

THE FIRST COAST FREETHINKER

Newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

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

SEPTEMBER 2004

NUMBER 9

SEPTEMBER MEETING

Speaker: **William A. Mendoza, Ph.D.**, professor of physics and engineering at Jacksonville University.

Topic: **"Buddhism: A Nontheistic Mystical Discipline"**

Time: **Monday, September 13, 2004**, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., in the sanctuary.

Place: **Unitarian Universalist Church**, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, FL

General Announcements

Saturday, September, 11, 2004 at 7:00 p.m.
MOLLY IVINS CAN'T SAY THAT!
at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall
777 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota, FL

Americans United Meeting
GREG WARNER
Assoc. Baptist Press News Service
Tuesday, September 14, 2004 at 6:45 p.m.
Regency Square Library in Jacksonville

FCFTS BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Did You Know?

I recently received an email concerning the "Christian roots" of our Constitution, titled, "DID YOU KNOW?" I am compelled to respond. --W.W.

This email began, Did You Know? (paraphrasing): Did you know that as you walk up the steps of the Supreme Court Building, you see on the edifice a row of the world's law givers facing towards one man in the center. It is Moses holding the "original" Ten Commandments! On entering the courtroom through the large oak doors, you see engraved on the doors the Ten Commandments. Directly above the area where the judges sit is another display of the Ten Commandments. Bible verses are etched in stone on federal buildings and monuments around our nation's capital. Further, the writer gives several quotes

by James Madison, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and John Jay giving favorable opinions of Christianity as a basis for governing. The writer then goes on to state that since 1777, every session of Congress has begun with a prayer by a paid preacher whose salary is paid by the taxpayers. Then the writer asks this question, "How then have we gotten to the point that everything we have done for 220 years in this country is now suddenly wrong and unconstitutional?" This essay was signed off as: "Chamber, US House of Representatives."

My answer: Regardless of the personal religious beliefs of the authors of the Constitution of United States of America, they were keenly aware of the divisiveness of religion and the dangers of mixing religion with government. The goal of the Constitution was to create a government which provided personal freedom, equality, and the opportunity to seek your highest potential as a human being. The authors of the Constitution knew this would not be possible in a theocracy of any kind, even Christianity.

THAT WAS THE REASON FOR THE FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION!

Even though the Constitution guarantees separation of church and state, Christianity, the majority religion, persists in attempting to impose its religious beliefs and practices on the general public. It is the nature of Christianity to proselytize, and the more conservative factions insist on prayer in the public schools, teaching creationism in secondary schools and colleges, prayer at all school events; and now we have school vouchers allowing students to opt to attend religious schools at tax payers expense, and faith-based initiatives.

The result of these illegal practices by the majority religion is intolerance and dissention among the many different religious denominations as well as the nonreligious. What the majority religion has been doing for 220 years has been “unconstitutional” for 220 years. Wendy Kaminer says in her book, *Sleeping With Extraterrestrials*, that the majority religion “seeks the kind of power that subjects children of minority faiths to religious persecution in the nation’s schools.”

Under the Constitution, the United States of America has done something that no other country in the world has ever done. We have brought together the poor and huddled masses of every ethnic and racial background in the world. With much national soul-searching, inner struggling, debating, arguing, and on comparatively few occasions fighting, we have established a country where the declared ideal is freedom, equality, and justice for all and the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

We still have a long way to go on some of these issues, but we have established a country that works relatively well. America is the most diverse country in the world. But, without freedom of and from religion, this grand experi-

ment would NOT have worked.

An article in our local newspaper told of a city in Michigan which recently voted on a referendum on whether to allow Islamic Mosques to broadcast their call to prayer over loudspeakers which can be heard all over their city. The Arabic chant is broadcast five times a day as a call to prayer. How would you feel about this if it were in your town? If Christians are allowed to do this type of thing, is it also fair for the Islamists? This type of thing will become increasingly more common in our country. How will we deal with this?

I believe we are at a very precarious point in our history where the wall of separation between church and state has some large cracks, and the chances of its crumbling are greater than

We are at a very precarious point in our history where the wall of separation between church and state has some large cracks, and the chances of its crumbling are greater than ever before.

ever before. Because the population of our country is growing much faster due to immigration than it is due to the birth rate, we will become more and more religiously and culturally diverse. Unfortunately, religious intolerance is inherent in religious extremism.

