



## City Council Should Respect The Law

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**Ken Hurley**

**D**ylan said, "God said to Abraham kill me a son."

It proves to be true that too many people are willing to do nearly anything if they believe or are of the opinion that their version of God will be pleased. There are no laws in America preventing someone from having a belief or an opinion, nor should there be.

However once a belief is turned into action, it becomes eligible for serious scrutiny. Many people are also willing to do nearly anything if

they believe they can make a dollar or two in the process. Couple the ability to make money and please God at the same time and we create a ripe and powerful mix. Then throw in the process of making money and pleasing God with the need to care for

council role. Too few are willing to say 'stop'.

This is the scenario that our City Council in Jacksonville has created. The invocation of God, Church, Money, and Children is what caused our City Council to pass unanimously, Ordinance 2006-176, an

ordinance that appropriates \$1,100,000 from taxpayers to build a gymnasium on property owned by First Timothy Baptist Church. To be fair, there were a few council members who grumbled and mumbled after they voted, that what they just voted to pass may

***Sinful. Tyrannical. Could Thomas Jefferson have been speaking about our City Council?***

our children at the same time . . . well, step aside bub. There are too few willing to say wait a minute, what you're doing just may not be kosher, copacetic, or befitting of your honored

*(Continued on page 7)*

*"SOS supports healthy skepticism and encourages the use of the scientific method to understand abuse of or dependence on alcohol and other drugs."*

--from a Secular Organizations for Sobriety pamphlet

### May 2006 Meeting

**Bob Stevenson**

Coordinator, CFI Community of Daytona Beach

**"Sobriety without a Higher Power, The Humanist Path to Sober Living"**

**Monday, May 15, 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:

- May 21, 2006 - *God Versus The Gavel* by Marci A. Hamilton
- June 18, 2006 - *Reading Lolita in Tehran* by Azar Nafisi



Azar Nafisi is visiting professor of literature at Johns Hopkins University. Returning to her native Iran after several years in the USA, she taught Literature at the University of Tehran, and later organized a secret literary study group in her home. *Reading Lolita in Tehran* is Nafisi's tale of the years she spent in revolutionary Iran, on the dangers of using religion as an ideology, and the freedoms that literature can bring. The best selling book is part personal memoir, part history of Iran, and part literary criticism. She explains her point of view in the following paragraph.

“At the core of Islamic fundamentalism is a repressive totalitarian ideology. This ideology is the manifestation of a great faith in crisis, where fanatics have perverted religion into vicious doctrines of intolerance, control, and hatred. Examining the ideological nature of the Iranian revolution is, therefore, vital to understanding Iran, for it was the first state captured by the forces of militant Islam in the twentieth century.”

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at 904-996-1553.



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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.

We welcome submissions. Deadlines are the end of the **THIRD** 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 at the address above.

## What Would Cartman Do?

Curtis Wolf

**T**hat is a good question. What would South Park bad boy Eric Cartman do? Since some have asked this question of Jesus, why not ask that sadistic epitome of evil on TV's South Park that very same question?

Unfortunately, in the April 5th episode of South Park, we know what he did and it is not good. He tried to have a Family Guy episode pulled due to a cameo appearance by Mohammed on the show. Not surprisingly, Cartman had an ulterior motive. He hated Family Guy and hoped that the pulling of one episode would lead to another cancelled episode and eventually to canceling the entire series. It took the efforts of another South Park character, Kyle, to persuade a television executive not to pull the episode and allow freedom of speech to overcome calls for censorship.

Unfortunately, the clear thinking of Kyle did not deter the Comedy Central executives from prohibiting the pictorial depiction of Mohammed in the South Park episode mentioned above. It was left to South Park creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker to display the message, "Comedy Central has refused to broadcast an image of Mohammed on their network" when Mohammed was supposed to appear in the fictional episode of Family Guy.

This is humorous since South

Park had previously depicted Mohammed in a 2001 "Super Best Friends" episode in which Mohammed and other religious icons battle the "magic" of David Blaine. So what has changed? Has terrorism (you have a better chance of dying in a car accident than dying in a terrorist attack) rattled us so much that we have forgotten our principles of freedom of expression and thought? In an episode in which Jesus defecates (literally!) all over everybody, is it the tendency towards violence that guarantees that one's sacred cows are off-limits when it comes to satire?

***Ideas are only scary when we are afraid to talk about them.***

As a freethinker, I believe that there are no taboo subjects. Everything is up for discussion. Every idea, religious or not, can be critiqued. Only by looking at ideas from every angle can we ensure that an idea is good and worthy of being applied in our lives. It is this marketplace of ideas that vaulted the ideas of self government and liberty to the forefront of American life when the rule of kings and priests in Europe was unquestioned dogma. This is why I find the censorship decision of Comedy Central to be abhorrent.

