

Red River Rationalist

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redriverfreethinkers.org

Old Books; New Books

Davis Cope

[Reviews books or anything else interesting to Cope.]

It must be true -- I read it on a dollar bill.

Reading letters to the editor in the local newspaper is my favorite spectator sport, and Red River Freethinkers' proposal for a "sister monument" to Fargo's Ten Commandments monument provoked plenty of them this past summer. The letters are especially interesting when I know something about the issue, because they give me some idea of the misinformation clouding the discussion, which gives me some idea of the misinformation floating around on other issues, which gives me the creeps. But I digress.

An 8 July 2007 letter from an Assembly of God pastor was memorable. It ignored the issue of a second monument, took a straightforward "pro-monument" stand (for his preference), noted that a federal judge had "dismissed a lawsuit brought by the Freethinkers to remove the monument", and stated a new lawsuit "would be a fight worth taking on" because "appeasement is poor policy".

None of this addresses, or mentions, the First Amendment questions actually involved, and it misstates the result of that lawsuit. To say it was dismissed suggests that the court refused to hear it due to a lack of grounds or merit. In fact, the case was in federal court for three years, and the decision, which was against us and allowed the Ten Commandments monument to remain on public property, was based on Supreme Court decisions made between the filing of our case and its conclusion. The First Amendment issues involved here are significant.

However, what particularly struck me about the letter was the following item:

"Consider the Founding Fathers. I have been told, incredibly, that the Founding Fathers were not in favor of public expressions of belief. This is silly. Look at the penny in your pocket or the dollar in your wallet, and read a public expression of faith: In God We Trust."

It bothers me in three ways. First, it's wrong, as the pastor would have learned if he had checked with any of the coin collectors in his congregation. The "Red Book" is a standard coin collector reference, issued annually to provide current prices. It includes historical information about U.S. coinage. For example, the Constitution gave Congress the power to coin money, and it did. But this was not as straightforward as you might think. It was first necessary to determine a national system, and two were proposed. The decimalists wanted a dollar divided into 100 cents, while the duodecimalists wanted a dollar divided into 1440 somethings (I forget what). The result you know, and the first United States coins appeared in 1787. The money did not have "In God We Trust" or any other religious statement on it, and the Founding Fathers were all long dead and buried when the phrase did appear. From my 1971 Red Book: "The two-cent piece is one of the short-lived issues of United States coinage. The motto 'In God We Trust' appeared for the first time [1864]. Its presence on the new coin was due largely to the increased religious sentiment during the Civil War crisis."

The second thing that bothers me is the casual dismissal of a really interesting question: What did the Founding Fathers think about religion? After all, here's a bunch of intelligent people who can't even agree on 100 cents in a dollar. You can bet they will have interesting, and different, views on religion.

Finally, even if you accept the idea that government should make statements of faith, what does it say about the society, about the religion, that places those expressions of faith on its money?

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*"And if there were a God, I
think it very unlikely that He
would have
such an uneasy vanity as to be
offended by those who doubt
His existence."
(Bertrand Russell)*

Pious Liars?

I would find it very painful to be a librarian because new books invading limited shelf space would force me to dispose of much valuable material.

I enjoy being on the receiving end: For fifty cents I bought the five volumes of Mark Sullivan's renowned *Our Times*, c. 1927. In Vol. II he devotes many pages (10-48) to the influence during the 19th century of McGuffey's Readers on generations of American children. These texts were loaded with religious and moralistic admonitions.

Sullivan recounts the story of H. H. Vail, an official of the company that published the readers: "In the year 1802 ... a Presbyterian clergyman named Thomas Hughes" started an academy. In 1818 "Hughes passed a log cabin" where he heard a widow praying to God to "send some means by which her children could get an education. ... Hughes ... took the oldest son, William Holmes McGuffey" to his academy. Sullivan adds "To the knowledge of the writer of this page, the influences thus casually set in motion were flowing in broad streams throughout the life of America more than a hundred years later."

He adds this remarkable footnote: "... After the present chapter was in type, it was sent for verification ... to Reverend Edward H McGuffey ...(a son of Alexander H McGuffey and nephew of William H), who ... wrote ... 'That is pure fiction. Nothing like it ever occurred.' "

Would the pious H H Vail have stooped to fabricate such a story? Or did the pious E H McGuffey repudiate a true story? We have the precedent of the parson Mason Locke Weems, whose 1800 biography of Washington included his fable of the cherry tree and the much-loved concoction of George on his knees praying at Valley Forge (depicted on two US stamps).

Could Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul, Joshua, Ezra, Job, Isaiah, Joel, Amos, Malachi, et al. also have taken pious liberties with the truth?

- **Bill Treumann**

*Jesus walks into a hotel, goes up to the counter. He puts three nails
on the counter and says, "I need to be put up for the night."*

Letter to the Editor

Dear RRR,

I'm a Christian of the born-again variety, a preacher, a paying recipient of the RRR newsletter, and a friend of Chuck Crane. This was my latest contribution to our local paper's editorial page.