When you believe, as the extremists do, that your way is the only way to salvation, you cannot be tolerant of other’s beliefs. All that is necessary to see the havoc that can be wreaked by religious extremism is to look at the countries in the Middle East and Africa. We would be naïve to conclude that that type of thing could never happen in “the land of the free.” Religious extremism destroys democracy. We can’t afford to allow religious differences to tear our democracy apart.

Just as diversity is beneficial in a rain forest, diversity is beneficial in human populations. To preserve our diversity and our democratic way of life, we must continue to persevere in upholding the first amendment of the Constitution keeping religion out of schools, the work place and government activities. --W.W.

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WHAT IS AN ATHEIST? One of the Most Misunderstood Words Explained

Member and writer, Beth Perry, has condensed an Atheists of Florida brochure (circa 1992) titled, "The Truth About Atheism" to provide us these most pertinent and provocative thoughts on religion.

The word "atheist" is one of the most misunderstood words in the English language. The word itself derives from the Greek word "theism" which means a belief in a god or gods, coupled with the prefix "a-" meaning "without." Thus, a literal interpretation is "without a belief in gods." An atheist is a person who directs his or her life without a belief in supernatural beings.

Finding no easy answers on where we came from and how to control our future, supernatural gods and religious systems were invented to provide this framework and a sense of control. Ingrained throughout their societies, some of the religions remain with us as crazy-quilt systems that borrowed from other religions as new questions emerged and added dogmas to increase their authority.

Religions use fear, ignorance, guilt, and intimidation to control people. Those who do not allow themselves to be taken over by a religion are free to use a mind that is not hampered by religious restraints, free to learn, free of undue guilt, and free from the conflict of hypocrisy inevitably induced by religion.

Even if you are not an atheist now, you were one when you were born. We accept a given religious ideology only through the training of the culture in which we are reared.

Man--probably the only species which contemplates its own demise--fears the finality of death. Thus, many religious adherents eagerly embrace the hope that death is a passage from this life to a better one which will last for infinity. On the surface, such an idea can become very real if it is constantly reinforced in

one's society, particularly when many approve of fostering such an illusion if it gives comfort to the dying or sorrowful, no matter how false that comfort may be.

Religion Won't Hurt Anyone ... or Will It?

Whenever your mind is glutted with fear and guilt, it is harmed. In addition to atrocities occurring daily in the name of religion--from an individual child suffering abuse, or death from a zealous parent, to entire nations consumed by age-old religious wars--religion has been mankind's greatest obstacle to progress and knowledge. No single idea has caused more human misery than religion. And in all likelihood, worse yet is to come.

Our world is becoming overpopulated by humans while outdated religious mandates proclaim, "Go forth and multiply... God will provide." Already pollution, hunger, and poverty are growing out of control due to our soaring birthrate. Future generations will face mass misery as world resources become incapable of producing the bare essentials to sustain life.

Some say that civilization is not possible without religion, for it specifies the morals on which laws are based. However, ethics can be established by reason and caring without the influence of religious dogmas--as demonstrated in many cultures. The fact is that any society can function better by following such ethics without need of religion which has mostly pronounced arbitrary and contradictory edicts.

The Issue Is Power

The world's major religions are engaged in a power struggle. In the United States, the Christian Right seeks to dominate us through restricting our constitutional freedoms.

Fortunately, our nation's founders incorporated a unique concept in our Constitution--separation of the church and state--which has been perceived mainly to guarantee freedom of our minds. Unfortunately, it has not included freedom of our pocketbooks. Each year, the business of religion extracts billions of dollars

from all our pockets, even those of non-churchgoers, through tax exemptions on church-owned properties, businesses and income, thereby boosting taxes for all of us.

Further, religion wields control over nonbelievers through the enactment of the "Blue Laws" and censoring textbooks, films, and other media.

Because our Constitution protects the rights of all minorities, even a minority of one, we have a lawful basis to oppose these heavy-handed maneuvers to "christianize" all of America. But only if we voice our rights and stand up to those who would restrict them.

