

FACT
P.O. Box
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San Antonio,
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A Matter of *FACT* & *The Voice*

April 2008

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

Don Rhoades, charter member and current board member of the Atheist Community of Austin, will be the guest speaker at the FACT General Meeting on April 19th. He will talk on the "History of Freethinkers in Texas." Don was one of the Atheists interviewed by the Express-News in its feature-length series on Atheism a couple years ago, and is a much sought-after speaker in and around the Austin area. Please join us for Don's take on this interesting topic.



General Meeting, Saturday, April 19th @ 1pm
Community Unitarian Universalist Church
4818 E. Beverly Mae

Evans Recovering

FACT Secretary and Webmaster, Jim Evans, is at home recovering from some serious surgery. While we can't say that "our prayers go out" to him, we certainly wish him a speedy recovery!"

Church Urges Hanky Panky

A southwest Florida church issued a challenge for its married members: Hanky panky every day. Relevant Church head pastor Paul Wirth issued the 30-day sex challenge to take on high divorce rates.

"And that's no different for people who attend church," Wirth said Sunday. "Sometimes life gets in the way. Our jobs get in the way."

The challenge doesn't extend to unwed congregants, however.

Source: Associated Press

Every Monday at 12:30 and 8:30 PM

Time Warner Digital Cable Channel 20

FREETHOUGHT FORUM

Hosted by Hugh Henry

March Meeting Review

Elected Positions:

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

Appointed Positions:

Newsletter

Publisher/Editor, Marc Janssens
 Webmaster, Jim Evans
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Texas Hill Country Freethinkers

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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 FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org.

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

The March General FACT Meeting was a lively informal discussion led by two members of the gay community in San Antonio. Dan Graney and Roberto Flores are both active in social and political organizations, although they were forced to leave their careers as minister and priest, respectively, because of their sexual preference. The pair talked about the history of the struggles and successes of the gay and lesbian community across the nation, beginning with the "Stonewall Riots" in New York City, in June, 1969. The flash-point for those riots was police harassment at a bar frequented by gays. Since that date, the gay community has become more politically active and vocal, and visible.

Dan and Roberto showed considerable interest in the state of atheism and the experiences of FACT members, and comparisons were made between the public attitude toward non-believers and the harassment and discrimination experienced by the gay community. Both speakers and audience went away enlightened. .

Submitted by Nick Lee

Freethinkers Bible Study

Why would freethinkers have bible study? The topic for the March Hill Country lunch was whether the bible is as wonderful as a book written by a god should be. The answer was a resounding "NO!" Christians usually think that atheists are ignorant about the bible, but the group at lunch had a lot of knowledge on the subject to share.

Clem stated that there are two different gods in the old testament, Yahweh (the Lord) and El (god). The bible is a scrapbook of documents from various cultures. That explains why there are two versions of creation, two floods, two covenants, several versions of the commandments, and two Jesus saviors.

Ruth noted how various translations of the bibles had well-known errors or embellishments in them. The "breeches" bible told of how Adam and Eve sewed breeches to wear, the "bug" bible said not to be afraid of bugs in Psalm 92, and the vinegar bible told the parable of the vinegar instead of the vineyard.

Sally listed several silly, horrible, or ridiculous things in the bible. As Thomas Jefferson said, "God is a being of terrific character...cruel, vindictive, capricious and unjust." In addition to talking snakes, donkeys, and bushes, there are instructions that condone slavery and happily killing babies. God rapes haughty women and sends people strong delusions so they will believe lies.

Julie claimed the basis of Christianity, that sin must be absolved by a blood sacrifice (Jesus), is contradicted by verses in the old testament that say flour is an adequate sin offering, and that what god wants is good human behavior, not sacrifices.

We discussed how futile it can be to discuss religion with believers, and yet found that at least 2 of the attendees had been religious earlier in life but had been healed.

Denny was dour throughout lunch and Corkie ate a whole hog along with her egg rolls.

Carol wasn't able to come to the lunch, but emailed her conclusion that, with the coming depletion of oil and global warming, food production is all that matters, and there is no time for discussion of religion.

