

# 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

NOVEMBER 2004

NUMBER 11

### NOVEMBER MEETING

Speaker: **David Henderson**, with the organization, Wage Peace, Inc.

Topic: **"What I've Discovered About The Roots of Our Country's Continual Involvement in Wars."** Mr. Henderson believes that our getting out of Iraq is not enough; that stopping our involvement in unnecessary wars should be our goal.

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

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

Please Watch

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### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

#### Why I Am a Humanist

**T**homas Paine wrote in *The Age of Reason*, "Infidelity does not consist of believing or disbelieving.

Infidelity consists of NOT BELIEVING WHAT YOU SAY YOU BELIEVE."

I have been persuaded, based on my present level of knowledge and understanding, that I do not believe the religious teachings I learned growing up a Methodist. I am a humanist, not because this is what I chose, but because I CANNOT be otherwise.

I knew if I were to announce that I was a humanist, my family and lifelong friends whom I loved would be very distressed. Most of them revile humanism and the fact that I no longer had

the same religious beliefs we grew up with would probably make them feel alienated. It was difficult to put my belief into words since I had nothing to replace it, and I felt I needed a belief system to sustain me. I did not know any humanists and I had no one to share my thoughts and ideas with. I was unsure how I would live my life without religion. I felt isolated but I knew I could not continue to pretend to believe in something that did not seem rational and reasonable. I felt there was much of the belief system of my childhood that was destructive and harmful. I felt like a fraud for pretending to believe something that I did not.

I began to read books by Lewis Thomas, Edward O. Wilson, Richard Feynman, and other great scientists, and eventually I was able to clarify my thinking about the way the universe works. Logically, I found I could no longer em-

brace supernatural phenomena, and I did finally meet others who felt as I did. As with Thomas Paine, "My own mind became my church."

I hated giving up the mystery and magic connected with my former religion. But, I have discovered new sources of awe and mystery. There is no awesomeness that compares with "nature's own miracles." The more I learn of the wonderful intricacies that nature has evolved over these several billion years, the more awesome it is. Tears came to my eyes when I watched on television a horse trainer who has discovered the secrets of a wild stallion's instinctive behavior so that in just a very few minutes of training work, the trainer has the horse following him around nudging him in the back with his nose as if he were his mother. This is an example of what we can learn when we explore the depths of nature's secrets.

I now find the world immensely more interesting. My view of the world now lets me look at all I see and hear, and evaluate each circumstance with objectivity and reason. If something doesn't seem logical and reasonable, I can reject it, but I always have the option to go back

and reconsider. As a humanist, I feel more comfortable with uncertainty and doubt because that is the reality of the universe. The faith I have now is that nature's laws are in place and life will evolve according to those laws as it must. I have a philosophy I am working on, and that is "nothing happens until it is necessary." Just an idea I like to play around with.

I know that life holds good and bad for

both believer and non-believer, and I am responsible for how I deal with both. I find that grieving over the losses we suffer in life is no easier with a religious belief than it is without. My life has the meaning I

give to it and I am also responsible for that. I am no longer trying to crack some nebulous code in an ancient book that is filled with myth, folklore, superstition, and hearsay to give meaning to my life.

One of the great thinkers of history, Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "Nothing is at last sacred save the integrity of your own mind." I had to become a humanist to secure "the integrity of my own mind." --W.W.

*As a humanist, I feel more comfortable with uncertainty and doubt because that is the reality of the universe.*

## "INTRODUCTION TO BIBLE" COURSES

*Update: Curtis Wolf continues his Bible course teaching inquiries. Concerned non-religious parents, contact Curtis! (Be sure to see next article.) --C.R.*

**F**or the past year and a half, I have been asking questions about the Introduction to Bible courses that are presently being taught in the Duval County school system. So far, the answers that I received have not been satisfactory so I will continue to ask the questions until I get better answers.

I need your help! I would like to hear

from anyone who has children or knows of anyone who has children presently enrolled in the Duval County high schools. If you want to support my effort on behalf of the First Amendment, please call me at 904-573-3847 or e-mail me at wolfcu@comcast.net.

Due to the fact that I have no children in the Duval County school system, it has been suggested to me that I should seek out parents of Duval County high school students who do not want Christian proselytization masquerading as academic study.

It would be easier for the school system to dismiss me than to dismiss the concerns of a multitude of parents questioning what their children are taught in school.

