



The Enlightenment



**The Newsletter of the
Humanist Association of London and Area**
An Affiliate of the Humanist Association of Canada (HAC)

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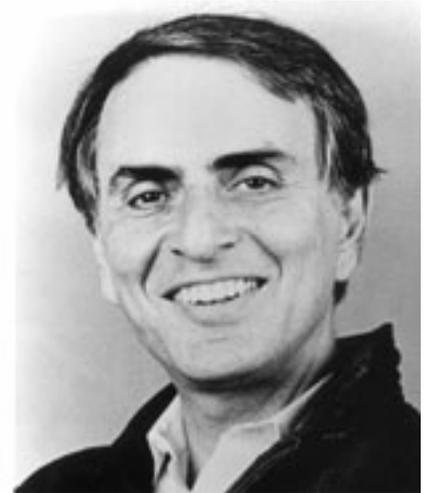
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Carl Sagan – Astronomer, Author and Humanist

Anyone who watched Carl Sagan's PBS TV series *Cosmos* in 1980 will remember the distinctive manner in which he continually enunciated the phrase "billions and billions" when describing various aspects of the universe. This series, seen by more than 600 million people in over 60 countries, was the most widely watched PBS program in history.

Carl was born of Jewish parents in Brooklyn N.Y. in 1934. He earned a Ph.D. in astronomy and astrophysics at the University of Chicago in 1960. He lectured at Harvard until 1968 when he went to Cornell University. From 1972 to 1981 he was Associate Director of the Center for Radio Physics and Space Research at Cornell. He worked closely with NASA in the field of planetary



research, helping to send probes to Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Like his colleague Isaac Asimov, he was very concerned with the growth of scientific illiteracy in the population at large.

Sagan wrote frequently about religion and about the relationship between science and religion, expressing his skepticism about many conventional conceptualizations of God. He once stated, "The idea that God is an oversized white male with a flowing beard, who sits in the sky and tallies the fall of every sparrow, is ludicrous. But if by 'God' one means the set of physical laws that govern the universe, then, clearly there is such a God. This God is emotionally unsatisfying... it does not make any sense to pray to the law of gravity."

In her book *The Road to Reason*, Pat Duffy Hutcheon describes Sagan as "one of the greatest humanists that ever lived, a man of our times whose life and work personifies the intellectual and ethical approach of modern humanism." The following excerpts from her book detail some of Sagan's thoughts on religion and his scientific agnosticism. He thought that religion could make a positive contribution to modern society only if it forsook myth and mysticism and concentrated on activities having to do with reverence for life, awe at the wonders of nature, ethics and morality, community, the *celebration* of life's passages and striving for social justice. For him, this was spirituality, of which he said, "Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality. The notion that science and spirituality are mutually exclusive does a profound disservice to both."

Carl Sagan died much too young from pneumonia at the age of 62 in 1996 after a long fight with myelodysplasia. In the end his final message was that it is only the candles lit by the scientific method that stand between us and the gathering darkness.

President's Remarks

A few years ago I was driving through Tennessee on a Sunday afternoon scanning stations on my car radio. Fully one half of the stations were broadcasting rants by fundamentalist Christian pastors. Out of curiosity I listened to a few of these orations that reminded me of H. L. Mencken's quip after covering the Scopes "monkey trial" in 1925 at Dayton Tennessee. He put it this way: "A smart dog is more intelligent than a Tennessee Holy Roller."

Upon arriving back in London I learned that a fundamentalist group was applying for a license to establish an evangelical Christian FM radio station. My Tennessee experience prompted me to write a letter to the editor stating that it was not a good idea to clutter up our airwaves with fundamentalist propaganda. A few days after the letter was published, I received an anonymous note in the mail stating, "You need to be saved." It was mailed from postal code N5Y which is in east London.

A short while ago I received a package in the mail containing a copy of Tom Harpur's book, *Would You Believe – A book for doubters skeptics and wistful unbelievers*, sent anonymously, also from postal code N5Y. Was this sent by the same person who sent me the earlier note? If so, why is he or she concerned about the state of my "soul"? I wish I knew. If this person reads these "President's Remarks," please identify yourself so we might discuss your concerns. (DAH)

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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 Thursday of the months September to July inclusive at 7:30 PM. Please use the rear door off the parking lot. The Enlightenment is published quarterly in January, April, July and October.

