

First Coast

# FreeThinker



The newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

June 2005

Volume 3, Issue 6

## Always Strive For Knowledge

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*This inspirational philosophical essay was written by 14-year-old Rebecca Pitts, granddaughter of members Ray and Nita Pitts.*

**A**bove all else that at present we hold to be true, despite the possibility that it may or may not exist, the only certainty in this universe is that knowledge is power.

As it stands, knowledge follows a principle of infinity; and thus, it is humanly impossible to ever know or completely comprehend it all or how it can be utilized. Knowledge is boundless; human life is fleeting.

But this means nothing more than that humanity will never run out of things to discover and subsequently, ways to aid the progression of humankind. The ultimate goal of science, though infinite knowledge is present far beyond our obtainment, is to reach as close to the infinity of knowledge as possible. This is crucial if we ever wish to even have a chance at supreme comprehension of the universe.

Humanity must be able to prolong its existence far enough into the distant reaches of time to allow, even if but a single human being remains, the opportunity to make a deci-

sive attempt at the highest, unsurpassable level of understanding. If that person (if he or she alone remains to conquer infinity) can do no less than try, then humanity can at least pass into extinction in peace, confident that we gave it our best shot.

Sometimes, though we may say that failure is unacceptable and inexcusable, such may be inevitable. It is not a crime in itself but rather, a step toward success. One simply cannot discover what works without first discovering what does not, nor can one ever hope to learn from the past

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### So true!

*"I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do because I notice it always coincides with their own desires."*

Susan B. Anthony  
(1820-1906) U.S.  
reformer, suffragist

### June 2005 Meeting

Guest speaker:

Bob Childers, retired, has worked almost 40 years for the Social Security Administration

## "Social Security Reform Examined"

Monday, June 13, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

Unitarian Universalist Church

7405 Arlington Expressway - in the sanctuary

# President's Message

## What Do We Want to Be When We Grow Up?

I want to thank everyone who participated in our newsletter meeting last month. The turnout was gratifying, and the discussion was as well-reasoned as one would hope for a group of freethinkers. As meeting moderator Ellen Wagner aptly put it, the disagreement over newsletter content uncovered a broader concern about the direction of our organization – whether we want to involve the group in political activism or take a more neutral educational role in the community.

How strident can we be and still work with other community groups? Would it be mealy-mouthed to tone down our rhetoric? If we dilute the presentation of our beliefs, will we be able to attract committed vital members? If we poke fun

at the religious, will we alienate people who could use our insight or learn from our stories? These are all questions posed at the meeting.

Since becoming president, I have talked to several non-members who don't consider themselves atheists or even agnostics, but tell me they agree with most of what is in our

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**“We want to be seen as people doing good works and helping others.”**

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newsletter. They would like to come to our meetings, but are hesitant because they're afraid of how they will be received. I tell them to come anyway. I tell them we are open to anyone who has an open, working mind.

Freethinkers, humanists, and atheists have gotten a bad

rap in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We are depicted as devil-worshippers and rioters – belligerent, cold, angry and hollow. We are rarely seen by others as we see ourselves. Yet I believe most of us want to make our world better for everyone – religious and non-religious folks alike.

At our meeting we discovered that we agree on more than we differ. We all want to have a positive image in the community, and we agreed that one of the best ways to do this would be to work on a project that will benefit others. We want to be seen as people doing good works and helping others. We want it known that contributions to the public welfare are not always faith-based. Christians do not have a monopoly on good works.



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## First Coast FreeThinker

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for members of the First Coast Freethought Society, other freethinkers and potential freethinkers. We exchange newsletters with other freethought groups and obtain information from many sources.

Readers are invited and encouraged to reprint our original materials provided they give credit to this publication.

The officials of the FCFS are not responsible for opinions or other statements expressed in this newsletter. It is intended to convey ideas to stimulate discussion on a variety of subjects.

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We welcome submissions. Deadlines are the end of the second week of the month for the following month. Submit contributions by e-mail to Hugo (see above), or mail to Hugo Borresen, 8831 Taurus Circle South, Jacksonville, FL 32222. Submit Web site contributions by e-mail to Carrie Renwick, carrieren@att.net.

## Dr. Kennedy's Holy Cure All for What Ails the U.S.

By Fred W. Hill

**E**vangelist minister Dr. D. James Kennedy of the Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale has diagnosed the U.S. and determined that we live in a very sick nation. Consequently, he has taken it upon himself to embark on a mission to make every American swallow his holy medicine and thereby "reclaim America for Christ" and, as spelled out by the mission statement on one of his web sites, (see <http://www.reclaimamerica.org/Pages/NEWS/newspage.asp?story=1247>) to "inform, equip, motivate, and support Christians; enabling them to defend and implement the Biblical principles on which our country was founded."

