

HOUSTON HUMANIST ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

THE NEWSLETTER FOR HOUSTON'S HUMANIST AND FREETHOUGHT COMMUNITY

JUNE 2003 ISSUE 44

In This issue:

Contributors, Pg.1
Sound Off by HOH Prez, Pg.1
From the Editor's Desk, Pg.1
Essays
 Day of Reason, Pg.1
 Islam and the West, Pg.2
Chronicles
 Humanist Manifesto III, Pg.5
 Bush church-state policies, #6 (2)
Obituary, Pg.6
Letters, #8
About the Houston Humanist Alliance,
 Pg.1
Statement of Principles, #10
Membership and Contact Information,
 Pg.10
Publisher, Pg.10
Explanation of iih symbol, Pg.10
Calendar of Events, Pg.11
Contact People, Pg.11
 iih

Contributors:

Jimmy Dunne, Pg.1
Robert D Finch, Pg.1
Sheila Finch, Pg.2
Karen L Hart, Pg.6
Keith Irish, Pg.8
Fred Mittag, Pg.7
Ron Titus, Editor, Pg.1
 lih

About the Houston Humanist Alliance:

The *Houston Humanist Alliance* is a collection of local humanist and freethought organizations in Houston which have come together to provide a wider range of services, information, and activities to their members. While still separated in their membership, leadership, and schedules, member-organizations of the *Alliance* share the same newsletter and mailing lists. This allows our organizations to cooperate effectively and enables individual members to be kept informed of virtually all activities of interests to humanists in the Houston area.

iih

Sound Off

By Jimmy Dunne
Greetings to members of American Humanist Association who are receiving this newsletter:

We extend a warm welcome and encourage you to attend one of our Humanists of Houston Meetings. We meet twice a month.

- 1) The first Sunday of the month, 9-11am, and the location is being changed.
- 2) The third Saturday, 2:30pm at the Unitarian Fellowship, 1504 Wirt Rd. We have a short business meeting and then a speaker followed by questions and discussion.

During the year, we celebrate Charles Darwin's birthday with a public event at Borders Books around Feb. 12. In December, we have a Winter Solstice party on the third Saturday.

Visit our web site at www.humanistsofhouston.org
Send your email address to jimmydunne@email.msn.com and I will add you to our Humanists of Houston email group.

We look forward to meeting you and having you join our family of humanists. If you have any questions, call me at 281.584.9707

Jimmy Dunne is President of the Humanists of Houston.

lih

Essays (#1 of 2):

Thoughts on the Day of Reason 2003

By Robert D Finch

It is May Day 2003 and the Bush Administration wants to institute a Day of Prayer. As our government becomes increasingly theocratic we are in danger of forgetting that the source of human progress has been our ability to reason.

See REASON on Pg. 2

From the Editor's desk:

By Ron Titus

Dear Readers,

[1] *We have struck it rich with a plethora of letters. A yesteryear habit prompts me to exclaim ALLELUIA!*

Since all of the letter-writers can be considered contributors, it was difficult for me to have to decide which would be listed as contributors. In this issue I am experimenting with the formulation of a new editorial policy: If a letter takes the shape of an essay, I will list it as an essay. But my many thanks to you, the many letter-writers.

[2] *Omitted from this issue are the "Ramblings" column and the "Food for thought" column. Reason: To reduce the level of my depression, I'm reducing my exposure to international political news. I'm turning newspaper & magazine pages and changing TV channels faster. The relief has been significant.*

I've learned that one of my friends has been doing the same thing. Another friend advised against such behavior, probably because avoidance and escapism are not considered good mental health moves. "Grow up and face it like a man!" is an old axiom.

[3] *For the record, I got another request for removal from the mailing list. Since additions still outnumber the removals, I guess that that is a good sign.*

[4] *Peace!*

iih

From REASON on Pg. 1

Aristotle called man “the rational animal”. We are the only species that thinks to any degree. We alone have a cerebral cortex which enables us to imagine the consequences of our actions. What a fine idea to take a day to celebrate Reason.

We humans alone are able to use symbols to stand for objects and actions and to use these symbols in associations that model the world in expressions of language and art. We alone have built on these foundations the methods of critical thinking and science.

We have a great facility to invent and use tools, to construct buildings and machines. We have used our reasoning abilities in the invention of agriculture and the development of metallurgy. It is reasoning that lies behind the growth of trade and money, banking, insurance and the stock market.

The sciences have all grown through the exercise of reasoning. Physics has elucidated mechanics and electricity, heat, light and sound, the existence and working of the atom and has given us the theory of the beginning of the universe. Chemistry has shown us how to produce substances and materials of all descriptions: fertilizers, paints, pharmaceuticals. Biology has enabled us to understand the growth and evolution of plants and animals from viruses to orchids, to conquer infectious diseases and feed a growing population.

We use reason along with our other cognitive abilities: perception, memory, consciousness and emotion in valuing and judging in everyday life and pursuing the arts: in refining skills in painting and sculpture, in playing and composing music. There is a level we call intuition at which all these faculties come together. We need a world view which unites all experience into a coherent picture and a lifestance which enables us to act in the world. For some people these needs are met by traditional religion. Others of us prefer the evolutionary search called Humanism.

