

First Coast

FreeThinker



The newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

September 2006

Volume 4, Issue 9

A Day of Faith: Religion or science — Which should we trust to bring down the murder rate?

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Curtis Wolf

On August 12, the Mayor invited the city to “A Day of Faith.” Described by the *Florida Times-*

Union as “a cross between a high school pep rally and a church revival” (“6000 rally against violence,” *Florida Times-Union*, August 13, 2006), the rally against violence brought over six thousand people together at the Veterans Memorial Arena.

Its description as a church revival was right

on the money. There were sermons, prayers and hands raised towards the ceiling in praise to God. Murder was described as the devil’s work. God was invoked to end the murderous rampage raging

nitely in Veterans Memorial Arena at a city spon-



sored event of all things. I’ll say it again. A city sponsored event.

Wow, the First Amendment really took a beating that day. As the American Atheists, Inc.,

pointed out on their web site (<http://www.atheists.org/flash.line/fla1.htm>), the event was pro-

(Continued on page 8)

This is no longer Peyton’s personal religious crusade. As taxpayers, it is now our religious crusade whether we are religious or not.

“Science is what you know. Philosophy is what you don’t know.”

—Bertrand Russell

“The strongest arguments prove nothing so long as the conclusions are not verified by experience. Experimental science is the queen of sciences and the goal of all speculation.”

—Robert Bacon

September 2006 Meeting

Erich Freiberger, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Philosophy, JU

“Philosophical Speculation: What it is, what it has achieved, and why we still need it.”

Monday, September 18, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

(Upstairs in the Sanctuary - Doors open at 6:00)

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:

- September 17, 2006 - *Civil Liberties vs. National Security in a Post 9/11 World* by Katherine B. Darmer, Stuart E Rosenbaum, and Robert M. Baird.
- October 15, 2006 - *Free Inquiry*, Oct/Nov edition.



Free Inquiry is a publication of the Council for Secular Humanism. Its main focus is ethics, philosophy, religion and public policy all from a secular humanist perspective. It promotes rational inquiry, free from authority that does not come from expertise, tradition for the sake of tradition, and orthodoxy that is rigid and not open to criticism.

This publication should be available in all public libraries thanks to the First Coast Freethought Society. Please let the board know if it is not.

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-996-1553.



**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.

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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.

Science Panel Discussion - Will Happen!

Wilhelmina Walton

For those of you who have not yet heard the scuttlebutt, since the first of the year, the FCFS has been working with UNF on co-sponsoring a science information panel discussion program with panelists consisting of UNF science professors. The plans have now come to fruition, and I am very excited to announce that all parties involved have met, are in agreement, and plans are well underway. This program is happening!!!! Yea, team!

On Monday, November 13, from 7:00 to 9:30 p.m., at the University Center of UNF, Dr. Anthony Rossi, Dr. Jay Huebner,

Dr. Matthew Gilg, and Dr. Gordon Rakita will present a science panel discussion titled, **“SCIENCE UNDER SIEGE: The Attack on Evolution.”** This program will provide an opportunity for the educational community, as well as the general public in Jacksonville, to participate in a panel discussion that will clarify the very essential role of teaching evolutionary theory in the classroom. Each panelist, from a different branch of science, will make a presentation, followed by a lively question and answer session with the audience.

It is essential that the general public have the opportunity to understand the reasons why

not teaching evolution is so detrimental. I am just ecstatic that the First Coast Freethought Society has the opportunity to be a part of this program.



The board is counting on every member of the FCFS to set this date aside to attend the program, and we are counting on you to be available to help with various activities that will be necessary to put this program on. This is our chance to show why the FCFS is an important part of this community.



First Coast Freethought Society - Looking at Our Identity

Carrie Renwick

Regarding the injunction against the City of Jacksonville that was filed by the American Atheists in response to the Mayor's "Day of Prayer," an FCFS member asked me, "Why weren't we the ones who sought the injunction?"

Because that is not what we do! That's not what we're about. There are other groups who do that, and of course we are delighted at their victories.

The goal and purpose of the

First Coast Freethought Society as stated in the bylaws, every newsletter issue, the letterhead, and all our literature, is not to instigate legislation - but to support fellow nonreligious persons and to educate. We are incorporated as an educational 501(c)(3) organization, not political. We also strive to be known in the community in a "nonadversarial way" so that nonreligious folks can find us should they feel lost in a sea of religion. We are a voice of reason in this Bible Belt.

If anyone prefers to seek injunctions and be involved in legislative activity, I encourage you

to join the ACLU, AU, or the American Atheists (in addition to staying with us, of course!). The purpose of the ACLU is "advocating individual rights by litigating, legislating, and educating the public on a broad array of issues affecting individual freedom." The American Atheists are "dedicated to defending the civil liberties of atheists and advocate the complete separation of church and state."

