

First Coast

# FREETHINKER

The newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society



January 2005

Volume 3, Issue No. 1

## Baptist leader declares war

*Southern Baptists set sights on nationwide power struggle.*

By Hugo Borresen  
and Michael Fitzgerald

IT'S HARDLY NEWS that Southern Baptists believe in gaining control over government. In Jacksonville — as in much of the South — local politics have been dominated by Baptists for generations.

Emboldened by the re-election of George W. Bush, Baptists are setting their sights on the federal government. Radio show host and theology professor Richard Land makes their agenda perfectly clear.

He should know. Land is president and CEO of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, the Southern Baptist Convention's agency for "applied Christianity."

"Today, all of Christendom is at war," Land says on his Web site, richardlandlive.com. "Like it or not, we are locked in a battle for our culture. The weapons are not bombs and guns, but words and ideas. The battlefield is the minds of Americans."

He presents his words and ideas on not one but two talk-radio shows, *Richard Land Live!* heard on Saturdays and *For Faith and*

*Family Insight*, heard daily. [Oddly, these are not broadcast in Jacksonville. Maybe Jerry Vines doesn't want competition? — MF].

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*"Today, all of Christendom is at war. Like it or not, we are locked in a battle for our culture."*

— *Richard Land*

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Land, a Princeton University graduate, has a master's degree in theology from Baptist Theological Seminary in New Orleans and a doctorate in philosophy from Oxford. He was an aide to Governor Bill Clements of Texas in the late 1980s. In 2003, he was appointed by President Bush to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom. The *National Journal* calls Land "one of the top-ten experts politicians call on when they get serious about addressing an important public policy issue."

Land, a busy guy, also teaches theology and church history at Criswell College in Dallas, a Bible-based institution with 400

students. The college was founded on the ministry of W. A. Criswell, a true Bible thumper whom Billy Graham thought was the best preacher he'd ever heard. Criswell opposed Darwinism, liberalism, humanism, Democrats and homosexuality. He favored capital punishment, and taught that wives were to be subordinate to their husbands.

Land follows closely in the footsteps of his mentor. On his radio show, he claims the world-view of the 1960s counterculture has been dominant for the last 30 years because the various secular elites have "disproportionate power" within the media, the judiciary, academia, and the federal government.

See "Land," page 3

### This month's meeting

Guest speaker:

**Ken Hurley** of the ACLU of Greater Jacksonville

"The Cost of Free Speech, Pulpit Politics, Moral Values, Fishing and the Big Lies"

**Monday, January 10, 6:30 p.m.**  
Unitarian Universalist Church  
7405 Arlington Expressway  
in the sanctuary

# President's message

Threat to separation of church and state has never been greater

It is with both gratitude and trepidation that I begin the presidency of the FCFTS. Filling the shoes of Earl Coggins, Will DeVore, David Schwam-Baird and Wilhelmina Walton will be a difficult task. I'm pleased that Wilhelmina will remain on the board and within arm's reach.

As I begin my first term, George W. Bush will be entering his second, perhaps posing the biggest threat to the separation of church and state in the history of our nation. Not only will he be able to influence Congress, he will appoint Supreme Court justices who will influence the country long after Bush has left office.

Now, more than ever, it is crucial that freethinkers stay informed and participate in our democracy. It is not enough to sit by and let others do the work. We must write letters, support like-minded organiza-



Susan Allen

tions and insist on equal opportunity for educational excellence for all our children.

When I went back to college in my 40s, I was appalled by the ignorance of my fellow students, especially in history and science. In the Duval County school system, middle-school students are now offered history and science merely as electives. The FCATs' focus on

math and English has diminished the importance of other subjects — coincidentally those that could bring the strongest challenge to a faith-based government.

In the coming year, I would like to see the FCFTS offer opportunities for its members to engage in reasoned dialogue about education, the separation of church and state and threats to our civil liberties. I invite you all to participate and help our organization grow.

We have an intelligent and creative membership and it would be a tragedy if we do not use these resources to influence our local and national debate. ❖

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*PS. I'm sure by now readers have noticed our new newsletter format. It's part of our ongoing evolution and continuing efforts to improve. Hope you like it. Let us know what you think.*

— Susan.

## First Coast FREETHINKER

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 obtain information from many sources.

Readers are invited and encouraged to reprint our original materials provided they give credit to this publication.

The officials of the FCFTS are not responsible for opinions or other statements expressed in this newsletter. It is intended to convey ideas to stimulate thinking and discussion about a wide variety of subjects.

