

North Texas Church of Freethought

By Preston Condra

Founders/Key Leaders: Timothy N. Gorski, M.D., F.A.C.O.G., *Pastoral Director*; Deborah Boak, *Youth Services Director*; Mike Sullivan (first *Executive Director*); Marilyn Sullivan, *Special Projects Director*; Dr. Zach Moore, *Executive Director*

Founding Date: 1994

Publications: *The Bulletin* (monthly newsletter distributed at monthly church service and available on the church's website)

Official Website: <http://www.churchoffreethought.org>

Organizational Structure: church leaders have no official authority; each member is a free thinker; churches are autonomous

Affiliate Organizations: Houston Church of Freethought¹

Unique Terms: *unbelief* (rejection of belief in God(s)), *freethought* (applying reason to religious issues; rejection of the supernatural), *faith* (needed only when evidence does not support beliefs or is against them).²

HISTORY

The North Texas Church of Freethought (hereafter: COF) was created by two atheist families in the Dallas area. Dr. and Mrs. Tim Gorski and Mr. and Mrs. Mike Sullivan “founded the Freethought church while seated around a kitchen table. Gorski, a former Catholic altar boy, and his wife became firm unbelievers years ago. But the Gorskis and Sullivans missed the sense of community and ritual that church attendance offered.”³ Together the Gorski’s and Sullivan’s donated \$8,000 as seed money so that there would be “a church for those who don’t believe in God.”⁴

The COF was not well received by some prominent atheists. Paul Kurtz, head of the Center for Inquiry, discouraged Gorski from creating an atheist church because “atheists don’t need church.”⁵ Ellen Johnson of the American Atheists said, “We’re not crazy about the idea of an atheist church.”⁶ Despite criticism from their atheist comrades, the atheist church was designed, created and launched in 1994.

Since its inception, the church has garnered much publicity. COF leaders have been interviewed by major media outlets such as *The Sean Hannity Show*, Fox News Channel’s *Hannity and Colmes*, *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Fort Worth Star Telegram*, *New York Magazine* and others. The media attention has helped enable the church to become somewhat of a regional congregation as “most members live in the [Dallas-Fort Worth] Metroplex, but some travel from as far away as Commerce and Wichita Falls.”⁷

Dr. Gorski is the church’s Pastoral Director, which entails presiding over the monthly church service held on the first Sunday of the month and is the editor/publisher of *The Freethought Exchange* and *Freethought Observer*.⁸ He is also an accomplished physician practicing in Arlington, Texas and teaches at the University of North Texas as an Assistant Clinical Professor.⁹

In addition to the monthly church service and children’s Sunday school the church offers officiating for weddings and other events. The church also fostered another atheist church in Houston, Texas called the Houston Church of Freethought, referring to it as “our independent affiliate.”¹⁰

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DOCTRINE

God: The COF is a self proclaimed “Fellowship of Unbelievers.”¹¹ “Unbelievers simply hold that the world outside of human thought, feeling, and imagination is best known through the tools of evidence and reason.”¹² In other words, unbelievers are atheists.

The COF is not alone in its atheism, particularly the idea that God is man’s creation. Karl Marx and Anton LaVey concur with church on that point. Marx taught that man, “looked for a superhuman being in the fantastic reality of heaven and found nothing there but the reflection of himself.”¹³ LaVey’s *The Satanic Bible* proclaims, “Man has always created his gods rather than his gods creating him.”¹⁴ Like Karl Marx and LaVey’s Church of Satan, the COF believes that arguments for the existence of God are failures because they are based on human speculations therefore God is synthetic.

For thousands of years, those who have thought hardest about the question of god(s), carefully setting aside faith and other personal considerations, have been forced to the conclusion that the existence of god(s) remains speculative at best. At the same time, the efforts of believers to construct arguments to prove the existence of god(s) have all met with failure. Therefore, until and unless new and relevant facts or reasons are introduced, Freethinkers remain unpersuaded of, and, in fact, are justified in strongly doubting any claims of the supernatural.¹⁵

Dr. Gorski succinctly describes the church’s position on God being the invention of man.