In fact, no other group does exactly what the First Coast Freethought Society does, and that's one reason I feel we are so important.



Scientology Revisited (or How to Make a Million Dollars)

Fred W. Hill

L Ron Hubbard reputedly once said at a science fiction convention, "Y'know, we're all wasting our time writing this hack science fiction! If you want to make a million dollars, you gotta start a religion!" As related by scientist and online author Don Lindsay (<http://www.don-lindsay-archive.org/scientology/start.a.religion.html#interview>), there are disputes as to the exact wording and when Hubbard made the statement, though he may have uttered variations several times before proving the veracity of the claim himself, by founding Scientology and collecting a substantial fortune from his devotees.

Of course, Hubbard was not the first nor the last to pull this trick. The founding of new religions or variants of old religions has been one of the recurring events of human history. David Sloan Wilson, in his book *Darwin's Cathedral* (University of Chicago Press, 2002) has argued that humans have an evolutionary disposition for religion, though obviously if that's true the disposition is not quite universal.

But then, in ages past, outspoken religious skeptics have typically been eliminated from the gene pool, meaning they seldom had opportunity to pass on their skepticism by either nature or nurture. These days, Hub-

bard's fanatics don't have the option of exterminating their critics, but have done their best to litigate and otherwise harass them into silence, a specific tactic devised by Hubbard and called the "Fair Game Law." After knowledge of the policy came to light and attracted much adverse attention, Hubbard publicly revoked the policy, presumably with a knowing wink to his followers.

In a previous newsletter article, I described my own experience with Scientology, too fleeting to teach me many of its

At best, none of this is much more outlandish than the more widely accepted nonsense of mainstream Christianity, Mormonism, Islam, Hinduism, etc.

darker "secrets," though long enough to cure me of any inclination to belong to any religion with a disposition to control my life and grab my meager assets. In the wake of recent publicity, Scientology has garnered due to the outburst of celebrity Hubbard devotee Tom Cruise against psychiatry and Isaac Hayes' termination of his long association with the irreverent cartoon series *South Park* as the voice of Chef over an episode he considered insulting to his particular faith, though he didn't seem to mind when other religions re-

ceived their equally deserving skewering, I now revisit the subject to describe some of the specific tactics and loonier beliefs of Scientologists.



Aside from sales of his pseudo-science "sacred" text, *Dianetics*, Hubbard and his church have primarily earned income by means of bait and switch tactics, a scheme by which one product is offered cheaply only as a lure to an attempt to sell a much more expensive item. With Scientology, the lure is a supposedly scientific means to improve one's overall mental state without expensive drugs or psychotherapy. Once the inductees, referred to as "pre-clears," have gone through some relatively inexpensive initial "processing," run essentially as a class, they learn that to really reap the benefits of Scientology they must undergo more deep and more expensive one-on-one "auditing," similar in some aspects to mainstream therapy though the auditors have no licensed training. The process is defined by Scientology itself as "a very unique form of personal counseling which helps an individual look at his own existence and improves his ability to confront what he is and where he is."

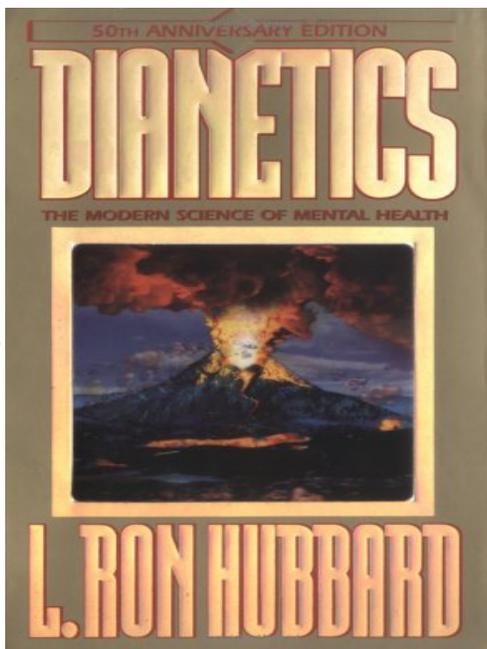
More extensive auditing uses

an electronic device called an E-meter, which essentially measures tension, much like a lie detector; and the auditee is “cleared” to move on to the next level when the provocative questions posed by the auditor elicit no perceptible emotional reaction. The E-meter is subject to the same limitations as a lie detector device, which a calm liar can easily pass while an honest but nervous person will fail. Of course, the more naturally nervous the auditee, the more profit the church will bring in through hundreds of hours of auditing.

