

Fall 2005

Our Motto: "To question is the answer."

## Are You A Freethinker?

Earl Coggins, Founder First Coast Freethought Society

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**W**hat is a Freethinker? Where do they hang out? Where do they come from? Why all the fuss?

Freethinker implies there might be nonfreethinkers, doesn't it? It also implies that perhaps there was or still might be a time in which the freedom to think had no place in human civilizations. Or perhaps it implies there once was a price to pay if one wanted to think freely. Maybe there still is.



orthodox thought" and defines **free-thinker** as "one that forms opinions on the basis of reason independently of authority, esp: one who doubts or denies religious dogma."

In the beginning (no pun intended) freethinkers were in the business of questioning the claims and beliefs of the government and its half-brother, religion. You see, prior to the formation of our country, both were usually integrated in a love-hate, dysfunctional setting of behind the scenes, backstabbing competition for control of the masses.

As the pattern-seeking life forms that we humans tend to be, paupers, serfs, and even peasants could

see that each new religion constituted a rejection of a previously held set of religious beliefs. As life forms who also seek pleasure and attempt to avoid pain wherever possible, the tyranny of the old world religions, which included crusades, inquisitions, ethnic cleansing, and witch burnings, wasn't terribly difficult to reject. Having said that, it's easy to see that there is an element of common sense in freethinking.

Freethinkers take advantage of the freedom to think independently, as opposed to believing everything they hear. In other words, freethinkers think for themselves. They don't usually follow the status quo, unless it's something a freethinker has thought long and hard about and says, "Okay, I can go along with that."

By now you're probably asking, "So freethinkers aren't religious?" Good question! Now you're freethinking!

Some are and some aren't. There are many

### Einstein speaks!

*"I do not believe in the immortality of the individual, and I consider ethics to be an exclusively human concern with no supernatural human authority behind it."*

Albert Einstein

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word **freethinker** as "one who refuses to submit his reason to the control of authority in the matters of religious belief; a designation claimed especially by the deistic and other rejecters of Christianity at the beginning of the eighteenth century."

*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* splits the term into two words as **free thought** and defines it as "free thinking or un-

examples of freethinkers in our history, going back to the Greek philosophers. Socrates said the unexamined life was not worth living. It's highly likely that he meant concepts, theories, politics, and religion must all be scrutinized. He was actually just abiding by the First Coast Freethought Society's motto, "To Question Is The Answer!"

There are examples of religious freethinkers who changed the course of history. One of the most famous that comes to mind would be Martin Luther. Many of us know that in the beginning, Catholicism was the only version of Christianity. Martin Luther, a member of the Catholic clergy, changed all that. He rebelled, after thinking about the logic behind the concepts of Catholicism, and helped create the Protestant Reformation. As great as it was to have someone not only challenge one of the world's greatest powers, but actually succeed with that challenge, Luther went on to create a religion with just as many shortcomings as Catholicism, including a brand of anti-Semitism that actually went right along with Catholicism. Martin Luther flirted with freethought, but never really got the freedom part right, which is its true essence.

But there's more to it than just the freedom part. Freethought is more of a procedure than anything else. It is closely aligned with the scientific method.

It's difficult to imagine a freethinker who does not support the scientific method, which is what science is all about. The scientific method uses empirical

evidence as the foundation for any claim concerning the workings of nature, truth, the cosmos, the universe, whatever you want to call it, along with the caveat that new evidence may come along that completely negates previously held beliefs. Some may see this as a threat, but to a freethinker it's common sense.

Most people will look both ways before crossing the road. They'll check the depth of a body of water before diving in head first. What they're doing is collecting objective evidence before concluding that it's okay to do those things without being in any danger. Scientists use the same method. Freethinkers be-

***"What is so terrible about admitting that we simply don't know yet?"***

lieve that belief in supernatural claims should also be held to the same standards.

Go ahead and say it . . . "Why is religion such a difficult thing for a lot of freethinkers?" It's not religion, per se. It's how religion gets treated and used. Most freethinkers believe strongly that religion should be held to the same standards as any other group claiming to have knowledge about the mechanisms guiding the way in which our universe works.

It should be perfectly obvious to anyone who has studied most religions that they all too often can be political as opposed to cosmic and emotional as opposed to rational – all the more reason

to keep them separate from government.

