

Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 8 Number 4 • April 2002

Our April Meeting

The April 14 AFS meeting will feature Mrs. Betty Bowers of the Landover Baptist Church. Her website at www.BettyBowers.com says that she is "America's best Christian" and encourages readers to always ask "What would Betty do?" which, incidentally, is also the title of her new book.

The **AFS Center** is at Suite 500, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, in Roswell, GA. To get there, take I-400 north from Atlanta past I-285 by 8 miles to Exit 7B, which is GA-140. Take GA-140 (Holcomb Bridge Road) west about 1 mile and turn left at Grimes Bridge Road. Go 0.2 miles to 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, which is on the right.

Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AFS Center at 12:30 on Sunday, April 28. AFS Vice President Tony King will speak on "Why Aren't There More Secularists?"

Fellowship of Reason Meeting

The **Fellowship of Reason** will meet at 12:30 PM on May 5 at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Highway in Atlanta. For details, see www.kindreason.com.

Ed Kagin To Speak

Ed Kagin, AFS member, author and lawyer, will speak at 1:00 on May 5 at the Birmingham Atheists meeting at the Homewood, AL library. His topic will be "When Religion Becomes Treason: The American Religious Civil War." For details, contact Larry Darby at ldarby@atheists.org.

Meetings and Activities

- Apr 14: AFS General Meeting at AFS Center, 1:00 PM.
- Apr 19: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
- Apr 21: AFS Discussion Group at AFS Center, 4:00 PM.
- Apr 26: AFS Game Night at AFS Center, 7:00 PM.
- Apr 28: AFS Board Meeting at AFS Center, 11:00 AM.
- Apr 28: Humanists of Georgia at AFS Center, 12:30 PM.
- May 5: AFS Hike, Chattahoochee River, 10:00 AM.
- May 5: Fellowship of Reason meets at NUUC, 12:30 PM.

"I do not consider it an insult, but rather a compliment, to be called an agnostic. I do not pretend to know where many ignorant men are sure...I believe that religion is the belief in future life and in God. I don't believe in either. I don't believe in God as I don't believe in Mother Goose."

—Clarence Darrow, American lawyer

AFS Activities

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet on Sunday, April 21, from 4 to 6 PM at the AFS Center.

The **AFS Game Night** will be on Friday, April 26 at 7:00 PM. This month, we expect to play Scrabble and other board and card games.

For details on the above activities, call Steve Yothment at 770-339-8394 or email him at SteveYoth@aol.com.

The **AFS Hike** will be on Sunday, May 5, at 10:00 AM at the Island Ford Branch of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. To get there from Atlanta, take I-400 North to the Northridge Road exit; stay in the right lane and cross over I-400, then take an immediate right onto Dunwoody Place. Go right at the second light on Roberts Drive. The park entrance is on the right less than a mile ahead. Meet at the end of the road. For info, call Lew Southern, 770-509-8272.

The Tuesday Lunch Bunch

A small group of AFS members is now meeting every Tuesday at 12:00 at Panahar Restaurant. The address is 3375 Buford Highway, Suite 1060, in Atlanta. Come on down and enjoy the Bangladeshi food buffet and the great company. For details, call Steve Yothment at 770-339-8394 or email him at SteveYoth@aol.com.

The AFS Social

This month's **AFS Social** will be on Friday, April 19, at 7:00 PM, at the Panahar Restaurant in the Northeast Plaza Shopping Center on Buford Highway. The restaurant is owned by AFS member Mirza Choudhury. The address is 3375 Buford Highway, Suite 1060, Atlanta, GA.

To get there from north of Atlanta, take I-85 South to the Clairmont Road Exit (Exit 91) and turn right at the light. Go 1.3 miles and turn left onto Buford Highway. Go 1.5 miles and turn left into the Northeast Plaza Shopping Center. Panahar Restaurant is across from "Planet Fitness."

To get there from south of Atlanta, take I-75/85 North to I-85 North (Exit 251). Take the North Druid Hills Road Exit (Exit 89) and stay left at the exit ramp to Highway 42 North. Turn right onto North Druid Hills Road and go 0.4 miles. Turn right onto Buford Highway and go 0.8 miles. Turn right into the Northeast Plaza Shopping Center; veer left. Panahar Restaurant is across from "Planet Fitness."

