

THE FIRST COAST FREETHINKER

Newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

An organization of freethinkers and secular humanists supporting free inquiry, education, and community in the Northeast Florida area

Our Motto: "To Question is the Answer."



VOLUME 2

FEBRUARY 2004

NUMBER 2

FEBRUARY 2004 MEETING

Speaker: Ken Hurley, President, ACLU of Greater Jacksonville.

Topic: "Endowed by their Creator . . . Considering the Origins of Civil Rights" (or "All You Need is Love" or "What's Love Got to Do With It?") in which Ken will examine the nature of "rights."

Time: **Monday, February 9, 2004**, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Place: Jacksonville Public Library, Southeast Branch, 10599 Deerwood Park Blvd., Jacksonville, Florida.

NEWSLETTER NEWS!!

Electronic version of *The First Coast Freethinker* now available! Starting with this issue, an Adobe Acrobat file will be e-mailed to everyone with e-mail. If you have opted to continue receiving hard copy, don't worry - you shall! Just DELETE the e-mail message.

Also, if you have agreed to try e-mail and do not like it, let me know, and we will send you hard copy. If you DO NOT have e-mail, your newsletters will continue uninterrupted.

Lastly, many thanks for your prompt and willing responses to my plea to convert!

For further details, see article on page 5 in this issue. --C.R.

FEBRUARY PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE "A New Beginning"

January 2004 begins my second year of the presidency of the First Coast Freethought Society. Our hopes for this year are high. We affiliated with the Humanists of Florida Association last year. This is a progressive, energetic, forward-thinking organization that is willing to give us assistance to do whatever we, as an organization, want to do.

You heard Jennifer Hancock's talk at our December meeting or read Beth Perry's write up in last month's newsletter. Jennifer encouraged us to stand up for reason and compassion, to speak out for an end of terror and hatred. She encouraged us to form alliances with other like-minded organizations to further the causes of tolerance and compassion.

How can we do this? We must all take an active part in making our voices heard in the community and beyond by writing letters to

those in positions of power expressing our concern about injustices that are taking place. Everyone can make his or her voice heard, no matter what your station in life. It only takes a few minutes to write a letter to the Mayor of Jacksonville, the school board, the City Council, your state and national governmental representatives and others who are in a decision-making position. We can educate ourselves by attending our regular programs, lectures announced in our newsletters or on-line, and participating in discussions as well as clarifying points in lectures that we don't understand.

If you are asked to serve on a committee or perform a service of any kind for our group, don't just automatically say no. Inquire as to what the task may require and honestly assess whether or not you can perform the task before saying no. Remember the board is available to give help and support. You will feel a sense of accomplishment for working towards accomplishing our goals for the year.

Some of the tasks that you could be asked to do might include taking charge of our lending library, hosting some of the video science programs, serving on a fund raising committee and taking charge of an activity. There may be several more activities planned. Or, if you have an activity that you think could further our goals, let us know about it and what it is, and we will help you plan it. This is the way to get things done.

Believe me, you will feel great about performing an activity that furthers the welfare of our organization. Don't just be an observer. Be a doer and at the end of the year, you will be able to hear your name called as having made a contribution to the program of the FCFTS for the year 2004. It will give you a warm, fuzzy feeling. Your cooperation for accomplishing our goals will be greatly appreciated not only by the board but by the whole membership. --W.W.

PROMINENT ATHEIST A Brief Biographical Sketch of George Soros

George Soros has given away \$15 billion. Much went overseas, but some also to the U.S. He supports abortion rights, drug reform, discussion of dying, euthanasia, immigrant entitlements, feminism, and other liberal causes.

He recently stated he would give \$15.5 million to the Democratic Party to defeat President George Bush in the coming election.

Soros founded the Open Society Institute which wants to strengthen civil society, economic reform, education at all levels, human rights, legal reform and public administration, media and communications, public health, arts and culture, and other areas, including abortion rights.

