



HOUSTON HUMANIST ALLIANCE

The Newsletter for Houston's Humanist and Freethought Community

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Calendar of Events:

October | *Houston Atheist Society (HAS)* | Meetings are held monthly. Contact: Keith McCaffety*

Sunday, October 3 | 10:00 - 12:00 noon | *Coffee Social* | at Borders Books & Music in Meyerland Plaza (I-610 W Loop S at Beechnut) | Spontaneous informal discussions are held on first & third Sundays monthly | Contact: Art Fay*

Sunday, October 3 | 12:30 - 2:00 pm | *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Brunch* | in upstairs facility of Kroger's on 1505 Wirt Rd (across street from Unitarian Fellowship) | Topics chosen by the group are discussed on first Sundays monthly | Contact: Tom Brucia*

Wednesday, October 6 | 6:30 pm | *Drug Policy Forum of Texas* | TV 26 or 95 | Drug policy reform discussed every other Wednesday | Contact: G Alan Robison*

Saturday, October 9 | 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, October 10 | 10:30-11:30 am | *Houston Church Of Freethought (HCOF) Service* | in the Magnolia Room of the Courtyard by Marriott on 3131 West Loop (northbound just north of Richmond) | Services (including song, humor, lectures & discussion with children's classes & baby sitting available) are held on second Sundays monthly | Contact: Art Fay*

Friday October 15 | 12:00 noon | *Newsletter Deadline* | All articles, letters, and submissions of interest are welcome if on editor's desk, postmarks not withstanding (e-mail format required), | Contact: Jim Knierien*

Saturday, October 16 | 2:30 - 4:30 pm | *Humanists of Houston (HOH) Regular meeting* | in the Unitarian Fellowship hall at 1504 Wirt Rd) | Contact: Tom Brucia*

Sunday, October 17 | 10:30 am | *Coffee Social* | at Borders Books & Music in Meyerland Plaza (I-610 W Loop S at Beechnut) | Spontaneous informal discussions are held on first & third Sundays monthly | Contact: Art Fay*

Wednesday, October 20 | 6:30 pm | *Drug Policy Forum of Texas* | TV 26 or 95 | Drug policy reform discussed every other Wednesday | Contact: G Alan Robison*

Sunday, October 24 | 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, November 7 | 10:00 - 12:00 noon | *Coffee Social* | at Borders Books & Music in Meyerland Plaza (I-610 W Loop S at Beechnut) | Spontaneous informal discussions are held on first & third Sundays monthly | Contact: Art Fay*

Sunday, November 7 | 12:30 - 2:00 pm | *HOH Brunch* | in upstairs facility of Kroger's on 1505 Wirt Rd (across street from Unitarian Fellowship) | Topics chosen by the group are discussed on first Sundays monthly | Contact: Jimmy Dunne*
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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.

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Publisher:

[1] The Houston Humanist Alliance Newsletter (HHA NL) is published monthly by the Houston Humanist Alliance (HHA).

[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 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.

[4] 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.

[5] 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. <mailto:Jim.Knierien@thermo.com> Name, phone number, & street address required for editorial contact purposes only.

[6] 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.

[7] Snailmail editions are sent gratis to paid members of the HHA. Email editions are sent gratis to anyone else upon request. Adobe PDF editions are available gratis by sending an email to: <mailto:jim.knierien@thermo.com>.

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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.

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From the Editors desk:

By Jim Knierien

I had an abundance of input this month. I received more than 2 essays and several letters. I have decided to save some for a future month. I thank all for the input. Please be assured that your essays and letters will be published in the future.

I received several (3) negative replies to the article by Felipe Hexsel and the Hitler cartoon, which were unfavorable to our president George W. Bush. Please see [3] in the *Publisher* box to the left. Several (2) alliance members had sent me the cartoon lately. If someone sends me an original piece supporting GW Bush and/or his US actions I will be happy to publish it the November newsletter, which will arrive before Election Day.

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Ron's Ramblings

By Ron Titus

[1] Mary & I have been away on a short vacation in California. The general depression that I have been experiencing in Houston because of national and international politics was countered and offset by the upbeat people in my extended family in California. Thanks, Extended Family!

[2] While on our trip to California, M & I met an American working in Peru. After making a distinction between the rich and the VERY rich, he said that the "real" liberals are the very wealthy!