...while we Freethinkers disbelieve in gods and devils, fairies and leprechauns, and all the other spooks and spirits alike, we also *believe* in them all alike... Perhaps it can be said that we are imaginatively promiscuous... In fact, there is... often, practical benefit in it, so long as somewhere along the line we remember that it matters a great deal whether our ideas are possible or impossible, probable or improbable, true or false. I think it is accurate to say that Freethinkers, while we reject the truth claims of the faith-based religions, are nevertheless interested, if not fascinated by, the question of how religious superstitions came to be. It’s a rare Atheist who does not harbor some favorite idea about the “true nature” or origin of religious faith and its teachings.¹⁶

Gorski presented no proofs for his conclusion that God is a man-made illusion, but instead presents his position as reasonably speculative. He continued, “It’s all speculation, of course. We know of no way to look back into the mists of time and see exactly how it all happened. But that does not mean that reasonable conclusions about the past cannot be made based on what evidence of it we may find.”¹⁷ Apparently in Gorski’s world theism is unreasonable because it is based on human speculation, but atheism based on human speculation is reasonable.

Scripture: For the COF, the Bible is a product of human understanding or thinking, not communication from God. People are free to think independently because there is no God and therefore no divinely inspired authority to which they must adhere. The COF’s criticism of scriptural authority goes beyond reasonable criticism to that of disdain not just for scripture in general, but for Christians and the Bible in particular.. The church’s website contains a link to *The Skeptic’s Annotated Bible*, which is described in this way:

Many atheists became so after reading, really *reading*, the bible--all of it. Few believers have done so, and those that have conveniently try to ignore all the horrors, inconsistencies, contradictions and outright absurdity it has so plainly written in its pages. This site is a comprehensive annotation of that tiresome old book, with extensive references to all the naughty, illogical, inconsistent, horrific and plain evil passages.¹⁸

Dr. Gorski made a clear statement of the church’s position on the Bible in his sermon, *Making Believe: Fiction and Fantasy*,

This is our only real objection to the Bible...: that some people are inclined to take it seriously as an ultimate statement about the nature of reality. After all, Zeus and Poseidon and Loki and Shiva are said to have done things every bit as revolting and reprehensible as Yahweh is depicted as doing in the Bible. It’s just that no one runs after others pestering them about whether they ‘believe in’ these other deities. Indeed, I think a good - if not a compelling case - can be made to the effect that the reason that fundamentalist believers are so obstinately opposed to so many items of literature and entertainment is that somewhere, deep down, they realize that these other fantasies are in competition with their own.¹⁹

Gorski's critique of the Bible is substantively limited to equating it with fantasies. Instead of a reasonable critique of the biblical text he opts to condescendingly portray all Bible believers as delusional and paranoid.

Faith: The COF has a unique view of "faith" in its unbelief. According to the COF, "Faith is needed only when the evidence does not support beliefs or is against them."²⁰ The COF views faith in God as unreasonable because God cannot be proven to exist. Hence, the "freethinkers" argue that believers unreasonably rely on faith alone for a belief in God while atheism is reasonable and therefore does not require faith.

Jesus Christ: The COF believes Jesus Christ is categorically not what the Bible proclaims. If Jesus was real, he was only human. His resurrection was not real nor was most of what he taught.

