

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

July 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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Christ the Sun God

The July General Meeting will be an exploration of the astrological origins of Jesus Christ. Did you know there were at least a dozen religious figures who preceded Jesus by thousands of years, all with the same characteristics of virgin birth, three wise men, miracles, betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection? These include Horus, Mithras, and Dionysus. All of these characteristics were based in astrology and early astronomical observations. The knowledge of celestial events among the Babylonians was quite remarkable, and were anthropomorphized into folklore carried through multiple cultures. A video will thoroughly explore the development of these myths and their adoption by the Christian religion, and an open discussion will follow.

After a break for refreshments, Marc Janssens will regale us with a review of a book he has just finished, entitled "How to Learn the Bible in 24 hours!" Sounds like fun.

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

Have You Overlooked Something?

There are a number of FACT members who have not yet submitted their membership dues for Calendar Year 2008. Are you one of them?

Anyone whose dues are not received by July 31st will be dropped from the rolls and will no longer receive a copy of the current Newsletter. Fair warning?

2008 Treasurer's Report

Bank Balance, January 1, 2008	\$1,108.79
Dues Paid	\$1,700.00
Extra Contributions	\$284.09
Expected Expenses	<u>(\$1,950.00)</u>
Net	\$34.09

24 members have outstanding dues

Summer Solstice

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
 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 FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org.

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

Guest Speaker Tim Keene spoke at the June General Meeting of FACT about the basis and traditional observances of the Summer Solstice. He explained that it occurs around June 21st of each year and is the longest day and shortest night of the year. The word "Solstice" comes from two Latin words meaning "the sun stands still." The Summer Solstice is the zenith of sun's power.

Tim spoke about the Druids, a priestly Celtic religion who were regarded as prophets and sorcerers. They celebrated the Summer Solstice at Stonehenge, on Salisbury Plain in England, which they built some 5,000 years ago. The Druids went underground when Christianity became widespread in Britain, but they re-appeared in the 18th Century.

The site of Stonehenge was held in private ownership until 1918, when the owners donated it to the British nation. In 1984, Parliament created the English Heritage to protect and promote England's historic places, including Stonehenge, and that organization immediately tried to bar access to preserve the site. This was resisted by public demonstrations that became violent, and in 2000 full public access was restored.

For Pagans, Summer Solstice is a time of rededication and contemplation, and looking inward. In many places it is observed by building bonfires which people jump over. In some Summer Solstice rituals, there is a symbolic fight between the Oak King (representing Summer) and the Holly King (representing Winter). The emerging Christian faith co-opted the celebrations by establishing June 24th as the date of birth of St. John, the Baptist.

Tim illustrated his talk with diagrams and videos of Pagan celebrations.

Jane Tuck

Major Atheist Event in October

Mark your calendars and cancel your dentist appointments in October! Plan to be at the First Annual Texas Freethought Convention in Austin! This event, being sponsored by Atheist, Freethinker, and Secular Humanist groups from all over Texas, will be held on October 26th at Scholz's Beer Garten.

Activities will include guest speakers, displays, live music, and general merriment. This is a family-friendly event, with face-painting, and de-Baptism ceremonies. You can schedule your ten minutes of fame to record a video of your history of non-belief. We will also have a blood drive to demonstrate our capacity for positive social action.

We will publish more detailed announcements as the date gets closer, and you can also follow developments at the web site: www.texasfreethoughtconvention.com. We will also be asking for volunteers to person the FACT information table at this event. The more people who volunteer, the less time anyone will be stuck at the table while everyone else is whooping it up. If you are planning to go, please call Nick, at 767-0769.

Nick Lee

Every Monday at 12:30 and 8:30 PM

Time Warner Digital Cable Channel 20

FREETHOUGHT FORUM

Hosted by Hugh Henry

Why Belief Belongs in Public Life (Part I)

by Len Wheeler

This is Len's presentation at the Freethinkers' Brunch on June 27, 2008. It is based on Austin Dacey's 'The Secular Conscience' and Marc Hauser's 'Moral Minds'.

