

FACT
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A Matter of FACT

April 2007

FACT

is an association of atheists, freethinkers, agnostics, secular humanists, rationalists, skeptics, and other non-theists serving the purpose of preserving the separation of church and state and promoting Freethought through education.

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April General Meeting

The speaker for the April General Meeting is Joellen DeBerg. A long-time member of FACT, Joellen will discuss her recent research into the development of Presidential war-time powers throughout American history.

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The after-the-break speaker will be FACT member Marc Janssens. The topic of his talk is "Dealing with Cancer in a Religious Environment."

General Meeting, Saturday, March 17th @ 1pm
Community Unitarian Universalist Church

IS THIS YOUR LAST ISSUE OF "A MATTER OF FACT"?

One of the benefits of membership is receiving a copy of the current issue of this Newsletter. In addition to organization news and announcements of coming events, we try to fill it with timely articles of interest to the Freethinker community. This Newsletter is funded in part by your dues.

In addition, your dues go toward the rental of space at the Community Unitarian Universalist Church, and we have just been informed of a major increase in that rent.

Although the dues are due in January of each year, many of you have not sent in your renewal. In spite of that, we have continued to send your copy of the Newsletter, allowing a grace period for the first few months of the year. But we can't continue to do that.

So, if you have not done so already please, go to your checkbook during this pledge break, and send your dues to:

FACT
P.O. Box 160881
San Antonio, TX 78280

Or, better yet, come to the General Meeting on April 21st, and deliver your dues to the Treasurer, in person!

Do your part to ensure the continued operation of FACT and continue to receive this Newsletter.

Thank you. Now, back to our program.

March Meeting Review

Elected Positions:

President, OPEN
 Vice President, OPEN
 Second Vice President, Nick Lee
 Secretary, Jean Clelland-Morin
 Treasurer, Cathy Howard
 Publicity, OPEN

Appointed Positions:

Newsletter

Publisher/Editor, Marc Janssens
 Webmaster, Jim Evans
 Discussion Group Host, OPEN
 Librarian, Jimmie Barnes

Texas Hill Country

Freethinkers

(No Officers)
 For Information contact
 Julie Fisher:
 zoezappa@hughes.net

FACT MEMBERS:

FACT wants your participation in communicating through our newsletter. Please contribute letters, articles, book reviews, highlights and comments on church/state separation, quotes, drawings, cartoons, etc. Please send contributions to janssensml@aol.com.

All submissions are subject to editorial revisions at the discretion of the publisher.

Vice President Nick Lee opened the meeting at 1:12 PM. He donated his copy of "Atheist Manifesto" to the FACT library. Nick's review of the book was published in the March newsletter. Nick reported that Utah uses the most anti-depressants and that Congressman Pete Stark has recently come out of the closet as a non-theist. Nick concluded his introductory remarks with the announcement of a meeting to create a local chapter of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. The meeting will be on the same day as our April General Meeting.

Nick introduced our speaker, Dr. Will Tuttle. Will has a master's degree in humanities from San Francisco State University and a PhD in the Philosophy of Education from the University of California at Berkeley. A professional pianist, composer and teacher, he has for the last 15 years presented at progressive churches, conferences and international communities throughout the country. He trained in Korea as a Zen Buddhist monk and worked extensively in Tai Chi, yoga, meditation, intuition development and spiritual healing. He lives in Healdsburg, CA.

Dr. Tuttle said he got tired of waiting for a holistic book on vegetarianism and so he decided to write the book himself, which he titled: The World Peace Diet. He gave us his ideas about our treatment of animals, especially for food, and the invisible, powerful driving core of our society that disconnects us from what is on our plates.

He referred to Donald Watson, who gave us the word, Vegan. Vegans seek to exclude all forms of unnecessary cruelty to other living beings. Will told personal, moving experiences during his teenage years in Maine that helped him arrive at becoming Vegan.

Will recounted his travels on foot with his brother. After investigating Zen at the end of college, he decided to go to California to find a spiritual teacher. Will and his brother walked to West Virginia where they visited a Vegan farm community of 800 (now 1200) residents and were impressed. Then they walked to a Zen center in Alabama. They often interacted with Unitarian churches.

Will then moved to South Korea and engaged in meditation in a temple that had been Vegan for 1000 years. He came back to the US to earn his degree at UC Berkeley and teach philosophy.

