



# The Humanist Society of the Suncoast

*A Socratic society dedicated to the proposition that the fully examined life is well worth living.*

Member organization of the [Humanists of Florida](#), the [AHA](#), [COR](#), and [CSH](#). Find us at [www.suncoasthumanist.com](http://www.suncoasthumanist.com)

*Our Program for April 3rd ...*

## Skepticism

With Terry Smiljanich,  
**Chairman of Tampa Bay Skeptics**

Skepticism is more than mere doubt. It is an approach to knowledge that demands the use of the scientific method to validate claims. It is useful to not only confront tarot card readers and astrologers, but for decisions in everyday life.



Terry Smiljanich attended the University of Florida, where he met his wife Dorothy Weik in 1967 (they married in 1969). He graduated in 1969 with a Bachelor of Arts in English and attended the UF College of Law serving as editor of the Law Review.

Smiljanich served as a Law clerk to judge Ben Krentzman in Tampa from 1972 to 1974. He was Assistant US district attorney for the middle district of Florida from 1974 to 1977. While serving as a federal prosecutor, he handled organized crime cases, kidnappings, bank robberies, and environmental crimes, among other prosecutions. Smiljanich served in the Army reserve from 1972 to 1981, and became a captain.

Smiljanich acted as counsel to the United States Senate during the congressional hearings on the Iran Contra Affair. His responsibilities included investigations of State Department and White House personnel involved in the political scandal. He conducted the public interrogation of former Treasury secretary and Chief of Staff Donald Regan during the televised hearings.

Smiljanich is currently a partner in the law firm James, Hoyer, Newcomer & Smiljanich<sup>1</sup>. He is Managing Editor of the Consumer Warning Network, and writes extensively for that organization.

He is a leader of the *Tampa Bay Skeptics*, a non-profit scientific organization interested in "objective and critical inquiry" of "paranormal and fringe science claims". Tampa Bay Skeptics offers a \$1,000 challenge for any scientific validation of paranormal claims, similar to the \$1 million challenge offered by the [James Randi Educational Foundation](#). He has written for the *Skeptical Inquirer*, a national magazine published by the Center for Inquiry.

## Elections

### For our board

Dear Friends,  
We will take a few minutes at the beginning of this meeting to elect a new board of directors. In the life of this organization, nothing is more important. Your participation can add a crucial dimension in determining the course of the next year, and whether we shall be more active in the affairs of our community, and continue to make a difference in the quality of our lives and that of others. Please help.

Thanks, *Jim Peterson*

Volume 19 No. 4

April, 2010

**Reserve now for  
the 2010  
Florida  
Humanist  
conference in  
Sarasota.**



**The Humanists  
of  
Florida  
Association**

*in collaboration with*

**AHA & CFI**

*announces*

***the first-ever, all-inclusive  
Humanist & Freethought  
Conference***

**April 30 - May 2, 2010  
Sarasota, FL**

[info@FloridaHumanist.org](mailto:info@FloridaHumanist.org)

**Please join us  
for a free and  
open  
discussion.**

**Saturday,  
Apr. 3rd  
2:00 PM**

**Clearwater East  
Library  
2251 Drew St.  
Clearwater**

Following our meeting, many of us will dine together at the

**Farmer Boy  
Restaurant**  
at 2129 Drew St. just 2  
blocks west of

**Don't Forget...**

**Tampa  
Bay  
Harvest  
Please...**



**Bring as many boxed and canned food items as you can to this meeting.**

With the important help of Glenn Paul and Tampa Bay Harvest, we can do our part to help relieve significant human suffering in our area. **It's the Humanist thing to do!**

**The Board will meet** at 12:30 before our regular meeting. All members are invited to attend. Election of new board members will be at the regular meeting.

