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The mission of the Red River Freethinkers is to advocate for a skeptical view of the role of religion in society and to promote critical examination of religious authority and dogma.

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RED RIVER FREETHINKERS

# THE RED RIVER RATIONALIST

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## FARGO NEEDS GAY AND LESBIAN PRIDE WEEK

Controversy over Gay and Lesbian Pride Week appeared in recent letters. Jon Lindgren (28 June) stated that critics of GLPW were prejudiced and justified their prejudice by religion. A fundamentalist response (4 July) claimed the criticism was not prejudice but moral truth justified by the Bible. By fundamentalists, I mean conservative Christians who take the Bible literally. The 4 July letter opens by quoting an African-

American on the difference between civil rights for blacks and civil rights for gays: "I've never met a former black person." The implication of having met "former homosexuals" is that homosexuality is a choice, being black is not. Fundamentalists insist that homosexuality is (1) a matter of choice, thus a subject for moral judgment, and (2) morally wrong. The letter quotes the Bible in this regard (Rom 1:18-32, 1 Cor

6:9-10, see also Gal 5:19-21). The verses provide a long list of those who "will not inherit the kingdom of God". Since homosexuals are listed, their behavior is morally wrong. Since the list includes carousers, idol worshippers, the quarrelsome, revilers, and others whose behavior is clearly a matter of choice, the verses imply that homosexuality is a choice as well.

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## A GOOD CHRISTIAN LEADER

As the world now knows, the married governor of South Carolina had (has?) a mistress, Maria, in Argentina. His wife, Jenny, forgave him but when he was unwilling to dump Maria, whom he described as his "soul mate,"\* Jenny said it is one thing to forgive but quite another to condone adultery. She added that "there's not room for three people in a marriage." Her husband, who may be more familiar with the bible than she is, could have pointed out that Sarai suggested to her husband Abram that their marriage be expanded to include her slave girl Hagar in a *Ménage à trois*. They

all might have gotten along fairly well if Hagar, after Abram knocked her up, hadn't been so snotty toward Sarai.

The governor "brushed aside any suggestion that he might resign, citing the bible and the story of King David -- who continued to rule after [seducing Bathsheba]." He continued with "What I find interesting ... is the way in which he fell mightily - fell in very, very significant ways, but then picked up the pieces and built from there ..."\*\* So if King David saw no reason to resign why should the governor?

Maria's former husband may be lucky that they had been divorced. After all, King David arranged for the death of his mistress' husband and Jehovah apparently regarded this as a misdemeanor, at worst.

The bible can come in handy not only in condemning one's enemies but also in defending one's friends and oneself. ■

\* St Paul Pioneer Press, 19 July 2009, p. 4A

\*\* St. Paul Pioneer Press, 27 June 2009, p. 6A.

Bill Treumann

### POINTS OF INTEREST

- This month's RRF meeting will be held at Atomic Coffee on Broadway in Fargo on Sunday August 16 from 1 to 3 pm. This will be our annual RRF business meeting.
- The RRF is sponsoring a free movie night for the community at the Fargo Theater next month. The movie being shown is Julia Sweeney's **Letting Go of God**. Evolutionary biology professor **PZ Myers** will be attending to show his support for this educational event and will be giving a talk after the movie.

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## BACKGROUND OF THE OKLAHOMA 10Cs CASE

On June 8, 2009 the U.S. Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled unanimously that county commissioners in Haskell County, Oklahoma violated the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution when they sought to promote their own religious beliefs by erecting a Ten Commandments monument on the front lawn of the county's courthouse. The decision stated that the whole process of the creation and religion-based defense of the monument by commissioners "strongly reflect a government endorsement of religion." One commissioner referred to the monument, saying "That's what we're going to live by, that right there. The good Lord died for me. I can stand for him, and I'm going to." The ACLU and the ACLU of Oklahoma filed the lawsuit challenging the display of the monument in October of 2005 about one year after it was erected. A copy the ruling is available online at: [www.aclu.org/religion/public/397841gl20090608.html](http://www.aclu.org/religion/public/397841gl20090608.html)

This legal victory has roots in a tale of change and redemption going back 28 years that begins with two young mothers. Joann Bell and Lucille McCord were not members of the dominant religious sect in Little Axe Oklahoma. Through conflicts with extremist Southern Baptists, both came to support the absolute separation of church and state and one of them (Bell) eventually became the director of the Oklahoma ACLU that filled the recently decided 10C case.

In 1981, Bell moved to Little Axe and enrolled her children in the public school. School officials were allowing a teacher-sponsored student Southern Baptist group, called the Son Shine Club, to use a classroom for prayer and "inspirational" meetings. School buses dropped all students off 30 minutes before classes started for these "voluntary" meetings which often extended into the first class period. Children not attending the religious meetings had to wait outside the building. As one student told the National Catholic Reporter in 1984, "If you wanted to be warm, you prayed." These meetings were run by Southern Baptists who told kids that rock and roll was the devil's music and anyone who disagreed with their theology was going to hell. Both Bell, who was an active member of the Church of the Nazarene, and McCord, who attended the Church of Christ, did not want their children exposed to Southern Baptist doctrine.

The same Catholic Reporter article quoted Lucille McCord, "I don't trust someone who tells me that he talked to God while sitting on the edge of his bed. Or that Oral Roberts saw a 100-foot Jesus. I don't need that kind of religion stalking my children through their classrooms." At this point

both Bell and McCord supported nondenominational Christian prayer in schools.

