

First Coast

FreeThinker



The newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

April 2006

Volume 4, Issue 4

Fundamentalists Threaten Democracy

Inside this issue:

- CFI Conference 3
- Secular Coalition 3
- Bonobos Extinct? 5

Hugo Borresen

The Religious Right seeks to bring God's law into civic and political life. This conservative evangelical vision of God's law is a theocracy which will limit participation of non-believers and religious minorities.

Churches will provide social services. The money they receive will permit preaching, proselytizing, and religious discrimination.

The Christian faith will be an important qualification to hold public office. Public policies will be influ-

enced by this morality. Their purpose is to restore this nation to its "early Christian roots."

In an Americans United interview with Esther Kaplan about *With God on Their Side*, which is one of the best

education in Africa. National Right to Life got money to set up storefronts to pressure pregnant women not to choose abortion. Phyllis Schlafly's group, Concerned Women for America, will combat

sex trafficking although this lobbying group has no expertise in this activity.

Political adviser Karl Rove holds

weekly conference calls with Christian Right leaders who also hold strategy meetings with conservative Republicans in Congress called the Values Action Team. Leaders like James Dob-

... the Christian Right is more than a religion; it is a movement to rewrite American government.

books dealing with this topic, she pointed out that the present administration has given millions of dollars to Pat Robertson's Operation Blessing and to Franklin Graham's Samaritan's Purse for teaching abstinence-only as sex

(Continued on page 7)

"I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their Legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between Church and State."

--Thomas Jefferson, in Letter to the Danbury Baptists, 1802.

April 2006 Meeting

David Schwam-Baird, Ph.D., Political Science Professor
Department of Political Science and Public Administration, UNF

"What the Forefathers Really Meant By 'Separation of Church and State'"

Monday, April 17, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

(Upstairs in the Sanctuary - Doors open at 6:15)

Unitarian Universalist Church • 7405 Arlington Expressway • Jacksonville, FL

HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP



When: 2:00 p.m., the third Sunday of each month.
Where: Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd., 519-6500, books are usually in stock.
What: Books/magazines planned for discussion:

- April 16, 2006 - *One Planet, One People* by Carl Coon
- May 21, 2006 - *God Versus The Gavel* by Marci A. Hamilton

God Versus The Gavel challenges the pervasive assumption that all religious conduct deserves constitutional protection. While religious conduct provides many benefits to society, it is not always benign. The thesis of the book is that anyone who harms another person should be governed by the laws that govern everyone else and-- truth be told--religion is capable of great harm. This may not sound like a radical proposition, but it has been under assault since the 1960's. Many academics and religious organizations would construct a fortress around religious conduct that would make it extremely difficult to prosecute child abuse by clergy, medical neglect of children by faith-healers, and other socially unacceptable behaviors. This book intends to change the course of the public debate over religion by bringing to the public's attention the tactics of religious entities to avoid the law and therefore harm others.

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at 904-608-7937
JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org



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 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.

Newsletter Staff

Editor:	Hugo Borresen	779-6883
	HBorresen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org	
Layout:	Curtis Wolf	573-3847
	CWolf@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org	
Staff writer:	Fred Hill	358-3610
	FHill@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org	
Proofreader:	Wilhelmina Walton	642-8798
	WWalton@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org	
Proofreader:	Carrie Renwick	268-8826
	CRenwick@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org	

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 at the address above.

Spending Time with Center for Inquiry

Curtis Wolf

The Center for Inquiry Florida conference held March 24 - March 26 was well worth the trip to Tampa. Located in the Clarion Hotel, it provided a combination of interesting speakers and good conversations with fellow infidels. As usual, Center for Inquiry Florida put on a good conference that mixed criticism of pseudoscience with promotion of humanism.

The conference had an international flavor not seen in previous Center for Inquiry Florida conferences. Norm Allen, Executive Director of African Americans for Humanism, summarized the prospects for humanism in Africa. Indian scholar Meera Nanda did the same for humanism in India. Finally, Ibn Warraq, author of *Why I am not a Muslim*, explained that Islam is neither a religion of peace nor a religion of rational enlightenment.

