



July 2007

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Inside this issue: **NPR Corporate Sponsorship – A Reality!**

- Billy Graham's Crusade 4
- Is Feeding The Homeless a Religious Duty? 5
- Can Ethics Be Reason Based? -- Part III 6

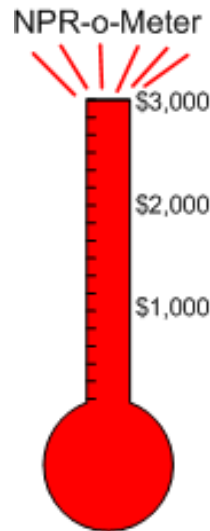
Carrie Renwick

We have hit our goal! Congratulations, everyone! We have raised \$3000. Thanks to your promptness and generosity, we reached our goal in record time, and six months of FCFS announcements on NPR member-station, WJCT, has begun on July 2nd, as scheduled.

As of our last meeting, June 2007, we still needed \$115. Two folks handed me checks, bringing our balance to \$40, and before the end of the meeting our goal was completely met!!

The announcement had to be written keep-

ing within strict WJCT guidelines. It had to be no longer 15 seconds in length and could contain no "action words" or su-



perlatives. In accordance with these guidelines, we endeavored to use the most accurate, clear, and concise wording to describe what

the FCFS actually does, so that listeners would get



a clear enough picture to know if they wanted further information. The announcements reads,

“The First Coast Freethought Society supports nonreligious persons in the Northeast Florida area, promoting secular humanism and a nontheistic approach to everyday life. More information at 288-6291, or on the web, at firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org.”

(Continued on page 3)

“The growth of Pentecostalism is the growth of unreason.”

--R. Joseph Hoffman, Chairman of the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion (See <http://www.centerforinquiry.net/cser/>). The Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion is affiliated with the Center for Inquiry.

July 2007 Meeting

Satya S. Pachori, Ph.D., (Ret.), Professor of English, University of North Florida
 Editor Emeritus, *South Asian Review* (official journal of the South Asian Literary Assoc., MLA)

“How Religion is Approached/Treated in Academia”

Monday, July 16, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

(Upstairs in the Sanctuary - Doors open at 6:00)

Unitarian Universalist Church • 7405 Arlington Expressway • Jacksonville, FL

HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

- When:** 2:00 p.m., the third Sunday of each month.
- Where:** Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd., 519-6500, books are usually in stock.
- What:** Books/magazines planned for discussion:
- July 15, 2007 - book of your choice
 - August 19, 2007 - *Infidel*, by Ayaan Hirsi Ali



Ali is the Somali-born former member of the Dutch parliament who faced death threats after collaborating on a film about domestic violence against Muslim women with controversial director Theo van Gogh (who was himself assassinated). Even before then, her attacks on Islamic culture as “brutal, bigoted, [and] fixated on controlling women” had generated much controversy. In this suspenseful account of her life and her internal struggle with her Muslim faith, she discusses how these views were shaped by her experiences amid the political chaos of Somalia and other African nations, where she was subjected to genital mutilation and later forced into an unwanted marriage. While in transit to her husband in Canada, she decided to seek asylum in the Netherlands. She delivers a powerful feminist critique of Islam informed by a genuine understanding of the religion. She is currently a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank. (List price \$26.)

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-996-1553.

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 diverse 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. The deadline is the **FOURTH SATURDAY** of each month for the following month's issue. Submit contributions by e-mail to Hugo (see above), or U.S. mail to Hugo Borresen, 8831 Taurus Circle South, Jacksonville, FL 32222. Submit web site contributions to Carrie Renwick at the e-mail address above.

NPR Corporate Sponsorship - A Reality!

(Continued from page 1)

I am happy to report that we have already had quite a few requests for further information and to be placed on our mailing list. I cannot tell you how thrilled and delighted I am with our success. You are all so **WONDERFUL!!** Thank you, thank you, thank you!!

The key to the asterisks is as follows: Up to \$100 = 1 star, up to \$200 = 2 stars, up to \$300 = 3 stars, up to \$400 = 4 stars, and up to \$500 - 5 stars.

NPR CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP FUND DONORS

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Thank you also to the three donors who preferred to remain anonymous.



Ongoing FCFS Activities

Dinners For Atheists (and Freethinkers, Humanists, Agnostics, etc.)

Sign up to attend or host a dinner yourself. Sign-up sheets will be at the back table at the monthly meetings. For further details on how this works, see page 9 of the February 2006 *Freethinker*, or ask the hospitality ladies at the back table.

