

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

## FACT

is an association of atheists, freethinkers, agnostics, secular humanists, rationalists, skeptics, and other non-theists serving the purpose of preserving the separation of church and state and promoting Freethought through education.

July General Meeting	1
Pilot's Prayer Killed Passengers	1
June Meeting Report	2
Top Ten Useless Organs	2
Critical Thinking Redux	3
Book Review	4
SBOE At It Again	5
Religions Continue War on Women	6
Word of the Day	7
Game Show Looks to Convert Atheists	8
Agnostic's Guide to Surviving the Bible Belt	9
Calendar of Events	11
Membership Application	12

# A Matter of *FACT* & The Voice

July 2009

## Let's Party in July!

In lieu of the usual General Meeting agenda in July, FACT will hold a Pot-Luck Party on the same date and time, but at a different location. We'll spend some time eating and drinking, some time in general discussion, and some time watching a provocative video by Richard Dawkins: "The God Delusion."

You can bring a dish to share from any of the categories:

Meats  
Vegetarian  
Salads  
Drinks  
Desserts

**IN ADDITION**, attendees are requested to bring at least one stuffed animal or other toy, game, or book for distribution to a needy child (up to 12 years). This will be part of FACT's outreach into the community, to increase our visibility and foster a positive image. We will discuss the range of organizations through which these toys will be distributed.

Please indicate your choice when you RSVP to

[FACT.President@FreethinkersACT.org](mailto:FACT.President@FreethinkersACT.org)

or by calling 210-767-0769. The "secret" location and driving directions will be revealed to you at that time.

## Pilot's Prayer Killed Passengers

A pilot who prayed instead of taking emergency measures before a Tunisian charter flight crashed into the sea off Sicily in 2005 killing 16 passengers, was convicted of manslaughter in Rome in late March.

Tunisian pilot Chefit Charbi according to the plane's black box ceded command of the plane to his copilot in order to pray. He and the copilot were among the 23 people who survived the crash. Both were sentenced to 10 years in prison for failure to put emergency measures in place.

Source: Freethought Today, May 2009

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

Time Warner Digital Cable Channel 20

Grande Cable Channel 19

AT&T U-verse Channel 99

**FREETHOUGHT FORUM**

Hosted by Hugh Henry

## Elected Positions:

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

## 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](mailto:FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org).

[FreethinkersACT.org](mailto:FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org).

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

# June Meeting Becomes Impromptu

For the General Meeting on June 20th, the scheduled speaker was Eric Lane, President of the local chapter of Americans United. However, Eric fell ill the day before and was unable to make it.

FACT Secretary Jim Evans stepped in and conducted a free-wheeling discussion of future activities that the organization could get involved in, and reports a hearty participation by all attendees.

Meanwhile, outside the Community UU Church, a fawn was born in the parking lot.

And you thought our meetings were dull!

Eric agreed to talk to us at the August General Meeting about legislative initiatives in Austin that impact on the separation of church and state.

Nick Lee

## Top Ten "Useless" Parts

Proponents of Intelligent Design argue that the human body is such a perfect engine that it could only have been built by a master craftsman just as we see it today. Well, I have a few questions about that. It seems to me that there are several parts of my body that I could do without, and it seems rather dumb that I am stuck with parts that serve no purpose. Here are some parts I don't understand, in Letterman style:

**No. 10—Plica semilunaris (third eyelid)**—You may not know it, but you have a third eyelid. Pull open the two more noticeable eyelids and take a look—it's located right in the corner by the tear duct. The third eyelid is left over from what's known as a "nictitating membrane," which is still present in animals like chickens and lizards.

**No. 9—Body Hair**—No doubt we were once hairier. Up until about 3 million years ago, we were covered with it. But by the time Homo erectus arrived, the ability to sweat meant we could shed our wooly ways.

**No. 8—Sinuses**—Doctors don't really know much about sinuses, only that we have a lot of them. Possibilities for their function range from insulating our eyes to changing the pitch and tone of our voice.

**No. 7—Adenoids**—Adenoids trap bacteria, but they're also prone to swelling and infection. Just ask any 7-year-old. Luckily, our adenoids shrink with age and are often removed, along with ...

**No. 6—Tonsils**—Also prone to swelling and infection. If you have them by your 30s, it's almost an accomplishment.

**No. 5—Coccyx**—More useful as a game-winning Scrabble word than part of the anatomy, the coccyx, or tailbone, is several fused vertebrae left over from the olden days when we had tails.