Let me start with John Stuart Mill's principle that every idea should be 'fully, frequently and fearlessly discussed' lest it 'be held as a dead dogma, not a living truth'. Dacey argues that secular liberalism today has come to hold that because conscience is private or personal, its moral conclusions must be subjective, and because conscience should be free from coercion, its moral conclusions must also be free from public criticism. And let's admit it, folks, too often we have said nothing or said it only in anger or aggressiveness.

What am I trying to do today? In the words of Sam Harris, "...nothing less than to interrupt a suicide." I want secular tradition to be rescued from self-defeat. I believe our stance on privacy, tolerance and freedom is simplistic and keep dangerous ideas sheltered from public debate. Therefore, I propose that secular morality must be restored to the public square and in doing so, we must allow the religious morality to remain there.

Religious figures have been claiming that they have been left out of the public square, pointing to the court cases against the private icons and idols of their faiths from being placed there and not being able to change our Constitution. I submit that nothing is further from the truth. Our views that conscience is a private affair (said sometimes in an effort to keep religion out of government) have left us (ourselves) out of the public square. We have let religion define the language in the public square today. No religious test for politicians? Baloney! We see Obama having to defend the fact he is not a Muslim, Hillary making statements like: "Faith without works is lacking and works without faith is too hard." We see McCain standing beside Hagee and other religious leaders to boost his appeal to the religious, apparently mostly white religious people.

We have been accused of having our fundamentalist views. When I think what an atheist fundamentalist would look like, I think about the fundamentalist religions who say: I'm right, you're wrong. And in comparison, I picture the atheist fundamentalist: I'm right, you're wrong, uh, let's talk some more.

Religionists always are free to voice their opinion and so many times lately without scrutiny because secularist liberals have not addressed the substance of what they are saying. We have no choice in the matter anyway. Religious liberty means the right to speak. We worry about cultural wars and have been told this is a cultural war, usually in the context of trying to scare off freethinkers. Yes, it is a war, and in more ways than the difference between secularists and religionists. We fought hard over immigration, race relations and war. They are not religious issues, but we allowed ourselves to be stopped on subjects about conscience and morals (because it's a private affair?). Religious morals don't have a lock on public discourse.

Our conundrum has been that if morals are stated that they are prescribed by God--because God says so, so how can we talk about it?

A claim that originates in something we don't believe in, does not mean we cannot criticize it.

I ask you: Is it condescension to converse, then scrutinize or disclaim, or it is condescension to dismiss the claims without discourse? It is people who deserve respect, not institutions. Ideas must be able to flow freely. Secularism must be defended and bring its moral code to bear.

There are many religious folks who agree with Dacey, Harris and me. Rev. Newhouse (Bush's advisor many times) who wrote 'The Naked Public Square' says that morals should be brought to conversation and that religious ideas about it should be open to the same scrutiny that secular ideas should be. Rabbi Marc Gellman mentioned in his syndicated newspaper column "The God Squad", June 7th: 'All of us, secularists and religious folks, must talk to each other and be prepared to give good reasons why we judge some act right or wrong. Saying there's just one truth in the world doesn't free any of us, from the responsibility to give good, sound accessible reasons for our moral judgments.'

We have been so closed-mouthed as to let the religionists name and define the language of today. We are afraid of words like morals, redemption, good, evil, right and wrong. Perhaps we want to be open-minded, or wish to leave that to a private conscience or feel like these words leave out science, etc. Out of privatizing conscience, we have left ourselves out of public life.

But how do we go about this dialogue?

We can deliberate in the public square by asking the right questions.

Does it make sense? What are its consequences? It must be an ongoing conversation with people listening to each other and not thinking of what they have to say while the other is talking.

We must realize that religious wars are/were not stopped by secularists speaking out. They aren't/didn't. Could some of the wars have been prevented if they had? There's no answer for this, but do we keep risking losing ourselves and our government to the majority religion of the day by keeping our mouths shut?

Continued on the next page ...

Why Belief Belongs in Public Life (Part II)

Religious tolerances can find a place in the Bible, as Spinoza did, against coercion of belief. Not all religionists are revelationist. We have to start conversations, continue them and not just in the media, but in our private lives.