Because atheism remains a feared lifestyle and is subject to prejudice from much of

our society, we must join together to protect our civil liberties. The church will continue to push the law as far as it can until discrimination against nonbelievers becomes a commonly accepted custom. Numerous constitutional violations are accepted simply because they are "traditional"--that is, they have been permitted to exist over time. From abortion to suicide, religion wants to control all aspects of our lives, denying each of us the freedom to choose rationally our own lifestyle and destiny.

Individually, the powerful religious horde may be able to run over us, but together we can make our voice heard and uphold our freedoms. (Source: a brochure published by the Atheists of Florida) --Beth Perry

LETTER TO AN ANTI-ATHEIST

Editor, Hugo Borresen, encountered a letter from Mr. Charley Reese reproduced in Free-thought Today, June/July 2004. Mr. Reese is currently a columnist for the Orlando Sentinel and has been a journalist for 49 years. He is reachable at P.O. Box 2446, Orlando, FL 32802. Here is the letter, dated July 29, 2004, that Hugo wrote him. (Would that more of us would do this!) --C.R.

Dear Mr. Reese:

I encountered this quotation from you:

"I have come to believe that one can have a successful Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist society, but not an agnostic or atheistic society that is successful ... I would rather live in a neighborhood of Islamic fundamentalists than in a neighborhood of atheists and agnostics."

You might reconsider. Christians have given us slavery, racial segregation, most of our 4,700 lynchings, the Ku Klux Klan, capital punishment, 225 foreign entanglements, etc. Jews have killed many Palestinians in the Near East. Muslims chop off hands, feet, and heads in public. Hindus have given us the untouchables, persons fit only to clean public toilets. Only the peaceful Buddhists deserve respect.

We freethinkers abhor such mistreatment of other human beings. We are probably more tolerant of other groups than are religious people. We try to make this a better world because we are--as a group--more intelligent and better educated, with higher income than are average Americans. Members of the Unitarian Church, which has many freethinkers, have an average education of two years of college compared to Southern Baptists with only two years of high school.

If you lived in a community with lots of freethinkers, you are more likely to have intelligent conversations about current events without mentioning athletes and celebrities, better public services, more awareness of the quality of media, increased safety of people and property, less crime and violence, a higher standard of morality, and a host of other benefits.

Half of Americans will not vote for non-believers, so we all lose the services of one of the more talented groups in society. This will change slowly, likely not for many years.

Cordially,
Hugo Borresen

HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP



When: 2:00 p.m. the 3rd Sunday of each month.

Where: Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd.
Phone 519-6500. Books for the group
may be purchased at Borders.

What: Books planned for discussion are:

- Sept. 19, 2004 - *The Bush-Hater's Handbook*, by Jack Huberman; also *The New American Empire*, by Rodrigue Tremblay; also an article, *The Despoiling of America*, by Katherine Yurica (click [Despoiling](#)).
- Oct. 17, 2004 - *Drug Crazy*, by Mike Gray.

For further information about the discussion group, leave a message at 996-1553.

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BOOK REVIEW

Democracy and Intolerance: Christian School Curricula, School Choice, and Public Policy, by Frances R. A. Paterson, Bloomington, IN: Phi Delta Kappa, 2003, 199 pages

The public should know what some fundamentalist Christians are currently teaching their children. Historically, colonial schools were often church related, public schools began in the 1800s, the Roman Catholic Church then started its own system, and now conservatives want to return to sectarian education.

Three publishers provide popular series: A Beka, Bob Jones University Press, and School of Tomorrow/Accelerated Christian Education (ACE). The first provides about half of materials purchased, and the other two divide the rest.

ACE is self-teaching and has no teachers. The three are very similar in content, so they are treated as the same here. Math and science are neutral, but social studies materials are informative and often very biased.

Some characteristics: they do not separate gender (he, she), are intensely specific, mix secular and religious content, mix fact and opinion, indicate sharply what is not tolerated, and enlarge contents about important topics.