Sign up Now for this year's  
**Florida State Humanist Conference**

This year's conference is an unprecedented event for Florida Humanists, naturalists, rationalists, skeptics, atheists, freethinkers and activists in its scale and variety of organizational participation. Join with others who think as you do. See **page 5** for link

**Our Website** All newsletters from the past two years are there, as well as pictures of some of us. (We need more!) <http://suncoasthumanist.com>



*Humanists work to build a world in which happiness is the enduring criterion of social policy.*

## What do Humanists Want?

1. To extend a human centered approach to the critical problems of life and society.
2. To encourage attitudes of kindness, compassion, tolerance and a loving generosity in human relationships, and in our treatment of all life. These attitudes help us to see ourselves in the lives of others and encourage appreciation for the remarkable diversity of human culture and experience.
3. To develop and popularize the skills of creative and critical thinking that empower people to challenge prejudice, superstition and irrationality in every area of life. Such empowerment enables the individual to reach the highest levels of achievement.
4. To exalt those artistic and imaginative expressions of life which have been the source of the greatest pleasure and enlightenment, and which reflect compelling human truths. Through music, literature, art, dance, and other expressions, we embrace the essence of the human spirit.
5. To explore the grounds of ethics and morality within the unfolding history of our evolving culture. Such knowledge will enable us to become effective protagonists for the happiness of the individual person. JP

## Our monthly social dinner, The Moveable Feast for April will be: **Our Annual Spring Picnic !**

In lieu of a restaurant social dinner for April 18th , we are going to have a chicken dinner with any optional covered dish you wish to bring, at Jackie's clubhouse in Village Lake Condos located on the north side of Roosevelt Blvd about one block east of M.L. King (9th) st. north, in northeast St. Pete.

**Free to members, there is a nominal \$7 cost per non member for the dinner. [New non members could skip the \$7 by becoming paying members at any level] We also encourage attendees to bring an appetizer or dessert, etc. to compliment the chicken.**

Contact Glenn Paul by the 17th at 727-595-3347 or email at [kpaul29@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:kpaul29@tampabay.rr.com) Reserve your spot.

## Laugh Lines

### Bumper Stickers !

Everywhere is within walking distance if you have the time  
Yesterday it worked, today it doesn't. Microsoft Windows is like that.

Reality is the only obstacle to happiness!

A wise monkey never monkeys with another monkey's monkey

People are not lazy, they're just happy doing nothing.  
Why be difficult, when with a bit of effort, you can be impossible?

Working is for people who don't know how to fish.

Beauty is in the eye of the beer holder.

Avoid hangovers by staying drunk.

Exercise and Diet... But you still Die.

Be nice to your kids, they choose your nursing home.

War does not determine who is right, it determines who is left.

Those who live by the sword get shot by those who don't.

Nothing is fool-proof to a sufficiently talented fool.

The higher you are, the farther you fall

Alcohol, the cause and solution to all of life's problems!

Most people are only alive because it is illegal to shoot them

Why do kamikaze pilots wear helmets????

Always tell the truth, even when you lie

Facts: Every year more than 2500 left handed people are killed from using right handed products.

If it is tourist season, why can't we shoot them?

Alcohol doesn't solve any problems, but milk does?

Smile and the world smiles with you. Fart and you stand alone

I'm better than normal, I'm abnormal!

Save a tree, eat a beaver

There are some that are wise and others that are otherwise

When life hands you a lemon, break out the tequila and salt!

What is arrogance? Thinking you can compete with me!

Trying is the first step towards failure

If marriage is outlawed, only outlaws will have inlaws

Statistics are used by people who have no proof

You'll never get rid of a bad temper by losing it!

Thanks to **Connie Purdum**

## HUMANIST SOCIETY OF THE SUNCOAST

A chapter of the American Humanist Assoc.  
the Association of Secular Humanist Societies

### Board of Directors

**Meets** Sept., December, April

**Don (Ace) Acenbrack**

**Jim Butler**

**Robert Collette**

**Terry Eckstein**

**Anita Garcia**

**Steve Brown, Secy.**

**Jerry Moore, Vice Pres.**

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**Jim Peterson, President**

~\*~\*~\*~\*~\*~

**Glenn Paul Publisher.**

**Jim Peterson, Editor**

Have an Idea, opinion or essay you want to share?

