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www.FreethinkersACT.org

FACT

is an association of atheists, freethinkers, agnostics, secular humanists, rationalists, skeptics, and other non-theists dedicated to preservation of the separation of church and state and promotion of Freethought through education.

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A Matter of *FACT* & *The Voice*

September 2007

September General Meeting

At press time, the topic and guest speaker for the September 15th meeting had not been confirmed. Notices will go out by e-mail as soon as plans are firm.

You can help plan for future meetings by suggesting topics and speakers from whom you would like to hear. FACT members are also encouraged to prepare presentations on topics of interest to them. Any ideas or suggestions should be sent to Nick Lee at fact.president@FreethinkersACT.org.

Contrary to last months announcement, FACT will continue to meet at the Community Unitarian Universalist Church for the next few months, until alternate, less expensive meeting space can be found.

FACT By-Laws Changed

At the August General meeting, those in attendance discussed and voted on several major changes in the by-laws that govern the Association. The most significant of these changes included the restructuring of Officer positions, the elimination of Vice President, and staggering of the terms of officers. This latter provision will ensure that some experienced officers will remain on the Executive Board, and avoid the discontinuity of mass turnover of Officers

Another significant change was an increase in annual dues (see the new schedule on page 12). This is the first increase in a number of years, and is in response to increased costs.

Immediately following this vote, Nick Lee (who has been serving as Acting President) was elected President of FACT, and Jim Evans was elected as Secretary. At the November meeting, elections will be held for the position of Treasurer and Vice President. Nominations for these positions will be taken at the October General Meeting.

Members wishing to have a copy of the final version of the By-Laws should contact Secretary Jim Evans at fact.secretary@FreethinkersACT.org.

Every Monday at 12:30 and 8:30 PM

Time Warner Digital Cable Channel 20

FREETHOUGHT FORUM

Inhuman Engineering?

By Jean Clellen-Moran

Elected Positions:

President, Nick Lee
 Vice President, OPEN
 Secretary, Jim Evans
 Treasurer, Cathy Howard
 Publicity Officer, OPEN

Appointed Positions:

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

Texas Hill Country Freethinkers

(No Officers)

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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. contributions to:

Fact.newsletter@
 FreethinkersACT.org

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

The Guest Speaker for August was Nick Calzoncit who spoke to us on the History of Eugenics. Mr. Calzoncit has a masters from Gallaudet University, Washington D.C. in education for the deaf and worked for 25 years as a Central Administrator at Harlandale Independent School District. He is founder of Mexican American Advancement Project and is involved in a movement to empower women including renaming schools and buildings that were named after, violent famous men and replacing the names with those of pacifist women. Mr. Calzoncit has also been recognized by the Clinton White House for his work in anti-tobacco use.

Mr. Calzoncit said he is not trained but well-read in the subject of Eugenics. His goal is to internalize Eugenics to help select actions to address society's problems.

Plato was a Eugenicist who advocated selective breeding between the "best" men and the "best" women. He thought the government should hold a secret lottery to pick sexual partners. From Sparta came the idea of leaving children out in the elements to eliminate the weak. Charles Darwin said that we should not take care of the sick and poor, and he felt people should be free to smoke because only "dumb" people smoke. According to Mr. Calzoncit, most Eugenicists have been Anglo-Saxon men of wealth and arrogance.

Noted figures who supported Eugenics throughout history include: George Bernard Shaw, Dr. Clarence Gamble and Margaret Sanger, (who took advantage of the movement to promote contraception). According to Mr. Calzoncit, several U.S. companies helped Hitler with his Eugenics program, including The Carnegie Institute, Rockefeller Foundation, and IBM, who provided the statistics for elimination. (IBM has never apologized).

The U.S. was a leader in Eugenics from 1850 to 1920, aimed largely at the "feeble-minded". California had a sterilization program for poor women, who were mostly Mexican-American. Up until 1945, 45,000 Americans had been forcibly sterilized as a public policy.

Hitler started his Eugenics program in 1936. The U.S. felt it was being "beaten at it's own game" and this began a renewed interest here. In order to have a "pure race", Hitler's program performed brutal experiments to get information - including babies, especially twins - for reducing the number of homosexuals, Gypsies, and other groups. Some abortions were prohibited while 400,000 humans were sterilized. Euthanasia was mandatory for the handicapped. "Fit" Arian women were rewarded for having babies fathered by "ideal Arian men." Babies who were "racially pure" were kidnapped from other countries and adopted.

