



# The Enlightenment



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## Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011) Author, Journalist and Humanist

Christopher Eric Hitchens, one of the world's best known antitheists, was the first-born son of Eric and Yvonne Hitchens. Eric was a Commander in the Royal Navy and Yvonne was a Wren in the same Service. Christopher attended various private boarding schools in England and later he attended Balliol College at Oxford where he graduated with a "third class degree." He married his first wife, Greek Cypriot Eleni Meleagrou, in 1981. They have two children, Alexander and Sophia. In 1989 he married American Carol Blue and they have one daughter, Antonia. Though Hitchens retained his British citizenship he became an American citizen on the steps of the Jefferson Memorial on April 13<sup>th</sup> 2007, his 58<sup>th</sup> birthday. He died on December 15<sup>th</sup> 2011 from pneumonia, a complication of cancer of the esophagus.



Hitchens described himself as a believer in the philosophical values of the Enlightenment. He was an admirer of George Orwell, Christopher Hitchens Thomas Payne and Thomas Jefferson. His Journalist career began in England in 1970 where he worked for various publications including the *International Socialism* magazine, the *London Times Higher Education Supplement*, and the *New Statesman* where he acquired a reputation as a fierce left-winger, aggressively attacking the Vietnam War and the Roman Catholic Church. In 1981 he moved to the United States where he wrote for *The Nation* penning vociferous critiques of American foreign policy. He became a contributing editor of *Vanity Fair* in 1992. He also wrote for *The Atlantic*, *Free Inquiry*, and *Slate* among others. He worked as a foreign correspondent in various countries including Cyprus, Chad, Uganda, Darfur and Iraq. In total his work took him to over sixty countries.

During his career Hitchens authored thirteen books, four pamphlets, and numerous essays. One hundred and seven of his essays are contained in his last book *Arguably*, published in 2011 not long before he died. Of special interest to humanists is his 2007 book *the Portable Atheist*, an anthology documenting the works of forty-seven humanistic thinkers from Lucretius to Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Probably his best known book is *God Is Not Great – How Religion Poisons Everything*. The following paragraph sums up part of the message of this book. (Continued on page 3)

## President's Remarks

In February, we were all very shocked and saddened by the sudden and untimely death of our good friend Ed Ashman at the age of 51. Ed was a long-time member of our Humanist Association, and served on the Board for a number of years. He was a very quiet person who was a little hard to get to know, but a thoughtful, well-read, caring person, with a depth of character and a good sense of humour, who was devoted to issues that mattered to him. Ed's commitment to Humanism was demonstrated by the fact that his Facebook photo was the "happy humanist," the international symbol of Humanism. Besides being an active Humanist, he was also a dedicated member of the New Democratic Party, and worked tirelessly in local election campaigns. He was also very involved in environmental causes. Since his death, I have heard from a number of people who knew him from different areas of his life, and have been struck by how deeply he was appreciated and how much he will be missed by so many. It has reminded me of how important it is to cherish our friendships and express our appreciation to others while we have the chance to do so. As Joe Wilson, president of the London-Fanshawe NDP riding association, commented about Ed, "he was easy to take for granted, because he was always there, always helpful, always dependable, always quiet, and never, ever complaining." Perhaps the most fitting way to honour our memories of Ed Ashman is to renew our own commitment to the worthy causes that were so dear to him, and to determine not to take one another for granted.

~ Rod A. Martin

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The Humanist Association of London and Area meets at the Cross Cultural Learner Centre, 505 Dundas Street in London, on the second Wednesday of the months September to July inclusive at 7:30 p.m. Please use the rear door off the parking lot. *The Enlightenment*, edited by Don Hatch, is published quarterly in January, April, July and October. Please note: We reserve the right to edit and publish articles at our discretion.

