

Red River Rationalist

No. 81 - November, 2005

redriverfreethinkers.org

OLD BOOKS; NEW BOOKS

Davis Cope

TEN COMMANDMENTS DECISION WON'T BE APPEALED

The five Plaintiffs in *Twombly v. City of Fargo* will not appeal the decision made by U.S. District Court Judge Erickson on September 29, 2005.

On September 29, 2005, the Honorable Ralph Erickson held that the Fargo Ten Commandments monument did not violate the First Amendment. The Federal District Court decision was based on precedents set recently by both the United States Supreme Court and the Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. As the decision was based on precedents set at higher levels, we will not appeal.

On November 27, 2002, we filed suit in Federal District Court against the City of Fargo, seeking the removal of a Ten Commandments monument from the Civic Center Mall. Two previous attempts were denied by the Fargo City Commission. Our request has been the same throughout and is simple: Move a religious statement (the monument) from public to private property.

Our request was based on the First Amendment, on the principle that public space should be neutral toward religion. The principle is clear, simple, and fair. We regard the present decision as a step away from that principle and a weakening of First Amendment protections.

We have been represented by student attorneys of the Civil Rights Project within the Clinical Education Program of the University of North Dakota School of Law. Year by year and team by team, these students have provided superbly competent and professional counsel. We are deeply touched and grateful for their service.

Inquiries can be directed to Jon Lindgren at (701) 232-7868 (Fargo).

Davis Cope, Jon Lindgren, Lewis Lubka, William Treumann, and Wesley Twombly

The above is the statement that was released to the media on October 26.

*Once I wasn't
Then I was*

Now I ain't again

(Epitaph of James Hewitt)

Biblical Recipes by **Bill Treumann**

Many people look to their bible (especially the King James Version) for guidance on all sorts of behavior. Here are a few quotes on food:

Matthew 3:4 ... his meat was locusts and wild honey.

If that's ok for the first Baptist surely it should be good enough for thee and me.

Ezekiel 2:9; 3:2 ... an hand was sent unto me; ... a roll of a book was therein ...I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll.

Revelation 10:10 ... I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up ...

Leviticus and Deuteronomy provide elaborate instructions on what may and what must not be eaten.

Deuteronomy 14:21 Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien ...

II Kings 6:25 ... an ass's head was sold for fourscore pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a cab of dove's dung for five pieces of silver.

18:27 ... hath he not sent me to the men which sit on the wall that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss ... Almost identical language in *Isaiah 36:12*.

Ezekiel 4:12,15 ... thou shalt eat it as barley cakes, and thou shall bake it with dung that cometh out of man ...I have given thee cow's dung for man's dung, and thou shalt prepare thy bread therewith.

5:10 ... the fathers shall eat the sons ... the sons shall eat their fathers.

II Kings 6:28,29 ... Give thy son, that we may eat him today and we will eat my son tomorrow. So we boiled my son, and did eat him.

Lamentations 4:10 The hands of the pitiful women have sodden [seethed] their own children; they were their meat ...

Deuteronomy 28:53,55,57 ... thou shalt eat the fruit of thine own body, the flesh of thy sons and of thy daughters ... he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat ... she

shall eat them ...

These quotations have been taken out of context. The reader can easily put them back in. Even then, they will never appear on church bulletin boards.

The Limits of Bush's Mind

(Excerpts from an article of this title by Gordon Livingston in the *Sacramento Bee*, October 25, 2005)

The author -- who is a psychiatrist -- points out that this president, who has never changed his mind nor made a mistake, is either a) so insulated from reality that he has come to believe his own administration's propaganda or b) has a "more ominous and pervasive problem influenced by a world view marked by an inability to reason logically and learn from experience."

He goes on to point out that the lack of this form of intelligence "tends to have adverse consequences on one's chances for success at tasks that require good decision-making." Now, that should give us all a warm, fuzzy feeling! The author goes on to say:

"While reason affects our beliefs, the process of correctly perceiving how the world works requires an understanding of the scientific method, and is fundamentally different from religious or philosophical inquiries that are concerned with questions of meaning and faith. When the two ways of thinking become confused, as in the controversy over evolution and 'intelligent design,' we are engaging in a kind of dialogue of the deaf in which scientific theory is pitted against religious belief."

He goes on to cite a 2004 Harris poll on religion showing that 90 percent of adult Americans professed a belief in God, 50 percent believe in ghosts, 30 percent believe in astrology and more than 25 percent believe they were reincarnated.

