

Red River Rationalist

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OLD BOOKS; NEW BOOKS

Davis Cope

[Reviews books or anything else interesting to Cope]

Testing Fundamentalism: The Literal Interpretation of the Bible. Science, Religion, and Lunch Seminar presentation by Davis Cope, November 14, 2006.

The question of literally interpreting the Bible set off some heated discussion in SRLS last spring, and I'm pleased to say some presentations this fall took up the issue. I will discuss my own talk here.

Inerrancy. Last spring's literal interpretation issue was raised by Fundamentalists, so I consulted several Fundamentalist references (e.g. *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon* by Dobson, Hindson, and Falwell, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* by Geisler and Howe, and other sources, including a statement of faith introducing the *Scotfield Study Bible* (1967)). These sources agree in listing "literal interpretation", that is, the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture, as the first principle of Fundamentalist belief. The position requires some interpretation: metaphors are not to be taken literally, multiple meanings and other translation difficulties may exist, copying errors can occur, etc. However, aside from these obvious caveats, it is interpreted with a strictness that is difficult for non-Fundamentalists to grasp. Geisler and Howe (GH) put it this way [pp. 12-13]: "The God of truth has given us the Word of Truth, and it does not contain any untruth in it. The Bible is the unerring Word of God.... Inspiration includes not only all that the Bible explicitly teaches, but also everything the Bible touches. This is true whether the Bible is touching upon history, science, or mathematics. Whatever the Bible declares, is true--whether it is a major point or a minor point. The Bible is God's Word, and God does not deviate from the truth in any point. All the parts are as true as the whole that they comprise." In short: "Yes God has spoken, and He has not stuttered."

A certain difficulty in discussing Fundamentalism will now be apparent. Its primary doctrine, the inerrancy of the Bible, is meant in the most extreme sense possible, a sense so bizarre in its totality as to be almost incomprehensible to a general audience. A natural reaction is to assume that I must be wrong. Indeed, the first objection raised at my presentation was that I was obviously using a "wrong" definition of inerrancy, that no one could seriously advocate such an interpretation of the Bible, and I had to point out (with, unfortunately, some exasperation) that I had taken meticulous pains to consult multiple Fundamentalist sources to insure that I was correctly stating their definition of inerrancy and that I cited them at length and by explicit quotation in my talk (briefly summarized here) to insure that I was correctly giving their interpretation of inerrancy.

Let me also state here that while I totally disagree with the Fundamentalist position, I do not reject it out of hand or regard it as not worth discussing, and the content of my presentation should make this clear. I know several Fundamentalists as friends, including several met through SRLS, and I have great respect for their sincerity and integrity. I believe, and certainly intend, to present my criticism in a way that they would regard as fair. If they should regard any part as unfair, I would welcome their criticism and carefully consider it.

Testing inerrancy. I regard the Fundamentalist position on inerrancy as incorrect. There are obvious reasons to support that opinion, such as the fact that literal interpretation of the Bible leads to conclusions about the Universe, the Earth, and humanity at variance with astronomy, geology, biology, archaeology, etc. However, these reasons are not meaningful to Fundamentalists because they explicitly reject much of science and history as false interpretations made up by "modernists". This leads to the point of my talk: I believe the Fundamentalist position, when tested within its own terms,

is untenable. In this section and the following ones, I will explain how such testing can be carried out, some examples of such testing, and why I use the term "untenable" for the result.

Testing a statement for error requires comparing it with an accepted source of knowledge. The Fundamentalist position is that the Bible is not merely a source of knowledge, it is the supreme source of knowledge. The Bible necessarily trumps all other sources of knowledge. The Fundamentalist position therefore (1) excludes meaningful testing of inerrancy by comparing Biblical statements with any source of knowledge outside the Bible (that is, with history, science, other religions, and the entirety of human culture and experience outside the Bible); and (2) leaves only the possibility of testing inerrancy by comparing Biblical statements with the Bible itself.

Testing inerrancy therefore reduces to approaches such as (1) comparing two or more Biblical accounts of the same event; or (2) comparing a general principle in one part of the Bible with principles or events in another part. The second approach has the problem of agreeing on the interpretation of a principle or the precedence of multiple principles. Practical test cases for inerrancy within the Fundamentalist position therefore reduce to instances where the Bible gives multiple accounts of the same event. The procedure is therefore to examine such multiple accounts and see if they contradict each other.

