



Humanist Society of New Mexico



January 2011

<http://humanistsocietyofnm.org/> zelda@amadorbooks.com

Quote of the Month

There are two kinds of [people] who never amount to much: Those who cannot do what they are told, and those who can do nothing else.

Cyrus H. Curtis

HSNM Family Co-Op Alternative Children's Sunday School

First and third Sundays, 3 PM
First Unitarian Church

Call 505-292-4375 for more information
or go to www.Meetup.com.

Santa Fe Humanists

Saturday, January 8th, 10:30am

Guest Participant
Imam Abdur'Rauf Raul Campos-Marquetti

Community Room, La Farge Branch of the
Santa Fe Public Library, 1730 Llano St.

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

Upcoming HSNM Meetings

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

Saturday, January 8th

Informal Meeting

General Discussion

Visitors please contact Zelda Gatuskin at
505-344-6102 for details or questions.

Refreshments: Randall Wall

Summit Apartments, 3901 Indian School NE

Saturday, January 15th

Topical Discussion

What is Holy? What is Sacred?

Erna Fergusson Library, 3700 San Mateo Blvd. NE

Saturday, January 22nd

Speaker Meeting

The Many Faces of Humanism – Part 2

By Fred March

Humanist Minute: Lee Delaney

Refreshments: ?

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.

**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/Committees

Zelda Gatuskin: President [Public Information]

Roy Moody: Vice President

[Education/Programs]

Fred March: Past President

[Special Projects]

Leland Franks: Treasurer [By-laws]

Jerry Gilbert: Secretary [Membership]

Carolyn Kaye, Member-at-Large

Ted Cloak, Member-at-Large

Ongoing Projects:

Ron Herman, Director of Classes

Randall Wall, Newsletter Editor

Phil Smith, Webmaster

Attila Csanyi, Friendly Philosopher's Director

Subscription to HSNM Newsletter, published monthly, accompanies AHA/HSNM membership or can be obtained by nonmembers for \$15 annually. Local membership (HSNM only) is \$15/year (\$20 for two adults in the same household); AHA membership is \$35 for the first year, \$45 thereafter, and includes HSNM membership. Send local subscription or membership request to: Humanist Society of New Mexico, P.O. Box 27293, Albuquerque, NM 87125-7293. Send Newsletter submissions to: Editor, Randall Wall, paragon2012@comcast.net

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

President's Message

By Zelda Gatuskin

My New Year's resolution for 2011 is to not be the one who's red in the face, foaming at the mouth, and blithering incoherently in anger - unlike the Monday morning after Thanksgiving, when two evangelicals rang the bell. I lit right into them about how many times I had told "you people" not to come on the premises. "Who do you think you are, that you get to talk to me about my spirituality...." The anger was making me too short of breath to speak. Meanwhile, the dog was right behind me barking sharply, and Frank, hearing the notes of alarm, came charging to our defense. In his big choral conductor voice he commanded the women to leave the property at once. They were more than happy to do so.

"What did they say to make you so mad?"

"Nothing." I felt embarrassed. "They didn't say a word. I just saw the bible in her hands and lost it." I was feeling more stupid by the second. How could the mere arrival of those two smiling, well-groomed, diminutive women make me lose my cool like that?

This depth of feeling reflects lessons instilled deep in childhood. I wasn't very old before I learned a big word, "assimilation," for a big sin. The frightening part of assimilation was that even if you didn't want to commit such a sin, you might be compelled to - or to choose between preserving your life or preserving your identity. This was not an academic topic in our household. One side of the family had fled the pogroms in Russia, the other had been herded into Poland's Warsaw ghetto, where many died. Our people had not come through such hardships to this brilliant land of equality and religious freedom only to be absorbed into the dominant Christian culture.

So you can see how having strangers show up uninvited to insert their unwelcome piety into my happy home really sets me off. I no longer practice the traditions of Judaism, but I am hardly assimilated. If anything, my outrage at Christian proselytizing has only increased. It used to be fun, as a kid, to see my grandmother welcome in the unsuspecting Seventh Day Adventists for a chat and then cream them with her superior knowledge of the Old Testament. As a Jew, such visits are not threatening - I never expect the knock on the door will be the gestapo come to drag me away.

But as an American, a patriot to the core by virtue of prior generations' immigrant experience, I am enraged by the chutzpah of someone trying to foist their religion on me.

