



Humanist Society of New Mexico



July 2008

www.humanists.net/nm/ fmarch@thinkwellassociates.com

HSNM Family Co-op

Alternative Children's Sunday School

July 6th , 11:00 am

Regular Meeting

July 20th , 11:00am

Special Event

Dave Thomas from New Mexicans for Science and Reason will be performing a magic show!

Ground Level, College of Santa Fe, Albuquerque
Campus, Pinetree Corporate Center

4501 Indian School Rd. NE

Santa Fe Humanists

Saturday, July 5th , 10:30am

Spinning Facts and Propaganda

Meeting Place to be Determined

For more information contact Bill Weihofen
(505) 988- 1343

Grants Humanists

Saturday, July 5th , 10:00 to noon

TBA

For more information contact Henry Bulger

(505) 287-4465

NMSU, Grants Campus, Room 103

Upcoming HSNM Meetings

Meetings are free and open to the public and run
from 10:00 to noon (except where noted)

HSNM Book Club

No Meetings During the Summer

Saturday, July 12th

Informal Meeting

General Discussion

Refreshments: Mina Yamashita

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

Saturday, July 19th

Topical Discussion

USA: The Long-Term Future

Note: No Food or Drink

Meet at Special Collections Library

423 Central Ave. NE

Saturday, July 26th

Speaker Meeting

*A Young American Atheist Views Religion
in Madagascar*

Andrew March

Refreshments: George Kennedy

UNM Law School, Room 2406, 1117 Stanford NE

Humanism is an ethical philosophy that derives its principles from science and reason rather than theology. It asserts the worth and dignity of every person, advocates personal liberty tempered by social and environmental responsibility, and promotes democracy, compassion, and justice. It sees human beings as natural organisms, whose values arise from culture and experience, and holds humanity responsible for its own affairs.

Donations, Publicity Grow

Julian Anderson, our previously anonymous donor, recently wrote a check to the HSNM education fund for \$1,498.68. That was a match to the donations from twelve other contributors since Dale McGowan's parenting seminar on March 22. We all appreciate the

motivation and the contribution that Julian provided. Because of these generous contributors, we added almost \$3,000 to our education program, our main focus as an AHA chapter. These donations were divided between the children's Sunday school – the Family Co-Op fund- and the Adult Program. Muchas gracias to all.

We will be renting space for both programs in the Albuquerque branch of the College of Santa Fe starting in July. The publicity committee is busy designing ads and fliers and writing notices, public service announcements, and press releases for these classes, as well as for our monthly Speaker Meetings. We must thank Jeff Cornelius and Olena Dziuba for the time they are giving to this publicity work. Randy Wall and Phil Smith have also been diligent about updates to our newsletter and website. These represent our image in the greater Albuquerque community, and we appreciate the skills and dedication of those doing this important work. We hope that in a couple of years the question "What's Humanism?" will be replaced by "How can I join?"

*Ron Herman
Director of Classes & Publicity*

The Humanist Society of New Mexico (HSNM)

A Membership chapter of the American Humanist Association.

The purpose of HSNM is to promote ethical, naturalistic, democratic Humanism among its members and within its community.

Officers

Frederic March: President

Harry Willson: Vice President/Programs

Jerry Wesner: Past President

Ed Root: Treasurer

John Waldrop : Secretary

Ron Herman: Director of Classes

Jeff Cornelius: Family Co-op

Randall Wall: Newsletter Editor

Janet Johnson: Book Club

Ted Cloak: Community Liaison

Phil Smith: Webmaster

Membership Director: Open

Social Coordinator: Open

Publicity Director: Open

Subscription to HSNM Newsletter, published monthly, accompanies AHA/HSNM membership or can be obtained by nonmembers for \$12 annually. Send subscription and membership request to: Humanist Society of New Mexico, P.O. Box 13675, Albuquerque, NM 87192. Send Newsletter submissions to: Editor, Randall Wall at Email paragon2012@comcast.net

The deadline for Newsletter submissions is the third Saturday of each month.

International Humanist Conference – Wow!