Sumerian history includes, "What a difference between our God and theirs!" Content is unbalanced: Jeanne D'Albret gets two-thirds of a page; Joan of Arc gets seven lines. Mainline denominations are denigrated: "...this rejection of true Christianity..." by Episcopalians. Nazism demonstrated "the spiritual and moral bankruptcy of a nation that accepts the teachings of Darwinism, socialism, and humanism."

Some areas are treated more broadly than in public education. In government, liberals are evil; Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas is lauded, while Thurgood Marshall is barely mentioned. Socialist propaganda got Franklin Roosevelt elected in 1932; human suffering is due to individuals instead of the social system; theocracy is the ideal form of government; and communism is linked to socialism and Democratic presidents. In politics, Reagan was great while Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and other Democrats were bad. Abortion and homosexuality are bad, capital punishment is good. In economics, government programs are contrary to the Bible, and Robin Hood was a thief. In government, the direct election of senators, rather than by legislatures, was bad. In foreign affairs, the biggest problems are communism and socialism.

Discussions of legal cases are "good" if they please conservatives. In historical cases, *Dred Scott* (remains a slave) and *Plessy* (separate is equal) were "good" decisions. Prayer should never be removed from public schools. Free speech should be restricted. Abortion is baby killing and murder, and school desegregation barely tolerable. Only God's intervention will improve the human condition and alleviate suffering; yet the hostility continues.

Catholicism is a mixture of biblical truth and pagan error, false and distorted. But public

schools do not attack it and thus have protected it for many years. Conservatives complain they are attacked, but they do the same to others. They can do this because the curriculum is rarely examined in public. All religions are false because they combine faith and good works; while conservative Protestantism asks only for belief.

Policies should be judged by fairness and wisdom. "Government should not be funding those whose main interest is promoting an agenda." The question is raised by educators whether these teachings help students make good choices to participate in democratic society. Democracy depends on compromise, civil discourse, and deliberation. Facts have to be separated from opinion. The emotionally unstable can be easily misled. Private schools have a right to exist but have to consider how much society can support in a conservative curriculum which does not have a stabilizing and beneficial effect.

--H.B.

Comments: Much information in the book is factual and accurate but is marred by these constant biases. Governments avoid existence of these biases by emphasizing numerical test scores rather than content. No mention is made that opposition to racial integration in the 1960s gave private segregated southern academies a big boost. Church schools using these materials do little or nothing to change or examine the curriculum, and media have done little to expose this curriculum. We, as a society, should not merely tolerate other cultures (people, ideas), but rather, should appreciate them. Democracy is so fragile it needs all the protection we can give it.

Christianity is a lazy man's religion because he does not need to know or do anything, just believe. It is hostile to critical thinking. To provide taxpayer money to support these schools with vouchers raises questions about good judgment. A major problem is that the purpose of education is rarely stated because it has many meanings. Conservatives just use it mainly as a means of indoctrination. Above all, conservative thinking is muddled; and the question is, where is Christian love??

--H.B.

SEPTEMBER SOCIAL

To: All **Freethinkers**, FCFTS Members, Friends, and Guests.

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

When: **TUESDAY, September 28, 2004**, (4th Tues.) 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., September 26, 2004!**

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IRON-JAWED ANGELS A short history lesson on the privilege of voting

Iron-Jawed Angels is a film depicting the "true story of two women who dared to make a stand for women's rights and ended up shaping the future of America." It certainly inspired the author of this e-mail, shared by Alice Ricker, to appreciate her right to vote. (It has inspired me, too. --C.R.)

The women were innocent and defenseless. And by the end of the night, they were barely alive. Forty prison guards wielding clubs and their warden's blessing went on a rampage against the 33 women wrongly convicted of "obstructing sidewalk traffic."

They beat Lucy Burn, chained her hands to the cell bars above her head and left her hanging for the night, bleeding and gasping for air. They hurled Dora Lewis into a dark cell, smashed her head against an iron bed and knocked her out cold. Her cellmate, Alice Cosu, thought Lewis was dead and suffered a heart attack. Additional affidavits describe the guards grabbing, dragging, beating, choking, slamming, pinching, twisting, and kicking the women.

Thus unfolded the "Night of Terror" on November 15, 1917, when the warden at the Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia ordered his guards to teach a lesson to the suffragists imprisoned there because they dared to picket Woodrow Wilson's White House for the right to vote.