Soros grew up in Nazi-occupied Hungary in a Jewish family. His father changed the family name from Schwartz and obtained false identification for him, his mother, and his brother. George became separated from them at age 14.

He later studied at the London School of Economics, where he was influenced by the ideas of philosopher Karl Popper to embrace the concept of open societies. Both boys reached the U.S. where their parents joined them. He is now a naturalized citizen.

Although George was born a Jew, he did not become interested in religion until age 12 and had a bar mitzvah a year after. Several relatives became Christians but he lost interest and now proclaims himself an atheist. He does not

approve of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the Bush decision to invade Iraq.

He was a very successful investor in Wall Street and at around age 50 became interested in philanthropy.

Conservatives have lined up to attack him, including many members of well known organizations. Lou Sheldon of the Traditional Values Coalition thinks Bush's favoring Israel caused Soros to oppose him.

Conservative Armstrong Williams thinks Soros wants to destroy America's founding values and wants him investigated for hating God, biblical principles, moral absolutes, and so on.

Robert H. Knight, associated with Concerned Women for America, claims "he seems determined to turn the world upside down and replace morality with immorality." Robert McGinnis, associated with the conservative Family Research Council, claims he embraces "a pro-drug, anti-life agenda."

Soros, his aide Michael Vachon states, has done much good and is prepared to be attacked. Soros has to Congress passing the Patriot Act without studying it. He feels that trading in global markets is good but must meet collective needs of nations, including social justice and law and order. He wants campaign reform to include more free time for television advertising to reduce spending.

Open Society Institute has a half dozen offices around the world and is active in helping people in many developing countries to meet their needs. He has authored a half dozen books and numerous articles to spread his ideas. He is a remarkable philanthropist, but his lack of relig-

ion is rarely mentioned. (E-mail from Pierce R. Butler, 12-16-2003)

No mention is made of the possibility that the attacks on him are motivated by anti-Semitism, a bigotry that is dying only slowly.

--H.B.

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NEW WORLD BEFORE 1492

When seven experts were asked if they would rather be a typical Indian or a typical European in 1491, they all said they would rather be an Indian. Life was better here.

The number of Indians living in the New World has been contentiously debated. High school students learn a million people but researchers suggest many more. European diseases (smallpox, measles, etc.) wiped out many, so Pizarro with 168 men could conquer the Incan empire. The colonial army survived at Valley Forge because Washington had it inoculated.

Hernando DeSoto landed at Tampa Bay in 1539 with men and horses, but his 300 pigs spread deadly germs widely. When Rene Robert LaSalle landed a century and a half later, he found few Indian villages. The Caddoans had been nearly exterminated. Determining exact counts is difficult because concrete evidence is missing, such as burial sites and bones. By 1900, only a half million Indians lived in the U.S. Furthermore, historians have long held Native Americans in contempt for supposedly being uncivilized.

But now researchers suggest that the Middle East and central Mexico were centers of invention. The world's first civilization was Sumer, giving us the wheel, metal tools, agriculture, writing, and other innovations. Half of the crops grown today were developed in the New World. Potatoes and corn (maize) are among many staples which were brought to Europeans from the New World to help them survive.

When disease killed too many Indians, the whites imported slaves from Africa. The need for them kept increasing so the trade continued for centuries.

When Cortes first saw the native city where Mexico City now lies (1519), it was clean and larger than Paris, the largest city in Europe where famines were common. Indians lived so well that some Englishmen ran off to live with them, but not the reverse. Aztecs washed themselves, and Indians noted the whites even carried dirty handkerchiefs.

Indians burned huge areas of land to allow grass to grow to attract grazing animals, such as buffalo. The Amazon forest may have been created by Indians who planted trees which helped produce crops for many years, while Europeans planted mostly annual crops. Amazonians apparently introduced microorganisms into selected areas to keep the soil fertile.

Development in tropical forests destroys the forests and the developers, but the Indians managed to plant many varieties of trees to provide as many as a hundred different crops.

