

Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 8 Number 10 • October 2002

Our October Meeting

Our October 13 AFS meeting will include a multimedia presentation by Clark Adams, Public Relations Director of the Internet Infidels. (See www.infidels.org.) His speech is titled "Atheism and Religious Satire in Popular Media."

Clark Adams is a 32 year-old freethought activist living in Las Vegas, Nevada. In addition to his work with Internet Infidels, he is the moderator for the Usenet newsgroup alt.atheism.moderated and Membership Chair of the Humanist Association of Las Vegas and Southern Nevada.

The meeting will be at 1:00 at the **AFS Center**, Suite 500, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, in Roswell, GA. To get there from Atlanta, take I-400 north 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 Rd., which is on the right.

Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AFS Center at 12:30 on Sunday, October 27.

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 have their next meeting at 12:30 PM on November 3 at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see www.fellowshipofreason.com.

Email Version of AFNews

The Atlanta Freethought News is now available by email in Adobe Acrobat® format. Please consider receiving your newsletter this way; it will save AFS about \$1.00 per newsletter, and the emailed version looks exactly the same, except that it's in color (which we think looks better)!

To receive AFNews by email, request this issue in an e-mail to SteveYoth@aol.com. If there is any problem, just let Steve know and he can return you to the paper mailing list.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Oct 12: AFS Hike, Chattahoochee River Rec. Area, 11:00.
Oct 13: AFS General Meeting at AFS Center, 1:00 PM.
Oct 18: AFS Social, Athens Pizza House, 7:00 PM.
Oct 20: AFS Discussion Group at AFS Center, 4:00 PM.

AFS Activities

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet on Sunday, October 20, from 4 to 6 PM at the AFS Center.

The **AFS Hike** will be on Saturday, October 12, at 11:00 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 at 770-509-8272.

The next **AFS Social** will be at Athens Pizza House, 1341 Clairmont Road, on Friday, October 18, at 7:00 PM. (It's on Clairmont Road near North Decatur Road 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.

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

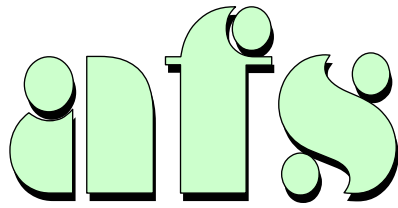
The Tuesday Lunch Bunch

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.

Elections

The AFS bylaws require nominations for officers and 3 board members at the October meeting. (Elections will be in December.) Please think about who you would like to nominate at the October meeting. As a review, here are the current officers and board members:

Judy Thompson, President (will run again)
Steve Yothment, VP, Ext. Comm. (will run again)
Tony King, VP, Int. Comm. (will run again)
Bill Burton, Treasurer (will run)
Joel Kollin, Board Member (will continue 2-year term)
Lew Southern, Board Member (will continue 2-year term)
Kate Miller, Board Member (will continue 2-year term)
Pierce Mahony, Board Member (2-year term expiring)
Open, Board Member (2-year term expiring)
Open, Board Member (2-year term expiring)



**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.

Oct 13: Clark Adams, Public Relations Director for The Internet Infidels, will speak on "Atheism and Religious Satire in Popular Media". (cadams@infidels.org)

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

Dec 8: Sharon Reynolds will speak on the pros and cons of alternative medicine and related legislative issues.

Jan 12: TBD

To join the AFS Forum e-mail list, send a blank message to AFSforum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. To join the AFS Announcements list, send a blank email to afs-announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. To join the Georgia Freethinkers Letter Writing Cooperative, send a blank email to flwc-ga-subscribe@yahoogroups.com.

You can unsubscribe by sending an email to xxxx-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.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**

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Steve Yothment

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The Atlanta Freethought News

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For membership and subscription
information, contact AFS at:

1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite
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Membership in AFS is \$25 / year for individuals, \$35 for households, and \$10 for students/low income/under 21. Sustaining members (individual) \$100 and sustaining members (households) \$125.

