

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

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

October 2009

## Hope

Everyone occasionally feels blue or sad, but these feelings are usually fleeting and pass within a couple of days. When a severely depressed mood persists for several weeks, a person is said to suffer from major depression. This mental disorder is characterized by a combination of symptoms that interfere with the ability to work, sleep, study, eat, and enjoy once-pleasurable activities. Major depression is disabling and prevents a person from functioning normally. It causes pain for both the person with the disorder and those who care about him or her.

According to the National Institutes of Mental Health, major depressive disorder affects approximately 6.7 percent of the U.S. population age 18 and older. That is nearly one in every fifteen adults in America! In 2006, 33,300 people died by suicide in the U.S. More than 90 percent of people who kill themselves have a diagnosable mental disorder, most commonly a depressive or a substance abuse disorder. To put this in perspective, this is approximately the same as the death rate from pancreatic cancer.

FACT member Ingrid De Buck suffered from several depressive episodes in her life. The most recent episode was the longest and lasted more than five years. It ended at the end of August after seven weeks of treatment in the Hope program at the Menninger Clinic in Houston.

At the October General Meeting husband and FACT newsletter editor Marc Janssens will share the story of his wife's journey to the dark world of the clinically depressed and her remarkable return to a more or less normal life. In passing Marc will comment on how the U.S. health care system (mis)treats the mentally ill.

During the "after-break" period we will elect a new President and Public Relations Officer. Normally, elections are held at the November General Meeting, but because the Texas Freethought Convention on November 14<sup>th</sup> will supplant our usual schedule, the elections will be held at the October meeting.

**General Meeting, Saturday, October 17<sup>th</sup> @ 1pm**  
**Community Unitarian Universalist Church**  
**4818 E. Beverly Mae**

**BOOK SIGNING**

Jane Boucher, author of "Escape from Domestic Abuse", will have a book signing at 7:00 p.m., November 12<sup>th</sup> at Barnes and Noble Bookstore, Northwoods Mall, 18030 Hwy 281 N. Suite 140, San Antonio, TX 78230. Sally Chizek reviewed Ms. Boucher's book in last month's FACT newsletter.

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

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

# Hinduism and Darwinism

Trinity University Professor C. Mackenzie Brown spoke on "Hindu Perspectives on Darwin and Evolution" at the September General Meeting of FACT.

Hinduism is one of the oldest religions and its adherents believe there has been plenty of time for evolution to occur as matter was recycled in reincarnation. In fact, many Hindus believe that their ancestors discovered the principles of evolution long before Darwin. They also assert that there is no conflict between Hinduism and modern science. According to Yoga Sutras, the concept of Hindu evolution is superior to Western evolution, and that Yogic Perception trumps the scientific method. Much of this is based on the ancient wisdom and teaching of the Veda and the Upanishads. Some Hindus find Darwinism incomplete because, they say, it is missing the principle of love.

When the British administrators became a political power in India, missionaries followed them, telling the Hindus to "destroy your Gods, burn your books, be converted and be saved." This created resentment, anger, and frustration. Hindus believe that God is an extra-cosmic creator and that intelligent design is the arrangement of the world. They also believe there are billions of other worlds.

Dr. Brown said that the Hindus became familiar with the work of Darwin through the interpretive works of Herbert Spencer and Thomas Huxley, rather than directly from Darwin's writings. But Hinduism is not monolithic and is represented by several sects. The most familiar to Americans is the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hare Krishna, founded by Swami Prabhupada, who was an anti-evolutionist.

For further study on this topic, Dr. Brown suggested a book by Indian poet Robin-dranath Tagore, entitled The Religion of Man. He modestly did not mention his own books, which include God as Mother: A Feminine Theology, and a translation of The Song of the Goddess. FACT is most grateful to Professor Brown for sharing the results of his travels to India and his knowledge of Hinduism and evolution.

Jane Tuck

## Charitable Donations Wanted

In its continuing effort to make an impact on the local community, FACT has embarked on a project of volunteerism and charitable giving. Last month, several boxes full of stuffed animals were delivered to the Rainbow Room, for distribution to children under the care of Child Protective Services.

