

First Coast

FreeThinker



The newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

May 2005

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THE DARK SIDE OF THE POPE

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The late Pope John Paul II has attracted many people to pass before him as he lay in state. These included some two hundred dignitaries and maybe a million ordinary people. He has been hailed as a man of peace, visitor to 135 nations to bring good will to Protestants, Jews, and Muslims, writer and poet, athlete, speaker of several languages, a friendly and humble person who makes others feel comfortable. He helped end Communism in Poland.

He studied theater as young man, used the media well, and brought many Africans and

Asians into his church, both ordinary people and Cardinals. His reign of 26 years is the third longest in Roman Catholic history and he has been call "great." He was a man of change.

But longtime Catholic commentator Jim Connolly looks more closely. He charges that the conservative pontiff forced the best minds to the sidelines or out of the Church completely.

John Paul emphasized loyalty and ended many of the progressive policies of Popes John XXIII and Paul VI. Freedom of inquiry was attacked in Catholic universities with pro-

gressive theology, feminist thought, and liberation theology, with scholars leaving. The Office of the Inquisition [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith] came back in Cardinal Josef Ratzinger to silence opinion contrary to John Paul's arch-reactionary point of view. The rights of foreign bishops to make decisions about their own countries were overturned. Progressives in the religious orders of Jesuits and Franciscans were purged (e.g., retired early). Creative and free-thinking members of the College of cardinals have been re-

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On May 5th, free-thinkers are encouraged to observe the National Day of Reason. This is a humanist response to the unconstitutional National Day of Prayer.

To get more information and/or to endorse it, go to the website <http://www.nationaldayofreason.org/>

May Meeting

Guest speaker:

Rona Brinlee, owner of the Bookmark Bookstore in Atlantic Beach

“Banned Books”

Monday, May 9, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Unitarian Universalist Church

7405 Arlington Expressway - in the sanctuary

President's Message

Rough Seas Ahead For Secularism

As Chief Justice William Renquist's health continues to fail, Congress is preparing to fight the battle over the next Supreme Court nominee. The religious right has made no secret of its intent to demand an anti-abortion, socially conservative Supreme Court justice as pay-back for its mobilization of Bush supporters during the last presidential campaign – and the Republican majority has unveiled its “nuclear option” as its method to ram Bush's appointments down the throat of a divided congress.

The nuclear option is simply an attempt to prohibit extended, unlimited debate or “filibuster,” as a method to block confirmation of judicial nominees. Democrats have used filibuster to successfully block 10 out of President Bush's 52 appeals courts nominees and this method

remains one of the few ways a minority view can influence Congress.

The rarely used parliamentary procedure required for the nuclear option is an example of the lengths to which the religious right is willing to go to ram religious dogma down the

“The same congressmen, who trumpet the sanctity of marriage, gleefully trample the legal and ‘sacred’ rights of a husband attempting to end his wife’s suffering.”

throats of a populace whose country was founded on the policy of separating religion from government. The repeated attempt of the same group to ignore the wishes of Terri Schiavo's husband and halt the removal of his wife's feeding tube is another example. The

same congressmen, who trumpet the sanctity of marriage, gleefully trample the legal and “sacred” rights of a husband attempting to end his wife's suffering.

Whether you believe in the sincerity of these politicians is really a moot point, because it doesn't matter whether they believe in the dogma or merely parrot it to get votes. What matters is that they are changing our constitution and our congressional rules.

The influence of religion is stronger than any other time in the last century and you will feel its effects whether you are an atheist, an agnostic, or fundamentalist Christian. The religious fundamentalists have taken their gloves off and we'd better be ready for it.



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 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 second 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. Web site submissions: Carrie Renwick, carrieren@att.net.

Another Round of Creationism vs. Evolution

By Fred W. Hill

The debate over evolution goes on and on, near 150 years after publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. One of the latest rounds of controversy arose regarding the IMAX film "Volcanoes of the Deep Sea" a science documentary that makes references to the Earth being several billion years old and to the fact of evolution, which affronted the sensibilities of those who believe the Earth is only about 6,000 years old and that every species, including homo sapiens, was specially made by God. As reported by Cornelia Dean in the *New York Times* (see "A New Screen Test for IMAX: It's the Bible vs. the Volcano" March 19, 2005), in the American Bible Belt, about a dozen IMAX theaters, many located in science museums, declined to show the film for fear of arousing the ire of local fundamentalists. So far the IMAX theater nearest Jacksonville, at the World Golf Village in St. Augustine, has not shown the film and has not responded to efforts by the FreeThinker to find out if the film will be shown in the near future or to explain why, if not. Perhaps the management of the theater prefers to pretend the film doesn't exist and so avoid potential controversy.

