

# Humanist CommonSense

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

## The Pursuit of Happiness: A Humanist Mandate

WHEN: Tuesday October 19 at 7 PM

WHERE: Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lakeland (see, map on p. 11)

MANY OF US ARE FAMILIAR WITH JENNIFER HANCOCK, a writer and



longtime Humanist activist in Florida. In addition to authoring a book, *The Humanist Approach to Happiness: Practical Wisdom*; writing for several Humanist magazines and e-zines; Jen produces the *Tampa Humanist and Freethought Examiner*

for Examiner.com. She has her own blog and podcast at Sumogirl.com.

Jennifer is one of few Americans actually raised according to Humanist principles, plus being a former executive director of the Humanists of Florida Association, giving her a distinctive approach to promoting Humanism.

She has co-authored important statements central to the New Humanist movement, and served on advisory boards to Humanist promotion groups in the US and the UK

In her book, she confesses that Humanists are obsessed with happiness. But not a pursuit of hedonistic happiness. Instead, Humanists pursue happiness through cultivating personal responsibility. This is probably why Humanism, as a philosophy, has been one of the most powerful forces for positive social change on the planet,

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### TIME TO RENEW FOR 2011

Look at our great Fall deal:  
15 months for the price of 12!  
See details on page 11.

## Pattern Detection Gone Awry

By James W. Williamson, M.D.

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

ONE OF THE GREATEST SKILLS the human brain evolved is pattern detection. This skill was honed under intense survival challenges our ancestors faced. Detection of patterns is the basis of many impressive feats humans have accomplished.

Sometimes this highly developed ability can have a down side. It can, in a sense, work too well, and illusory patterns can be perceived. And these illusory perceptions have been at the root of much irrational thinking that has led humans into beliefs in the supernatural and the paranormal, as well as other types of faulty conclusions. Freethinkers will have a special interest in how these genetically determined tendencies to see false patterns can affect religious beliefs.

Three psychological concepts will clarify how strange beliefs can result from pattern detection that works too well:

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## Water, Water, Everywhere!

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.]

“Water, water, everywhere,  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water, everywhere,  
Nor any drop to drink.” [3:377]

Samuel Taylor Coleridge  
Those classic words did write.  
The Bible tells a tale far worse  
Of even greater fright!

For on its pages there is writ  
The story of The Deep  
So evil none but God can save,  
So evil grown men weep!

MOST OF US, MOST OF THE TIME, THINK ABOUT WATER only in the most positive of terms. We know that nothing can live without water and so we often praise its life-giving capacity. We enjoy its ability to refresh us when we drink it. We revel in its playfulness as we swim in it

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## CALENDAR

### October-December 2010

October 11 .....	Humanist Dinner <b>Fred's Southern Market: Map p. 11</b>
October 19 .....	Regular Meeting
November 8 .....	Humanist Dinner
November 16 .....	Regular Meeting <b>National Speaker: Jerry Dincin, President of Final Exit Network— Mark this date on your Calendar!</b>
December 15 .....	Annual Meeting <b>Fred's Southern Market: Map p. 11</b>

## The Power of the Outright Distortion

Ed. Note: *I hadn't meant to write this article, but couldn't contain myself after reading the newspaper article referenced below. Surely I should no longer be so astonished.*

LAST SUNDAY, I WAS PLEASED TO WATCH A FILM I have long wanted to see, namely, *Constantine's Sword*. The film's story is told by writer James Carroll, formerly a Roman Catholic priest who, after a time, began to see a dark side to the Catholic Church—both in his time and in prior history. Subsequently he left the priesthood, but I believe he is still a practicing catholic.

Although the film particularly shows the Church's part in the persecution of Jews through the centuries, I was struck by how Carroll portrayed the Emperor Constantine (or "Saint" Constantine). Constantine was portrayed in the traditional Catholic view rather than how historians view him. It wasn't so much a white-wash of Constantine as a surprise to me at how strong the Church tradition holds, even for educated persons.

The next morning, in my daily newspaper, my eye caught a picture of Britain's Queen Elizabeth, arrayed in her usual frilly hat, standing next to the white-clad Pope Benedict as he accepted flowers from Scottish schoolchildren attired in various plaids. As I read the article, which quoted a bit of the Pope's speech, once again I noted that papal or religious view (one could say twisting—or contortion? falsification?) of history.

During his visit to Scotland, the Pope stated:

Even in our own lifetime, we can recall how Britain and her leaders stood against a Nazi tyranny that wished to eradicate God from society and denied our common humanity to many, especially the Jews, who were thought unfit to live.

Talk about "white-washing"—this goes far beyond just making history look better for the church. It's a clear

deception. Not just hyperbole, but falsehood, ... fabrication ... equivocation! To be fair to the Pope, however, Christians in general like to spout that Hitler was an atheist and his whole Third Reich was an atheist oppression upon the world.

This Pope is an educated man ... he must know better. Obviously he chooses blatantly to trumpet a lie to unburden Christianity and the church. Here's what Hitler himself had to say about his regime:

I believe today that my conduct is in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator.

Secular schools can never be tolerated because such schools have no religious instruction, and a general moral instruction without a religious foundation is built on air; consequently, all character training and religion must be derived

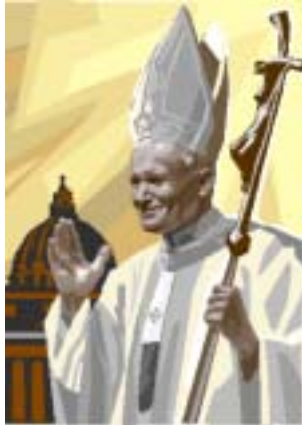
from faith . . . we need believing people.

Never in these long years have we offered any other prayer but this: Lord, grant to our people peace at home, and grant and preserve to them peace from the foreign foe!

