

Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 9 Number 3 • March 2003

Our March Meeting

Our March 9 AFS meeting will include a speech by a *mystery speaker*. Who is it? We have two speakers available, but which one will speak is not yet confirmed.

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 April 6 at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see www.fellowshipofreason.com.

Fellowship of Reason Fundraiser

The Fellowship of Reason and the Atlanta Radio Theatre Company—both non-profit organizations based in Atlanta—are holding a joint fund-raising event on Wednesday, March 19, at Manuel's Tavern.

The event is a performance by ARTC titled "Guerilla Radio Theatre". It's a series of audio-dramas (and comedies) in the style of classic radio, but updated for the 21st century. The show will also feature spoofs of prominent local radio personalities—including a certain Libertarian syndicated talk show host! Tickets are \$10 each. See more information at www.fellowshipofreason.com/for_artc.htm. To buy tickets, contact webmaster@fellowshipofreason.com or call 678-585-0406.

Arrive at Manuel's Tavern at 7:30 PM for dinner and some friendly conversation. The show starts at 9:00.

Manuel's Tavern is at 602 N. Highland Avenue (at the intersection of North Ave. and Highland Ave.) in Atlanta.

AFS Meetings and Activities

- Mar 9: AFS General Meeting at AFS Center, 1:00 PM.
- Mar 14: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
- Mar 16: AFS Board Meeting, AFS Center, 2:00 PM.
- Mar 16: AFS Discussion Group, AFS Center, 4:00 PM.

AFS Activities

The AFS Discussion Group will meet on Sunday, March 16, at 4:00 to 6:00 PM at the AFS Center. If you haven't been to a Discussion Group yet, come try it out! We had about a dozen people at the February Discussion Group meeting. Topics for this month: Further developments in the Iraq war, The Pledge of Allegiance, and President Bush's Faith-based Initiatives.

The next AFS Social will be at Las Margaritas Restaurant at 1842 Cheshire Bridge Road (Atlanta) on Friday, March 14, at 7:00 PM.

To get there, take I-85 to the Cheshire Bridge Road exit (Exit 88) on the north side of Atlanta. Turn east at the light and go about 1.5 miles. The restaurant will be on the right.

Humanists of Georgia Meeting

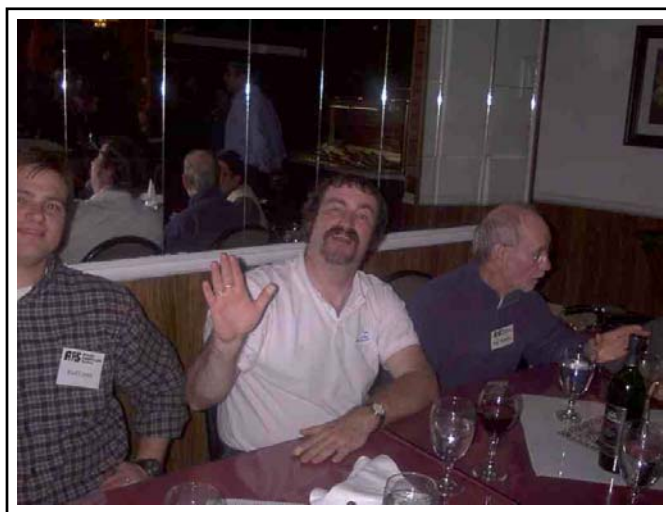
The Humanists of Georgia will meet at the AFS Center at 12:30 on Sunday, March 23.

The Tuesday Lunch Bunch

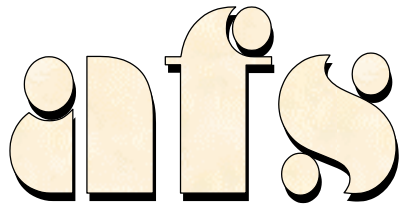
A group of AFS members meets every Tuesday at 12:00 at Panahar Restaurant. The address is 3375 Buford Hwy, Suite 1060, in Atlanta. Come on down and enjoy the Bangladeshi food buffet and the great company.

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.



Tony King waves "hello" at the AFS Fundraiser at Panahar Restaurant. We had about 60 people show up, and it was a lot of fun! Thanks to Mirza for serving the great food!



**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.

Feb 9: A mystery speaker... Who is it?

