

FACT
P.O. Box
160881
San Antonio,
TX 78280
(210) 767-0769

A Matter of *FACT* & *The Voice*

July 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.

July General Meeting	1
AAI Convention	1
June Meeting Review	2
Problems with Teaching the Bible	3
How to Take a Wife	4
Timing is Everything	4
Book Review	5
The War on Living Wills	5
The Viagra Pope	6
Freethought and the 4 th	6
Letters	7
National Day of Prayer Fizzles Out	8
Kurt Vonnegut	9
Europe's Atheists Protest	10
Calendar of Events	11
Application for Membership	12

July General Meeting

The speaker for the April General Meeting is Russell Gainer. The title of his presentation is "Funeral Consumers Alliance."

=====

The after-the-break speaker will be Patrick Greene. The topic of his talk is "Plans for 2008 National Day of Prayer."

General Meeting, Saturday, July 21st @ 1pm
Community Unitarian Universalist Church
4818 E. Beverly Mae

AAI Convention in September

The 2007 convention of the Atheist Alliance International (AAI) is scheduled to be held on September 27-30 in Washington, DC. The advantage of that location is that they will help you schedule an appointment with your member of Congress to present your viewpoint.

Christopher Hitchens, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Eugenie Scott, and Eddie Tabash will be there, as well as the great-great-grandson of Charles Darwin! In addition, AAI has planned many practical workshops on organization and activities for local groups.

For more information, or to register on-line and to join AAI, please visit the Atheist Alliance International website at: www.atheistalliance.org. or write to: Atheist Alliance International, P.O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366. (If you want to talk to your representative during the "Lobbying Day", you must register 30 days in advance.)

Every Monday at 12:30 and 8:30 PM

Time Warner Digital Cable Channel 20

FREETHOUGHT FORUM

Hosted by Hugh Henry

A HOUSE BUILT ON QUICKSAND

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.

To those reared in the Christian tradition, the Bible is presented as a unified whole, the inerrant word of God, not to be challenged. In fact, some scholars have argued, there have been as many as 600 books of the Bible, of which only 66 are included in the Protestant Bible (39 OT, 27 NT), and 64 (39 OT, 25 NT) in the Catholic Bible. What happened to all the rest of the 'inerrant words of God', and how do you build an institution on an ever shifting foundation?

It is generally accepted that the Hebrew Bible, which formed the basis for the "Old Testament" was not codified until about 450 BCE. At that time, it consisted of 24 books, and has been standardized through to the current Hebrew Bible. (Some of the difficulty in counting 'books' is that the definition has varied over time, with some being compressed into one and some expanded into two or more.)

As the Christian community began to grow within the Roman Empire, a proliferation of post-Christ books began circulating, beginning with the four biographies of Christ, known as the Gospels. The first of these was not set down in writing until 50 years after Christ's death, and its author had never met Jesus. Subsequent writings, especially the letters by Paul to the far-flung Christian enclaves, elaborated on what had said, or what he really meant. By the Fourth Century CE, Christian leaders became concerned with the diversity of doctrine reflected in these various books and began debating the one, true interpretation of the faith.

When Roman Emperor Constantine I converted to Christianity in 320 CE, about 10% of the population of the Empire professed to be followers of Christ, and there is speculation that Constantine saw the value of unifying these into a common doctrine. When he called some 300 bishops together at the first Council of Nicaea in 325 CE, it was to address some of the controversies of doctrine. Contrary to *The DiVinci Code*, the Council of Nicaea did not establish the canon (accepted content and order of the Bible) but dealt with such issues as the divinity of Jesus. However, Constantine continued to issue edicts that changed the interpretation of the books of the Bible without tossing them out altogether.