My feelings as a Christian points me to my Lord and Savior as a fighter. . . . [many more such quotes are available].

Instruction in the Catholic faith is a regular part of the curriculum in the elementary, technical, intermediate, and high schools and is taught in accordance with the principles of the Catholic church. It will be a special concern of religious instruction, ... to inculcate a sense of patriotic, civic, and social duty in the spirit of Christian faith and morality. The syllabus and selection of text-books for religious instruction will be determined with the agreement of the church authorities. ... [1933 concordat between Pius XI and Adolf Hitler]

Not only is Pope Benedict trained in history, he actually lived through the time of Hitler as a Catholic in Germany. But then, some habits



die hard: he had been, after all, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (in previous centuries, called "the inquisition"). And even previous to that, upon becoming an Archbishop, he chose as his episcopal motto: "Cooperators of the truth". I guess he's still doing so.

I must say that I did not mean for this article to be an anti-Catholic screed. Rather, it was born out of my astonishment that religious figure-heads don't really care if they distort the truth—even when some know better. I don't restrict this just to Catholic religious leaders. But, I must add, to politicians and corporate executives who use similar tactics to steer ill-gotten profits their way.

Having said this, I must admit that politicians and tycoons cannot exert the compelling power over our citizenry as can the sanctimonious but specious spouting of our platitudinous pulpiteers.

### Update: Protest from India

FROM *ONE INDIA* comes a Hindu protest: HINDUS DENOUNCE POPE FOR BEING OFFENSIVE TO ATHEISTS, "Hindus have criticized His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for rough handling of atheists in his speech at Holyroodhouse ... where he appeared to associate atheism with the Nazis." (<http://news.oneindia.in/2010/09/17/hindusdenounce-pope-for-being-offensive-toatheists.html>)

The prominent Hindu statesman Rajan Zed was reported as commenting: since Catholics, Hindus, *et al.*, while having freedom of their belief systems were respected for their respective choices, so should be the atheists. He claimed that a religious leader of the Pope's stature should have been more inclusive.

"Zed ... said that although the Pope frequently talked about right to religious freedom, etc., in this speech he apparently condemned the beliefs of a considerable chunk of world population called atheists. Who were we as human beings to judge publicly that other humans' beliefs different than us were wrong?"

"Rajan Zed stressed that Pope should get rid of his obsession against atheism and show some maturity and inclusiveness."

## I Told You, I Told You, and I Told You!

.....  
By John Rafferty, Reprinted with permission from PIQUE, Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

ED NOTE: I recognize the following is a controversial issue—but then, humanists have always been ready to step up to the plate and debate a topic in reasoned, civil terms. So ... I welcome your comments and letters!

DISCLOSURE: I must admit that I agree with this writer and have been quite perturbed at a movement toward what I perceive as thought control.

I HATE HATE CRIME LAW. In the first article I ever wrote for PIQUE, "Hate Crime Laws: A Dissenting View," in April, 1999, when the law was limited to matters of "religion, national origin or color," I argued against:

... new proposals that would extend the scope of that law to include real or perceived sex orientation, gender or disability, and push the envelope three ways: first, by adding three new categories of victim (does anyone really hate the crippled and blind?); second, by opening that real or perceived floodgate that will lead to enormous new prosecutorial possibilities.

I believed then, still do, that "hate crime" is a dangerous, unconstitutional weapon to put in the hands of pandering politicians and headline-hungry prosecutors. Eleven years ago I asked:

... if 'death or bodily injury' defines the scope of this new law today, can anyone doubt that in another decade, civil lawsuits and cowed congressmen won't broaden it step by step, to include financial loss, career non-advancement or job loss, and even psychic or emotional distress? Will Big Brother investigate the motivations of and prosecute for 'hate crime' the African separatist group that refuses to hire a white P.R. agency?



The fundamentalist church that declines to marry a lesbian couple? The Serbian-American landlord who won't rent a room to a Muslim tenant?

**And even eventually me, for writing a letter like this?**

In October, 2001 ("I'm Afraid to Hate Myself"), I argued against more new legislation and my hero, Ted Kennedy, and agreed with my nemesis, Orrin Hatch, "that the inclusion of sex as a protected class would make every rape, every domestic abuse, every assault between genders a federal crime."

I got a lot of grief ("You're defending rapists?") for that one. And more for "This is America, We Don't Punish People for What They Think," in June, 2007, when I wrote that:

... extending protection from violent or discriminatory acts of hate to gay and lesbian Americans is a rotten idea.

In fact, I think all hate crime law is a totally misguided liberal attempt (hey, I'm a liberal!) to change people's hearts and minds through legislation, with the courts as judges of right thinking and the police as its enforcers—an idea that has more in common with fascism than liberalism.

For the fourth time in these pages, I'm going to say it: This is America, we don't punish people for what they think.

Okay, that's what, as the headline here reads, "I told you." So what? Have my decade-old dire predictions come true, or not? Am I Cassandra or Munchausen?

In a June 22 article in *The New York Times*, "A Novel Twist for Prosecution of Hate Crimes," reporter Anne Bernard writes:

In the public's imagination, the classic hate crime is an assault

born of animus against a particular ethnicity or sexual orientation ... but in Queens since 2005, at least five people have been convicted of, or pleaded guilty to, committing a very different kind of hate crime—singling out elderly victims for nonviolent crimes like mortgage fraud because they believed older people would be easy to deceive and might have substantial savings or home equity. ...

The legal thinking behind the novel method is that New York's hate crimes statute does not require prosecutors to prove defendants 'hate' the group the victim belongs to, merely that they commit the crime because of some belief, correct or not, they hold about the group.

New York's law is ambiguous. It says prosecutors must prove only a crime was committed because of a belief or perception regarding the race, color, national origin, ancestry, gender, religion, religious practice, age, disability or sexual orientation of a person.'

