

CENTER FOR INQUIRY (CFI)

The Center for Inquiry is a US-based, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization committed to actively encouraging evidence-based inquiry into science, pseudoscience, medicine and health, religion, ethics, secularism, and society.

The CFI was established in 1991 by philosopher and author Paul Kurtz and is based out of Amherst, NY. The stated purpose of the CFI is "to contribute to the public understanding and appreciation of science and reason, and their applications to human conduct".

Kurtz is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo, is the publisher of over 650 articles or reviews, and has authored and edited over 40 books. Kurtz is editor in chief of Free Inquiry magazine, is a Fellow of the American

Association for the Advancement of Science, and is Humanist Laureate and president of the International Academy of Humanism.

There are physical Centers for Inquiry in Toronto, London, Washington DC, Indianapolis IN, Grand Rapids, MI, and Austin TX. The Center for Inquiry in Washington DC represents CFI's interests on Capitol Hill.

One of the many programs that CFI operates is their *Center for Inquiry On Campus* program (CFI On Campus). CFI On Campus was developed to reach out to university and high school students and to provide funding, speakers or debaters, literature, and other promotional and educational resources to student groups that affiliate. CFI On Campus currently supports almost 200 campus groups around the world.

CFI On Campus has an active group at Minnesota State University Moorhead. This is a group of "freethinking, skeptical, humanistic students who want to create a community of those who value thinking". The group "promotes freethought through open discussion and advances humanism through campus and community events. It encourages freedom from superstition and dogma, challenges misrepresentations of the non-religious, and works to advance secular ethics and human values. Above all, it defends science, reason, and freedom of inquiry".

The CFI On Campus group at MSUM is open to all students and also open to the public.

<http://www.cfamsum.org> ■

Jason Schoenack
Fargo, ND

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Articles in this newsletter do not necessarily reflect the ideas or opinions of the Red River Freethinkers organization.

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.

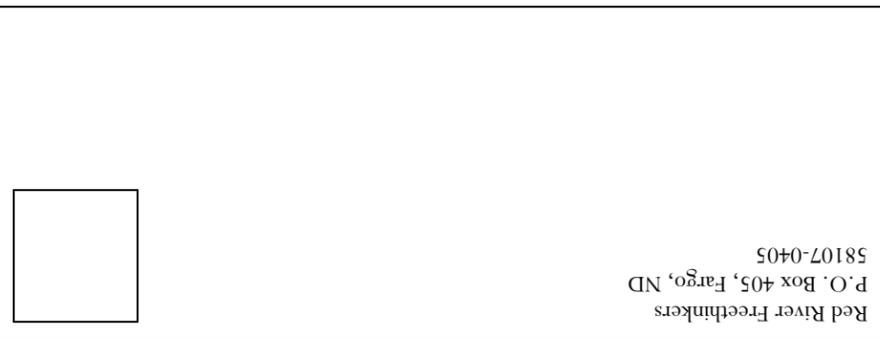
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RED RIVER FREETHINKERS

THE RED RIVER RATIONALIST

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THE NUMBER OF FAITH REJECTERS IS RISING IN THE UNITED STATES

It can still be hard to come out as an atheist in the religious North Dakota.

The year 1985 was just about to turn into 1986. A father from Minnesota was making his daughter read the Book of Revelation (Apocalypse) all night and was saying that the world would end on New Year's Day.

"I sat there crying the whole night. I was only nine-years-old," 32-year-old Lilie Schoenack relates.

In the world of her childhood, a good person was synonymous with a good Christian. Every day she felt threatened by Hell, and at home she had to watch videos about the prophecies of Nostradamus. The Bible, the Book of Mormon, and marijuana had all turned into one apocalyptic mess in her father's head.

Today, Schoenack and her 38-years-old husband Jason, who was also raised in a religious family, are atheists.

The couple living in Fargo, the biggest city in North Dakota, wants to protect their own children from religious brainwashing and they are both active members of an organization called the Red River Freethinkers, or RRF.

The Schoenacks are part of a phenomenon that has developed quietly: the number atheists and other non-church member Americans

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10 COMMANDMENTS SHOULD BE REMOVED

Today I ask you to read the 10C's again but instead of reading them as sacred unquestionable truths, pretend you've never seen them.

