



ISSUE NUMBER 5

PHONE: (403) 241-7585

WEBSITE: WWW.CALGARYHUMANIST.CA

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"Atheism is always a result of some tragic event in our lives"

UNDERSTANDING ATHEISTS

I read an article the other day by Mr. Marc Gellman in Newsweek, entitled "Trying to Understand Angry Atheists", "Why do nonbelievers seem to be threatened by the idea of God?" Mr. Gellman is a Rabbi and has written quite a few good articles in his day. This particular article was very typical though of many articles like them, in that he knows very little of what an atheist really is.

In the first paragraph of his article he states "I don't think they need to be religious to be good, kind and charitable people", and yet further down in the article he states "Religion must remain an audacious, daring and, yes, uncomfortable assault on our desires to do what we want when we want to do it." In other words, maybe you don't think you need religion to be a good person, but in reality only religion will keep you in check. He even goes so far as to suggest that only religion can teach the way to discipline our animal urges, combat racism, materialism, selfishness and arrogance. Of course, he also makes the claim that only religion can end the sinful oppression of the most vulnerable and the most innocent.

That of course borders on that almighty line of morality that the religious always assume you can't have without a god. It's a shame that these types of stereotypical assumptions about atheists still exist. Another assumption made is that our atheism is always a result of some tragic event in our lives. Mr. Gellman suggests that it is probably the result of "the tragic death of a loved one, or an angry degrading sermon, or an insensitive eulogy, or an unfeeling castigation of lifestyle choices, or perhaps something even worse". Unfortunately, it is never mentioned or even thought that most atheists made their decision to live their life without a belief in a god because of reason, critical thinking, and basic observation. Most atheists are constantly educating themselves. Education in itself is one of the best and most proven ways of eradicating such things as racism, materialism, selfishness, arrogance and of course curbing those ever present animal urges!

There was one sentence in Mr. Gellman's article that I did agree with, "I think I need to understand atheists better". It's a shame though that he has no intention of actually doing so. Instead, he apologizes for his article sounding condescending and states that he views atheists with a patient sympathy because we are wrong about the big question "Are we alone?"

I am always saddened when I read these types of articles because they always point a very negative finger at atheists. They never mention all the good things that they do for others in this world. You could fill many books with the scientific discoveries, the personal sacrifices made to improve human rights, and the generosity of atheists throughout history. Instead, Mr. Gellman gives one example

of an atheist that impressed him, as if they are few and far between.

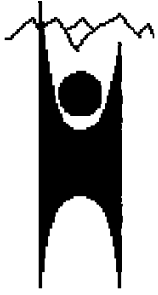
This article generated quite a bit of mail for Newsweek. In fact, over 2,000 letters were received. Mr. Gellman has a problem understanding why atheists are often so angry, and I would think that if his articles about atheism are like this one, yes it would anger some of those among us. One reader even wrote "I wasn't angry until I read this article". Although a lot of atheists wrote Mr. Gellman and Newsweek, I am sure that their articulate and well thought out points will be dismissed by the Rabbi, as we are looked at as those poor lost souls. So once again another critic of atheism learns nothing more of what they already have in their minds. Which of course, leads me to the question - Why do believers seem to be threatened by the idea of living a life without god?

Why do believers think that if you take away religion the world will go into complete chaos? Why is it assumed that people can't do good or be moral without religion? Why do a lot of believers think that if you don't believe in a god you are evil? Why is religion afraid of scrutiny? It is these types of questions and more that atheists ask themselves. It is how many of us become atheists. Instead of ignoring those with beliefs and just looking at them with the kind of patient sympathy that they often show to us, we ask questions. We inform ourselves, test ourselves and make informed decisions based on reason and critical thinking.

In conclusion, I think one of the atheists that wrote to Newsweek in response to Mr. Gellman's article said it best. He stated it's not that atheists are angry, it's that we are frightened of what religion is becoming and what it is destroying. When a mass of people have the same strong belief that they have the right to discriminate, hate and even kill those that don't believe in the same god and principles as they do, atheists, freethinkers, humanists and the like MUST stand up and shout the voice of reason.

Pat Terrell
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THIS QUARTER'S MEETING DATES

All our meetings are held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month, except for July and August.

We also meet informally for Sunday brunches and discussion groups. A big thank you to our gracious hosts Dona and Ross for making our luncheons possible. Contact us for more details:

www.calgaryhumanist.ca or
calgary_humanists@yahoo.com

Notification of our meeting date, time, place and topic is sent to everyone via email.

