

FACT

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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.

February Meeting	1
Zimmerman Concert	1
January Meeting Report	2
Solstice Celebration	3
Irish Atheists Challenge Blasphemy Law	4
Letters	5
Compass Movie Follow-Ups Halted	6
Book Review	7
Paying for Prayer	8
So That's How It's Done	9
Hardball with Bishop Tobin	10
Calendar of Events	11
Membership Application	12

A Matter of *FACT* & The Voice

February 2010

Meet the Author of "The God Virus"

The featured guest at the February General Meeting of FACT will be Dr. Darrel Ray, an organizational psychologist and author of three books. In his latest book, Dr. Ray asks the question "Is religion a virus that infects otherwise healthy individuals?" In a cogent and highly readable analysis, he traces the contagious course of religion as it enters the lives of countless individuals, beginning in childhood and infecting their behavior, professions, sex lives, and virtually every aspect of living.

Dr. Ray draws on his own experiences as the child of fundamentalist, evangelical parents who frequently took their young son to Bible-thumping religious revival meetings. He was taught that people of other religions (or of no religion) were sinners who would wind up in hell. It was only after he matured and earned degrees in religion and psychology that he began to see the mental health hazards of prejudice, myth, and superstition.

"The God Virus" carefully details the practical consequences of fundamentalist religious beliefs, infecting personalities, families, and cultures. It deals with the superstitions of religion propagated by clerics who obstructed the advancement of science by convincing congregants that the plague, tuberculosis, cancer and other diseases were the results of sinful living.

You will find "The God Virus" an exciting and challenging experience.

General Meeting, Saturday, February 20th @ 1pm
Community Unitarian Universalist Church
4818 E. Beverly Mae

"Roy Zimmerman, Real American"

FACT is proud to bring folk singer and satirist Roy Zimmerman back to San Antonio for another Valentine's concert. If you saw him last year, you will want to hear him again. If you missed him last year, don't make the same mistake this year! He has all new material.

"Real American" is 90 minutes of Zimmerman's funny songs and comic commentary, a tuneful examination of the American political landscape in the era of Hope and Change. Health care, the economy, same-sex marriage, climate change, Creationism, guns, taxes, abstinence and even Obama all come under satirical scrutiny.

His tune "Buddy, Can You Spare a Trillion Dollars?" landed him a mention on the front page of the Wall Street Journal, an unaccustomed honor for a folkie. The Los Angeles Times says, "Zimmerman displays a lacerating wit and keen awareness of society's foibles that bring to mind a latter-day Tom Lehrer."

Saturday, February 13, 2010, 8 pm
First Unitarian Universalist Church
7150 IH-10W

PS. We are looking for some special donations from FACT members to defray the cost of the venue. The at-the-door donations are for Roy.

Healthy Futures

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:
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FACT MEMBERS:

FACT wants your participation in communicating through our newsletter. Please contribute letters, articles, book reviews, highlights and comments on church/state separation, quotes, drawings, cartoons, etc. Please send contributions to FACT.newsletter@FreethinkersACT.org.

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

Janet Realini, M.D., M.P.H. was the guest speaker at the January 16th FACT meeting. A native of San Francisco, she came to San Antonio in the mid-seventies to practice medicine. Her first patient was a 14-year old with a two-month old baby. When Dr. Realini saw this patient two months later she was pregnant again.

Dr. Realini soon realized that she needed to get “out of the Ivory Tower.” She obtained a Master of Public Health degree and went to work for the City of San Antonio in Project WORTH, where she devoted her time to reduce the vast number of teen-age pregnancies in Bexar county.

