



December 2008

Volume 6, Issue 12

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Terry Loucks

My greatest fear is that America will succumb to the pressures from fundamentalists on the religious right and become a theocracy, bringing to an end our 200-year democracy and the science that has thrived here. I fear that we will become the Christian version of the Islamic nations, like Iran and Saudi Arabia, neither of which—in spite of their oil fortunes—is known for its scientific research, because of all their religious constraints.

The present Bush Administration has given us a glimpse of what an American theocracy would be like. They have stopped embryonic stem cell research for religious reasons, while the rest of the world has proceeded, and they have

been curtailed. In addition, the scientific budgets have been reduced, in many cases to the point of layoffs.



President Bush even advocated teaching Creationism as a science in the public schools.

Every year, the number of students who go into the sciences and mathematics is on the decline. Our high school students have fallen on exams to the level of third world countries. Even our

Even economists admit that half of our national wealth can be traced to the sciences.

appointed religious ideologues at the top of all the government agencies that perform scientific research. As a result, the research publications have been censored, and travel to scientific meetings has

(Continued on page 3)

“Theology made no provision for evolution. The biblical authors had missed the most important revelation of all! Could it be that they were not really privy to the thoughts of God?”

— Edward O. Wilson in *Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge*



December 2008 Meeting - Party - No Lecture

Human Light Celebration

Bring a dish to share • Bring a beverage of choice

Monday, December 15, from 6:00 to 9:30 p.m.

Social Hour at 6 p.m. • Dine at 7 p.m. • Ceremonies at 8 p.m.

Unitarian Universalist Church • 7405 Arlington Expressway • Jacksonville, FL
(Downstairs in the Social Hall - Doors open at 5:30)

HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

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

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

What: Books/magazines planned for discussion:



- December 7, 2008 - *Becoming Evil*, by James Waller (see November's newsletter for more details)
- January 4, 2008 - Discussion: What is Humanism, and what do you prefer to call yourself—a freethinker? A humanist? A religious humanist? An atheist? An agnostic? Or something entirely different?

Read the *Humanist Manifesto III* and any article on the definition of humanism. Both can be found at <http://www.americanhumanist.org>. Use <http://www.google.com> to Search for “humanist manifesto” and “what is humanism?” Finally, books such as *Affirmations: Joyful and Creative Exuberance* by Paul Kurtz could be helpful in defining what ideas are important for humanists.

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-996-1553. (NOTE: If you purchase books from Amazon, please go to our website first, <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/index.html> and then click the link to Amazon.com. Thank you!)

First Coast FreeThinker

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for FCFS members, other freethinkers, and potential freethinkers. Nonmembers may receive three issues for free, after which they must join the FCFS to continue to receive hard copy.

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. The *FreeThinker* is intended to convey ideas to stimulate thought and discussion on a variety of subjects.

We welcome submissions. The deadline is the **FOURTH SATURDAY** of each month for the

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following month's issue. Submit contributions to the newsletter by e-mail to Hugo (see above), or by U.S. mail to Hugo Borresen, 8831 Taurus Circle South, Jacksonville, FL 32222.

My Concerns for Science from Religion

(Continued from page 1)

universities, which miraculously remain tops in the world, are increasingly relying on brilliant students from Asia and India. How much longer can they maintain this leadership with decreasing government funding and increased censorship?

And yet it will be scientists, not fundamentalist preachers,

who solve the problems we face in greener energy, medical cures, and advanced electronics. Can we look to their pulpit for new computers and the next Internet? Even economists admit that half of our national wealth can be traced to the sciences. I would put the number at 90% at least, because I can see the thread all the way back to electricity, magnetism, and the discovery of the electron over 100 years ago. I challenge you to

look around and find one thing that is not based on our understanding of physics, biology, and chemistry.

I also know that it will be science that improves our understanding of the universe and provides us with ideas for new habitable planets. These answers will not come from the Bible, which would be the only "science book" if we become a theocracy, as the fundamentalists aspire.



Two Special Announcements!

Carrie Renwick

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL TIME

Yes, it's that joyous time of year when the FCFS receives the financial injection that allows it to function for another year. Membership dues are essential as they cover the general, ongoing operating expenses of the organization. Quite simply, the First Coast Freethought Society would not exist without the support of its members.

The membership year extends from January through December, and all membership renewals are due in January. A big thank you to those of you who have already renewed! Note, if you have joined during the last quarter of 2008, your membership is good through December of 2009.