Submitted by Julie Fisher

AU Lawsuit Over Prayer at Graduation Settled

Americans United for Separation of Church and State and a Texas public school district have settled a lawsuit involving a policy that allowed students to vote on prayer at graduation ceremonies. The settlement follows a ruling by U.S. District Judge Sam Sparks that found the Constitution prohibits public schools from holding student votes on whether to have prayers during commencement.

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United, applauded the settlement. "Religious liberty is too precious to subject to a majority-rules vote," said Lynn. "This lawsuit was designed to prevent school officials from meddling in what ought to be personal religious matters."

Although Sparks dismissed some portions of Americans United's lawsuit on behalf of Round Rock parents and students, he agreed that the charge of constitutional rights violations could proceed. Sparks, however, strongly urged both parties to settle the case.

The settlement in *Does v. Round Rock Independent School District* also provides that Sparks retains the power to enforce the school district's promise not to conduct or lead further student elections on prayer at graduation ceremonies. Round Rock officials could hold such elections only if certain future court decisions specifically permit school districts to conduct student votes on prayer at graduation.

Americans United filed the lawsuit last August, challenging the district's policy of allowing seniors to vote on whether to include prayer in graduation ceremonies. In 2007, students at three of the district's four high schools voted in favor of prayer. Americans United charged in its lawsuit that school officials organized, oversaw, and attempted to manipulate the votes on whether to include prayer.

Sparks noted in his ruling that the Supreme Court has forbidden schools to impose prayers through student elections. He rejected arguments by the school district that graduations are not covered by this rule, explaining that a federal appellate decision allowing student-voted prayer at graduations has been overruled by the Supreme Court.

Attorneys at Americans United were pleased that a settlement in the case was reached. "Our goal all along was to prevent students from being subjected to religious exercises based on the will of a majority," said Ayesha N. Khan, Americans United legal director. "Today's settlement ensures that Round Rock will not be facilitating a process that abridges students' religious liberty rights through a 'majority rules' vote."

Source: <http://www.au.org/>

Fitna

by Marc Janssens

On Thursday March 27 at 7 PM Dutch politician Geert Wilders released his 17 min anti-Islam movie "Fitna" to the Internet. The movie shows a selection of verses of the Qu'ran that call for terrorist attacks against the enemies of Allah, Islamic anti-Semitism, the death penalty for apostates and Islamic world domination. The verses are interspersed with graphic video footage and photographs of the September 11 attacks and other atrocities committed in the name of Islam, newspaper headlines, and inflammatory rhetoric by Muslim leaders. The movie ends with clips intended to make the viewer aware of the growing influence of Islam in the Netherlands and the inconsistencies and incompatibilities between Sharia law and the principles of a liberal democracy.

It is quite obvious that the primary purpose of Fitna is to gain increased support for Wilders' right-wing anti-immigration *Party for Freedom*. The main problem with the movie is that it promotes hatred against a large ethnic group without providing any real solutions to the problems of integration of Muslim immigrants in Dutch society and Muslim extremism in the Netherlands.

Fitna was first posted on Liveleak, but was quickly pulled due to death threats to the British Internet movie site's staff. Otherwise the reaction from the Muslim world has been well below that to the Muhammad cartoons published in a Danish newspaper over a year ago. At press time the movie could still be viewed at <http://video.google.com/>.

National Day of Prayer

Thursday, May 1, 2008 will be the "National Day of Prayer" in the United States. Believe it or not, the nation that created the First Amendment has such a day. The bill creating this national observance was signed into law in 1952 by President Harry Truman, and another bill fixing its date as the first Thursday in May was signed in 1988 by President Ronald Reagan. The purpose of this day, according to the original bill's text, is for Americans to "turn to God in prayer and meditation at churches, in groups, and as individuals".

If I were a religious person, I would find this offensive enough. The government has no business telling me when I should be praying or what I should be praying for. But to an atheist, it is even more obvious that this event is repugnant to the principles of the Constitution that governs our land. Not only does the government have no right to tell us when we should pray or for what, it has no right to tell us whether we should be praying at all. That is an entirely private and individual matter, completely outside the sphere of government, and none of its concern. We live in a secular state where the citizens' religious beliefs, or lack thereof, are irrelevant to their ability to participate fully in society, and what we believe or do not believe is no business of publicity-seeking politicians.