With regard to Jesus specifically, unbelievers find the evidence for his being anything more than a human being to be lacking. A coherent account even of the circumstances of his alleged resurrection cannot be constructed from the books of the New Testament. In some respects we find his teachings lacking, as he never, for example, spoke against slavery and the subordination of women, practices that were common in his day. Many of our members doubt whether Jesus ever existed, and in this they have the support of some scholars. We certainly do acknowledge the fact that Jesus, whoever he was, if he was anybody, is credited with saying and doing some admirable things. We admire many of those things as well. But, like Thomas Jefferson, who edited the New Testament down to its most praiseworthy passages, we see no reason to suppose that the moral teachings ascribed to Jesus have anything to do with theological doctrines.²¹

Dr. Gorski equates Jesus Christ with fictional characters, "So that we can truthfully say that we believe in God and Jesus and Allah and Brahma. We believe in them in just the same way that we believe in Mother Goose and Paul Bunyan and Caspar the Friendly Ghost and Captain James T. Kirk and the Klingon civilization in *Star Trek*."²²

Church: "The word 'church' describes perfectly what the COF is and what it does. The COF's members are drawn together on the basis of their shared values and approach to questions and problems that are generally considered to be religious."²³ Too, the COF contends that "Freethought" is a religion and is therefore correct in calling itself a church.²⁴ To Freethinkers, however, theism is not necessary for a group to call itself a church. As noted above, the COF believes that theistic churches are merely organizations based on fantasies. The implication is that the COF is a congregation of the one true religion, Freethought.

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Scripture: The Bible is a reliable historical document. Sir Fredrick Kenyon, former director and principal librarian of the British Museum, a foremost authority on ancient manuscripts, declared,

The interval then, between the dates of original composition and the earliest extant evidence becomes so small as to be in fact negligible, and the last foundation for any doubt that the Scriptures have come down to us substantially as they were written has now been removed. Both the authenticity and the general integrity of the books of the New Testament may be regarded as finally established.²⁵

The Bible's historical reliability is a compelling reason to give serious consideration to its teachings. Though historical reliability does not prove it is the Word of God, it does grant credibility to that claim and confidence to its adherents.

God: There are many intelligent, plausible arguments for God's existence. One in particular is the *Cosmological Argument* which states that 1- whatever begins to exist has a cause, 2- the universe began 3- hence, the universe was caused. The implication of a caused universe is that only a sentient being (conscious and aware) can cause it. That sentient being is God.²⁶ Conversely the origin of life is a fundamental problem for the atheist's naturalistic Evolution because the organic and the inorganic cannot independently originate from nothing. Well known atheist scientist and science fiction writer, Isaac Asimov, acknowledges this fact, "Life comes only from life in the case of every animal man herds and of every plant man cultivates."²⁷

The problem of evil is also a major problem for the atheist's naturalistic Evolution. Since Darwin, many definitions for "Evolution" have emerged, but the fundamental idea of Evolution is that everything is evolving to a higher form of existence. The word "evolution" itself implies an

upward change. *The Oxford Concise Science Dictionary* says evolution is “The gradual process by which the present diversity of plant and animal life arose from the earliest and most primitive organisms.”²⁸ If evolution is true and everything is evolving then humanity would be evolving away from evil, yet the opposite is true.

Faith: The COF believes faith is unreasonable because the existence of God is unproven. Faith, however, is required for unbelievers because they cannot disprove the existence of God. So even by the COF’s standards atheism is a faith position which is true for any theological position.

Jesus Christ: In addition to the New Testament, ancient non-Christian historians support the fact that Jesus Christ was a historical person. Roman historian Cornelius Tacitus mentions Christ in his commentary on the rumors of Nero burning Rome:

Hence to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt ...the persons commonly called Christians... Christus, the founder of the name, was put to death by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea in the reign of Tiberius: but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also.²⁹

Lucian the second century Greek satirist wrote: “The Christians, you know, worship a man to this day – the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account.”³⁰ Jewish historian Flavius Josephus observed:

Now there was at this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive truth with pleasure. He drew over to him many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day.³¹

Ancient documents both Christian and non-Christian are rich with references to Jesus Christ as a historical person. Interestingly, these ancient non-Christian accounts also verify some of the early church’s unique beliefs about Jesus Christ which are presented in the New Testament.