The first four are directly related to Judeo-Christianity. I find chilling: "...For I, the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations" from new King James Version, Exodus 20:5. Why would anyone teach that to their kids or promote it? Honoring your parents can be good advice, but wouldn't it be better to forbid rape and slavery, which are

instead condoned in the bible. Next come the 'shall nots', which make sense in any culture, even places that have never heard of the 10C's. Except for the last one: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife ... nor anything that is your neighbor's, Exodus 20:17, which defies human nature. If you are starving and you see someone with food, you are going to want some.

Imagine being Hindu or Buddhist, or atheist and seeing these in a public square. Neither our laws nor our morality are based on the 10C's.

Why are you moral? Is it because you fear god's wrath, or because you care about people? The Constitution doesn't mention any gods. Our first amendment contradicts the 10C's. You can take the lord's name in vain all you want and worship any gods or no god. The 10C's were made by an ancient bronze-aged civilization. I'm not bound to them, and I don't want anyone else to feel bound to them. That's why we need to take the 10C's monument off public property. ■

Lilie Schoenack
Fargo, ND

POINTS OF INTEREST

- The next RRF meeting will be held at Atomic Coffee on Sunday July 19th, 2009 from 1 to 3pm. The theme of the meeting will be "Freethinking and Politics". We are welcoming **Mary Tintes** from the **Change that Works** campaign
- The RRF will be hosting a movie night at the new Fargo Public Library this Fall. This event will be free and open to the public. Evolutionary biology professor PZ Myers will be attending to show his support for this educational event. More to come.

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SEPARATE CHURCH, STATE NECESSARY

Many in the Fargo area see the Red River Freethinkers' actions regarding the Ten Commandments monument as pointless. "If you don't like it, don't look at it," they say. Let me pose a scenario:

Picture a possible future Fargo. A rapidly growing Islamic community causes a change in the regional religious demographic, to the point where the majority of elected city officials are now Muslim. They decide to remove the Ten Commandments and put up a monument to the Black Stone of Mecca, with the Five Pillars of Islam engraved around it.

Would the Christians then say, "It's a symbol of what the majority believe, and we really don't have the right to say anything about it because we're now the minority. So if that's what the city leaders now want, we're fine with that." Majority rules, right? By allowing our leaders to endorse any religion, it's a short step to imposing their beliefs on everyone.

"Blue laws" are a perfect example of this. Many states have

now deemed "blue laws" unconstitutional, yet in North Dakota they are still enforced. Sectarian governments, often with good intentions, can make bad rules that infringe on the rights of everyone, regardless of belief.

I know many will dismiss this, believing it could never happen. Yet as close as Michigan, Islamic communities are taking legal action to allow their calls to prayer projected in their communities the same as Christian church bells. Times are changing.

This is exactly why our Founding Fathers created a separation of church and state. This is why they put no religion in the Constitution, giving Americans freedom of – or from – religion. They understood all too well that sometimes "majority rule" does not allow "liberty and justice for all." I believe this is the fundamental freedom the Freethinkers' actions are trying to protect. ■

Trevor Nelson
West Fargo, ND

OUR MEETINGS, OUR CHAPTER, WHAT TO DO

Some of our members attend our monthly meetings regularly, some attend occasionally, and some cannot or choose not to attend ever. It is not necessary to attend any meetings --we're glad to have people as a part of our community whatever their level of participation.

We often have brief discussions at our meetings about what people like and dislike. Your Executive Committee, Carol, Lilie and myself, visit about this as well. We are a growing organization, not only in terms of members, but in the breadth of our activities as well. This progress brings with it the luxury of more ideas and new attitudes as to where we have been and where we want to go.

This is why I was fascinated by an article in a recent Christian Science Monitor. The long article, "Ranks of atheists grow, get organized", reviewed visits with members of local atheist groups across the country to see what they were doing. I'll try to summarize what the author found.

All chapters found that membership is rising. In addition, the number of groups in the country is rising rapidly as well. During the first five weeks in 2009, 95 new groups registered on the site, meetup.com. The group, North Alabama Freethought Association, has grown from 50 members in

2006 to 350 today.

