

First Coast

# FreeThinker



The newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

October 2005

Volume 3, Issue 10

## FCFS Reaches Out to Community — with Fall Newsletter

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*“The goal of understanding our universe, including the nature of mankind, is surely among the noblest of human aspirations. There is no dignity to be attached to ignorance.”*

Noretta Koertge, History of Science Professor at Indiana University

<http://www.indiana.edu/~koertge/>

Close to 300 copies of a one-time Fall newsletter were distributed to sites in our local area for the purpose of publicizing the First Coast Freethought Society and freethought in general. The newsletters contained selected articles which have appeared in previous monthly issues.

The articles dealt with the meaning of atheism, Southern Baptists, creationism, education, the Constitution, Scientology, and the physical universe. They also included Society activities such as past speakers and topics at monthly meetings, book

selections for the monthly book discussion group, FCFS social activities, and ways to contact the Society should readers be interested.

Selecting locations for leaving the Fall newsletter for members

***The question is:  
Was it worth the effort?***

of the public to pick up was a problem. They should be places likely to be seen by people who would probably be interested, easily accessible, widely distributed across the city, and protected from the weather.

Fall newsletters



were left at the twenty branches of the Jacksonville Public Library, the five Florida Community College sites, Jacksonville University and University of North Florida, Bookmark Bookstore, and Fuel Coffeehouse.

The director of public relations for the public library system gave permission but required that someone at each branch approve place-

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### October 2005 Meeting

Guest speaker:

Greg Warner, editor, Associated Baptist Press news service

**“Understanding the Fundamentalist Mind”**

Monday, October 17, from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. (Please be on time!)

**Pablo Creek Regional Jacksonville Public Library**

## 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/magazines planned for discussion:
- October 16 — *Atheism: The Case Against God* by George H. Smith
  - November 20 — *The Happy Heretic* by Judith Hayes

Why do people see images of the Virgin Mary in their waffles? Why do people pray and why don't they do other equally effective things like rubbing a small stuffed animal for good luck? Why has Mother Teresa been so popular and does that popularity have anything to do with the reality of the things she did?

All these questions and more are addressed in Judith Hayes's lively and proactive book. Hayes writes a monthly column appearing on the internet which tackles a great deal of social, religious and political topics from the perspective of an atheist and a humanist. But more than that, her perspective is laced with a sharp wit and a keen eye for the ironic and humorous elements in all of these stories.

Funny, provocative, and touching, *The Happy Heretic* offers a fresh new perspective on the age-old questions about religious beliefs and institutions. It is not a scholarly analysis, but rather a personal exploration of one person's feelings and experiences. It is the nonbeliever's equivalent to the autobiographical testimonies of faith from believers. The target audience is the nonbelievers who wonder if they are alone in not being religious. As such, it is a fully successful work — it reassures and inspires.

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



### Newsletter Staff

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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 diverse 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.

We welcome submissions. Deadlines are the end of the **THIRD** 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.

## Yes, the freethought community cares about race relations, too!

*The First Coast Freethought Society recently sent the following letter to Charlene Taylor Hill, Executive Director of the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission. Freethinkers often complain that they are being marginalized in American society. It is important that we confront this marginalization at every opportunity.*

*It is also important that we put our money where our mouths are when we say that mankind needs to solve its own problems instead of waiting upon a savior to solve them for us. Playing our part in improving race relations would certainly be a way of showing that freethought is a positive influence on the human condition.*

Dear Ms. Hill,

I read recently in the *Florida Times-Union* ("Faithful asked for help on race" *Florida Times-Union* 7/20/2005) that you spoke about the need for the faith community to start a new effort towards improving race

relations in Jacksonville. The faith community was singled out in the article as having a "built-in willingness to help others." While I agree that there are many religious people who are willing to help others, I believe that you have overlooked an important group of people in Jacksonville who believe in improving race relations and are willing to help make this happen. You should consider

***There is a long history of support for human rights within the freethought community.***

reaching out to the freethought community in Jacksonville for help in improving race relations in our city.