This led to the Council of Carthage in 397 CE, which adopted an official canon of books that were "in" and books that were "out." The books that made the cut include the 66 books of the Bible we have today with the addition of the 14 books of the Apocrypha as additional resources. The criteria for accepting books into the New Testament were that they were widely circulated and accepted by the Church; they were written by an apostle or a close associate of Jesus; they were edifying to the Christian faith; and they were written in continuity with the known apostolic teachings and traditions.

The ferment and divisions within the Christian (specifically, the Catholic) Church continued for the next millennia, until, as part of the reformation, the Council of Trent was convened in 1545. There the assembled officers of the Church dictated the canon of the Bible as consisting of 73 books (46 OT, 27 NT), and further declared:

"...that the said old and vulgate edition, which, by the lengthened usage of so many years, has been approved of in the Church, be, in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions, held as authentic; and that no one is to dare, or presume to reject it under any pretext whatever.....Furthermore, in order to restrain petulant spirits, (the Council) decrees, that no one, relying on his own skill, shall,--in matters of faith, and of morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine,..., presume to interpret the said sacred Scripture contrary to that sense which holy mother Church...hath held and doth hold...."

Since that time, the list of the acceptable books of the Bible has remained stable, but with all alterations and interpretations that had gone on before, one has to wonder: how much is the word of God and how much is the words of men?

"Given that inclusion into or rejection from the canon is a human affair, involving politics and passions, and given that these factors have been motivating those involved in the process since the time of King Solomon, inerrancy seems patently untenable." *Bible Prophecy*, Tim Callahan

Contributed by Nick Lee

Problems with Teaching the Bible in Public Schools

By Dave McNeely

It may not happen, but state Rep. Warren Chisum, R-Pampa, has proposed requiring that the Bible be taught in public schools.

Again, it may not happen - probably won't - but if it does, like some others before me, I've got some questions about parts of the Bible that hopefully are a bit confusing.

I don't have any problem with the Golden Rule (Luke 6:31). It seems sort of like common sense to treat others the way you'd like to be treated, and I usually try to do that.

We've also talked about requiring the teaching of the Ten Commandments. But even though some believe in the inerrancy of scripture, I worry that, for example, ordering people not to covet their neighbor's house (Exodus 20:17) could seriously undermine the real estate business.

And I presume the prohibition against working on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10) is well-intentioned. But it gets a bit harsh when Moses says anyone who does should be put to death (Exodus 35:2). If that indeed is correct, my question is whether we can just stone them or have to use some harsher method. Or can we just get the sheriff to do it?

I read that it's OK for me to have slaves, either male or female (Leviticus 25:44), providing they come from neighboring nations. It's obvious that I could then possess people from Mexico. But would Canada qualify as a neighboring nation, or is Texas limited to Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas and New Mexico?

I realize it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord when I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice (Leviticus 1:9), and I've gotten pretty accustomed to the smell. But I've got some new neighbors that say the odor doesn't please them. Shall I smite them?

I wear trifocals, but the Bible says I can't approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight (Leviticus 21:20). Would Lasik surgery qualify me for an altar approach?

Most of my buddies get haircuts, including the hair around their temples. But Leviticus 19:27 flatly says this is wrong. Am I required to kill them, or can someone else take care of it?

I realize touching the skin of a dead pig makes one unclean (Leviticus 11:6-8). Is that why football players get so dirty? And if they wear gloves, will that take care of it? Also, I worry that this may discourage pass interceptions.

My brother has a farm. He plants two different crops in the same field, which I've told him is a clear violation of Leviticus 19:19. Furthermore, his wife wears garments made of two different kinds of thread (a cotton/polyester blend.)

When I mention these things to him, he curses and blasphemes. Am I required to get the town together to stone them (Leviticus 24:10-16)? Or could we just burn them to death in a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws (Leviticus 20:14)?

I like raw oysters, but a friend tells me eating shellfish is an abomination (Leviticus 11:10.) He says it's less of an abomination, however, than homosexuality. Is he correct? Are there degrees of abomination?