As we look to the future there are hopes that reason will continue to serve us well. We look to the elimination of such scourges as mental illness and congenital disease, of deformities both from accidents and genetic heritage. We hope to cure cancer and control the processes of death.

If we use our reason well we should be able to feed the world and provide economic bounties to everyone. We should be able to ensure a loving upbringing and education to every child and permit every man and woman to meet their potential to the full. We will treat the Earth and the solar system like a garden and act like citizens of the cosmos. We will look back to the beginning of time and forward to the extent of the universe.

This is my celebration for the Day of Reason. What do you think?

lih

Essays (#2 of 2):**Islam and the West**

By Sheila Finch

I wrote this talk some months ago when a study group that I belong to asked me to do some research on Islam and the sect that Osama Bin Laden belongs to. At that time the focus was much more on Bin Laden than Saddam Hussein.

I knew very little about Islam so I read several articles and in particular the book entitled Islam by Karen Armstrong. Questions that were very prevalent and that I wanted to find out more about were first, What Happened to the Arabs? They had been so powerful and successful at one point and such rich contributors to learning and science. What happened to change this? And the second question was, Why do They Hate Us So Much?

Starting with the second question first, why is it that this fundamentalist message is receiving so much support in many Islamic countries?

Going back to Muhammad the Prophet, all religions have started with a dream and a hope or message of a better way of life. In the 7th century, Mecca was a thriving mercantile city. Muhammad was worried that his tribe was so intent on making money that they were losing old values and the spirit of community. (Doesn't that sound familiar? We hear the same thing today.) Also the idea of one God rather than many was prevalent at that time but although the Jews and the Christians had their prophets, no prophet had come for the Arabs.

Muhammad had several strong religious revelations and began to preach in 612. The spirit of his original Islam was the striving towards an egalitarian community. Social justice was the crucial virtue. Muslims had a religious duty to build a just community whose members would be submissive to God and where there would be a fair distribution of wealth. All members of the community, including women, were to be treated with equal respect. Dogma was not important because it's useless to argue about abstruse things that you can't be sure of. It's how you live that is important. Salvation is not the redemption of sin it is the building of a just community.

Therefore, the laws that govern the community are an intrinsic part of the Islamic experience. They have to be the religious laws if the community is to mirror the will of God. Politics and religion are knotted together. The idea of government for the people, by the people is seen as arrogance to people who have been raised with the idea that the laws come from God. If a Muslim community prospers it is a sign that it is living according to God's will. If it doesn't prosper, the traditional response has been that the laws need to be stricter, that people need to look back to the past.

The five pillars of Islam are: the profession of faith (“There is no God but Allah, and Muhammed is the Messenger of God”), Prayer, Almsgiving, Fasting, and Pilgrimage. Islam has had many sects over the centuries from insistence upon outward

ritual to an inner spiritual quest. These sects have not been what Christians might call heresies in their religion, because in Islamic belief, as long as you believe in the 5 pillars of Islam, you are a Muslim.

In the 7th and 8th centuries the body of law, called the Sharia was formulated and made up of documented traditions of the teaching and actions of the Prophet (Sunna), teachings from the Koran, independent reasoning of the jurists, and the consensus of the community. Following the Sunna and the Sharia gives Muslims the feeling that they are doing as Muhammad did, surrendering to God's will and acquiring some of his perfection.

The Sharia was also, originally, a political protest against a ruling elite seen as corrupt. The ethos of the Sharia, like that of the Koran, is egalitarian.

In the 9th and 10th centuries different sects joined together to form the consolidation of Sunni Islam (following the pathway of the prophet). In the Sunni branch of Islam no religious authority of group of clergy can come between God and the individual. No priesthood acts as an intermediary. Shiites, by contrast, who trace a different line of authority for their leaders, claim that only their Imams are legitimate, and regard the Imam as the guide of the community and as infallible.

In the 12th century occurred one of the periods of culture and learning in cities such as Baghdad, Cairo and Cordova. Strong government and commerce with other peoples allowed learning and the arts to flourish. Muslims were successful, confident and forward-looking. Europe was still a backward area with no culture or learning to speak of and was dismissed as of no importance by the Muslims. Then came disaster. The Crusaders marched into their lands and after the Crusaders came the Mongol armies. Islam experienced devastating wars, the destruction of manuscripts, the slaughter of leaders and scholars. Their reaction was to retreat into conservatism. Any education that was available was designed to preserve what had already been achieved and to put a brake on the ingenuity and curiosity of the individual. No new ideas were allowed that could undermine the stability of the community. The tradition of rational thought, inherited from the Greek Skeptics, which had existed alongside the religious tradition, was suppressed. It was understood that rational thought would lead to a lack of belief.

By the 15th century Islam had regained power and prestige, especially after taking Constantinople. The acquisition of gunpowder gave the rulers more power than ever before and Islamic empires in Iran, India and North Africa all set up absolute monarchies although this was against the egalitarian precepts of the Prophet. The Ottoman Empire reached its height under Suleiman the Magnificent in the 16th century when the sultans ruled a massive empire efficiently. The prosperity from trading with Christians, Jews, Turks, Berbers and others and the free exchange of ideas led to another period of learning and achievement. There was a flowering of literature, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, and superb architecture. The Sharia became the law of the land so it now endorsed the system of absolute monarchy, which it had

originally been designed to oppose. The rich and successful Muslim rulers felt they were the champions of orthodoxy and superior to infidels.

