

Rationalists of East Tennessee Newsletter
April 2011 – edited by Ralph Isler

Reminder:

RET dues pay for all those things necessary to keep the organization operating: the room for Sunday meetings at PSTCC, our lecturer for the annual meeting, KNS notices of RET events, etc. If you have forgotten to pay your dues for the year, please mail them to The Rationalists of East Tennessee, P.O. Box 51634, Knoxville, TN 37950 (regular:\$35, student or low-income:\$15) . Also, it costs \$1/minute to keep Freethought Forum on the air. Any additional contributions can be designated to go to the FTF fund if desired. The guys working so hard to keep our presence alive on local television would greatly appreciate the support.

Question:

April 22 is designated as Good Friday on most calendars this year. Good for whom? It's hard to picture three fellows hanging around on crosses asking each other "Was it Good for you too".

Quote of the month: "Saints are dead sinners, revised and edited"-Ambrose Bierce

It certainly is an appropriate definition in view of Faithless Forest noting on Freethought Forum that the US Post Office is now issuing stamps with Mother Teresa's portrait.

RET April 2011 calendar:

Freethought Forum

Every Tuesday 5:00 pm – 6:00 pm

Community Channel of Knoxville – Comcast Channel 12

The free streaming live broadcast can be seen at <http://ctvknox.org/> for those who do not live in Knoxville.

Sunday, April 3 – Presentation

Topic: "The Bible Tells Me So: The Politics of Biblical Interpretation".

Speaker: Professor Christine Shepardson, Department of Religious Studies, University of Tennessee

Time/location: 10:30 - 12:30, Pellissippi State, Goins Bldg., Cafeteria Annex

A lot of Americans rely on the Bible to support their views on everything from how to treat the environment, to the use of our country's military, to the rights of gays and lesbians. We've all heard people say that they hold a certain political view "because that's what the Bible says." But it's interesting that different people use the Bible to support completely opposite political views - for example, some Christians quote the Bible to support the use of military force, while other Christians quote the Bible to argue against war altogether. This lecture will examine some of the complicated conscious and unconscious choices people make in interpreting Christian scripture, and think about some of the unspoken politics behind the claim, "the Bible tells me so."

Sunday, April 10 - Skeptic Book Club

Book: "The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society" by Frans de Waal.
Time and location: 4:00 to 6:00pm, Barnes and Noble Booksellers, 8029 Kingston Pike.

De Waal (Chimpanzee Politics), a renowned primatologist, culls an astounding volume of research that deflates the human assumption that animals lack the characteristics often referred to as humane. He cites recent animal behavior studies that challenge the primacy of human logic and put animals on a closer behavioral footing with humans. Based on the studies of mammals, from primates to mice, de Waal proposes that empathy is an instinctual behavior exhibited by both lab rats and elephants. But de Waal's aim isn't merely to show that apes are transactional creatures with a basic understanding of reciprocity—but to reveal that the idea that humans are naturally calculating, competitive and violent is grounded in a falsehood willfully and selfishly perpetuated. Throughout the book, de Waal illustrates how behaving more like our wild mammalian cousins may just save humanity. His contention, colored by philosophical musings and fascinating anecdotes of observed emotional connections between animals, argues persuasively that humans are not greedy or belligerent because animals are; such traits are far from organic or inevitable but patently manmade.

Sunday, April 17th - Presentation

Topic: "Why unions are needed in today's world more than ever — and why they need significant reinventing."

Speaker: Professor Fran Ansley, College of Law, University of Tennessee,

Time/location: 10:30 - 12:30, Pellissippi State, Goins Bldg., Cafeteria Annex

Sunday, April 24 – Reflections Group (potluck lunch)

Topic: To be announced

Location: home of Schera Chadwick & Ted Lollis, 9219 George Williams Road, Knoxville 37922

Call 865.690.8742 for detailed directions

Time: 1:00 pm – 3:30 pm

Non-RET Events:

Sunday, April 24, 2011-Your local churches everywhere will feature rerun presentations of "Dead Man Walking"

May 15, 2011.-The second annual Orange County Freethought Alliance Conference is scheduled for May 15th at the John Wayne Airport Hilton in Orange County, CA from 10am – 9:45pm. The theme for this year's conference will be "The Hazards of Living in a Religious World". All non-believers, philosophers, agnostics, humanists, rationalists and naturalists are invited. This is a rare event to see secular leaders from the country gather and discuss the current issues of how we, as secularists, can positively affect our world.

Speakers confirmed so far are Mr Deity, (as himself), author Victor Stenger, Brian Dunning from the Skeptoid.com Podcast, Eugenie Scott, director National Science Education, Jim Underdown from CFI West, Tim Callahan, editor of Skeptics Magazine, Sean Faircloth, director of the Secular Coalition for America, Rebecca Watson from the Skeptics Guide to the Universe podcast, and James Corbett, educator and the focus of a church-state separation lawsuit in San Juan Capistrano