

First Coast

FreeThinker



The newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

July 2005

Volume 3, Issue 7

Gimme that red-state religion

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Fire

Michael Fitzgerald

One-time presidential candidate Pat Buchanan is credited for introducing the term culture wars into the political lexicon during his 1992 campaign. Since then, there has been much disagreement about the origins of this great divide and even whether it really exists or has been largely manufactured by the media.

Some historians of the phenomenon trace its roots to the late 1960s with the rise of the anti-ERA movement. However, the so-called red-state revolt

has been with us a very long time and has reappeared frequently and in many different incarnations.

It's basically a continuation of a complex, three-way conflict that goes back to the 17th-century British Isles among Anglicans, Puritans and Presbyterians. Author James Webb, a former U.S. undersecretary of defense and author of *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America*, says it's even older than that. Its roots are found in an ancient struggle between Celtic and Anglo-Norman cultures.

Webb traces its modern incarnation directly to a 17th-century Brit-

ish social-engineering experiment that proposed to plant Protestants from Scotland in Northern Ireland—a misguided move with dire consequences that still plague that region.

After being denied the right to practice their fervent form of Calvinism (i.e., Presbyterianism) by Queen Anne's Test Act in 1703, Ulstermen and their families began migrating en masse to the U.S. seeking religious freedom and free land to farm. This emigration went on for more than a hundred years, bringing roughly 400,000 Ulster immigrants to these

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"Have you ever wondered why God waited thousands of years, from Adam to Jesus, to tell the world he had a son? He, who begins by loving Christianity more than truth, will proceed by loving his sect or church better than Christianity, and end in loving himself better than all."

Samuel Taylor Coleridge
English poet, critic, and
philosopher (1772-1834)

July 2005 Meeting

Guest speaker:

Earl Coggins, Founder, First Coast Freethought Society

"Mom's Funeral: The story of one atheist vs. his Christian family"

Monday, July 11, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Unitarian Universalist Church (the last meeting at this location)

7405 Arlington Expressway - in the sanctuary

Gimme that red-state religion

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shores.

These rough-and-tumble Ulster immigrants conveniently served as a buffer between aristocratic Anglican planters in the Southeast and resentful Native Americans in the less arable regions. As settlers, they were largely responsible for the country's great westward push into most of the land Americans now occupy. In fact, there simply would be no United States without their fearless efforts, writes President Theodore Roosevelt who is himself of Ulster stock on his mother's side. Like Roosevelt, Webb proudly identifies himself as being from Ulster Presbyterian Jacksonian stock.

Even before the conflict in Ulster, a similar one between Puritans and Anglicans had exploded in the English Civil War. Puritans led by Oliver Cromwell

(Roundheads) fought the Norman nobility (Cavaliers) during the 1640s.

All of these British conflicts and class struggles were carried over to the colonies. While the English Civil War was building up steam, a group of Puritans were establishing cities in New England, and a group of Cavaliers were establishing plantations in the southeastern U.S. Thus, the line between red and blue states was drawn even before Independence. The relationship between the urbanized north and the plantation-based south had been an uneasy one long before the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter.

By the time of the Revolutionary War, the Ulster Presbyterians had joined the fray, distrustful of both sides. Webb suggests that the War for Independence was not so much about taxation without representation as it was about taking land the

British government had guaranteed to Native Americans. Ulstermen wholeheartedly supported removing British officials who stood in the way of their settling of Indian lands.

These fierce, uneducated Ulster immigrants and their descendants came into their own as a powerful political force in the 1820s thanks to laws abolishing property requirements for white male voters. Their patriarch and role model, Andrew Jackson, a notorious brawler, gunslinger, military hero and later the seventh president of the U.S was himself the son of an Ulsterman. His followers quickly became a force to be reckoned with and have been ever since.

The modern Americans whom Council on Foreign Relations analyst Walter Russell Mead calls 'Jacksonians' (<http://denbeste.nu/external/Mea>

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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 FCFS are not responsible for opinions or other statements expressed in this newsletter. It is intended to convey ideas to stimulate discussion on a variety of subjects.

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

Fred Flintstone Rides the Bronto Again

Fred W. Hill

Dinosaur fossils were planted by Satan to fool people into believing in evolution.

So asserted Isaac, my roommate, circa 1988. He was desperate to convince me that the Bible was literal truth and that all evidence to the contrary was either the work of the devil or God's method for testing human faith in his revealed wisdom. For some odd reason I was not convinced.

Maybe it was because his assertions were not consistent in that he wavered as to whether Satan or God was responsible for the fossil planting. Or maybe it was the undermining of that absurdity with further absurdity when he claimed humans and dinosaurs once lived side by side, as revealed in the Flintstones. I had to laugh at that – here was an adult telling me with a straight face that the cartoon adventures of Fred Flintstone and the gang must be based on genuine pre-historic life because the series was in accord with biblical teachings.

