

# FIRST COAST FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY, INC.

*An organization of freethinkers and secular humanists supporting free inquiry, education, and community in the Northeast Florida area*

**Our Motto: “To Question is the Answer.”**

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The First Coast

# FreeThinker



Newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

March 2012

Volume 11, Issue 3

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## President's Message - March 2012

**Earl Coggins**

In a conversation many years ago, a friend of mine jokingly said, "thinking is overrated," which got me to thinking (yet again) about thinking. People

say the weirdest things about thinking, much of which is picked up along

their way through life and never really given much thought (no pun intended). Today I want to think about thinking and perhaps even think-

ing about other people's thoughts on thinking about thinking.

French Philosopher Rene Descartes will be forever famous for his proclamation, "I think, therefore, I am." I, per-

thinking about his existence. I would suggest he say, "I think, therefore, I think I am."



*"If one spends a lifetime thinking about life, has one really lived his or her life? I'm still thinking about that one."*

I wonder how Rene Descartes and Aldous Huxley would have gotten along. In his short story "Green Tunnels" (in *Mortal Coils*), one of the characters, Mr.

sonally, wish I could go back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century and remind Rene that he might want to rethink his thoughts on

Topes, has a rather facetious, but perhaps realistic, attitude towards thinking: "Most of one's

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*"No man ever believes that the Bible means what it says; he is always convinced that it says what he means."*

—George Bernard Shaw

## March 2012 Meeting

# "Taxpayer-Funded Religion in Florida"

**Mark Palmer, Attorney; Executive Director, Humanists of Florida Association**

**Monday, March 19, 2012, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.**

**In the Sanctuary, upper parking lot level • Doors open at 6:00  
Unitarian Universalist Church • 7405 Arlington Expressway • Jacksonville, FL**

## Humanist Book Discussion Group



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

**Where:** Books-A-Million, 9400 Atlantic Boulevard, Jacksonville, FL 32225

**What:** Books planned for discussion:

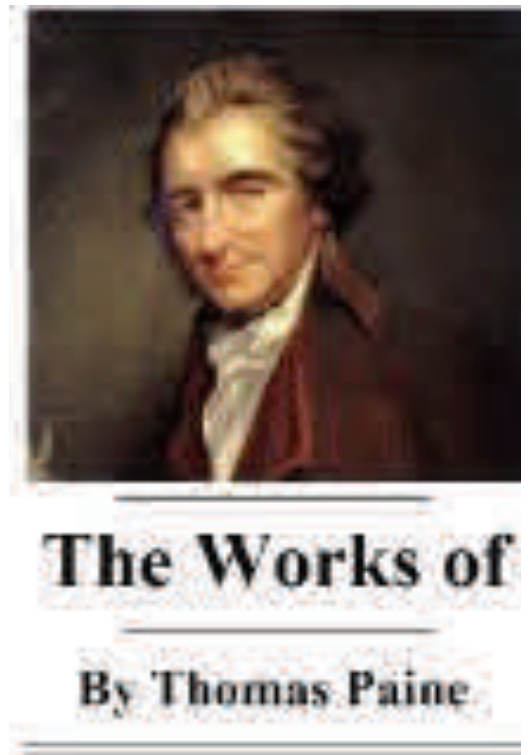
- April 1, 2012 - *Thomas Paine's Rights of Man*, by Christopher Hitchens (or any other book about or by Thomas Paine)
- May 6, 2012—Any book by Christopher Hitchens

Books may be found in the library, purchased from local book stores, or purchased online. The First Coast Freethought Society will receive a small remuneration from your purchase (at no additional cost to you) if you first go to <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org> and then click the link to Amazon.com for your purchase.

This April Fools Day, the Humanist Book Discussion Group will be devoted to works by or about that celebrated revolutionary and fool for liberty, justice and reason, Thomas Paine. His literary career began in 1776 with *Common Sense*, an argument for the independence of the American colonies from British rule and described by historian Gordon S. Wood as, “the most incendiary and popular pamphlet of the entire revolutionary era.”