Save money on long distance and help AFS! There is no monthly fee; calls are 40 cents for up to 10 minutes, and 4 cents per minute thereafter. Dial **10-15-335-1**-area code number. At the prompt, enter the AFS code: **215152**.



Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at the AFS Center, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Roswell, GA, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

Apr 14: Our program on April 14 will feature Betty Bowers of the Landover Baptist Church. Betty says she's a better Christian than you! Her website at <http://www.BettyBowers.com> says to always ask "What would Betty do?"

May 12: Open Forum. Here is the chance for AFS members to discuss the direction of AFS, any suggestions for improvements, or anything of particular concern to members. Please send suggestions to Tony at ngoldwe_2000@yahoo.com.

June 9: AFS member and prolific letter-to-the-editor writer Ried Crowe will speak on "My Neighbor's Discussion Group."

Join the AFS Forum e-mail list by sending a blank message to afs-forum-subscribe@yahoo.com. Join the AFS Announcements list by sending a blank message to afs-announce-subscribe@yahoo.com. To unsubscribe, send a blank email to afs-forum-unsubscribe or afs-announce-unsubscribe@yahoo.com.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists. We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about the advantages of living life free of religious dogma through speeches, debates, discussions, protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available.

We define freethought as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or, especially, lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion, primarily through having a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs and by maintaining and using our own extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to us are tax deductible.

Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Atlanta Freethought News
an AFS publication

Editor

Steve Yothment

How to Contact the Editor

Send correspondence to AFS at:
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500
Roswell, GA 30075-3905
or phone Steve at 770-339-8394
or send e-mail to SteveYoth@aol.com.

Atlanta Freethought Society

President

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

VP for Internal Communication

Tony King – 706-886-9224

VP for External Communication

Steve Yothment – 770-339-8394

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Pierce Mahony – 404-634-1697

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The Atlanta Freethought News

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For membership and subscription
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Freethought News

NEW COBB COUNTY TEXTBOOKS

Science textbooks in Cobb County schools will soon have an emphasis on evolution. The new textbooks were selected by committees of teachers, working in consultation with the American Association for the Advancement of the Sciences. The books will be distributed in August.

The school board rejected appeals by about 30 parents who complained the science books give too much weight to evolution and natural selection. The board approved nearly \$8 million in new science, health and physical education textbooks.

However, due to county resident complaints, board members said a note will be inserted in each book to caution students that evolution is only a theory. Attorneys will be consulted to word the notes.

In the March school board meeting, county residents expressed concerns about the new books. Marjorie Rogers, whose child attends Pine Mountain Middle School, told the school board she had collected petitions signed by 2,300 people who are dissatisfied with science texts that espouse "Darwinism, unchallenged."

"It is unconstitutional to teach only evolution," she claimed. "The school board must allow the teaching of both theories of origin."

However, Cobb County Superintendent Joe Redden said that Creationism cannot be taught in public classrooms. "It's against the law," he said.

[From an article by Mary MacDonald in the March 29 issue of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.]

ALA. ATHEISTS PICKET PROTESTERS

Six members of the Fred Phelps family arrived in Montgomery, AL on Sunday, March 24, from their Kansas-based Westboro Baptist Church to picket two local churches and spread hatred of homosexuality.

"(We came) to picket this church because Judge (Sharon) Yates goes here," said 13-year-old Isaiah Phelps-Roper, a grandson of Fred Phelps, founder of Westboro Baptist Church, an anti-gay group. The church was identified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Isaiah referred to a recent opinion by Yates, a Civil Appeals judge, that a lesbian mother could share custody of her children with their father. Yates is a member of First Baptist Church on Perry Street.

Yates' decision was later overturned by the Alabama Supreme Court, leading Chief Justice Roy Moore to issue his controversial opinion calling homosexuality "an inherent evil."

Isaiah held a sign that said "Matt, 3 years in hell," a reference to Matthew Shepard, a college student at the University of Wyoming. Shepard was lured outside a bar by two men, driven to the outskirts of Laramie, lashed to a fence and was beaten. He died six days later in October 1998.