Freethinkers reject tradition, authority and dogma as the basis of their beliefs. Instead, they rely on reason and science to establish what is true. This philosophy is represented

in Jacksonville by the First Coast Freethought Society whose membership includes atheists, agnostics, rationalists, skeptics and humanists from all walks of life and experience. As noted in the Affirmations of Humanism (visit our website, <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/slow/affirmation.htm>), we "attempt to transcend divisive parochial loyalties based on race, religion, gender, nationality, creed, class, sexual orientation, or ethnicity, and strive to work together for the common good of humanity."

There is a long history of support for human rights within the freethought community. Feminist and freethinker Elizabeth Cady Stanton along with Lucretia Mott and Susan B. Anthony fought for the woman's right to vote. Freethinker Robert Ingersoll condemned the 1883 Supreme Court decision permitting racial discrimination in public accommodations. Michael Schwerner and Andrew

*(Continued on page 6)*

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## A change would do you good . . .

The First Coast Freethinker has a different look. Converting from "newspaper" style to 8-1/2 x 11 pages affords more flexibility in length and allows us to put in more articles and announcements. That means that we need members and supporters of

this group to submit articles and announcements to fill up the additional pages. Come on. We know that there are some good writers out there. Let us hear your thoughts.

Another change is that an-

ouncements will appear throughout the newsletter instead of on the last page. This way, they are unlikely to be missed by those who do not finish reading the whole newsletter. We hope that everyone likes the changes.



## Fantasy and Morality in Comics and the Bible

Fred W. Hill

I love fantasy. Delving into the realms of imagination provides a brief respite from the responsibilities and recurring horrors of reality. But then I also have a fascination with history and science, attempting to understand reality and human behavior. However much I enjoy escaping into modern fictions or ancient myths on occasion, I remain moored in the real Earth.

Even as an adolescent addict of comics in the 1970s, I preferred those about characters who, however absurd in concept, nevertheless had some grounding in the common frailties and anxieties of real people: characters, in other words, with whom I could somehow identify despite their silly costumes, powers that defied reality or the ridiculousness of the situations they were put in.

Superman and Spider-Man were both characters of pure fantasy; but as a character, Superman was portrayed as too morally perfect, while Spider-Man was continually beset by problems and feelings of grief and guilt.

In the very first published Spider-Man story, *Amazing Fantasy #15*, his beloved uncle was killed as an indirect consequence of his refusal to stop a thief. It was his massive guilt that propelled him to become a crime-fighting hero. Superman bored me, but Spider-Man fascinated me. Still, I never took either of

them, or any of their four-color super-powered kin, too seriously. I always remembered they were nothing more than fantasy.

They were all human inventions used to wrap stories around. The same is true of all the gods and other fantastic beings ever imagined to have existed by ancient Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Scandinavians, and Aztecs, or anyone else – including those modern “peoples of the book,” otherwise known as Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The “book,” of course, is that col-

*... a rational study of the fable of the fall of man related in that third chapter would recognize the numerous moral failures not of Adam or Eve but of God himself!*

lection of stories from over two millennia ago that Christians refer to as the Old Testament of the Bible, a revered text to all three groups.

Much of what is contained in the O.T. is as absurd as anything that can be found in a comic-book or Bullfinch’s *Mythology*. Yet hundreds of millions of people around the world believe every word of it, no matter how absurd or contradictory.

Absurdities abound in the very beginning of the Bible. God

creates light on the first day and the Earth with grass and fruit-yielding trees on the third day but doesn’t get around to creating the original sources of light, the sun and other stars until the fourth day. God creates man and woman and tells them to multiply in chapter one of Genesis.

In the very next chapter, however, an apparently addle-minded God creates man again and later realizes he forgot to create a “helpmeet” for his Adam, and so pulls a rib out of Adam to create a woman, a stunt akin to pulling an I-beam from one skyscraper to create another, slightly smaller skyscraper.