Tested and failed. It might seem that we have now so severely constrained the procedure that inerrancy could scarcely be tested and, if tested, scarcely fail. Surprisingly, however, there are many instances of multiple references to the same event in the Bible, and they typically give different accounts. (Examples will be given below.) So, inerrancy fails. Yet Fundamentalists continue to proclaim inerrancy. How is this possible? We have now reached the real issue.

Testing inerrancy: The real issue. Fundamentalists are quite aware of these instances of differing multiple accounts of the same event. But they claim that these failed tests are only "difficulties" and proceed to explain them -- all of them. For example, GH describe their book this way: "[This] is a book on Bible difficulties that gives answers to all the major questions ever raised about the Bible--over 800 in all. [p.10] " They explain "The Bible is without mistake, but the critics are not. All their allegations of error in the Bible are based on some error of their own.[p.15]" It is certainly true that, when a test case from the Bible indicates that inerrancy fails, it may be merely a difficulty rather than an actual failure of that hypothesis. You will find that Fundamentalists have an explanation for every "difficulty", that is, for every instance where Biblical statements contradict each other. Indeed, they sometimes have several explanations. Since Fundamentalists can explain every difficulty, *the real issue is whether their explanations are less believable than the conclusion that inerrancy was tested and failed.*

That is why I used the word "untenable" for the result of testing the Fundamentalist position. Fundamentalists will never admit a contradiction. They will always have an "explanation". All one can do is to examine such "explanations" and the strain required to accept them. I say that strain that becomes more and more obvious as one "difficulty" after another is, somehow, "explained", and that the ultimate result is that the Fundamentalist position is untenable.

Examples. I gave examples of Fundamentalist explanations at some length in my talk and will give brief ones here.

Jesus drives traders from the Temple at the beginning of his ministry in *John.2:14ff*. In the other three gospels (*Matthew.21:12-13*, *Mark.11:15-17*, *Luke.19:45-46*), such an event occurs after his last entry into Jerusalem, a few days before the Crucifixion. Is this a contradiction? No, say the Fundamentalists. It just shows that Jesus drove the traders out of the Temple twice. This example is the Fundamentalist approach in a nutshell. Notice it explicitly "explains" the "difficulty" and a contradiction is avoided. At the same time, it implies that three gospel writers, two of whom start with the birth of Jesus, have somehow all managed to forget the first occurrence but uniformly include the second, while the one

writer who is careful enough to include the first somehow manages to forget the second, even though it is a major event of those last days leading up to the Crucifixion!

Once you understand that the essential point is to "explain" the contradictions of a plain reading of the text, regardless of collateral damage, you will not be surprised to learn that GH list seventeen categories of "explanation" that they use to reconcile "difficulties" (pp.15-26). (GH do not put it quite this way. They say they are listing seventeen categories of mistakes made by Bible critics.) The two incidents at the Temple appear to fall under No. 10, "Assuming that Divergent Accounts are False Ones", although I can't say for sure, as GH don't include the dual Temple incidents as a difficulty.

Another short example is the death of Judas, who received the famous thirty pieces of silver for betraying Jesus. Here are the two accounts:

Matthew. 27.5-8. Throwing down the pieces of silver in the temple, he departed; and he went and hanged himself. But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since they are blood money." After conferring together, they used them to buy the potter's field as a place to bury foreigners.

Acts 1.18. (Now this man acquired a field with the reward of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. This became known to all the residents of Jerusalem, so that the field was called in their language Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

These descriptions obviously contradict each other, hence the inerrancy hypothesis fails when tested. But Fundamentalists identify this as a "difficulty". GH specifically identify this as an example of Category No. 10 and discuss it this way in their detailed listing [p.361]:

Did Judas die by hanging or by falling on rocks?

PROBLEM: Matthew declares that Judas hanged himself. However, the Book of Acts says that he fell and his body burst open.

SOLUTION: These accounts are not contradictory, but mutually complementary. Judas hung himself exactly as Matthew affirms that he did. The account in Acts simply adds that Judas fell, and his body opened up at the middle and his intestines gushed out. This is the very thing one would expect of someone who hanged himself from a tree over a cliff and fell on sharp rocks below.