Meanwhile, Europe was beginning to stir. The European Renaissance brought ideas which were exhilarating. New inventions were quickly accepted in printing, navigation, agriculture and politics. Europeans found they could change and prosper. Thinkers adopted the Greco-Roman culture. There were huge upheavals in ideas. Protestants rebelled against the authority of Rome, towns evolved differently from the established agrarian model, and explorers sailed round the world. From 1750 on, Europe and America went in the direction of innovation and autonomy. The Enlightenment prepared people to think rationally rather than accept the status quo. The American colonists rebelled and established their own autonomy. The French Revolution did the same for France. Other monarchies in Europe fell and bloody wars were fought. New patterns of power and autonomy were emerging. Change was the order of the day.

As Europe and America were going through these huge changes the Islamic empire was beginning to weaken. Starting in the 17th century the agrarian economy was no longer sufficient and trade was declining due to stiffer European competition. There was corruption and tax abuse. The upper classes lived in luxury and the lower classes in need. But whereas in the west there was change, in Islam there was stagnation. There was no call to adapt beliefs to current conditions, no great upheavals in political structures and no equivalent to the Enlightenment. There was no acceptance of technological progress. As in the 12th century it was thought that change would hurt stability.

As the empire weakened the Islamic schools of higher education actually opposed any experimentation derived from the European infidels. They resisted change at a time when Europe was seething with it. The conservative agrarian societies were still looking to the past for a model of how to live.

In the 18th century reformers tried to correct matters by the tried and true method of enforcing the religious laws more strictly. This is when Mohammed Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703-92) delivered his message that Islam needed a fundamentalist return to the Koran and the Sunna and the rejection of all the additions to Islam, which had collected over the years. Unfortunately his interpretation of Islam was light years away from the spirit of the original teachings.

The Wahhabi sect of Islam is the most extreme form of Islamic fundamentalism - violent, intolerant and fanatical beyond measure. It demands punishment up to death for drinking, sexual transgressions, and other failures to adhere to the Sharia, the Islamic law. Music and dancing are not allowed and women are shut away, probably because they represent temptation.

Osama Bin Laden is a Wahhabi. The September 11th hijackers were Wahhabis. The suicide bombers in Israel, the Egyptians who killed foreign tourists at Luxor, the Algerians who killed people for reading a secular newspaper were all

Wahhabis. The Taliban are Wahhabis. There are mosques and schools in the U.S. right now, which are run by Wahhabi Imams. The Wahhabi brand of Islam is the official theology of Saudi Arabia which funds Wahhabi schools all across the Islamic world.

Unfortunately, western countries have supported Wahhabi Muslims in the past when it suited them. Britain supported the Wahhabi Arabs in their revolt against the Ottomans, because they wanted the Ottomans crushed. America supported the Wahhabis in Afghanistan because they wanted the Soviets beaten. One grievance that Muslims have against the West is that western countries have interfered in their affairs only to promote western objectives and without any regard for the indigenous Muslims.

Another reformer, Ahmad ibn Idris, offered a different message – that people should rely on their own insights, not rely on the Imams, and should value what was new instead of clinging to old traditions. He exhorted Muslims to model themselves on a human being, the Prophet, and not to yearn for a distant God. The more traditional and emotional message of Wahhab won the day, perhaps because his followers brutally assassinated those who opposed them.

The 19th century brought to the West the Industrial Revolution and the biggest change of all. In Europe and America the thinking was all about progress, innovation and looking to the future. The new society was no longer founded just on agriculture but increasingly on technology and investment of capital.

Democracy and the separation of Church and State slowly came into being for economic reasons as much as philosophical. The increased technology needed people with some education, and those people, once educated, wanted some say in the decisions of government. The standard of living rose because more mass-produced goods needed people with enough money to buy them. The idea of progress was accepted and religious constraints and differences were not allowed to get in the way. In order to be efficient and productive a modern nation needed to be tolerant, democratic, and in matters of state, secular. John Locke, in particular, influenced the Founding Fathers of America. He recommended separation of Church and State so that religion was free from government interference and control, and government was free from conflicting religious edicts. As a result, science, technology, trade and business were also free to experiment, innovate and progress.

The Islamic countries had an entirely different experience. They were tied to their religious laws, had no freedom to innovate and had no choice in their form of government. Seeking new markets for their goods, western countries set out to colonize Islamic lands. They took their raw materials and forced them to buy manufactured goods. They tried to impose their ideas of modernity on agrarian societies, which resented the intruders. Muslim lands were plundered and dominated by European powers. After World War I their lands were divided up into kingdoms whose borders were arbitrarily

drawn up by the West. After WWII Palestine was given to people, who are infidels, according to the Muslims. It was the ultimate symbol of humiliation. There was and is a desire to get rid of the arrogant West and bring it to its knees. Westerners have found their culture liberating and empowering, but millions of Muslims are furiously hostile to it. The Wahhabi sect encourages enmity against what is considered to be western decadence, corruption and aggression.

