

# Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 9 Number 2 • February 2003

## Our February Meeting

Our February 9 AFS meeting will include a speech by **Bobbie Kirkhart**, President of **Atheist Alliance International**. Bobbie will speak on the AAI, Gora and positive atheism. (Gora was a man who worked with Gandhi for the liberation of India. After independence, he established the Atheist Centre of India, which is a founding member group of the Atheist Alliance.)

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.

## 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 March 2 at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see [www.fellowshipofreason.com](http://www.fellowshipofreason.com).

## Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AFS Center at 12:30 on Sunday, February 23.

## 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.

## Email Version of AFNews

You can now receive the Atlanta Freethought News by email in Adobe PDF format. Please consider receiving your newsletter this way; it will save AFS about \$1.00 per newsletter. Send your request to [SteveYoth@aol.com](mailto:SteveYoth@aol.com).

## AFS Meetings and Activities

Feb 9: AFS General Meeting at AFS Center, 1:00 PM.  
Feb 12: AFS Demonstration, Marietta Square, 11:30 AM.  
Feb 14: AFS Social, Athens Pizza House, 7:00 PM.  
Feb 16: AFS Discussion Group, AFS Center, 4:00 PM.

## AFS Activities

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet on February 16 at 4:00 to 6:00 PM at the AFS Center.

The next **AFS Social** will be at Athens Pizza House, 1341 Clairmont Road, on Friday, February 14, at 7:00 PM. (It's on Clairmont Road near North Decatur Road in Atlanta.)

To get there, take I-85 to Exit 91, the Clairmont Road exit. Turn east at the light and go 3.5 miles to Athens Pizza House, which is on the left before you cross N. Decatur Rd.

## AFS Darwin Day Demonstration

On Wednesday, February 12, the Atlanta Freethought Society will have a **Demonstration and Celebration of Darwin Day** at the Marietta Square in Marietta, GA. The event will start at 11:30 AM and will be concluded by 1:00 PM. AFS will protest the Cobb County science book stickers which read: "This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully, and critically considered."

We plan to have more info at the February meeting.

### AFS Position on Cobb County Textbook Disclaimers:

By adopting its textbook disclaimers, the Cobb County Board of Education has demonstrated its misunderstanding of the true nature of science.

Science involves observation and testing. Physical evidence of evolution has been observed and some of the accompanying concepts tested. Supernatural phenomena, on the other hand, have yet to be observed or tested using scientific methods. There is no such thing as "creation science" – this is a contradiction of terms.

Creationism has been rejected by organizations such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Institute of Biological Sciences, the National Academy of Sciences, the Geophysical Union, the National Science Teachers Association, the National Association of Biology Teachers, and the National Science Education Leadership Association.

Creationism is not science; it is religion. As such, the teaching of creationism in public schools is a violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States. Attempts by creationists for "balanced treatment" have been ruled unconstitutional. (See *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 1987.)

It is the position of AFS that evolution is science, and as such, belongs in the classroom; that creationism is religion, and its place is the church and home.



## 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.

Feb 9: Bobbie Kirkhart, President of Atheist Alliance, Inc., will speak on the AAI, Gora and positive atheism. (Gora was a man who worked with Gandhi for the liberation of India. After independence, he established the Atheist Centre of India, which is a founding member group of the Atheist Alliance.)

Mar 9: TBD

Apr 13: TBD

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

You can unsubscribe by sending an email to [xxxx-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto: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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# Evolution and Creationism by Steve Burnett

**D**arwin's birthday is coming up on February 12th. He was born 194 years ago, and he published his most famous work, *On the Origin of Species*, in 1859. There are a number of events taking place this February to celebrate Darwin's life and work.

Sadly, Darwin's work is probably less understood now than it was when he published it! Recent efforts to add "intelligent design" to school standards in Ohio and Georgia have made local and national news. Luckily, in both of these cases, the forces trying to insert their religious views into public schools have pretty much lost out, but it is certain they will try again in the coming months.

