

Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 8 Number 5 • May 2002

Our May Meeting

The May 12 AFS meeting will include an open forum for discussion of AFS, its purpose and its direction for the next year. Here is the chance for AFS members to provide input so that AFS can better meet its members' needs. Please send any suggestions for improvements, or anything of particular concern to Tony at ngoldwe_2000@yahoo.com.

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, May 26. AFS Vice President Tony King will speak on "Why Aren't There More Secularists?"

New: SOS Meets at AFS Center

The Secular Organizations for Sobriety now meets at the AFS Center every Tuesday evening at 7:30 PM. SOS is the secular replacement for AA (Alcoholics Anonymous). Thanks go to Donna Gore and Ray Knisley for starting this chapter and running the meetings. (SecularSobriety.org)

Sue Garland says "THANK YOU!!" to all the folks who helped to staff the booth at the Inman Park Festival on April 25th and 26th. AFS took in almost \$800.00 and made many new contacts at the festival. Many people who were not aware of AFS now are, and several inactive members or former members dropped by, and plan to rejoin. We couldn't have done it without you!

Meetings and Activities

May 12: AFS General Meeting at AFS Center, 1:00 PM.
May 17: AFS Social, Athens Pizza House, 7:00 PM.
May 19: AFS Discussion Group at AFS Center, 4:00 PM.
May 24: AFS Activity Night at AFS Center, 7:00 PM.
May 26: AFS Board Meeting at AFS Center, 11:00 AM.
May 26: Humanists of Georgia at AFS Center, 12:30 PM.
June 1: AFS Hike, Fernbank Forest, 11:00 AM.
June 2: Fellowship of Reason meets at NUUC, 12:30 PM.

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**.

AFS Activities

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet on Sunday, May 19, from 4 to 6 PM at the AFS Center.

The **AFS Activity Night** will be on Friday, May 24 at 7:00 PM. This activity is now more than just games! It may include discussion, a movie, dinner out, or 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 Saturday, June 1, at 11:00 AM at Fernbank Forest, which is behind the Fernbank Science Center at 156 Heaton Park Drive, NE. To get there from Atlanta, go east on Ponce de Leon about a mile past Clifton Road, then turn left onto Artwood Road (just before the railroad crossing). Go one block and turn right onto Heaton Park Drive. The Fernbank Science Center is one block ahead on the left. Let's meet in front of the Science Center at 11:00 sharp. We'll do lunch/brunch after the walk. For details, call Lew Southern at 770-509-8272.

The Tuesday Lunch Bunch

A 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

The May **AFS Social** will be at Athens Pizza House, 1341 Clairmont Road, on Friday, May 17, at 7:00 PM. (It's at the intersection of Clairmont & North Decatur Rd. in Atlanta.)

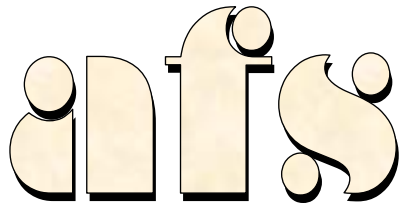
To get there from north of Atlanta, take I-85 South to Exit 91, the Clairmont Road exit. Turn left at the light and go 3.5 miles to Athens Pizza House, which will be on the left before you cross North Decatur Road.

To get there from the south, take I-75/85 north to Exit 251, the I-85 exit. Take I-85 north to Exit 91, the Clairmont Road exit. Turn right onto Clairmont Road and go 3.5 miles to Athens Pizza House, which will be on the left before you cross North Decatur Road.

The phone number at Athens Pizza is 404-636-1100.

A Reminder...

AFS members often keep in touch via our AFS Forum email list. To join the list, just send a blank message to afs-forum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. If you prefer to receive only announcements of upcoming AFS events, join the AFS Announcements list by sending a blank message to afs-announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.



**Atlanta
Freethought
Society**

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.

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."

July 14: TBD

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**

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The Cost of Religion

The Price is High for Pie in the Sky: How Religion “Picks Your Pocket and Breaks Your Leg”

By Marie Alena Castle, President of Atheist Alliance, Inc.

Thomas Jefferson said, “...it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.”

True enough if religious belief were only a matter of personal opinion like belief in tarot cards and flying saucers. But this has never been so. Religions are, and ever have been, set up to control people one way or another, always with evil results, sometimes mild, often severe. This is done most effectively by controlling an entire society through laws and customs—that is, by putting the coercive power of society’s institutions to the service of the politically dominant religion.