I had a dear friend tell me the other day, that if she talked about religion as much as I mention the principles and mores of secularists, that it would probably end our friendship. I am sorry to report that I said nothing and started censoring my language. But then, I began to think about it. How will she know how much I listen to her sacred talk if I stay quiet? How is she going to recognize that I do listen to her "side" of it every time I'm with her. Words like: it was meant to be, there is a reason for everything, it will come out all right some way because it always does; I'll just say it will happen and it will. Yet, I have never felt like censoring her, because she is not proselytizing.

The conversation could start with a religious claim: There are so many morals in the world that are the same, it must be God-given.

Marc Hauser, who wrote *Moral Minds*, is an evolutionary biologist and psychologist at Harvard. He is Director of the Primate Cognitive Neuroscience Laboratory there. He expounds the theory that morality has biological origins while challenging the common view that morality comes from God. He compares the human capacity for morality with Noam Chomsky's notions of a universal grammar, arguing that there is a "morality module" in the brain. His distinction between the brain's innate faculty for the structural parts of morality (as it does in language), is sort of like saying that all human brains have a "blank moral canvas" as standard equipment, but society brings the oil paints and covers the blank canvas with a culture-specific moral "painting."

The brain in back if damaged prevents face recognition of previously known faces, but not of other objects. That and many other experiments show the parts of the brain to be very specific. Patients of frontal lobe damage where social decisions are made, many times have performed perfectly normal, there is a small class of these individuals who when faced with the moral dilemma looked only at the ends not the means, when the average person looks at both. This is a on-going study.

But what the specific brain function of the frontal lobes suggest is that we have a morality specific lobe developed evolutionarily. Perhaps there is a biological morality that give us structures like our innate grammar gives us structures, then culturally is extended into the various languages, so that cultural also gives the variations in morals.

There are some pretty basic answers to moral dilemmas, such as:

- 5 on a track, 1 on the other, which way do you throw the switch?
- 5 on a track, 1 on the other, a line of people, you are the second in line, the first one is the only one heavy enough to stop the trolley, do you throw the person on the track and save five?
- 5 family members on a track and one stranger on the other, what do you do then?

The first one is almost universally answered yes; the second one gets diverse answers, mostly no; but the third, gets almost totally nos. Maybe the first comes from the innate moral grammar and the other two becomes cultural morals? It's worth talking about and experimenting with.

Everyone agrees when we make moral decisions or are helping someone that our emotions are involved. To what extent are the emotions specific to morality? To what extent do the emotions precede the decision or do they fall out of the decision? It is important to explore these answers, and it is important to educate the public that they are still questions and need to be explored. The selectivity of the brain functions can be tested and perhaps so can the selectivity of moral decisions.

As Rabbi Gellman and Rev. Neuhaus say: all subjects must be open to public scrutiny. That's what Dacey and Harris believe, that's what I believe and that's what the best religious thinkers I have read believe.

Could we just start with looking at the problems and listening to all solutions presented and their consequences without worrying about whether the language is redemption, good, evil or right and wrong?

Can we not try to exclude the belief from public dialogue, so that we can find ways to work on solutions by asking: Does it make sense? What will be the consequences?

Let's not abandon the field to religious voices only. We, too, make moral decisions, so we must talk about it in public life, as the religionists are doing daily. Come out of the closet, but without so much emotion and with reason in mind, is my philosophy today.

Recommended reading: "The White Whale" by E. L. Doctorow, an article of his keynote address to the Academy of Arts and Sciences and The American Philosophical Society, "The Public Good: Knowledge as the Foundation for a Democratic Society".

Submitted to San Antonio Express News. Not published.

Re. Deaf seminarians close to getting OK for house.

We would not be having this debate on the subject of deaf seminarians seeking OK for house in Castle Hills if things were fair. If everyone would pay their fair share of taxes (no exceptions), our individual tax bill would be small. But, no, we have given religion a free ride on the backs of hard-working Americans. Is it "just" for clergy (or at least people who claim that title) such as John Hagee, Benny Hinn, Paula White, Pat Robertson, etc. to live lavishly while milking their followers of every penny they can get? Is it fair for tax-exempt religions to compete with tax-paying businesses? Example: the Baptist's Fourth Street Cafe and the parking lot that charges a fee to park when there is an event at Municipal Auditorium.

