

FREELY SPEAKING

FREE MINDS
FREE PEOPLE

Vol. 1, No. 2

October 2003

Four pages

SKIRMISHES

The "Ten" on tour

• Now that the "Ten Commandments" monument has been removed from the Alabama Judicial Building, Christian reactionaries have launched a "Save the Commandments" caravan which will hold rallies in several cities and will culminate at a rally in Washington D.C. on October 5.

Atheists and other advocates of church-state separation plan counter-demonstrations.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Congress, never reluctant to jump on the bandwagon for public piety is working on legislation that will attempt an end run around both the U.S. Constitution and the federal courts.

Greasing the skids

• According to the *Washington Post*, the Bush administration has repealed some regulations and proposed others that will make it easier for religious charities to receive federal money. Among the changes is one that would allow such organizations to hire people based on their religious faith.

Critics charge that the changes will further erode the First Amendment and the "Wall of Separation."

Anyone know where we can get a good price on bricks?

Reprieved

• An Islamic court in Nigeria has overturned the conviction of an illiterate mother sentenced to be stoned to death for having sex out of wedlock.

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Fences make good neighbors?

Israel's construction of a 400-mile long security fence to separate itself from Palestinian territory has come under fire in a new United Nations report which denounces the wall as an illegal annexation. Palestinians have complained the wall has diverted from the internationally recognized boundary (the Green Line) in order to include disputed West Bank settlements. Israel dismisses the claims as "politically motivated.



Apparently neither fences nor religions make good neighbors.

SCFA starts "wish" list

By Dianna Narciso

Sept. 14 was another hot and sunny day in the park. As is usual for our meetings, the conversation flowed from topic to topic without effort. Luke Setzer told us about his exciting meeting of Objectivists the night before. He had invited a Christian co-worker to the discussion on Genesis versus Peikoff, making for some great conversation.

SCFA's discussion touched on morality, childrearing, the concept of the Trinity, and the origins of religion, with a brief foray into explaining the Birds and Bees to our children.

Luke suggested a brainstorming exercise in which we imagined where we would like the SCFA to be in five year's time, assuming we had unlimited resources.

What would we like to accomplish?

Here's the list of ideas we came up with:

- Sponsor local library subscriptions to freethought periodicals such as Freethought Today, Secular Nation, and American Atheist.
- Create a Fellowship of Reason with a membership of 500. (<http://www.fellowshipofreason.com/>)
- Remove the phrase "...under God" from the Pledge.

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Page #1

HAPPENINGS

The Space Coast Freethought Association will hold it's monthly gathering in the park from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on October 5th at Wickham Park.

Topics for this months meeting may include more discussion of our wish list of projects we might want the group to undertake, our most recent letter-writing efforts (see SPEAKING OUT on page 4), and Dianna and Charley's upcoming trip to the Freedom From Religion Foundation's convention next weekend (Oct. 10 - 12) in Washington D.C. Of course, our discussions are usually wide-ranging and doubtless will cover other subjects as well.

Those attending should bring chairs, something to drink and sun screen.

Turn right after entering on the south side of Wickham Park. We usually set up shop near the first big pavilion on the left. Look for the SCFA sign on the back of a vehicle in the parking lot to get a fix on our location.

Our own Luke Setzer and Jesse Harris have formed the Kennedy Space Center Freethinkers lunch club. So far, a total of 13 people have expressed interest. Eight people attended the first meeting on September 26 at noon in the Space Station Processing Facility Room 3039. Meetings for lunch and

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WISH LIST (from page 1)