The Buddha taught: "Do not fight in anger." A local wise man taught me this: "There are real reasons to be angry. People do wrong and hurtful things. But what are you going to do, be mad forever? Anger is a strong emotion and it makes us feel strong, but in reality it weakens us." His words have registered ever more deeply over the years. There is only one thing now that really and truly makes me lose it – door-to-door proselytizing. But I am resolved this year: Deep breaths, count to ten, smile.

Happy New Year, Humanists! Let's remember to be happy humanists and not angry humanists. We are indeed in a fight for a freer and fairer society, but we need not fight in anger. We can address our problems with reason and our adversaries with respect. We are our own best advertisement for our philosophy when we demonstrate how humanism allows us to be our best selves.

HSNM Governance Notebook

by Zelda Gatuskin

The full Governing Board will meet for the first time on January 27. Our focus will be on setting priorities and goals for HSNM committees. In February we will be recruiting for committees and holding committee meetings. Watch this space in the next newsletter for details. Please consider signing up for a committee or a task.

NM Church State Coalition Forms/HSNM Needed

By Carolyn Kaye

In view of Governor Martinez' campaign pronouncements in favor of giving tax credits to those who send children to private religious schools, we are reconstituting a coalition of progressive organizations and faith groups to prevent it. We were successful in combating this a few years ago under Pres. Jerry Wesner. We expect other church-state separation issues to arise in this legislature as well.

School tax credits are "backdoor voucher" schemes, plain and simple. In Arizona, they have diverted \$349 million since 1997 that could have gone to improve public schools. In 2009 alone, 92% of AZ tax credits went to religious schools, primarily Catholic, and secondarily, evangelical.

HSNM volunteers are very much needed to represent

us at occasional Coalition meetings hosted by the ACLU, or attend legislative committee hearings, and/or make occasional legislator contacts by e-mail, phone, or in person (your choice). Please call Carolyn Glen Kaye (323-5288) if you can help a little. We need you!

Holiday Lights Potluck/Roadrunner Food Drive a Success!

It happened long ago... No, it was last December 11th when we humanists gathered together at the Summit to celebrate at our annual Holiday Lights Potluck Lunch. We partook in many tasty dishes and lively conversation but we did not forget those who have less than we. Thanks to Leland who did the paperwork, and Roy who made the delivery, and everyone who donated, we were able to contribute \$586 in cash and many food items to the Roadrunner Food Bank. Fantastic! Till next year.

Contemplating America's State Terrorism as Torture

By Donald Gutierrez

Individuals tortured lie in the inconceivable clutches of the demonic. The tortured inhabit a world of extreme psychic and physical torment that separates them ineffably from ordinary life experience. They undergo experiences of extremity that people in the "safe" world don't want to even think of. Though the argument for empathy for the tortured rooted in our common humanity should be persuasive and even obvious, we allow barriers of space, culture, race, gender, ideology and an excessive trust in the ideal of a democratic government to desensitize us to the diabolic world of maliciously devised pain. Yet, any affirmative conception of community and of the sanctity of vulnerability of the human body and mind urges that people should be outraged about governments - especially their own government - being directly or indirectly responsible for torturing individuals.

To deal seriously as Americans with state torture and particularly with state torture perpetrated by Washington, one needs to come alive to the ontology, the being, of torture. This could involve the daunting prospect of imagining the experience in the present of those tortured in the past, at least, to what extent one could bear. Such contemplation might strike some as morbid. What is truly morbid, however, is dismissing the plight of the tortured as beneath one's concern. Many of the tortures of individuals by the American state occurred in the past half-century, though some even earlier, going back to the horrible "Water-cure" torture

of Philippine “insurgents” by American soldiers during the 1898-1902 Spanish-American War. Even the usually negligent mass media has been relatively informative about the torture at Abu Ghraib to make elaboration of such “depth interrogation” unnecessary. (The media has been for less informative, however, about extreme abuse and/or even murder of detainees at Bagram, and very likely in other Black cells scattered around the world.) However, we do well to recall some - among many - earlier instances of direct as well as indirect involvement of American military and intelligence (CIA) forces in torturing, whether the extremely savage Vietnam “Operation Phoenix” program, the instruction by the School of the Americas in “security training” of Latin American military officers and police that enabled them to inflict torture, mutilation and horrible death on many countless thousands of Latin Americans, or methods of torture provided the Shah of Iran's SAVAK by the CIA (including lessons in the torture of women)

Despite the ostensible pastness of torture occurring before the present, something timeless and eternal exudes from the experience of the radically violated body and mind of tortured human beings. According to NGOs who care for, and try to rehabilitate the tortured, most torture victims might never fully transcend the memory of their terror and agony. We who have been so fortunate as to have lived free of such horror should consider the moral obligation of bearing witness contemplatively and responsively to their terror and pain and to the radical government evil that brought such extreme suffering about. We must attempt to sense the cast of mind of politicians, military brass, Elite Forces like the Seals, intelligence agencies, free-market lobbyists, mega-corporation and defense-industry moguls who forge and enact the policies that result in the oppression and torture of populations in nations vulnerable to Washington's power. That contemplation might help us realize more deeply what we are up against, the better to oppose and overcome it.