Please be mindful of the higher levels of membership that we offer. Note that any amount over that of one of the basic membership levels is tax deductible, and you will receive a letter for IRS tax purposes to that effect.

Visit the FCFS website, <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/> and click "Renew your Membership Now!" to renew on line using a credit card or PayPal. Or, mail a check to the FCFS, P.O. Box 550591, Jax, FL 32255-0591. If any of your contact information has changed, please let us know.

ANNUAL PLANNING MEETING - MEMBERS INVITED

Members, please mark your calendar for **Sunday, January 11, 2009**, at 1:00 p.m., and plan to attend the FCFS Annual Planning Meeting. The meeting is at the home of Mark and Carrie Renwick, in Mandarin. We'll be brainstorming about **meeting ideas, programs, special projects, future direction**, so plan to join us and bring your ideas. Might you be willing to chair a committee? Serve on a committee? Are there any speakers or topics you would like to hear? We want your input!

Please RSVP to Carrie (CarrieRen@att.net or call 268-8826) if you are attending and if you need directions. Every member is welcome! We hope you can make it.



The Texas Two-Step: The Dance Between Science and Religion in Texas

Curtis Wolf

Revising state science standards is resulting in a stressful time for science lovers in the South. Fortunately, Florida's recent revision of the science standards includes strong support for evolution despite a difficult vote before the Florida Board of Education. Unfortunately for Texas public schoolchildren, this may be a cakewalk in comparison to what is taking place in Texas.

The Texas science standards revision process began in May 2008. As in Florida, writing teams made up of educators worked on a revision of the current science standards that was released in September 2008. So far, so good.

Where the trouble began is when members of a six-member science standards review panel were selected by the Texas State Board of Education. You know that things are not going to go well when the chairman of the Texas Board of Education, Don McLeroy, is an outspoken creationist. So it was not surprising when three known proponents of Intelligent Design including Stephen Meyer, vice president of the pro-Intelligent Design Discovery Institute, were added to the panel.

The major disagreement between the pro-science and pro-Intelligent Design groups in

Texas is over the teaching of the "strengths and weaknesses" of scientific theories in public school science classes. The current Texas science standards include language to do this very thing. The original draft of the writing teams eliminated this language. It was not long before another science standards draft surfaced that morphed "strength and weaknesses" into "strengths and limitations."

Are we just nitpicking over words? Not really. What evolution supporters fear is that teachers who are friendly towards Intelligent Design will use

Anti-evolution forces have gotten less and less from their holy wars against biology as the courts keep throwing out their challenges to the teaching of evolution.

the "strengths and weaknesses" clause as an opportunity to undermine evolutionary theory with arguments that could be easily refuted by biologists but are given undue credence by the scientifically illiterate.

Also, talking about "weaknesses" or "limitations" of scientific theories requires us to define what those words mean. Do they mean that the theory of evolution is in conflict with the

many discoveries of biology? If so, why would biologists keep such a theory around? If the theory of evolution provides no explanatory advantages over other explanations, scientific progress is impeded if it is not discarded like many other theories that have been discarded by scientists in the past. The theory does not have to answer every question, but it cannot contradict what biologists see happening in the natural world.

Some may find this hard to believe, but it is good news that this is the kind of disagreement that we are seeing in Texas. Once, evolution was not allowed in the science classroom. Then, it was taught alongside "scientific creationism." Then Intelligent Design with its silence over the nature of the intelligent designer became the buzzword of the day. Now, all that is left is teaching the "strength and weaknesses" of evolution. Anti-evolution forces have gotten less and less from their holy wars against biology, as the courts keep throwing out their challenges to the teaching of evolution.

The dance between science and religion in Texas will end in the spring of next year. Hopefully, science will prevail over religion in the Lone Star State.



Einstein Speaks!

Here are several gems of wisdom from one of the most popular scientist of the 20th Century. For more Albert Einstein quotes, see [http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Albert Einstein/](http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Albert_Einstein/).

"Few people are capable of expressing with equanimity opinions which differ from the prejudices of their social environment. Most people are even incapable of forming such opinions."

"Ethical axioms are found and tested not very differently from the axioms of science. Truth is what stands the test of experience."

"The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity."

"Only two things are infinite, the universe and human stupidity, and I'm not sure about the former."

"The most incomprehensible thing about the world is that it is at all comprehensible."

"We should take care not to make the intellect our god; it has, of course, powerful muscles, but no personality."

"Truth is what stands the test of experience."



Ongoing FCFS Activities

Dinners for Doubters

Sign up to attend or to host a dinner yourself. Sign-up sheets will be at the back table at the monthly meetings. For details on how this works, see **page 7 of the August 2008 FreeThinker** (available on website) or ask a greeter at the back table.

