

Red River Rationalist

No. 85 - March, 2006
redriverfreethinkers.org

WWJD?

Any similarity to actual persons living or dead is purely coincidental. :-)

JC, A young bachelor, received an inheritance from his step-dad Joe, who had greatly enhanced what had been willed to him by his dad Jake.

On a dull day a stock broker making cold calls reached JC by phone. He was astonished to hear his new prospect say that he wanted to buy high and sell low (cf. Matthew 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22) The broker assumed this was a slip of the tongue but JC explained that he regarded this as his xian duty.

So the broker placed JC's order to buy Transfix at its current price of 40 and sell it if it dropped to 25. When JC told Mary, his mom, what he was doing with his new wealth she protested that Joe had promised her that it would be used to protect her from want in her old age. But JC was unsympathetic, pointing out that the birds neither sow nor reap yet they get along just fine, without worrying about the future.(cf. Matthew 6:26, Luke 12:24)

Mary became very angry and blurted out that during her first pregnancy she had sobbingly told Joe that she was much too young to become a mother and that she wished she had never let that ghost enter - ah, uh - her. She added that she had pleaded with Joe to slug her in the belly every day until she would no longer need to worry. Joe reluctantly complied but Mary found it almost unbearably (pun?) painful. When they became convinced that this wasn't working she sought out Jemima, a wise old neighbor woman, who gave her some bitter roots to chew. Jemima's childless daughter, Joanna, a middle-aged widow, urged her to jump from big rocks and land stiff-legged. Mary desperately tried everything but all to no avail.

Because of JC's desire to help the poor he placed more losing orders with his new broker, a man who regarded himself as a good xian but not good enough to impoverish himself. He became so impressed with JC's results that he started making the same trades in his own account but in reverse, e.g., short-selling Transfix at 40 and buying it back at 25. JC lost all his money; his broker became rich; the poor really never got into the loop. Well, JC couldn't be expected to foresee everything.

What about Mary? Well, one day she had talked Jimmie, her favorite son, and her other kids (cf. Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; Acts 1:14) into going with her to see JC, hoping to get some help before he went broke. But he refused to see them, even implying that they were no kin of his. (cf. Matthew 12:46-48) She should have anticipated this because earlier he had addressed her brusquely as "Woman" and made it clear that he had no interest in her. (cf. Matthew 19:29; Mark 3:31-33; 10:29,30; Luke 14:26; John 2:4) She probably recalled that when JC was a pre-teen Mary and Joe found their missing boy after a three-day search. When Mary mildly reproached him, asking why he had caused them so much worry and grief, he gave her a snotty answer. (cf. Luke 2:43-50) When Mary quoted the commandment to honor one's parents he brushed that off as irrelevant if not irreverent.

- Bill Treumann

Pledge of Allegiance

(1924 - 1954)

*I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America,
and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation,
indivisible, with liberty and justice for all*

Experimentally Confirmed: Not a Trifle.

I welcome the expression of a differing point of view by MW in the January 2006 newsletter. But I disagree and here is why.

The writer's view is that posting the Ten Commandments in public places is a trifling matter, that "passive public expressions that no one is required to venerate can only qualify as trifles". That view was experimentally tested by RRF in August 2001 when we put the issue of removing Fargo's Ten Commandments monument from public property before the City Commission. The public response was immediate, substantial, hysterical, and furious. The Fargo Human Relations Commission held a meeting to hear public opinion, and the turnout was so heavy that it had to hold a second meeting, attended by over 300 people. RRF was excoriated in talk shows and letters to the editor. The fact is that such monuments have immense symbolic value for part of the community, and the presence of a RELIGIOUS symbol on PUBLIC property is the very essence of the value. Indeed, religion was equated with patriotism and nonbelief with treason. That experiment indicates the writer's view to be incorrect. The issue cannot be classified as a trifle.

The writer also notes that "Human beings are cracked pots, faulty switches, and broken pipes. We are all capable of the most egregious errors and abuse of our fellows and so it behooves us to exercise grace and good will in the allowance of each other's freedoms." Quite so, an excellent argument for courtesy and compromise and good humor in the daily round. However, as a statement on human nature, it implies that democracy cannot work and that our government is based on a misapprehension. The issue is one of principle, of legal precedent and interpretation, of where the boundary between church and state is to be drawn. That is why the issue ended up in federal court instead of being placed before Miss Manners.

