

Red River Rationalist

No. 91 - September, 2006

redriverfreethinkers.org

Musings on Death

During the past month the local Fargo paper has been full of stories about jury selection in the trial of Alfonso Rodriguez for the murder of Dru Sjodin.

It took weeks to fill the jury pool, partly because it was difficult to find people who had not already formed an opinion on such a publicized and high-profile case. But another problem was finding potential jurors who felt that they could impose the death penalty if the defendant was found guilty.

According to the news reports, some people were excused from the jury pool because they said that they were opposed to the death penalty on religious grounds. But death will happen to all of us. Wouldn't a quick, relatively painless execution be less of a punishment than the long, excruciating process that modern dying has often become? And Catholics believe that if a person confesses and repents his sins just before death, and is given absolution by a priest, then that person will go to heaven. So sentencing someone to the death penalty would appear to guarantee that he would have a better opportunity to go to heaven than most other Catholics, who probably won't have the chance to prepare for the moment of death.

Actually heaven has always sounded like an excruciatingly boring place. And since the people that I care for haven't been practicing religious folks either, they won't be there, so why would I want to go to heaven?

Christian religions can't generally improve the conditions for believers while they are alive. They say that following their arbitrary rules while alive will guarantee perfection afterwards. Why then do so many Christians fear the prospect of their own deaths? Why do they think that the death penalty is the worse punishment that can be given? Maybe, deep down, they don't BELIEVE as sincerely as they would like others to think that they do.

- Carol Sawicki

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I Know I'm not God's Darling

*I know I'm not God's darling,
I am not His main concern,
I doubt He gives a damn at all
If I drown or burn.*

- Tudy Cowdery

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*

BT Squares Off with TB

(BT writes) Tom Blair: In *The FM Extra*, August 7-20, 2006, page 4, you remarked that you "don't know of any God of any religion who" condones killing people.

A religion rather well-known in Europe and the Western Hemisphere has a sacred book in which God's spokesman Moses passes on the divine order to kill most of the Midianites after overpowering them.

The somewhat more drastic orders regarding the Amalakites were to slaughter every man, woman, and child among them.

The sacred text of the Muslims conveys Allah's orders to slay all unbelievers. If you need chapter and verse please let me know. I trust that after verification you will pass the word on to your readers.

Someone who is familiar with other inspired holy books may be able to provide more examples.

- Bill Treumann

(TB replies) Well Bill, There may be some off-beat religions that may preach that it is ok to kill people, but we are talking "GOD". A "Religion" may have created text to condone it, but that doesn't make it GOD'S word to do so. Yes, there was murder and death in the bible, but when the New Testament was created and when Moses brought the commandments down... "Thou Shalt not kill" was the word of God as I understand it. Thanks for the information.

-Tom

(And BT responds) Hi Tom. My original message was in response to your statement "I don't know of any God of any religion who" condones killing people. You seem to accept "Thou shalt not kill" as "the word of God" but ignore the word of God in Numbers, Chapter 31. The entire chapter is relevant but includes: "... the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites ...And Moses spake unto the people, saying, ... avenge the Lord ... And Moses sent them to the war ... and they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses; and they slew all the males ... And the children of Israel took all the women ... captives, and their little ones ... And they ... brought the captives ... unto Moses ... And Moses was wroth ... And ...said ... Have ye saved all the women alive?.. Kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him ..."

On the basis of your own words, you must have been quite unaware of this God-ordered holocaust. Probably most people who regard the bible as the inspired word of God are equally unfamiliar with this. In view of your earlier statement, don't you owe it to your readers to bring this to their attention?

-Bill Treumann

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In the News: John Sherman calls attention to an article in *Science* (Aug. 11, 2006) rating the

acceptance of evolution in the U.S. in comparison with other countries. As John says, "We came in just ahead of Turkey and behind every other country with flush toilets." Of the 34 countries polled, the U.S. ranked 33rd.

In an unrelated(?) item, on TV news, it was noted that SAT scores of U.S. students took the biggest drop in 31 years. HMMMMMM.....

Welcome Jon!