Does this mean that freethinkers "think" they have all the answers to life's most serious questions, like "Where did we come from? Where are we going? Why are we here?"

No! But freethinkers want an even playing field for any attempt at answering those questions, with rules that apply to everyone. The scientific method is the perfect source for such a field of play because all it asks is that each player have evidence to support a claim.

Freethinkers, like most scientists, believe that we are just now reaching the threshold, the door, if you will, to unlocking some of the mechanisms guiding the underlying engines of the universe that have yet to be discovered. As to where we came from, where we are going, and most importantly, why we are here, I think most freethinkers would say, "What is so terrible about admitting that we simply don't know yet?"

Okay, freethinkers are like people from Missouri, the "Show Me" state, which is really saying, "Prove it to me with evidence or I'm not going to believe you."

Don't believe me? Want me to prove it? Good! That's the way it should be!

This is what the First Coast Freethought Society is about. Asking questions. Looking at evidence that supports the answers offered to these questions. Making up our minds based upon this evidence as well as our own reason. Asking more questions . . .



## More About Us!

### Monthly Meetings

Looking for a mind-stimulating evening? Come listen to speakers on a variety of topics of interest to freethinkers. We also hold moderated discussions as a lively alternative that provides variety to our meetings. The meetings take place at **Pablo Creek Regional Jacksonville Public Library** on the third Monday of the month. (Meetings are free and open to the public.)

Past meetings have included the following speakers and topics:

Rona Brinlee	“Banned Books”
Erich Freiberger, PhD	“A Brief History of Just War Theory”
Anthony M. Rossi, PhD	“The debate between evolution and ‘creation science’”
Ellen Wagner, PhD	“What Is the Good Life?”

### Humanist Book Discussion Group

What a great way to spend the afternoon — sitting around and discussing a good book! The discussion starts at 2 p.m. on the third Sunday of the month. The location for the discussion is **Borders Books at 8801 Southside Blvd.**, Jacksonville, Florida. Please call (904) 519-6500 for directions.

Books discussed at previous discussions:

*Why People Believe Weird Things* by Michael Shermer  
*Age of Reason* by Thomas Paine  
*Best of Robert Ingersoll: Selections From His Writings and Speeches*  
Robert E. Greeley, ed.  
*The Philosophy of Humanism* by Corliss Lamont

### Dinner and Socializing

Humanist just want to have fun, too! We gather every fourth Tuesday of the month at the **Steak and Ale**, near the intersection of Baymeadows and I-95 South. Contact us for more information about the Dinner and Social.

### Web site/Contacts

[www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org). (Web site under construction.)

E-mail: [firstco@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:firstco@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org)

Voice mail: 904-288-6291

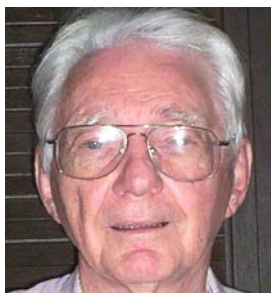
Snail mail: First Coast Freethought Society  
PO Box 550591  
Jacksonville, Florida 32255-0591



# Baptist Leader Declares War

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].

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

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

was founded on the ministry of W.A. Criswell, a true Bible thumper who 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 worldview 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.

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 United for 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, Land 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.”



## Strayer Debates Creation — Another Hovind Debate Experience

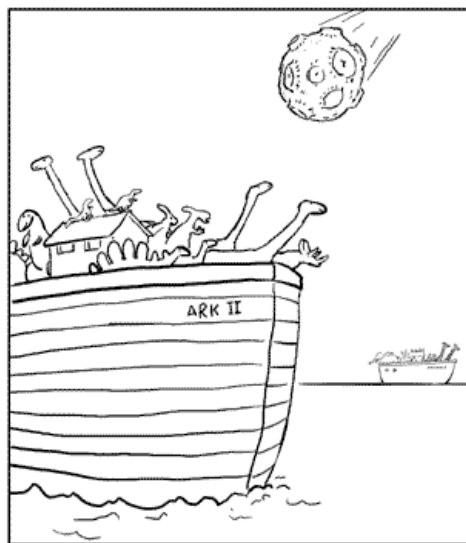
**Jim Strayer, biologist  
Ormond Beach**

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

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

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

Each side has a twelve-minute opening statement. I did it for our team. My idea was to spend just six minutes on the definition of evolution, listing the stages of natural selection, showing how the earth is proven to be old, and the sciences used to prove evolution. It is possible, and I did it. Then I followed



***What really happened to the dinosaurs?***

with six minutes showing the Bob Jones University and A Beka creation biology textbooks. This was to show that there are no scientific references in them and that they use the Bible as a source of scientific evidence. I then read from Supreme Court cases that state creation is not a science, but a religion.