Secular Sunday Morning in the Park (or Atheist Sunday Morning)

Freethinkers... let's get acquainted and enjoy intelligent conversation **every 4th Sunday of the month** (unless inclement weather prevails) at 10 a.m. until ? at the pavilion at Losco Park, 10851 Hood Rd., S., Jacksonville 32257, between Shad and Losco Roads. Need directions? Call Beth Perry at 733-5489 or Google the address to get a map and directions. We generally provide coffee. Bring breakfast snack and a **chair**. Mark your calendar. We hope to see you there!

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 a member is in order, or if a sympathy card, flowers, or some form of support is needed, please contact **Nita Pitts** at 904-996-0879 or e-mail her at pitrymnd@comcast.net. If you prefer, leave a notation on the sign-in sheet at the back table at one of our monthly meetings.

A Night at the Inn (or The First No El)

Fred W. Hill

Imagine you have stumbled upon a fantastic machine allowing you to go way back to any time and place that you desire and, further, that you are a devout fundamentalist Christian. Above all else, you want to experience the Nativity—to see that guiding star, hear the herald angels, meet the three wise men and, above all else, bathe in the warm glow of the baby Jesus in his manger. Yes, that would fill you with so much satisfaction. And so you set the controls for the ancient town of Bethlehem of Judea on December 24, Christmas Eve, in the year you regard as 1 A.D., the first year of our Lord.

Upon stepping out of the time machine, you look anxiously up to the evening sky. The stars are brilliant, brighter than you ever recall seeing them before, their illumination undiluted by modern, man-made lights. However you are disappointed that none take the form of a beacon to any particular spot in Bethlehem. You are bewildered. Without that guiding star, how can you find the stable where Mary will go into labor and bring forth joy to the world? Have you arrived too soon? Too late? Is this really Bethlehem? You wander around looking for a sign.

The city is much bigger and more complex than you had anticipated and, of course, you can't easily communicate with anyone because you don't know the local language and you're a millennium and a half too soon

to find anyone anywhere who might comprehend the modern English you speak. Fortunately, the parable narrator has placed a Babel fish in your ear, which miraculously enables you to understand and speak any language that you hear. The hitchhiker then points out a nearby inn before catching a lift on a passing chariot and disappearing down the labyrinthine streets.

You greet the innkeeper with "My friend, I bring good news. The messiah shall be born tonight in your fair land! I have traveled far to witness the miracle. Mary and Joseph, a descendent of your King David, has re-

I'm going back home where I can persist in my faith without worrying about reality.

turned from Nazareth in Galilee because Augustus Caesar ordered everyone to be counted in the place where they were born for the census. They needed shelter because Mary is pregnant with the child of God. But no rooms were available, and so they took refuge in a stable where she will give birth to the savior of all mankind! So It was prophesized and so It shall be. There should be a star, brighter than any other in all the heavens, to mark the location. Three wise kings followed it from the east to bring presents to the new born king. But I don't see the star and I am perplexed."

"My friend, you're a stranger

to me and you, my friend, are very strange," the innkeeper responds. "I don't know anything about this star or the wise kings you mention, but there's plenty of room in this inn, no need to sleep or give birth in any stinking stable. And census? What census? Oh, yes, old King David once held a census, ages ago, and, hoo boy, what a mess that was! Made God so mad he punished King David by killing 70,000 Danites, so they say. Mind you, it might have been more just if God had struck down only David, but who are we to question the Most High and Mighty? But, no, there's no census now and if there were, they'd just count us where we live now, no need to go back to wherever we were born just to be counted. That would be stupid, and believe you me, Augustus didn't get to be where he is today by being stupid! Besides that, I'm familiar with the ascetics who are called Nazarites and I've been to Galilee a few times, but there's no place there or anywhere near called Nazareth.

"As for this messiah business," the innkeeper continues, "these days you can hardly turn around without bumping into a new messiah, and none of them have done anybody a spittle's worth of good as far as I'm concerned. The birth of a new one hardly constitutes a miracle.

"Anyhow, I think you have our god mixed up with those



other gods. They go about getting girls pregnant at the drop of a hat, disguised as swans, snakes, even showers of gold. No morals at all. Even Augustus was supposedly fathered by some god or another, they say, and at least he brought some peace and stability to the empire, even if he had to knock off a bunch of heads to do it. But our god, the real god, mind you, doesn't muck about getting girls pregnant. Only a blasphemer would say otherwise!"