After a few years, the limited city budget made it impossible for Project WORTH to expand. In 2006 Dr. Realini therefore decided to start Healthy Futures. The 501(c)(3) non-profit enables her to do legislative work. Healthy Futures has three projects:

1. *Healthy Futures Alliance*, a community coalition working together to prevent teen and young adult unplanned pregnancies in San Antonio and surroundings.
2. *Big Decisions*, an Abstinence-Plus sexuality education program that was developed by Dr. Realini. It is currently used in seven Texas school districts and under consideration by several others.
3. *ME NOW...Baby Later*, an exciting new campaign in collaboration with Project WORTH and Metro Health that targets teens. “Parents Have the Power” workshops help parents improve their skills in talking to teens about sex.

Healthy Futures takes a middle-of-the-road approach. Pro-choice and pro-life people work together to make families healthier. Teen pregnancies limit futures. They cause school drop-outs and cognitive problems for babies. Unplanned pregnancies in young adults (18-29 yrs) are likely to disrupt education, cause family turmoil and abortions.

San Antonio is so fortunate to have a dedicated physician doing this essential work.

Jane Tuck



FACT met with Dan Barker and Victor Stenger for breakfast after the Convention

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

Solstice Celebration Major Success

On December 12th, FACT celebrated the arrival of the Winter Solstice with a BIG party at the Pompeii Italian Grill, on Nacogdoches. After a fine meal, guest speaker Kathy Miller, President of Texas Freedom Network, entertained a large group of FACT members and friends with a presentation about her nationally-recognized challenges to the ideological religious bent of the Texas State Board of Education and TFN's many other activities to fight the growing influence of the religious right. Sally Chizek, Nick Lee and Marc Janssens received awards for outstanding performance. A door prize drawing brought another successful FACT year to an end.

Marc Janssens



Guest Speaker Kathy Miller of the Texas Freedom Network



Two "faithful" attendees; Corkie and Denny Law



Award recipients Nick Lee, Sally Chizek and Marc Janssens



Webmaster Jim Evans holds one of the door prizes, a paper weight with FACT logo, in front of our colorful banner

PLEASE RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP TODAY!

Under the by-laws of FACT, membership dues are based on a calendar year. Memberships for 2010 are now due. What do we do with your dues? The major expense is the monthly rental for our meeting place. Another monthly is the printing and mailing of the newsletter to members who do not receive the electronic version. We also subsidize many member activities, such as the Solstice Party. But we want to build a reserve so that we can afford to do more community outreach and promotion of our group and its mission statement.

You can pay your dues directly to the Treasurer at the monthly meeting, or by mail using the form on page 12. (We are working on setting up the web site to accept electronic payments.) Members who do not renew by March 31 will be dropped from the rolls and not receive the Newsletter.

Irish Atheists Challenge Blasphemy Law

An Irish atheist group has published a series of quotations on religion in an attempt to challenge a blasphemy law that went into effect on New Year's Day. The 25 "blasphemous" quotations include the words of Jesus, Mohammed, Mark Twain, Salman Rushdie and Bjork. Atheist Ireland published the list on its Web site Friday. It says it aims to challenge the law, which makes blasphemy a crime punishable by a €25,000 (\$35,800) fine.

Here are some American "blasphemous" quotations that are in the 25 listed on the web site:

4. Mark Twain, describing the Christian Bible in *Letters from the Earth*, 1909: "Also it has another name - The Word of God. For the Christian thinks every word of it was dictated by God. It is full of interest. It has noble poetry in it; and some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; and some good morals; and a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies... But you notice that when the Lord God of Heaven and Earth, adored Father of Man, goes to war, there is no limit. He is totally without mercy - he, who is called the Fountain of Mercy. He slays, slays, slays! All the men, all the beasts, all the boys, all the babies; also all the women and all the girls, except those that have not been deflowered. He makes no distinction between innocent and guilty... What the insane Father required was blood and misery; he was indifferent as to who furnished it." Twain's book was published posthumously in 1939. His daughter, Clara Clemens, at first objected to it being published, but later changed her mind in 1960 when she believed that public opinion had grown more tolerant of the expression of such ideas. That was half a century before Fianna Fail and the Green Party imposed a new blasphemy law on the people of Ireland.

