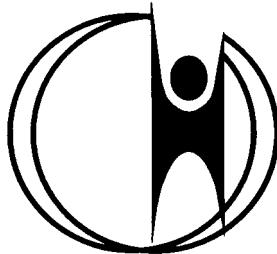




HUMANIST NEWS

2004 • Issue 1 • Newsletter of the HUUmanists • 1777 T Street NW • Washington • DC • 20009 • 202.238.9088



President's Corner

by David Schafer

Getting ready for General Assembly 2004 is an opportunity to reflect on the meaning this GA has for us as Unitarian Universalists and as Humanists—in particular, what we hope to bring to it, and what we hope to bring away from it. This June, in the middle of an election year of monumental significance, in a time of war and worldwide terrorism, the GA must have a special meaning for Americans, and for all UU Humanists as members of the human world community. The Humanist message more vitally needed now than at any previous time in UU Humanism's past.

Yet it appears that many UUs, possibly including even some Humanists, remain unsure about the true nature of this Humanist message. Today one of the most important tasks confronting HUUmanists is to explain clearly what Humanism has in common with other UU points of view, what is distinctive about it, and how these are related to each other. That's why we have devoted much of this newsletter to "Reasonable Religion," in which Sarah Oelberg defends the belief that what particularly distinguishes Humanism among UU viewpoints is its uncompromising emphasis on reason. But the fascination that reason holds for Humanists may not be easy for everyone to comprehend. If we are to succeed in making reason seem, well, *reasonable* to others we have to remember that although reason is an absolutely essential Humanist value, *by itself it is never enough*. As a defining feature of Humanism it's necessary but certainly not sufficient.

Earlier this year Sarah and I spoke before very different audiences about the prominent role of reason among the values of UU Humanism. Neither of us knew about the other's talk until later, but the coincidence shouldn't surprise anyone, because the subject is so important. I gave my talk on February 29 to the Humanist Association of Massachusetts, in the Harvard University Science Center, where I was preaching to the choir. Sarah delivered hers five weeks later as a guest sermon at the Prairie UU Society of Madison WI. "Reasonable Religion" is a print version of that sermon.

As Sarah points out, reason is usually thought of as a means, not an end in itself. Likewise, in my talk I mentioned that the sociologist Max Weber, among many others, stressed the instrumental character of reason; he used the term *Zweckrationalitaet*, translated as "instrumental reason" or "purposeful action," to describe it. Humanists value reason because it is one of the most reliable and powerful tools by which we can hope to achieve other Humanist goals, nearly all of which we share with other UUs. When we combine reason with careful observation and then apply it to the solution of practical human problems, we have science and technology, respectively, both of which are also means rather than ends—although many consid-

President's Corner continued from page 1

er them valuable "for their own sake," as quintessentially human activities.

Sarah and I were in complete agreement on these basic principles. But the purpose of my talk was not to convince my audience of the value of reason, science, and technology (I called them "R, S, and T") but to explain why they can never be enough, and why many people may actually feel distrust toward them. I listed three principal reasons why I thought people who should be our natural allies might be put off by constant Humanist emphasis on "R, S, and T." First, most people are not specialists or even well grounded in these subjects, and from those who aren't we sometimes hear criticisms of Humanists as being cold, remote, technical, intimidating, elitist, or even arrogant. Second, we all know it is generally easier to build bridges by stressing values we hold in common—e.g., the environment, minority rights, economic justice, and separation of church and state—than the differences between us, agreement over ends rather than possible disagreement over philosophical means.

Finally—and as a scientist I think it is impossible to exagger-

ate this fact—it is absolutely true that powerful means such as reason, science, and technology have always been and will always be value-neutral, equally capable of being used for the best ends or the worst. In defining ourselves to others it can never be enough to emphasize our commitment to Humanist means like reason, science, and technology while leaving to our listeners' imagination the question of ultimate Humanist goals, exemplified by Sarah's list "the worth and dignity of all persons; justice, equity, and compassion in human relations; the goal of world community with peace, justice and liberty for all."

Albert Einstein, addressing several hundred students at California Institute of Technology on February 16, 1931, put the roles of reason, science, and technology in proper perspective in these words: "If you want your life's work to be useful to humanity, it is not enough for you to understand applied science. Concern for humanity and humanity's fate must always form the main goal of all technological effort; concern for the big, unsolved problems of how to organize human work and the distribution of goods so that the results of our scientific thinking may be a

blessing to humanity, and not a curse. Never forget this when you are pondering over your diagrams and equations."

