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

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LOVE: REASONABLE and RELIGIOUS

"God is Love," say believers. The statement appears twice in the Gospel of John. Yet the facts of human existence suggest that "God" does not love humanity or is not omnipotent. And if the deity of the Torah-Tanakh/Bible/Koran is "love," it is surprising that there is not much that these three "holy" writings have to say on the subject beyond platitudes. Divinely-commanded genocide and doctrines such as eternal torture in hell and jihad are certainly not expressions of love.

Christianity famously lays claim to the term agape (uh-GAH-pay), one of a number of forms of love that the ancient Greeks recognized as a selfless and unconditional love. Christians appropriated this idea, understanding it to be "God's" unconditional love of humanity and one that believers should reciprocate towards "God." It is also the "Christian charity" that believers claim to feel towards others.

John 3:16, often held to capsulize Christianity, is not consistent with an "unconditional" love inasmuch as divine salvation is conditioned on its recipients being "whosoever believeth in [Jesus]." Christianity also fails to account for why an omnipotent deity needs a blood sacrifice to forgive or "redeem" humans who are only in need of forgiveness or "redemption" because of circumstances that "God" is responsible for. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul, predating the author(s) of John, supplies frequently-quoted lines about agape, translated there as "love." But it is questionable, to say the least, how well his description applies to the Bible deity, especially as that deity appears in the Old Testament.

Christianity – and civilization generally – borrowed many important concepts from the ancient Greeks, whose ideas about love were much better developed than those to be found in the Bible. The Greeks distinguished different forms of love depending on its felt and expressed character:

✦ Eros, or sexually-oriented love, from which we

get our word "erotic."

✦ Philia, love without sexual attraction, often (not always) used today as a suffix that may be attached to whatever may be loved in this way: bibliophilia (love of books), hemophilia ("love" of bleeding, medical disorders of blood clotting), oenophilia (love of wine), technophilia (love of technology) and so on.

✦ Storge is the love of family members for one another, often considered an instinctual attachment.

✦ Ludus, or playful love, a superficial affection for games and amusement that may be reflected in the pursuit of short-lived pleasures such as flirting and promiscuity.

✦ Mania, obsessive or jealous love, a kind of love-gone-wrong that can lead to serious problems.

✦ Pragma, from which we get our word "pragmatic," a practical-minded love that is mature and usually of long-standing as with friends or couples who have been together for many years.

✦ Philautia, a healthy love of oneself including compassion for and a sympathetic understanding of oneself without which it is difficult to love others.

✦ Agape, selfless or unconditional love, relates modern philosophers' ideas about moral progress: a love for one's own family/tribe is gradually expanded to encompass all of humanity.

Love has been studied, analyzed and dissected into many elements and characteristics. A variety of systems of classification and categorizations of love have been proposed. But love is so personal and subjective, so tightly related to its particular and changing contexts that millennia of writers, singers, artists and others have failed to capture its essence. Changing terminology, to say nothing of the connotations of the many terms used to refer to this emotion – "feeling," "sentiment," "passion," "attachment," "affection," and the like – have made it all

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but impossible to reach definitive conclusions. Neurobiology and neurochemistry have allowed us to think of love as a physical phenomenon in the brain but though the sciences may study what is happening physically when people express what they are feeling, science cannot tell us what it is really like to love or feel loved.

Love, at bottom, it is an expression of human values at the most personal level. It is involved in driving every human thought and behavior. There is a moral dimension to this as people can be impelled to actions that affect others for good or ill and one's own happiness and capacity for insight, growth and effective living. In this way, love is arguably a religious matter and clearly a subjectively religious experience. Even the feeling of agape can be compared to the feeling of "being one with the universe." French writer Romain Rolland (1866-1944) said of this that it is:

"... quite independently of all dogma, of all Credo, of every Church organization, of every Holy Book, of all hope in a personal survival, etc. - the simple and direct fact of the sensation of the eternal (which can very well not be eternal but simply without perceptible limits, and in that way oceanic). ... I, myself, am familiar with this sensation. ... I can say that I am profoundly 'religious' without ... [it] in any way harming my critical faculties and my freedom to exercise them ... I carry on simultaneously ... a 'religious' life (in the sense of this prolonged sensation) and a life of critical reason (which is without illusion)."

[letter to Sigmund Freud December 5, 1927]

Love in all its complexity lies at the core of the human condition and so must be considered profoundly religious. But unlike supernaturalism – falsely considered by many to be the essence of religion – love is a subject that scientific methods are now poised to explore, even if the sciences cannot quite get to the subjectivity of it. Religion, properly understood, and critical reason, as Rolland said, can – indeed, they must – not only coexist but work in service to each other. For science is at once an object of love and a restraint on human passions including religious zeal. While human values anchored in religious feeling – “religious” in the sense that Rolland used it – must direct scientific methods and technologies towards advancing human well-being. And critical reason, in turn, is the best guide to discerning the nature of human well-being.

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.

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 LIKE US at www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/ and sign up for our Twitter feed at twitter.com/ntcof !

PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH: (guest speakers!)

"SKEPTICS IN SUNDAY SCHOOL"

> Sunday, March 4, 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
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