There are about 24 million nonreligious people in the US, only a handful of whom get involved in efforts to resist religious control. The non-joiners’ rationale is that religion isn’t injurious to them personally. They’re wrong. We are living in the backwash of Christianity and are so swamped by the insanity of it all that we no longer see the injuries. The following is a summary of what religion costs YOU in terms of *your* money, *your* personal freedom, *your* health and sometimes even your very life. You may escape some of these costs, but not all.

COST #1: RELIGION PROSPERS FROM YOUR MONEY

The wall separating church and state

is full of pass-throughs. Who do you think makes up the revenue short-fall caused by religious tax exemptions? You do! If you own or rent any property, residential or commercial, the property taxes are several hundred dollars higher than if religious property, worth billions of dollars, was also taxed. You pay more, because they pay nothing.

IRS estimates of money that accrues to religion in exemptions, subsidies and donations is over \$270 billion a year – just to promote religious fantasies! That’s over \$2 billion a year per state on average. Think what a truly secular society could do with that! Lower our taxes substantially, fix our roads and bridges, improve our schools, rebuild deteriorating neighborhoods. And if you think religious charitable works are paid for by religious institutions, think again. Anything significant they do is funded by the government.

It is always extremely difficult politically for governments to find a compelling reason to deny religion whatever it wants. If you own a business and want to expand, you must abide by zoning laws designed to preserve neighborhood values. Not so for religious institutions. They can expand as it pleases them, adding to traffic congestion and noise, restricting views, destroying historic preservation areas and generally enhancing

their interests at the expense of everyone else’s.

Now, here’s a low blow: If you lend money to religionists who then declare bankruptcy, the money they tithe to their church cannot be touched to help repay you. The church gets its tithes while you get the shaft. It’s the law.

COST #2: RELIGION MESSES WITH YOUR SEX LIFE

If you think your sex life and reproductive decisions are your business, check the statutes. Most states forbid adultery, fornication and sodomy, and they apply various unnecessary restrictions on sex education, contraception and abortion. These laws are based entirely on religious beliefs, serving only to legally validate those beliefs. Whether you are heterosexual or homosexual, have a disability that makes government-approved forms of sexual relations difficult or impossible or find yourself needing accurate sex information or trapped in an unwanted pregnancy, there is a law to intimidate or even force you into conforming to someone else’s religious beliefs.

COST #3. RELIGION MESSES WITH YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

If you’re an atheist, you have another problem – finding a nonreligious partner. Chances are you will fall in love with a religious person who will not hold still for any atheist talk



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The Cost of Religion (*continued*)

or action from you. She or he will be active in church, get religious literature in the mail, brainwash your children into religion and be happily identified openly as religious. If you are equally expressive of your atheism, be prepared for marital discord and one of two choices: keep your atheism to yourself or split up. (And good luck getting custody of your kids when it's a devout church-going parent against a "morally suspect atheist" parent.)

COST #4: RELIGION AFFECTS YOUR HEALTH

Fetal-tissue research is discovering how to cure Parkinson's disease, diabetes, spinal-cord injuries and many other afflictions, but religion-dominated legislators have restricted funding severely. Why? Because of the belief that an embryo, a microscopic cluster of eight cells, is a real human being with an immortal soul. These undifferentiated cells are hyped hysterically as "baby body parts" and destroying these nearly invisible specks is called murder. This is human imagination run amok while sick people pay with their health and their lives.

Then there's the hospital mergers, which is seen as a solution to financial problems. Trouble arises when one of the hospitals in a merger is Catholic. All staff in the merged institution are required to sign an agreement to adhere to the "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services" dictated by the Catholic bishops of America. They apply to everyone, Catholic or not.

Treatment must conform to Catholic doctrine, not your medical needs. If you live in a small town where the only hospital is Catholic, you are in trouble. No contraceptive advice, no abortions even if your life depends on it, no removal of a life-threatening ectopic pregnancy, no prenatal diagnosis if the hospital suspects the purpose is to determine the need for abortion, no sterilizations, no morning-after pill, no in-vitro fertilization or other fertility technology, no ag-

gressive end-of-life pain remission no matter how much you plead for it. (From the Directives: "Patients experiencing pain that cannot be alleviated should be helped to appreciate the Christian understanding of redemptive suffering.")

