

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

## 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.

# A Matter of *FACT* & *The Voice*

April 2009

## A Law-Full Assembly

Please join us for our General Meeting on April 18<sup>th</sup>, when FACT Member Denny Law will expound on the subject: "Project American Economic Recovery and Uplifting". Denny describes this as an economic recovery plan which will "keep our economy from tanking, create full employment, clean up the environment, give OPEC and the terrorists the back of our hand and restore morale to Americans." Sounds like a comprehensive plan!

Denny is an entrepreneur, inventor of the Bearing Buddy (<http://www.bearingbuddy.com/history.html>), among other things, and a noted raconteur.

General Meeting, Saturday, April 18<sup>th</sup> @ 1pm  
Community Unitarian Universalist Church  
4818 E. Beverly Mae

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## FACT Newsletter Soon to Be Banned?

The Inquisition is back, and this time it has set up shop at the United Nations. Consider the resolution "Combating the Defamation of Religions" passed by a comfortable margin last month at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva (and passed by the General Assembly every year since 2005).

The resolution decries a "campaign of defamation of religions," intensifying since 2001, in which "the media" and "extremist organizations" are "perpetuating stereotypes about certain religions" (read: Islam) and "sacred persons" (read: Muhammad). It urges UN member states to provide redress "within their respective legal and constitutional systems." Capitalizing on cartoon riots and Western anxieties over the excesses of the war on terror, the language conflates peaceful criticism of Islam with anti-Muslim bigotry and seeks to stifle speech in the name of "respect for religions and beliefs."

It would all be absurdist comedy if it didn't have such grave consequences. Defamation of religions resolutions are far worse than useless; they are a direct threat to human rights. While they will have no impact on blasphemy in Western democracies (which already censor themselves far too often), they serve to legitimize the suppression of peaceful political and religious dissent elsewhere—first and foremost in the Islamic states themselves.

Source: Excerpts from "Religious Persecution Wolf in Anti-Defamation Sheep's Clothing" by Austin Dacey, published March 30 at <http://www.religiondispatches.org/>

**Every Monday at 12:30 and 8:30 PM**

Time Warner Digital Cable Channel 20

**FREETHOUGHT FORUM**

Hosted by Hugh Henry

## Faith-Based Initiatives

### Elected Positions:

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 Vice President, Jane Tuck  
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### Appointed Positions:

#### Newsletter

Publisher/Editor, Marc Janssens  
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### 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](mailto:FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org).

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

Professor Stephen Amberg, our guest speaker on March 21<sup>st</sup>, describes himself as a “political development scholar.” His subject was the faith-based initiatives of President Obama.

He said it is important to understand that, with our representative government, the Constitution is flexible and open-ended. When this constitution was written the Federalist authors wanted to avoid religious and class factionalism. Madison and the anti-Federalists put in the First Amendment because they wanted a secular government.

There is a slippery slope when government endorses religion. The free exercise of religion is permitted by the Constitution. The problem is the difference between secularism and religion. When religion is involved, there is often proselytizing.

In the 1930’s, the people supported the New Deal and the Supreme Court supported individual religious liberty. In 1946, religious hospitals were first given Federal grants.

President Bush’s attempt to start faith-based initiatives failed to pass Congress in 2001. Therefore, he used an executive order to start the program. There were no controls on hiring or firing; no studies done to see if positive results were achieved. The first director of the Bush plan, John Diulio, resigned after a short time, saying the initiative was unconstitutional. Bush’s motive appeared to be to help elect Republicans.

President Obama’s faith-based initiative says there must be no discrimination in hiring or firing. The Justice Department will handle any controversies on a case-by-case basis. Community action training will be a requirement.

In contrast to the Bush plan, Obama’s plan calls for monitoring and evaluation.

President Obama has hired a Pentecostal minister to lead his program.

At the end of Professor Amber’s remarks, there were questions about the constitutionality of the plan. “Do we not still have separation of church and state?” “Have faith-based offices become government vehicles of religious propaganda?” There was discussion of what FACT members could do to challenge this initiative.

Jane Tuck

## The Easter Story

By Nick Lee

OK, let me see if I have this straight. Let’s say I live in this neighborhood, OK? And let’s say that I get along with most of the neighbors. But there are some of them that behave badly, and that bothers me.