In his view, mankind became violent and dominant to obtain wealth, which was measured in animal domination. "Capital" comes from the Greek word Capita, meaning head. The number of animal heads measured wealth. Slavery and submissioin of women also became considered as a source of wealth. Will noted that slavery is now exploding in the world.

In our eating rituals, we block the ability to connect with our domination, exploitation and slavery which leads to our violent mentality. We waste enormous energy in herding and transporting animals. We waste enormous amounts of edible grain and plants to produce a minimal amount of flesh to eat. The methods of producing meat for human consumption translate into obesity, cancer and other diseases. We need to change our relationships with each other by changing our behavior.

After the break, we had a drawing of two door prizes: a CD donated by Dr. Tuttle and an emergency light kit donated by Hugh Henry. Nick then introduced Murphy Woodson who is "point man" for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). Murphy handed out fliers with information and a registration form for joining a walk that begins in Brackenridge Park on April 14th.

Contributed by Jean Clelland-Morin

Mohler's Theological Dilemma

Rev. R. Albert Mohler Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY recently admitted in his blog that research points to the possibility of a biological basis for sexual orientation. Mohler concluded his blog by encouraging Christians to think about the following points.

1. There is, as of now, no incontrovertible or widely accepted proof that any biological basis for sexual orientation exists.
2. Nevertheless, the research points in this direction. Research into the sexual orientation of sheep and other animals, as well as human studies, points to some level of biological causation for sexual orientation in at least some individuals.
3. Given the consequences of the Fall and the effects of human sin, we should not be surprised that such a causation or link is found. After all, the human genetic structure, along with every other aspect of creation, shows the pernicious effects of the Fall and of God's judgment.
4. The biblical condemnation of all homosexual behaviors would not be compromised or mitigated in the least by such a discovery. The discovery of a biological factor would not change the Bible's moral verdict on homosexual behavior.
5. The discovery of a biological basis for homosexuality would be of great pastoral significance, allowing for a greater understanding of why certain persons struggle with these particular sexual temptations.
6. The biblical basis for establishing the dignity of all persons -- the fact that all humans are made in God's image -- reminds us that this means all persons, including those who may be marked by a predisposition toward homosexuality. For the sake of clarity, we must insist at all times that all persons -- whether identified as heterosexual, homosexual, lesbian, transsexual, transgendered, bisexual, or whatever -- are equally made in the image of God.
7. Thus, we will gladly contend for the right to life of all persons, born and unborn, whatever their sexual orientation. We must fight against the idea of aborting fetuses or human embryos identified as homosexual in orientation.
8. If a biological basis is found, and if a prenatal test is then developed, and if a successful treatment to reverse the sexual orientation to heterosexual is ever developed, we would support its use as we should unapologetically support the use of any appropriate means to avoid sexual temptation and the inevitable effects of sin.
9. We must stop confusing the issues of moral responsibility and moral choice. We are all responsible for our sexual orientation, but that does not mean that we freely and consciously choose that orientation. We sin against homosexuals by insisting that sexual temptation and attraction are predominately chosen. We do not always (or even generally) choose our temptations. Nevertheless, we are absolutely responsible for what we do with sinful temptations, whatever our so-called sexual orientation.
10. Christians must be very careful not to claim that science can never prove a biological basis for sexual orientation. We can and must insist that no scientific finding can change the basic sinfulness of all homosexual behavior. The general trend of the research points to at least some biological factors behind sexual attraction, gender identity, and sexual orientation. This does not alter God's moral verdict on homosexual sin (or heterosexual sin, for that matter), but it does hold some promise that a deeper knowledge of homosexuality and its cause will allow for more effective ministries to those who struggle with this particular pattern of temptation. If such knowledge should ever be discovered, we should embrace it and use it for the greater good of humanity and for the greater glory of God.

Source: <http://www.AlbertMohler.com>

NOTE: If there is indeed a biological basis for a person's sexual orientation, homosexuality is not something that can be "cured." Should Christians therefore not question the morality of a god who condemns homosexual behavior as sinful while allowing the creation of humans (in his own image!) with a predisposition toward homosexuality? There is no easy way out of this theological dilemma.

