



# BULLETIN of THE NORTH TEXAS CHURCH OF FREETHOUGHT

The Fellowship Of Unbelievers Throwing light on Facts and their Logical Consequences since 1994

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## CHRISTMAS: SOMETHING IS MYTHING

The word “myth” comes from the Greek word “muthos,” meaning story, which in ancient, preliterate times, was conveyed by word of mouth. The Dictionary of English Folklore (2000) says that myths are:

“stories about divine beings ... revered as true and sacred; they are endorsed by rulers and priests; and closely linked to religion. Once this link is broken, and the actors in the story are not regarded as gods but as human heroes, giants or fairies, it is no longer a myth but a folktale. Where the central actor is divine but the story is trivial ... the result is religious legend, not myth.”

This is muddled. For giants and fairies – as well as human demigods or just plain humans who contend with or may command magical powers – are still in the realm of the fantastic. They still imply a supernatural reality beyond the natural one and thereby have religious significance. But when the stories are designated “holy scripture” of a given religious faith, a tension is introduced. Portions of the traditions may be euphemized as being “symbolic,” “metaphorical,” or considered to be parables. But where the elements considered central to the essential dogmas and doctrines of a faith-based religion are involved, there is strong motivation to insist that the stories are literally true.

Such claims of literal truth and inerrancy vary between various religions and religious sects. On the other hand, “truth” need not equate to “historical truth.” It can be said that events happened in a “spiritual” or supernatural realm. Clearly this is the case with the “War in Heaven” in which Lucifer led an unsuccessful revolt against Yahweh. More importantly, something can be “true” in that it speaks to emotions, values and meaning. Something may not “ring true” but nevertheless resonate with our deepest human sensibilities.

The trouble is that “myth” is a word also used to refer not just to useful or instructive or entertaining fictions, but to falsehoods, misinformation and even deliberate lies that come to be believed, whether innocently or not, as true. And it is this sense in which many atheists refer to the Bible – and other “holy scriptures” - as being myth. While this is appropriate, it does not do justice to the appeal of myth, even – or perhaps especially – the myths that are so important to many religious believers.

Of course, believers are as insensible to the fact that a story being myth does not drain it of its appeal or meaning. They are strongly motivated to ignore the obvious mythic elements in their “holy” books and are typically outraged when this is pointed out. When they cannot deny the fantastic character of what they assert, they have a ready excuse: their own supernaturalist doctrines! They expect the few factual references in their “sacred” texts to cover for all the improbable and nonsensical content. On this logic, the 2012 film “Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter” proves that the 16<sup>th</sup> President of the United States did, in fact, battle vampires during the Civil War! After all, people would not waste their time and money watching an elaborate dramatization of a lie, would they? Yet those who make such films do not react violently when it is said that their work is fiction or even very bad fiction. Why is that?

The simple truth is that our ancestors, even our distant ancestors of the ancient world, were as fond of storytelling as we are. It may well be true, though, that “the truth” in a literal, factual, objective sense was not so important in those times as it has since come to be. The distinction may not even have been very well-understood to most people then. Many, if not most, seem to have taken it for granted that one could acquire knowledge from dreams, visions, oracles and the like. We know better now only because of

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the development of science, which was once described by American physicist and Nobel Prize Laureate Richard Feynman (1918-1988) as “what we have learned about how to keep from fooling ourselves.”

Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), an American Professor of Literature, popularized the idea of the “monomyth.” In his 1949 book The Hero With a Thousand Faces he explained that epic myths follow a pattern. Campbell said that:

“Myths are public dreams.  
Dreams are private myths.”

Interestingly, the Australian Aborigines refer to the primordial world in which their traditions began as “the Dreamtime.”\* The analogy is apt, as dreams reflect our conscious thoughts as well as our unconscious concerns, wishes and fears. Unsurprisingly, one of the first people to rationally consider the significance of dreams, Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud (1858-1939), also studied and wrote about the meaning of myth. And just as with dreams, which are involuntary experiences, myths also come to us from “the dreamtime” of our ancient ancestors. Yet both are really manifestations and reflections of the architecture, function and content of our own minds.

This being the case, it is probably as futile to think of eradicating myths, even the myths that are the basis of religious zealotry, fanaticism, hatred and violence, as it is to think of eradicating dreams. On the other hand, civilized people have learned to recognize that dreams do not take place in or amount to messages from a supernatural realm. So it is reasonable to expect that it can also be learned that myths do not emanate from any supernatural source either. It must come to be recognized that however appealing it may be for many to think of such things as being – or even to wish that such things are – as real as objective reality, they are not. They cannot be and should not be.

This does not mean that significance, value and meaning cannot come from private myths or public dreams. But regardless of their source, we should critically consider all of what we think in the light of reason and facts. For that is the test that really determines the worth of our ideas.

\* This may stem from a mistranslation of late 19<sup>th</sup> Century anthropologists but took hold and is commonly used today by the native peoples of Australia.

All NTCOF events can be found through our [web-site calendar](#), or our [meetup page](#), from which you can RSVP, at: - [www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought](http://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.

**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!

**Have Another Idea?** Email or call! Read bulletins & presentations and post on the FORUM at [www.churchoffreethought.org](http://www.churchoffreethought.org) LIKE US at [www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/](https://www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/) and sign up for our Twitter feed at [twitter.com/ntcof](https://twitter.com/ntcof) !

PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:

## “WILL THE FUTURE BE UTOPIA or DYSTOPIA?”

> Sunday, January 7, 2018 <

COMFORT INN DFW AIRPORT NORTH

(Take the Freeport Parkway exit, then the frontage road east just past Best Western; service starts at 10:30 but come early for coffee, snacks - you can bring some! - and conversation)

**THANK YOU !!  
FOR YOUR GENEROUS  
DONATION OF TIME & FINANCIAL  
SUPPORT to the NTCOF !!  
It is needed, appreciated  
and Tax-Deductible !**

**The North Texas Church of Freethought  
The Fellowship of Unbelievers**

Pastor (It's a job description, not a title!) Tim Gorski  
Presenters (How about YOU?).....Tim Gorski  
Social Media Czar.....Aaron Kelton  
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Videographer.....John Gauthier  
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