In that same spirit, as we UU Humanists attempt to define ourselves to others let's remember not only our instrumental values of reason, science, and technology, but also our ultimate values, our Humanist goals. Let's remember with humility that we are all an integral part of nature—in the poetic phrase of Carl Sagan, "star-stuff." Let's remember our ultimate values of compassion for others, helping each other to experience the greatest possible emotional and intellectual personal fulfillment, the glorious beauty of living.

In the history of UU Humanism there has never been a more urgent need for the Humanist message that intimately unites reason and compassion, that speaks to both mind and heart—a genuine affirmation of truth and love. This is the message we hope, each and all, to bring to GA 2004; and from GA 2004 we hope to bring away the joy of having made many new friends, and a renewed resolve to work together to help right the tragic wrongs in our world. Surely we need each other for the huge tasks we face!

SEND US YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS!

We promised you earlier that we would use the spectacular Internet facilities of the UUA to build a communications mini-network among HUUMANISTS. Bob Prestemon has recently set up the first of our new HUUMANISTS lists, and it's ready for you now! The address is huumanists-mem@lists.uua.org, and it's open only to HUUMANISTS members and contacts. If you'd like to use this new list please write to us at huumanists@americanhumanist.org, so we can enter you in our new database. See you at huumanists-mem!



Reasonable Religion

by Sarah Oelberg

The following is an extensive excerpt from a guest sermon delivered at Prairie UU Society, Madison WI, on April 4, 2004.

—Editor:

Nowadays everything, it seems, has to be “faith-based,” from popular entertainment to social programs. Even Unitarian Universalism appears to be losing its historic devotion to reason, and seeking a return to something some people feel is more religious. There is president Sinkford’s call for more reverent language, a desire for more “spirituality” in our services, and churches sponsoring programs on topics from New Age crystals to faith healing. A few years ago, UU ministers gathered at a convocation designed to forge a “new covenant for the 21st Century.” After a five-day process, a statement was offered for approval which began, “We covenant to affirm that at the heart of our faith is a sense of the holy...” One of our respected Humanist ministers rose to offer an amendment to add after the word “holy” the phrase “and a critical trust in the power of reason.” After two hours of debate, there was no agreement about affirming reason as one of our underlying principles, and months of further discussion led to no resolution.

No longer can the tensions over reason be characterized simply as a Humanist vs. theist controversy. It is much more complex

than that. It is a tension between us old-timers who still revere rationality, and younger members who find their religious experience in “spirituality”—a term tossed around with great abandon and signifying very little because it is not something that can be considered at the core or center of a collective religion, because it means something very different to

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each person. Unfortunately, it has become the “catchword” of the day, and is being used against reason.

I submit that the heart of our faith always has been and still is a devotion to reason. It is found in the Fourth Principle: “A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.” I only hope it will remain if and when Sinkford’s suggested review and revision of the Seven Principles takes place. UUism, like other religions, has firm foundations and fundamentals. One of those fundamentals is the search for truth embedded in the Fourth Principle. I am writing to defend this important principle.

I want to focus on the search for truth, and leave the very important but distinct search for meaning to a later date.

It’s not easy to get hold of the Fourth Principle. When people ask what you believe, it is relatively easy to respond with ideals from the other principles: we believe in the worth and dignity of all persons, justice, equity and compassion in human relations, goal of world community with peace, justice and liberty for all, and so on. These are ends - they can be stated as beliefs. But the Fourth Principle, while supremely important as a defining ideal of Unitarian Universalism, is about a means rather than an end. It is an optimistic statement of how we arrive at what is important to us.

The freedom of each individual to discover basic truths is a vital part of our religious tradition. And yet, there are many today who feel that this principle is under attack. Whether this is because we live in a time of perplexity and uncertainty in our everyday lives and we want something that is unchanging to hold on to in our religion; or whether it is due to the ever increasing numbers of theological strands that are now accepted and fighting to establish their credibility and merit within UUism; or whether it might be related to a kind of new-age emphasis on spirituality which some feel has no roots in

continued on page 4

Reasonable Religion continued from page 3

reason, I don't know. But I do know, from my experience at the minister's convocation and from various things I have read and heard recently, that many feel this basic principle is no longer viewed as central—or the center of UUism. Yet, for me, it always has been. I think it is in the middle of the Seven Principles for a reason, and the reason is that it is the one that describes the central premise of our faith.