FACT Walks for NAMI

By Murphy Woodson

I want to thank the members of FACT who have agreed to support the National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) in their Walk on Saturday, April 14. NAMI is a non-profit grassroots organization to fight the stigma of mental illness and to support individuals living with mental illness. The US Surgeon General has estimated that more than 20% of adult Americans suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder! All proceeds from the NAMI Walks will go to fund support, education, and advocacy programs for these individuals.

The NAMI Walk in San Antonio will be at Brackenridge Park. You can check in as early as 7:00 and the Walk starts at 8:00. The Walk is only 3 kilometers long (about two miles), so anyone can make it.

I will serve as the Captain of the Freethinkers Team, and Nick has promised to bring the banner. The new FACT T-shirts may also be ready for sale by then. We will meet at the Cypress Pavilion, near the Zoo entrance. Take 281 to Mulberry exit and turn left to St Mary's, then left to the Zoo parking lot. This is a rain or shine event, by the way, so bring an umbrella. Also, leashed pets are allowed and I will be bringing my dog if it's not raining.

There is no registration fee for the Walk. If you would like to make a donation to NAMI, you can do it online at www.nami.org/namiwalks/tx/sanantonio or by check. When payment is made online, select the team, "Freethinkers Assn of Central Texas". Checks may be made payable to "NAMI San Antonio". Either give the checks to me on Walk Day, or mail them to me at: Murphy Woodson, 5450 Rowley #616, San Antonio, TX 78240. All walkers donating at least \$100.00 will be given a "NAMI Walks" t-shirt.

Newsweek Religion Quiz

So you think you're so smart about world religions? Challenge yourself with this test!

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17407363/site/newsweek/?pg=2#anc_nwk_070301_ReligionQuiz

"I cannot imagine a God who rewards and punishes the objects of his creation, whose purposes are modeled after our own -- a God, in short, who is but a reflection of human frailty. Neither can I believe that the individual survives the death of his body, although feeble souls harbor such thoughts through fear or ridiculous egotism."

Albert Einstein

Every Monday at 12:30 and 8:30 PM

Time Warner Digital Cable Channel 20

FREETHOUGHT FORUM

Hosted by Hugh Henry

The Jesus Project

by Tom Flynn

This article is adapted from Tom Flynn's op-ed in the April/May issue of *Free Inquiry*.

From January 25 through January 28, 2007 the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion (CSER) convened a conference on "Scripture and Skepticism" at the University of California, Davis. The roster of speakers featured many of the most distinguished names in the field. During the conference a new initiative called The Jesus Project was unveiled.

The Jesus Project will empanel fifty carefully chosen academics from a wide range of disciplines: some theologians, to be sure, but also archeologists, social historians, classicists, experts in historical linguistics, and others. Their mission will be to apply the most current scholarship and methodologies to the questions that the Jesus Seminar never confronted: Did the historical Jesus even exist? If so, what can we know of him? Armed with contemporary tools and another century of archeological discoveries, can today's best objective scholarship push past the point where Albert Schweitzer and his contemporaries judged these questions insoluble?

The Jesus Project will meet twice a year and publish its findings annually (though it will not conduct secret ballots using red and white marbles, as the Jesus Seminar did). At the end of five years, the Project intends to issue a final report. As one hallmark of the objectivity of its mission, that final report may—or may not—put the vexing questions of Jesus' historicity to rest. The possibility remains that today's scholars may find, like Schweitzer, that the truth about the historical Jesus still remains out of reach.

I've been convinced that this approach to the "Jesus question" constitutes exactly the sort of inquiry that FREE INQUIRY, the Council, and the Center for Inquiry exist to grapple with. I couldn't be more excited to see that today CSER is preparing to conduct the Jesus Project as an objective inquiry (not an exercise in a priori scoffing), focusing some of the world's foremost scholars from a broad spectrum of disciplines.

What might result from this initiative? If cutting-edge research should yield incontrovertible proof that the founder of Christianity is a mythic construct, don't expect the world to change overnight. For one thing, millions of Christians will simply reject its findings. Additionally, among those who study religion objectively, it is already well known that new faiths can elicit immense personal sacrifices from first-generation converts—despite their first-hand knowledge that the new faith's teachings don't quite align with ground truth. Consider the Mormon pioneers who knew Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, or both—warts and all—yet willingly laid down their lives for the church many of them had seen one or both of those men concoct from whole cloth. Nothing about the earliest Christians—not even the eagerness with which some of them embraced martyrdom—should be surprising to serious historians, if, as some scholars think, Christianity never had an actual Jesus but rather a gradually accreting "just-so" story about a figure by that name.