11. Frank Zappa, 1989: "If you want to get together in any exclusive situation and have people love you, fine - but to hang all this desperate sociology on the idea of The Cloud-Guy who has The Big Book, who knows if you've been bad or good - and cares about any of it - to hang it all on that, folks, is the chimpanzee part of the brain working."

15. George Carlin, 1999: "Religion easily has the greatest bullshit story ever told. Think about it. Religion has actually convinced people that there's an invisible man living in the sky who watches everything you do, every minute of every day. And the invisible man has a special list of ten things he does not want you to do. And if you do any of these ten things, he has a special place, full of fire and smoke and burning and torture and anguish, where he will send you to live and suffer and burn and choke and scream and cry forever and ever 'til the end of time! But He loves you. He loves you, and He needs money! He always needs money! He's all-powerful, all-perfect, all-knowing, and all-wise, somehow just can't handle money! Religion takes in billions of dollars, they pay no taxes, and they always need a little more. Now, talk about a good bullshit story. Holy Shit!"

Source: <http://blasphemy.ie/>

"Despite these quotes being abusive and insulting in relation to matters held sacred by various religions, we unreservedly support the right of these people to have published or uttered them," the group said on the site. "We unreservedly support the right of any Irish citizen to make comparable statements about matters held sacred by any religion without fear of being criminalized, and without having to prove to a court that a reasonable person would find any particular value in the statement."

Lawmakers in staunchly Catholic Ireland passed the law in July, but it came into force January 1. A person breaks the law by saying or publishing anything "grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion, thereby causing outrage among a substantial number of the adherents of that religion." Those found guilty of breaking the blasphemy law may try to defend themselves by proving that a reasonable person would find literary, artistic, political, scientific or academic value in what they said or published, the law says.

Atheist Ireland called the law "silly and dangerous," because it provides an incentive for religious outrage. "We believe in the golden rule: that we have a right to be treated justly, and that we have a responsibility to treat other people justly," the group said. "Blasphemy laws are unjust: They silence people in order to protect ideas. In a civilized society, people have a right to express and to hear ideas about religion even if other people find those ideas to be outrageous." The group urged the Irish government to repeal the law. It also asked lawmakers for a referendum on removing all references to God from the Irish constitution.

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

LETTERS

Unpublished letter submitted to the San Antonio Express News on December 16, 2009

Re. Christmas tree

Oh, Gary White, you must be listening a lot to Bill O'Reilley on Fox News. He wants to rile people up on a war on Christmas. There is no war on Christmas. If there were, it would be unwinnable. But, trust me there is no war and never was. Where the conflict comes in is when Christians want to display their relics on government property. That is a commingling of church and state, and besides there are so many places you can display the crèche, and any other symbol of your religion: churches, malls, businesses, homes, busses, cars, handbags, sweaters, blouses, t-shirts, and the list goes on.

USAA is free to display a Christmas tree or any other decoration. If they have not done so is their own affair. It could be the economy. No one has a reason to object to USAA putting up a tree, they are a business and it belongs to them. It does not belong to the state or country. I'm an atheist and I have a decorated tree in my house. No I take it back, I have two. They are beautiful, but they are not religious. It was the custom of pagans to celebrate the winter solstice. That day was originally regarded by the pagans as the day of the nativity of the sun, the shortest day of the year -- when the light begins its conquering battle against darkness.

It was taken over by the Christians as the birthday of their mythological Christ. (The story says that shepherds were watching their sheep; did they really do that in December, hmmm.) Anyway the day survives as a day of rejoicing that good will and love will have a perpetual rebirths in the minds of men -- even as the sun has a symbolic rebirth yearly. Most of the information regarding the solstice is from a 1987 publication of the Society of Separationists, Inc.

Sally Chizek (FACT member)

Letter published in the San Antonio Express News, December 22, 2009

Re. Is there a God?