Thank you for your support. --C.W.



## TEACHING THE BIBLE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### A Hidden Hazard

**“Don’t be misled by politically correct  
world religions courses:**

A secular organization has been promoting a ‘World Religions’ course which teaches how other faiths interpret and critique the Christian Bible. These groups want school districts nationwide to believe this is the only legal way to teach the Bible. **THIS IS NOT TRUE.**”

**S**o states an impressive, patriotic-looking brochure entitled, *The Bible in History & Literature*, prepared by a group with the official-sounding name of The National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public School (NCBCPS). The Council, however, is far from neutral. It is, in fact, a fundamentalist group who wants the Bible taught in public schools because “that teaching is going to be a positive situation for developing citizens for the future.”

The NCBCPS claims that its curriculum, in use for over 40 years, has been adopted in 275 school districts in 35 states, is spreading, and “the curriculum has never been legally challenged.” Since 1995, 170,000 high school students have taken the course for credit and it has been adopted in 92% of the school districts where it has been presented.

The Bible is the textbook, with The King James version recommended. “The course emphasizes that the Bible is the foundation document of our society and is the single most influential book in shaping western culture, our laws,

our history, and even our speech. It is a lesson in America’s heritage.”

This is the best approach to teaching the Bible in public schools, contends the Council. The other course is “in the context of world religions; subjecting the Bible to inter-faith criticism, judging it by group consensus, and molding it to fit politically correct standards. Such courses tend to promote faiths such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Taoism.”

The Council cautions that supporters of the second approach “are groups and individuals with controversial pasts and questionable motives.” One group is the Freedom Forum/First Amendment Center, which is headed by the former director of “the radical Americans United for Separation of Church and State Research Foundation” and a board member of The Pluralism Project which “is dedicated to the rejection of absolute truths, the advancement of a ‘new world order,’ and the blending of all religions into one.”

Another group is People for the American Way which “is closely allied with and even more radical than the ACLU” and “openly advocates for such radical liberal causes as homosexual rights and the desecration of the American flag.”

It is interesting to note, the forty members of the NCBCPS Advisory Committee include several judges, state legislators from North Carolina and other states, pastors, a rabbi, and citizens. Some better known names are D. James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Ministries, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, Howard Phillips of Conservative Caucus, David Barton of WallBuilders, and Chuck Norris [who is on one of television’s most violent programs].

The organization’s president and founder is Elizabeth Ridenour, a real estate broker and paralegal who has appeared often in the media to be recognized for her achievements in bringing the Bible into North Carolina public schools. The brochure, “The Bible in History & Literature” states also, “The Bible was the foundation and blueprint for our Constitution, Declaration of Independence, our educational system, and our entire history until the last 20 to 30 years.” (Bibleinschools.net)

The NCBCPS does not provide copies of the curriculum or the names of schools using it. But some details became public when People for the American Way went to court in Florida several years ago to challenge teaching fundamentalist Protestantism in public schools.

The Bible was used as a history book. Hebrew Scriptures were called The Old Testament, and the talking serpent became Satan. Creation and the Flood were historical events. Jesus is the Messiah whose parables were studied. God had plans for families. Children memorized quotations rather than analyze them, just like Sunday school. These examples put religion in secular schools.

The court found that this teaching with public money was unconstitutional, a violation of separation of church and state. Teachers, would-be clergy, or other religious persons would be delighted to indoctrinate children. The Supreme Court states that any teaching about religion is good but must be secular. Teachers were retrained and classrooms had cameras installed to ensure that secularism was followed.

Ironically, using the Bible for teaching critical thinking would have students looking for contradictions, assumptions, ambiguities, immorality, conflicts with archaeology, violence, conflict with a religion of love, and a host of other difficulties. --H.B.

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## NOVEMBER 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, NOV. 24, 2004**, (4<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto:CarrieRen@att.net). **The deadline to RSVP is SUN., November 21, 2004!**

## 9/11 COMMISSION REPORT

**T**om Kean was asked to head the Commission reporting on the attack of September 11, 2001, on the World Trade Center and Pentagon. The former two-term governor of New Jersey is a soft-spoken member of a well-to-do family whose state lost 691 persons, a fourth of the dead, including some of his friends. Henry Kissinger withdrew as head of the Commission because he refused to disclose his foreign clients. Kean was much moved by the loss of life and the harm done to families by the attack, some of these families of the victims wanting the investigation.