Why is it okay for religions to defy ordinances of communities, in this case Castle Hills? Is one of the arguments for the exemption that being deaf won't be noisy? Would it be okay if it were a glee club wanting the same deal?

As for Father Tom Coughlin. Give me a break, he purchased an 8,100 square foot home with nine bedrooms and nine baths. Of course, he didn't plan to use the home for deaf seminarians all along, did he? Of course not, he knew the ordinance against that. And, where did he get the money? Does priesthood pay well? Never mind that Castle Hills will lose the tax base on that house. Shame on you City Council and Zoning officials. Incidentally, I don't live in Castle Hills.

Sally Chizek, San Antonio, TX

Published in the June 2008 Newsletter of Atheists for Human Rights, Minneapolis, MN .

Re. Fighting the Good Fight

I want to thank you for fighting the big fight to enforce the values of separation we all hold dear. Even some religious groups understand the value of the Wall. Our group in Texas, the Texas Freedom Network, is religious (although I'm not a church attendee) and does do battle with those who dismiss our First Amendment rights. i.e., the fundamentalists and some evangelicals. TFN has done much for the cause of separation. Not a bad bunch for church goers.

I'm also a member of the American Legion. I joined the organization to support veterans and issues related to veterans, period. Support of the supernatural and extreme nationalism are part and parcel of the contract. The byline "For God and Country" flashes from every front page. Enough. The support I'll retain; the propaganda I'll reject. I sent them this email:

Question, comment, or suggestion: I request that you remove my name from your mailing list. I don't wish to receive any further publications from the American Legion. I'm in support of many of your veterans health programs and will remain a member of the Legion. Your support for veterans health issues to include PTSD, Agent Orange, and Gulf War Syndrome drew me to your organization. Your motto "For God and Country" does not express my views. The organization's motto seems to reflect its desire to place the supernatural ahead of our natural democratic ideals as I and many other non-faith affiliated see them. Foxholes contain all persuasions and we're all veterans. The "Pillars" content did not contain references to the supernatural, a refreshing view to be sure. I'm not sure what you mean by Americanism. Extreme nationalism isn't an answer for America in the 21st century.

Dan Nichols, Kempner TX.

Re. Religious Abortion Fanatics.

I clipped this from <http://www.nytimes.com/>: "Alexia, who wore a cross pendant, prayed all through the two-and-a-half-hour drive from Delta State University in Mississippi. At 23, she was having her third abortion. 'My religion is against it,' she said, adding that she is a Baptist. 'In a way I feel I'm doing wrong, but you can be forgiven. I blame myself. I feel I shouldn't have sex at all.'"

I think this goes to the whole psychological dynamic of theological mind-control and how the abortion controversy fits in with that. And in Oklahoma now the legislators have mandated medical procedures as punishment for the crime of unwanted pregnancy (which, of course, stems from the crime of sex). They just passed a law (over the governor's veto!) requiring all women wanting an abortion to undergo a vaginal ultrasound. Glad I don't practice in that state, where doctors must now choose between effectively raping a woman and being fined \$10K and charged with unprofessional conduct!

You can see where they can go with this next: forcing women to watch the abortion being done on ultrasound, forcing them to watch a recording of it again and again afterwards. Etc.

Tim Gorski, M.D., Arlington TX

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 with the date that they were submitted.

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

The Great Evangelical Decline

by Christine Wicker

What Baptist leaders have known for years is finally public: The Southern Baptist Convention is a denomination in decline. Half of the SBC's 43,000 churches will have shut their doors by 2030 if current trends continue.

And unless God provides a miracle, the trends will continue. The denomination's growth rate has been declining since the 1950s. The conservative/fundamentalist takeover 30 years ago was supposed to turn the trend around; it didn't make a bit of difference. Leaders said it did. Reporters and politicians believed it did. But the numbers kept going down until, finally, they have become obvious to everyone.

