

Humanist CommonSense

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A CHAPTER OF THE AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION (AHA) AND AN AFFILIATE OF THE COUNCIL FOR SECULAR HUMANISM (CSH)

Science and Religion— Two Ways to View our World?

**Come on out & join us on
Tuesday, March 16, 7 pm at the
Lakeland UUCU (see map pg. 9)**

BACK BY POPULAR ACCLAIM: our HAWCF guest speaker for Tuesday, March 16, will be Jonathan P. Smith. His topic, SCIENCE AND RELIGION:



TWO WAYS TO VIEW OUR WORLD?, debunks the notion that science and religion are both valid and equal concepts around which to organize our lives. You may recall that Jonathan addressed HAWCF in June 2009

on "Darwin's Dangerous Idea".

Jonathan Smith is a founding member, and currently vice president and a board member for the Florida Citizens for Science (a watchdog group dedicated to maintaining standards for rational science teaching in Florida public schools); lifetime member of the National Center of Science Education; member of the American Association for the Advancement of Science; and a Florida State science standards framer. Smith has appeared on PBS radio and CNN headline news. Born and educated in England, Smith moved to the United States in 1980.

2010 DUES ARE DUE

HAWCF 2010 Membership dues (covering the full year Jan–Dec) are now being accepted. Please make check payable to HAWCF. Give to co-Treasurers Eskenazi or mail to HAWCF as shown on page 9.

Humanism: A Much Better Alternative

By James W. Williamson, M.D.

[Dr. Williamson, a member of our chapter and longtime Humanist advocate, is a retired cardiologist and currently lives in Orlando. Editor of a magazine for physicians, CENTRAL FLORIDA PHYSICIAN, he has contributed articles to various freethought publications and regularly submits letters to the ORLANDO SENTINEL. He served on the boards of Humanists of Florida and Atheists of Florida. E-mail: jwingw@aol.com]

HUMANISTS MUST PUBLICLY EXPOSE the inaccuracies of religious beliefs and stand up against assaults on church-state separation by Christian Fundamentalists. But if Humanists are to flourish as an important and influential movement in the world, they must stress much more the positive virtues of Humanism. They must convince people that what they have to offer is far superior to what any religion offers.

I've not seen the advantages of Humanism over religion spelled out in a comprehensive and concise manner, and it is important for members to have this knowledge at their fingertips. You may think of more to add to the list.

The fundamental difference between Humanism and religion is the method used in arriving at reality about our material universe. From this difference many of Humanism's advantages flow. Humanism uses scientific thinking in arriving at conclusions while religion

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Immanuel Kant, But You Can!

By Robert P. Tucker, Ph.D.

[Dr. Tucker, a founding member of our chapter, received his Ph.D. in Theology from the University of Chicago. He was chair of the Dept. of Religion and Philosophy, Yankton College, Yankton, SD, and former professor of Philosophy and Bible at Florida Southern College, Lakeland.]

MARCH 30, 2010, WILL BE THE 29TH ANNIVERSARY of the day in 1981 when John Hinckley shot U. S. President Ronald Reagan. Having seriously wounded his victim, there seems no question that the shooter was an evil person. However, if he had missed and wounded no one, would he still be considered evil? Probably. But, here's the thing: the criteria for condemning him as evil would be *different* in the two cases!

Consider the following story:

Once upon a time, there was a woodsman. One day while he was out chopping down trees on the top of a hill, he heard a cry for help. The voice belonged to a young girl, and it was coming from somewhere below him. He looked down the hill, and there in the valley was a small lake, and in it

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CALENDAR

March–June 2010

March 8..... Humanist Dinner

**Location—Mt. Fuji Steak house:
See Info & Map on p. 9**

March 16 Regular Meeting

April 12 Humanist Dinner

April 17 *Special Event*

CFI invites HAWCF to hear Dr. Tucker!

April 20 Regular Meeting

May 10 Humanist Dinner

May 18 Regular Meeting

June 14 Humanist Dinner

June 22 Regular Meeting

SOS Comes to West Central Florida

THE RATIONALIST SERVICE MOVEMENT KNOWN AS SOS ... Secular Organizations for Sobriety ... has come again to west central Florida as SOS Tampa Bay. Sometimes referred to as Save Our Selves, SOS is an alternative recovery method for alcoholics or drug addicts who are uncomfortable with the spiritual content of widely available 12-Step programs.



Currently, area meetings are being held on the last Wednesday of every month, 7:30–8:30pm, at 3614 S. Manhattan Ave., Tampa. Additional dates and locations will be added to meet local need. Visit their website at <http://sostampabay.org>. SOS Tampa Bay is also on Facebook.

SOS takes a reasonable, secular approach to recovery, maintaining that sobriety is a separate issue from religion or spirituality. SOS credits the individual for achieving and maintaining his or her own sobriety, without reliance on any “Higher Power.”

SOS supports healthy skepticism and encourages the use of the scientific method to understand alcoholism. Quite apart from the religious issue, SOS bases its approach on methods that have been formulated and tested in a rational, scientific manner.

SOS is a non-profit network of autonomous, non-professional local groups dedicated solely to helping individuals achieve and maintain sobriety. There are groups meeting in many cities throughout the country.

SOS seeks only to promote sobriety amongst any who suffer from alcoholism or other drug addictions. As a group, SOS has no opinion on outside matters and does not wish to become entangled in outside controversy. As in life, in recovery people hold differing views on religion, spirituality and politics. To keep the focus on recovery, SOS meetings are meant to provide a safe environment without interference or criticism of individual religious and political views. Like-minded members are free to express

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Which Godless, Secular Values are Most Important?

10 Internet Readers' Responses

The following article by Austin Cline is reprinted from his online blog: About.com (<http://atheism.about.com/ua/aboutethics/ImportantSecularValues.htm>). I thought the ideas expressed in it could be food for thought for our humanist community. Responses were to an article: Godless Ethics, Morality, and Values: Do Godless Morals & Values Exist?