It is a great pleasure to report that Jon Lindgren was elected Interim President at our August meeting! Jon, a retired professor of Economics at North Dakota State University, is well known to many of us. He was Mayor of Fargo for four terms (1978-1994). He was President of the Board of the ACLU of the Dakotas for six years, was Regional Director of PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) for eight years, was active in organizing the Fargo PFLAG chapter, and was one of the plaintiffs in the federal suit to move Fargo's Ten Commandments monument from public property. Jon brings us a rich store of experience, and I invite you to join me in looking for opportunities to pitch in and support him.

- Davis Cope

Message From Jon

Greetings. I have just been elected Interim President of our group. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Freethinkers for placing their trust in me and hope I can help.

This is also a chance to thank the many people, founding members, current and past office holders and others. Through your work, people in our region have had available an organization which explores alternatives to what we often call conventional wisdom. It seems there is always a shortage of opportunities to explore different ideas and Freethinkers have helped to fill that void.

At our last meeting we exchanged ideas about the future of Freethinkers. Bill Treumann volunteered to take on the task of coordinating programs for our monthly meetings. We hope all of you will pitch in with ideas.

With an membership of creative people, our organization is ready to move forward. Exciting times are ahead of us.

- Jon Lindgren

SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND LUNCH SEMINAR

Fall Semester 2006
North Dakota State University

Meetings are Tuesdays at noon in the NDSU Memorial Union.
All meetings are one hour and free. The public is welcome.
Meadow Lark Room = Memorial Union 342/343.

[A campus map can be found in the local telephone directory].
Updated 2006.08.26.

12 Sept. Meadow Lark. Don Miller. Antivaccinationists: A Case Study in Pseudoscience.

19 Sept. Meadow Lark. [Islamic presentation being arranged.]

26 Sept. Meadow Lark. P. Z. Myers (University of Minnesota at Morris). Title to be announced.

3 Oct. Meadow Lark. John Pexton. Penn and Teller on Creationism.

10 Oct. Meadow Lark. Darin Johnson. The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion. I.

17 Oct. Meadow Lark. Darin Johnson. The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion. II.

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

Bill Moyers Quote

Right now, the seesaw between faith and reason is unbalanced because the media give a mighty megaphone to the loudmouths, the dogmatists, the people who turn their beliefs into bumper stickers and sound bites.

The Islamists want a world ruled by Allah. The fundamentalists in Israel want a nation ruled by Jehovah. And right-wing Christians in this country want God -- their God -- to take charge here, no matter what that means to democracy, pluralism and dissent.

I think we're on a collision course that only leadership and a resurgence of common sense, of faith in democracy, can prevent. Tolerance is such a good thing. Whatever happened to it?

[from the *Dallas Morning News*, June 24, 2006, and quoted in *Freethought Today*, September 2004]

Truth in Fiction: Often, there is more truth in the fiction we read than in the news media. Consider this, from Donald E. Westlake's novel *The Road to Ruin* (Mysterious Press, 2004):

"... [He] was enrolled in a huge Midwestern land grant university, thousands upon thousands of enrolled students, hundreds in every lecture hall, and all of it to cover for the schools' football team, which was the actual product being manufactured there. The football team won games, the alumni

therefore gave to the university endowment, and the school sailed sunnily on."

- **Chuck Crane**

(sent by **John Sherman**)

TREATMENT of the screenplay **KENTUCKY HOME** by **LEWIS LUBKA, 2006**

[Note: A "Treatment" is a condensed version of the screen play, with not much room for dialogue or scene setting, but mainly the story line/plot and some character development. The Kentucky Home treatment will be printed in installments in the *Red River Rationalist*. This is the third installment.]

Shortly thereafter, Overby calls Moore and they meet at Rev. Rucker's office. Rucker introduces them to a Black lawyer who looks over the deed and tells them that title transfer is a standard procedure. He can have the documents ready in a few days. They sign some papers and leave.

The lawyer calls Moore early the next week and tells him the transfer has gone through. He is now the owner of the house on Gruber Lane in Shively.

Moore is carrying small boxes from his car to his new home. His daughters are playing in the front yard and a few neighborhood children come over and play with them.