In none of the talks was there overwhelming optimism. It is clear that theocracy is a danger in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. There are also voices for humanism in all of these areas, but it is slow going for reason when religion maintains such a strong hold on people in developing countries.

Penny Higgins gave an entertaining autobiographical account of her conversion from a Mormon apostate to scientist to pro science activist. I had an opportunity to talk to her during the conference, and it was a pleasure

to meet someone who approached life with such an irreverent sense of humor.

Jeannette Madea gave a humorous look at pseudoscience vs. real science. One of the funniest moments is when she showed us how to create a homeopathic remedy for a sour attitude. She took lemons, made juice, and diluted it in water. She proceeded to dilute the lemon juice again and again using a succussion ritual which involves shaking the homeopathic remedy ten times

Having a voice for secular humanism in Tallahassee is an idea that is long overdue.

in three different directions. At one point, she had to put on gloves because the remedy was becoming too "powerful" for her not to protect her hands.

Attorney Eddie Tabash gave a lawyerly defense of atheism's denial of god. It may be a circumstantial case, but it was quite persuasive as long as you expect the case to be judged only beyond a reasonable doubt.

Other talks involved sexual abuse trauma in the military, sex education, life on other planets, and CFI communities. The only disappointing talk involved an interview with St. Petersburg Times columnist Robyn Blumner. What started as a discussion of her coming out as an atheist in her newspaper column became an attack upon political conservatism whether it was of

the religious right variety or not. Unfortunately, the conflation of political liberalism and humanism remains accepted dogma for the secular humanist community.



Finally, I along with Jeannette Madea introduced the audience to the Florida Science Standards Committee. The purpose of the committee is to improve Florida's science standards. I informed everyone of the need for scientific literacy among our youth. Jeannette talked about the Thomas B. Fordham report which gave Florida's science standards a grade of "F." All of this makes it crucial that we influence the process by which the science standards are written.

Before the conference started, the Florida Science Standards Committee met at the CFI Florida office. The meeting ended with four conclusions:

1. We decided to work with the Florida Citizens for Science (<http://www.flcfs.org/index.html>). They have similar interest in the science standards, and there is no reason for them to duplicate our efforts.
2. We need to start an alternative process of improving the standards. The nature of this alternative is still uncertain. It was felt that developing alternative science

standards may be too big a job for our committee. Whatever we do, we need to bring scientifically qualified people into our effort.

3. We need to become more familiar with the science standards revision process to determine how best to influence the process. We also need to become politically sophisticated enough to be effective in influencing the process. We do not want to go through all this effort and be completely ignored by the educational bureaucracy.

4. We need to publicize our effort more effectively. We decided to start with a web site that explains what we are trying to do.

As if I had not spent enough time with Center for Inquiry, I decided to assist Toni Van Pelt in Tallahassee. She and I distributed folders to legislators

points on the Naturopathic Medicine bill (HB 1261). See the legislative bill section in last month's newsletter for more details.



and department secretaries that contained information about Center for Inquiry and its programs. It also contained talking

Lobbying is hard work. My feet hurt so bad at the end of the day that I wished for an out-of-body experience (which I do not even believe in). There were only two of us talking to the staff members for 160 legislators. You feel as if you're working on an assembly line: Make your two minute presentation and then move onto the next legislator. It would be much easier if there were more people going to Tallahassee with Toni. Having a voice for secular humanism in Tallahassee is an idea that is long overdue.



Support the Secular Coalition of America!

Wilhelmina M. Walton

During this past year, something very important happened for secularism in America. That something is the hiring of a lobbyist by the Secular Coalition for America to represent secularism in Washington, D.C. This may just be the most important thing we have done for secularism since the writing of separation of church and state into the Constitution. Now we

finally have a voice supporting the issues that are important to the nonreligious.

At the last FCFS board meeting, the board voted to make a donation of \$200 to help support keeping this representative in the nation's capital. The lobbyist's name is Lori Lipman Brown. We received a very cordial letter from Lori thanking us for our contribution. She has invited any of us who happen to be in Washington to let her

know ahead of time, and she will arrange a constituent lobbying meeting with our representatives.