RELIGIOUS THEISTS MAY CLAIM THAT THEIR RELIGIOUS MORALITY is superior to secular, atheistic, and godless morality, but there are plenty of secular, godless values that require neither theism nor religion. In fact, there are values which are contrary to many fundamental religious perspectives. Some atheists focus on intellectual values like skepticism and critical thinking while others focus on political or moral values. Which secular, godless values are most important in your life and why? Ten responses:

1. Honesty, compassion accompanied by hands to help others, fairness and lots of love. And as many good values as you can think of.—Bettobeky

2. The value that is most important in my life is COMPASSION. Theistic Christians seem to be seriously lacking in that value. In fact, most theistic religions seem to be lacking it. Buddhism seems to be the only religion that places it at the top of their values.—Dr. Blair

3. My most important values: Honesty, integrity and justice. I never let anything compromise these values.—Guest Victoria

4. Helping my Fellow Humans: I have a drive to help my fellow humans in whatever way possible. To this end I volunteer sometimes to a state of exhaustion. I drive a Meals on Wheels route, because, if not me, then who? I help in my kids' school because I know that improving their classmates' lives will improve their future, too, as those are their peers, those are the adults that they will rub elbows with someday. To me, the most important thing I can do is help others, and I do it simply because I CAN—not for any fear or hope for reward.—

Guest Allena

5. Question: Can any moral or ethic exist apart independent of “Honesty?” I'm curious. Really!—Guest Cllay

6. Integrity: You should NOT have to know that there is a God watching you to make good choices in your lifetime.—Guest Michael Sisler

7. My Values include: Integrity, compassion, equanimity, and always a healthy dose of skepticism.—Guest Steve C

8. Values: Fairness, civility whenever possible, the infinite value of life, the necessity of balance, the necessity of adaptability, truthfulness and honesty, the evil of cruelty, respect and empathy for others. There are more, but I'm too tired to think better just now. The best ethical tool kit must include the ability to stand in another's shoes. A preference for seeing that other people are happy is also high on the list, along with a loathing for needless—or any—suffering.—Guest Ian T. MacLeod

9. Empathy for those not like me: As a retiree enjoying a union pension and, when working, paid higher wages than the average Arizonan, I have a hard time seeing the fairness of businesses that layoff workers merely to keep their profits at the same level. A more empathetic and loyalty-inducing company would do as my employer did; When things slow down, bid jobs at only the level that will pay for the overhead and wages, in order to keep workers productive. Having to answer to stockholders, of course, means that keeping workers in place would likely be detrimental to the stock price. To my mind's eye, there is something wrong when someone can see their stock price rise due to massive layoffs because of mergers, downturns, or whatever the reason, and the two things aren't weighed to determine the costs to the many, for the profits of the few. I know only enough to realize how ignorant I am of economic principles, but one basic fact is that workers are at the mercy of employers unless they organize.—trog69

10. Basic things: Logic, a solid sense of skepticism, the ability to realize your beliefs may be wrong.—Guest Squid

The Question of Atheist Hospitals

From *AA NEWS* (American Atheists at http://www.atheists.org/The_Question_of_Atheists_Hospitals) comes this thoughtful article by Doug Ittner. Though not all humanists call themselves atheists, this same question (and solution) turns up for humanists. Just substitute humanist/freethinker/etc. as you read it.

CONVERSATIONS WITH CHRISTIAN APOLOGISTS often turn up the question, "How many hospitals have Atheists built?" The question is directed towards a justification of organized religion as a preferred establishment over Atheism. The question is not a new one: Col. Robert Green Ingersoll attacked the issue in his essay, "What Infidels Have Done."^[1]

One hundred years after Christ died, suppose someone had asked a Christian, "What hospitals have you built? What asylums have you founded? They would have said "None."

Suppose three hundred years after the death of Christ the same questions had been asked, the Christian would have said "None, not one." Two hundred years more and the answer was the same. And the Christian could have admitted to the questioner that the Mohammedans had built asylums before the Christians. He also could have told him that there had been orphan asylums in China for hundreds and hundreds of years, hospitals in India, and hospitals for the sick at Athens.

To be fair to the Christian apologist, perhaps the question should be directed towards modern times, after Christianity had been well established. America, as Christian historical revisionists have claimed, was established under Christian principles. Therefore it makes sense to conclude that such a Christian nation would build hospitals faster than a colony of ants could build an anthill.

The oldest American hospital in existence is New York's famed Bellevue hospital, established in 1736. The hospital, initially a six-bed hospital, was not created by any religious institution but was a municipal hospital created by a secular, nonreligious govern-

ment.^[2] The city was filling a gap left by the lazy religious institutions who apparently were failing in their mission to care for the sick and ailing.

But Bellevue wasn't the first American hospital ... the first being created as a business venture. Master Jacob Hendrickszen Varrevanger, a surgeon to the Dutch West India Company, created the first hospital in the region in 1658: New York didn't exist—the area was referred to as New Amsterdam.^[3]

The religious weren't in any rush to create any institutions for public welfare. Ben Franklin, inventor, ambassador to France and Founding Father, managed to find more time than the entire American religious industry to develop the first fire department, public library, and even another hospital (founded in 1751).^[4]

America's first university was created in Franklin's Philadelphia as well, nor was it religious. Rather than another center for educating clergy, as in old European universities, the University of Pennsylvania was established in 1751 to train students for careers in business and public service.^[5] Religious missionaries were apparently too busy caring for people's afterlives rather than their lives on Earth.

Surely, some 200 years after America's signing of the Constitution, the religious industry has developed a system of hospitals throughout the United States. Well, in a sense they have. Hundreds of hospitals that bear a connection to some religious institution dot the American landscape. The largest and best known is the Catholic hospital system. Surely a Catholic-affiliated hospital must mean it is a religious hospital founded and financed by the Catholic Church. Alas, even this is not the case; Catholic hospitals are merely public hospitals with a Catholic label and fewer health services.

In America as of 1999, 13% of all hospitals were religious (totaling 18% of all hospital beds)—that's 604 out of 4,573 hospitals.^[6] Despite the large presence of organized religion in America, churches have managed to scrape together only a few hospitals. Of these 604 hospitals many are a product of mergers with public, nonsectarian hospitals. Nor are all

of these 604 hospitals Catholic: many are Baptist, Methodist, Shriner (Masonic), Jewish, etc.