Mar 9: TBD

“A nation of well informed men who have been taught to know and prize [their] rights...cannot be enslaved. It is in the region of ignorance that tyranny begins.”
— Benjamin Franklin

“Ignorance breeds monsters to fill up the vacancies of the soul that are unoccupied by the verities of knowledge.” — Horace Mann

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

Editor

Steve Yothment

How to Contact the Editor

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

Atlanta Freethought Society

President

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

VP for Internal Communication

Tony King – 706-886-9224

VP for External Communication

Steve Yothment – 770-339-8394

Treasurer (Interim)

Bill Burton – 770-469-1228

Board of Directors

Harriet Harris – 404-252-1962

Joel Kollin – 770-392-7958

Kate Miller – 770-xxx-xxxx

John Schwartz – 770-757-2883

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

The Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 9, Number 3, March 2003

is copyright © 2003 by The Atlanta
Freethought Society, Inc.

Signed articles are all copyright ©
2003 by their respective authors.

For membership and subscription
information, contact AFS at:
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite
500, Roswell, GA 30075-3905

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.

Visit our World Wide Web site at

www.atlantafreethought.org.

Send E-mail to

afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Webmaster: Ken Cummings

Call the **AFS Infoline:** 770-641-2903

Georgia House Resolution 27: An Examination

By Bryan Prim, Director, American Atheists of Georgia

House Resolution 27 is currently on the table in the Georgia Legislature. In this article, I would like to examine the validity of this resolution. (See the whole thing at http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2003_04/fulltext/hr27.htm.)

HOUSE RESOLUTION 27

By: Representatives Mosley of the 129th, Post 1, Smith of the 129th, Post 2, Porter of the 119th, Royal of the 140th, Boggs of the 145th and others

A RESOLUTION

Urging the Congress of the United States of America to reaffirm the history of this nation as a Judeo-Christian nation; and for other purposes.

It is a fact that American "history" (a vague term here) is absolutely not Judeo-Christian in nature, but rather is comprised of any and all religions via the freedom of our people to worship how, who, and where they like, as well as of secular ideals and values (choosing no religion whatsoever). This certainly has been the case during the history of my own lifetime, at least.

Perhaps by "history", we're not talking about the totality of American history, as it would seem by using the term in the vernacular, but rather early American history relating to the founding fathers and the founding of the nation. If that is the case, then this resolution is ill-named. It is not an urging to "reaffirm the history of this nation" as being Christian in na-

ture, but rather attempting to reaffirm the beliefs of the founding fathers as being Christian in nature. We will examine this in detail.

WHEREAS, the words of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag appear in 4 U.S.C.A. Section 4: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all"; and

Yes, it is true that the current version of the Pledge of Allegiance reads this way. It is not true, however, that the original Pledge of Allegiance included the words "under God".

It is widely known in the academic and intellectual community that President Eisenhower allowed the pledge to be changed in order to allow the mentioning of a monotheistic deity (presumably Christian by definition). It is interesting to note that during this time period, McCarthyism was in full swing, and those Americans not perceived as godly capitalists were scandalized and persecuted. Ironically, we could call it a modern-day witch hunt.

Anyhow, we all know what the current Pledge of Allegiance says. What we do with it is the question, as we will see.

WHEREAS, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals has recently issued an opinion holding that use of the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag in

public schools is an unconstitutional infringement upon freedom of religion because of the words "under God"; and

This is false. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in no such way. "Use" of the Pledge of Allegiance is now, and always has been, perfectly legal and Constitutional. I am astonished and hurt that lawmakers from my home state would stoop so low as to misrepresent the ruling of the Ninth Circuit simply to bolster their own religious values by cementing them in government! Surely there are a couple of lawyers among the Georgia legislature?

Making the pledge compulsory among students by the school administration is unconstitutional, and this was the impact of the Ninth Circuit. I now quote from the decision itself:

"In conclusion, we hold that (1) the 1954 Act adding the words 'under God' to the Pledge, and (2) EGUSD's policy and practice of teacher-led recitation of the Pledge, with the added words included, violate the Establishment Clause."