Eugenics come in several forms, and Mr. Calzoncit cited several examples:

- 1) Medical testing for payment.
- 2) Benign Eugenics in which "smart" people looked "up" in selecting a mate.
- 3) Good Eugenics - voluntary physical exams with no injury to the body.
- 4) Recent lowering of requirements in IQ, education etc. of military recruits. (Nick cited a program sponsored by Robert McNamara which created an Army of 10,000" perfect soldiers).
- 5) China practices Eugenics which has lost power through reduction of the masses.

A current form of Eugenics in the U.S. is "Prisons for Profit " which holds mostly immigrants (some legal and a few Americans). There is sexual abuse in these prisons. Kids who have already been separated from their fathers are afraid of being separated from their mothers. These prisoners get no day-in-court but must wear prison garb. The Department of Homeland Security gives mega-dollars to Correction Corporation of America in an effort to get rid of immigrants any way they can.

Can good come out of Eugenics? We can't be sure, but we must be cautious in the attempts.

Opinions Galore at Hill Country Lunch

Contributed by Julie Fisher

The topic of discussion for the Hill Country Freethinkers lunch on August 7 was freethinker activism: "Can we catch more flies with honey? Exploration of a different approach to Freethought activism."

Freethinkers are often seen as strident and divisive. Polls show we are distrusted and disliked.

Attendees were sent 3 articles to read before the lunch. We had a huge crowd including one new person who came all the way from Hondo. Opinions were many and varied. I'll just try to recap some of the things that were said.

* With all the publicity the atheist books on the bestseller list are getting us, now is a good time to do things to draw more attention to us.

* We never would have gotten any publicity ever without the hard-line activities of the past.

* Each of us serves as an ambassador for atheism in our dealings with other people.

* Attempting to work with religious moderates in the past has backfired.

* Large-scale efforts to help the downtrodden like the Atheist Centre in India does would help people see us differently.

* Use the term "freethinker" instead of "atheist."

* Volunteer to go to churches to explain atheism to them.

* Meet with moderate religious people and work on common goals.

* Don't waste our time talking to religious people.

* Do we want to be liked, understood, or just respected?

* Attempts to get publicity will fail because the mainstream media does not want to cover us.

* Work with other minority groups.

* Just work for church-state separation and otherwise ignore religion.

TCF in Vigorous Dialog

As you can see from Julie's report above, the Hill Country Freethinkers have some ferocious debates during their monthly lunches. But, it doesn't end there! The dialog often continues in e-mail exchanges for days after the lunch. Following are excerpts from the flurry of e-mails about the August lunch.

For that lunch, Julie asked "What is the most effective sort of freethinker Activism?" and started the discussion with three articles: on the "New Atheists", on the renewed dialog between Christians and Atheists, and the rising voice of moderate Christians. She also Here are excerpts from the e-mail exchange following the luncheon:

Nick Lee: - "There is a pattern in the way political and social minorities make themselves heard. The evolution begins underground, with a few dissidents grumbling among themselves about the status quo (e.g., Christians in the Catacombs of Rome). Over time, a few martyrs begin to make themselves known to the outside world, and take their punishment for being different (e.g., feminists in the late 19th Century). Then come the violent public rallies (e.g., civil rights in the '60s). As the movement matures, however, cooler head prevail and moderates begin negotiating with the establishment to achieve incremental progress, and gain acceptance by the majority. ... The fanatically religious right has passed its high tide and is on the ebb. We are at the point where we must work with the moderate religious majority to build the sea wall to prevent the tide from returning....What will YOU do today to start the dialogue?"

Lois Neuville – "I'm satisfied with the amount of "dialogue" I have with my Xn friends - the Methodists do great church-suppers, and the catholics are sociable enough at their Bingo games. I'm not interested in any dialogue beyond that. As long as Xns intrude in our legislatures, interfere with our medical choices, distort the teaching of Science, condemn political candidates who do not support the dictums of religious leaders - and make any

(Continued next page)

“THCF Dialog” (cont.)

other intrusion in the secular world, I'm going to bash the hell out of them. If any of you are planning to get involved in such dialogues, Tell them to keep their misbegotten "values" on their own turf and I might feel more kindly toward them. IMO this sudden interest in "dialogue with Atheists" is no more than a ruse to divert attention from their efforts to make the US " a christian nation" ..