In other words, he would very much like to transform the United States into a Christian theocracy, even though he denied any such ambition to Terri Gross when interviewed on NPR's Fresh Air, broadcast on May 18, 2005. On his own international radio program, Dr. Kennedy claims the United States was founded as a Christian nation and it is only due to nasty, god-hating secularists distorting history that anyone thinks otherwise.

Shame on us secularists, then, for noticing that the federal Constitution, the document that truly gave birth to our country as a genuine nation rather

than just a loose confederacy of squabbling states, makes no reference to any deity as the source of creating our government, but rather to "We the People of the United States."

Even if the founding fathers essentially meant only "white, land-owning men" by reference to "the people," they were at least on the right track in recognizing that god deserved neither credit nor blame for the work that they did. They further specified "no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or Public Trust under the United States."

Finally, there's that clause in the First Amendment that instructs, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." How picky for us to take them at their words encoded as national policy and take those words to mean that the government should stay separate from religion.

Yes, this gives the religious the right to believe and practice whatever they wish, bar engaging in human sacrifice or other such offenses against public welfare as I would hope even the most conservative strict Constitutionalist judge agrees even if it's not specifically stated. It also means that the government should give them no official support or sanction.

By that very same amendment, Dr. Kennedy has the right to exercise his religious beliefs and say whatever he chooses,

save perhaps yelling fire in a crowded theater. However, Dr. Kennedy has no right to make his religious views the undisputed law of the land, which is exactly what he and his supporters are trying to do. This would be true even if they comprised a majority of American citizens.

Among other purposes, the U.S. Constitution was meant to prevent either a majority or a minority from running tyrannically roughshod over the other; to find a balance in promoting the general welfare of all citizens and the perceived rights of individuals. Naturally, as governments are and have always been run by imperfect humans rather than by sublimely perfect angels, those lofty intentions have not always been met.

A close, objective reading of the biblical books Numbers and Deuteronomy reveals, however, that not even the Judeo-Christian-Islamic god nor his agent Moses was capable of adhering to God's own Commandments against murder, false witness, and theft. They even directed the murder and rape of children, but then this is the same god who reputedly murdered all living things, even unborn children, save what could be fit on one ship. Yet, Dr. Kennedy insists this very same god, who he insists is all good despite substantial biblical evidence to the contrary, knows what is best for all of us, and since this god is

*(Continued on page 6)*

# Pope Faces American Dissent

By Curtis Wolf

**W**ith the election of the new Pope Benedict XVI, freethinkers are naturally curious about the impact that he will have on the future of the Catholic Church.

He is very conservative in doctrine, possibly more than John Paul II. He was the prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the new name for the Inquisition which is milder than its predecessor in the Middle Ages only because it cannot use force to get the desired results. As Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the new pope supported a ban on teaching in Catholic universities for some eminent Catholic scholars, such as Charles Curran and Hans Kueng.

More interesting is the conflict between the new pope and the American public. Recent polls (see below) show that the majority of Americans are in conflict with the Vatican on various issues. Many Catholics — the word means universal — are more stalwart in their support of their religion's teachings than is the general public, but the conflict is still obvious.

According to an Associated Press/Ipsos poll (margin of error  $\pm 3.1$ ), a majority of respondents believe that the laity should have more say in the governing of the church (62% All adults, 63% Catholics); the pope should do more to control sexual abuse by clergy (86% All adults, 82% Catholics); priests should be al-

lowed to marry (69% All adults, 60% Catholics); women should be ordained priests (64% All adults, 60% Catholics). According to a CNN/USA Today/Gallup Poll (margin of error  $\pm 7$ ), 78% of the Catholics polled believe that use of birth control should be permitted. According to an ABC News/Washington Post Poll (margin of error  $\pm 6.5$ ), 57% of Catholics hope for changes in church policies under the new pope. (See <http://www.pollingreport.com/religion.htm>)

Recently, the editor of the Jesuit magazine, *America*, resigned under pressure from the Vatican. His ouster was a culmination of years of Vatican dissatisfaction with Rev. Thomas J. Reese's penchant for publishing points of view that clashed with church teaching.

At one point, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith under Ratzinger's leadership considered creating a three-member censor board to keep an eye on the magazine, but this was never implemented. (*National Catholic Reporter*, "Editor of Jesuits' *America* magazine forced to resign under Vatican pressure" May 6, 2005)

The unwillingness of the Catholic Church to tolerate dissent over church teachings should be disturbing to freethinkers. Freethought is based on the idea that nothing is sacred. Everything is up for discussion. Through reason and science, we can make better decisions since they are being looked at from many different view-

points before they become official policy. To freethinkers, the church's unwillingness to expose church doctrine to critical examination appears to reflect its lack of confidence that it could win the debate over church teachings in the end.