**No. 4—Erector Pili**—When were hairier (see No. 9), the erector pili made the hairs stand on end when we needed to appear bigger and scarier. Now, it just gives us goose bumps.

**No. 3—Wisdom Teeth**—Back in the day, when we ate mammoth meat off the bone and didn't floss afterward, our teeth tended to fall out. Therefore, when those reserve molars, aka "wisdom teeth," came in they were welcomed. Nowadays, fluoride and dental plans have just made them a huge pain.

**No. 2—Appendix**—Darwin claimed the appendix was useful for digestion during our early plant-eating years; it's dwindled down to little since we started eating more digestible foods.

**No. 1—Male Nipples**—Because, why?

Adopted from the Net

# Critical Thinking Redux

## by Nick Lee

The May 2009 issue of Matter of FACT included an article entitled "ARE YOU A CRITICAL THINKER?", which was a summary of a plea by an educational psychologist to improve the critical thinking skills of the American public. According to the psychologist, "Everyone thinks; but we don't always think well. In fact, much of our thinking, left to itself, is sloppy, distorted, partial, uninformed, or prejudiced", and she expressed her frustration that we are not teaching public school students "to entertain (in good faith) viewpoints with which they disagree." FACT Member Hugh Henry appended his comments to this report, applying this concept to Atheists and other Freethinkers. In Hugh's observation, most of us are guilty of dismissing the views of Christians, out of hand, without applying the skills of critical thinking. According to Hugh, "So many atheists cease critical thinking once they have concluded that there is no God", and he suggested that we might have better luck getting along with Christians if we engaged them with critical thinking and acceptance, instead of trying to out-shout them.

FACT Member Clem Wiechecki responded in the June edition of A Matter of FACT, arguing against fraternizing with the enemy. His concern is that working with Christians, who are attempting to impose their will on us and take away our freedom from religion, is a form of appeasement. According to Clem, Christians will not respond to critical thinking and the only thing that will ensure our civil rights is through raw political power. He said: "The longer the ('Appeasement Atheists') foster the belief that we have to work with Christians, the longer it will take for Atheism to take its proper place on this planet. Atheists have to work toward making our own rights because no one is going to give them to us."

Hugh, meet Clem! Clem, meet Hugh! Let's talk!

My observation is that there are Christians, and then, there are Christians. The Christians that Clem appears to be referring to, are the stereotypical fundamental right-wing hard-liners that are so visible and fill up the airwaves. Clem is right that this segment of the Christian population has an agenda that has no room for non-believers in this country. For the past 25 years, they have had some success in advancing their narrow world-view, and threatened the civil rights of anyone who did not share their "family values." They are indeed a threat to non-believers, as well as other religions, gays, and politically progressive social activists.

But that is only a small portion of the Christian spectrum. There are some 2,000 Christian denominations in the United States, ranging from the barely spiritual to the hellfire and brimstone crowd. The doctrinal battles between those denominations are almost as pitched as between Christians and other religious faiths. The vast majority of these Christians are much less militant, much more progressive (dare I say, Christ-like?) in their philosophy that their noisier brethren. I call them the Mainstream.

For example, on the issue of the separation of church and state, most Christian denominations are in favor of it, for the same reason that the Danbury Baptists expressed their concern to Jefferson. Most of the members of Americans United (including the Director, Barry Lynn, an ordained minister) are religious people, with deeply held beliefs; they just don't want government meddling in their practices, and have no desire to force others to adhere unwillingly to their doctrines. (I was once present at a discussion where an audience member prefaced her question with the statement "I don't believe in God", at which point the minister interjected "I probably don't believe in the same God you don't believe in!" So, it is not useful (nor an exercise in critical thinking) to lump all Christians together and tar them with the same intolerant brush.

Although recent polls show that the percentage of non-believers in this country is growing by leaps and bounds, atheists are not large enough, nor unified enough, to be a political force. In order to achieve the political influence which Clem aspires, we need to find common cause with SOME people of faith. We do not need to convert to Christianity, nor do we need to disabuse the faithful of their "superstition" in order to work with others toward a common goal. You want evolution taught in schools? We need the votes of mainstream churches to make that happen!