The "explanation" avoids a contradiction, but notice the cost: First, we have the curious spectacle of two writers each recording only part (and different parts) of what Fundamentalist scholars have now determined to be an extraordinarily dramatic and intricate suicide. Second, the other contradiction is ignored (one account says Judas returned the money and the priests bought a field; the other says Judas kept the money and bought the field himself).

If you have caught the spirit of the Fundamentalist approach to these "difficulties", you will have no problem reconciling the second contradiction in the Judas accounts. Indeed, you will probably be able to come up with two or three "explanations". At the same time, all will require various distortions of the plain and evident meaning of the texts. Judge for yourself whether such contortions show the Fundamentalist position tenable or untenable.

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Correction: In the article "Do Solemnly Swear" on page one, December, 2006 *Rationalist*, conservative talk-show host Dennis Prager was mistakenly identified as Keith Prager.

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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*

The End of Faith Reviewed

Tom Ebacher

Sam Harris. *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror and the Future of Reason.* 2004, 2005. W.W. Norton.

Sam Harris by writing *The End of Faith* has made a substantial contribution to contemporary Freethought literature. He points the way toward a saner, safer world that can be achieved by casting off the superstitions of our ancestors. He hammers on the connection between religious belief and the war in Iraq. Contrary to many who would portray the Islamic religions as peaceful he cites section after section of the Koran that demonstrates the dangers of violence from this major world religion and then goes on to point out that the Christian religion is no better. Harris demonstrates how religion and religious belief harms our culture and creates risk of catastrophe to our society. He strives to create a social climate that not only recognizes the inherent risks of religion, but one that is no longer tolerant of religious irrational belief. He then goes on to suggest alternatives to religious belief that better fulfill human needs.

The End of Faith is in sixth place in the New York Times best-seller list. Sam Harris is exposing a whole lot of people not only to a highly critical view of religion but also a fresh perspective on the developments in our war in Iraq. This fresh perspective, due to the large numbers of our fellow citizens who have read it, may have an influence on our foreign policy as we try to extricate ourselves from the mess that George Bush created. Indeed, this book makes us take a fresh look at our relationship with the entire Middle East as it compares their moral development to that which we achieved in the Middle Ages. Harris strives to demonstrate that in some sense in the Middle East we are dealing with barbarians and then asks us how we are going to succeed without resorting to barbaric strategies.

The majority of this book is riveting in its relevance to our war in Iraq. I suspect that this is why it has reached sales that pushed it onto the New York Times best-seller list. As Sam takes us on a search for the future of reason the focus is lost and it is only toward the end of the book that he refocuses the discussion and shows its relevance on our societies.

There are few other recent books that have promoted atheistic Freethought as widely as Sam Harris has achieved with the publishing of *The End of Faith*. He lends his support to our criticisms of our society and brings hope that we may yet achieve a society that is free to achieve the wonders that freedom from superstition can bring.

The Jesus Mysteries Reviewed

Timothy Freke & Peter Gandy. *The Jesus Mysteries: Was the "Original Jesus" a Pagan God?* 1999.

Summary: This astonishing book completely undermines the traditional history of Christianity that has been perpetuated for centuries by the Church. Drawing on the cutting edge of modern scholarship, authors Tim Freke and Peter Gandy present overwhelming evidence that the Jesus of the New Testament is a mythical figure. Far from being eyewitness accounts, as is traditionally held, the Gospels are actually Jewish adaptations of ancient Pagan myths of the dying and resurrecting godman Osiris-Dionysus. The supernatural story of Jesus is not the history of a miraculous Messiah, but a carefully crafted spiritual allegory designed to guide initiates on a journey of mystical discovery. A little more than a century ago most people believed that the strange story of Adam and Eve was history; today it is understood to be a myth. Within a few decades, Freke and Gandy argue, we will likewise be amazed that the fabulous story of God incarnate -- who was born of a virgin, who turned water into wine, and who rose from the dead -- could have been interpreted as anything but a profound parable.