So, let’s say I call all the neighbors together, and I tell them I am really ticked off at some of the things they do. So, I make a deal with them.

“Folks,” I say, “I think a lot of you are on the wrong path, and it irritates me. So, here’s what I am going to do. I’m going to drag my son out to the middle of the street, and I’m going to let some of you kill him. (Except he won’t really be dead because he’ll get up and fly away when nobody’s looking).”

“Now, after that is done, I am going to forgive all you guys for all the mean and nasty things you’ve ever done. Not only that, I will forgive all the mean and nasty things all of your descendants ever do. And then everything will be alright, and you will think highly of me and thank me for what I have done.”

Do I have that scenario right? Do you think anybody will believe that?

# Texas SBOE Protects Teaching of Evolution

by Gary Scharrer

After a debate drawing national attention, the State Board of Education adopted new science curriculum standards for Texas schools Friday March 27 that protect the teaching of evolution championed by many scientists.

The decision on how to handle future evolution education will influence what Texas public schools teach about biology and other sciences, and what is published in new science textbooks, for the next 10 years, starting in the 2010-2011 school year.

Board Chairman Don McLeroy, R-Bryan, and six other social conservatives lost several narrow votes designed to cast specific doubt on evolution. The new standards no longer contain a provision allowing educators to teach the "weaknesses" of evolutionary theory, part of the current standards.

By 8-7 votes, the board removed specific references to insufficiencies of evidence for common ancestry and natural selection and to "the arguments for and against universal common descent in light of fossil evidence." All are key parts of evolutionary theory.

The board did approve several amendments creating expectations that students analyze and evaluate such issues as fossil data and the complexity of the cell without specific references to common ancestry and natural selection. The opportunity for students to analyze and evaluate those controversies pleased McLeroy. "The science community got its luster back," he said.

The final board vote to adopt the new standards, 13-2, with dissenting votes by Rene Nunez, D-El Paso, and Mary Helen Berlanga, D-Corpus Christi.

Scientists from throughout Texas and helped shape the new science curriculum standards.

"They came to tell the board 'this is what science is, this is what you should be doing.' This is the scientific consensus and to completely ignore that in favor of political expediency is very dangerous for education in Texas," said Eugenie Scott, executive director of the Oakland-based National Center for Science Education. The conflict over how to teach evolution in public schools is greater in Texas than most other states, she said. "It's been very frustrating to see the politicization of science education," Scott said. "It's sad to see that anyplace in the country, but I think it's worse in Texas than just about any other place."

About 4.6 million students attend Texas public schools.

The evolution issue has made rewriting science curriculum standards in Texas particularly sensitive. The Texas Education Agency received more than 10,000 emails on the subject. Some board members complained of unspecified threats directed at them from over-zealous partisans.

Geraldine Miller, R-Dallas, said she received both indirect and direct threats of consequences if she did not oppose the evolution perspective. Berlanga, who has been tending to her ailing husband during his intensive care in a Houston hospital, said people "were even rude about that." "I have received many, many threats," Berlanga said. "I can't tell you what the stress I have been under." Berlanga told board members that her husband's condition has stabilized "because of science and because of God."

The board's final action brought mixed reactions.

"The requirement that students examine, 'analyze, evaluate and critique scientific explanations' and examine all sides of scientific evidence is the strongest critical thinking standard in any state science standards," said Casey Luskin, a lawyer for the Seattle-based Discovery Institute, which challenges evolution theory. "Looking at today's overall outcome, Texas now leads the nation in requiring critical analysis of evolution in high school science classes."

Texas Citizens for Science President Steven Schafersman said scientists did not achieve complete victory but got enough to make him happy. "I think the science standards will be OK. Frankly, the publishers and the authors of the textbooks will be able to use this standard and write good textbooks," Schafersman said. "They won't be forced to do anything really bad."

But Kathy Miller, president of the Texas Freedom Network, which fought efforts to water down evolution education, was less satisfied. Although teachers won't be able to teach the "weaknesses" of the theory, she complained that "the document still has plenty of potential footholds for creationist attacks on evolution to make their way into Texas classrooms." "Through a series of contradictory and convoluted amendments, the board crafted a road map that creationists will use to pressure publishers into putting phony arguments attacking established science into textbooks," she said.