Why does Darwinian evolution cause so much controversy? Why do so many people feel that evolution is destructive to morality and ethics? Unfortunately, people see Darwinism as an assault on religion at the same time as they assume that morality can only be found in god. As humanists, I think it's safe to say that we don't make this assumption, but what sorts of arguments can we present to people who do hold religious beliefs?

It turns out that the idea that evolution is anti-religious is incorrect. The majority of religious denominations in America have no problem with evolution, and recent surveys of religious belief among scientists indicate that approximately 40% of biologists have some religious affiliation. Clearly evolution and religion can

coexist in the minds of most people.

Why the push to remove evolution from public schools? As is usually the case, a vocal group of people who insist on a literal reading of the bible have a problem with many scientific discoveries. Along with a literal reading of the bible, these people insist that the Earth is very young (no more than 10,000 years old), an idea that is in opposition to knowledge we have gained from geology, physics, chemistry, and biology. Generally, young-earth creationists equate all of their disagreements with biology. It is not uncommon for me to be asked, "How do you explain the origin of the universe?" Of course, since I'm not a physicist, I'm not obligated to know about the origin of the universe, yet that question seems perfectly logical to them. This is where the fatal flaw in young-earth creationism rests — it doesn't just attack biology, it attacks all of modern science. When a creationist tries to attack the age of the Earth, I point out that this is a problem for physicists and geologists, since they are the ones who have developed the dating methods, not biologists. I say if they want to attack the age of the universe, they need to talk to a physicist, not me! In the end, we need to make sure that we have a good grasp of the facts and that we make sure that we don't let the creationists be the ones who determine the characteristics of the debate.

For more information on evolution,

here are some good websites to check out:

- [www.talkorigins.org](http://www.talkorigins.org) - the best site for the evolution/creation debate
- [www.darwinday.org](http://www.darwinday.org) - a site about the events that are scheduled for Darwin's birthday
- [www.aboutdarwin.com](http://www.aboutdarwin.com) - a good general site about Darwin's life and work.

[Dr. Burnett is an Assistant Professor of Biology in the Department of Natural Sciences at Clayton College and State University. He is also President of the Humanists of Georgia.]

"A biology or earth science course taught without the inclusion of evolution is an inferior course. Students who take these courses without being told that evolution unifies the data and concepts of the field are being cruelly short-changed. They will leave the course having been misled that science largely consists of the tedious memorization of lists of facts, rather than a tool we can use to help us understand the world of nature. This episodic, atomistic view of science is particularly regrettable: it turns students away from studying science, and perhaps worse yet, defeats our efforts to produce a scientifically literate society."  
- Eugenie C. Scott Ph.D.



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# Cobb Issues Evolution Guidelines to Teachers

**F**our months after Cobb County schools opened the door to considering “disputed views” of evolution, the district essentially told teachers on January 8 to handle the topic as they always have.

Superintendent Joe Redden issued guidelines that advise teachers to stick to state standards, and keep science classes focused on science.

“I don’t think it’s going to change at all the practices of our teachers,” said Deputy Superintendent Don Beers.

That has some parents irked.

“That’s disappointing to me,” said Marjorie Rogers, parent of an eighth-grader. “I’d like teachers to be encouraged to open discussions. I want it to be opened up so kids can be introduced to other scientific evidence that would disprove evolution, in my opinion.”

The guidelines advise teachers to moderate class discussion carefully and if conflicts arise, “to promote a sense of scientific inquiry and understanding of scientific methods, and to distinguish between scientific and philosophical or religious issues.”

At South Cobb High School, biology teachers reacted to the new

guidelines with some indifference. The fact is, evolution makes up a tiny portion of the state standards for biology and other life sciences.

Erika Ijames, a teacher for 10 years, estimated she spends about three days on evolution themes during each biology course. If a student asks a question, she handles it quickly and moves along.