We once had founding fathers who understood this. Sadly, America has become blind to the wisdom of great men like Thomas Jefferson, who specifically refused to proclaim a national day of fasting and prayer when he was president:

"I do not believe it is for the interest of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct its exercises, its discipline, or its doctrines; nor of the religious societies, that the General Government should be invested with the power of effecting any uniformity of time or matter among them. Fasting and prayer are religious exercises; the enjoining them, an act of discipline. Every religious society has a right to determine for itself the times for these exercises and the objects proper for them according to their own particular tenets; and this right can never be safer than in their own hands where the Constitution has deposited it... Everyone must act according to the dictates of his own reason, and mine tells me that civil powers alone have been given to the President of the United States, and no authority to direct the religious exercises of his constituents."

Even worse, however, the National Day of Prayer has in practice become not an inclusive, generically inter-faith event, but a chance for the Christian fundamentalist right to boast about their piety and press for their specific vision of a theocratic state. Consider the National Day of Prayer Task Force, whose banner proclaims that theirs is the "Official Website" of the National Day of Prayer. Given its constant invocation of words like "official", "honorary" and "national" and their claims about "coordinating" events for this day, one might be forgiven for thinking that this was a body endorsed or sponsored by the government, and the NDPTF's website (<http://www.ndptf.org/>) does nothing to dispel that misconception.

In fact, it is not a government body, but an extreme right-wing Christian theocratic group. It is chaired by Shirley Dobson, wife of right-wing ideologue James Dobson of Focus on the Family. (So we don't get the wrong idea, the website helpfully explains that although the NDPTF is a separate organization from Focus on the Family, it works out of the Focus on the Family headquarters "for convenience"). Prior to Dobson, its chair was Vonette Bright, wife of Campus Crusade for Christ founder Bill Bright.

The NDPTF website is rife with specifically Christian, specifically Protestant evangelical language. It is blazoned with Bible quotes, links to numerous right-wing groups, and proclaims that its mission is to "communicate with every individual the need for personal repentance and prayer and mobiliz[e] the Christian community to intercede for America".

The religious right's triumphalism and exploitation of the National Day of Prayer shows why such events are both unconstitutional and dangerous. These theocratic groups will seize on any crack, however fine, in the wall of separation between church and state and try to wedge that crack open into a gap through which religion and government can mingle with impunity. That is why this wall must be kept high and impregnable, with not the slightest breach allowed. Thankfully, the power of the religious right has been greatly diminished, but American politicians of all parties still show a nauseating willingness to cozy up to religious groups in exchange for votes, cloaking their unconstitutional actions in flowery rhetoric of patriotism. We atheists must become more visible and politically organized to show our public officials that flaunting their faith is not a fool-proof way to win support.

Source: <http://www.daylightatheism.org/2007/05/national-day-of-prayer.html> (slightly edited)

Published in San Antonio Express News, January 20, 2008.

Re. Bible as literature class now law - school districts must offer it if 15 or more students show interest

On the surface, that seems like a good idea. After all, to be educated you must know as much as possible about literature, even fairy tales. So many writings and books make reference to quotes from the Bible, fairy tales, other books, politics, quotations, history and on and on.

And, of course, the Bible belongs in literature with books about myths, legends and world religions. But that is not why it is being taught in high school. It is being taught as a way to wedge in religion in public schools. You know, the camel getting his nose in the tent. Pretty soon, he can get his whole body in.

And how are you going to control so that teachers do not proselytize? Oh, maybe that's not important because that may be fulfilling the intent to begin with.

But, what are you going to do when 15 or more Muslim children want the Koran taught as literature? What about 15 or more Wiccan children, Hindu children, pagan children or many other religions?

Careful, you might be opening Pandora's box.

Sally Chizek

Published in San Antonio Express News, March 18, 2008.