Review: This is at once a wonderful and a terribly flawed book; at times it is absolutely on target, and yet it yields to such vitriol and inflated language that it will be easily dismissed. The authors postulate that Christianity as we know it, regardless of the teachings of its founder, ultimately distilled and usurped the greatest wisdom inherent in pagan traditions. Specifically, they charge that Christianity looted the traditions of the Osiris/Dionysus cults--borrowing, synthesizing and domesticating what was most sacred to Greco-Roman civilization. Freke and Gandy assert that Christian history is "nothing less than the greatest cover-up of all time. Christianity's original Gnostic doctrines and its true origins in the Pagan Mysteries had been ruthlessly suppressed by the mass destruction of the evidence and the creation of a false history to suit the political purposes of the Roman Church." The authors compare the revolution of the imperial Christian church (which finally suppressed pagan worship) to the Communist revolution in Russia, arguing that both saw enormous bloodshed and suppression of all dissent. This kind of polemic detracts from the usefulness of this study. The book's great tragedy is that many of its most scholarly kernels of insight, such as the authors' discussion of Secret Mark or their tantalizing analysis of the Lazarus material, will be lost to responsible discussion. In sum, this is a disappointing, sensationalist polemic. [Copyright 2000 *Cahners Business Information, Inc.* Appeared in: *Reed Elsevier Inc.* Copyright Reed Business Information]

Freke (a philosopher and author of books on spirituality) and Gandy (who is studying classical civilization) believe that first century Jewish mystics adapted the potent symbolism of the Osiris-Dionysus myths into a myth of their own, the hero of which was the Jewish dying and resurrecting godman Jesus. Therefore, the story of Jesus is a consciously crafted vehicle for encoded spiritual teachings created by Jewish Gnostics. We are unaware of this, they claim, because the Roman Catholic Church destroyed evidence of the connection between Christianity and the pagan mysteries. They offering an examination of mystery religions, especially Greek, pointing out the many parallels between them and what they see as the Gospels' message about Jesus. Freke and Gandy are familiar with a significant amount of recent biblical scholarship, though they rely mostly on Elaine Pagel's work on the Gnostics. This book will obviously be controversial, but the authors are quite informed, as demonstrated by their extensive notes and bibliography. A list of related web sites, a Who's Who, and an index add to the book's usefulness. Recommended as an important book in the debate on the historical Jesus. [David Bourquin, California State Univ., San Bernardino Copyright 2000 *Cahners Business Information, Inc.*]

Freke and Gandy's breathless tone and anti-Catholic diatribes are distracting, but the parallels they draw between early Christianity and the mystery religions of its time may intrigue a sizable readership. Their thesis is that Christianity began as a Jewish variant of the Osiris-Dionysus cult, with its seminal stories of a divine human's death and resurrection. The cult took on local characteristics when the Egyptian deity was grafted onto local gods. Freke and Gandy argue that the Messiah of Judaism served as the local god in Christianity and that the crucified Messiah was historicized by literalist Christians,

who suppressed Christianity's original gnostic form while destroying evidence of its pagan roots. Claiming that gnosticism preceded "orthodox" Christianity and that Christianity owes more to Greek philosophy and paganism than it has acknowledged isn't new, nor is dispute over whether Christianity's core is historicized myth or mythologized history. But bringing those claims and that argument to nonspecialists may stimulate them to rethink the relationship of Christians in a "post-Christian" world to their ancestors in a "pre-Christian" past." (Reviewed 2000 by Steven Schroeder).

- Thanks to **Ron Frederickson**

The Jesus Mysteries Thesis (from Wikipedia)

Freke and Gandy base the Jesus Mysteries thesis partly on a series of parallels between the biography of Osiris-Dionysus and the biography of Jesus drawn from the four canonical gospels. Their reconstruction of the myth of Osiris-Dionysus, compiled from the myths of ancient dying and resurrected "godmen," bears a striking resemblance to the gospel accounts. The authors give a short list of parallels at the beginning of the book:

Osiris-Dionysus is God made flesh, the savior and "Son of God."

His father is God and his mother is a mortal virgin.

He is born in a cave or humble cow shed on December 25 before three shepherds.

He offers his followers the chance to be born again through the rites of baptism.

He miraculously turns water into wine at a marriage ceremony.

He rides triumphantly into town on a donkey while people wave palm leaves to honor him.

He dies at Eastertime as a sacrifice for the sins of the world.

After his death he descends to hell, then on the third day he rises from the dead and ascends to heaven in glory.

His followers await his return as the judge during the Last Days.