The Commission held 15 meetings open to the public in twelve months, which were televised. President George W. Bush granted only a one-hour interview with Kean, without oath taken or record kept, with the only other person present being Vice President Dick Cheney. Although Bush was initially opposed to the investigation, he was persuaded to appoint the commission.

The Commission staff read secret documents in a vault-like room, could not use tape recorders, cell phones, or copiers, and their notes were locked up. The White House controlled the final content. Condoleeza Rice also refused to testify at first, but eventually consented and gave the name of a CIA briefing written to warn the president five weeks before the attack: "Bin Laden Determined to Strike Inside U.S." The publicity forced the administration to release the document.

The staff was persuaded to water down its criticism of the White House and did not ask about financing of the 19 hijackers by Saudi Arabia. It did not find evidence of that nation financing Al Qaeda.

The staff learned that suggestions of attack by airplanes were first voiced in 1991. By 1993 threats of attack already existed. Terrorists had been identified, yet they were admitted to the U.S. and lived here. To the surprise of the administration, Kean said the 9/11 attack could have been prevented.

On the day of the attack, the Federal

Aviation Administration and the Secret Service knew that Middle Eastern men had hijacked more than one plane. But no one broadcast a nationwide warning. The report does not contain an existing time line to answer who knew what, when, and what the administration did; nor does it include interpretive staff reports and transcripts of witness interviews. These exclusions avoided charges of partisanship, provided anonymity, and avoided White House censorship. The report omits names and blame but stated there was no collaboration between Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein.

Kean believes we are safer now than before, but still not safe enough. Security agencies have not improved, the government is still not ready to fight the mobile and global jihadists, and only the head of the FBI, George Tenet, has been ousted. Out of all groups, the passengers in Flight 93 which crashed in Pennsylvania were truly courageous and acted well. (*Mother Jones*, 09/10/04)

The online magazine contains more information, also by Gail Sheehy. For example, who was in charge? No one was in charge while the attacking aircraft were still in the air. Families of the victims wanted an investigation and still have questions. They did not get an all-important time line of what happened. “The Secretary of Defense did not enter the chain of command until the morning’s key events were over.” When asked what he had done to protect the nation and the Pentagon, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld replied only, “it was a law-enforcement issue.”

The National Military Command Center in the Pentagon was the nerve center of the military response but it was leaderless because “for 30 minutes we couldn’t find [Secretary Rumsfeld].” He was having breakfast with Congressional leaders. The presence of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney played no role. What they stated afterward could not be verified because no records were kept. No aircraft were sent aloft to protect the nation’s capital because the decision had to be made whether they were to shoot down

aircraft that refused to divert. That decision belonged to Rumsfeld. They were unprepared although warnings had been available since 1996 that Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda were a threat.

Bush and Rumsfeld talked only after the three of the four aircraft had crashed. Their main interest was Iraq. Before the 2000 election, Rumsfeld, Cheney, Paul Wolfowitz, and Jeb Bush had commissioned “a blueprint for maintaining global U.S. pre-eminence.” They wanted military control of Persian Gulf oil, whether or not Saddam Hussein was in power, and even if there was no threat. Written by Project for the New American Century, the blueprint wanted regime change in China, North Korea, Libya, Syria, and Iran. A member of the British Parliament said, “This is a blueprint for

U.S. domination—a new world order of their making.” It was expected to take some time. In 2001, Rumsfeld “sponsored a study of ancient empires—Macedonia, Rome, the Mongolians—

to find out how they maintained dominance,” reported the *New York Times*.

Counterterrorism Chief Richard Clarke wrote of the meeting, “At first I was incredulous that we were talking about something other than getting Al Qaeda. Then I realized with almost a sharp physical pain that Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz were going to try to take advantage of this national tragedy to promote their agenda about Iraq.”

Afterward, Rumsfeld set up a small team to find Iraqi ties to Al Qaeda. He asked the CIA ten times to find such evidence, but the team came back empty-handed.

Three questions remain unanswered. First, who financed the attacks, and was Saudi Arabia involved? The Commission said no. Senator Bob Graham, who chaired an earlier inquiry, thought otherwise, but 27 pages of his report were censored from the original report by the White House.

Second, did airline managers cover up the hijacking when lives could have been saved?