At the September and October General Meetings, FACT will gather basic household items for distribution to women who have been released from prison or mental institutions and are ready to re-enter society. They are provided temporary housing, but it is barely furnished and absent many bare housekeeping necessities.

The San Antonio branch of Home Comforts, Inc., formed by Patsy Cheney, is in the business of filling that gap, and has been recognized as one of the most effective non-profit organizations in this city.

Here is a list of the typical items needed to set up a household:

- Kitchen: Cooking Utensils, Dishes, Flatware, Glasses, Towels, Pots and Pans
- Bathroom: Shower Curtains, Towels, Toilet Brush, Soap, Shampoo, Toilet Paper
- Bedroom: Sheets, Blankets, Pillows, Alarm Clock, Waste Baskets
- Cleaning: Brooms, Mops, Laundry Soap, Sponges, Dust Pan

Cash is also welcome.

Please plan on attending our October General Meeting and drop off your donation for this worthy cause. We will deliver the items in early November. If you want to contribute an item, but cannot attend, please call Nick (210-767-0769). If you would like to donate cash, but can't attend the meeting, mail a check to the FACT P.O. Box, annotated to show "Patsy Cheney" as the purpose. Thank you!

## Big Event in November!

by Nick Lee

FACT will host the Texas Freethought Convention on Saturday, November 14<sup>th</sup>, at the Alfazar Temple near Loop 1604 and HWY 281. Members of Freethought and Atheist groups from Dallas, Austin, Houston, and Corpus Christi, as well as individuals from around the State will gather to get invigorated and plan coordinated activities. This promises to be "a Reeely Beeg Shew!", with presentations by nationally-known speakers in the Humanist/Atheist/Freethought movement, including: Dan Barker (Freedom From Religion Foundation), Stuart Bechman (Atheist Alliance International), and Kathleen Johnson (American Atheists). The keynote speaker will be Dr. Victor Stenger, who is internationally recognized for his contributions to elementary particle physics, but who is also the author of many popular books on physics and the religion/science debate. His best seller "God: The Failed Hypothesis" made the New York Times Best Seller List in March 2007, and his most recent book, "The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason," just came out this year.

In addition to the talks, there will be live music, family-friendly activities, door prizes, a blood drive, and book sales (with authors available to autograph them). Drinks will be available for a donation, and we'll have a list of near-by restaurants where you can grab a bite without missing too much of the program.

General admission is \$25; and \$20 for students. You can get up-to-date information on speakers, events, and activities at the TFC Web site [www.TexasFreethoughtConvention.com](http://www.TexasFreethoughtConvention.com). You can also register and pre-pay your admission on the web site, and that is greatly encouraged, so we can cut down on the chaos during the first hour!



**SPECIAL EVENT:** Here's the BIG NEWS, for current FACT members only. The TFC09 keynote speaker, Victor Stenger has agreed to join us in a Sunday Brunch on November 15<sup>th</sup>. This is an opportunity for you to meet "up close and personal" with someone who is not only a preeminent scientist, but also has been recognized for his popular and insightful books on science and religion. This opportunity will be reserved for current FACT members only, who make a \$15 contribution to FACT over and above the cost of the meal. (Meals will be "Dutch.") The specific restaurant and location will be identified later. If you are interested in taking part in this event, please contact [FACT.President@FreethinkersACT.org](mailto:FACT.President@FreethinkersACT.org).

Several of you have volunteered to help at the Convention. But we need a few more. We need people to work at the registration desk, at the FACT table, at the book sales table, and at the beverage counter, plus one or two BIG bruisers to act as Sergeant at Arms! I will identify those volunteers who are accepted and make specific assignments directly with you a couple weeks before the event. I will try to limit your duties to a couple of hours, so you can enjoy the rest of the program. Those who are accepted for volunteer duty will be "comped" their registration fee and a free FACT t-shirt. If you are interested in volunteering, contact me at [FACT.President@FreethinkersACT.org](mailto:FACT.President@FreethinkersACT.org), or 210-767-0769.

P.S. Trinity University will host a lecture by Dr. Stenger on Thursday, November 12<sup>th</sup>, at 6:30 p.m., in the Chapman Auditorium. This event is free and open to the public.



