

# Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 8 Number 7 • July 2002

## Our July Meeting

The July 14 AFS meeting will feature **Ross Sloan**, speaking on "The Psychological Foundations of Religion."

Ross was one of the original members of the Mobile Atheist Society, and is currently a member of the Mobile Area Freethought Association. He is an insurance salesman in Mobile, AL, and is also a pilot.

Ross did an outstanding impression of Robert Ingersoll at the Atheist Alliance convention in Atlanta last year. Ross says he has been studying Albert Schweitzer lately, and will have some things to say about him at our meeting.

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, July 28.

## SOS Meets at AFS Center

The Secular Organizations for Sobriety meets at the AFS Center every Tuesday evening at 7:30 PM. SOS is the secular replacement for AA (Alcoholics Anonymous).

## Fellowship of Reason Meeting

The **Fellowship of Reason** will meet at 12:30 PM on August 4 at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Highway in Atlanta. For details, see [www.kindreason.com](http://www.kindreason.com).

## Meetings and Activities

July 13: AFS Hike, Tallulah Gorge State Park, 10:00 AM.

July 14: AFS General Meeting at AFS Center, 1:00 PM.

July 19: AFS Social, Athens Pizza House, 7:00 PM.

July 21: AFS Discussion Group at AFS Center, 4:00 PM.

July 26: AFS Activity Night at AFS Center, 7:00 PM.

July 28: Humanists of Georgia at AFS Center, 12:30 PM.

Aug 4: 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, July 21, from 4 to 6 PM at the AFS Center.

The **AFS Activity Night** will be on Friday, July 26 at 7:00 PM. It may be a 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](mailto:SteveYoth@aol.com).

The **AFS Hike** will be on Saturday, July 13. Meet at the AFS Center at 10:00 AM. We will carpool to Tallulah Gorge State Park, which is about a 1 hour drive to the northeast corner of Georgia. The spectacular gorge is 2 miles long, 1000 feet deep and very scenic. Bring a camera and lunch. Lew will provide soft drinks. It will be easier to plan with a head count. Phone Lew Southern at 770-509-8272.

## The Tuesday Lunch Bunch

A group of AFS members meets every Tuesday at 12:00 at Panahar Restaurant. The address is 3375 Buford Hwy, Suite 1060, in Atlanta. Come on down and enjoy the Bangladeshi food buffet and the great company. For more information, call Steve Yothment at 770-339-8394 or email him at [SteveYoth@aol.com](mailto:SteveYoth@aol.com).

## The AFS Social

The July **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.

## Sad News

We are very sorry to report that Dorothy Larson passed away on July 4th. Dorothy was a member of AFS and the Humanists of Georgia and supported both organizations.

We hope to have more information for members about Dorothy at the July meeting.



## 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.

July 14: Ross Sloan will speak on "The Psychological Foundations of Religion."

Aug 11: Reggie Finley will present his seminar on Critical Thinking.

Sept 8: Sam Chupp will speak on "Much Ado About Harry: Myth & Hysteria in Popular Culture." The subject is about how some short-sighted individuals characterize fantasy literature as "occult", and what you can do about it.

Oct 13: Clark Adams, Public Relations Director for The Internet Infidels, will speak on current Internet Infidels projects. (cadams@infidels.org)

Nov 10: Dr. Scott Lillienfeld of Emory University will speak on false memories.

To join the AFS Forum e-mail list, send a blank message to [afs-forum-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:afs-forum-subscribe@yahoo.com). To join the AFS Announcements list, send a blank email to [afs-announce-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:afs-announce-subscribe@yahoo.com). To join the Georgia Freethinkers Letter Writing Cooperative, send a blank email to [flwc-ga-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:flwc-ga-subscribe@yahoo.com).

You can unsubscribe by sending an email to [xxxx-unsubscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:xxxx-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 AFS are tax deductible.