Subscriptions alone are \$20 for 12 issues, \$25 to Canada/Mexico, \$30 for other addresses. Please make checks and money orders payable to Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc.

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Don't Teach Religion in Public School Science Classes

By Barry Lynn, Executive Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State

This essay by Barry Lynn appeared in many newspapers around September 24. It is reprinted here by permission.

Cobb County, GA, has become the focus of national attention as its school board considers a policy to teach "disputed views of academic subjects," including human origins. Supporters of the proposal have conceded the policy would allow biology classes to introduce creationism into the curriculum.

The Cobb County controversy is not an isolated incident. Similar proposals to introduce religious concepts about human origins and undermine instruction about evolution have appeared in many other states and communities over the past few years. It's discouraging that at the dawn of the 21st century, during a time of unparalleled scientific discovery, we are still fighting this ancient battle.

We do our children one major disservice by pretending there are controversies in science when in fact there are not. Evolution is controversial only among certain fundamentalist Christians who say it conflicts with their interpretation of the Book of Genesis. As far as the mainstream scientific community is concerned, the issue is settled: Evolution happens and is a cornerstone of modern science.

In public colleges and universities across the land, evolution is taught without controversy. Public schools in European and Asian nations teach evolution unabashedly, without pretending there is an equally valid view called "creation science." Only in

America, where a well-organized, well-funded bloc of fundamentalists wields political power, is this even an issue. This is strong evidence that the battles over evolution spring from political pressures, not legitimate disagreements in the scientific community.

Religious Right activists have been unable to ban the teaching of evolution outright or get creationism taught alongside evolution in public schools. The U.S. Supreme Court slammed the door on those gambits in 1968 and 1987, respectively. Desperate Religious Right activists shifted gears and are now trying to undermine the teaching of evolution by any means possible.

They've demanded disclaimers in textbooks, insisted that schools teach "evidence against evolution" and, in one notorious case from Kentucky, actually glued together the pages of a science book that dared to mention evolution. Advocates of creationism also keep changing its name. Nowadays, they are calling it "intelligent design." (Of course, the God of Genesis is the "intelligent designer.")

No matter what proponents of creationism call it, the bottom line remains the same: Fundamentalist groups want public schools to teach that the first few chapters of the Book of Genesis are a science text. Their "creationism" is little more than a dressed-up Sunday School lesson. All religions and cultures have creation stories, but

creationists want only the Christian fundamentalist version taught as science.

The problem with this should be obvious. Tailoring state educational curricula to appease one segment of Christianity violates the separation of church and state. Under our Constitution, religious groups do not have the power to censor ideas they do not like or insist that their particular religious beliefs be taught as fact in public schools.

As a Christian minister, I realize that people interpret the Christian Bible in different ways. The fundamentalist interpretation of Genesis is a minority perspective among Christians, most of whom long ago reconciled their religious beliefs with modern science. For example, Pope John Paul II has stated that evolution is a well-grounded scientific theory that need not clash with religious faith. It would be wrong to adopt one view of scripture and force it on our public school science classes.

Americans face a choice: We can teach our children the best science possible and watch them become leaders in the world of tomorrow, or we can deny them this knowledge and leave them woefully unprepared for college and the increasingly technological world beyond that.

The choice is ours to make, and we must take our next step with utmost care. The future of America's schoolchildren is riding on it.



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The First Freethought Day

By Tim Gorski, Pastoral Director of the North Texas Church of Freethought

Throughout the spring and summer 310 years ago, a great evil was at work in Salem, Massachusetts. It was not witchcraft, though, as many then believed. It was the evil of belief in witchcraft, the evil of irrationalism and of superstition.

In the harsh winter into which 1692 opened, it was too cold and snowy to do much else but sit inside and play at incantations and foretelling of the future. That's what two young girls in the household of the Reverend Samuel Parris did to amuse themselves. And when the two girls began "acting strangely," they were examined by a doctor, and by ministers and magistrates. The experts concluded that the girls were bewitched.