We encourage you to visit the website of Secular Coalition for America, at www.secular.org. You will be impressed with what they are doing. Contact Lori if you have any concerns. We also encourage a personal donation from members. The Secular Coalition is a501(c)(4) (advocacy) organization.



Goodbye to the Bonobos?

Fred W. Hill

Some of our closest cousins are being eaten to extinction. Literally. Bonobos, an ape native to the rain forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo, have been heavily poached by people for food, as reported in an Associated Press article by Anjan Sundaram (“Endangered bonobo is tasty dinner in the Congo,” *Florida Times-Union*, March 6, 2006). The Congolese who live near the bonobos’ habitat have been eating bonobos for as long as any of them can remember, and they can scarcely believe that the apes could actually be totally wiped out. But then humans have a knack for denying reality until absolutely forced to deal with it.

The known facts are, according to Ino Guabini, a primatologist for World Wildlife Fund, that bonobos in the wild have decreased from an estimated 100,000 in 1984 to approximately 5,000 in 2006. During that same period, the human population in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), formerly Zaire and not to be confused with the neighboring Republic of the Congo, has grown, in rough numbers, from 29.6 million to 60 million (sources: http://www.country-data.com/frd/cs/zaire/zr_appen.html and <http://www.answers.com/topic/congo-country-zaire>). This more than doubling of the local human population in little more than

two decades has occurred despite devastating civil wars and epidemic diseases, including A.I.D.S. The wars have ensured that there was little protection for the bonobos, even in supposed sanctuaries, from poachers who regard the apes as easy sources of meat and trade product. Bonobos reproduce very slowly, females typically giving birth to one infant every five or six years. The ongoing predation by the far more rapidly reproducing humans ensures that if continued at the present rate, bonobos will be extinct in the wild before 2010.

If bonobos go extinct, however, there will be no mystery as to the cause. Human predation and destruction will have done it.

Bonobos were initially confused with common chimpanzees and were not recognized as a separate species until 1929. They are still often referred to as “pygmy chimpanzees” because although both species grow to roughly the same height, bonobos are much slimmer and have narrower shoulders than do chimpanzees (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonobo> for a full description). Having seen the bonobos at the Jacksonville Zoo, I was struck by how closely the bonobos physically resemble humans, even to the extent of walking upright, far more often than chimpanzees do. One bonobo, in

the large naturalistic habitat pit that was his home, looked at the people gawking down at him, stood up tall, stretched out an arm and held up his hand, palm facing out, as if in greeting and turning around so that he could salute everyone.



Unlike chimpanzees which are known to engage in very violent tribal warfare against one another, bonobos are a far more pacific species and are famed, even notorious, for their sexual behavior. As described by Richard Dawkins in *The Ancestor’s Tale* (Mariner Books, 2005, p. 105), “Bonobos use sex as a currency of social interaction, somewhat as we use money. They use copulation, or copulatory gestures, to assert dominance, to cement bonds with other troop members of any age or sex, including small infants.” Of course, that description alone would fill prudish religious fundamentalists with such revulsion they might enlist to wipe out what few bonobos remain, while the “make-love-not-war” crowd might hold up the bonobos’ habits as wonderfully exemplary, save for the pedophilia.

Genetically, bonobos and chimpanzees differ from one another by only 0.7 percent. Humans differ from both of them by only 1.6 percent. In fact, no other currently existing species is more closely related to both

than humans. That 1.6% difference is responsible for various physiological differences, including less prominent body hair, a larger brain and the structure of our larynx, tongue and related muscles which allow us to make a much wider variety of sounds than simians are capable of (see *The Third Chimpanzee*, Jared Diamond, HarperCollins, 1992, p. 55).

Contrary to the common conviction that humans are not descended from apes, the fact is that genetically speaking we *are apes!* Neither bonobos nor chimpanzees are ancestral species to humans – our last common ancestor with them existed approximately six million years ago (see Dawkins, op. cit., p. 107) and although that unknown species was not a bonobo, chimpanzee or human, it was equally related to all three of us and would have been called an ape if it had survived to the present. Diamond argues that logically, based on the standard rules of taxonomy, humans, chimpanzees, bonobos and even the more distantly related gorillas should all be placed in the same genus, *Homo* (Diamond, op. cit, p. 25). It is, to my perception, only due to continued inflated perception of human uniqueness that prevents the vast majority of our species from admitting our actual close relationship with our hairier cousins.