Still, the controversy exists because despite all the grandstanding by creationists,

reality does not conform to their worldview, and modern scientists know it and refuse to pretend otherwise. It does not matter that several billion people believe there is a god and that this god created everything that exists exactly as depicted in a factually careless collection of stories written over two thousand years ago. Unlike politics, science does not work on the basis of popular or even representative vote. A billion people can believe in creationism for a billion years and still be completely wrong. The debate over evolution does not exist among reputable scientists who actually work in the fields of biology, genetics, archaeology, physiology, geology, or any of the myriad related fields where they have to rely on actual data and support any assertions with sound arguments that will hold up to close scrutiny by other scientists.

There is some debate regarding various details as to exactly how evolution happens, but no disagreement over evolution itself – evolution is a fact supported by evidence far more voluminous now than even when Darwin began research for data to support his initial hypothesis that species, including humans, are the result of natural selection, an idea long since accepted as a scientifically validated theory. Contrary to the notions of many creationists, a scientific theory is not merely a hunch, but is rather "an explanation of a set of related

observations or events based upon proven hypotheses and verified multiple times by detached groups of researchers," as defined by science teacher Jerry Wilson.

(<http://wilstar.com/theories.htm>)

The debate over evolution is fueled solely by theists who cannot let go of their ancient notion that a god whose eternal existence we must not question created the universe out of nothing. They are the ones who demand that evolution not be taught in science classes in public schools. A more current tactic, resorted to after repeated failures in U.S. courts to ban evolution from school, is to win equal time for creationism or its bastard child, intelligent design, in science courses, without regard for the fact that there is no scientifically validated proof whatsoever supporting either.

Another current effort is to allow university students with fundamentalist beliefs to sue teachers who fail to respect their religious beliefs in class, such as by failing them for refusing to acknowledge the scientific validity of evolution, via the Academic Freedom Bill of Rights, sponsored by Rep. Dennis Baxley, R-Ocala (see <http://www.alligator.org/pt2/050323freedom.php>). By the logic of these fundamentalists, equal time should also be given for teaching the assertions that the universe revolves around a flat

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Jacksonville Jumps On The Faith Based Bandwagon

By Curtis Wolf

Over Easter weekend, politicians and preachers in Jacksonville met to pray together and to preach the Word to one another. They heard others say, "What really matters is we are being moved by the spirit of God" and "There's something exciting about the word of God." Was this a church revival? Was it a typical Sunday at the First Baptist Church? No, it was a meeting sponsored by Jacksonville's new Office of Faith and Community Based Partnerships (*Florida Times-Union* "Faith-based office set to give grants" March 25, 2005). This office is Mayor John Peyton's newest entry into the faith based initiative fad that is sweeping the nation.

Situated in the Fire and Police Pension Fund Building at Adams and Main streets, its staff of three includes its executive administrator Rev. Michael Payne, an assistant administrator, and a human services planner. The city agency has an annual budget of \$1.1 million (*Florida Times-Union* "City sets up faith based office" November 20, 2004). As stated in its website, the main purpose of the office is to partner with faith and community based organizations to better provide services that meet certain community needs. It plans to accomplish this through small capacity building grants, training on how to apply for and effectively manage grants from private and public sources, and

community leadership development (<http://www.coj.net/Departments/Neighborhoods/Faith+Based+Partnerships/default.htm>).

This sounds good in theory. But critics are naturally concerned about the intermingling of government money and religion. Even with a prohibition against religious proselytization, freethinkers should be concerned about the quality of services provided by organizations that promote unverified claims with no more evidence for them than is provided to children who believe in Santa Claus. Will the service delivery system established by faith based groups be based on science and reason, or will it be an extension of their willingness to promote religious dogma that is not to be questioned by true believers?

