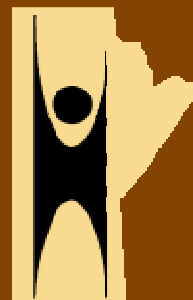


Manitoba Humanist



Published by and for the
Humanist Association of
Manitoba

*“We are beyond
belief”*



www.mb.humanists.ca

GIVING THANKS WITH AGAPE TABLE

For most of us, October is traditionally a time of abundance, of spending time with loved ones and eating way too much turkey, pumpkin pie, and Halloween candy.

However, there are many among us who go hungry on a regular basis. For whom eating a nutritious meal is a challenge, not a given.

At our October meeting, we're welcoming representatives from **Agape Table** who will speak to us about Giving In a Time of Need.

Agape Table is a non-profit organization, committed to providing a community-based program that nourishes the body, mind, and spirit of their guests.

They will be discussing the

philosophical pillars of Nutrition, Empowerment, Dignity and Community that are the foundation to program design and the daily life at Agape Table.

DONATIONS REQUESTED

To promote and support the work that they do, we will be collecting donations for Agape Table at the October meeting.

My suggestion: Take the amount of money you might spend on a meal out, and consider donating it to Agape Table.

Remember... our meetings are always free and open to the public!

UPCOMING EVENTS

All of our upcoming events can be found on page 5 of this newsletter.

ATTENTION: At our October meeting, we'll be reversing our former order of events. At the October 8th meeting, we'll have a meal first (optional, of course), followed by announcements and the speaker.

Approximate times on page 5

QUICK REPORT FROM FARGO

Once again, the Project 42 Convention was a wonderful event! Our friends at the Red River Freethinkers are to be commended for their efforts.

The speakers were engaging and informative. The facilities at the Ramada were comfortable and spacious.

What's great about this sort of event (as opposed to something like The Amazing Meeting), is that the relative small size of the crowd means it's easy to find a moment or two to converse with the speakers. All interesting individuals, by the way!

The Saturday night debate was, in my opinion, a clear win for the Atheist side, and there was an interesting panel discussion on the Sunday morning.

While I'd like to provide you with some more details, at this time I'm conscious that our deadline for this newsletter is looming.

More next month. I'd also like to mention to the Winnipeg attendees – if any of you would like to write an article on the Fargo convention, I'd be happy to hear from you.

- Donna Harris



Richard Carrier (author of Not The Impossible Faith and Why I Am Not A Christian) and Donna Harris



The Winnipeg travelers

BIBLE BABBLE

I am fascinated with discussions between believers and non-believers. I enjoy formal and informal debates about the existence of god and I am always happy to have a conversation myself with believers about what they believe and why they believe it.

The conversations usually start off with good intentions on both sides but at some point it becomes glaringly apparent that not only do we not agree, we are not even speaking the same language. I find myself using words and phrases such as reason, evidence, scientific method, doubt and reality and the believer (usually a Christian) is conversing in Christianese, a dialect that I find incomprehensible.

I confess that as soon as I hear phrases such as "personal walk with Jesus; love the sinner, hate the sin; the holy spirit opened my eyes or we're in the end times", my eyes start to glaze over and I am sure the expression on my face registers a poorly concealed mix of perplexity and pity. Sometimes it seems impossible to move the conversation forward in any productive way.

Modern evangelical Christian language is simply bizarre to me. It appears to be a weird

conglomeration of King James English, modern marketing slogans, Orwellian doublethink and a hefty dose of obsession with sin. Trying to have a meaningful dialogue with someone immersed in this language and culture is usually frustrating and futile. I have to wonder what these believers are thinking as they try to share their faith with others. I know that their goal is to bring non-believers to "know the saving power of Jesus" (or something like that anyway), but how is it that they do not notice that many people like myself find their message odd and unappealing?

I know they have a variety of responses to this problem, ranging from the non-believer being "in love with their sin" to being "blinded by Satan". But honestly, does it never occur to them that the reason outsiders find their religion and language so weird is that maybe it IS weird?

So much for the average Christian sitting in the pew (or the comfy theatre chair in the local megachurch). Surely sophisticated theologians and academics are more effective at communicating their beliefs in a coherent manner. Well it turns out, the answer to this is no, actually they are not.

I recently watched a short video by Jonathan Pararajasingham titled "20 Christian Academics Speaking about God". Watching these 20 very intelligent people try to explain why they believe in their religion was like being trapped in a blackhole of bewildering bible babble. The poetic language, verbal contortions and imaginative explanations may be convincing to someone who already believes what they do, but I highly doubt that many on the outside are inclined to change their minds when presented with these explanations.

