



MEDIA MANIPULATION

Human beings certainly “do not live by bread alone.”* Those with sufficient bread hunger especially for “food for thought.” This is said to be why ancient peoples welcomed travelers, because they brought news and knowledge of other places. Everyone naturally and enthusiastically shares what they know about all sorts of things. Of particular interest has always been news of actual or potential physical threats, the doings of the rich and powerful, and who is having sex with whom. These subjects continue to dominate the modern media.

Early in history, rulers and governments issued proclamations, sent messengers and sometimes etched their orders into metal or rock such as the famed Rosetta Stone. A few people wrote books but they had to be written and copied by hand. The printing press was a transformative innovation and the Industrial Revolution a few centuries later made it possible for written materials to be produced and distributed by the thousands and millions. Electronic media and the Internet changed everything again. Each change has been in many ways for the better but in some ways for the worse.

Literacy and a better informed populace are clearly an enormous benefit, vitally so for participatory democracies. But it has also made it easier for people to be lied to, propagandized, frightened by hoaxes, swindled by con artists, cheated by crooked sellers, deceived and endangered by medical quacks, and stampeded into rash decisions or made tolerant of rash decisions and even crimes committed by their own governments.

Noam Chomsky’s (and Edward S. Herman’s) famous 1988 book Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media, argued that five “filters” work together to make the media a propaganda machine serving the interests of major corporations and the governments they control:

*Not everything in the Bible is wrong, but this is most often said by those who have sufficient bread. Or who want yours!

- 1) The profit motive of media companies,
- 2) The dependence on advertising revenue,
- 3) The dependence on and priority given to “official” and “established” sources for content,
- 4) The reluctance to elicit negative reaction or become the target of lawsuits by reporting facts or including opinions threatening to the interests of those in a position to respond with such “flak,” and
- 5) The need to encourage public fears used for social control, currently of terrorism and previously communism and the Soviet Bloc.

It is a persuasive idea. But there have only been two ways to make a profit by selling news and information: by getting money from readers/listeners/viewers or from advertisers. But to get the money from advertisers it is first necessary to have an audience. Thus it is necessary to produce and present what people want and to do it better than one’s competitors.

Computers and the Internet, and increasingly mobile devices, have made it easier than ever to know what people want. This is because their “clicks,” search terms, “pageviews,” and even the time people spend on each item and whether they “share” or “forward” them, and to whom, can be tracked. This can be compared with online purchases, visits and posts to interactive sites, message boards and other activities. It then becomes a science of how to keep each individual engaged, clicking, and, most of all, being exposed to the advertisers’ messages. In this game, communicating a preferred “establishment” message and “manufacturing consent” for the rulers is a distant secondary concern. And educating, informing, encouraging judicious thought and public participation, and caring about the truth become hardly a concern at all.

While the public has some appreciation of these hazards, people fear more how they affect others, not themselves. The Pew Research Center found in 2014 “that trust and distrust in the news

media varies greatly by political ideology." Liberals, for example, mostly trusted the major TV networks and The New York Times, while conservatives did not trust these sources as much. Conservatives, on the other hand, mostly trusted Fox News, Glenn Beck and Sean Hannity, while liberals did not. Both put trust in The Wall Street Journal and neither trusted BuzzFeed.

What can one do to be better informed and avoid lies, misinformation and bias? The maxim "you get what you pay for" probably applies. "Free" news and information is largely someone else's marketing. News sources that depend on their subscribers have more incentive to provide value and less incentive to be reckless with facts or their interpretation. Specialized media with a topical or regional focus may also be less apt to make obvious errors: Astronomy magazine does not feature stories of alien abductions. Perhaps most important is to exercise caution and maintain a good deal of doubt. As Edgar Allen Poe put it: "Believe nothing you hear, and only one half that you see." For while in science there are many incentives to avoid, uncover and correct mistakes and advance understanding, in journalism there are few such inducements. News and opinion writers consider that they have done their jobs if, at the very end of an article, "balance" is provided by allowing someone to deny what is asserted.

Finally, given the ubiquity of misinformation, bias and downright lies, it is well not to live in an "echo chamber" of one's own beliefs and ideological commitments. Sometimes what we want and most enjoy is not what we need or what will contribute to our growth. If we want truth we should realize that part of the truth about reality is that people have ideas and opinions that are different, sometimes unwelcome and even disturbing. So if one is conservative, one should make some effort to understand the liberal point of view, and vice versa. And, always – always! – it is well to keep in mind that some people will say and do anything for their own advantage, especially if they happen to be a Nigerian prince or Minister of Petroleum, or a televangelist.

**YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS
TO THE NTCOF ARE NEEDED,
APPRECIATED,
AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!!**

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar , or 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 Jason's Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of 635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555. After that, at the Perot Museum in Dallas from about 3 to 6 pm.

Freethought Salon: Discuss today's service topic or other conundrums of interest. It happens most non-first Sundays of the month, over breakfast, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Hotel restaurant "The Vineyard" - inside the hotel - in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM.

Game Night: 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 Le Havre, Carcassonne, and other fun games!

Freethought Book Club September 18, 2016
THE BOOK: Undeniable by Bill Nye "The Science Guy."
Location: during and/or after the Salon (see above)

Communitas Dinner Group: To be Announced!
Have Another Idea? Email or call! Read bulletins & presentations and post on the FORUM at www.churchoffreethought.org LIKE US at www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/ and sign up for our Twitter feed at twitter.com/ntcof !

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:
"BOO!!"
Things To Be Afraid Of
(also Fritha Robinson LPC)
> Sunday, October 2, 2016 <
COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH
(Take the Freeport Parkway exit, then the
frontage road east just past Best Western;
starts at 10:30 but come at 10 for fellowship!)**

The North Texas Church of Freethought
The Fellowship of Unbelievers

Pastor (It's a Job Description, NOT a title!)	Tim Gorski
Presenters	Tim Gorski
Social Media Czar	Aaron Kelton
Book Club Lord	Nirav Assar
Welcome Coordinator	Mark Barnick
Videographer:	John Gauthier
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