Notes

- ¹ Houston Church of Freethought, <http://www.hcof.org> (accessed July 18, 2008).
- ² “Frequently Asked Questions,” The North Texas Church of Freethought, <http://www.churchoffreethought.org/index.php/frequently-asked-questions> (accessed July 18, 2008).
- ³ David Casstevens, “At atheist church, it’s the free thought that counts,” *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, September 28, 2002.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵ Sean McManus, “If God is Dead, Who Gets His House?,” *New York Magazine*, April 21, 2008, <http://nymag.com/news/features/46214/>.
- ⁶ Alexandra Horowitz, “Some atheists go to church too, but not to worship,” *The Barre Montpelier Times Argus*, April 20, 2008, <http://www.timesargus.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20080420/FEATURES07/804200331/1016/FEATURES07>.
- ⁷ Casstevens, “At atheist church, it’s free thought that counts.”
- ⁸ The Secular Web, “Atheism: Magazines and Media Reviews,” http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/jeff_lowder/media-magazines.html (last accessed July 18, 2008).
- ⁹ About, Timothy N. Gorski, M.D. FACOG, <http://www.obgdoc.com/aboutdoctorg.html> (last accessed July 18, 2008).
- ¹⁰ The North Texas Church of Freethought, <http://www.churchoffreethought.org/> (last accessed July 18, 2008).
- ¹¹ *The Bulletin*, March 2, 2008, The North Texas Church of Freethought, <http://www.churchoffreethought.org/media/Bulletins/03-2008.pdf> (last accessed March 4, 2008).
- ¹² Houston COF, <http://www.hcof.org/> (accessed July 18, 2008).
- ¹³ Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Karl Marx – Frederick Engels: Collected Works*, (New York: International Publishers, 1976), 3:182; as quoted in *Understanding The Times*, David Noebel (Harvest House Publishers, 1991), 70.
- ¹⁴ Anton LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 40.
- ¹⁵ “Frequently Asked Questions,” The North Texas Church of Freethought.
- ¹⁶ Gorski, *Making Believe: Fiction and Fantasy*, <http://www.churchoffreethought.org/cgi-bin/contray/contray.cgi?DATA=&ID=000011010&GROUP=034> (accessed March 3, 2008).
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ Freethought Links, The North Texas Church of Freethought, <http://www.churchoffreethought.org/cgi-bin/contray/contray.cgi?DATA=&ID=000013&GROUP=002> (accessed February 22, 2008).
- ¹⁹ Gorski, *Making Believe: Fiction and Fantasy*.
- ²⁰ “Frequently Asked Questions,” The North Texas Church of Freethought.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² Gorski, *Making Believe: Fiction and Fantasy*.
- ²³ “Frequently Asked Questions,” The North Texas Church of Freethought.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ F. G. Kenyon, *The Bible and Archaeology*. (New York and London: Harper, 1940), 288-89; quoted in Montgomery, op. cit., 6, as quoted in “The New Testament: Can I Trust it?” by Rusty Wright and Linda Raney Wright, <http://www.probe.org/reasons-to-believe/reasons-to-believe/the-new-testament-can-i-trust-it.html> (last accessed July 18, 2008).
- ²⁶ For a good explanation and defense of this argument, see William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith* (Chicago: Moody Press 1984).
- ²⁷ Isaac Asimov, *The Wellsprings of Life* (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1960), 14; as quoted in *Understanding the Times* by David Noebel (Harvest House Publishers, 1991), 272.
- ²⁸ “Evolution” in *The Oxford Concise Science Dictionary*.
- ²⁹ *Annals* 15, 4.4 as quoted in *A Ready Defense* by Josh McDowell (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993), 198.
- ³⁰ *The Death of Peregrine*, 11 as quoted in *A Ready Defense* by Josh McDowell (Thomas Nelson Publisher, 1993), 198.
- ³¹ *Antiquities* 18, 3.3 as quoted in *The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict* by Josh McDowell (Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 213.



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