The teachers at South Cobb say the fractious debate over the way science is taught there has not changed their approach. “I still cover the same things,” said biology teacher Ann Dau. Her colleague, Julie Quarles, said teachers understand not to teach evolution as a fact, but as accepted theory. “In science, we don’t ever teach something as an absolute. It’s always changing.”

The guidelines did not require board approval, but its seven members reviewed the language recently and did not object. The four-paragraph regulation is the work of an administrative committee that included teachers and a team of lawyers, said Curt Johnston, board chairman.

“Our objective was to clarify what was appropriate and what was not,”

Johnson said. He shrugged off the criticism that the guidelines will not encourage discussion of alternate views of evolution, saying, “Encouraging discussion of that might be illegal.”

The suburban district became the center of national focus in September, when its school board unanimously approved a policy on evolution that allowed science teachers to include “disputed views” on the origin of man. Seeking to dispel criticism from parents and scientists, the board said its purpose was to encourage critical thinking among students, while ensuring “neutrality toward religion.”

By then, debate over the teaching of evolution had polarized parents for months. In August, the district placed stickers in middle and high school science textbooks advising students that evolution was a controversial theory, not a fact, and should be critically considered. The stickers drew a federal court lawsuit challenging the inserts as “fundamentalist Christian expression.”

[This article is from a January 9 article by Mary MacDonald in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.]

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“The (First Amendment) requires the state to be neutral in its relations with groups of believers and non-believers.”  
– Justice Hugo L. Black, U.S. Supreme Court Justice, majority opinion in *Everson v. Board of Education*, 330 U.S. 1 (1947)

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## AAI to Give Annual Dawkins Award By Bobbie Kirkhart

**W**orld-renowned scientist and atheist advocate Richard Dawkins has authorized the Atheist Alliance International to present an annual award in his name to an atheist who has made outstanding contributions to the cause of rationalism. Dr. Dawkins will personally present the award at this year’s AAI annual convention, to be held in Tampa, Florida, April 18-20. He is gifting the recipient with a complete collection of his books, autographed to the honoree.

Dr. Dawkins, Charles Simonyi Professor of the Public Understanding of Science, at Oxford University, is the author of eighteen books, including

*The Selfish Gene*, *The Blind Watchmaker*, *Unweaving the Rainbow*, and *Climbing Mount Improbable*. His books are known not only for their flawless interpretation and development of scientific information, but also for an eloquence of writing style unusual in technical material. Since he once taught at the University of California, Dr. Dawkins is familiar with the religiosity of American society and is very concerned about U.S. issues of church-state separation.

Other notable atheists will be present at this AAI convention. Among them will be “The Amazing” James Randi (famed magician and

nemesis of faith healers and psychics), Darrell Lambert (the Seattle Boy Scout who was disqualified from the Eagle Scout rank he had earned because he would not deny his atheism), and Michael Newdow (the atheist who brought a case before the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals seeking removal of the phrase “Under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance).

For more information about the AAI convention in Tampa, go to <http://www.atheistalliance.org/florida/conventionflyer.htm> or call the Atheists of Florida at (813) 835-1500 or the AAI (toll-free) at (866) HERETIC.

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# Freethought News

## BUSH GIVES RELIGIOUS GROUPS BUILDING AID

The Bush administration plans to allow religious groups for the first time to use federal housing money to help build centers where religious worship is held, as long as part of the building is also used for social services.

The policy shift, which was made in a rule that the Department of Housing and Urban Development proposed in January, significantly expands the administration's contentious faith-based initiative. The White House says it wants to "end discrimination against religious groups." Opponents say the policy breaches the separation of church and state.

Current regulations generally prohibit religious groups from using federal housing and community development grants, which totaled \$7.7 billion last year, to build or rehabilitate structures. The new rules, still subject to final approval by housing officials, allow the use of federal aid to acquire, rehabilitate or build centers used for religious and specifically approved nonreligious activities, so long as no federal money is used for the religious section.