Marc Tyler – “It seems to me that "this thing of ours" is much closer to the Christians in the Catacombs stage, Eschewing contact with the majority in the streets, while the majority, in a vacuum, succumb to made up stories of amoral baby eaters. Perhaps patience is the key. Allow Dominionist Theocracy to flourish, overreach and decay, and in about 600 years we might have a secular society in North America. Not in the United States; that will have long since perished. Hunting and gathering, anyone? This, by the way, is the optimistic scenario.”

Frank Hernandez – “WERE (the Christians) really hiding? Or was it just part of the ritual of Mithraism that they did the "cave" thingy? After all, Mithraism needed a "roof" to show the stars and the constellation of Taurus. Did early Christians just borrow this from Mithraism and thus the catacombs?”

Marc – “Unlikely since early Christianity had no Astrological component, and freely welcomed women as practitioners. The catacombs thing more likely arose from Christ's admonition to pray in private. That did not set well with the Romans at the time.”

Lois – “The catacombs are where the Christians buried their dead (in the 1st & 2nd century) because they didn't want them buried among Pagans. It's a series of tunnels, with little shelves cut into the sides where they placed the dead body. I saw the catacombs of St Calixtus in Rome - there's no place to hold a service, and I'm sure it would have smelled too bad to do much praying. If they did a prayer meeting, it was in someone's home.”

Heidi - So where are the Atheists hiding? I guess I'm wondering if anyone has a comment about my main point which was not about the catacombs but about the oppression of Atheists. If Atheists are being oppressed by the Christians (are they?) in what way are they being oppressed, in what way do they need to hide?”

Lois – “The most obvious example of how atheists are discriminated against is in politics. In the current atmosphere, no atheist is likely to be elected anywhere in America and it would be political suicide for a politician to speak out in defense of Atheists' interests. Another is in the courtroom. The parent who professes belief in a religion, and attends Church, is more likely to receive custody of a child than will the Atheist mate. The prevailing attitude is that Atheists have no 'moral imperative' to provide the "values" that are the basis of our society. Atheist discrimination begins early - in the schools (and Boy Scouts) before reaching the work place. Families who sued schools to prevent Xn exhibits in their schools, suffered a great deal of harassment in their communities...Religious discrimination in the workplace is illegal, but this doesn't keep those who are prejudiced against atheists from acting. Known Atheists are targeted the same as any other minority — one reason why many atheists keep their true beliefs a secret.

Heidi – “What is the difference between discrimination and Persecution? Are atheists persecuted? Or are they just discriminated against? Does this discrimination differ in some significant way from the way, for instance, Wiccans are discriminated against? Or other minority religions?”

Lois – “The discrimination is more intense than it is toward minority religious beliefs. The absolute LACK of belief in gods and spirits is more odious (or threatening) than belief of some sort of god, spirit or power - Xns have been taught that non-believers are sons-of-Satan, etc. It's in their gospels... and maybe in the epistles of Paul – so many of them have grown up with that belief about Atheists. Besides, a person who "believes" in some kind of supernatural being, is open to the possibility of other imaginary beings - thus, more likely to be "saved".

Heidi – “I'm not sure I'm convinced discrimination is worse against atheists. Is there evidence to that effect? People of minority religions lose their jobs, etc also.... That's why, to me, trying to work with these other minorities might be beneficial. . But only if atheists are willing to hold dialogue with them, which seems difficult.”

To Believe or Not to Believe

By Sally Chizek

Sunday, August 19th, on CBS News Sunday Morning several atheists were featured. What was a bit different on atheists being interviewed on TV was that the segment lasted approximately 10 minutes. Usually, we get a 30 second airing. For those of you who might have missed it, the following is what I heard and hopefully it's mostly accurate. The interviewer was named Claudia, but I couldn't make out the last name.