E-Mail us at: [jamest@suncoasthumanist.com](mailto:jamest@suncoasthumanist.com)

[@suncoasthumanist.COM](mailto:jamest@suncoasthumanist.com)

*Join us in our effort to ignite critical thinking, and embrace reason, & compassion in life.*

**~ Join or Renew ~**

**The Humanist Society  
of the Suncoast.**

☞ Trial -3 month- free news

☞ Regular -\$25. **New! 2010 only**

☞ Reg. Couple -\$30.

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address -if new: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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(Privacy respected)

**Send to: Glenn Paul, Treasurer  
Suncoast Humanist Society  
2507 First St. #E  
Indian Rocks Beach  
33785-3010**

# Cooperation in the Humanist Community

There has been a good deal of cooperation among the various freethought organizations in the Tampa bay community in the last year. With the closing of the CFI Center building ( but not CFI, the organization), it has become imperative that all of us must work together to strengthen a vital part of the intellectual and social life of our area. The last year has also given rise to at least three philosophical coffeehouse programs in Tampa, Largo, and St. Petersburg. In addition there are a variety of similar programs being offered through the online Meet-up website. The college campuses are also hospitable to the interests of hundreds of students who have joined campus freethought and atheist organizations. Local Unitarian-Universalists churches are home to many religious Humanists. We are not alone.

The ongoing recession has brought with it many problems, but also a renewed interest in exploring the vital questions now being asked in the light of uncertainty, doubt and anxiety. Many people have come to realize that the old reliable shibboleths of prosperity on which our past was based, have proven to be illusory. Thus they are looking for new ideas, methods and approaches to understanding a world once comfortable, now daunting in its challenges to our sense of confidence.

There is something about America that makes us the eternally restless seekers. Our ancestors came looking for personal prosperity amid the opportunity that comes with casting off old oppressions. The events of our time has renewed and intensified this tradition. We need to respond to it by making the humanist alternative more accessible to large numbers of people. JP

## Atheists exercise leadership in defending civil and human rights.

The **Atheists of Florida** organization is pressing the Tampa city council to rid itself of religious invocations traditionally used to open each session of the council. Such habits have alienated and intimidated non-believers who have business before the council. It is an impossible and unnecessary burden to require citizens to either suppress their own beliefs and go along with the "prayer," or by withholding participation, risk alienating council members from whom they wish to solicit favorable attention.

AoF, led by executive director, Rob Curry has consistently confronted the council directly with the serious problem their procedure has created. For many months now, dozens of AoF members have pressed the council to revoke or modify this practice by perhaps substituting a moment of silence. So far they have met only stony opposition from council members who believe that by pandering to the beliefs of their majority constituents, they can curry favor and secure their office. But the nature of our society is changing, and such attitudes may no longer be as acceptable as they once were. This difference will become apparent if not in the next election, perhaps the next, or the next. JP

**Our Humanist Society is actively looking for interesting speakers with novel and well thought out ideas on just about any subject of interest to a general audience - even if not from a distinctly Humanist perspective.**

Let me know if you would like to recommend a person or organization.

Call Jim at (813) 531-8138 or E-mail me at: [jamestp@suncoasthumanist.com](mailto:jamestp@suncoasthumanist.com)

**Have an opinion**, idea, or essay that needs to get vented? This newsletter is your space.

For editorial consideration for the next issue, see Jim Peterson at: [jamestp@suncoasthumanist.com](mailto:jamestp@suncoasthumanist.com)

## Share your favorite restaurant.

Glenn Paul wants to improve the selection of restaurants in which we have our monthly social dinners. Our main criteria for selection is:

1. Location—center county preferred
2. Cost—low to moderate accommodates everybody.
3. Room—to accommodate up to 25
4. Ambience—not too noisy at 5PM.
5. Food—good.

Contact Glenn at:

[kpaul29@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:kpaul29@tampabay.rr.com)  
or call 727-595-3347



## Read Humanist Periodicals:

The Humanist, Free Inquiry, Free Mind, Humanist Perspectives, Skeptical Inquirer, Secular Humanist Bulletin, The Skeptic, Essays in Humanism, and many others.

