



NTCOF TURNS EIGHTEEN!

If the North Texas Church of Freethought were a person it would now be old enough to vote, watch an NC-17 film, and join the military! On February 5th of 1995, the NTCOF held its first regular first Sunday services featuring a dramatic reading of TH Huxley's Letter To Kingsley (available on the NTCOF website at http://www.churchoffreethought.org/Huxley_Kingsley_Letter.php). Eighteen years later we have yet to run out of things to talk about including a wealth of material representing the heritage of Freethinkers and religious skeptics, what science and philosophy can teach us about "religious questions," current events, and much more. And Thank You to the NejdI family for bringing our delicious birthday cake today!

RELIGION AND MORALS IN THE NEWS

The orthodox religious traditions have for some time succeeded in identifying "values" and "morality" with their opposition to sexual and reproductive-related rights. Recently, there were tremors in this mostly frozen-up landscape.

The Boy Scouts (BSA) has been set in stone over its exclusion of gays and unbelievers backed by the US Supreme Court's decision in its 2000 BSA v Dale case. This past week the Scouts let it be known that it is considering ending its organizational ban on gays and leaving each of its hundreds of regional councils and sponsors to discriminate or not. An important reason may be increasing pressure from large donors and even some United Way organizations. (Dallas and Tarrant County UW's both fund the BSA.) Intel and UPS both discontinued six-figure annual donations to BSA citing their own policies barring discrimination. But even if change happens, it will be a small one: from requiring discrimination to allowing discrimination. And, of course, the ban on unbelievers – specifically those who do not agree that they owe any "duty to God" – remains unaffected.

Also this week the Obama Administration announced an expansion of the religious exemption for health insurance coverage of contraceptives. And, for those who are personally affected by such exemptions, free separate health insurance coverage just for contraception. And by "free" is meant paid-for by some means that obscures who is actually paying for it, similar to the way in which religious organizations get "free" government services that everyone else must pay taxes for. The new policies, notes Americans United, are "bending over backward to address religious objections" to contraception and "should more than satisfy religiously affiliated institutions that have objected to the birth control mandate."

And it was reported a few days ago that Los Angeles archbishop Jose Gomez relieved his predecessor, Roger M. Mahony, of all public duties for Mahony's role in the clergy sex-abuse scandals.

All three stories shine a hard light on the poverty of the "values" and "morality" of the relevant religious groups. What kind of "moral code" has, at its core, hating gays and atheists on the claim that they cannot be "the best kind of citizen?" What kind of understanding of right and wrong requires opposition to birth control? Meanwhile, actual immorality – abusing children – is covered up in order to protect the reputation of a faceless deity and its alleged spokesmen. Although the relevant religious groups do not represent all religious believers, these things cast almost all of their traditions in a very bad light. And some – perhaps many – unbelievers may applaud that.

But there is a flip side. To the extent that it is socially and culturally accepted that homosexuality, religious heterodoxy (especially atheism) and reproductive rights and decision-making are what "values" and "morality" amount to, it casts the very idea of right and wrong, of good and evil, in a bad light. Why should anyone even care about morality if this is all it amounts to? And if the

nation's religious organizations and leaders don't say differently, then who else will? If there is to be a real revival of social and cultural concern with meaningful values, perhaps it should start with these questions as well as to what extent it is acceptable for religious groups to enjoy exemptions from the moral standards that everyone else is held to as a matter of law.

GOD AND THE SUPERBOWL

It was announced this past week that a survey conducted by The Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) found that 27% of Americans said that they either "completely" or "mostly" agreed with the statement that "God plays a role in determining which team wins a sporting event." The finding was widely reported as "nearly a third" of Americans believing that "the Super Bowl is controlled by God." PRRI's chief executive was quoted as saying that "in an era where professional sports are driven by dollars and statistics, significant numbers of Americans see a divine hand at play."

Except it's not quite true since even Deists would agree that a deity that set the universe going eons ago and then absented himself still "plays a role" in the outcome of any and all physical phenomena. Someone for whom God is "the laws of nature" would have to say the same thing.

What was not reported was that 21% of respondents chose "mostly disagree," 49% said they "completely" disagreed, and 3% said they didn't know in answer to the statement. Thus, it should have been reported that more than half of Americans do not think that God plays any role in the outcome of sporting events and that more than a fifth mostly doubt it.

YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS TO THE NTCOF ARE NEEDED, APPRECIATED, AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!! (AND NECESSARY FOR AN AUSPICIOUS START OF A NEW YEAR!)

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:
MORE ON ANCIENT MYTHS**

**>>> Sunday, March 3rd, 2013 <<<
SHERATON GRAND DFW AIRPORT
SE CORNER OF 114 AND ESTERS**

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar, or through our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at: www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought - **JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!**

Social Luncheon: Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Golden Corral Buffet and Grill in Grapevine, located just across from the Grapevine Mills Mall, at 2605 E. Grapevine Mills Circle, phone (972) 874-7900. To reach Golden Corral from the Sheraton, cross over the freeway and make a left onto John W. Carpenter Freeway (114) going west. Then take the first exit RIGHT onto International Parkway (121), then Grapevine Mills Parkway exit. Turn LEFT on Stars and Stripes Way, continuing on to E. Grapevine Mills Circle.

Freethought Salon: Get together to discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest for Freethinkers. Most Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton Vineyard in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM; see the meetup site!

Game Night: The regular game night crew meets nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

Secular Singles: Freethinkers have met their life-partners with whom they have begun families through the Secular Singles group. Check the meetup site for the next date, time and location!

"The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched."

- Helen Keller



DFWCOR

Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason

The North Texas Church of Freethought
The Fellowship of Unbelievers

Presenters: Professor Gail Gear, David Burgess & Tim Gorski
Welcome Coordinator: Mark Barnick
Videographer: John Gauthier
WebMasters: Rusty and Sarah Nejdil

P.O.Box 202447, Arlington, TX 76006
(214) 702-2050

Website: www.churchoffreethought.org
Email: info@churchoffreethought.org