Decorating an imaginary concept with flowery language and shiny packaging is just not good enough. Christians can tell me as many times as they like that God loves me, but until I can find a dictionary where the word love is defined as: to torture eternally in a lake of fire for the crime of unbelief, I am going to have to take a pass.

- Diana Goods

BOOK REVIEW – INSIDE SCIENTOLOGY

Inside Scientology: The Story of America's Most Secretive Religion

By Janet Reitman

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 464 pages, \$34.95

It takes a brave soul to write about the inner workings of an organization that is arguably not only America's most secretive religion, but also the most litigious and vindictive. Let's hope the author has deep pockets and an alligator-like hide, or at the very least, an unlisted phone number.

We do know that Janet Reitman holds a master's degree in journalism from Columbia University. While her work has appeared in a number of magazines and papers, this is her first book. She is currently a contributing editor for *Rolling Stone*, where her original article, *Inside Scientology*, was published in 2006. In the five years it has taken to complete this volume, Reitman has conducted extensive research and interviewed dozens of Scientologists, both current and ex-members, famous and obscure, teens and seniors, from former powerful insiders to young third-generation Scientologists.

In 1949, L. Ron Hubbard was a little-known U.S. science-fiction writer when he first came up with the idea that would eventually form the heart of Scientology. He called it dianetics, for the Greek terms dia (through) and nous (the mind). In the beginning, it was an innovative self-help method for people to work through painful issues and memories, which Hubbard called "engrams." This mind therapy, or "auditing," appeared to obtain results much faster than traditional psychotherapy.

By the late 1960s, the new religion of Scientology had grown into a worldwide network, and LRH, or the "Founder," as he was now called, was building an empire that would help him carry out his mission to "clear" the planet (of thetans) and to rid the world of his declared enemy, psychiatry. As time went on,

however, Hubbard became increasingly isolated, paranoid and distrustful.

Scientology's answer to any criticism has always been to take the offensive, which it has done by a variety of means, including infiltrating organizations by planting operatives, stealing information, hiring private detectives, wiretapping and general harassment, not to mention initiating innumerable lawsuits. The church is composed of hundreds of organizations worldwide, yet Reitman's main focus is the seat of power and Hubbard's inner circle. While this gives the work great clarity, the downside to this approach is that church doctrine is not covered in depth, but only incidentally.

The narrative zips along, at times reading like an action-packed spy-thriller, as more jaw-dropping information is uncovered. After Hubbard's death in 1986, there was no succession plan in place. But in less than a year, a young disciple named David Miscavige, who had been gaining power at the time, emerged triumphant, having eliminated all other rivals to take over the reins of the organization. Twenty-five years later, he remains the church's ecclesiastical head and chairman of the board.

There are other surprises to be had, especially if you are not familiar with the organization. For example, even though the Internal Revenue Service had revoked the church's tax-exempt status in 1967, ruling that Scientology "made a business out of selling religion," the church fought back. It took years, but after a concerted campaign of lawsuits, freedom of information requests, threats of blackmail and various other pressure tactics, the IRS agreed to work with the church to reach a settlement. In a controversial ruling, the church's tax-exempt status was reinstated in 1993.

The debate over whether Scientology is truly a church (or even a cult) could fill a book all on its own. Whatever its true nature, it does exhibit some of the more questionable traits of the American 20th century: self-entitlement, celebrity worship and, most profoundly, greed. The church makes large sums of money by

charging members for everything. The cost to progress up the levels (known as the "Bridge to Total Freedom") can run into the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Reitman has not forgotten Scientology's most famous members. From the very beginning, Hubbard himself made no secret about actively pursuing famous and influential people who would be assets through their active promotion of the church. Nowadays, showbiz members include John Travolta, Kirstie Alley, Jenna Elfman and Lisa Marie Presley. The Canadian-born Hollywood director Paul Haggis quit the church a few years ago, and his experiences were documented in a long piece in *The New Yorker* in February.

Tom Cruise is even granted his own chapter by Reitman. It's rather satisfying to read that when he was first introduced to the church's deepest truths at the level of Operating Thetan 3 (which is the part that involves Xenu, volcanos and immortal thetans), he freaked out, his reaction basically being "what the f-is this science-fiction s--t?"

What the church's future involves remains to be seen. While the church denies it, speculation is mounting that membership numbers have decreased considerably. In today's wired world, anyone who wants can gain access to the church's closely guarded doctrines, and the list of websites and blogs run by former members is long indeed. It's worth noting that many former members remain Scientologists; their difficulties not with the belief itself, but how the organization is being run. With Miscavige at the helm, the church has become even more controlling and paranoid.

When the story of Scientology is made into a movie -- and this book is that interesting -- at least they don't have too far to look for actors. Tom Cruise would be a natural to play David Miscavige.