Re. The testosterone factor

Cal Thomas suggests that if Gov. Eliot Spitzer had reached for the Gideon Bible in that hotel room, he would have been forewarned of the "dangers of such liaisons" ("Did the governor think of his family? But in this smut-riddled, hypocritical world, why would he?" Thursday).

The Bible also condones multiple sexual relations for men. Thomas uses Bible quotations to show how base prostitutes are. He ignores the history of prostitution that is based on women not having been allowed to have personal and financial independence.

Keeping a woman in her "place" is largely a religious concept. A father, husband or client was necessary for survival.

Finally, Thomas throws in the "legacy of Bill Clinton." If it had been Hillary in the White House, we wouldn't have had to deal with the testosterone factor.

Jean Clelland-Morin

Letter to the Editor of A Matter of FACT & the Voice

To all members,

I want to invite all of you to a meeting of San Antonians for Church/State Separation on Saturday April 12, 2008, from 4 to 5 p.m. at the Cody Branch of the San Antonio library on Vance Jackson. We will plan for a rally on the steps of city hall at 8:00 a.m. to noon to support the Constitutional Separation of church and state and protest the government's involvement in the National Day of Prayer.

Call Patrick Greene at 913-5138.

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 to: FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org or PO Box 160881, San Antonio, TX 78280

Let's Call the SBOE to Order!

by Nick Lee

Although the Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) is generally little-known and its mission is less understood than most agencies of the State government, it actually has considerable authority over the quality of education of four and a half million school children in Texas. The Board's role encompasses adopting public school policy, setting education standards for each grade, establishing curriculum materials, and approving school textbooks to be used State-wide. The Board consists of 15 members representing SBOE Districts across the State.

The SBOE has been in the news recently regarding its deliberations of the language arts curriculum. Controversy arose when the ultra-conservative majority on the panel threw out a curriculum for K-12 that had been developed over a period of two years by professional educators, and substituted their own plan, which included a required reading list notably lacking in literature from other cultures. Chairman McLeroy famously said that there was no use for kids to learn foreign stuff, except, maybe, "chow mein."

The SBOE has also recently been involved in setting the guidelines for the teaching of Bible classes in public schools. Last year, the Texas legislature approved a law requiring that school districts offer such a course, but left the details of the course materials and the course content to the SBOE. In Bible studies as in anything else, the Devil is in the Details! At least SBOE members recognize this is a political hot potato, which they are tossing back and forth with Attorney General Abbott.

But it will get worse this Fall, when the SBOE takes up setting standards for teaching Science in public schools. The conservative majority is still working on "wedging" in provisions for raising challenges to the teaching of evolution. Seven of the 15 Board members support the teaching of creationism or intelligent design. Chairman McLeroy, appointed by Governor Perry, is a "young-earth" creationist, and considers the theory of evolution to be "far-fetched." McLeroy has long been committed to undermining the teaching of evolution and is using raw political power, rather than reasoned debate, to achieve that aim. Public hearings on the science curriculum will be held in Austin in November. It is to be hoped that the community of scientists and teachers will show up in force in opposition to any tilt toward intelligent design.

I urge all FACT members to get involved in this issue by calling, emailing or writing to their SBOE member in opposition to this watering down of science in favor of dogma. Whether or not you have children in public schools (most of the SBOE Board members sent theirs to private schools!), you have a dog in this hunt: the future prosperity of Bexar County falls within two SBOE districts: roughly the southern half is in District 3 and the northern half of the County is in District 5. If you can't figure out which one you are in, contact both of them: Rick Agosto, SBOE District 3, 205 N. Presa, Suite B 200, San Antonio, TX, 78205, 210-226-7106; or Ken Mercer, SBOE District 5, P.O. Box 781301, San Antonio, TX 78278, 512-463-9007. Both can be reached in care of sboesupport@tea.state.tx.us

Here are some talking points provided by the Texas Freedom Network (more information available at www.tfn.org):

Children of Texas deserve a 21st Century education, including benefit of all the recent scientific advances.

Public schools should be in the business of preparing students for success in college and the workplace, and in competition with other advanced countries, not in deciding which religious beliefs to teach in science class.

The best way to honor the faith of all Texas is to teach sound science in the classroom, and leave instruction in personal religious views to family and churches.