DeSoto apparently never saw buffalo, nor did the French who followed. But buffalo multiplied later when disease killed the Indians who kept down populations of buffalo, elk, mule deer, passenger pigeons, and other animals.

People were the key to development of ecology in the New World. Their diseases killed natives already living there, so animals and plants grew. Apparently more forests grew after the Europeans landed than before. (*Atlantic Monthly*, March 2002)

This concentration on ecology neglects the superiority of Indian civilization--health, medicine, justice, government, and a host of other elements--equal to or superior to that of Christian Europe, where many people lived in ignorance and superstition.

--H.B.

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DARWIN DAY

February 12 is set aside to honor Charles Darwin, the naturalist. He introduced the theory of evolution which, as refined, explains how life has developed over many years. The word theory here means *the analysis of a set of facts in relation to*

one another, the first definition in *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (1988). A further definition following it is, *a plausible or scientifically acceptable principle or body of principles offered to explain phenomena.*

Instead of being just a wild guess, as some critics claim, it is the basis of modern science and accepted by most scientists today. It is considered the most fundamental concept in biological science.

The Supreme Court ruled the ban on teaching evolution unconstitutional (1968). Arkansas required teaching the Biblical account of creationism along with evolution (1981), but a Federal court ruled it unconstitutional before it went into effect.

This is a religious concept and violates the First Amendment's separation of church and state. The recent attempt to combine the two by calling it *intelligent design* without mentioning God has not had much success.

--H.B.

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U.N.F. PHILOSOPHY SLAMS

Welcome back for the spring semester! We have set up the schedule of philosophy slams for this semester as:

- Wednesday, Jan. 28, 2004
- Wednesday, Feb. 25, 2004
- Wednesday, Mar. 31, 2004

All Slams are at 7:30 p.m. at the Fuel Coffee House, 1037 Park St., in Five Points. In the first one, Dr. Andrew Jones-Cathcart of UNF, will explain, "Why We No Longer Believe in Free Speech."

The topics for the other slams will be announced via e-mails and *The First Coast Freethinker.*"

Ellen Wagner, Associate Professor, Dept. of Philosophy says, "Come join is -- We look forward to seeing you again!"

* * * * *

THE INQUISITION

How many had to lose their lives?
 And how many had to suffer?
 How many lost their families?
 Their sister, wife or mother?

They called it angelic, upright and just,
 They called it moral and holy... but
 How do you associate all those words
 With something so deceitful and lowly?

For nothing more than vision... for
 Daring to peek out and look,
 Their lives were torn asunder
 In the name of a mythological book.

They murdered anyone who challenged them
 Including their families and friends
 Their methods they never pondered
 Because the means always justified the ends.

They were nothing but sanctified criminals
 They murdered with a wink and a nod,
 They were accountable to no one
 For they did it in the name of god.

--Earl Coggins

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FEBRUARY SOCIAL

To: Freethinkers, FCFTS members, friends, and guests.

What: **DINNER and SOCIALIZING** at the **STEAK AND ALE** Restaurant, corner of BAYMEADOWS & I-95 South.

When: **TUESDAY, February 24, 2004**, (4th Tue.) Gather at 6:00 p.m. for cocktails in the LOUNGE; 7:00 p.m. for dinner.

RSVP to **Carrie Renwick**, at 268-8826, or e-mail CarrieRen@att.net . **The deadline to RSVP is Sun., Feb. 22, 2004!**

* * * * *

HOMOSEXUALITY CONDEMNED

A fundamentalist internet site claims that the biggest moral issue to be contested in the coming national election is homosexuality.

Gay marriage is now legal in Massachusetts. A Texas law, now overturned, made sodomy a crime if engaged in by homosexuals but not by heterosexuals.

Thus, to many true believers, the war in Iraq and the killing of 6500 Iraqis is not immoral; or sixteen million American children growing up in poverty; or forty million people who will face hunger this year; or corruption in government.