I realize it's OK to sell my daughter into slavery, according to Exodus 21:7. I'm giving it serious thought, because I need the money. But every time I mention it to either of my daughters, they get really, really upset. Got any advice about what to do?

It's entirely possible that Bible study won't be required, since other legislators want to water down Chisum's bill, including by requiring use of a textbook rather than the Bible and letting local officials decide whether their school districts will offer the courses at all.

But if they do, I hope a good teacher can help clear up some of these nagging questions, sure to come up in classrooms.

(Ed. Note: The referenced legislation, HB 1287 was signed into law by Gov. Perry on 15 Jun 2007. During debates (?), Rep. Chisum estimated a fiscal impact of \$750,000.)

Source: Abilene Reporter-News

Tips for (Single) Men: How to Take a Wife (According to the Bible)

#1 - Find an attractive prisoner of war, bring her home, shave her head, trim her nails, and give her new clothes. You then own her.

(Deuteronomy 21:11-13) See among the captives a beautiful woman, and have a desire for her and would take her as a wife for yourself, then you shall shave her head and trim her nails. She shall also remove her clothes and shall remain in your house, and you may go in to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife.

#2 - Find a prostitute and marry her.

(Hosea 1:1-3) the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry."

#3 - Purchase a piece of property, and get a woman as part of the deal.

(Ruth 4:5-10) Moreover, along with this land, I have traded for Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of Mahlon, to be my wife.

#4 - Pick the dancer you like.

(Judges 21:19-25) The sons of Benjamin took wives according to their number from those who danced, whom they carried away.

#5 - Cut off 200 foreskins of soldiers to get a wife.

(1 Samuel 18:27) David struck down two hundred men among the Philistines. Then David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full number to the king, that he might become the king's son-in-law. So Saul gave him Michal his daughter for a wife.

#6 - Hold a beauty contest, and pick your favorite.

(Esther 2:3) "They gather every beautiful young virgin to the citadel of Susa, to the harem, and let their cosmetics be given them. Then let the young lady who pleases the king be queen in place of Vashti.

#7 - Spot a woman you like, and demand your parents get her for you.

(Judges 14:2) So he came back and told his father and mother, "I saw a woman in Timnah, one of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."

#8 - Snoop on her bathing, send your henchmen to take her.

(2 Samuel 11) David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. David sent messengers and took her, and when she came to him, he lay with her; she became his wife; then she bore him a son.

Timing Is Everything

Father Murphy walks into a pub in Dublin, and says to the first man he meets, "Do you want to go to heaven?" The man says, "I do, Father." The priest said, "Then stand over there against the wall."

Then the priest asked the second man, "Do you want to go to heaven?" "Certainly, Father," was the man's reply. "Then stand over there against the wall."

Then Father Murphy walked up to O'Toole and said, "Do you want to go to heaven?" O'Toole said, "No, I don't Father."

The priest said, "I don't believe this. You mean to tell me that when you die, you don't want to go to heaven?"

O'Toole said, "Oh, when I die, yes! I thought you were getting a group together right now."

“Infidel” by Ayaan Hirsi Ali

From Washington Post Book World

The story of the Somali-born member of the Dutch parliament (now living in the U.S.) who faced death for collaborating on a film about violence against Muslim women with director Theo van Gogh (he was murdered and a death-threat note to Ali was impaled on a knife left in his chest) — and who was subsequently accused of “intolerance” by the Dutch liberal left for her calls to action against Muslim extremists.

Hirsi Ali's break with tradition began when she slipped away from her family on her way to a forced marriage in Canada and talked her way into political asylum in Holland. Soon after arriving, she removed her head scarf to see if God would strike her dead. He did not. Nor were there divine consequences when, defying her ancestors, she donned blue jeans, rode a bicycle, enrolled in university, became a Dutch citizen, began to speak publicly about the mistreatment of Muslim women in Holland and won election to the Dutch parliament.