Source: [San Antonio Express News.](#)

## 2009 National Day of Prayer

In 1952, following a six-week prayer campaign in Washington, DC led by Billy Graham members of the House and Senate introduced a joint resolution for a yearly National Day of Prayer, "on which the people of the United States may turn to God in prayer and meditation at churches, in groups, and as individuals."

Rep. Percy Priest called for a proclamation of "a day which members of all faiths and all religions could spend in meditation and prayer." Senator Robertson saw the resolution as a measure against "the corrosive forces of communism which seek simultaneously to destroy our democratic way of life and the faith in an Almighty God on which it is based."

In 1952, President Truman signed into law an act officially establishing a National Day of Prayer. These days varied from year to year, as each president proclaimed a different date; President Eisenhower, for example, named July 4, 1953.

In 1988, Congress amended the resolution to name a recurring date of the first Thursday in May. The resolution was signed into law by President Reagan, and subsequent presidents have offered non-sectarian proclamations on the National Day of Prayer.

In recent years the National Day of Prayer has been co-opted by the religious right to advance a politicized, sectarian agenda. This is due in large part to a deceptive and deliberate strategy executed by the National Day of Prayer Task Force. The Task Force was founded in 1988 to "encourage and promote events related to the National Day of Prayer." It is a private non-profit organization that recruits volunteers on local and regional levels as well as planning events in Washington, D.C. It maintains close ties with Focus on the Family, a conservative evangelical Christian organization; the Task Force's headquarters are within Focus on the Family offices in Colorado, and the Task Force is chaired by Shirley Dobson, wife of the founder of Focus on the Family.

Events sponsored by the Task Force are "specifically limited to the Judeo-Christian heritage and those who share that conviction as expressed in the Lausanne Covenant." The Lausanne Covenant expresses a specifically evangelical Christianity, which may not be compatible with the beliefs of Catholics and many non-evangelical Protestants: for example, salvation is not to be found without Christ, and the Bible is regarded as infallible. Those who are not members of this tradition are welcome to attend events, but will not be allowed to speak. A 2005 research report by the Texas Freedom Network concludes that the designation of Task Force events as "Judeo-Christian" is "a disingenuous claim", given that the Lausanne Covenant focuses on redemption through Christ alone, and thus does not include Jewish beliefs.

Although the National Day of Prayer Task force has no recognized standing with any governmental body, its Web site bills itself as the "official" Web site of the National Day of Prayer. Further, the group's extensive organizing efforts at the federal, state and local level have established it as the de facto national sponsor. This is evidenced by widespread endorsement in the media and, more alarmingly, by state and local governments.

This year the National Day of Prayer will be on Thursday May 7 and the National Day of Prayer Task Force continues to hijack the event. The Task Force Web site lists the following description of the "Steps of City Hall Prayer and Praise Gathering" in San Antonio:

Join us for our 22<sup>nd</sup> annual observance of the NDP in San Antonio. Come to City Hall early at 11:30 am for praise music. Show your allegiance to our God...exalting Him unashamedly in the public arena...joining with fellow Believers across our city to proclaim His Power and Faithfulness, lifting up the Name of our Savior among the peoples. Pastors, laymen, students, professionals will lead us in prayer for our nation realizing that God is the only hope for our country. "May Your unfailing love rest upon us, O Lord, even as we put our hope in You." Ps. 33:22

Whether Mayor Hardberger will endorse the event this year remains to be seen.

Sources: <http://pluralism.org/>, <http://www.tfn.org/>, <http://www.ndptf.org> and NIV Bible

Ed. Sometimes I wonder whether evangelicals read and interpret the Bible as literally as they claim they do. "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Mt 6:5-6

# Pope Says Condoms Won't Solve AIDS

by Victor Simpson

Pope Benedict XVI said condoms are not the answer to the AIDS epidemic in Africa and can make the problem worse, setting off criticism Tuesday as he began a weeklong trip to the continent where some 22 million people are living with HIV.