We need to realize that the person writhing or screaming in agony from electrodes applied by the Washington-supported military or police of Honduras, Guatemala, Contra-venomated Nicaragua, Pinochet's Chile (among other nations) to one's gums or genitals or gasping for crucial air from having one's face covered by a drenched tight-fitting cloth is often as innocent as we are, and that his/her pain and terror constitute a reality as immediate, substantive and “human” as one's own daily experience of breathing, salivating and drinking. Olga Talavante, a torture victim in Washington-backed Argentina in 1974 (a powerful anti-torture activist since), strapped to a bed naked, her hands and legs tied to the bed posts, said that when her

tormentors pushed a pillow down on her face every time they would re-commence electrocuting her, she survived suffocation by turning her head to the side after the pillow was put on her face but just before it was pressed down, not only allowing her to breathe, but implementing a strategy that helped Olga sustain her sanity - (Social Justice, v. 33, no.2, 112-13). Developing a keener sense of shared human reality can occur through an imagining of the violated body and mind of the tortured with a force and clarity sufficient to prevent that body, though not one's own, from ever being disowned or entirely forgotten. Developing this sense could - and should - lead to doing whatever one can to stop torture anywhere and everywhere. This is a sizable task considering that, according to human-rights organizations, some two thirds of the nations in the world practice torture.

Though past torture may never be fully redeemed by any kind of contemplating or imagining leading to political action, the experience of torture in Guatemala related by Sister Dianna Ortiz in her extraordinarily harrowing book The Blindfold's Eyes: My Journey from Torture to Truth suggests an exception to this surmise. Ortiz's subsequent activism against high-placed state individuals in Guatemala and Washington responsible for her torture and that of many other individuals may help protect future potential victims of state terror. The average person might not easily or readily achieve that level of communal empathy and selfless activism against state terrorism, nor would anyone want to undergo Ortiz's or Talamante's ordeals. Nevertheless, attempting that identification constitutes as valid and fulfilling a spiritual path as any. And, again, terrorism as political torture imposed by *our* government means that we as tax-paying citizens are supporting this illegal and ineffably brutal foreign “policy” in Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan, Camp Justice /sic/ in Diego Garcia island, Eastern Europe and elsewhere - right now under the Obama Administration. Who wants their tax money used to torture other human beings? Who wants torture committed virtually in their name?

According to the The New York Times (1/11/82), one Salvadoran General, advising Army recruits in the presence of eight American military advisers, claimed that watching individuals (in this instance, teen-age prisoners) being tortured “will make you feel more like a man.” I suggest that an immeasurably superior definition of wo/manhood is to confront the brutal reality of torture in all its human and inhuman dimensions of radical violation, evil and horror, and vow to do whatever one can to end it. The torture victim, after all, is not a stranger; conceived by the moral imagination s/he, by virtue of being human, is *ourselves*.

Humanist Slogans

At a recent meeting, Jerry Wesner spoke of devising short slogans that promote Humanism. These slogans could be placed on bumper stickers or small billboards, with the credit, "Humanist Society of New Mexico" and our website. Here are some that Jerry came up with:

It's not about faith.

It's about actions.

It's not about belief.

It's about character.

It's not about religion.

It's about behavior.

It's not about theology.

It's about ethics.

It isn't what you believe.

It's how you act.

(Then later, after these have been seen for a while:)

It's not about myth.

It's about reality.

It's not about revealed truth.

It's about scientific truth.

Don't pray about problems.

Work to solve problems.

So how about it? Does anyone have any ideas for more slogans? If you do, please let either Zelda or Randy know. Thanks.

Humanists Launch Largest National Advertising Campaign Critical of Religious Scripture

Staff Report

For Humanist Network News

Nov. 11, 2010

A national multimedia ad campaign – the largest, most extensive ever by a godless organization – launched on Tuesday and will include a spot on NBC's "Dateline" on Friday, Nov. 12, as well as other television ads that directly challenge biblical morality and fundamentalist Christianity. The campaign, sponsored by the American Humanist Association, also features ads in major national and regional newspapers and magazines

demonstrating that secular humanist values are consistent with mainstream America and that fundamentalist religion has no right to claim the moral high ground.