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|         | <u>Humanist Canada</u> | <u>Humanist Perspectives</u> | <u>HALA Basic</u> | <u>HALA Limited Resources</u> |
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| Single  | \$ 40                  | \$22                         | \$20              | \$10                          |
| Family  | \$ 50                  |                              | \$25              | \$15                          |
| HC Life | \$700                  |                              |                   |                               |

(Christopher Hitchens continued from page 1)

From *God is Not Great*:

“Above all we are in need of a renewed Enlightenment, which will base itself on the proposition that the proper study of mankind is man and woman. This Enlightenment will not need to depend, like its predecessors, on the heroic breakthroughs of a few gifted and exceptionally gifted people. It is within the compass of the average person. The study of literature and poetry, both for its own sake and for the ethical questions with which it deals, can now easily depose the scrutiny of sacred texts that have been found to be corrupt and confected. The pursuit of unfettered scientific inquiry, and the availability of new findings to masses of people by electronic means, will revolutionize our concepts of research and development. Very importantly, the divorce between the sexual life and fear, and the sexual life and disease, and sexual life and tyranny, can now at last be attempted, on the sole condition that we banish all religions from the discourse. And all this and more is, for the first time in our history, within the reach if not the grasp of everyone.”

With all the problems facing us in the world today, it would seem that Hitchens is overly optimistic about beneficial changes occurring in our societies in the near future, but I believe he is absolutely right in claiming that these problems will be easier to solve if religions are out of the picture.

In order to get a real understanding of Hitchens the man it is necessary to read his book *Hitch 22, a Memoir*, published in 2010. In this volume he chronicles his life with anecdotes about his parents, his younger brother Peter, his education, his close friends Martin Amis, James Fenton, Salman Rushdie and others. Also his many experiences in foreign countries, why he approved of the war in Iraq, how he became an (Anglo) American, his metamorphosis concerning his political views, his debates on atheism and religion, the Jewish/Palestinian problem, (he learned later in life that he was partly Jewish), his love of wine and whiskey, and a host of other things.

Regarding his love of the grape and grain, in 2003 he wrote that his daily intake of alcohol was enough “to kill or stun the average mule,” noting that many great writers, “did some of their finest work when blotto, smashed, polluted, shitfaced, squiffy, whiffled or three sheets to the wind.” British politician George Galloway called Hitchens “a drink-sodden ex-Trotskyist popinjay,” to which Hitchens replied, “Yes, I am an ex-Trotskyist, a popinjay (a target for arrows and shots) but that I cannot hold a drink, here I must protest.”

Hitchens is now identified as a champion of the “New Atheism” movement, describing himself as an antitheist, someone who is “relieved that there is no evidence for the assertion of god.” It is truly regrettable that this great humanist, one of the most prolific wordsmiths of our time, passed away at the young age of sixty-two. His friend, and fellow antitheist Richard Dawkins, lamented his passing with these words, “I think he was one of the greatest orators of all time. He was a polymath, a wit, immensely knowledgeable, and a valient fighter against all tyrants including imaginary and supernatural ones.”

Christopher Hitchens requested that his body be donated to science and that there not be any funeral. His brother Peter has indicated that some form of a memorial gathering will likely take place in New York and also in London, probably in April 2012. Details will be posted when finalized. (DAH).

# **Faith, Reason, and Atheism**

*By Dr. Rod Martin*

*This is the fourth in a series of talks loosely based on the book "Humanism: Beliefs and Practices" by Jeanane Fowler. It was presented at the meeting of the Humanist Association of London and Area on January 11, 2012.*

As stated on the Humanist Canada website, "Humanism is a deity-free worldview that affirms our ability to lead ethical and meaningful lives without reliance upon a belief in the supernatural." By rejecting belief in the supernatural, Humanists also reject the notion of gods or other supernatural entities. Thus, a fundamental assumption of Humanism is atheism, or at least agnosticism. What is an atheist? The simple answer is: someone who doesn't believe in God. However, this simple definition bears further reflection. I'd like to briefly explore the concept of "God," and what it means to "believe."

## **The Concept of God**

It's important to recognize that there are many different conceptions of God, and some of them are less believable than others. Any rational argument that we might make against belief in a god may apply to some of these conceptions but not others. Albert Einstein, when asked if he believed in God, would reply, "Tell me first what you mean by God, and I'll tell you whether or not I believe in it." Two people might be having a heated debate about the existence of God, each strenuously opposing the other's arguments with further counter-arguments. However, it's possible that they're not actually talking about the same thing. The god that the atheist doesn't believe in may be quite different from the god the believer does believe in. So in our discussions with believers, it's important to clarify what we're talking about.