The reasoning behind it is quite simple. "One Nation Under God" is a specifically monotheistic sentiment, and most would say a specifically Christian one. Polytheism is excluded. Atheism is excluded. So is Buddhism and Taoism. Why should a polytheist student be forced to recite a pledge that specifically denies and contradicts her beliefs; that there is only one



PANAHAR ~ a Bangladeshi place

3375 buford highway; suite: 1060 atlanta, ga 30329

(inside Northeast Plaza Shopping Center)

phone: 404-633-6655 cell: 404-805-2020

e-mail: panahar@aol.com www.panahar.com

ONE COMPLIMENTARY ENTRÉE WITH THE PURCHASE OF
AN ENTRÉE OF EQUAL OR GREATER VALUE.

USE UNLIMITED TIMES (alcoholic beverages not included in this offer)

MONDAY THROUGH THURSDAY ONLY

House Resolution 27 (continued)

deity instead of many, as her faith dictates? Why should an atheist student be forced to recite a pledge that proposes an offensive notion; that our nation relies and depends upon the magical powers of an invisible being living in the sky?

Are Americans not free to be polytheists or atheists? Must we worship a monotheistic deity? May I not worship a deity that is female (a goddess)?

Both the polytheist and the atheist are Constitutionally guaranteed to be able to think the way they do. As it currently stands, the Pledge of Allegiance, if forced upon the student body, is quite plainly unconstitutional. I challenge any lawyer or law maker, from street-level practice to federal bigwig, to provide an argument to the contrary that does not either purposely deceive, or violate the constraints of logic. Certainly this resolution fails in this respect.

WHEREAS, Official Code of Georgia Annotated Section 20-2-310 provides that "Each student in the public schools of this state shall be afforded the opportunity to recite the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America during each school day..."; and

Granted. There is currently no law, nor bill, nor movement in action which is attempting to deny students of this right. Students should have ample time to recite the Pledge — or not to recite it. This portion of the resolution is another straw man argument. Lunchtime seems to me like a wonderful compromise; there is ample time during this activity to recite the Pledge. Or even between classes.

WHEREAS, history records in the words of the founders of our republic their faith and their expectation that religion would be a part of American life; and

Again, granted. It is the Constitutional right of every American to incorporate religion — any religion — into their lives at their own judgment, or not at all.

The implied argument here is that the founding fathers also intended for religion to be forced upon captive audiences by the government, such as the compulsory recitation of the pledge in public schools. The words "under God" absolutely do have specific religious implications. It's worth mentioning here that the author of the Pledge was, by the way, a socialist.

WHEREAS, President George Washington said, "Reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle"; and

George Washington was indeed a great man, but I'm not entirely certain what his beliefs have to do with the Constitutionality of being forced to recite the Pledge, or with the argument that the United States is a Christian nation. However, I'm willing to delve into his writings and speeches if that is what this argument depends upon (please note the references):

"...The path of true piety is so plain as to require but little political direction." [George Washington, 1789, responding to clergy complaints that the Constitution lacked mention of Jesus Christ, from *The Godless Constitution: The Case Against Religious Correctness*, Isacc Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, W.W. Norton and Company, pp. 101-102]

"If they are good workmen, they may be from Asia, Africa or Europe; they may be Mahometans, Jews, Christians of any sect, or they may be Atheists..." [George Washington, to Tench Tighman, March 24, 1784, when asked what type of workman to get for Mount Vernon, from *The Washington Papers*, edited by Saul Padover]

"To give opinions unsupported by reasons might appear dogmatical." [George Washington, to Alexander Spotswood, November 22, 1798, from *The Washington Papers*, edited by Saul Padover]

"...I beg you be persuaded that no

one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny, and every species of religious persecution." [George Washington, to United Baptists Churches of Virginia, May, 1789, from *The Washington Papers*, edited by Saul Padover]

"George Washington, though he belonged to the Episcopal church, never mentioned Christ in any of his writings and he was a deist."

[Richard Shenkman, *I Love Paul Revere, Whether He Rode or Not*, New York: Harper, Collins, 1991]

I seem to have more quotes from and about Washington on my side of the argument that the resolution mentions for the opposing side. Does that mean I win?