Fundamentalist movements in every religion reflect a deep disenchantment with the modern world. Their rage is against progress and change. There is a fear that the laxity allowed to people who are not strictly regulated will submerge the culture of the true believer. Freedom of choice seems dangerous to them. Fundamentalists often withdraw from the mainstream and create an enclave of pure faith. This can result in extreme repression and terror. Fundamentalism attracts millions of adherents because it provides a sense of direction in a disorienting world. The blind recourse to religious texts embraced as literal truth, the injunction to follow the commandments of God before anything else, even the subjugation of reason to the dictates of dogma, provide an anchor and can be exhilarating.

Millions of Bin Laden's followers have received no benefits from the modern world. They have been taught to see change as dangerous. A secular government seems to go against their religious duty to build a godly community. Wahhabi schools have preached a fanatic adherence to Islam and hatred of western ways. Bin Laden's war is against unbelief and unbelievers, the changes of the modern world and the arrogance and corruption of the West .

The eradication of fundamentalism is likely to take decades, just as the eradication of the Inquisition did. There will always be people who feel that the modern world has passed them by and there will always be resentment against people or countries, which are more successful or more prosperous. It is clear that Muslims can live successfully in a secular state as many do in this country. In Islamic countries rulers repress change in order to maintain their own power. Moderate Muslims have the difficult task of finding a way to live in the modern world that is compatible with their religion and then of spreading that solution throughout the many Islamic countries.

Humanists and free-thinkers like ourselves, can also hope that increased education and exposure to western thinking might replace hatred with an open mind and the spirit of inquiry.

Bibliography: Armstrong, Karen, Islam New York and Toronto, 2000

Chronicles (#1 of 2):

[Ed: This and the following outdated articles were released before the formal beginning of the US invasion of Iraq.]

Humanist Manifesto III **signed by Nobel laureates & others**

AHA NEWS RELEASE (2003 0421m1533)

By Roy Speckhardt (202-238-9088)

(Washington, DC) Today the American Humanist Association proudly releases Humanism and Its Aspirations, a successor document to the movement-initiating Humanist Manifesto of 1933, and to Humanist Manifesto II which made headline news worldwide in 1973.

In signing this landmark document, 19 Nobel laureates join celebrities such as Oliver Stone, the "Amazing" Randi, and Kurt Vonnegut, as well as influential thinkers including Janet Jeppson Asimov, Bill Baird, Richard Dawkins, Vashti McCollum, Katha Pollitt, and Edward O. Wilson.

"This document marks a distinct evolution of thought. It succinctly details a positive and personal Humanism, one that will more clearly resonate with the general public," said Tony Hileman, executive director of the American Humanist Association.

Fred Edwards, chair of the Drafting Committee, the voice of Humanism on many radio and television programs, and editor of the Humanist magazine added, "This new manifesto gives more emphasis to compassion as the motivating force behind the Humanist commitment to reason. It therefore expresses the fullness of what it means to be human."

The document treats the subjects of how we understand the world, how the world works, the source and nature of ethics, finding meaning in life, and working toward social justice.

With this release the American Humanist Association is calling on all likeminded individuals dedicated to a better future to add their signatures. As the document declares, "We aspire to this vision with the informed conviction that humanity has the ability to progress toward its highest ideals. The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone."

The public is invited to see it and sign it at:
www.AmericanHumanist.org

The American Humanist Association is the oldest and largest Humanist organization in the nation. The AHA is dedicated to ensuring a voice for those with a positive outlook, based on reason and experience, which embraces all of humanity.

Chronicles (#2 of 2):

Bush church-state policies **violation of US Constitution?**

AHA NEWS RELEASE (2003 0422tu1632)

By Roy Speckhardt (202-238-9088)

(Washington, DC) A report entitled Bush: The New Face of the Religious Right was released today by the American Humanist Association. This new report details how the Bush Administration is the new executive branch of the Religious Right. It also explores the question, "Is President Bush so beholden to religious fundamentalism that he is illegally making appointments based on faith?"

When President Bush says, "I welcome faith to help solve the nation's deepest problems," it's clear from his context and actions that he may not just welcome such help but that he is actually relying on it. As this report details, Bush is not just a public official who happens to hold a strong faith, he's one who's willing to allow his faith and Religious Right interpretations of faith to guide national policy.

Bush is the most overtly religious president to use his office as a bully pulpit, and his pervasive religiosity is raising serious concerns. If Bush is choosing his appointees based on their faiths, he is in direct violation of Article VI of the United States Constitution as it states, "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." Despite being spread across many different offices, several Bush appointments (some clearly unqualified) are nevertheless comparable in one conspicuous way. A survey of his friends, advisers, and appointments reveals a disconcerting similarity--an unusual proportion of men and women of deep religious faith who often harbor extreme views on a host of the Religious Right's favorite subjects: abortion, gay rights, the dangers of secularism, and others.

AHA executive director Tony Hileman said, "The contents of this report should concern all supporters of our Constitution, even the most religious, but we are releasing this today because Humanists are being excluded from full participation in democracy."

This new report can be read in full at
<http://www.AmericanHumanist.org/humanism/bush.htm> or
print copies can be ordered from the AHA national offices.