Women would not have won the right to vote without enlisting the support of lots of sympathetic men. Blacks would not have ensured their civil rights without a lot of white allies. Gays have not made inroads on discriminatory practices without a lot of heterosexuals behind them. Non-believers will not gain our freedom from religious incursions without the cooperation of mainstream Christians and other religions. Getting their cooperation will require that we stop demonizing them and begin treating them with respect. We will isolate ourselves out of existence unless we find common cause with the community of faith.

That is why it is critical that we apply the reason that we say we trust in, and approach the problem with less heat.

## "Crooks and Homos in the Pulpit"

by Rueben Armstrong

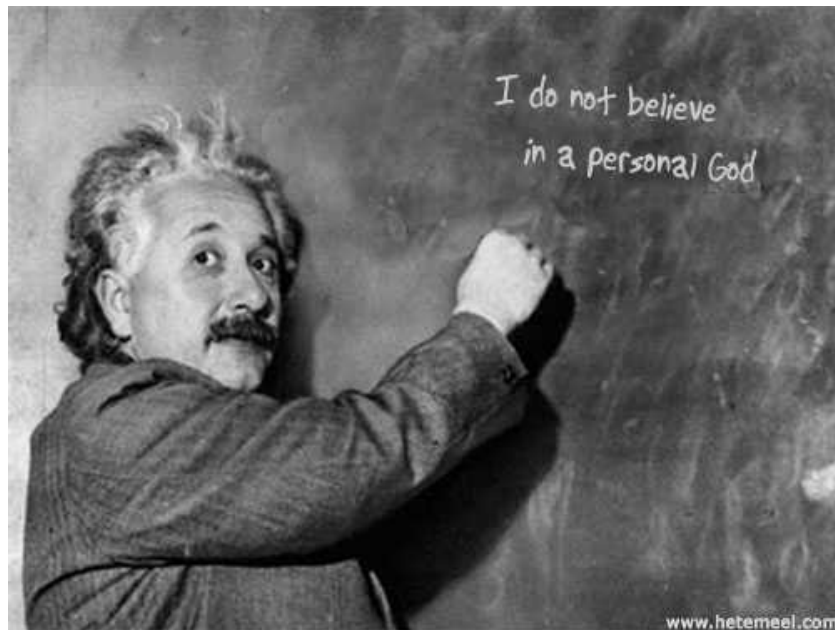
It has always been fairly easy to take potshots at televangelists who set themselves up as paragons of virtue and rake in a hefty income from the flock, only to fall from their lofty perches through scandals, sexual and/or financial. One need only to mention Bakker, Swaggert, and Haggard, for prominent examples. While it is fun to point out their hypocrisy, up to now this has only been the favorite pastime of skeptics and non-believers.

Now comes a devout Christian, national talk-show host Reuben Armstrong, who has written a book which calls out many of today's famous Christian pastors from the prosperity Gospel community, including T.D. Jakes, Joel Osteen and Bishop Eddie Long as well as Ted Haggard. Armstrong styles himself a crusader on behalf of his fellow Christians; with a goal to educate Christians on the tactics and methods used by those who deceive others by taking advantage of the beliefs of the average Christian.

He argues that these megapastors have distorted God's Word and have become corporate CEOs, allowing money, greed, and materialism to take over their souls. They have no accountability, Armstrong charges, and dip into church donations to fund luxurious lifestyles and engage in gay and straight sex that the Bible they say they believe in forbids. He is particularly incensed by the revelations of homosexuality among these megapastors and is concerned that their lifestyles are becoming an insidious epidemic in America's churches.

Make no mistake, this is not an anti-religious tract; Armstrong is a very vocal Christian. Rather, he is concerned that the influence and images of these megachurches are contrary to traditional Christian thought, and he calls on Christians to clean up their own house. Many critics of this book (and of his previous one: "Snakes in the Pulpit") maintain that there is little hard evidence for his charges of misfeasance and malfeasance – how could there be, since there is no way to audit the cash offerings collected at each service – but it is filled with titillating anecdotes based on interviews with insiders about the financial and sexual hanky-panky among the big boys.

Non-believers will find this book an affirmation of their opinions of megachurches, but should be careful about tarring all Christian churches with the same brush.



**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

## The Culture Wars' New Front: U.S. History Classes in Texas

by Stephanie Simon

The fight over school curriculum in Texas, recently focused on biology, has entered a new arena, with a brewing debate over how much faith belongs in American history classrooms.