So how have we gotten to this state of affairs? Professor David Robinson, the author of *The Unitarians and the Universalists*, claims that UUs are periodically vexed by a sense of vagueness concerning their religious identity—perhaps due, in part, to the open search for truth which gives individual answers and not one cosmic TRUTH! Robinson suggests that we have deliberately disconnected ourselves from our own history. Our 360 degrees of openness to change, to every trend, makes us vulnerable to an undiscriminating eclecticism. And present-day UUs, suggests Rev. Ron Knapp, are far too inclined to get locked into what he calls “contemporaneity,” locked into the idea that the only thing that is important is our time and our world and our thoughts, going from one fad to another.

We need to constantly remind ourselves that we are part of a historical movement that extends from far back in the distant past to far forward in the distant future. We are the spiritual children of Michael Servetus who died in flames and of Francis David, who

died in prison, both proclaiming the Unitarian faith. We are children of Channing and Parker and Emerson and Murray and Ballou and a whole host of women and men who spread the gospel of freedom and equality for all throughout this part of the world. We are the children of John Locke and Thomas Jefferson and of that whole historic period called the

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“Enlightenment.” When Jefferson optimistically predicted that everyone would some day be Unitarian, he was stating his faith in reason and the reasonableness of his faith.

And we are the children of Humanism, both ancient and modern. And the Fourth Principle, more than any other, comes from the Humanist tradition, which is currently under attack within Unitarian Universalism as being passe, male-dominated, anthropocentric, anti-spiritual and culturally absorbed. But it was, and still is, Humanism which holds that each person can be the chief agent of spiritual force and intellectual freedom in his or her life.

The Humanist outlook implies affirmation of the dignity and the power of the human individual to carve out one's own destiny and to derive standards and values from one's own experience of life in light of the experience of others.

But whether the antagonism to the Fourth Principle comes from a desire to have some certainty in life, or because many new UUs come with their own sense of what is true, or out of a simplistic embrace of the elusive spirituality, the fact remains that we turn our backs on this important principle at our peril. For, from the very beginning of both Unitarianism and Universalism, the freedom of belief and the search for truth and meaning has been what has differentiated us from other religions. If we abandon this historical principle and move to the middle, history tells us that some new organization or sect will develop to assume our discarded mantle of reason in religion. As Kendyl Gibbons cautions, “The first chapter of the Enlightenment may be closed, but reason and objective truth, like Pauline of the perils, has a way of making a comeback out of seemingly dire situations.”

There are, of course, many jokes about the Unitarian Universalist search for truth. And there is some truth to the charge that, for some, the search is the end, not the means. We are a community of seekers, we say. But that is not good enough—it seems to me to suggest what philosophers would call “solipsism,” the idea that we are, each of us, only

in our individual worlds, with our individual ideas. There is no communal context to it. One has to ask, “what are we seekers after? What are we seekers of?” And the only answer that resonates with our tradition is that we are seekers after the truth. Not individual truth, but however difficult the task may be, however far it is beyond our reach, the shared truth. That seems to me to be the mark of an authentic community.

UU's are often accused of believing whatever they want to believe. We ourselves are often guilty of perpetuating that image when we answer people who ask what UUs believe with something like, “Well, we can pretty much believe what we want to.” That is absolutely wrong. It is the fundamentalists who can and do believe what they want to—for one would really have to want to believe something that makes absolutely no sense, like the Virgin birth or the bodily resurrection of Christ, things that fly in the face of truth and reason. We, on the other hand, believe what we are compelled to—compelled not by any book, or any church, or any creed, but by the dictates of our own active and critical minds. We believe what our search for truth tells us is real—at least as real as we are able to determine at the present, and open to modification in the future if our continuing search yields new evidence.