A church could erect a building using federal money to create a shelter for the homeless in one part and private money to create a sanctuary in another part, officials said.

"We see no reason to exclude religious organizations from participation in these programs if there can be a reasonable mechanism to ensure that a program has no particular religious connotation one way or another," the general counsel of the housing department, Richard A. Hauser, said in an interview. "There's no reason you can't have a cathedral upstairs and something that would look like any other room in the basement" for counseling.

Civil rights advocates, legal experts and Congressional critics attacked the

change. They said it moved the government dangerously close to financing the building of houses of worship in violation of the separation of church and state.

"This is probably the most clearly unconstitutional aspect of the White House's faith-based initiative that we've seen up to this point," said Christopher Anders, legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union. "What this does is take federal money that is serving the neediest of the needy in our society and diverts it to the bricks-and-mortar construction of churches and sanctuaries and other places of worship."

Opponents said the change forced the government into the difficult position of having to determine which part of a building is used for worship and which is for social services.

"You run into the nightmarish problem of having the government monitor what goes on inside churches" and sanctuaries, said Representative Barney Frank, Democrat of Massachusetts, who promised to seek hearings on the change.

The new regulations set up a system for programs at mixed-use sites "where a structure is used for both eligible and inherently religious activities." The change does not spell out how the proportion would be formulated. Officials said that would have to be determined case by case.

Some civil rights advocates and Congressional critics promised to fight the change. Several legal experts said the new policy might not pass muster under a 1971 Supreme Court case, *Tilton v. Richardson*, that restricted aid to religious institutions.

"The question is whether you can legitimately allocate, say, 80 percent of a building for religious use and 20 percent for secular use and say that the federal money is only paying for the secular use," said Douglas Laycock, a professor and religious liberties specialist at the University of Texas Law School. "The answer to

the allocation question right now in the courts is no, you can't do it."

A professor at the Cardozo Law School, Marci Hamilton, said that it might be difficult for government lawyers to argue that they can truly separate religious and social functions in a building and that many religious groups might not even want to try to do so.

"Once religious entities start arguing that any portion of their building is for nonreligious purposes," Professor Hamilton said, "they start opening themselves up to all sorts of problems like their tax-exempt status as religious institutions. It's a whole Pandora's box."

In a press release on January 26, American Atheists said that the plan "crosses a dangerous line and threatens the separation of church and state."

"For the first time since the American Revolution, taxpayers will be picking up the tab for the construction of churches, mosques, temples or other facilities used for sectarian worship as part of a scheme to further the federal faith-based initiative," said Ellen Johnson, President of American Atheists. "It's pretty clear to us that this is also part of a plan to use government money to pay for the rehabilitation of dilapidated houses of worship, and divert money away from secular social services."

"There are no oversight or accountability mechanisms to protect tax money from being used to subsidize the religious mission of any church which obtains government funding," warned Ron Barrier, Communications Director for American Atheists. "Millions of Atheists, Freethinkers and other Americans who do not believe in religious creeds are now going to suffer the imposition of a 'Religion Tax' under the veneer of Mr. Bush's reckless faith-based initiative." [This article is from a January 23 *New York Times* article by Eric Lightblau.]

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# Freethought News (continued)

## BUSH PLAN TO SUBSIDIZE "FAITH-BASED" DRUG TREATMENT

President Bush's plan to divert up to \$200 million in public funds to faith-based addiction programs violates the Constitution and common sense, according to Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The Bush proposal, announced in the State of the Union address on January 28, poses serious legal and policy problems, says the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director. (Americans United has spearheaded a coalition of groups that oppose the administration's "faith-based" initiative.)

"The president wants to fund untested, unproven programs that seek to pray away addiction," said Lynn. "This violates the Constitution and common sense.

"People with addiction problems need medical help, not Sunday school," Lynn observed. "The Bush plan would entangle government with religion and jeopardize the health care needs of Americans struggling with alcohol and drug problems.