Apparently not having much else to do either, the good people of Salem, Massachusetts became concerned ... Hearings into the matter began on March 1st. And less than three months later, 100 people were in prison awaiting trial. The Governor of the colony, one Sir William Phips, appointed a seven member panel to try the accused, who were not allowed counsel. Although initially uncomfortable with "spectral evidence," voices and visions that only the witnesses could perceive, the Christian ministers of the community reassured the authorities that such testimony could be accepted with "exquisite caution."

By September 22nd the judges had tried and convicted 27 people. Nineteen were hanged. Giles Corey was pressed to death by stones in an effort to get him to confess. His last words were: "more weight!" Another 50 or so people had confessed to witchcraft, 100 were in prison waiting to be tried, and another 200 stood potentially accused.

With the jails overflowing and no end to the frenzy in sight, Cotton Mather delivered a sermon in which he argued against the mass convictions. This emboldened some of the other clergy to begin questioning the reliability of "spectral evidence." And with the public support he needed — the Governor was a politician, after all — William Phips issued an edict on October 12th, 1692 barring the admissibility of such evidence from the courts. Whereupon the basis for the charges against all the accused became immaterial as well, and the infamous Salem witch trials came to an abrupt end.

It is that edict of October 12th, 1692 that is the basis of Freethought Day, October 12th.

Some atheists and humanists object to observing the anniversary of the Phips Edict. They say that all the players in that ugly chapter of American history were mired in religious superstition. And so they were.

That's the beauty of the thing, really. Here were mobs of rabid fundamentalists, more strictly orthodox by far than all but a very few of 20th Century Christians, who had gotten in totally over their heads. Terrible things were happening, and it looked as if the worst was yet to come. And so they did the only thing they could do. With the encouragement of the local clergy, Governor Phips banned "spectral evidence" from the courts.

But was the edict an expression of some recognition that, in fact, there are no witches, no demons, no evil spells and the like? No. Governor Phips, with the support of other political and religious leaders of the day, took this step because they had to.

At some level, people simply have to act rationally. One has to open

doors before walking through doorways. One has to turn the key in the ignition before driving in an automobile. No amount of faith and prayer can allow anyone to do otherwise. And despite all the rhetorical flourishes of the superstitious believers, that's the way it's always been and always will be.

This is also the whole essence of rational, practical law: to hold people to a standard of dealing with one another that's based on reason. This is the basis of every shall and shalt not that there is, not some divine command of "do it or else."

That's the beauty of honoring the Phips Edict: it's a forceful example of the dangers of superstition and the necessity of rational thought to a world that is fit for human beings to live in. Instead of a celebration of what some "great man" — or woman — said or did, a man or woman who will necessarily be imperfect in some way, just as we all are and as everything is, Freethought Day is a celebration of progress, of choosing the better over the worse. Most importantly, it's a celebration of what we want our fellow humans who happen to be believers to do: to set aside their superstitions in their dealing with others in favor of reason.

Finally, any true holiday should be more than paying homage to a person, a scientific discovery, or even an ideal. It should be a day that carries a message. And the message should be one that exhorts us to do and to be better. Freethought Day does this, because it admonishes us to stop the petty witch-hunts of our everyday lives, by no more complicated an expedient than being reasonable.

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"There is something feeble and a little contemptible about a man who cannot face the perils of life without the help of comfortable myths." — Bertrand Russell in *Human Society in Ethics and Politics*

"What if we chose the wrong religion? We're just making God madder and madder every Sunday." — Homer Simpson

"I haven't rejected god. I've never met him." — Trevor Hick on alt.atheism

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GEORGIA SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVES PLAN TO TEACH "DISPUTED VIEWS" IN PUBLIC SCHOOL SCIENCE CLASSES

The Cobb County school board approved a controversial policy on September 26 that will allow teachers to discuss evolution "along with disputed views" on the origin of man.

