

## Memberships Due for 2009

For most of you, your memberships to the Red River Freethinkers for 2009 were due in January. All memberships to this 501(c)(3) organization are tax-deductible to the full extent as allowed by law.

Your contributions are the main source of income for this organization. Without your continued support, we would not be able to continue producing and distributing this newsletter.

Individual Membership	\$30/year
Family Membership	\$45/year
Student Membership	\$15/year
Newsletter only	\$10/year

Send dues, along with name, address, phone number, and email address to: Red River Freethinkers, P.O. Box 405 Fargo, ND 58107-0405.

Your membership dues to the Red River Freethinkers for 2009 have been paid.

You are not yet a member of the Red River Freethinkers for 2009.

NOTE: If you received a complimentary copy of this newsletter and would like to be removed from our mailing list, please contact any of the RRF officers or send an email to [info@redriverfreethinkers.org](mailto:info@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 advocate for a skeptical view of the role of religion in society and to promote critical examination of religious authority and dogma.

Items for this newsletter may be sent to 4330 47th Street S Unit K, Fargo, ND 58104.

Red River Freethinkers is a 501(c)(3) non-prophet 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.
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RED RIVER FREETHINKERS

# THE RED RIVER RATIONALIST

ISSUE 121 MARCH 2009

## THE ACHILLES HEEL OF THE NAZARETH STORY

Was there a village called Nazareth at the time that the central figure of Christianity, Jesus, was born? It is imperative that there was such a village of Nazareth because plans are under way for a 60 million dollar village and theme park depicting events that supposedly happened there.

But, friends, new evidence has surfaced. Some of us who attended the annual convention of American Atheists last year heard an archaeologist speak about the controversy surrounding

the artifacts unearthed at the present city of Nazareth. There have been archaeologists of different camps digging in and around Nazareth for many years. One camp seems to have as its objective justifying the Bible story while another camp is only trying to accurately date the artifacts. What has happened, and continues to happen, would make for a dramatic movie of archaeological intrigue.

The scholar who spoke at the convention was Rene Salm. Salm has published a

book, "The Myth of Nazareth: The Invented Town of Jesus" and provided updates on what is happening in and around present day Nazareth in this month's issue of American Atheist.

A broad overview of events could be summarized in this way: In spite of lots of digging, only a hand full of artifacts have been unearthed. Salm reports that, with the

*(The Achilles' Heel of the Nazareth Story continued on page 3)*

## SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND LUNCH SEMINAR

It is commonly assumed in the United States that the motivation for any group advocating public discussion is necessarily propaganda, proselytizing, and advancing a private agenda.

The Science, Religion, and Lunch Seminar (SRLS) is an informal discussion group for controversial topics in science, religion, pseudoscience, and pseudoreligion that meets weekly and has met regularly since Spring 2000. The creation-evolution controversy is a central, but by no means the only, topic. The Management actively seeks the presentation and discussion of a wide variety of views as well as in-

volvement by the community. Speakers may be scientists, ministers, students, faculty, theists, atheists, creationists, evolutionists, etc. Discussion is valued. To encourage it, speakers have a standard limit of 40 minutes to allow time for questions and comments.

The motivation for SRLS is that public discussion of controversial subjects is most valuable when opposing ideas meet. Consequently, whatever your point of view, if you have not been irritated by SRLS, you have not attended enough meetings.

The Science, Religion, and Lunch Seminar is sponsored by the NDSU College of Arts,

Humanities, and Social Sciences, by the NDSU Society of Physics Students, by the NDSU student organization Atheists, Agnostics, and Secular Humanists, and by the Red River Freethinkers. Claims made and views expressed are not necessarily those of the sponsors and are not the responsibility of the sponsors.

Meetings are Tuesdays at noon in the NDSU Memorial Union.

All meetings are one hour long and are free. The public is welcome.

For more information: <http://www.ndsu.edu/>

### POINTS OF INTEREST

- The **Red River** is expected to crest **Saturday March 28** at between 39.5 and 40 feet. Mayor Dennis Walaker is asking for everyone's help. It is estimated that 1.3 to 1.5 million sandbags will be needed for Fargo. The Fargodome will be the staging area for volunteers. If you can help, call 476-4000. If you need help, call 241-1545.
- The **March 24** Science, Religion, and Lunch Seminar will feature **Phil Boudjouk** presenting his talk, "Universities and Their New Mission of Economic Development: Challenges, Barriers, and Opportunities."
- The **March 31** Science, Religion, and Lunch Seminar will feature **Brad Lesser** presenting his talk, "The Book of Mormon: What It Is and What It Is Not"

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## WATCHDOG REPORT

### WASTING TIME IN TEXAS

A federal appeals court recently upheld a Texas law that requires public school students to observe a daily minute of silence in order to pray, reflect or otherwise remain quiet.

### OBAMA PUTS SCIENCE ABOVE THEOLOGY

President Obama has signed an executive order ending his predecessor's restrictions on stem cell research. Embryonic stem cell research has great potential to alleviate or even cure many devastating medical conditions.

### NONES ARE ON THE RISE IN ALL 50 STATES

A new survey of religion in America reports that "nones"—people claiming no religion—constitute the only "religious" tradition that is growing in all 50 states.