# DON'T MISS IT!

NOVEMBER 14, 2009  
AL FAZAR TEMPLE  
SAN ANTONIO, TX

## At the AAI Convention

by Nick Lee

Dateline: Burbank. The Atheist Alliance International held its 15<sup>th</sup> convention here, and it truly was an International gathering, with representatives from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Mexico, Nigeria and Switzerland, as well as most states in the U.S. The program ran for three days, packed with speakers and seminars. Seven hundred people registered for one or all of the three daily programs, becoming the most successful of all AAI Conventions.

The theme for this year was “Darwin’s Legacy”, in honor of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Charles Darwin’s birth and the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of his magnum opus, “Origin of the Species”. This theme brought out a plethora of prominent speakers on the topic of biology and evolution, including Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, P.Z. Meyers, Lawrence Krauss, Jerry Coyne, and Eugenie Scott. Other speakers, including Sean Faircloth (“Atheisms Lobbyist”), Ed Buckner, Robert Reichert, and Richard Haynes talked about the new activist atheism. In addition, about 30 exhibitors representing other organizations and atheist-friendly companies were there to display their books, t-shirts, and distribute information about their activities. To balance out the serious tone of the convention, there were also comedy acts, including Brian Keith Dalton as “Mr. Deity”, and several stand-up comics.

For many attendees, the highlight of the convention was a live streaming of Bill Maher’s HBO show, with guest Richard Dawkins, followed by their live appearances at the Convention (after a short limo ride from the studio), as Dawkins presented Maher with an Atheist of the Year Award from the Richard Dawkins Foundation, which was a major supporter of the AAI convention.

A recurring theme from the major speakers was the struggle between science and religion. One pointed out that in public polling, the U.S. ranks 33<sup>rd</sup> out of 34 industrialized nations in the public acceptance of evolution. The corollary to that statistic is that the U.S. has the highest incidence of religiosity of any nation outside the Moslem world. This anti-science attitude manifests itself in the resistance to teaching Americans about real science and the ease with which they adopt irrational, unscientific public policies, or resist initiatives based on hard science.

Of course the major impact of any convention is in the connections made and the casual conversations with like-minded folks. It seemed that everyone I talked to felt that the town they lived in was the most hostile anti-atheist environment in the world, while I hastened to assure them that could not be, because that was true of where I lived!

Since FACT is an AAI affiliate, I was invited into the annual governing board meetings, held in conjunction with the Convention. So I also spent two days talking about the organization structure and policy and budget issues. We focused on the mission of AAI and its plans to support its 60 affiliates.

All in all, it was a busy four days. Just don’t ask me what Burbank looks like outside of the Marriott Airport Hotel!

Two related quotes from two different speakers:

“Religion must die if mankind is to live!” (Richard Dawkins)

“If we want to extinguish religion or encourage it to mutate into benign forms, we need to understand how it works.” (Daniel Dennett)

And a throw-away line that would make a good poster: “Atheism is to Religion as Baldness is to Hair Color”

### “God” vs. “god”

I have taken, in writing the word "god", of not capitalizing it. Although standard grammar dictates that we do, I object. Just like I don't capitalize the word when I am talking about Norse gods, I don't think I should when talking about the Christian god. Why does this require caps? Sure, when I type Jesus, or Zeus, I capitalize. Proper name and all that. But otherwise, why signify that the Christian god is any different than any other "god"?

(Of course, I never write "christmas" (until just then). I always write xmas. That annoys the crap of the religious nuts.)

Joe LaBonte

## LETTERS

Published in the Salt Lake Tribune, September 15, 2009

### Re. Political Cowardice

Today's paper, September 4, '09, has an article informing of the doubling of the population of Ethiopia in the 25 years since their last famine. There is another article regarding the tension between Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, who all share the water from the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, because there isn't enough to support projected population growth. Utah, Arizona and California are in perpetual competition for Colorado River water. Because there isn't enough to support projected population growth. There isn't enough water, petroleum, energy or food. There's too much toxic waste and air and water pollution. There are more people in the world than can be supported by renewable resources.