In this suspenseful account she discusses how her views were shaped by Islam's “brutal, bigoted [culture] fixated on controlling women,” and her own experiences of genital mutilation and a forced marriage. How many women with Hirsi Ali's experience of radical Islam have emerged to tell their stories? *Infidel* is a unique book, Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a unique writer, and both deserve to go far.

The War on Living Wills

By Barbara Coombs Lee

The Terri Schiavo debacle warned most Americans to prepare a living will as written evidence of their end-of-life wishes. But it also warned moral conservatives that popular, stronger living wills could thwart their campaign to force tube feedings on comatose people indefinitely. So now they are waging a war on living wills. You probably think I'm exaggerating. I wish I were. It is a little recognized, but incontrovertible fact that religious conservatives want to roll back principles of autonomy and self-determination that form bedrock law in end-of-life decisions. These principles underlie court decisions in Cruzan and Quinlan and advance directive laws in every state. Autonomy sets the terms of inquiry: “What would this patient want us to do if she could awaken, evaluate her situation and make a decision about life support?”

Moral conservatives don't want courts to ask that question. They want to ask, “How have the needs of this person changed since she wrote her living will? What do we think is best for her now?” They think that what the patient thought she would want, so long ago, can't be best, since it would lead to her death. And they believe death is never in the best interest of a living being.

End of their story. Everybody gets forced to endure feeding tubes and other life-sustaining therapies, irrespective of their level of dementia or coma, and irrespective of wishes they formerly expressed. This conservative agenda ... found full flower when the President's handpicked Council on Bioethics published its report, “Taking Care: Ethical Caregiving in Our Aging Society” in September of 2005. The report is less a comprehensive treatise than an exhaustive polemic on autonomy as an inferior value, unworthy of deference once our minds are lost. They even have a demeaning term for it. They call it “precedent autonomy.”

The lone voice of moderation on the council, Dr. Janet Rowley, put it in perspective. She wrote in her dissent, “The clear message from this report is if you feel strongly about not living in a decerebrate state, you better kill yourself while you have control over your fate!”

Most Americans want to strengthen, not weaken, the force of their opinions and desires formed while they are thinking, rational beings. They want living wills expanded and given the force of law ... [and don't want] end-of-life decisions in the hands of a religious minority.

Source: PIQUE May 2007 (Excerpted from *The Secular Circular*, April 2007)

The Viagra Pope

The deal raised a storm in Italy. Negotiations were top secret, but the reputed financial paper "Milano Finanza" broke the news: Pope Benedict XVI is going to buy the Pfizer Viagra plant in Nerviano near Milano. The deal will be done in the name of the venerable brotherhood "Figli dell'Immacolata Concezione" (children of the immaculate conception.) The order tries to present the takeover as a good deal. It may save 300 jobs as Pfizer considered closing down the Milano plant despite the protest of trade unions, say the brethren, who are already running Pfizer's medical research centre in Nerviano since three years.

The Vatican keeps mum about the holy father's reach for the blue pill. An anonymous insider, asked by the Swiss paper "Blick," tried to play the story down, proposing that the factory may shift to less controversial products once in immaculate hands. But there are other representatives of the Catholic Church like archbishop Arrieta (Spain) who openly recommend Viagra to brighten the sex life of the faithful - of course only those living in heterosexual marriages. "The faithful can take Viagra," Arrieta said recently. "Married couples have the right to experience the sexual act."

Source: Rationalist International, Bulletin # 166, 18 May 2007

Freethought and the Fourth

By Stuart Bechman

The Fourth of July is one of the most significant holidays for American atheists. It is significant not only for the date being when the 13 American colonies declared their independence from Great Britain and started the long march to forming an independent nation; but equally significant for atheists are the reasons used to justify the revolution and, even more, in the philosophical underpinnings of the new country and government. Most Americans today do not appreciate the uniqueness of the American revolution. Up to that point, the world was ruled by monarchs who justified their claim to power by relying on Christian teachings, specifically Paul's Letter to the Romans where he states that all rulers (governments) have been put in place by God, and that it is sinful to oppose their rule no matter what (Romans 13:1-7.)