For the same reasons, we should not expect the Jesus Project's conclusions to sound the death knell for Christianity. Through most of the twentieth century, historically sophisticated Christian clergy and theologians made the choice to maintain their faith commitments despite their new understandings that, by and large, their religion's self-proclaimed founding events never actually occurred. That's not my idea of rationality, but it's the option many sophisticated liberals exercise. On the long view, it will be more than enough if the Jesus Project can help to create a climate that encourages more rank-and-file Christians to form similarly nuanced understandings of their faith. (If some of them take the next two or three steps further, abandon supernaturalism, and embrace secular humanism, so much the better—but that cannot be our goal.) One might even hope that this process might provide an example in light of which more Muslims in the West can come to understand their faith, too, as a historical artifact. Want to talk about prospective impact? That's impact enough for a dozen projects.

The Jesus Project may be the single most important commitment that the Center for Inquiry and its affiliated organizations—among them the Council for Secular Humanism, publisher of FREE INQUIRY—will ever make. I hope you will join me in giving it wholehearted support.

Source: http://www.secularhumanism.org/index.php?section=library&page=flynn_27_3

READ A GOOD BOOK LATELY? TELL US ABOUT IT.

Send your book reviews, recommendations, critiques, or top 10 list to:

janssensml@aol.com

Or P.O. Box 160881, San Antonio, TX 78280

Counter Apologetics

by Martin Wagner

Here are a few guidelines for Christians to consider before posting messages on atheist sites. These guidelines were posted on <http://atheistexperience.blogspot.com/> (a blog of the *The Atheist Experience*, a weekly television show in Austin) in response to a Christian visitor named Dan.

- **Be aware that most atheists have come from religious upbringings.** This means that your arguments and appeals have most likely been heard by us before.
- **Be aware of logical fallacies so that you do not make them.** Atheist bloggers tend to be reasonably well educated folks, with backgrounds — either professionally, academically, or as involved laypeople — in religion, science, philosophy, and forensic debate. Nothing marks a person as a bad arguer quite like the clueless delivery of logical fallacies. From Dan we've already had appeals to belief and popularity (millions of people believe Christianity so it must be true), and these amateurish debating mistakes can be easily corrected simply by studying what they are. Just Google "logical fallacies" and you'll be okay.
- **Don't mock guys like Charles Darwin or Richard Dawkins if you've never read a word they've written.** Ignorance alone is annoying; ignorance coupled with undeserved cockiness is just offensive and arrogant. And before you remind me that this kind of thing swings both ways, be aware that most of us here have, in fact, read the Bible.
- **Don't make foolish assertions that your religious belief is on the same footing as science.** We've already had this silliness from Dan, and nothing catches a believer with his rhetorical pants down more embarrassingly. Faith-based belief in an ancient holy book full of angels, devils, and talking donkeys is not even close to being in the same intellectual ballpark as the scientific method, which entails drawing conclusions about the natural world through experimentation and observation. Science is a rigorous exercise, ruthlessly vetted through a process of peer review to weed out and correct mistakes. There is no analogue in religious practice. To say, as Dan did, that to disbelieve the Bible one must also disbelieve every work of science ever written, well, that's the kind of thing that'll get you sent to the corner with a dunce cap on your head.
- **We are aware that to Christians, atheists can often sound brusque, condescending, and downright pissy.** Chalk this up to frustration. Our position, by and large, is this. We're just normal folks, trying to live our lives and get by as peaceably and decently as we can. And because we don't share the belief in sky gods held by others, we are condemned as the worst kinds of people in society. We are told we are deserving of eternal torture for not sharing your beliefs, and we are fed the same bogus arguments — most of which are emotional appeals and exercises in loopy illogic — in your attempts to make us see the error of our ways. Mainly, we just want to be left alone. But in a religion-addicted world, this is impossible. So the next time you wonder, "Why are atheists so angry?" think about how religionists routinely behave towards us. I certainly will do my best to be polite and cordial to guys like Dan as long as they are polite and cordial and not trolling.
- **Be aware that the minute you fall back on "You just have to have faith," you've lost.** If atheists differ from believers in one area more than any other, it's that believers think that "faith" — belief in the supernatural claims of the Bible without evidence — is an acceptable means of cognition. We know it isn't. There is no religious belief — not yours, not anybody's — so innately special that it gets to bypass the same criteria that human beings use for any other decision-making they do in life. If I wouldn't do faith-based used-car shopping, or allow someone to perform faith-based surgery upon me, I see no reason to accept a faith-based belief about questions regarding the nature of the universe and my own fate. If you're going to tell me flat out that I'm eternally doomed for not believing as you believe, then you'd better make with the most incontrovertible evidence anyone has ever produced for anything. Otherwise, you're just insulting and threatening me, and that not only reflects poorly upon your arguing skills but upon your personal morality.