A short while later, Gertrude Gruber comes over and asks Moore whether he is getting the place ready for Overby. He politely tells her that he bought the house from Overby and that he is moving into his own house. She is openly furious and tells her kids to immediately go home and not play with these kids any more. She then tells Moore that he will regret his trickery.

That evening a procession of cars driven by whites slowly passes in front of the Moore home and racist epithets are shouted. "Nigger get back to Louisville where you belong." "You aren't going to live here much longer", "get out while you can". "You ought to know your place." A brick is thrown through the picture window, shattering the glass.

Moore picks up the brick from the living room floor and reads the note attached to it. "This is a warning. Get out of here while you're still alive. This is a warning". Moore is very worried. He calls the police to report the incident and also calls some of his friends to come and bring guns.

Several people come out to the home and openly carry rifles. Two police officers come in response to his call. They act perfunctorily with a tinge of racism. One of them tells him, "we didn't move you out here; you did it on your own". They make notes and leave. It later turns out that one of them is a member of the KKK. A few nights after he moves in a cross is burned in a nearby field.

At first Moore tries to guard the house by himself but after about a week he invites some friends to come to help. This isn't enough, so he, Betty, the Overbys and some friends get together and form a Moore Defense Committee.

The committee includes Moore's friends and relatives, church members, trade unionists and others. The Committee also does publicity for the media and tries to develop community support for the Moores. It also tries to exert political pressure for more acceptance of desegregation. A wider purpose is to gather support from the rest of the country.

The volunteer guards include Blacks and whites. Overby and Moore serve regularly. The number of volunteers varies. It is quite informal, each person serving as they can. Some stay for an hour or two and some longer, but someone is there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

One night about a month after Moore has moved in, the sound of a gun shot is heard coming from behind the house and a loud thud as the bullet tears into the wood. Immediately afterward, a volunteer shoots back in the direction of the hostile shot. After this, months pass with no overt act of hostility against the house or its inhabitants. Moore begins to think that his theory – "live and let live" is working. He has occupied the house for almost four months. The lawn is well kept and he assumes that since there has been no overt hostility he has been accepted

The newspaper is delivered to his door. One morning he picks it up and looks at the headline - **US SUPREME COURT RULES IN FAVOR OF BROWN VS THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF TOPEKA, KANSAS. Pubic School Segregation Is No Longer Legal.**

Up to that time, segregation was legal as long as the education of Blacks and whites was "equal". Brown proved that segregation in itself made the education unequal. Test scores of Black children in segregated schools were always lower than Black children in integrated schools.

The White Citizens Council of Jefferson County, KY, is meeting in Louisville. After a brief opening prayer by Rev. Jesse Milam, there is polite but racist-tinged discussion of the Moores. A member says the recent Supreme Court decision to integrate the schools and other problems of the country happened because Karl Marx is on the Court. Buck Gruber says that if they can no longer legally keep Black children out of the schools, they had better keep them out of the school district. The new elementary school in Shiveley will serve the subdivision where the Moores live. The group concludes that the Moores must be gotten rid of. Gruber says leave this to him, he will make sure they leave Shiveley. Driving the Moores out will also be a lesson to other Blacks.

(Continued next month)

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.

We'll enjoy the hospitality of the Rognes for a wiener roast to celebrate the Autumnal Equinox Party. Potato salad for everybody provided by the Rognes. Bring wieners and, if you can help with soda pop or other potluck, please contact Carol Sawicki or Davis Cope. Activities include roasting wieners and burning in effigy. Please consider preparing effigies beforehand. Spontaneous potato-and-wiener effigies, however enjoyable, often require explanation and interpretation to the point of detracting from their impact.

The **Autumnal Equinox party** will be held on **Sept. 17 at 1:00-4:00 pm.**

Directions to the Rogne farm:

On I-29, take Exit 48W onto Hwy 46. (Exit 48 is roughly 15 miles south of Fargo.) On Hwy 46, go about 2.5 miles west to Richland County Road 1, turn south. On Richland County Road 1, go about 1/2 mile south to the first farm (blue house on west side of road).

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.