



August 2007

Volume 5, Issue 8

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Sigrun Buckley

Coming from secularized Germany, I was surprised to see the level of religiosity here in the U.S. In my naïve perception of America--no doubt influenced by Hollywood flicks--I expected to find a modern, advanced, open-minded country.

Previous visits to New York did nothing to prepare me for Jacksonville where total strangers in the parking lot outside Publix asked me which church we attended. Driving past a sign on I-95 near Cape Canaveral, of all places, was the ultimate eye-

opener: "Evolution--A Fairytale for Adults." I never knew that the validity of evolution was still in question.

It took some surfing the channels to find alternatives to the multitude of vociferous tele-



A recent study by the University of Frankfurt shows that citizens with a lower education, in rural areas, with a lower income, predominately female (sic!) are more likely to be religious.

vangelists on a Sunday morning when I searched for political programs or entertain-

ment. What my German ex-husband used to joke about seems to be true: The quickest way to get rich is to start a church. They fill big arenas. They must be doing something right. The forces of capitalism seem to be working even in the realm of religion:

Supply and demand? Being a fallen theologian, maybe I should

(Continued on page 6)

"Although I cannot believe that the individual survives the death of his body, feeble souls harbor such thought through fear or ridiculous egotism."

--Albert Einstein

August 2007 Meeting

Hugo Borresen, Founder, Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Jacksonville

"How to Buy the Funeral You Want at a Reasonable Price"

Funeral industry secrets revealed!

Monday, August 20, 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:
- August 19, 2007 - *Infidel*, by Ayaan Hirsi Ali
 - September 16, 2007 - *The Assault on Reason*, by Al Gore



Al Gore's new book is described as a visionary analysis of how the politics of fear, secrecy, cronyism, and blind faith has combined with the degradation of the public sphere to create an environment dangerously hostile to reason. The larger goal of *The Assault on Reason* is to explain how the public sphere itself has evolved into a place hospitable to reason's enemies, to make us more aware of the forces at work on our own minds, and to lead us to an understanding of what we can do to restore the rule of reason and safeguard our future. The White House has taken strong issue with Gore's book, both its substance and analysis.

As scathing as it is meticulous, Gore's treatise on reason juggernauts its way through the Bush administration, never even needing to include the controversial nature of Bush's presidential elections. (Publishers Weekly)(\$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.

Jeb Bush's Policies Finally Publicized

Hugo Borresen

Former governor Jeb Bush combined state and church whenever he could, says the author of a very new book. Throughout his two terms, Jeb injected religion into state government at seemingly every opportunity. This was not to provide personal consolation or other benefits to individuals. We're talking about elected leaders and candidates taking this force and twisting it to mobilize political support.

This insight into Florida politics comes from S. V. Date's 2007 book, *Jeb: America's Next Bush, His Florida Years and What They Mean for the Nation*. The Florida Department of Children and Families sought to prevent a minor girl who had sex while in the state's protective custody from having an abortion. Bush pushed through a law strictly regulating abortion clinics but not other types of outpatient clinics. He created faith-based prisons where all inmates get religious counseling without paying attention to its effect on recidivism. He put

money in the budget to finance anti-abortion groups which counsel women to carry pregnancies to term.

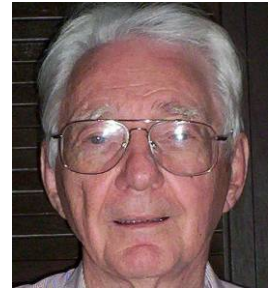
The author, a reporter for *The Palm Beach Post*, states Jeb pushed his plans more strongly after winning reelection in 2004. He was not interested in the Sunshine Law in state government which requires public officials to meet openly,

Throughout his two terms, Jeb injected religion into state government at seemingly every opportunity.

provide notice, and summarize their decisions for all to know. He had no use for public scrutiny, and his administration went out of its way to devise new and ingenious methods for withholding what historically had been public record.

Jeb pushed private school vouchers despite no evidence they improved performance of school children. They are intended to help youngsters who

need special instruction which may not be available in public schools. But, 77 percent of the schools in that program did not even have any teachers trained to teach disabled children. The program was declared unconstitutional by the state Supreme Court.



The book is reviewed in the current issue of *Voice of Reason, Journal of Americans for Religious Liberty*, 2007, No. 2.

The *Florida Times-Union* did not include such details in its reporting of eight years of this Republican administration. William S. Morris III, CEO of the Morris Communications Corporation which owns the newspaper, told the *Augusta Chronicle*, January 2, 2004, "This newspaper is owned by a Christian businessman. God is the Supreme Being in our universe, and we make no apology for defending America's Judeo-Christian heritage and values."



NPR Corporate Sponsorship Bears Fruit for the FCFS

Carrie Renwick

Our six-month schedule of announcements for the FCFS on NPR member-station

WJCT, July 2nd through December 31, is already bearing fruit for the First Coast Freethought Society. More people than ever are requesting to be placed on our mailing list.

We would like to recognize the following three people whose contributions to the
(Continued on page 10)



Stalin & Hitler And Atheism

Fred W. Hill

“Stalin was an atheist.”