The policy appears to be a thinly veiled effort to advance religion in public schools by advancing creationism or by discounting evolution.

The policy was under review for 30 days up to the September 26 board meeting. In that time, over 100 university professors from across Georgia contacted board members to oppose the policy. The National Academy of Sciences, the nation's most respected institution of scientific research, chartered by Congress to advise the federal government of scientific matters, also urged the board to reject the proposal.

More than 150 parents squeezed into the board meeting room in Marietta and others stood outside and listened. After the board's unanimous vote, parents who favored the new policy erupted in applause, some in a standing ovation.

The passionate debate about what students should be taught about evolution and whether alternative views belonged more properly in a religion class attracted national attention.

To supposedly "clarify" the policy, the school board inserted a sentence that says the purpose is to "encourage critical thinking among students while ensuring neutrality toward religion."

In a prepared statement read before the vote, board Chairman Curt Johnston said, "We seem to have been caught in the middle of a dispute between various parties who apparently want to use our curriculum to promote their own views... We expect teachers to continue to teach the theory of evolution. We do not expect teachers to teach creationism... Religion has no place in science instruction. But science instruction need not

offend those who hold religious beliefs of whatever type."

However, those opposed to the new policy vowed to continue their fight. Jeffrey Selman, an east Cobb parent who has sued the school district over disclaimers on evolution inserted into science books, said defiantly, "I'll see you in court."

"Their intention is to pander to the population, and that's not their job," Selman said of the board's action. "They've left a huge loophole in this thing. Who is going to determine what is brought into those science classes?"

Americans United For Separation of Church and State was very concerned about the new policy. "This policy is clearly intended to allow teachers to circumvent the law and promote religion in science classes," said Barry Lynn, AU's executive director. "Sunday School lessons masquerading as science have no place in public school classrooms. Cobb County board members have made the wrong call."

"Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident," Lynn continued. "From coast to coast, Religious Right activists have launched a crusade to undermine school neutrality on religion. These fights do nothing but distract attention from the goal of providing students the best education possible."

Americans United's Legal Department contacted Cobb County officials about the policy and explained that federal courts have consistently ruled that public schools cannot engage in religious indoctrination. However, it appears that Board members were not persuaded by scientists or legal experts and instead succumbed to political pressure from groups such as local affiliates of the Christian Coalition and the American Family Association (AFA), both of which lobbied aggressively on behalf of the anti-evolution proposal.

In fact, an "action alert" sent by the AFA this past week boldly acknow-

ledged the religious motivation behind the Cobb County proposal. The alert noted that the policy "would allow for scientific classroom discussion on creation as described in the Biblical account of the book of Genesis."

AU's Lynn said the new policy is part of an effort to undermine quality science, religious liberty and religious neutrality in public schools.

"To protect the religious liberty of a diverse student population, public schools are required by law to remain neutral on matters of faith," Lynn said. "This policy is a religiously motivated attack on the science curriculum, suggesting a scientific controversy exists where it does not."

"For everyone's benefit, the public schools should stick to the three Rs -- reading, writing and 'rithmetic -- and leave religious lessons to parents and religious leaders," concluded Lynn.

[Facts in this article are from a Sept 27 AJC article by Mia Taylor and a Sept 27 Americans United press release.]

MONTGOMERY EVENTS - OCTOBER 15

October 15 will be a very busy day for freethinkers in Montgomery, AL. AFS member Larry Darby, who is also the Alabama state coordinator for American Atheists, has scheduled several major events.

The first event is a **Breakfast with Dr. Michael Newdow** at 7:00 AM. It will occur in the Second Floor Banquet Room at 231 Montgomery Street in Montgomery.

(Dr. Newdow was the plaintiff in the famous Pledge of Allegiance court case in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. Dr. Newdow now also has a lawsuit filed against the US Congress concerning the legality of Senate chaplains.)