The Rev. Michael Chalk's Dec. 12 religion article ("Info important, but faith also act of imagination") stated "one of the gifts of humanity is to imagine God." I might add, another gift of our humanity is to imagine no God. "Imagination" is defined as "the act or power of forming mental images of what is not actually present." Based on that, one can say that God is merely a figment of man's overactive imagination.

Chalk said, "Religious faith encompasses both imagination and the intellect." I disagree. "Intellect" implies the ability to apply logic and critical thinking. When applying intellect to scrutinizing supernatural religious faith, you will find the intellect cannot be encompassed by supernatural religious faith. I believe religious faith is strictly an act of imagination. If I were to choose between "faith/imagination" and "reason/intellect," my ability to apply "reason" would take precedence over just having "faith."

Gilbert Whitsey (FACT member)

Unpublished letter submitted to the San Antonio Express News on January 17, 2010

Re. Advertising During Super Bowl

Focus on the Family (FOTF), a component of the American Christian right is active in promoting interdenominational work toward its view on social conservative public policy. It is a tax-exempt nonprofit organization.

I saw in your newspaper that Focus on the Family is one of others who will pay millions to advertise themselves for a few seconds during the Super Bowl. Surely, the executives of the Super Bowl franchise will not be so benevolent as to donate TV time to a nonprofit organization. Naw!! That can't be, so I assume FOTF will pay. That will be strange since in November of 2008, the organization announced that it was eliminating 202 jobs (18% of its workforce), and cut its budget from \$160 million in FY 2008 to \$138 million for FY 2009. Even paying for the Super Bowl advertisement, that will still leave a tidy sum.

What wrong with this picture. Plenty!! Any nonprofit, especially if they can afford advertising during the Super Bowl, or buy luxurious mansions, trappings and even "glad rags," should not be tax-exempt. If the mission of the FOTF is to nurture and defend families worldwide, what a grand opportunity now to help Haitians in time of terrible distress instead of advertising themselves for the purpose of enlisting more members, or asking for more donations.

This brings me to the payment of taxes---which politicians wouldn't touch with a "ten foot pole." If everyone, especially those who avail themselves with the services of the police, fire departments, and sometimes utility services for free would pay their fair-share, none of us would have to pay our share and yours, too. How fair is that? Some religious entities rake in millions of dollars to use as they wish. Some engage in their profitable religion activities, and also have commercial ventures competing unfairly with persons who have to pay top dollar for their buildings and all taxes due. Again, not fair at all.

Thomas Jefferson said, "...To compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves is sinful and tyrannical...our civil rights have no dependence on our religion opinions, anymore than our opinions in physics or geometry..." In other words if you want to believe in talking snakes and bushes, spaceships, or whatever that is your right and business, but don't go on talking our tax money to promote it.

Sally Chizek (FACT member)

Compass Movie Follow-Ups Halted

by Darren Devine

Philip Pullman recently spoke of his “disgust” at the triumphalism of America’s religious right following its successful campaign to sideline attempts to dramatize the last two books in the writer’s *His Dark Materials* trilogy.

Actor Sam Elliott, who starred in the film version of the first novel *The Golden Compass*, that grossed \$370M, says a campaign by conservative Catholics has halted plans to complete the trilogy. He said, despite *The Golden Compass*’ global success, film industry executives have shown little appetite for follow-ups due to an uncompromising campaign by the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights.

Following protests led by the group’s leader Bill Donohoe, that the film was based on a novel that introduces children to atheism, it made only \$85M in the US despite its success elsewhere. *The Golden Compass* was produced by New Line Cinema, which has since been absorbed by Warner Brothers, and Elliott says the studio was put off by the inevitable controversy. This means plans to turn into films the second and third novels in the trilogy, *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*, have effectively been shelved.

Mr Donohoe has said he was “delighted” by the effectiveness of his religious boycott – “I knew if we could hurt the box office receipts here, it might put the brakes on the next movie.”