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

**Atlanta Freethought News**  
an AFS publication

**Editor**

Steve Yothment

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**The Atlanta Freethought News**

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For membership and subscription  
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1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite  
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# Court Rules "under God" in Pledge Unconstitutional

A federal appeals court declared for the first time on June 26 that reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools is unconstitutional because of the words "under God" inserted by Congress in 1954.

The ruling, if allowed to stand, would mean schoolchildren could no longer recite the pledge, at least in the nine Western states covered by the court.

In a 2-1 decision, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the phrase "one nation under God" amounts to a government endorsement of religion in violation of the separation of church and state.

Leading schoolchildren in a pledge that says the United States is "one nation under God" is as objectionable as making them say "we are a nation 'under Jesus,' a nation 'under Vishnu,' a nation 'under Zeus,' or a nation 'under no god,' because none of these professions can be neutral with respect to religion," Circuit Judge Alfred T. Goodwin wrote.

The government had argued that the religious content of "one nation under God" is minimal. But the appeals court said that an atheist or a holder of certain non-Judeo-Christian beliefs could see it as an endorsement of monotheism.

The 9th Circuit covers Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and Washington state. Those are the only states directly affected by the ruling.

However, the ruling does not take effect for several months, to allow

further appeals. The government can ask the court to reconsider, or take its case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Congress inserted "under God" at the height of the Cold War after a campaign by the Knights of Columbus, religious leaders and others who wanted to distinguish the United States from what they regarded as "godless communism."

The case was brought by Michael A. Newdow, a Sacramento atheist who objected because his second-grade daughter was compelled to listen to her classmates recite the pledge. A federal judge had dismissed his lawsuit.

Newdow, a doctor who holds a law degree and represented himself, called the pledge a "religious idea that certain people don't agree with."

After the ruling, Newdow said he was trying to restore the pledge to its pre-1954 version, saying no one should be forced to worship a religion in which they don't believe.

"Many people who are upset about this are people who just don't understand," he said. "People have to consider what if they were in the minority religion and the majority religion was overpowering them."

The appeals court said that when President Eisenhower signed the legislation inserting "under God" after the words "one nation," he declared: "Millions of our schoolchildren will daily proclaim in every city and town, every village and rural schoolhouse, the dedication of our nation and our people to the Almighty."



The appeals court noted that the U.S. Supreme Court has said students cannot be compelled to recite the pledge. But even when the pledge is voluntary, "the school district is nonetheless conveying a message of state endorsement of a religious belief when it requires public school teachers to recite, and lead the recitation of, the current form of the pledge."

The ruling was issued by Goodwin, who was appointed by President Nixon, and Circuit Judge Stephen Reinhardt, a Carter appointee.

In Canada, where President Bush was taking part in an economic summit, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said: "The president's reaction was that this ruling is ridiculous."

The ruling was also attacked on Capitol Hill, with Senate Majority Leader Thomas Daschle, D-S.D., calling it "just nuts."

After the ruling, House members gathered on the front steps of the Capitol to recite the pledge en masse - the same place they defiantly sang "God Bless America" the night of the Sept. 11 attacks.

And senators, who were debating a



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# Court Rules “under God” Unconstitutional *(continued)*

defense bill, stopped to unanimously pass a resolution denouncing the decision.

The issue prompted television and radio appearances by many atheists and freethinkers. AFS Vice President Steve Yothment was on CBS Atlanta News on Thursday, June 27. (The news crew came to the AFS Center for the interview and showed viewers our pre-1954 Pledge of Allegiance on the wall!) Steve was also on CNN Talk-Back Live that afternoon to discuss the pledge issue.

## OUTRAGEOUS REACTIONS

On the day after the ruling, President Bush announced that he would establish a criterion of particular religious belief for judicial appointments, saying, “I believe that it points up the fact that we need common sense judges who understand that our rights were derived from God. Those are the kind of judges I intend to put on the bench.” The American Humanist Association responded (correctly!) with a press release, saying, “Bush’s public statement of intent to discriminate on religious grounds makes a mockery of the US Constitution. Article VI states ‘no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.’”