WHEREAS, President John Adams wrote, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people... Statesmen may plan and speculate for liberty, but it is religion and morality alone, which can establish the principles upon which freedom can securely stand"; and

Again, I'm pleased to offer some further illumination on the beliefs and sayings of President Adams:

"The divinity of Jesus is made a convenient cover for absurdity. Nowhere in the Gospels do we find a precept for Creeds, Confessions, Oaths, Doctrines, and whole carloads of other foolish trumpery that we find in Christianity." [John Adams]

"The question before the human race is whether the God of nature shall govern the world by his own laws, or whether priests and kings shall rule it by fictitious miracles." [John Adams, letter to Thomas Jefferson, 1815]

"As I understand the Christian religion, it was, and is, a revelation. But how has it happened that millions of fables, tales, legends, have been blended with both Jewish and Christian revelation that have made them the most bloody religion that ever existed?" [John Adams, letter to F.A. Van der Kamp, Dec. 27, 1816]

House Resolution 27 (continued)

"I almost shudder at the thought of alluding to the most fatal example of the abuses of grief which the history of mankind has preserved—the Cross. Consider what calamities that engine of grief has produced!" [John Adams, letter to Thomas Jefferson]

I will also note here that President Adams signed into law the Treaty of Peace and Friendship Between the United States of America and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary, which read:

"As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion, — as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion or tranquility of Musselmen, — and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mehomitan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries." [John Adams, 1797-05-27, Article 11, *Treaty of Peace and Friendship between the US and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli of Barbary. Treaties and Other International Acts of America*, ed. Hunter Miller]

This was not a resolution, this was not a speech, and this was not a letter to a friend. This was binding law. It was originally begun under Washington's presidency. Truly, can there be more damning evidence against the United States being a "Judeo-Christian Nation"? Would Adams be behind such a resolution as the one proposed now? Can any state or federal lawmakers use Adams in any argument for such a resolution without proposing a blatant contradiction? I wonder if the representatives who authored this resolution are simply ignorant of this law. I hope so... ignorance is better than outright deception.

WHEREAS, President James Madison said, "We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not on the power of government ...[but] upon the capacity of each and every

one of us to govern ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God."

Ah yes, Madison. It may be of interest to the Georgia State Legislature that Madison never said such a thing. My lawmakers have been had. The quotation listed here is an admitted product of religious-right propagandist David Barton.

A few years ago, with the quote popping up increasingly in the mass media (including Rush Limbaugh's daily radio show), Robert S. Alley, professor emeritus at the University of Richmond and author of *James Madison on Religious Liberty*, undertook a dogged effort to track it down. Enlisting the help of the editors of *The Papers of James Madison* at the University of Virginia, Alley scoured reams of documents, books and writings. After coming up empty-handed, the Madison scholar concluded that the quote was probably fictional.

Now the major purveyor of the quote, Texas-based Religious Right propagandist David Barton, has admitted it's bogus. Last year Barton's group, WallBuilders, issued a one-page document titled "Questionable Quotes," a list of 12 statements allegedly uttered by Founding Fathers and other prominent historical figures, that are now considered to be suspect or outright false. Madison's alleged comment about the Ten Commandments is number four on the list and is flatly declared by Barton to be false.

Advocates of separation of church and state were left breathless over Barton's audacity. For nearly 10 years, the Texas propagandist has traveled the country, putting on programs about America's alleged "Christian heritage" at fundamentalist churches and other places. During these events, Barton argued that the separation of church and state is a myth foisted on the country by the Supreme Court 50 years ago. The United States, he insisted, was founded by Christians and was intended to be a fundamentalist-style "Christian nation."

What was Barton's proof for these

claims? Many of the quotations he now admits are groundless! At least nine of the 12 were included in Barton's 1989 book *The Myth of Separation*, and appeared in a video version as *America's Godly Heritage*. Barton was so enamored of one quote supposedly uttered by Benjamin Franklin ("Whosoever shall introduce into the public affairs the principles of primitive Christianity will change the face of the world.") that it was included on a biographical sketch WallBuilders distributes about Barton, saying it "fully sums up what David believes and teachers." Barton now admits the quote is "questionable" and recommends people don't use it.