That was a new twist for me, but it made sense. To wit: Dubya Bush and his Administration staff are very wealthy, and, although they want to conserve (conservative) their positions of privilege and power, they nonetheless want to liberate (liberal) themselves from all the laws and regulations that limit or inhibit their freedom to do as they please.

Some people regard me as a "liberal", but actually I want to conserve the laws and regulations that preserve a modicum of stability in my unstable life and world.

[3] On TV's *Newsworld International* (2004 0910f1252), an American film director in Japan said "I believe that 'believing is seeing', not the other way around."

See *Ramble continued on pg.4*

The Courtesy Debt

By Bill Sutton

It was only a minor novelty. There was a shuttle train, moving between terminals at the airport, looping endlessly on its trip. It was mid-afternoon, and human traffic was nearly nonexistent. So there was only me and the girl who got on one stop after me, joining me as the only other passenger in the middle car of our three-car train. She was smiling to herself about something when she got on, and she glanced at me and said hello.

That in itself is kind of an anomaly, but this is Houston, so it isn't out of order to say hello to strangers. But she was young and I'm not. She was a girl and I'm a guy. She was black and I was white. But to her, these obvious differences seemed to make no difference.

I was trying to judge her features, idly, trying out conclusions without justification, deciding if she was intelligent or not. Her face was attractive, but not pretty, if that makes sense. She was nobody's definition of beautiful, but she wasn't ugly either. She looked at an ad in the shuttle, reading it, a sort of pensive expression on her face. She was eating some candy, small loose pieces, maybe M&Ms or something, shaking them out of a bag into her hand, transporting them to her mouth. I was going to reach a judgment about her manners depending on how she ate the candy, whether she chewed with her mouth open, noisy. She didn't. Then I heard a rattling sound and realized that one of the candies had fallen and bounced loudly on the hard plastic of the seat. And she reached out for it and retrieved it.

I was being surreptitious in all of this, of course. It's bad manners to stare at someone. Obviously, I didn't think it was bad manners to *watch* someone, only bad to let them know that I was watching. And I was judging her, appraising her, because I had nothing else to do. At least that's my story. I guess that I do it with people all the time, when I have to watch them or be near them for no particular reason, like being on an elevator, or an airplane. So I was watching her kind of sideways, not making eye contact.

Suddenly she looked quickly at me as though she had just realized something. "These are Skittles", she said, "Do you want some? Do you like Skittles?" I smiled and said no, but thank you for asking. The

gesture made me foolishly happy, almost guiltily happy, it was so natural, or seemed to be, on her part. It was a small, spontaneous, generous thing for her to do, and people so rarely do generous things, unprompted or otherwise.

I wanted to ask her if she had ever been to New York, or nearly any other large Northeastern city, where the only strangers who talked to you were panhandlers or deranged. Coach Al Maguire said "I come from New York where, if you fall down, someone will pick you up by your wallet." I had been to New York. I remember when I first moved to Texas with my ex-wife. She was a native of Connecticut and I told her that we would get friendlier, better service at any coffee shop in Houston than we could get from the best restaurant in Connecticut. I still believe that isn't exaggerating.

Had this girl been closer to my age, I might have flirted, or been motivated to. I might have said something about never accepting candy from strangers. I can be witty like that. I've done it several times in my life time - at least four or five times - once as recently as two or three years ago. But I didn't. And I know that she wasn't flirting with me. Young girls only flirt with older men when they want something, an unfortunate fact I am only too well aware of. She seemed to be polite is all. Courteous.

Kurt Vonnegut once told a story while being interviewed on TV. He was as famous as he was going to get at that point. He said that he had gotten a letter from a young boy, about 14 or 15 as I remember it and the boy had said that he knew what Vonnegut was saying in every novel that he wrote, that it was always the same thing. What the boy said was "Love may fail, but courtesy will prevail". And Vonnegut said that there it was, everything that he had ever written summed up in seven words. If you've read Vonnegut, you realize that the boy had a point. Passion is tiring, difficult to maintain, no matter how strong and bright and beautiful it is to start with. But courtesy, ah, so easy to give, so slight, it's like the grass. And like the grass, it's one of the most important and overlooked elements of life.