Julia Sweeney, who some of you may remember from Saturday Night Live as Pat, the gender confused character, comes from a large Irish family. A clip of her program, "Letting Go of God" was shown. She was interviewed and she told Claudia that she just didn't see any evidence of god. She said, "Well, there is evidence of God, just not very good evidence. Yeah, there isn't, so it's not even close, it's not even debatable." Her parents were upset that she became an atheist and wouldn't talk to her for a while. They have reconciled now, but her mother still hopes she comes back to the religion. The interviewer, Claudia, said that Julia Sweeney is clearly in the minority in this country from the classroom (pledge of allegiance), politics, movies, and In God We Trust on our money. In a recent CBS News Poll, the percentage of people who believe in God. 82% believe in God; 9% in a Universal Spirit and 8% neither. Claudia said that the neither was getting louder. She said a new crop of books written by atheists-The End of Faith and Letters to a Christian Nation by Sam Harris, The God Delusion by Richard Dawkins, Breaking the Spell by Daniel Dennett and God is not Great by Christopher Hitchens is on the best sellers list. The interviewer said, "Take, for instance, the book by Christopher Hitchens. He aggressively attacks organized religion, and he also says that nothing is sacred and that religion brings out the worst in us."

Christopher Hitchens answers: "There are unethical things that people do because and over it that they wouldn't do without it: mutilating the genitals of their children, blowing themselves up in the attempt to murder other people, banning books, and burning each others churches. Things that an atheist wouldn't do."

Interviewer: "How would you define atheism?"

Hitchens: "Atheism is a view that there is no God, or rather there is no evidence that there is, thus those who claim to know are by definition mistaken."

Interviewer: "Mistaken, why mistaken?"

Hitchens: ".....They claim not only that there is a God that they cannot know but then claim to know his mind and his instructions which is much more than any human being can claim to know."

Interviewer: "Hitchens believes religion, no matter which faith, no matter where in the world, can bring out the worst in us."

Hitchens: "Take my birthplace in northern Ireland: Christians kill each other happily and reduce the whole level of society to one of practically one of underdevelopment."

Interviewer: "Or, consider the Middle East, the cradle of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Hitchens has traveled widely in that region."

Hitchens: "To be a foreign correspondent in places that could and should be civilized and see them torn to shreds and their cultures reduced to beggary and misery by religion is an education everyone should have.".....

Steven Prothero, Chair, Religion Studies, Boston University, said, "What is missing in the atheists books is the claim that religion is the greatest force for evil in the world. I think that is probably true, but it's also the greatest force for good in the world. So if you're going to criticize religious people for the Inquisition, then you need to praise them for the civil rights movement; you need to praise them for getting rid of slavery in the United States, which they did. You can't sorta have it both ways. And, certainly if you're going to praise atheists for things, you need to criticize the Stalinists. Some of the most murderous regimes we had in the 20th Century were atheist regimes.....We used to have a 'gentleman's agreement' that religion was private and so if you were against religion, you wouldn't trash the religion of your neighbor. That would have been un-American and intolerant. But, once religion moved into the public area like in abortion and things like that, then it was almost the duty of atheists who are opposed to the religious right to step in and say that's idiotic, God doesn't exist, or why are we talking about the Bible, it's a pack of lies."

Ellen Johnson, who is the present President of American Atheists, said that Madalyn Murray O'Hair was a very courageous woman. She said that O'Hair was incredibly honest and said what she thought. And some people didn't like what she said, and therefore didn't like Madalyn. Ellen went on to say that atheist are everywhere. She said, "They are your police, your physicians, your teachers and your children. We know who they are, but unfortunately are in the closet. "The people who don't know that much about atheists think we are unpatriotic, un-American and immoral."

The Interviewer said: "But are we as religious as we say we are? The number of people who say they belong to no organized religion, while still small, is growing.

(Sally invites your comments, especially about what Stephen Prothero said about how religion was so active in the civil rights movement and ended slavery in America. Also how they always bring up Stalin and other atheistic regimes. Are they really atheists, or how are they different atheists? Send your comments to sally.chizek@FreethinkersACT.org.)

School Sued Over Voting on Graduation Prayers

Americans United for Separation of Church and State has filed a lawsuit against a Texas public school district that sponsors prayer at high school graduation ceremonies.

Representing six parents and a former student, Americans United told the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas yesterday that the Round Rock Independent School District's policy of allowing students to vote on whether to include prayer in its graduation ceremonies violates the First Amendment principle of church-state separation.

"Graduation ceremonies should welcome all students, regardless of their beliefs about religion," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Religion is personal, and decisions about it should never be the subject of a 'majority rules' vote."

The school district policy allows a yearly vote by seniors on whether to include prayer in graduation ceremonies. In 2007, three of the district's four high schools decided in favor of prayer. Americans United charges in its lawsuit that school officials organize, oversee and attempt to manipulate the votes on whether to include prayer at the ceremonies.