Cynical politicians should stop promoting a phony conflict between science and faith. Many people of faith see no conflict between the idea of evolution and their faith in God.

FACT members and Friends of FACT, get involved NOW! Don't let Texas become the new Kansas!

Tell Me

by John Hendrickson

Tell me preacher, if you can
alpha and omega man,
keeper of the staff and rod,
who knows the very will of God,
is there now, or was there ever,
a master plan for our endeavors?
Are we wending toward some end,
or is it all just let's pretend?

The speaker of the primal ough
was he the grandson of a bug
the first fruit of our family tree
the progenitor of you and me,
from cell to human one straight line,
ever upward by design,
or was it all pure happenstance
that the monkey now wears pants?

“The Portable Atheist” by Christopher Hitchens ” Book Review by Nick Lee

Christopher Hitchens latest book “The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Non-Believer” is an excellent compendium of the history of non-belief, which will serve audiences on both sides of the aisle. For the current Freethinker, it is a wonderful synopsis of atheist thought though the ages. For the an intelligent believer, it would serve as an introduction to the wide spectrum of discourse on the basis of religion or the lack thereof. (It is unlikely to reach the unintelligent believer, however.)

Hitchens has gathered together the writings of 42 authors and philosophers, ranging from Lucretius through Hobbs, Spinoza, Marx (Karl, not Groucho!), and Mencken, to Salman Rushdie and, who have written persuasively on the non-existence of God. For those only familiar with the current crop of atheist writers, such as Dennett, Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens himself, this collection will show the long and rich history of philosophical thought on the same theme. Not all of the authors included here are strictly atheists, but at least skeptics. It is refreshing to be reminded that the counter-arguments to religious thought did not originate in the 20th century but date back to periods Before the Common Era.

Setting the stage for the rest of the writings, Hitchens presents an introduction that lays the ground work for the arguments in support of opposition to religious thought, and he asserts “Religion invents a problem where none exists...” He presents the positive characteristics of atheism. Then he marches chronologically through history with well-chosen excerpts from philosophy, literature and science. Each selection is prefaced with a note from Hitchens giving the historical context for the writing as well as how it fits into the overall counter-argument to religion. Thus, the anthology illustrates the evolution of non-belief throughout history.

While the writings contained here will be familiar to most hard-core freethinkers, there is still value in the book for putting these selections in one place and placing them in context. For those exploring non-belief, this would be an excellent introduction to the rich intellectual history of thought that has generally been subdued by the social taboo discouraging dissent. Consider it for a graduation present!

As Hitchens concludes his introduction: “It is in the hope of strengthening and arming the resistance to the faith-based, and to faith itself, that this anthology of combat with humanity's oldest enemy is respectfully offered.”

READ A GOOD BOOK LATELY? TELL US ABOUT IT.

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

FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org

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

WMAP Reveals Age of the Universe

Last month NASA released five years of data collected by the Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe (WMAP) that refines our understanding of the universe and its development. It is a treasure trove of information, including at least three major findings:

- New evidence that a sea of cosmic neutrinos permeates the universe;
- Clear evidence the first stars took more than a half-billion years to create a cosmic fog; and
- Tight new constraints on the burst of expansion in the universe's first trillionth of a second.

"We are living in an extraordinary time," said Gary Hinshaw of NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, MD. "Ours is the first generation in human history to make such detailed and far-reaching measurements of our universe."

WMAP measures a remnant of the early universe - its oldest light. The conditions of the early times are imprinted on this light. It is the result of what happened earlier, and a backlight for the later development of the universe. This light lost energy as the universe expanded over 13.7 billion years, so WMAP now sees the light as microwaves. By making accurate measurements of microwave patterns, WMAP has answered many longstanding questions about the universe's age, composition and development.