It's not just Catholic hospitals. If you live in a small town where the only pharmacy is at Wal-Mart, you can't get the morning-after pill. It's against the religious beliefs of John Walton, the born-again corporate founder.

COST #5: RELIGION AFFECTS YOUR EDUCATION

Many school systems or individual teachers nationwide downplay the teaching of evolution in science classes. This is due to pressure from fundamentalists who believe the Bible is a divinely inspired science textbook and anything that contradicts it is in error. The theory of evolution consists of a solid body of evidence that explains the development and speciation of earth's biosphere. The concepts undergird all other sciences, which cannot be understood without them.

If you are unfortunate enough to have graduated from a school system that sold you out educationally to avoid controversy, you will have a lot of catching up to do in college science classes.

Worse, as a citizen, you will be surrounded by people who come out of school scientifically illiterate. These people will vote for politicians who also have no understanding of the physical world and will most likely make destructive decisions. You will suffer the consequences along with everyone else.

And don't forget sex education, or the lack of it, in our schools. In northern Europe, where religion is not a controlling factor, comprehensive sex education is a standard part of the curriculum and contraceptives are widely promoted, available and affordable. If we had that here, we'd get the same results they do. Like them, we'd have far fewer unplanned preg-

nancies, far fewer abortions and far fewer teenagers and their babies on welfare for you to help support.

COST #6: RELIGION AFFECTS HOW WELL YOU LIVE

It's been said that, if it hadn't been for religion, Columbus would not have landed in the New World — he would have landed on the moon! Because of religion, we lost 1,500 years of progress toward improving human life. The ancient Greeks knew the earth was round. They speculated that matter is made up of ever smaller particles, the smallest of which they called an atom. They made major strides in mathematics. They were beginning to think along evolutionary lines about biological changes. They were developing rational treatments for diseases. They, along with the ancient Romans, made impressive technological advances that eased physical labor and improved the quality of life, including indoor plumbing.

Then the Dark Ages of Christianity rolled over Greco-Roman civilization and destroyed everything. The Library at Alexandria was burned to the ground and a world of knowledge with it. Learning became limited to theological musings. Scientific investigation was replaced by speculation about how many angels could stand on the head of a pin. Technological advances consisted of improved torture instruments for the Inquisition.

If not for religion, many diseases and birth defects would be history, and contraceptive technology would have long ago achieved population growth control. As it is, our overpopulated world now faces the prospect of proliferating wars, disease epidemics and economic disasters as fossil fuels, forests, fishing grounds and fresh-water supplies dwindle.

Religion continues to affect our lives adversely as we suffer the consequences of religion-driven wars, global family-planning restrictions and economic and social oppression of women. Refugees by the thousands are at our borders seeking safety and

The Cost of Religion (*continued*)

economic survival. And they bring with them the primary cause of their homeland's misery – their religious beliefs.

COST #7. RELIGION AFFECTS YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

Maybe you have no problem being atheist. If your family and friends do not take religion seriously, all is well. You live a sheltered life. Most likely you never venture into areas where people do take religion seriously. So, go sign up for the Boy Scouts and refuse to take their god oath and see what happens. Get a job in a company where the boss is a born-again fanatic and likes the employees to follow suit and see what happens. Attend a company dinner meeting where the boss starts with an invocation to Jesus and asks you all to bow your head. Want to take a chance on not being noticed if you don't go along with this? Care to speculate about your career repercussions?

Get into politics and be just as up front about your atheism as religious

people are about their beliefs. As a campaign committee member, you are likely to be kept well out of public view lest your atheist identity get your candidate in trouble for associating with you.

Try running for office, but don't expect your party to nominate you, however much you are admired personally. You can count on your opponent letting the public know you're an atheist and playing the religious bigotry card to advantage. You won't even survive the primary election.

You can avoid all this, of course. Just keep quiet about your atheism. Like the light-skinned "colored" people years ago who "passed" as white to avoid discrimination, you too can "pass" as a god believer. Just bow your head and bend your knee when told to, and sprinkle a little god-talk in your conversation. Let religion have its way, because you sure don't want to rock the boat. But whatever you do, don't look in the mirror. You

won't be proud of what you see.

IT'S NOT A COST IF YOU REFUSE TO PAY IT

Consider that 1987 news conference at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport when former President George Bush responded to a reporter on the subject of non-religious people as follows: "... Faith in God is important to me.... I don't know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God."