Religious hospitals get 36% of all their revenue from Medicare; public hospitals get only 27%. In addition to this 36% of public funding, they get 12% from Medicaid. Of the remaining 44% of funding, 31% comes from county appropriations, 30% from investments, and only 5% from charitable contributions (and that not necessarily religious). The percentage of actual Church funding for Church-run hospitals reaches a grand total of 0.0015 percent.^[7]

The claim that the religious build hospitals gives the illusion that they are more charitable than the secular, nonreligious. With hospitals, at least, that isn't the case. Every hospital writes off a certain percentage of medical revenue as charitable care. Though the religious hospitals aren't the least charitable, they're close to it. For-profit hospitals provided, on average, only 0.8% of their gross patient revenue as charity care; religious hospitals came in with 1.9%. But secular nonprofit hospitals had 2% ... the godless secular public hospitals provided 5.1%.^[8]

Though only 200 years since America's founding, perhaps in another 200 years the religious will catch up to the secular government in providing charitable medical care. But in actual care now, it gets worse. Religious hospitals provide fewer medical services than secular hospitals. Catholic hospitals, despite being publicly funded, refuse to provide certain medical services on religious grounds: *e.g.*, infertility treatments, birth control, abortion, and emergency contraception for rape victims. It is the position of the Catholic church: "A female who has been raped should be able to defend herself against a potential conception from the sexual assault."^[9]—it's the woman's responsibility to make her rapist wear a condom.

Catholic hospitals have directives opposing informed consent regarding side effects of potentially harmful health care decisions, as well as policies

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Humanism—A Better Way

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uses faith. Scientific thinking has also been called critical thinking, and this method relies on using the rules of logic plus reliable, reproducible evidence in reaching valid conclusions. Faith, which is highly touted by religions, is actually their major weakness, since it can support any belief, including ludicrous and contradictory ones.

The use of Occam's Razor leads us to believe that Humanists are on the right tract. It never seemed logical to me that two completely incompatible methods of arriving at conclusions should co-exist in the brain, the scientific and the faith-based. The adoption of scientific thinking, the one with proven validity, simplifies our understanding of the universe, and has an esthetic appeal, which humans seem to be programmed to experience when taking the correct logical path.

To sharpen our own thinking about the virtues of Humanism over religion, let's list some of the major ones with a brief explanation of each. These points are generalities and exceptions to each will exist. In the present context, when referring to religion, I refer mostly to fundamentalist, monotheistic, religion, although a good case can be made that a world without any religion would be preferable.

Why Humanism will produce a better world than religions:

A safer and less violent world. There would be no more religious terrorist attacks, religious wars, or religious genocide without religion. There would still be non-religious terrorist attacks, wars, and genocide, but these events tend to be more barbaric with religious underpinnings; some would not happen at all lacking these underpinnings.

A friendlier world. When faith-based

disagreements arise between people of different religions, there is no rational way to resolve them and violence can erupt. American sociologist Nathan Glazer noted that of the many factors that can divide people - religion, race, language, economics, locale, politics, culture - religion is one of the strongest dividers.

More rational morality. Since much of the world equates religion with morality, this point may seem surprising to many. Humanists find no credible scientific evidence for the existence of a supernatural world inhabited by quaint entities such as gods, goddesses, angels, demons, and souls, so they turn to an earthly rationale for morality. Humanists appreciate that humans are genetically programmed to have a general sense of morality, which must be continuously fine-tuned by ethicists. They reject pre-scientific sacred texts, such as the Bible and the Koran, as a rational basis for ethics. These texts often contain repressive and unenlightened views on race relations, women's rights, homosexuality, punishment for crimes, medical treatments, and others.

A better environment. Many religious people believe that a deity awarded the Earth to humans to do with pretty much what they want. Also, some fundamentalists think that since the "end times" are coming soon, the state of the environment really doesn't matter. Humanists find no scientific evidence to support these beliefs and think that humans themselves must be careful custodians of the environment or suffer dire consequences.

A more fulfilling life. Religions often teach that our earthly existence pales in importance with the eternal life of our soul. This belief has often been used by religions to convince people living in miserable conditions that things will

be made right in the next world and that correcting these conditions is not so important. Humanists, seeing no scientific evidence of a soul or an afterlife, think that this life is it. Therefore, they think individuals should develop to their full potential, and that we should all strive to make this earthly existence as pleasant and rewarding for everyone as possible.

Superior educational system. Fundamentalists try to eliminate scientific findings from school curricula that conflict with their beliefs, such as evolution. These faith-based modifications in curricula leave students at a marked disadvantage in a highly competitive world that requires accurate scientific knowledge.

Population control. Many religions teach that a soul is implanted in the human fetus at the moment of conception. Humanists, who find no scientific evidence of a soul, are able to support a more vigorous program of population control, which leads to less poverty, overcrowding, and use of natural resources as well a healthier population.

A systematic comparison between Humanism and religion indicates that Humanism offers much more for the betterment of humanity. But since that is so, why are there so few Humanists compared to religious people? One of the major reasons resides in the question I often hear when telling individuals I am a Humanist. They ask, "What is a Humanist?" People are simply unaware that such an excellent alternative exists.

Consequently, we need vigorous programs to get our message out to the public. To some extent Humanists are beginning to do this, but the general public still is woefully uninformed about what Humanism is and about its promise for a much better world.

SOS now in Tampa Bay Area

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their religious, nonreligious and political beliefs outside the meetings.

In SOS:

- » Each person is the leader in his or her own sobriety.
- » Each Group, as each person, is separate yet a part of SOS.
- » The SOS mission is recovery.

» NO promotion of any kind of drug use [except for medical reasons].

» NO Criticism of others' choices of recovery.

» SOS as an abstinence Group does not advocate moderation methods.

Although sobriety is an individual responsibility, life does not have to be faced alone. The support of other alcoholics and addicts is a vital

adjunct to recovery. In SOS, members share experiences, insights, information, strength, and encouragement in friendly, honest, anonymous, and supportive group meetings. To avoid unnecessary entanglements, each SOS group is self-supporting through contributions from its members and refuses outside support.

Immanuel Kant, But You Can!