The writer explains the point at which matters are not trifling and, I suppose, where objection is justified: "Requiring me to pay the support of the local preacher bites harder. Enforcing a religious loyalty oath to hold public office twists my arm." At such a point, however, the Constitution would already have been thrown out the window, and the situation would be far beyond the possibility of peaceful protest. The time to speak up is when you can, not when you can't.

The fact that a large segment of my community is incapable of rational discussion of the Ten

Commandments issue is not a trifle to me. But you will not find me dismissing or excusing that segment as "cracked pots". I have faith in the common man and the common woman. I have faith in their empathy, their compassion, their concern for the community, their willingness to listen to other views, and their ability to learn, to think, and to change. I have faith in democracy. I believe the best way to make my community capable of rational discussion on this or any other issue is not to avoid discussion, but to engage in it.

- **Davis Cope**

Our very own American Jihad

Conservative Catholics and Protestant Fundamentalists, our very own jihadist coalition, are now marshalling their troops for a frontal attack upon the Constitution itself. Much as they complain about liberal activists who distort the intentions of the Founding Fathers and advocate social changes that never entered the minds of the initial framers of that Sacred Document, they now stand ready to add amendments imposing draconian restrictions on the lives of present day sinners!

These Holy Warriors are loud in demanding a Constitutional Amendment to prevent gay marriage, thus protecting the sanctity of this admittedly fragile institution from incursions by those out to destroy their insistence that it be reserved only for the purpose of reproduction and therefore permissible only between one man and one woman.

Their bigotry is blatantly apparent when they refuse to demand as well, an amendment forbidding divorce as equally damaging to the marriage covenant. None care to discuss this -- obvious to everyone but themselves -- inconsistency. One wonders why? Over half the marriages in this country now end in divorce, but the jihadists are not calling for an end to divorce by Constitutional fiat. What fair-minded person can fail to conclude from this that homophobia is at the base of their movement? Yet, they continue sanctimoniously to deny that this is so. There is scant chance that their Holy War will end with this amendment when there are so many other areas where coercion to their standards of morality can be obtained by Constitutional prohibitions. I invite you to just watch and see!

- **Lee Paulson**

Coming Attraction

Wednesday, 19 April, at the Fargo Theatre: **DAVID SEDARIS**, the national best selling author and NPR regular. "One of America's most prickly, and most delicious, young comic talents." The Washington Post. Tickets available at all TICKETMASTER outlets 701-235-7171. Tickets also available at the Fargo Theatre Box Office during regular business hours.

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ID proponents want a warning sticker on biology texts. As a suggested compromise, the following sticker has been proposed for the Holy Bible: "If taken literally, this Holy Bible contains material that contradicts current scientific theories about nature and the diversity of living things. All religious arguments should be studied carefully, critically considered and compared with current scientific theories." (Letter from Jason Grosser in *Freethought Today* March, 2006).

Memberships Due for 2006

For most of you, your memberships to Red River Freethinkers for 2006 are due this month.

Your contributions are the only source of income for this organization. Without your continued support, we will no longer be able to continue producing and distributing this newsletter.

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

Send dues, along with name, address, phone number, and e-mail address to: Red River Freethinkers, P.O. Box 405, Fargo, ND 58107-0405

Your membership for 2006 has been paid.
 You are not yet a member for 2006

We Got Mail

[The following e-mail is from an individual who requested and received a copy of RRR]

Thanks for sending me a copy of your newsletter....It was interesting! I've decided that you guys are not quite the organization for me....Close, but not quite. I would appreciate it very much if you would send me the e-mail of address of any organization you may know who would better fit me.

Please let me explain how I see things... You ask in your newsletter why, when there may be 10,000 or so possible members in this area, your organization has only a fraction of one percent as members... I think I may have a possible, partial answer...as I see it, anyway.. (I realize that I know very little about your group and may not know what I'm talking about...probably DON'T, actually,) but as a total

outsider, here's how it seems to me.

As I see it, your main concerns are maintaining the separation of church and state and doing everything you can to keep this country from turning into a theocracy. I COULDN'T AGREE MORE!!! Thank God. (oops) for people like you! The problem I have with your organization is that it seems to swing a little too far to the Left for me. Most people really aren't part of the right or left extremes. Although you do mention the Great Agnostic (which I guess, I would have to describe myself as, for lack of a better word) your organization seems to be completely atheistic and precludes ANY type of religious exploration or thought. To my mind, true "freethinkers" wouldn't do that....To be truly a "free thinker" , in my opinion anyway, one must keep an open mind...to everything..always... I think if you guys would tone it down...just a TAD...you would see your membership soar! Just a suggestion from one, who admittedly, knows very little about your organization.