## Humanist Quotes



"The beginning of wisdom is the awareness that there is insufficient evidence that a god or gods have created us and the recognition that we are responsible in part for our own destiny. Human beings can achieve this good life, but it is by the cultivation of the virtues of intelligence and courage, not faith and obedience, that we will most likely be able to do so." Paul Kurtz

See H. V. Grey on  
Fundamentalists vs. Global Warming

on [page 6](#)



# Why Logic Does Not Persuade Religious People

By Darrel Ray, Ed. D.

This article courtesy of the New York City Atheists Inc. 3/10

Have you ever argued with a religious person only to hear them respond with well-practiced dogma that they probably learned in Sunday School years ago? You quickly see that, from their perspective, logic plays no part in the discussion. They see, hear and feel their invisible god-friend clearly and are amazed that you cannot see it. How can you not see and feel the love of Jesus or the power of Allah? As you talk with these staunch believers, you may also notice that they do not hear certain things you say. Your evidence and logic seems to go right over their heads. They may be highly intelligent, yet they firmly hold that they can talk with their god or that their invisible friend is with them and monitoring their thoughts at all times. It appears that the logical part of their brain is turned off. Yet when you talk to them about something like the way they solved a mechanical problem or organized the bake sale, their brain seems to function quite logically. What is going on?

The most important thing to understand is that presenting logic to these unwaveringly religious persons is *not* the answer. Religion very selectively turns off specific logical functions in the brain and leaves other areas untouched. Religion creates strong emotional pathways that can override the higher brain functions when necessary. This override is so powerful that it can cause people to behave in ways that are consistently illogical. In fact, religion infects and controls people in just about the same way that schizophrenics are overwhelmed with emotional messages in their brains. Schizophrenics cannot reason their way out of their emotions and compulsions any more than you can rid yourself of the Herpes virus once it gets into your system. Religion infects and controls people in much the same way: Their logical system remains intact—except for the parts that deal with religion. Their religious beliefs are rerouted through an emotional channel that can overrule the rational system when needed.

When discussing religion with a steadfast believer, you will often notice their eyes glaze over, they miss important points in the discussion, and they cannot understand key ideas about science. This glaze-over is evidence that you have triggered the religious-override system. No learning or understanding will take place after that point. The

religious person's mind is now overcome with emotion.

How do you handle this situation? Recognize that triggering the override system has effectively ended any productive discussion. Hammering logic down the throat of a religious person does only one thing: it strengthens the override pathway in their brain.

To keep the person as a friend or acquaintance, you must develop and maintain a relationship that effectively ignores the "god virus" within them.

Ignore their god references but pay attention to the emotional message and respond to their human concerns without reference to their invisible friend.

Focusing on their emotions will give you a far better chance of eventually enlightening them than any amount of logic at that moment. □

*Dr. Darrel Ray is a practicing clinical psychologist and author of "The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture."*

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*This letter from Frank Prah! appeared in the St. Petersburg Times recently...*



## Possible benefits

Don't be afraid of China's one-child policy. It may be a win-win situation. Old patriarchal cultures often promote having boys, rather than girls. There are two ways this could be beneficial in the long run.

First, realizing that there will be fewer future mothers will result in a reduction in the population explosion, which is the most threatening problem the world is facing. Malthus was right, but his timetable was off because he did not realize how well science would overcome the food problem. Even that is starting to fail and starvation is becoming more common.

Second, supply and demand will raise the status of women as they will be in a position to bargain for more equality, possibly breaking the stranglehold men have in those strongly patriarchal societies.

Human population growth must be brought under control! If humans cannot make the necessary emotionally charged controls, nature will do it for us, and that will not be pretty.

*Francis Prah!, St. Petersburg*

Good work Frank, and all our fine correspondents including; Bob Collette, Glenn Paul, and Abigail Martin.



**CREDO**  
action

If you thought that decisions made by the Texas State Board of Education don't affect you, think again. Led by far-right ideologues, the Texas SBOE recently gave preliminary approval to a plan that would radically change what children across the country learn in history class. The ultra-conservative majority on the board (none of whom are experts in any academic discipline and many of whom are explicitly anti-science) took the curricula proposed by teachers and made over a hundred changes to "correct" the perceived left-wing bias. But it gets worse. Since Texas is one of the largest textbook markets in the country, material written to cater to the Texas curricula will find its way into textbooks across the country unless textbook publishers take a stand.