To protect one's belief system from scrutiny by critics under the guise of guarding the teachings of Christ which were supposedly passed down generation to generation from the founding of Christianity is intellectual cowardice. If the Bible is truly the word of God, every syllable in the book should be able to withstand the harshest intellectual attack brought against it. The fact that so many have found reasons not to believe the Bible speaks volumes about its origins.

The Catholic Church's intolerance of dissent may seem to its leaders to be a wise decision. Consider the case of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev cracked open the door to freedom with his introduction of glasnost. The next thing he knew, the Berlin Wall came tumbling down. A little dissent once it is sprung from its cage rarely consents meekly to its return to its former prison.

Despite all of this, an institution that does not examine itself from time to time and allow open discussion of its most cherished beliefs risks the possibility of becoming irrelevant in an increasingly rational age.

Note: Margin of error is a way of evaluating the accuracy

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## Members Meet to Discuss Controversial Cartoon

**O**n May 11, twenty-one members of the First Coast Freethought Society met to discuss whether a certain cartoon which some contend denigrates religion and contains offensive language should be printed. The question quickly morphed into “Should we confront religion in the newsletter and how should we do so?”

The members who attended the meeting were guided very effectively by Ellen Wagner, professor of philosophy at the University of North Florida, who kept a tight focus on the questions before the meeting.

Everyone was encouraged to present his or her viewpoint on the cartoon and the issues that it raised. Also, several e-mails from members who could not attend the meeting were read at the beginning of the meeting. There was a lively discussion on

newsletter procedures, intended audience of the newsletter, definition of Christian bashing, and clarification of our group’s mission. There was an informal show of hands that rejected the inclusion of the cartoon in the newsletter (15 against, 6 for), but the proper role of the newsletter in confronting religion and presenting humanism to the First Coast community is still an issue for our group to resolve.

Wagner identified seven comments/questions for the group to consider:

1. Who is the audience for the newsletter? What kind of people are we looking for when we seek new members?
2. What is “Christian bashing”?
3. What are the standards and procedures for discussion of issues like the cartoon within

the group?

4. What aspects of our public persona (newsletter, meetings, etc.) should be monitored for their impact upon our group image?
5. Develop group by-laws and decide on the purpose of the group.
6. What kind of relationships do we want to establish with other organizations like the UU Church, Americans United, public libraries, etc.
7. Start a project that makes a contribution to the welfare of other human beings.

President Susan Allen, with the help of Treasurer Karen Spuria, organized the meeting. If you would like the minutes for the meeting, please contact Carrie Renwick at [carrieren@att.net](mailto:carrieren@att.net).



## Update on Bills Before the Florida Legislature

**L**ast month’s FreeThinker included an article on bills before the Florida Legislature that were of interest to freethinkers. Of the bills mentioned in the article, only House Bill 319 (Freedom to

Worship Safely Act) and HB 1651 (Chiropractic Education) passed the Florida legislature. Fortunately, these were fairly innocuous bills when compared to the other bills mentioned in last month’s article so we can consider ourselves fortunate.

However, a bill never truly dies. It often resurrects itself in the next legislative session. We should think about what we can do as humanists to make our voices heard on statewide issues before the Florida legislature.



### First Coast Freethought Society 2005 Events

June	13- Monthly meeting	19- Book discussion group	28- Social at Steak and Ale
July	11- Monthly meeting	17- Book discussion group	26- Social at Steak and Ale
August	15- Monthly meeting	21- Book discussion group	23- Social at Steak and Ale

**Always Strive for Knowledge** (Continued from page 1)

without making mistakes. No one is perfect.

However, there are three failures of human character that are unforgivable sins. The first is to never try at all. The second is to quit without first making every possible effort. The third is, if knowledge is found, to hoard it for the sake of personal greed. To commit any of these three crimes, (let alone all three), is a capital offense. These sins do nothing less than sentence humanity to a tyranny of ignorance.

As stated previously, the goal of learning is to carry humanity on for as long as it takes to give us a chance to find the highest in knowing, to conquer the limits imposed on us by the power infinity has to outlast us. So, even if only one human being lives to make the ultimate jump, if he or she succeeds, that person will have broken the ultimate and finite limit. He or she will have access

to the supreme gifts that life and knowledge have to offer. If any of us as humans can achieve that goal, we will surpass all other limitations. We will break all boundaries. We will soar beyond space and time itself, and we will be worthy of a place among divinity, bestowed with all knowledge has to give. Perhaps, and I mean no blasphemy, if a god or goddess exists as our supreme creator, he or she may have achieved their own greatness this way, the lone survivor(s) to triumph over the final frontier.