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We welcome submissions. Deadlines are the second week of the month for the following month. Submit contributions by e-mail to Hugo or Michael (see above), or mail to Hugo Borresen, 8831 Taurus Circle, South, Jacksonville, FL 32222. Web site submissions: Carrie Renwick, carrieren@att.net.

# The politics of piety

**George W. Bush** is the most outwardly religious of all our presidents. His piety serves him well.

CNN's recent election exit-poll results show 60 percent of regular churchgoers voted Republican.

A 2003 Pew Research Center survey shows 67 percent of regular churchgoers vote Republican.

A non-Christian candidate would have little or no chance of getting elected.

Compared to Republicans, Democratic candidates tend to be reticent about mentioning God.

Dick Gephardt and Wesley Clark were subdued on the subject.

John Kerry is Catholic, but supports women's reproductive rights.

Howard Dean was once a Catholic, then an Episcopalian, and later a Congregationalist. He now rarely attends church, and objects to the divisive issues of "race, guns, God, and gays."

But at least one Democrat hyped the religious angle: Senator Joe Lieberman, "a Jew who invokes God, casts policy issues in moral terms, and refuses to campaign on the Sabbath," according to the *Philadelphia Enquirer*.

Lieberman said Democrats should lose their aversion to religion. "Republicans act as if they have a monopoly on values or faith-based values," he said. "They don't."

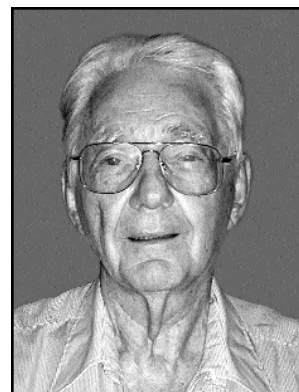
Bush still sticks out like a sore thumb, even in a country where 40 percent claim to be born again.

Even Southern Baptists Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton were relatively low-key about their religion while in office.

In 1988, the religious right had its own candidate, TV preacher Pat Robertson. Since he flopped, their best bet was to throw in their lot with the Republicans.

Christians, who claim to care

## Editor's Corner



**Hugo Borresen**

about the welfare of others, joined a party that is largely indifferent — and sometimes opposed — to helping ordinary people.

Before Bush, the most ostentatiously religious president was Richard Nixon, who often invited Rev. Billy Graham to the White House to hold services.

Nixon might not be the best example of a Christian politician. He did manage to get re-elected, but along the way proved he had a few problems with moral principles and left in a hurry before his term ended.



## Land lays out Baptist political agenda continued from p. 1

Land is spearheading a new push by Southern Baptists to turn the tide by amassing political power. At a convention of Baptists, Land said Christians need to be more active in elections. "We are to be obedient for conscience's sake.... That means we get involved in the public policy process."

Commenting on the presidential election in a November 28, 2004 appearance on NBC's *Meet the Press*, Land told host Tim Russert that dialogue between conservatives and liberals will not be effective until "Democrats rid themselves of their bondage to the radical, secular fundamentalists of the left. As long as they are carrying Barry Lynn [a United

Church of Christ minister who is head of Americans for the Separation of Church and State], the ACLU and Michael Moore on their backs, they are not going to be all that successful at the ballot box.

"The secular fundamentalist left is clearly seen as part of the problem, not part of the solution... we need to have discussions where religion is part of the issue and not specifically segregated from public policy."

Some groups, he said, don't think religious values should have any bearing on public policy.

"They would consider that to be a violation of their perverted understanding of separation of church and state."



# Ethics and morality

## Time to redefine their meaning?

Guest Commentary

By J. Dan Dupree

RELIGIOUS FOLKS claim ours is a Christian nation, deriving moral authority from God for its existence. They claim that our nation's laws, policies and actions spring from Christian principles.

Christian mores have been used to claim moral authority for almost any action, including the Inquisition, the Crusades, the persecution of Jews and competing denominations of Christians, the Salem witch trials, slavery, and many wars. These conflicts continue into today's political battle between organized Christianity and secular Americans.

Actually, the traditions of ethical pursuit owe more to Plato, Socrates and Marcus Aurelius than to the Disciples, Thomas Aquinas or Martin Luther. Our Founding Fathers were familiar with classical philosophy. Our Constitution, which resulted from their synthesis of those ideals, remains one of the great products of the Age of Enlightenment.

Yet at the time it was adopted, only 10 percent of Americans were eligible to vote. Many states had property-ownership requirements; women, slaves and the illiterate were simply ineligible. This great experiment was not a democracy, but a republic, with layers of separation between the ruling class and the general public — designed to impede direct participation by most citizens.