Did you get all that? First, the original three categories of protected groups (religion, national origin, color) have now been extended to ten. ("Ancestry"? What the hell does that mean?) But why stop at ten?

How about Republicans? (Or Democrats.) Will every political slanging match that turns into a bar brawl be investigated for "I hate Republicans" remarks?

Yankees fans? *Everyone* hates smug, front-runner Yankees fans. So be careful in arguments with them about whether Steinbrenner should be in the Hall of Fame. (*Ed: No!*)

And so now we have what S.J. Perelman used to call "the beauty part": today in New York you don't even have to hate anyone to be convicted of a hate crime!

I TOLD YOU.

## The Pursuit of Happiness

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and why some of the most influential people on our planet today are Humanists. So: What is the Humanist approach to finding happiness? How can the Humanist pursuit of happiness help

make the world a better place? Why does it matter?

While Humanists believe that people should be allowed to pursue their happiness however they want, there is a difference between pleasure and happiness. You have a choice: Do things that bring

you happiness, or choose to do things you know are counterproductive.

"Happiness is the only good. The place to be happy is here. The time to be happy is now. The way to be happy is to help make others so."—Robert Ingersoll

## Pattern Detection Gone Awry

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apophenia, pareidolia, and priming. They will be discussed in that order.

APOPHENIA is the experience of seeing meaningful patterns in random or meaningless data. The term was coined by Klaus Conrad in 1958. In statistics, it is known as a type I error (a false positive).

A list of examples of this type of faulty thinking could be almost unlimited, but one example should make the concept clear. Soon after his son committed suicide, Episcopalian Bishop James A. Pike (1913-1969) began seeing meaningful messages in such things as a stopped clock, the angle of an open safety pin, and the angle of two postcards lying on the floor. He thought that events were conveying to him the time when his son, Christopher, had shot himself.

PAREIDOLIA is a psychological phenomenon involving a vague and random stimulus, often an image or a sound, that is perceived as significant. Examples include seeing images in clouds, a man in the moon, a face on Mars, images on a Rorschach inkblot test, and hearing hidden messages on records played in reverse. Pareidolia is similar to apophenia since both involve the misperception of patterns, but they differ in that in apophenia the misperception is between multiple phenomena, and in pareidolia the misperception is focused on one phenomenon.

The most frequent examples of pareidolia involve seeing faces in random visual stimuli. Many of the examples are humorous and show a childish credulity on the part of a significant portion of the population.

Diana Duyser of Hollywood, Florida, was jolted by a religious message on a grilled cheese sandwich that she prepared for herself in autumn 1994. As she stared at the brown skillet marks on the bread, she stated, "I saw a face looking up at me; it was the Virgin Mary staring back. I was in total shock." She hung onto this stale relic for 10 years, put it up for sale on eBay, and received the astonishing sum of \$28,000. This sum clearly showed that many people besides

Ms. Duyser saw a face and that many considered the face of great significance. To add to this sum, Ms. Duyser attributes winning \$70,000 at a Florida casino near her home to the magical powers of the sandwich.

Other Virgin Mary "face" sightings abound in bizarre and undignified locations. In Chicago, a stain on a section of the Kennedy Expressway underpass resembling the Virgin was discovered. Her visage was perceived in stains on the bathroom floor of a Texas auto parts store. A likeness appeared on an office window in Clearwater, Florida.

Many other "face" sightings have generated titillation in the populace. Jesus' image was discovered in the skillet burns of a tortilla in New Mexico, in rust stains on a 40-foot-high soybean oil tank in Ohio, and a forkful of spaghetti illustrated on a billboard in Georgia. A likeness of Mother Theresa was seen on a cinnamon bun and kept under glass for years in a coffee shop where it was nicknamed the Nun Bun. Multiple sightings of Fidel Castro have been reported on Lay's chips.

The perception of faces has evolved in the human brain to an exquisite degree. In a fraction of a second humans gain information not only about another person's identity, but also some clues about their emotional state, gender, age, attractiveness, social status, and even honesty. Doris Tsao, a neuroscientist at Massachusetts General Hospital, states that, "The evidence is overwhelming that there is a specialized system dedicated to processing faces and not other objects." This specialized system is called the fusiform facial area (FFA), and it is located about halfway back in the brain, near the bottom of the visual cortex. There is usually one on each side of the brain, but the one on the right is dominant, the other a backup. Other portions of the brain connect with this dedicated area in the complex process of perceiving faces.

Why a portion of the brain would evolve whose only function is facial recognition is not hard to understand. This ability enabled our ancestors to immediately distinguish friend from

foe, in order to live on to reproduce, thereby being more likely to pass on the favorable genes for facial recognition. Being able to recognize faces and read facial expressions also had a favorable effect on survival in facilitating harmonious social interaction. These are just two examples among many that show the survival advantages conferred on humans by facial recognition skills.

Neuroscience studies have shown that general pattern recognition is processed in the prefrontal cortex, the site of higher brain function in humans. As with face recognition, the evolutionary rationale for the high priority given to pattern detection seems clear. For example, if our ancestors saw rustling in tall grass it could be a warning that a wild animal was present and about to pounce. Also, spotting multiple subtle clues could enable a hunter to successfully track and kill an animal as a source of food. In both cases, this pattern recognition could improve survival chances.

On the other hand, pattern detection that was so highly developed that it led to erroneous conclusions wouldn't be a survival advantage. The overall benefit, however, would be positive as long as the over-perception did not have serious consequences. In the above rustling tall grass example, if instead of the pattern indicating a lurking wild animal, it turned out that it was only the wind, no harm would be done.