Whether or not Isaac took himself seriously regarding dinosaur rides, he was clearly upset that I didn't regard the Bible as a good source of facts about nature and history. I, in turn, was aghast that he had such avid faith in a book so riddled with contradictions and obvious myths and, if anything, revealed the character of God as

vainglorious, hypocritical and monstrous. I had previously thought he was more intelligent than that

Sadly, Isaac has many co-believers of the ancient nonsense, particularly in the American South where creationist theme parks and museums have sprouted up in recent years with the purpose of indoctrinating children and naïve adults in the quaint hunches that the Earth, with co-existent humans and dinosaurs, was specially created roughly 6,000 years ago.

Among them, Dinosaur Adventure Land, was opened in Pensacola, Florida, in 2001, by Kent Hovind, former public school science teacher, tax-evader and founder of Creation Science Evangelism (see "Stupid Dino Tricks," by Greg Martinez, *Skeptical Inquirer*, November 2004).

As described by Martinez, among the attractions at Dinosaur Adventure Land, set up in Hovind's two-acre backyard, are the Longneck Liftosaurus, the Circle Swivel Springasaur, and Raptor Range, all designed with the intent of imparting reputedly spiritual lessons about the wonder and goodness of God, and a "Science Center" where legitimate science is taught as fraudulent, a sign proclaims "Darwin is a Liar" and the Bible taught as absolute truth.

Due to his apparent belief that he is above such obligations

as paying federal taxes, obtaining business licenses, not assaulting people who disagree with him or obeying other mere human laws, Hovind has landed numerous times in legal hot water with governmental authorities, becoming yet another shining example of how the Bible influences honesty and moral behavior in its adherents.

The Museum of Earth History, promoted by Thomas Sharp, business director of the evangelist group Creation Truth and associated with the New Holy Land theme park in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, is somewhat more sophisticated than Hovind's tawdry enterprise.

As described by reporter Paul Harris, (see "Mixing science with creationism," *The Guardian* (U.K.), May 24, 2005), it is "the first dinosaur museum to take a creationist perspective." Adam and Eve are depicted living in vegetarian harmony with all the creatures, including Tyrannosaurus Rex most of whose kind went extinct due to the supernatural God-created Flood that also created the Grand Canyon, theories regarding comets and natural erosion be damned. In another creationist twist, a few dinosaurs survived the Flood only to be wiped out by cavemen and the onslaught of the Ice Age, save perhaps for a species of fire-breathing dinosaurs spared just long enough to provide holy sport for saintly knights.

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Fighting fire (and brimstone) with fire

Earl Coggins

In his book *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, And the Future of Reason*, the author, Sam Harris, points out what is obvious to many freethinkers:

“A glance at history, or at the pages of any newspaper, reveals that ideas which divide one group of human beings from another, only to unite them in slaughter, generally have their roots in religion . . . Observations of this sort pose an immediate problem for us, however, because criticizing a person’s faith is currently taboo in every corner of our culture.”

If a humanist, being concerned for all other humans, criticizes another human for irrational beliefs or behavior, has that criticism compromised the integrity of humanism? In other words, is it anti-humanistic to “speak up” when other humans “act up” in a way that is anti-theological to humanism? There are some among us who feel strongly that to criticize religion too harshly, specifically Christianity, is Christian bashing.

Organized religion (pick your version) has committed crimes against humanity that would make even Hitler and Stalin blush. If I complain that Hitler killed millions in a genocidal fashion, is that Nazi bashing? If I point out that in the Bible, a homicidal Jehovah was angered by the behavior of a few humans and decided -- with the exception of one boatload of life forms -- to destroy every living thing on the

planet, am I “bashing” religion?

Some point out that there are denominations of Christianity much more humanistic than others. This argument has serious flaws. Regardless of the denomination, they all huddle around an ancient book riddled with anti-humanistic dogma.

Logic says you can’t have it both ways, that is, humanistic and anti-humanistic traits, yet Christians have indeed had it both ways and I think this is where Christian bashing gets its roots.

In his recent article, “To Bash Or Not To Bash,” (<http://www.atheists.org/Atheism/bash.html>) Edward Tabash (no pun intended), an attorney and activist in the freethought movement, asks the same questions: “Some of us are bogging down in a debate over whether the promotion of secular humanism should involve ‘bashing’ religion, or whether we should only focus on presenting humanism in a positive light. The answer is that both are necessary components of the secular humanist message.”