The Texas Board of Education, which recently approved new science standards that made room for creationist critiques of evolution, is revising the state's social studies curriculum. In early recommendations from outside experts appointed by the board, a divide has opened over how central religious theology should be to the teaching of history.

Three reviewers, appointed by social conservatives, have recommended revamping the K-12 curriculum to emphasize the roles of the Bible, the Christian faith and the civic virtue of religion in the study of American history. Two of them want to remove or de-emphasize references to several historical figures who have become liberal icons, such as César Chávez and Thurgood Marshall.

"We're in an all-out moral and spiritual civil war for the soul of America, and the record of American history is right at the heart of it," said Rev. Peter Marshall, a Christian minister and one of the reviewers appointed by the conservative camp.

Three other reviewers, all selected by politically moderate or liberal members of the board, recommended less-sweeping changes to the existing curriculum. But one suggested including more diverse role models, especially Latinos, in teaching materials. "We have tended to exclude or marginalize the role of Hispanic and Native American participants in the state's history," said Jesús F. de la Teja, chairman of the history department at Texas State University.

Social studies teachers from Texas are meeting this summer to write new standards. They can accept, reject or modify the six reviewers' suggestions, all of which were made individually. The teachers' recommendations are sent to the 15-member board of education, a conservative-dominated body that has authority to revise standards.

The three reviewers appointed by the moderate and liberal board members are all professors of history or education at Texas universities, including Mr. de la Teja, a former state historian. The reviewers appointed by conservatives include two who run conservative Christian organizations: David Barton, founder of WallBuilders, a group that promotes America's Christian heritage; and Rev. Marshall, who preaches that Watergate, the Vietnam War and Hurricane Katrina were God's judgments on the nation's sexual immorality. The third is Daniel Dreisbach, a professor of public affairs at American University.

The conservative reviewers say they believe that children must learn that America's founding principles are biblical. For instance, they say the separation of powers set forth in the Constitution stems from a scriptural understanding of man's fall and inherent sinfulness, or "radical depravity," which means he can be governed only by an intricate system of checks and balances.

The curriculum, they say, should clearly present Christianity as an overall force for good—and a key reason for American exceptionalism, the notion that the country stands above and apart.

"America is a special place and we need to be sure we communicate that to our children," said Don McLeroy, a leading conservative on the board. "The foundational principles of our country are very biblical.... That needs to come out in the textbooks."

But the emphasis on Christianity as a driving force is disputed by some historians, who focus on the economic motivation of many colonists and the fractured views of religion among the Founding Fathers. "There appears to me too much politics in some of this," said Lybeth Hodges, a professor of history at Texas Woman's University and another of the curriculum reviewers.

Some outside observers argue that curriculum analysts should be trained academics. "It's important to have trained historians establishing the framework," said David Vigilante, associate director of the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Continued on page 8

### 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](mailto:FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org) or PO Box 160881, San Antonio, TX 78280**

## Religions Continue War on Women – A Texas View

by Sheldon Gottlieb

Have you noticed that when religionists are defeated in the courts or in the market place of ideas they react by either ignoring legal judgments or by trying to find other ways of promulgating their messages of ignorance and hate? They are constantly pushing the boundaries of the separation of church and state. With the aid of scientifically ignorant, God-believing and/or pandering politicians they even are successful in getting their legislation passed. Inevitably, millions of hard-earned, public tax dollars will be wasted in defending such laws as the legislation is challenged in the courts. Of course, by labeling the subject of the legislation as religious, religionists expect others to automatically respect their views and accept incredulous ideas as facts, thereby ending further discussion and thus, automatically winning all debates. Such behavior is what Martin Luther expected when he concluded that to be a Christian one first has to tear reason from the mind. Texas as well as other states' politicians must be mindless. Unfortunately, they are not so mindless—they continue to find ways to wage their war on women and reason.