Not content to rest on his laurels, Paine went on to pen *Rights of Man* in 1791 in his defense of the French Revolution, and while thrown in prison in 1793 for protesting against the violent excesses of Robespierre, Paine began work on his most infamous and acclaimed work, *The Age of Reason*, a critique of institutionalized religion and the Bible,

Among recent books about Thomas Paine are *Thomas Paine's Rights of Man* by Christopher Hitchens; *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America* by Harvey J. Kaye; and *Thomas Paine: Enlightenment, Revolution and the Birth of Modern Nations* by Craig Nelson. Several collections of Paine's writings can also be purchased online or in bookstores.



**The Works of**  
**By Thomas Paine**

For more info, contact Herb Gerson at 904-363-6446, or [herbge@bellsouth.net](mailto:herbge@bellsouth.net)

### Monthly Social

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

**When:** **Tuesday March 27, 2012** 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](mailto:CarrieRen@att.net) (or 268-8826) by **Tues. a.m.**, if you plan to go!

*(President's Message,  
continued from page 1)*

life is one prolonged effort to prevent oneself thinking." Mr. Topes goes on to explain that most people do all sorts of things from collecting pictures, breeding rabbits, or amateur carpentry, all in an effort to avoid thinking about the important things. People reminiscent of Rene Descartes would hardly fall into that category of persons.

Why do some people (Rene Descartes and his philosophical peers) think about the meaning of life—assuming that is what Huxley meant by "important things" while writing the dialogue for his character Mr. Topes—while others merely collect pictures, breed rabbits, or dabble in amateur carpentry? Is thinking really that difficult or troublesome? If one spends a lifetime thinking about life, has one really lived his or her life? I'm still thinking about that one.

Vivian, a character in Oscar Wilde's essay "The Decay of Lying," considered thinking to be a malady: "Thinking is the most unhealthy thing in the world, and people die of it just as they die of any other disease." I have to wonder (a synonym of thinking) about Wilde's motive for such an assertion. He was a proponent of aestheticism (the topic in his essay), so perhaps it

was his covert way of responding to his pedantic contemporaries, the likes of John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold, who felt art was a means to an end and not just art for art's sake, as so many others, including Wilde, felt. Through his character Vivian, Wilde was sending a message that too much thinking on this subject was futile.

Bertrand Russell would fit in

Of equal interest, at least to me, is the antithesis of thought. In other words, is it okay to be without thought? Many people who meditate pride themselves in their ability to purge their minds of everything, with nary a thought to be found within the confines of a mind in a state of meditative bliss. In other words, the Zen masters of the world want to achieve a state of mind

absent of thought, or thoughtlessness. To be without thought is to be thoughtless, yes? A quick read-through of the synonyms for the word "thoughtless" in a thesaurus will quickly get a mind to thinking—what were the creators of the thesaurus thinking?

The synonyms for the word "thoughtless" include: antisocial, apathetic, blind, deaf, discourteous, egocentric, impolite, insensitive, neglectful, negligent, primitive, rash, reckless, rude, self-centered, and uncaring. Many people do just as Mr. Topes suggested, never thinking too deeply, but just doing things. Would it be fair to label them with any of the synonyms above?

If Shakespeare could weigh in on this, perhaps Hamlet would have been debating something other than death: "To think, or not to think, that is the question."



**Cartoon by Jon Kudelka**

well with the political unrest of our time. Russell on thinking: "People don't seem to realize that it takes time and effort and preparation to think. Statesmen are far too busy making speeches to think." In fairness to the thinking statesman (they do exist), I'm thinking Russell wasn't thinking about all statesman but perhaps just those he didn't particularly agree with. Russell also said about thinking: "People would sooner die than think. In fact they do."