Many of our Founding Fathers

considered the Republic just that, an experiment — doomed to return to aristocratic rule. This was still an improvement over feudal Europe.

For the first time in western civilization, a government did not claim its authority from God. The

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*Our Constitution  
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groundwork was laid for a society in which the rights of all, regardless of gender, religion or ethnic heritage, would have a fair hearing, and the outcome was the result of law, not religious or royal decree.

Our Constitution is a living document that allows for reinterpretation of those rights. Any challenge to those “inalienable” rights must be made by amendment.

OPPOSING SIDES in many conflicts can find support in the Bible to justify their positions. During the Civil War both sides used the pulpit to vilify the other. Southern preachers railed that the North wished to turn godless animals — slaves — loose on the nation, while northern preachers labeled southerners evil torturers of fellow humans.

The official slaughter of the “heathen” Native Americans is yet

another example of the power and shame of so-called Christian morality. Not only were Native Americans and blacks disenfranchised by the prevailing wisdom that they were subhuman, women were disenfranchised in a similar patronizing manner — based on Biblical principles. No major religious organization ever came forward to voice support for woman suffrage.

THE QUALITIES that sparked the hopes and imagination of Western civilization were a result of the secular aspects of our Constitution. That all humans could be considered equal and have equal protection under the law was derived from our recognition of intrinsic human rights — not emanating from God nor the state. When those secular and humanist ideals are forgotten and religious authority becomes a basis for our actions, calamity and shame are often the result.

The current political climate makes this clear. Although Bill Clinton was ridiculed, derided and impeached over a moral failure, the ethical failures of George W. Bush are ignored. Sexual misconduct is considered more egregious than possible conflicts of interest between the administration and its former business partners. The real possibility that the death of many thousands has been based on faulty or unsubstantiated evidence is not even a consideration.

Yet a brief showing of Janet Jackson's breast during a football

See “Morality,” page 5

# To shut up or not to shut up

*Is it 'patriotic' to keep silent?*

by Fred W. Hill

Judging from the results of the 2004 election, 51 percent of American voters apparently believe our invasion and ongoing entanglement in Iraq are entirely justified. And, according to a recent University of Connecticut survey, nearly 40 percent feel public protest and criticism of military policy should cease during wartime.

Apparently, many Americans agree with conservative commentator Ann Coulter and Fox News pundit Bill O'Reilly that during wartime we should "just shut up."

Coulter has written books



deeming it "treason" to oppose government policy [*Coulter ought to bust out a dictionary and find out the difference between "treason" and "sedition"* — MF].

Most conservative commentators — Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Don Feder, et al. — seem to agree with her, except of course when the government happens to be

in the hands of "immoral," secularist liberals — as they describe anyone who dares disagree with them.

Fortunately, the First Amendment has not yet been nullified, despite the best efforts of former U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft.

We still retain the right to criticize our politicians for their actions, even during wartime, in the grand tradition of such iconic Americans as Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt and Mark Twain.

Lincoln earned his first taste of national recognition as a freshman Congressman during the Mexican War by demanding President Polk point out exactly where Mexican

See "Is silence," p. 6

## 'Morality' a major issue in recent election

game is an outrage and cause to change laws and add restrictions to all manner of public discourse.

Many Americans voted for this administration because of its supposed moral superiority. The Taliban too is a "moral" organization. The West's progressive ideas and their accompanying freedoms are anathema to its fundamentalist morality. Only its leaders can determine right conduct.

IF A GOD WILLS IT and a "holy" book gives it authority, it is the right action. To question matters of faith is "sin."

The broad brush of religious morality, which paints only in black and white, is the wrong tool

with which to determine correct interaction between human beings. If we make judgments of our fellow humans based on religious authority, any possibility of reconciliation or negotiation is gone.

Because simple-minded morality places gay marriage and abortion above ethical conduct in government, we have reached a crossroads in our nation's future. When religious convictions are given more consideration than the ethical treatment of our fellow citizens, we have reached a point of becoming that thing which we fought during the revolution that created this nation.

The only escape from dogmatic behavior is ethical thought and action — not faith. If our actions

Continued from page 4

as a nation and the laws we live by become the product of the pulpit instead of sound judgment, we stand at the edge of losing 225 years of perhaps the greatest progress made by any group of humans in the history of the world.

We as a nation must return to those secular ideals described by our Constitution. We as ethical humans must continue to offer the thoughtful guidance that has never been provided by religion.