I know that probably no one there wants to hear such a thing and that I have no business saying anything, but I just wanted to give you my outsider's impression and explain why I've decided not to join.... Like I said earlier, if you know of any organization that would better fit me, I'd love to know about them. I agree with almost everything I read in your newsletter...It was, by and large, refreshing in the EXTREME! (ha ha) I support everything you're trying to accomplish! However, sometimes to accomplish one's goals, especially in a state like ND, it is necessary to moderate the official line.....

Well, I've said more than enough. Good luck to you all in what you're trying to do and thanks again for sending the newsletter. (Name withheld by request)

[Thank you for your good wishes and for the constructive criticism. My response is that you may be a bit hasty in presuming all our members to be atheists. I would suggest attending a meeting or two as a guest; I think you'll find a group that includes agnostics, humanists - even a liberal Christian or two - in addition to atheists. We tend to poke fun, not at religion per se, but at the fundamentalists. I think that, with the current "religious right" involvement in politics, you'll find most freethinkers tend to lean a little left. Chuck Crane, editor]

Bible Verse

Another in our series of limericks to help make Bible study more fun:

*Though alchemists studied it well
For centuries, they never could tell
Just exactly how God
Could have changed Mrs. Lot
Into one solid pillar of NaCl.*
(Genesis 19: 23-26)

For readers who don't have their Bible handy, the appropriate Bible passages are herewith appended:

[The Lord has agreed to let Lot and his wife and daughters escape

to the small town of Zoar before he destroys Sodom and Gomorrah.]

19:23 The sun had risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.

19:24 Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven;

9:25 And He overthrew those cities, and all the plain and the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

9:26 But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

Readers of RRR are encouraged to submit their own favorite passages from the Bible (preferably KJV) in the form of a limerick.

It Must Be Intelligent Design

Here's one genius's take on evolution (Letter to the Editor, *St. Paul Pioneer Press* 2/26/06). This gent (from Alexandria, yet) says, in part, "More than one letter writer talks about cows becoming better cows, dogs branching out to become different types of dogs, etc. That doesn't say a lot about evolution. A cow becomes a cow. Wow! Let me know when a cow becomes a horse, or a pig becomes a human."

[I'm pretty sure though, there is evidence that a human can become an ass. CC]

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"There is a great fraud perpetrated on the human mind. When any institution, group, tribe, society, corporation, church, gang, or country tells their children from the cradle that they have the one and only absolute, universal truth, they drug the human mind into a lethargy of blissful ignorance." (Letter from Michael Osborn in *Freethought Today* March, 2006).

"My sister and I read [Freethought Today] with great joy knowing we're not alone in this big, nasty, religion-filled world of ours..." (Letter from Tobin Atkinson in *Freethought Today* March, 2006).

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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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.

For **19 March 2006**, we will celebrate the **Spring Equinox** with a party and potluck. Please remember that RRF celebrates the Equinox for purely astronomical reasons and let's try to downplay the "fertility rites work whether you believe in them or not" that got us into so much trouble last year. The theme for the party will be "Biblical Origins of Barbecue".

For a free copy of *Freethought Today*, published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, write to FFRF, PO Box 750, Madison, WI 53701

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You can see the Danish cartoons that caused all the fuss at the following website:
mohammed-drawings.blogspot.com

SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND LUNCH SEMINAR

Spring Semester 2006

North Dakota State University

Updated 02/27/2006.

Meadow Lark Room = Memorial Union 342/343.

University Chamber = Memorial Union 349.

Plains Room = Memorial Union 350.

[A campus map can be found in the local telephone directory.]

28 Feb. Meadow Lark. Davis Cope: Creationism as a Bad Example for Students - Case Study: The Age of the Earth. Part I.

7 Mar. Meadow Lark. Davis Cope: Creationism as a Bad Example for Students - Case Study: The Age of the Earth. Part II.

21 Mar. Meadow Lark. John Helgeland: De-mythologizing Scripture.

28 Mar. University Chamber. Dennis Cooley: Does Liberalism Lead to Relativism in Science and Religion?

4 Apr. Meadow Lark. [Presentation on Islam.]

11 Apr. University Chamber. Gerald Fauske: Review of "The Evolution of a Creationist" by Jobe Martin.

18 Apr. Meadow Lark. Kris Groberg: [On the Russian Orthodox Church.]

The Science, Religion, and Lunch Seminar has been sponsored by Red River Freethinkers since spring 2000.

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.

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