Further, the auditor takes notes of each session, and despite assurances by the Church of Scientology that these notes are kept in strict confidentiality, defectors have claimed that the notes have been used as a means to blackmail or otherwise intimidate them. Fortunately, during my brief tenure with the Scientologists, I didn’t have any dirty secrets to reveal that they can hold over my head if they were so inclined.

At any rate, members who stay the course, and pay up thousands of dollars for the privilege may eventually achieve the rank of OT III, that is an “Operating Thetan, Third Level,” at which point they are qualified to learn that 75 million years ago, Xenu, the ruler of a galactic confederacy, solved an overpopulation problem by bringing billions of his subjects to Earth to be destroyed by H-bombs detonated in volcanoes, but which survived in the form of spirits referred to as thetans and cur-

rently inhabit the bodies of living humans causing the various ailments that afflict us. Naturally, to eradicate these bothersome ghosts in our bodily machines requires even more expensive auditing treatments. This very interesting detail was exposed by various former high-ranking Scientologists who arrived at the appropriate level to be clued in as to what it was all about and suddenly had an attack of rationality that precipi-



tated a split from Mr. Hubbard’s money-generating venture.

If asked about Xenu, Church of Scientology members typically express total ignorance on the subject, though high-ranking defectors have noted that they were taught that learning of the tyrannical alien and the sinister specters dwelling within us was far too dangerous for any but those who had gone through the most extensive auditing and risen far up in the ranks of the

church to cope with.

Of course.

The notion that most people who might fall for Scientology’s claims to be a viable alternative to psychiatric treatment, which the church deems evil and harmful, would be less inclined to check them out if they heard about Xenu right off the bat doesn’t enter into the church leaders’ fears at all. Oddly, learning about Xenu and the thousands of thetans supposedly inhabiting my body hasn’t caused my head to explode or reduced me to a quivering mass of fleshy pulp despite my utter failure to ever be “cleared.” They just don’t make thetans like they used to, I suppose.

At best, none of this is much more outlandish than the more widely accepted nonsense of mainstream Christianity, Mormonism, Islam, Hinduism, etc. Hubbard mixed his wild notions of science fantasy, psychology, history and religion in a way that yielded him far greater riches than he could have earned solely as a hack sci-fi writer and he did it by claiming it was all real.

I would like to think that exposure of the Xenu story will ultimately cause Hubbard’s religion, which continues to flourish over 20 years since he died, or, as announced by Scientology on the occasion, he “discarded the body’ to do ‘higher level spiritual research, unencumbered by mortal confines” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L. Ron Hubbard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L._Ron_Hubbard)), to yet decline and eventually

fade away despite all its celebrity endorsements. However, as noted by Mark Twain in 1902, when commenting on assurances of the wise that Mary Baker Eddy's Christian Science movement was just a "fleeting craze that would soon perish" and which nevertheless persists to

this day, over a century later, "...such a thing as a serious and painstaking and fairly competent inquiry into the claims of a religion or political dogma is a rare occurrence." One can hope that in the opening decade of the twenty-second century of the common era that reason will

hold more sway, but odds are there will yet be more inspired swindlers concocting religions out of their fevered imaginations in order to swell their own earthly possessions while promising heavenly delights that they can never deliver.



FL-PIN—NEW INFO SYSTEM

A new nonpartisan communication network is intended to link progressive organizations and progressive activists, the "Florida Progressive Information System. Individuals can join. They will receive alerts about important events. Current information can be selected to meet interests of individuals in their specific location in ten Flor-

ida cities. The purpose is to have large numbers of individuals, for example, to contact legislators at the same time. The five-year plan calls for several hundred thousand members. The Humanists of Florida Association, under executive director Jennifer Hancock, is leading this development of the Progressive Information Network. Much more detail is available on the internet. Visit <http://www.flpin.net/>



Ongoing 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.

Caring Tree

If a telephone call to any member or anyone interested in our group might serve a purpose--such as a ride to our meeting or some other personal need, please contact **Nita Pitts** at 904-996-0879 or e-mail her at pitrymnd@comcast.net. Otherwise, leave a notation on the sign-in sheet at the front table during one of our meetings.

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
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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 6:00. Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

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September Social - All Welcome!

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

WHEN: Tues., Sept. 26, 2006. Gather in Lounge at 6:00 p.m., Dinner at 7:00 p.m.

RSVP: CarrieRen@att.net (or 268-8826) by **September 25**, if you plan to attend!

A Day of Faith: Religion or science — Which should we trust to bring down the murder rate?