Obituary:

Ray Adams**Tribute (#1 of 2)**

By Jimmy Dunne

We are saddened and shocked by the senseless murder of Ray Adams who had been active with the Humanists of Houston for several years. Ray was bludgeoned to death with a hammer and knife on May 14, at age 76, allegedly by a man who was renting a room from him. The man said he was afraid that Ray was going to evict him for non payment of rent.

I have known Ray since 1965 when he came to my College Club mixer-parties for singles, ages 21-35. We became friends, played tennis and later I was best man at his marriage in the Unitarian Fellowship. He had an earlier marriage performed at the Harmony Wedding Chapel on the Gulf Freeway. Ray used to ride a motorcycle and had tattoos to go with it.

Ray had worked in the merchant marine and as an accountant. He ran his own business as a placement firm primarily for accountants.

Ray had a good sense of humor and an occasional bombastic temper. He would call me regularly about various TV programs that he thought I might want to watch. Ray was divorced and has three children.

We will miss Ray.

Tribute (#2 of 2)

By Karen L Hart

For those of you who didn't know Ray (or didn't know him well), he was a salty old guy with a pugnacious attitude, but he was lovable in many ways. He was a merchant marine, veteran of the Korean war, IRS agent, accountant, and head-hunter for accounting firms.

He lived alone. He had few friends and was estranged from his family. He was often, hostile, rude and short-tempered, but he had a heart as big as a house. The love of his life was a little black dog.

He may not be missed by many, but I will miss him.

iih

Letters:

[1] Ron,

This afternoon, I enjoyed looking back over some past issues of the HHANL. A couple of letters by Jim Ashmore caught my attention, because I read them back to back. He takes a laudable stand in the January, 2003 issue when he demands scholarly documentation of claims posted on the internet. He did, indeed, find a few discrepancies, such as a refutation of the claim that President Bush cut \$39 million from library funding. Unfortunately, the record of the Bush administration is such that the "List," as a whole, rings true. One might almost say, "Well, if it isn't true, it should be." In fact, Ashmore's few citations do not really serve his cause of refutation, for they make one think these few were the only ones he could find, and all the rest remain true. Still, I support his lament of undocumented claims, even if they are in character with the general truth of things.

But then I went back to the issue of November, 2002 and found another letter from Jim Ashmore. It was a bit of a shock to see how far short he fell from his own dictum. He complained of "predominantly left-wing views and anti-Bush rhetoric." It is hard to imagine what else one would expect of a humanist publication when we have a "born again" President who visited Jim Jones University, had Franklin Graham say the inaugural invocation ("Islam is a very evil and wicked religion") and who has un-Jeffersonian ideas about school vouchers and faith-based initiatives. For good measure, the President's all important right wing has a publication, the National Review, which suggested using nuclear bombs on Iraq, Iran, Gaza City, and Ramallah. No humanist publication should have much tolerance for these stances. Ashmore went on to write about what he called "Left-Behind'ers." More than anything else, he sounded like he was well indoctrinated in ideology. To wit:

"I find it hypocritical of the Left-Behind that they supported regime change and military action in 1998 under Left-Behind President Clinton, yet have trouble supporting the same exact policy today... Daschle was 100% behind the 1998 Senate Resolution to use military force to oust Saddam Hussein. Could it be the Left-Behind'ers are against military action because there is a Republican in the White House? Nah, that would mean they are politicizing the issue."

Here, the truth lies in the eyes of the ideologue. The "Left-Behind" did not support regime change and military action in 1998. It is not the exact same policy today. That is why Bush had to get another resolution, against the well-reasoned objections of Robert Byrd. Daschle did not support the use of military force to oust Saddam Hussein. The Left-Behind'ers are against military action in Iraq

because it is wrong, not because a Republican is in the White House. When the young Iraqi boy, with both arms blown off from a bomb, was visited by an American soldier, he asked, "Why did you come here and do this to us?" No doubt, the soldier left the boy wondering the same thing.

What the 1998 Senate Resolution did state was:

(1) Condemns in the strongest possible terms the continued threat to international peace and security posed by Iraq's refusal to meet its international obligations and end its weapons of mass destruction programs;

(2) Urges the President to take all necessary and appropriate actions to respond to the threat posed by Iraq's refusal to end its weapons of mass destruction programs; and

(3) Urges the President to work with Congress in furthering a long-term policy aimed at definitively ending the threat to international peace and security posed by the government of Iraq and its weapons of mass destruction programs.

All of the above fits in neatly with a policy to work through the United Nations and its inspectors, had President Bush chosen to do so. There is no declaration of war in this resolution. Jim Ashmore continued his letter with more presumptions, which along with his complaints of hypocrisy, have damaged his credibility.

Fred Mittag

[2] Dear Ron,

I am honored to be quoted in your excellent newsletter. You used my email about the quote that the US didn't know what "the rest of the world meant." How true!

It's only too bad your material doesn't get more circulation. It's all right on the money.

Jim O'Leary

[3] Hi, Ron,

Thanks for the newsletter. I only have one comment, on this piece:

AHA NEWS RELEASE (2003 0319w1409) (This open plea has been delivered to members of the House of Representatives and Senate of the United States, and to the member nations of the Security Council.) In the harsh light of President George W. Bush's unilateral pronouncements last evening, and in accord with the positions of the American Humanist Association (AHA), we call upon the Congress of the United States and the Security Council of the United Nations to vigorously intervene and stop this unprovoked aggression against the people of Iraq before it begins.