His death and resurrection are celebrated by a ritual meal of bread and wine, which symbolize his body and blood.

It's the Thought that Counts

Staff writer Ilene Lelchuk in a *San Francisco Chronicle* article (12/12/06) says that Christians are divided over whether to ask Wal-Mart to drop a "Convert or Die" computer game from their stores. According to Lelchuk, "Liberal and progressive Christian groups say a new computer game in which players must either convert or kill non-Christians is the wrong gift to give this holiday season and that Wal-Mart ...should yank it off its shelves. The Campaign to Defend the Constitution and the Christian Alliance for Progress, two online political groups, plan to demand today that Wal-Mart dump Left Behind: Eternal Forces...." This PC game was inspired by *Left Behind* series of Christian novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. The novels are based on the authors' interpretation of the Book of Revelation and describes events after the Rapture, when Jesus takes his people to heaven and leaves nonbelievers behind to face the Antichrist.

The article continues, "Left Behind Games' president, Jeffrey Frichner, says the game actually is pacifist because players lose 'spirit points' every time they gun down nonbelievers rather than convert them. They can earn spirit points again by having their character pray. 'You are fighting a defensive battle in the game,' Frichner, whose previous company produced Bible software, said of combatting the Antichrist. 'You are a sort of a freedom fighter.' A Wal-Mart spokeswoman said the retailer has no plans to pull Left Behind: Eternal Forces from any of the 200 of Wal-Mart's 3,800 stores that offer the game.... 'We look at the community to see where it will sell,' said Tara Raddohl. 'We have customers who are buying it and really haven't received a lot of complaints about it from our customers at this time'."

Clark Stevens, co-director of the Campaign to Defend the Constitution, was quoted as saying the

game is not peaceful or diplomatic. He described it as an incredibly violent game, saying, "Sure, there is no blood — the dead just fade off the screen — but you are mowing down your enemy with a gun. It pushes a message of religious intolerance. You can either play for the 'good side' by trying to convert nonbelievers to your side or join the Antichrist."

The Rev. Tim Simpson, and president of the Christian Alliance for Progress joined Stevens in condemning the game calling it an allegedly Christian video game that teaches young children to hate and kill. The two groups, mentioned above, formed in 2005 to protest what their approximately 130,000 members feel is the growing political influence and hypocrisy of the religious right.

Frichner denied that, in using Arab- and Muslim-sounding names, the game is endorsing prejudice. He said that since Muslims are not believers in Jesus Christ, they obviously can't be on Christ's side in the game. His company's ultimate goal, Frichner claims, is to bring parents and kids together to talk about the Bible. He said most teens are playing video games, so it was natural to turn the books into one.

Frichner said more than 10,000 retailers offer the game. He described sales as "terrific", though he wouldn't reveal figures.

- Thanks to **John Sherman**

"When the consensus of scholarship says one thing and the Word of God another, the consensus of scholarship can go plumb to hell for all I care. America is not a country for a dissenter to live in."

Billy Sunday, American evangelist

How Old Is The Grand Canyon? Park Service Won't Say

Orders to Cater to Creationists Makes National Park Agnostic on Geology

Washington, DC — Grand Canyon National Park is not permitted to give an official estimate of the geologic age of its principal feature, due to pressure from Bush administration appointees. Despite promising a prompt review of its approval for a book claiming the Grand Canyon was created by Noah's flood rather than by geologic forces, more than three years later no review has ever been done and the book remains on sale at the park, according to documents released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER).

"In order to avoid offending religious fundamentalists, our National Park Service is under orders to suspend its belief in geology," stated PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch. "It is disconcerting that the official position of a national park as to the geologic age of the Grand Canyon is 'no comment.'"

In a letter released today, PEER urged the new Director of the National Park Service (NPS), Mary Bomar, to end the stalling tactics, remove the book from sale at the park and allow park interpretive rangers to honestly answer questions from the public about the geologic age of the Grand Canyon. PEER is also asking Director Bomar to approve a pamphlet, suppressed since 2002 by Bush appointees, providing guidance for rangers and other interpretive staff in making distinctions between science and religion when speaking to park visitors about geologic issues.