July 4 is the seminal anniversary when the promises of the Enlightenment were put into practice; when the people rose to challenge the oppressive traditions of kingship and religious authority and build a new kind of society based solely on human rights, science, and reason. When the Founding Fathers adopted the Declaration of Independence, they were making that declaration not only against King George of England but also against the accepted teachings of Christian doctrine and religious authority. They had the gall to declare that The People, rather than God, had the right and duty to determine who would rule over them. Instead of the Bible, they referred to the writings of Enlightenment philosophers John Locke and David Hume to assert the humanistic principles of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness as "self-evident", "unalienable rights" owed to all men [sic] regardless of time or circumstances.

These Enlightenment principles were further put into practice in the creation of our Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The omission of any reference to God or "Jesus Christ our Savior" in our Constitution, along with a specific ban of any religious test to hold public office, was heretical to many Christian leaders, leading many evangelicals of the day to predict that our "Godless Constitution" would lead to the quick downfall of our country and government. Despite the frequent claim that the United States was "founded as a Christian Nation," I have yet to find anyone, Christian or otherwise, who can point out the biblical passages that talk about elected representatives, separation of powers, terms of office, sovereigns serving the will of the people, or any one of the points in our Bill of Rights.

There is power in atheists uncovering and understanding our heritage. And one of the most neglected notes of our heritage is in the part that Enlightenment values played in the founding of our own country. Atheists should be at the forefront of the celebration of the fourth; of proclaiming From Many, One; and boasting of the "blessings" that our Godless Constitution and government have brought in spearheading an unprecedented empowerment of people over superstition and oppression.

Source: Rational Alternative, Newsletter of Atheists United, June 2007

Sent to the San Antonio Express-News.

Re. Call him Dr. Mercy

Leo Garza's "Nacho Guarache" cartoon Saturday about "Dr. Death" Jack Kevorkian's release from prison should have read "Dr. Mercy." He broke the law not to enrich himself, but to alleviate the unwanted suffering of his fellow humans. Some people want to hold on to life to the last second — no matter how painful, dreadful and devoid of quality— and if they do, fine; it's their right.

Dr. Kevorkian wouldn't have considered interfering. He helped those who needed him because the medical profession could not help. So he was tried and sent to prison. And why is that? Religion! Religion is peculiar in that it values suffering. Mother Teresa said, "The suffering of the poor is something very beautiful and the world is being much helped by the nobility of this example of misery and suffering." I noticed she didn't want to suffer in one of her own clinics. When Mother Teresa got sick, she came to the best medical facility in the U.S.

The law doesn't allow doctors (except in Oregon) to humanely give a person suffering from terminal disease a pill or shot. Instead, hospitals and doctors are required to keep them alive to suffer as long as possible. Dr. Kevorkian only helped those whose suffering made it intolerable for them to go on. He had to do it clandestinely, because "heaven forbid" a doctor would humanely give them a pill or shot to get them out of their misery. Let's drag out Terry Schiavo's non-life and use it for political and religious grandstanding.

Sally Chizek

Sent to the San Antonio Express-News. Posted 06/11/2007.

Re. They flunk

Talk about bottom-of-the-barrel candidates! Three in the Republican lineup for president have declared they do not believe in evolution. They are former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas and Rep. Tom Tancredo of Colorado. To me, and to millions of scientific-minded people, this makes them intellectually incompetent to be the CEO of the world's most scientific and mightiest nation. They are stuck on stupid and should be given their pink slips now and sent back to school.

Stan Grayson

Baptists advocate bias

God preserve us from the Southern Baptists! Bigotry has always been prevalent in religious doctrine, but the resolution passed at the Southern Baptist Convention takes the prize ("Baptists want hate-crimes bill to be defeated," Thursday).