Benedict's first statement on an issue that has divided even Catholic clergy working with AIDS patients came hours before he arrived in Cameroon's capital — greeted by thousands of flag-waving faithful who stood shoulder-to-shoulder in red dirt fields and jammed downtown streets for a glimpse of the pontiff's motorcade.

In his four years as pope, Benedict had never directly addressed condom use, although his position is not new. His predecessor, Pope John Paul II, often said that sexual abstinence — not condoms — was the best way to prevent the spread of the disease.

Benedict also said the Roman Catholic Church was at the forefront of the battle against AIDS. "You can't resolve it with the distribution of condoms," the pope told reporters aboard the Alitalia plane heading to Yaounde. "On the contrary, it increases the problem."

The pope said a responsible and moral attitude toward sex would help fight the disease, as he answered questions submitted in advance by reporters traveling on the plane. His response was presumably also prepared in advance.

The Catholic Church rejects the use of condoms as part of its overall teaching against artificial contraception. Senior Vatican officials have advocated fidelity in marriage and abstinence from premarital sex as key weapons in the fight against AIDS.

The late Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo made headlines in 2003 for saying that condoms may help spread AIDS through a false sense of security, claiming they weren't effective in blocking transmission of the virus. The cardinal, who died last year, headed the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Family.

Three-quarters of all AIDS deaths worldwide in 2007 were in sub-Saharan Africa, where some 22 million people are infected with HIV — accounting for two-thirds of the world's infections, according to UNAIDS.

Rebecca Hodes with the Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa said if the pope is serious about preventing HIV infections, he should focus on promoting wide access to condoms and spreading information on how to use them.

"Instead, his opposition to condoms conveys that religious dogma is more important to him than the lives of Africans," said Hodes, head of policy, communication and research for the group.

Hodes said the pope was right that condoms are not the sole solution to Africa's AIDS epidemic, but added they are one of the very few proven measures to prevent HIV infections.

Even some priests and nuns working with those infected with the AIDS virus question the church's opposition to condoms amid the pandemic ravaging Africa. Ordinary Africans do as well.

"Talking about the nonuse of condoms is out of place. We need condoms to protect ourselves against diseases and AIDS," teacher Narcisse Takou said in Yaounde.

Stanley Obale Okpu, a civil servant working in the ministry of urban development in Cameroon, said: "What the pope says is an ideal for the Catholic church. But he needs to look at the realities on the ground. One should be aware of these realities. In the case of Cameroon — and Africa as a whole — condoms are very necessary ... You need condoms to prevent AIDS and birth control."

A crowd of photographers and cameras flashed as the 81-year-old pontiff stepped off the plane into the steaming 88-degree heat, with humidity levels measuring a wilting 90 percent.

It was the first stop on a weeklong pilgrimage that will also take Benedict to Angola as he seeks to draw international attention to Africa's problems of famine, poverty and armed conflict.

The pope was greeted by Cameroon's President Paul Biya, who has ruled since 1982 and whose government has been accused by Amnesty International of abuses in crushing political opponents.

[Continued on the next page ...](#)

## 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.**

## Condoms Won't Solve AIDS (Continued)

The pope made no specific reference to the situation in Cameroon, but he did say in general remarks on Africa that "a Christian can never remain silent" in the face of violence, poverty, hunger, corruption or abuse of power.

"The saving message of the Gospel needs to be proclaimed loud and clear so that the light of Christ can shine into the darkness of people's lives," Benedict said as the president and other political leaders looked on.

Africa is the fastest-growing region for the Catholic church, though it competes with Islam and evangelical churches.

The pope said Tuesday he intends to make an appeal for "international solidarity" for Africa in the face of the global economic downturn. He said while the church does not propose specific economic solutions, it can give "spiritual and moral" suggestions. He described the current crisis as the result of "a deficit of ethics in economic structures."

"It is here that the church can make a contribution," he said.

On the plane, Benedict also dismissed the notion that he was facing increasing opposition and isolation within the church, particularly after an outreach to ultraconservatives that led to his lifting the excommunication of a Holocaust-denying bishop. "The myth of my solitude makes me laugh," the pope said, adding that he has a network of friends and aides whom he sees every day.