Though it's hard to compare sites, topics, and talks, some at the recent Humanist conference in Washington, DC considered it to be the best conference ever. That might have been because it was a joint conference of the American Humanist Association, the International Humanist and Ethical Union and their youth organization, and the Secular Student Alliance. Three of our members attended – Carolyn Glenn-Kaye, Margaret Nahas, and Ron Herman. It was held near the heart of the city at the L'Enfant Plaza Hotel, and as Carolyn says, "the joint was jumping" with about 600 Atheists and Humanists with a variety of views, backgrounds, and national origins. The topics were pertinent and timely, and the speeches and discussions were informative and sometimes provocative, inspiring, and entertaining, too.

Some of the notable speakers were Maryam Namazie (Iran feminist who is on an Islam hit-list), Eugenie Scott (science education director), Jamie Raskin (Distinguished Service awardee, Maryland State Senator), Rep. Pete Stark (Humanist of the Year),

Wendy Kaminer (attorney and author), Matthew LaClair (Pioneer awardee for student activism), Judge John Jones (Religious Liberty awardee for courage during *Kitzmiller vs. Dover*), Eleanor Smeal (editor of *Ms. Magazine*, Feminist awardee), Carolyn Porco (Cassini Image scientist and Isaac Asimov Science awardee), Phillip Pullman (author of *The Golden Compass*, IHEU awardee). There was also a short talk by surprise visitor Christopher Hitchens, author of *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. Not least was Ron Herman speaking on a Comparison of Science and Religion, which was followed with vigorous Q & A. Ron will give his talk here at our speaker meeting in August or September.

The discussions were great, covering a broader range of issues than just the usual concerns of US members. They covered such topics as whether cults should be prosecuted in Great Britain for fraud, whether it is a Humanists' duty to, in effect, debunk and expose religion as the greatest fraud in history or be kind and tolerant to all beliefs and non-belief, and whether the media engages in sexist reporting.

There also were some very funny people there; Darwin's great, great grandson, Matthew Chapman, alluded to his past relatives as "alcoholics, marital failures, ne'er do wells, and myself, a screenwriter! You can see *The Descent of Man* in my own family tree." The awe-inspiring and uplifting moments (though not "spiritual") included Porco's slide show on recent discoveries in the cosmos and LaClair's campaign to get the presidential candidates to debate science issues. We also spoke with major donors to Humanist programs, including Pritpal Singh Kochhar, who is sponsoring the education program, and Lou Appignani, who has offered to match donations up to \$1 million. As you would expect, the conference covered every Humanist topic under and over the sun, and we even had a performance by a Humanist Hip-Hopper, Greydon Square.

We visited the AHA offices on T Street, and spoke with staff in Heather Wilson and Jeff Bingaman's offices on Lobbying Day sponsored by the Secular Coalition for America. Our seat of government is certainly an exciting and inspiring place. We are sorry the rest of our members missed this experience, but you can start planning for the next AHA conference, which will be close-by in Tempe, AZ. We suggest a new fund category to help a few UNM students attend.

Carolyn Glen Kaye, Ron Herman

The Pressure to Believe

Here we go again. The presidential candidate notes that unemployed residents of the Rust Belt "become

bitter and cling to religion." His opponents leap up to say that he doesn't understand small-town America. Some turn up in the media to assert that they are proud of their religion and are not religious because they're bitter. It seemed to me that the candidate understood the situation quite well, and that these objectors were stating that they were proud to believe what they believe in spite of evidence, that they were proud to believe nonsense. Once again we're left wondering "Where does this inclination to believe things that aren't so come from?"

Here's a hypothesis, stirred up by reading Richard Dawkins' book, *THE GOD DELUSION*. There is a built-in mechanism in the human brain, which was originally an evolutionary advantage. The young are strongly inclined to believe what older ones tell them. "Wolves and cougars can hurt you badly, if you're not careful. Beware of weak limbs when climbing trees. Beware also of thin ice. Learn this now and you will save much time and avoid much misery later. Learn it well, and live longer." Learning survival tricks this way is a very fine advantage in life's struggle.