***“At first I was incredulous that we were talking about something other than getting Al Qaeda. . . .”***

American Airlines has a tape, now kept by the FBI, where flight attendants said that men described as Middle Easterners had stabbed two crew members and sprayed Mace or pepper spray, menaced others with what looked like a bomb, and stormed the cockpit. Airline managers said, "Don't spread this around. Keep it close. Let's keep it among ourselves."

Third, why hasn't anyone been fired or reprimanded for failure, and where was the leadership? Only Tenet resigned, and the White House admits no mistakes. Even with a new terrorism leadership, a bureaucratic reorganization cannot replace leadership at the top. (*Mother Jones*, 07/22/2004)

The war in Iraq has diverted resources from pursuing Al Qaeda, alienated other nations, and encouraged recruitment of terrorists. The U.S. needs to require Israel to make peace with the Palestinians and to stop supporting its occupation uncritically. (*The Progressive*, 09/2004)

It could also have Islamic leader Ali al-Sistani help form a more popular government.

--H.B.

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## EVOLUTIONARY ETHICS

*Terry Loucks reviews a book, The Science of Good & Evil: Why People Cheat, Gossip, Share, Care & Follow the Golden Rule, by Dr. Michael Shermer.* --C.R.

Michael Shermer, a leading spokesman for skeptics and secular humanists, does a good job of explaining why humans are moral (and immoral) animals in his recent book: *The Science of Good and Evil*. It has the interesting subtitle, "Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share and Follow the Golden Rule."

Using scientific data rather than opinion or Holy writ to defend his conclusions, he shows that moral sentiments in humans and moral principles in human groups evolved primarily through the force of natural selection operating on individuals and secondarily through the force of group selection operating on populations.

Humans are, by nature, moral and immoral, good and evil, altruistic and selfish, cooperative and competitive, peaceful and belligerent, virtuous and nonvirtuous. Most people, most of the time, in most circumstances are good and do the right thing for themselves and for others. Central to our evolved ethic is the Golden Rule, augmented by Shermer's "Happiness Principle" and "Freedom Principle."

As an evolved mechanism of human psychology, the moral sense transcends individuals and groups and belongs to the species. Moral principals preceded religion and exist outside of us, being products of the impersonal forces of evolution, history and culture.

He introduces a list of "human universals" compiled by anthropologist Donald E. Brown. Numbering 373 (over half being moral or religious), these universal traits of culture, society, language, behavior, and psyche are present without exception in all ethnographically or historically recorded human societies. In other words, we all have the same "universal" behavior around the world regardless of race, culture, language, religion or nationality.

Early humans, from 100,000 to 10,000 years ago, roamed primarily in small bands (10 to 100 individuals.) Then relatively quickly our social structure evolved first to tribes (up to 1,000 individuals), to chiefdoms (5,000 individuals), to states (50,000) and finally to much larger empires in the last thousand years.

Along the way, moral sentiments evolved out of the pre-moral sentiments of our primate and hominid ancestors and moral rules were established. In the last 10,000 years, these moral behaviors were codified into moral rules and principles by religions that arose as a direct result of the shift from tribes to chiefdoms to states.

Shermer also introduces the powerful concept of the bio-cultural evolutionary pyramid, which is much better described by a drawing than words. At the bottom of the pyramid is the individual whose concern is self survival, and the next level is the family, with the task of passing on the genes.

Next is the extended family and above it the community, where humans first discovered

the benefits of reciprocal altruism. Prior to the community (35,000 years ago) our moral behavior was influenced primarily by the ancestral environment; since then it has been influenced primarily by the modern environment.

The top three levels of his bio-cultural pyramid are the society (where most of us are today), next the species and ultimately the biosphere. He closes with a note of optimism by pointing out that humans have made rapid progress moving from survival of the individual to survival of societies, and that we are already broadening our "in group" to include the entire species. Next in this evolution will be the inclusion of the entire biosphere.

I can recommend this book to anyone who wants to understand why humans are moral (and immoral) without resorting to the supernatural. --T.L.

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### HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP



When: 2:00 p.m. the 3<sup>rd</sup> 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:

- Nov. 21, 2004 - *Best of Robert Ingersoll: Selections from his Writings and Speeches*, Robert E. Greeley, Ed. (This prominent lawyer and statesman was known as the Great Agnostic.)
- Dec. 19, 2004 - *Drug Crazy*, by Mike Gray (See brief article in this newsletter.)