Sadly, the history of human atrocities gives little hope that recognition of our close relationship with bonobos will stop the slaughter. An entirely human

denizen of the Congo rain forests, the pygmies, have also been slaughtered and cannibalized by their neighbors as reported by Eddy Isango (“Congoese Rebels in Cannibal Atrocities,” *The Guardian*, Jan. 16, 2003).

Even the supposedly more civilized Europeans attempted to exterminate peoples deemed “subhuman,” witness the holocausts of World War II and the European conquest of the Americas and Australia, among the most infamous examples. British settlers in Tasmania hunted the natives like wild animals,



though at least a few of the settlers found Tasmanian women comely enough to mate with. There were an estimated 5,000 native Tasmanians in 1803, when English settlement began. By 1874 they were down to 47. The last died in 1876. Children of European men and their Tasmanian concubines were allowed to live and roughly 4,000 of their descendants have survived to the present (see Jared Diamond, “Ten Thousand Years of Solitude,” *Discovery*, March 1993,

p. 57).

Our ancient ancestors were likely also responsible for the extinction of many hominid cousins even more closely related to us than the bonobos, such as the Neanderthals. Whether prehistoric *Homo sapiens* were able to mate with and thus absorbed the dwindling numbers of Neanderthals, or they out-competed them for the same scarce food resources, or even hunted the Neanderthals for food, so some combination of these and other factors is still a subject of much conjecture and debate. It is incontrovertible that humans and Neanderthals were different species, that they shared the same environment for thousands of years, but ultimately the Neanderthals went extinct and the humans have long outlasted them.

If bonobos go extinct, however, there will be no mystery as to the cause. Human predation and destruction will have done it. Perhaps the death of the last bonobo in the wild will be of no direct consequence to most humans, other than to those Congolese who will have to seek out another source of protein from their rapidly shrinking jungles. There are now about 6.5 billion people – about 1.3 million for every wild bonobo. I have often heard claim as to how unique humans are, how morally superior we are to all other creatures because “god made us that way and gave us dominion over the Earth.” I do not buy into that line of thought, but I will grant

(Continued on page 7)

Fundamentalists Threaten Democracy

(Continued from page 1)

son of “Focus on the Family” and Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council have met with President George W. Bush and witnessed signing of legislation such as the Partial Birth Abortion Act. Many right wingers hold posts in the administration.

Medical doctor David Hager was appointed to the Food and Drug Administration Advisory Committee for Reproductive Health. He belongs to the Christian Medical and Dental Association which requires members to sign a statement of faith that the Bible is literally true. In one of his books, he prescribes prayer as treatment for many of women’s illnesses.

He and others voted against emergency contraceptive pills while most of the committee voted in favor of the pills. Hager wrote a dissent with information from God, and the PDA commissioner overrode his scientific staff by claiming data were not available for how adolescents use such pills and therefore rejected their use.

When the government wanted to develop social programs, the Religious Right was skeptical until they got lots of money to participate. They also

were freed of restrictions, so they can now “witness” (proselytize) and refuse to hire Jews, homosexuals, and nonbelievers. One judge upheld this discrimination.

One problem is that these people want to save others for the afterlife rather than improve people’s lives in this world today. One religious intake director of a drug treatment center was unwilling to refer people to secular programs. A woman who taught



“abstinence-only” sex education was unwilling to teach about protection because (she feels), if a woman got pregnant or diseased, she would then know she had done wrong. The administration has given \$1 billion to spread this program in Africa.

What is very disturbing is the attention to detail and the widespread tinkering with public affairs, sometimes in secret. Consider the following:: Appointing very conservative

judges, signing the partial birth abortion law, Bush’s flying to Washington to sign the bill intervening in the end-of-life choice of Terri Schiavo, influencing research to protect embryos, swapping one acre of land in a national park for five acres of private land to preserve a giant cross in the Mohave Desert, selling a creationist book stating the Biblical flood that launched Noah’s ark also created the Grand Canyon, and making the murder of a pregnant woman a two-person crime.