The universe is awash in a sea of cosmic neutrinos. These almost weightless sub-atomic particles zip around at nearly the speed of light. Millions of cosmic neutrinos pass through you every second. "A block of lead the size of our entire solar system wouldn't even come close to stopping a cosmic neutrino," said science team member Eiichiro Komatsu of the University of Texas at Austin. WMAP has found evidence for this so-called "cosmic neutrino background" from the early universe. Neutrinos made up a much larger part of the early universe than they do today. Microwave light seen by WMAP from when the universe was only 380,000 years old, shows that, at the time, neutrinos made up 10% of the universe, atoms 12%, dark matter 63%, photons 15%, and dark energy was negligible. In contrast, estimates from WMAP data show the current universe consists of 4.6% percent atoms, 23% dark matter, 72% dark energy and less than 1 percent neutrinos. Cosmic neutrinos existed in such huge numbers they affected the universe's early development. That, in turn, influenced the microwaves that WMAP observes. WMAP data suggest, with greater than 99.5% confidence, the existence of the cosmic neutrino background - the first time this evidence has been gleaned from the cosmic microwaves. Much of what WMAP reveals about the universe is because of the patterns in its sky maps. The patterns arise from sound waves in the early universe. As with the sound from a plucked guitar string, there is a primary note and a series of harmonics, or overtones. The third overtone, now clearly captured by WMAP, helps to provide the evidence for the neutrinos. The hot and dense young universe was a nuclear reactor that produced helium. Theories based on the amount of helium seen today predict a sea of neutrinos should have been present when helium was made. The new WMAP data agree with that prediction, along with precise measurements of neutrino properties made by Earth-bound particle colliders.

Another breakthrough derived from WMAP data is clear evidence the first stars took more than a half-billion years to create a cosmic fog. The data provide crucial new insights into the end of the "dark ages," when the first generation of stars began to shine. The glow from these stars created a thin fog of electrons in the surrounding gas that scatters microwaves, in much the same way fog scatters the beams from a car's headlights. "We now have evidence that the creation of this fog was a drawn-out process, starting when the universe was about 400 million years old and lasting for half a billion years," said WMAP team member Joanna Dunkley of the University of Oxford in the U.K. and Princeton University in Princeton, N.J. "These measurements are currently possible only with WMAP."

A third major finding arising from the new WMAP data places tight constraints on the astonishing burst of growth in the first trillionth of a second of the universe, called "inflation", when ripples in the very fabric of space may have been created. Some versions of the inflation theory now are eliminated. Others have picked up new support. "The new WMAP data rule out many mainstream ideas that seek to describe the growth burst in the early universe," said WMAP principal investigator, Charles Bennett, of The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Md. "It is astonishing that bold predictions of events in the first moments of the universe now can be confronted with solid measurements."

The five-year WMAP data were released this week, and results were issued in a set of seven scientific papers submitted to the *Astrophysical Journal*. For further information, see <http://wmap.gsfc.nasa.gov>.

Prior to the release of the new five-year data, WMAP already had made a pair of landmark finds. In 2003, the probe's determination that there is a large percentage of dark energy in the universe erased remaining doubts about dark energy's very existence. That same year, WMAP also pinpointed the 13.7 billion year age of the universe.

For related images to this story, please visit on the Web: http://www.nasa.gov/topics/universe/features/wmap_five.html.

Source: http://map.gsfc.nasa.gov/news/08-074_WMAP_Press_release.rtf

Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed

Last month Ben Stein's new creationist documentary "Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed" toured the US with private screenings in many major cities, including San Antonio (Santikos Palladium IMAX, March 12). The advance screenings would have gone relatively unnoticed by the non-believing Internet community had it not been for PZ Meyers' ban from the March 21 showing at the Mall of America in Minneapolis. Strangely enough, Meyers' family and world-renowned colleague Richard Dawkins were allowed in. The last few scheduled screenings were cancelled, probably because of the Minneapolis incident. A detailed review of the movie can be found on Dawkins' web site (www.richarddawkins.net). Rather than sharing this review with you, I opted for the following unintelligent account extracted from an e-mail published on the movie's blog (<http://expelledthemovie.com/blog/>). I also added a few comments of my own.