Donna Harris is a Winnipeg skeptic and the newsletter editor of the Manitoba Humanist.

Republished from the Winnipeg Free Press print edition August 20, 2011

GOOD JOB DIANA!

More great work from our own Diana Goods. The Winnipeg Free Press recently published her submission as Letter Of The Day on September 28th:

Letters represent the opinions of their writers and do not reflect the opinions of the Winnipeg Free Press or its staff.

LETTER OF THE DAY



The auditorium of Steinbach's Southland Community Church.

Same old fundamentalism

Bill Redekop's article on the success of the Southland Community Church (*Religious revival*, Sept. 24) paints a rosy picture of the wonderful role this church plays in Steinbach.

As almost all of these evangelical megachurches do, it uses charismatic leaders, modern marketing techniques and emotional manipulation to sell its product. And what is that product? Well, I visited their website to find out.

When perusing their list of core values, I found the same old fundamentalist doctrines that can be found in any of today's megachurches — for example, denial of the fact of evolution and condemnation of homosexuality, premarital sex, abortion and divorce.

Of course, they are also believers in a literal hell and separating humanity into the saved and unsaved. I have to wonder how it is that the members of this church, and many more like it, manage to accept that they worship a god who sends unbelievers to eternal torture and punishment for the thought

crime of disbelief. For according to this doctrine, our actions are completely irrelevant to where we end up.

I suppose they must be OK with the idea that people such as Gandhi, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, Christopher Reeve and Helen Keller are already writhing in hell, to be followed at some point by Lance Armstrong, Bill Gates, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Brad Pitt and many more.

Perhaps it is people's need for black-and-white answers to life's difficult problems or the comfort of a community that sends people flocking to these churches. I myself am more satisfied to be a part of the growing community of atheists and secular humanists. We may not have huge buildings, coffee shops or splashy new technology, but I'll take reason, empathy, kindness, inclusiveness and intellectual honesty any day.

DIANA GOODS
Winnipeg

UPCOMING EVENTS

Saturday, October 8, 2011

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park

Time: Meet & Greet 5:00 pm, order our meal 5:30 pm, meeting intro & speaker, 7:00 pm (all times approximate)

Speaker/Topic: Sean Brennan and Kevin Vandal, Agape Table – Giving In a Time of Need
Cost: Free. But individuals pay for their own food & drink

Saturday, November 12, 2011

Regular Meeting

Location: Canad Inn Polo Park

Speaker/Topic: Andy Thomson, Trustee and CFO of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science. We will watch one of his lectures, then he will be available for a Q&A over the computer (via Skype).

December, 2011

Solstice Party

Date and Time still To Be Determined

RAFFLE TICKET RESULTS

The results of our "Get Real" raffle from September 10th are as follows:

Xbox 360 – David Donald

McNally Robinson gift certificates – Les Parry

Kobo E-Reader – Grant Rogerson

Congratulations to all our winners!

Executive:

Jeff Olsson, President
Donna Harris, Vice President
Helen Friesen, Treasurer
Heather McDonell, Secretary

Members at Large:

Greg Christensen
Myrna Donald
Diana Goods
Barry Hammond
Allison Nelson
Jake Peters
Grant Rogerson
Neil Schipper
Scott Shabaga
Sophie Shulman

Newsletter Editor:

Donna L. Harris
ham_librarian@yahoo.ca

We're on the Web!

See us at:

mb.humanists.ca



Yes, I would like to BECOME A MEMBER of the Humanist Association of Manitoba

New Member Renewal

Membership Category:

- Individual Membership \$25.00
- Individual Limited Income \$10.00
- Household Membership* \$45.00
- Household Limited Income \$15.00

* After July 1st, just pay ½ the yearly fee for the rest of the year. After October 31st, pay full fee and get the entire next year.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ Province: _____

Postal Code _____

Telephone#: _____ Cell #: _____

Email address: _____

*Household Memberships: Please give the names of all additional Humanists in your household 18 years or over:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

DONATION (Tax receipts issued for all donations of \$10 or more)

I would like to make a donation to HAM of:

- \$10 \$20 \$30 \$50 \$100
- Other: _____

PAYMENT: Cheque Money Order
 Visa Mastercard Amex

Please complete the following if paying by credit card:

Account No. _____

Expiry Date: ____/____

Name on Card: _____

Signature: _____

Please make cheque or money order payable to:
Humanist Association of Manitoba and mail to:
*Humanist Association of Manitoba, 7 Pinehurst Lane,
Mitchell, MB, R5G 2J3.*

Or bring your form and the fees to any HAM meeting and give it to Helen Friesen, or any member of the executive.