In August 2003, Park Superintendent Joe Alston attempted to block the sale at park bookstores of Grand Canyon: A Different View by Tom Vail, a book claiming the Canyon developed on a biblical rather than an evolutionary time scale. NPS Headquarters, however, intervened and overruled Alston. To quiet the resulting furor, NPS Chief of Communications David Barna told reporters and members of Congress that there would be a high-level policy review of the issue.

According to a recent NPS response to a Freedom of Information Act request filed by PEER, no such review was ever requested, let alone conducted or completed.

Park officials have defended the decision to approve the sale of *Grand Canyon: A Different View*, claiming that park bookstores are like libraries, where the broadest range of views are displayed. In fact, however, both law and park policies make it clear that the park bookstores are more like schoolrooms rather than libraries. As such, materials are only to reflect the highest quality science and are supposed to closely support approved interpretive themes. Moreover, unlike a library the approval process is very selective. Records released to PEER show that during 2003, Grand Canyon officials rejected 22 books and other products for bookstore placement while approving only one new sale item — the creationist book.

Ironically, in 2005, two years after the Grand Canyon creationist controversy erupted, NPS approved a new directive on "Interpretation and Education (Director's Order #6) which reinforces the posture that materials on the "history of the Earth must be based on the best scientific evidence available, as found in scholarly sources that have stood the test of scientific peer review and criticism [and] Interpretive and educational programs must refrain from appearing to endorse religious beliefs explaining natural processes."

"As one park geologist said, this is equivalent of Yellowstone National Park selling a book entitled *Geysers of Old Faithful: Nostrils of Satan*," Ruch added, pointing to the fact that previous NPS leadership ignored strong protests from both its own scientists and leading geological societies against the agency approval of the creationist book. "We sincerely hope that the new Director of the Park Service now has the autonomy to do her job."

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility News Release (www.peer.org)

- Thanks to **John Sherman**

That's God

Who is the keeper of the gate? That's God.
And whom do seekers contemplate? That's God.
Whom do the sheep anticipate? That's God.
Who likes to set the record straight? That's God.
Who worked his arse off to create? That's God.
All fossils both in shale and slate? That's God.
Who sent His son to compensate? That's God.
For errors made before that date? That's God.
Who is both fisher and the bait? That's God.
Who doesn't seem to concentrate? That's God.
Who kills the sparrows by the crate? That's God.
Who did, with Mary, fornicate? That's God.
Who tends to do things rather late? That's God.
Who made this evil sinful state? That's God.
Who brings the blasphemer to fate? That's God.
Who fries the sinners on a grate? That's God.
Who drowns His creatures when irate? That's God.
Who's body count does still inflate? That's God.
Who is this lying fraud? Oh wait -- that's God.
Who is this tyrant coward, mate? That's God.
Who is the Lord of death and hate? That's God.

- unknown author (internet)

Memberships Due for 2007

Memberships to Red River Freethinkers for 2007 are due this month.

Your contributions are the only source of income for this organization. Without your continued support, we will no longer be able to continue producing and distributing this newsletter.

"Those Fundamentalists who deny Darwin by insisting that Evolution is really Intelligent Design have now added their refutation of the Law of Gravity by referring to it as Intelligent Falling. Which puts them in the Vaudeville shtick known as Prat-Falls.

"Look for them, any day now, to insist that our orbiting lunar satellite is actually Intelligent Mooning."

- **Marcel Stratton**

"Since the publication of my first book, *The End of Faith*, thousands of people have written to me to tell me that I am wrong not to believe in God. The most hostile of these communications have come from Christians. This is ironic, as Christians generally imagine that no faith imparts the virtues of love and forgiveness more effectively than their own. The truth is that many who claim to be transformed by Christ's love are deeply, even murderously, intolerant of criticism. While we may want to ascribe this to human nature, it is clear that such hatred draws considerable support from the Bible. How do I know this? The most disturbed of my correspondents always cite chapter and verse."

- **Sam**

Harris in *Letter to a Christian Nation*:

Note to the Reader.

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.

The next meeting will be at the Unitarian Universalist Church on January 21, 2007. We will meet for discussion, information sharing, and gossip!

Kristi Groberg, a noted scholar on the subject of the Russian Orthodox Church, will give a talk entitled, "Was Rasputin a Religious Figure?"

The meeting will end a bit early as another group will be meeting there at 4:00 pm. The public is welcome.

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