For weeks, the women's only water came from an open pail. Their food--all of it colorless slop--was infested with worms. When one of the leaders, Alice Paul, embarked on a hunger strike, they tied her to a chair, forced a tube down her throat, and poured liquid into her until she vomited. She was tortured like this for weeks until word was smuggled out to the press.

So, refresh my memory. Some women won't vote this year because--why, exactly? We have carpool duties? We have to get to work? Our vote doesn't matter? It's raining?

Last week, I went to a sparsely attended screening of HBO's new movie "Iron-Jawed Angels." It is a graphic depiction of the battle these women waged so that I could pull the curtain at the polling booth and have my say. I am ashamed to say I needed the reminder.

All these years later, voter registration is still my passion. But the actual act of voting had become less personal for me, more rote. Frankly, voting often felt more like an obligation than a privilege. Sometimes it was inconvenient.

My friend Wendy, who is my age and studied women's history, saw the HBO movie, too. When she stopped by my desk to talk about it, she looked angry. She was--with herself. "One thought kept coming back to me as I watched that movie," she said. "What would those women think of the way I use--or don't use--my right to vote? All of us take it for granted now, not just younger women, but those of us who did seek to learn." The right to vote, she said, had become valuable to her "all over again."

HBO will run the movie periodically before releasing it on video and DVD. I wish all history, social studies and government teachers would include the movie in their curriculum. I want it shown on Bunco night, too, and anywhere else women gather. I realize this isn't our usual idea of socializing, but we are not voting

in the numbers that we should be, and I think a little shock therapy is in order.

It is jarring to watch Woodrow Wilson and his cronies try to persuade a psychiatrist to declare Alice Paul insane so that she could be permanently institutionalized. And it is inspiring to watch the doctor refuse. Alice Paul was strong, he said, and brave. That didn't make her crazy. The doctor admonished the men: "Courage in women is often mistaken for insanity." (Source: E-mail) --A.R.

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AMERICANS UNITED MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT

What: Americans United Forum, "**CHURCH AND STATE**" sponsored by the Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Northeast Florida.

Place: Regency Square Branch, Jacksonville Public Library, 9900 Regency Sq. Blvd.

When: **TUESDAY, Sept. 14, 2004**, at 6:45 p.m.

Topic: Guest speaker **Greg Warner**, Editor of the Associated Baptist Press News Service. Mr. Warner will discuss one Baptist's views on faith-based initiatives, church politicking, and other public-policy issues at the intersection of church and state, as well as give an overview of the Baptist political landscape.

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STRAYER DEBATES CREATION Another Hovind Debate Experience

Those of us who attended Dr. Tony Rossi's recent talk on evolution and report of his experience debating Ken Hovind will find this article particularly interesting.

Those of us remembering Mr. Strayer's fine presentation on teaching evolution in the public schools of a few years ago will find it

even more interesting. I think you will join me in saying, "Three Cheers for Jim!" --C.R.

I was involved in a "debate" with evangelist Kent Hovind on April 17, 2004. It was an experience. These debates are always arranged to give advantage to Hovind. They are usually in a church, but this one was at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida. It was sponsored by the Humanities Department and set up by Christian students. The title was Evolution/Creation. There were two "teams." One team was Kent Hovind, and the other team consisted of two professors from the university and myself.

Most scientists refuse to get involved with him and I do not blame them. He is clearly there to sell his tapes and other paraphernalia. So the question is, why would I do such a thing?

First of all, I had seen Hovind's presentation before, and I knew about his tactics of combining attacks on evolution with preaching fundamentalism at the same time. It was my feeling that the scientists who had debated him were too involved in defending evolutionary science and were not attacking creationism.

Each side has a twelve-minute opening statement. I did it for our team. My idea was to spend just six minutes on the definition of evolution, listing the stages of natural selection, showing how the earth is proven to be old, and the sciences used to prove evolution. It is possible, and I did it. Then I followed with six minutes showing the Bob Jones University and A Beka creation biology textbooks. This was to show that there are no scientific references in them and that they use the Bible as a source of scientific evidence. I then read from Supreme Court cases that state creation is not a science, but a religion.

