

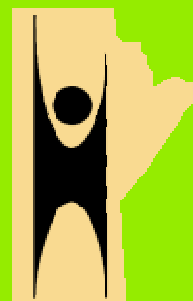
Manitoba Humanist



Main Street,
Winnipeg

Published by and for the
Humanist Association of
Manitoba

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belief”*



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FOCUS: ON THE FRINGES IN WINNIPEG

At our March meeting, we're focusing on a topic close to home: life for some residents in Winnipeg's inner city.

Our speaker is Dr. Andrew Woolford, Associate Professor in the Sociology department at the University of Manitoba. He is also a researcher with the Manitoba Research Alliance, which is working on a five-year research project dedicated to solving the complex problems of poverty and social exclusion in Manitoba's inner-city and Aboriginal communities.

Dr. Woolford's topic is a look at how social services are delivered to those residents who rely on them.

Here's a brief description from Professor Woolford:

“The neoliberal turn in politics has resulted in increased pressures on nonprofit social service agencies to deliver programming that engages with program users as individuals responsible for their own care and self-improvement, rather than as victims of structured social inequalities.”

“My talk will discuss the ways in which marginalized inner city dwellers suffering from poverty and addiction think about and interpret their "responsibility." These individuals are sufficiently aware of changing trends in the field of social services that



March 8 – International
Women's Day

March 21 – World Day to
Eliminate Racial Discrimination

they work to present themselves as the sort of citizens neoliberalism demands -- e.g., autonomous, responsible, entrepreneurial -- rather than direct their frustrations to the obstacles they face in terms of social and economic inclusion."

"In short, this is a study of how the marginalized learn to "perform" the requirements of neoliberal citizenship in order to access much needed services, thus silencing their own experiences of hardship."

"This study is part of a larger project that critiques the ways in which the neoliberal policy shift has negatively affected helping relationships in the inner city, as the demands of accountability and responsibility make it more difficult for social services workers and program users to get to know and care about one another."

*Andrew Woolford is Associate Professor of Sociology and Criminology and Social Justice Research Coordinator at the University of Manitoba. He is author of *The Politics of Restorative Justice: A Critical Introduction* (Fernwood, 2009), *Between Justice and Certainty: Treaty Making in British Columbia* (UBC Press, 2005), and co-author of *Informal Reckonings: Conflict Resolution in Mediation, Restorative Justice, and Reparations* (Routledge-Cavendish, 2008).*

WE H.P. LOVECRAFT

Our February speaker, Dustin Geereart, introduced us to an interesting author – H.P. Lovecraft.

Prior to Lovecraft, horror writing involved lots of ghosts, vampires and other monsters. Lovecraft was really the first writer to look at Darwinian natural selection and evolution as a source for weird, bone-chilling terror.

Themes in his works include forbidden knowledge; a civilization struggling against dark, primitive barbarism; inherited guilt; the risks of a scientific era and (scariest of all) religion.

Here's a great mini-biography on Lovecraft:

*One of the 20th century's most influential horror writers, H.P. Lovecraft is most famous for his stories involving a slimy alien god named Cthulhu. Lovecraft was born and raised in Rhode Island and made his living as a ghost writer and contributor to pulp magazines such as *Weird Tales*. After 1923 he published dozens of horror stories under a variety of pseudonyms, but his fame was posthumous. Lovecraft actively encouraged other writers to use elements of his "Cthulhu Mythos," and that alternate world -- fishy alien beings eager to oppress humans -- has been the subject of stories, novels, movies and comics since his death. His most famous works include the short stories "The Statement of Randolph Carter," "The Dunwich Horror" and "The Call of Cthulhu." His novels include *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward* and *At the Mountains of Madness*. (from Answers.com)*

If you have a yen to explore and read some Lovecraft, both our city's libraries and book stores have plenty of volumes available.



Dustin Geereart and Donna Harris

WE HAVE A BOOTH!!

It's official! The Red River Exhibition has informed me that HAM has been allotted a booth space at this year's Ex.

My next order of business will be to organize the planning committee and start strategizing. But soon, we'll be looking for help and information on ideas such as fund raising, and we'll be asking for volunteers. If you're interested in helping out, the days to remember are June 17th to 26th!

- Donna Harris

FOOTPRINTS

I have long been fascinated with the evolutionary history of humans. The discoveries made by anthropologists and archaeologists are of great interest to me as I seek to learn more about where we come from and the amazing journey we have made. With each new fossil discovery, another puzzle piece is added to the picture of this journey.

One particular story that captivated my imagination when I first heard about it was the discovery of the Laetoli footprints, found by Mary Leakey's team in Tanzania in 1976. The famous Laetoli footprints, discovered in a layer dated to 3.6 million years ago, show the footsteps taken by 2 or possibly 3 bipedal individuals as they walked in a freshly deposited layer of fine ash from a nearby volcano. An incredibly lucky set of circumstances allowed this fragile evidence of some of our remote ancestors to survive.



The Laetoli footprints

The footprints were likely made by some *australopithecus afarensis* individuals, as fossils of this type have also been discovered nearby in similarly dated layers. Analysis done on the footprints shows 2 individuals, one larger than the other, with a possible third walking in the footsteps of the larger one. Some analysis points

to the smaller of the 2 appearing to be burdened on one side, perhaps carrying an infant. It is easy to imagine this as a family group taking a stroll. Of course, this family portrait that I see may just be sentimental conjecture on my part, but as an armchair anthropologist, I'm allowed to fantasize all I want.