For example, earlier this year, officials at the district's four high schools conducted the votes on whether to include prayer at the 2007 graduation ceremonies. The senior class at Westwood High School was the only class to vote against prayer, and it was promptly ordered by district officials to conduct a re-vote. Westwood seniors, however, again voted against prayer at their graduation ceremonies.

"There could be no mistake among the students that the vote was an official school-sponsored event: school officials crafted the ballot and orchestrated and carried out ballot delivery, collection, and tabulation," Americans United argues in its *Does v. Round Rock Independent School District* lawsuit. "And there could be no mistake among the students about which way the District expected them to vote: the one senior class that voted to reject the invocation was promptly ordered to re-vote on the issue."

Although the seniors at Westwood High School withstood the district's pressure, prayer was included in the graduation ceremonies at McNeil, Stony Point and Round Rock high schools.

Before filing the lawsuit, Americans United in May asked district officials to remove prayer from the high schools' graduation ceremonies. Round Rock Independent School District Superintendent Jesus Chavez, however, defended the prayer policy.

Americans United's lawsuit asks the federal district court to declare that the school district's prayer policy violates the First Amendment and to issue an injunction barring prayer at future graduation ceremonies.

The plaintiffs in the case have chosen to remain anonymous because they are concerned about hostile reactions to the lawsuit.

Source: Americans United website

Separation Rally in Austin

ALERT— FACT Members are urged to turn out for a State-wide Rally on September 8th, from Noon to 3:00, on the steps of the Capitol building in Austin, in support of the Separation of Church and State. In view of recent legislation such as discussed in the article above, it is time for all freethinkers, atheists, secular humanists, liberal Christians and members of other faiths to make a show of force in opposition to the creeping incursion of religious extremists into Texas state politics. The Rally will include speakers from several organizations from around the state, including Nick Lee representing FACT. The focus of the Rally will be on the recent spate of laws by the Texas State Legislature and pending lawsuits challenging those laws.

PLEASE make the short trip up I-35 next Saturday, and show your support!

We Got Letters

From the Express-News:

(Don't know this guy but he sounds like one of us:)

"Angels took a break?"

While watching the coverage of the bridge collapse in Minnesota, I was disgusted to see a man claim the reason for his survival was "God and angels."

He needs to look the families of the deceased in the face and tell them why these alleged entities did not see fit to save their loved ones' lives.

/- Jeremy Atkinson /

To the Editor:

"I highly recommend FACT members and even non-FACT members read the following two books: (1) The God Delusion, by Richard Dawkins and (2) "god is not GREAT", by Christopher Hitchens.

First, Dawkins using his scientific expertise to debunk the existence of God through an engaging series of arguments. Though he does get a bit overzealous, his humor and thoroughly referenced text makes for an excellent read. Hitchens, though not as aggressive as Dawkins, shows how various religions have basically terrorized man-kind since its inception. Both books should definitely be added to the FACT library.

V/r,

Mick Fulton

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

Did You Know?

Speaking of the FACT Library, did you know that the Association has an extensive collection of over 100 books about atheism, religion, philosophy, and science. Every month, the FACT Librarian, Jimmie Barnes, hauls 4-5 boxes full of books to the General Meetings, and makes the books available for check-out by FACT members. There is no need for you to build your own collection; take advantage of ours!

Here is a sample of some of the titles available for loan:

- "Agnosticism and Christianity" - Thomas Huxley
- "Apes, Angels, and Victorians" - William Irvine
- "Bertrand Russell on God & Religion" — Bertrand Russell
- "Darwin's Dangerous Idea" - Daniel Dennett
- "Deceptions & Myths of the Bible" - Lloyd M Graham
- "Dragons of Eden" - Carl Sagan

That's just highlights from the first four letters of the alphabet. Think of what other treasures await. Come to the next General Meeting and find out!

Convert a Fence-sitter for Ingersoll

By Len Wheeler

(At the August Discussion Brunch Len Wheeler discussed her experiences at the Summer Seminar at the Center for Inquiry in Amherst, NY. Part of her talk focused on how to discuss religion with people who may be wavering in their faith (like Mother Teresa?) Len has provided an excerpt from her presentation.)