I attended a screening of EXPELLED: NO INTELLIGENCE ALLOWED yesterday in Dallas. We got stuck in traffic, and arrived about twenty minutes into the picture. It was still wonderful. My son Joshua, a business major at Baylor, and Charley, my long time retired air force father in law, came too. On about three hours each of sleep the previous night, we watched the movie with unwavering interest. Wow. I want everybody to see this important film. I now know where I will do my Christmas shopping. John Sullivan, one of the movie's producers, said EXPELLED will open on about a thousand screens in February (Ed. Now scheduled for April 18). This is about the same number of screens for Michael Moore's last documentary. There is sooooo much great stuff in this movie. Here are some bullets.

Like many great movies do, EXPELLED takes you on a roller coaster from belly laughs about some of the ridiculousness of Scientism (Ed. ?), to anger at the manner Scientism treats good people (Ed. ??), to alarm that atheism is being forced down our throats by the Academy (Ed. Read the clergy comments in the recent NAS/IOM report on creationism and ID?), to hope that this problem can be corrected, and back to a belly laugh at one of Ben Stein's quips.

The identity of Scientism as atheism dressed in a cheap tuxedo (my words) came across strongly in the movie - especially in the interviews with atheists Richard Dawkins, PZ Meyers, and Michael Ruse. These men may have to change their occupation descriptions in 2008 to "Punch line for EXPELLED."

There are great animations of the inside workings of a cell (Ed. Apparently Harvard University copyright infringement). I'm not a biologist, but seeing this as an engineer (Ed. What? Engineering = Applied Science) invariably causes my jaw to drop.

The contribution of Darwinism to Nazi atrocities was addressed (Ed. At this time freethinkers will leave the theater in disgust). This could have been over the top (Ed. Could have?) - but came off well. Parallel quotes from Hitler and Darwin were appropriately tempered by Berlinski saying something like "Of course Darwinism does not always lead to Nazism. It is, though, a necessary albeit not sufficient component." There was a chilling visit to a Nazi "hospital" where the "unfit" were gassed by Hitler's cult. The contribution of the euthanasia movement to the founding of Planned Parenthood was identified.

Old B&W movie clips were sprinkled throughout the film. One showed a 1950's middle school bully (Big Science) sitting on the stomach of a victim (ID proponent) pinning his arms back. The bully boy keeps saying "OK. Now you're on our side. Say you're on our side!" It was hilarious.

There are also a bunch of short custom animated cartoons. One is an animation of Richard Dawkins frustrated at the low probabilities emanating from a bank of slot machines. The audience roared.

There is plenty for the cerebral from both the scientific and political perspective. Dr. Richard von Sternberg, Dr. Doug Axe, Dr. Guillermo Gonzalez, Dr. William Dembski, Dr. Jonathan Wells, Dr. Walter Bradley, Dr. Alister McGrath, Dr. Stephen Myer, Dr. Carolyn Crocker, Dr. David Berlinski, Dr. John Polkinghorne and yours truly were on screen. (I KNOW I'm missing some. Sorry.) Doug Axe and Stephen Myer did a lot of the heavy lifting concerning biology.

Here's a teaser. How do Michael Ruse and Richard Dawkins explain the origin of life? Be prepared to grin. I am reminded of Richard Feynman's explanation of all that is bogus: The closer you look, the more it goes away.

The Berlin wall is used as a metaphor for the divide between ID and the Academy. On one side of the wall are researchers who are required to conform to an ideology in order to get funding and tenure. Near the end of the movie, there is a back and forth between Reagan's "tear down this wall" speech and Ben Stein giving an speech on academic freedom. (a part of Ben Stein's speech is in the EXPELLED Teaser Trailer.) I admit getting a wonderful shiver.

This is the ice berg tip. There is so much wonderful stuff in the movie. Co-Producer Mark Mathis said there are a lot of fantastic scenes that could not be included in the movie. When the EXPELLED DVD is released, there will be a second DVD with these extras. This takes care of my Christmas shopping for next year.

Word of Advice: Don't line the pockets of these charlatans. Wait until it is on YouTube or get the DVD from the library.

Church-State Champions in Historic Simulcast

On Wednesday, March 26, in theatres across the country, including the Metropolitan Stadium 14 in Austin, interested citizens gathered to learn about the threats to church-state separation and to demand that presidential hopefuls and candidates for other offices answer questions about key issues dealing with individual freedom.