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

## THE WAR AGAINST DRUGS

Anyone who thinks the war on drugs is succeeding should read *Drug Crazy*, the book scheduled for the Humanist Book Discussion Group on Sunday, December 19.

Over the last fifteen years, American taxpayers have laid out over \$300 billion to wage the war on drugs--three times what it cost to put a man on the moon.

*Drug Crazy* offers a scathing indictment of our expensive and hypocritical follies which have essentially benefited only two classes of people: professional anti-drug advocates and drug lords.

Mike Gray has launched a frontal assault on American drug war orthodoxy, and his disturbing overview of the battlefield makes it clear this urgent debate must begin right now.

--Jewell Cross

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## REFORMATION SUNDAY

Reformation Sunday celebrates the beginning of Protestantism and an enormous change worldwide. On October 31, 1517 (487 years ago), Martin Luther posted 55 theses on the church door of the castle in Wittenberg, Germany. The theses were grievances posted to produce discussion. Examples include, "The whole life of believers should be penitence . . ." and "The true treasure of the Church is the Holy Gospel . . ." This was a time when the purpose of life was to prepare for the hereafter.

Luther (1483-1546) was an Augustinian friar, wearing a brown habit, or robe, who was concerned about the selling of indulgences by Johann Tetzel, a Dominican friar in black habit. The Roman Catholic Church sold them at this time for Pope Leo X to pay to enlarge St. Peter's church in Rome. For his money, the buyer got a reduction in punishment for his sins.

Luther expected objections but instead

found that his ideas spread rapidly throughout Europe. The Church asked him to withdraw his complaint. He was confronted, refused to withdraw, and was excommunicated as a heretic. He was hidden and supported by German princes who were happy to escape the authority of Rome. He translated the Bible into vernacular German, which led to translations into hundred of vernacular languages and stimulated thinking.

The Protestant Reformation changed western civilization. It destroyed the control of the Church and separated church and state. Secular life developed. Commercialism developed because people could lend money and collect interest. Church unity ended, and hundreds of denominations and splinter groups developed. Protestants settled the New World so the United States became primarily Protestant with its concomitant advantages and disadvantages. --H.B. (*Celebrations: A Complete Book of American Holidays*, Robert J. Myers)

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## SOCIAL RELIGIOUS GAP

“Never before in American history have churches been tied so directly to one political party.” So said Professor Mark Silk of Trinity College, referring to Republicans. Voters who frequently attend prayer services favored George H. W. Bush over Bill Clinton by 14% in 1992 and George W. Bush over Al Gore by 20% in 2000.

Democrats want to close the gap, but the public thinks liberals are against religion. It has noted that President Bush talks biblical language, pushes faith-based services, and enlists churches to register voters and assist in other ways, while progressives are concerned with separation of church and state.

The majority of Americans share many principles related to this situation. Seventy percent of Catholics believe their Church should not try to influence the positions of Catholic politicians, while the Professor Silk believes that separating faith and politics dampens voting and social activism. The civil rights movement’s

strong spiritual foundation helped to abolish the “sin of segregation.”

In the 1950s and 1960s many northern liberals were anti-clerical and regarded religion as a source of intolerance. That was when Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson represented public religion although they spoke for a small minority, and Falwell now gets a more unfavorable than favorable rating from fundamentalists. The author observes that evangelicals now care more about jobs and the economy than about gay marriage and abortion.

Forty percent of Americans are born-again Christians (they have a personal relation to Jesus), but a third are “freestyle evangelicals” whose opinions are very selective, and 15 to 20 percent are minorities who tend to vote Democratic. Furthermore, mainline Protestants and centrist Catholics are moderates in voting and want to abolish capital punishment as well as homelessness, domestic violence, and other social problems.

These moderates are not a force like the Christian Coalition but have progressive concerns like helping the needy, peacemaking, and protecting the environment. A FaithAmerica.org statement on Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya in the Middle East presented by a rabbi, Muslim cleric, Presbyterian minister, and nun stated regarding abuses in Iraqi prisons: “We condemn the sinful and systemic abuses committed in our name.” The organization is also demonstrating to honor “Unknown Civilians Killed in War” at the Democratic and Republican conventions.

Showing concern for these problems can put progressives on a high moral ground to work with religious groups, avoiding fractious topics like abortion and homosexuality. Both sides may not agree on all issues, such as causes of poverty, but can work together.