Evangelical faith has been dropping since 1900, when 42 percent of the U.S. claimed that distinction. Every year, Religious Right evangelicals, such as those who lead the Southern Baptists, are a smaller proportion of the country. Every year, their core values are violated more flagrantly by the media, scientific discovery and mainstream behavior. Every election, politicians promise to serve them and then don't because evangelicals lack the power to make them.

What all this means is that we were duped. All the hype proclaiming an evangelical resurgence was merely that - hype, a furious shout from a faith losing its grip, manipulation by a relatively small group of dedicated, focused, political power-seekers.

The long decline of Southern Baptist faith is critical to the entire evangelical movement because the Southern Baptist Convention, which claims 16 million members, is the biggest evangelical denomination in the country, almost six times as large as the next biggest predominately white evangelical denomination.

The second-largest evangelical group, the National Association of Evangelicals, has claimed 30 million members. Their churches actually have 7.6 million, tops. Most of those are having the same problems the Baptists are having.

As the true picture of evangelicals' problems has developed, panicked leaders are splitting into camps. Some say that the church is lax, soft, sold out. That what's needed is an even bigger dose of the medicine that the SBC fundamentalist takeover delivered. More authority, more strict interpretations of the Bible, more sermons about sin and suffering and sacrifice, more rigor about who is and who isn't getting to go to heaven.

Others say the problem is image. Evangelicals have been seen as mean-spirited and narrow. Caring about the environment and giving more attention to the poor and needy will turn it around. Get out of politics, they say. Play down abortion and gay rights. That will fix the problem.

But these responses won't halt the increasing irrelevance of evangelical faith to the great majority of the U.S. population. Here are just three of the many reasons.

One is Alcoholics Anonymous and all its 12-step offspring - the creation of two Christian men who wanted to help alcoholics. They modeled AA on the teachings of Jesus and the ideas of philosopher William James. Instead of asking alcoholics to be saved, they asked them to call on a god of their own understanding.

The second attack came within the church as American evangelicals themselves became less willing to proclaim that they are the only ones saved. That idea had seemed reasonable when people lived in fairly homogeneous groups. But international travel, business and communication have changed that. So have huge waves of immigration. Now "the other" is likely to be your son-in-law or grandchild.

And along comes The Pill. Nothing in history has changed human relations as much as that little white pill. The curse God laid on Eve wasn't quite so ironclad anymore. Skip forward a few decades, and couples started delaying marriage until their late 20s, 30s or even 40s. But that pill meant there was less pressure to abstain from sex until the wedding. So hardly anyone did.

But I've named only three of the ways that evangelical faith has come to seem less useful, necessary and vital to those who might benefit from its teachings. Evangelical faith is failing in so many other ways that a growing number of Christians believe a New Reformation is needed. If they are correct, the Southern Baptist Convention is unlikely to lead that reformation. Let's hope it is at least around to participate.

Adapted from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christine-wicker/the-great-evangelical-dec_b_105009.html

“Learn the Bible in 24 Hours” by Dr. Chuck Missler

Book Review by Marc Janssens

This book is a 329-page review of the books of the Bible, illustrated with verses of the King James Version (KJV) and supplemented with a detailed Pretribulational Millennial commentary. The material is well-written and can be read in 24 hours or less. At the end of the book, it is suggested that the reader conduct an independent investigation and form his/her own opinion. With the Internet as my main source of information, that is exactly what I did.

Already in the Introduction there are some major inaccuracies. The following quote attributed to George Washington is printed on page x: “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.” An Internet search quickly reveals that Washington supposedly made this statement during his September 17, 1796 Farewell Address to the people of the United States. The address can be found at <http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/farewell/sd106-21.pdf>. The document does not contain the word “Bible”.

The following quote on page xi is attributed to Abraham Lincoln: “I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man. All the good from the Savior of the world is communicated to us through this book.” Every verifiable quote attributed to President Lincoln by others, can be found in the searchable database at The Abraham Lincoln Association website (<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/incoln/>). A search of the database for the word “Bible” returned 181 matches in 23 records. The quote in the book could not be found.

The inaccuracies in the Introduction do not give the reader much confidence in the validity of what is written in the rest of the book. I could go through the text from cover to cover and identify questionable statements and sections on nearly every page. Of course that would result in a much more lengthy review than can be accommodated here.