Kinky Friedman, a wonderful Texas writer with an unfortunate habit of repeating himself, has a quote: "Courtesy is owed, respect is earned, love is given". If this statement is as true as it appears to be, much of the world is in debt over its head. We are not, as a

rule, courteous. And what this girl showed through her courtesy was her character, not mine. She wasn't courteous to me because I deserved it. I had done nothing to earn it. She was courteous because she chose to be. Perhaps her parents taught her, perhaps some religion taught her, perhaps her school or her friends. Perhaps she had learned it on her own, modeled someone else's behavior, because she admired it. Maybe someone had been courteous to her and she liked the way it felt.

There is some small risk involved in such behavior. People don't always respond in kind. They can even be rude in return. Some may even criticize, pointing out that generosity can be taken advantage of, which is true, of course. But I prefer to think that people like her are optimists, willing to take the small chance that offers no reward. Because the only possible payback for courtesy is the same currency, which is no currency at all, except social and human value. Someone might be courteous in return, is all. But she was distributing that currency without regard for return.

That made me happy. It made me happy that one human being could offer something of hers to someone else, something of nearly no value, and in doing so actually offer something of herself that was priceless, if that word hasn't been rendered meaningless by credit card commercials. What a wonderful transaction courtesy creates: it costs nothing to give, but can have such value when received. Courtesy *is* owed, and we as human beings should be happy to pay that debt.

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Ramble continued from pg.2

This supports what was said in earlier columns: People see only what supports their beliefs and prejudices, and are blind to what does not (support their beliefs and prejudices).

This explains for me how many people looking at the one same thing can and do come away with all kinds of divergent "self-evident objective facts".

"We see things, not the way THEY are, but the way WE are."

[4] I am still having trouble dealing with people who do not see eye to eye with the "self-evident objective facts" that I see. (Ha!)

Is trying to get along with everyone impractical or downright impossible?

[5] After reading an article about Islam (Shahada, Confessions of a Muslim, <http://muttaqun/shahada.html>), I concluded that I might no longer be a Muslim.

No longer? Yes. Some years ago, a Muslim Imam told me that there were only two things required to be a Muslim: Believe that (1) there is no god but Allah, and that (2) Muhammad is his prophet.

At the time, I could and did accept this, and thus regarded myself a Muslim. This did not conflict with my beliefs as a Christian, because Islam accepts Abraham, Moses, and Jesus as prophets.

But the article cited above stated a whole bunch of other things ("legal ways, orders, acts of worship, statements, etc") required of Muslims, and as such I questioned the legitimacy of my Islamic membership. (Sigh)

[6] Whereas in yesteryear YT (Yours Truly) knelt before the Catholic Eucharist's Tabernacle, an equivalent of the ancient Jews' Ark of the Covenant, contemplating the god that rested respectively therein and thereupon, so now I stand before whatever and contemplate my unconscious.

Contemplating the unconscious is nothing other than (1) freeing as much as is possible the active conscious mind of all of its activity, and (2) probing (or better: ALLOWING TO SURFACE) the unconscious mind.

[7] In my yesteryear when I became an atheist, was my rejection of "God" an over-reaction when all that was needed was a rejection of prayers of petition?

Was it not MY concept of god that was MY problem?

Indeed, I used to conceive of god as all knowing (omniscient), all-mighty (omnipotent), and all-loving (omni benevolent). Maybe god is none of the above; rather, maybe god is as ignorant, as helpless, and as loveless as I am. If so, maybe god is ... me?

And Yahweh god said unto Moses, "I am who I am. My name is "I AM" (Yahweh). Tell the pharaoh that "I AM" sent me to you. [Exodus]

[8] Since Hurricane Charley (2004 09) played such havoc in Florida, I am surprised that the Rev Pat Robertson hasn't said something like "See? I told you so! I told you that god would punish Florida for its tolerance of homosexuals!"

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WHY?

By Felipe A. Hexsel

Why does the US government keep talking about supporting democracy in all countries around the world, and at the same time the CIA overthrew the democratic elected president of Chile and replaced him with a brutal dictator, Gen. Pinochet?

Why in 1953 did the USA, the greatest democracy in the world through CIA depose the free elected premier from Iran, Mohammed Mossadegh, who nationalized the oil industry and denied the Americans and other foreign countries contracts for drilling oil and put in his place the corrupt and tyrannical Shah?