## Capital Punishment, Part 1

Fred W. Hill

According to biblical literalists, about 5,000 years ago, give or take a millennium, God lost his temper and executed by drowning every living thing on Earth, including innocent newborn babies and cute little puppies, with the exception that he did allow the guy he liked and his family, and whatever animals they could fit on their ark, to survive. Roughly 2,000 years ago, scripture relates that God's reputed son was crucified by the Romans, apparently for proclaiming himself King of the Jews and for throwing a temper tantrum of his own in a temple. A few weeks shy of 400 years ago, on April 11, 1612, Edward Wightman had the dubious distinction of becoming the last man in England to be burned at the stake for blasphemy, having inflamed the ire of church and state by asserting that Jesus Christ had been merely a man, that the Trinity and Hell were false doctrines, and that he himself was the Holy Spirit and god-ordained savior of mankind. A little over 315 years ago, on January 8, 1697, Thomas Aikenhead, a 20-year-old university student in Edinburgh, became the last Briton executed for blasphemy, hanged for openly and correctly asserting "that theology was a rhapsody of ill-invented nonsense, patched up partly of the moral doctrines of

philosophers, and partly of poetical fictions and extravagant chimeras," as specified in the indictment against him.

Since then, most nations that at least purport to be genuinely civilized have ceased executing freethinkers and heretics suspected of purposely offending a deity, although to this day there are several Islamic-dominated nations where openly expressing doubt in God, his prophet, and his words could result in your head being lopped.

***"Capital punishment...had long been held, as decreed by God, for anything reputedly offensive to Him, to maintain order, and...to reduce the risk of rebellion or regicide."***

The pious authorities don't trust their god to simply zap offenders with a bolts of lightning and be done with it, the old fellow being too occupied ignoring prayers for peace and helping pious football players win touchdowns and all that. Many more predominantly secular nations, however, have taken an opposite approach, outlawing capital punishment itself altogether. The modern trend was begun by an enlightened despot and Holy Roman Emperor, Leopold II, in a previous role as the Grand Duke of Tuscany, when in 1786 he abolished the death penalty, having been convinced by the arguments of the Marquis Cesare Beccaria of

Milan expounded in a 1764 treatise, *On Crimes and Punishments*. Beccaria held, in sharp contrast to the prevailing wisdom of nearly all human history, that states do not have the right to take lives and that capital punishment is neither useful nor necessary.

A review of the punishments meted out for a variety of criminal offenses in the centuries following Leopold's bold decision shows that in other realms, national leaders (whether they inherited, took by force, or were elected to their positions) were slow to accept Beccaria's reasoning. Capital punishment, after all, had long been held, as decreed by God, for anything reputedly offensive to Him, to maintain order, and (most important to many dictatorial regimes) to reduce the risk of rebellion or regicide. The most painfully drawn-out forms of execution, including crucifixion and drawing and quartering, were typically reserved for attempts to overthrow the government or slay the reigning monarch. Gradually, however, dominant views on religion and state power shifted; and in most democracies, support for capital punishment declined, particularly in the dec-



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ades after World War II, possibly in response to direct experience of, or learning of, the atrocities committed by the Nazis who mechanized and mass produced state-sanctioned murder. Excepting the former Soviet republic of Belarus, every European state, including Turkey, has abolished capital punishment for all crimes, as have Australia, several African and Asian nations, and most of those of North and South America. Significant hold-outs include China, India, most of the Muslim-dominated nations of north-east Africa and southern Asia, including Indonesia. Oh, and a place called the United States of America.