The next hour and a half was Hovind showing slides of things like a cow evolving into a whale, or dogs always begetting dogs. Almost all of my responses were an attack on creation science. I did not spend much time defending evolution. When I did, I usually went the DNA route. I brought up the creationist belief that thorns and toothaches are caused by Adam and Eve's fall from grace, there have never been any fossils found of a cockatrice or a unicorn (two animals that are mentioned in the Bible), that the Bible mentions dragons 17 times, that radioactivity was caused by the fall from grace, and several other points that have no relationship to science but are commonly taught in creation schools.

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

rematch the following day. I just laughed. [Note: There is a three-hour DVD of the debate available for the cost of postage

and handling. If you are interested, please contact the First Coast Freethought Society at the e-mail address, the post

office box, or the phone number (904-288-6291) given in "More About Us" on page 3 of this newsletter. Ed.]



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## My (Brief) Life in the Bush of Scientologists (or Lessons on the Road to Freethinking)

Fred W. Hill

**T**he night they put their sights on me, I made a great target. It was 1984, when I was 21 and had recently dropped out of San Jose State University due to a deepening depression, crippling social anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and confusion as to what to do with my life. It had been another grueling day at my dead-end job at the Brothers' Pizza Galley, and I was relaxing in the small apartment I shared with my alcoholic mother, when I heard the knock on the door. I opened the door to find two nicely dressed young men whom I had never seen before standing in front of me.

They asked if they could just take a few minutes of my time to tell me about a questionnaire that they were passing out. "Well, sure," I warily but politely responded. They handed me some papers which as they explained contained questions designed to elicit responses from which a unique personality profile could be made. I could answer the questions at my leisure, and then call the number provided for information on how to receive a free evaluation. Admittedly I was very intrigued and it didn't seem that I had anything

to lose. So I agreed. Unbeknownst to me, I had just had my first encounter with Scientologists.

Before then, I had never heard of either Scientology or of its founder, L. Ron Hubbard. So when I visited their building for the evaluation, the name of the organization meant nothing to me. Oh, yes, as it was explained to me by a pleasant female evaluator, this is a group dedicated to helping people better their lives through "proven scientific methods" which will enable them to overcome negative mental blocks that prevent them from achieving their full potential. It wasn't exactly news to me when she explained to me that my profile indicated I had several psychological handicaps that were obviously weighing me down.

We can help you, she assured me, through the teachings of L. Ron Hubbard, all outlined in his book, *Dianetics*, which, she insisted, I urgently needed to read. But if I really wanted to improve my life, I needed to sign up for the courses of study in *Dianetics* offered at this branch of Scientology. At this point they were emphasizing the "science" of Hubbard's teachings and making no reference to its religious aspects yet. Somehow, it all

seemed very reasonable to me. I knew I was going nowhere in my current situation and wanted to change. I

wanted to overcome my shyness, to make more friends, to find love. Scientology seemed a means to this end. I got out my checkbook and spent about three hundred dollars on books and courses. I was vulnerable, I had some extra cash, and they were reeling me in with finesse.

And so for the next two months I attended the course, four hours a night, one day a week. It was a friendly atmosphere, and I got to know a very attractive young woman and actually worked up the nerve to ask her to go out with me to a concert – the first time I'd ever asked any woman out on anything even resembling a date. Yes, I had been that shy as a teenager. Shockingly, she agreed to go with me. I was elated.

And the instructors told me that I exhibited great potential and thought I'd be ideal for a job with the group as their Communications Officer. Very flattering! The prospect of taking the



job filled me with some anxiety but I thought at the least I would give it a try, since it was a great opportunity that would at least look better on a resume than “cook” if I ever hoped to find better job prospects. Yes, things seemed to be looking up for me.