The prevalence of superstition may explain why U.S. 12th-graders perform below the international average for 21 countries in math and science. The author points out that this is "an ominous statistic at a time when much energy is being expended in educational circles debating whether a creationist belief ought to be taught alongside evolution in science classrooms."

Livingston goes on to say that "the human quality required for the progress of any civilization is curiosity. This desire to formulate and try to answer important questions about our world is the fundamental driving force behind all scientific inquiry. It is in the nature of religious dogmatism to close the doors to discovery."

It is pointed out that, for the true believer, there is no evidence of any kind that will cause a change of mind and that "this is the difference between a scientific theory, which can be disproved, and a religious belief, which cannot."

Livingston goes on to describe this president, who considers himself appointed by God, as "incurious, inarticulate and insulated from people and information that might contradict his "gut feelings" or religious beliefs." He concludes, "To fulfill the duties of our national chief executive, intelligence is

not enough - Woodrow Wilson taught us that - but a conspicuous lack of it is fatal."

(submitted by **John Sherman**)

Evangelical Assault

It probably should come as no surprise that the courts found against removing the ten commandments from government property in Fargo. The religious extremists seem to be having their way everywhere these days. If you think I exaggerate, just consider a few of the things I see in my own small city of Alexandria, MN:

For some time, I have been surprised that all the schools here -- and apparently in many other towns in Minnesota -- have religious "release time" every week. This, to the best of my knowledge, is unconstitutional, but if no one complains, I guess they just go ahead and do it. I know that several years ago there was a football coach here who wouldn't let anyone play if they didn't belong to FCA (Fellowship of Christian Athletes). At least, in this case, someone complained and the coach was replaced.

Now, over the past year or so, I hear of a group of students holding religious meetings at the local high school. They are sponsored by one of the evangelical churches and are reportedly very aggressive proselytizers. I know of some at the school who are quite annoyed by their tactics.

About a month ago, there was a small article in the local paper about a group of ministers who had approached city hall to use a room for their "prayer circle." They wanted to meet once a week to pray so as to influence the city council and city officials to make right decisions (I guess their prayers are sort of like cell phones -- doing them in a church would subject them to roaming charges). And, of course, the city fathers thought that was fine and even agreed to forego the charge (\$25, I think) that anyone else would have to pay to use a room.

And, the latest -- preachers from eight churches (probably the same bunch that are in city hall) are gathered to transform our city through prayer and worship. They recently had a meeting (at the local high school, of course) that was attended by more than 150 of the faithful.

Yesterday's local paper (Oct. 26) had a front page story headed "Prayer packs them in" and a color photo with the cutline "A special blessing for Alexandria." The lead is "Prayer can be a powerful thing. And when an estimated 2,000 people get together to do so, its outcome is bound to resonate throughout the community." The head shaman was quoted as saying, "Truly God is at work in a very big way -- and this is just the beginning." (If interested, you can find the article at www.EchoPress.com).

Just a few days ago, I found out what is no doubt the source of this "wonderful idea." I heard about a book, *The Elk River Story*, which is now available at the local Christian book store. What follows is from www.livingstonesnews.com in an article titled *The Elk River Story* by *Rick Heeren*, *Midwest Regional Vice President, Harvest Evangelism, with the Pray Elk River Team*. (Whew!)

Here is the lead for that article: "Over the last decade, the pastors, business people and lay persons in Elk River, Minn., have been praying and working together in unity with accelerating intensity for God to transform their community. He has!"

"Imagine a city where pastors, intercessors, business leaders, government officials, educators, youth leaders and worship leaders share a vision to see their city transformed by the power of Jesus Christ. That city is Elk River, Minn., where the power of unified prayer is lighting the fuse for a major spiritual transformation."

Now, here's a part that chokes me up: A Sr, Vice President at one of the banks enthuses, "We have had many people pray to receive Christ and also to receive physical healings. Even our drive-through tellers have prayed with people."

I have heard it rumored (and be aware this is only a rumor) that these pious folk are making strides toward getting "Intelligent Design" (e.g. Creationism) into the local school's science teaching. What I do know for a fact is that a story in today's *Minneapolis Star Tribune* (Oct. 27) announces that both the Superintendent and the President of the School Board in Elk River have resigned. It makes one wonder.

Many people scoff at the idea that the United States of American could ever become a theocracy but, under the current administration, I don't think we can just shrug off the idea. I believe that the most insidious thing we have to guard against is the constant pressure to undermine the teaching of science in our schools. I am certainly not alone in that belief (see the item below).