President Bush also said that “America is a nation that ... values our relationship with an Almighty. It’s a confirmation of the fact that we received our rights from God, as proclaimed in our Declaration of Independence.” (Nevermind that it is the Constitution, not the Declaration of Independence, that determines the laws of the land!)

Attorney General John Ashcroft said the federal government would appeal the ruling, saying, “The Justice Department will defend the ability of our nation’s children to pledge allegiance to the American flag.” (Note the carefully chosen words. He says “defend the ability” when he means “defend the government endorsement of religion.”)

Sen. Kit Bond, R-Mo., was one of

many lawmakers who immediately reacted in anger and shock to the ruling. “Our Founding Fathers must be spinning in their graves. This is the worst kind of political correctness run amok,” Bond said. “What’s next? Will the courts now strip ‘so help me God’ from the pledge taken by new presidents?”

(Of course, “political correctness” had nothing to do with the decision. The judges ruled according to the US Constitution and Constitutional Law. Also, there is NO requirement for a new president to say “so help me God” in the oath of office.)

Newsweek reported on June 28 that politicians “went to comical length to proclaim their godliness” by objecting to the decision. “Anti-judicial rhetoric could help GOP candidates in some races,” claimed Ralph Reed, a Republican strategist and Georgia state party chairman. “This is what motivates our base. In low-turnout mid-term elections, this will help.”

Letters-to-the-editor in newspapers indicated general disagreement with the decision. Arguments against the decision usually fell into one or more of the following categories:

1. The judges are “educated into imbecility” and have lost contact with reality. They should be replaced. (These letters indicate a basic lack of understanding of the Constitutional separation of church and state.)
2. The judges are trampling on the rights of many to protect the rights of a few. The rights of the many should prevail. After all, this is a democracy. (Nope, we live in a Republic, and the Constitution protects the rights of all.)
3. The judges’ ruling was to make the Pledge of Allegiance “politically correct.” We don’t need it to be “politically correct.” (The ruling had nothing to do with political correctness.)
4. Our money says “In God We Trust” so it should be OK to say “under God” in the pledge. (No. “In God We Trust” on the money is also unconstitutional.)
5. You cannot deny God or you’ll fry in hell. Therefore, “under God” must

stay in the pledge. (That’s a religious argument. The Government must follow its laws and cannot endorse religion.)

6. The Declaration of Independence says that our rights come from God. Therefore, “under God” should be in the pledge. (But our laws come from the Constitution, which says that the government should not endorse religion.)

7. We should force people to say “under God”. If they don’t like it, they should leave America. (Anarchy is a bit excessive, don’t you think?)

## ENDORSEMENTS

Many atheist/freethought groups issued press releases endorsing the decision. Here are a few excerpts...

Co-president Bobbie Kirkhart of the Atheist Alliance said in their press release, “Let us hope all Americans rally around this decision and return us to being ‘one nation, indivisible’ again. We are delighted to know that at least one court in this country has forbidden our children from being marginalized in the classroom, the place where diversity of thought should be most welcome.”

“They (critics of the ruling) just don’t get it,” said Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists. “This call is right on the money. And a lot of the practices which people are pointing to, like religious slogans on money or invoking a deity in court, need to be re-examined, too.”

“We were delighted with the judge’s sense. It was common sense given the previous finding that you don’t burden the captive audience of children with private religious beliefs,” said Anne Gaylor, president of the Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation.



**Get your new AFS T-shirt at the next meeting! We now have 2 styles to choose from!**

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# Statement of the Council for Secular Humanism regarding the Pledge of Allegiance Ruling

“No man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship.” (Thomas Jefferson)

(Amherst, NY) - June 27, 2002 - The Council for Secular Humanism welcomes the decision of the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which holds that the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in schools is an unconstitutional endorsement of religion by the government of the United States.