Visit our web site at www.humanists-london.org

New members are welcome. Contact Membership Chairperson Ed Ashman at (519) 457-9982 edward017@sympatico.ca . Membership fees are listed below.

	<u>HAC</u> <u>Basic</u>	<u>HAC Limited</u> <u>Resources</u>	<u>Humanist</u> <u>Perspectives</u>	<u>HALA</u> <u>Basic</u>	<u>HALA Limited</u> <u>Resources</u>
Single	\$30	\$15	\$22	\$20	\$10
Family	\$35	\$20	\$22	\$25	\$15
Life	\$500				

Accepting Darwin – Why is it Taking so Long?

The Royal Ontario Museum is currently staging a Charles Darwin exhibit in the new Michael Lee-Chin Crystal. This exhibit is a cooperative effort of the New York Museum of Natural History, the ROM, and science museums in Boston, Chicago and London England. It offers both showmanship (live tortoises, iguanas and frogs) and an engrossing intellectual biography. A copy of the first edition (1859) of *On the Origin of Species* is on display along with 260 artifacts, including some of Darwin's original specimens, his hammer, manuscripts and notes. The display also traces events in his life, including the voyage aboard HMS Beagle and his experiences and discoveries in the Galapagos. It will take a committed visitor a minimum of two hours to do justice to this exhibition that represents contemporary museum programming at its most convincing.



Darwin was fascinated by the similarities of embryos. Left to right, a horse, a mouse, a bat.

Surprisingly, when this exhibition opened in New York in 2005, there was not a peep of protest out of the creationists. Nevertheless, neither the ROM, nor any of the other venues, has been able to enlist a corporate sponsor brave enough to underwrite the show. Just why is it that corporations consider this exhibit “too hot to handle?” Perhaps examination of the results of a recent Pew Research Centre survey will shed some light on the matter. The poll showed that 42% of Americans reject evolution outright, saying they believe humans and other living things have existed in their present form since the creation. About 51% believe that evolution has occurred, but many think it was guided by a supreme being or a higher power, i.e., by intelligent design. Only 26% of this group believes in evolution by natural selection. These are of course American statistics; surely we Canadians are not so naïve. But don't feel too smug. An Angus Reid poll last year found that only 59% of Canadians believe in evolution and 22% believe that God created humans in their present form within the last 10,000 years. And 19% were not sure. With this revealed amount of ignorance and disbelief in what is now regarded as hard scientific fact, it is not so surprising that corporate sponsors for the Darwin exhibit are hard to come by. Even though modern DNA evidence substantiates Darwin's remarkable insight, corporate executives reason they just cannot risk alienating so many customers. What a pity that not even one corporation has the courage to help promote such a worthwhile educational cause.

But all is not lost. There is some very good news. The Humanist Association of Canada (HAC) has announced that it will donate \$50,000 to become a Supporting Sponsor of the ROM Darwin exhibit. Here are some of the benefits HAC will enjoy as a result of this sponsorship:

- Sponsorship credits on all marketing and promotional material.
- Recognition of HAC sponsorship in media releases.
- Recognition of HAC sponsorship on paid advertising, on-site signage, flyers and brochures.
- 100 general admission tickets to the ROM.
- HAC logo recognition and reciprocal hotlink on the ROM website with the HAC website.

This is a tremendous opportunity for HAC. The media spotlight HAC will enjoy will put the Association at the front of freethinking initiatives in Canada and make the HAC name known far and wide.

HAC is not the only supporter. Both the United Church Observer magazine and the Blyth Academy are listed as Exhibit Patrons. The Observer is independent of, but affiliated with, the United Church of Canada. David Wilson, the Observer editor, says: "Our support is modest, but symbolic. There is nothing in the exhibit that threatens or diminishes religion or people of faith in any way. If anything it shines a light on the inherent beauty and wonder that is constantly evolving." The Blyth Academy is a private high school that operates several schools in the greater Toronto area. It is encouraging to see that they support, and obviously teach, Darwinian evolution, unlike some of the private Christian schools that still teach creationism.