At the breakfast, Larry will also talk about his new venture, the **Atheist Law Center, Inc.**, which was established on September 11, 2002. Larry's goal is for Atheists to take their legal concerns to the ALC rather

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than the ACLU or AU. The Atheist Law Center is not affiliated with American Atheists or any other organization. The ALC is a non-profit corporation governed by a board of directors who live in several states across the nation.

After the breakfast, people are invited to walk over to the Federal courthouse, which is only a short distance away. The trial of Chief Justice Roy Moore is set to begin at 10:00 AM. At 8:15 AM, Larry will lead a demonstration in support of our First Amendment rights and in protest against Roy Moore. At about 9:15, protesters are invited to put away their signs and go inside for the opening of the Roy Moore trial.

Larry says that October 15 will be an important day in the history of freethought and atheism in the Heart of Dixie! Check www.atheists.org/al for updates and details on these events.

TV PREACHER PAT ROBERTSON GETS "FAITH-BASED" GRANT

Giving TV preacher Pat Robertson and other religious leaders control over the distribution of public funds through the Bush "faith-based" initiative violates the Constitution, according to Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The Department of Health and Human Services announced on October 3 that Robertson's Operation Blessing and 20 other charities – many of them religious – will be given demonstration grants through the so-called Compassion Capital Fund. Robertson's organization and the other "intermediaries" will in turn distribute the public money to religious and community groups of their choice to provide social services.

"Giving religious groups control over public funds is a blatant violation of the Constitution," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director. "Under the First Amendment, religious ministries shouldn't become an arm of the government."

Lynn said the grant to Robertson illustrates one of the problems with the faith-based initiative.

"Robertson is one of the chief purveyors of religious bigotry in America," said AU's Lynn. "To reward his outfit with government funding is an insult to every American taxpayer.

"Robertson was one of the earliest critics of the 'faith-based' scheme," Lynn continued, "but I guess 30 pieces of silver was enough to change his mind."

Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition and head of the Christian Broadcasting Network, was a harsh critic of the Bush "faith-based" initiative when it was first announced in January 2001, but in recent months his criticism of the plan has all but disappeared.

The transformation has been dramatic. On Feb. 20, 2001, the Virginia Beach-based preacher told his "700 Club" television audience that the Bush plan "could be a real Pandora's box."

Robertson also expressed concern that religious minorities such as the Rev. Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, the Church of Scientology and the Hare Krishnas might get public funding through the initiative.

Two weeks later, Robertson told his viewers that religious groups would become addicted to government funding. "They'll begin to be nurtured, if I can use that term, on federal money, and then they can't get off of it," he said. "It'll be like a narcotic; they can't then free themselves later on."

Robertson's new role as a partner with the Bush administration is startling, given his vitriolic attacks on political opponents and religious minorities, and his questionable financial dealings.

Robertson's Operation Blessing, a \$66-million-a-year agency, has a controversial history. According to news media reports, investigators with Virginia's Office of Consumer Affairs wanted to prosecute Robertson in 1999 for making deceptive appeals

about his charity but were overruled by the attorney general's office. Lawyers in the attorney general's office agreed Robertson had made inaccurate statements but decided against prosecution.

The controversy over Operation Blessing stretches back to 1994 when Robertson used his "700 Club" daily cable television program to raise funds for the charity. Robertson told viewers Operation Blessing was using cargo planes to aid refugees from Rwanda who had fled into the neighboring nation of Zaire (now known as Congo) to escape a violent civil war.

In fact, Robertson was using the planes to haul mining equipment in and out of Zaire for African Development Corporation (ADC), his for-profit diamond-mining company. Robertson later said the planes had proved impractical for relief work and insisted he had reimbursed the charity for ADC's use of them.

The Virginian-Pilot newspaper noted that state officials criticized the charity for sloppy bookkeeping and for mixing non-profit and for-profit activities. It also pointed out that Robertson reimbursed Operation Blessing for ADC's use of its airplanes in two stages. Investigators determined that ADC owed Operation Blessing \$468,773. Robertson ultimately gave the group \$572,597, but \$400,000 of that came two months after the official investigation began.

