The North Texas Church of Freethought

BULLETIN

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ON MIRACLES

Everyone loves miracles.
As children we are captivated by stories of far-away places and times. We are astonished by dinosaurs, by robots, by beings from other planets, and by magnets that seem to exert a spooky action at a distance. Anything that departs surprisingly from the ordinary draws attention, interest, and, at times, obsession. Future career paths are often traced back to such childhood fascinations.

The popular mind too has always been excited by the strange and unfamiliar. From the time of Herodotus to Marco Polo and the age of European exploration, as today, the stay-at-home public can’t hear enough (or, today, see enough!) about the peculiar customs of distant civilizations and obscure tribes and sects. And, because of the increasingly specialized nature of the economy, nowadays even the ordinary workaday world of a variety of industries and occupations with which few have first-hand experience excite interest. The gritty world of law enforcement, the gladiatorial profession of the law, the life-and-death issues of medical care, the dangers of military service, working with wild animals, driving trucks over frozen lakes and other hazardous occupations offer titillation for the love of wondrous events. Even “reality shows” of seemingly mundane situations can offer something if they are sufficiently geared to provide a window into the odd or abnormal.

Of course, “real miracles” are supposed to violate known physical laws. They are supposed to be supernatural in nature. But with the development of a more scientific understanding of the world claims of such miracles tend to be looked upon, as the Scottish philosopher David Hume argued, as less likely than that the claimants are mistaken or lying. Certainly, no modern court of law will accept an explanation of events that runs clearly counter to known facts and settled reason. Even devout advocates of nonsense now resort to saying that their counterfactual and irrational beliefs are predicated on facts not yet in evidence and still-undiscovered laws of nature. An additional miracle, a huge but unsuspected conspiracy that suppresses the real truth is often added into the mix. It doesn’t help that many in the media – negligently at best and deliberately at worst – report their “news” in a way that gives credence to this kind of morbid obsession with miracles.

Perhaps the most pathological of such obsessions is when the belief in the miracle is only a means to the end of belief in something altogether different, typically a set of religious doctrines. Purveyors of the supernatural need not try too hard to perform their miracles when they have plenty of followers who need to believe. Nor do such followers think to ask the obvious question of how such miracles can really be possible when their real impact is no more than the tricks that skeptics say they are. Someone capable of curing cancer with a touch, for example, would not be a TV preacher but the world’s foremost

RICHARD DAWKINS AT OU

Retired Oxford Professor Richard Dawkins will be lecturing at the McCasland Field House on the Oklahoma University Norman campus, at 7:00 PM on Friday, March 6th. Doors will open at 5:30PM; there are no tickets required, but admission is first-come, first-seated. Following the talk entitled “The Purpose of Purpose,” Dr. Dawkins will answer questions and sign copies of his books, which will be available for purchase.
**DIRECTOR PROFILE:**

**SUSETTE GElSSLER**

The North Texas Church of Freethought couldn’t accomplish all that it does without the important volunteer work provided by its leadership, who serve their fellow freethinkers out of their own love of freethinking values and desire to help fulfill our shared mission.

**Susette Geissler** and her husband **Keith** have become very active since first joining the NTCOF; Keith established our adopt-a-highway program in 2008, and Susette agreed to take over as Outreach Director when **Cash Foley** nominated her for the position just this year. Cash will continue to manage our quarterly blood drives, and Susette will seek to expand our current community outreach efforts and enhance our altruistic footprint.

When Susette first joined the NTCOF, she was looking desperately for a place where she could “fit in,” where she could be true to herself and not do something that she didn’t believe in. Upon first discovering us, she and Keith were relieved to find that there were so many atheists in the North Texas area. What Susette enjoys most is getting to know all the members here; the social and charitable activities are important to her and provide a great way to get to know more people. The people that she has gotten to know through the NTCOF are so much more intelligent, more down-to-earth, and friendly than most people she encounters in daily life. In the future, she would like to continue to help NTCOF reach out through volunteer actions that demonstrate the kindness and compassion of our members.