Even so, there were aspects of Scientology that troubled me. I was irritated by constant efforts to get me to buy more books and very expensive tapes of L. Ron Hubbard’s lecture series and pay high fees for more classes. Do they think I’m made out of money, I wondered.

Moreover, I discovered that my primary task as Communications Officer was to pester other members of the church to write letters to potential recruits, to get more fresh blood in. Every day I had to ensure more letters went out than the day before. I had to meet ever rising quotas. I quickly came to hate it. I was also growing increasingly suspicious of how they all seemed to think that L. Ron Hubbard had the answers to everything.

And I noticed that despite all the vaunted claims for how Scientology would make us all better, happier people, several decades-long Scientology adherents I came to know didn’t seem all that much happier or well adjusted than neophytes or “gentiles” as Scientology called new converts.

Everything came to a head on the day I got my first paycheck. It was much smaller than

I had anticipated for all the hours I had put in. I protested, stating I could not live on such meager pay, that I had car payments, rent and other bills to pay. I was reminded that Scientology is a religious organization and could not afford to pay much (oh, but I silently countered, too polite to say it out loud, that all those exorbitant prices for the books, tapes and classes must be going to help L. Ron Hubbard live like a king with his mansions, yachts, and fancy cars).

***They were trying to suck me in completely, to render me economically and emotionally dependent on them.***

You should sell your car, they suggested, move in with other Scientologists, and become closer with the group.

Externally, I acquiesced; internally, I stewed. The fog was lifting. They were trying to suck me in completely, to render me economically and emotionally dependent on them. Yes, don’t worry about life, L. Ron has already done the hard thinking for you, you just have to pay for the honor of receiving gradual glimpses of his oh so benevolent insights.

As of yet, I was not familiar with the term “freethinker,” but still I disliked this obvious at-

tempt to reign in my thinking. I may have been looking for some sort of guidance, but I loathed overbearing authority. Despite my terrible youthful naivety and self-doubts, I was no longer fooled into believing that Scientology had anything at all to do with real science. At last, I was ready to take the hook out of my mouth and swim free.

However, I feared confrontation. I didn’t want to argue with them. I didn’t want to discuss why I wanted to leave. I just wanted to leave. And so I told them I was going out for lunch, drove off and never went back. Conveniently, my mother and I left our old apartment that same week to move in with her new husband. Later, I found out members of the church did go to the apartment looking for me, but they never found my forwarding address.

Since then, I learned much more about Mr. Hubbard and his adherents, enough to become convinced that Hubbard was a greedy, manipulative megalomaniac who cynically contrived Scientology for no other purpose than to make himself fabulously wealthy and obtain a flock of potentially dangerous sycophants to sing his praises, feed his ego and do anything to silence any critics.

In 1984, I was not quite yet the avowed freethinker that I am now, but I was at least far enough along to break free of L. Ron’s sick but growing cult without having incurred too much damage.



# The Proper Role of Education

Curtis Wolf

**O**n February 20th, an article by Matt Crenson titled, “Children caught in the crossfire of culture wars” appeared in the *Florida Times-Union*. In the article, the reporter wrote that “in America’s culture wars, school children are on the front lines.” The battles fought on the front lines involve what school children are taught about science, sex, and religion.

What is the proper role of the educator in teaching about these and many other subjects? I believe that the teacher should teach the consensus of experts in the academic subject area. If there is no consensus on a specific controversy within the subject area, then the prevailing theories should be presented. What should not be presented is the teacher’s pet theory masquerading as the final word on the subject. This does not mean that the teacher cannot present his or her point of view. But if it is not the scholarly consensus on the controversy, the teacher should clearly identify it as his or her own personal belief and be honest enough to acknowledge that it is outside of the mainstream. To do otherwise is intellectual hubris.

Does this mean that students should be spoon fed the prevailing wisdom without questioning its supporting premises? I believe in critical thinking. No student should ever be taught to accept without question anything on the basis of authority and sa-

cred dogma. This violates one of the basic axioms of freethought: That all knowledge should be tested by evidence and reason.