**We can't allow a small group of extreme ideologues on the Texas State Board of Education to re-write history. Click here to tell textbook publishers to stand up to the Texas Taliban.**

Children who use textbooks conforming to the new standards will not learn anything about the political philosophy of Thomas Jefferson or his thoughts on the separation of church and state. When they learn about the Civil War, they'll have to study Jefferson Davis' inaugural address alongside Abraham Lincoln's. And when they study the civil rights movement they'll have to learn about the "unintended consequences" of Great Society programs, affirmative action and Title IX. Oh — and Joe McCarthy was right all along no matter what historians actually say about it.

**It's outrageous. Education will fail if we can't teach our children history.** We can't let these far-right ideologues co-opt our educational system



## HFA E-NEWS

### An Electronic News Update from The Humanists of Florida Association

**One month remaining for reduced conference hotel rates!**

Please remember to register for the conference and be sure to make your hotel reservation by April 9 to take advantage of the special \$89 room rate when you mention the Humanists of Florida Association conference:

<http://floridahumanist.org/forms/reg2010.html>

Here's Barry Lynn's recent article published in the *Huffington Post*, "Faith, Hope and Charity: Why President Obama's 'Faith-Based' Agenda Must Change":

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/barry-w-lynn/faith-hope-and-charity-wh\\_b\\_450099.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/barry-w-lynn/faith-hope-and-charity-wh_b_450099.html)

Please visit  
**www.FloridaHumanist.org**  
to support HFA with your  
membership & donations



**Humanists of Florida  
Association**  
*Reason and Compassion in Action*

## Want to be a more active Humanist?

Being an active agent of social change in many ways defines the practical meaning of Humanism. Despite the vast numbers of us on this planet, all too few actually are involved in making life better for all of us. Especially if you are retired, or have leisure, you should consider expanding the range of your positive involvement in the lives of others.

**Glenn Paul has been a stalwart of social/political activism in behalf a great many causes.** He could sure use some help in his capacity as Social planning director, publisher, and all around doer of good deeds. If you have the time, interest, and a small amount of energy to devote to any of the forgoing, please contact Glenn and offer your help. He wants to continue as treasurer, but even here he could use a little help. Contact Glenn at:

[kpaul29@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:kpaul29@tampabay.rr.com) or by phone at 727-595-3347.

HFA member Arthur Jackson from Silicon Valley wrote: "If you have an hour for a Humanist Sermon regarding Darwin, here is an opportunity brought to you from the Humanist Community in Silicon Valley's weekly Humanist Forum. Dr. John van Wyhe discusses the topic, Why did Darwin Really Give up Christianity." <http://vimeo.com/9289445>



# GLOBAL WARMING THREATENS RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

by H. V. Grey

**If the Creationism/Evolution debate has taught us anything, it's that many religionists have no moral scruples whatsoever when it comes to lying to protect their faith; indeed, they consider such lying a supreme act of virtue, the height of moral integrity. Their intellectual corruption/perversion is such that:**

- 1) They worship "faith as a means of knowing" as superior to "logical reasoning from scientific evidence as a means of knowing," proudly (and loudly) proclaiming belief in church doctrine in the absence of empirical proof or even the presence of massive scientific and logical proof to the contrary,
- 2) Their belief is ultimately based on unsubstantiated claims of psychic power (namely, their ability to function as "human lie detectors" capable of flawlessly assessing the truth value of the written word, e.g., "scripture," without external corroboration),
- 3) When confronted with #2, they vehemently deny it's what they're in essence claiming but have no alternative explanation,
- 4) They put the truth value of this psychically derived scripture ahead of empirical facts and the laws of mathematics/physics, with especial glee when the former flagrantly violates the latter, and
- 5) They claim it is not they who are the immoral liars, but instead, anyone who dares to offer proof of scientific facts contradicting their religious dogma or to point out the illogic of their "reasoning." (The latter are still publicly executed when the political climate will allow it.)