IMHO, it's this type of ill conceived advocacy that will forever condemn humanism/secularism to a permanent state of marginalization. U.S. policy on Iraq has absolutely nothing to do with the core issues of secularism. AHA needs to stay on track and stick with such issues as freedom of speech, freedom from religion, and separation of church and state. Why make enemies unnecessarily? Why balkanize one's own faction?

Ed Uthman

[Ed: Secularism? Maybe not. But humanism? I believe the core issues of humanism have a lot to do with current US policy on Iraq. How can a humanist be FOR nonviolence without at the same time being AGAINST violence? It may be the luxury / agony / or plight (take your pick) of the marginalized to take pot shots at entrenched establishments. Perhaps ironically, my first exposure to political action came in the late 1940s from my first reading of the Bible Book of Exodus. (IMHO = In my humble opinion)]

[4] Ron,

Why is so much of these newsletters devoted to anti-Bush and anti-war rhetoric and propaganda? One could read these and conclude that is all the "Houston Humanist and Freethought" community stands for and does.

I would think that the HOH would be better served promoting and (more importantly) acting upon its Humanists values than continually taking political (mainly anti-Bush) positions. I am left wondering if it is in the best interest of HHA to promote a wholly partisan agenda and, if so, will HHA endorse political candidates in future elections. I am also left to wonder if the HOH board approves of the partisan content of this newsletter or tolerates such rhetoric of an obsessively anti-Bush editor because no one else will publish the newsletter.

Certainly the Houston Church of Freethought, from the very beginning, has made a concerted effort to avoid taking an official stand on political issues in general and, specifically, the war. When the time comes that HCoF has its own independent publication, you can be sure it will not contain

political messages which only divide our community rather than unites it.

Jim Ashmore

[Ed: A good humanist, a good AMERICAN, yea, a good PATRIOTIC American is not going to sit back and watch his country go down the tube without a struggle. Many people believe (even strongly) that the best way to promote our nation's health is by imperial expansions via international military invasions with our own "weapons of mass destruction". But others are just as strong in their beliefs that such behavior is self-destructive. Killing innocent bystanders in a war zone (call it "collateral damage" or however you wish to sanitize it) IS a humanist issue, and is not limited to any one political party.

It is indeed useful for the community, both the freethought and the nonfreethoughters, to know that freethought is not limited to anti-Bush and antiwar positions. A true freethought community is diverse. Thanks to people like yourself for presenting alternate perspectives to my sometimes vitriolic ramblings, readers will realize that there are indeed not only differing but also opposing viewpoints, all within the one same humanist/freethought community!

Repeated monthly in this NL's "Publisher" column: "[2] The purpose of the HHA NL is ... (2) providing for the public at large information about humanism and humanist thought, and (3) providing a platform for members to express their viewpoints and opinions. [3] ... Readers are the board of directors, the advisory board. And since no meetings are set, it is up to readers to make their views known to the editor. [4] The HHA and the editor do not necessarily agree with nor endorse the views expressed herein."

Should the HCOF publish its own newsletter, I hope I am on its mailing list. If you are the editor, I suspect that I will not agree with all that is published therein, but I still believe in the old Bill of Rights and freedom of the press, and am conversely OPPOSED to censorship in all of its ugly forms.

Anyone attending the HOH May breakfast meeting can testify that not all members agree with one another. But rather than excommunicate dissident members, it is generally agreed that more tolerance be developed.]

[5] *Thanks, Ron, for a good job on the newsletter. I thought I should respond to the letter by Rich in the last (May) newsletter, since some of the comments related to my article. I appreciate the editorial comments you added.*

Regarding the remarks on evolution and "Darwin's ideas ... [are] as unproven and unprovable as anything in the Bible," I'm perplexed by that comment. It is true that nobody directly witnessed the exact chain of events that led from the development from apes to humans, nor can we reproduce it and watch it happen again. Fortunately

science does not require that. Darwin observed the natural world and the relationships between numerous species and animal groups, and from there he developed an explanation for the process. He did not know the mechanism by which the changes occur, but described the effects. Mendel's discovery of genetics paved the way for scientists to understand the mechanisms by which the Darwinian process of change occur. From there came chromosomes, DNA, the double helix structure, amino acids, RNA, and all the various other discoveries about how cells function and what makes life. Darwin's observations were matched completely with controlled breeding, which had been occurring for almost as long as humans have existed. But it took genetics for us to learn just how selective breeding works.

Since then, scientists have observed directly speciation both in the laboratory and in the wild. It is not a stretch to left field to take what we know happens and can duplicate and to apply that information to our own past. Evidence from the fossil record conforms with expectations of evolution. Darwin's ideas match and mesh directly with radio-isotope dating, geology, physics, chemistry, and even medicine. Evolution provides a coherent and cohesive explanation that fully meshes with other branches of science, and ties together every aspect of biology.