Why, when the Russians invaded Afghanistan, the USA trained and gave arms and money to the Taliban, whose leader was Osama Bin Laden, the only ones who were fighting the Russians?

Why did the USA give for free 500 shoulder rocket launchers to the Taliban, and later offered to buy them back and got only 100? Where are the other ones?

Why, when Khoumeni kicked the good American subservient friend, the Shah, out of Iran, Iran was immediately considered an enemy of the USA?

Why, when Saddam Hussein invaded Iran and was losing the war did the USA give him chemical weapons (toxic gases), that he used against the Iranians and later against his own people?

Why, when Donald Rumsfeld went to Iraq to congratulate and praise Saddam Hussein for his victory (shaking Saddam's hand), and asked if it was right to use chemical weapons, Rumsfeld responded: " Each country has the right to use the weapons that they deem necessary for their defense "?

Why, during the above war (Iraq vs. Iran), did the puppet government of Saudi Arabia, at the USA request, help to finance Saddam's war?

Why in the Gulf War, after expelling the Iraqis from Kuwait, did the USA refrain from invading Iraq? Was it to keep in check the already enemy, Iran?

Why, at the beginning of the Gulf War, the USA promised the Kurds, in the north of Iraq, if they would come up in arms against Saddam, the USA would not only run in their help, but also support them in their quest for independency, and then didn't keep the promise and left them alone to be massacred by Saddam's troops?

Why after 9/11 when it was known that from the 19 hijackers, 11 were Saudi Arabians and 9 Egyptians, the USA didn't bomb Saudi Arabia and Egypt?

Why in the numerous massive genocides in the poor African Countries, where there is no oil to be explored, the USA didn't intervene to save human lives?

Why after bombing and killing civilians in Afghanistan, the USA, the democratic leader of the world, sided with the Warlords who supported the Soviets?

Why, before the Taliban, Afghanistan was the major producer of opium (2/3 comes to the United States) and the Taliban government destroyed ALL the poppy fields and now under the USA sponsored, subservient government, and the same Warlords, the production of opium doubled?

Why is the USA keeping troops in the Arabian Peninsula when the majority of the Arab people hate the Saudi family, who always favored the American big oil companies?

Why is it that thousands of young, gallant and courageous Americans soldiers died in WWII to free the world of tyrant dictators who were using inhumane concentration camps and now our government has Guantanamo?

Why when American prisoners of war in WWII in Nazi Germany were treated according to the Geneva Conventions, now the prisoners in Iraq are humiliated, tortured and murdered?

Why are we giving 1 billion dollars a year of taxpayer money to Mubarak, president of Egypt, and we don't have enough money to help our inner city neighborhoods or the millions of Americans without health insurance?

Why are we giving 6 billion dollars a year of taxpayer money to Israel, money that is not accountable, and Israel uses it for their own expansion at the cost of the freedom and lives of the Palestinians?

Why, when the UN by unanimous vote, more than a dozen of times, condemned Israel for its aggression to the neighbors Palestinians, the resolutions to withdraw to original borders could not be enforced due the constant veto of the United States, the champion of democracy in the world?

Why when Israel destroys houses and villages of innocent Palestinian families, Israel calls it an act of security, and when the people displaced, who have no ways to appeal or to be reimbursed then use bombs against the aggressors are called terrorist and the United States government agrees with this situation?

Why are there are still good American citizens who cannot understand the reason why the great majority of the Middle East people hate the USA?

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Humanists to be represented at UN Conference

AHA Press Release September 8, 2004

The American Humanist Association will be well represented at the 57th Annual United Nations Department of Public Information/Non-Governmental Organization Conference to be held at UN headquarters in New York City, September 8 to 10, 2004. AHA board member Maddy Urken, AHA UN NGO representative Beth Lamont, and AHA program staffer Anne Lyster will hear Secretary General Kofi Annan address an expected 2000 NGO delegates at the opening session. Entitled, "Millennium Development Goals: Civil Society Take Action," the conference will focus on the roles of NGOs, civil society and governments in the implementation of the eight Millennium Development Goals which were adopted by 189 UN Member States at their high-level millennium session in 2000.