Americans who have fought for individual freedom told their stories during the 90-minute simulcast event. Bryan and Christy Rehm (who fought creationism in Dover, Pa. science classes), Matthew LaClair (a New Jersey high school student who exposed religious indoctrination at his school), Roberta Stewart (an Afghanistan War widow who fought for equal rights for Wiccan veterans), Dr. Susan Wicklund (who wears a bullet-proof vest to provide reproductive services in underserved areas), the Rev. Madison Shockley (pastor and reproductive rights advocate), David and Ryan Antoon (who oppose fundamentalist proselytism at U.S. military academies), Melinda "Lindy" Maddox (who successfully sued Alabama "Ten Commandments" Judge Roy Moore), and Susan Jacoby (author of *The Age of American Unreason*).

These religious liberty heroes joined actors, musicians and comedians on March 26 for a simulcast event titled "Everything You Always Wanted to Know about the Separation of Church and State ... but Were Afraid to Ask!" The high-definition program was hosted by First Freedom First (FFF), a joint project of Americans United for Separation of Church and State and The Interfaith Alliance Foundation.

Peter Coyote, celebrated Hollywood actor and filmmaker, emceed the program, which included a performance by special guests the Bacon Brothers. Actor Kevin Bacon and his brother Michael formed the band more than 10 years ago and continue touring nationwide.

Other participating actors and celebrities included Michael J. Fox ("Family Ties" and "Spin City"), Jack Klugman ("The Odd Couple" and "Quincy, M.E."), James Whitmore ("The Shawshank Redemption"), Wendie Malick ("Just Shoot Me!"), Dan Lauria ("The Wonder Years"), Catherine Dent ("The Shield"), stand-up comedian and Air America host Marc Maron, singer/songwriter Catie Curtis and singer/satirist Roy Zimmerman.

Source: <http://www.firstfreedomfirst.org/>

You can't be moral without God!

A common debate point in religious debates is morality. We often meet the argument that you can't be moral without God. Here is one of the top-rated rebuttals submitted by "dloubet" on Richard Dawkins' web site.

The obvious response is to turn it back upon them.

I was on an atheist call-in cable access show, and a theist posed this very question. He asked why I wasn't out raping and killing if I didn't believe in a divine law-giver. I responded by asking him if that's what he would rather be doing if not for the strictures of his god.

Rather than surrender the point, he said yes.

I like to think he didn't mean it, but that he had to say it so that he wouldn't lose the point.

But turning the question back on the theist is certainly the sound-bite response to that argument. If he says yes, then you can point him out as a monster, and if he says no, then you can point out that he's just sunk his own argument.

Source: <http://www.richarddawkins.net/>



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 Sally Chizek
Sally.Chizek@FreethinkersACT.org (210) 656-3796

April Events

April 1st - THCF First Tuesday Lunch

1:00 pm: Meet other Freethinkers at the Texas Hill Country Freethinkers' First Tuesday Lunch (held monthly)

Host: Sally Chizek

Discussion Topic: "Famous Atheists"

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

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April 9th – THCF Lunch in Northwest

12:30 pm - Meet other Freethinkers at the Texas Hill Country Freethinkers' Lunch (held monthly)

Host: Sally Chizek

Discussion Topic: "Our Founding Fathers: Who were they, who were the Christians or Deists, what kind of work did they do, and what became of them? "

Sarovar Indian Restaurant
10227 Ironsides Drive (Near Wurzbach)

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April 19th – 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

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April 19th – FACT General Meeting

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

Speaker: Don Rhoades

Title of Presentation: "History of Freethinkers in Texas"

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

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April 31st – FACT Discussion Brunch

9:30 am - Join us for a brunch and discussion the last Saturday of every month.

Topic: TBD

DENNY'S Back Room
4510 Fredericksburg Road
New Location! Different Day!

May Events

May 6th — THCF First Tuesday Lunch

May 14th — THCF Lunch in the Northwest

May 17th — General Meeting

May 31st — FACT Discussion Brunch

April 2008						
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			

May 2008						
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 (Jan-Dec)

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

- 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.
- Donations in addition to dues are always welcome.