"But it was a miracle! The Holy Ghost made Mary pregnant with the Son of God!"

"He calls His thing the Holy Ghost?"

"No, no," you exclaim, shocked at the vulgarity, "the Holy Ghost is one of the three persons of the one God who is also the Father and Jesus, the Son, and He will be born tonight so that He can die for all of our sins and save mankind! This is so exciting!"

"God is using this guy you call the Holy Ghost who is really God anyway to get some girl pregnant so she can give birth to Him just so that He can die for other people's sins, and this is supposed to save us? This is excruciatingly silly."

"You just have to have faith. It's really not so complicated. It's just a shame, though, that

King Herod will kill all the innocent babies in Bethlehem because he's jealous and fears Jesus who will nevertheless escape his cruelty."

"King Herod died about four years ago and nasty as he could be, I've never heard any talk about him indiscriminately killing bunches of babies around here. If there'd been such a mas-

historical Jesus somewhere, anywhere.

A few hours later you return to the inn. "So," the innkeeper asks, "did you find your messiah, that Joshua fellow?"

"Jesus," you reply wearily, "He's Jesus, and no, I didn't find Him. I've been up and down the time-stream, everywhere the Bible says He was supposed to be, but I haven't found a trace of Him. I know He's somewhere, though. He has to be. I just know it in my heart. The problem must be with my time machine. I'll have to destroy it when I get back."

"Your babble about a time machine is peculiar, but if it's any consolation to you, a couple named Joseph and Mary came in while you were gone. They were too cheap to pay for a room, though, so they snuck into my stable and she had a baby. Named him Brian. Didn't look particularly messianic. I had to kick them out because they were upsetting my goats and sheep."

"Oh, that's ok. I'm going back home where I can persist in my faith without worrying about reality."

(This parody makes use of Who Was Jesus? by D. M. Murdock, an exploration of the problems of finding any sound historical evidence for the existence of Jesus; and alludes to the gospels of Douglas Adams and Monty Python. F.W.H.)



sacre, the locals would be squabbling about it plenty. Maybe you're thinking of Moses."

"My gosh, why are you lying to me? It's all in the Bible and the Bible is absolute truth and I will prove it," you shout at the innkeeper before running out into the night, back to your time machine, desperate to find the



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 550591
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(904) 288-6291
<http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

Statement of Purpose

The First Coast Freethought Society, Inc. is an educational, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization dedicated to supporting nonreligious persons in the Northeast Florida area and promoting a nontheistic approach to everyday life.

Meetings

The FCFS meets the THIRD Monday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, upstairs in the sanctuary, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida 32211, (904) 725-8133. Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Meetings are free and open to the public. Doors open at 6:00 p.m.

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December Social

Where: OLIVE GARDEN on Philips Highway, near the Avenues Mall.

When: Tuesday December 23, 2008 at 6:00 p.m. Proceed directly to our room. Drinks at 6:00. Dinner at 7:00. (Order from the menu.)

RSVP: CarrieRen@att.net (or 268-8826) by **Tues. a.m.**, if you plan to go!

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

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2009 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? Comments? _____			

Membership level (please select one):

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

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <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) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family (\$45/yr.) | | |

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

- General member Committee member Officer Financial supporter

- Annual dues cover the period of January 1 through December 31.
- The initial dues for new members joining in July through September shall be half the regular rate. Membership shall extend to the end of the current calendar year.
- The initial dues for new members joining in October through December shall be the full, regular rate. Membership shall extend to the end of the following calendar year.

*You can make a lasting impact on the future of
freethought and secular humanism in this community
...if you provide for the First Coast Freethought Society in your Will.*

Your bequest will ensure that the FCFS continues to be a beacon for freethinkers on the First Coast and to remain a vital Voice of Reason in the Northeast Florida area. Several options are available for establishing a bequest (specific, percentage, residual, or contingent). We will be happy to provide the appropriate wording to you and your attorney, depending upon your wishes.

For further information, contact
Carrie Renwick, P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 or
904-288-6291 • CarrieRen@att.net • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

FCFS December 2008 Activities

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7 Book Group	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15 Public Meeting	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23 Olive Garden	24	25	26	27 Article Deadline
28 Secular Sunday	29	30	31			

Visit our website at <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>.

In the Adobe version, the links are **LIVE!** One click takes you there. Two-line links may not work. Best to copy and paste into your browser window.

*2009 membership dues are due!
You can now PAY ON LINE !!
(See page 3 for details.)*

Return Service Requested



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
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