The Texas legislature is in the process of considering passing HB109 “relating to the issuance of ‘Choose Life’ license plates and the creation of the Choose Life account in the general revenue fund.” The bill goes on: “The department shall issue specially designed license plates that include the words ‘Choose Life.’ The department shall design the license plates in consultation with the attorney general. After deduction of the department’s administrative costs, the department shall deposit the remainder of the fee for issuance of license plates under this section in the state treasury to the credit of the Choose Life account?” This is the undisguised war of the Texas legislature on women and privacy. In the following sections of the proposed law the emphasis is mine:

“The Choose Life account is a separate account in the general revenue... composed of: (1) money deposited to the credit of the account under...and (2) gifts, grants, donations, and legislative appropriations...The attorney general administers the Choose Life account...The attorney general may spend money credited to the account only to: (1) make grants to an eligible organization; and (2) defray the cost of administering the account. (c) The attorney general may not discriminate against an eligible organization because it is a religious or nonreligious organization. (d) The attorney general may accept gifts, donations, and grants from any source for the benefit of the account. (e) The attorney general by rule shall establish: (1) guidelines for the expenditure of money credited to the Choose Life account; and (2) reporting and other mechanisms necessary to ensure that the money is spent in accordance with this section. (f) Of any money received by an eligible organization under this section, *at least 50 percent must be spent to provide for the material needs of pregnant women who are considering placing their children for adoption*, including the provision of clothing, housing, prenatal care, food, utilities, and transportation, and to provide for the needs of infants who are awaiting placement with adoptive parents. The remainder may be used to provide counseling, training, advertising, and pregnancy testing, but may not be used to pay an administrative, legal, or capital expense. (g) In this section, “eligible organization” means an organization in this state that: (1) qualifies as a charitable organization under Section 501(c)(3), Internal Revenue Code of 1986; (2) *provides counseling and material assistance to pregnant women who are considering placing their children for adoption*; (3) does not charge for services provided; (4) *does not provide abortions or abortion-related services or make referrals to abortion providers*; (5) *is not affiliated with an organization that provides abortions or abortion-related services or makes referrals to abortion providers*; and (6) *does not contract with an organization that provides abortions or abortion-related services or makes referrals to abortion providers.*”

“The attorney general shall appoint a seven-member Choose Life advisory committee” which “shall: (1) meet at least twice a year or as called by the attorney general; (2) assist the attorney general in developing rules... (3) review and make recommendations to the attorney general on applications submitted to the attorney general for grants funded with money credited to the Choose Life account.”

There is little question that the proposed Texas bill is similar to existing law in Florida (since about 1999 the first official sanctioning of a vanity license plate in the world which encourages women to consider adoption as a solution to unwanted pregnancies): it includes a mechanism whereby profits from the sale of these vanity license plates could (will) be used to support anti-women’s rights organizations irrespective of whether they have a religious or non-religious basis while simultaneously preventing publicly raised money from being used to support any and all activities that in any way involve abortion.

Continued on Page 7

## Religions Continue War on Women (Cont'd)

In Florida alone, since its inception, this specialty (vanity) plate has raised millions of dollars. Some other states that have adopted similar laws sanctioning the sale of "Choose Life" license plates include Alabama, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and Ohio.

Are these legislative activities legal? Do such laws discriminate against organizations that counsel women on all options concerning pregnancy including abortion? Do such laws create an environment in which only one political point of view is not only sanctioned by the government but is promulgated by the government while organizations holding other opinions are denied an equal opportunity to express their views? Do such laws also provide opportunity for violating the first amendment by enabling religious organizations to receive public money and entangling such organizations in public policy? The answer appears to be yes, these activities are legal. The courts have stated: "The First Amendment does not require states to authorize the speech of those who have expressed no interest in speaking; it only protects the rights of those who wish to speak. The First Amendment protects the right to speak; it does not give Appellants the right to stop others with opposing viewpoints from speaking." Abortion-rights advocates in Ohio dropped their lawsuit to block sales of the "Choose Life" vanity plates after the U.S. Supreme Court (2006) refused to hear an appeal of a decision upholding a similar program in Tennessee.

The primary way of defeating the war on women by fighting encroachments on their reproductive freedom and privacy is to elect members to state legislatures who have a different philosophical worldview and who have sufficient testosterone to prevent the exclusiveness of that part of the legislation pertaining to the way profits are distributed or by changing existing legislative verbiage. Alternatively, but not as effective as controlling legislatures, pro-choice organizations must work to develop their own vanity plates with appropriate verbiage written into legislation as to how the profits from the sale of the plates will be used. Refusal of state legislatures to pass such legislation when they have already passed Choose Life legislation could (should, must) be considered unconstitutional.

Sheldon F. Gottlieb, Ph.D. is the author of "The Naked Mind"

## Word of the Day

by Nick Lee

Well, I always thought I had a pretty good vocabulary. A lifetime of reading and crossword puzzles have introduced me to a wide variety of words in a wide variety of fields in a wide variety of languages.