Capital punishment in the U.S. had been barred by the U.S. Supreme Court between 1972 and 1976, after which it made a big comeback commencing with the execution by firing squad of Gary Gilmour on January 17, 1977. It has, however, been restricted to those cases in which someone has been convicted of killing, or the attempt or intent to kill, per *Enmund v. Florida* (1982), or of being a major participant in an underlying felony and acting with reckless indif-

ference to human life, per *Tison v. Arizona* (1987). As of 2011, capital punishment is banned in 16 states and the District of Columbia, and Gallop polls indicate a large majority of Americans (64 percent in 2010) support the death penalty for people convicted of murder. Naturally, emotions run high for the death penalty in the wake of particularly horrific crimes, such as the 2007 Petit case in Cheshire,

ernor Jodi Rell vetoed the bill, stating, “I also fully understand the anguish and outrage of the families of victims who believe, as I do, that there are certain crimes so heinous—so fundamentally revolting to our humanity—that the death penalty is warranted.” Last fall, during a Republican presidential debate, when moderator Brian Williams asked candidate Rick Perry if he ever worried about

whether any innocent people had been executed by the State of Texas during his tenure as governor, noting that he had authorized more executions, 234, than any other governor in U.S. history. Applause erupted from the audience even before Governor Perry answered, “I’ve never struggled with that at all,” going on to explain that Texas had “a very thoughtful...clear



***A depiction of the execution of Edward Wightman at a market place in England on April 11, 1612.***

Connecticut, where two paroled habitual criminals, Steven Hayes and Joshua Komisarjevsky, invaded a home, severely beat and tied up Dr. William A. Petit, Jr., and raped and murdered his wife, Jennifer Hawke-Petit, and their daughters, Hayley, 17, and Michaela, 11. Since 1960, only one person had been executed in Connecticut, serial killer Michael Ross in 2005, and the state general assembly voted to outlaw the death penalty in 2009, but Gov-

process in place” that allows for a fair hearing and an appellate process that goes up “to the Supreme Court of the United States if that’s required.”

In reality, however, none of Perry’s assurances guarantee that people have not been convicted, sentenced to death, and actually executed for crimes they did not commit, as will be discussed in part 2 of this article to be included in next month’s *FreeThinker*.



## Why Do We Fight Unnecessary Culture War Battles?

Curtis Wolf

Sometimes, you have to wonder if politicians get stupid and underestimate the public reaction to government policies, or maybe they just like to stir up the pot from time to time to entertain themselves. Well, stir up the pot President Obama did when the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) ruled that faith-based employers other than churches must pay for insurance coverage for birth control. Not surprisingly, Catholic bishops and Republican politicians angrily denounced the regulations as an infringement of First Amendment-based religious liberties. The outcry by bishops and politicians soon led to a “compromise” that supposedly did not require the faith-based employer to pay for the contraceptive coverage, but did require the insurance company to provide it for “free.” The reason that I put a couple of words in the previous sentence in quotes is that it is highly unlikely that the cost to the insurance company for the “free” contraceptive coverage will be effectively firewalled from the health insurance-related costs paid by the employer. As much as I hate to take sides with the Catholic Church since its policy on contraceptives is so absurd, I do believe that the church has a valid point here.

Let’s start by agreeing that

the Catholic Church’s stance on contraceptives is dumb. The use of contraceptives is a no-brainer. The arguments in support of couples having pleasurable sex without the risk of bringing a child into the world are so compelling that I have to shake my head in disbelief at the Catholic Church’s stance.

Let’s continue by understanding how employer-based health insurance got started in this country. During World War II, wage controls forced employers to look for alternative ways

viduals and families buying health insurance on their own.

So now, health insurance for a large majority of people is tied to their employers. With that in mind, throw in an HHS mandate for contraceptive coverage, and you just created a combustible cauldron of conflicting values and beliefs. And you know what the thing about it is? This conflict is not inevitable!