So these good Christians are saying, essentially, that crimes against gay people should not be scrutinized and should be swept aside. Folks, members of this organization believe it is OK to discriminate against gay people, OK to persecute gay people, OK to murder gay people.

I sincerely hope there is a God and that she sees fit to relegate this organization into obscurity. If a federal law did exist that would provide federal support to local, state, and tribal law enforcement agencies to prosecute crimes motivated by prejudice, then the leaders of this convention would surely be prosecuted for their hateful prejudice and advocacy of violence.

Harvey Kendall

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

National Day of Prayer Fizzles Out

One of Congress’s many panic attacks about communism and atheism during the Cold War was the establishment in 1952 of a National Day of Prayer (now set as the first Thursday in May). As a magic spell to drive away those communists and atheists it never worked well and it hasn’t been working well lately either. Now even the liberal religionists are being driven away, what with the religious fundamentalists taking over. Many media outlets ignore the event or nearly so. In Washington D.C., according to one report, the organizers set up 600 chairs, but only 37 people showed up. A group of six atheists arrived to do some kind of protest, but there seemed little there to bother with. That’s progress.

However, the NDOP organizers in San Antonio have been more effective in terms of turnout and rude violation of the Constitution. Hundreds of them show up at City Hall to turn the place into a de facto church, as though San Antonio doesn’t have more than enough churches on hand to pray in.

The San Antonio Express-News did give the event extensive coverage and, to its credit, gave much of it to valiant atheist Catherine Fahringer, to rebut a religionist’s defense of the event. The religionist took the “freedom of religion” position, which he interpreted to mean the freedom to use the resources of government to promote his religious beliefs.

Catherine is well-known as an outspoken, no-nonsense atheist, a leader in the local freethought community and a member of the board of Freedom From Religion Foundation. Another valiant atheist and local free-thought leader, Sally Chizek, contributed to Catherine’s article. Both are members of FACT (Freethinkers Association of Central Texas).

Catherine sent this note with the newspaper article: “We scored big-time for the first time in all our years of protesting NDOP! I think we have a friend in the new editor of the E-N religion section!” Catherine threw the Bible at the religionist, quoting extensively the parts where one is admonished not to pray in public, but to go into one’s room and pray in private.

Then she turned a liberal religious minister against him and quoted him as saying prayer “can be used as a way to escape reality. People hypnotize themselves into feeling better without addressing the real problems. Prayer can also be a way one group tries to get hold of the public sphere. So in Matthew 6:5-8, Jesus puts a warning label on prayer—keep it short, keep it authentic and don’t force it on people.” That preacher sounds a lot like an atheist.

Catherine quoted other religious people, who also sounded a lot like atheists (is that where liberal religion is heading?) until surely the religionist must have wondered if there was anyone on his side when the Bible was against him, the atheists were against him, and so many varieties of his co-religionists were against him. The tide may be turning in this country. The fundamentalists are facing increased resistance, books by atheists are best sellers, and PBS is going to air the “History of Disbelief.” Now if only more of the print and electronic media would give us the attention the Express-News gave Catherine, we might keep our secular government.

Source: Atheists For Human Rights, Minneapolis, MN, June 2007



FACT T-Shirts for Sale (Grey w/Black Logo)

Small-XLarge.....\$12.00	3X.....\$15.00
2X.....\$14.00	Vests (Red).....\$17.00

To order or for further information, contact Catherine Howard
catherine.j.howard@jci.com (210) 545-4235

Kurt Vonnegut, Humanist, 1922-2007

By Elaine Friedman

The humanist community lost one of its most renowned and colorful champions with the death of Kurt Vonnegut Wednesday, April 11, 2007.

The author of *Slaughterhouse Five* was the 1992 Humanist of the Year and honorary president of the American Humanist Association (AHA).