PRIMING. The third term I mentioned that helps us understand why humans believe strange things is priming. This mechanism explains why erroneous pattern perception can follow predictable courses. For priming to occur, a person has to have been indoctrinated with some form of irrational belief system. The importance of this mechanism is well explained by Michael Shermer: "Why do people see faces in nature, interpret window stains as human figures, hear voices in random sounds generated by electronic devices, or find conspiracies in the daily news? A proximate cause is the priming effect in which our brain and senses are prepared to interpret stimuli according to an

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## Water, Water, Everywhere!

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and ski upon it. We marvel at its beauty as we gaze upon spectacular waterfalls.

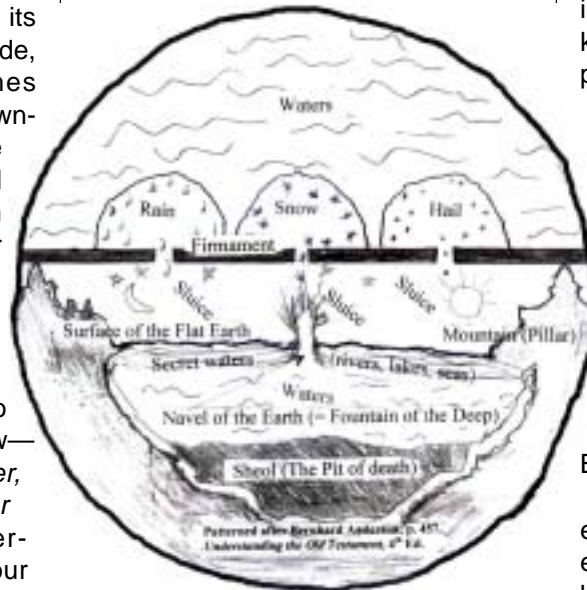
But water has another side, as Hurricane Katrina made clear with its flooding of New Orleans. Worldwide, every year hundreds, sometimes thousands of people die from drowning when storms cause rivers to leave their banks, lakes to overflow, and tidal waves to come ashore. Death by water even comes to us in our backyard swimming pools.

In the same way that we often forget the destructive capacity of the world's most abundant liquid, we also tend to forget—or we may not even know—that *the Bible, from cover to cover, uses water as one of its major symbols of evil*. A clear understanding of that will strengthen our ability to teach others what a book of *myths* the Bible really is.

When believers in the Bible think of water, several *positive examples of water* in it come to mind: Jesus promises to give the “living water” of eternal life to his followers. [John 4:10, 13f; 7:37-39] Christian baptism with water is said to be necessary if one is to enter the kingdom of God. [John 3:5] Even Jesus was baptized in water by John before he began his ministry and then his first miracle supposedly involved turning water into wine. [Matthew 3:13; John 2:1-11] In the Old Testament, water is often praised not only for its life-giving quality, but also as a symbol of powerful goodness, as when the prophet Amos demands, “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” [Amos 5:24]

But, such positive things constitute less than half the story! Something quite different lies behind all such happy images, something profoundly, primordially, and permanently negative. That thing is *water's eternal, inherent, and ineradicable evil*. According to the Bible, the goodness of water arises only after its hero god Yahweh takes control of it and lasts only so long as Yahweh dominates it. Should he relax for a moment, death and destruction would

immediately result. The good biblical images of water are good only because they illustrate Yahweh's being in total control as the absolute lord of history. But to make that clear, we must begin at the beginning.



The Old Testament's Universe

Remember these words from Genesis?

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of The Deep; and the spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.

“And God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light...

“And God said, ‘Let there be a [metal dome, a] firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters. And God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament... And God called the firmament heaven. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

“And God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear....

“And God said, ‘Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures....

“And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” [Excerpts from Genesis 1; see annotations in Source 8, pp. 1-3]

To save space, I have quoted only a few verses from Chapter One. But

they are essential since they describe water's role in everything!

We live in a scientific age where our view of the Universe tells us that the Earth orbits the Sun in a solar system that is part of a galaxy that is part of a cosmos unlike anything known or imagined by the primitive, pre-scientific peoples who created the various world religions. Their views of the universe were mythological and bizarre—and that includes the view presented throughout the Bible.

If you have never tried to picture what the biblical universe looked like, I include a crude drawing of its elements. It was a “3-story universe.” [1:725] In the center is a flat earth. Above it is the heavenly abode of Yahweh. Below it is the realm of the dead.

What I want you to notice, especially, is the water. Water everywhere—above, around, and below, threatening all life with destruction unless Yahweh's divine intervention restrains it.

As John L. McKenzie, S.J., says in his *Dictionary of the Bible*:

“To understand the OT idea of creation it is necessary to have some knowledge of the mythology of creation in Mesopotamia and Canaan, since the OT incorporated some motifs from this mythology... The classic Mesopotamian account is found in the epic *Enuma Elish*... The creative deity...is Marduk, the god of Babylon... In older accounts other gods had this position... The Mesopotamian account of creation begins with a chaos...[which is] the sea, a formless monster which is hostile to the land and perpetually attacks it. In the beginning...there is no land. The chaos is personified as two deities, the male deity Apsu and the female deity Tiamat... They first beget the gods; but hostility arises, and Apsu is slain by Ea, who was probably the creative deity in an older form of the poem. Tiamat is now revealed as the dragon of chaos, a monster. From her womb she spawns a whole horde of demons to assist her in her attack upon her offspring. The gods in terror seek a champion, but several gods refuse the chal-

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## Water, Water, Everywhere!