The media never made an issue of this, because former president Bush only reflected the popular sentiment. That sentiment exists, because we have rolled over and played dead rather than stand up for our rights. We don't have to continue doing this. We don't have to "pass" with demeaning groveling and god-talk. Like other minorities who organized against their oppressors, we atheists can also "...take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing end them."

Freethought News

ALABAMA ATHEIST GROUPS TO OPPOSE RALLY BY CHRISTIAN COALITION OF ALABAMA

MOBILE, Ala. - The Mobile Atheists (TMA) have organized atheists across the state to oppose and counter-protest an upcoming pro-Moore rally by the Christian Coalition of Alabama (CCA). The rally and counter-protest will be held on the steps of the capitol building in Montgomery at noon on Saturday, May 11th.

According to a CCA flier, the rally is being held to support Chief Justice Judge Moore *"For upholding the moral foundation of our law and in keeping our Ten Commandments monument."*

Blair Scott, president of The Mobile Atheists, said, "When I found out that people were rallying to support Moore's bigotry against homosexuals and his lawless shenanigans, I felt it was important to get other people

together to counter them and support equality under the law and constitutionalism."

When asked about the CCA flier, Blair stated, "The Bible is not the 'moral foundation of our law' and the Ten Commandments monument is in direct violation of state and federal constitutions. Moore swore an oath to uphold Alabama law – not his particular religion."

The Mobile Atheists contacted four other atheist groups in Alabama and is coordinating the counter-demonstration. The other groups participating in the counter-protest are The Birmingham Atheists, Skeptics-Free-thought of North Alabama, The Wiregrass Atheists and American Atheists via the state director.

In addition to atheist groups, an invitation was sent to gay and lesbian activists and proponents of the consti-

tutional separation of church and state throughout the state.

"From the moment that Moore took office he has done nothing but embarrass the state of Alabama. His violations of the state and federal constitutions are bad enough. Calling an entire group of people "inherently evil" and hinting that the state should execute and incarcerate homosexuals emphasized his bigotry and faith-based hate," said Blair.

"It's important that Alabama and America know that not all Alabamians hate people because some religious book says so. A lot of Alabamians love all their neighbors, regardless of sexual orientation, race or religion," continued Blair.

The Mobile Atheists are located online at <http://atheists.home.att.net>.

[This article is from a press release by The Mobile Atheists.]

Freethought News (*continued*)

MAGISTRATE ORDERS JUDGE MOORE TO RELEASE PAPERS

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — A federal magistrate has ordered Chief Justice Roy Moore to release documents about his ties to a television preacher who promoted Moore's display of a Ten Commandments monument in the state court building.

The decision by U.S. Magistrate Delores R. Boyd came in a lawsuit challenging Moore's placement of the huge stone marker in the lobby of the building. Boyd ruled Moore must turn over the documents to lawyers suing him.

Moore had the 2½-ton monument installed in the building after-hours, without telling other judges, but allowed a crew associated with Rev. D. James Kennedy to videotape the installation. Later, in November, Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries offered copies of the video of the installation for a suggested donation of \$19. Footage of the installation also was included in one of Kennedy's weekly TV shows.

Kennedy's Coral Ridge Ministries has said it contributed at least \$130,000 to Moore's legal defense fund, and Moore is scheduled to appear this summer on a Christian-themed cruise to Alaska being promoted by Kennedy.

Ruling in the lawsuits challenging the monument as unconstitutional, Boyd ordered Moore to give plaintiff's

lawyers documents about his relationship with Kennedy and his Coral Ridge Ministries. Boyd also ordered Moore, elected chief justice in 2000, to turn over campaign documents.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State filed the lawsuits against Moore over the monument, which Moore contends is legal.

In addition to the numerous legal documents that Moore must hand over, he must also provide thousands of cards and letters he has received from supporters of the Ten Commandments monument to lawyers for the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Stephen Melchior, an attorney for Moore, said the chief justice will comply, and noted that about 40,000 "encouragement cards" received by Moore will also be handed over.

"We think they're irrelevant," Melchior said about the cards. "But anyone who writes a letter to Chief Justice Moore supporting his stand on the monument, it's going to have to be produced."

The Southern Poverty Law Center filed their lawsuit on Oct. 31 in federal court on behalf of Montgomery lawyer Stephen R. Glassroth asking that the monument be removed. Glassroth said the monument offends him.