As the church service began at First Baptist about 5:30 p.m., the six picketers packed up and took their protest to Immanuel Presbyterian Church on Vaughn Road. The group targeted this church because of its support and acceptance of homosexuals. Also, Immanuel Presbyterian helped organize a recent anti-hate rally and openly opposed Moore, the chief justice.

However, the picketers met an even larger contingent of gay rights supporters at Immanuel Presbyterian, which has gay and lesbian members.

As the Phelps family members gathered near a driveway entrance to the church, counter-protesters lined up across from them, including members of American Atheists and other independent picketers, about 7-8 in all.

"We're here to associate Roy Moore with Rev. Fred Phelps," said Larry Darby, state director of the atheist group (and an AFS member).

"We take opportunities like this to point out the evils of religion," said Darby, holding a sign that read "Faith-based government is tyranny."

Nearer to the church, a large crowd assembled that included about 80 members of New Hope Metropolitan Community Church in Montgomery.

"We need to understand that his (Phelps') view of Scripture is extremely primitive," said the Rev. John Hankins, pastor of New Hope.

"This is not about gay and lesbian



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Freethought News (continued)

rights," said the Rev. John Hankins, pastor of New Hope. "It's about all people's rights," he said.

The Rev. Elizabeth O'Neill, Immanuel's pastor, praised the coordinated response to the picket and criticized the Phelps family's use of child picketers.

"It's very disturbing and a real example of hate breeding hate," she said.

Not long after the American Atheists and other counter-pickers arrived, the Phelps family packed its signs and left.

[From an article by Neil Probst in the March 25 issue of the *Montgomery Advertiser*.]

TENN. STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL CALLS TEN COMMANDMENTS DISPLAY UNCONSTITUTIONAL

Ten Commandments displays on government property amount to an unconstitutional promotion of religion, according to the Tennessee state attorney general.

The displays violate a provision of the First Amendment that states "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," state Attorney General Paul Summers opined on April 3.

"Courts have held this provision applicable to states and their political subdivisions," Summers wrote.

The *Tennessean* reported on March 24 that, according to June Griffin, a woman seeking to get the Ten Commandments posted in all of the state's 95 counties, 82 counties had passed resolutions in support of the religious codes.

The newspaper then reported on March 30 that the American Civil Liberties Union of Tennessee said it had conducted an informal telephone survey of all 95 counties. ACLU officials told the newspaper that the survey, which the group didn't claim to be scientific, found 65 county commissions had endorsed the posting of the codes.

The Associated Press reported that the decision to post the codes in some counties was inspired by the Sept. 11 attacks and in others by the belief that putting the commandments in public view will encourage morality. Washington County in northeast Tennessee has displayed the commandments for more than 80 years.

Yet Summers found these resolutions to be unconstitutional.

He cited the so-called "Lemon test" established by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*. The test requires that a law have a secular purpose, that its primary effect be "one that neither advances nor inhibits religion" and that it does not "create excessive government entanglement."

Summers also relied on the high court's ruling in *Stone v. Graham*, in which the court held that a Kentucky law requiring the Ten Commandments in each public school classroom violated the Constitution under the Lemon test.

Summers' opinion was requested by Cornelia Clark, director of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

"The opinion was requested on behalf of the judges of this office and is being distributed to all state judges," said office spokeswoman Sue Allison.

Summers notes there are laws allowing Ten Commandments displays in government buildings.

"However, it is clear that if the General Assembly enacted a statute which authorized or required the posting of the Ten Commandments in county buildings, such a statute would have no discernible secular purpose and would violate the Establishment Clause," Summers wrote.

The Tenn. General Assembly in 1996 considered a resolution encouraging homes, schools and businesses to post the Ten Commandments. Attorney General Charles Burson opined the resolution was unconstitutional.

[From a May 5 Associated Press article.]

WIREGRASS ATHEISTS - 1ST MEETING

On Wednesday, April 3, eleven Alabama atheists met at the Po Folks restaurant on Boll Weevil Circle in Enterprise, Alabama for the first Wiregrass Atheists meeting. Before the group even assembled, they received resistance.

According to Larry Darby, state director for the American Atheists (and an AFS member), the *South-eastern Sun*, a local newspaper, refused to run meeting announcements.

