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Editor: Catherine Ousey

Next Meeting

Viscount Gort Hotel

Saturday October 14

5:30 PM

Dinner may be ordered from the coffee shop menu

After Dinner Discussion Topic:

Freedom From Religion in Manitoba Public Schools

GUEST SPEAKER: Ivan Pokus

HAM members pass resolutions at Sept. meeting

At their regular monthly meeting in September, members of the Humanist Association of Manitoba passed three motions.

The first dealt with the Annual General Meeting. In a unanimous vote, the AGM was changed from December to January.

The second motion

gave HAM's president, Barrie Webster support for changing the November meeting from November 11 to November 18th or any other date the venue is available in order to accommodate a speaker that the executive plans to invite for that meeting.

The members also passed a motion to

have Ivan Pokus speak at the October meeting on the topic of religion in the public schools with a view to possible support by HAM for a court challenge of the Provincial Government on their religion in the schools policy.

Members view video on mythology

At the September 9th monthly meeting of the Humanist Association of Manitoba, the members viewed a thirty-minute excerpt of the video, "The God Who Wasn't There."

The video dealt with the similarities

between the Christian mythology surrounding Jesus and the mythology of other god figures in history. The members were surprised to learn that aspects of Jesus' life as portrayed in Christian writings such as the Bible are consistent with the Hero

mythology as described by such writers as Joseph Campbell and J. G. Frazer. 22 parallels were drawn including performance of miracles, virgin birth and divine status.

HAM member Jeff Olsson led the discussion that followed.

Freedom from religion must also be guaranteed

By Timothy Friesen
Reprinted with permission of the Winnipeg Herald

It's absurd that the Manitoba Human Rights Commission is getting so much flak for trying to remove Christian exercises from Manitoba classrooms.

Classrooms are places for academic learning.

Young people are required to be there, by law, and graduation is required to move on to virtually

any form of higher learning, at college, university, and even in most entry level jobs.

There are plenty of places people can freely practice their religion, voluntarily.

But forcing people to attend a public institution and then ramming religion down their throat while they're there is simply wrong and goes against the very principle of our most cherished charter rights – Freedom of Religion.

Before anyone can be free to practice their

religion, they must be free from having any other religion forced upon them.

In order to be free to be Christian, you must be free from being Muslim. In order to be free to be a Buddhist, you must be free from being Hindu.

Freedom of religion requires freedom *from* religion.

Personally, my religion is no religion – which I practice every day.

Despite all the good ideas and pleasant sentiments

"Ramming religion down their throat ... is simply wrong."

Freedom... continued

embedded in the world's sacred texts and oral traditions, religion is primarily a powerful political force.

People have been using religion for thousands of years to galvanize empires, foment revolt, and build communities.

Some form of religion Has been found in virtually every society and culture.

This is because it provided such a powerful, if sometimes blunt, way to co-ordinate and control

people, that those societies that didn't have it simply didn't survive.

But that was then, and in recent centuries we have developed far more inclusive ways to bind together our communities and build our nations.

As a result, many people such as myself are deciding to remove themselves from any kind of religious environment.

That is my choice, and I believe the Canadian Charter protects my right to do

so.

The young people in Winkler's public schools, along with young people across the province, are at a very impressionable age.

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission must continue its efforts to afford them the opportunity to make their own decision about their religion.

(Editor's note: Mr. Friesen sounds like a good prospect for membership in HAM)

"...many people such as myself are deciding to remove themselves from any kind of religious environment."

Member profile: John and Amanda Froese

By Helen Friesen



John and Amanda Froese found HAM through the Internet and became members in the beginning of 2004. Although John was a humanist when they

"Amanda...said the more she listened to John and Pete about religion, the more she agreed with them."

joined, Amanda said it had taken her a while. Amanda attended a United Church and was raised to be very open minded, learning that there are other cultures and beliefs. However, she said the more she listened to John and Pete (*John's brother*) about religion, the more she agreed with them.

John and Amanda have five delightful and very active sons: Jonathon 10, Donovan 9. Matthew 7, Tommy 5, William 9 months.