"The display of the Ten Commandments monument constitutes an im-

permissible endorsement of religion by the state and thereby violates the plaintiffs' rights under the First and 10th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution," Glassroth's complaint stated.

Efforts to reach Morris Dees, an attorney for Southern Poverty, were unsuccessful, but court files show Dees told Boyd that the requested documents are needed as evidence.

Moore's lawyers have objected not only to providing copies of his cards and letters but also to providing a mountain of other documents, including photos of Moore's billboards in his 2000 chief justice campaign in which he called himself the "Ten Commandments judge," records showing where and how long they were displayed, and information about all radio, TV and newspaper ads, including costs of production and distribution.

Dees said the documents are needed to show that Moore's display of the Ten Commandments monument is, or at least appears to be, for the purpose of endorsing religion.

"The reasonably informed observer in Alabama was saturated with political commercials and advertisements from the 'Ten Commandments judge' shortly before the monument was installed," Dees stated.

[This article is from a 4/18/02 article by Stan Bailey for the *Birmingham News* and a 4/10/02 Associated Press article.]

"This call for a worldwide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class, and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all mankind. We can no longer afford to worship the God of hate or bow before the altar of retaliation. The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of hate.

History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path of hate."

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

"It behoves every man who values liberty of conscience for himself, to resist invasions of it in the case of others; or their case may, by change of circumstances, become his own." — Thomas Jefferson, in a letter to Benjamin Rush, April 21, 1803.

"During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the clergy; ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution." — James Madison, from "A Memorial and Remonstrance," addressed to the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1785.

EVOLUTION - A Simple Idea, Yet Extremely Powerful

By Sarah L. Pallas, associate professor of biology at Georgia State University

(This article is from the April 14 issue of the Atlanta Journal Constitution and is reprinted here by permission.)

A minority of Cobb County parents say that the school system's teachings about life on Earth conflict with their religious views. Fortunately the county school board did not succumb to pressure to throw out the system's excellent biology textbooks. But the board has taken a step to pacify the critics, which I believe is misguided and harmful. It plans to put a disclaimer in biology textbooks that suggests that since evolution is only a theory, students need not take it seriously.

The problem with this is that the word "theory" means different things to scientists and laypeople. In science, calling a scientific explanation a theory expresses the highest confidence that it is a correct explanation of a set of facts and laws. Theories typically undergo decades of rigorous experimentation. They cannot be in conflict with independent observations from other areas of science.

A scientific theory must be based on natural phenomena. Scientific theory is thus quite different from a hunch about which lottery numbers will come up or which horse will win at the track.

Why does Darwin's idea cause such consternation among some people? There are many other scientific theories to pick on. But no one is asking for atomic theory to be stricken from physics and chemistry books, nor do they suggest that gravity is "only a theory" and thus advocate stepping out of eighth-floor windows.

The reason is that creationists would like Divine Creation presented

in biology class as a valid scientific theory for how the diversity of life arose. But as the county school superintendent points out, it is illegal to do this. Creationism is not a scientific theory, but a faith-based one. Science requires data and rigorous proof before acceptance of an idea. Faith requires accepting an idea in the absence of data or proof.

Further, creationism requires a particular version of religious faith. Catholics and many mainstream Protestants accept evolution as the process that brought about the diversity of life. Under our Constitution, one religion cannot be promoted over another in school.

What exactly is evolution? Contrary to what Cobb's textbook disclaimer says, evolution is an observable process, a fact of life. It refers to changes in gene frequencies between generations of animals or plants. It occurs every day and has been demonstrated in many species. And it has its downside: Most laypeople are familiar with the rapid evolution of bacterial resistance to antibiotics, or the evolution of resistance to DDT in mosquitoes.

So where is the theory part? Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection is a nearly universally accepted scientific explanation for how, not whether, evolution occurred in the past and how it is occurring in the present. One aspect of this theory, well-supported by fossil and DNA evidence, is that all creatures arose from an original common ancestor, and branched or died off under the in-

fluence of natural selection as the planet changed.

Natural selection works like this: Since life is hard, not all animals survive. Those that were a little faster or a little smarter lived longer and made more babies, so their genes became over-represented in the next generation.

After a few billion years, little changes add up to big ones. This is quite a simple idea, yet extremely powerful in its explanatory and predictive power. Evolutionary theory is also nicely consistent with geology, paleontology, genetics, ecology and many other branches of science, which adds to its power.

