

PROJECT 42: 2010 VALLEY FREETHOUGHT CONVENTION

The Red River Freethinkers is bringing the very first major freethought convention to the Fargo-Moorhead area.

Project 42: 2010 Valley Freethought Convention.

The event will be held on Saturday September 18, 2010 at the Fargo Civic Center from 8:00am to 6:00pm. The event will feature five world-class speakers including: August Berkshire, Annie-Laurie Gaylor, Brian Keith Dalton (aka Mr. Deity), Dan Barker, and PZ Myers.

The event website is Project42Convention.org

This event is part of the Red River Freethinkers' ongoing efforts "to promote freethinking through education and activism," which is the group's mission.

For further information please contact Jon Lindgren (jon.lindgren@redriverfreethinkers.org) or Trevor Nelson, event coordinator (trevor.nelson@redriverfreethinkers.org). ■

<http://www.redriverfreethinkers.org>

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 promote freethinking through education and activism

Red River Freethinkers is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Family membership	\$45/year	Membership includes a subscription to this newsletter. Send name, address, phone number, email address and dues to Red River Freethinkers, P.O. Box 405, Fargo, ND 58107-0405.
Individual membership	\$30/year	
Student membership	\$15/year	
Newsletter only	\$10/year	

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RED RIVER FREETHINKERS

THE RED RIVER RATIONALIST

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KEEP YOUR RELIGION - AND ANY RELIGION - OUT OF PUBLIC SQUARE

Published in the Fargo Forum May 18 2010.

In response to John McGovern of Lake Park, Minn., and his letter (May 4) on "Freethinkers insult veterans": At issue is the lawsuit filed over the Ten Commandments by the Red River Freethinkers. According to McGovern, the Freethinkers should find something "beneficial to the common-sense majority."

I am a veteran of Vietnam, having served in the worst battles and outposts of that war, 1967-68: Con Thien, Hue City and Khe Sanh. The war altered my beliefs nearly 180 degrees, and one of the victims of my rethinking my world was religion. I went over a Christian and returned an atheist. No loving god could have condoned what we did over there in the name of God, free enterprise and country.

One of the things that really affected me was the day I found a Christmas card lying along the trail. Opening it up, expecting to see a name of a fellow Marine who may have lost it, the card said instead, "Christianity is merely the rich imposing their values upon the poor." I was outraged at first, but the more I thought about it, the more it became "common sense." I have since written a book on that very subject.

Secondly, if I remember correctly, being a member of the Red River Freethinkers, it was I who came up with the idea to challenge those Ten Commandments on the Fargo City Hall

lawn. Religion has no place in a public forum, and that is why, since returning from Vietnam, I have never attended a Memorial Day Service or joined the VFW or American Legion.



I know some Christian is going to get up in front of me and try to tell me how God had some reason for us being in Vietnam and that those who fell there fell for a reason. Maybe some did, but as a medic, the last question nearly everyone who died in my arms asked me was "Why?"

I am a combat veteran. Given the war I was in, I'm not sure I am proud of that. I am an American. Given the way America bullies the rest of the world, I'm not sure I'm proud of that, either. I am an atheist, however, and I am proud of that.

I am a member of the Red River Freethinkers – and I am proud of that. We fight for "common sense," for example, the common knowledge that those commandments stand as a breach of the constitution by publicly favoring a given religion, a religion that is not mine, and a religion – given the religious right praying for President Barack Obama's death and claiming that the Haiti earthquake is the result of a pact with the devil – I grow more opposed to with each passing day. ■

**David Johnson
Forman, ND**

POINTS OF INTEREST

- The Red River Freethinkers group is hosting a freethought convention on September 18, 2010. *Project 42: 2010 Valley Freethought Convention.* See more details and ticket information on back page of this newsletter.
- The June Red River Freethinkers meeting will be a potluck held at the Rogne farm in Kindred, ND from 1:00pm-3:00pm on Sunday June 20. Directions to the Rogne farm are on the front page of the RRF website. The RRF website address is on the back page of this newsletter. Everyone is welcome!
- Every Saturday morning from 11-12pm on KNDS 96.3 FM in Fargo, catch Brian Magee on his radio show "Appreciate your Mind" (formerly The Amplified Atheist).



BIBLICAL COMMANDMENTS ARE UNCONSTITUTIONAL

There are many Ten Commandments monuments on public property throughout the United States. They are often found on the lawns outside courthouses, city halls, state capitols, and in public parks.

Many of these monuments were erected from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s by the Fraternal Order of Eagles. This was done at the behest of film director



Cecil B. DeMille, as a publicity stunt to promote his 1956 film *The Ten Commandments*.

These monuments should be removed from public property because they represent a government establishment of religion, in violation of the First Amendment. The monuments should also be removed because they have little connection to U.S. law, and because enacting most of them into law would be unconstitutional.



Looking at a typical monument, we find there are actually eleven commandments. (The first commandment is in two distinct parts.)