Tabash tells it like it is: “When we fear being accused of ‘religion bashing,’ we are buying into the trap our opponents have set for us. We do secular humanism an immense disservice if we buy into the mindset that criticism of religion has to be more muffled than criticism of other ideologies. We have to use all available tactics, including destroying the misconception that religious beliefs are entitled to some special immunity from

piercing criticism.”

Columnist George Will recently noted that George W. Bush felt it necessary to declare that “unbelievers” can be good Americans. “Unbelievers” -- he wouldn’t use the A-word -- have some impressive numbers: if we had our own state, we’d rank second, after California. Will is subtly suggesting that our numbers are not only swelling, but are politically worth considering. He says we number 29.4 million, double what we were in 1990.

Compare the numbers, and you get the picture: The largest U.S. Christian denomination is Roman Catholics with 50.8 million, followed by Baptists at 33.8 million; Methodists are third with 14.1 million. I think Will’s estimates are low. We’re closer to 45 million, and those numbers have politicians and religious leaders worried. The religious right has two advantages mitigating these numbers: We’re not organized into a cohesive unit, and we’re still operating under the prohibition of “no Christian bashing.”

Our strength and numbers are starting to get noticed, and our relentless criticism of irrationality along with our steadfast litigation against the violation of our civil rights is finally reaping some rewards.

So, why would we want to turn down the heat with lukewarm criticism of the absurdities of religion? Scientists know as soon as a theory is published, it will be subject to intense scru-

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Fighting fire (and brimstone) with fire (Continued from page 4)

tiny. Criticism is expected. It is not seen as “bashing.”

Christian bashing, if done correctly, is not immoral. For freethinkers, it has both pros and cons. It’s one way, as Tabash shows, to turn the tables. It may not give us the best image, but it can accomplish two things. First, it can generate publicity -- negative publicity is still publicity, and publicity is good. Secondly, it shows that the FCFS does not talk out of both sides of its mouth.

Richard Dawkins, free-thought activist and author of *The Blind Watchmaker*, is a notoriously harsh critic of Christianity. His columns in *Free Inquiry* can be found in almost every public library in Jacksonville, thanks to us. We paid to put a Christian-bashing magazine in the libraries of this city. It does so eloquently and subtly, but it bashes.

These issues were raised by a dispute over a cartoon pulled from a recent FCFS newsletter. This cartoon, in my view, merely pondered what the world might have looked like had it been free to grow without Christianity. The cartoon had an expletive in it. The foul word should have been pulled, not the entire car-

toon. The editor admitted that his decision to pull the cartoon stemmed largely from the fact he is a “moderate” and wants no part of Christian bashing.

We are a voice for the free-thought movement -- whether we want to be or not -- by virtue of the fact we are one of the largest freethought groups in Florida. Watering down that voice with a moderate tone is hurting our movement.

The one thing we cannot afford to do is dilute our message.

Sam Harris writes in *The End of Faith*, “Religious moderates are, in large part, responsible for the religious conflict in our world, because their beliefs provide the context in which scriptural literalism and religious violence can never be adequately opposed.”

Secular moderates are causing similar problems. I’m not saying secular moderates are bad, just that their perception of harsh criticism as a liability to our movement must be reassessed.

Organized religion is moving ever deeper into the world of

politics. While the religious right is busy attacking science, banning homosexual weddings, denying women their right to choose, flying planes into buildings and rewriting our Constitution, we are busy arguing that we don’t want to hurt anyone’s feelings. We must compromise on our definition of Christian bashing without watering down our message to the point where we make no point at all. The FCFS has been largely passive since its inception. We can no longer be passive.

We are in a war on terror, but what most people miss is that the root of the terror is religion. We are in a war with religion, and the time to sit quietly has passed. I’m not saying we should become church-burning fanatics. But we must develop powerful arguments that deal with taboo issues in an assertive manner.

The one thing we cannot afford to do is dilute our message. We owe it to Socrates, Giordano Bruno, Galileo, Thomas Paine, and other freethinkers, many of whom paid the ultimate sacrifice, to carry the torch. Whether we intended it or not, our free-thought worldview has put us in a league of extraordinary human beings. We cannot take up where they left off without fighting fire (and brimstone) with fire.



First Coast Freethought Society 2005 Events

July	11- Monthly meeting	17- Book discussion group	26- Social at Steak and Ale
August	15 - Monthly meeting	21- Book discussion group	23- Social at Steak and Ale
September	12- Monthly meeting	18- Book discussion group	27- Social at Steak and Ale

Gimme that red-state religion

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d01.html) are the cultural and philosophical and in some cases, literal descendents of those hell-fire-and-brimstone-preaching, violence-loving, Ulster-born Presbyterians. The way they see it, they built this country and now they aim to take it back.