Language is obviously part of this built-in mechanism. The basic inclination is to believe, to accept the wisdom of the older ones, to assume that the authority is well-meaning and benign. It will take some unpleasant experiences, and some courage, to conclude later that the story told by the elder, or the authority, is false, and that believing it will actually constitute a disadvantage in the struggle for survival.

So, people are inclined to believe the stories the older ones tell. These stories then coalesce into a system of beliefs, and that system, which could perhaps be called a religion at this stage, is attached to a wider authority than father or older brother. Thus people end up believing nonsense and behaving irrationally. The notion that the Leader [King, or whatever] has been selected and put into his position of authority by a superhuman Entity which made the world and is in charge of it seems preposterous in the face of the historical evidence. Getting people to believe that has been greatly helped by this built-in inclination to believe what authority says, in spite of evidence.

So we have tyrants and their obedient unprotesting subordinates. And we have half the population, i.e. the females, accepting inferior status because Scriptures and priests are prescribing it. People believe nonsense and accept the consequences of that, because of this habit of believing what they've been told.

Schools and teachers are involved in all this, one way or another. Some schools are an extension of parental control, and try to strengthen in children that innate inclination to believe and obey. They don't teach

students to think and analyze and doubt and question; instead they fortify the easy way of acceptance and obedience.

Some parents find their role confusing -- should they try to produce obedient and subservient offspring, or should they try to produce thoughtful, independent persons, who are inclined to depend on evidence rather than the dictates of authority? Not all children, even in the same family, handle this the same way. We have observed remarkable contrasts in our household. Some children are more inclined to believe and be obedient than others. Some want to know how it really is and are unsatisfied with the explanations of the older people.

The stories to which the young are subjected range from the silly to the very serious. From some perspectives, e.g., the washing of dishes to make sure they are kosher seems like a colossal waste of time and effort. Yet those who do it refer to tradition and the group that they are part of, and the support and consolation they get from that group. Perhaps it's not quite as silly as outsiders assume.

All the stories about Santa Claus can give insight into these matters. The adults don't believe it, but they encourage little children to believe in the fat guy with the flying reindeer. For a while many of the little ones are believing nonsense, unnecessarily. Gradually they figure it out. It's a myth, with an expiration date. If you meet a 25-year-old who is waiting for Santa Claus to come, you know you have a problem. But what happens to this myth, namely that no adult really believes it, could happen to all the others. Some of us ardently wish it would, and soon.

Harry Willson

Letter to the Editor

Donald Gutierrez's book review (June newsletter) ends with the statement that Americans should "subordinate their daily concerns and begin taking action against a government regime that is taking their freedom and ultimately their country away from them." Because I'm a conscientious objector people occasionally ask me if I would have fought in WWII. An answer that I find satisfying is "I'm still fighting it." I was fighting fascism in 1960 when I refused to take an oath to obey military officers and the President. Blind personal loyalty is the core, the essence, of fascism. In reading *The Separation of Church and State* (edited by Forrest Church, 2004) I note that the perception of human equality is the basis for our constitutional prohibition of establishment of religion. The founders understood that uncoerced communication among a multitude of equal individuals is the only reliable path to truth. Hierarchical societies

cannot generate new truths, tell the truth in the present or preserve the wisdom of the past. In times like this the greatest heroes are reporters and journalists, especially those who admit it when they realize that they have been fooled by those in power. The current occupants of the White House should spend the rest of their lives in prison for their many abuses of power including crimes against humanity.

Dale L. Berry

Grants, NM



Friendly Philosophers

Monday, July 7th

Open Forum

Bring Your Own Topic for a General Discussion

Monday, July 21st

The Role of Fitness

Dr. Len Kravitz

Copper Canyon Restaurant, 5455 Gibson (opposite Lovelace Hospital) in conference dining room. Dinner at 5:30; talk follows.

Atheists/Freethinkers Meetup Group

<http://atheists.meetup.com/75>

Sunday, July 6th, 9am

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202 Harvard SE

Tuesday, July 15th

Social Meeting at 6:30pm at Mimi's Cafe, 4316 The 25 Way, Near Jefferson and I-25

New Mexicans for Science and Reason

Wednesday, July 9th, 7pm

Climate Change in the Geological Record

Prof. Peter Fawcett