Pullman, who grew up in Wales, stated: “If Sam is right then I am very disappointed because it obviously would have been very good to have seen the other two films made.” He said of Mr Donohoe’s triumphalism: “It is disgusting, but the sort of behavior I expect of these people. That *The Golden Compass* introduces children to atheism is rubbish.”

Donohoe’s campaign means unless a director’s cut of the film, described by critics as a toned-down version of the novel, is released these will probably never be seen.

Pullman, 63, said several important scenes shot during the making of *The Golden Compass* were not included in the film in the hope they would be used in a sequel. Pullman said: “The film finished about three quarters of the way into the book so there were a number of very important scenes that were shot and were very good, but we didn’t see them in the film. Their justification was that they were going to use the scenes they had shot, but at the start of the second film. It sort of made sense, but if what Sam Elliott says is true we won’t see those scenes.”

Pullman, who once said he was “trying to undermine the basis of Christian belief,” suggested critics who depict him as a religion-hating anti-Christ are wide off the mark. He is supportive of Jesus’ teachings, but says the notion they came from God was used to justify some of the darkest episodes in the Church’s history.

His latest novel (*The Good Man Jesus and the Scoundrel Christ*) to be published before Easter 2010 denies Jesus was the son of God. He said: “Jesus said all kinds of stuff that I am a complete supporter of. If the Church had taken notice of what Jesus had said the world would be a much better place. Despite the efforts of the Church to smother what Jesus said enough of it got through to make a very large number of Christian institutions and people extremely worthwhile and good things for the world. There is no difficulty with morality – the difficulty comes when they start saying, ‘God in heaven has got a special message for me and I am telling you that you have got to do this because God says so’. That’s the problem.”

Recently the author wrote his own version of the New Testament in which he imagined Jesus being given a fair trial and walking free instead of crucified. Discussing the work for the first time the author, who lives in Oxford, said no crucifixion and resurrection would have meant a world without Christianity, but not necessarily a better one.

Pullman, who read his passage at the Globe theatre as part of an event to celebrate the 10th anniversary of prisoners’ rights charity Reprieve, said: “The world would have been pretty much the same. People are people and human nature is what drives history. Human nature hasn’t been changed greatly by any philosophical or religious movement. We would still have had an industrial revolution and we would still be pumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and faced with the problem of global warming.”

Donohoe accused Pullman of duplicity by suggesting he was opposed to the Church and not Jesus. He said he has no problems with atheists such as writer Christopher Hitchens, who make no attempt to qualify their anti-religious feeling with an admiration for Jesus. “I just like people who are honest and say what they mean.” Donohoe said. “This idea that ‘I am not against Jesus, I am against organized religion’ – any idea worth keeping has to be built around an organization. He really does have a problem with Christianity and Catholicism in particular. But he’s right, I am triumphalist. I am feeling very good about it (preventing the sequels being made). I am boasting and I am wearing it on my sleeve because it is nice to beat someone who is introducing kids to the wonders of atheism by the backdoor.”

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

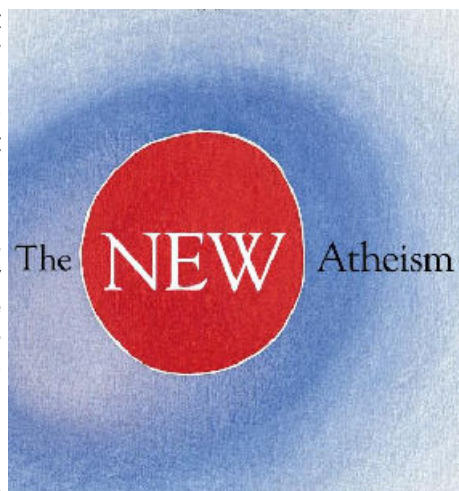
“The New Atheism” by Victor Stenger

A Book Review by Marc Janssens

I bought this book just before the Texas Freethought Convention so that I could have it signed by the author. I already owned Stenger's earlier book, "God: The Failed Hypothesis. How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist", and as an engineer I very much liked his use of the scientific method to convincingly demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that there is no God. I was not sure exactly what to expect from his newest work, but it turned out to be an excellent buy.