The main objective of the book is about the author’s unsubstantiated theory: “The Bible is an integrated message system (page 1), not in broad terms but down to the very letter (page 8). Each incident, each episode, fits into a deliberate, well-designed program from beginning to end (page 306). Every passage, every word, every letter is there by deliberate design, all part of a comprehensive fabric, and that fabric is largely predictive (page 159). Prophecy is the central theme of the Bible (page 305). [The Old Testament] Scriptures—in print and circulated well before the time of Christ—contain more than three hundred prophecies detailing the coming Messiah; and all of them were fulfilled in the first century A.D. For every prophecy of Jesus’ first coming there are eight for His Second Coming, and the more we examine the circumstances necessary for that Second Coming the more we will recognize that they are nudged into place (page 161)”.

Throughout the book the author tries to convince the reader that the Bible is prophetic. He claims that many predictions in the Old Testament were fulfilled in the New Testament. The obvious message is that the unfulfilled prophecies in the Bible have to be taken seriously and will (soon) come true.

Missler sells his theory and tries to substantiate his claims by cherry picking from the Scriptures, by selectively presenting obscure data that fit the theory while disregarding large bodies of widely accepted data that contradict the theory, by giving subjective interpretations that are not supported by most reputable Biblical scholars and, in some instances, by providing information that is blatantly incorrect. We do not have the original documents of the Bible and its numerous errors and inconsistencies are well documented (see, for example, Bart Ehrman’s “Misquoting Jesus: The Story behind Who Changed the Bible and Why”). So, the KJV or any other version cannot be the inerrant word of God, but is without a doubt a collection of subjective writings by a diverse group of human scribes.

This book is reasonable choice if you want to gain better insight into the twisted evangelical mind without spending an enormous amount of time.

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

Church Can't Be Sued in Exorcism

by Max Baker

A divided Texas Supreme Court ruled in favor of a former Colleyville church Friday, saying church members who were involved in a traumatic exorcism that ultimately injured a young woman are protected by the First Amendment. In a 6-3 decision, the court ruled that the Pleasant Glade Assembly of God staff's efforts to cast out demons from Laura Schubert presents an ecclesiastical dispute over religious conduct that would unconstitutionally entangle the court in church doctrine.

Schubert described a wild night in 1996 that involved casting out demons from the church and two attempts to exorcise demons from her. The incident left Schubert physically bruised and so emotionally scarred she later tried to commit suicide. She was 17 at the time.

Justice David Medina, writing for the majority, said that while Schubert's argument regarding physical injuries might be tried without mentioning religion, her case was mostly about her emotional or psychological injuries from a religious activity that was sanctioned by the church. For the court to impose any legal liability for engaging in a religious activity "to which the church members adhere would have an unconstitutional 'chilling effect' by compelling the church to abandon core principles of its religious beliefs," Medina wrote.

"Religious practices that might offend the rights or sensibilities of a non-believer outside the church are entitled to greater latitude when applied to an adherent within the church," Medina wrote. He went on to say that when claims involve "only intangible, emotional damages allegedly caused by sincerely held religious belief, courts must carefully scrutinize the circumstances so as not to become entangled in a religious dispute."

Chief Justice Wallace Jefferson, in a stinging dissenting opinion, wrote that the majority opinion is at times "imprecise and overbroad" and imposes an "erroneous standard" that would allow a church to simply claim a "religious motive" to avoid being sued. He wrote that this "sweeping immunity" is inconsistent with U.S. Supreme Court precedent and that the First Amendment "guards religious liberty; it does not sanction intentional abuse in religion's name."

"This overly broad holding not only conflicts with well-settled legal and constitutional principles, it will also prove to be dangerous in practice," Jefferson wrote. "Texas courts have been and will continue to be confronted with cases in which a congregant suffers physical or psychological injury as a result of violent or unlawful, but religiously sanctioned, acts," he wrote.

Since the incident, Pleasant Glade has merged with another Colleyville church.

The Schuberts moved to Georgia and were not available for comment Friday. William Wuester, their attorney, also was unavailable for comment.

