Some people say October is “too early” to begin the holiday season. Well, of course, it is too early to begin Thanksgiving and Christmas and New Years. But it’s just the right time of year to observe Freethought Day and Halloween. In fact, they relate to one another in that Freethought Day celebrates an historic step out of the darkness of superstition in the form of the end of the Salem Witchcraft trials and Halloween demonstrates that the imaginary can, after all, be fun. Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, also falls usually in September or October. This year it came September 27-28. Yom Kippur is also known as the Day of Atonement, and atonement is only possible for those who make mistakes, a kind of acknowledgement of human fallibility but, at the same time, a refusal to accept the idea that this forecloses human improvement. Even if we are not perfectible it remains our responsibility to recognize and learn from our mistakes, a very Freethinking way of looking at things.

NTCOF’s next three services in November, December and January fall more squarely into the traditional holiday season with its many themes of appreciation, contentment, generosity, and hope for the future. Plan now to be able to attend these events. Santa Claus usually shows up to check if you do!

SKEPTRACK @ DRAGON*CON

For four days spanning the Labor Day weekend this year, I was in Atlanta attending Dragon*Con, described as “the largest multi-media, popular culture convention focusing on science fiction and fantasy, gaming, comics, literature, art, music, and film in the US”. The convention is huge, filling four high rise hotels with over 35,000 attendees. The schedules are packed with celebrities, writers, artists, vendors, contests, gaming, charity events, and a parade through the streets of Atlanta. Dragon*Con also has over 30 special interest “tracks”, which are conventions within the convention.

One might wonder what Dragon*Con has to do with Freethought. In 2008, the Skeptrack was launched at Dragon*Con. It grew out of the ex-
This past week, the world discovered that Iran has had a secret nuclear processing facility in addition to the ones it had disclosed to the International Atomic Energy Commission. Some have suggested that it may have even more. In the context of Iran’s systematic failure to comply with the safeguards of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, to which it is a signatory, the conclusion appears obvious: that Iranian authorities are, despite their unconvincing protestations, intent on acquiring nuclear weapons.

So what does this have to do with the NTCOF, or Freethinkers, or even religious questions in general? It clearly has to do with world peace. It has to do with the safety and security of Iran’s neighbors and the Middle East generally, and everywhere that is within reach of missiles that the Iranian rulers have also been developing and testing. It also has to do with a religion – Islam – that is frequently referred to as “a religion of peace” but which appears to motivate activities that are decidedly belligerent. And all of these things are legitimate concerns for people who care about what matters in life.

If the Swedes or the Swiss or one of many others of the world’s nations were to announce tomorrow that they were in possession of atomic bombs, it seems doubtful that this would create significant worries. It might be wondered, of course, why the Swedes or the Swiss or sensible people of any country had wasted their money on such things. But there is not the same puzzle about the motivations of the Iranian authorities’ drive to acquire nuclear weapons. And that is why, when they do acquire them, hopes for world peace will dim.

Iranian nuclear weapons will not contribute to the peace and stability of the Middle East. The nations in this part of the world have not generally seen eye-to-eye. Indeed, this was a major reason why the European Crusaders managed, for a time, to take and keep control of large parts of the region. One of them acquiring atomic bombs is likely to create an incentive for others to do so as well. Even one of them lying about the extent of their nuclear program creates such an incentive. Israel, in particular, has reason to fear, reason that was laid out by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu before the UN General Assembly on September 24 of this year. The placement of nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962 by a nation that had said it would “bury” us was an international crisis. What then, can we expect when the people of Israel are similarly targeted by a nation whose rulers have repeatedly called them a “cancerous tumor” whose continued presence cannot be tolerated?

Finally, how does all of this reflect on the alleged “religion of peace?” Iran is not just a nation whose majority religion is Islam, after all. Iran is an Islamic theocracy headed by a Supreme Leader whose authority comes supposedly from a deity, Allah. True, this same leader issued a “fatwa” against nuclear weapons. But this obscure fact doesn’t compare to the far more numerous and better-known decrees for killing all manner of people from specific individuals who “offend” Islam to any and all Americans and their allies. What kind of “religion” is it that advocates murder?

The determination of the tyrants of Iran to acquire nuclear weapons has definite religious implications. Why has this gone unnoticed? It would cause more consternation if the Vatican had a program to develop nuclear weapons. Yet the Catholic Pope has not been in the habit of denying the Holocaust and calling for people to be killed and countries to be wiped off the map. Let us be honest: either the Islamic clerics that run Iran are not real Muslims or Islam is not a real religion.