Thus it comes as no surprise to me that the Human-Component-Global-Warming-denial camp is demographically very top heavy with proponents of Intelligent Design and a Young Earth, because the ideological concept of a *"significant human causal component to detrimental climate change"* is an even more severe threat to their fundamentalist religious beliefs than Evolution, on a par with the threat claims of a spherical Earth orbiting the Sun posed to their match-happy flat-Earther ancestors.

Even the very idea of Human-Component Global Warming is a slap in the face to the by-definition implicit "all-is-goodness/no-possible-significant-harm" in the Old Testament Jehovah dictum, "be fruitful and multiply." A large number of organized religions do everything in their power politically to encourage aggressive population growth and illegalize contraception, etc., without apparent regard to concomitant resource depletion, environmental degradation, and enormous human suffering. (One reasonably assumes their god flunked algebra and never made it to calculus, they themselves think natural logarithms are a form of Catholic birth control, and that many of them deny the claim by the World Health Organization that more than a billion people presently go to bed hungry as just one more piece of evil "socialist propaganda"; after all, such a horrible thing couldn't possibly be true, by definition, since an omniscient, omnipotent, omni-benevolent God commanded licentious population growth with "be fruitful and multiply.")

But religionists are not the only ones whose cherished a-priori flat-Earth-endless-growth-is-good ideologies are threatened by the mere concept of Human-Component Global Warming, as its implications also severely impact economic philosophies worldwide that are heavily dependent on uninterrupted population/market growth; not to mention all manner of minorities frantically playing the political-numbers game (and *everybody* has minority classification of some ilk, whether it's ethnic, racial, political, economic, geographic, religious, ancestor enslavement/persecution, etc.).

While the Catholic Church can no longer get away with publicly burning people at the stake for heresy, its modern canonical accommodation of a spherical Earth orbiting the Sun is superficial. For all practical purposes, such as the exponential function as it applies to population growth, they still consider the Earth flat. They abuse the fact that, in physics, within certain narrow ranges of values, you can reasonably consider certain variables as constants, certain very small constants as zero, and certain very large constants as infinity. So while they admit the Earth is "technically" round, "pragmatically" speaking, as far as they're concerned, its radius is so huge it's safe to treat the Earth as a "flat" commodity, with virtually infinite horizons stretching in all directions—limitless arable land, potable water, mineral/fossil resources, clean atmosphere and oceans, etc., which can easily and imperviously absorb and accommodate ever-increasing numbers of humans.

However, just because these religious persons feel self-righteously entitled to spread the most egregious and self-serving lies about all the factual evidence, mathematics, and logic that support Evolution and an Old Earth (as well as lies about the people who "blasphemously" claim them), doesn't necessarily mean they'll lie about facts supporting *other scientific theories that also present a significant threat to their religious beliefs*. But I, personally, certainly think they would feel equally justified, if not morally mandated, to do so. *If Human-Component Global Warming were true, then they would very likely feel obligated as a matter of religious principle to deny it every bit as vigorously as they now deny Evolution and an Old Earth.*

The fact that a Creationist denies both Evolution and Global Warming does not, of course, in and of itself, automatically mean the opposite is true. But let me put it this way: if any of several very prominent national politicians who blithely malign geology, paleontology, paleobiology, molecular biology, astronomy, nuclear physics, etc. in defense of Creationism, a Young Earth, their fraudulent claims to have psychic abilities, and an otherwise literal interpretation of their religious manifestos, said "Good morning" to me, first I'd check my watch, then I'd turn on the news expecting to hear of a new major disaster. Then I'd put my hand on my wallet to make sure it was still there. At least Bernie Madoff finally admitted he was dishonest. These morally and intellectually bankrupt excuses for responsible adults won't because "truth" as the rest of us understand it is both figuratively and literally... "against their religion."