Specific Millennium Development Goals are set to: eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability, and develop a global partnership for development.

Since 1976 the AHA UN NGO office has served as an advocate for humanitarian aims like these. The AHA has issued resolutions in support of a shared vision, highlighting the Humanist support of the United Nations and its treaties and conventions, which support religious freedom, environmental treaties, disarmament, arms control, women's rights, and other multilateral agreements which lead to a just and safer world.

Conference delegates will attend five plenary sessions with governmental, UN Agency, NGO, civil society, and local community leaders to assess the progress each sector has made on the goals. Emphasis will be placed on reviewing successful programs to be replicated, possible strategies for raising resources required for the implementation of the MDGs, and heightening public awareness of the Goals. After interactive workshops, delegates will consider recommending a plan of action for use by their NGOs and other civil society members to help meet the Millennium Development Goals by the target date of 2015.

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AHA Breaks with other Humanists over French Headscarf Ban

AHA Press Release August 31, 2004

On Wednesday, the controversial ban on "conspicuous" religious apparel will go into effect in France's public schools, disallowing Muslim headscarves and Jewish yarmulkes. "This ban violates the principle of religious freedom, denying children the identity of their faith," stated Tony Hileman, executive director of the American Humanist Association.

Other groups, some even within the community of reason, have published statements defending France's radical step, prompting Hileman to explain the AHA's difference of opinion: "We feel government should not interfere with religious liberty and private family decisions without a legitimate state interest. While government should be neutral toward religion and schools kept free from proselytization, we see no compelling interest in banning clothing that is not disruptive and does not create a threat to safety."

"Faced with religious conflict, the French government has an interest in supporting educational programs that focus on gender equality and religious tolerance, rather than trying to suppress individual religious expression," added AHA president Mel Lipman.

"France has an honorable history of appropriately separating religion from government, but in this case shows an unnecessary favoritism to religious people whose faith does not mandate the wearing of specific apparel, and discriminates against religious minorities. Children should not be used as political weapons and should not be forced to the front lines of France's cultural and religious differences," continues Lipman.

Since democracy should never yield to the demands of terrorism, the taking hostage of French journalists in Iraq should not figure into the French government's policy decision. "This is clearly a time for reasonable accommodation--favoritism and proselytizing, no. Religious identification, yes," concludes Hileman.

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HOH

Humanists of Houston held a very successful "strategic planning meeting" Monday, Sept. 11th. The agenda was to make plans and choose activities for the next twelve months. Nine people show up and everyone talked for well over 2-1/2 hours.

Among other things discussed: (1) fund raising (an annual fund-raising dinner, passing the hat at each meeting, direct mail to members, Pay Pal, etc); (2) establishing a formal and legal trust fund structure like that of The Humanist Foundation for our HOH 'building fund' – currently about \$7,200; (3) speaker topics at our meetings (more emphasis on "humanism" as an "ism"); (4) use of films/DVDs at meetings to supplement the traditions of 'talking heads' or 'talking heads with Power Point'; (5) possible establishment of a 'film club' as a special interest sub-group; (6) learning from 'mega church' successes in recruitment (cf. Rick Warren's 'The Purpose Driven Church'); (7) the opportunities and difficulties involved in working with campus-based humanist groups; and (8) better coordination/communication with our nearest sister group, the Montgomery County/Isaac Asimov chapter.

'The AHA 2004 Grassroots Manual' pages on Strategic Planning & Budget served as the basic framework of discussions. The specific areas discussed were: (1) planning and objectives; (2) organizing resources, to include time, money, and talents; (3) staffing; (4) responsibilities for specific tasks; (5) monitoring progress; and (6) reviewing results – specifically, "What went well?" "What went badly?" And why...

Since the meeting, Ross Henry, at the Montgomery County/Isaac Asimov Chapter and we have discussed (by email) coordinating our activities more closely. (I should mention that thanks are due to those who went to listen to the Evolution/Intelligent Design 'Great Debate' in The Woodlands recently – supporting Jimmy Dunne and Bob Finch who were 'on the hot seat'). Ross is enthusiastic about improving cooperation between our two AHA chapters!