- **Chuck Crane**

The First Shot?

The excerpts that follow are from an article in the Oct. 16, 2005 *Pioneer Press* under the heading "**Is 'intelligent design' the first shot of war?**" and was written by Paul Nussbaum, Knight Ridder News Service.

The article begins "The advocates of intelligent design, spotlighted in the current courtroom battle over the teaching of evolution in Dover, Pa., have much larger goals than biology textbooks.

"They hope to discredit Darwin's theory as part of a bigger effort to restore faith to a more central role in American life. 'Design theory promises to reverse the stifling dominance of the materialistic worldview, and to replace it with a science consonant with Christian and theistic convictions,' says a strategy document written in 1999 by the Seattle think tank at the fore- front of the movement.

"The authors said that they seek nothing less than the overthrow of materialism and its cultural legacies."

The article goes on to describe the five-year plan to promote intelligent design and attack evolution.

The Center for Science and Culture, an arm of the Discovery institute, has sponsored books, forums, and research by about 40 college professors and have made intelligent design a prominent player in the nation's culture wars.

An Invitation to Prospective Freethinkers

What do you think about the appropriateness of the 10 Commandments monument on the Fargo city plaza? Were you surprised by the intensity of the public reaction against the request for its removal? Did the entire episode make you think more seriously about the meaning of "separation of church and state?"

Come and join us at a Red River Freethinkers meeting. We want to hear your ideas.

- **Carol Sawicki**

Interesting Quotes

"The national government will maintain and defend the foundations on which the power of our nation rests. It will offer strong protection to Christianity as the very basis of our collective morality. We want to fill our culture again with the Christian spirit. We want to burn out all the recent immoral developments in literature, in the theatre, and in the press -- in short, we want to burn out the poison of immorality which has entered into our whole life and culture as a result of liberal excess during the past few years."

- **Adolph Hitler**

"What shall we Christians do now with this depraved and damned people of the Jews? ... I will give my faithful advice: First, that one should set fire to their synagogues ... Than that one should break down and destroy their houses ... That one should drive them out of the country."

- **Martin Luther**

"To initiate a war of aggression, therefore, is not only an international crime, it is the supreme international crime differing only from other war crimes in that it contains within itself the accumulated evil of the whole. If certain acts in violation of treaties are crimes, they are crimes whether the United States does them or whether Germany does them, and we are not prepared to lay down a rule of criminal conduct against others which we would not be willing to have invoked against us."

- **J. Robert H. Jackson**

(Jackson, quoted above, was the U.S. Prosecutor at the Nuremberg Trials. This quote appeared in the October 24, 2005 issue of *The Nation*, along with a photo of Rumsfeld, Cheney, and George W. Bush being marched off in handcuffs.)

"Reason is the greatest enemy that faith has ..."

- **Martin Luther**

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.

Red River Freethinkers Board Members

Treasurer	701-232-5676	Carol Sawicki csawicki@corpcomm.net
Secretary	701-293-7188	Davis Cope davis_cope@msn.com

General Contacts

Web Mistress	Lisa Centorrino
701-866-0323	rrfreethinkers@att.net
Newsletter	Chuck Crane
320-763-5666	cranes@rea-alp.com

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

Red River Freethinkers Calendar

Regularly scheduled meetings are on the third Sunday of each month. The time and place of upcoming meetings will be posted in the newsletter and on the website.

Lew Lubka is hosting the November meeting of Red River Freethinkers for a showing of "The Heart of the Beholder" (provided by Tom Ebacher).

Some religious groups have shown a great deal of hostility towards this film, so it should be mighty interesting.

Sunday, November 20, 1:00-3:00 pm, at 1723 6th St. S., Fargo. Rides are available. Call Davis Cope at 701-293-7188.

Note: Lew has suggested that we make this a pot-luck, so let's all bring something to share.

Bible Verse

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

*The first woman created by God
Must have somehow been fatally flawed,
'Cause, some time past Day Six,
He took care of this fix
With a spare rib from Adam's old bod.*

(Genesis 1:27 and

2:21-22)

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

1:27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

Note: The above was on Day Six, after which the Lord God took a day off. Then, after some unspecified time, he fixed up the Garden of Eden for Adam, where the following transpired:

2:21 And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he

slept; and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;

2:22 And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from the man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.

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

* * * * *

Let it be noted that the word "evolution" appears not even once in Darwin's "Origin of Species." Nor does he breathe a single word to assert that humans are descended from monkeys. Nor was the book about how new species came to be.

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.