However, it is important that teachers and students understand that before they can question conclusions reached by experts in an academic field, their criticisms must rise to the sophistication of the arguments and evidence used to justify these conclusions. Experts spend several years of their lives seeking PhDs and then spend even more years in their fields doing research and publishing their findings which are then probed for weaknesses by their peers in

***... before they can question conclusions reached by experts in an academic field, their criticisms must rise to the sophistication of the arguments and evidence used to justify these conclusions.***

the field. Hopefully, these findings will help lead to a consensus among the experts. Otherwise, more research is needed. This amount of effort should not be taken lightly.

We must understand that critical thinking requires sufficient knowledge before it can come to valid conclusions. It was absurd for the Cobb County school board to put stickers on science textbooks which supposedly call for critical thinking and

open minds. Most students do not have adequate knowledge of biology or the scientific method to make sound assessments of the theory of evolution. It is doubtful that the limited time given to evolution in high school will be sufficient for students to properly evaluate the evidence for or against evolution.

Instead of dismissing the conclusions of experts when these conclusions do not fit into their belief systems, teachers and students should be encouraged to get their own PhDs and do the kind of research that changes the minds of the experts concerning a particular idea. Only when they convince the experts that their conclusions are wrong and that a new consensus is needed should this new consensus reach the classroom.

The failure to do this is why many biologists are furious with Intelligent Design proponents. As noted in the *T-U* article, even Discovery Institute’s John West recognizes the wisdom of proving Intelligent Design before teaching it in public schools.

Human knowledge is not a popularity contest. What is taught in public schools should be based on the conclusion of experts whose hard work in an academic field should be recognized by teachers and students no matter how much they personally disagree with them.





## Is the U.S. Constitution Christian?

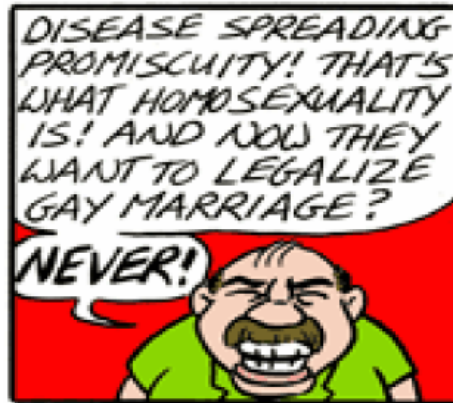
Hugo Borresen

Is the Judeo-Christian heritage the foundation of our democracy? Lots of Christians think so, but they are wrong. The U.S. Constitution is the basis of our government. It mentions religion only twice: Article VI states that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States” and the First Amendment provides for freedom of religion (as well as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the right to assemble). The rest is secular, defining power and distributing it among the branches of government.

If it were Christian, the Constitution would refer to God and would rule on religious questions as state constitutions do. The most important features of the federal government do not appear in the Bible: 1) separation of powers among the three branches of government; 2) a two-chamber legislative branch (i.e., congress); 3) the different modes of representation of the two chambers; 4) a limited executive branch; 5) an independent judiciary branch; and 6) a complex system of checks and balances. Nothing like this appears in the Bible.

Instead, the Bible describes judges and kings who were both lawmakers and judges. Laws were not separated as secular and religious. There is no bicameral legislature mentioned in

Freethunk!



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the Bible, nor is an independent judiciary.

The New Testament does not contain a model government. One verse is sometimes cited as religious influence: “For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our law-giver, the Lord is our King; he will save us.” (Isaiah 33:22) In contrast, the Constitution has an elected executive, not a king. The Bible places the three branches under the Lord.

As for the Ten Commandments, the Constitution repudiates the first two by allowing the freedom to worship gods other than Jehovah and to make graven images; it is silent on blasphemy, breaking the Sabbath, dishonoring parents, mur-

der, adultery, stealing, false witness, and coveting.

The Constitution’s oath of office (Article II, section 2) is a secular “oath or affirmation.” It has no religious references and need not be taken on the Bible. “So help me God” is voluntary and was added later.

The Constitution is so secular that it allows non-Christians to serve in federal offices and does nothing to promote Christianity. If the Constitution were Christian, it would have mentioned God and Bible verses many times. Interestingly, the Constitution was denounced by the more religious colonial citizens for being too secular. (members.tripod.com)



# Is Humanity Destined for the Stars or the Dark Ages?

**T. L. Loucks, PhD, FCFTS  
member, physicist, author**

**W**e've learned a lot in recent years about our fascinating universe: It counts everything in billions, it's a hazardous place to live and yet, paradoxically, it readily synthesizes life. We see solar systems being born and dying almost daily throughout the universe, and from this process ironically come the chemical elements themselves, the ones throughout the universe and in our bodies.