Then, in chapter 3 of Genesis, a talking snake convinces Eve to disobey a command of God and eat a forbidden fruit that would give her knowledge of good and evil. Eve, in turn, convinces Adam to do the same and as a consequence, the snake and all its future progeny must go upon its belly and eat dust, while Adam and Eve are cast out of paradise. Eve is further punished to bring forth children “in sorrow” and be ruled by her husband Adam who, in his turn, is punished to toil in sweat and sorrow, to wrest food out of the cursed ground until the day he dies and returns to the dust out of which he was created.



(Hhmmm...by the logic of this story, shouldn't women therefore revert to a rib out of which Eve was created when they die?)

A rational mind of our era would recognize it all as fantasy, perhaps of a more high-minded purpose than those old Marvel Comics I collected, but nevertheless fantasy. Objective scholars of the Bible know that the contradictory stories of the creation of man and woman are the result of the conjoining of two creation myths into one.

Astronomers now know that the sun existed long before the Earth, and modern biologists know that without the sun there would be no life on Earth; and they know that humans were not specially created but evolved from other species, as did all other known life-forms, and that the very first living things were microscopic creatures probably similar to viruses.

Herpetologists know that while the ancient ancestors of snakes did have legs, and indeed several snake species still have rudimentary legs, no snake ever had the physiological capacity to make a sound approximating human speech. These are facts based on careful study and interpretation of known data, not fantasies based on the fevered imaginations of prophets or myth-makers, ancient or modern.

Further, a rational study of

the fable of the fall of man related in that third chapter would recognize the numerous moral failures not of Adam or Eve, but of God himself! After all, God created Adam and Eve without knowledge of good and evil, thus rendering them incapable of knowing that disobeying his command and eating the fruit that would give them that knowledge was in any way "evil."

Hence, God's punishment, meted out to not only Adam and Eve but to all their progeny as well, is entirely unjust. It is comparable to a parent hitting



an infant for continuing to cry after being told to stop and promising to hit every future descendant of the baby as well; the infant had no way of understanding the instruction it disobeyed, and the descendants are being punished for an action none of them committed. Based on the evidence presented, I would judge that God had not eaten enough fruit from the tree of knowledge to realize it was his

own behavior that was evil, not that of his mortal creations. As a morality tale, the Genesis tale is sillier than any Road Runner cartoon or Marvel Comics whopper.

Truth be told, what ruined the Bible — any version of it — for me, even as a faulty work of literature, was that too many people personally insisted to me that it was all literally true. Having read those opening chapters of Genesis, but also having at least a cursory knowledge of mythology and modern science, I knew it just wasn't so; and no number of threats of eternal damnation or promises of heaven will ever convince me otherwise.

Moreover, as a student of history, I realized that the confusion of fantasy for fact has led to massive human suffering, as wars have been fought over and over again to impose various religious fantasies on others.

Save for catching the occasional big-budget films that have been released recently, I haven't kept up with the exploits of Spider-Man or any other superheroes for many years, but I'm sure he still has his problems; that's part of what has made him a modern iconic hero. Still, he never inspired anyone to commit mass murder on a grand scale in the all-too-real world.

Alas, the same cannot be said for God, who has far more to feel guilty about, even as a character of fantasy.



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Give a man a fish, and you'll feed him for a day. Give him a religion, and he'll starve to death while praying for a fish.

**Yes, the freethought community cares about race relations, too!** (Continued from page 3)

Goodman who were murdered along with James Chaney by Ku Klux Klan members in 1964 Mississippi were freethinking secular Jews. All of this is found in Susan Jacoby's *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* which is a must-read for anyone who wants to understand the contributions to this country made by freethinkers throughout American history.

We would like to invite you to speak at a future meeting of

our group. This way, you can meet all of us while you talk to us about the study circle program and other activities associated with the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission. We meet on the third Monday of the month at the Pablo Creek Regional Jacksonville Public Library. If you are interested, please leave a message at 904-288-6291 at your earliest convenience and we will then contact you about arrangements for your speaking engagement.