Over the past year, I have had a conversation by mail with the Department of Corrections over the faith based prison at Lawtey Florida (<http://home.comcast.net/~skepticallythinking/Oct2004Article1.htm>, <http://home.comcast.net/~skepticallythinking/Jan2005Article2.htm>). I have asked a simple question: Will the efficacy of the faith based prison in reducing prison recidivism be scientifically verified through well designed research? It is not enough for an idea to sound good. The idea must have empirical data to prove its effectiveness in meeting some desired goal such as lower prison recidivism. So far, the

Corrections Department has provided nothing more than a promise to develop a reporting system that will likely not benefit from randomly assigned control groups and other controls found in well designed scientific research. Even if the religious programs at the Lawtey prison are provided at no public expense by volunteers, they waste the time of the prisoners if better programs are available for ensuring that they become law abiding citizens again.

We as freethinkers should question what is being done with our tax money. Mayor Peyton has been smart so far to avoid the legal problems inherent in directly providing faith based government programs. However, if his new approach to meeting community needs leads to more grants given to church oriented groups that squander the money with religious inspired ideas that are ineffective and unproved, what is the difference? Public money (and private money, too!) should be spent only on services that work whether they are popular with the religious community in Jacksonville or not.

To contact Rev. Michael Payne about the new faith based office, either call at (904) 588-0155 or write him at:

Office of Faith and Community Based Partnerships
Suite 300
One West Adams Street
Jacksonville, Florida 32202
Attn: Rev. Michael Payne



Bills Before The State Legislature That Freethinkers Should Know About

House Bill 695 - Naturopathic Medicine – Provides for the licensure and regulation of naturopathy, a pseudoscience which is rooted in the belief that restoring the body’s ability to heal itself can be achieved by detoxifying the body of toxins and establishing the body’s balance.

House Bill 837 - Student and Faculty Academic Freedom in Postsecondary Education – While the bill is not all bad, it does contain a clause that could lead to the teaching in Florida universities of Intelligent Design and other ideas that do not represent the consensus of experts in an academic subject all in the name of greater diversity of ideas.

House Bill 1373 - Florida Faith-based and Community-based Advisory Board – Codifies into state law the faith based approach pursued by Governor Bush.

House Bill 319 - Freedom to Worship Safely Act – While violence in any setting should be proscribed, one could wonder why the religious worship setting needs any additional protection from violence. Is violence against religious persons more intolerable than violence against atheists?

House Bill 455 - Florida Faith-Based Initiative – Establishes a Florida Families Faith-Based Institute within the University of South Florida.

House Bill 1431 - Regulation of Faith-based Counseling – Provides for the registration and regulation of faith based counselors.

House Bill 1611 - Stem Cell Research – Creates a \$10 million stem cell research program.

House Bill 1651 - Chiropractic Education – Exempts chiropractic clinics affiliated with chiropractic colleges from certain licensure requirements

and establishes chiropractic college based internships. This bill continues the mainstreaming of chiropractic “medicine” which many doctors consider to be nothing more than pseudo-science.

Senate Bill 1420 - Relating to School Events/Inspirational Message – Authorizes school boards to allow inspirational messages that are non-sectarian and non-proselytizing to be given by students at secondary school events.

You can find out more about these bills at <http://www.myfloridahouse.gov/bills.aspx> and <http://www.flsenate.gov/Session/index.cfm?Mode=Bills&Submenu=1&Tab=session>.

To find out who your elected officials are, go to <http://www.vote-smart.org/> and enter your zip code in the box on the left hand side, and click the **GO** button.



Due to the Terri Schiavo case, there has been new interest in living wills and the designation of health care surrogates. Freethinkers tend to be an independent lot and therefore want control over end of life decisions. For more information on living wills and the designation of health care surrogates, either contact your lawyer and/or check out the Florida Bar website on living wills, health care surrogates, and advanced directives at <http://www.flabar.org/tfb/flabarwe.nsf/0/b954f12053a410ec85256e28005bd4a0?OpenDocument>.



First Coast Freethought Society 2005 Events

May	9 - Monthly meeting	15- Book discussion group	24- Social at Steak and Ale
June	13- Monthly meeting	19- Book discussion group	28- Social at Steak and Ale
July	11- Monthly meeting	17- Book discussion group	26- Social at Steak and Ale

Dark Side of the Pope

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moved. Lay input is not allowed in major decisions of the Church. Progressive Father Robert Drinan was forced out of the U.S. House of Representatives if he wanted to remain a priest.