These chemical elements are amazingly well-suited for the evolution of complex forms of life. Further, we know that the organic precursors of life, the polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, are widely distributed in space and eager to form RNA and simple living organisms like bacteria—our earliest ancestors.

Our universe is paradoxical, readily creating and destroying life. The real game, it seems, for any conscious life form that finds itself in this precarious situation is to learn quickly as much as it can about the universe in order to improve the odds of its survival.

Closer to home, our own Sun is already middle aged at five billion years. We can't stay here forever because it will eventually explode, taking us and the other planets with it. By sheer luck, our first star happened to have a

relatively long life (10 billion years), but in order to survive we must begin our nomadic migration from star to star as soon as we have the knowledge.

We made it to the semi-finals of this "real game" through a combination of good luck and fitness—but mostly luck. Our ancestors, all the way back to the sea worms, managed to avoid dozens of major extinctions. In most cases, these survivors were not the dominant species. Our



ancestors were as unremarkable as the marsupials that scurried underneath the dinosaurs, or the fish that walked on their fins to avoid competition with the more successful predators in the seas; or for that matter, the ape that learned to walk on two hind legs and carry a club, and that later learned to speak, write, and do mathematics.

We also had some good luck in our choice of a planet: Earth is an ideal distance from the Sun, giving us a nice orbit—not too hot and not too cold—at least for now. The atmosphere here is both stable and hospitable, and we have more than our share of

water, the magical elixir of life. Equally fortunate, our Sun has shined steadily for 5 billion years, and life has evolved for 3.5 billion of these. Further, we have recently learned that our Sun is in a relatively safe part of the galaxy, and even our galaxy has a lot going for it compared to some.

"Location, location, location," as they say in real estate.

But it would be foolish for us to bet the future on this string of good luck. We know, for example, that our weather, problematic as it can be at times, is in a rare temperate period between recurring ice ages. We also know that both super volcanoes (like the one that scientists are monitoring at Yellowstone Park) and huge asteroids have led to major extinctions in the recent geological past. They will

certainly be part of our future, whether we like it or not, along with rapidly evolving viruses and bacteria.

The long-term astronomical and galactic challenges we face are daunting compared to hurricanes, tornadoes and other natural disasters (now including global warming) that command our immediate attention, even compared to world wars. Nevertheless, we are making some progress, especially since we began liberating science from the bonds of religion a few centuries ago. Starting with the Copernican revolution, our scientists have steadily

improved our understanding of the physical laws governing the universe, the laws that will enable our solar migration.

Today, our scientists understand not only mechanics, electricity, and magnetism but also the inner workings of atoms and the nucleus. They also understand the fundamental particles, quantum mechanics, relativity, and the evolution of the cosmos. In our times, at the threshold of the genetics revolution, they will soon understand the molecular basis of life. Scientists at the leading edge of physics and mathematics are searching today for the overreaching principles, such as "string theory," that will, it is hoped, tie many of these ideas together.

The responsibility for migrating to other suns, both the science and the implementation, falls disproportionately on those few individuals who strive to understand the world around them. Representing only a small percentage of humanity today, these rationalists have developed immunities to the sundry religious viruses and are not handicapped by delusions of benevolent gods or an afterlife. Instead of sticking their heads into the sands of superstition, they have accepted responsibility for humanity's survival.

Over the reaches of time, hopefully, the rationalists will multiply as more humans give up the crutches of religion. Cultural evolution, which is much faster than biological evolution, has been a major factor for only the past 35,000 years. We have come a long way

from small bands of hunter/gatherers to large societies in only 10,000 years, and there is every reason to expect this progress to continue. In as little as 3,000 years of cultural evolution, a majority of humans could value their species more highly than race, religion, or nationality.

Along the way, the faithful will worry that without religion humanity will slide inexorably into the dark hole of immorality. Fortunately, we now know from scientific studies that our morality, basically the Golden Rule, evolved with our species long before it was codified into myths by religions around the world. If anything, our morality

***Cures came from science not prayer, as has the food on our plates, the planes we fly. . .***

will evolve further as we place increasing emphasis on our species and our biosphere; as we spend less time defending our faiths, and more time in search of veracity.