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was someone wildly thrashing about. The woodsman threw down his ax and raced down the hill. When he got to the water, he jumped right in and swam out to the girl who was just about to go under for the third and last time. The woodsman grabbed her and swam to shore. He pulled her out of the water and helped her start breathing again. Without a doubt, the woodsman saved her life.

Now, the moral question is: Was the woodsman a good or an evil man?

Most people would say, "Good." If you asked them "Why?" they would respond, "Because he saved the girl's life."

But, wait! As Paul Harvey might say, here's "the rest of the story."

After the woodsman had rescued the girl, he then brutally raped and murdered her. Next, he tied heavy stones to her body and sank it out of sight in the lake.

Now, what do you think? Was the woodsman a good or evil man?

At this point, most people would answer, "Evil." If you asked them "Why?" They would say, "Because he raped and murdered the girl."

In both the first case and in the second case, the judgments about whether the woodsman was good or evil were based upon the *consequences* of his actions.

But here is a third case for you to consider. Imagine a different woodsman chopping away. He also hears the girl crying, for help. He, too, throws down his ax and starts running down the hill. But this woodsman is old and out of shape. Halfway down the hill he suffers a heart attack and falls down dead. The girl drowns. Now, is this woodsman a good or evil man?

Most people don't know how to answer that. The problem is that nothing definitive happened. Because he died, he did not save the girl. But he also did not rape and murder her. He didn't do anything but drop dead! His actions brought about no ethical consequences for anyone to use in evaluating him.

But what if I told you "the rest of the story" about this second woodsman?

What if I said that just before he started running he told another logger that he intended to save the girl and then rape her and murder her? Then we would have the basis for making an ethical judgment. We would conclude that he was an evil man. Our decision would not be based upon any consequences—for he did not do anything (except run and die). Our decision would be based upon his *intentions*. [Note.]²

As newspapers, TVs and radios remind us every day, this world is a very dangerous place. For the sake of our own safety and happiness, it is therefore essential that we be able to make *moral and ethical judgments* about people—including about ourselves!

Sometimes these judgments can be based upon the *consequences* of a person's actions. Ethicists refer to this approach as "*teleological*," "*a posteriori*" and "*empirical*."

But sometimes there are no consequences. Then it becomes necessary to base our conclusions upon other things, such as a person's *intentions* or upon *whether or not s/he has obeyed some ethical principle*. Ethicists refer to this second approach as being "*deontological*," "*a priori*," and "*rational*."

Immanuel Kant was an ethicist who found the *ambiguity* of consequence-based ethics unacceptable. One of his many contributions to humanity was the creation of a system of ethics which could provide a reliable basis for ethical judgments whenever consequences prove to be inadequate. That is something from which all of us can benefit. In what follows, I want to summarize for you some of his most basic and important ideas.

Immanuel Kant was born in 1724 in the Prussian city of Königsberg. Always a bachelor, Kant maintained a rigorously regular daily schedule which included a walk along an avenue lined with trees. So punctual was he about this that each day when he appeared at his door dressed for this excursion, his neighbors would check their clocks to see if they correctly displayed the time as being exactly 3:30. [3:320] Kant spent his

entire life in that one city, but, by the time of his death in 1804, he had changed the whole world of philosophy and of ethics!

Like Copernicus, who revolutionized science by showing that the Sun, and not the Earth, is at the center of our solar system, Kant sparked his own "Copernican Revolution" in philosophy when he showed that objects must conform to our minds—and not the other way around—if we are to have any knowledge of them. [7:667]

Similarly, in ethics, Kant stood the world upside-down when he rejected the use of consequences and relied, instead, upon an ethical principle—which he called the "*Categorical Imperative*"—to serve as the basis for making moral judgments. From that change there emerged a new emphasis in ethics that took *duty*, *fairness*, and *personhood* more seriously than they had ever been taken before. [7:166f.]

Kant understood that there are two kinds of values: "*extrinsic values*" and "*intrinsic values*." Something is *extrinsically* valuable if it used as a "*means*" for getting something else." Something has *intrinsic* value if it is good in and of itself, that is, as an *end* in itself. Thus, ends are always more valuable than means.

The *consequences* of our actions are the *means* whereby we secure the *ends* we want, such as life, liberty, or happiness. Such consequences are therefore not only ethically *ambiguous*; they are also *secondary* in ethical value to whatever ends there are. For this reason, Kant held that *the primary concern in ethics must be with those things which have intrinsic value*. [2:172-205 and 4:208-240]

One such intrinsically valuable thing is a "*good will*." "Nothing can possibly be conceived...which can be called good, without qualification, except a good will," wrote Kant. [2:174] "A good will is good not because of what it performs...but simply by virtue of [its] volition—that is, it is good in itself." [2:174f.]

Kant argued that the will must be guided by *reason* in order to know what is *good* for it to intend to do. If it

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is so directed, the result will be the achievement of profound “happiness” (which is philosophy’s term for what religions call “salvation”). [2:175-8] Once reason has identified the good, the will achieves happiness by its *intention* to do the good (*whether or not its attempt succeeds*). [2:178f.]

According to Kant, to be morally good, our intentions must be based upon our sense of “duty,” and not upon our emotional “inclinations” (which might be self-serving or otherwise morally ambiguous). [2:178f.] We have such a sense of duty whenever we recognize and “respect” the necessity of obeying *laws*, not only the laws of nature, but especially ethical laws. [2:179]

Kant referred to ethical laws as “*maxims*.” [2:179-181] Maxims are *commands* to do the right thing. Because of their importance, Kant called such commands “*imperatives*” and he distinguished two kinds. “*Hypothetical imperatives*” take this form: “If you want ‘x’ then do ‘y’.” These commands relate to things which have extrinsic value. They are thus only of secondary ethical importance. Of primary ethical importance was what Kant called “*The Categorical Imperative*.” This command relates to things which have intrinsic value and so it has the utmost significance.

The genius of Kant’s ethic is found in this Categorical Imperative for it is the clue which reveals which actions are good and which are evil.

Although there is only one Categorical Imperative, Kant expressed it in two different ways. One version says: “*To be good, you must act only on those maxims which you are willing to make into universal laws*.” [2:183, paraphrased] The other version says: “*To be good, you must always treat yourself and other persons as ends, and never as means only*.” [2:188; paraphrased]

Kant believed that before any act is performed its ethical quality can be determined by asking whether or not the maxim that describes it complies with both versions of the Categorical Imperative. If it does, then it is to be

considered good and permissible. But if it fails to comply with either one or both versions, it is to be considered evil and prohibited.

