



**Humanists of Sarasota Bay, Inc.**  
Sarasota, Florida

## HUSBAY NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2021

### Secularism a good thing for America

From the Herald Tribune 4/12/21

Phil Zuckerman  
Guest columnist

The secularization of U.S. society - the waning of religious faith, practice and affiliation- is continuing at a dramatic and historically unprecedented pace. While many may consider such a development as cause for concern, such a worry is not warranted. This increasing godlessness in America is actually a good thing to be welcomed and embraced.

Democratic societies that have experienced the greatest degrees of secularization are among the healthiest, wealthiest and safest in the world, enjoying relatively low rates of violent crime and high degrees of well-being and happiness. Clearly a rapid loss of religion does not result in societal ruin.

For the first time since Gallup began tracking the numbers in 1937, Americans who are members of a church, synagogue or mosque are not in the majority, according to a Gallup report released recently. Compare today's 47% to 1945, when more than 75% of Americans belonged to a religious congregation. And the percentage of Americans who confidently believe in God's existence, without a doubt has declined from 63% in 1990 to 53% today.

Fears that this rise of irreligion might result in the deterioration of our nation's moral fiber - and threaten our liberties and freedoms - are understandable. Such concerns are not without historical merit. The former Soviet Union was a communist country deeply rooted in atheism and was one of the most corrupt, bloody regimes of the 20th century. Other atheistic authoritarian regimes, such as the former Albania and Cambodia, were equally crooked and vicious.

They were all godless dictatorships that tried to forcibly destroy religion by persecuting the faithful, actively oppressing religious institutions and making a demagogic cult out of their thuggish rulers. Such coercive secularization is indeed something to dread.

However, there is another, alternative kind of secularization - one that emerges organically amid free and open societies where human rights, including religious freedom, are upheld and respected.

Many societies qualify for this label including those in Japan, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, Australia, Canada and Uruguay (among many others). In these places, religion is not actively repressed, nor do governments promote secularization. And yet it occurs simply because the people living in these societies lose interest in the whole religious enterprise.

Organic secularization can occur for many reasons. It happens when members of a society become better educated, more prosperous and live safer, more secure and more peaceful lives; when societies experience increases in social isolation; when people have better health care; when more women hold paying jobs; when more people wait longer to get married and have kids. All of these, especially in combination, can decrease religiosity.

Another major factor is the ubiquity of the internet, which provides open windows to alternative worldviews and different cultures that can corrode religious conviction - and allows budding skeptics and nascent freethinkers to find, support and encourage one another.

The organic secularization we are experiencing in the United States is a progressive force for good, one that is associated with improved human rights, more protections for planet Earth and an increased sociocultural propensity to make this life as fair and just as we can - in the here and now - rather than in a heavenly reward that fewer and fewer of us believe in.



Haiku Quintets: [dandana.us/fivepalms](http://dandana.us/fivepalms)

### I Forgot to Ask

Grandpa, where were you  
When the First War broke out?  
I forgot to ask.

Grandma, tell me tales  
About my great-grandmother.  
I forgot to ask.

Dad, how did you choose  
Your career, and your first wife?  
I forgot to ask.

Mom, what did you like  
About Dad when you first met?  
I forgot to ask.

Kids, is there something  
You'd like to know about me?  
Don't forget to ask.



My mom on her last birthday, 2008.



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**Humanism** is a progressive philosophy of life that, *without theism or other supernatural beliefs*, affirms our ability and responsibility to lead ethical lives of personal fulfillment that aspire to the greater good. To learn more go [here](#).

**CHURCH & STATE | To Defeat COVID, We First Must Overcome The Dangerous Lies Of Christian Nationalism**  
By Rob Boston from The Humanist

I hope you had a chance to listen to Dr. Anthony S. Fauci's remarks during the recent American Humanist Association virtual conference or read them in this issue.

Listening to Fauci's words, I felt pride that he's part of our movement and that the AHA saw fit to award him its highest honor of Humanist of the Year. Fauci is a dedicated public servant who has committed his life to using science, reason and evidence-based medicine to make Americans healthier and safer. I wouldn't want to go through this pandemic without him.

Yet, I am aware of the daunting task that faces Fauci and indeed all of us in the reason-based community: The forces of regression are dragging us backward.

For a few brief, glorious weeks this summer, we thought we had COVID on the run. Stores in my area posted signs saying that fully vaccinated patrons didn't have to wear masks, restaurants reopened for indoor dining and Americans began taking vacations again.

Then, the Delta variant struck. We might have been able to handle it if vaccination rates had been high enough, but they weren't. For various reasons, tens of millions of Americans refused to take the jab. Soon, mask mandates were back, hospitals were overflowing with COVID cases, and the death rate was spiking.

As someone who keeps an eye on religious extremists for a living, I have a special interest in the role conservative white evangelicals, aka Christian nationalists, have played in bringing us to this unpleasant place. It's substantial, and they have much to answer for.