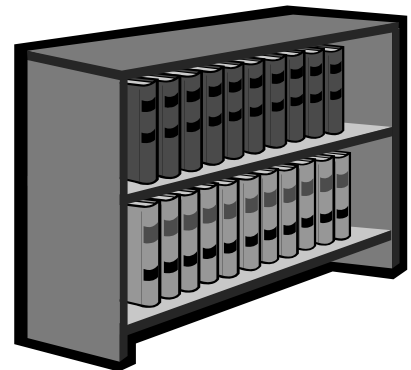


SHIC LIBRARY NEWS

Hi All - I am making a list of our library books and such. Anyone who has borrowed anything let me know what it is (title, author, description) so I can include it.

Deb Rennie

If anyone would like to donate items to our library, please contact one of the board members or email us www.calgaryhumanist.ca



*“Often, the less there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it.”
- Mark Twain*

SHIC BOARD MEMBERS

Bruce Godwin - President
Mike O'Brien - Vice President
Brenda O'Brien - Secretary
Dona Vine-Mutton - Treasurer
Deb Rennie - Librarian
P. Robinson

You can contact any Board Member through our website www.calgaryhumanist.ca

NEWSLETTER SUBMISSIONS - NEW SCHOOL PRAYER

I got the following submission from one of our members.

New School Prayer

*Now I sit me down in school
Where praying is against the rule
for this great nation under God
Finds mention of Him very odd.*

*If Scripture now the class recites,
it violates the Bill of Rights.
And anytime my head I bow
becomes a Federal matter now.*

*Our hair can be purple, orange, or green,
that's no offence; it's a freedom scene.
The law is specific, the law is precise.
Prayers spoken aloud are a serious vice.*

*For praying in a public hall,
might offend someone with no faith at all.
In silence alone we must meditate,
God's name is prohibited by the state.*

*We're allowed to cuss and dress like freaks,
and pierce our noses, tongues, and cheeks.
They've outlawed guns, but FIRST the Bible.
To quote the Good Book makes me liable.*

*We can elect a pregnant Senior Queen,
and the 'unwed daddy,' our Senior King.
It's 'inappropriate' to teach right from wrong,
we're taught that such 'judgments' do not belong.*

*We can get our condoms and birth controls,
study witchcraft, vampires and totem poles.
But the Ten Commandments are not allowed;
No word of God must reach this crowd.*

*Its scary here I must confess,
when chaos reigns the school's a mess.
So, Lord, this silent plea I make:
Should I be shot; my soul please take!*

Amen

I thought this was a prime example of the typical thought process of quite a few Christians. I say that with confidence because this New School Prayer is one of the top emails being circulated today.

The problem I have with these types of Christian "feel-good" writings is that atheists get blamed for the behavior of the religious. What they fail to realize or acknowledge is that the reason morning recital of the lord's prayer was removed from the classroom is because in a public school, not everyone is of a Christian faith.

It violated the right to freedom of religion. Recital of the lord's prayer forced others of another faith and those without religion to conform to the rituals of one religion.

Once again the Christians have no problem trying force their faith on others, but have a huge problem when the rest of us force upon them the basic human right of religious freedom.

We know that it is not illegal to pray, nor is the bible outlawed. It is not legal to force others to feel like bad citizens because they don't believe in your bible or say your prayers in a public setting. They know that they have the freedom to pray all they want in their homes and churches. They also know that they have the freedom to read their bible. What irritates them is that they don't have the right to force their beliefs on others. It has become where they feel that their religion is the one that should rule government, schools, and anything else. Blinded by their own imagined persecution they are doing exactly what they accuse atheists of.

The supposed chaos that they claim is running through the schools has nothing whatsoever to do with removing the recital of the lord's prayer. Most of the children that go to these same schools are religious. What the real problem is, is very simple, it is the breakdown of the family. We live in a time where it is almost impossible for the mother to stay home with their children. Both parents have to work in order to maintain the costs of keeping a home, putting food on the table, clothes on their children's backs and still try to save enough for surprise expenses. Children are rarely brought up with the values of their parents anymore, they instead have little values or sense of responsibility. With the high divorce rate, a lot of these same children also have a very low sense of self-worth. There are problems in schools because the day care worker, the teacher, and the parents have very little time for them. This is why so many children and young adults these days don't know right from wrong. It has nothing at all to do with religion in a school setting. If their children are getting pregnant out of wedlock, cussing, lying, dressing like freaks, practicing witchcraft, and vandalizing others property, it is because an adult hasn't taken their responsibility in helping these children develop a sense of belonging, responsibility, and taught them self-criticism or empathy for others. I feel that if schools taught courses on critical thinking a lot of the problems in today's schools would diminish dramatically.