The idea of radical freedom of belief lies at the heart of our UU faith. No one, no church, no authority, can tell one what to believe. Individuals must work out matters of belief for them-

selves. For more than a century that idea, in the form of various “liberty clauses”, has been part of any collective affirmations we have devised. But, although it is up to individuals to work out what is to be believed, there is also a sense of certain parameters—some things are just too unbelievable to be taken seriously. So there is a kind of tension. We say that individuals have to come to

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their own beliefs, but we also feel that if the beliefs they embrace are outside the realm of sensibility, then they are violating the principle of “responsibility” in their search for truth and meaning.

You see, liberty can lead to license. Freedom of belief can lead to all kinds of absurdities unless it has a powerful corrective. In our own history there have been those who believed—believed religiously—that African

Americans were an inferior race and therefore, in the name of God, could be subjected to slavery. Today we see people who believe that it is God’s will that they kill doctors who perform abortions, or that homosexuals be prohibited from enjoying the privileges of legal marriage, or that George Bush be elected president. These are people who deeply believe that one Truth is so superior to all other ideas that it is permissible to insist that everyone embrace that Truth, and to punish those who do not. Unitarian Universalists may not hold such beliefs, but it is easy, if we focus only on individual freedom of belief, to arrive at the absurd notion that it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you truly believe it. Well, it does matter. And this is where responsibility and discipline come in to the picture.

We have set the idea of the “free and disciplined search for truth” at the very heart of our faith. It is not an easy faith. It is not a shortcut or a copout. It requires a lifelong commitment to the disciplined search. It goes back to the Enlightenment and John Locke, who said, “One unerring mark of the love of truth is not entertaining any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built upon will warrant.” It requires the centrality of reason; asking, with respect to beliefs, “is it reasonable to believe this? Does what I believe square with what I know to be true?” People are *free* to believe that the world is flat, or the sun revolves around the earth, or the holocaust

Notes from the Grass Roots: Parenting Skills are Needed in Creating a Humanist Discussion Group

by Jack Sechrest, Co-founder and chair, the Humanists of West Suburban Chicagoland

The following article is intended to be the first of a series illustrating the diversity of Humanist groups throughout the UUA. We expect each story to be unique in some respects; this one, for instance, describes the Humanists of West Suburban Chicagoland (HWSC), now a Membership Chapter of the American Humanist Association, housed in a UU congregation itself affiliated with the AHA. It was co-founded by Jack Sechrest, a long-time member of the Humanists@uua.org list, and Mike Werner, who is also a member of the HUUMANISTS Board. As you might expect, both of them are enthusiastic advocates for the model they have followed, but HUUMANISTS does not promote any particular model. We know of many different ways UU Humanists have successfully established working local groups, depending on a variety of local conditions, and we invite you to share your own stories with us. In early May, HWSC was awarded the title of "Chapter of the Year" at the 2004 annual meeting of the American Humanist Association in Las Vegas.

—Editor.

Raising your offspring from birth through maturity requires consistent effort and careful attention to details, and so does the creation and development of a successful Humanist Discussion Group. The Humanists of West Suburban Chicagoland meet at the DuPage Unitarian Universalist Church (DUUC), which is an Affiliate of the American Humanist Association. We started as a Humanist Discussion Group with the help and support of about two-dozen UU Humanists from DUUC and some invited AHA Humanists. We organized on Oct 14th 1999 and have held monthly meetings ever since, except in July and August. Our earliest meetings were attended by as few as seven or eight people; but attendance gradually increased. Our human resources included our members and others from DUUC. As a co-founder of our group, Mike Werner continues to be our most frequent presenter. With continuing growth, we needed to look to outside speakers for some of our programs. On March 3rd 2004 we held our 46th regular meeting.

In Nov 2002, we organized as a Membership Chapter of the AHA. This was significant

because it brought us into contact with many other AHA members who live in the area but were not attending DUUC. Also, we received assistance from the AHA in terms of speakers, mailings, and financial support based on our membership.

We held our first Darwin Day Event and potluck in Feb 2003, and Fred Edwards, editor of *The Humanist* magazine, was our guest. We had forty at the potluck and 57 for the regular meeting. This event attracted about a dozen AHA members who designated our chapter as theirs. In one year, we doubled our membership from 24 to 48. By April 2004, we had increased to 60. In addition, there are another fifty friends and visitors, some of whom will become members. One reason so many AHA members have joined our Chapter may be that we have provided the first opportunity for them to participate in any Humanist group activities locally.