The *first version* of the Categorical Imperative emphasizes the *universalizability* and *desirability* of an action’s maxim. Kant argued that *fairness demands equal treatment of all people without exceptions*. [2:185; 4:217-224] Therefore, only maxims which apply to everyone, without exception, can be considered good.

The boxer, *Joe Louis* certainly understood the correctness of Kant’s principle. During the Second World War, he and black fighter Sugar Ray Robinson toured army bases in the South giving boxing exhibitions. One day while they were waiting at an Alabama bus station, an M.P. arrested them for not remaining in the rear of the building. Taken before a provost marshal, Louis exemplified Kant’s rule about ethical maxims needing to be universalizable when he said, in his defense: “I’m in this war like anybody else. I expect to be treated like anybody else!” [3:368]

Kant also recognized that some maxims might exist which could be universally commanded, but which might not be good—such as a requirement that all people shave their heads or paint their faces purple. So, he added the stipulation that the maxim must also be something all rational people would be *willing* to do. *Lying* offers a serious example. Lying could never be universalized, not if its goal is to achieve benefits for the liar, for if all people lied, no one would believe anyone, and then it would become impossible to benefit oneself by lying. Moreover, because universal lying would destroy all trust between all people, no rational person could ever will that lying become universal. Therefore, lying is evil. [2:180]

The *second version* of Kant’s Categorical Imperative focuses upon the crucial role of “*personhood*” in ethics. “*Things*” have *extrinsic* value because they serve us as the *means* to achieving our ends. Things have *no rationality* and *no freedom*. They are merely *tools* that we use.

Moreover, things can be *replaced* by other things, and so the value of things can be given a *price*. But “*persons*” have *intrinsic* value, which Kant referred to as “*dignity*.” Persons are not means, but are *ends* in themselves precisely because they have *rationality* and *freedom*. These abilities make each person *unique*, and this uniqueness makes each person *irreplaceable*. As long as these characteristics are recognized, *no price* can be placed on persons. *Slavery* is the proof of that, for people can only be bought and sold, as things, when there is no respect for their freedom, their rationality, their uniqueness, their dignity—in short, their personhood. [2:188-193; 4:224-232]

We run into violations of this second version of Kant’s Categorical Imperative every day: whenever a bureaucrat treats us “like a number”; whenever we treat a cashier as if she were nothing but an extension of her cash register; whenever a teacher treats a child as just some anonymous pupil; whenever a reckless driver acts in total disregard of how his driving might harm others. All of these are instances of personhood being denied. They all violate the Categorical Imperative and, according to Kant, they are all evil and unethical practices.

The ethical importance of this Kantian respect for personhood cannot be overestimated! Think of all the “isms” in the world: racism, sexism, ageism. Think about homophobia or about any other kind of prejudicial discrimination. All of these evils arise because the personhood of the victim is not respected.

When this nation was founded, blacks and women were not considered real persons. As a consequence neither group could vote or own property, and the former group was legally designated as being property. The Thirteenth, Fourteenth, Fifteenth, and Nineteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution reduced, but did not eliminate these evil denials of personhood. [1:847f.] Besides the obvious continuation of sexist and

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racist discrimination in the workplace, let me cite just one other truly heinous example:

In the 1930s, the U.S. Government began a project to determine the long-term effects of syphilis on men. By then it was already known that most cases of syphilis could be cured by penicillin. This made a long-term study difficult since most patients were being treated and quickly cured. So, it was decided that a group of black men would be used as human lab rats. These men had already been diagnosed as having syphilis, but they had not yet been told that they had the disease. They never were told. Nor were they ever treated. Instead, they were "observed" until they died. The project continued until 1972! [4:229f.]

There are two other areas in which personhood is a crucial element for ethical analysis. They are *abortion* and *euthanasia*.

In a previous article, I argued that *abortion* is *not murder* when it is performed during the first trimester.[8] To be considered "murder" in an ethical sense, an action must involve the *intentional killing* of an *innocent human life* which is a *person*. (Each italicized term represents a criterion.) Early term abortions meet only five of these criteria. They do not meet the sixth criterion because a *fetus* which does not yet have a *brain* and *central nervous system* is not yet capable of experiencing the *consciousness*, *self-awareness* or *memory* which are constitutive of *personhood*. On the other hand, a *pregnant woman* is very definitely a person, and as a person, she has the *right of self-defense*. If a pregnancy threatens her life or well-being, she has the right to end it. Even in the second or third trimester, after the fetus develops a brain and central nervous system and (possibly) achieves personhood, killing it in self-defense does not constitute murder, for *killings in war*, in *capital punishment*, and in *self-defense* are *not acts of murder*.

Similarly, in the area of *euthanasia* personhood is of paramount importance. The only thing, ethically, that

allows doctors to unplug brain-dead patients from all of the life-prolonging machinery in hospitals—and to do so without being arrested and charged with "murder"—is the fact that once the brain has permanently ceased to function, the personhood of that individual has already been destroyed. What is killed by disconnecting the equipment is only the body. The person was already dead. (These ethical [not legal or religious] comments on abortion and euthanasia are shared by some modern Kantians. They are based upon Kant's principles, but go beyond Kant's own view which is generally conceded to have been too restrictive.)

Whether or not we have ever heard of Immanuel Kant, as Humanists we have already incorporated many of his ethical insights into our own thinking. When we affirm our commitment to the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for *all*, we echo Kant's principle of *universalizability* found in the first version of the Categorical Imperative. When we affirm the inherent worth and dignity of every *person*, we restate the basic elements of the second version of Kant's Categorical Imperative.

Kant gave this world a precious gift. He gave us a method of achieving clarity in our ethical thinking. More than this, Immanuel can't do, for he has passed from the scene. But we can! We can use the insights he gave us to *make this world a better place for all people*, and that ought to be *our Categorical Imperative* as Humanists.