- Remove the phrase "In God We Trust" from US currency
- Found a freethought school
- Publish a freethought newspaper
- Get a weekly or monthly column published in Florida Today
- Start freethought groups at area high schools
- Get the Boy Scouts of America to drop their religious belief requirement.
- Get the Girl Scouts of America to drop their religious belief requirement. (See this website for more info: <http://www.bsa-discrimination.org/html/gsus.html>)
- Sponsor a community freethought BarBQue
- Hold a convention
- Unite all atheist and freethought groups into one group
- Get government sanction of the National Day of Reason (<http://www.nationaldayofreason.org/>)
- Endorse a Month of Reason to go with National Day of Reason
- Support national recognition of Darwin's birthday.
- Support national recognition of Thomas Paine's birthday.
- Donate classroom sets of Thomas Paine's Age of Reason.
- Petition churches to have a "Reason Section" like the smoking section in restaurants. HeHeHe
- Found a Freethought Toastmaster's group.
- Found a Freethought study group
- Run a freethinking candidate for local office
- Develop a pamphlet for placement in libraries
- Develop a flyer for general distribution
- Set up a publishing company for freethought books
- Hire a plane to fly a banner over Brevard that reads: There is no god!
- Establish a Temple of Reason or have another sort of permanent building.
- Create a non-profit organization.
- Create a symbol or unique icon for SCFA; perhaps a rocket.
- Create and distribute bumper stickers.
- Create and offer a six-week course in logic.
- Become efficient in marketing reason.
- Develop a course on propaganda, how it works and how to avoid being duped by it.
- Take a road trip to the Randi Foundation.
- Isolate and promote standards for validating knowledge.
- Change the definition of atheism and atheist in dictionaries.
- Create an atheist anti-defamation league.
- Create an atheist charities resource.
- Write and produce freethought songs.

Many of these ideas are workable. What else would you like to see us do?

Space Coast Freethought Association

Founded by Dianna Narciso, the SCFA seeks to bring freethinkers of Brevard and surrounding areas together for social interaction, activism and community outreach.

To join the group go to:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SpaceCoastFreethought/>

For more information, contact Dianna Narciso by email at catspah@cfl.rr.com or by telephone at (321) 952-1231.

Free Minds — Free People

CONNECTIONS:

some web addresses that may be of interest to freethinkers

<http://www.atheistalliance.org/florida/index.htm>

Atheists of Florida was "founded to heighten public awareness about atheism, monitor state/church separation issues, and provide intellectually stimulating contact for the membership."

The organization was founded in 1992 and is an all-volunteer, not for profit group. Atheists of Florida has several chapters statewide, publishes a newsletter for its members, sponsors the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund and is affiliated with the national Atheist Alliance.

<http://www.atheistalliance.org/index.htm>

The Atheist Alliance Web Center is home to the "only democratic national atheist organization in the United States. The Alliance sponsors annual conventions, publishes Secular Nation magazine and The Freethought Directory, maintains a web site that hosts member societies' web sites free of charge, and has a national distribution network for atheist videotapes on public access TV. The alliance now accepts individual memberships as well as group affiliations.

<http://www.secularhumanism.org/>

The Council for Secular Humanism cultivates rational inquiry, ethical values, and human development through the advancement of secular humanism. To carry out its mission the **Council for Secular Humanism** sponsors publications, programs, and organizes meetings and other group activities. Founded by Paul Kurtz, the council sponsors The Center for Inquiry - including CFI Florida and publishes Free Inquiry magazine, among other publications.

<http://skepdic.com/>

The Skeptic's Dictionary calls itself "A Collection of Strange Beliefs, Amusing Deceptions, and Dangerous Delusions (and how to think critically about them)." It's a lively site with lots of information.

Some of the topics covered under "A" - for example - include: Amway, ancient astronauts, angel therapy, animal quackers, Area 51, argument from design, astral body ... and so on.

The site offers an online newsletter and a mailing list, for those who want to sign up.

Freely Speaking is the newsletter of the Space Coast Freethought Association. It is published in the first week of the month and distributed free as a pdf file via email and/or by regular mail. Print copies may be available on request.

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Freely Speaking invites the submission of articles which promote freethought and church-state separation or may otherwise be of interest to our membership and announcements relating to groups and activities which do the same. Articles should be a maximum of 1,000 words and announcements a maximum of 100. All submissions are subject to editing and may be cut to conserve space. Email submissions to gricker@cfl.rr.com with the subject heading "newsletter submissions."