This February, Roger Brewin came "in character" as Clarence Darrow for our annual Darwin Celebration. Sixty-two people joined in our celebration, our largest attendance to date. We have been fortunate to have Ed Yohnka, of the American Civil Liberties Union, and Betty

Holcomb, of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, as speakers. The continuing increase in membership requires that we make changes to facilitate the dialogue as the groups become larger. At the beginning we used a circle of 24 chairs, but now these are surrounded by a half circle in the second row.

Another factor in our growth is the use of e-mail to regularly contact the members and friends. We also have a very short list that requires US postal service. We take attendance and collect phone numbers and surface and e-mail addresses from everyone willing to provide them. Getting this information and following up is very important.

We strive to be educational as well as social. Themes related to the Humanist Manifestos (HM) I, II, and III have included "Existence," "Epistemology," "Environment," "Ecology," "Evolution," "Ethics," "Equality," "Enlightenment," "Enthusiasm," "Esthetics," and many more. Eight of our members presented a program focusing on HM III at the Sunday Morning Service at DUUC on Aug 3rd 2003. The edited text of all eight participants is printed in Volume XXXVI (2003) of *religious humanism*. Please consult your copy.

Besides offering a variety of programs and subject matters, we promote social interaction by sponsoring a "Philosophers' Lunch" and a dinner for "Free Thought Conversants" each month. There is also a related

group directed by one of our members, Stephanie Downs Hughes, called "Just Views" that meets at DUUC. We hold picnics and other gatherings, both formally and socially. We stop our evening meetings at 9 pm with the request that everyone stay a little longer for informal conversation. This personal interaction helps us get to know one another better.

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The sense of community is growing and participation is consistent.

Recently an invitation was extended to a dozen targeted people to join in a new Humanist Discussion Group in Gurnee, IL. That group will be led by one of our Chapter members, Ted Sanders, and I will facilitate that organization. This HDG will serve Lake County and the nearby areas. The name will be Humanists of Northeastern Illinois. Establishing that group is a joint effort of our Chapter, the AHA, and the Ethical Humanist Society of Greater Chicago. We would welcome HUUMANIST members to consider joining.

Our most recent meeting at HWSC was intended to be the

first in a series on "Evidence for Evolution." We will look at evidence for evolution in at least three phases: (1) before any living thing existed; (2) among living things (Darwinian); and (3) in human psycho/social experience. We want to talk about emerging properties that occur as evolution takes place. We could expand the number of programs in the series depending on the speakers in various fields that we can contact and interest. Obviously a paleontologist, a geologist, a chemist, a biologist, a botanist, a zoologist, and an anthropologist could be included to expand the series. For our first meeting, on May 5th, we had a physicist, Dr. Mike Albrow, a member of HWSC.

In summary, our success relates to a set of factors that include having a friendly home in DUUC, which is an Affiliate of the AHA; a group of dedicated and supportive members; excellent leadership; regular communication by e-mail; AHA support, because of our Membership Chapter status; excellent speakers; varied and interesting programs; small group events and special events; attention to the details of programming, membership promotion, and community building; and volunteers who don't have to be asked to make things work. We promote two things: Humanism and Community with a sense of belonging. This has worked for us, and maybe it will for you.



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Reasonable Religion continued from page 5

never happened, but to do so defies reason and therefore flies in the face of the *responsible* search for truth.

Throughout our history, Unitarians and Universalists have been trying to bring about a reconciliation between science and religion; indeed, Humanism in particular, and liberal religion in general, have forged a marriage of science and religion. The use of reason, the quest for truth, the free and responsible search—all these imply that there is something to be found, and scientific methods of inquiry can aid in the search

Unitarians and Universalists have been trying to bring about a reconciliation between science and religion

and the discovery.

For me, then, the Fourth Principle, with its preface “we covenant to affirm and pro-

mote...,” is at the core of our Unitarian Universalist religion. More than any other principle, the Fourth defines who and what we are, not only today but historically and, I trust, far into the future. This is the one principle which really separates us from other religions, and distinguishes us as a people of reasoned and reasonable faith. It is my favorite principle; the one that makes me really proud to be a Unitarian Universalist. I only wish the rest of the world could see its value and embrace it as we do. What a different world this would be!