“Expressing fealty to a God should not be a condition of citizenship. Love of country does not necessarily correlate to a love of God,” said Ed Buckner, executive director of the Council for Secular Humanism. “While the attention of the nation is focused on the phrase ‘under God’ we should not lose sight of that other important phrase in the Pledge of Allegiance, ‘with liberty and justice for all,’ said Buckner. “In a country that prizes itself for protecting freedom, it cannot be that people are only free to agree with the majority.”

This ruling and the national debate it has prompted will serve as a history lesson for all citizens. The original

Pledge of Allegiance, which was crafted by a Baptist minister, was completely secular and contained no reference to a “God.” The phrase “under God” was added to the Pledge during the McCarthy era, a time to which we do not wish to see a return.

The original motto of the United States was the Latin phrase, “E pluribus unum,” which means, “Out of many, one.” And, Sen. Christopher Bond’s somewhat agitated expression of concern about preserving the oath of office for presidents belies the fact that the Constitution, at Article II, section 1, does NOT contain the phrase “so help me God” in the oath. In fact, the entire Constitution makes no reference to a supreme being.

While our current crop of political leaders rush to get photo ops of themselves on the Capitol steps, it might be instructive to return to the pronouncements of the true political giants who founded this country. Thomas Jefferson declared in the

Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom that, “no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship.” John Adams said, “Thirteen governments thus founded on the natural authority of the people alone, without pretence of miracle or mystery...”

The fact that a majority of Americans believe in God does not make it right to impose that belief on the minority of citizens who do not. It was not so very long ago in this country that a majority of citizens believed African Americans should not have the right to vote, the right to live in communities of their choosing, the right to a quality education.

As reports of death threats to the man who brought this case increase, presumably from “god-fearing Americans,” one cannot help but wonder what exactly is the benefit of a belief in a god for those people. As Edmund Burke said, “The tyranny of the multitude is a multiplied tyranny.”

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## Vouchers Destroy the Wall of Separation

By Marie Alena Castle, Co-President, Atheist Alliance International

The wall between state and church is down, now that taxpayers will be funding religious schools. Not that it ever amounted to much, with all the pass-throughs via tax exemptions, subsidies, accommodations, and statutes upholding every religious doctrine from abortion to divorce to Sunday closings to zygote research.

Now we have this intense emotional reaction to “under God” in the pledge being unconstitutional. The ruling won’t hold. People out there are acting for all the world like they are ready to kill and die for it. So much for the argument that God phrases and God talk in government affairs are just meaningless “civil religion.” They are not meaningless.

They mean exactly this: “If you don’t believe in the culture’s current god(s) you are not a true citizen. We may barely tolerate you but we don’t trust you.”

So we have politicians in both major parties saying we have freedom of religion but not freedom *from* religion. They’re right. Just ask an atheist. The Boy Scouts think we can’t be “the best type of citizen” without a god belief, so they reject us. The VFW thinks god beliefs are part of the definition of patriotism, no matter how many medals for heroism our atheist veterans earned, so they reject us. Clergy regularly hammer at us as evil, incapable of moral behavior and not fit to hold public office, so the

voters reject us.

But you don’t see atheists embroiled in pedophile cover-ups. We’re not the ones filling the prisons. You’ll never see us flying planes into towers, blowing up federal buildings or murdering abortion doctors.

The entire Cold War era had politicians ranting about “godless communism,” putting “under God” in the pledge and changing our national motto to “One Nation Under God” as a slap at atheist citizens. But atheists never ranted about “Christian fascism” or tried to change our motto to “No gods, no masters” as a slap at religionists. We wouldn’t do that. It wouldn’t be fair.