[This article is from an October 3 Americans United press release.]

CHURCH ELECTIONEERING BILL REJECTED IN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

A bill to allow tax-exempt houses of worship to intervene in partisan political campaigns was rejected on October 2 in the House of Representatives.

The final vote was 239-178 against the legislation. Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a leading opponent of the legislation, praised the action.

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"The House did the right thing by rejecting this reckless scheme," said Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "This bill may have been the Religious Right's dream, but it was a nightmare for anyone concerned with the integrity of houses of worship and the political process."

Rep. Walter B. Jones' "Houses of Worship Political Speech Protection Act" (H.R. 2357) was drafted by attorneys with TV preacher Pat Robertson's American Center for Law and Justice and was being aggressively pushed by numerous Religious Right organizations. The measure sought to change federal tax law to allow houses of worship to use their personnel and other resources to endorse or oppose candidates for public office.

Federal tax law currently prohibits non-profit groups, including houses of worship, from intervening in partisan campaigns if they are tax exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the tax code. H.R. 2357 would have lifted that regulation — but only for houses of worship.

"Most Americans do not want their churches turned into smoke-filled rooms where political deals are cut and partisan politics replaces worship," AU's Lynn said. "When people put their money in the collection plate, they don't expect it to be used for candidates' campaign literature and attack ads."

Jones and other congressional sponsors had argued that the bill was necessary to protect the right of religious leaders to speak out on moral

issues. AU's Lynn called this argument "nonsense."

"Religious leaders are already free to expose moral evils, propose ethical solutions and hold our leaders to the highest standards," Lynn said. "The only thing that tax law prohibits is intervention by tax-exempt groups in political campaigns."

The House rejected the legislation despite intense lobbying efforts by the Religious Right. Some of the movement's largest groups and most prominent leaders endorsed the bill, including the Christian Coalition, the American Family Association, Concerned Women for America, the Family Research Council, James Dobson of Focus on the Family and TV preachers Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. The Southern Baptist Convention, a denomination closely aligned with the Religious Right, also endorsed the measure.

Religious Right groups were eager to get rid of the federal tax law provision so they could legally use churches as cogs in a political machine.

Nevertheless, religious leaders and organizations from across the theological spectrum announced opposition to H.R. 2357. The bill was also opposed by leading civil rights organizations including the NAACP and the National Congress of Black Churches.

[From an October 2 AU press release.]

Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Larry Darby's letter (below) was in the Montgomery Advertiser on September 11.

Attacks showed perils of theism

The faith-based terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 awakened many citizens to the fact that theism is harmful to humankind. That theism inspires bad acts, as it has done for centuries, has been injected into the American stream of consciousness, at least for a generation. That the God of theism has blessed America has been exposed as just another myth propagated by the priestcraft.

In the dark days of the 1950s, sometimes referred to as the McCarthy era, Congress and President Eisenhower officially merged government and religion by putting "under God" into the loyalty oath and by forcing the religious motto "In God We Trust" onto all Americans, discarding that truly genuine American motto, *E pluribus unum*.

In the aftermath of Sept. 11, many national leaders such as Bush, Cheney, Ashcroft and Lieberman have acted in ways that are best described as attacks against our U.S. Constitution and the American way of life. Surely individual liberties are under the dark cloud of theistic oppression, not unlike that of the pre-Constitution American colonies.

Citizens, let us work to remove all vestiges of ceremonial deism from our government and redirect America to a course of enlightenment. When this is done, the McCarthy Era or the American Dark Age will be closed.

And instead of being hated by many of our global neighbors, America might become of beacon of enlightenment — in the spirit of those American patriots who fought a war to break away from the tyranny of a government of divine right of kings.