SOURCES

NOTE: The opening story comes from Immanuel Kant. Unfortunately, I no longer have the bibliographical reference. Please email me if you have it: drroberttucker@aol.com]

[1] Bernstein, Peter & Christopher Ma. *The Practical Guide to Practically Everything*. New York: Random House, 1995.

[2] Dewey, Robert E. and Robert H. Hurlbutt III. *An Introduction to Ethics*. New York: Macmillan Pub. Co. Inc., 1977.

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Continued on p. 9

The Question of Atheist Hospitals

Continued from p.3

preventing euthanasia—terminally ill patients must be kept on life support despite their demands to end treatment.

Catholic hospitals aren't alone in promoting their religion in the medical field. Mormon hospitals will refuse sterilization to women who have had less than five children or are younger than 40 years of age. Seventh-day Adventist hospitals won't serve meat or caffeinated beverages in their cafeterias. Southern Baptist hospitals won't provide abortion services.^[10]

Robert Ingersoll's response to the question, "What hospitals have Atheists built?" is still relevant. Despite European Christians being on the American continent for hundreds of years, they not provided the medical charity for which they are credited. To answer the question "How many American hospitals have Atheists built?"—All of them!

Of the 13% of religious hospitals, all are maintained by public funds. Those public funds are not paid exclusively by the religious, they certainly aren't supported by American churches. If the religious hospitals were to be truly religious and separated from secular government subsidies they would collapse. The question that Christian apologists should be asked is, "Where are all the truly religious hospitals?" Slapping a Catholic or Methodist label upon a hospital wall isn't sufficient to create a truly independent, private religious hospital free from Atheist support.

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1. Ingersoll, Robert G., *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, Louisville, Bank of Wisdom.

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5. <http://upenn.edu/about/heritage.php>

6. Uttley, L. J., "No strings attached: Public funding of religiously-sponsored hospitals in the United States," *Mergerwatch*, 2002, p.10.

7. Ibid, p.13-15.

8. Ibid, p. 18-19.

9. Ibid, p. 23.

10. Ibid, p. 24-25. (Footnotes)

New York Times Reports on the National Prayer Breakfast

By Nan Owens, Editor

THE *NEW YORK TIMES* WROTE ABOUT A NEW CHALLENGE to the National Prayer Breakfast (or NPB) last month. The editorial noted that for over 50 years the NPB provided Washington with a major networking opportunity to bring together the president, congress-people and diplomats—plus religious, business and military leaders for “scrambled eggs and supplication”.

Non-Christian protests to the event largely have been ignored through the years. But this year, the press has made public that an ethics group in Washington has asked President

Obama and Congressional leaders to stay away from the breakfast. The *Times* noted that religious and gay rights groups have organized competing prayer events in 17 cities, with protesters

picketing in Washington and Boston. No mention, of course, of the many freethought communities staging National Day of Reason events. But hey, this is at least a start of protests to this annual use of government for proselytizing.

The *Times* states that the NPB objections are focused on the sponsor of the breakfast, which the paper calls “a secretive evangelical Christian network called The Fellowship, also known as The Family,” and further referred to alleged ties to Ugandan legislation that calls for imprisonment and even execution of active homosexuals.

The capitol breakfast often features a prominent keynote prayer-speaker e.g., Bono, Mother Teresa, former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. Many states and cities have prayer breakfasts, often appearing to be government-sponsored or government-affiliated. Actually many of these are quietly underwritten by the Family.

Though short on lead time now, a number of liberal clergy and gay rights leaders have organized alternative events for this year, to be known

as the American Prayer Hour. Places lined up for their debut are Washington, DC; Glendale City, California; Rochester, NY; and Center Point, Ala.

Often perceived as an ecumenical event, a visit to the official web site of the National Prayer Breakfast (<http://NationalDayofPrayer.com>) paints a whole different picture.

Below are a couple of excerpts just from the NPB application to become a volunteer.

“OFFICIAL POLICY STATEMENT ON PARTICIPATION OF ‘NON-JUDEO-CHRISTIAN’ GROUPS IN THE NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER: The National Day of Prayer Task Force was a creation of the National Prayer Committee for the expressed purpose of organizing and promoting prayer observances conforming to a Judeo-Christian system of values.”

NPB does say that non-conforming people are free to organize activities consistent with their own beliefs, that all who seek to pray for this nation are encouraged to do so in a way deemed appropriate.

However, even the “Judeo-Christian” designation in their literature is a stretch. To be a volunteer, you are asked to attest to the following:

Statement of Belief: I believe that the Holy Bible is the inerrant Word of The Living God. I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the only One by which I can obtain salvation and have an ongoing relationship with God. I believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, his virgin birth, his sinless life, his miracles, the atoning work of his shed blood, his resurrection and ascension, his intercession and his coming return to power and glory. I believe that those who follow Jesus are family and there should be unity among all who claim his name.

I agree that these statements are true in my life.

Doesn't sound very “Judeo”-Christian to me! Wouldn't most Jews be quite perturbed to affirm this?

Following this declaration of belief are six commitments requested of each volunteer. Just two are listed here

[emphasis is added].

No. 2: In both public and private life, we ask that YOU DEMONSTRATE THE COMMITMENT YOU HAVE MADE TO JESUS CHRIST in the following areas: spiritual maturity, emotional stability, healthy personal relationships, financial responsibility, and a stable living situation

No. 6: We would hope that the new volunteers joining us would share in the legacy of those before them who would have SHOWN A PASSIONATE DEVOTION TO ADVANCING CHRIST'S KINGDOM and the cause of prayer in our nation. As true volunteers, those who partner with us have earned our great admiration for their sacrificial work. They are the backbone of our ministry and labor diligently for God's glory, without any expectation of early pay, recognition, or compensation

More will be forthcoming next month about this travesty of government religion—stay tuned.

Atheists are front page news for St. Petersburg Times

LATE BREAKING NEWS: The March 5 edition of the *St. Petersburg Times* featured a front-page article about atheists at the Tampa City Council meetings, titled “Dispute is over ‘one nation under ...’”.

Although members of the Atheists of Florida were attending the Tampa City Council meetings to protest its pre-meeting prayers, the article focused largely on the atheists' recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. It appears that, though they do not intone the “under God” insertion, some continued on without pause to the “with liberty for all” phrase (as written in the original Pledge).