However, the *Enterprise Ledger*, the major newspaper in Enterprise and Coffee County did announce the meeting. And shortly thereafter, some good Christians began to make their bible-based version of love known to others in the Wiregrass.

The owners of Po Folks Restaurant telephoned the *Enterprise Ledger* and told a reporter they had received complaints about the Atheists meeting at the restaurant. They reported callers to the restaurant saying, "You shouldn't let devil worshippers hold a meeting there," and "I will never eat there again because you're supporting atheism."

The owners of Po Folks Restaurant allowed The Wiregrass Atheists to dine and meet at their restaurant.

But before the meeting, Vic Powell, the group's Coordinator, received word that picketers would be present at Po Folks. But rather than protest the Atheists, the Christians said they would protest the restaurant itself for allowing the meeting.

One caller told the owner, "If I had known you were a devil-worshiper, I would have never prayed for the recover of your child." The owner's daughter had a brain tumor, but has since recovered fully from the successful operation to remove it.

When members arrived at the restaurant, a newspaper photographer was present, in anticipation of the Christian picket against the restaurant. But the threatened picket never

Freethought News (*continued*)

materialized and the first meeting of The Wiregrass Atheists was successfully conducted.

After the meeting, Coordinator Vic Powell learned that one of the persons at the meeting was not an Atheist. The quiet one turned out to be the Rev. Glenn Butler, pastor of Saint Luke United Methodist Church in Enterprise.

Vic says the pastor left the meeting of Atheists with a favorable impression. "It's a good sign that this pastor attended, and instead of trying to save our collective 'souls,' felt comfortable enough to listen to our meeting," he said.

[From an email by Larry Darby on the AFS Forum email list.]

GEORGIA RELIGION-BASED BILLS

The Georgia Faith-Based Initiative Task Force had a rally on the steps of the Georgia Capitol on Wednesday, March 13. Gov. Roy Barnes spoke at the Standing For Faith Day event, saying, "Faith-based organizations and government are both committed to achieving the same goal - improving the lives of the people they serve... The state of Georgia is committed to expanding its role in partnering with faith-based organizations."

The governor's bill and other measures are being backed in the General Assembly by a bipartisan coalition of religious conservatives.

But with time running out in this year's session, Mr. Barnes' legislation to aid faith-based groups is the only bill among about 20 that has passed either the House or the Senate. The others, including many left over from past sessions, face an uphill struggle to get past wary Democratic legislative leaders.

"If this war with the Taliban has taught us anything, it ought to be that government shouldn't run religion, and religion shouldn't run government," said Rep. Tom Bordeaux, D-Savannah, the chairman of the House

Judiciary Committee, which has jurisdiction over a handful of the bills.

Many of the bills seek to put religion back into Georgia's public schools, using a variety of approaches aimed at staying within the limits set by state and federal court rulings.

Similarly worded measures concerning abortion are pending in the House and Senate. And an alternative to Mr. Barnes' legislation that has passed a House committee would give voters a chance to amend the Georgia Constitution to allow public money to go to faith-based groups.

The bill that would go furthest toward restoring school prayer would allow a daily educational period during which pupils in a classroom could speak, on a rotating basis, about their religious beliefs. The educational period could not exceed three minutes a day.

The two abortion bills would require that women give informed consent prior to undergoing the operation. Similar measures have been introduced in the General Assembly for years without making much headway.

"This bill should just be common-sense practice," said Sen. Mike Beatty, R-Jefferson, the Senate bill's chief sponsor and a candidate for lieutenant governor. "Doctors will tell you that any surgical procedure requires that certain information be given to you."

But Beth Cope, the executive director of the Georgia Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League, said requiring informed consent prior to abortions would in effect single them out from other surgeries.

"We believe the purpose of this law is for providing biased information that will provoke fear, anxiety and guilt in women facing crisis pregnancies," she said.

Mr. Barnes' decision to put himself in front of the faith-based funding effort looks like smart politics because he's adopting a position that voters associate with President Bush, said

Phil Kent, the president of the Southeastern Legal Foundation.

But Mr. Barnes said he's no newcomer to public funding of faith-based charities. He said he's been working for almost two years on wording his bill in a way that would avoid potential legal pitfalls, an effort that he says took a good deal of research.