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lenge; it is finally accepted by Marduk, the son of Ea. In combat Marduk slays Tiamat; he catches her in his net, inflates her with the [four] wind[s], and pierces her with an arrow. The gigantic carcass of the monster is the material from which Marduk creates the visible universe... Marduk creates a world in which the [flat] disk of the earth rests upon the abyss of the ocean. Over this structure arches the sky, in which move the stars, and above it are the chambers of rain and wind... Man is made of clay... The [Mesopotamian] myth clearly exhibits the belief in the production of the universe from a preexisting chaos. This chaos is the ultimate principle of the origin of all things, and itself arises from nothing. It is divine in character, for it is the parent not only of men but also of gods. Creation is the victory of the creative deity over this monster." [9:157f.]

McKenzie further explains: "The myth had an important place in Mesopotamian cult. The cycle of nature, in which life is born anew each year to perish at the end of the year, was conceived as a recurring cycle of creation and chaos. In the spring life must be born anew; hence the New Year was celebrated by the recitation of the myth of creation and by its ritual reenactment... The victory of the creative deity is never final, since in his turn he must yield to chaos." [9:158]

The same pattern appears in Canaan and in many other ancient Near and Middle Eastern religions which took water to be the primordial chaos out of which the ordered universe had to emerge. Scholars call these myths "cosmogonies." The water version of such creation myths arises from the annual inundations which come around the world every year as snow melts off of mountains and new springs gush forth. Even the Chinese refer to the act of confining an overflowing river as "the caging of the dragon." [9:158; 4:702, 703; 706; 6:3ff.] When the ancient Hebrews, Jews and Christians came along, they

adopted and adapted this and other myths from the cultures around them. [4:703] Over a period of centuries, they gradually replaced the original polytheisms with their own monotheism. Chaos was reduced from being a goddess to being water, waters, the ocean or sea, or a sea monster, sea serpent or dragon with various names such as "Leviathan" and "Rahab." The original battle became more like Yahweh's struggle to control the elements. *Like these pagan myths, the biblical versions also began with a "formation" model of creation in which Yahweh merely formed or re-shaped pre-existing materials into the orderly elements of our present universe. Only later was that approach replaced by a "creation from nothing" model, leaving Yahweh the only existing thing prior to creation.* [8:1; 9:158f.; 4:706; 1:728] Similarly, for a time, the Hebrews celebrated a yearly New Year's mythic reenactment of Yahweh's victorious battle against chaos or The Deep. [1:726] That was needed because *Yahweh never destroys chaos or The Deep, but only pushes it back, time and again.*

Down through history, less explicit attention was given to this battle and its annual cultic observance, and more and more references to the original creation myth became symbolic and subdued and almost invisible to the untrained eye. [2:813f.] But, they did not stop or disappear entirely, for, as McKenzie says, "If Yahweh were to relax the bonds which keep the monster under restraint, the world would relapse into primeval chaos." [9:160; 1:730] Dozens of passages echoing the primordial battle between Yahweh and chaos can still be found throughout the Bible, all the way from the creation myths in Genesis to the myths about the End of the world in the book of Revelation! You just have to know what to look for. [For examples, see McKenzie: 9:159-60, 782]

I don't have space to give you an exhaustive survey, but here are a few examples.

*The Flood.* In Genesis 6:5-9:17 there is the Bible's version of a myth that has appeared in almost every culture. [6:82-131; 2:808] "The closest parallel to the biblical story of the

Flood, and undoubtedly the primary source of it, occurs in the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*," the details of which are extremely similar to what appears in Genesis. [6:82; cf. 9:188ff.] Because of human sin, Yahweh decided to punish humanity by destroying it. [Genesis 7:4] He accomplished that by relaxing his control over chaos. "On that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. And rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights." [Genesis 7:11f.] This was not a natural storm, but the supernatural "collapse of the entire cosmos" back into the chaos described in the creation myth of Genesis 1. [9:188f.] Yahweh started it and stopped it and then gave the rainbow as a sign of his covenant never to relax control again. [Genesis 9]

Later, *Moses* came along and had a string of water-connected adventures! Like many other ancient mythical heroes around the world, *he began his life by being thrust into and then drawn out of water.* This reflects both the primitive notion that special power and wisdom come to such heroes by their being in the primordial water, as well as the Hebrews' belief that Yahweh has special power over The Deep. [6:224-230]

Then there is *the magical rod of Moses*. [9:922] Not only does Yahweh tell him to use it to *part the waters of the Red [Reed] Sea* [Genesis 14:16; Source 1:809] in order to save the Hebrews from their Egyptian pursuers; but also he uses it *to find (and control) water which springs forth out of rocks* during the Hebrews' Exodus in the wilderness, all to the glory of Yahweh. [Genesis 17:5; Exodus 20:11] The use of such magical rods to "part" waters and to find water was commonplace magic in many ancient religions. [6:233f.] But, in the Bible, such stories are given for the purpose of displaying Yahweh's power.

Another sign of Yahweh's power came in *Elijah's contest on Mt. Carmel* against the priests of Baal. [1 Kings 17-18] There had been a devastating drought. In a competition worthy of the magician David Copperfield, Elijah supposedly proved

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## Pattern Detection Gone Awry

Continued from p. 4

expected model. UFOlogists see a face on Mars. Religionists see a Virgin Mary on the side of a building. Paranormalists hear dead people speaking to them through a radio receiver. Conspiracy theorists think 9/11 was an inside job by the Bush administration. Is there a deeper ultimate cause for why people believe such weird things? There is. I call it patternicity, or the tendency to find meaningful patterns in meaningless noise."

In the case of religion, priming helps

## Water, Water, Everywhere!

Continued from p. 6

that only Yahweh has the power to control water, this time in the form of rain. [2:807]

In the story of *Jonah*, Yahweh saved his prophet from certain death when he was thrown into The Deep and swallowed up by a sea monster. [Jonah]

Throughout the *Psalms*, there are songs of praise to Yahweh for his beneficent control of the rains from above and the waters from below. [2:807; 9:782] Especially telling is Yahweh's control of The Deep as expressed in Psalm 23's claim that "he leads me beside still waters."