For the last 12 or 13 years, the Winkler area has been home for the Froeses where they live on 2¼ acres, 1½ of which John uses to grow vegetables – lots of them! Potatoes, kohlrabi, beets, onions, green peppers, jalapenos, tomatoes (regular and cherry), pumpkins, zucchini, acorn and spaghetti squash, cabbage, carrots, cucumbers, melons, watermelons, a large assortment of herbs, beans, corn, spinach,

radish, romaine lettuce, Swiss chard, apples, rhubarb and more!

John brings his produce to a market garden in St. Norbert every weekend throughout the season usually accompanied by one of the boys. The entire family attends market gardens in Winkler and Morden, Tuesdays and Thursdays. While John works his garden, keeping it absolutely

immaculate, Amanda cans and makes raspberry and apple jelly, salsa, spaghetti sauce, rhubarb jam, bread and butter pickles, relish, and hot pepper pickles. And she bakes for the Winkler market too!

Living in the Garden Valley School Division, religious exercises have been a contentious issue for John and Amanda. They did not sign the petition to have religious instruction in school, which resulted in a letter from the principal reminding them that they had till

the end of September to sign it. Apparently all parents received this letter. It seems their sons will be the first to be excluded from this class. Amanda said their children's school has a sign in front of it that says in part, "The mission of Southwood Elementary School, in partnership with the home and community, is to train every child in knowledge, wellness, and Christian character....."

John & Amanda would like to attend more HAM meetings but have a difficult time finding sitters for the children. They look forward to seeing more profiles of members in the newsletter.

(Editor's Note: We plan to feature more member profiles in future issues.)

"...religious exercises have been a contentious issue for John and Amanda."

Book review

By Sophie Shulman

The Sins of Scripture
J. S. Spong
Harper Collins
2005
ISBN: 0060762055

If asked to define in one short statement, *The Sins of Scripture*, written by J.S. Spong, I would say, "A brutally honest book by a highly intellectual expert of unshakeable integrity." John Shelby Spong was the Episcopal Bishop of Newark, NJ for more than twenty years; he taught at Harvard, at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, CA, and lectured all over the world. He is the author of 15 books on the topics of progressive Christianity. So, his opinions matter.

With horrifying clarity Spong explores, as James Carroll did in another excellent book, *Constantine's Sword*, how the Christian Church for two millennia has

planted and nurtured rabid anti-Semitism, culminating in the Holocaust. Says Spong, "The darkest and bleakest side of the Christian faith is revealed in the Christians' treatment of the Jews throughout history. Anti-Semitism is a terrifying prejudice that is rooted so deeply in the Church life..."

With unassuming simplicity, Spong demonstrates how religion has justified the divine rights of rulers and horrors of the Crusades; how it has approved of slavery and of Inquisition; how the Bible has been used to ban scientific progress, to denigrate homosexuals and is still being used to support the treatment of women as inferior

beings.

Of religion Spong says: "...Even in the twenty-first century religion remains one of the most divisive and hostile forces in the world. ...Religion has so often been the source of the cruelest evil," perpetually breeding fundamentalism and fanaticism.

The book is also a profound theological and historical study of Biblical origins expressed in language available to a layperson. Spong reflects on the question: "From where does evil come?" Having disproved the founding Christian myths of the primary human sin of disobedience to God as the cause of the fall from primordial

"Religion has so often been the source of the cruelest evil..."

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perfection, Spong submits: "It [lack of perfection] rises rather from the incompleteness of the evolutionary process... We do not need to be punished either in this life or in the life to come, nor do we need to have some mythical god figure take our punishment for us. What we need is the power to take the next step into a new and more complete humanity..."

At the end Spong goes so far as to voice a rhetorical question: Does there remain any room for Christianity in human

life at all? And he answers: 'I do not know...' But, he concludes, as Jesus is Love and there is no life without love, he chooses to believe that Jesus remains in people's life. To which I might comment: Are we talking of the Spirit of Universal Love named Jesus? Be my guest – as long as it is not an organized religion! And Spong would agree as, following Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he calls for "religionless Christianity!" The very blood of the author's heart has written the book.