I am of the opinion that there are many people who live in doubt of a supreme authority or being. The Harris Poll (Oct. 06) showed that 42% of the Americans asked answered 'no' to the question of: Are you absolutely certain there is a god?

Many of these people feel they are alone. Their fears are high. They will be afraid that their families might find out. I am here to give them confidence to ask and learn. I hope you will join me. Here are some tips for talking to people of wavering faith:

1. - Show compassion when telling people there are reasons to doubt. Don't patronize.
2. - Be polite; messages can be specially designed without proselytizing. Don't have that as an agenda.
3. - Never compromise on the truth. Bertrand Russell
- 4 - Provide viable alternatives such as books to read and places to go (here, CFI, places on the internet) where they may discover new ways of thinking and perhaps, more liberation. Remember when asked, that you are an atheist, but oh so much more. One great alternative is Phillip Kitcher's new book called LIVING WITH DARWIN, and Nicolas Walters: HUMANISM. Magazines such as SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, FREE INQUIRY and SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN. Leaving them with nothing to hold onto make great Warriors of God as we have seen on CNN's programs Aug 21, 22, and 23, '07.
5. -- Put your reasons out there, then go on unless they continue to be curious. Persuasively show our skepticism without being intellectual snobs.
- 6 - Don't scoff at irrational thinking, lead away from it. Use the Socratic method by asking sincere questions of the answers that the religious try to give us.

One of the most critical questions is where our morals come from if we don't use a supreme authority. We use our reason as to what is improvement for ourselves, our loved ones, society and the universe. We must be very well educated on what our values are, and also about the believers' values. Hence, we can have well-thought out answers, AND we can have intelligent, sincere questions for them.

Len Wheeler, Aug, '07



FACT T-Shirts for Sale (Grey w/Black Logo)		
Small-XL...	..\$12.00	3X.....\$15.00
2X.....	\$14.00	Vests (Red).....\$17.00
To order or for further information, contact Sally Chizek sally.chizek@FreethinkersACT.org		

Rules of Religious Warfare

By Nick Lee

Well, isn't this an interesting development! According to an Associated Press report, Evangelical groups have joined efforts spearheaded by Roman Catholic, Orthodox and mainstream Protestant churches to create a common code of conduct for religious conversions that would preserve the right of Christians to spread their religion while avoiding conflict among different faiths.

The code aims to ease tensions with Muslims, Hindus and other religious groups that fear losing adherents and resort to punishments as extreme as imprisonment and even death for converts from their faith and foreign missionaries. Sensitivity to Christian proselytism is widespread among Muslims. Under most interpretations of Sharia, or strict Islamic law, conversion from Islam is forbidden. The rules should also address concerns in other religions about Christians seeking converts, and inspire those faiths to "consider their own codes of conduct," it added.

Evangelization also has caused concern among the branches of Christianity because of the vigor with which Pentecostal and evangelical congregations have led the drive for conversions around the world, outstripping the growth of older churches. Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Brazil in May was partly a response to the exodus of millions of Catholics to Protestant evangelical churches.

It appears that the world's major religions are attempting to "make nice" with each other, and established rules for proselytizing on each other's turf. I don't know whether to be gladdened or alarmed by this development. Does that mean the market demand for religion is diminishing, leaving the suppliers to fight over diminishing customers? Or is it the case that the major religions are forming an international cartel to keep the faithful in line?

Perhaps at the next meeting of the World Council of Churches, Atheists, agnostics, and freethinkers should have a place at the table, so we can shape the rules under which we do our OWN evangelizing!

The Future of Atheism and Agnosticism

By Gene Madeo

As a non-believer, I have felt like a minority all of my adult life, and have often been afraid to openly express and share my beliefs and ideas. As minorities, it is easy for atheists and agnostics to express anger, frustration, and disappointment at how we are depicted and treated by believers and defend ourselves.

We have certainly been victims, and we always have been a small minority. The political religious right agenda in the U.S. for the last six years has been rather scary, demonstrating in real terms how religion and religious people can be dangerous. A direct result of it has been the emergence of Sam Harris and others, who are doing a fantastic job of pointing out the flaws and dangers of religious belief.

Should atheists and agnostics be angry fighters for legitimacy and dignity? If history is any guide, we should certainly never allow ourselves to be forced into a minority status. Sam Harris and some of our other spokespersons feel that indeed we are in danger and need to be fighting back -- and hard.

.....