To provide continuity for planning and 'brainstorming' we have set up a new Yahoo Group: HumanistsofHouston_Plan. It's a place that can act as a central clearinghouse of ideas concerning the future direction of Humanists of Houston: activities and objectives; organization and resources to achieve these; feedback on successes and failures; etc. (It is NOT a general discussion group; it is more closely a 'suggestion box' with feedback.). In simple language, it's for YOU to post YOUR suggestions and feedback regarding where 'we' should go during the upcoming weeks, months, and years. We encourage anyone with an interest in 'getting things rolling' to join the group. As of September 15, 2004, seven persons have already signed up for this group – and we would like to get more!

Ed Uthman (active in the Houston Church of Freethought) has promised to help us set up the electronics gear

needed to show a 'movie' at our Winter Solstice Party at the Museum of Natural History on December 18th. Currently under consideration are Monty Python's "Life of Brian", and Satoshi Kon's anime feature "Tokyo Godfather". If anyone has another suggestion, please email us: tbrucia@houston.rr.com. If the Christmas movie 'goes over' we may use this approach occasionally at monthly meetings instead of a 'speaker'.

Expect action soon regarding (ugh!) fundraising. I am not among those who think a tiny income is better than an adequate income. Unfortunately our current income is tiny.

Also, Bob Finch has been very impressed by the ideas in Rick Warren's 'The Purpose Driven Church' – and it is always smart to examine the ideas of others (no matter how different in philosophy!) to find out what works!

Right now, we need people with good ideas willing to 'grab the ball and run with it'. Those who think that Humanists of Houston should be doing things that the organization is not currently doing need simply speak up. And hopefully the Yahoo Group will provide a focus for inputs and idea sharing! Also expect future 'face-to-face' meetings....

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HCOF

The Houston Church of Freethought held their service on Sunday, September 12, 2004

Anthony Stott presented a personal account of his path to non-belief.

The Freethinker of the Month was Peter Ustinov

Jim Ashmore presented Pastoral Comments

As always Sunday School was provided for kids of all ages

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Letter:

NOT a "Christian nation"

I am not a historian, a biblical scholar, or an attorney. I am a citizen with deeply held convictions regarding the importance of maintaining the wall of separation between church and state.

Attorney Joe H. Reynolds wrote "The Bible as exhibited at our courthouse could not be an embarrassment, offensive or a bother to anyone...". That statement displays the sad neoconservative ability to ignore reality in favor of preconceived convictions: the very existence of the lawsuit that Judge Lake heard proves Mr. Reynolds wrong.

Further, Mr. Reynolds cites a poll, which concluded "...that 80 percent of... this community wished the Bible to remain". That means 20 percent do object (at least potentially). Approximately 30 million Americans have no church affiliation. Many others belong to non-Christian faiths. And the majority (I think) of American Christians adhere to the principle of separation of church and state. I praise the common sense displayed by Judge Lake and the Chronicle.

Mister Reynolds quotes part of the speech Benjamin Franklin gave on 28 June 1787, during the Constitutional Convention. Then Mr. Reynolds states that "following this speech... these great men commenced starting their days together with prayer. And shortly thereafter, the Constitution... was agreed upon".

To that I reply:

They may have indeed met thusly, but I have seen no documentation of such meetings (although those who were Christians probably had been praying all along, alone, heeding the words "...thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men...").

Mister Reynolds implies cause and effect between prayer and the Constitution (which required almost three more months of debate for completion). I need to be shown.

Mister Reynolds needs to review "The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787 [Farrand's Records, Volume 3]", Appendix A "CXCV. Benjamin Franklin to the Editor of the Federal Gazette - [Note 2: 2 Documentary History of the Constitution, IV, 567--571; printed in the Federal Gazette, April 8, 1788.]", where Franklin wrote:

"To conclude, I beg I may not be understood to infer, that our general Convention was divinely inspired when it form'd the new federal Constitution, merely because that Constitution has been unreasonably and vehemently opposed; yet I must own I have so much Faith in the general Government of the World by Providence, that I can hardly conceive a Transaction of such momentous Importance to the Welfare of Millions now existing, and to exist in the Posterity of a great Nation, should be suffered to pass without being in some degree influenc'd, guided and governed by that omnipotent, omnipresent & beneficent Ruler, in whom all inferior Spirits live & move and have their Being.--" (emphasis added).
Deistic, yes -- Christian, no.

