

Editor's Preface

With victories by science advocates over Intelligent Design in both the Dover, Pennsylvania court case and the Kansas Board of Education, with three skeptical books—Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, Sam Harris' *The End of Faith*, and Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell*—breaking into the best seller lists, and with the heartening up tick of Humanist activity, reflected most prominently perhaps in the increasing numbers of campus groups, even a skeptic would be tempted to that the tide was at last turning. Couple all this with scandals among the religious right and (often scandal related) electoral misfortunes of their primary political sponsors, a Humanist could get positively ... giddy!

This issue of Religious Humanism is a reminder of places where the battle still rages, and danger still resides. From an account by Jeff Tate (and respondents on the Humanist Institute on-line discussion) of his visit to a "Mega Church," to Lynn Hunt's analysis of the bizarre educational approach showcased in the documentary film "Jesus Camp," we show you both the seemingly benign and the just plain scary face of our cultural competitors. Tate and company exemplify the best of humanist give and take, logical, respectful and deeply felt argumentation, mutual correction and suggestions for the future. Lynne Hunt is simply hopping mad, and shows us how to channel outrage into constructive comparison and alternatives.

Paul Woodruff (whose book *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*, was lauded by Kendyl Gibbons in this Journal two issues back) keeps the UU language of reverence issue going, reminding us that danger (even if it is only brought on by careless inattention to getting language right) can be found in our own back yard.

The tasks before us, defending reason against senseless attacks (as in Hunt's article), wondering if reason can benefit from some of the strategies that faith has employed, as Tate and the HI folks contemplate, and reminding our close friends among liberal Christians, Buddhists, Pagans and others in UU ranks, that reason is still the very heart and—dare I say it—soul of this liberal religion, are daunting, and seemingly endless.

The same Fort Worth UU General Assembly where Woodruff spoke to HUUmanists and many others, also saw three prominent members of our leadership—President David Schafer, ministers Kendyl Gibbons and Katy Korb, take the stage to remind us that the humanism we espouse today is very different from the humanism we honor in the 1933 Manifesto. Korb points out, reflecting on the feeling by some UUs that humanism in our movement is past its prime, that we are often not given credit for the modifications that we have made since the heady days of humanist hegemony, in both our sometimes unwarranted optimism, and our recognition of multiple approaches to knowledge. Schafer's four axes of change and Gibbons' honoring the founding generation of UU humanists represented by her father, while delineating the differences that separate us, are great examples of the type of communication, of which we need much more.

Mason Olds writes as if he were out to prove Korb's point. He begins his treatise on ethical considerations of cruelty with references to Sartre and Rawls, but quickly moves beyond the straw man of "corpse cold rationalism" by bringing in the personal dilemma of how we 'know what we know' about morality, without reference to some

supernatural absolute. Art and literature are among his suggestions, and rather than theorize about it, he goes into detail with a particular dramatic work.

When it comes to telling off the traditionally religious, (something for which modern humanists are frequently berated) without tact or quarter, but with ferocious effect, few could top Tom Paine. Sadly, few then or now could tell you what he did believe, only what he attacked. His Deism, a positive and straightforward theology, is on full display in the first few chapters of *The Age of Reason*, presented here in lightly edited form as our Heritage Document. But don't despair, I've left in a bit of what Tom the Terrible is famous for.

Once again Jerome Stone shares book review duties with Daniel Ross Chandler, promoting Bill Murry's *Reason and Reverence: Religious Humanism for the 21st Century* as a "well rounded affirmation," both "passionate" and "preachable." (We hope to have Bill's book and Mason Olds' reprinted *American Religious Humanism* available at the HUUMANISTS booth at the Portland GA.) Daniel reads and travels endlessly it seems: some of the current reviews arrived from him in a Bangkok Hotel envelope, some from Evanston, IL, and his range of reviews is nearly as exotic.

A couple of letters (which we love, so send more) and my own observations round out this issue, and all that remains is for you to read it, talk about it, love and/or disagree with it, and make it part of our ongoing struggle to reclaim the religious stage for reason and tolerance.

Roger Brewin