Of course, the right to criticize anything has its responsibilities. When you criticize an idea, it would be nice if you

would actually identify a specific problem with this idea. It would also be nice if you would be fair in your criticisms. It is not good enough to throw out a lot of "straw man" accusations and hope that one of them sticks to its target. The reasonable person may not completely agree with your criticisms, but at least he should understand why you disagree with the idea so that he can seek evidence to dispute your arguments.



I cannot say that South Park has always been fair. The "Red Hot Catholic Love" episode, in which South Park Catholic character Father Maxi finds out that he is the only Catholic priest who is not a pedophile, was clearly a misrepresentation of the Catholic sexual abuse scandal. The scandal did not center around the belief that all Catholic priests lust after young boys. The problem was that the Catholic Church swept the sex abuse accusations under the rug instead of removing the pedophile priests from contact with children.

The same pedophile smear campaign was implied in the sendoff of South Park character, Chef, in which he was brain-washed by the "Super Adventure Club" and turned into a child molester. This was a thinly disguised swipe at Scientologist

Issac Hayes who provides the voice for Chef. Hayes criticized South Park for religious intolerance when it lampooned Scientology in an earlier episode. Again, the suggestion that pedophile behavior is common among Scientologists is a bit of a stretch.

Of course, South Park is a satire. It is supposed to make fun of everyone. Whether it is fair in its attacks is not as important as whether it is funny, which it usually is. So I am willing to cut the show a little slack.

However, if secular humanists want to be heard in the marketplace of ideas, we cannot do the same. Our criticisms of religion and other superstitions should be measured and backed by sound arguments and evidence. As I have noted in an August 2005 article, I did not believe that the Terminator saving Jesus off the cross cartoon was an appropriate way to respond to

Christianity's claims.

I certainly did not believe this because I considered Jesus to be a sacred cow that should be protected from any criticism. Instead, I believe that the cartoon makes us lazy when it becomes easier to lob cheap shots at Christians rather than use



our brains and show them why we cannot believe in the Bible as the source of all truth. They may not agree with us and they still may demonize us as Satan's lackeys, but at least we stuck to the facts and bypassed the vitri-

olic rhetoric that passes for discussion of ideas in our society, especially in Washington these days.

If secular humanism has any influence in society, I hope that it leads to people talking about ideas without strapping bombs onto their chests and blowing up those who disagree with them. Ideas are only scary when we are afraid to talk about them. These taboo ideas are the ideas that often lead to oppression and violence. Ideas cannot hurt us when they are discussed openly and either accepted or rejected based on the consensus of those who spend a lifetime studying these ideas.

Maybe I live in a utopian dream world. But it has been the dreamers who have made this world a better place and should be applauded for their willingness not to accept that the way things are is the way that things should be.



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## Here we go again...

Curtis Wolf

**D**etox your body! What could be more natural than that? In an advertisement in the April 29th edition of the *Florida Times-Union*, readers are told that colon hydrotherapy which is sometimes called colon irrigation will help relieve fatigue, allergies, brain fog, chronic illnesses and other medical problems. Is colon hydrotherapy a scientifically tested

medical treatment regularly used by medical doctors?

Not according to debunker Dr. Stephen Barrett of the Quackwatch website (See <http://www.quackwatch.org/01QuackeryRelatedTopics/gastro.html>). Instead, it is an unregulated practice based on the questionable idea of autointoxication. Autointoxication, according to Dr. Barrett, means that "stagnation of the large intestine (colon) causes toxins to form that are

absorbed and poison the body." While the idea was accepted by doctors around the turn of the 20th century, medical science has proven it wrong. Dr. Barrett writes that the practice can be expensive and dangerous.

Unfortunately, the *Florida Times-Union* continues to accept advertisements that promote questionable medical practices. Obviously, advertising dollars are more important to the newspaper than people's health.



## The Founding Fathers, The U.S. Constitution and God

Fred W. Hill

**W**e, the people of the Confederate States, each State acting in its sovereign and independent character, in order to form a permanent federal government, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity -- invoking the favor and guidance of Almighty God -- do ordain and establish this Constitution for the Confederate States of America.

Thus reads the constitution we here in Florida might be living under if the Confederacy declared in 1861, on the principle that some people deserve to be the property of others, had succeeded in separating itself from the United States. The Union prevailed, of course, despite failing to beseech or even refer to God at all in its own Constitution which, despite various efforts to undermine or even ignore it, remains the oldest written constitution in the world.