We believe that all men and women are really the same underneath their variety of pigmented skins. We believe that everyone deserves the

opportunity to get ahead based on one's talent and hard work without being hindered by racial discrimination. Above all, we support and stand willing to assist the efforts of many in this community to bring people of diverse cultures, races and backgrounds together in order to foster racial unity and understanding. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Susan Allen  
President  
First Coast Freethought Society  
Jacksonville, Florida



## Give back to the community — Teach adults to read!

The First Coast Freethought Society has determined that we, as an organization, need a group project that would make a contribution to the community and provide a sense of purpose to our group. There are 150,000 adults in Jacksonville whose lives are made difficult because they are functionally illiterate.

There are two programs that work with these people in order to make their lives easier by teaching them to read. They are Learn To Read, Inc., and the Center for Adult Learning at the Jacksonville Public Library. It



certainly would be a grand contribution if we had 10 to 15 volunteers from the FCFS to sign up and participate in one of the programs to work with these people. If you are even slightly interested in participating in this program, you may call

Learn To Read at 399-8894 or Tammy Owens, Jacksonville Public Library, 630-2924. They will send you information along with an application. This is a really wonderful way for the members of the FCFS to make a contribution to the community and also to fulfill the purpose of the First Coast Freethought Society as an educational organization.

For further information, please call Wilhelmina Walton, past president, at 642-8798. I hope to hear from many of you very soon!



### First Coast Freethought Society 2005 Events

October	17 - Monthly meeting	16 - Book discussion group	25- Social at Steak and Ale
November	21 - Monthly meeting	20 - Book discussion group	22- Social at Steak and Ale
December	19 - HumanLight Party	18 - Book discussion group	27- Social at Steak and Ale

## Come one, come all! — Freethought Fall Frolic

**WHAT:** Fabulous Freethought Fall Frolic

**WHEN:** Sunday afternoon, October 23, 2005 from 2:00 PM until ?

**WHERE:** Wilhelmina Walton's Backyard Bower of Beauty

**BRING:** A dish to share, your beverage of choice, and **LAWN CHAIRS!!**



If you'd like a suggestion of what to bring or you need directions, contact Wilhelmina at wilwalt@bellsouth.net or call 642-8797. Mark your calendars and plan to attend what is probably the loveliest party the FCFS has all year!



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## FCFS Homeless Again . . .

The First Coast Freethought Society needs to find a new home in 2006!

Effective October 1, 2005, all library branches will be closing at 8:00 p.m. instead of 9:00 p.m. This means that our meetings will end at 7:30 pm. We will, however, remain at San Pablo library for the October and November meetings. Please make every effort to be there no later than 6:30 p.m. because we

must start on time.

If you have any specific suggestions for a meeting place, please let the FCFS board know. Keep in mind the following. The location needs to:

- be somewhat central;
- accommodate at least 50 people - more would be better;
- provide AV equipment;

- have capability for refreshments - nice but certainly not essential;
- have parking; and
- be safe.

The board is open to and grateful for any suggestions you might have. The board sincerely hopes this will be our last move for many years to come.



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## FCFS Reaches Out to the Community (Continued from page 1)

ment also, which all did. Earl Coggins, Ray Pitts, and Hugo Borresen each delivered to a third of the sites. From six to ten copies were left at sites, depending on the judgment of those delivering the newsletters.

When the librarians asked, the trio explained that they had permission to leave the newsletters but had to ask permission, show that money was not being solicited, and stipulate that the newsletters were being delivered only once.

The question is: Was it worth the effort? Time was needed to

decide on content and format, to produce a master copy and have it printed at a cost of 50 cents each and to find people to take the time and gas to distribute.

Time and the response of the public will prove whether producing and distributing the Fall Newsletter to the community was worth the effort.



## The Nominating Committee Wants You!!

The Nominating Committee was appointed at the September 18 Board meeting and is hard at work preparing the slate of FCFS officers for 2006. Elected positions include President,

Vice-president, Secretary, Treasurer, and Parliamentarian. If you are interested in a leadership role, please let Nominating Committee Chair Earl Coggins know right away!