Of these eleven commandments, only three, or 27%, have counterparts in American law:



- 5) Thou shalt not kill.
- 7) Thou shalt not steal.
- 8) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Even so, there are exceptions that we do not prosecute, such as killing in self-defense, stealing evidence of illegal activity and turning it over to the law, and lying about public figures if there is absence of malice.

The other eight commandments, representing 73% of the total of eleven, would be unconstitutional if we were to enact them into civil law:

1a) Thou shalt have no other gods before me. This violates freedom of religion.

1b) Thou shalt not make to thyself any graven images. This violates freedom of religion and freedom of artistic expression.

2) Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. This violates freedom of religion and free speech.

3) Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. This violates freedom of religion.

4) Honor thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee. Compelling loyalty to anyone is tantamount to slavery.

6) Thou shalt not commit adultery. This violates our right to privacy.

9) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house. This violates freedom of thought.

10) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is thy neighbors. This violates freedom of thought.

The first four of these eight commandments are purely religious and have no place in civil law. The last four may often be good advice, but it would nevertheless be unconstitutional to legislate them.

Thus we have a conflict between the U.S. Constitution and the Bible, between civil law and theocracy.

For the sake of our democracy and our civil liberties, Ten Commandments monuments should be removed from public property. ■

**August Berkshire
Minneapolis, MN**



VETERAN MISREADS HIS RIGHTS

Published in the Fargo Forum May 29, 2010.

Here's another response to John McGovern's letter to the editor in which he claims that being a veteran gives him the right to ignore the constitution.

I am an honorably discharged parachute rifleman who served in the 82nd Airborne Division in WW II. I also happen to be a Freethinker. FYI, the only way a person could get into the airborne was to volunteer (in addition to meeting the physical requirements, of course).

John McGovern, who does not live in our fair city, says he wants a symbol of his religious beliefs imposed on all the diverse beliefs of our residents. He wants the 10 Commandments monument to continue to be displayed on public property. I can't figure out how having been in the service gives him the right to override the constitutional separation of church and state.

Furthermore, he says Freethinkers should drop the lawsuit against the monument and instead get involved in activities that benefit the community and visit the Veterans Hospital. The Freethinkers have assisted at the Food Pantry and will continue to do so. I visit the Veteran's Hospital for medical check-ups as I have a service-connected disability. OK?

The separation of church and state is a principle that has differentiated the US from many countries that have a state religion. As Americans, we have freedom of religion and FREEDOM FROM RELIGION. Fargo City Hall property is not the place for a 10 Commandments monument, or a Quran monument or a Hindu religious symbol or an animist fetish or the great Manitou, or any other religious symbol, for that matter.

Since Mr. McGovern does not live in Fargo, he might not be aware that the Fargo City Commission unanimously voted to have the monument removed and placed on private property. This drove religious zealots to organize a signature campaign to keep the monument. One of the arguments for leaving the monument on public property is that it is not a religious symbol but something traditional. We have a video that shows people praying at the monument while collecting signatures, so it's religion and tradition.

After the petitions were submitted to the City Commission, they took another vote and four to one reversed the decision to remove the monument. Apparently concern about displeasing the petition signers trumped the principle of separation of church and state. In our country, if you want to do something that the constitution does not allow, you have to go through the process of a constitutional amendment. Just voting to get around the constitution is not the American way.

Entangling government with religion is a no-no, and just because someone served in the military, as millions of Americans have done, does not give them the right to violate the principles upon which our country was founded and which have made it great. To me, upholding our constitution is a major reason for wearing the uniform. ■

**Lewis Lubka
Fargo, ND**

ISNOGOD PLATE APPROVED IN ND

At a traffic signal this winter I saw my first pro-god license plate: ILOVGOD. I asked my former radio co-host to snap a picture. We posted it online and didn't think about it much after that. Then, a couple of months later, I saw another one: TRI GOD. Then a few weeks later a third: PRZZGOD. I snapped pics of those, too. "What's going on here?," I thought to myself. "Is North Dakota really allowing these blatantly religious messages on government property?"

So, almost on a whim, I applied for a license plate that reads ISNOGOD, which was suggested by someone on the Facebook fan page of the radio program. I thought it would be turned down and I would have to appeal. It was, and I did. The state's DOT director reversed the original decision and approved the plate after consulting with the state's attorney general. This saga became a story in the local media and online.

Most people supported the application and the state's eventual approval. Some, however, didn't understand why anyone would want to do this, not realizing the greater issue at stake: *freedom of religion*.

If the state exclusively allows a religious point of view on its property, it is endorsing that point of view. In order to maintain a society where anyone can choose a religion freely (or opt out altogether), the government really shouldn't get in bed with any of them. If it decides otherwise, it must get in bed with all of them. It makes the bed uncomfortably crowded, but it's fair.

I was hoping that the state would turn down my application and recall all plates with religious messages, clearing its bed completely. Instead, the state opted for the crowded bed solution. It's a poor second choice, but better than allowing only some access to the government's bed. ■

**Brian Magee
Fargo, ND**