**Susette Geissler** has organized many charitable activities, including school supply drives for single mothers, sending care packages to military freethinkers, and the upcoming Cookie Party!

- **TIm Gorski**

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**THINK ABOUT IT!**

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oncologist. And “remotely viewing” would not only make X-rays obsolete but would eliminate the need for expensive robotic satellites in space exploration and many other applications.

There is a kind of miracle that legitimately interests intelligent thinking people and that is the miracle that violates known laws of nature because they occur under conditions where such laws break down. The very earliest moments of the birth of our universe, for example, or what is going on inside black holes and singularities that result from collapsing stars stymie our attempts to understand. High temperature superconductors are even now leading to whole new theories of how superconductivity works. A wide variety of such puzzles continue to challenge the human enterprise of science. But it is just these puzzles that drive progress in human understanding. As the late Isaac Asimov put it: “The most exciting phrase to hear in science is not ‘Eureka!’ but ‘That’s funny ...’”

Finally, it is an odd and curious thing that people often refer to the mundane and the ordinary as miraculous. People speak of “the miracle of birth,” for example, even though babies are born every day. An internet search on “the miracle of” yields millions of hits, the overwhelming bulk of which refer to things even more commonplace. It is, it seems, as Niels Bohr noted, a trademark of profound things that their opposites are as pregnant with truth. Everyone loves miracles. But a well-considered and thoughtful understanding of miracles shows us that there is virtually nothing, when properly considered, is not a miracle in the sense of its being wonderful, astonishing, and mysterious. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that no one – not even believers in the supernatural – has yet been able to offer an explanation for the simplest fact that we have: that there is something instead of nothing.
BOOK REVIEW: A SHORT HISTORY OF NEARLY EVERYTHING

A Short History of Nearly Everything is a fascinating journey through the history of scientific discovery by acclaimed author Bill Bryson. Written like a novel in which each of the historical persons are integral characters to the overall plot, this book begins with the origins of the Cosmos and continues through to the present day. It is a favorite of many, and you’ll love learning how it’s impacted your fellow freethinkers. Among the many stellar reviews of this book on Amazon.com, are such thoughts as, “I picked this one up expecting “good”. Instead, I got one of the most delightful reading experiences in science that I have ever had. What a wonderful surprise,” “if our civilization were wiped out and intelligent beings were to find one book... this is the one book they should find,” and “I think this book should replace the texts used in most high school science courses. If it did, I think we would see more kids pursuing science careers, because Bryson does a wonderful job of conveying the joy and excitement of doing science as well as a sense of awe that our world evolved as it did.”

NTOCF Members Cash Foley, Susan Eshelman, and Erin Taylor will be giving us their perspectives on the book during today’s service, and their reviews will also be published to our website along with links to A Short History of Nearly Everything through Amazon.com, where your purchase can help support the NTCOF.

After reading it, please log onto our website and share your thoughts on our forum, which provides a place for book reviews and other engaging discussions.

MARCH BULLETIN SPONSORSHIP: PRO-COUNT, INC.

The March 2009 issue of the NTCOF bulletin was sponsored by Pro-Count, Inc, who will donate $40 to the NTCOF on behalf of any NTCOF member who enrolls and completes Concealed Handgun License training through this school. To sign up for the class, please visit:

www.chl-tx.com

Please contact the Executive Director if you or your business would like to sponsor a future bulletin.

FEBRUARY FORUM CHATTER

The following is a sampling of the ongoing discussions held at the NTCOF forum through the past month- log on to add your two cents!

Aaren: “I’m pleased so say I have stumbled open your Church after surprisingly watching an episode of 30 Days. In which an Atheist mother spent 30 days with a Catholic family in Texas. There were members of the NTCOF in the episode that sparked my interest. A Church for free thinkers!? I’m glad I had decided to look this up. I just wanted to share that I am very very happy with what this Church is doing.”