According to the *Times*, the Council's attorney requested that persons remain silent during that portion of the Pledge if they find it objectionable ... saying it confuses others in their recitation, that it is “disruptive” to continue without pausing appropriately.

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LETTERS



Ed. Note: HAWCF Member Bill McKee clued me in to the following Letter to the Editor. It appeared February 19 in the *Lakeland Ledger*. I found it interesting and apropos to sound reasoning. The *Lakeland Ledger* granted permission to reprint it in its entirety without any changes. The letter can be accessed at <http://theledger.com/article/20100219/EDIT02/100219725>.

Billboard Is Insulting

NO ONE LIKES TO BE INSULTED. It doesn't make things any better knowing people cite Scripture to rationalize their behavior. I'm talking about the billboard that a local Lakeland congregation has erected in place of the one that the Atheists of Florida had there previously.

The atheists' billboard read as follows: "Don't believe in God? You're not alone." There were many people who took great offense to this billboard, but I really can't understand why.

It's not like the Atheists of Florida were bashing those who did believe in God. Look at the billboard and you will find nothing derogatory to those of faith, unless of course you consider atheists reaching out to other atheists insulting, which then begs the question of why is it only insulting when people who don't share your faith reach out?

That's what a lot of churches do: reach out via TV, newspapers, etc. Why isn't it insulting when a church does it?

Immanuel Kant, But You Can!

Continued from p.7

Ft. Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998.

[5] Kant, Immanuel. *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964.

[6] Kant, Immanuel. *Lectures on Ethics*. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963.

[7] Kenny, Anthony. *The Oxford History of Western Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

[8] Tucker, Robert P. "Why Abortion Is Not Murder." *Humanist Common Sense*. Oct. 2000, Vol. No. 3, Issue 8. pp. 1-5.

This billboard that a local church has put up in response is a blatant insult. It doesn't even try and hide it. The ad cites Psalm 14, which says: "The fool hath said in his heart, 'There is no God.'"

So, just because I don't believe in a God, I'm a fool? I can recite Scripture too and it won't make what I suggest correct. I'll do it now. Psalm 137:9 says, "Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones." You'd think me, or anyone, insane for smashing infants against rocks. You'd think me even more insane if I cited Scripture to rationalize such appalling behavior.

So, for those who put the billboard up, thanks for resorting to the name game. How very Christian. "Agree with me or I'll hurt you." Tsk, tsk, tsk.

JAIME DELGADO, Lakeland

Ed. Note: The following letter not only praises the elegance of our Constitution but is itself elegant and reasoned. Published on February 26 in the *St. Petersburg Times*. It was responding to a February 21 article regarding a controversy in Texas (the second-largest textbook market in the country) where a Christian conservative bloc on the state school board wants the social studies curriculum to promote the idea that America was founded on biblical precepts. You can read the article at <http://tampabay.com/opinion/columns/debating-the-founding-fathers-religious-intentions/1074526>.

Consider the Preamble

THERE IS MUCH QUERULOUS ARGUING about whether or not

Atheists at Tampa City Council

Continued from p.8

Discussing comments between the various Council and staff members, the article quotes Councilman Caetano that the atheists "should keep their mouths shut" (if they don't like whatever). Councilman Miranda responded, "You're living in a free country. Let them do what they want."

During the meeting's open comment period, several people objected to the pre-meeting prayer/invocation.

the United States is a "Christian nation," or at least founded on "Christian" ideals. At times, the issue amounts to an almost vicious quarrel. The statements of Ben Boychuk and Joel Mathis are unusually sober and (shall we say) gentlemanly.

I submit that the problem can be solved if everyone concerned simply reread the Preamble to the Constitution. In elegant, dignified words—all too rare in common assertions—it is like a tremendous organ chord and should be memorized by every citizen.

Why is the Constitution "ordained and established"? In other words, why does our government exist? Answer:

- To form a "more perfect Union"
- To "establish Justice"
- To "insure domestic Tranquility"
- To "provide for the common defense"
- To "promote the general Welfare"

And finally, a tremendous summing up:

- To "secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity."

Here we have it, in imperishable phrases—the reason why all "faiths" or none may exist. Baptist? Methodist? Presbyterian? Roman Catholic? Buddhist? Yes, and atheist. These and all other beliefs or convictions are included in the words "domestic Tranquility," if the "Blessings of Liberty" are to mean anything at all.

Certainly, if textbooks leave out the role of religion in history, students will be deprived of the full truth. But, on the other hand, to give American history a Christian luster is more than "annoying," as Joel Mathis says, "it's also deeply dishonest." As for insuring "domestic Tranquility".....

Abigail Ann Martin, *Brandon*

The atheists have been attending Council meetings monthly, asking instead for a moment of silence instead of the opening prayers..

Atheists of Florida Executive Director Rob Curry told the *Times* that on Monday, March 1, they had petitioned the Lakeland City Commission to end their opening prayers as well. They plan to extend this request to Pinellas Park, Clearwater, and other Pinellas County cities.

Should be interesting to see how this all shakes out in Lakeland, eh what?

AHA Defines Humanism

[As published in *THE HUMANIST* magazine, a bi-monthly publication of the American Humanist Association (AHA), 1777 T Street NW, Washington, DC 20009.]

"Humanism is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. Affirming the dignity of each human being, it supports the maximization of individual liberty and opportunity consonant with social and planetary responsibility. It advocates the extension of participatory democracy and the expansion of the open society, standing for human rights and social justice.

Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as a part of nature and holds that values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human nature, experience, and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny."



Definitions of Humanism

[From the website of *Humanist Network News*—Ed.]

Humanism is:

"...seeking, without religion, the best in, and for, human beings." *Chambers Pocket Dictionary*

"...a doctrine, attitude, or way of life centered on human interests or values; especially: a philosophy that usually rejects supernaturalism and stresses an individual's dignity and worth and capacity for self-realization through reason." *Merriam Webster Dictionary*

"...a non-religious philosophy, based on liberal human values." *Little Oxford Dictionary*

"...an appeal to reason in contrast to revelation or religious authority as a means of finding out about the natural world and destiny of man, and also giving a grounding for morality... Humanist ethics is also distinguished by placing the end of moral action in the welfare of humanity rather than in fulfilling the will of God." *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*

"The rejection of religion in favor of the advancement of humanity by its own efforts." *Collins Concise Dictionary*

"A system of thought that centers on humans and their values, capacities, and worth." *American Heritage Dictionary*

What do Humanists believe?