If I could get past his blatant dishonesty and knack for historical revisionism, I could certainly understand why Barton would choose to deface Madison in such a way. Madison is, without a doubt, the very strongest proponent of separation between church and state:

"An alliance or coalition between Government and religion cannot be too carefully guarded against... Every new and successful example therefore of a perfect separation between ecclesiastical and civil matters is of importance... religion and government will exist in greater purity, without (rather) than with the aid of government." [James Madison, in a letter to Livingston, 1822, from *The Establishment Clause, Religion and the First Amendment* by Leonard Levy, pg. 124]

"It was the belief of all sects at one time that the establishment of Religion by law, was right and necessary; that the true religion ought to be established in exclusion of every other; and that the only question to be decided was which was the true religion. The example of Holland proved that a toleration of sects, dissenting from the established sect, was safe & even useful. The example of the Colonies, now States, which rejected religious establishments altogether, proved that all Sects might be safely and advantageously put on a

House Resolution 27 (continued)

footing of equal & entire freedom... We are teaching the world the great truth that governments do better without Kings & Nobles than with them. The merit will be doubled by the other lesson that Religion flourishes in greater purity, without [rather] than with the aid of government." [James Madison, Letter to Edward Livingston, July 10, 1822, *The Writings of James Madison*, Gaillard Hunt]

"What influence, in fact, have ecclesiastical establishments had on society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the civil authority; on many instances they have been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny; in no instance have they been the guardians of the liberties of the people. Rulers who wish to subvert the public liberty may have found an established clergy convenient auxiliaries. A just government, instituted to secure and perpetuate it, needs them not." [Pres. James Madison, "A Memorial and Remonstrance", addressed to the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1785]

"Experience witnesseth that ecclesiastical establishments, instead of maintaining the purity and efficacy of religion, have had a contrary operation. During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What has been its fruits? More or less, in all places, pride and indolence in the clergy;

ignorance and servility in the laity; in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution." [James Madison, "A Memorial and Remonstrance", addressed to the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1785]

Let me be clear. There is a difference between knowing the minds of our founding fathers and doing what is Constitutional and fair. Even if the mentioned founding fathers were completely in favor or a state church (and it is painfully obvious that they were not), it is unwise and unnecessary to make legal decisions which affect the people as a whole based upon the "historical" beliefs of such people. For example, slavery was alive and well during those times. Most if not all of the founding fathers had no problem whatsoever with slavery; that was also their belief. Shall we prepare a resolution in favor of slavery since some of the founding fathers believed in it? None of them thought too highly of the right of a woman to vote, either. Shall we now prepare a resolution in favor of such discrimination?

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the General Assembly of Georgia that the members of this body urge the Congress of the United States of America to reaffirm the history of this nation as a Judeo-Christian nation and refuse to remove the words "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

I'm sorry, but I am unimpressed with the scholarship of this resolution. It attempts to undermine the Constitution, and it is full of straw man arguments, ignorance, and possibly outright deception. The "history" of America is not owned, part and parcel, by the Christian religion. Instead, this is a country where people are free to worship however they like or not at all, and owe absolutely no attention to Christianity, nor any other religion. Our history is a melting pot of religions and secular ideals, most of which tend to compliment each other.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the House of Representatives is authorized and directed to transmit an appropriate copy of this resolution to each member of the Georgia delegation to the Congress of the United States of America.

Granted. I will ensure that those people harmed by such a resolution (or a law equivalent to it) will have the opportunity to speak out against it. It has not been at all difficult to expose the quality of this one, and that is heartening.

May the U.S. Congress take both our arguments into consideration and weigh them with an unbiased mind.

Alternately, assuming this does not happen, we always have the facts to fall back on.

— Bryan Prim, Director,
American Atheists of Georgia

Here are web links for more of Bryan Prim's excellent commentary on proposed Georgia legislation:

Senate Res. 1 (for public money to be used by religious groups): <http://www.the-archon.com/AA/essays/SR1.htm>

Senate Bill 90 (to authorize teaching of religion by students): <http://www.the-archon.com/AA/essays/SB90.htm>

"The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance—it is the illusion of knowledge. I have observed that the world has suffered far less from ignorance than from pretensions to knowledge. It is not skeptics or explorers but fanatics and ideologues who menace decency and progress. No agnostic ever burned anyone at the stake or tortured a pagan, a heretic, or an unbeliever." —Daniel J Boorstin, from *Living Philosophies, The Reflections of Some Eminent Men and Women of our Time*, Doubleday 1990, pg. 24.

"As nightfall does not come all at once, neither does oppression. In both instances, there is a twilight. And it is in such twilight that we all must be aware of change in the air—however slight—lest we become unwitting victims of the darkness." — Justice William O. Douglas, US Supreme Court

Freethought News

AFS CELEBRATES DARWIN DAY

On Wednesday, February 12, AFS members celebrated Darwin Day and demonstrated against Cobb County science book disclaimers at the town square in Marietta, GA. Members present included Ray Knisley, Priscilla Vandecar, Bill Burton, Ried Crowe, Larry Darby, Roberto Moraes, Donna Gore, Dale Heatherington, George Sossenکو, Laura Brown with children Eleanor May and Ruel, John Schwartz and his son Casey, Sue Garland, Lew Southern, and Steve Yothment.