Source: Associated Press

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## Fahringer on the National Day of Prayer

by Sally Chizek

The following is a draft of something Catherine Fahringer was working on. It doesn't appear to be complete, but I was struck by the fact that she wrote it in 1999, and nothing has changed. Ten years later, we are still fighting for separation of church and state.

"National Day of Prayer Has Become a Platform for the Religious Right Propaganda Campaign"  
Americans for Separation of Church and State Church-State Workday Group, Tuesday, April 27, 1999.

The annual National Day of Prayer (NDP) has been hijacked by the Religious Right organizations that are using it to promote their religious political agenda. Congress mandated this 'civil religion' event in 1952 and it has become increasingly dominated by religious broadcaster James Dobson (Focus on the Family) and other Religious Right leaders.

Executive Director Barry Lynn of AU charged that groups are promoting bad history, bad law and bad inter-faith relations. NDP Task Force materials tell local organizers that they need not allow religions outside of the 'Judeo Christian' tradition to participate. They recommend that in public events only church leaders who believe in 'salvation by grace alone' and who 'have a personal relationship with Christ' get access to the microphone. NDP Task Force materials state "...we are looking forward to assembling the BODY OF CHRIST so we are covered as to why we haven't invited Mormons, Muslims, etc." The materials include an inflammatory "We pray that the citizens of this country will elect leaders whose consciences will not be available to the highest bidder, who will not seek to curry the favor of Godless power mongers.... We seek the assistance of pro-family Christian groups."

Jefferson, writing to the Rev. Samuel Miller in 1808 said, "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 of 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."

## The Means of Reproduction: Sex, Power and the Future of the World

A new book by Michelle Goldberg

In this groundbreaking work of investigative journalism by the author of The New York Times bestseller Kingdom Coming, Michelle Goldberg exposes a global battle over women's reproductive rights that pits reformers against an international alliance of fundamentalists, with profound consequences for both individual lives and worldwide development.

Women's rights are often treated as mere appendages to great questions of war, peace, poverty and economic development. But with networks of social traditionalists, feminists and government bureaucrats struggling to remake gender and childbearing norms worldwide, the battle to control sex and reproduction has become a high-stakes enterprise determining the fate of nations and individuals alike.

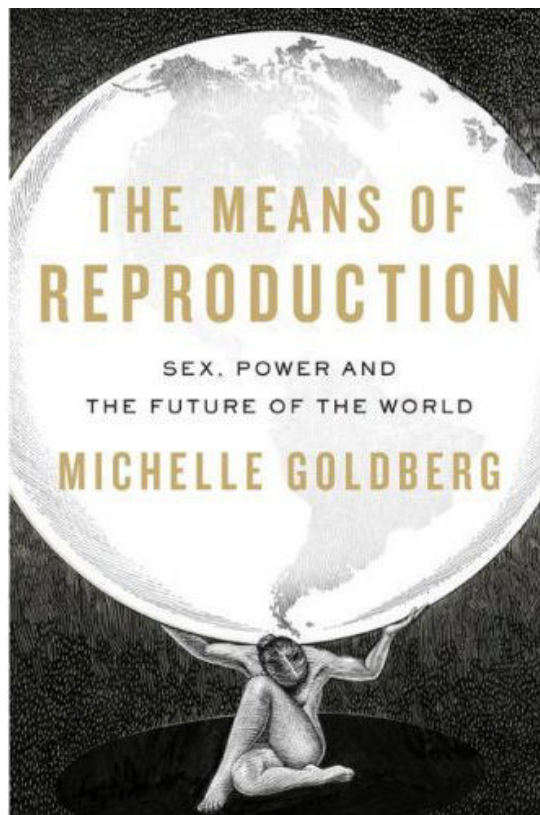
In a work of incisive cultural analysis and deep reporting, Michelle Goldberg shows how the emancipation of women has become the key human rights struggle of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

The Means of Reproduction travels through four continents, examining issues like abortion, female circumcision and Asia's missing girls to show how the battle over women's bodies has been globalized, and how the United States has, depending on who is in power, alternately advanced and impeded women's rights worldwide. In reporting that encompasses both dramatic human stories and the rarified realms of international policymaking, Goldberg elucidates the economic, demographic and health consequences of women's oppression, which affect more than simply half the world's population.