We must stop population growth. Then, initiate population reduction. We must practice this in the U.S. before we can justify preaching it to the world. We must stop being proud of large family size and start feeling embarrassed about it. Continuing the population growth will lead to correction by genocide, starvation and disease. Is this the future we want?

Where can be found, a politician on the national scene, with the courage to espouse population reduction, placing the best interests of the world, the U.S. and humanity before his own re-election prospects?

Denny Law

Sent to sboeteks@tea.state.tx.us, October 9, 2009

### Re. Curriculum Review

I am writing to express my deep concern about some of the proposed changes to the Public School social studies curriculum currently being considered by the State Board of Education.

The idea that our country was established as a Christian nation, based on biblical law is not only misguided—it is directly false, as clearly stated in our Constitution. The founding fathers made it very clear that no religion should be established by the state and that a wall between church and state would protect the rights of both from each other. Teaching otherwise in public schools is clearly a violation of that constitutional principle and of the public trust placed in our school system.

When discussing the contributions of great Americans, it would a great disservice to future generations to omit the names of individuals as influential as Thurgood Marshall and Cesar Chavez, both of whom profoundly changed the social fabric of society and brought opportunity and hope to millions of Americans. It would indeed be tragic if public school children of Texas were to go through life without having learned about the accomplishments of these two and many other influential Americans of color. One can only speculate why SBOE would even consider excluding these leaders. Could it be racism ?

I urge the members of the State Board of Education to consider their immense responsibility assuring children of Texas can go forth into life armed with meaningful, truthful information obtained in our public schools.

Vibeke M. Lee, LCSW

Sent to sboeteks@tea.state.tx.us, October 9, 2009

### Re. Curriculum Review

I want to submit my objections to the proposed standards for teaching social studies in Texas classrooms. The proposals are far from representing me or any rational thinking person when they push fundamentalist Christian beliefs regarding evolution vs. creation, family planning, and civil rights. Evolution makes sense; creationism is nothing short of absurdity. The appalling number of teen pregnancies and out-of-wedlock births certainly attest to the fact that abstinence-only does not work. Thurgood Marshall is one of the great heroes in American history. Newt Gingrich and the so-called Moral Majority are clearly enemies of democracy. Please do not let the distorters of democracy continue to destroy the great country that was founded on freedom from religion and other democratic principles.

Harvey Kendall

## 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.**

## Losing My Religion\*

by Howard Lisnoff

Dreams and old habits and beliefs all die hard. This has been the case as I have moved further and further away from religious beliefs as the years have passed. I now consider myself a secular Jew and hold on to many of the humanist principles of Judaism, such as the respect for learning, the belief that justice will prevail against evil, and a commitment to peace. Humanism, however, has its own pitfalls with an overreliance on a belief that a capitalistic economic system will bring about a newer and more just world.

I no longer attend religious services during the Jewish New Year, but mark the holiday with a special meal with family. I also go to a nearby cemetery and place a stone on the headstone of a woman who was born at about the same time as my grandparents were. It appears that no one visits or marks that gravesite, and I place the stone, as is Jewish tradition, in remembrance of the person buried there and in recognition of how fleeting human existence is.

During the antiwar movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, in a small segment of the legions of committed peaceful protesters, a point of view developed that represented a vitriolic point of view toward Israel.

I saw that attitude rise again during the 1980s, and into the present, with the nation and people of Israel viewed as not able to act in a just manner in any respect when the interests of the people of the Palestinian Territories are considered. This view sees Israel's "adversaries" in some neighboring Middle Eastern countries forever enemies, as well as the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

In an interview on Democracy Now! on September 21, 2009, Ralph Nader, consumer advocate and quadrennial presidential candidate, made the observation that members of the peace movement in Israel ought to be invited to give testimony before the U.S. Congress about that movement's view of the issues of war and peace between Israel and the people of the Palestinian Territories and the larger Middle East. Mr. Nader was onto something, quite a novel approach to the stalemate that has existed between the two entities for decades!

This week yet another summit was hosted in Washington, D.C., between the two nations, and it appears that the outcome was similarly dismal, as has been the track record for past summits on this pressing issue of peace in the Middle East.