There. That should help our evangelical visitors understand the boxing ring they have chosen to step into. We're all for being nice folks and carrying the torch of positive atheism. But if you make bad or hackneyed arguments that we've heard before, we'll call you on them. Atheists, contrary to preconceptions, can usually be counted on for honesty.

Pope Warned of Green Antichrist

By Richard Owen

An arch-conservative cardinal chosen by the Pope to deliver this year's Lenten meditations to the Vatican hierarchy has caused consternation by giving warning of an Antichrist who is "a pacifist, ecologist and ecumenist". Cardinal Giacomo Biffi, 78, who retired as Archbishop of Bologna three years ago, quoted Vladimir Solovyov (1853-1900), the Russian philosopher and mystic, as predicting that the Antichrist "will convoke an ecumenical council and seek the consensus of all the Christian confessions". The "masses" would follow the Antichrist, "with the exception of small groups of Catholics, Orthodox and Protestants" who would fight to prevent the watering down and ultimate destruction of the faith, he said.

The Pope traditionally withdraws from public view during the first week of Lent, conducting "spiritual exercises" in retreat with close advisers. The choice of Cardinal Biffi raised eyebrows in the Vatican, given his sometimes eccentric views. The cardinal gave a warning of the coming of the Antichrist during his two decades as the Archbishop of Bologna, and said that an "invasion" of Muslim immigrants was undermining Europe's Christian values.

Cardinal Biffi said that the Antichrist was not necessarily a person but "the reduction of Christianity to an ideology ... The teaching that the great Russian philosopher left us is that Christianity cannot be reduced to a set of values. At the heart of being a Christian is the personal encounter with Jesus Christ." But he quoted with approval from Solovyov's Three Dialogues on War, Progress and the End of History, which suggests that the Antichrist is a real figure.

Cardinal Biffi said that Christianity stood for "absolute values, such as goodness, truth, beauty". If "relative values" such as "solidarity, love of peace and respect for nature" became absolute, they would encourage "idolatry" and "put obstacles in the way of salvation".

When he was still Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Pope Benedict sternly defended core Roman Catholic doctrines and opposed calls for an ecumenical Third Vatican Council advanced by Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, the liberal former Archbishop of Milan. The choice of Lenten speaker has in the past given a clue to Vatican policy, although one source said that Cardinal Biffi had perhaps been chosen because his "verbal fireworks" would keep listeners awake.

Source: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article1459003.ece>

Letter sent to the San Antonio Express-News. Not Published.

Re. Ink for the Soul

It never ceases to amaze me how ignorant Christians are about the Book they profess to be the "inerrant word of God". Can it be that this best-seller of all time is sold and bought, but not read?

I was once again fascinated by these "practicing" (will they ever get it right?) Christians when the Sunday Metro section featured an article called, Ink for the Soul. George Perez, 20, is featured in a color photograph displaying his love of Jesus with a large tattoo of his hero and the words, "Only God Can Judge Me."

Well, I hate to break this to you, George, but God has already judged you in Leviticus 19:26-29. God speaking: "you shall not eat meat with the blood in it. You shall not practice divination or soothsaying. You shall not round off your hair from side to side, and you shall not shave the edge of your beards. You shall not gash yourselves in mourning for the dead; You shall not TATTOO (emphasis mine) yourselves. I am the Lord." You can check this out in The New English Bible or similar bibles such as Revised Standard Version, or the old favorite, The King James. The wording will differ slightly because human beings keep playing around with God's inerrant words to make them clearer for those who don't read the book anyway.