***“If Christians want to convince people to live according to a church defined code of conduct, they are welcome to raise money and use powers of persuasion to do so, but the use of force to gain compliance or money, which is central to government, should not be available to them.”***

to compete for employees. Since these controls did not include fringe benefits, this led businesses to compete for new employees with health insurance, among other benefits. It did not take long before the employer and employee contributions to the health insurance premium received tax preferences by Congress. Today, about sixty percent of people get their health insurance through their employers, with the employer typically paying about eighty percent of the cost. Interestingly, these tax preferences do not apply to indi-

This really has nothing to do with Catholics imposing their dogmas on everyone else. It is not as if they are burning down every store that sells contraceptives so that no one has access to them anymore. Contraceptives are not that expensive, especially if you go generic (birth control pills are \$15–\$50 a month according to Planned Parenthood) and could be purchased by many women out of pocket. As an alternative to birth control pills, I found online prices for condoms at about 40 cents per condom. Furthermore, all of these costs could be split by the couple. So this silliness about a Catholic hospital denying contraceptives to women needs a serious reality check.

So how do we avoid this culture war battle? First, end the tax preferences for employer-

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based health insurance. The local Catholic hospital could increase the pay of its employees by the amount that it used to contribute towards health insurance (or not if it wants those employees to go elsewhere) and the employees could buy their own health insurance policies that cover contraceptives if desired. The good thing about this is that the decision to buy health insurance that pays for contraceptives is made by the employee alone, without an employer middleman weighing in on something that really is not its business anyway.

Also, discontinue all government mandates concerning what should be covered by health insurance. Let the consumer decide what is important to him or her. Besides, mandates drive up the cost of health insurance since everything covered by insurance has to be paid for by premiums.

Let us freethinkers make a bargain with the Christians in this country. The Christians will not try to fashion laws based upon the Bible verse of the month or fund their religious activities with taxpayer money. If Christians want to convince peo-



***Birth control pills—yet another cause belli in the American Culture Wars***

ple to live according to a church-defined code of conduct, they are welcome to raise money and use powers of persuasion to do so, but the use of force to gain compliance or money, which is central to government, should not be available to them.

In return, we freethinkers will acknowledge that having a secular government does not mean forcing Christians to par-

ticipate in activities that violate their principles, like taxpayer subsidization of art that they consider to be blasphemous, or mandating the provision of contraceptive coverage by faith-based employers. Of course, this is not always possible. Pacifists, religious and non-religious, are forced to pay for national defense, but national defense is a public good that cannot be privately funded unless you think that the warlords in Afghanistan are really cool. However, whenever we get the government involved in value-laden services, like education and

health care that are not public goods, and inevitably one side wins the battle of values which, in this case, is the secular side due to the First Amendment, you create unnecessary culture war battles that could be avoided by letting people individually seek out services that reflect their values and not the values of the politically connected.



*Charles Darwin and a friend*

***“It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change.”***

**—Charles Darwin**



## What Did the Founding Fathers Intend?

Michael Clarke

There has been a significant amount of discussion of late about the Constitution and what our Founding Fathers intended when they drafted that document. This often comes up while the religious are trying to make a point in their favor. The Christian interpretation of our Founding Fathers' intent is always, it seems, highly in favor of Christian themes, while at the same time ignoring what our less religious Founding Fathers had to say. For example, in homosexual rights, or in abortion rights, or in the separation of church and state, Christians believe there are none afforded or mentioned in the Constitution. What was their intent?

So, I thought it might be interesting to step back and see if we might have another document available that might give us a publically stated guidepost for what our Founding Fathers intended. Let's take a look at the very first step we took as a nation, the Declaration of Independence.

The opening of the Declaration reads thus, "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of

mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation."

Notice please that there is an expression of opinion about the "Laws of Nature" and about "Nature's God." Note further, there is neither mention of Jesus, nor a Christian god, nor anything that can be construed as declaring the foundation of a Christian nation (nor in the Constitution). All that, despite the fact there was, at the time, quite a large movement among Christians who thought this emerging nation was the foreshadowing of the return of Jesus to the Earth. One might think

***"The doctrines of your church or your religion, do not trump the guarantee of human rights afforded to us all."***

that had the intent been to declare this a Christian nation, it would have been clearly stated. But no. What we have instead are the "Laws of Nature" and "Nature's God," more a Deistic comment than anything else.