- American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS)

### HUMANISTS NOW ARMED TO GO AFTER MONUMENTS

Since the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in Pleasant Grove City v. Summum, 07-665 on February 25, the American Humanist Association (AHA) announced that it has been given just what it needs to pursue the removal of Ten Commandments monuments on public property all over America.

### RELIGIOUS RIGHT ATTACKS CAPITOL VISITOR CENTER

U.S. Rep. J. Randy Forbes has introduced a resolution (H. Con. Res. 34) mandating that a bible owned by President Abraham Lincoln be displayed at the new Capitol Visitors Center in Washington DC.

Some might view this as promoting the Christian religion.

### VATICAN: CONDOMS MAKE AIDS PROBLEM WORSE

Pope Benedict XVI said condoms are not the answer to the AIDS epidemic in Africa and can make the problem worse. "You can't resolve it with the distribution of condoms," the pope told reporters on March 17. "On the contrary, it increases the problem."

The late Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo made headlines in 2003 for saying that condoms may help spread AIDS through a false sense of security, claiming they weren't effective in blocking transmission of the virus.

### MORE SPEAK UP ABOUT RELIGIONS INAUGURATIONS

The court case *Newdow v. Roberts*, filed December 30, 2008, by atheist Michael Newdow and others to remove prayers and a religious oath from the inauguration ceremony of the United States President rages on.

On March 11, attorneys for the plaintiffs filed an amended complaint adding 230 plaintiffs (including a number of children) to show the court there are many Americans who object to the infusion of religion into inauguration ceremonies.

### POPE SAYS TRUE RELIGION REJECTS VIOLENCE

During his visit to Yaounde, Cameroon on March 19, Pope Benedict XVI spoke "Genuine religion ... stands at the base of any authentically human culture". "It rejects all forms of violence and totalitarianism, not only on principles of faith but also of right reason."

The Pope stated that "religion and reason mutually reinforce one another".



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### (The Achilles' Heel of the Nazareth Story, continued from page 1)

exception of a piece or two which have uncertain dates of origin, all the pieces discovered date from hundreds of years after the reported birth of Jesus. That is, there was no village on the site of today's Nazareth at the time of the Bible story.

The traditional Nazareth story is also complicated by some tombs that have been found under today's Nazareth. Jewish law at the time would have forbidden townspeople to live next to the buried dead.

So, the traditionalists, and the inves-

tors in the Nazareth "Disney", have work to do. They must overcome both the archaeological evidence and the burials. What to do?

The traditionalists have counter attacked on several levels. First, they "discovered" a few coins which date to the era of the birth story. There is considerable suspicion of these coins since they were reportedly found on the surface in an area where digging had been conducted for many years. Additionally, traditionalists have surmised that the burials took place after the Jesus story.

This conclusion, however, does not jive with the artifact dating. And, just in case all else fails, they say that the original village of Nazareth might have been located nearby, somewhere which has not been, and will never be, searched by archaeologists.

In the meantime, we have only one fact so far that has held up under scrutiny: There are no artifacts dated to the time of the Jesus story at the site of present-day Nazareth.

**Jon Lindgren**  
Fargo, ND

### MONUMENT WARS: PLEASANT GROVE CITY V. SUMMUM

Pleasant Grove City v. Summum was heard by the United States Supreme Court on November 12, 2008.



The court considered whether or not Pleasant Grove, Utah must allow the Summum Church there to display its monument on public property alongside the ten commandments and other monuments that are on display there.

Many believe, in cases like these, that the Court should rule that the United States Constitution does not allow government to favor one religion over another and should not allow any religious monuments to be displayed and maintained on the public property that all tax-payers pay for.

On February 25, 2009, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously against Summum in the Pleasant Grove case.

Justice Samuel Alito explained that Pleasant Grove's acceptance of some monuments and refusal to accept other memorials is a valid expression of "governmental speech".

The Red River Freethinkers filed a federal lawsuit against the City of Fargo in April 2008 after the city denied a request to place their monument in the city mall area where a 10 commandments monument stands. Both sides of that case have been waiting for the Summum case ruling.

**Jason Schoenack**  
Fargo, ND

### CANADA'S SCIENCE MINISTER QUESTIONS THEORY OF EVOLUTION

Canada's Minister of Science, a self-described Christian, won't affirm that he believes in the scientific theory of evolution.

"I'm not going to answer that question. I am a Christian, and I don't think anybody asking a question about my religion is appropriate," said Mr. Gary Goodyear in an interview with The Globe and Mail.



Goodyear is Canada's federal Minister of State for Science and Technology.

"I do believe that, just because you can't see it under a microscope doesn't mean it doesn't exist. It could mean we don't have a powerful enough microscope yet."

When Mr. Goodyear was asked to clarify if he was talking about the role of a creator, Goodyear said that the interview was getting off topic.

Jim Turk, executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, was flabbergasted that the minister would invoke his religion when asked about evolution.

"The traditions of science and the reliance on testable and provable knowledge has served us well for several hundred years and have been the basis for most of our advancement. It is inconceivable that a government would have a minister of science that rejects the basis of scientific discovery and traditions," Turk said.