*Larry Darby
Montgomery*

GODLESS AMERICANS MARCH SPEAKERS

The Godless Americans March, scheduled for November 2 in Washington, DC, now has a long list of speakers for the event. Some of the speakers who AFS members may know include the following:

- Ed Buckner, Executive Director, Council for Secular Humanism (and former AFS President)
- Edwin Kagin, Founder, Camp Quest
- Bobbie Kirkhart, President, Atheist Alliance
- Michael Newdow, attorney who challenged the Pledge of Allegiance
- Eddie Tabash, attorney for AU, Council for Secular Humanism

September 2002 AFS Board Meeting Minutes

Present: Judy Thompson (presiding), Joel Kollin (minutes), Steve Yothment, Ram Avtar, Bill Burton, Pierce Mahony, Lew Southern, Tony King, Kate Miller.

Location: AFS Center

Date/Time: Sept 22, 2002, 11:00 AM

Treasurer's Report (Ram Avtar, Judy Thompson)

Due to Ram Avtar's need to resign from the Board, a new AFS Treasurer was sought to fill his vacant position. (The AFS Bylaws read: "The president shall fill vacancies on the board by appointment with the board's approval.") Bill Burton agreed to take the position, with the understanding that he would get assistance with book orders from other AFS members. Kate Miller and Joel Kollin volunteered to help with the book orders and other duties of the Treasurer. Ram agreed to assist Bill with the Treasurer's duties until he could familiarize himself with that function. It was agreed that Bill Burton's name was to be added as a signatory on the AFS South-Trust corporate account. The Treasurer's report was approved unanimously by the Board.

Board Elections (Judy Thompson)

Kate Miller (a long-time member of AFS) was approved unanimously as a new member of the AFS Board to fill one of the vacant positions. With the resignations of Ram Avtar and Dave Patterson, and the vacancy Pierce Mahony will be leaving when his term expires; there will be three vacant positions on the AFS Board. Elections to fill the Board positions will be held, as is the rule, in December. In conformity with the bylaws, ballots must be mailed out one month in advance. Joel Kollin agreed to manage the election and to mail out the ballots by the first of November following announcement of the election. Steve Yothment said he would call for nominations at the October meeting. Election results will be announced at the December AFS meeting. Agreement to proceed with the elections as outlined was approved unanimously by the Board.

Fundraising Dinner (Lew Southern)

Lew Southern reported that the August Fundraising Dinner was a great success, with a large showing and several very generous contributions by attendees and also non-attendees. After expenses, AFS raised \$1,025.00 from ticket sales and contributions. Lew suggested that AFS hold a holiday dinner during the winter holiday season at the same venue, namely the Panahar Restaurant. The general consensus was that a January date for the dinner would be preferable, since many members would be out of town in December. The report on the August Fundraising Dinner and plans for a January dinner were approved unanimously by the Board.

Restaurant Book (Judy Thompson)

By executive decision, it was decided that a trial stock of eleven (11) restaurant books containing coupons were to be purchased by AFS at \$8.00 each for a sale price of \$15.00 each to offer to AFS members and visitors. If the books prove popular, more books could be purchased and offered along with other table sales. The books met with general approval of the Board members.

Tee-shirts (Pierce Mahony)

Joel inquired about tee-shirt sales. Pierce said that he would provide a report to the Board at the next meeting regarding tee-shirt sales but added that sales of tee-shirts had been slow, so far. It was agreed that AFS would promote its tee-shirts in the newsletter and at the next AFS general meeting.

Next Board Meeting (Judy Thompson)

Judy announced that she would be out of town during the latter half of October. Therefore, she proposed that there be no Board meeting in October. (According to the AFS Bylaws, the Vice President for External Communications is authorized to fulfill the duties of the President in his or her absence. The Board unanimously decided to not meet in October.