John Paul intervened in Poland to bring conservative politicians to restrict women's rights, abortion, and consumerism. Prelates in Latin America were persuaded to end support for cooperatives, peasant political initiatives, and community organizing, thus ending liberation theology. Indigenous cultural forms were forbidden in Christian worship (no African and Latin masses and hymns, concerts, art exhibits, community activities in religious buildings). Birth control and abortion were severely restricted in developing countries.

Clergy were used to oppose abortion, women's rights, contraception. Women were not elevated to the ministry and their sisterhoods reduced. Working conditions for underpaid and overworked priests were not modernized. Celibacy and rights of deacons in the sacraments are not examined. Pedophilia in the U.S. and several other nations was mostly ignored, and bishops lost power to dis-

cipline abusers. Members of the secretive Opus Dei, which is hostile to Jews and Muslims, have been promoted in the Church and its founder honored. (counterpunch.com)

Connolly's text is harshly worded and omits the following: John Paul was opposed to divorce, gay marriage, euthanasia, homosexuality, condoms, capital punishment, embryonic stem cell research, dealing widely with overpopulation, materialism, debating the role of women, globalization, anti-Semitism. John Paul favored governments collecting money for religious institutions, working against women's rights in the United Nations, keeping Terri Schiavo's feeding tubes in place, God deciding when people die, use of the media to spread ideas, celibacy of clergy, evolution, human rights, and controlling populations and disease by abstinence.

John Paul ignored the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, violence against women, child support, participation of laity as Vatican II encouraged. Ironically, his admirers filled the streets of Rome but left the churches nearly empty as attendance steadily declines in Europe. (from local newspapers)



Another Round of Creationism vs. Evolution

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Earth in astronomy courses and that the Nazis did not murder millions of Jews and other peoples in history courses. If creationists were really concerned about fairness they should argue as vehemently that the teachings of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, animist, and the vast assortment of other religious beliefs about the world also be made part of the science education curriculum. The fact that adherents of these other religions are far less numerous in this country does not make their notions any less (or more) valid than those of Christians. All are based on faith, rather than evidence; and most often their faith is determined not by objective reasoning but by emotional ties to family, friends and local majority culture. None of them, however, holds up to scientific scrutiny.

Unlike religious beliefs, evolution is not based on dogmatic faith. It is based on careful

observations of fossils, genes, and comparative anatomy. Hypotheses may be asserted but once brought before the scientific community, they may either be proved with a reasonable degree of certainty or disproved by even one inconvenient fact. Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* are not holy writ for evolutionists. For all his research, there was much that Darwin did not know, much he could not know at the time he lived; but he realized that, and he knew his work would be refined and greatly expanded upon by future scientists and that some of his ideas would even be invalidated, all of which has been the case. However, the bulk of his ideas have withstood intense scientific scrutiny for well over a century, and evolution has become a key factor in modern understanding of all facets of biology. All the efforts of all the creationists in the world to stifle the teaching of evolution will not change that or make their antiquated myths scientifically valid.



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
 P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 • (904) 288-6291
 2005 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 (\$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: _____

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Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the First Coast Freethought Society is to serve the needs of the non-religious population of Northeast Florida, to promote freethought and secular humanism, to provide a place for agnostics, rationalists, atheists, skeptics and other freethinkers.

Meetings

The FCFS meets the second Monday of every month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida. 32211. (904) 725-8133 Meeting time: from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

Humanist Book Discussion Group



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

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

What: Books planned for discussion:

- **May 15** - *The Fundamentals of Extremism* by Kimberly Blaker, Ed.
- **June 13** - *Why People Believe Weird Things* by Michael Shermer

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at 996-1553.

Condolences are extended to FCFS founder Earl Coggins and his family for the recent loss of his mother. Earl, you are in our thoughts as you go through this difficult time.

YOU CAN'T BE NEUTRAL ON A MOVING TRAIN documents the life and times of the historian, author, political, social, and peace activist, **Howard Zinn**. This must-see film will be shown in Jacksonville on Sunday, **May 15th**, at **1:00 p.m.**, for **one showing only**. Howard Zinn may be best known for his best-selling book, *A People's History of the United States*, which is a widely used textbook for college level history courses. The movie will be shown at the:

San Marco Theatre
1966 San Marco Blvd. Jacksonville, FL 32207
(904) 396-4845

Welcoming remarks by FCFS member Ken Hurley and a lively discussion after the film. For more information, contact Doris Marlin by phone 727-0020 or by e-mail wagepeace@bellsouth.net.

Return service requested

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