RELIGIOUS-BASED PROPOSALS

Here are some of the bills pending in the General Assembly that are being pushed primarily by religious conservatives. With the exception of HB1407, which was introduced on behalf of Gov. Roy Barnes, most are given little chance of passage:

HB244, HB462, SB209: Requires women to give informed consent before undergoing an abortion

HB1027: Authorizes posting or reading of historic writings in public schools, even if they contain religious references

HB1171, SB402: Specifies that pupils may engage in silent prayer or meditation during daily moments of silence

HB1407: Allows faith-based groups to receive federal funds to provide certain social services

HB1540: Authorizes posting of the Ten Commandments, the national motto, the Declaration of Independence and the preamble to the Georgia Constitution in public schools

HB1617: Requires prominent display of the national motto "In God We Trust" in all public schools, public universities and government buildings

SB331: Allows a daily educational period not to exceed three minutes during which each pupil in a classroom may speak about his religious beliefs

HR131, SR480: Amends state constitution to allow public money to be used by faith-based organizations to provide nonsectarian social services

[From an on-line article by Dave Williams of the Morris News Service.]

AFS Board Meeting Minutes for March

Day/Date/Time: 3/24/02; Sunday;
11:00 AM

Where: AFS Center

In Attendance: Judy Thompson, Steve Yothment, Tony King, Mirza Choudhury, Joel Kollin, Lew Southern, Pierce Mahony, David Patterson.

Minutes Prepared By: Steve Yothment

•The February board meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

Inman Park Festival:

- Judy announced that Sue Garland will coordinate our presence at the Inman Park festival, which will be on April 27 and 28.
- The board agreed to have the April 28 board meeting at the Inman Park Festival at the AFS booth at 11:00 AM.
- Joel agreed take minutes at the April board meeting; Tony agreed to take minutes at the May board meeting.
- Steve announced that he was the guest speaker at the March Alabama Free-thought Association meeting, and that he sold \$101 in AFS material at the meeting.

AFS Handicapped Ramp:

- Joel agreed to help with research for the ramp.
- Lew agreed to purchase the Roswell building code as it applies to handicapped ramps.
- Lew will investigate pricing for a metal ramp and will supply an orange cone.

Treasurer Replacement:

- Since Mirza recently resigned as Treasurer, the board discussed his replacement.
- Judy agreed to talk to Kate Miller and/or

Ram Avtar to be the AFS Treasurer.

- The board agreed that the Treasurer duties are quite extensive, and that it would be best for the Treasurer to be assisted by others.
- Judy announced that Kelly Wilhoit has agreed to do order fulfillment.
- Steve agreed to be responsible for the membership database. He will maintain a database at the AFS computer and at his home computer, keeping both current.
- Tony agreed to be responsible for the AFS bookstore.
- Joel agreed to receive mail, deposit received checks and log deposits in the AFS computer. He will be our "Accounts Receivable" person.
- Mirza, Joel, Tony and Steve agreed to meet at the AFS Center at 11:00 on April 14 to discuss individual duties.
- Mirza agreed to be the "Accounts Payable" person. He will write checks for AFS as needed.
- There was some discussion about getting on-line access for the AFS computer. Steve agreed to investigate the possibility of on-line access through a cell-phone.

AFS Corporate Annual Registration:

- Mirza agreed to fill out the annual Corporate Registration form and send it in, changing our address and contact information. Judy and Tony volunteered to be the AFS contacts on the form.

Ad for Panahar Restaurant:

- The board agreed to put Mirza's ¼-page ad for Panahar Restaurant in the AFS newsletter for a charge of \$15/month.
- Joel agreed to put up a Swap N Shop page on the AFS Bulletin Board.

The meeting ended at 12:07.