There are many gods that no one believes in today, such as Zeus, Apollo, Aphrodite, Thor, and Woden. At one time there were many people for whom each of these gods was very real and important in their lives, much like the gods of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam today. Ironically, the early Christians were condemned for being atheists themselves, because they didn't believe in the many gods of the Greeks and Romans. If a Christian says, "How can you be an atheist?" one reasonable response is, "Well, you're an atheist yourself! There are many gods that you don't believe in either. I just don't believe in one more god than you!"

Obviously, where we have our real difference with the Christian is over the God of the Bible. Even there, however, it's important to recognize that there actually isn't just one god of the Bible. Several very different conceptions of God are seen in different parts of the Bible, as beliefs evolved while this book was written over more than 1000 years. Early in the Old Testament, we meet Yahweh, a tribal war god of the Israelites, who is very similar to the local gods of many other tribes living in the region. Richard Dawkins describes this early conception of God as:

... arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully.

By the end of the New Testament, however, God has evolved into something quite different, a universal god of love, grace, and mercy (although he is still a rather sexist and homophobic male figure).

It's also important to recognize that the "god" concept has continued to evolve over the years since the Bible was written. Particularly in the past century, there has been a major shift among liberal or "progressive" Christians. Many honest, thoughtful Christian theologians have grappled with the issues and arguments that have led many of us to become atheists or agnostics. They have acknowledged that the old ideas about God are incompatible with modern science and ethics, and they have modified their view of God accordingly. For example, John Shelby Spong, a well-known Anglican bishop in the United States, has written a number of best-selling books (e.g., *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*) in which he rejects many traditional Christian beliefs. He criticizes much of the Bible and the concepts of God portrayed in it, and sees it as a product of human thinking that is full of errors, primitive ideas, and outmoded ethical standards. He would no doubt agree with most of the arguments against God made by people like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens, because he also doesn't believe in the god that they reject. Nonetheless, he still apparently believes in some sort of concept of god, which he defines in very vague, metaphorical terms, such as "the ground of all being," or "ultimate concern." It's not at all clear, though, what he really means by this.

For most Humanists, the crucial issue is whether you believe in something supernatural, or outside of nature. Nature is everything that is understandable through science and can be potentially explained by natural laws without having to resort to explanations involving divine intervention. I say "potentially" because there are, of course, many things that science doesn't yet understand but which will presumably become clearer with further research. The supernatural, in contrast, refers to some sort of higher dimension of existence, or divine energies or miraculous events, that cannot be explained scientifically, even in principle. Another way of putting this is the distinction between monism and dualism. Monism is a view of the entire universe as all one continuous thing, which is ultimately based on the natural laws of physics and chemistry. Dualism is the belief that there is something more than physical reality, which can't be known through empirical science. The fundamental problem with this sort of dualistic belief is that, because the supernatural domain can't be known scientifically, by definition, there is no objective way of knowing it at all, and therefore it can only be "known" through subjective experiences or feelings, the pronouncements of religious gurus, ancient scriptures, etc. Without any objective standard for evaluating such concepts, believers open themselves up to all kinds of potentially ludicrous ideas that can't be verified and can only be taken on faith.

The point where I would part company with someone like Bishop Spong, therefore, is when he begins talking about something that is beyond nature, something supernatural. However, it's very hard to know whether Spong's conception of God actually involves the supernatural, or if "god" is just a word he uses to refer to something within nature. John Dewey, a well-known Humanist philosopher and educator who was one of the signers of the first Humanist Manifesto in 1933, wrote a book called *A Common Faith*, in which he argued for an approach to Humanism as a purely naturalistic religion. He advocated that we continue to use the word "god," but that we redefine it to describe the things we value most in human nature, such as love, truth, beauty, and honesty. However, this idea never caught on, as it was rejected by believers and Humanists alike. Using the word "god" in this way was seen (correctly, in my view) as too confusing and potentially misleading, and Dewey himself later backtracked on this idea.