In front of Solomon's Temple there sat a bronze "sea," which was an immense reservoir: 7½ feet high, 15 feet in diameter. It symbolized the primeval sea which Yahweh conquered during creation. [9:874]

In the apocalyptic vision of *Daniel*, the prophet foresaw four evil beasts that would arise out of "the great sea" only to be destroyed by the "Ancient of Days." [Daniel 7]

Other apocalyptic writers foresaw that Yahweh "will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent, and he will slay the dragon that is in the sea." [Isaiah 27:1; cf. Ps. 74:12-17; Source 2:809]

Ironically, some biblical prophets tried to praise Yahweh by saying that because of his victory over water, in the End Times he will bring forth a fountain of living waters, that the New Jerusalem will be like a watered garden, and nature will gush forth with springs and

explain why believers see images that are not only religious but specific to an individual's own religion. Seeing these religion specific images is not only emotionally gratifying, but serves the functional of confirming the reality of their religious icons as well as the reality of the supernatural realm.

So what can be done to combat this inborn tendency for humans to believe strange things because of apophenia, pareidolia, and priming. Unfortunately, the brain hasn't evolved a baloney detector. The baloney detecting must be performed by a

a river of life will emerge [4:708; 2:807f.; 9:922]; while other biblical prophets, like John of Patmos in his book of Revelation declared that Yahweh must fight a final battle with the dragon, the serpent (who by John's time was also equated with "the Devil" and "Satan"), and then after Yahweh wins, in the new age the evil sea will be no more at all! [Revelation 12:7-10, 20; 21:1; Source 4:708]

In the New Testament, besides *baptism*, and *Christ as the living water*, think also about how Yahweh's victory over The Deep is symbolized in *Jesus' rebuke and calming of the sea*, and in the claim that *he walked upon its waters!* [Matthew 8:26; 14:25; Source 9:782]

Go to any good Bible dictionary or encyclopedia, or any reliable dictionary or encyclopedia on the history of world religions, and you will find all these things, and much more about not only the biblical, but *the worldwide use of water as a symbol for primordial evil.*

So, what, then, does all of this mean for us, today?

*All of the world's great religions arose in pre-scientific times and before the Enlightenment had taught humanity how to do historiography reliably.* Those ancient people did not have the scientific tools needed to ask and to answer questions about the origins of the universe. Nor, before the 1700s, did most people seriously ask the question: "What really happened?" *Instead, primitive peoples spoke in the language of myth and symbol.* Using fabulous and often purely fictional stories, they tried to

learned method called scientific thinking, which should be specifically taught. Many students graduate from higher education with vast funds of knowledge, even including science, but are unable to reason scientifically. These graduates often still express belief in the paranormal and supernatural, as well as an assortment of other irrational beliefs. Scientific thinking (also less accurately called critical thinking) has freed humans from many strange beliefs, but we have a long way to go before we can be thought of as rational animals.

ease human fears of the unknown, and comfort human sufferings with promises of hope and a better life—if not in this world, then in the next.

*They spent their lives fearing and placating an infinite variety of gods and goddesses.* To support these metaphysical beliefs, *they invented complex mythologies.* *When the writers of the Bible came along, they adopted and adapted such fables for their own use, changing the names of the deities, the places and times of events, and many other details, all in order to express their own particular beliefs.* One of those mythical stories was the ancient, world-wide combat myth between a creator deity and chaos symbolized as water or a sea monster.

Understanding that the biblical writers took over and used such myths will help us greatly to understand the mythical nature and symbolic meaning(s) of the Bible. It will also help us combat irrational fundamentalists who foolishly try to read and interpret the Bible literally.

Water, water everywhere,

And not a drop to drink.

Water, water everywhere:

**Let it make us think!**

### SOURCES

[Specific biblical passages are cited with great abundance throughout these detailed sources.]

[1] Anderson, B. W. "Creation." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. 1. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.

[2] Anderson, B. W. "Water." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*.

Continued on p. 8



*The first letter was published in the St. Petersburg Times on August 29, 2010, in answer to an August 19 letter—"Fed up with voting and Weep for our future."*

### Through it all, we have survived

Certainly the letter writers are correct as they mourn over the frightful condition in which we find our country. One feels a sick despair at every new revelation of fraud, or hypocrisy or double-dealing. The words of men fighting to win elections ring hollow, somehow. Their aides and friends try valiantly to cover up or smooth over quite serious flaws—a startling breach of ethics, or blatant hypocrisy. And (to my mind) what is the worst of all: an almost defiant effort to buy an exalted position!

In the meantime, the economy teeters on the edge of disaster, men and women are desperate for jobs that seem to have vanished, academics wring their hands at the inadequacies of the education being given our children. Athletes and entertainers are accorded unbelievable salaries, and a growing number of homeless walk the streets of once-proud cities.

In the midst of all this, one must cling to the knowledge that our country has, all through its history, known difficult times. Poverty, war, crime, a divisive Civil War—all these have made large numbers of citizens miserable. And we have survived.

We have shown ourselves greater

than the evils that beset us. We'll live through these bad, apparently hopeless years because there are enough men and women who will never give up searching for solutions to the problems they see about them ... and who care enough to eliminate them.