In fact, the Constitution itself makes only one reference to religion briefly, in Article VI, and that states, "...no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States." The lack of reference to a deity in the Constitution was not an oversight on the part of the framers or based on an as-

sumption that it was "understood" that the Constitution was in any way inspired and authorized by God or any other divine being. As pointed out by Dr. David Schwam-Baird in his lecture to the First Coast Freethought Society monthly meeting on April 17, 2006 (titled "What the Forefathers Really Meant by 'Separation of Church and State'"), many of the framers of the Constitution had been trained in law and were scrupulously exact in their wording, and they were all educated men of the Enlightenment, well-versed in the political philoso-

***The "founding fathers" who took part in the Constitutional Convention were not demi-gods and were not inspired by any deity when they drafted a better means for running this nation.***

phies espoused by such radical thinkers as Hobbes, Montesquieu, Hume, Rousseau, and Locke.

Further, they were very aware of the viciousness of the religious wars and persecutions that had ravaged Europe and North America throughout known history. Even though the executions of Quakers, supposed witches and other "heretics," as

occurred in 17th century colonial Massachusetts were excesses of the not-so-distant past by the 1780s, religious persecution remained rife throughout the fledgling nation.



The Virginian Baptist preacher John Leland in fact objected to the Constitution in part because it did not sufficiently protect religious liberties, writing in a treatise that was forwarded to James Madison.

*"What is clearest of all -- Religious Liberty, is not sufficiently secured, No Religious test is Required as a qualification to fill any office under the United States, but if a Majority of Congress with the President favour one System more than another, they may oblige all others to pay to the support of their System as much as they please, and if Oppression does not ensue, it will be owing to the Mildness of Administration and not to any Constitutional defence, and of the Manners of People are so far Corrupted, that they cannot live by Republican principles, it is Very Dangerous leaving Religious Liberty at their Mercy."* (p. 267, "The Debate on the Constitution, Part 2," edited by Bernard Bailyn, Library of America, 1993).

As a Baptist, Leland had

been discriminated against for belonging to a minority sect in Episcopalian-dominated Virginia until the passage in 1786 of a bill on religious liberty written by Thomas Jefferson, stating “that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions on matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.”

As reflected on the epitaph that Jefferson chose for his gravestone, the above-quoted statement on religious liberty (along with his authorship of the Declaration of Inde-

pendence and the founding of the University of Virginia) was one of the three proudest achievements of his distinguished life. Moreover, although Jefferson was not present at the Constitutional Convention (he was serving ambassadorial duties in France at the time), his political disciple, James Madison, who played a key role in getting Jefferson’s controversial religious liberty bill passed, was the primary author of the federal Constitution. And in response to numerous complaints like those of Leland’s which threatened to prevent ratification of the Con-

stitution, Madison also drafted the Bill of Rights which, in the opening two clauses of the First Amendment, directs that “Congress shall make no laws respecting the establishment of a religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

The “founding fathers” who took part in the Constitutional Convention were not demi-gods

clause requiring “an explicit acknowledgement of the being of a God, his perfection and his providence...” (ibid, p. 193).

His view, however, did not prevail – not because any of the other members were anti-religious or didn’t believe in god, but because enough had been convinced that government and religion should be separated. On



the closing day of the convention, that luminous elder statesman of American science and politics, Benjamin Franklin, observed that while there were many parts of the document of which he could not approve, he nev-

ertheless urged his colleagues to sign it because he doubted “whether any other Convention we can obtain, may be able to make a better Constitution.” (<http://www.usconstitution.net/franklin.html>) Especially, I’d add, since perfect gods or angels weren’t available to help draft our Constitution.

Some of them, such as William Williams of Connecticut who wrote in a letter published on February 11, 1788, in the newspaper *American Mercury of Hartford* that he wished that instead of prohibiting any religious test for public office, the Constitution instead opened with a

ertheless urged his colleagues to sign it because he doubted “whether any other Convention we can obtain, may be able to make a better Constitution.” (<http://www.usconstitution.net/franklin.html>) Especially, I’d add, since perfect gods or angels weren’t available to help draft our Constitution.



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### FCFS CARING TREE

Remember, if you know of anyone having a personal need or concern we could help with, please contact Nita Pitts, 996-0897, or [pitrymnd@comcast.net](mailto:pitrymnd@comcast.net).



### ***City Council Should Respect The Law***

*(Continued from page 1)*

not be on the up and up.