Not only do believers ignore such problems, they select what to obey in the Bible. It has 613 laws the faithful should consider. Although ordered, they do not kill witches. They do not take outside the city and stone to death a disobedient son or an impure daughter. One law they do obey is not cooking a lamb in its mother's milk.

Fundamentalists practice "cherry-picking" religion, selecting carefully what they support, oppose, or ignore. This makes Christianity so versatile that it can be made to fit nearly any situation.

Fundamentalists object to homosexuality and often cite the Bible's description as an abomination (1Cor 6:9, which is read as first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 6, verse 9). In the Old Testament, it is mentioned twice (Genesis 19:1-25 and Judges 19:13 to 20:48), but they condemn an attempted homosexual rape rather than a caring homosexual relationship between consenting partners. The context of the relationship is ignored.

Another example is homosexuality may be related to prostitution associated with cult idols. Here abomination is a religious term which may have a different use not necessarily related to personal behavior (1Kings 14:24, 15:12, 22:46, and Leviticus 18:22, 20:13).

In the New Testament, Paul says homosexuality is a departure from the Creator's intention and is therefore unnatural (Romans 1:23-27). He also says homosexuals are unrighteous (1Corinthians 6:9f.) and lawless and disobedient (Timothy 1:9f).

In the Ten Commandments, the seventh condemns adultery outside of marriage, whether heterosexual or homosexual.

The Greek word for sodomite, arsen-ikoites, may possibly have been restricted to male prostitutes. Regardless, Paul condemned the practice but not the person. (J. D. Douglas, *New Bible Dictionary*, Second Ed., 1962, "HOMOSEXUALITY")

Ed. Note.: Most believers who condemn gays have little understanding of the subtle background of the Biblical context. --H.B.

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THE FIRST COAST FREETHINKER The Story in Detail



Our newsletter is broadening its method of delivery. Due to the need to cut costs, a decrease in the number of printed and mailed copies is necessary if the newsletter is to continue. Paid members will continue to receive hard copy if they prefer (at no extra cost). Promotional copies will be distributed to non-members on a limited basis. We determined that converting as

many recipients as possible to soft copy would allow a sufficient decrease in the hard copy mailing list.

Therefore, starting with this issue, an Adobe Acrobat file will be e-mailed to everyone with e-mail. If you have opted to continue receiving hard copy, don't worry!! You shall. (You might take a look at the electronic version to see if you like it; otherwise, just DELETE the e-mail.) Also, if you have agreed to try e-mail and do not like it, let Carrie know, and she will send you hard copy. If you DO NOT have e-mail, WORRY NOT, your newsletters will continue uninterrupted.

E-mail delivery has real advantages. It is prompt, saves trees, saves considerable expense, and avoids mutilated or destroyed copies as is sometimes the case with the U.S. Mail. Also, the Adobe file can be printed should hard copy be desired. In addition, all issues (including back issues starting with our first edition) will ultimately be available on the FCFTS web site.

NOTE to fellow freethought GROUPS: If you are willing to receive an e-mail version, please let Carrie know and PROVIDE YOUR E-MAIL address! CarrieRen@att.net.

NOTE to NON-MEMBERS: If you wish to continue receiving the newsletter, please opt for e-mail or **join** the FCFTS!

Lastly, many thanks to all for your prompt and willing responses to Carrie's plea to opt for soft copy. You have enabled *The First Coast Freethinker* to continue!

--H.B. and C.R.

* * * * *

SOUTHERN BAPTIST FAITH

The complete printed Baptist Faith and Message of Southern Baptists is available at local churches and on the internet. The eighteen sections deal with Scriptures, God (father, son, holy spirit), man, salvation, God's purpose of grace, the church, baptism & the Lord's supper, the Lord's day, last things, evangelism and missions, education, stewardship, cooperation, the Christian and the social order, religious liberty, and family.

Seven of these Basic Beliefs are condensed here:

I. The Scriptures. The Holy Bible was written by men divinely inspired and is God's revelation of Himself to man. It is a perfect treasure of divine instruction. It has God for its author, salvation for its end, and truth, without any mixture of error, for its matter.