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**THINK ABOUT IT!**
OCTOBER EVENTS

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.

Family Group: The Family Group meets after the October service at I Fratelli’s Italian restaurant, right next to Jason’s Deli. They have a great Sunday buffet with pizza and other food, and we will be in the meeting room in the back... this will be a great way to meet some of the other families in the NTCOF!

Pub Night: Formerly called the Freethought Forum, we’ll be meeting at unique local pubs with great beer selections and great conversation. This month, we’ll be at The Flying Saucer in Addison on October 16th, and then again at The Ginger Man in Dallas on November 7th.

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).

Women’s Group: Do you miss getting to spend quality time with female friends? Want a comfortable place to chat without all those pesky men around? Come on out to the newly-formed NTCOF Women’s Group, where there will be knitting lessons, conversation, and lots of female freethinking fun! Next meeting is Sunday, October 18th at 7:00 PM at Alex Evans’ home.

Cookie Party: Join us for a Cookie Party on Sunday, October 18th. 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!

2009 NTCOF EVENTS

October 12th: Freethought Day
October 31st: Halloween Party
November 1st: Monthly Service
November 14th: Freethought Convention
December 6th: Monthly Service

tabulated Science and Space tracks as a new track focused on skepticism and rational thought. The first year of Skeptrack was well attended, so it returned again in 2009 with double the meeting space. It was my primary reason for going to Dragon*Con this year, and I spent the majority of my time attending the Skeptrack presentations.

Skeptrack is similar to the annual skeptics conference, “The Amazing Meeting” (TAM), held in Las Vegas. Although Skeptrack is sometimes referred to as “mini-TAM”, it is actually longer than TAM with over 30 hours of events. A wide variety of topics covered parenting, atheism, medicine, brain science, paranormal investigations, women’s issues, blogging, podcasting, and “feeding the skeptic’s soul”. The non-stop party atmosphere of Dragon*Con keeps Skeptrack from getting too serious. Older children are welcome and can find plenty to keep them occupied. Skeptrack also provides a great opportunity for outreach since anyone at Dragon*Con is free to wander into Skeptrack. Even though the convention focuses on fantasy and escapism, many of the attendees are interesting in learning about the facts behind the fiction, a mindset that fits well with Skeptrack.

Skeptrack had notable speakers in the rational thought community including Eugenie Scott (National Center for Science Education), Phil Plait (Bad Astronomy blog and president of JREF), Joe Nickell (Committee for Skeptical Inquiry), D.J. Grothe (Center for Inquiry), Ed Buckner (American Athiests), Seth Shostak (SETI Institute), and many others. There was a special video message from James Randi, who could not attend in person this year because of medical issues. Comedy and music were provided by George Hrab, who visited the Dallas area less than a year ago. Podcasters recorded live shows from Skeptrack, such as “Skepticality,” “Skeptics Guide to the Universe”, “American Freethought”, “Amateur Scientist”, “Skeptoid”, and “The Skeptic Zone” from Australia. Those podcast episodes are now available online.

Planning for Dragon*Con and Skeptrack has started for Sept 3-6 2010. Discount memberships to the convention are already available and many hotels are taking reservations. More information can be found at dragoncon.org and skeptrack.org. If you are interested in attending next year, plan early since the hotels fill up fast.
The North Texas Church of Freethought

PROUD MEMBERS OF THE TEXAS FREETHOUGHT CONVENTION

Please mark your calendars today and make travel reservations to come to beautiful San Antonio on Saturday, November 14th!
texasfreethoughtconvention.com

The October 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.

www.chl-tx.com

To sign up for the class, please visit: www.chl-tx.com

To your business would like to sponsor a future bulletin, please contact the Executive Director.

Richard Dawkins, author of “The God Delusion,” has just published a definitive collection of evidence from the natural world in support of evolutionary theory, entitled “The Greatest Show on Earth.”

Ariane Sherine, the lead instigator of the UK „There’s probably no God” bus sign campaign, has a new book for the holiday season called “The Atheist’s Guide to Christmas.”

You can purchase both books through the Amazon link on our website. Please mark your calendars today and make travel reservations to come to beautiful San Antonio on Saturday, November 14th!