But a few weeks ago, I learned a new word from a 13-year old girl from Kansas, who won the National Spelling Bee. The word is: - *laodicean* [*lay-oh-diss-see-an*], meaning 'indifferent or lukewarm especially in matters of religion.' It is based on a passage in Revelations 3:14-16, wherein John condemns the citizens of the city of Laodicea, saying "...because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

It appears that the purported author of the last book of the Bible would prefer folks to be either intensely religious or intensely anti-religious; they just can't be wishy-washy about it. So, Atheist would at least come in second in a three-way race judged by John. FACT members would accept the characterization that they are "cold" to religion, just as we see those who are "hot" for religion to be our opposition.

My feeling, though, is that the vast majority of Americans, even among those 90% who are counted as Christians, are really lukewarm and pay lip service to their devotions. There are no reliable figures on the number of attendees at church services; only the un-audited claims of the church themselves. It must be admitted, though, that the image of church-going is so pervasive in American society that it is social suicide for folks to admit that they really don't care.

The significance of this is that there are lots of fence-sitters out there for us to talk to. They probably have never heard religious belief systems challenged before, and may be astonished to learn there is a different world-view.

Just be careful who you approach, though – there's no telling what will spue out of their mouth!

## Game Show Looks to Convert Atheists

by Daren Butler

What happens when you put a Muslim imam, a Christian priest, a rabbi and a Buddhist monk in a room with 10 atheists? Turkish television station Kanal T hopes the answer is a ratings success as it prepares to launch a game show where spiritual guides from the four faiths will seek to convert a group of non-believers. The prize for converts will be a pilgrimage to a holy site of their chosen religion—Mecca for Muslims, the Vatican for Christians, Jerusalem for Jews and Tibet for Buddhists.

But religious authorities in Muslim but secular Turkey are not amused by the twist on the popular reality game show format and the Religious Affairs Directorate is refusing to provide an imam for the show. "Doing something like this for the sake of ratings is disrespectful to all religions. Religion should not be a subject for entertainment programs," High Board of Religious Affairs Chairman Hamza Aktan told state news agency Anatolian after news of the planned program emerged.

The makers of "Penitents Compete" are unrepentant and reject claims that the show, scheduled to begin broadcasting in September, will cheapen religion. "We are giving the biggest prize in the world, the gift of belief in God," Kanal T chief executive Seyhan Soylu told Reuters. "We don't approve of anyone being an atheist. God is great and it doesn't matter which religion you believe in. The important thing is to believe," Soylu said.

The project focuses attention on the issue of religious identity in European Union-candidate Turkey, where rights groups have raised concerns over freedom of religion for non-Muslim minorities. Detractors of the ruling AK Party government, which is rooted in political Islam but officially secular, accuse it of having a hidden Islamist agenda, a charge it denies.

Some 200 people have so far applied to take part in the show and the 10 contestants will be chosen next month. A team of theologians will ensure that the atheists are truly non-believers and are not just seeking fame or a free holiday.

Source: [http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20090703/od\\_nm/us\\_gameshow\\_odd](http://news.yahoo.com/s/nm/20090703/od_nm/us_gameshow_odd)

## U.S. History Classes in Texas (Cont'd)

The conservative Christian reviewers, in turn, are skeptical of the professional historians' emphasis on multiculturalism, views stated most forcefully by Mr. de la Teja but echoed by Ms. Hodges. Reaching for examples of achievement by different racial and ethnic groups is divisive, Mr. Barton said, and distorts history. The standards that the school board eventually settles on won't dictate day-to-day lesson plans; that is up to individual teachers. But they will offer clear guidelines for educators—and also for publishers.

Nearly every state has its own curriculum standards, and there are scores of social studies texts to choose from at most grade levels, so what happens in Texas won't necessarily affect other states. But the Texas market is huge, so most big publishers aggressively seek approval from the board, in some cases adopting the majority's editing suggestions nearly verbatim.

While the battle in Texas is just heating up, the tug-of-war over how to present history dates back nearly 150 years, said Jonathan Zimmerman, a New York University professor of education. A single paragraph in a third-grade text might seem insignificant. But it is a powerful symbol, he said, "because schools remain the most important venue for teaching our kids who we are."

Some curriculum changes recommended by reviewers appointed by social conservatives on the Texas SBOE are to include more study of religious revival movements and to replace references to America's "democratic" values with "republican" values.