HUUMANISTS Treasurer's Report

July 1, 2003 to May 1, 2004

INCOME	
Memberships & Subscriptions	\$17,521
Contributions	\$6,520
Other	\$410
TOTAL INCOME	\$24,451
EXPENSES	
Services - American Humanist Association	\$12,000
<i>religious humanism</i>	\$3,018
<i>HUUMANISTS News*</i>	\$2,798
Mailings	\$1,075
Archival storage	\$312
Book purchase	\$216
Other	\$41
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$19,460
*Formerly <i>The Communicator</i>	
MEMO - Cash on hand:	
Start of year	\$9,042
May 1, 2004	\$14,033

Members and friends,

Thanks to subscription renewals, new members, and gifts from many generous donors, income during the period has about kept pace with the expense of publishing our journal, *religious humanism*, and our newsletter, *HUUMANISTS News* – as well as the cost of services provided by the AHA.

Realistically, however, we have to recognize that many of the memberships and subscriptions this year were for two years rather than one, and that at present levels of membership the cost of AHA services alone is still in the range of \$25-30 per person. Clearly, the treasury needs added strengthening from continued membership growth, which we are working hard to make happen at GA 2004 and in the year ahead.

Meanwhile, tax-exempt gifts from those who share our commitment to UU Humanism are not only greatly appreciated but frankly essential for our continued growth!

Our budget for the coming fiscal year will be a major subject for discussion at the annual business meeting on Monday, June 28 at the GA, along with quite a few other aspects of our proposed program.

We hope to see many of you there!

Bob Prestemon, Treasurer

HUMANISTS PROGRAMS AT GA 2004, JUNE 24-28

Lecture: "What's 'Intelligent' About Intelligent Design?"

Eugenie C. Scott, Ph.D., Executive Director, National Center for Science Education

Friday, June 25, 11:00-12:15 p.m. – Long Beach Convention Center, Room 104C

Friday, June 25, 1:30-2:45 p.m. – Long Beach Convention Center, Room 104C

Adherents to intelligent design creationism (IDC) are fewer than those supporting traditional creationism, yet the movement is disproportionately affecting science education. Although IDC lacks acceptance in the scientific community, proponents have very intelligently packaged the movement to appeal to American society, threatening the separation of church and state.

Panel: "Not Your Father's Humanism"

Rev. Gail Geisenhainer, Rev. Dr. Kendyl Gibbons, Rev. Kathleen Korb, Dr. David Schafer

Monday, June 28, 10:15-11:30 a.m. – Long Beach Convention Center, Room 104B

Humanists believe we should help each other to achieve our greatest fulfillment in life. How best to accomplish this depends on individuals and situations. Humanism is inherently dynamic – growing, adapting, evolving. Our panel will explore several among many ways Humanists can accomplish the goal of mutual fulfillment within today's UUA.

Annual Meeting of HUUMANISTS follows the Monday presentation of "Not Your Father's Humanism" (Monday, June 28, 10:15-11:30 a.m. – Long Beach Convention Center, Room 104B.) The room has been reserved through the lunch hour to permit full discussion of important business.

Exhibit hall display – Friendly Humanists from UU congregations across the continent look forward to meeting you at the display sponsored jointly by HUUMANISTS and American Humanist Association. **Join us as a member of HUUMANISTS** and help us promote and strengthen Humanism throughout the Unitarian Universalist Association. Membership includes a subscription to the journal *religious humanism*. See you at the GA!



From the Journal Editor

by Roger Brewin

All the articles have been selected, and editing is under way, for the first issue of *religious humanism*, 2004 volume. It'll be in your mailbox in early July, and additional copies should be available at the General Assembly in Long Beach. It's a provocative set of articles—great beach reading, or for wherever you do your summer thinking.

IMPORTANT: Did you last subscribe or pay your dues between January and June of 2003 (including the Boston GA)? You're due to renew. A letter will be on its way shortly, but please save us the printing and postage—use the form opposite. And thanks—for the continuing conversation in print,

Roger Brewin
Rabrewin@aol.com



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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

President's Corner

by David Schafer

page 1

Reasonable Religion

by Sarah Oelberg

page 3

Notes from the Grass Roots

by Jack Sechrest

page 6

HUUMANISTS Treasurer's Report

by Bob Prestemon

page 9

From the Journal Editor

by Roger Brewin

page 10