Abigail Ann Martin, *Brandon*

*From The American Rationalist newsletter (Vol. LVI September/October 2010, No. 5), the following is an excerpt from a member's letter, with AR's promise of good reading to come.*

*The American Rationalist is always richly rewarding, but I think this latest issue (July/August) is one of the very best. I am a passionate atheist, and the pervading atmosphere of American religiosity sickens me. I often despair, feeling as if the fight against it is a hopeless one. It honestly seems as if people cling more stubbornly than ever to their fantasies: yet we know there many non-believers who are afraid to advertise their opinions. And these badly need encouragement. We may not be able to eradicate the power of perverted imaginations. But we can certainly try! ...*

Abigail Ann Martin

Abigail Ann Martin's study of guilt in America will appear in the November/December issue. (KD)

*The following letter was sent to Common Sense, providing us with helpful material. Ted Utchen, a retired attorney lives in a fundamentalist community similar to the atmosphere in Lakeland.*

*This letter was printed also in the September 2010 issue of Freethought Today.*

### What really is the Constitution?

In our debates with religiosofists we are often told that it's OK to com-

mingle government and religion because the words "separation of church and state" are not to be found anywhere in the Constitution or the establishment clause of the First Amendment. As an attorney, let me explain exactly how we should respond to such an argument so we can more effectively proclaim the wall of separation of church and state.

We are not governed only by the Constitution and its Amendments, but rather by something called "Constitutional Law." Constitutional Law consists of (1) the Constitution itself, which was written in general terms because the founders knew they could not foresee all the specific fact situations that would arise in the future, and (2) federal court interpretations of the Constitution as it is to be applied to specific cases that arise.

Thomas Jefferson in his famous letter to the Danbury Baptists used the terminology "wall of separation between church and state." That's where that phrase came from. Then the U.S. Supreme Court, in handing down decisions in cases that came before it, referred to that phrase and incorporated it into their opinions. That action by the Supreme Court made Jefferson's phrase a part of our governing "Constitutional Law." So when we are confronted with religiosofists who tell us it's OK to commingle religion and government because the phrase "separation of church and state" appears nowhere in the Constitution, let us tell them that we are governed by "Constitutional Law" and not just by the Constitution, and our "Constitutional Law" does in fact incorporate that phrase.

Theodore M. Utchen, *Wheaton IL*

### Water, Water, Everywhere!

Continued from p. 7

Vol. IV. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.

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[4] Gaster, Theodor H. "Cosmogony." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the*

*Bible*. Vol. I. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.

[5] Gaster, Theodor H. "Dragon." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. I. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.

[6] Gaster, Theodor H. *Myth, Legend and Custom in the Old Testament*. Vols. I & II. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1969.

[7] Jackson, J. J. "The Deep." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*.

Vol. I. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.

[8] May, Herbert G. and Bruce M. Metzger, Eds. *The Oxford Annotated Bible: The Holy Bible*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1962.

[9] McKenzie, John L., S.J. *Dictionary of the Bible*. Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Co., 1965.

[10] "Waters, Many." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. Vol. IV. New York: Abingdon Press, 1962.



## Freethinker Events in Central Florida

**Saturday Oct 16, 2010**

**Matt Dillahunty—From Austin, TX**

WHEN: October 16, 2010, 2–4 pm

WHERE: In Tampa, at Carrollwood Cultural Center, 4537 Lowell Road

MATT DILLAHUNTY IS BRILLIANT AND FUNNY: when he goes off it's like Hitchens on crack. President of the Austin Community of Atheists,

Dillahunty is famous his public access TV show

THE ATHEIST EXPERIENCE, plus his

NON-PROPHETS radio show. THE ATHEIST

EXPERIENCE won the *Austin Chronicle's*

"Best of Austin 2010" award as Best Public Access TV Show.

The Atheist Community of Austin was among 200-plus people who showed up on Sunday, May 16, 2010, for a "Texans for Truthful Textbook Rally" in the Texas State Capitol, protesting ideological- and religious-based curriculum changes proposed by the Texas State Board of Education.

Sadly, real history lost. The Texas State Board of Education voted in social studies standards that cover less Franklin Roosevelt and more Ronald Reagan, requires students to learn the key actors and movements in the rise of the New Right: the Moral Majority, Phyllis Schlafly, the Heritage Foundation and the Contract With America. Even the Tea Parties may make their way in.

Religious "deviant" Thomas Jefferson no longer counts as an influential Enlightenment thinker, replaced by John Calvin and Thomas Aquinas. To hear Matt will not be a dry academic outline but a humorous and knowledgeable experience.

**Saturday Oct 16, 2010**

## Freethought Day at Disney 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Freethought Day at Disney & Epcot

JOIN freethinkers, atheists, agnostics and humanists of all kinds on

the third Saturday in October for a fun day at Walt Disney World in Orlando ... hosted by Humanist Family Network—Greater Tampa Region.

This is a social event open to anyone and everyone who wishes just to have a good time at what is billed as the Happiest Place on Earth.

When you come, wear lime green! That way we can identify you in the crowd. Any old lime green t-shirt will do, or you can order the official shirt at [www.cafepress.com/](http://www.cafepress.com/) at cost.

The Humanist Family Network also has t-shirts for sale for this day—check out your preference.

For more information, go to <http://freethoughtdayatdisney.org/>

**Saturday, October 23, 2010**

## EXIT International North America Tour 2010

MEETINGS & WORKSHOPS with Dr Philip Nitschke MD PhD

WHEN: October 23, 2010

WHERE: Orlando, 1st Unitarian Church of Orlando, 1901 Robinson St East

**11 am–12 noon:** A Free Public Meeting—legislative history and current political status of Assisted Suicide.

**1–4 pm:** Safe Suicide Workshops provide the latest end-of-life practical information based on the *Peaceful Pill eHandbook*. Note: Attendance is limited to those over 50 years old and/or people who are seriously ill.

For information on Topics to be covered, workshop pricing, and registration information, visit their website at <http://exitinternational.net/page/Workshops>. or email to [contact@exitinternational.net](mailto:contact@exitinternational.net), or call 1-248-809-4435.

Exit International is a leading end-of-life choices (voluntary euthanasia/assisted suicide) information and advocacy organisation founded by Australian physician, Dr Philip Nitschke. A registered non-profit with administrative headquarters in Darwin in the Northern Territory, Australia, EXIT has a full time staff of five and more than 50 active volunteers around the world. EXIT International US is based in Bellingham WA.