"Kurt Vonnegut was important to the humanist movement because his celebrity status helped popularize our humanist worldview," said Larry Jones, president of the Institute for Humanist Studies. "We will greatly miss him."

Both Jones and Kurt Vonnegut worked at General Electric in Schenectady, N.Y. But their paths didn't cross until a humorous encounter in June 2005, when Jones and three other humanist leaders scheduled a strategic dinner meeting at a New York restaurant to discuss the future of humanism with Vonnegut. On their first attempt the two parties sat at different tables and ate their meals separately, each wondering why the other party never showed. It was so absurd that it could have been a scene straight out of a Vonnegut novel, noted Jones with a laugh.

"We humanists are freethinkers. So there's a saying that trying to get humanists to cooperate is like trying to herd cats. Well we couldn't even coordinate a lunch meeting in the same restaurant!" Jones joked.

Luckily for Jones, his second attempt to meet with Vonnegut was successful, and the humanist leaders were able to discuss lobbying, bioethics and humanist educational programs.

"Vonnegut had a unique position on things," Jones said about meeting the author in person. "He had a wry sense of humor that he could deliver with a poker face.

Vonnegut's special brand of wit can be seen in his 1992 Humanist of the Year award acceptance speech entitled "Why My Dog Is Not a Humanist," in which he said:

I am, incidentally, Honorary President of the American Humanist Association, having succeeded the late, great Isaac Asimov in that totally functionless capacity. We had a memorial service for Isaac a few years back, and I spoke and said at one point, 'Isaac is up in heaven now.' It was the funniest thing I could have said to an audience of humanists... And if I should die, God forbid, I hope you will say, 'Kurt is up in heaven now.' That's my favorite joke.

"Kurt will be remembered for his direct personal approach; he will also be remembered for his acerbic wit and humor and his unflagging support for humanist concerns," stated Roy Speckhardt, AHA executive director.

While Vonnegut's sarcasm was often viewed as cynicism, he believed in the potential of people to rise above their circumstances, as he had done throughout his life. While Vonnegut often wrote about war and disaster, his work also expressed hope and optimism for those struggling in a troubled world. He said the villains in his books were never individuals, but culture, society and history, which he said were making a mess of the planet.

Vonnegut grew up in a family of German-American freethinkers. Vonnegut's great-grandfather was the first president of the Freethinkers Society of Indianapolis and Vonnegut maintained the family tradition of rejecting religious dogma in favor of humanism.

The sarcastic tone of Vonnegut's work came from major traumas including his mother's suicide early in his life. As a humanist in a foxhole, he witnessed the 1945 bombing of Dresden, Germany while a prisoner of war.

Despite such experiences, Vonnegut never felt the need to fall back on irrational beliefs to explain irrational actions. He maintained his belief in a humanist worldview throughout his life.

"I am a humanist," Vonnegut wrote in a letter to AHA members, "which means, in part, that I have tried to behave decently without expectations of rewards or punishments after I am dead."

He will be sorely missed.

Source: [Humanist Network News](#), the weekly e-zine of the Institute of Human Studies

Europe's Atheists Protest

By Marie Alena Castle

Throughout Europe, atheists are almost literally up in arms over the growing religiosity stemming from Muslim immigration that has brought religion into politics after years of it being not much more than background noise. The long years of secular peace are giving way to religious assertiveness that is shredding the social fabric.

An article by Andrew Higgins in the April 12 Wall Street Journal reports that, in France, rallies organized by "militant atheist" Michel Onfray are packing auditoriums. Onfray is serious. "Mr. Onfray argues that atheism faces a 'final battle' against 'theological hocus-pocus' and must rally its troops," Higgins writes. The troops appear to be rallying.

In England, Higgins reports, atheists held a public debate with religionists on the topic, "We'd be better off without religion." A 2,000-seat auditorium, with tickets at almost \$40, sold out. The result? Higgins says, "The audience declared the atheists the victors, by a margin of 1,205 to 778, with a few score abstentions." In four years, membership in Britain's National Secular Society, which dates from the 19th century, doubled to about 7,000.