Four conservatives on the Supreme Court threaten to put more Christianity into government. This threatens our democratic rights. The Christian right is mobilized by issues such as gay marriage to turn out voters in greater numbers. These values can be countered by economics values, but the Democrats have failed to put forth a good counter program.

The public may not realize that the Christian Right is more than a religion; it is a movement to rewrite American government. It has seized power to oppose civil rights, equality, pluralism, public health, women’s reproductive rights, and women’s other rights. The rest of the nation needs to take back that power.



Goodbye to the Bonobos?

(Continued from page 6)

that we humans are unique in the shame we should hold for

having such great intelligence yet being so willfully destructive of our own kind, of our wild cousins, and of the very environment

that sustains us all. How soon will it be before the last bonobo waves to us, meaning “good bye, forever?”



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 550591
Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591
(904) 288-6291
<http://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, and to provide an opportunity for agnostics, atheists, skeptics and other free-thinkers to exchange ideas.

Meetings

The FCFS meets the third Monday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida. 32211. (904) 725-8133. Doors open 6:15. Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

COMMITTEES AND CHAIRS

Program Curtis Wolf 573-3847
CWolf@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Audit R. C. Pitts 996-0879
RPitts@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Newsletter Hugo Borresen 779-6883
HBorresen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Membership June Applen 762-0627
JApplen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Telephone Nita Pitts 996-0879
NPitts@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

FCFS OFFICERS

President Carrie Renwick 268-8826
CRenwick@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Vice President Curtis Wolf 573-3847
CWolf@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Secretary Wilhelmina Walton 642-8798
WWalton@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Treasurer Susan Allen, CPA 564-2255
SAllen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

At-Large Earl Coggins 519-1890
ECoggins@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

E-mail Secretary Carrie Renwick 268-8826
CRenwick@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Parliamentarian Herb Gerson 363-6446
HGerson@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Founder Earl Coggins 519-1890
ECoggins@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Finance Susan Allen 564-2255
SAllen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Publicity Jay Mooney 288-6291
JMooney@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Website Mark Renwick 268-8826
MRenwick@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Hospitality Alice Ricker 745-1840
ARicker@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

Long Range Planning Curtis Wolf 573-3847
CWolf@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

April Social - All Welcome!

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

WHEN: Tues., April 25, 2006. Gather in Lounge at 6:00 p.m., Dinner at 7:00 p.m.

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

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

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

2006 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 - 65+ (\$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: _____

Other FCFS Activities

Dinners For Atheists (and Freethinkers, Humanists, Agnostics, etc.)

Sign up to attend or host a dinner yourself. Sign-up sheets will be at the back table at the monthly meetings. For further details on how this works, see page 9 of the February 2006 *Freethinker*, or ask the hospitality ladies at the back table.

Atheist Sunday Morning (or Sunday Morning in the Park)

For those of us seeking more freethought fellowship, conversation and camaraderie, here is an opportunity to get together on Sunday mornings. Contact **John Ruskuski** at ruskuski@ilnk.com or call 904-260-0071.

No Atheist Left Behind (or Are You Going My Way?)

If you are seeking a ride to an FCFS event, contact **Hugo Borresen** at HBorresen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-779-6883.

Humanistic Alert!

If a telephone call to any member, or anyone interested in our group, might serve a purpose-- such as organize a ride to a meeting or serve some other

personal need, please contact Nita Pitts at 904-996-0879 or e-mail pitrymnd@comcast.net. Otherwise, leave a notation on the sign-in sheet at the back table during one of our meetings.

Help us to be aware of the humanistic dimension of our membership and those who share our ideals and to address the needs of our fellow freethinkers.



Happy Third Birthday, First Coast FreeThinker!



First Coast Freethought Society 2006 Events

April	17 - Monthly meeting	16 - Book discussion group	25- Social at Steak and Ale
May	15 - Monthly meeting	21 - Book discussion group	23- Social at Steak and Ale
June	19 - Monthly meeting	18 - Book discussion group	27- Social at Steak and Ale

Return service requested

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
8831 Taurus Circle South
Jacksonville, Florida 32222