Then there’s our essentially defunct

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## Vouchers Destroy the Wall *(continued)*

First Amendment. President James Madison said: "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the endless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries." They *had* to have separation! The colonists were persecuting and hurting each other endlessly over religious differences. It took a constitutional amendment to stop them!

And people wonder if *atheists* can be trusted??!!

We atheists don't need a constitutional amendment to force us to behave rationally, nor do we need any of the thousands of gods, belief systems, scriptural interpretations or whatever else someone's vivid imagination can dream up to make us behave decently. Normal human compassion and common sense do it for

us.

Recent surveys show there are 24 million of us, mostly minding our own business. But we've heard "Christian nation" zealots vow that, as they consolidate their power in the Republican party, "every head shall bow and every knee shall bend" before their Jesus god. Not ours. Our heads don't bow and our knees don't bend. And never will.

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### *June 2002 AFS Board Meeting Minutes*

Present: Judy Thompson, Steve Yothment, Lew Southern, Pierce Mahony, Bill Burton, Joel Kollin  
Location: AFS Center  
Date/Time: June 23, 2002; 11:00 AM  
Minutes Taken By: Steve Yothment

The May Board Meeting minutes were approved unanimously.

The board noted that Dave Patterson and Tony King have missed two consecutive board meetings. (Tony indicated in an email to the board that he was having car trouble and probably would miss the meeting.) Judy agreed to ask Dave if he wants to continue as a board member. Bill agreed to talk to Tony.

Pierce agreed to take minutes at the next board meeting.

Steve agreed to update the Board Minutes file in the office.

Judy noted that Judy, Steve, Tony and Ram met on June 17 at South-Trust Bank to sign an account signature document. This means that Judy, Steve, Tony or Ram can now sign AFS checks.

Ram noted that AFS has approximately \$2500 in its account.

The board discussed raising the shipping charges for books and merchandise.

They decided to wait on the decision until Mirza can tell them what the actual shipping expenses are.

Bill noted that we are sold out of the Bible Bloopers book. He does not yet have information on what the expense would be to reprint the book.

Bill has sent several chapters of Ed Kagin's book back to him with edits. Ed has not responded back to Bill, yet. (Ed is no doubt busy with Camp Quest at this time of year.)

Steve agreed to send Mike Ledo's phone number to Bill so that he can call Mike on the status of the Bible Bloopers book and check to see if Mike has some extra copies for us to sell until the next printing.

Bill and Ram agreed to do an inventory of the AFS-published books that we have in stock.

Judy agreed to give Bill an errata list for Tales of the Rational.

Bill noted that he has not pursued fund-raising plans with Ried, yet. He will talk to Ried about it soon.

Pierce reported that we have received 13 dozen AFS T-shirts at a cost of \$880. After some discussion, the board decided that the selling price for all AFS T-shirts

will be \$12. All other T-shirts will sell for \$18 each.

Steve agreed to pick up the July speaker (Ross Sloan) at PDK Airport on the day of the meeting. Judy will bring a video camera to the meeting to videotape Ross's presentation. Steve will remind Judy a few days before the meeting to bring the camera.

Steve agreed to meet with the Fire Inspector to inspect the fire extinguishers at the AFS Center. Bill gave Steve the Fire Inspector's card (with name and phone number) which indicated that the inspection is now due.

After some discussion, the board agreed to have a fund-raising dinner on Thursday, August 22, 2002, at Panahar Restaurant. (This has since been changed to Saturday, August 24.) The charge for this dinner will be \$20 in advance and \$25 at the door.

The board decided to not have a board meeting in July.

The board agreed that if a board member's email does not work, he/she should contact another board member to learn about current board issues.

The meeting ended at 12:30.

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In 1943, during our war against Hitler, the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision concerning the Pledge of Allegiance that created fierce controversy around the country — just like last week's Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruling.

The West Virginia Board of Education had expelled children of Jehovah's Witnesses for refusing to salute the flag and stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. These deviants were to be sent to reformatories for criminally minded juveniles, and their parents were threatened with prosecutions for causing juvenile delinquency.