The new atheism (NA) is a recent movement of nonbelievers. NAs largely rely on persuasive arguments against God that have existed for centuries, but strengthened by the most recent developments in science and philosophy they "preach a more militant, in-your-face kind of atheism that has not been seen before, except with the abrasive and unpopular Madalyn Murray O'Hair" (p. 25). Stenger does an outstanding job at summarizing his own earlier writings and the works of Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Christopher Hitchens and other NAs. Combined with some new and original material, the end result is "a well-argued defense of the atheist position and a strong rebuttal of its critics." If you have not read any of the NA books and want to find out what the movement is all about, Stenger's "The New Atheism" is a great place to start. Definitely a five-star effort.

"The New Atheism: Taking a Stand for Science and Reason" by Victor Stenger. Prometheus Books, 2009, ISBN: 978-1591027515, 282 pages, Paperback \$19.00.



Taking a Stand for
Science and Reason

VICTOR J. STENGER
author of the New York Times
best seller GOD: THE FAILED HYPOTHESIS



Area Freethinkers gathered at Simi's Indian restaurant on December 25 (Julie Fisher is behind the camera)

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

Paying for Prayer and Other Nonsense

by Lamar Hankins

Lamar Hankins is a lawyer from San Marcos who has a weekly online column, *Freethought San Marcos*, on sanmarcosmercury.com. The following article is a good example of the type of topics that are discussed. Despite the fact that the article was published three months ago, it is still timely.

There may be many reasons that making laws has been compared to making sausage, but the one that comes to mind with respect to the health insurance bills wending their way through Congress is this: They include many bits and pieces of proposals of unknown origin and substance.

When you cut open the bills and try to figure out what a particular piece is, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to identify just what you are looking at and what that piece might do to you. Just as some parts of sausage may not be food (perhaps red flannel), some parts of the health insurance legislation may not involve health care.

The House health insurance bill, passed on November 7, is over 1900 pages long and the Senate bill is reported to be in excess of 2000 pages. The details of each are not yet apparent to most of us. As I write, all of the Senate bill's provisions are not yet completely determined.

But for some provisions being considered, we do know the origin of the bits of red flannel. For instance, one of those bits Sen. Reid is considering for the Senate bill was put forward by the Christian Science Church-known officially as The Church of Christ, Scientist.

An amendment sponsored by Senators John Kerry (D-Mass.) and Orrin Hatch (R-Utah) would require private and public health plans to cover all "spiritual care." This provision is intended to apply to Christian Scientists and their 1100 practitioners who "treat" sick people through prayer. Similar provisions are in some of the health insurance reform bills passed in the House, but apparently not included in the final version.

The founder of the Christian Science Church, Mary Baker Eddy, directed certified practitioners-those who are certified to pray for others to get well-to charge members for praying for their wellness at the same rates doctors charge for providing science-based medicine.

I haven't had any experience with Christian Science faith-healing practices, but I have had some experience with faith-healing. My maternal grandmother was Pentecostal and believed in faith-healing. I occasionally attended services with her. One Sunday, her pastor was in the middle of his sermon when he started having severe pains running down his left arm and across his chest. He stopped preaching, obviously in need of help. Some parishioners rushed to his side and helped him sit down, while the rest of the congregation began praying for him. After a few minutes, the preacher started feeling better and was able to complete his sermon. Three days later, he died of a massive heart attack.

Faith-healing is a fine religious practice for those who believe in its efficacy. I certainly support their right to seek prayer rather than medical help. My quarrel with them involves two points. They should not receive from the government any support for their religious practices, whether by regulations that require health insurance coverage for those religious practices or by direct payments to their practitioners for praying that their members' health be restored. And they should not receive medical tax deductions for payments made for prayer, which are currently allowed by the IRS.