David Pruessner, the attorney for the church, said he was delighted to win a case that has been a part of his life for more than a decade.

While he may not agree with what the church did, that doesn't mean it can be sued, he said. "I personally don't agree and would not let one of my daughters face that kind of emotional pressure," Pruessner said. "But you can't sue a church because you find things they do emotionally disturbing."

Joining Medina in the majority opinion were Justices Nathan Hecht, Harriet O'Neill, Dale Wainwright, Scott Brisster and Don Willett. Dissenting along with Jefferson were Justices Paul Green and Phil Johnson.

Source: <http://www.star-telegram.com/local/story/729096.html/>



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

The Other War In Iraq: The War Against Women

by Tern Judd

Excerpted from The Independent (UK), "Women Are Being Beheaded for Taking Their Veil Off," and posted on alter-net.org April 30, 2008

Nineteen-year-old Shawbo Ali Rauf was murdered by her own in-laws, who took her to a picnic area and shot her seven times. Her crime was to have an unknown number on her mobile phone. Her "honor killing" is just one in a grotesque series emerging from Iraq, where activists speak of a "genocide" against women in the name of religion.

17-year-old Rand Abdel-Qader was stabbed to death by her father for becoming infatuated with a British soldier serving in southern Iraq. In Basra alone, police acknowledge that 15 women a month are murdered for breaching Islamic dress codes.

Violence against women is rampant, rising every day with the power of the militias. Beheadings, rapes, beatings, suicides through self-immolation, genital mutilation, trafficking and child abuse masquerading as marriage of girls as young as nine are all on the increase. In Mosul two years ago, eight women were beheaded in a terror campaign.

Du'a Khalil Aswad, 17, was executed by stoning in front of mob of 2,000 men for falling in love with a boy outside her Yazidi tribe. Mobile phone images of her broken body transmitted on the internet led to sectarian violence, international outrage and calls for reform.

Despite the outrage, recent calls to outlaw honor killings have been blocked by fundamentalists. "Honor killings are not actually a crime in the eyes of the government," said Houzan Mahmoud, who has had a fatwa on her head since raising a petition against the introduction of sharia law in Kurdistan. "If before there was one dictator persecuting people, now almost everyone is persecuting women."

"In the past five years it has got much worse. It is difficult to describe how badly we have been pushed back to the dark ages. Women are being beheaded for taking their veil off. Self-immolation is rising - women are left with no choice. There is no government body or institution to provide any sort of support. Sharia law is being used to underpin government rule, denying women their most basic human rights."

The new Iraqi constitution is a mass of confusing contradictions. While it states that men and women are equal under law, it also decrees sharia law — which considers one male witness worth two females. The days when women could hold down key jobs or enjoy any freedom of movement are long gone. The fundamentalists have sent out too many chilling messages.

Source: PIQUE, June 2008, Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

Former State Science Director Sues over ID E-mail

The following is an excerpt from the July 3 article by Terence Stutz in The Dallas Morning News.

A former state science curriculum director filed suit against the Texas Education Agency and Education Commissioner Robert Scott on July 2, alleging she was illegally fired for forwarding an e-mail about a lecture that was critical of the teaching of intelligent design in science classes.

Christina Comer, who lost her job at the TEA last year, said in a suit filed in federal court in Austin that she was terminated for contravening an unconstitutional policy at the agency that required employees to be neutral on the subject of creationism – the biblical interpretation of the origin of humans.

The policy was in force even though the federal courts have ruled that teaching creationism as science in public schools is illegal under U.S. Constitution's provision preventing government establishment or endorsement of religious beliefs. "The agency's 'neutrality' policy has the purpose or effect of endorsing religion, and thus violates the Establishment Clause," the lawsuit said.

Ms. Comer also said in her complaint that she was fired without due process after serving as the state science director for nearly 10 years. Her lawsuit seeks a court order overturning the TEA's neutrality policy on teaching of creationism and declaring that her dismissal was unconstitutional. The suit also seeks her reinstatement to her old job.