Secular Sunday Morning in the Park (or Atheist Sunday Morning)

Freethinkers... let's get acquainted and enjoy intelligent conversation **every 4th Sunday of the month** (unless inclement weather prevails) at 9 a.m. 'til ? at the pavilion at Losco Park, 10851 Hood Rd., S., Jacksonville 32257, between Shad and Losco Roads. Need directions? Call Beth Perry at 733-5489 or Google the address to get a map and directions. Bring your own cup and breakfast snack. Most of the time coffee is furnished. Mark your calendar and we hope to see you there!

No Atheist Left Behind (or Are You Going My Way?)

If you are seeking a ride to an FCFS event, contact **Hugo Borresen** at HBorresen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org or call 904-779-6883.

Caring Tree

If a telephone call to a member is in order, or if a sympathy card, flowers, or some form of support is needed, please contact **Nita Pitts** at 904-996-0879 or e-mail her at pitrymnd@comcast.net. If you prefer, leave a notation on the sign-in sheet at the back table at one of our monthly meetings.

Billy Graham's Crusade

Fred W. Hill

They came from near and far throughout the southeastern Bible belt to see the aging crusader. This might be his last hurrah, his last personal appearance in the region, their final chance to see him in the flesh, to hear him "preach the gospel." The year was 2000. Christ had failed to make a much promised appearance. But the Reverend Billy Graham, one of the first and foremost televangelists, was bringing his crusade to the Alltel Stadium in Jacksonville, to galvanize the faithful and bring more heathens to Christ.

One of my co-workers was so thrilled about the prospect of Graham's coming that she could not shut up about it. She seemed incapable of speaking without referring to God or Christ and attempted to infect me with her fervor. She was a volunteer for the event and handed me tickets to the crusade, urging me to keep them even after I declined. She knew that I was an atheist and obviously hoped I would attend, listen to Mr. Graham preach, and open up my heart to Christ. Of course that didn't happen, and I remain certain the Reverend had nothing meaningful to say that would have swayed me to join his pious parade.

True, compared to the hateful hectoring for Jesus of Fred Phelps, Pat Robertson, and the late Jerry Falwell and their ilk, Graham's sermons are far more

restrained. Unlike Robertson, Graham never strived to become President and thereby enforce his piety on the nation.

However, he established close ties with every U.S. President from the mid-1950s to the present, earning the sobriquet, "Minister to America's Presidents." Reputedly, during the Reagan years, Graham met with the brash, ill-tempered, and alcoholic eldest son of then current Vice-President George H. W. Bush and convinced him to give up the booze and become a born-again Christian. As has since

However, he established close ties with every U.S. President from the mid-1950s to the present, earning the sobriquet, "Minister to America's Presidents."

become evident, the experience failed to transform the future President into an intelligent, effective democratic leader, more evidence of the limitations of God and even money.

All joking aside, however, Graham deserves some credit for being among the few prominent white Southern ministers to openly oppose racial segregation in the early 1950s, personally taking down the rope that separated the black and white sections of a church in Chattanooga, Tennessee, in 1953

("Graham Cracks the Social Barrier," Joe Laconte, *Policy Review*, Jan/Feb 1996).



Further, Graham has been lambasted by his more radical evangelical peers (see <http://www.atruechurch.info/graham.html> for one example) for not stressing damnation, even though he firmly believes in Satan and Hell, and for promoting inclusivism, "the belief that while Christianity is the only true religion, some God-fearing people may come to salvation without having heard or accepted the gospel." (Christopher Pope, *Realms of Faith*, see <http://faith.propadeutic.com/authors/g.html#extent>).

For all that, Graham has hardly been progressive, providing religious guidance to Presidents, yet apparently never using his clout to promote positive social change, declining to align himself with the civil rights movement despite his opposition to segregation. According to historian Frank E. Smitha, "Graham reduced all problems to sin; ...social conditions, including institutions, counted for nothing. Graham stayed focused on the solution to personal problems as 'coming to Christ.'" (*Religion from the Vatican to the Hare Krishna*, 2002, please see www.fsmitha.com/h2/ch29.html).

There's the rub--faith in God, and preferably Jesus Christ, too, is Billy Graham's cure-all for

every ailment in the world. He is a salesman for Christianity.

Further, Graham is a proponent of biblical inerrancy, holding the Bible as absolute truth; and “lordship salvation,” a view that “saving faith must involve a commitment to repent of one’s sins and follow Christ as Lord” (Pope, op. cit.). His product, however, is not something that anyone committed to freedom of thought would ever buy. Belief that mere faith in any god can genuinely cure anything beyond psychosomatic ailments is childish and certainly neither a rational nor practical solution to the numerous complex problems faced by people all over this globe. Any objective view of any version of the Bible or other “holy” books will find both numerous internal contradictions and contradictions with modern knowledge of science and history. Moreover, while I certainly make no claim

to perfection and I recognize I am generally obliged to heed authority and various rules and regulations, I decline to bemoan myself as a sinner requiring saving by any supposed heavenly lord.