Of course asking anyone to take responsibility these days is like asking a donkey to lay an egg. So like the rest of the population, the Christians don't take responsibility either. Their clergy has decided to blame it all on the atheists. Oh if only it was that easy.

Pat Terrell - Editor
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AVAILABLE FROM SHIC LIBRARY

BOOKS:

- Flim-Flam! By James Randi
- How we Believe by Michael Shermer
- The Science of Good and Evil by Michael Shermer
- How Mumbo-Jumbo Conquered The World by Francis Wheen

CASSETTES:

- Robert Ingersol

PERIODICALS:

- Canadian Humanist News Issue 1208-6193
- Kitchener Waterloo Cambridge Guelph Humanists News—March 2005 Issue
- HAT Newsletter March/April 2005 Issue
- Victoria Secular Humanists March 2005 Issue
- Humanist Association of Ottawa—Spring/Summer 2005 Issue



DVD'S & VIDEOS:

- Not available at this time

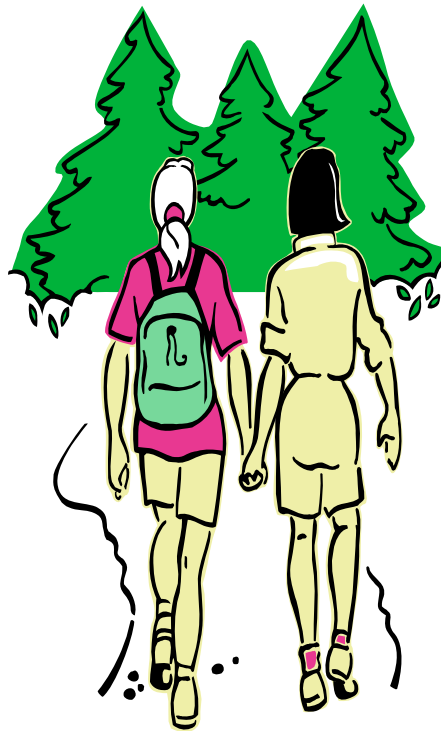


To donate to the SHIC Library please contact:
www.calgaryhumanist.ca

Better-Late-Than-Never Summer Solstice Camp Over

Two of our members Mike & Brenda O'Brien have an acreage in the country, just 90 minutes north on highway 22, a bit north of Sundre, and are checking to see who might be interested in a camp over, Saturday/Sunday July 8 & 9. Tents, trailers, tent trailers, fifth wheels, whatever; there is room for everyone. There is a large fire pit, and the stars at night are amazing. The James River is just a minute away, and there are miles of trails and creeks for nature walks. Well behaved dogs are welcome too.

Please email Mike or Brenda (mike@outdoormuseum.ca) by June 30 if possible, if you are interested, as they would like to know how many plan to attend.



“Giving up witchcraft is, in effect, giving up the Bible.”-- John Wesley, clinging to the spirit of the Inquisition in the face of the rise of Rationalism, from his Journal (1768)

Atheistic Evangelism

Leo J. Mauler

I remember the good old days in college. Myself and an agnostic friend would dress up in suits and ties (an odd arrangement considering we were both UNIX hackers and rarely out of blue jeans and weird T-shirts), then go out on campus during times when lots of people would be about. In our hands would be some thick religious-looking book (usually the book would be on the subject of Evolution), and we would have all the poise and charm of a couple of Jehovah's Witnesses.

We would approach a person or small group, and ask, "Have you considered a personal relationship with Jesus Christ?" Or, alternately, with "God?"

The usual response was twofold. Either they would say, "No!" hoping we would just go away. Then we would reply, "GOOD!", hand them a pamphlet from our two-person Atheist organization (usually a page at most), and walk away. Lots of odd stares, but we feel we had an effect on the population, if only because we acted like Jehovah's Witnesses, then left people alone. :)

What happened when the victim said, "Yes!"?

We'd say, "WHY????", hand them a pamphlet, and walk off.