At the very least, what the evidence does tell us is that 3.6 million years ago, some early primate had already developed the ability to walk upright. Another piece of the puzzle carefully fitted into place, another step on the journey illuminated.

One day recently, I was googling for images of these footprints, and to my surprise, instead of the ancient images I was looking for, I got thousands of hits for a different set of footprints. Pages and pages of images for the well-known poem "Footprints in the Sand".

I am sure many are familiar with this poem, which describes a dream someone is having of a conversation with God. He is looking back over his life represented by footsteps on a beach and wonders why during his most troubled times, there appears to be only one set. The reply is that, at those times, he was being carried by God.

I have to admit, even when I was a believer, I never cared for this poem. I found it to be an inadequate answer to suffering and God's reply sounded kind of arrogant. Now that I no longer believe in God, I find it sad that people find inspiration from this poem. When I think about all of the suffering that occurs in this life, ranging from the everyday ups and downs we all experience to the truly horrific things that happen to some people, many of them praying to God for help that does not come, I fail to see what comfort there can be found in a God whose presence is undetectable.

Maybe it helps some people to feel that God is with them in their suffering, and I am sure that there are many who would argue that they can feel his loving arms around them. I need a bit more reality than that. As a parent, there were many times when I carried my child. She felt my arms around her and heard my words of

comfort. In this poem, God seems to me like a negligent parent.

But back to the real footprints. I can imagine all I want about the ancient family that I see in those footprints. These are stories that I invent to fill in the missing spaces in the puzzle of our history. But I can no longer be satisfied with the imaginary footprints of an undetectable God. The real comfort and companionship of my fellow humans is what I need, and it's enough.

- Diana Goods



THE REAL COST OF RELIGIOUS FAITH

Imagine if I were to accept, on faith, that the following statements were absolutely true:

1) That those who break the Sabbath should be stoned. (Numbers 15:32-36)

2) That homosexuality truly is a sin and that all homosexuals will go to hell and deserve death. (1 Corinthians 9-10) That homosexuality is an abomination and is hated by God (Leviticus 18:22)

3) That Jews were knowingly responsible for the death of Jesus (Matthew 27:25) and that Jews who do not accept Christ as their lord and

saviour will go to hell (John 3:16) and will burn in a fiery hell with all sinners (Isaiah 47:14).

4) That non-believers, including atheists and agnostics, are sinners and are deserving of eternal punishment and should be killed. (John 3:16) (Deuteronomy 13:6)

5) That my own children who no longer believe in the Abrahamic God and who advocate other beliefs should be stoned. (Deuteronomy 17:2-5) That my rebellious children who have been drunk and rebellious should be stoned. (Deuteronomy 21:18-21)

6) That my wife is not equal to me and should not be allowed to hold the same status in our society as any man would enjoy. (1 Corinthians 11:8-9)

7) Those who choose to have sex outside of marriage are sinners and should burn in hell. (Acts 15:20; 1 Corinthians 5:1; 6:13, 18; 10:8; 2 Corinthians 12:21; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; Colossians 3:5; 1 Thessalonians 4:3; Jude 7)

8) Disabled people are not allowed to play any role in the sanctuary lest they defile it. (Leviticus 21:17-23)

I'll stop there. I hope you are already getting the point. Only "faith" could have brought anyone to a position that would demand that they should discriminate against people as shown above. Of course most modern Christians or Jews don't practice all of the scenarios listed above.

With the exception of discrimination against homosexuals, most folks interpret the bible according to their own denominational theology and acceptance of diversity is fairly common in Canadian society. However, over the course of world wide history, every single one of the scenarios listed above has been practiced because "faith" had demanded it.

I know it seems like I have chosen extreme examples from scripture. After all, I could have chosen all of the good things that can be done as a result of faith, like feeding the poor, caring for widows and the homeless or the sick etc. I

chose these issues to discuss because they are the ways faith has failed over the course of history. There has been a societal cost associated with "faith". Faith is not the virtue that everyone claims it is.

Take a look at our law books for evidence of how faith has been a corrupting force in society and has had to be reined in. There once was a time in Canadian society when homosexuality was punishable by a prison sentence, when women (and aboriginals) were not allowed to vote or own property, when aboriginals were considered 'savages' because of their religious beliefs resulting in their children being taken away and sent to residential schools with disastrous results, and when unmarried mothers were refused treatment at Canadian hospitals. There is much more that could be said.

Currently, Canadian human rights legislation protects those who would be discriminated against in our society based on race (3), national or ethnic origin (1,3), colour, religion (3,4,5), age, sex (6), marital status (7), family status (7), pardoned conviction, disability (8), and sexual orientation (2).

Can faith be good? Of course. I don't know anyone who would disagree that people of faith do good things in our society. However it is very important to remember where our society has come from, and that faith has not always been the virtue everyone claims it is.

One of our friends south of the border once summed up this problem rather nicely when he said,

“In the experiences of a year of the Presidency, there has come to me no other such unwelcome impression as the manifest religious intolerance which exists among many of our citizens. I hold it to be a menace to the very liberties we boast and cherish“ –
Warren G. Harding (1865 – 1923), in a presidential address (March 24, 1922).

- Jeff Olsson

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, March 12, 2011

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park (Room M)

Speaker/Topic: Prof. Andrew Woolford, “The Responsibilities of the Poor: Performing neoliberal citizenship on society’s threshold”

Saturday, April 9, 2011

Regular Meeting

Location: TBA

Speaker/Topic: John Hutton, John Howard Society

Saturday, May 9, 2011

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park

Speaker/Topic: TBA

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