"Bush seems to be on a religious crusade and that's not the role of the president," Lynn concluded. "Americans put a lot of money in the collection plate voluntarily, but they should not be forced to do so by the government."

[From a January 29 AU press release]

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## PICKERING NOMINATION QUESTIONED

In a press release on January 16, American Atheists expressed concern about President Bush's recent re-nomination of controversial Judge Charles W. Pickering for a post on the federal appeals court.

Pickering is currently a U.S. District Judge. Last year, his nomination was blocked after heated debate in the Senate, and opposition from a coalition of rights and other organizations. American Atheists sees the move by Bush as an attempt to "pack" the judiciary system with religious right candidates who would threaten civil liberties, erode abortion rights for wo-

men and hand down rulings which violate the constitutional separation of church and state.

American Atheists pointed out that Pickering, a former President of the Mississippi Baptist Convention, often lectures defendants in his courtroom on the need for them to be involved with religious programs in prisons and embrace religious belief. He has also been accused of leniency in sentencing if the defendant professes a strong interest in religion. Pickering has even quoted from the Bible (BARNES V. MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS) when handing down sentencing decisions.

[From a January 16 AA Action Alert]

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## JUDGE MOORE SUGGESTS LINK BETWEEN SEPT. 11 AND LEGAL DECISIONS

WASHINGTON — Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore warned a religious audience Tuesday night of "great consequences" when America turns away from God and suggested the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks might be an example.

Moore, in Washington to accept an honorary doctorate in divinity from the National Clergy Council and Methodist Episcopal Church USA, implied a parallel between the attacks and what he contends has been a 40-year legal erosion of several religious rights, including his own right to display the Ten Commandments in court.

He pointed out similarities between the devastation and the biblical words of Isaiah, who had forecast a "day of great slaughter, when the towers fall." He compared that forecast to the attack on the World Trade Center's twin towers.

"How many of you remember Americans running to get gas masks because (of) some bearded man in Afghanistan?" Moore asked during his address at Georgetown University. "Fear struck this country ... You see, there are consequences when we turn away from our source of our strength."

The remarks on the 2001 attacks

came near the end of the chief justice's speech, which lasted about 30 minutes. Up to then, he had largely discussed his political fight to return prayer to school and the commandments to the public square, using animal analogies and rhyming poems to outline his case.

Moore argued that about 40 years of legal theory have attempted to erase the religious theories on which the country was founded, including what he insists are promises in the Declaration of Independence that the rights of Americans are not given by government but by God.

"The role of government is not to give us rights," he said. "The role of government is not to deny the God that does. The role of government is to secure the rights God gave you."

[From a Jan. 21 AP article by Jeffrey McMurray]

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## ALABAMA GOVERNOR HAS PRAYER BREAKFAST

Bob Riley, the new governor of Alabama, began the day of his inauguration with a Prayer Breakfast, acknowledging a higher power.

Riley and wife, Patsy, and more than 700 friends gathered at the Embassy Suites Hotel downtown for the event that was moved from the Retirement Systems of Alabama Activity Center to accommodate the crowd.

"How important it is to start off our inaugural celebration in praise of our lord and savior Jesus Christ," Riley said.

"We are the greatest country in the world because we were founded on godly, Judeo-Christian principles and ethics. That is something we should never forget, but I am convinced that this country and this state will never be all it can be without the blessings of the Almighty God," Riley said.

The crowd sang two songs requested by the Rileys, "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," and "Holy, Holy, Holy," and listened to the music of Christian recording artist Don Moen.

[From a Jan. 20 article by Mike Sherman in the *Montgomery Advertiser*]

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# National Day of Reason Web Site Launched

(See [www.nationaldayofreason.org](http://www.nationaldayofreason.org).)

By Melvin Lipman, President, American Humanist Association

Many who value the separation of church and state have sought an appropriate response to the federally-funded National Day of Prayer, an annual abuse of the constitution. Non-theistic Americans (including freethinkers, humanists, atheists and agnostics), along with many traditionally religious allies, view this government-sanctioned sectarianism as unduly exclusionary.