Jacksonians have long since shed their ethnic identity and limitations. Jacksonian America now comprises many diverse segments of society, which are united mainly by ideology. You don't have to be a member of their gene pool or even their religion to join the club. You simply have to espouse their ideals—the more ebulliently, the better.

The Jacksonian electorate reveres violence as a solution to difficult problems, a machismo-

style code of honor (and its accompanying jingoist rhetoric), rugged individualism, anti-intellectualism, anti-urbanism and knee-jerk nationalism.

Though there are some non-religious Jacksonians, religion particularly the evangelical born-again variety, plays a large role in their official worldview and always has. In order to win the substantial Jacksonian vote (today about 40 million), a U.S. political leader must brandish a gun in one hand and a bible in the other.

The more rabidly religious Jacksonians advocate a strict Calvinist societal model: theocracy. They see nothing wrong with this and in fact openly oppose what they feel is the spurious concept of separation of church and state.

This is the point where Jeffersonian and Jacksonian indi-

vidualists drastically diverge. Even though Jacksonians share Thomas Jefferson's appreciation for rugged individualism and his nostalgic anti-urbanism, most notably embodied in country music, they clearly are not fans of Jefferson's ideas on secular government nor of free speech.

Ultimately, there are striking and very scary similarities between the Calvinist form of theocracy and the Fascism that took hold in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s: Both revere a messianic personality as leader, and both are authoritarian systems that demand unquestioning obedience.

Like it or not, these extremely dangerous ideas are experiencing a powerful resurgence in our country, and are part and parcel of the red-state revolt already underway.



Fred Flintstone Rides the Bronto Again *(Continued from page 3)*

Similarly orientated is the Museum of Creation being built in northern Kentucky by Ken Ham, an evangelist from Australia bent on saving souls from any scientific theories he finds in disagreement with his Bible and due to open this year as the largest such museum in the world (see "Ministry uses dinosaurs to dispute evolution", by John Johnston, Cincinnati Enquirer). Ham blames all the woes of the world on the undermining of biblical

authority by belief in evolution, displaying typical theistic obliviousness to the less than utopian existence of people in the centuries when no one openly disavowed any part of the Bible – at least no one who wanted to avoid hideous torture and execution by the oh-so-God-fearing authorities.

Aside from a huge display of an ark complete with dinosaurs among all the other creatures he could fit in, Ham's museum also has a section devoted to warning patrons about the horrors of homosexuality, thereby combining disdain for legitimate science and hatemongering with

typical fundamentalist élan.

Isaac, whom I haven't seen in 15 years, might enjoy visiting these places and trying to convince me that they are based on "real" science in accordance with the supposed revealed truth of the Bible. I still wonder how any otherwise intelligent person in this era can read the Book of Genesis and regard it as anything other than myth. Hovind, Sharp and Ham are each making their special contributions to perpetrating an infantile view of reality not suitable even for a modern Stone Age family.



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 Code
E-mail address	Home phone
	Business phone
Occupation	Areas of interest and/or expertise

How did you hear about us? _____

Membership level (please select one):

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular (\$30/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Carl Sagan (\$50/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Charles Darwin (\$200/yr.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student (\$15/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Bertrand Russell (\$75/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Robert Ingersoll (\$500/yr.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior (\$15/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Thomas Paine (\$100/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime (\$1,000) |

I'm interested in getting involved in the FCFS as a(n):

- General member
 Committee member
 Officer
 Financial supporter

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

Comments: _____

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

Humanist Book Discussion Group

When: 2:00 p.m., third Sunday of each month.

Where: Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd.
519-6500, books are usually in stock.

What: Books planned for discussion:

- **July 17** — May/June issue of *The Humanist*
- **August 21** — July issue of *Skeptic Magazine*

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at 996-1553.

Meeting LOCATION and DATE to CHANGE!

Starting in **AUGUST**, the FCFS will meet at the **Pablo Creek Regional Jacksonville Public Library**, 13295 Beach Blvd., (between Kernan & Hodges) Jacksonville (904 992-7171).

Also starting in August, the meeting day is changing to the **THIRD MONDAY** of each month so the August meeting will be held on the 15th. However, the meeting time will not change. It will remain **6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**

Board Meeting

The FCFS Board Meeting will be held on Monday, July 18, at the **Pablo Creek Regional Jacksonville Public Library**, 13295 Beach Blvd., from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. All members in good standing encouraged to attend.. Your input is valuable.

July Social - All Welcome!

Where: **STEAK & ALE** at Baymeadows and I-95 South

When: **Tues., July 26**, Gather in Lounge 6:00 p.m., Dinner at 7:00 p.m.

RSVP to: **CarrieRen@att.net** (268-8826) by Mon., July 25, if you are attending!

Return service requested

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