Billy Graham has been in semi-retirement for many years now, his mission now largely in

the hands of his far more conservative son, Franklin Graham, and as I write this in late June, news arrives of the death of his wife after a long illness. Based on what I have read about the Reverend, he strikes me as basically a decent, kind person, dedicated to promoting a cause in which he sincerely believes, as is his right.

Fortunately, I have the right to disagree with him and even promote my own sincere beliefs, even if on a much smaller scale than Mr. Graham’s. Billy had his crusades, I have my little articles and a blog. I’ll never reach more than a tiny fragment of the sort of audience Billy routinely garnered, and I certainly won’t earn a spot in his imaginary heaven, but I’m happy to do my bit to promote the cause of reason in

what too often seems a very, very mad world.



Is Feeding The Homeless a Religious Duty?

Curtis Wolf

Who would have thought that feeding the poor would be so complicated? When University of North Florida Professor Michael Herkov and other members of the Christian Homeless Ministry started handing out food and drink to homeless people in the parking

lot of historic Mount Zion AME Church on Beaver Street, his act of charity quickly became a violation of a city ordinance when officers cited him for distributing aid to the homeless without a permit. Even though the charges were eventually dropped, he decided to sue the city to enjoin them from enforcing the ordinance on the grounds that it violated his right to practice his religion (i.e.,

feeding the homeless). Recently, the lawsuit was settled by the city in return for a new city ordinance that exempts “any person motivated by *bona fide* religious beliefs” from having to obtain a permit to feed the homeless.



(Continued on page 7)

Can Ethics Be Reason Based? – Part III

Curtis Wolf

Over the last two months, I contended that a universal ethical system could be established by specifying a series of empirical verifiable statements and deductive assertions that derive from the empirical facts that provide a solid foundation for this system. The empirically verifiable statements are as follows:

All men and women are equal to each other in every relevant way.

Humans are social animals.

My actions have consequences that affect other people’s ability to live happy lives.

The deductive assertions are as follows:

All men and women have equal rights to happy and fulfilling lives.

We have to take in account the consequences of our actions that affect other’s ability to live happy lives.

Since no one can dictate ethical rules to any other person, they must be negotiated between people with equal rights to happiness.

Now for the fun part. What principles can we derive from the preceding foundation of empiricism and deduction that can guide us in making ethical deci-

sions? The following principles are not exhaustive (I only have a page and a quarter to work with), but I believe that they provide a good starting point for further discussions about ethics.

All ethical rules should be based on clearly identified consequences of one’s actions that hinder the ability of others to achieve happiness.

Is there a clearly identified injury to someone else due to my actions? Nothing else matters. It does not matter if it violates some religious doctrine or some-

Ethics is about relationships, and relationships are strongest when everyone gets something that they want out of them.

one’s vague idea of the way that the world should be. If my actions hinder someone from achieving happiness, and my actions are not justified because I am stopping that someone from hindering someone else from achieving happiness (e.g., a police officer arresting a rapist) these actions are not ethically good.

You should try to put yourself in their shoes when you negotiate ethical rules with others.

When negotiating ethical rules with others, you should seek the greatest happiness for everyone involved. What is

gained by asserting your “rights” and alienating the people who could become your friends? Ethics is about relationships, and relationships are strongest when everyone gets something that they want out of them.



We should emphasize the pursuit of happiness rather than the realization of happiness when negotiating ethical rules.

It is not the responsibility of others to achieve happiness for you. Instead, you should establish mutually satisfactory relationships that help everyone involved to get what they want. In the end, it is up to you to achieve happiness, but you have the right to expect a fair chance at a happy ending that does not hurt others.

Ethical rules should reflect current scientific understanding of human beings and the broader environment in which we live.

Chimpanzees often help other closely bonded chimpanzees without expecting equivalent actions, but do expect something in return from other monkeys who are usually not part of this close circle. (*Cooperation Among Animals: An evolutionary perspective* By Lee Alan Dugatkin, page 127.)

(Continued on page 7)

If this kind of action is found in humans (and I believe that it is), any ethical system that we desire to be universally accepted should take this reciprocity principle into account. Otherwise, we may find ourselves spending too much time trying to enforce ethical rules that go against our evolutionarily determined na-

ture.

The ethical system described above is admittedly incomplete. How do we treat animals ethically? How do two people negotiate ethical rules on an equal basis when one is more powerful than the other (e.g., abusive boyfriend and abused woman)?