White evangelical Protestants remain the religious group with the highest percentage of vaccine refusers with 24%. It's part of a pattern: Throughout the pandemic, vaccine-denying Christian nationalists have spawned all manner of chaos. Remember their super-spreader church events last year? Recall how many of them vowed that they'd never take a shot? Recollect their claims that the blood of Jesus would keep them virus-free?

But it's their embrace of ridiculous conspiracy theories that have really done us in. Fauci and other public health officials worked hard to convince Americans that the vaccines were safe and effective, but their facts were buried in a tsunami of lies manufactured and spread by an assortment of crackpots and often amplified via social media. To their eternal shame, Christian nationalists remain high among the offenders.

As educators nationwide planned for a new school year, the Ohio-based Christian nationalist group Moms for America called on evangelicals to pull their children out of public schools rather than send them there masked. Mat Staver, head of a Religious Right legal group called Liberty Counsel, took to the airwaves to spread a tinfoil-hat conspiracy theory that the vaccines are part of a plot to decimate the world population by causing widespread infertility. (Is Bill Gates behind it? You bet!) Not to be left behind, the American Family Association (AFA), a gang of LGBTQ-bashing Christian nationalists based in Tupelo, Miss., issued a fake news story amplifying the demented claims of an Ohio attorney that vaccines have killed something like 100,000 Americans. (It's all being covered

up by President Joe Biden, you see.) The AFA isn't bunch of backbenchers; the group has a budget of \$21 million annually and owns a string of radio stations in the Bible Belt. Like Fox News, it is a major font of vaccine misinformation.

Think of every YouTube video you've seen where an outraged fundamentalist screams at a school board that God wants us to breathe free. Reflect on those marches where people hoisted anti-vaccine signs alongside crosses and Christian symbols. That's Christian nationalism in action. Never assume that in "post-truth" America, a story is too crazy to be believed. Remember, some people decided to quaff a de-worming product designed for horses and cattle rather than submit to the needle, a stance that was egged on by several Fox hosts. You can see what we're up against.

Christian nationalists have fought every effort to keep us safe since the pandemic began. With Delta cases soaring, some employers in the public and private sectors finally began taking the logical step of requiring employees to be vaccinated as a condition of remaining employed. Christian nationalists howled about "tyranny" and looked for a loophole. They soon found one: religious exemptions.

Let's be clear: It makes perfect sense to offer *medical* exemptions from vaccines. Some people are immune-compromised and can't safely get a shot—that's another reason for you to get one—but religious exemptions aren't as defensible. They may exist in many states as an example of how our society constantly kowtows to the demands of the religious, but that doesn't mean they're good public policy. They're not.

In America, religious freedom has been broadly interpreted—and rightly so. We don't want government officials attempting to determine whether someone is really sincere about what they say they believe. What this means is that you don't have to do much to get a religious exemption from a vaccine mandate—basically, you just have to ask for it. You can't be made to "prove" that you deserve it or be denied it because your church doesn't require it. Religious exemptions make it too easy for people to opt out of vaccines. Pre-COVID, we saw them being abused in some states where ill-informed parents decided they did not want their children to receive the standard childhood vaccines. The result was an outbreak of diseases like measles and whooping cough we thought we had under control.

There will always be some people you cannot reach. What are you going to do with someone who believes that Tucker Carlson (delightfully nicknamed "Tuckums" by MSNBC commentator Joy Reid) knows more about how to respond to the pandemic than Dr. Fauci?

Yes, we have to tolerate those who embrace foolishness and conspiracy theories. But right now, we're doing a lot more than that—we're making it easier for Christian nationalists and their allies in the unreason community to spread disease and extend the misery this pandemic has brought. That must stop. It's time to move aggressively forward with vaccine mandates and abolish religious exemptions.

Published in [the Fall 2021 Humanist](#)

## Special Interest Groups

Here is a list of Special Interest Groups (If you have an idea for one, please let us know).

### **SIG Names**

### **Focus of the Group**

**Current Affairs (CAF):**

Events discussed during the current news cycle

**Life's Experiences (LEX):**

Your memorable experiences to share with the group

**Non-Fiction Review (NFR):**

Reviews of non-fiction books, magazine articles, films and TV

**Creativity (CRE):**

Includes short stories, poetry, blogs; in other words fiction writing (including reviews) as opposed to non-fiction review.

**Roundtable (RT):**

A discussion of a topic selected by the SIG hosts

**Science Technology & Medicine (STM):** What have you learned, and would like to share

**Open Forum (OF):**

This SIG will happen on dates when no one has stepped up to do a presentation on any of our previously existing categories.

Check our website for specific information by clicking [HERE](#).

**We need members to step up and help** us develop programs for our SIG (Special Interest Group) meetings! Do you have a story to tell? A book to review? A rant? Do you have a career experience or hobby to share? A talk about a technology you like? A topic you would like covered? (We can find a speaker.) Have you written a book? Let us know ASAP!