A consortium of leaders from within the community of reason recently endorsed the idea of a National Day of Reason. This observance is to be held in parallel with the National Day of Prayer, on the first Thursday in May (May 1, 2003). The goal of this effort is to celebrate reason – a concept all Americans can support – and to raise public awareness about the persistent threat to religious liberty posed by government intrusion into the private sphere of worship.

To facilitate the commemoration of the National Day of Reason by individuals and organizations throughout the U.S., the American Humanist Association and the Washington Area Secular Humanists have joined in launching the National Day of Reason Web Site, hosted by the Institute for Humanist Studies. This web site is designed to serve as the focal point for an effort to recognize the National Day of Reason, and as a platform to offer criticism of

the federally-sponsored National Day of Prayer. We hope that it will be a resource to the community of reason, the press, and the general public.

In the coming weeks, look to this site for facts and statistics regarding the National Day of Prayer, essays on church-state separation from noted authorities in the field, sample proclamations and press releases, and a host of other resources. The focus of the site will be on the many National Day of Reason events taking place in cities and towns across the nation.

We invite individuals to endorse this campaign, and organizations to submit information about their plans to commemorate the National Day of Reason and their efforts to educate the public about the important underlying issues. Those organizations conducting events, activism or outreach in their communities will be featured on the site so that activists can readily identify opportunities to organize and participate in local events.

There is great potential this year to give voice to our shared concerns about the serious threats to the wall separating church and state. We hope that you will visit our new web site, and we look forward to hearing about your plans to observe the National Day of Reason.

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## Minutes for January 2003 AFS Board Meeting

In attendance: Judy Thompson, Bill Burton, Joel Kollin, Steve Yothment, Lew Southern, Kate Miller, Kelly Wilhoit, John Schwartz, Ray Knisley

Minutes taken by: Kate Miller

Time/Date of meeting: 2:00 PM, January 19, 2003

- ▶ Bill Burton reported that pledge letters have yielded approximately \$1700 in contributions so far.
- ▶ John Schwartz volunteered as website liaison with Ken to ensure current information is included on the site.
- ▶ Ray Knisley said that he has received authorization by

authorities for an AFS Darwin Day demonstration at Marietta Square on 2/12/03 from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM. Ray requested that the board approve having the demonstration to promote AFS's position on the Cobb County Board of Education issue regarding the teaching of creationism. The board voted and approved having the demonstration.

- ▶ Prez Judy noted that she will not be able to attend a board meeting at the usual time in February. The board voted to not have a board meeting in February.

Congratulations to:

**Edwin Kagin**, for becoming the new Kentucky State Director for American Atheists. (Ed, with his wife Helen, founded and operate Camp Quest, a secular camp for children.)

**Ed Buckner, Edwin Kagin, Herb Silverman, and Bobbie Kirkhart**, for each writing a chapter of the new book, *The Fundamentals of Extremism: the Christian Right in America*. A forward by Richard Dawkins states, "I have just read this brilliant book from start to finish, almost without a break, and I am stunned and horrified by what I have learned." A prepublication version of the book is available now from [www.NewBostonBooks.com](http://www.NewBostonBooks.com).

"The twin doctrines of separation of church and state and liberty of individual conscience are the marrow of our democracy, if not indeed America's most magnificent contribution to the freeing of Western man."

–Clinton Rossiter, American historian

# Clipped

## Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

(Ried Crowe's letters were in the *Anniston Star* on January 16 and the *Tuscaloosa News* on January 19. Tony King's letter was in the *Toccoa Record* on January 19.)

### The Law and Freedom

In the writer's Jan. 13 letter "[Constitution](#)", he rambles on in an attempt to justify Judge Moore's holy rock by decrying his fears of losing the "freedoms the Constitution gave us" if we citizens fail to "understand our guaranteed right of ... posting the Ten Commandments anywhere we please."