H. V. Grey is a notable Humanist writer and novelist.  
A recent work is *The Suicide Squad*.





## *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them\**

I didn't quite know what to expect when I recently rented the 2009 movie, "The Invention of Lying." I watch about two rented movies a week, many of them obscure because of low-budget, independent or foreign origins (bartered marriage between a middle-aged Danish plumber and the illegal immigrant sister of the Chinese man who runs the neighborhood Chinese take-out ("Kinamand," from Denmark) anyone?). In these cases I seek out and read at least two or three reviews (NY Times and Roger Ebert to start with, if available) before putting them in my "queue."

So I knew the general premise of the movie: an alternate Earth where people (or should I say "folks?") don't have the capacity to lie. They don't have the ability even to envision as an option saying something they know not to be true. In this setting one person finds, in extremis, he has the faculty for falsehood (and we literally see the fiery explosions in his brain that blast open the genetic barrier). But I didn't know how the story line unfolded after this "Little Bang."

The lead actor, as well as principal author and director, is Ricky Gervais, someone I thought simply a low-brow or middle-brow English stand-up comic. I was wrong. He is, whatever else he may be, a skilled, sensitive, serious, affecting performer. And I learned, somewhat to my surprise, that the movie in good measure is about religion (or at least the religion we know) as a web of lies.

The Eureka moment comes at a bank the Gervais character. "Mark," visits to withdraw his entire \$300 savings. He's lost his job, can't pay the \$800 rent and needs to finance a move. The bank's computer system is down, and that sets off the fireworks in his brain. The bank teller assumes, even as the system quickly gets up and running again, that Mark has to be telling the truth -- it's just the way everybody's wired -- the computer has to be wrong and so, apologetically, hands over the \$800.

However, this is not sufficient to thoroughly alter Mark's genetic make-up with respect to lying. That takes his dying mother in the nursing home labeled "A Sad Place Where Old People Come to Die." The mother is almost paralytically afraid to die, and the compulsively truthful doctor says it will happen soon that night. People in that society have been under the impression that after death there is "absolute nothingness." On the spot, to comfort Mother, Mark makes up the story that rather than nothingness there's a great place in the sky where people go to live in mansions with all the people they have loved and who have loved them.

Doctor and nursing home staff have overheard all this and of course assume it is true. They take this new "information" with them and it quickly becomes widespread, and a climactic scene occurs when crowds gather in front of Mark's new home (he's benefited career-wise as a screenwriter who can actually make up stories, that is, create new truth) to demand finer explanation about this newly revealed life after death. Mark demurs, says he has to think about this and write it all down. He retreats inside, scribbles first on notepaper, but feels he needs a medium less flimsy, more like a tablet, which he improvises from two Pizza Hut box tops, on each of which he inscribes five major points (!).

Mark takes to his front step and tells the crowd that there's a man who lives in the sky who has told him all this. That everybody who goes to that great place in the sky will have his or her own mansion, and those who want to live together will sell their own places or put them up to auction -- or whatever -- and that there will be free ice cream, in all flavors, all day and all night. In response to questions, he conceives that not everybody will get to go there. The man in the sky has a three strikes and out policy. The third really bad thing you do on Earth gets you to a terrible place. Newspaper headline flashes on screen, "Finally Reason to Do Good."

He needs two hours more on the doorstep to figure out all the niceties related to defining doing good and doing bad. He tells the people that he (and they) are learning all this only now because "the man in the sky" simply forgot to tell us earlier. He's asked whether the man in the sky has any control over what happens on Earth, and he comes up with the tale that the man is in control of EVERYTHING. So Newspaper headlines flash across the screen such as "Man in Sky Murders 40,000 in Tsunami."

Well, that was the weight of the movie for me, and an unexpected delight (as was the scene in "The Contender," where the female nominee for vice president (to replace the deceased former v.p.) in a Senate confirmation hearing largely concerned with her alleged sexual misconduct in college, makes explicit her atheism and makes a rousing defense of it.

There's a wedding scene in "The Invention of Lying," reminiscent of others in other movies, but by this time Mark has become an icon and a huge blow-up photo of him in a business suit is mounted on the wall behind the pulpit in what is known as (like the nursing home, it's what the sign says!) "A Quiet Place to Think About the Man in the Sky." The actor performing the ceremony is a choice that couldn't be bettered, John Hodgman, the bland but matter-of-fact "Daily Show" expert on everything and personification of the "PC" in the Apple television ads.