Call (904-519-1809) or write (infidel@bellsouth.net). Voting will be conducted by mail this year. You will find the 2006 ballot in the November newsletter.



## Talk Back

Here are the responses to the last Talk Back question, *What do you see as the biggest obstacle to the spread of secular humanism throughout the world?*

Wilhelmina Walton states, "I see ourselves as the biggest obstacle to the spread of secular humanism. Unless we make ourselves known, secular humanists are destined to remain invisible. Starting in our own community, the FCFS needs to take a page from the book of blacks, gays, and women who made their presence known by speaking out in nonviolent ways. No one will do that for us!"

The FCFS needs a publicity committee. We need to speak out on current issues to the newspapers, radio and television. Curtis Wolf is currently examining how best to improve our web page in order to attract

other nonbelievers and potential nonbelievers to our group. The issue of Lon Beville protesting the lighted cross on the water tower in Starke would be a great opportunity for a press release from the FCFS, wouldn't it? We need someone to handle that.

The FCFS is incorporated as an educational organization. Jewell Kross is making a very worthwhile contribution towards achieving our purpose by leading a monthly humanist book discussion group. We need a press release informing the public about the book discussion group. Soon, some of our members will be involved in the Learn to Read project, here in town. Is there something YOU could do? Think about it."

Curtis Wolf states, "Religious thinking appears to be nearly universal among our species.

Whether it is hardwired into our brains or it is cultural memes passed down from generation to generation, it has been very difficult to eradicate. Only in Europe have we had considerable success. This tells us that the elimination of the religious mindset is possible. However, science needs to understand the root cause of religious thinking so that we can evolve away from a way of thinking that has held us back for thousands of years."

This month's question:

***Do you believe that new Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts will be an impediment to the separation of church and state and why?***



## October Social - All Welcome!

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

**WHEN:** Tues., October 25, Gather in Lounge at 6:00 p.m., Dinner at 7:00 p.m.

**RSVP:** CarrieRen@att.net (or 268-8826) by Mon., October 24, if you are attending!

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

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

2005 Membership application



<b>Name</b>		<b>Date</b>	
<b>Home address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Zip Code</b>
<b>E-mail address</b>	<b>Home phone</b>	<b>Business phone</b>	
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Areas of interest and/or expertise</b>		

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: \_\_\_\_\_

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 nonreligious of Northeast Florida, to promote freethought and secular humanism, to provide an opportunity for agnostics, atheists, skeptics and other freethinkers to exchange ideas.

**Meetings**

The FCFS meets the third Monday of each month at the Pablo Creek Regional Jacksonville Public Library, 13295 Beach Blvd. (between Hodges and Kernan Blvd.), Jacksonville, Florida 32246. (904) 992-7101. Meeting time: from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

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# Can the Bible Improve Marriage?

Christian fundamentalists want to control many aspects of everyday life, including marriage. They claim to want better marriages and fewer divorces. If we use the Bible as a guide, here are some guidelines for improving marriage in the United States:

- Marriage in the United States shall consist of a union between one man and one or more women and a few concubines on the side (Genesis 16:3, Genesis 25:1-6). Note that Abraham is never condemned by God for his polygamous marriages.
- A marriage shall be considered valid only if the wife is a virgin. If she is not, she shall be executed (Deuteronomy 22:13-21).
- Marriage of a Christian and a non-Christian shall be forbidden (2 Corinthians 6:14).
- Since marriage is for life, neither the Constitution nor the constitution of any state, nor any state or federal law shall be construed to permit divorce (Mark 10:2-9).
- If a married man dies without children, his brother shall marry the widow. If he deliberately does not give her children [spills his seed on the ground], he shall die (Genesis 38:6-10).
- The father shall choose a husband for his daughter (Exodus 22:16,17).
- A female virgin not engaged to be married who is raped shall marry her attacker. The only punishment for the rapist is that he must pay the father fifty shekels and never divorce the woman (Deuteronomy 22:28,29).

Return service requested

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.  
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