However, I suspect that many liberal or progressive Christians may actually have adopted Dewey's idea without acknowledging it. For example, when Bishop Spong talks about God, he may very well be using the concept in this purely naturalistic way. If so, then in my view he is actually a Humanist. The only thing we disagree about is semantics: whether or not religious language ("god-talk") should be used to describe what are really naturalistic concepts. We can have a disagreement about that, but this is quite a different disagreement than the one about the existence of a supernatural god. In any event, it's obviously very important that we clearly define what it is that we're arguing about.

### **Faith/Belief versus Knowledge**

It's also important for us to recognize that whether or not a god exists is a matter of faith or belief, not knowledge. I'm personally convinced that the evidence against the existence of God is much stronger than the evidence for his existence, and I'm quite sure of my position, but I still need to acknowledge that it's a matter of belief rather than knowledge.

Immanuel Kant, in his book *Critique of Pure Reason*, discussed the distinction between opinion, belief, and knowledge. There are some things that we have opinions about, some things that we believe, and other things that we know. An opinion is an idea for which there is no strong objective evidence, and limited subjective confidence or conviction. You might have the opinion that the Toronto Maple Leafs will win the Stanley Cup this year, but there's not a lot of evidence for this and you're not likely to bet a lot of money on it. A belief is an idea for which the objective evidence remains inconclusive, but there is much stronger subjective confidence. You might believe that a particular political party has the best policies, and you're so convinced about this – even though it can't be proved conclusively – that you're willing to devote your energies to this cause. Finally, knowledge is when subjective confidence is accompanied by conclusive objective evidence through direct sensory experience or scientific research. You may know what you ate for breakfast today, but no one really knows for sure whether or not God exists.

For some reason, we humans have a tendency to form very strong beliefs accompanied by a subjective sense of certainty, even in the absence of sure objective evidence. There's likely some evolutionary reason for this. This means that our beliefs – for theists and atheists alike – are only partly based on objective evidence, reason, and logic. There are also many non-rational, personal, and emotional reasons why we either believe or don't believe in God. The emotional aspect of our beliefs often becomes very evident whenever people get into an argument about religion, especially on the Internet, where the normal rules of politeness are harder to maintain. What starts out as a polite, rational debate can very quickly deteriorate into angry name-calling, irrational defensiveness, and foul language. The reason for this is that there's a lot of emotion underlying each person's point of view, and this is just as true of the atheists as the believers. If it was purely a matter of logic, reason, and evidence, there would be a cool, thoughtful discussion without so much defensiveness, anger, and name-calling.

Why am I an atheist? In part, it's because of objective scientific evidence and rational arguments that have convinced me to abandon my earlier belief in the existence of God. This is a very important part of the reason. But if I'm honest with myself, there are also no doubt some non-rational reasons for being an atheist. Atheism feels good; there's a sense of liberation in it. As an atheist, you're not under the thumb of authoritarian priests; you're able to think for yourself, to be in control of your own life. Some of these non-rational reasons likely have their origins in early life experiences that have given us negative conditioned responses to religion. Some of us may have memories of aversive experiences with religion such as guilt induction, punitive

treatment, emotional abuse, and even sexual abuse. For some of us, feelings about religious beliefs may partly have to do with the way we were treated by our parents, which became associated with religion in our minds. Much of this is likely outside of our conscious awareness. Of course, there's no one pattern for everyone; we each have our own personal, subjective, experiential reasons for not believing in God.

The same is true for those who believe in God. They have positive feelings associated with their beliefs. Their faith may give them a profound sense of reassurance and confidence in times of trouble and adversity. Why are believers so antagonistic toward atheists? Why do people like Bishop Spong still feel the need to cling to the concept of God? Why don't they just accept science as their basis for living, and leave concepts of God and the supernatural behind? A big part of the reason is that they conceive of a purely science-based world as a very cold, hostile, unwelcoming place; a place without soul, without compassion, ethics, warmth, and feeling; a place they wouldn't want to live in. For them, the concept of God brings a dimension of sacredness to life. If God created the natural world, then it is worthy of our respect and care. If God created us, then our lives and relationships can take on a sacred meaning. They are threatened by atheism because they assume that it takes the joy, love, meaning, and mystery out of life.