This afternoon, Sunday, I was lying around flipping channels on the TV. I came across Pastor John Hagee from Texas hosting a large conference in Washington D.C. concerning the nation of Israel. I imagine there were 5,000 people in attendance with perhaps 30 big name Evangelical preachers on the stage with him. He was boldly advocating a military first strike against and war with Iran. The Reverend got repeated standing ovations.

I was reminded of the Crusades and Manifest Destiny, both driven by militant, violent religious zeal. They would convince us that to be a Christian one must be militarist. If you listen to these folks long enough you will also be persuaded that to be saved you must be a Capitalist, a Far Right Republican, and a U. S. Imperialist to boot.

Pastor Hagee contended that 50 million Evangelicals and 5 million Jews will decide the fate of the world. Here is the world at the point of a Bible bayonet, the end of a Gospel gun barrel and the receiving end of a Family Values falling bomb. It is no wonder that so few people outside of the church have any interest in coming in. I can hardly blame them.

- **Mark Weise**, Brandon, MN

Update On Monument Wars

Members of the Red River Freethinkers will recall that we asked the Fargo City Commission for permission to place our own monument next to the Ten Commandments monument. Our monument will contain a quote from the Treaty of Tripoli. After ten months of asking and negotiating we were finally given a definite answer of "no."

Since then there has been nothing in the news media about the issue. Your Executive Committee, however, has been very busy looking into other avenues that might be available. It is our belief that ultimately we will be able to place our monument on the Fargo City Mall. Please stay tuned as we figure our next step.

We would like to thank all members for their patience and support as we move this project forward.

- **Jon Lindgren**, President

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SRLS FALL 2007. UPDATED 2007.09.14.

Meetings are Tuesdays at noon in the NDSU Memorial Union. All meetings are one hour and free. The public is welcome. An NDSU campus map can be found in the local telephone directory.

(4) 2 Oct. Mandan. **JOHN HELGELAND**. Schleiermacher Answers All Your Questions.

- (5) 9 Oct. Mandan. **KATHRYN TRILL**. An Ancient, God-Centered, Scientifically Compatible Explanation of Creation and How the Universe Works. Part 1.
- (6) 16 Oct. Mandan. **KATHRYN TRILL**. An Ancient, God-Centered, Scientifically Compatible Explanation of Creation and How the Universe Works. Part 2.
- (8) 23 Oct. Mandan. **PAUL FROESCHLE**. Book Review: Jesus for the Nonreligious by Bishop Shelby Spong.
- (9) 30 Oct. Mandan. **SYED AHMAD**. Christian-Muslim Interaction at the Dawn of Islam.
- (10) 6 Nov. Mandan. **SYED AHMAD**. Evidence on the Sojourn of Jesus to India.
- (11) 13 Nov. Mandan. **TONY FLOOD**. Non-scientific Presuppositions of Popular Scientific Movements.
- (12) 20 Nov. Mandan. **GERALD FAUSKE**. TBA.

SRLS Happenings

Every Tuesday at noon, Dennis Cooley and Davis Cope host the Science, Religion and Lunch seminar (SRLS) in the Mandan Room at NDSU.

These seminars are open to the public and I have been fortunate enough to make it to all of them so far.

Moderated by our own Davis Cope, these one-hour seminars feature a 40-minute presentation followed by 20 minutes of questions and answers and, as you might have guessed, observe punctuality and decorum with mathematical precision.

Presentations given so far include, "Transgender and the Nature/Nurture Dichotomy" (David Du Shane), "A Refutation of Human Evolution" (Martin Wishnatsky), "Remarks on Human Evolution" (Tom Riley), and "Schleiermacher Answers All Your Questions" (John Helgeland).

Presentations coming up in October and November include "An Ancient, God-Centered, Scientifically Compatible Explanation of Creation and How the Universe Works." (Kathryn Trill), "Book Review: Jesus for the Nonreligious by Bishop Shelby Spong." (Paul Froeschle), "Christian-Muslim Interaction at the Dawn of Islam." (Syed Ahmad), and "Non-scientific Presuppositions of Popular Scientific Movements." (Tony Flood).

Attendees have included, typically, 20 to 30 scientists, ministers, students, faculty, theists, atheists, creationists, evolutionists, etc. I have found the presentations, and the post-presentation discussions, to be spirited, well-meaning and thought-provoking.

From the SRLS web site "<http://www.ndsu.nodak.edu/ndsu/srls/>", "The Science, Religion, and Lunch Seminar is sponsored by the NDSU College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, by the NDSU Society of Physics Students, and by Red River Freethinkers."

- Jason Schoeneck

Brief Report on the "Potluck Experience"

* Lilie and I brought green bean casserole, my favorite!

* Carol updated us on the 501c3 non-profit status, and said it might be another 4-5 months until the dust really settles on that.

* John gave a brief update on our legal outlook.