Speaking out:

(continued from page 4)

Pensacola News Journal - Sept. 30

Get a clue

In his letter of Sept. 18 ("Reese is right") attacking separation of state and church, John Woodward credited James Madison with the following quote: " We have staked the entire future of the American civilization, not upon the power of government, but on the American people following the Ten Commandments of God."

A little research reveals that this is one of the bogus quotes promulgated and now retracted by author David Barton. No such quote has ever been found in the writing of Madison, and none of his biographers can locate the origin of the quote.

Gullible right-wingers should get a clue and research such things before accepting them as the truth. It could save them some embarrassment.

Larry Munding, St. Augustine

SKIRMISHES (from page 1)

Amina Lawal, 32, had become the center of a controversy that made headlines around the globe and drew sharp criticism to the government of Nigeria.

If the stoning had been carried out, she would have been the first woman stoned since 12 northern states in Nigeria adopted strict Islamic law, or Shariah, in 1999.

It should be noted, however, that Ms. Lawal's conviction was overturned on technicalities, not because the law itself is a barbaric relic that ought not be allowed in any civilized society.

Those who advocate adherence to the Shariah insist it is important to their religious traditions and helps reduce crime.

Now, why does that have such a familiar ring to it?

HAPPENINGS (from page 1)

and book discussions will take place there the second Friday of each month. Visit

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/KSCFreethinkers/>

to learn more and to join the list for updates and announcements. So far, Leonard Peikoff's essay "Religion vs America" and Carl Sagan's book THE DEMON-HAUNTED WORLD will serve as the first two items of discussion.

Got an announcement to make?

The Space Coast Freethought Association welcomes announcements from other groups and organizations who are interested in promoting reason, freethought and the separation of church and state.

Please submit announcements of your group's meetings and activities no later than the last Friday of the month. All announcements should be emailed to: gricker@cfl.rr.com. Please do not send them as attachments but in the body of the email message. Please head all such messages "newsletter submission."

Announcements should not exceed a length of 100 words. All announcements will be subject to editing and may be shortened to meet space requirements.

Pensacola News Journal - Sept. 30

Religious freedom

I must admit that Dorothy Standley got me to scratch my head in disbelief. In her letter titled "Our way or highway," she said things like, "If they don't like the God we were created under ... they can leave!"

Once again, another Christian trying to force everyone to submit to, and serve, their God. She not only displays religious intolerance, typical of some Christians, but also shows how unpatriotic she is by not respecting our Constitution and freedom for all.

Our forefathers established this country, and like secularists they wanted religious freedom, thus Congress "shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Secularists believe that everyone should have freedom regarding religion. Our government should represent all of us. Why can't Christians understand that in order to have religious freedom for everyone, our government cannot establish or support any one religion.

Is it because, unlike secularists who believe everyone has the right to religious freedom, Christians believe there should be no freedom as they push everyone to adhere to Christianity? -

Charles Eugene, Titusville

Pensacola News Journal - Sept 28

Buried in sand

Recent letter-writer Dorothy Standley ("Our way or highway," Sept. 19) is sorely in need of digging out. She has buried her head in the sand, deluded herself into thinking that belief equals truth. She believes her God made this country great; and we evil secularists want to evict Him.

If we could extricate her head from its dark, dank hole, she might realize that this country is religiously diverse. Her God isn't the only one being worshipped around here, and there are those who worship no gods at all. Such a country requires a secular government to represent all its citizens.

That she has the audacity to suggest those who don't accept her brand of superstition ought to leave is shameful; no wonder she's buried her head in the sand. I am a citizen of this country by birth and entitled to the same rights and representation as she is. How dare she suggest I leave my home simply because I want my government to represent her and me, not just her.

I pity those who bury their ability to reason in the dirt of dogma; the suffocating fear of diversity must be an awful burden to bare.