Going back a while, back to the 1980s, following on the heels of the antinuclear movement in the early part of that decade, I marched for peace in D.C. and was alarmed to see many carrying the Israeli flag with swastikas sewn onto it beside the Star of David. I found it hard to accept the fact that anyone could harbor such hate. Yes, the political leaders that founded Israel and its subsequent governments have violated the most basic rights of the people who had been living on the land that made up what was ancient Palestine, but those wrongs could be righted through serious peace talks and negotiations to rectify those wrongs. Indeed, the United Nations became a center of that effort, but with the same dismal results as talks that have been hosted by the U.S.

Tragically, the hatred between the leadership of the Palestinian people and the government of Israel rose exponentially before and after Israel's founding. Attacks and counterattacks were the hallmark of these degraded relations. At different times following the founding of Israel in 1948, Israel would also be at war with Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and of course, the Palestinian Territories: the Six Day War in 1967 and the 1973 Yom Kippur Wars being the most well known of these wars.

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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

## “Me of Little Faith” by Lewis Black

A Book Review by Marc Janssens

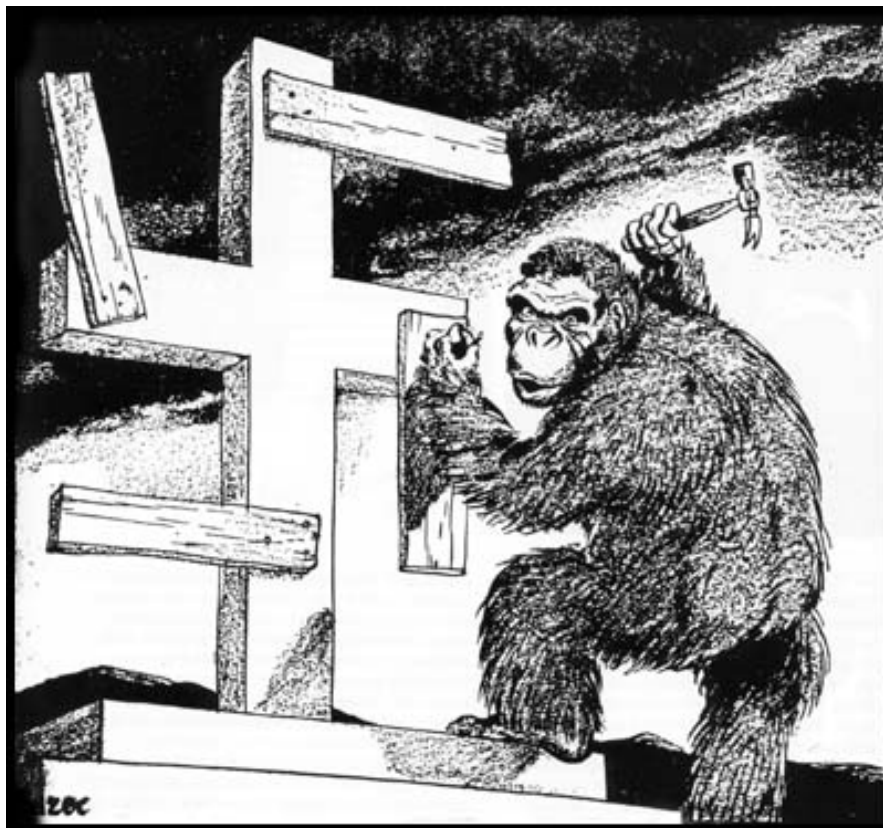
A few months ago I happened to see a TV interview with Lewis Black. I did not really know him and he was loud and funny. At the end of the show Black pitched his new book “Me of Little Faith”, more specifically the expanded paperback version of the original hardback published last year.

The book consists of a series of essays in which Black presents his take on religion. Some compare him to George Carlin, but only in his abundant use of the f-word does Black seem to rise to the level of the late king of stand-up comedy. Some essays are very funny indeed, but too many not so much. Black’s reflections are not likely to sway the faithful reader either. The book did not quite live up to my expectations, but if you are looking for a critical commentary on religion that is easy read and will occasionally make you laugh out loud, perhaps this is a book for you.

“Me of Little Faith,” by Lewis Black. Riverhead Trade, 2009, ISBN: 978-1594483776, 272 pages, Paperback \$15.00.