Championing the well-being of children is noble and laudable. However, if more of our elected leaders were to respect and champion the parameters under which we have already agreed to govern ourselves, those parameters being the United States Constitution, The Florida Constitution, and previous legislation enacted by our own City Council, our children may learn from the example of our leaders to respect the rule of law.

Take a look at the Florida Constitution, ARTICLE 1, SECTION 3 - Religious freedom.

“There shall be no law respecting the establishment of religion or prohibiting or penalizing the free exercise thereof. Religious freedom shall not justify practices inconsistent with public morals, peace or safety.

No revenue of the state or any political subdivision or agency thereof shall ever be taken from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution.”

That last sentence seems clear, doesn't it?

So the question becomes, “Is City Council aware of our Florida Constitution's prohibition against funding the development of church property with funds from the public treasury yet proceeding with wanton disregard?” Or, “is City Council unaware of our Florida Constitution?”

Either way is discouraging.

In response to the ACLU and public inquiries regarding the legality of the church scheme, City Council has established another committee to review their own procedures for funding projects. This new committee seems unnecessary if City Council were

to follow the law, their own rules, and their oath of office.

Some words of Thomas Jefferson are useful reminders, “To compel a [person] to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical.” --Thomas Jefferson: *Bill for Religious Freedom, 1779*. Papers 2:545

Sinful. Tyrannical. Could Thomas Jefferson have been speaking about our City Council?

Our City Council should take another vote, reverse themselves, do the right thing, and move on with a healthy respect for the people they were elected to represent.

*Editor's Note: Kudos to Ken Hurley for bringing this important matter to our attention. FCFS members are encouraged to contact their council representatives and the Mayor concerning the church gym issue.*



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## **So which is it?**

### **Hugo A Borresen**

**O**ne report describes “A surprise stronghold of religion: The young.” Another says, not so.

A national survey in 2004 reported 80% of 18- to 24-year-olds believe in God or some other higher being. Two-thirds of those surveyed identified with a particular organized religion or church. Only one-fifth said that

religion plays a small or unimportant role in their lives.

Despite their strong religious beliefs, young people have their own take on morality. They believe they should do what is right rather than make judgment on others' behavior. They are more interested in their own rather than others' behavior. They are tolerant and open-minded toward those who hold different beliefs and believe that

others' religious beliefs could also be true.

They also support individual choice, fairness, and social justice in religious contexts. They are about equally divided regarding whether abortion should be legal



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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, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida. 32211. (904) 725-8133. Doors open 6:15. Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

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[CWolf@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:CWolf@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org)

## May Social - All Welcome!

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

**WHEN:** Tues., May 23, 2006. Gather in Lounge at 6:00 p.m., Dinner at 7:00 p.m.

**RSVP:** [CarrieRen@att.net](mailto:CarrieRen@att.net) (or 268-8826) by Mon., May 22, if you are attending!

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 • (904) 288-6291

2006 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: \_\_\_\_\_

## Other 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.

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

For those of us seeking more freethought fellowship, conversation and camaraderie, here is an opportunity to get together on Sunday mornings. Contact **John Ruskuski** at [ruskuski@ilnk.com](mailto:ruskuski@ilnk.com) or call 904-260-0071.

### 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](mailto:HBorresen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org) or call 904-779-6883.

**So which is it?**

*(Continued from page 7)*

or banned. They depart from their parents by being for gay rights, civil union, same-sex marriage, and economic justice.

In contrast, a four-year study published a year later in North Carolina -- Study Questions the Faith of Teens -- indicated that this age group has beliefs that are "mostly shallowly expressed." Discussion about faith does not come easily. "I find it

real hard just to explain in words what my relationship is with God," said a high school senior.

As reported by James Dobson's Focus on the Family, the researcher stated they have "meager" and "shallow" faith. Parents might be tempted to blame shallow teaching in church youth groups, but that isn't really the culprit. "Teens are very much modeling the adult society that they see around them" and "their parents

are not very well-versed in talking about their own religion."

So which is it? Maybe teens in North Carolina--in the South--do have a different view of what religion means (i.e., belief in God or biblical truth) than does the national sample.

Perhaps some church goers identified in the national sample are actually skeptics who attend primarily for social reasons. They may some day join freethought groups.



**First Coast Freethought Society 2006 Events**

May	15 - Monthly meeting	21 - Book discussion group	23- Social at Steak and Ale
June	19 - Monthly meeting	18 - Book discussion group	27- Social at Steak and Ale
July	17 - Monthly meeting	16 - Book discussion group	25- Social at Steak and Ale

Return service requested

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