Now back to Darwin and natural selection. Why has there been so much misunderstanding and skepticism about evolution among a significant segment of the population? Two things immediately come to mind. First, our schools (particularly American schools) have failed to generate sufficient interest in science, and second, the evangelical/fundamentalist churches have been remarkably successful at convincing their followers that "only God can make a tree," (or a human). It is going to take at least another generation for these beliefs to wane. The process will be slow because even though the mainline denominations are losing members, the non-denominations (the fundamentalists) are growing. Nevertheless, surely in the long run, reason and common sense should prevail. (Much of the information for this article and the picture was gleaned from the Saturday March 8th edition of The Globe and Mail.)

Some Statistics for Humanists

The surveys mentioned in the above article reveal statistical information that could be of interest to humanists. In the United States 16% of respondents reported they are not affiliated with any religion. (In Canada the figure is about 20%). Now here is the interesting revelation. Only 1.6% admit that they are atheists and only 2.4% claim to be agnostics. This leaves 12% in the U.S. that say they are "nothing in particular," which indicates they have no interest in belonging to any sort of religious group. They just don't care to be "anything," and probably very few of these people are likely to have any interest in humanism. It is the 4% of combined atheists and agnostics that are potential humanists. In the United States this amounts to 14 million people and in Canada the number is 1.3 million. If you add to these figures, the unknown number of seriously doubting liberal Christians, there is an amazing potential for humanism to grow and be a potent publicly recognized force for helping to make a better world. Humanists have a challenging future ahead.

Book Review

How Jesus Became Christian - by Barrie Wilson

Readers of The Enlightenment may well ask: What is a review of a book dealing with Christianity doing in a humanist newsletter? The answer: This book is a seminal work exposing the “cover-up” started by Paul and perpetuated by Luke, the supposed author of the Acts, and then later fostered by the early church fathers. The cover-up concerns the converting of a human Jesus into a supernatural being whose death and resurrection supposedly enabled the atonement of believers. Wilson claims that the Christian religion is a result of historical **fiction**, and is based on a **crime** committed two thousand years ago. Strong words indeed that spark interest and demand consideration. Assuming Wilson’s thesis exposes the reality of the situation that existed two thousand years ago, it provides interested humanists with information that will aid in tactfully pointing out some of the shortcomings of the Christian religion.

In order to appreciate how the cover-up occurred, it is necessary to have an understanding of the conditions existing at the beginning of the Common Era. For many centuries BCE, Judaism centered on the Torah, containing the laws of Moses, and also on the Temple(s) in Jerusalem. At the time of the birth of Jesus, Herod’s magnificent Temple (the third one) was under the control of the Sadducees, one of the four Jewish sects existing in those years in the Kingdom of Judah, which was under Roman rule. The other three sects were the Pharisees, the Essenes (the Dead Sea Scroll people) and the Zealots.

The Sadducees were the wealthy people in Jewish society, firmly in control of commerce and the Temple. The Pharisees were the educators. The Essenes were a monastic group awaiting a Messiah, residing in the isolated community of Qumran near the Dead Sea. The Zealots were a group resisting and fighting the Roman occupiers. The Sadducees and the Essenes ceased to exist as a sect after the Romans put down the Jewish revolt and destroyed the Temple in 70 CE. The Zealots retreated to the fortress of Masada and most reportedly committed suicide four years later rather than be captured by the Romans. Only the Pharisees survived as a group, and they went on to form Rabbinic Judaism that has existed for two millennia throughout the world, and since 1948 in Israel. The Rabbinic Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah who was supposed to form and rule a Davidic-like Jewish kingdom in Israel at some time in the future.

Now along comes a new group. After the death of Jesus, his brother James, a few of the disciples and others, formed a movement to continue the teachings of Jesus in the hope that this would lead to a righteous Jewish Kingdom of God here on earth, not in some future heaven. They considered Jesus as fully human. Their claim was that salvation is achieved through good works, compassion and righteous living, not by belief or faith. There was no attempt to convert Gentiles to this new Jewish (not Christian) religion. Their mission was to attract fellow Jews, but they had only limited success. James was murdered in 62 CE, but the group carried on and became known as the Ebionites. They died out after a few hundred years.