### NEW BOOK OF INTEREST—Jon Krakauer: “Where Men Win Glory” (Doubleday)

Pat Tillman walked away from a multi-million dollar N-F-L contract to fight with U-S special forces. He was killed in Afghanistan two years later. How the Army tried to keep his family and the public from learning the truth about his death.



### 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

## Losing My Religion\* (Continued)

Other seismic shifts were taking place within Judaism in the U.S. during this period and its support for the policies of Israel. Most tragically, the horror of the Nazi Holocaust was partly adopted by the staunch supporters of all of Israel's policies from the 1980s to the present.

When I grew up in a small town in central Rhode Island in the 1950s, the horror of the Holocaust was recognized as the culmination of nearly 2,000 years of anti-Semitism. It was part of the wrenching history of the Jewish people. I can't remember the Holocaust ever being used to support the policies of Israel, but this would change as the people of the Palestinian Territories became more militant, and sometimes equally as violent as Israel, in expressing their demands for a Palestinian State.

During the same period, the idea of the "tough Jew" surfaced in debates about the Middle East. Many of the philosophical tendencies contained in Jewish culture were co-opted by uncritical supporters of Israel holding to the idea that Jews could be depended on to mount strong and militant actions, as had been the case in the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto during the Nazi Holocaust. Along with this new resurrection of so-called toughness, was the demonizing of those who offered any criticism of the policies of the government of Israel toward the people of the Palestinian Territories.

A former friend, who grew up during the Vietnam era, but would have no part of the Vietnam War, typified these sentiments when he spent several weeks on an Israeli military base with his son offering relief for Israeli soldiers while those soldiers carried out the policy of Israel enforcing its draconian policies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

On September 18, Ethan Bronner reported in The New York Times ("Mideast Peace Talks Unlikely to Resume Next Week") that "American diplomats were unable on Friday to bridge gaps between Israel and the Palestinians on restarting peace talks . . ." Consistent with representing a one-dimensional view of Jewish opinion, The New York Times carried an Associated Press article on September 17, 2009 ("Jewish Leaders Calling for Ethical Renewal"), "calling on U.S. rabbis to emphasize the faith's ethical requirements in their sermons during Rosh Hashanah in response to recent financial scandals involving its members, including Bernard Madoff."

Nowhere in these "mainstream" sermons is there a call to note The Gaza War of December 27, 2008, through January 18, 2009, in which 1,417 Palestinians and 13 Israelis were killed. Dreams and old habits and beliefs all die hard, and so do seemingly ageless and lethal animosities.

\*From the song by R.E.M.

Howard Lisnoff is a freelance writer. He can be reached through his website [howielisnoff.com](http://howielisnoff.com).

Source: Online Journal

## Romance Gone Bad

When love and stupidity embrace, the results can be downright criminal. Case in point: A Florida minister accused of faking his own kidnapping so he could cheat on his wife.

Hillsborough County deputies say Wikler Moran-Mora's wife received a disturbing text message from him on the night of August 25. He said he had been abducted but he was negotiating with his captors, so she shouldn't worry or panic. She did both—and called the cops. Officers launched a full-scale search that included more than a dozen deputies and dogs.

While the manhunt was going on, Mrs. Moran-Mora received more texts from her husband telling her the kidnappers were letting him go and he would be home soon. It wasn't long before deputies used signals from his cell phone to locate the Seventh Day Adventist Church of Reform pastor. They say Moran-Mora, 38, was with another woman and admitted that he'd fabricated the kidnapping story so his wife wouldn't find out he was spending time with his mistress.

The minister was charged with filing a false police report and released on \$500 bail.

Source: <http://news.aol.com/article/dumb-criminal-suspects/>

## Humanism and Religion—Part II

by Marilyn Westfall

Maybe two hours after the Sunday service, we were driving back to her home, from lunch, and she said in raw anger: "You Humanists are trying to take all the magic from the world." I was dumbfounded, and didn't reply. Later in the day, after cooling down, she reminded me that she had been a social worker for over twenty years. "I saw so many horrible things during that time," she said, "that I want to believe there's some good in the universe—that something spiritual can help people along, and give them hope."