AFS Financial Report

1/1/2002 through 3/31/2002

INCOME:

Previous Balance:	\$ 3,671.08
Dues Paid:	660.00
AFS Center Fund:	83.00
Pledges Paid:	1,348.51
Merchandise Sales:	277.00
Bank Interest:	704.85
Book Sales:	23.93
Shipping and Handling:	56.25
World Exchange:	32.38
Suite 400 Rent:	<u>2,250.00</u>
Total Income:	\$ 9,113.00

EXPENSES:

Mortgages:	\$ 5,771.36
Condo Fees:	800.00
Utilities:	58.46
Speakers Fees:	100.00
Supplies & Newsletter:	687.38
Shipping and Handling:	122.67
Voicemail:	68.50
Book Royalties:	45.29
Book Publishing:	<u>358.88</u>
Total Expenses:	\$ 8,012.54

NEW BALANCE: \$ 1,100.46

If you can start the day without caffeine,
If you can get going without pep pills,
If you can always be cheerful, ignoring aches and pains,
If you can resist complaining and boring people with your troubles,
If you can eat the same food everyday and be grateful for it,
If you can understand when your loved ones are too busy to give you any time,
If you can overlook it when those you love take it out on you when, through no fault of yours, something goes wrong,
If you can take criticism and blame without resentment,
If you can ignore a friend's limited education and never correct him,
If you can resist treating a rich friend better than a poor friend,
If you can face the world without lies and deceit,
If you can conquer tension without medical help,
If you can relax without liquor,
If you can sleep without the aid of drugs,
If you can say honestly that deep in your heart you have no prejudice against creed, color, religion or politics,
Then, my friend, you are almost as good as your dog.

— Les Pourciau, Univ. of Memphis
(pourciau@latte.memphis.edu)

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Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Ried Crowe's letter (below) was in the *Tuscaloosa News* on April 3. Michael Buckner's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on March 22.

Choose Sides, Alabama

Dear Editor: In Kim Dudley's March 8 letter ("Roy Moore has his supporters"), she finishes her defense of Judge Roy Moore's actions by proclaiming, "Good Christians of Alabama, I urge you to stand up for what you believe in!"

Well, I agree.

I think that all Alabamians should stand up as one and proclaim their bigotry in unison. Alabamians ought to proudly trumpet their intolerance of all lifestyles that aren't exactly like their own.

Yes, good God-fearing citizens of Dixie, you have a duty to uphold and elicit the same time-honored values of hatred, prejudice and discrimination that your beloved brethren have shown throughout the history of your dear state.

Go ahead, righteous Christians, and share that podium with the ghost of Gov. Wallace. Join that Klan rally on the courthouse steps. Urge your elected officials to eliminate every last freedom enjoyed by those that don't look, act, pray or behave just like you do!

On the other hand, if you are tired of your state being viewed as the laughingstock of the nation, enter the 21st century and join the rest of America in respecting the lives of every one of your fellow citizens, regardless of your differences with them.

Feel free to embrace the ideals of diversity that are the cornerstone of our great melting pot society. Proudly condemn the narrow-minded statements of those zealots that refuse to allow all Americans to peacefully live as they please.

Stand up and tell Judge Moore that Alabama will not tolerate his intolerance.

Ried Crowe, Powder Springs, GA

Not state's role

It astonishes me that proponents of state-proclaimed religious dogmas aren't capable of understanding the objection to government displays of the Ten Commandments. The state should not tell citizens which God to worship, how to worship him and when to worship him — which is precisely what the state does when it endorses the Ten Commandments. That is not a recipe for social justice; that is a recipe for the destruction of liberty.

MICHAEL BUCKNER
Decatur

Begging the question

In a letter to *The Star* on March 3, entitled "[Restored faith](#)," the writer defends Roy Moore's opinion against a homosexual mother by stating that the verdict "is as legally sound as any document (he has) ever seen."

While the court's decision itself is not disputed (after all, the decision was unanimous), the writer is completely missing the boat here.

The issue of outraged citizens like myself is not whether the mother should have been given custody; rather, it is whether or not Judge Moore overstepped the limits of appropriateness by penning his completely unnecessary diatribe of a concurring opinion as a means of doling out morality from the bench.

If Judge Moore had simply stuck to the relevant facts and legal issues of the case, he would have been completely within his judicial rights to concur in any way he would have liked. However, Moore wrote a virtual sermon, peppered with Old Testament-style condemnation, which provided nothing but slanderous rhetoric against an entire class of citizens.

The vitriolic spirit of Moore's biblically motivated attack smacks of the American Supreme Court's embarrassing 1820 "Dredd Scott" decision in which an overzealous Chief Justice Taney needlessly opined that a "negro" belongs to an "inferior class of beings."