Codified cultural myth is the failed past of humanity. How we interact with and care for our fellow humans should not be defined by our past prejudices if we are to continue to advance as a species.



# Upcoming book discussions

by Jewell Kross, moderator

**January 16:** *The Philosophy of Humanism* by Corliss Lamont.

Renowned philosopher and activist Corliss Lamont offers a vigorous argument for humanism and provides an affirmative, intelligent guidebook for shaping a better life in today's complex world. This book is considered a standard text on the subject of humanism. It includes chapters on the meaning of humanism, humanism's theory of the universe, and reliance on reason and science.

**February 20:** *The Age of Reason* by Thomas Paine.

American philosopher and patriot Thomas Paine, author of the political pamphlet "Common Sense," is best remembered for exciting colonial opinion in support of the American Revolution. In *The Age of Reason*, Paine critiques Christianity and the Bible.

Paine zeroes in on the internal contradictions as well as atrocities contained in the Bible. The idea of examining the Bible objectively — let alone critically — was unheard of in the 18th century.

Paine began this work in 1793, while he was in jail in France for protesting the execution of Louis XVI.

This book is a freethought classic. ❖

## January Social

**To:** All freethinkers, FCFTS members, friends and guests.

**What:** Dinner and socializing at the Steak and Ale Restaurant, near Baymeadows Road and Interstate 95 South.

**When:** Tuesday, January 25 (fourth Tuesday of each month). 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). Deadline to RSVP is Sunday, January 23.

## Is silence golden? continued from p. 5

forces supposedly invaded U.S. soil. Polk, who won the Presidency on promises to annex Texas and a large chunk of what was then northwest Mexico, could not comply because the skirmish that provided the *casus belli* occurred in a border region in dispute. Polk's rationale for declaring war was, as Lincoln asserted before the House of Representatives, "from beginning to end the sheerest deception."

During World War I, ex-President Theodore Roosevelt denounced Woodrow Wilson's anti-sedition policies. The famously belligerent Roosevelt saw nothing wrong in U.S. participation in the war, but took exception to Wilson's announcement that criticism of his administration was unacceptable, even seditious.

"To announce that there must be no criticism of the President, or that we are to stand by the President right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile but is morally treasonable to the American public," Roosevelt thundered.

In 1901, humorist Mark Twain risked his popularity by unveiling his disgust with President McKinley's decision to crush the Philippines' struggle for independence following the Spanish-American War — a struggle that created a much longer and bloodier conflict than the war with Spain. An appropriate flag for the brutally acquired archipelago, Twain suggested, would be a variation of our own, save for black stripes replacing the white and a skull and crossbones occupying the left corner.

We can only guess what these eminent Americans would think about efforts by the Bush administration and its cheerleaders to stamp out criticism of its policies and the assured but misguided strides by which it waded so deeply into our current international imbroglio. Lincoln, Roosevelt and Twain regarded it their patriotic duty to speak out against egregious blunders and inequities.

None of them would have acquiesced to commands to "shut up!" ❖

*Fred Hill is a staff writer for the First Coast FreeThinker. He's also a member and a former officer of the First Coast Freethought Society.*

**First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.**

P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 • (904) 288-6291

**2005 Membership application**



Name		Date	
Home address	City	State	ZIP
E-mail address	Home phone	Business phone	
Occupation	Areas of interest and/or expertise		

How did you hear about us?

MEMBERSHIP:      Regular (\$30/yr.)       Student (\$15/yr.)       Senior (\$15/yr.)

I'm interested in getting involved in the FCFTS as a

General member       Committee member       Officer       Financial supporter

Do you object to having your name appear on our membership list, which is only distributed to other members?

YES       NO

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.**

P.O. Box 550591  
 Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591  
 (904) 288-6291

[www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org)

**Statement of 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.

**Meetings**

The FCFTS meets the second Monday of every month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, FL 32211. (904) 725-8133  
 Meeting time: 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

**Membership**

Regular: \$30 per year • Seniors & students: \$15  
 Application is also available on our Web site.

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## First Coast Freethought Society

### First quarter 2005 CALENDAR

January 10 — Monthly meeting  
January 16 — Book discussion group\*  
January 25 — Social at Steak & Ale

February 14 — Monthly meeting  
February 20 — Book discussion group\*  
February 22 — Social at Steak & Ale

March 14 — Monthly meeting  
March 20 — Book discussion group  
March 22 — Social at Steak and Ale

\*See page 6 for book details.

Return service requested

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.  
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