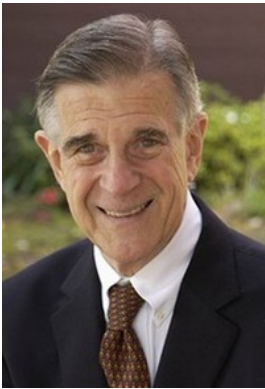
Catherine Fahringer, an atheist who reads bibles.

HEY, LETTER WRITERS!

We're looking for well-crafted letters having to do with the separation of church and state, atheism, or any other relevant topic. Members are encouraged to forward published letters, or ones which were rejected by the mainstream media, for publication. Send them either to: janssensml@aol.com or P.O. Box 160881 San Antonio, TX 78280

US Congressman Holds No God-Belief

by Secular Coalition for America



There is only one member of Congress who is on record as not holding a god-belief.

Rep. Pete Stark (D-Calif.), a member of Congress since 1973, acknowledged his non-theism in response to an inquiry by the Secular Coalition for America. Rep. Stark is a senior member of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee and is Chair of the Health Subcommittee.

Although the Constitution prohibits religious tests for public office, the Coalition's research reveals that Rep. Stark is the first open non-theist in the history of the Congress. Recent polls show that Americans without a god-belief are, as a group, more distrusted than any other minority in America. Surveys show that the majority of Americans would not vote for an atheist for president even if he or she were the most qualified for the office.

Herb Silverman, president of the Secular Coalition for America, attributes these attitudes to the demonization of people who don't believe in God. "The truth is," says Silverman, "the vast majority of us follow the Golden Rule and are as likely to be good citizens, just like Rep. Stark with over 30 years of exemplary public service. The only way to counter the prejudice against non-theists is for more people to publicly identify as non-theists. Rep. Stark shows remarkable courage in being the first member of Congress to do so."

In October, 2006 the Secular Coalition for America, a national lobby representing the interests of atheists, humanists, freethinkers, and other non-theists, announced a contest. At the time, few if any elected officials, even at the lowest level, would self-identify as a non-theist. So the Coalition offered \$1,000 to the person who could identify the highest level atheist, agnostic, humanist or any other kind of non-theist currently holding elected public office in the United States.

In addition to Rep. Stark only three other elected officials agreed to do so: Terry S. Doran, president of the School Board in Berkeley, CA.; Nancy Glista on the School Committee in Franklin, ME; and Michael Cerone, a Town Meeting Member from Arlington, MA.

Surveys vary in the percentage of atheists, humanists, freethinkers and other non-theists in the U.S, with about 10% (30 million people) a fair middle point. "If the number of non-theists in Congress reflected the percentage of non-theists in the population," Lori Lipman Brown, director of the Secular Coalition, observes, "there would be 53-54 non-theistic Congress members instead of one."

If you would like to send a message to Congressman Stark, go to:

http://www.secular.org/activism/thank_stark_070312.html.

Source: http://www.secular.org/news/pete_stark_070312.html

Photograph: <http://www.richarddawkins.net/home>

For more information on the Secular Coalition for America and this story go to <http://www.secular.org> or contact Lori Lipman Brown at (202) 299-1091.

The spectacle of what is called religion, or at any rate organized religion, in India and elsewhere, has filled us with horror, and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it.

Jawaharlal Nehru, first Prime Minister of independent India

A 'Sad First' in the History of the Congress

It did not take long until Christians responded to the announcement by the Secular Coalition of America of Rep. Stark's lack of belief in a supernatural being (see page 8 in this Newsletter.) On March 15, three days after the announcement, the Christian Seniors Association (CSA) published the following press release.

CSA ASKS MEMBERS OF CONGRESS TO SPEAK UP AS CALIFORNIA CONGRESSMAN STARK DENIES GOD'S EXISTENCE

A Sad First in the History of the Congress

Washington, DC – The Christian Seniors Association (CSA) today encouraged members of the Congress to speak of their belief in God on the floor of the House after a liberal California Congressman made history by denying God.

According to Christianity Today, Congressman Pete Stark (D-California) became the first member of Congress to deny the existence of God. "When the Secular Coalition asked me to complete a survey on my religious beliefs, I indicated I am a Unitarian who does not believe in a supreme being."