The full report by each reviewer can be found at <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/teks/social/experts.html>.

Source: Online Wall Street Journal (<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124753078523935615.html>)

## Agnostic's Guide to Surviving the Bible Belt

### by "Aunt Shelle"

I grew up in a town where the phrase "religion is the opiate of the masses" is pretty apropos. Teachers preached to us regularly in the hallways of our public school, there were regular conversion experiences in the choir room where the Student Christian Association met during lunch.

It hasn't changed much in 15 years. When my father was sick a few years ago, preachers we didn't even know showed up at his hospital room to pray with us. My mother and I spent many nights running interference with the ministers, trying to keep them out as much as possible. My father is a man of science.

Many of my friends who don't come from the Bible Belt regularly question how I can stand to live down here, considering I can't really call myself a Christian because I don't go to church. I'm a woman of science too, who believes it's possible I don't know everything. I am much too liberal to fit in with the general tendency toward Evangelical Christianity. Sadly, I'm also sort of an evangelical magnet.

I'm regularly approached by people looking for converts on the street. If I'm standing in a crowd of people, somehow, those seeking to spread the word of God manage to single me out. This goes across cultural boundaries too – the Hare Krishna's make a bee line for me as fast as the Jehovah's Witnesses. There are entirely too many examples of this in my life to list. Once, in exasperation I asked one of these people why he picked me out of the crowd. He said there was something about me, some kind of positive aura he could feel.

I realized that this probably the same reason why pushy sales people follow me around. I'm subconsciously exuding "sucker" energy into the universe. I've developed a few strategies for dealing with this situation over the years, strategies which come in handy this time of year. I thought I would share.

1. **Learn Tolerance.** So you're an agnostic liberal, or a Wiccan, or a Muslim, or Jewish, or you're just a secular humanist. Whatever you are, if you aren't openly a Christian, you're probably in the minority anywhere in the Bible Belt. The best way to survive this experience is to simply learn to tolerate the religion of others. Actually put it into practice by simply not allowing yourself to get annoyed at all the daily reminders of your minority status.

Learn to translate what people say into something useful. If someone at work says, "Jesus will help you through it," understand that what they really mean is "I know you're going to be okay because I believe in you." If someone offers to pray for you, simply say "thanks" and take it as "I'll keep you in my thoughts and I have sympathy for your situation." Don't hold their preachiness against them, it's their cultural context. You can't force other people to remove themselves from their cultural contexts. It takes an intellectual and philosophical leap that a lot of people simply can't make.

2. **Calm down, already.** It's not worth getting yourself worked up into a hissy fit over every expression of religious belief around you, even in public places. Learn an old writer's trick, "If the comment doesn't apply, ignore it." You wouldn't go to Mexico and take offense at every religious icon you saw, right? It's part of the landscape, part of the way people explain themselves to themselves. Learn to step out, and away, from the tendency to take personal offense unless someone personally offends you.

Continued on Page 10

According to the popular "Christian" mythology, an angry warrior sky "God" who created and set up the first humans in the Garden of Eden and then, after they 'sinned' – which He knew they would since He's all-knowing – He punished all humans and eventually all life on planet earth by drowning it in a global flood . . . well, all life except for Noah, his family, and the relatively few land animals known to Middle Eastern Bronze Age mythmakers. Incest again became "God's" Rule of the Day for Noah and his family in order to re-populate the earth, just as incest has been the Rule of the Day in Eden with Adam and Eve and their kids. But then, after a trial run in which "God" demanded that Abraham kill his beloved son, this "loving" Father – "God" – relented a bit and just demanded the bloody torture and death of HIS "only begotten Son," the followers of whom commemorate the event in a cannibalistic ritual – often followed by the singing of "Onward Christian Soldiers" – and then pray and pay for their salvation in order to be with this filicidal Father-God and his resurrected Son-God.

Can true Divinity be found in any of that?

Mel Seesholtz, PhD (excerpted from [www.onlinejournal.com](http://www.onlinejournal.com))

## Agnostic's Guide to Surviving the Bible Belt (Cont'd)

3. **Learn the Art of the White Lie.** Down here, when you meet someone new they ask three questions: "Where do you live," "what do you do," and "where do you go to church." They ask these questions because they are trying to situate you into their world. If you know people they know, well, that makes you almost kin. Down here, we figure out people by figuring out how we're connected to them. Ask any southerner, they will back me up on this.