Speakers at the lunch-time event were Ray Knisley, Larry Darby, Ried Crowe, Donna Gore and Steve Yothment. Ray Knisley organized the event.

The *Marietta Daily Journal* covered the demonstration. (See their article at www.atheists.org/al/rep02122003.html.)

After the speeches and demonstration, participants enjoyed lunch at Le Peep Restaurant across the street from the square.

APPEALS COURT WON'T RECONSIDER BAN ON PLEDGE

On February 28, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals rejected the Bush

administration's request to reconsider its decision that the Pledge of Allegiance is an unconstitutional endorsement of religion when recited in public schools, setting up a showdown at the Supreme Court.

In Washington, a Justice Department spokesman said the department's only recourse is to appeal to the Supreme Court. Attorney General John Ashcroft said the Justice Department would "spare no effort to preserve the rights of all our citizens to pledge their allegiance to the American flag."

Ruling in June on a lawsuit brought by Sacramento atheist Michael Newdow, the court panel decided 2-1 that Newdow's daughter should not be subjected to the words "under God" at her public school.

The court said the phrase was an endorsement of God, and the Constitution forbids public schools or other governmental entities from endorsing religion.

On Monday, March 3, the Elk Grove (CA) school district at the center of the issue said it will ask the Supreme Court to overturn the ruling. Dave Gordon, superintendent of the school

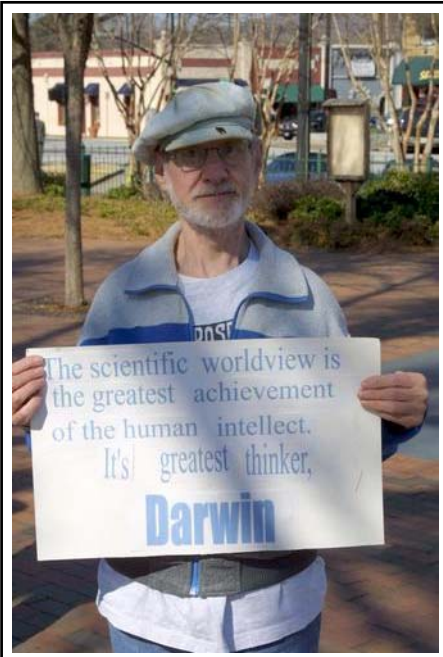
district, said attorneys will ask that the ruling be put on hold so children can continue reciting the pledge.

On Tuesday, March 4, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court agreed to stay the ruling, i.e., put it on hold, at the request of the school district. The stay is valid for 90 days. Without the stay, the deadline for stopping the pledge in classrooms was Monday, March 10! If the Supreme Court refuses to rule or rules with the current decision, 9 states must stop reciting the pledge in public schools. (The states are Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon and Washington.)

FUND-RAISING FOR JUDGE MOORE?

A new fund-raising pitch from Coral Ridge Ministries is raising some eyebrows by suggesting Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore might end up in jail over his Ten Commandments monument.

An envelope containing the appeal for donations asks, "Must Justice Moore GO TO JAIL for acknowledging God?" and depicts a man clutching the bars of a jail cell. It asks for money to help raise \$150,000 for an



Ray Knisley with his sign



Larry Darby, Ried Crowe, Roberto Moraes, Priscilla Vandecar, Ray Knisley, Sue Garland and Steve Yothment listen to Donna Gore

Freethought News (*continued*)

an appeal of a federal judge's ruling that Moore's display in the state Judicial Building is unconstitutional.

"The chances of him going to jail are infinitesimal," said attorney Morris Dees of the Southern Poverty Law Center, one of three organizations suing Moore to have the monument removed. "It's all fund-raising hype. It's a cruel hoax on those who support Coral Ridge Ministries to have them believe Justice Moore is going to jail."

Coral Ridge Ministries is based in Fort Lauderdale, FL, and is headed by

D. James Kennedy. It broadcasts television and radio programs around the country, including Alabama. Moore often has appeared on the programs.