Please respond to Dave Helgager at [dbhelgager@comcast.net](mailto:dbhelgager@comcast.net) or

Barry Zack at [barryzed@gmail.com](mailto:barryzed@gmail.com)

## Monthly Meetings

**ALL LECTURES, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED, WILL BE AT THE CENTER FOR ARTS AND HUMANITY, 1226 N. TAMIAMI TRAIL, SARASOTA 34236** (Corner of 13th and Tamiami Trail) Suggest if coming west on Fruitville, you turn right at Coconut and proceed to 13th St., turning left. All lecture dates are on Mondays.

December 6--Sarasota County Homeless Project for the Mentally Challenged, Megan Howell, Executive Director, Founder, Second Heart Homes

December 1--Renew your membership

December 20--Annual Meeting 7pm (Most likely on Zoom but not final.)

January 3--New Year's Party, 7pm-9pm (Drinks, Snacks, Music provided.)

January 17--Miracles of Science--Brian Dunning, Science Writer and producer of Skeptoid Podcast ([skeptoid.com](http://skeptoid.com))

February 12--Darwin Day Luncheon, Saturday, 11:30 at Marina Jacks, Scientist from Mote Marine (Speaker and subject yet to be determined.) This year we celebrate on Darwin's actual birthdate. Details for reservations, etc. in January.

March 7--Dr. Matthew Edlund, What Constitutes Good Sleep Health?

April 3--Annual Carl Sagan picnic--4-7pm at Turtle Beach Pavilion (Directions and what to bring will be provided at a later date.)

SPECIAL NOTE: Summer lectures under consideration and will be announced sometime in 2022.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

It's certainly good news to me that I will soon have a booster. Hopefully, all of you will be doing the same, so we can have a great turnout at the December 6<sup>th</sup> lecture, our first since the pandemic began.

The Board and I have been trying hard to keep HUSBAY moving in some form of normalcy with the special interest groups on Zoom and the newsletter. We now look forward to moving on with lectures, luncheons, Darwin Day and other events. And particularly, we look forward to seeing all you again!

The Board and the Secular Student Alliance will soon be announcing the name of our scholarship recipient for the 2021 season. Another example

of one of our programs that continued and is supporting a young person who believes in Humanism and is an atheist. We need these young people more than ever in these times.

Beginning December 1, you will be asked to renew your dues for 2022. Hopefully, you will continue your support of HUSBAY by renewing your membership. Even if you feel you can't be active any longer, your financial support is still valuable and needed to run our organization. A special thanks to all of you who have emailed me expressing your support of the Board and the efforts we have made to keep all of us connected. We are grateful for your kind words.

Dave Helgager

### **Good Reasons for Bad Feelings: Insights from the Frontier of Evolutionary Psychiatry** **"Emotions are not positive or negative but must be used appropriately in situations—through neither under- nor overuse—to be effective."**

*Book Review by Karen Koenig*

If you're curious about why humans seem stuck with emotional suffering, *Good Reasons for Bad Feelings* provides thoughtful evolutionary commentary. Nesse looks at emotions, addictions, and mental afflictions every which way and, to his credit, does not pretend to have all the answers. The ones he offers and the questions he raises about their likelihood make for highly interesting and enlightening reading.

Nesse explains the purpose of evolutionary psychiatry as: "Using the principles of evolutionary biology to improve understanding and treatment of mental disorders in psychiatry, clinical psychology, social work, nursing, and other professions." He then delves into what evolutionary biology is—the "foundation of understanding normal behavior"—and moves on to addressing natural selection. He informs us that natural selection cares little about individual happiness and is not about health, fitness, or longevity, as one might think. Its primary concern is to shape the brain and body to maximize reproductive success, aka gene transmission. Nesse describes the limits of natural selection regarding emotions, including its inability to completely eliminate mutations, and admits that, "Our emo-

tions benefit our genes far more than they do us." He goes on to describe how humans are an imperfect evolutionary mishmash of pluses and minuses, warning against throwing out the baby with the bath water to reduce emotional suffering when pain and fear are inarguably at times essential defensive responses against threats. He stresses how important it is for psychiatry and its patients to understand that some problems are caused not by genes or brain defects, but that, in many cases, our suffering is due to our bodies and brains being wildly out of sync with our environment.

Though a natural process, Nesse maintains that social selection is also a cause of some mental health problems. It primes us to partner, collaborate, and cooperate with others, but causes friction when people prioritize human goals of food, friends, sex, safety, status, and offspring differently from each other. Moreover, social selection causes us to care a good deal about what others think of us and, therefore, can lead to anxiety and depression when we don't or think we don't measure up. Nesse helps us understand that part of the answer to why human life contains so much suffering is "that natural selection shaped emotions such as anxiety, low mood and grief because they are useful . . ." and that, "Sometimes painful emotions are normal but unnecessary because the cost of not having the emotion could be huge."

For the rest of the article click [HERE](#).

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