Did Moore have to say that homosexuality is "inherently evil" in order to render his decision, or did he do this just to enter his own bigoted opinion into the court record?

This is the accusation that the writer ought to have defended.

Ried Crowe
Powder Springs, GA

Ried Crowe's letter (above) was printed in the *Anniston Star* on March 28. Ried's letter (at right) was printed in the *Florence Times Daily* on March 31.

Moore Violated Oath

In David Montgomery's March 8th letter ("Stop Bashing Moore"), he defends Chief Justice Roy Moore's recent anti-homosexuality decision by stating that Moore "is only basing his concurring opinion upon the word of God, the Holy Bible."

Montgomery's assertion is exactly right. This is precisely why Moore is incompetent and should be impeached.

The job of a judge is to interpret law, not to impose religious morality.

People like Montgomery would do well to consider what might happen if they were to be accused of a crime in the court of a judge whose religion regarded their lifestyle as somehow wrong. Even if the evidence did not warrant a conviction, could a fair and impartial outcome be expected?

Would Montgomery support a Hindu judge that based decisions on interpretations of the Vedas? Or a Muslim judge that based decisions on the Koran?

It is very possible that Montgomery might someday appear before a Jewish judge. Wouldn't Montgomery object to that judge's reliance on the Torah when determining guilt?

Outside of his court, Judge Moore is perfectly free to feel any way he likes about anybody in this world and to treat him or her accordingly.

But that is not the issue. What is at issue is Moore's ability to uphold the judicial oath while performing his Supreme Court duties. In this oath, Moore swore to interpret only the laws of Alabama and to be fair and impartial to all litigants.

Moore's legally unfounded assertions that homosexuality is "inherently evil" clearly violate that oath in both of these ways.

Ried Crowe
Powder Springs, GA

Letters to the Editor from AFS members *(continued)*

Larry Darby's letter (below left) was in the *Montgomery Advertiser* on March 17.

Larry's letter (below right) was in the *Decatur Daily* on March 21.

Moore Antithesis of Freedom

The U.S. Constitution, by means of Article VI and the First Amendment, guarantees religious freedom. Another supreme law of the land, the Treaty with Tripoli, made it clear ours is not a Christian nation: "As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion"

Religious freedom did not exist in the American colonies; otherwise it would not have been necessary for Thomas Jefferson to introduce in 1779 the Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in Virginia, which holds, in part: "That to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency is a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty, because he being of course judge of that tendency will make his opinions the rule of judgment, and approve or condemn the sentiments of others only as they shall square with or suffer from his own."

Roy Moore placed religious idolatry in the state Judicial Building; his nocturnal skulduggery effectively destroyed religious freedom in Alabama. To entrench his power, Moore and his accomplices serving on the Supreme Court have made it virtually impossible for judges to be charged with misconduct.

And Moore's recent court opinion wherein he spoke of the Judeo-Christian principle that homosexuals are inherently evil makes it evident to all he promotes faith-based hatred. Moore is the antithesis of religious freedom.

Larry Darby
Montgomery, AL

Bills Threaten Our Liberties

Gary Hearon's March 29 letter indicated the constitutional principle of separation of government and religion "was a restriction on the federal Congress only."

The incorporation doctrine of the Fourteenth Amendment empowers citizens to seek redress in the federal courts against state governments that do not respect individual liberties regarding freedom of religion.

The lawsuits concerning Roy Moore's holy rock in the state Judicial Building are examples of citizens seeking protection in federal court from an oppressive state government.

Alabama legislators are racing to end religious liberty in Alabama with their bills concerning the placement of the Decalogue and the theocratic national motto in public schools.

The Constitution of Alabama guarantees religious liberty even to those who live by reason, not faith.

Article 1, Section 3 reads: "That no religion shall be established by law; that no preference shall be given by law to any religious sect, society, denomination, or mode of worship; that no one shall be compelled by law to attend any place of worship; nor to pay any tithes, taxes, or other rate for building or repairing any place of worship, or for maintaining any minister or ministry; that no religious test shall be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under this state; and that the civil rights, privileges, and capacities of any citizen shall not be in any manner affected by his religious principles."