Humanists believe that life is a naturally occurring process in the universe, that humans and human consciousness evolved on earth in the same way as all other life on the planet, and that humans will share with all other life the same ultimate fate.

Humanists believe that the application of human reason and the scientific method are the best means for discovery of truth about the universe and ourselves. Humanists reject the notion that the application of intellect to all areas of human concern is in any sense vain or arrogant, and require that all claims to truth be supported by credible, verifiable evidence.

Humanists believe humanity alone is responsible for its own destiny. All values—spiritual, ethical and social—have their source in human experience, are products of evolving culture, and are subject to human critique and amendment. Humanists believe in the common moral decencies, including altruism, integrity, honesty, tolerance, compassion, and equal justice for all.

Humanists believe in individual liberty and responsibility, freedom of conscience and speech, and in free inquiry. They support separation of church and state, and are opposed to censorship.

Humanists believe each person has but one life to lead, here and now on this earth; each of us must make the most of it in terms of creative work and happiness, and by respect for and cooperation with others we can make this a better world.

HAWCF ... Vision & Mission Statements

The Following Vision and Mission Statements were approved by the membership on December 19, 2006:

Vision: *HAWCF membership to grow to more than 100 active members by 2010. Media sources in Lakeland are aware that HAWCF exists. Non-Humanists begin to see Humanism, science, and secularism as an ethical, nonthreatening alternative to sectarian supernaturalism. HAWCF has a committee structure of active members performing tasks related to our mission.*

Mission:

1) *Actively increase the public awareness of the Humanist, secular worldview as a rational alternative to views based upon supernaturalism.*

2) *Act as an informational, educational and social resource for members and others on all matters related to Humanistic, Rationalistic and Free-thought ideas.*

Common Sense is the newsletter for members and friends of the Humanist Association of West Central Florida (HAWCF). Its purpose is to report information and opinions of interest to members.

Its articles are the opinion of the respective authors only and not necessarily of HAWCF, AHA or CSH.

Permission to reprint articles in this newsletter is granted to all Humanist/Freethought groups provided proper acknowledgement is given. All others write for permission.

Editor: Nan Owens

Associate Editor: Abigail Ann Martin

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What is HAWCF?

The Humanist Association of West Central Florida (HAWCF) is a chapter of the American Humanist Association dedicated to the promotion in our area of a rational worldview free from dependence upon supernatural belief systems.

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A chartered Chapter of the American Humanist Association and an Affiliate of the Council for Secular Humanism

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New Renewal

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I am interested in helping on the following activities

- Membership Recruit, welcome and orient new members to HAWCF
- Civic Action Promote Humanism within community and government
- Activities Develop and facilitate social activities for the membership.
- Programs Arrange/facilitate interesting programs for HAWCF meetings
- Hospitality Facilitate social, housekeeping and refreshment activities for HAWCF
- Education Develop/provide humanist educational & historical materials for HAWCF
- Newsletter Write for or edit HAWCF newsletter
- Publicity Publicize HAWCF and Humanist activities in the community

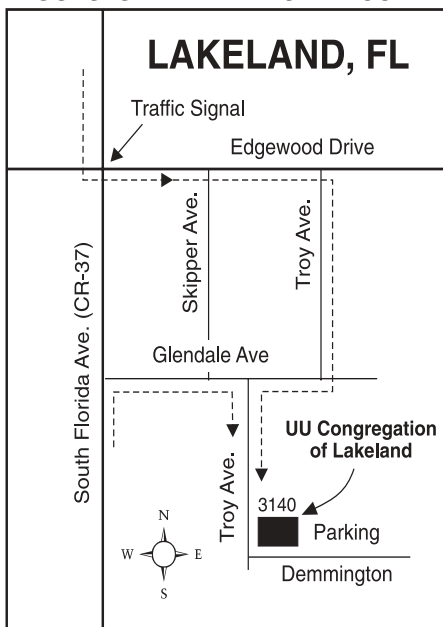
The Humanist Association of West Central Florida is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization. Contributions are tax deductible as provided by federal and state law.

WHEN AND WHERE?

THE HUMANIST ASSOCIATION OF WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA usually meets on **the 3RD Tuesday of every month at 7 pm** (except July & August) at the UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF LAKELAND (UUCL), 3140 Troy Avenue, Lakeland.

See map below.

GUESTS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME!



HUMANIST DINNER!!

JUST A REMINDER: we usually hold an informal Humanist dinner gathering on the **2ND MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH at 6:15 pm.**



NOTE THAT WE MEET AT:

Mt. Fuji Sushi Bar & Steakhouse, 2607 S Florida Avenue in Lakeland (in the Southgate Shopping Center) between Pablo and Oak Streets. See Map below.

PLEASE JOIN US...BRING YOUR FRIENDS!



ANSWER THIS, PAT ROBERTSON

(Rev. Mohler's response to Pat Robertson's claim that the Haiti earthquake was punishment from God was reported on National Secular Society (UK) Newline, 1/22/2010)

WHY DID NO EARTHQUAKE shake Nazi Germany? Why did no tsunami swallow up the killing fields of Cambodia? Why did Hurricane Katrina destroy far more evangelical churches than casinos? Why do so many murderous dictators live to old age while many missionaries die young?

Albert Mohler, Baptist Preacher

In Cyber Space:

WEBSITE ADDRESS:

<http://hawcf.org>

BLOG ADDRESS:

www.humanistcommonsense.blogspot.com

Please visit each of these sites. Comments or suggestions on either site are earnestly desired and should be brought up at meetings or made directly to webmaster Ken Schmidt:

kschmidt@tampabay.rr.com

Note: this newsletter can be printed from our website with adobe acrobat reader.

Inquiring Minds Want To Know...

March 2010

Science and Religion: Are they
equal ways to view the world?

Join us on Tuesday, March 16—
Lively Discussion on this Issue!

See inside for exciting news.



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