Second, they should not be permitted by law to deny medical care to their minor children, who are not old enough to make an informed decision about adhering to Christian Science beliefs about prayer in place of real medical care. There is a societal interest in keeping these children alive through the best medical care available until they are old enough to decide whether to risk their own lives by practicing faith-healing.

I understand why Sen. Kerry would support this amendment to the Senate's health insurance reform bill-the headquarters of the Christian Science Church is located in Massachusetts, and the religion was founded in Boston. As a result, Christian Scientists have significant influence on Sen. Kerry. I'm not clear why he was joined in proposing the amendment by Sen. Hatch, who is from Mormon-dominated Utah. Mormons usually opt for medical care when they are sick.

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

Paying for Prayer and Other Nonsense (Cont'd)

But even Christian Science beliefs do not completely prohibit medical care. If you have a broken bone, for instance, it is permissible to seek medical intervention. It appears that Christian Scientists believe in faith-healing to a point. They seem to realize that prayer has never caused a severed limb to grow back or a broken bone to heal properly. Evidently, prayer is good medical practice, but not for all medical conditions.

The most egregious examples of the failure of Christian Science faith-healing concerns children who have died from diabetes, malignant lymphoma, spinal meningitis, peritonitis with twisted bowel, anaphylaxis, and other curable or treatable diseases. If our health insurance laws require that Christian Science Practitioners be paid for praying for children to get well from such illnesses, our government will be encouraging the parents of these children to opt for unproven, unscientific religious quackery to the detriment of those children. As a general proposition, health insurance should not pay for any health care treatments that are not scientifically valid and medically efficacious.

I don't believe that anyone should be required to buy health insurance, even if there are subsidies for low-income families and a public option that is affordable. We do not need government compulsion to assure that affordable health insurance is available for all who want it. While there may be some young people who feel that they are invincible, at least for the time being, most Americans want health insurance so that they have access to health care when they need it. If we do get a health reform law that requires all people to purchase health insurance, I have no quarrel with exempting from mandates people who don't want health insurance on grounds of religion or conscience.

Finally, the government should not be encouraging religious practices of any group by paying them to exercise those religious practices. Government neutrality toward religion does not exist when the government encourages religion. When the government pays for or requires payment for religious practices, the wall of separation between government and religion that Thomas Jefferson believed was in the Constitution has been breached. Christian Scientists' prayers are not medicine. They are religion.

Source: <http://www.sanmarcosmercury.com/archives/10626>

Lamar makes some very good points, but you may not agree with everything he writes. Check out his column and contribute to the online debate by posting a comment to express your views.

So That's How It's Done

by Nick Lee

I have often said that we can learn a lot from the Christian success story, while rejecting their message. A recent example can show the way for FACT to fill its coffers.

Evangelical pastor Rick Warren sent out a plea to his parishioners for donations 's to fill a \$900,000 budget deficit which his megachurch was facing. So effective was his call to action, that he actually raked in \$2.4 million! He assured his congregations that it would all be used for charitable works, although since churches do not file financial statements, we'll have to take his word for that.

In contrast, FACT has limped along, hand-to-mouth for the past 20 years. So, inspired by this 'purpose-driven' success story, I plan to announce a FACT fund drive with a goal of \$240,000, only a tenth of what that greedy Warren got.

What will we do with a full treasury, you ask? I promise to give a full accounting from our new headquarters in the Bahamas!



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

Hardball with Bishop Tobin

by Marc Janssens

U.S. Congressman Patrick Kennedy, son of the late Ted Kennedy, has been instructed by his Roman Catholic bishop not to take holy communion, due to his views on abortion rights. The November 23, 2009 episode of MSNBC's 'Hardball with Chris Matthews' featured an interview with Bishop Tobin of Rhode Island, who had asked Congressman Patrick Kennedy not to receive communion. Most of the time the interview sounded more like a scolding on Matthew's part, which probably explains why the program is called 'Hardball.' A video clip of Senator John F. Kennedy's famous statement about the separation of Church and State served as an introduction and immediately set the tone for the interview:

I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant, nor Jewish, where no public official either requests or accept instructions on public policy from the pope, the National Council of Churches, or any other ecclesiastical source, where no religious body seeks to impose its will, directly or indirectly, upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials.