This should have been the end of Jesus. His followers and promoters were not successful in the long run, so he should have gone down in history simply as another Jewish Rabbi/prophet, not the founder of a Gentile religion. So what happened? The apostle Paul came on the scene, that is what happened, and this eventually changed the course of western history in the years that followed.

The beginning of the book of Acts describes the founding of the Christian church on the day of Pentecost and goes on to describe the "Acts of the Apostles," Peter, James and John and others preaching the gospel of Jesus, urging Jews to "repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven." (New Revised Standard Version). Then in Chapter 9, Paul, who was a Pharisee and a Jew (then called Saul) is described as "breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord." One day, while traveling on the road to Damascus, he claims he had a revelation from Jesus who eventually told him to bring His name and teachings before the Gentiles. For a time Paul associated with the disciples, but later struck off with Silas to convert the Gentiles throughout the eastern Mediterranean, proclaiming it was no longer necessary to observe all the laws of the Torah, including the rite of circumcision. Instead, his converts would receive salvation through the grace of Jesus (whatever that is) simply by having the faith to believe He was the Messiah raised from the dead. By no longer requiring the observance of the Jewish laws and the painful process of circumcision, it was much easier for Paul to gain converts than it was for James and his crew. Paul's Epistles document how he separated himself from Judaism and how he achieved such a large following, although it was at the expense of considerable suffering on his part.

Wilson claims that the events described in the Book of Acts is not how things actually transpired. According to the Epistle of James, the Jesus Movement maintained that salvation was achieved in the eyes of God through good works. "What good is it if you have faith, but do not have works? Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." Wilson maintains the author of Acts (who was also the author of Luke) fuses the Jesus movement led by James, with the activities of Paul in order to provide some Jewish roots to Paul's Christian churches. Without this link, it would have been more difficult for Christianity to develop into the religion it became. It is this fusion that Wilson calls the cover-up. The Gospels and Acts were written some forty to sixty years after the Epistles, and by this time it must have been evident that Gentile Christians outnumbered the Jewish converts to the Jesus movement by a wide margin. Therefore, since Jesus was a Jew, fusing the Pauline Christians to Jewish roots provided credibility, according to Wilson. Thus the founding of the Christian Church described at the beginning of Acts, written at least fifty years after Paul established the first churches, robs Paul of his rightful place as the true founder of Christianity. Instead, the disciples of the Jesus Movement erroneously get the credit. This is another aspect of the cover-up.

This connection of Christianity to Judaism was strengthened several hundred years later through the order of the books in the New Testament. By ignoring the real chronology of their writing dates and placing the book of Matthew, which contains the Jewish genealogy of Jesus, as the first book, the connection is firmed up. This is further strengthened by placing all the gospels and Acts ahead of the Epistles. Finally, when the early church fathers decided to add the Old Testament to the canon, the marriage was complete. Thus by the time Constantine decided to adopt Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, and the questionable Trinity and the enigmatic creeds had been created at Nicea in 325 CE, the forerunner of what became the Roman Catholic Church, organized along monarchical lines, had been formed, and the rest as they say, is history.

Looking back, it can be claimed that the successful establishment of the exclusive Christian church can be regarded as one of the greatest marketing coups in history. All other brands of Christianity, including the Ebionites, Arians, Marcionites, Gnostics and others, some of which considered Jesus as human and not the divine Son of God, faded away. One exception is the Egyptian Coptics, who are still around today. Paul's Christianity, based on faith and belief, won out over those that promoted a salvation based on good works and righteous living. Hence very

few people today know and recognize the earliest form of Christianity led by Jesus' brother James.