As The Means of Reproduction reveals, the conflict between self-determination and patriarchal tradition has crucial implications for global development. Empowering women is the key to addressing both overpopulation and rapid population decline, helping the third world climb out of poverty and retarding the spread of AIDS. Yet attempts to improve women's status elicit fierce opposition from conservatives who see women's submission as key to their own national or religious identity.

Goldberg reaches back through the last half century to explain how control of women's fertility has been a kind of proxy for other ideological struggles. From the anti-communist genesis of America's attempts to stem population growth in poor countries to the current worldwide attack on women's rights as a decadent Western imposition, Goldberg explores the interplay between the great issues of our time and the politics of sex and childbearing. Finally, The Means of Reproduction shows how women, strengthened by a solidarity that transcends borders, are fighting for freedom.

The 272 page hardcover book was published by the Penguin Press on April 2, 2009 and is available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) for \$17.13 plus shipping and handling.



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

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## Ben Stein Sweeps the Field!

Every year the Secular Humanist Society of New York (SHSNY) elects the “Dumbth Award” winner. The results of the most recent elections were published in last month’s SHSNY newsletter PIQUE.

**Ben Stein**—financial columnist, game show host and self-satisfied rightwing gadfly— produced and starred in the 2008 movie, “Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed,” which blamed the Holocaust on Charles Darwin and claimed that the only reason “Darwinism” is taught in the nation’s schools is that an anti-religious, elitist academic cabal suppresses the “truth” of creationism. Promoting the movie last fall, Stein told a radio interviewer: “Dachau is where science leads you. Love of God and compassion and empathy leads you to a glorious place, and science leads you to killing people.”

For that morsel of mendacity, Stein garnered more votes —39 out of 66— than the other four 2008 Dumbth nominees put together. The not-so-coveted horse’s ass trophy is his whenever he wants to pick it up. (Leave a message on the machine, Ben— we’ll get back to you.)

How did the other nominees fare?

Oklahoma State Representative and anti-gay, pro-creationism activist **Sally Kern** was the surprise runner-up, with 11 votes, for her judgment that, “Homosexuality is the biggest threat our country has, even more so than terrorism or Islam.”

Perennial favorite **Ann Coulter**—our 2007 Dumbth Award winner for her remark that she just wanted Jews to be “perfected” by becoming Christians— impressed nine of our voters this year with her pronouncement that, “Biologists believe in evolution, not real scientists like physicists and chemists.”

Poor **Newt Gingrich**, once the most powerful politician in America, could muster only four votes (“Newt” who?) for his warning, after the anti-Proposition 8 demonstrations in California, that, “There is a gay and secular fascism in this country that wants to impose its will on the rest of us, is prepared to use violence and harassment.”

But the booby prize—only three votes— goes to right-wing radio bloviator **Michael Barone**, who fulminated that, “The liberal media attacked Sarah Palm because she did not abort her Down syndrome baby. They wanted her to kill that child.”

Nominations are now—and all through 2009— open for this year’s “winner.” Keep your eyes and ears open for the clueless, the fatuous, the anti-science and anti-reason remarks with which our political, religious and media “leaders” are sure to gobsmack us, and send your nominations to [editor@shsny.org](mailto:editor@shsny.org).

Source: PIQUE, March 2009 Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

## L’Aquila Earthquake

by Marc Janssens

Yesterday night I happened to watch the news on BCC America. There was extensive coverage of the earthquake in Italy. A reporter interviewed a nun in front of the badly damaged convent. She thanked God for the fact that she was still alive. Later a man burst into tears in front of the camera as he explained that he had lost his wife and children in the quake. How does God pick and choose who lives and who dies?

At the time of writing the death toll exceeded 200. Surely God could have prevented the deaths of these innocent people and the suffering of so many others, right? New Testament scholar and former evangelical Bart Ehrman lost his faith because he could not find a satisfactory answer to question why there is so much suffering in the world. In his book “God’s Problem”, Ehrman examines the Bible’s many contradictory answers.

You can help the victims of the earthquake and other crises around the world by donating to secular humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross (<http://redcross.org/>).