There is a romantic comedy sub-plot, and Mark winds up "getting the girl," a Jennifer Garner at her most luscious in a superb comic performance. Mark in effect is a "straight man" throughout the film and Garner gets most of the laughs.

The irreligion gets downplayed in most reviews, but most curious is the complete ignoring of something that seems to me to blur, or evade, (next page)



# Religious Freedom

## South Pinellas Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State

www.AmericansUnitedSPinellas.org

Spring 2010

### AU's Rev. Steven Baines to be keynote speaker AU Annual Meeting April 10.

#### "Fissures in the Mortar: A Crisis for Church and State Separation in America"



Rev. Steven Baines will have a busy day Saturday, April 10, with the South Pinellas Chapter of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State.

He will kick off the day at 10:00 AM with a workshop on **"Effective Outreach to Religious Communities and Leaders."** After a pizza and salad lunch provided by the AU Chapter, he will give the keynote address during the annual meeting.

Rev. Baines is Director of Religious Outreach for Americans United for the Separation of Church and State where he is responsible for the organization's national engagement with and mobilization of people of faith. Before coming to Americans United, he served as Director of Interfaith Outreach at both the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and People For the American Way. He has also served as Executive Director for Equal Partners in Faith, a national interfaith organization committed to fighting racism, sexism and homophobia.

Rev. Baines has served as both senior pastor and associate minister in Southern Baptist churches in North and South Carolina. Since 1999, he has been affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and is currently serving as the Chair of Elders at the denomination's national cathedral in Washington, DC, National City Christian Church.

Rev. Baines is a national spokesperson on issues of faith and politics and has been featured debating leaders of the Religious Right and the so-called "ex-gay" movement on CNN, CSPAN, Court TV and numerous syndicated talk radio shows.

We hope to see you there. Here is the schedule. Lunch will be provided courtesy of the South Pinellas Chapter.

#### Annual Meeting April 10, 2010

**Good Samaritan Church, 6085 Park Blvd.  
Pinellas Park (at 61<sup>st</sup> St. N.)**

- 10-10:30 – Registration and refreshments.**
- 10:30 – Workshop on "Effective Outreach to Religious Communities and Leaders."**
- 12:00 – Lunch & Legislative Update.**
- 12:45 – Annual Meeting: Reports and Election.**
- 1:10 – Onions and Orchards Awards.**
- 1:15 - Keynote Address – Rev. Steven Baines.**
- 1:45 – Q & A.**
- 2:00 – Adjourn.**

Officers and Board members for 2010 – 2011 will be elected. Officers are nominated for a 1 year term as officer.

The following people have been nominated:

**President** – Rev. Harold Brockus – 1 year.

**Vice President** – Carlos Madrid – 1 year.

**Secretary** – Fran Capasso – 1 year.

**Treasurer** – Margaret Evans – 1 year.

**Directors** – (2 yr) – Bob Collette, Sara Robertson, (Rev. Dr. Robert Shirer.

**Board Members with 1 year remaining in 2 year term:** Rev. Alec Craig, Jeffrey Harper.

**Emeritus Members** – Jean Pugh, Jerry Moore, Jean Herzig.

### Liars... (from page 7)

the issue of what it is to lie. The people in this movie seem compelled to say everything that's on their minds, not simply to tell the truth if asked or where the situation demands it.. They just have to unload their streams of consciousness: the waiter saying "I hate working here" or "I took a sip out of your drink, just here, right here, on the rim," the sweet young thing saying "You're not attractive", or "I'm not sleeping with you tonight; I may not even kiss you" or "Sorry, I didn't expect you this early; I was masturbating and I may want to finish," or in response to "You're beautiful," "I know. Everybody tells me that," or the boss saying, "Good morning. I'm going to fire you today... or maybe tomorrow."

And that's the gospel truth. As I see it.

*Steve Brown*

\*with a nod to Senator Al Franken of Minnesota for the title