We may well end up winning some major battles, but end up losing the war (again), because we are not likely going to win this ideological war with criticism, argument, attack, and anger. Still, I give Sam Harris and others a lot of credit for forcing the issue with powerful arguments. But if powerful arguments were all that was needed, atheists and agnostics would not be the small minority they are today. (cont. next page)

Future (continued)

There have been powerful arguments in the past as well. Yes, we need scientists, theologians, philosophers, and other professionals to defend atheism and argue effectively in academic circles concerning the defects of religion. At the same time, most people are not receptive, but instead react negatively, to attacks against their beliefs.

I suggest that the only way atheists and agnostics will ever reach believers is by offering people a joyful, wonderful alternative to religion. To do so, we need to understand why religions are so successful. We are not doing this, and this is where our energy should be directed. We need to change people's minds with the same message of hope, peace, and love that religions offer. (They do offer it, even if they often fall short.)

We need to satisfy the same wants, needs, and desires that religion does. But if all we offer is criticism, argument, and anger, very few will listen to us. Unless atheists and agnostics somehow can satisfy the same needs, wants, and desires that are satisfied by religion, we will always be a very small minority.

When the believer asks, "What does the Atheistic and Agnostic life offer me and why is your way of life better?," we should have some great answers. We need to distance ourselves from the usual answer: "It's a more sensible, intelligent view of life, and a better way of life" -- because it is not necessarily so.

In my own quest over many years, I have been disappointed in what I've found as an alternative to religion, whether it was a group of atheists, humanists, secular humanists, freethinkers, or others. They always seemed angry, spending most of their time defending atheism, and criticizing religion and a belief in God.

Believers, in contrast, usually had pleasant dispositions and were involved in all kinds of enjoyable, and uplifting community activities. Adding to the contrast was the fact that you could drive around on any day and see tons of cars in church parking lots, yet you had a difficult time getting 30 atheists to attend a monthly meeting. Atheism may be right, but it was losing the battle with religion. "Why?" I asked myself.

My answer is that most non-believers 1) have failed to understand that religions satisfy very important needs, wants, and desires, 2) don't study and analyze how and why religions satisfy those needs, wants, and desires, and 3) do not work conscientiously to come up with a viable alternative that can satisfy most or all of those needs, wants, and desires that religion fulfills.

In general terms, my plan for the future of atheism is to

- Embark on local, national, and international campaigns to present people with a viable alternative to religion that focuses on love and reverence for all human beings.
- Leave the arguing to the theologians and scientists. In everyday life and in our campaign to elevate atheism to a higher position of respect in society, renounce all criticisms of religion and belief in God, and focus primarily on presenting a viable alternative to religion.
- Formulate a joyful, uplifting, passionate, and powerful message about atheism
- Build a headquarters, and throughout the country and the world, support the movement with structures and purposes similar to churches.
- Satisfy the same needs, wants, and desires that religions do, even if in a different form

Source: Humanist Network News

READ A GOOD BOOK LATELY? TELL US ABOUT IT.

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

Fact.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org
Or P.O. Box 160881, San Antonio, TX 78280

September Events

September 4th - THCF First Tuesday Lunch

1:00 pm – Meet other Freethinkers at the Texas Hill Country Freethinkers' First Tuesday Lunch (held monthly)
 Discussion Topic: "Universal Health Care: Can We Afford it?"

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

September 15th – 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 Drive (near Fredericksburg Road)
Note New Location!

September 15th – FACT General Meeting

1:00 pm: General meetings occur on the 3rd Saturday of every month (unless otherwise announced)
 Guest speaker: To Be Announced
 Title of Presentation: To Be Announced

After-break: Patrick Greene on "NDOP 2008"

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

September 30th – FACT Discussion Brunch

10:00 am - Join us for breakfast and discussion the last Sunday of every month.
 Hosted by Catherine Fahrigner
 Topic: "How will we know when the world is overpopulated?"

Grady's BBQ
6510 San Pedro Ave.
(intersection with Jackson-Keller)

Note New Location!

October Events

October 2nd — THCF First Tuesday Lunch

October 20th — FACT General Meeting
October 28th — FACT Discussion Brunch

September 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						

October 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			

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ANNUAL DUES

A.	Individual Paying Member	\$30
B.	Family (2 or more members)	\$42
C.	Full-time Student and Active Duty	\$18

- Membership dues are due on January 1st.
- 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.