Why do students need to learn evolution, even if it offends some people?

Because evolution is the organizing principle of biological science. Without a clear and unbiased understanding of the unifying theory of life, it is very difficult for students to make sense of life science. It is critically important for the future of Georgia and the country that our schools produce well-educated, scientifically literate citizens.

The Cobb school board should entrust the scientific education of our children to scientists and teachers, not lawyers and preachers. Although most biologists have little money or political influence, we are very dedicated to science education, and we know our subject. We would like to devote our time to that and to the next medical breakthrough, and cease spending time arguing 19th-century issues.

Freethought: Atheism: Agnosticism: Skepticism: Science

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Letters to the Editor from AFS members

Larry Darby's letter (below left) was in the *Florence Times Daily* on April 11. Francis Assaf's letter (at right) was in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* on April 28.

Answer to question

A recent writer [Dillon, April 3] asks, "Just what does the unbelieving atheist have to offer?"

Atheism is the natural or default human condition regarding religion; the word simply means "without theism." Atheism involves the mental attitude that unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a life-style and ethical outlook verifiable by experience and the scientific method, independent of all arbitrary assumptions of authority and creeds or supernatural agency. Where theists base their worldview on fear of eternal torment by a loving god, atheists live by the philosophy of materialism, which is predicated on ideas of the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, Demokritos.

Materialism declares that the cosmos is devoid of immanent conscious purpose; that it is governed by its own inherent, immutable, and impersonal laws; that there is no supernatural interference in human life; that humankind -- finding their resources within themselves -- can and must create their own destiny. Materialism restores dignity and intellectual integrity to humanity. It teaches that we must prize our life on Earth and strive always to improve it. It holds that we are capable of creating a social system based on reason and justice.

Materialism's "faith" is in humankind and their ability to transform the world culture by their own efforts. This is a commitment that is in its very essence life-asserting.

Prior to Sept. 11, 2001, 29 million American citizens (14 percent) were identified as atheists. The number of citizens who wish to live the life of reason, and not a life of faith in unverifiable things or untenable concepts, is growing, too.

The faith-based terrorist attacks by theists on Sept. 11 caused many people to examine the validity of religion and cast out their superstitious beliefs.

In Alabama there are groups in Mobile, Birmingham and Decatur that are officially affiliated with American Atheists; another group is forming in Enterprise.

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

Opponents fall short scientifically

To rail against evolution because it is "godless" is to miss the point: All science is godless. Otherwise, it would not be science. Whether a triangle is drawn by a rabid atheist or by a religious zealot, the sum of its angles is still 180°

If anti-evolutionists want to be taken seriously, they must present a theory about the origins of life and the diversity of life forms that proves evolution by natural selection invalid.

To qualify as scientific, however, that theory must conform to three norms: (a) it must be naturalistic: Invoking a divine intervention excludes it from the realm of science; (b) it must be open to invalidation by another naturalistic theory that better accounts for the known facts (and is itself open to falsifiability, ad infinitum); (c) it should be possible to predict, based on that theory, what as-yet unknown or undiscovered facts, systems or characteristics will be like.

Not only is neo-Darwinian evolution better supported by known biological facts, but it also conforms precisely to the norms above.

Anti-evolutionism is on a par with flat-Earth and faith healing: it's all nonsense, and doesn't belong in our schools or colleges.

FRANCIS ASSAF
Athens

AFS Board Meeting Minutes for April

Day/Date/Time: 4/28/02; Sunday; 11:00

Where: At Inman Park AFS Booth

In Attendance: Judy Thompson, Steve Yothment, Ram Avtar, Joel Kollin, Bill Burton, Lew Southern, Pierce Mahony, Sue Garland.

Minutes Prepared By: Joel Kollin

- The February board meeting minutes were unanimously approved.
- Tony King will take minutes for the May meeting.

Treasurer Duties:

- For reasons of efficiency Ram Avtar has volunteered to take over the checkbook responsibilities. Joel will help Ram with this as asked. Ram will reconfigure the financial system. The board is very grateful to Ram for taking over the job of

treasurer. We are also very appreciative of all the work that Mirza has done and the fine systems he initiated.

Funds Needed:

- The board is concerned about the need for \$5,000 to pay the upfront costs of publishing the Kagan book. We discussed ways of bringing in more revenue to pay for this and other ongoing expenses. Judy will contact FFRF about holding a convention here (with a view to making some money on "running" the meeting).