So, what are all these new and growing groups doing? They seem to be doing exactly what we are doing, discussing what to do. Some chapters have found that members do not like speakers and organized programs, so meetings are ad hoc, simply discussing issues that come up. Others have developed more chapter direction, doing more outreach and/or more community service. There are discussions about whether or not atheists are too "negative" and need more positive ways to interact with the public. Along with larger memberships and higher levels of participation have come more, and sometimes conflicting, ideas about what groups should be doing and where things should be heading.

This brings us to the Red River Freethinkers. The history of our small group has been, and continues to be, one where many directions are pursued at the same time. Members have the green light to take on projects that interest them and RRF cheers them on. But, perhaps, as new members join us we will need even broader and more inclusive approaches than this. This is, for certain, an exciting time. ■

Jon Lindgren
Fargo, ND

(NUMBER OF FAITH REJECTERS RISING, *continued from page 1*)

has almost doubled since 1990 and is now c. 15 per cent of the population.

Conversely, a survey made by Trinity College in Connecticut shows that amount of Christians has gone down from 86 per cent to 76 per cent.

It is said that atheists are now able to breathe more freely, the amount of organizations for those not any religion is increasing in school campuses and elsewhere. For example, the Secularized Students Association says that they have increased the number of divisions from 42 to 150 in couple of years.

People are also able to take religion more lightly than before. An example of this is the Pastafarians, who follow the teachings of the "Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster".

The Freethinkers in Fargo show that there is a wind of change, but so far it has been blowing quietly in the 600,000 strong state of North Dakota. The state has the highest ratio of churches per person. Most non-religionists, atheists, agnostics and skeptics mostly still keep quiet when it comes to their personal views.

56-year-old Carol Sawicki tells that, for an American, coming out with these ideas is as hard as telling your parents about being gay or telling your work-mates about having a mental disorder.

"It's just like before, when people were ashamed to say that they had cancer. They were afraid it was contagious."

Sawicki and her 65-year-old husband Charles had never taken part in any religion. They say that they started being active in religious matters when George W. Bush got into power and there was fear that fundamentalist Christian would soon have an increased influence in politics.

The gulf between American Christians and American Atheists is deep, but the country also has a tradition of tolerating, and accepting, differences. 95-year-old Kathrine Rogne, a founding member of RRF, says that she has not faced any problems during her whole life-time as result of her agnostic world-view.

"I live in an area influenced by Norwegian Lutheranism and there people are very tolerant, at least they appear politely tolerant."

Another founding member of RRF, a 59-year-old Professor of Mathematics, Davis Cope, facilitates weekly meetings at North Dakota State University called Science, Religion, and Lunch Seminars, and purposefully invites provocative lec-

tures.

"If the seminars haven't gotten on your nerves yet, it means you haven't been to enough of them," the advertisements for the events say.

Dispute Over 10Cs Monument Continues

The Freethinkers in Fargo have been fighting for years with the city council and with citizens regarding a 7-foot monument in front of the City Hall, with the Ten Commandments carved into it.

After failing in court to have the 10Cs monument removed, the Freethinkers requested permission to place their own monument next to it, which would reinforce the distinction between church and state. The undertaking was headed by the President of the Freethinkers and ex-Mayor of Fargo, Jon Lindgren.

Lindgren believes that after years of struggling, the attempts to have a permit to set up their own monument have failed, but the fight to have the Ten Commandments monument removed from public property continues.

"It was left there because of pressure from the religious communities," Lindgren explains at the RFF organization's Midsummer party on Sunday.

According the supporters of the monument, it is just a harmless reference to the cultural heritage typical to the area. In 2005, the United States Supreme Court gave two contradicting decisions regarding Ten Commandment monuments in public places.

In a legislative building in Texas, such a monument was permitted, whereas in a courthouse in Kentucky, the same monument had to be removed.

The decision has not only divided the United States Supreme Court, but also every-day Americans. ■

Pekka Mykkänen
HELSINGIN SANOMAT
Finland

"Question with boldness even the existence of God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason than that of blindfolded fear."

- Thomas Jefferson