-
Dianna Narciso, Palm Bay

Speaking out:

(more on page 3)

Orlando Sentinel — Sept. 5:

The "Friday Forum" in the Orlando Sentinel asks: "Should the Ten Commandments monument have been allowed to stay in the Alabama Judicial Building? Why or why not?"

No, they should not. Human history has made it very clear that mixing religion with politics leads to bloody intolerance. Furthermore, no person has ever proven that God even exists. Belief in any gods requires faith.

Our verifiable common bond as humans is not faith in the supernatural, but reason regarding natural facts. We can easily construct fully secular laws holding human life as the standard of value. Any attempt by the judiciary to appeal to faith requires an abandonment of reason and therefore a prejudice against anyone who adheres to a different faith.

This nation took a bold step by sanctioning religious freedom. We need to do all we can to keep church and state separate.

Luther Setzer, Cocoa, FL

Bradenton Herald — Sept. 17

Keep religion separate

A letter-writer said recently, "Our nation was founded on Christian principles" and "When prayer was taken out of our schools, this was the beginning of moral decay in our nation."

Not true! There is no mention of Christianity, the Bible, Jesus or God in our Constitution. This was done for a reason. Our founding fathers left England because the kings established government-sanctioned religion and forced everyone to adhere. Our founders wanted religious freedom, thus the words, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Our nation was not founded on Christian principles or any of the other religions that exist in our country. Every citizen has the right to believe or not believe whatever religion they want.

Having prayer in public funded schools is government establishing religion. Also, morality has nothing to do with religion, Christianity or otherwise. Good morals come from society striving to better humanity. There was a time when Christians used their Bible to support their "God-given" right to own slaves. Was this moral? Morality is doing what is right no matter what you are told. Religion is doing what you are told no matter what is right.

Charles Eugene, Titusville

In "Speaking out" the Space Coast Freethought Association reprints letters from its membership that have been published in the media. If you have a published letter that has appeared in a newspaper, magazine or other media, please send a copy to gricker@cfl.rr.com with the heading "newsletter submission." Please include the date the letter was published and the name of the publication.

Bradenton Herald — Sept. 24

Free to pray

Recent letter writer James Hall ("Offense taken," Sept. 15) has me confused. He's offended that some enemy known as "they" has taken prayer out of schools and taken away his right to chastise his children. When did this happen? No one took prayer out of schools. What "they" did was ensure that the captive audience of schoolchildren, whose parents are religiously diverse, were no longer subject to Christian indoctrination. Anyone can pray in school; you just can't lead my children in prayer to your God.

For the life of me, I can't figure out what is wrong with that. As with parents not being able to chastise their children, is he living in America?

Mr. Hall also seems to have a problem with non-Christians being fairly represented by a secular government. Christians do a lot of whining about losing their rights to a Christian government. They refuse to accept the diversity of our country. They just can't stand it that we all aren't buying into their delusion, so they want the government to force us to pay lip service to it. As to his offense at rude, crude and obnoxious people, I know exactly how he feels.

Dianna Narciso, Palm Bay

Florida Today — Sept. 28

Stand up against fundamentalism

By Dianna Narciso, Palm Bay

A recent letter headlined "Leave America if against religion," stated that "it's time the people in this country take a stand and make sure majority rules in a democracy."

Well, I agree that it's time the people took a stand. It's time we took a stand for education, to rid our children of the lie that this is a Christian nation and that we live in a democracy where the majority is free to trample the rights of the minority.

It's time we took a stand for tolerance, shaming the bigots who claim that people who don't believe like they do ought to leave or be forced to acknowledge their particular myth above any other.

It's time we took a stand for peace, encouraging our children to learn about other faiths and atheism, to judge people as individuals by their actions, not by which holy book they read.

It's time we took a stand for morality, insisting people look to what is right and just and good, instead of looking into the past for support for their worldview.

It's time we took a stand for history and stop the misquoting and lies by people desperate to believe this nation was founded by those who believe as they do.

I'm ready to take a stand for a secular government that can represent the religious and nonreligious alike.

Who's standing with me?