The words are used as a cudgel. “Oh, yes,” the theists smugly avow, “Stalin, Hitler, Mao, and Pol Pot were all atheists and they were all evil, mass-murdering fiends, so all atheists must be evil just like them!” Their verbal blows, they think, should smash freethinkers into quivering blobs, acquiescing to accusations of guilt by association of disbelief with homicidal tyrants.

Of course, the main intent is to bolster belief in their god, but they fail in both their primary and underlying assertions in several ways. For one, it is a fallacious *ad hominem* attack against persons rather than a coherent argument for god. Further, it makes a groundless generalization: Because a few atheists are evil, all atheists must be evil. Moreover, while Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot were undoubtedly atheists, Hitler asserted numerous times in public and private, even to the day he committed suicide, his belief both in god and that he was doing god’s work. Finally, the argument falsely implies that Stalin and the other communist despots committed evil because they were atheists.

Naturally, most extreme theists will not be swayed by rules of logic, although many freethinkers were once theists whose faith eventually gave way to reason. Regarding Hitler, the typical Christian response is that

despite Hitler’s claims to be a Christian, his behavior was so atrocious he could not possibly have been a *real* Christian. This despite a long historical record of vicious crimes against humanity committed by Christian rulers of the past whose religious faith has never been seriously questioned. By another Christian tenet, that all that’s required for salvation is belief in Jesus as the son of God who died for the sins of the world, then even Hitler could presumably have been saved at the last moment and be currently engaged in table-talks in Heaven with various saints

So, no, atheism had nothing to do with the crimes against humanity committed by the totalitarian monsters of the last century.

and angels, while all his Jewish and other non-Christian victims are burning in Hell for all eternity. And unless I happen to get knocked senseless and change my mind about Christianity before my death, their mythology holds I’ll keep company with the latter, as well as with Stalin and Mao and all the other unbelievers, including the much nicer ones I’ve come to know through the First Coast Freethought Society.

It is true that Stalin and the other mass-murdering communist leaders were atheists – as best as can be determined, none

of them believed in god. Stalin, however, was raised in a Christian nation, Czarist Russia, and from the age of 14 until he was nearly 20, he attended a theological seminary, undergoing training to become an Orthodox Christian priest. Despite the ban on “dangerous” secularist books at the seminary, Stalin, or Joseph Djughashvili, as he was known at the time, rejected the mythology of his teachers but adopted their repressive methods as his own.



As Alan Bullock notes of Stalin in his dual biography, *Hitler and Stalin* (1992, Knopf, p. 13), “a church education helped to form the mind of a man who was to become known for his dogmatism and his propensity for seeing issues in absolute terms, in black and white.” Hitler, by the way, never attended a seminary but was educated in Catholic schools, and both Hitler’s and Stalin’s fathers were physically abusive authoritarians. Clearly, if we take the theist approach to logic, we should lock up all fathers who don’t spare the rod and call for the closure of all religious schools because they produce mass murdering megalomaniacs! Not that I really believe that.

However, I do believe in freedom of thought, even thoughts I disagree with. Atheism itself simply refers to a lack of belief in any deity; it makes no assertion as to any sort of political or

other belief. From my experience, most atheists are liberal but many others are conservative, libertarian, and yes, even communist or fascist; many even still pretend to be believing Christians in order to better fit in with their communities. Whatever their politics, I've come to know many atheists over the last decade, most good, trustworthy people who would go out of their way to help others in need, like many Christians I know as well, even those who are certain I'm going to Hell because of what I don't believe, even if they regard me as otherwise a nice guy.

Whatever their beliefs, neither Stalin nor Hitler could be accurately described as "nice" or as a champion of freethought. Like many of the autocratic Christian monarchs who ruled before them, they brooked no dissent and imposed their unfounded assertions on everyone unfortunate enough to fall within their domains. Hitler expressed a desire to eliminate all

atheists, as well as Jews and Gypsies, while creating a continental empire in which the German "master race" dominated all "inferior" races deemed fit to live and serve them. Stalin wished to eliminate all religion from the



Soviet Union, while creating a continental "classless" society in which everyone was treated as reputed equals, although, of course, some were more equal than others (and anyone Stalin perceived as a threat to his dominance was *less* equal and

prone to disappearing permanently).

Mao, Pol Pot, and Kim Il-Sung all had similar goals and methods. They each sought to suppress individualism, to impose an absolute rule in which the state could not be challenged or even questioned by its citizens whose only "rights" were to obey the state. Outspoken, freethinking, humanistic atheists would not have survived long living under any of these tyrants, but the same applied to most Christian kingdoms of the not so distant past and remains the case in many modern Muslim nations.

So, no, atheism had nothing to do with the crimes against humanity committed by the totalitarian monsters of the last century. Some were atheists, some fervidly believed in god, but they were united in their efforts to impose their personal dogmatism on the people they so horribly misruled. And regrettably, we have not seen the last of their repressive ilk.



Sometimes, You Can Beat City Hall!

Curtis Wolf

In last month's *FreeThinker* ("Is Feeding The Homeless a Religious Duty?"), I wrote about the proposed exemption of religious people from obeying the city ordinance related to feeding the homeless. According to a July 18th *Florida Times-Union* article, the

proposed exemption is history.