The ads juxtapose notable humanist quotes with passages from religious texts, including the Old Testament, the New Testament and the Quran. The ads then ask the audience to "Consider Humanism."

"Humanist values are mainstream American values, and this campaign will help many people realize that they are already humanists and just did not know the term," said Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association. "Humanists believe in and value love, equality, peace, freedom and reason – values that are comparable to those of moderate and liberal religious people."

In addition to the television ad on NBC, ads will also be displayed on cable channels. Print ads will appear in major newspapers, including USA Today, the Seattle Times, the Village Voice, the Atlanta Journal Constitution, the Independent Triangle, and the San Francisco Chronicle, and magazines, including Reason and The Progressive. Ads will also appear on Metro trains in Washington, D.C., on billboards on I-95 near Philadelphia and in Moscow, Idaho, and on buses in select cities.

"We want to reach people in every corner of the U.S., from all walks of life, to raise the flag for humanists and show others that they have more in common with us than with biblical literalists," said Speckhardt.

"It's important that people recognize that a literal reading of religious texts is completely out of touch with mainstream America," Speckhardt added. "Although religious texts can teach good lessons, they also advocate fear, intolerance, hate and ignorance. It's time for all moderate people to stand up against conservative religion's claim on a moral monopoly."

All quotes from religious texts were checked by scripture scholars to ensure accuracy, context and proper translation. The Stiefel Freethought Foundation was the primary sponsor of the Consider Humanism campaign with a \$150,000 donation. Another \$50,000 was raised from supporters of the American Humanist Association for the launch of this campaign, bringing the total ad buy to \$200,000 so far.

The ads have already received a great deal of news

coverage, including articles in the New York Times and CNN.

If you'd like to see one of the Consider Humanism ads in your city, you can send a recommendation to the AHA. Also, visit the Consider Humanism website to see images and videos of the ads and find more information about the campaign.

Americans United Criticizes Smithsonian For Caving In To Religious Right Pressure On Art Exhibit

AU Press Release
December 1, 2010

A video that was part of an art exhibit at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C., should not have been pulled at the behest of government officials and aggressive religious groups, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Americans United criticized U.S. Reps. John Boehner (R-Ohio) and Eric Cantor (R-Va.) – who will likely be speaker of the House and majority leader next year – for demanding that the Smithsonian Institution remove the video.

“Boehner and Cantor aren't even in control of the House yet, and already they're kowtowing to the Religious Right,” said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. “This is religiously based censorship, pure and simple – and it's reprehensible.”

Among the organizations leading the campaign against the video is the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, a New York City-based group that promotes an ultra-conservative version of Catholicism rejected by most American Catholics.

The video in question is by late artist David Wojnarowicz. It is about four minutes long, and an 11-second segment shows ants crawling on a crucifix. It is believed that Wojnarowicz, who died of AIDS in 1992, was making a statement about the suffering of those who have the disease.

Lynn noted that censorship based on religion was once common in America but that public sentiment and court rulings led to its demise.

“If some people believe a show like this offends their religious sensibilities, the answer is for them not to go to it,” Lynn said. “They should not have the right to control what art the rest of us can see.

“Apparently, some people think tax-funded museums

should display religious-themed art only if it's nice, sanitized and doesn't offend anyone,” Lynn added. “If that's the standard, there will soon be precious little worth looking at in the galleries.”

Concluded Lynn, “Authoritarian religious groups who want to control what people see and read have persuaded governments to suppress a lot of great art, films and literature over the years. It's a shame to see our country headed back to those bad old days.”

Friendly Philosophers

Monday, January 3rd

Open Forum

Bring a Your Own Topic for General Discussion

Monday, January 17th

The Three R's of my Youth: Religion, Repression and Revolution in Hungary

Attila Csanyi

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

The Atheists and Freethinkers of New Mexico

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

Sunday, January 2nd, 9am

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice, 202 Harvard SE

Tuesday, January 18th, 6:30pm

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, January 12th, 7pm

Therapeutic Massage: What It Is and the Evidence for What it Does

Linda Delker and David Fletcher

UNM Law Building, Room 2405

1117 Stanford NE

Albuquerque Philosophy Meetup Group

Thursdays at 7pm

Varied Topics

For location see: www.meetup.com/philosophy-229