Mister Reynolds forgot to mention that although the motion was seconded, it never merited a vote. He also forgot to mention Franklin's own note on his personal copy of the speech: "The Convention, except three or four Persons, thought Prayers unnecessary". Mister Reynolds also forgot to mention that the brief discussion of the motion pointed out that the Convention had no funds to hire a preacher (religion was a business already then).

As one historian (Charles L. Mee, Jr., "The Genius of the People", Harper & Rowe, 1987) wrote "Although the worldly Franklin may have made his proposal only as a way of gently chiding the delegates...". It is unfortunate that Franklin's speech is again being misrepresented (see Farrar, *ibid*, pg. 467) by those who want to rewrite history to further an extreme and misguided religious agenda.

Franklin is not alone -- similar "newhistory" was perpetrated upon what some have called "George Washington's prayer", concerning Thomas Paine's reported deathbed "conversion", etc.

I have no objection to anyone practicing his or her religion as long as they don't hurt or offend others. Or conversely, living up to high non-religious moral and ethical standards. But our Founding Fathers knew they had to keep their own religion (or lack thereof) separate from the government of the Nation they fought so hard to create for us. They knew about rendering unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's. Why should we not keep it that way?

Ariel Thomann

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Food for thought and/or thought for indigestion

By Ron Titus

[1] “Do I have to floss ALL of my teeth?” “Only the ones you want to keep!”

Do I have to exercise ALL of my muscles and limbs? Only the ones you want to keep! (Sigh)

[2] “The really rich people figure out how to dodge taxes anyway.”

[George W Bush, on (John) Kerry’s proposal to rescind tax cuts for the wealthy, *Time*, 2004 0813, P 17]

[3] “In Russia, democracy is who shouts the loudest. In the U.S., it’s who has the most money.”

[Russian President Vladimir Putin speaking to Western foreign policy experts meeting in Moscow, *National Catholic Reporter*, 2004 0917, P 3]

[4] “I have not seen anything thus far that says the people abused were abused in the process of interrogating them or for interrogation purposes.”

(US) Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, on two Army investigative reports released last week. The Army found that, in fact, 13 of 44 cases of abuse involved the interrogation process.

[*Time*, 2004 0906, P 23]

[5] “Americans want better leadership”.

[Presidential candidate John Kerry, *Time*, 2004 0920, P 28]

When politicians say “Americans want”, they mean “I want”.

[6] “I didn’t see one minute of the (Republican National) Convention.”

[Presidential candidate John Kerry, *Time*, 2004 0920, P 28]

So, how is Kerry not like Bush? Apparently, neither wants to view unpleasantries.

[7] “It is our responsibilities, not ourselves, that we should take seriously.”

[Actor & philosopher Peter Ustinov, quoted in the *Houston Church of Freethought Bulletin*, 2004 09]

[8] Jesus doesn’t have to be a real, historical figure to be a powerful influence in people’s lives.

[9] Some people no longer believe in gods and in the tooth fairy and in Santa Clause, but they do now believe in the OOO (Oval Office Occupant).

[10] (US President George W) Bush seems to believe what he says, even if it doesn’t always match reality.

[*Time*, 2004 0920, P 21]

If I believed what Dubya says, I’d vote for him.

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Top 10 Reasons

Submitted by Jimmy Dunne

Here are the top ten reasons why beer is better than religion:

10. No one will kill you for not drinking Beer.

9. Beer doesn't tell you how to have sex. (Beer doesn't tell you how to have families).

8. Beer has never caused a major war.

7. They don't force Beer on minors who can't think for themselves.

(No one proposed a school beer amendment to the US Constitution)

6. When you have a Beer, you don't knock on people's doors trying to give it away.

5. Nobody's ever been burned at the stake, hanged, or tortured over his brand of Beer.

4. You don't have to wait 2000+ years for a second Beer.

3. There are laws saying Beer labels can't lie to you.

2. You can prove you have a Beer.

1. If you've devoted your life to Beer, there are groups to help you stop.

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12086 Sela Lane
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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 / jimmydunne@msm.com / 281-584-9707 (1306 W Brooklake Houston TX 77077)

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

Houston Atheist Society (HAS): Affiliated with American Atheist Society / Founded 2003 / thinkbolt@yahoo.com / 713-968-6520

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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."

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