This is one of the points where I think believers are mistaken. Rejection of God does not necessarily mean the loss of goodness, morality, meaning, love, and a sense of the sacredness of life. These are all things that I certainly value too, along with my fellow Humanists. None of us want our lives to be cold and meaningless, devoid of caring, value, mystery, and joy. This is where Humanism moves beyond atheism. Humanism begins with the rejection of belief in God, but it is much more than that. I see Humanism as a very positive, life-affirming, joyful, compassionate response to life and the universe. As Humanists, we are thrilled by the wonder and mystery of life, evolution, and the human experience. If there is no God, then we have all the more reason to value the world we live in, to cherish our lives and our relationships with one another. If there is no life after death, then all the more reason to find joy and beauty and meaning in our lives, to do all we can to make the world a better place for everyone.

In our dialogue with believers, I think it's important not only to try to give rational arguments and logical evidence against the existence of God. That is certainly an important part of the dialogue, but it only addresses the logical, rational component of faith. It misses the underlying non-rational, emotional reasons why people cling to their religious faith. We need to try to understand the fears, desires, values, and emotional needs underlying their faith, and we need to acknowledge that we share the same basic values, desires, needs, and fears.

At the risk of gross oversimplification, I think there are two general kinds of atheists, which I call Bashers and Builders. Bashers are those who take a confrontational approach, make fun of religious belief, and push their views on others, often in a fairly obnoxious way. There is certainly value in getting the word out there, through books and publicity campaigns that make people aware of the existence of atheism and the arguments for it. But too much bashing can lead to polarization, defensiveness, and misunderstanding of one another, leading to further stereotyping, demonization, and entrenchment of attitudes. On the other hand, the Builders are those who seek to engage in dialogue with religious believers, to listen, empathize, and try to understand what people mean by their conception of God and what it means to them. This can hopefully lead to finding some common ground, better mutual understanding, and respect. It might also help others to see, by the compassionate and responsible way we live, that their fears about the dire consequences of atheism are groundless.

## **Conclusion**

There are many compelling rational reasons for rejecting belief in God. It's important for us as Humanists to understand the arguments on both sides, and to be clear about why we take the position we do. However, reason, logic, and evidence are only part of the story. For atheists as well as theists, there are also non-rational and emotional reasons for believing as we do. In rejecting the concept of God, Humanists reject beliefs in the supernatural; we refuse to rely on the speculations of religious mystics, spiritual gurus, and ancient scriptures. However, rejection of gods and other supernatural entities does not mean rejection of meaning, morality, values, love, beauty, and the sacredness of life. These are things we all cherish and strive to promote, values we share with many religious believers. Religious faith is not going to go away; most believers in God will never be convinced by our arguments, no matter how rational and logical these arguments may seem to us. Through empathic listening and dialogue, we may be able to find a way of building greater respect and acceptance of one another, despite our differences in beliefs, so that we can work together to make this world a more caring and more peaceful place for all of us.

## **Humanists Doing Good Work – Persistence Pays Off**

The July 2011 issue of The Enlightenment contained a brief article about the reciting of the Lord's Prayer at municipal council meetings, which is now illegal in Ontario. In particular it dealt with the attempts by Dagmar Gondard-Zelenkova, the late Bill Broderick, Secular Ontario and others, to persuade the council in Hastings Highlands to cease reciting the prayer at their meetings. At the time of writing that article, the Council had decided to continue with the prayer. But new developments have now taken place and the prayers have ceased, not only in Hastings Highlands, but also in Bancroft and Belleville. Dagmar describes how this came about in the following article.

### **Our Secular Crusade**

By Dagmar Gontard-Zelinkova

There is a huge binder filled with newspaper clippings, documents, letters, notes, and as I leaf through them, a message catches my eye. It was posted on the Humanist forum on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011. On the morning of October the 10<sup>th</sup>, it's author quietly left this world. His name was Bill Broderick. He knew what was ahead. These are the words from his last message to his fellow Humanists: "It comes to all of us in time. I'm proud to have been of some service to HC and humanism along the way. But the time has come to pass the torch."