The writer's thinking here is wrong in so many ways.

First, the writer is clearly narcissistic in his belief that publicly posting the Decalogue somehow brings freedom. He cannot seem to recognize that the same "freedoms" that some Christians feel they receive by posting them are seen as stifling mental shackles to many others.

Why must Hindus, Buddhists, Wiccans, atheists, and all other peoples of our society have to be coerced by their own government to "Have no gods before Me" or "Keep the Sabbath holy"?

Secondly, the Decalogue demands that our economic structure be deemed morally untenable, as the coveting of other's assets that is at the heart of our free market system is plainly condemned.

Finally, the writer considers Benjamin Franklin's words from 1737 as "proof" that a "literal" reading of the Constitution helps us understand his claims. What?!? How do Franklin's words from almost 40 years prior to the writing of the Constitution have anything to do with its literal wording? This brand of twisted logic is akin to accepting as the literal verbiage of a recent presidential speech his father's off-hand ruminations from before the president was in high school.

The Constitution attempts to provide for religious freedom for all, not just for those who happen to share the writer's religiosity. That is why the First Amendment has been correctly interpreted as a prohibition of public governmental endorsements of the (monotheistic) Ten Commandments.

*Ried Crowe  
Powder Springs, GA*

### Addition of Phrase a Violation

In Mary Wright's Jan. 14 letter ("What did our forefathers say?") she quotes several historic Americans in a weak attempt to support her claim that the pledge's "under God" phraseology should somehow not seem objectionable to others.

I could easily provide just as many quotes from the Framers that support the opposite opinion, such as that espoused by the judges of the Ninth Circuit Court who ruled that the inclusion of this verbiage is unconstitutional.

However, I will not do this because it simply doesn't matter. The only thing that does matter is what is written in the Constitution, which is the only standard against which our laws are judged. And, by this standard, the "under God" addition to the Pledge is clearly a violation of the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, as it provides a governmental endorsement of monotheism at the exclusion of the beliefs of polytheists and atheists.

Our nation was founded with, among other things, the notion of religious equality. The spirit of this ideal is destroyed when a religious majority, such as Christians and other monotheists, attempt to persuade our government to coerce the religious minorities to accept its dogmatic notions. Why can't the religious right seem to understand this concept?

Religious freedom cannot exist in any society without governmental neutrality on the issue. Hooray for the Ninth Circuit Court!

*Ried Crowe  
Powder Springs, GA*

### My Response

There are many people who feel just like Ms. Genny Wirth ("Whiners have the right to leave America") that those who are considered "whiners" should be invited to leave the country.

I would like to ask Ms. Wirth this one question: How would you like it if someone invited you to leave the country based solely on your opinion?

This is an argument that is not well thought out. It is 100% emotion and 0% rational.

Now to quickly deal with the presented arguments:

1. "This idea of America being a multicultural community has served only to dilute our sovereignty and our national identity": We ARE a multicultural nation. Beyond our Anglo base there are Native Americans, Greeks, Poles, Africans, Asians, Hispanics etc; each ethnic group has their own languages and cultural ways. And each has contributed to the national identity. Each one of us do things that originated in another group's culture. Each person's ancestry is mixed as well.

From an anthropological point of view, cultures which rub shoulders are not free from borrowing ideas, words, and practices from the other, even within Toccoa, our own community. That is a historical fact! How else do you explain the popularity of restaurants such as Taco Bell, The Olive Garden, and The Bamboo House, for example?

2. "We speak English, not Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, or any other language": What rock have you been living under? Go to any major city in America, and not only will you hear English, which is our primary language, but you will also hear the previous languages mentioned being spoken, and more! That is the daily reality, even in a small town such as Toccoa.

3. "In God We Trust" is our national motto": Not until 1954. At that time Congress violated the establishment clause of the Constitution. Actually, the motto which our Founding Fathers chose was E PLURIBUS UNUM, Latin (another foreign language) for "From Many, One", which recognized the coming together of 13 colonies into one federal governmental system, as well as many people from various origins being melded into one nation. The melting pot, if you will.