When their complaints went unanswered, one sympathetic school board member suggested that they contact the ACLU. Neither of the mothers had even heard of the ACLU. After the ACLU complained to the school board and filed a lawsuit in 1981 to stop the religious services on public school property, life became very difficult for the Bell and McCord families. At the next school board meeting held to discuss the lawsuit, more than 300 people chanted "Atheists, go home!" One school board member handed out placards to the angry crowd that read "Commiss Go Home." Both families were force fed large doses of "Southern Baptist love". Their children were threatened with death and harassed in school and the families received many threatening phone calls and letters including their own obituaries. Bell was attacked and beaten on school property by a cafeteria worker. The worker lost a lawsuit and had to pay Bell \$10 plus her medical bills. In the spirit of Christian fellowship, Little Axe residents took up a collection to pay all of the perpetrators' expenses. The faith-based violence culminated in the firebombing and total destruction of Bell's house and the mutilation of prize winning milk goats raised by one of McCord's sons. The attitude of most of the residents of Little Axe was summed up by the school superintendent Paul Pettigrew "The only people who have been hurt by this thing are the Bells and McCords. The school goes on," said Pettigrew. "They chose to create their own hell on earth." Subsequently 31 of the 41 teachers at the school resigned due to the conflict. Both families moved to another town and eventually won the lawsuit in the 10<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals.

In a classic case of Karmic justice, Joann Bell began working in 1987 as a part-time Litigation Coordinator for the ACLU, in 1990 she became Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma Foundation. Under Bell, the Oklahoma ACLU dealt with several other cases involving extremist religion that most recently included the 10C case decided on 6/8/09. Bell also serves as state co-chair for the Oklahoma Coalition to Preserve Religious Liberty. Although her main concern is the First Amendment, she also advocates for reproductive freedom, Lesbian/Gay rights and the abolition of capital punishment. At this point it should be clear to all the religious nuts in Oklahoma that they picked the wrong person to harass. ■

**Charles Sawicki**  
Fargo, ND

## FARGO NEEDS GAY AND LESBIAN PRIDE WEEK (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

Increasing scientific evidence over the past half century gives a different understanding. Genetic sex is determined by chromosomes. At puberty, most persons are sexually attracted to the opposite genetic sex. Those readers who remember experiencing that surprising new aspect of life will mostly remember that attraction to the opposite sex as innate, as something that was just there, and as something that persisted during their life as an inherent experience. That attraction, and its direction, was not experienced as a choice either initially or later. In the same way, some persons are sexually attracted to the same genetic sex initially, experience that attraction as innate, and find that it persists as an inherent attraction to the same sex during their life. It was not, and is not, a choice. This is the experience of sexual orientation. A same sex, or homosexual, orientation occurs for both males and females, and the occurrence rate seems to be in the 3% to 7% range. Sexual orientation is different from a sexual role, which is learned and a matter of environment, and from sexual behavior, which is a matter of choice. Sexual orientation is innate and independent of environment. It is part of the variation of human nature.

That knowledge has an implication: fundamentalist families will have the same percentage of children with homosexual orientations as the general population. That

## HOW I BECAME A FREETHINKER

Compared to many others in the group, my path to identifying as a Freethinker was quite painless.

To begin with, a couple of the main issues that appear to drive people to religion don't matter to me at all.

The questions "Why am I here?" and "What is the purpose of life?" have never seemed important to me. And I've always felt that the mind, (or soul, or identity, etc.) of all living things disappears when the body dies, so that took care of the worry about life after death.

When I learned about evolution in school, that explained how humans and other living creatures had developed. Evolution through natural selection seemed much more reasonable than the idea of a powerful and complex God that was just there, without his own development from a simpler form or having his own creator.

I was raised as an Episcopalian, but most of my schoolmates were Jewish. It was obvious to me at a very young age that

means some 3 to 7 out of every 100 fundamentalist children will have homosexual orientations. Those children will be raised in homes where the parents' love for their children will be mixed up with the belief that homosexuals will "not inherit the kingdom", a fundamentalist euphemism for "be damned to hell for eternity". That mixture is a recipe for tragedy.

Lindgren, who was a national officer for Parents and Friends of Gays and Lesbians, mentioned a recent study that found "when parents disapprove of their child's homosexuality, that child is eight times more likely to commit suicide". The 4 July letter responded "If a young person chooses to kill himself because his God-fearing parents won't support his lifestyle of sin, that's not the parents' fault". The documentary "For the Bible Tells Me So", shown in Fargo in 2007, gave case studies of young homosexuals who committed suicide, including interviews with their parents. Those parents felt the fault lay with conservative Christian groups and their drastically misguided policies on homosexuality.

I admire Jon Lindgren for having the guts to help the start of GLPW during his time as mayor. I support the gay and lesbian community in their quest for the respect and dignity that everyone deserves, and I wish them well. ■

**Davis Cope**  
Fargo, ND

they couldn't both be correct, so probably neither one represented the "truth."

I completed all the requisite childhood rites of Christianity, but in our household religion was rarely discussed. Regular church attendance was expected of me, but belief in God was not. And going to church meant getting dressed up, which I hated, and it was boring, so religion already had two strikes against it!

Once I went away to college I stopped attending church. There was no moment of decision, just the realization that I didn't believe in the fairy tales and that I actually never had.

There was almost no negative feedback from my family. In fact one of my relatives commented that she thought that it was very brave of me to have become an atheist and that she was impressed. ■

**Carol Sawicki**  
Fargo, ND