At a Call to Renewal conference, one attendee was against gay marriage and abortion but opposed to big tax cuts and wants more earned-income tax credit, food stamps, a living wage, and better health care for the needy. “I don’t think God is a Marxist, but frequently the Bible suggests that people get rich by oppression or are rich and don’t share what they have—and in both cases, God is furious.”

Fifty-five percent of “freestyle evangelicals” voted for Bill Clinton in 1992 and 1996. Secular and moderately religious people lean leftward. Fifteen percent of the Democratic Party are secular voters and the same percentage of members of the Republican Party are evangelicals. Two specialists comment: “In 2000, voters who never attended church vastly outnumbered voters from the Christian right.” and “The Democrats would be in trouble if they tried to be a purely secular party” but are wasting their time wooing religious Republicans.

The religious gap is not a noose tightening on progressives but just an example of cultural divisions, or traditionalists vs. the less pious. The former are not more numerous but just better organized and active. The voting records of senators who quietly support general welfare values are often better for the nation than the voting records of those who are more religious and outspoken. (*The Nation*, 08/30-09/06/2004)

In other words, cooperate with those policies which are like ours and avoid conflicts. Both secularists and moderate religionists gain from cooperation. --H.B.

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## CONTEMPORARY RELIGION

**H**ere is information from reviews of two books which help give perspective on the world today.

The first contains quotations about the difference in the views of the Catholic Church and the United States on world events.

“Beginning with Pope John XXII in *Pacem in Terris*, every pope of the later twentieth century has called for a strengthened United Nations with real enforcement powers to make international law stick. The Holy See believes in the rule of international law, in part as an antidote to a unilateral world in which strong nations impose their will on the weak. This Vatican conviction leads to resentment of the United States when it is perceived to be obstructing the construction of an international legal order. It will be increasingly difficult for the Holy See to look the other way when the United States takes

action in contravention of international standards and agreements.”

In addition, “Though no pope and no Vatican diplomat will ever come out and say so, the bottom line is that despite great respect for the American people and their democratic traditions, the Holy See simply does not think the United States is fit to run the world. Thus, the Holy See’s diplomatic energy in coming years will have as a central aim the construction of a multilateral, multi-polar world, which will necessarily imply a limitation on the power and influence of the United States. For that reason, the relationship between Rome and Washington seems designed to be complex and sometimes strained.”

--John L. Allen, Jr., *All the Pope’s Men*

The second book contains quotes and a summary dealing with contemporary religion.

“... theologically moderate and liberal congregations appear more likely than others to act as stewards of civil society rather than as one competing component of civil society ... The highest levels of civic activity among moderate and liberal Protestants may be in part a by-product of mainline Protestant domination of civil society.” and “Virtually every indicator of civic engagement currently available shows decline in religious participation in the last third of the twentieth century.”

The rise of evangelical church membership may be starting to taper off. Conservative denominations have increased to claim 53% of all Protestants, but the gain is mostly due to the increased birthrate, not just conversions. Weekly church attendance has declined from 40% to perhaps 25% in all groups and is expected to continue. “Recent generations attend religious services at lower rates than did previous generations when they were the same age.”

--Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America*, with summary by Al Menendez. (*Voice of Reason*, 2004, #3, The Newsletter of Americans for Religious Liberty)

Increase in Protestant churches in Latin America appears to come from Catholics converting due to the shortage of priests. --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

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**  
 December 13, 2004 - Monthly Meeting  
 December 19, 2004 - Book Discussion Group  
 December 28, 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](mailto: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 November**

### **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**

**Abigail Adams** (1744-1818) first lady, wanted equal rights for women.

**Carl Sagan** (1934-96) scientist, author, Humanist of the Year - 1981.

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton** (1815-1902) suffragist who paved way for women to vote, wrote The Woman's Bible.

**Wilma Mankiller** (1945- ) first woman elected chief of Cherokee Nation

**Benedict Spinoza** (1632-77) philosopher, emphasized reason in metaphysics, and ethics.

**Soujourner Truth** (1797-1883) abolitionist, feminist, orator, had her 13 children sold into slavery.

**Mary Walker** (1832-1919) surgeon, only woman to receive U.S. Medal of Honor in Civil War, scandalized by wearing men's clothing.

### **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**