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

Sexpelled: No Intercourse Allowed

(See the spoof video at <http://lricharddawkins.net>)

Anticipating success with their feature film, the producers of “Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed,” have already leaked a teaser trailer for the film’s sequel. Their “teach the controversy” slogan seemed to work well in getting the general public to believe that Intelligent Design is a viable alternative scientific theory to evolution, so the team has moved on to promoting other theories they feel are being suppressed by the scientific community.

“Sexpelled: No Intercourse Allowed,” tells how Sex Theory has thrived unchallenged in the ivory towers of academia as the explanation for how new babies are created. Proponents of Stork Theory claim that “Big Sex” has been suppressing their claim that babies are delivered by storks. Furthermore, Stork Theory proponents warn of the serious moral dangers posed by teaching children that sex has a function. They point out that evil dictators such as Hitler, Stalin and Mao all believed in Sex Theory, and they may have even had sex themselves.

There is also a late-breaking new development in the controversy, a new theory called Avian Transportation Theory. Unlike the original Stork Theory, the modern, sophisticated “Avian Transportation Theory” (ATT) merely points out that there are gaps in the orthodox Sex Theory, and that technology like current sonogram imaging is unreliable. Moreover ATT does not specify that babies are necessarily brought by storks but by “large birds unspecified” (although many individual ATT theorists privately believe it is a stork).

Source: PIQUE, June 2008, Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

GOTCHA!

by Nick Lee

The Germans have a word for it: Schadenfreude, which is the malicious enjoyment of the misfortunes of others. While it sounds perverse it is really quite common in human experience, as when your rival on the cheer-leading squad twists her ankle, or when the guy who just cut you off on the freeway is tagged by a cop a few miles down the road.

One of the most enjoyable features of the monthly newsletter, *Freethought Today*, from the Freedom From Religion Foundation, is the “Black Collar Crime Blotter”. Subtitled “By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them”, two large pages are filled with accounts of the legal difficulties of religious leaders around the world. Arrests, convictions, and civil suits run the gamut from stealing from the collection plate to child pornography to adult rape to sexual misconduct with a minor.

We’re not just talking about Catholic priests, here. The offenders include Protestant ministers, youth leaders and choir directors from several Christian denominations. Interestingly, given the avowed homophobia of most religions, many of the offences by these “holier-than-thou men” involved same-sex encounters. (Women in the church were mostly caught up in embezzlement.)

Just within the State of Texas within the past few months, there have been two dozen incidents of criminal and civil actions against these “people of faith” and “men of the cloth!” (Including ‘Yisrayl’ Bill Hawkins from Abilene who has a Public Access TV program on Time-Warner Channel 20 following FACT’s Freethought Forum. It seems the Rev. Hawkins has been promoting bigamy among the members of his sect.) The most egregious of these was the head of a ‘Christian Academy’ in Houston, who offered to waive tuition for a student in exchange for sexual favors from her mother. Does that sound like ‘good Christian family values’ to you?

The malicious enjoyment in reading these accounts come from the hypocritical hubris of these religious leaders, who have set themselves up as paragons of virtue and examples of Christian virtues. Past examples include Jimmy Swaggart, Ted Haggard, and Jim Bakker, among a long line of self-serving “servants of Christ.” Because they inflated their images while railing against the sins of the world, they deflated that much faster when it became known that they did not practice what they preached.

It is too much to hope that the faithful sheep will be shaken in their core beliefs by the weaknesses of their shepherds, but it is somewhat gratifying for the rest of us to yell: “Gotcha!” .

July Events

July 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

July 19th – FACT General Meeting

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

Title of Presentation: “Astrological Origins of Christ” (video and discussion)

After Break Speaker: Marc Janssens

Topic: “Learn the Bible in 24 Hours—Book Review”

Community Unitarian Universalist Church

4818 Beverly Mae East (off Babcock)

July 26th – FACT Discussion Brunch

9:00 am - Join us for a brunch and discussion the last Saturday of every month.

Host: Jane Tuck

Topic: Social Work in Mexico

DENNY'S Back Room
4510 Fredericksburg Road
(South of Crossroads Mall)

NOTE TIME CHANGE!!

August Events

August 16th — General Meeting

August 30th — FACT Discussion Brunch

July 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		

August 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.