Internet Connection:

- After much discussion we decided to drop the idea of having an Internet connection at the home place. The cost and problems outweigh the benefits.

Swap Shop Board:

- Joel will work on getting a "Swap Shop"

board at the meeting place. The idea is to make it easy for members to buy and sell items and swap talents.

Handicapped Ramp:

- Lew built a portable handicapped ramp for the home place. (Thanks!)
- Steve will put a notice in the newsletter that we are handicapped accessible.

Becky Long is Moving:

- Becky Long is leaving our fair city and has asked if we want some of the equipment that she does not want to take with her -- projector, shelves etc. Judy will look into this. We would like a member to volunteer to store the items we don't need right away.

- Lastly, we all thank Sue Garland for coordinating the Inman Park booth.

"To assert that the earth revolves around the sun is as erroneous as to claim that Jesus was not born of a virgin."

— Cardinal Bellarmine, during the trial of Galileo, 1615

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Thank you for all your support and we look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

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 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500, Roswell, GA 30075
 Phone: 404-805-2020 e-mail: mirza404@aol.com

“Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect.” - James Madison, 1774

Why I Am Not A Christian — \$9

Lucid, comprehensive, engaging answer to Christian apologists by Keith Parsons. Respectful but devastating to all Christian claims. Wonderful follow-up to Bertrand Russell's great essay with the same title.

Tales of the Rational: Skeptical Essays About Nature and Science — \$17

Massimo Pigliucci's essays examine and criticize both religion and science. He defends straw men, attacks creationism, and explains why scientists and other skeptics should be nontheists.

An Uppity Old Atheist Woman's Dictionary — \$10

By Carol Faulkenberry (illustrated by Amanda Faulkenberry); like Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*—but better: more biting, funnier. Guaranteed to make you laugh out loud and to challenge at least one idea you hold.

Bible Bloopers: Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Too! (A Skeptic Answers Josh McDowell) — \$15

Mike Ledo's funny, scholarly book—over 270 pp. of effective dissection of biblical mythology, explanations of Bible contradictions, and detailed background on historical, mythological perspectives for modern Christianity.

Quotations That Support the Separation of State and Church (2nd edition) — \$11

Compiled by Edward M. Buckner and Michael E. Buckner; ammunition against Christian-nation mythologists. Quotes from America's revolutionaries, constitution framers, Presidents, court decisions. Sources carefully documented, extensive index. Comb-bound—lies flat for easy copying.

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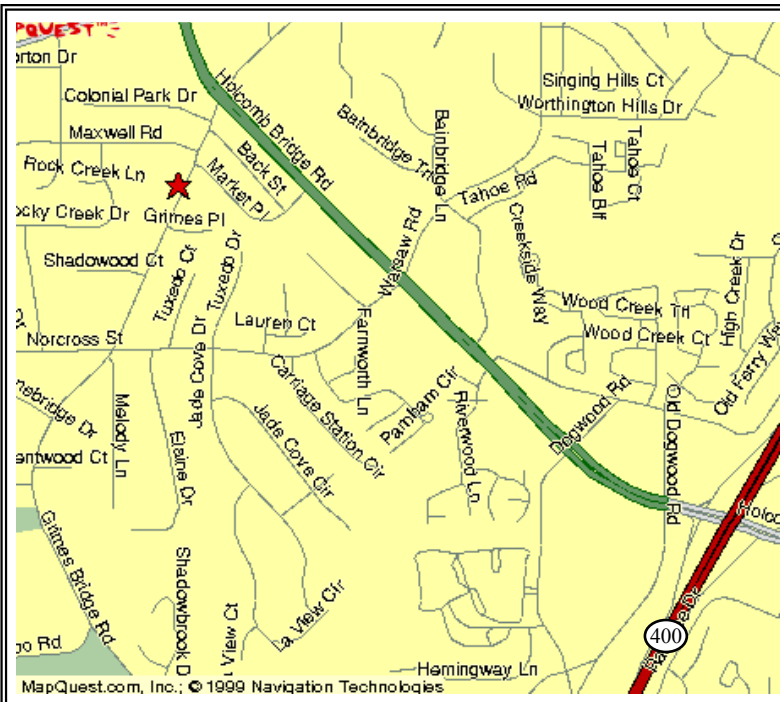
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**The May Meeting:
Sunday, May 12
1:00 PM at the AFS Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road,
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Meeting:
An Open Forum**



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