Wilson devotes one chapter in his book to the important subject of anti-Semitism. As is well known, there have been many instances of Jewish persecution by Christians throughout history, culminating in the Holocaust. This persecution and hatred resulted, at least partly, because of various wordings in the New Testament intimating that the Jews were responsible for killing Jesus. This accusation is not entirely true. It was mainly the Sadducees who wanted him out of the way because he was highly critical of their activities in the Temple. The Romans were equally guilty because they did not want Him disturbing the Pax Romana. Labeling the Rabbinic Jews as "Christ killers" for centuries, has been a gross injustice.

It is an established fact that, during relatively recent times, numerous Jewish individuals have made inordinate contributions in the fields of science, medicine, finance and others, for the betterment of all humanity. Two that immediately come to mind are Albert Einstein and humanist Jonas Salk, and there are many others. Who knows how many potentially great Jewish minds were silenced through persecutions. Anti-Semitism is a shameful black mark on the history of Christianity.

Hopefully the above summary captures the essence of *How Jesus Became Christian*. The Book must of course be read in its entirety in order to grasp the full explanation of Wilson's cover-up thesis. It is not a long book (265 pages) and it is clearly written in layman's language. It is a book that all liberal Christians should read. It is also recommended for those humanists who feel they need to have an understanding of the actual hard facts of the early history of the Christian religion in order to promote humanism as a more credible and more preferable life stance than Christianity. (DAH)

Future Meetings of the Humanist Association of London and Area

All meetings are held at the Cross Cultural Learner Centre 505 Dundas Street in London. Enter from the parking lot at the rear.

June 12th The speaker will be Dr. Donglin Bai. The topic will be: Gap Junction and Cardiac Arrhythmias.

Dr. Bai is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Physiology and Pharmacology at The University of Western Ontario. He is a Tier II Canada Research Chair and works on the physiology of cell-to-cell communication in the brain and the heart, including gap junctional intercellular communication

July 10th The Speaker will be Melina Naric, who works at the Host Program of the Cross Cultural Learner Centre. The Host Program is a community integration program offered to newcomers to Canada. Melina will present a review of where immigrants and refugees are coming from, their experiences prior to arrival, the services offered to them once they arrive, obstacles and hurdles they stumble upon after arrival, and so on.

The Humanist Association of London and Area has been meeting at the Cross Cultural Learner Centre for over two years. We feel we are fortunate to have the use of this facility.

Humanist Association of London and Area Library

We now have the following books related to humanism in the HALA library under the custodianship of Derek Kaill. Any of these books may be borrowed for a reasonable time by members of HAC and or HALA by contacting Derek at 519-432-6122 or derek_kaill@yahoo.com

“Fire & Ice: The US, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values” - by Michael Adams.

“Infidel” – by Ayaan Hirsi Ali. An Autobiography of a Female Champion of Free Speech.

“The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease. Past and Present” – by Peter Lewis Allen.

“The Canon: A Whirligig Tour of the Beautiful Basics of Science” – by Natalie Angier.

“Beliefs that Changed the World” – by John Bowker.

“Plan B 2.0: Rescuing a Planet Under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble” - by Lester R. Brown.

“Can We Be Good Without God” – By Robert Buckman.

“Extraordinary Evil: A Brief History of Genocide and Why it Matters” – Barbara Coloroso.

“The Analects” – by Confucius. Introduced and translated by D. Lau.

“The God Delusion” – by Richard Dawkins. (2)

“Breaking The Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon” – by Daniel Dennett. (2)

“Morgentaler: A Difficult Hero” - by Catherine Dunphy.

“Introducing Ethics” - by Chris Garratt & Dave Robinson.

“Richard Dawkins: How a Scientist Changed the Way We Think” – by Alan Grafen & Mark Ridley

“The Race Myth” – by Joseph L. Graves.

“The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason – by Sam Harris. (2)

“God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything” – by Christopher Hitchens. (2)

“(The Illustrated) A Brief History of Time/The Universe in a Nutshell – by Stephen Hawking.

“The Counter-Creationism” – by Mark Isaak.

“Mining the Sky” – by John S. Lewis.

“In Defense of Atheism” – by Michael Onfrey.

“God: the Failed Hypothesis” – by Victor Stenger.

“The Age of Unreason” – by Susan Jacoby.

“Stories of Secular Humanism” – by a group of Victoria humanists.