Let's go on. The second paragraph reads thus, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness..."

Notice please that again, there is a mention of a "Creator" but no sectarian slant whatsoever.

More importantly, I would like you to note that in this paragraph can be found the one clear and unambiguous declaration of the Founding Fathers' intent, and that is "self-evident equality" for all, and the right to "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." This declaration is stated to be "unalienable," i.e., "not transferable to another or capable of being repudiated." Furthermore, neither in the Declaration, nor in the Constitution, is there any stipulation that these rights are dependent upon your gender, your race, the religious or moral interpretation of anyone, nor are they dependent upon the interpretation of any holy book or set of religious laws.

They are simple. They are straight forward. They are unambiguous. They are your human rights by "natural law."

Yet, the religious seem to want to tack on their own stipulations to what is pretty clear right from the start. Christians seem to think that homosexuals have no inalienable rights and therefore do not have to be treated like anyone else; no marriage, no equality. This is a pattern for the Church as in the past, the Church believed that women and African Americans did not have the right to equality, either. When you look at the

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larger picture, the Church has a real problem with adhering to the laws of the land, not only in matters of equality, but in other aspects as well.

I will grant you that the rights of homosexuals, African Americans, and women were not in the forefront of the discussion at the time of the founding of this country. Yet, the language is plain and clear that freedom was the right of every human being, a worthy goal if at the time not yet achieved or realized in full. And the interpretation of the Constitution has always been the same; equality belongs to everyone. This was true for African Americans and other minorities. This was true for women. And it is true for homosexuals.

Yet the religious, it seems, cannot understand what is

printed on the pages of our founding documents and which has been upheld over and over in the courts: equality is for everyone.

Lately, the Christians have been claiming it is their religious right to denounce homosexuality in the face of anti-



bullying laws preventing Christian students from harassing homosexual students. Christians are actually claiming persecution because they cannot discriminate according to their religion.

Yes, you heard it right. It's

nuts isn't it?

In closing, I would like to say that the practices of bigotry and discrimination are anathema to the very fabric and laws of our nation. Freedom and equality belong to us all. The practices of bigotry and discrimination are not a religious right afforded to you as a religious person. The doctrines of your church or your religion do not trump the guarantee of human rights afforded to us all. So, while you may believe anything you want—as silly as it may be—your religious interpretation of life is not, and thankfully never can be, the law of the land. This is not persecution, as is often claimed by the religious; it is the protection of our human rights.

I think it is time that the interpretation of equality and freedom be brought into the 21st century and taken out of our prehistoric and barbaric past.



## Ongoing FCFS Activities

**Dinners for Doubters:** Sign up to attend or to host a dinner yourself. If a dinner is scheduled, sign-up sheets will be found at the back table at the monthly meetings. For details on how this works, see page 7 of the July 2008 *FreeThinker*, available on the website, or ask a greeter at the back table.

**Secular Sunday Morning in the Park:** Freethinkers, let's get acquainted and enjoy intelligent conversation every 4th Sunday of the month (unless inclement weather prevails) at 10 a.m. until ? under the pavilion at Losco Park, 10851 Hood Rd., S., Jacksonville 32257, between Shad and Losco Roads. Need directions? Call Beth Perry at 904-733-5489 or Google the address to get a map and directions. We generally provide coffee. Bring a breakfast snack and a chair or two. Note, if it's too hot under the pavilion, we take our chairs to some trees with a nice breeze. Mark your calendar. We hope to see you there!

**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 **Judy Hankins** at 904-724-8188, or e-mail her at [info@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:info@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org), or leave a notation on a meeting sign-in sheet.

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### 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.

For other activities besides monthly meetings, please see the website, brochure, or newsletter!

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## First Coast FreeThinker

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for all freethinkers and potential freethinkers. Nonmembers may receive the e-mail version indefinitely. Nonmembers may receive three hard-copy issues 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 that stimulate thought and promote discussion on a variety of subjects.