III. Man. Man was created by the special act of God, in His own image, and is the crowning work of His creation... By his free choice man sinned against God and brought sin into the human race... The sacredness of human personality is evident in that God created man in His own image, and in that Christ died for man; therefore every man possesses dignity and is worthy of respect and Christian love.

VII. Baptism & the Lord's Supper. Christian baptism is the immersion of a believer in water. It is an act of obedience symbolizing the believer's faith in a crucified, buried, and risen Savior, the believer's death to sin, the burial of the life, and the resurrection to walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus... The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members ...memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

X. Last Things. God, in His own time and in His own way, will bring the world to its appropriate end... Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly ...the dead will be raised; and Christ will judge all men in righteousness. The unrighteous will be consigned to Hell... The righteous will receive their reward and will dwell forever in Heaven with the Lord.

XII. Education. The cause of education in the kingdom of Christ is co-ordinate with the causes of missions and general benevolence... there should be a proper balance between academic freedom and academic responsibility... The freedom of a teacher in a Christian school, college, or seminary is limited by the preeminence of Jesus Christ, by the authoritative nature of the Scriptures, and by the distinct purpose for which the school exists.

XVII. Religious Liberty. Church and State should be separate. The state owes to every church protection and full freedom in the

pursuit of its spiritual ends. A free church in a free state is the Christian ideal.

XVIII. Family. God has ordained the family as the foundational institution of human society... Marriage is the unity of one man and one woman in covenant commitment for a lifetime. The husband and wife are of equal worth before God, since both are created in God's image. The marriage relationship models the way God relates to His people... Children, from the moment of conception, are a blessing and heritage from the Lord. (www.sbc.net)

COMMENT--BAPTIST BELIEFS

The Southern Baptist statement of beliefs which members should hold is very helpful. Believers who read it will have a better understanding of what their faith means. Possible joiners will know what is expected of them. A few more details here will increase understanding.

The First Baptist Church of Jacksonville once posted six of these

in the sanctuary in a few words for all to see, but they have been removed. Before the Civil War, Baptists owned the most slaves, after Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians. After the Civil War, Baptists were the largest denomination in the many Ku Klux Klans.

Fundamentalist men are more likely than other men to abuse their women. Fundamentalist women are more likely than other women to be overweight.

The average level of education seems to have remained below high school graduation. This fits well with sermons which tell the faithful what they should believe and what they should avoid, like pre-marital sex and evolution. They are rarely - if ever - challenged to think about larger social problems, like the morality of capital punishment and invasion of other nations.

The pastor of one church told his congregation that he had a weight on his heart because he and two other pastors were to meet

with laity volunteers from their churches on a Saturday morning to pass out religious tracts on street corners. The church members did not show up, even though proselytizing is part of Baptist faith.

About two decades ago, fundamentalists seized control of the half dozen Baptist seminaries. Among the changes, they required instructors to teach that the Bible is infallible, and they fired those who refused. The separation of church and state has weakened with the increase of power of conservative Republicans.

The thirteen million adherents have enough variety so that Baptists divide into some 70 groups.

When Dr. Jerry Vines of First Baptist told a convention that Muhammad was a "demon-possessed pedophile" who married a girl

before puberty, he made national headlines as an example of intolerance. Secular critics disapproved, but he received a standing ovation in his church and was praised by many Baptist publications.

No one noticed that he believes in demons, or that in the Middle Ages many noble Christian infants were betrothed when very young to other noble Christian infants for political reasons. Vines handled the conflict smoothly by citing a book source which described Muhammad and stated he would not discuss the matter further.

A Jacksonville Southern Baptist family which attends the church met on the Sunday after but did not discuss the event at all, probably because they were not aware of what had happened.

The family is remarkable for not reading newspapers, magazines, or books (with one exception) and probably not watching television news. It lacks intellectual curiosity and uses poor English. But it is admirable for the love shown the grandchildren, who are given unstinting care and attention. The world would be much better if all children could be treated so warmly.