As noted in the article, the city was afraid of being sued by the "atheists" and backed away from the exemption. Even though they did not specify the litigious atheist group, they are referring to American Atheists whose Florida state director, Greg McDowell, queried the city about the exemption. As noted

in my previous *FreeThinker* article, the First Coast Freethought Society also added its voice to the opposition to the exemption.



We are only as marginalized as we allow ourselves to be.



Religion in Germany/Europe

(Continued from page 1)

capitalize on this aspect of religion since my degree didn't provide me other answers. At least, I could reap some financial rewards.

I studied Catholic Theology in the '70s in Germany, a rather outlandish thing to do there and then. Today people would call it "seeking the truth." Remember the X-Files? At my Alma Mater, University of Muenster, North-Rhine Westphalia, in those days, if you were Catholic, you enrolled with the Catholic faculty; Protestants with the Protestant faculty. There was no such thing as comparative religious studies, which would have suited my quest better. So I ended up as a teacher of religious education since I didn't want to take the vows.

Yes, we have religious education in every German school, normally 2 hours a week. Again, if you are Catholic, it is a compulsory part of the school curriculum like sports or musical education. At the ripe age of 14, pupils (we don't call them students until they go to college) may opt out but have to take either philosophy or ethics classes instead.

Germans primarily belong to two Christian Churches: A third of the population are Catholics. A third are Protestants. The remainder are non-religious non-Christian. There are 3 million Muslims in Germany now, primarily immigrants.

Catholics are concentrated traditionally in southern and western Germany whereas northern Germany is predominantly Protestant. These figures

remain unchanged since the 1950s, since the first post war census. The new states, formerly part of the German Democratic Republic, show a significantly smaller church affiliation due, no doubt, to the decade-long prevailing suppression of religion. Here, only 3% see themselves as church affiliated.

A recent study by the University of Frankfurt shows that citizens with a lower education, in rural areas, with a lower income, predominately female (sic!) are more likely to be religious. In plain English: the better-educated, urban dwelling, well-earning Germans are less likely to be regular churchgoers. Loss of religiosity is seen by this study to be caused by increasing individualization and lack of ties to the community. The church and its customs do not guarantee

a perpetuation of tradition and providing a meaning to life anymore in an increasingly mobile and changing environment. The number of Catholics leaving the church (79,000 in 1970 and 121,000 in 1999) is being balanced by the influx of new citizens or guest workers and their families. The number of Protestants has dropped since 1950 from 51% to now 32.7%

It may come as a surprise to Americans that Church attendance in Germany may have to do with the revenue system. Every working person pays a church tax of 8-9%, depending on the state. This is deducted from their monthly pay check. They never even see it. For the self-employed, it's part of their an-



remain unchanged since the 1950s, since the first post war census. The new states, formerly part of the German Democratic Republic, show a significantly smaller church affiliation due, no doubt, to the decade-long prevailing suppression of religion. Here, only 3% see themselves as church affiliated.

A recent study by the Univer-

nual tax declaration. The Protestant Church is more affected by this than the Catholic, according to statistics. Since the '70s, this was one leading factor for people leaving the church. As far as I know, Germany is the only country with this direct tax charging system.

Since the new government came into power under Angela Merkel in 2005, a coalition of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats--with Merkel being Christian Democrat and the previous Chancellor, Schroeder, leading a Social Democratic government--there is a tendency to

be conservative. This is could be seen in reputable political shows on national public TV, promoting, glorifying motherhood and traditional family values according to which a mother should stay at home. The network is called *Family is the Future*. A Catholic bishop weighed in on the argument founded on bogus, later unsubstantiated, figures from a Swedish study. In Sweden mothers go back to work early leaving babies in state-provided childcare. The Bishop and "a neo-Catholic expert" claimed that one-third of children were psychologically dis-

turbed and that this forebodes ill for German children who are put into public childcare early.

It has to be seen whether the new German Pope Benedict continues to create a spiritual revival among teenagers in Germany. His new guidelines on driving made the news here in the U.S: How would Jesus drive? All we need . . .

Contrary to common practice in the U.S., except among freethinkers, discussions about religion, politics and sex are not taboo but add to the spice of life.



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.

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
P.O. Box 550591
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(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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August Social - All Welcome!

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

WHEN: TUES., August 28, 2007. Gather in Lounge at 6:00 p.m., Dinner at 7:00 p.m.

RSVP: CarrieRen@att.net (or 268-8826) by August 27, 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.

NPR Fund reached us just after the deadline of last month's newsletter. They are:

Fee Dedrick
Jay Huebner
Bob Irwin

Thanks again to all donors!
This project is keeping the FCFS on the map.



Freethinkers' Quotes

"Truth is the daughter of time, not of authority." Francis Bacon, philosopher

"Properly read, the Bible is the most potent force for atheism ever conceived." Isaac Asimov, author

Next deadline for article submission: August 25, 2007

First Coast Freethought Society 2007 Events			
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
October	15 - Monthly meeting	21 - Book discussion group	23- 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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