"It is sad but not surprising that the current Congress has produced this historic first – one of its members has denied God," said CSA Executive Director James Lafferty. "The liberals in Congress want to throttle any school child who bows his or her head in prayer, but they want to establish a right for liberals to bash Christians and berate God around the clock."

"It is time for religious members of Congress to push back. A simple declaration of a belief in God by members of Congress on the House floor will be greatly informative for the American people. Members who wish to expand could use the 'special orders' portion of the House calendar to elaborate but a simple "I believe in God" will suffice.

"We have long recognized that all of this hot air about 'separation of church and state' has been a veiled effort to intimidate and silence religious voices in public policy matters.

"If the liberal House leadership refuses to recognize lawmakers who want to affirm their belief in God, then we suggest they add it to the end of floor speeches on other matters.

"Congressman Stark's statement is a very sad benchmark for America. It could be the moment which defines the decline of our country or it could be the spark which marks an important day. That would be the day that religious Americans stood-up to the liberal bullies who are so determined to use the power of government to silence prayer and every other religious expression of free speech.

"This is a fight which is destined to be fought in America and we think it should begin today."

Source: <http://christiansenior.org/press/031407.php>

Editor's Note: Oh my Lord! The world is about to come to an end. Is that not what Christian fundamentalists want anyway? This press release is a prime example of Christian bigotry against atheists. It is full of the standard deceptive rhetoric. No school child who wants to bow his or her head in prayer is being throttled as long as he/she does not disrupt class. The right for anybody to bash Christians and berate God already exists, it is called the right to free speech. Why would lawmakers be allowed to affirm their belief in God on the House floor? Stark did not use the House floor to proclaim that he is a non-theist. That is not what Congressmen are paid for. For Pete's sake (no pun intended), Stark has an exemplary 30+ year record in Congress. Not one controversy has been associated with his name. This demonstrates that one can be a great Congressman without believing in God.

CONSERVAPEDIA

An American Christian conservative, Andy Schlafly has started a "Christian" alternative to Wikipedia because of its alleged "anti-Christian", "anti-American" "liberal bias." Among his criticisms listed on Conservapedia, Schlafly explains how many Wikipedia articles often use British spelling instead of American English and says it "refuses" to give enough credit to Christianity for the Renaissance. "Facts against the theory of evolution are almost immediately censored," he says. The URL for Conservapedia is <http://www.conservapedia.com>.

Conservapedia lists six rules (or "commandments" as they call them) that must be observed when posting entries. The first rule states that "Everything you post must be true and verifiable." The rule page further states that "A blatantly inappropriate entry, such as vandalism or obscenity, can result in immediate blocking without warning." and "Vandalism is punishable up to 10 years in jail per 18 USC § 1030. The IP addresses of vandals will be reported to authorities. That includes your employer and your local prosecutor." And who determines what is "vandalism"? This sounds like the evangelical Christian fire and brimstone scare tactics used against non-believers.

The fourth rule reads as follows: "When referencing dates based on the approximate birth of Jesus, give appropriate credit for the basis of the date (B.C. or A.D.). 'BCE' and 'CE' are unacceptable substitutes because they deny the historical basis." Since Jesus was born between 7 and 3 BCE, the "historical basis" for B.C. and A.D. is incorrect. In other words forcing the use of B.C. and A.D. promulgates an untruth, which in violation of the first rule.

Conservapedia has a sneaky way to circumvent the first rule. For example, here is what Conservapedia has to say about the origins of kangaroos:

The creationist organization Answers in Genesis states the following regarding the evolutionary view of kangaroo origin: Creationists believe that there is a lack of transitional fossils showing that the origin of the kangaroo was the result of evolution. They believe that this is not surprising given their view that the fossil record as a whole does not support the evolutionary position.^[3]

The Macropod family is alleged to have evolved from either the Phalangeridae (possums) or Burramyidae (pygmy-possums)... However, there are no fossils of animals which appear to be intermediate between possums and kangaroos. *Wabularoo naughtoni*, supposed ancestor of all the macropods, was clearly a kangaroo (it greatly resembles the potoroos which dwell in Victoria's forests). If modern kangaroos really did come from it, all this shows is the same as we see happening today, namely that kangaroos come from kangaroos, "after their kind."^[2]

According to the origins theory model used by creation scientists, modern kangaroos, like all modern animals, originated in the Middle East^[Citation Needed] and are the descendants of the two founding members of the modern kangaroo baramin that were taken aboard Noah's Ark prior to the Great Flood. It has not yet been determined by baraminologists whether kangaroos form a holobaramin with the wallaby, tree-kangaroo, wallaroo, pademelon and quokka, or if all these species are in fact apobaraminic or polybaraminic.