4. "If God offends you...consider another part of the world as your new home." What offends me is that many theists wish to impose their religion upon me. Legislating the Bible offends me. Violating the establishment clause of the First Amendment offends me. Telling me to leave my home because you don't like what I say offends me. I would never ask the same of others for expressing an unpopular opinion.

What Ms. Wirth and others have failed to understand is that America is made up of many people from many lands who actively engage not only in their native culture but also in the wider common American culture, which is the sum of all of its parts as practiced in everyday life. If everyone who expressed an unpopular opinion (and everybody has at one point or another) were made to leave, there would be very precious few left in this country. Who would run the mills, the farms, the banks, the government, etc? American culture would decline.

Yes, my opinions are unpopular. But I am not going anywhere. This is my America, too!

*William A. King  
Toccoa*



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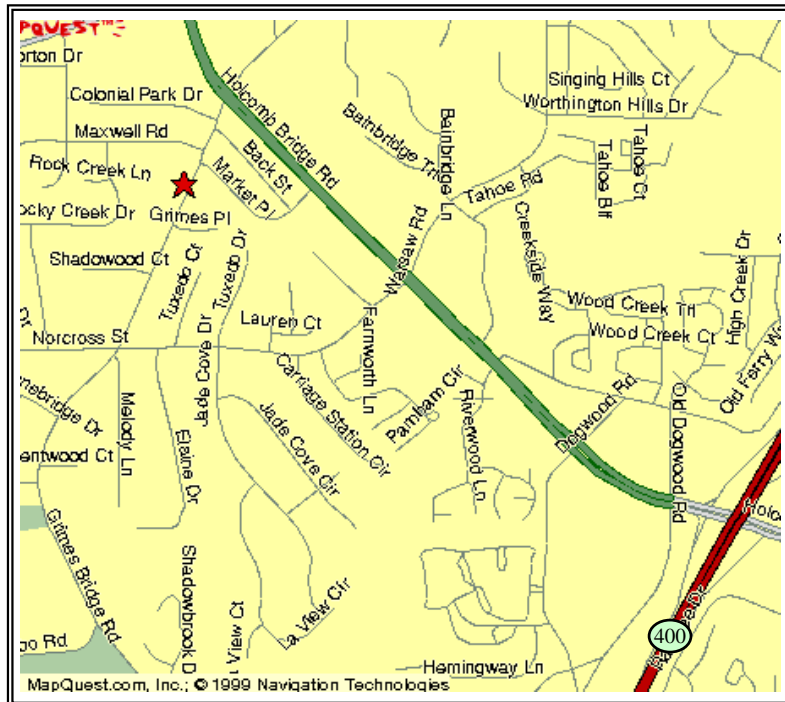
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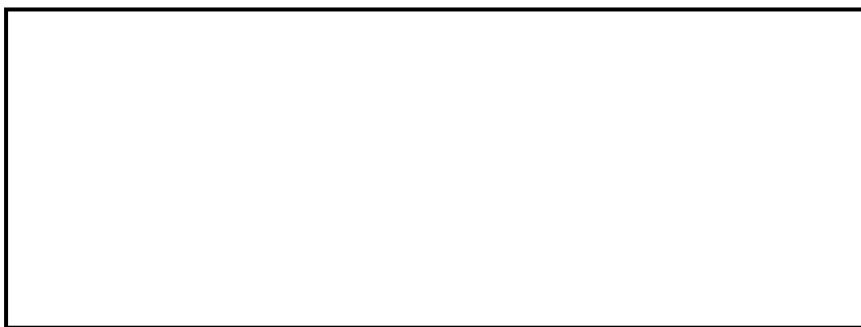
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Sunday, February 9  
1:00 PM at the AFS Center  
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**This Month's Speaker:  
AAI President  
Bobbie Kirkhart**



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