The majority of the Court, in a decision written by Judge Robert Jackson, defined the very essence of Americanism as they rebuked the West Virginia Board of Education and sent those kids back to school:

"If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox politics, nationalism, religion, or any other matters of opinion, or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein."

— From Nat Hentoff, in his June 28 article "The Government Cannot Endorse Any or All Religions" at VillageVoice.com.

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# Letters to the Editor from AFS members

Bill Jager's letter (below left) was in the *Anchorage Daily News* on July 1.  
(Bill lives in Douglasville, GA, but also has a summer home in Anchorage, Alaska.)

Bill's letter (below right) was in the *Douglas County Sentinel* on July 3.

## Time for public school educators to stop coercing kids through the pledge

A federal appeals court in California ruled correctly that the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance are unconstitutional. Now is the time for educators in public schools to stop coercing students to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance as long as "under God" remains part of the pledge. It is not a civic duty for any government official to promote any god or gods or even no god. Religion is a personal matter between the individual and whatever the individual believes. The government must remain neutral on matters of religion. God is the quintessence of any religious belief, and promoting religion is also against state and federal law.

Congress (our beloved politicians) is forbidden under the First Amendment to make any laws regarding the establishment of religion.

*Bill Jager  
Anchorage, AK*

## Maintain Separation of Church and State

Bill Fordham is still confused on why it is necessary for a religious free country to maintain a separation between religion and government. (See "The mysterious 'wall,'" *Douglas County Sentinel*, 6 June 2002.)

Ever since 'under God' was added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954, children recited the Pledge daily during the school year and were indoctrinated by the government to believe in God. After all the years of being told to believe in God by the government, is it any wonder why there is so much nationalistic hysteria when a Federal Appeals Court in California ruled correctly, that the words 'under God,' in the Pledge of Allegiance is unconstitutional. It is not the governments business to endorse the idea of God, or no God. The government must remain neutral on religious matters. The 'wall' works both ways.

Michael Newdow sued the government to remove 'under God' from the Pledge of Allegiance and has already begun receiving death threats from Christian Fundamentalists who demand that the government promote their God. It appears that there isn't much difference between the Christian Fundamentalist and the Taliban (Islamic Fundamentalists).

*Bill Jager  
Douglasville, GA*

Tony King's letter (below) was printed in the *Toccoa Record* on July 2.

## Show Respect for Nonbelievers

The recent controversial ruling on the constitutionality of the Pledge of Allegiance not only has upset a lot of religionists, it also has brought the issue of the separation of religion from government to the forefront.

Yes, it is upsetting, yes it is controversial, and yes my opinion on the subject is unpopular. But facts matter more than crass emotionalism. The fact is, no matter how many people wish to ignore, push aside, wish it or legislate it away, or say that the Founding Fathers did not really mean it, that First Amendment to our U.S. Constitution clearly states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Very clear and simple. Yet time and again most Americans have never really understood, let alone actually read it!

Thomas Jefferson stated in his Virginia Bill for Religious Freedom, Sec. 1, that "...our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions..." and in Sec. 2, "...that no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burdened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief." Furthermore, in a reply to the Danbury Baptists, Jefferson stated "the legislative powers of the government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should

'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' thus building a wall of separation between church and State." Very perfectly clear.

So what are we freethinking Americans asking? We are not asking you religionists to close down your churches or stop praying among yourselves or quit reading your Bibles. That would be a First Amendment violation. What we ARE asking is that you show RESPECT for your fellow Americans who do not share your faith! For the past 100 years or more religionist America has looked down upon, reviled, and discriminated against the non-religious. And for the past 50 years bigotry and hatred has been legalized in the form of religious mottos, songs and slogans in our official governmental functions and documentation, violating the First Amendment.