As for criticism over the use of "pro-choice" and the choice of terminology for the position statements of each camp, I will agree that the pro-choice position is advocating a pro-abortion position, but if you are going to blast them for selective terminology, then you also should tell the "pro-life" camp to use their correct title, anti-abortion. The terminology chosen by each camp reflects the position statement of the camp, and their reason for advocating the position they take. Each side is defining their focus for the moral position of the debate, and using a title that reflects their definition of the debate. I see nothing wrong with a group choosing a title that reflects their interests and focus. I should also point out that many in the pro-choice camp do not advocate that abortions should be performed in all or even many cases. Some even personally abhor abortion, and would not choose to have one. The argument rests on the right of the woman to decide what affects her body over being told by the government and/or religious leaders deciding for her.

As for the comments about the current Catholic Church scandals, pedophilia is correctly associated with acts against pre-adolescent children. Acts against underage adolescents (i.e. those who have entered puberty) is not technically pedophilia, though common usage has extended the term to apply to all cases of sex acts against minors. (I forget the other word.) I will note that while a majority of cases publicized involve male on male acts, they

are not exclusive to the cases of priest abuse of power at issue. Women and girls have also been victims. And while the acts that do involve male on male abuse are by definition homosexual, it is misleading to focus on that part of the issue. What is at issue is the acts of abuse. What makes it wrong is the manipulation and intimidation of those unable to protect themselves. The fact that the abuse is male on male versus male on female does not make it any more or less appropriate or vile. Focusing on the homosexuality aspect does not serve to address the true problem, and does serve to polarize the debate and obfuscate the real abuse of power behind cultural attitudes about a lifestyle.

Keith Irish

[6] I wanted to address the comments in the article by Leonardo Boff, specifically the statistics about civilian deaths as reported by Max Born. First, I think the wording of the statements was incorrect. The wording suggests that in Korea and Vietnam 85% of the total populace was killed. I think this is a misstatement. I suspect what was meant was that 85% of the deaths were civilians. The same goes for the other wars mentioned: 5% of deaths in WWI, 50% in WWII, etc. Second, I do not think it's fair to compare WWI vs Vietnam. Consider the situation in Vietnam was not traditional battlefield confrontation, but guerrilla warfare. A large part of the "civilians" were in fact cooperating in combat activities - either traditional or guerrilla. That certainly makes balancing the numbers more difficult.

I also wish to comment on Ron's remark number 11 - "I am against the war. But since it has already started, I am now FOR finishing it," - comparing the war to gang rape or stealing. I do not think the analogies are appropriate. Neither stealing nor gang rape are likely to leave a situation more destabilized by early stopping. Consider if the U.S. had pulled out after beginning the invasion, but before taking Baghdad. This could potentially have left Saddam's regime unstable enough to fall in a protracted civil war, creating a situation similar to the post-Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. We saw how the power vacuum there was filled by the Taliban. It is very likely a similar situation could have erupted in Iraq.

Keith Irish

iih

[7] Hi, Ron. I enjoy the newsletter. Wish to make one minor comment about the May Issue: #4 - Essays (#1 of 2): Houston Church of Freethought described for Evangelicals by Ed Uthman: "There is a substantial libertarian element in the congregation, as well as through-and-through, one-size-fits-all, classic liberals."

Most libertarians, myself included, assert that the only "Classic Liberals" (usually referred to as "Classical Liberals") are now called "Libertarians". The political landscape was dominated by classical liberals up until the beginning of the 20th Century. They believed the purpose of government was to protect individual rights; they believed in individual responsibility rather than social responsibility.

The word "Liberal" has now morphed into what Europeans more correctly call "Socialist" or "Social Democrat". They include the "Old Left" of the FDR - make - the - government - big so the common man can "soak the rich" type (Hillary Clinton comes to mind), as well as neo-liberals like the Greens and postmodernists.

I believe most humanists are of this left liberal type. Sad.

Ron Jones

lih

Statement of Principles:

The following are the core principles upon which our member-organizations are allied. Individual member-organizations may have missions beyond the scope of the Alliance itself, but any Houston-based group whose mission is compatible with these principles is welcome to join our community of organizations.

We are committed to freedom of thought and expression, as well as human rights and equality.

Our beliefs are based on healthy skepticism, physical evidence, the scientific method, and naturalistic philosophy -- unfettered by faith, mysticism, the supernatural, or any other form of superstition.

We stand for the pursuit of moral excellence, ethical integrity, and social responsibility based on humanity's needs and happiness in *this* world and not in an alleged "after life."

lih

Membership and Contact Information:

Whether you are a humanist, or seeking to pursue a meaningful life without theism, or simply reexamining your beliefs and exploring the humanist approach to knowledge and moral issues, consider contacting one of our organizations. We will be happy to answer any questions about humanism and/or membership.