Bill and I met at a Humanist forum, years ago. We shared the view that humanism was an enlightening philosophy of life. Yet we knew that, as with every light, it had to be shielded from adversary winds, and we also knew that we would strive to keep the torch of humanism constantly bright. Over the years, we would join forces in many fights for what we believed were the right causes. Our last battle together was against the recitation of the Lord's Prayer in public meetings.

The crusade against the Lord's Prayer was initiated by Henry Freitag in Penetanguishene, Ontario. Mr. Freitag argued that the prayer in council meetings was infringing on his rights to freedom of conscience and religion. In 1999, the Court agreed with him. A similar ruling was pronounced in Quebec, in the case of Payette vs. Laval, in 2006.

One could reasonably expect that these rulings would be enforced by the respective Ministers of Municipal Affairs and Housing. It did not happen and it became increasingly obvious that private citizens would have to come forward and fight for these rulings to be enforced. Bill and I,

being residents of Hastings County, would take it upon ourselves to challenge our administrative authorities.

Bill was a man of good will, always looking for conciliatory solutions. In 2007, when he addressed his Council in Belleville, he said: "Today I am asking you - very respectfully – as a friend, as a neighbour, as a citizen, and as a non-believer in everything supernatural – to please discontinue your practice of opening your meetings with a prayer. Not only the Lord's Prayer, but all prayers. Opening your meetings with prayer may be a tradition. But surely you can find or invent another tradition – one that doesn't pander to superstition or discriminate against non-believers." Bill left this meeting and lo and behold, the next council meeting was opened with the Lord's Prayer, and so would all the meetings that followed.

The following year, I opted for another approach: when I addressed my Council in Maynooth, I said that, as a freethinker, I felt totally excluded by the recitation of the Lord's Prayer. To be included as a participant in the Council meetings, I asked to be allowed to say an Atheist Invocation once or twice a year. The answer from the Council was a resounding NO.

When Secular Ontario offered to provide legal help, I decided to become a plaintiff and take my municipality to Court. But prior to that, I wanted to try, once more, to reach my Council through a dialogue of reasoning. I wrote an essay on secularism, had it distributed to the Councilors, and later, on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011, I addressed them. Quoting from my speech, I said: "As a secularist, and as a representative of Secular Ontario, I want to make it very clear, I am here to promote secularism. I am here to promote the separation of Church and State, I am NOT here to advocate the death of religion. I will explain why I formally request that you discontinue saying the Lord's Prayer... Today, in the name of Secular Ontario, which wrote to Ontario Municipalities about four years ago, advising them of the illegality of saying the Lord's Prayer before Council meeting, I ask you to abide by our Charter of Rights and Freedoms..."

What happened next came as a blow to me: a motion was put forward to continue with the prayer, and that motion was approved, with two abstentions.

But I would not give up, and there would be more presentations and more face to face meetings, and many more trips, not only to Maynooth and to my neighbouring municipality of Bancroft, but also to Belleville; indeed, when I learnt that my fellow Humanist, Bill, had to give up the fight due to his declining health, I decided to take over. Eric Thomas, who had taken over from Bill as President of the local Humanist association, would accompany me to the Council meetings, in Belleville. It was a precious moral support. In Bancroft, I got help from another Humanist, Bill Kilpatrick, who kindly took upon himself the task of answering the flurry of letters from disgruntled believers, who were hitting our local newspapers with their harsh comments.

Yet, in my own municipality, my mission of good will was getting nowhere and, in March, the Secular Ontario's lawyer stepped in, with a "cease and desist" letter, sent to the Hastings Highlands Council. The letter was ignored and, in late April, the lawyer was busy with starting court's proceedings. A tentative hearing was arranged for mid-June. However, the lawyers on both sides agreed that more time was needed to further preparation of relevant documents, and the case was put to rest during the summer months.