The question of whether the regular date and time of Board meetings should be changed was brought up. Pro: There are some AFS members who haven't been

able to be Board members because of its current meeting schedule at 11:00 p.m. on the fourth Sunday of the month. Pro: There would be greater flexibility in the time allotted to meetings and greater opportunity to announce Board decisions in the newsletter if the Board met on the third Sunday of the month at a later time. Pro: If the Board were to meet on the third Sunday at 2:00 p.m., Board members would be present to attend the 4:00 p.m. meeting of the AFS Discussion Group. None of those present had any problems with changing the schedule. The Board unanimously approved moving the regular Board meeting date and time to the third Sunday of each month at 2 p.m.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

AFS Financial Report

1/1/2002 through 10/5/2002

Income:

Balance forward from 2001	\$3,671.08
Dues Paid	2,265.00
AFS Center Fund	83.00
Pledges Paid	6,120.25
Merchandise Sales	762.50
Book Sales	2,992.26
Shipping and Handling	125.75
Bank Interest	46.63
World Exchange	132.39
Festival	2,237.00
Fundraising Net Profit	853.00
Suite 400 Rent	7,500.00
Total Income	\$26,788.86

Expenses:

Book Royalties	\$ 45.29
Mortgages	14,772.16
Condo Fees	2,000.00
Utilities and Taxes	2,437.55
Speakers' Fees	150.00
Supplies and Newsletter	2,509.10
Merchandise	1,910.08
Festival Registration	450.00
Shipping and Handling	584.78
Voicemail	225.00
Book Publishing	358.88
Total Expenses	\$25,442.84

Balance Now **\$ 1,346.02**

"If I were not an atheist, I would believe in a God who would choose to save people on the basis of the totality of their lives and not the pattern of their words. I think he would prefer an honest and righteous atheist to a TV preacher whose every word is God, God, God, and whose every deed is foul, foul, foul. Humanity has the stars in its future, and that future is too important to be lost under the burden of juvenile folly and ignorant superstition." — Isaac Asimov

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<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Household	\$125	_____	\$ _____
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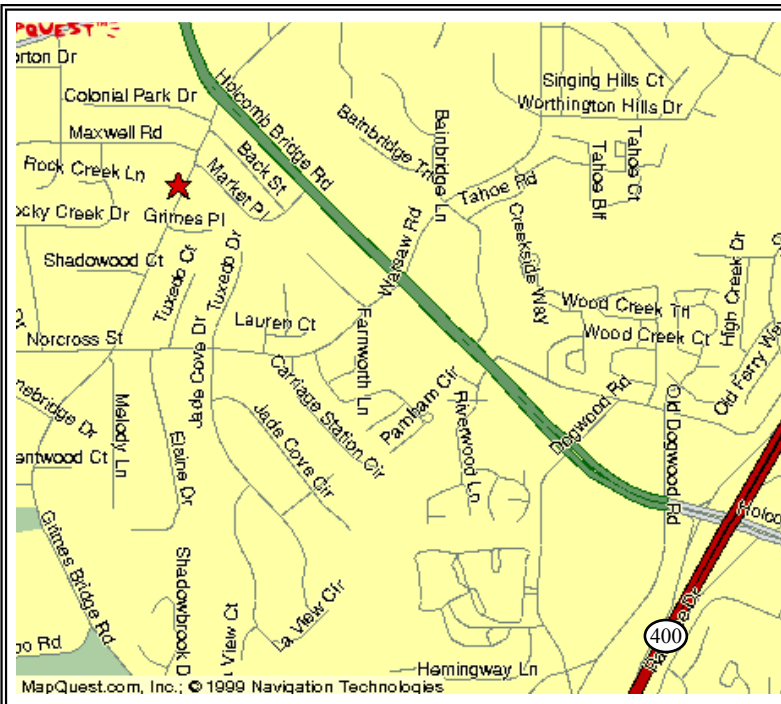
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 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500, Roswell GA 30075



Atlanta
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Society

**The October Meeting:
Sunday, October 13
1:00 PM at the AFS Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road,
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Clark Adams**



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