Humanists of Houston (HOH): Houston chapter of the American Humanist Association (AHA) / Founded 1978 / 281-493-6232 / jimmydunne@msm.com / 1306 W Brooklake Houston TX 77077

Humanist Association of Montgomery County, Isaac Asimov Chapter (HAMCIAC): Montgomery County chapter of the American Humanist Association / 281-288-6064 / rosshenry@mac.com

Freethinkers' Union (FU): Student freethought group at the University of Houston. Member of the Campus Freethought Alliance / 713-743-5180 / freethnk@bayou.uh.edu / www.uh.edu/~freethnk / 4800 Calhoun Rd Campus Activities Box 205 Houston TX 77024-2610

iih

Explanation of iih symbol:

The ii of the iih represents two or more people. The h of the iih represents the humanness to which they aspire. A lower case h is used instead of an upper case H to indicate that it is better to become human (as opposed to inhuman) than it is to join a Humanist organization.

iih

Publisher:

[1] The **HOUSTON HUMANIST ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER** (HHA NL) is published monthly by the Houston Humanist Alliance (HHA). Since 2001 05 (Issue #22), it is compiled, edited, printed, photocopied, and circulated by J Ron Titus (713-680-2880 / jront@juno.com / 5202 Viking Houston TX 77092-4236). Staff: Jim Knierien (Page-Layout Editor) and Nancy & Richard Chancey (Circulation Assistants)

[2] The purpose of the HHA NL is (1) publicizing events, i.e., keeping members informed of regularly and specially scheduled meetings, (2) providing for the public at large information about humanism and humanist thought, and (3) providing a platform for members to express their viewpoints and opinions.

[3] "The only free press is the one you own." How true H L Mencken was! The HHA owns this NL. Current editorial policy is: Readers are the board of directors, the advisory board. And since no meetings are set, it is up to readers to make their views known to the editor.

[4] The HHA and the editor do not necessarily agree with nor endorse the views expressed herein. Many humanists and freethinkers pride themselves with being individuals. Consensus among Humanists is therefore difficult to achieve. No one humanist can speak for all other humanists.

[5] The current editor operates personally from two principles: (1) "People do not make mistakes by knowing too much; they make mistakes by not knowing enough!" and (2) "Better than censorship of views is education of viewers."

[6] Anyone may quote from the newsletter but is asked to please give credit where credit is due, i.e., cite author, newsletter issue (number or date), & page.

[7] All articles, letters, and submissions of interest are welcome if on editor's desk by deadline (12:00 noon on the 15th of each month), postmarks notwithstanding. E-mail format required. Name, phone number, & street address required for editorial contact purposes only.

The editor reserves the right to edit all submissions for space or clarity, but never with the intent to alter the thrust of the author.

[8] Snailmail editions are sent gratis to paid members of the HHA. Email editions are sent gratis to anyone else upon request.

iih

Calendar of Events:

Sunday, June 1 / 9:00-11:00 am / *HOH Brunch* / in the coffee shop of the Holiday Inn on I-10 (at Silber) / Buffet breakfasts (available from 9:00) and discussions on topics chosen by the group (beginning at 9:30) are held on first Sundays monthly / Contact: Jimmy Dunne*

Sunday, June 8 / 10:30-11:30 am / *Houston Church Of Freethought (HCOF) Service* / in the Ramada Plaza Hotel on 7611 Katy Fwy (I-10 at Silber) / Services (including song, humor, lectures & discussion with children's classes & baby sitting available) are held on second Sundays monthly / Contact: Art Fay*

Saturday, June 14 / 1:30 pm / *HAMCIAC Regular Meeting* / Montgomery Co. Library in the Woodlands (2nd floor) [From I-45 go west on Woodland Pkwy to 2nd traffic light; turn north (right) on Six Pines Dr; cross bridge & watch for wavy sculptures in the median; turn west (left) to Lake Robbins Rd; pass Woodlands Pavilion; turn left into Library parking lot] / Regular meetings are held on second Saturdays monthly / Contact: Ross Henry*

Sunday, June 15 / 10:30 am / *Freethinkers Coffee Social* / at Borders Books & Music in Meyerland Plaza (I-610 W Loop S at Beechnut) / Spontaneous informal discussions are held on third Sundays monthly / Contact: Art Fay*

Sunday, June 15 / 12:00 noon / *Newsletter Deadline* / All articles, letters, and submissions of interest are welcome if on editor's desk, postmarks notwithstanding (e-mail format required), / Contact: Ron Titus*

Saturday, June 21 / 2:30 - 4:30 pm / *HOH Regular meeting* / in the Unitarian Fellowship hall, 1504 Wirt Rd / Business meetings followed by presentations are held on third Saturdays monthly / Contact: Jimmy Dunne*

Sunday, June 22 / 10:30 - 12:00 noon / *Ideas Club* / in Borders Books & Music on 9633 Westheimer (at Gessner) / Book reviews by members are held on fourth Sundays monthly. Contact: Bob Finch*

Sunday, July 6 / 9:00-11:00 am / *HOH Brunch* / in the coffee shop of the Holiday Inn on I-10 (at Silber) / Buffet breakfasts (available from 9:00) and discussions on topics chosen by the group (beginning at 9:30) are held on first Sundays monthly / Contact: Jimmy Dunne*

iih

***Contact people:**

Dunne, Jimmy (281-493-6232 / jimmydunne@email.msn.com)

Fay, Art (281-933-2986 / afay@worldnet.att.net)

Finch, Bob (281-491-1608 / rdfinch@flash.net)

Henry, Ross (281-288-6064 / rosshenry@mac.com)

Titus, Ron (713-680-2880 / jront@juno.com)

iih

5202 Viking Dr
Houston TX 77092-4236

POST MASTER: Please return undelivered issues to sender. Thank you.