The United States IS NOT a theocracy. The American government is not one of the Christians, by the Christians, and for the Christians, but as Lincoln said, a government "of the people, by the people, for the people." In practice that has been made into a lie. The American faithful and leadership have spit upon our Constitution. The time has come to practice more respect towards both the Constitution and Americans who are of a minority religion or no religion whatsoever.

So for those of us who prefer the pre-1954 Pledge, I encourage that we enunciate it as it was written before the change.

*William A. King  
Toccoa, GA*

"It is darkly ironic that the McCarthy-era Congress chose to put the words 'under God' between 'One nation' and 'indivisible,' because it is exactly this kind of populist religious rhetoric that leads to divisions. What unites this nations' citizens is a civic bond devoted to the principles of liberty and equality embodied in the Constitution, not religious belief - of which there is a great diversity, a source of many disputes." - George Felis of Athens, GA, in a letter to Senator Cleland

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# Letters to the Editor from AFS members

Ried Crowe's letter (below left) was in the *Marietta Daily Journal* on June 6.

Ried's letter (below right) was in the *Anniston Star* on June 12.

## Rebuttal to Rev. Price's Letter

In Rev. Nelson Price's May 19th letter ("Moral laws are relevant, not relative"), he makes many broad and unfounded claims that pain me to see going without rebuttal.

Price's major themes are that society's morals are static and based upon the teachings of the Bible. He further seems to suggest that people somehow should not be trusted to influence society's moral and ethical codes.

What a load of malarkey!

A few simple counterexamples quickly dispel these ridiculous ideas: Our much beloved secular and capitalistic society clearly violates the spirit of the Ten Commandments by ensuring the Americans do not have to honor Price's god above all others or that they must resist the temptation to covet the belongings of others. Furthermore, our society's accepted moral practices have changed drastically only over the short time span of the last two hundred years as legalized slavery, disenfranchisement of women, and public corporal punishment have all gone the way of the dinosaur.

Thus, it is obvious to all but the most myopic of religious holy rollers that morals are as malleable as silly putty and only narrowly adhere to any religious dogma, and that humanity can function just fine under self-created moral standards.

I think that if Rev. Price would like to live his life according to the teachings of his preferred religion, then more power to him. However, I am afraid that he smacks of those fundamentalist zealots that seek to impose their dogmatic views on the rest of us by trying to have the Decalogue displayed on public property or mandatory prayer reinstated for all public school children.

I am very afraid of tyrants with attitudes consistent with those of Rev. Price's letter.

*Ried Crowe  
Powder Springs, GA*

## Majority Rules

This just in: Dean Young (candidate for Secretary of State) now supports legalized abortion and thinks that Al Gore should be president!

How do I know this, given that I have not actually heard these sentiments directly from the confused Executive Director of the Alabama Christian Family Association? I know this because he has publicly insinuated that a "majority rules" form of government should now be implemented in America (regardless of the ways that the Constitution forbids this).

In his May 15th letter ("Missed opportunity"), Young states that the Alabama Legislature should have passed the Ten Commandments amendment because "polls show between 80 percent and 90 percent of Alabamians wanted (it)." This is evidence that Young feels that if a majority of the populace desire something (however unconstitutional), then it ought to become law. Thus, it can be inferred that he also sides with the majority of Americans that voted for Al Gore over George W. Bush, and the majority that support legalized abortion.

What Bible thumping tyrants of Young's ilk fail to understand is that their predatory religious advances on the rest of society are not constitutional. Thus, conscientious legislators are legally bound to veto them. Our government cannot force its citizenry to observe Young's religious practices by displaying his version of the Decalogue.

*Ried Crowe  
Powder Springs, GA*

Ried's letter (below) was in the *Marietta Daily Journal* on June 30.

## Pledge of Allegiance Is Unconstitutional

As a proud resident of Powder Springs, please allow me to voice my opinion on the recent ruling regarding the constitutionality of the Pledge of Allegiance.