I avoid answering the third question by lying, simply to add grease to the social friction. Who really wants to get into a debate about religion every time they meet someone new? I have various approaches to this kind of white lie. The first approach is not to mention a church specifically. Just say, "I'm Episcopalian" or "I'm Unitarian" and change the subject. This usually satisfies most people. If they insist on a particular church, I tell them that I go to church someplace out of town, but close enough for me to reasonably drive there every Sunday.

4. **Learn Graciousness.** If you live in the Bible Belt, at some point someone is going to tell you how Jesus can change your life. It's sort of inevitable. At my last job, the secretary regularly sat me down and explained to me that if I would just get Jesus, I would be so much better off. In this situation, it's not a good idea to lie, because it's going to end in an uncomfortable invitation to a church that you can't avoid. It's better to simply learn a little graciousness.

First, thank the person for their concern. Tell them you will seriously consider what they have to say, and that you respect their beliefs. Explain that you do have a relationship with God (you don't have to give the details) and that there's really no reason to worry about you. Explain that you feel religion is private and that you don't like to talk about it, but that you sincerely appreciate their desire to see you have a better life. Then, smile, say God Bless You, and get out of there as soon as possible.

5. **Don't Assume.** Don't assume that other people share the same ideas about the basis of the universe as you do. If you get into a discussion which requires the assumption that the universe wasn't created by God or that evolution exists (which happens more than you'd expect), explain that you are speaking in general terms about what most people believe. Leave a small opening for the fact that you might not be "most people," this will avoid a very difficult devolution of the conversation.
6. **Adopt tactics to scare away door-to-door ministers.** They are rampant and they don't go away. We get at least three visits a week from our local "community ministry." Generally, I just don't answer the door unless I'm expecting someone. This has a downside, though. They keep coming, and they always leave pamphlets stuck in the screen door. There are other tactics that work better. Hang a pentagram over your door. Answer the door in your underwear, holding a beer (this works especially well for women). Get one of those signs that says, "Solicitors will be mauled by angry dogs." Turn up your death metal the minute they walk up to the door. Anything that might broadcast "evil sinner" as opposed to "poor lost sinner." All of these, of course, have the side effect of making your neighbors talk about you behind your back.
7. **Quit worrying about how people judge you.** Pretend they don't. Ignore the neighbor gossip. My personal tactic is to simply pretend it doesn't exist and assume everyone likes me anyway. If I went around worrying that every Christian I met was secretly judging my worthiness in the eyes of God, I'd go insane. A little denial is not always a bad thing. Live your life the way you want, and let that speak for itself.
8. **Don't Be a Hater.** That old Christian commandment "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is an excellent motto to adopt in this circumstance. Don't assume you can't be friends with someone because of their religious bent. There's a lot to be learned from people of faith, even if you don't share their beliefs.

Source: [http://open.salon.com/blog/aunt\\_shelle\\_stormoe/](http://open.salon.com/blog/aunt_shelle_stormoe/)



FACT T-Shirts for Sale (Grey w/Black Logo)  
 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  
 To order or for further information, contact Sally Chizek  
 Sally.Chizek@FreethinkersACT.org or (210) 656-3796

## July Events

### July 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

Discussion Topic: "Report Card on Obama Part 1—  
(A) Healthcare & (B) Foreign Policy"

**Naple's Italian Restaurant**  
**215 W. Bandera Rd, Boerne**

### July 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: "Report Card on Obama Part 2—  
(A) Religion-related issues & (B) the Economy"

**Taste of China Super Buffet**  
**3711 Colony Dr**  
**(Off Wurzbach near I-10)**  
**NEW LOCATION!**

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

1:00 pm: This month we will have a Pot Luck in lieu of the General Meeting

**Meeting location will be revealed when you RSVP to [FACT.Web@FreethinkersACT.org](mailto:FACT.Web@FreethinkersACT.org) or call 210-767-0769 to confirm**

### July 29<sup>th</sup> – FACT Discussion Brunch

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

Host: TBD

Topic: TBD

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

## August Events

August 4<sup>th</sup>—THCF First Tuesday Lunch

August 12<sup>th</sup>—THCF Lunch in the Northwest

August 15<sup>th</sup>—General Meeting

August 29<sup>th</sup>—FACT Discussion Brunch

July 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	

August 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.