### Information for Contributors

We welcome submissions. Articles for consideration should be submitted via e-mail to the e-mail address shown below. Contributors who cannot submit manuscripts electronically may send them to Fred

Hill, 1817 Egner St., Jacksonville, FL 32206. The deadline for time-sensitive material is the FOURTH SATURDAY of each month for the following month's issue.

We prefer articles no longer than 1,000 words. Longer articles will be evaluated in terms of whether their importance and degree of interest to our readers warrant publication.

All accepted manuscripts are subject to editorial modification. Our style guide is *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Manuscript submissions cannot be returned. Authors are responsible for the accuracy of all quotations and for supplying complete references where applicable.

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- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <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, distributed to other members?  Yes  No

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

- 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** are half the regular rates. Membership extends to the end of the current calendar year.
- The initial dues for new members joining in **October through December** are the full, regular rates. Membership extends 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  
904-419-8826 • [CarrieRen@att.net](mailto:CarrieRen@att.net) • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>  
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

## Upcoming Freethought Events of Interest on the First Coast

Monday	March 19	FCFS Monthly Meeting, Jacksonville - 6:30 p.m.
Tuesday	March 20	Vernal Equinox JAM Session at a private residence - 7:30 p.m. *
Saturday	March 24	FCFS Deadline to submit articles for January 2012 <i>FreeThinker</i>
Sunday	March 25	FCFS Secular Sunday in the Park, Jacksonville - 10:00 a.m.
Tuesday	March 27	FCFS Monthly Social at Olive Garden, Jacksonville - 6:00 p.m.
Sunday	April 1	FCFS Humanist Book Discussion Group, Jacksonville - 2:00 p.m.
Monday	April 16	FCFS Monthly Meeting, Jacksonville - 6:30 p.m.

\* See <http://www.jaxatheists.com/events> for more details

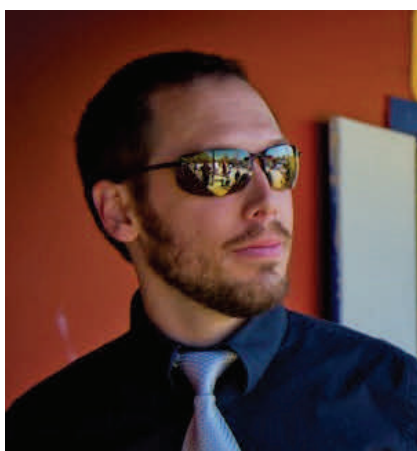
First Coast Freethought Society (FCFS) • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>  
Jacksonville Atheist, Agnostic, Secular Meetup Group (JAM) • <http://www.jaxatheists.com/>  
Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason (NeFCoR) • <http://NorthEastFloridaCoR.org/>

The FCFS is a proud member of the Humanists of Florida Association  
and the Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason.

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## Meet Our March Speaker - Mark Palmer, Esq.



**M**ark Palmer will present the reasons why November's Amendment 8 (Removal of the No Aid Clause) and Senate Bill 98 (Prayer at Public School Assemblies) threaten the freedoms of religion and belief of all Floridians.

Palmer is executive director of the Humanists of Florida Association, a nonprofit organization that fosters education, equal rights, the separation of church and state, and other humanist values. He is also a practicing attorney, a co-founder of the Tallahassee Atheists, and the president of Center for Inquiry - Tallahassee.

Mark observes, Floridians will be able to choose in November whether to alter our constitution and permit our tax dollars to fund religious activity. Further, some of our representatives in the Florida House and Senate are seeking to bring sectarian prayers to public school graduations. Mark urges that we get the word out now and stop these laws that would force everyone to support the majority religion. Removing the No Aid Clause would be un-American. Many decades have passed since Floridians supported the legal superiority of one race, gender or religion. We're Americans. We're better than that. We do not believe in abusing minorities. Yet that is the only outcome that can arise from removing the No Aid Clause.