Again, stares and the feeling of having done something good for the Universe... :)

Ahh, the good old days...hmmm, y'know, I had been wondering what to do with all my free time Saturday morning... :)

How To Get Rid of Door-To-Door Missionaries

Rorke Haining

A chalk outline of a human body on the sidewalk, and a few copies of The Watchtower scattered around...

My mother (a second-generation atheist) used to say (in a very sweet voice): "I'm sorry, I don't give a damn about Jesus." Worked every time. The missionaries just backed off the porch in slack-jawed, bug-eyed disbelief.

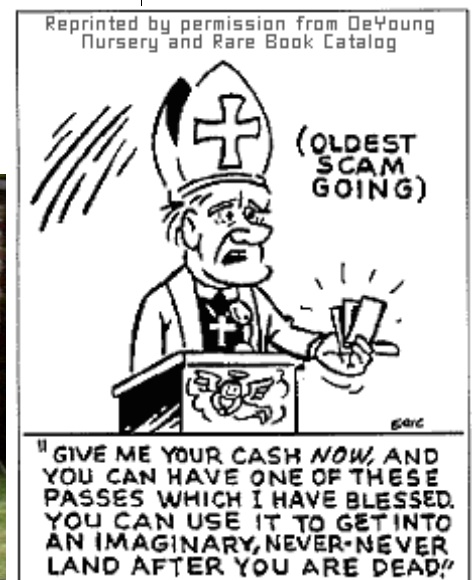
A friend claims that when missionaries knock on her door, her first response is to ask for their address. When they ask why she wants to know, she says it is so she can visit them to push her beliefs. So far, none of them have given their address. It also marks the end of the interview. SLAM!

A guy goes up to my friend's friend and asks, "Can I talk to you about God?" She says, "Sure, what would you like to know?"

I answer the door with a bloody knife and say, "I'm sorry, could you come back in a half hour? We're not done with the virgin yet."



**"The truths of religion are never so well understood as by those who have lost the power of reasoning."
- Voltaire**



**Society for Secular Humanists in
Calgary**

Calgary, Alberta

Phone: (403) 241-7585
calgary_secular_humanists@yahoo.com
Email Editor: shic.news@gmail.com
Website: www.calgaryhumanist.ca

We're on the WEB!
www.calgaryhumanist.ca

Secular humanists do not rely upon gods or other supernatural forces to solve their problems or provide guidance for their conduct. They rely instead upon the application of reason, the lessons of history, and personal experience to form an ethical/moral foundation and to create meaning in life. Secular humanists look to the methodology of science as the most reliable source of information about what is factual or true about the universe we all share, acknowledging that new discoveries will always alter and expand our understanding of it and perhaps change our approach to ethical issues as well.

The Society for Secular Humanists in Calgary was incorporated in Alberta, Canada, on November 15th, 2002. Humanists had been meeting in Calgary for many years and it was with the encouragement from some of those earlier members which led to establishing a formal organization.

The basic objective of the Society, as recorded in its "Application To Form A Society" is: To study and promote Secular Humanism as an alternative to religious and other supernatural belief systems.

Types of membership in the Society is spelled out in the By-Laws. People over 18 years old who support the basic tenets of Secular Humanism can become Voting Members. (Under 18 membership requires Board approval.) People over 18 who do not necessarily support the tenets of Secular Humanism but who want to find out more about it or who wish to support activities of the Society can become Associate Members.

The Society for Secular Humanists in Calgary is closely affiliated with the Humanist Association of Canada. The membership of the Society believes that Secular Humanism can be strengthened by working with the national organization and with other local associations.

Secular Humanism

Secular Humanism is a term which has come into use in the last thirty years to describe a world view with the following elements and principles:

- A conviction that dogmas, ideologies and traditions, whether religious, political or social, must be weighed and tested by each individual and not simply accepted on faith.
- Commitment to the use of critical reason, factual evidence, and scientific methods of inquiry, rather than faith and mysticism, in seeking solutions to human problems and answers to important human questions.
- A primary concern with fulfillment, growth, and creativity for both the individual and humankind in general.
- A constant search for objective truth, with the understanding that new knowledge and experience constantly alter our imperfect perception of it.
- A concern for this life and a commitment to making it meaningful through better understanding of ourselves, our history, our intellectual and artistic achievements, and the outlooks of those who differ from us.
- A search for viable individual, social and political principles of ethical conduct, judging them on their ability to enhance human well-being and individual responsibility.
- A conviction that with reason, an open marketplace of ideas, good will, and tolerance, progress can be made in building a better world for ourselves and our children.