Note that EXIT reserves the right to refuse entry.

**Sunday, November 14, 2010**

## Sean Faircloth Florida Tour

WHEN: November 14, 2010, 2–5 pm

WHERE: In Orlando, UU Congregation Auditorium, 1901 E. Robinson Street E

Sean Faircloth, Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for America is making a special trip to Florida... to discuss what direction should our country take ... what goals should we seek to accomplish in our quest for equal rights and representation.

Prior to being appointed Executive Director for the SCA, Sean served 5 terms in the Maine Legislature. He is responsible for originating over 30 laws including the Deadbeat Dad Law. Known for his social activism, and for founding and heading the Maine Discovery Museum in Bangor, Faircloth was also involved in promoting economic development and pressed for tax credits for companies that invest in research and development. He has worked as a lawyer, prosecutor, lawmaker and educator.

Most recently though, Sean's activism has taken him to Washington, DC where he works the halls of Congress in the fight to keep religion out of government.

Sean and the SCA heralded a new era in politics this year when they were successful in facilitating a meeting of the SCA and other secular groups with the Obama administration.

Join in this special speaking event. There will be a meet and greet after, with time for photos and autographs.

**Tuesday, November 16, 2010**

## HAWCF Presentation: By Final Exit Network, Florida Tour 2010: Jerry Dincin, President

WHEN: Tuesday, November 16, 2010

WHERE: Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lakeland (see, map on p. 11)

LAKELAND IS HOSTING an area meeting for this national organization, which is working to maintain our freedom of choice in our most private life events.

PLEASE—**Mark your calendars**—invite interested or curious friends, plus organizations that have concerns for civil liberties, privacy rights, and quality-of-life issues. This is a great opportunity to explore this concern!

## HAWCF ... Vision & Mission Statements A

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 Freethought ideas.

## Definitions of Humanism

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

### Humanism is:

"...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*

"...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*

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

### LINKS: Central Florida Freethought

Atheists of Florida Inc.  
 AtheistsofFlorida.org  
 facebook.com/AtheistsofFlorida  
 Center for Inquiry Tampa Bay  
 CenterforInquiry.net/Tampa  
 Humanist Society of the Suncoast  
 (Pinellas County)  
 SuncoastHumanist.com  
 facebook.com/pages/Humanist-Society-of-the-Suncoast/  
 Orlando Freethinkers & Humanists  
 meetup.com/GotReason  
 Humanists of Sarasota Bay Area  
 (HUSBAY)  
 http://sarasota.humanists.net  
 Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lakeland (UUCL)  
 uuclakeland.org

*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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# Humanist Association of West Central Florida

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

Make check payable to HAWCF and mail to: P.O. Box 6675 • Lakeland, FL 33807-6675 • 863-644-0560

## MEMBERSHIP

New  Renewal

<input type="checkbox"/> Newsletter Only	\$15	<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member	\$100
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<input type="checkbox"/> Family	\$35	<input type="checkbox"/> Cardinal	\$1000
<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$50	<input type="checkbox"/> Endowment	

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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

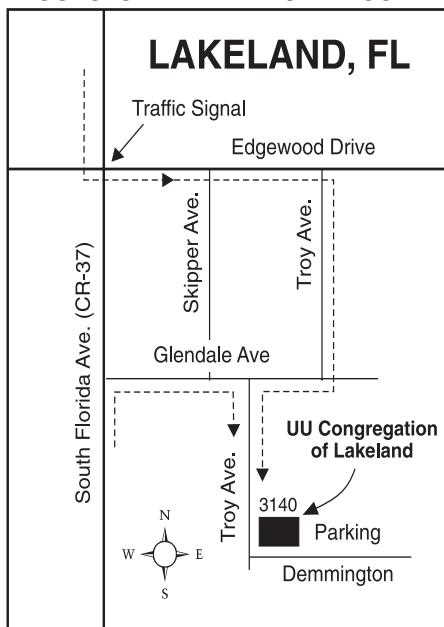
The Humanist Association of West Central Florida is a 501(c)(3) non-profit educational organization. Contributions are tax deductible as provided by federal and state law.

## WHEN AND WHERE?

THE HUMANIST ASSOCIATION OF WEST CENTRAL FLORIDA usually meets on **the 3<sup>RD</sup> 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: each month we usually hold an informal Humanist dinner gathering (except December).

**WHEN:**

**The 2<sup>ND</sup> MONDAY OF EVERY MONTH at 6:15 pm.**



**WHERE:**

**Fred's Southern Market ...**

located at 2124 Harden Boulevard in Lakeland (just south of Beacon Road on east side of the road). See Map below

PLEASE JOIN US...BRING YOUR FRIENDS!



## NOW: TIME TO UPDATE YOUR MEMBERSHIP!

Has your membership lapsed ... have you forgotten about your membership dues? If you're not sure, just renew now for 2011—and get three months of Fall 2010 for free.

For all, just send the above membership form with your check to the address listed. Let's make our Annual Meeting at Solstice, a true celebration of full membership and funding for our 2011 Association Year ... for your newsletters, socials, and stimulating meetings—we're already lining up exciting speakers!

Do your part to keep HAWCF vital!

## In Cyber Space:

**WEBSITE ADDRESS:**

<http://hawcf.org>

Please visit each of our 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](mailto:kschmidt@tampabay.rr.com)

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

# Inquiring Minds Want To Know...

How do Humanists pursue Happiness?  
Does the Humanist pursuit of Happiness  
benefit our community?  
Why do we need more than optimism to  
solve our problems?  
Join us to learn the difference between  
happiness and pleasure!

See inside for exciting news.



October 2010



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