TxSkeptic: “Although [Lori Lipman Brown] has never served on the bench (she did run for the Nevada Supreme Court in 2004), she has valuable experience and a philosophy that secularists would particularly appreciate. Even if there were no chance in, well, not hell but some other really hot desert region, of her getting the appointment, the nomination, or even the serious floating of her name [for a United States Supreme Court nomination] as a possibility, might cause the likes of Limbaugh, O’Reilly, Hannity etc. to blow such streams of smoke out their ears as to make the whole effort worth it. Just think of the apoplexy by Rick Warren, Pat Robertson and the entire right wing fruit basket of characters. It brings a warm smile to my face.”

KipBond: “I think religion & politics should be taught in schools -- in a non-indoctrination sort of way -- to help insulate kids from being brainwashed into certain belief systems. I’d also like to add an “Intro to Logic” and a “Personal Finance” class to the curriculum too. And I think every class should strongly encourage critical thinking about the material being taught.”

texarkandy: “Personally, I have no issue with the public school objectively teaching the history of world religions in the context of a history course. History & religion are intertwined anyway. I don’t think they should really dwell on it too much though. Is it really that important as to require a special class? I’d rather they not waste my kid’s time with it. Let’s have a little more math, science, literature.”

find more at:
www.churchoffreethought.org/bb
All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar, or through our Meetup.com site. Please check these locations regularly, and RSVP through Meetup.

Social Luncheon: Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and friendly discussion at Jason’s Deli in Irving, located just south of I-635 on MacArthur, at 7770 N. MacArthur Blvd., phone (972) 432-0555. Easy driving directions: To reach Jason’s from the Holiday Inn: turn RIGHT out of the parking lot onto Esters Blvd., RIGHT onto Freeport Parkway, RIGHT to enter I-635 EAST. Exit I-635 at MacArthur Blvd., then RIGHT onto MacArthur, and RIGHT again just ahead into the Jason’s parking lot.

Board Game Night: The NTCOF Board Game group meets nearly every Friday night at the smoke-free IHOP at 2310 Stemmons Trail in Dallas. The IHOP is adjacent to the Radisson Hotel along North-west Highway, about a ½ mile east of Loop 12.

Secular Singles: The Freethinking NTCOF Singles meets at the Vineyard restaurant in the Hilton DFW Lakes Executive Conference Center in Grapevine (1800 Highway 26 East).

Museum of Nature and Science: Volunteers are needed on Saturday, March 14th from 1:00 to 5:00 to help with the hands-on activities for the children, demonstrations and exhibits. The theme for this event is “Discovery Construction,” an exploration of green buildings. Please let Susette Geissler know by email if you can make it BY MARCH 6th.

Cookie Party: Join us for a Cookie Party on Sunday, March 15th. We’ll get together and bake cookies to be delivered to area police and fire stations. Let’s show our appreciation for all they do in our communities. And what a great opportunity to socialize with your fellow freethinkers!

Homebrew Club, Video Game Night, and Food Critics Dinner information TBD

### FINANCIAL REPORT

Folks, you hear this over and over, but it’s true: Freethought is NOT Free! Our continued growth is only possible through your generous donations and contributions to the church- our success depends on the commitment of ALL our members. We’ll share a more detailed financial summary later in the year, but here’s a snapshot of our financial activity from the past month:

- **Total Income:** $1,077.02
- **Total Expenses:** $1,279.71
- **Difference:** -$202.69

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**Christopher Hitchens in DFW**

Christopher Hitchens is a columnist for Vanity Fair, and author of “God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything.” He will be a featured panelist at the 2009 Christian Book Expo here at the Dallas Convention Center on **Saturday, March 21** from 1:00 PM until 3:00 PM, debating as the sole atheist against the likes of Christian apologists William Lane Craig, Lee Strobel, and Doug Wilson. Hitchens will also be in attendance on **Friday, March 20** for a screening of the documentary “Collision,” about his debate with Doug Wilson, where he will be signing copies of his book.