Her words recalled for me what Rev. Martin Luther King once suggested—that there was an "arc of justice" designed into the destiny of humans: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." As a humanist, I would be reluctant to discard King's strand of poetry, which is powerful, and able to create the fabric of hope for humans.

But let me return to the current Humanist Manifesto. Does it really rob humans of "magic"? Hardly. Rather, it says that wonder, imagination, fulfillment, creativity, and meaning are available to everyone—religious or not. These emotional states are part of our human birthright, as stated in another paragraph of Manifesto III:

*We aim for our fullest possible development and animate our lives with a deep sense of purpose, finding wonder and awe in the joys and beauties of human existence, in challenges and tragedies, and even in the inevitability and finality of death. Humanists rely on the rich heritage of human culture and the life stance of Humanism to provide comfort in times of want and encouragement in times of plenty.*

Our human heritage—our very nature—allows us to experience awe, wonder, and flights of imagination. Also, we naturally give each other comfort. We naturally revel in "sublime" experiences; we're born to do so.

There has been outreach by many humanists—famous and well-deserving of their fame—to repair the social fabric that has been damaged by open "cultural warfare": ideological, political, and religious. For example, E.O. Wilson, who was honored as Humanist of the Year by in 1999, wrote his new book *The Creation* as "an impassioned letter to a Southern Baptist pastor." Wilson hoped to demonstrate "that science and religion need not be warring antagonists." In fact, according to Wilson, religionists and nontheists need to stop antagonizing each other, because there is an enormous problem to mend—that of vanishing global biodiversity. So in *The Creation* Wilson asks his Evangelical counterpart to help him save plants, animals, and humans:

Let us see, then [Wilson addresses a typical Baptist minister], if we can, and you are willing to meet on the near side of metaphysics in order to deal with the real word we share. [...] I suggest that we set aside our differences in order to save the Creation. The defense of living Nature is a universal value. It doesn't arise from, nor does it promote any religious or ideological dogma. [...] Scientists estimate that if habitat conversion and other destructive human activities continue at their present rate, half the species of plants and animals on Earth could be gone or at least fated from early extinction by the end of the century.

Wilson's outreach to his religious counterpart offers me hope, and a vision for an "arc of justice" for the other creatures on this planet; let us humans, no matter our religious positions, agree to stop poisoning and destroying animal habitats.

On the other hand, while we're discussing reconciliation, we cannot ignore those who would prefer to Swiftboat such a process. For example, did you hear of Islamo-Fascism Awareness Week? This was an event that occurred on perhaps a hundred college campuses during October 22-26, 2007, sponsored by David Horowitz and other sympathizers of the Neoconservative movement. Here is how the event was described on the web page constructed to advertise the event's dates and mission:

*The purpose of this protest is crucial: to confront the two Big Lies of the political left: that George Bush created the war on terror and that Global Warming is a greater danger to Americans than the terrorist threat. [...] In the face of the greatest danger Americans have ever confronted, the academic left has mobilized to create sympathy for the enemy and to fight anyone who rallies Americans to defend themselves.*

In other words, this "awareness week" is really an attack on academic freedom, and thus is also an assault on the ability to discuss political ideology, activity, and the effects of political decisions on the American public and the world at large. The event included the distribution of literature such as: *The Islamic Mein Kampf*, *Why Israel is the Victim*, and *Jimmy Carter's War Against the Jews*.

Continued on the next page ...

## Humanism and Religion—Part II (Continued)

Now, there is no doubt that the West is having difficulty responding to the growing influence of Islam and some of its pathologies. But is it then fair to give yet another forum to people like Ann Coulter, who was one of the headliners for this event, to bash Muslims in general? Wasn't it Coulter who said that we need to invade Muslim countries and convert all Muslims to Christianity?