In short, I completely agree with the circuit court's opinion that the "under God" phraseology of the Pledge is unconstitutional. Here are just two of my reasons:

1. In deference to what many of our more religious citizenry have been fond of touting lately, America is not a "Christian nation" or a "godly nation," but rather it is a constitutional democracy that is based in large part upon such fundamental guaranteed liberties as freedom of religion (per the First Amendment). Thus, our government simply does not have the right to impose any particular brand of religion (including monotheism) on its populace.
2. Personally, I respect the religious (or nonreligious) views of everybody, and cannot bear to see something as seemingly harmless as

the Pledge being used as a means of religious division or social ostracism. The Pledge should be something that EVERY American should feel comfortable reciting, not just those that happen to agree with its religious verbiage.

I cannot conclude this letter without a comment about the childish behavior of our President, our congress, and certain other individuals in the wake of the decision. Terms such as "stupid" have flown freely from the lips of holier-than-thou zealots such as George Bush, Trent Lott, and Jerry Falwell. Can't these self-serving theocrats argue the actual issues of this ruling rather than simply bully the justices that prudently handed down a decision in as proper a fashion as was possible?

*Ried Crowe  
Powder Springs, GA*

"Lately, everyone is wondering how much advance information about the 9/11 terrorist attacks was available to George W. Bush. This serves as a good reminder that the total number of psychics, mediums, palm and tea-leaf readers, tarot interpreters, spiritualists, fortune tellers, numerologists, and astrologers who foresaw the attacks is precisely zero. Coincidentally, this is the same number of lives saved by the no doubt abundant prayers for deliverance offered up by the passengers and crew members of the hijacked airliners." - Richard Russell, AAI Secretary, in a letter to the *Capital Times*



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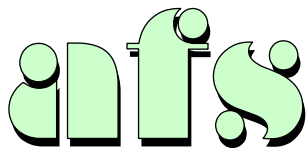
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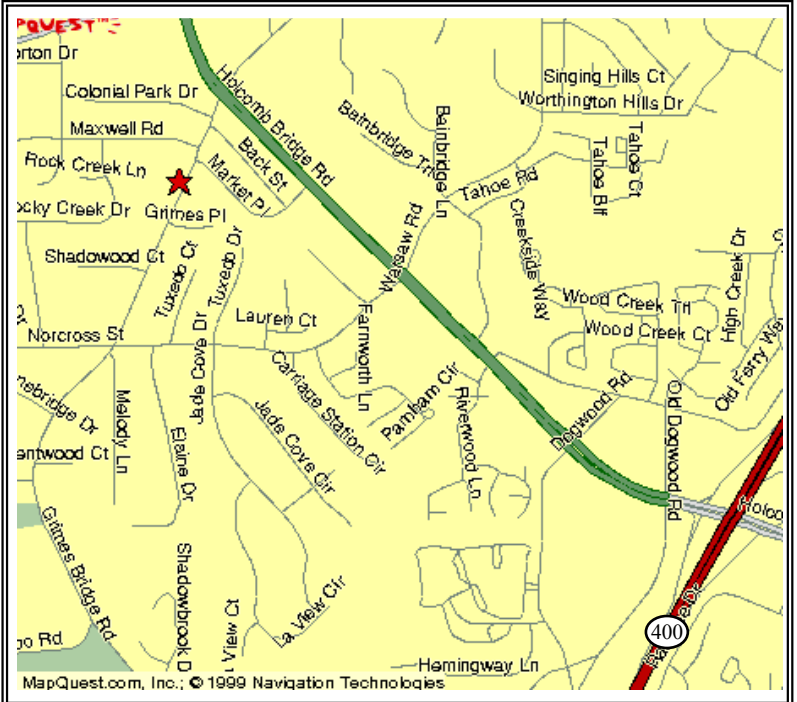
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**This Month's Speaker:  
Ross Sloan**



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