The important concept, I cannot stress enough, is to believe that as long as knowledge remains to be gained and understood, anything is possible, but we will never know positively unless we try our hardest, try as long as we are able, and share our gifts for the benefit of humanity. Though probably eons from attaining it, we will always have the opportunity to try for the best.



**Dr. Kennedy's Holy Cure All for What Ails the U.S.** (Continued from page 3)

apparently incapable of speaking directly to any but a very minute number of people, Dr. Kennedy and his cohorts, including many of our highest-ranking politicians, will kindly assist their doddering old deity by attempting to run our government the way they insist he or Jesus, his supposed son and separate-but-entirely-equal manifestation of himself, would do it.

Of course, this means they must outlaw all abortions, all homosexual activity, all science that contradicts anything in the Bible, and must also undo all those terrible, "Satan-inspired" laws which restricts the power of the church from exer-

cising authority over the lives of every American, even those who do not accept the divinity of Christ or even believe he or his supposed heavenly father ever existed. Then, to be true enforcers of the word of God as revealed in the Bible, they will have to take all disobedient children to the outskirts of the cities and stone them to death. And to be sure they can get into heaven, they will have to give away all their wealth and live as paupers for the remainder of their lives.

After all, can Dr. Kennedy, who has amassed a multi-million dollar fortune with his evangelizing, be certain that his god is really angrier about same-sex marriage than about wealthy people attempting to enter his kingdom?



**Pope Faces American Dissent** (Continued from page 4)

of a survey. A margin of error of 4% means that if you ask the same question 100 times, in 95 of

those times the percentage of the people providing a certain answer will be within 4% of the percentage of the people providing that answer in the survey.



According to the *Florida-Times Union*, Americans paid \$36 billion for alternative medicine

therapies. They bought an additional \$20 billion of dietary supplements which includes

herbs and minerals. (*Florida Times-Union*, "No longer the alternative" May 7, 2005)



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

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2005 Membership application



<b>Name</b>		<b>Date</b>	
<b>Home address</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Zip Code</b>
<b>E-mail address</b>	<b>Home phone</b>	<b>Business phone</b>	
<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Areas of interest and/or expertise</b>		

**How did you hear about us?** \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership level (please select one):**

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular (\$30/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Carl Sagan (\$50/yr.)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Charles Darwin (\$200/yr.)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student (\$15/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Bertrand Russell (\$75/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Robert Ingersoll (\$500/yr.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior (\$15/yr.)  | <input type="checkbox"/> Thomas Paine (\$100/yr.)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime (\$1,000)           |

**I'm interested in getting involved in the FCFS as a(n):**

- General member    Committee member    Officer    Financial supporter

**Do you object to your name appearing on our membership list, which is only distributed to other members? YES**

**Comments:** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of the First Coast Freethought Society is to serve the needs of the non-religious population of Northeast Florida, to promote freethought and secular humanism, to provide a place for agnostics, rationalists, atheists, skeptics and other freethinkers.

**Meetings**

The FCFS meets the second Monday of every month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida. 32211. (904) 725-8133 Meeting time: from 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

## Humanist Book Discussion Group



**When:** 2:00 p.m., third Sunday of each month.

**Where:** Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd.  
519-6500, Books are usually in stock.

**What:** Books planned for discussion:

- **June 19** - *Why People Believe Weird Things* by Michael Shermer
- **July 17** - *May/June issue of The Humanist*

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at 996-1553.

## June Steak & Ale Social

**Where:** Steak & Ale, Baymeadows & I-95 South

**When:** Tues., June 28, Lounge 6:00 pm, Dine 7:00 pm

**RSVP to:** KAREN SPURIA, by Mon., June 27, if you are attending!! 270-0605 or KSpuria@bellsouth.net.

**EDITORIAL BOARD** At the FCFS May board meeting, the Newsletter Committee was renamed the Editorial Board. This board sets over-all policy and procedures for the *First Coast FreeThinker*. The Board is presently composed of Curtis Wolf, Fred Hill, Susan Allen, Wilhelmina Walton, Carrie Renwick, and Hugo Borresen. Members are welcome to join. It meets as necessary and is currently developing written newsletter guidelines. Day-to-day newsletter operations are directed by Hugo who relies on consensus when making decisions. Comments from readers are always welcome. This is your newsletter!

**WE NEED YOUR HELP!** The FCFS needs members to serve on any of three valuable committees: **Membership, Program** which finds interesting speakers, and **Project** which seeks to ways increase FCFS visibility and recognition in the community. Last but not least, we need a **Webmaster** for our Web site.

The more that our talented members get involved in our group, the greater the impact we can have on the First Coast. If any of the above interests you, please contact Susan Allen at susanalien@comcast.net.

Return service requested

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