I am proud to say that the American Humanist Association has been working to thread the needle in understanding and responding to Islam. Former diplomat Carl Coon, of the AHA's executive board, and several of the top staff created a statement that was approved by the American Humanist Association board, setting a standard for the organization's approach to Islam. Here is a portion of it:

Since September 11, 2001, prejudice and discrimination have been on the rise in Europe, the United States, and elsewhere against Muslims, especially those of Middle Eastern and similar descent. Such individuals are suffering from increased security screenings, hostile media attention, and oppressive new laws, as well as localized acts of violence and widespread disrespect. Moreover, disinformation campaigns and negative imagery have led to popular confusion wherein al-Qaeda is inaccurately connected to the former regime of Saddam Hussein, Iranians and South Asians are misidentified as Arabs, Sikhs are mistaken for Muslims, and the world faith of Islam, with its 1.3 billion followers, is viewed as a doctrinaire monolith.

The American Humanist Association is opposed equally to the activities of Islamic extremists and to the crusade mentality rising in Western circles that condemns all Muslims indiscriminately. This statement aims at defining a rational and informed humanist position. [...]

Humanists strive for a world where violence and fear are not the drivers of ideals and actions. In every case and in all its forms, extremism must be condemned. But neither should fear and ignorance be permitted to sanction prejudice and discrimination. Humanists recognize that challenging Islamic extremists, Christian fundamentalists, and all others who hold to religious or ideological extremes is not a process with an easy or short-term conclusion, but it is the way toward progress.

Humanists see no contradiction, on the one hand, between their longstanding adherence to principles that run contrary to religious beliefs and, on the other, their strong distaste for efforts to propagate a crusade mentality against Islam or any other religion. Religious liberty means freedom for all: freedom to peacefully affirm and practice a faith, freedom from religious coercion, and freedom to peacefully reject a faith. Such religious liberty is and always has been a central tenet of humanism and is herewith reaffirmed.

I hope that I have provided some insight into the current direction for Humanism, particularly in our own country, where religion continues to have extraordinary power and influence. Humanists, in my view, are trying to understand why people are religious, and to be sure that religious people are not denied rights under the Constitution; however, Humanists themselves have a Constitutional right to argue against blindly dogmatic religion and to hold ministers, priests, imams and other religious representatives accountable for their dogmatic utterances. I thus invite you all to "thread the needle," to create a hopeful, progressive Humanism and more just vision for our country.

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

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## New Culture Wars Movie

A prescreening of the documentary film "Lord Save Us From Your Followers" took place at 7 p.m. Thursday September 17, 2009 at TriPoint at 3233 N. St. Mary's at U.S. 281. The screening included a talk and question-and-answer session by Dan Merchant, the writer, producer and director of the film that takes aim at the so-called culture wars. The movie points out the divisions over hot-button issues such as homosexuality and abortion that have caused fragmentation of religious groups. Through interviews with famous people including U.S. Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., rock legend Bono and Hollywood celebrity George Clooney, the film contends evangelical Christians have taken too many judgmental, doctrinal stands and not engaged the world in the kind of social compassion their beliefs call for. It will be released Sept. 25 nationwide, including showings at San Antonio's Santikos Palladium 20. For more information e-mail Tim Adams at [u2wesley@yahoo.com](mailto:u2wesley@yahoo.com).

Reported by Nick Lee

## October Events

### October 6<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: "Happy Things"

**Naples Italian Restaurant**  
**215 W. Bandera Rd, Boerne**  
**NEW LOCATION!**

### October 14<sup>th</sup> – THCF Lunch in the NW

1:00 pm - Meet other Freethinkers at the Texas Hill

Country Freethinkers' Lunch (held monthly)

Host: Julie Fisher

Discussion Topic: TBD

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

### October 17<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)**

### October 17<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: Marc Janssens

Title of Presentation: "HOPE: The Story of a Remarkable Recovery from Major Depression"

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

### October 31<sup>st</sup> – FACT Discussion Brunch

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

Topic: Freewheeling Discussion

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

## November Events

### November 3<sup>rd</sup>—THCF First Tuesday Lunch

### November 11<sup>th</sup>—THCF Lunch in the Northwest

### November 14<sup>th</sup>—TX Freethought Convention

### November 28<sup>th</sup>—FACT Discussion Brunch

October 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

November 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					

**FACT**  
P.O. Box 160881  
San Antonio, TX 78280  
(210) 767-0769  
[www.FreethinkersACT.org](http://www.FreethinkersACT.org)

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## 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.