While the lawyers were enjoying the summer recess, the battle continued to rage in the pages of the local newspapers. One letter writer sent a reminder to his countrymen. "Let us remember," he wrote, "that our national anthem openly asks for God's help: 'God keep our land glorious and free. We stand on guard for thee.' If secularism or Secular Ontario has their way we will continue to lose more and more of this freedom." Another person wrote: "Anti-religion faction threatens legal action against municipal council..." Yet another person described the situation in the following words: "One person's small group should not have the power to hold a council hostage into bending to their will... In this case, Hastings Highlands council has decided to ask for guidance from a higher power in helping them make the correct decisions for the residents that they represent. That a few people are uncomfortable that a council of the people

have decided to ask for divine intervention, because they personally disagree with it doesn't matter."

To these types of writings, Bill Kilpatrick was firing back lengthy and well-reasoned exposés, allowing from time to time, for a pinch of humour: "It would seem that it is not Dagmar, but Jesus who would like to wipe out the public prayer all together. Perhaps Jesus is using a secular humanist to help the Christians become better, more humble, Christians."

From his deathbed in Belleville, Bill Broderick, dispatched another rebuttal, in my defense: "As Ms Gontard-Zelinkova tried to tell her council away back on January 26, secularism is inclusive. It doesn't divide people. It does not favour one set of beliefs over others. When it comes to politics and public council meetings, it just does the job that it came to do. Why is that so difficult to understand?"

As well as the battle raging in the pages of the newspapers, there was also some activity within all three councils – in Maynooth, in Bancroft and in Belleville. Yet none would venture into any decision-making. On August 19<sup>th</sup>, one newspaper reported about the municipality of Bancroft: "After much discussion about whether or not to continue the tradition of opening council meetings with the Lord's Prayer, council has decided to take the "wait and see" approach."

At the end of August, I was facing a dilemma: my municipality had switched from the Lord's Prayer to so-called generic prayer; challenging that one would be more difficult and costly. What should I do? Continue? Abandon and be satisfied with a partial victory? My dear friend, Bill Broderick, decided for me, and when I read his message on my screen, tears ran down my cheeks: there was money for me, in his will, and I could use it whenever needed. Nothing was now in my way. I was determined to continue the fight.

On September 29<sup>th</sup>, I was again in Belleville, where I made my presentation before the Hastings County. A few hours later, a QMI Agency came up with the title "Lord's Prayer of the agenda." Another article in Belleville's media, on October 7<sup>h</sup>, came with the title "Lord's prayer likely off local council's agenda." Then, on October 28<sup>th</sup>, Belleville's *Intelligencer* brought another title "Silence is golden at Hastings County Council meetings." The last paragraph of the article read: "... Mayor Bernice Jenkins of Bancroft challenged a proposed substitute prayer... Her bid for silence went down to defeat on a tie-vote, but won on a recorded second vote which requires a special "weighted" vote system based on number of electors." By the end of October, Belleville was prayer free...

On November the 8<sup>th</sup>, the Bancroft municipality held its council meeting and the local newspapers reported that, "Council's members finally resolved the issue of using the Lord's Prayer to open its meetings ...All members voted in favour of starting their meetings with a moment of silence." Bancroft municipality was now prayer free....

As for my municipality of Hastings Highlands, we will never know what the councilors had to say or how they voted; indeed, debates were kept away from the public, the issue had been discussed 'in Camera Sessions.' However, on November the 8<sup>th</sup>, the lawyer of the opposing party notified our lawyer that the municipality of Hastings Highlands was changing its by-law procedure, in order to have the prayer replaced by a moment of silence. The court case was scheduled for February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012. Our lawyer was left with the last task: to secure a court order to close out the court case.

The fight is over. There's that warm feeling of having been part of a team and having the job done. I know that, without the support of Secular Ontario and my fellow Humanists in Bancroft and Belleville, nothing would have been achieved. My special thought goes to Bill Broderick. During my life, I've been part of a number of teams and fought for various causes. Victory was not always at the end. Yet, whether we won or lost, we were together to celebrate or to support and encourage each other. In this recent fight, a comrade fell, so close to the finishing line. As I close the binder, I whisper: Rest in peace, dear friend. The torch is burning bright. When the time will come I will pass it on. ~ Dagmar ~ January 2012.