Willful disregard of these constitutional provisions is treasonous.

Larry Darby, Montgomery

Residents Losing Religious Liberty

There is a parallel to what citizens are experiencing in Alabama regarding the separation of religion from government and Nazi Germany.

People who want "God" plastered all over public schools, whether by "hanging 10" or by showing the theocratic national motto into the children's faces, do it.

People who want taxpayer money to be funneled to Christian schools, in the form of vouchers, do it.

People who defend the religious oath our children are compelled to recite every morning do it.

Please spare me any commentary as to any alleged voluntariness of the theocratic pledge of allegiance, because you'll be doing it, too.

What are they doing? They are working to destroy religious liberty and brainwash our children in the process.

How do you know who they are? They define religious freedom the way Adolf Hitler did in the Nazi manifesto:

"We demand freedom for all religious faiths in the state. . . . The party as such represents the point of view of a positive Christianity without binding itself to any one particular confession."

If you belong to a sect of Christianity tolerated at this moment by Judge Roy Moore, you have religious freedom in Alabama. Too bad if you do not.

Larry Darby, Alabama state director
American Atheists Inc.
Montgomery, AL

Larry Darby's letter (at left) was in the
Montgomery Advertiser on April 5.

Charlie George's letter (below) was in the
Pensacola News Journal on March 9.

'Primal Cause' Flawed

Since the author of the Feb. 19 letter, "One step back," seemed sincerely keen to get a response, I decided to offer this. The argument was presented that something must have caused or created the universe to exist. The assumption is that all things must have a cause.

We are instructed that the only solution to this dilemma is to postulate a "primal cause," or Creator. Unfortunately, the author glosses over the obvious question, "What created the Creator?" If we assert that nothing created Him, we have violated our only assumption, that all things must have a cause. If God can be regarded as eternal, then we might as well save a step and regard the universe as eternal, since no one knows what happened before the big bang.

This logical flaw negates the "primal cause" as a solution to the dilemma. Postulating God adds complexity to the universe, but solves no new mysteries. The philosophical principle of Occam's razor dispenses with unnecessary complexity in choosing between competing theories.

Charlie George
Alpharetta, GA

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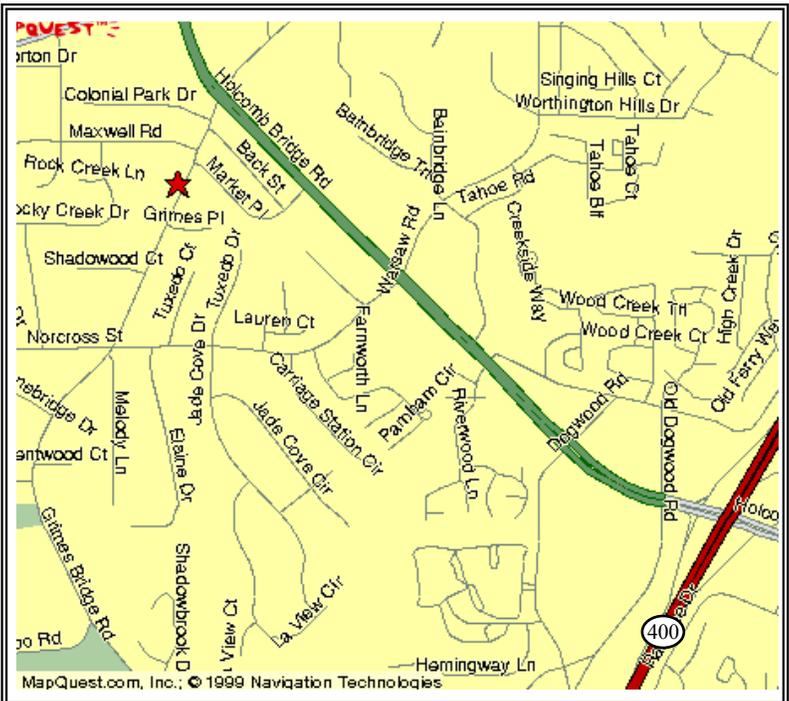
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**The April Meeting:
Sunday, April 14
1:00 PM at the AFS Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road,
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Betty Bowers**



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