The next hour and a half was Hovind showing slides of things like a cow evolving into a whale, or dogs always begetting dogs. Almost all of my responses were an attack on creation science. I did not spend much time defending evolution. When I did, I usually went the DNA route. I brought up the creationist belief that thorns and toothaches are caused by Adam and

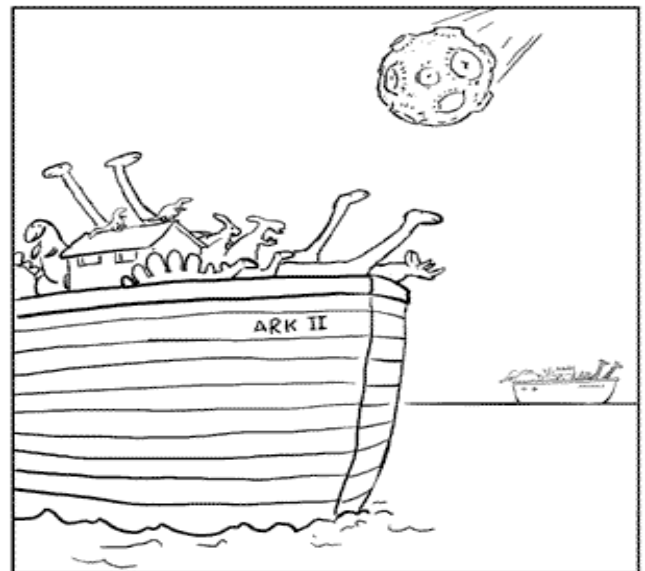
Eve's fall from grace, there have never been any fossils found of a cockatrice or a unicorn (two animals that are mentioned in the Bible), that the Bible mentions dragons 17 times, that radioactivity was caused by the fall from grace, and several other points that have no relationship to science but are commonly taught in creation schools.

The reaction following the debate was wonderful. I would say that no less than 50 people approached me to thank me for being there. Some Christian students who could not believe the information I gave from the Bible asked for the verses. This attack on the Bible may seem like the wrong thing to do, but it was very effective. The creationists were not expecting it. I would not be sending this to you if I thought we did poorly. Hovind was so taken back that he asked for a rematch the following day. I just laughed.

There is a three-hour DVD of the debate. It can be purchased from Bruce Fogleman Studios, Inc., 143 N. Woodland Blvd., Deland, FL 32720, for \$30.00, which includes postage and handling. Phone (386) 956-8264. (I make nothing from this arrangement.)

--Jim Strayer, Biologist
Ormond Beach

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*The dinosaurs were wiped out
by a giant asteroid.*

VOUCHERS - TO THE RESCUE??

Editorial

The *Florida Times-Union* has printed perhaps twenty editorials praising vouchers for public school children. They permit parents to put their children into private schools, paid with tuition provided by the state, when students perform poorly on standardized tests. The editorials praised this procedure as the solution to schools which perform poorly.

In addition, many conservative organizations have praised this free-market answer to solving a serious problem. Several wealthy individuals and organizations have spent literally millions of dollars advertising and advancing this solution. Milton Friedman, who won a Nobel Prize in economics, proposed the idea about a half century ago and continues to praise it. Several state legislatures have provided vouchers in various forms and courts have rendered favorable decisions. State departments of education have praised the solution. Judging by the publicity, huge numbers of school pupils must be using them. No so.

Fewer than ten percent (9.8%) of elementary and secondary school students are in private schools. Of these, most are in Catholic parochial schools, but Jacksonville is not among the top twenty cities in enrollment. In addition, the percentage has not changed in a decade. Vouchers are going nowhere.

Furthermore, several private schools have received unfavorable recognition. In Florida, administrators at Hermitage Schools in Miami cashed checks worth \$38,000 for 18 students who had returned to public schools, did not refund the money, accepted state funds for 44 more pupils, and shut down at the end of 2003. In Ocala, the operator of a private school was arrested for stealing \$268,125 in state voucher money, none of it used for vouchers. Four other academies, including Faith Academy in Bartow, are under investigation. The director of a private school in Jacksonville Beach allegedly forged parents' signatures on checks. Despite five criminal investigations, the state legislature has not improved regulations.