(Continued from page 1)

moted at the city website (<http://www.coj.net>) and by flyers and letters from Mayor John Peyton. Free shuttle service and parking was made available to event attendees. Volunteers were solicited to help out at the event by the City of Jacksonville Office of Volunteer Services. As Mayor, Peyton could not have promoted religion any more blatantly if he had gone door to door with a Bible and encouraged everyone who answered his knock on the door to join Jesus in his campaign to purge murder from our city. Ignore the fact that Jesus could do this by returning to Earth from the comforts of heaven and forcing an end to all violence as the Christians allege that he will do one day. But that is another story...

I am always amazed at how brazenly religious our city leaders can be at times. If they were characters in the Danish fable *The Emperor's New Clothes*, they would be denying that the king was naked despite the irrefutable fact of his nudity. No, the Day of Faith is not a religious event. No, the cross on the wa-

ter tower is not an official endorsement of religion. You could not find more denial frenzy from a recalcitrant alcoholic who refused to acknowledge his addiction.

It is not that Peyton does not have religious rights. He certainly has the right to practice his religion during his term as Mayor. I would not have a prob-

The Library Company of Philadelphia



lem if he attended a church sponsored event and gave a speech on how Jesus could easily stop the violence in its tracks if everyone in Jacksonville joined hands and prayed for his forgiveness. Of course, he should not do this as an official member of government. But as a private citizen, he had every right to acknowledge his god in whatever way he pleases.

I also would not have a problem if Peyton recruited the religious leaders to join his campaign against violence in Jacksonville. Religious leaders have considerable influence in Jacksonville, and it would be foolish for any leader not to take advantage of their ability to rally the troops. He could sit down with religious leaders and encourage them to use their pulpits to call for an end to violent behavior in their neighborhoods. One of the most powerful weapons that a chief executive at any level of government has is to use his bully pulpit to make his case for a particular course of action in response to a problem.

Where he went wrong was in his use of City machinery and taxpayer funds for organizing an essentially religious event. This is no longer Peyton's personal religious crusade. As taxpayers, it is now our religious crusade whether we are religious or not. Instead of being inclusive of all Jacksonville residents in the fight against violent crime (Freethinkers hate violence, too!), he divides up the city into the haves (have God) and have nots (don't have God and don't want him, either!) and then cozies up to the haves. Someone needs to remind Peyton that he

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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: _____

A Day of Faith: Religion or science — Which should we trust to bring down the murder rate?

(Continued from page 8)

is the Mayor, not the high priest of Jacksonville.

We secular humanists are like the kid in the playground who is ostracized by the popular kids, but still has to hand over his lunch money to them whenever they corner him. The wall of separation of church and state

is supposed to keep the government from marginalizing the non-religious, but it is a full time job repairing the holes in the wall that so frequently crop up when religious zealots openly swing their sledge hammers against it.

Even if we get past the First Amendment problems, will the Day of Faith rally have a positive effect on the murder rate in Jacksonville? To answer that, let's acknowledge the fact that a sincere desire to make a differ-

ence is not enough to make our society a better place. We have to understand the problem and use a well tested strategy for solving the problem. This approach is tailor made for science.

At the FCFS August meeting, Dr. Chris Rasche talked to us about understanding violent crime from a scientific point of view. Science may not be able to give us a step-by-step procedure for fixing the violent crime problem. However, the process of testing ideas against experience

using controlled experimentation can provide us important insights about the human condition. These insights can lead us to crime reduction approaches that actually address the roots of the problem.

At some point, Peyton and other city leaders have to rely on science to solve our violent crime problems. Instead of calling upon God, they should consult with the best criminologists in the nation who can advise them on the most promising crime re-

duction approaches available today. Some of these approaches may not work in Jacksonville, but they have a better chance of success than prayer to a divine being. At least they are based on the many insights on criminal deviance provided by science.

From my point of view, the threat to our city posed by murder is overblown. Murder in our city is rare. When we talk about 100 + murders in a city of over 800,000 people, we are not talking about a common everyday

experience. This is not to minimize the tragedy of murder. It is a terrible thing to bury someone that you love—especially when they die so young.

But we do not have a murder crisis in this city. Go to Iraq. Now, we are talking murder crisis. Life has become so cheap there that Iraqi society will feel the effects of this savagery for decades to come. Unfortunately, science cannot stop people from killing each other for the sake of religion. At least not yet.



First Coast Freethought Society 2006 Events

September	18 - Monthly meeting	17 - Book discussion group	26- Social at Steak and Ale
October	16 - Monthly meeting	15 - Book discussion group	24- Social at Steak and Ale
November	20 - Monthly meeting	19 - Book discussion group	28- Social at Steak and Ale

Return service requested

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