Sen. John F. Kennedy (D), Massachusetts

Matthews first focused on the question why the communion ban should not be viewed as an attempt to force the Congressman to accept instructions from the Church on how to vote on specific public policy (abortion) issues. The Bishop replied that he did not view it that way, but his arguments were not too convincing. He essentially stated that Catholics in public office should be faithful to the teachings of the church. The Bishop's answers were even less specific when Matthews asked what law(s) he would pass and what the penalties should be for those performing or getting an abortion. At the end of the interview Matthews summed it up as follows:

I think you're intervening. I think you're getting into law here, and you don't like Congressman Kennedy's voting record in Congress. That's what you're really going after, where he stands on the law. A lot of Catholics agree or disagree in every poll I've seen about what the law should be. They generally accept the teaching authority of the church.

Where the disagreement is where the law should be, what the penalty should be. I've never heard of anybody in the church, in the laity, in the clergy, or in the hierarchy saying a woman should be put in prison for having an abortion. And then I said, wait a minute, if you think it's murder, there's an inconsistency here.

And if there is a hesitancy to punish a woman for having an abortion, maybe that's instructive to you, your Excellency, because when you realize you don't really want to punish a woman for having an abortion, under the law, then maybe you should step back from using the law as your tool in enforcing moral authority.

Maybe your moral authority comes from the pulpit and from teaching, and a congressman has a totally different role, which is to write the law. Now, I've asked you three times, your Excellency, to tell me what the law should be. And if you can't do it, maybe you shouldn't be involved in telling Congressman Kennedy how to write the law. You say you don't know how to do it. Well, you ought to try before you tell him what he's doing wrong. That's my thinking.

Because when it comes to the law, it's a secular question. It has not to do with the moral—we do a lot of things in this country we don't like, we think are immoral. But the question is, what sanction do you apply to it? And I'm asking you again with respect, because you are here on the show of your own free will, at our request. What should be the penalty for a young woman or a girl, even, to have an abortion? And if there is no penalty for it, are you really outlawing it?

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After two more attempts to have the Bishop be more specific it was clear that the question of what the penalty should be was not going to be resolved. Matthews concluded the interview stating that he believes that Jesus was right when he said "render under Caesar the things that are Caesar" and that writing law is very tricky in a secular society.

Full transcript at http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/34128572/ns/msnbc_tv-hardball_with_chris_matthews/

February Events

February 2nd – 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: "Haiti. What is responsible for its many problems? Would a Marshall Plan for Haiti work?"

Dodging Duck Brewhaus
402 River Road (Hwy 46), Boerne
NEW LOCATION!

February 10th – 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: "Why are we so war-oriented?"

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

February 13rd – 8 PM -- Zimmerman Concert

First Unitarian Universalist Church
7150 IH-10W

February 20th – The Lunch Bunch

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

Simi's Indian Restaurant (Buffet)
4535 Fredericksburg Rd (Inside 410)
NEW LOCATION!

February 20th – FACT General Meeting

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

Speaker: Dr. Darrel Ray

Title of Presentation: "The God Virus"

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

February 27th – 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

March Events

March 2nd—THCF First Tuesday Lunch

March 10th—THCF Lunch in the Northwest

March 20th—Potluck

March 27th—FACT Discussion Brunch

February 2010						
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						

March 2010						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

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ANNUAL DUES (Jan-Dec)

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

- Membership dues are due in January.
- Dues are non-refundable.
- New members who join after the 1st month of the year will pay a prorated amount for the remainder of the year.
- Members who paid dues the previous year, but who are paying late, will be liable for the entire year.
- Donations in addition to dues are always welcome.