--H.B.

Before the Civil War, Baptists owned the most slaves, after Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians.

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NEWSLETTER

The First Coast Freethinker is published for members of the First Coast Freethought Society, other freethinkers, and potential freethinkers. We exchange newsletters with other freethought groups and get information from many other sources. Readers are invited and encouraged to reprint our original materials if they give credit to this publication.

NOTE: The officials of this organization do not take responsibility for opinions and other statements expressed by anyone in this newsletter. It is intended to convey ideas to stimulate thinking and for discussion about a wide variety of subjects.

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PURPOSE

The purpose of the First Coast Freethought Society is to serve the needs of the non-religious population of Northeast Florida; to promote freethought and secular humanism; to provide a place for agnostics, rationalists, atheists, skeptics, and other freethinkers, to hear speakers and discuss philosophy, science, ethics, and other topics of interest, and to enjoy fellowship with like-minded people.

FREETHINKER

A freethinker is a person who forms opinions about religion or any other subject on the basis of reason, **independent** of tradition, authority, or established belief.

CALENDAR - 2003 - 2004

February 9, 2004 - Ken Hurley
 February 24, 2004 - **SOCIAL**
 March 8, 2004 - Monthly Meeting
 March 23, 2004 - **SOCIAL**
 April 12, 2004 - Monthly Meeting
 April 27, 2004 - **SOCIAL**
 May 10, 2004 - Monthly Meeting
 May 25, 2004 - **SOCIAL**
 June 14, 2004 - Monthly Meeting
 June 22, 2004 - **SOCIAL**
 July 12, 2004 - Monthly Meeting
 July 27, 2004 - **SOCIAL**

FIRST COAST FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY

An organization of freethinkers and secular humanists supporting free inquiry, education, and community in the Northeast Florida area

Post Office Box 550591 • Jacksonville, Florida 32255-0591 • 904-288-6291



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION – 2004

We are an organization of freethinkers and secular humanists supporting free inquiry, education, and community in the Northeast Florida area. We do not believe in the supernatural. The First Coast Freethought Society welcomes you as a member. For further information, visit our web site, address below.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Home Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Business Phone: _____ Fax: _____

E-mail address (legibly!): _____

Occupation: _____

Areas of interest and/or expertise: _____

How did you hear about us? _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES:

Regular (\$30.00) _____ Senior (15.00) _____ Student (\$15.00) _____

I am interested in being involved in the FCFTS as a:

General Member: _____ Committee Member: _____ Officer: _____

Financial Supporter: _____ Other: _____

TO MEMBERS: Do you object to your name appearing on the Membership List which would be distributed only to other members? YES _____ NO _____

Other Comments: _____

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Visit our web site at: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

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THE FIRST COAST FREETHINKER
Newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society
8831 Taurus Circle South
Jacksonville, Florida 32222

FREETHOUGHT HEROES

February 2004

MEETING DATES

Usually the Second
Monday of every
month:

February 9, 2004
March 8, 2004
April 12, 2004
May 10, 2004
June 14, 2004
July 12, 2004
August 9, 2004
September 13, 2004

Charles Darwin (1809-82) natural-
ist, published *On the Origin of Species by
Means of Natural Selection*

Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910)
first woman to earn medical degree in U.S.

Leonora O'Reilly (1870-1927)
labor organizer and demonstrator, helped
found NAACP

Betty Friedan (1921-) author,
started women's liberation movement

Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906)
suffragette, campaigned for women voting

Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) author
who used minimal language and repetition,
influenced other writers

Clare Boothe Luce (1903-87) edi-
tor, playwright, ambassador to Italy

FREETHINKER DEADLINES

Kindly submit items
to Hugo or Carrie by
Friday:

February 13, 2004
March 19, 2004
April 16, 2004
May 21, 2004
June 18, 2004
July 16, 2004
August 20, 2004
September 17, 2004