



# BULLETIN of THE NORTH TEXAS CHURCH OF FREETHOUGHT

The Fellowship Of Unbelievers

Beginning Religion Over Again Since 1994

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## A VALENTINE FOR FREETHOUGHT

Valentine's Day is a celebration of romantic love. How it came to be that way is a puzzle since Saint Valentine is not associated with eroticism. More puzzling is how sexual love came to be seen as noble and ennobling. It certainly was not so regarded by the ancients. Even for the first thousand years of the current era it was viewed as a human failing, weakness or temptation that led to foolishness, madness and, worst of all, sin. Importantly, it had always been seen as incompatible with reason and good judgment and for this reason suspect and dangerous. Such undercurrents persist in the form of such aphorisms as "love is blind."

But in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, in the south of France, the idea began of romantic love as something dignified, grand, idealistic and even sacred. As it first took hold in medieval circles of royalty and nobility it became known as courtly love. The famous writer and Christian apologist C.S. Lewis, in his classic analysis [The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition](#) wrote that it was:

"love of a highly specialized sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love. The lover is always abject. Obedience to his lady's lightest wish, however whimsical, and silent acquiescence in her rebukes, however unjust, are the only virtues he dares to claim. There is a service of love closely modeled on the service which a feudal vassal owes to his lord. The lover is the lady's 'man'. He addresses her as midons, which etymologically represents not 'my lady' but 'my lord'. The whole attitude has been rightly described as 'a feudalisation of love'."

Contrast this with Christian "agape," or the sort of love that "God" has for humanity, bizarrely

manifested in such things as cancer, Ebola, tsunamis and that ultimate gift of unsurpassed love, everlasting torture in hell. This, not romantic love, is what Paul extols in 1 Corinthians 13, often read at modern marriage ceremonies. Paul ranks celibacy as a greater virtue than marriage and states in 1 Corinthians 7: "It is good for a man not to touch a woman."

Of course love is a word that is used – both as a noun and a verb – to mean many different things. Indeed, when it is said "love is XYZ," it is to say no more than that "the sort of love that is XYZ is XYZ." Once the impression of sublime wisdom passes, a discerning mind is led to ask what is really being asserted. What does it mean to say that "God is Love!" for example? Does it mean that someone's conception of a deity is totally loving no matter the nature of that conception and the claimed character, commands and conduct of the deity? Or does it mean that one's best understanding of love is actually what "God" is? And what about "love conquers all?" Does it mean that, motivated by love, we can find satisfaction and even a sense of accomplishment no matter what difficulties we encounter? Or does it mean that love can literally achieve anything, even the impossible?

Love and especially romantic love is a frequent and ubiquitous element of human culture. It is a major focus of music and the arts. It may be fairly said that humanity has been and remains obsessed with this emotion. One explanation for this is that it is important in human "pair-bonding" and other relationships that facilitate the care of children. For, unique among animal species, human offspring are born helpless and must undergo a prolonged period of growth and development before having any reasonable chance of independent survival. Despite this, infant and child mortality have

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historically been as high as 40-50%, significantly declining only in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

Whatever the selective pressures that made emotional attachments so important for humans, there is no doubt about its impact. For without such a great propensity for social connection there would have been no need for language. Without language there would have been nothing to enable and structure thinking. And without this there would have been no way to slowly accumulate culture. This, accelerated by writing, generated the descriptions, problems, ideas, arguments and theories that preoccupy us. And these, as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Austrian-British philosopher Karl Popper pointed out, are related to the distinctive mode of existence of human beings just as are the nests of birds, the dams of beavers and the honeycombs of bees.

But it happens that when some structure or trait arises and is selected for in the course of evolution because it serves some purpose, it then becomes available for other purposes. The atheist/agnostic American paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould and his colleague, Elisabeth Vrba, coined the term “exaptation” to describe this. It applies here because it is no accident that people commonly use the word “love” to describe their emotional attachment not just to their romantic partners, family and other people but to animals, objects, sensations, activities, places and a wide range of ideas. Such love has motivated many to devote their time and energies to all manner of explorations and exploits. And this, in turn, has profoundly affected the world and everyone in it, often for the better but, at times, for the worse.

Emotional attachments lie at the root of our humanity. It is no exaggeration to say that love made the human species. And love makes us what we are as individuals. It is where all meaning comes from for it is how we come to discover meaning. Love teaches us the value of our lives, of others and of our connections with others. Love reveals the beauty and majesty of the natural world and of our place in it. And love motivates us to search for more, to recognize and confront the many obstacles to our pursuit of happiness both within ourselves and beyond.

Truly, as “The Great Agnostic,” the 19<sup>th</sup> Century writer and orator Robert Ingersoll put it: “without [love] we are less than beasts; but with it, earth is heaven, and we are gods.” There is far more power in that insight than in any trite sayings that an imaginary invisible supernatural being “is love.”

**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](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 I-635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

**Freethought Salon:** Discuss today's service topic or other conundrums on most non-first Sundays of the month, over breakfast/coffee (or not)(and you can bring whatever you want to eat!), in the atrium – usually towards the back – of the Embassy Suites DFW Airport North – on Bass Pro Drive in Grapevine beginning at 10:00 AM.

**Game Night:** Most Friday nights 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 Imperial 2030, Dominion, Terraforming Mars, Le Havre, Caverna, and other fun games!

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

## **PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH “FICTIONAL RELIGIONS”**

**(yes, yes, we know, we know!)**

**> Sunday, March 1, 2020 <  
HERE at the Hawthorn Suites  
DFW Airport North  
at 10:30 AM**

## **THANK YOU !! FOR YOUR TIME and FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

**of 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!)  
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