Also according to creation science theories, after the Flood, kangaroos bred from the Ark passengers migrated to Australia. There is debate whether this migration happened over land^[4] -- as it is thought that Australia was still for a time after the Flood connected to the Middle East before the supercontinent of Pangea broke apart^[5] -- or if they rafted on mats of vegetation torn up by the receding flood waters.^[4] The theory that God simply generated kangaroos into existence there is considered by most creation researchers to be contra-Biblical.

Other views on kangaroo origins include the belief of some Australian aborigines that kangaroos were sung into existence by their ancestors during the "Dreamtime"^[6] and the evolutionary view that kangaroos and the other marsupials evolved from a common marsupial ancestor which lived hundreds of millions of years ago.^[7]

This section presents almost exclusively the creationists' views on the origins of kangaroos. Strictly speaking the article does not violate the first rule. It is true and verifiable that creationists have the views about the origins of kangaroos that are presented here. However, the article is clearly biased. The "evolutionary view" is only briefly mentioned at the end of the section and is presented alongside the Australian aborigines' belief that kangaroos were sung into existence by their ancestors. The kangaroo article on Conservapedia has an external link to www.exzooberance.com where it is stated that "Fossil evidence shows that the first kangaroos appeared in Australia about 15 million years ago, during the Miocene Epoch." Why Conservapedia does not explain the "evolutionary view" in more detail is quite obvious. We would not want the home schooled children of conservative Christian parents to know about these heresies, would we?

April Events

April 3rd - THCF First Tuesday Lunch

1:00 pm – Meet other Freethinkers at the Texas Hill Country Freethinkers' First Tuesday Lunch (held monthly)
 Discussion Topic: "The Roots of Today's Wars," and "The Myth of Muslim Support for Terror." Contact Julie at zoezappa@hughes.net for a copy of the articles.

Ping's Restaurant
(by the HEB in Leon Springs)
24165 W IH 10 # 221

April 14th – SPECIAL EVENT: NAMI Walk

8:00 am: Join the FACT Team as we walk in support of the National Alliance on Mental Illness.
 Meet at the Cypress Pavilion in Brackenridge Park.
 Look for signs and the FACT Banner!

April 21st – The Lunch Bunch

11:30 am: Join the "Lunch Bunch" for good food and great conversation before the General Meeting

Sarika's Thai Restaurant
4319 Medical Dr, Near Fredericksburg Rd

April 21st – FACT General Meeting

1:00 pm: General meetings occur on the 3rd Saturday of every month (unless otherwise announced)

Guest speaker: Joellen DeBerg
 Title of Presentation: "A Historical Perspective on Executive Wartime Powers"

After-break speaker: Marc Janssens
 "Dealing with Cancer in a Religious Environment"
Community Unitarian Universalist Church
4818 Beverly Mae East (off Babcock)

April 29th – FACT Discussion Brunch

10:00 am - Join us for breakfast and discussion the last Sunday of every month.

Hosted by Len Wheeler
 Topic: "Impact of Religion in Foreign Policy"
Justin's Ice Cream and Deli
2512 N. Main (Near Woodlawn)
Note New Location and New Time!

May Events

May 1st — THCF First Tuesday Lunch

May 19th — FACT General Meeting

May 27th — FACT Discussion Brunch

| April 2007 | | | | | | |
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www.FreethinkersACT.org

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YEARLY DUES

| | | |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------|------|
| A. | Individual Paying Member | \$25 |
| B. | Family (2 or more members) | \$35 |
| C. | Full-time Student | \$15 |
| D. | Restricted Member (Newsletter Subscription Only) | \$15 |

- Membership dues are due in January.
- Dues are non-refundable.
- New members who join after the 1st month of the year will pay a prorated amount for the remainder of the year.
- Members who paid dues the previous year, but who are paying late, will be liable for the entire year.