* MSUM student Adam came to the potluck meeting. You may not remember Adam, his first RRF meeting was our August business meeting. I mention this because he is one of the organizers of a new Freethought org at MSUM. He may be a good source for additional RRF membership/action. I have

been attending their Thursday night meetings. Also, Adam is an avid "multimedia guy", in other words, he can record/edit/produce audio-video media. This might give us some creative options for spreading

the good word.

* Had Lew's borscht, with sour cream. Isn't borscht supposed to be cold?

- Jason Schoenack

Why Did The Chicken Cross The Road?

Pat Buchanan: To steal a job from a decent, hardworking American.

Jesse Jackson: The road, you will see, represents the black man. The chicken crossed the "black man" in order to trample him and keep him down.

The Bible: And God came down from the heavens, and He said unto the chicken, "Thou shalt cross the road." And the chicken crossed the road, and it was good.

Colonel Sanders: I missed one?

L.A. Police Department: Give us five minutes with the chicken and we'll find out.

Sen. Larry Craig: The chicken did not cross the road. I repeat, the chicken did NOT cross the road. I don't know any chickens. I have never known any chickens.

Dr. Seuss: Did the chicken cross the road? Did he cross it with a toad? Yes! The chicken crossed the road, but why it crossed, I've not been told!

Martin Luther King, Jr.: I envision a world where all chickens will be free to cross roads without having their motives called into question.

Grandpa: In my day, we didn't ask why the chicken crossed the road. If someone told us that the chicken crossed the road, that was good enough for us.

Aristotle: It is the nature of chickens to cross the road.

Karl Marx: It was an historical inevitability.

Saddam Hussein: This was an unprovoked act of rebellion and we were quite justified in dropping 50 tons of nerve gas on the it!

George W. Bush: What chicken?

Captain James T. Kirk: To boldly go where no chicken has gone before.

Bill Gates: I have just released Chicken '98, which will not only cross roads, but will lay eggs, file your important documents, and balance your checkbook, and Explorer is an inextricable part of the operating system.

Einstein: Did the chicken really cross the road or did the road move beneath the chicken?

Bill Clinton: I DID NOT cross the road with THAT chicken.

(adapted from anonymous internet posting)

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went on a camping trip. On day one, they set up camp and bedded down.

Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his friend. "Watson, look at the sky and tell me what you see.

"Watson replied, "I see millions and millions of stars."

"And," Holmes asked, "what does that tell you?"

Watson mused, "I can see that God is all powerful and that we are but small and insignificant. What does it tell you, Holmes?"

"It tells me, Watson, some bastard has stolen our tent."

The Sept. 27 *MSUM Advocate* announced the formation of the "Campus Freethought Alliance" which "will work to challenge misrepresentations of non-religious convictions and counter religious extremism, while also encouraging freedom from superstition." The contact is "mailto:musumcfa@gmail.com" weekly meetings are Thursdays at 8 p.m. in CMU 216.

- sent by **Donna McMaster**

Bylaws to be Amended

Several amendments and additions to the Red River Freethinkers bylaws were proposed at our September 16th meeting. In accordance with the procedures set out in our current bylaws, these amendments must be approved at our October 21st meeting in order to be adopted. We need to make these changes to get 501(c)(3) status.

A copy of the current bylaws and the proposed amendments and additions will be mailed to all RRF members in good standing before the October meeting. All members who are present at that meeting may vote on the amendments. Approval will be by a simple majority of those voting.

To see if your dues are current and you are a member in good standing, please check below:

___ **Your dues to RRF for 2007 have been paid & you are a voting member.**

___ **You have paid a newsletter-only fee; you are not a voting member.**

___ **You are not yet a member of RRF for 2007.**

There are three religious truths:

1. Jews do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah.
2. Protestants do not recognize the Pope as the leader of the Christian faith.
3. Baptists do not recognize each other at the liquor store or at Hooters.

The Red River Freethinkers is organized by freethinkers to be a nonprofit educational organization. We are a group of nonreligious people skeptical of religious dogma. We advocate Intellectual Freedom and the use of Reason. Articles and letters in this newsletter present ideas and opinions of individual writers and do not necessarily reflect those of the Red River Freethinkers organization.

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Items for newsletter may be sent to P.O. Box 995, Alexandria, MN 56308

Red River Freethinkers Calendar

Regularly scheduled meetings are held at 2:30 p.m. on the third Sunday of each month at the Fargo Unitarian Universalist Church at 121 9th Street South in Fargo.

This month's meeting will be on October 21, 2007, at the usual time and place.

Please note the article in the next column regarding the amendments and additions proposed to our bylaws. We hope to have a good turnout to vote on these changes.

BECOME A MEMBER!

Membership includes a subscription to this newsletter. Send dues, name, address, phone number and e-mail address to Red River Freethinkers, P.O. Box 405, Fargo, ND 58107-0405.

Family membership	\$45/year
Individual membership	\$30/year
Student membership	\$15/year
Newsletter only	\$10/year

NOTE: If you received a complimentary copy of The Red River Rationalist and would like to be removed from our mailing list, please contact any of the officers.