Michael Shermer is on tour in a series of debates with supporters of “Intelligent Design”. On April 28<sup>th</sup> he will be at University of Texas, Austin, joined on-stage by Dr. Steven Weinberg, UTA Professor. Together they will take on Hugh Ross and Fazale Rana, from the “Reasons To Believe Science and Faith Think Tank”. Details on time and location will be announced later. Check the UTA web site.

## Knights Hid Holy Shroud

by Richard Owen

Medieval knights hid and secretly venerated The Holy Shroud of Turin for more than 100 years after the Crusades, the Vatican said in an announcement on April 5 that appeared to solve the mystery of the relic's missing years.

The Knights Templar, an order which was suppressed and disbanded for alleged heresy, took care of the linen cloth, which bears the image of a man with a beard, long hair and the wounds of crucifixion, according to Vatican researchers.

The Shroud, which is kept in the royal chapel of Turin Cathedral, has long been revered as the shroud in which Jesus was buried, although the image only appeared clearly in 1898 when a photographer developed a negative.

Barbara Frale, a researcher in the Vatican Secret Archives, said the Shroud had disappeared in the sack of Constantinople in 1204 during the Fourth Crusade, and did not surface again until the middle of the fourteenth century. Writing in *L'Osservatore Romano*, the Vatican newspaper, Dr Frale said its fate in those years had always puzzled historians.

However her study of the trial of the Knights Templar had brought to light a document in which Arnaut Sabbatier, a young Frenchman who entered the order in 1287, testified that as part of his initiation he was taken to "a secret place to which only the brothers of the Temple had access". There he was shown "a long linen cloth on which was impressed the figure of a man" and instructed to venerate the image by kissing its feet three times.

Dr Frale said that among other alleged offences such as sodomy, the Knights Templar had been accused of worshipping idols, in particular a "bearded figure". In reality however the object they had secretly venerated was the Shroud.

They had rescued it to ensure that it did not fall into the hands of heretical groups such as the Cathars, who claimed that Christ did not have a true human body, only the appearance of a man, and could therefore not have died on the Cross and been resurrected. She said her discovery vindicated a theory first put forward by the British historian Ian Wilson in 1978.

The Knights Templar were founded at the time of the First Crusade in the eleventh century to protect Christians making the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The Order was endorsed by the Pope, but when Acre fell in 1291 and the Crusaders lost their hold on the Holy Land their support faded, amid growing envy of their fortune in property and banking.

Rumors about the order's corrupt and arcane secret ceremonies claimed that novices had to deny Christ three times, spit on the cross, strip naked and kiss their superior on the buttocks, navel, and lips and submit to sodomy. King Philip IV of France, who coveted the order's wealth and owed it money, arrested its leaders and put pressure on Pope Clement V to dissolve it.

Several knights, including the Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, were burned at the stake. Legends of the Templars' secret rituals and lost treasures have long fascinated conspiracy theorists, and figure in *The Da Vinci Code*, which repeated the theory that the knights were entrusted with the Holy Grail.

In 2003 Dr Frale, the Vatican's medieval specialist, unearthed the record of the trial of the Templars, also known as the Chinon Parchment, after realizing that it had been wrongly catalogued. The parchment showed that Pope Clement V had accepted the Templars were guilty of "grave sins", such as corruption and sexual immorality, but not of heresy.

[Continued on the next page ...](#)



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Available Sizes: Small, Medium, Large, XLarge, 2X and 3X

Also Available: One Size Fits All Vests (Red)

Price for All T-Shirts and Vests: \$15.00

## Knights Hid Holy Shroud (Continued)

Their initiation ceremony involved spitting on the Cross, but this was to brace them for having to do so if captured by Muslim forces, Dr Frale said. Last year she published for the first time the prayer the Knights Templar composed when “unjustly imprisoned”, in which they appealed to the Virgin Mary to persuade “our enemies” to abandon calumnies and lies and revert to truth and charity.

Radiocarbon dating tests on the Turin Shroud in 1988 indicated that it was a medieval fake. However this had been challenged on the grounds that the dated sample was taken from an area of the shroud mended after a fire in the Middle Ages and not a part of the original cloth.