What are the acceptable ways of responding to someone who does not obey the negotiated ethical rules (i.e., is the death penalty an ethical way of punishing a murderer)? These are all good questions to answer before we rely upon this ethical framework to help us do the right thing.



Is Feeding The Homeless a Religious Duty?

(Continued from page 5)

This proposed exemption immediately set off a red flag with me. Why should religious people be exempt from obeying an ordinance that members of the First Coast Freethought Society who tend to be more secular minded have no choice but to obey? Should compliance with city ordinances be dependent upon one having the "correct" motivations? The First Coast Freethought Society considers this exemption to be discriminatory and unfair to nonreligious people and sent the following e-mail to Mayor John Peyton and City Council President Michael Corrigan concerning the proposed exemption (in Italics):

If your mother told you that your brother did not have to follow the same rules that you had to follow, would that make you mad? Of course, it would! It is unfair for your brother to be exempt from rules that should apply to all siblings in your family.

In settling a lawsuit filed by

University of North Florida professor Michael Herkov, the city of Jacksonville is prepared to do this very thing by exempting religiously motivated people from certain food distribution regulations (Chapter 250 of the Ordinance Code). Specifically, we are talking about feeding the homeless without a permit.

The First Coast Freethought Society does not have a problem with religiously motivated people helping the less fortunate. If anything, we applaud it. But exempting them from city regulations that affect those of us who do things for secular reasons is unfair and discriminatory.

If the regulations are too restrictive or the permit process is too cumbersome, then let's change them. But let's change them for all people regardless of their motivations. What is the point of the rule of law if it does not apply equally to everyone?

In October 2006, the New York Times did a series of articles on how American religious organizations benefit from an increasingly accommodating government. It documented tax exemptions, government grants and yes,

regulatory exemptions that benefit religious organizations. For example, in Alabama, church day care programs are exempt from the state regulations that secular day care owners have to follow. This is little different from what bill 2007-611 is doing.

The city should withdraw bill 2007-611 and rescind the settlement of the lawsuit with Mr. Herkov that requires this bill to be passed. The city should tell Mr. Herkov that no one is above the law regardless of his or her belief system.

Please join us in expressing your opposition to bill 2007-611 to your City Council representative. If you do not know who your representative is, please contact the main City Council office at (904) 630-1377 to find out.

Currently, the bill is in the Rules Committee and could come before the full City Council as early as July 24. By opposing this bill, you will be speaking out for the rights of the nonreligious who are just as motivated to help the poor as are the religious.



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 550591
Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591
(904) 288-6291
<http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the First Coast Freethought Society is to serve the needs of the nonreligious of Northeast Florida, to promote freethought and secular humanism, and to provide an opportunity for agnostics, atheists, skeptics and other free-thinkers to exchange ideas.

Meetings

The FCFS meets the THIRD Monday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, upstairs in the sanctuary, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida 32211. (904) 725-8133. Doors open 6:00. Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

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July Social - All Welcome!

WHERE: STEAK & ALE at Baymeadows and I-95 South

WHEN: TUES., July 24, 2007. Gather in Lounge at 6:00 p.m., Dinner at 7:00 p.m.

RSVP: CarrieRen@att.net (or 268-8826) by July 23, if you plan to attend!

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 • (904) 288-6291
2007 Membership Application



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

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 - 65+ (\$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: _____

***You can make a lasting impact on the future of
freethought and secular humanism in this community
...if you provide for the First Coast Freethought Society in your Will.***

Your bequest will ensure that the FCFS continues to be a beacon for freethinkers on the First Coast and to remain a vital Voice of Reason in the Northeast Florida area. Several options are available for establishing a bequest (specific, percentage, residual, or contingent). We will be happy to provide the appropriate wording to you and your attorney, depending upon your wishes.

For further information, contact
Carrie Renwick, P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 or
904-288-6291 • CarrieRen@att.net • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

In a recent Supreme Court ruling, *Hein vs. Freedom from Religion Foundation*, the court found that federal taxpayers lack standing to challenge in federal courts conferences organized by federal executive branch agencies

designed to promote faith-based community groups' access to federal funding. Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, condemned the ruling as "a disappointing decision that

blocks the courthouse door for Americans with legitimate church-state grievances. Taxpayers should be allowed to challenge public funding of religion, whether the money is allocated by Congress or the White House."



Next deadline for article submission: July 28, 2007

First Coast Freethought Society 2007 Events

July	16 - Monthly meeting	15 - Book discussion group	24- Social at Steak and Ale
August	20 - Monthly meeting	19 - Book discussion group	28- Social at Steak and Ale
September	17 - Monthly meeting	16 - Book discussion group	25- Social at Steak and Ale

Visit our website at <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>.

(In the Adobe version, the links are **LIVE!** Ctrl & Click will take you there.)

Return service requested



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