In Germany, a "think tank of Enlightenment" is being funded by a wealthy atheist and pulling in scientists whose aim is to debunk religion. In Italy, an atheist, saying Jesus never existed, is taking the Catholic Church to court on charges of fraud for claiming Jesus did exist as an historical figure. In discussing the cause of this growing atheist assertiveness, Higgins writes, "Europe's disquiet over Islam soared after the November 2004 murder by a Muslim militant in Amsterdam of Theo van Gogh, an irreverent Dutch writer, filmmaker and antireligious polemicist. Then came a global furor over cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad published in a Danish newspaper, JyllandsPosten.

"A French court in March ended a long legal campaign by Muslim groups to jail the editor of a satirical weekly that republished the cartoons. The court ruled that the editor had committed no crime. One of the groups that initiated the case immediately vowed to appeal.

"There is an identity crisis. We have to answer the question: Who are we? One answer is to say we're atheists,' says Flemming Rose, the Danish journalist who first commissioned the drawings and now gets invited to speak to atheist groups.

"Muslim activism is encouraging other faiths to be more assertive. University of London professor Anthony Grayling cites violent protests by British Sikhs that forced the cancellation of a play in Birmingham in 2004, and Christian protests against the television broadcast of a London opera that featured Jesus dressed in diapers. Christians and Muslims both campaigned vigorously, but without success, to torpedo elements of a new British law that bans discrimination against homosexuals. Such faith-based agitation, says Mr. Grayling, threatens a 'dark ages for free enquiry and free speech'."

And so it goes, in one European country after another.

Source: Atheists For Human Rights, Minneapolis, MN, May 2007

"Religion has convinced people that there's an invisible man...living in the sky, who watches everything you do every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a list of ten specific things he doesn't want you to do. And if you do any of these things, he will send you to a special place, of burning and fire and smoke and torture and anguish for you to live forever, and suffer and burn and scream until the end of time. *But he loves you!* He loves you and he needs money!"

George Carlin

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

July Events

July 3rd - THCF First Tuesday Lunch

1:00 pm – Meet other Freethinkers at the Texas Hill Country Freethinkers' First Tuesday Lunch (held monthly)
 Discussion Topic: "Philosophy: What's It Good For."

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

July 21st – The Lunch Bunch

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

Nicavid's Bakery and Café
 5115 Fredericksburg Road (Near Callaghan)
 Note New Location!

July 21st – FACT General Meeting

1:00 pm: General meetings occur on the 3rd Saturday of every month (unless otherwise announced)
 Guest speaker: Russell Gainer
 Title of Presentation: "Funeral Consumer Alliance."
 After-break speaker: Patrick Greene
 "Plans for 2008 National Day of Prayer."

Community Unitarian Universalist Church
 4818 Beverly Mae East (off Babcock)

July 29th – FACT Discussion Brunch

10:00 am - Join us for breakfast and discussion the last Sunday of every month.
 Hosted by Len Wheeler
 Topic: CFI Summer Session "Beyond Belief."

Justin's Ice Cream and Deli
 2512 N. Main (Near Woodlawn)

August Events

August 7th — THCF First Tuesday Lunch

August 18th — FACT General Meeting

August 26th — FACT Discussion Brunch

July 2007						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30	31				

August 2007						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

FACT
P.O. Box 160881
San Antonio, TX 78280
(210) 767-0769

www.FreethinkersACT.org

Opinions and statements made by authors, contained herein may not reflect the position of FACT and are, therefore, not the responsibility of FACT, its officers, directors, or editors.



FACT MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Tel: (____) _____ Fax: (____) _____ E-mail: _____

Return form to : FACT, P.O. Box 160881, San Antonio, TX 78280-3081

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.