After the sack of Constantinople it was next seen at Lirey in France in 1353, when it was displayed in a local church by descendants of Geoffroy de Charney, a Templar Knight burned at the stake with Jacques de Molay.

It was moved to various European cities until it was acquired by the Savoy dynasty in Turin in the sixteenth century. Holy See property since 1983, the Shroud was last publicly exhibited in 2000, and is due to go on show again next year.

The Vatican has not declared whether it is genuine or a forgery, leaving it to believers to decide. The late John Paul II said it was “an icon of the suffering of the innocent in every age.” The self proclaimed heirs of the Knights Templar have asked the Vatican to “restore the reputation” of the disgraced order and acknowledge that assets worth some \$120 million were confiscated.

The Association of the Sovereign Order of the Temple of Christ, based in Spain, said that when the order was dissolved by Pope Clement V in 1307, more than 9,000 properties, farms and commercial ventures belonging to knights were seized by the Church. A British branch also claiming descent from the Knights Templar and based in Hertfordshire has called for a papal apology for the persecution of the order.

Source: <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/>

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## Darn Danes Defy Dogma

by Nick Lee

Here is a bit of perspective on what a Theocracy would look like.

For 250 years, American Atheists, Humanists, Agnostics and Freethinkers have been fighting to maintain a complete separation of Church and State. (In fact, so have most of the mainstream religions.)

The guiding principle is that one religion would take advantage and impose its dogma and doctrines on all citizens and dictate personal behavior according to their world-view. There have been examples of this pervasive control in European history, and currently in some Middle-Eastern countries.

And, in the U.S., the threat of faith-based public policy has been hanging over our heads for the past eight years. In spite of our opposition to the undue influence of the religious radicals, and in spite of their minority position among their Christian brethren, the United States is one of the most religious nations in the world.

How do you explain, then, a country like Denmark, where there is NO separation of Church and State? The Evangelical Lutheran Church is the official (by law) state church. Every citizen pays one-percent of their annual income as a tax to support the church. Lutheran Priests are civil servants. The King is required by the Constitution to be a practicing Lutheran. The public school system is required to have classes on Christianity for one hour every week.

That sounds unbearably theocratic!

But, wait! Denmark is one of the least religious countries in the world! Estimates of the percentage of Atheists among the population range from 43% to 80%. (Although 85% are counted as members of the Lutheran Church, that stems from their ritual confirmation in childhood, not from any active participation after age twelve, and the Church does not drop them from its rolls.) Despite their rejection of Christianity, the Danes are a highly moral country, with high social awareness and low crime rate.

Maybe we should just drop this “separation” thing. Maybe there is another way to get the religious fundamentalists off our backs. I’m just saying.

## April Events

### April 7<sup>th</sup> – THCF First Tuesday Lunch

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

Host: Julie Fisher

No Discussion: "Desert Island Bookshelf: What 3 books would you like to have with you on a desert island? "

**Yummi Japanese Restaurant**  
**24165 W IH 10 # 221**  
**(by HEB in Leon Springs)**

### April 15<sup>th</sup> – THCF Lunch in the Northwest

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

Host: Julie Fisher

Discussion Topic: "Effects of the Recession on You"

**Sawasdee Thai Cuisine**  
**6407 Blanco Road, Castle Hills (inside 410)**  
**NEW LOCATION!**

### April 18<sup>th</sup> – The Lunch Bunch

11:30 am: Join us for good food before the Meeting

**Sarika's Thai Restaurant**  
**4319 Medical Dr (Near Fredericksburg Rd)**

### April 18<sup>th</sup> – FACT General Meeting

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

Speaker: Denny Law

Title of Presentation: "Project American Economic Recovery and Uplifting"

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

### April 25<sup>th</sup> – FACT Discussion Brunch

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

Host: Jane Tuck

Topic: TBD

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

## May Events

### May 5<sup>th</sup>—THCF First Tuesday Lunch

### May 13<sup>th</sup>—THCF Lunch in the Northwest

### May 16<sup>th</sup>—General Meeting

### May 30<sup>th</sup>—FACT Discussion Brunch

April 2009						
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 2009						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30
31						

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

[www.FreethinkersACT.org](http://www.FreethinkersACT.org)

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



## FACT MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

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

### 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.