Today, however, religious people are limited in the contributions they can make to our solar migration. They fully expect to be saved by their local gods, if not now then sometime in the future; and they are frozen in place by the very kerygmas that bring them comfort. The rationalists will have to go about their research and planning with the masses

maligning them and praying to their various gods.

Religious balm for the masses, however, is a two-edged sword. When empowered, the churches have tried to strangle the very science we will need to find new suns. We do not have to go all the way back to Bruno, Galileo, and the Inquisitions to find scientists and their ideas burned at the stake. The Christians (not to mention Muslims) also fought Darwin's and Einstein's ideas. Since the '20s, they have substituted Bible stories for biology and geology, bringing American science education to new lows, and today they want to ban embryonic stem cell research.

We must remain eternally vigilant of efforts by fundamentalists of all stripes to recombine church and state, sending us not to the stars but back to the Dark Ages. Our renaissance in science during the past 200 years is due in large measure to the American experiment in secular government, and we must rebuild the Jeffersonian wall between church and state every time someone removes a brick. The church has never been as good at either science or government as We the People have, and the pulpit certainly won't find us a new Sun.

The major world religions could, however, make a significant contribution to our eventual migration to new suns. Our limited natural resources, including the environment, are under increasing pressure from burgeoning world population, and most of this can be blamed

on anachronistic church dogmas. We certainly can't get to a new sun on an empty tank, so we need to conserve everything for this journey.

Our only hope as a species is the scientific process and our growing base of tested scientific knowledge. From the perspective of today, we can see the folly of the pathetic believers who carried statues of Jesus and Mary in the streets to combat the virulent Black Plague. Cures came from science not prayer, as has the food on our plates, the planes we fly, and our advanced electronics. Science, not religion, has shown us the mathematical fabric of the universe and created the ever-expanding *Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*. Books like these, not sacred texts from ancient civilizations, will be used to discover and explore new solar systems.

The challenges ahead of us

are daunting but manageable. If we are to have the knowledge and the resources needed for solar migrations, we must first stabilize world populations (hopefully with some reformations from the world religions). At the same time, we must convert our planet to sustainable economies, taking the pressure off of our irreplaceable resources.

Meanwhile some of our scientists, with increased government funding, must continue to buttress our defenses against evolving viruses and bacteria. Others must develop plans for addressing both global warming and the next Ice Age, not knowing for certain which will come first. Still other scientists must accelerate our understanding of the universe and the molecular basis of life; we have only scratched the surface of this knowledge in spite of our amazing recent

progress.

Advances in the sciences will not come without a matching commitment to education. If our species is to have new homes before our Sun explodes, more of us must take the "hardest" courses in college, and the religious pendulum against science must swing the other way if we are to end up in the galactic winners circle.

The real game here on Earth, in spite of what we are being told, is not the conversion of "souls" from one religion to another and the wars spawned by this proselytizing. It is the survival of our species in a crap shoot of astronomical proportions. Hopefully, history will show that a few brave rationalists have already accepted the challenge and that our species is giving new meaning to the ancient word, Sun Day.



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## The Humanist Ten Commandments

**These "commandments" did not come from the top of a mountain, but they represent human reason at its best.**

- I THOU SHALT NOT BELIEVE ALL THOU ART TOLD.
- II THOU SHALT CONSTANTLY SEEK KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH.
- III THOU SHALT EDUCATE THY FELLOW MAN IN THE LAWS OF SCIENCE.
- IV THOU SHALT NOT FORGET THE ATROCITIES COMMITTED IN THE NAME OF GOD.
- V THOU SHALT LEAVE VALUABLE CONTRIBUTIONS FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.
- VI THOU SHALT LIVE IN PEACE WITH THY FELLOW MAN.
- VII THOU SHALT LIVE THIS ONE LIFE THOU HAST TO ITS FULLEST.
- VIII THOU SHALT FOLLOW A PERSONAL CODE OF ETHICS.
- IX THOU SHALT MAINTAIN A STRICT SEPARATION BETWEEN CHURCH AND STATE.
- X THOU SHALT SUPPORT OTHERS WHO FOLLOW THESE COMMANDMENTS.