A Maine court dismissed a suit by parents wanting vouchers to put their children in a school which is religious.

In Utah a bill to help students with disabilities in private schools is controversial because of the need for accountability. And a tuition tax credit bill failed because it would benefit most the high-income parents who already send their children to private schools and not help lower-income families much.

In Wisconsin, the Mandella Academy of Science and Math signed up more than 200 students who never attended classes and cashed \$330,000 in state-issued tuition checks. The principal does not even have a teacher's license and was not required to submit information about the school's philosophy or curriculum before receiving more than \$1 million in funding.

The legislature was forced to pass a law requiring more financial information and allowing state officials to suspend voucher payments to private schools which do not meet health, safety, and academic performance standards. This was in response to scandal in the \$75 million voucher system for 13,000 students in private schools.

In addition, private school teachers and principals are usually not required to have criminal background checks. So a felon who was founder and principal of Alix's Academy of Excellence received \$2.8 million in voucher money.

Vouchers programs have failed in Arizona, Connecticut, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Texas. (Source: *Voice of Reason*, 2004 #2, a publication of Americans for Religious Liberty)

Such misbehavior rarely occurs in public schools because of training, tight controls, and high standards. In some states, private schools are responsible only to parents, and state oversight is weak. When private schools are not obligated to give achievement tests or account to the public, as they are in Florida, some administrators feel free to misuse public money. Such details are too often not printed in *The Florida Times-Union*.

--H.B.

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NEWSLETTER

The First Coast Freethinker is published for members of the First Coast Freethought Society, Inc., 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.

Submit contributions by e-mail to Hugo or Carrie, or mail to Hugo at 8831 Taurus Circle, South, Jacksonville, FL 32222. See monthly deadlines on back cover of every newsletter.

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.

For web site postings, contact Carrie.

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 (See application in newsletter or on web site)

PURPOSE

The purpose of the First Coast Freethought Society, Inc. is to serve the needs of the nonreligious 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.

MEETINGS

We meet the second Monday of every month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, 7405 Arlington Expressway, in Jacksonville, FL 32211 (Phone 904-725-8133)
 Time: 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

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.

BRIEF CALENDAR - 2004

September 13, 2004 - Monthly Meeting
 September 19, 2004 - Book Discussion Group
 September 28, 2004 - **STEAK & ALE**
 October 11, 2004 - Monthly Meeting
 October 17, 2004 - Book Discussion Group
 October 26, 2004 - **STEAK & ALE**
 November 8, 2004 - Monthly Meeting
 November 21, 2004 - Book Discussion Group
 November 23, 2004 - **STEAK & ALE**

FIRST COAST FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY, INC.

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, Inc., 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: _____

Make check payable to: **FIRST COAST FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY**

Mail to: Post Office Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591

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

President: **Wilhelmina Walton**

Wilwalt@Juno.com



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

FREETHOUGHT HEROES **Born in September**

MEETING DATES

**Usually the Second
Monday of every
month:**

May 10, 2004
June 14, 2004
July 12, 2004
August 9, 2004
September 13, 2004
October 11, 2004
November 8, 2004
December 13, 2004

Steven Jay Gould (1941-2002)
scientist, popularizer of paleontology, evolution, punctuated equilibrium

Margaret Sanger (1879-1966)
nurse, advocated birth control, equality for women, founded Planned Parenthood

Upton Sinclair (1878-1968)
author, muckraker, exposed meat-packing industry, helped establish first pure food laws

Charles Bradlaugh (1833-91)
English freethinker and politician, denied seat in Parliament for eight years because he refused to take God oath

Albert Ellis (1913-) psychologist, developed Rational Emotive Therapy

Oscar Riddle (1877-1968)
eminent zoologist who studied birds and wanted biology taught unhampered, including evolution

FREETHINKER DEADLINES

**Kindly submit items
to Hugo or Carrie by
Friday:**

May 21, 2004
June 18, 2004
July 16, 2004
August 20, 2004
September 17, 2004
October 15, 2004
November 19, 2004
December 17, 2004