Editorial

Eternal vigilance, the price of liberty

It’s no exaggeration to say that every day in the news we are provided with ample fresh reminders of why the separation of church and state is such a profoundly good idea. It seems like such a simple, such an obvious, such a hard-earned bit of wisdom, but in much of the world it is still stranger than a talking snake.

In Pakistan’s Swat Valley, 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai is shot in the head for encouraging girls to go to school. Turkish pianist Fazil Say is convicted of blasphemy for a series of Tweets. Indonesian Islamist hard-liners destroy homes and a mosque in an Ahmadiyyah community. A court in Saudi Arabia sentences two men to hundreds of lashes on top of jail time for converting a woman to Christianity. In Afghanistan, Iran, Maldives, Mauritania, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Sudan, those who openly discuss atheism face the death penalty. A Salvadoran court denies a potentially life-saving abortion to an ailing woman.

In every case, the offense against human dignity is committed by a sitting government or by an outfit within a stone’s throw of governing.

We don’t have to look to distant shores for examples of unsavoury church-state conjoinings. Some tentacles still reach out from the Dark Ages and emerge in our very own backyards. Ontario, for example, has a multi-billion dollar, fully publicly funded institution that openly and legally discriminates against gays and those with the “wrong” religion. Making matters worse, not one politician will even dare to acknowledge the situation for the shameful anachronism that it is. It’s a script worthy of Rod Serling.

The institution, of course, is Ontario’s publicly funded Catholic school system. It has earned Canada a pair of UN Human Rights condemnations and, moreover, all citizens foot the bill for an extra billion dollars each year just for duplication costs. (See HP #173’s Canada’s Dirty Little Secret.)

I’ve been told many times, by people who ought to know better, that “time” and “the inexorable march of progress” will ride in like the cavalry and save the day, one day, many years from now. All we have to do is sit back, wait and watch, bag of popcorn in hand.

That just won’t do.

– Richard Young

Letters

It was with a lot of sadness that I read of Joe Piercy’s passing in the last issue of HP. I found him a wonderful person.

My acquaintance with Joe was limited mainly to our time together on the Board of Canadian Humanist Publications, where Joe served variously as President or as Editor of what was then Humanist in Canada. Joe’s commitment to HiC and to ensuring that issues came out on time was exemplary.

At the time, I much appreciated his support of CHP’s venture into book publishing in the form of Earl Doherty’s The Jesus Puzzle and the late Pat Duffy Hutcheon’s The Road to Reason.

A lasting impression of Joe is of a civil, intellectually aware person, whose dedication to the cause of humanism generally and to a more rational and humane world belied his mild demeanour. He was also someone who enjoyed the ironies of life, and at least to those who knew him fairly well, he had an infectious sense of fun.

The last two times I saw Joe were at some event or other in a religious establishment a decade or so ago, and well recall the mischievious smile that light up his face when I said upon running into him again on the second occasion, “How come we keep meeting each other in church, Joe?” That smile was one of Joe’s great charms.

Thanks, Joe. You did your bit in this troubled, wonderful world.

– David Blackwell

Eastern Passage, NS
September 27-29, 2013: Freedom From Religion Foundation’s 36th annual conference in Madison, WI, USA. Register online at www.ffrf.org

October 24-27, 2013: CFI Summit: A Meeting of Minds – A Call to Collaborative Action.
The time has come for humanists to work together for a more rational world. Joint conference of CFI, CSH & CSI at the Hotel Murano, Tacoma, WA, USA.

Yahweh and Stephen Harper have at least one thing in common – they both hate censuses. (See 1 Chronicles 21:1 for the Yahweh part and Statistics Canada for the Harper part.) Take a moment to visit Atheist Census Canada at http://census.atheisme.ca as well as www.atheistcensus.com for the international census.

A Major New Initiative from our friends at Civil Rights in Public Education (CRIPE)
For students in Roman Catholic separate high schools, there are religious programs and courses such as retreats, mass, etc. Although the process of exemption from such programs has validity in law, as outlined in the provincial Education Act, applications for exemptions are fiercely opposed by Catholic schools. In most cases, it can take months for a parent to convince separate school authorities to obey the law. In July, CRIPE is supporting a court action to establish the validity of the exemption process. If you agree and would like to contribute to the final legal cost of up to $9,000, please send a donation to:
Civil Rights in Public Education, Box 491, Pembroke, ON K8A 6X7 [www.CRIPEweb.org]

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**Your Donation is Important**

Canadian Humanist Publications has charitable status to encourage concerned readers to support Humanist Perspectives magazine, and thus to help promote the humanist message in Canada and to the world. The following is a summary of tax deductible contributions we received in the 2012 calendar year:

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<th>Number of donors</th>
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<tr>
<td>Friends of HP:</td>
<td>18 ($100 or more)</td>
<td>$2,556</td>
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<td>To general fund:</td>
<td>74 (average $32)</td>
<td>$2,359</td>
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This represents about 15% of total income and pays almost all of the printing/mailing costs of only one issue of the magazine. For this, sincere thanks are extended to our friends and donors for their continuing support. In addition, last October a special $10,000 was received from a generous donor. We also accept donations for designated memorial funds in honour of special individuals or events. Funds are still needed for planned promotion and other projects, so please consider becoming a donor today.

Dan Morrison, CHP Treasurer