Moore's lead attorney, Stephen Melchior, said that neither he nor Moore had anything to do with the mailing. Melchior coordinates the Judge Moore Defense Fund, which is completely separate from Coral Ridge Ministries funds.

Coral Ridge, which has stated its goals as "glorifying God, proclaiming truth and reclaiming America," has

long backed Moore and his cause. A film crew from the ministry received exclusive rights to film the installation of the monument, which it has used to raise money, supposedly for Moore's legal defense.

Dees estimated the Moore campaign has raised about \$5 million for Coral Ridge so far. A recent fund-raising letter said the church contributed \$200,000 to Moore's defense last year.

[From a February 18 article by Todd Kleffman in the *Montgomery Advertiser*]

Clipped

Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

(Ried Crowe's letter was in the *Gadsden Times* on February 16.

Bill Jager's letter was in the *Douglas County Sentinel* on February 13.)

Proud atheist

In Joseph Kennedy's Feb. 13 letter (Fundamentalists), the author proudly proclaims his fundamentalist Christian lifestyle. In response to this, I'd like to have the same opportunity to proudly proclaim my atheistic lifestyle. I have been unable to accept the poorly supported claims of theists my entire life.

I recall my early days in elementary school when some of my various friends and family would try to convince me that their Christian stories were true (without, of course, a shred of tangible evidence) and how, even at that young age, I could not discern any significant difference between their stories and those of ancient mythologies.

I am no different today. I do not live shackled by the superstitions of prayer or the fear of being eternally punished in some afterlife. I enjoy the world that I know exists and am comfortable with the idea that I will cease to exist in any meaningful way when my body can no longer supply oxygen to my brain.

And what awful fate have the various gods bestowed upon me for this brazen disregard of their existence? I maintain good health, a wonderful marriage, two beautiful daughters, a rewarding and fruitful career, strong family bonds and overall happiness with life. Essentially, I feel that I lead the kind of life that I think a great deal of others in our society might feel envious of.

Could a deity have something to do with my apparent successes? Of course. Could that same god (or goddess, or committee of gods) be blithely waiting until my demise to then judge my life solely on whether or not I acknowledged His (or Her, or Their) supreme power in the universe? I cannot rationally deny the possibility. However, just like the former conjecture, I gauge the probability of this as bordering on zero.

I encourage everybody that harbors any doubts about the claims of fundamentalist Christians to explore the possibility that the religionists could be wrong.

And I want my fellow questioners to know that there are many others just like me that have decided to live contentedly without the unnecessary mental bonds that organized religion places on its adherents.

*Ried Crowe
Powder Springs, GA*

Forgotten History Lessons

If Bill Fordham is going to use the Douglas County newspaper to tell the readers about "Forgotten history lessons" (Douglas County Sentinel, February 9, 2003), please tell about the conclusion that all the deeply committed Christians reached when it came to writing the United States Constitution.

The Declaration of Independence broke the ties between the colonies and England. The Constitution of the United States, a purely secular document, established the supreme law of the United States.

Some, of course like Patrick Henry, believed and argued that it was necessary to be a Christian to have good government. Patrick Henry and those who believed like him lost that argument. As a result, the United States ended up with a Constitution that does not mention a God, or any gods and no one in the United States is required to pay homage to any Deity.

What does it matter if an individual believes in one god, or a thousand gods? The individual beliefs of anyone is their own personal beliefs, be it Bill Fordham, or a President of the United States. Is it necessary for everyone in the United States to believe like Bill Fordham in order to be a good citizen? No, neither is it necessary to believe like the Founding Fathers to be a good citizen.

The Christian religion may be the majority religion in the United States, but the United States is also a very diverse nation that is made up of cultures from all over the world. For the Congress of the United States to recommend any one particular brand of religion over any other, would be disrespectful to all other religions. And the Christians who use the government to push their brand of religion are very disrespectful Christians.

The United States Constitution is about freedom, whereas, Christianity is about enslavement where a person must be obedient to one master. I prefer freedom over enslavement and tyranny any day.

*Bill Jager
Douglasville, GA*

Become a Member!

(Or renew your membership with this form!)



If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiastically invite you to join the Atlanta Freethought Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed monthly newsletter the *Atlanta Freethought News*, voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment of the superb speakers we have coming up, as well as the social and activist events that we sponsor!

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$25 per year.

Household memberships: A household is defined as two members sharing one newsletter, and is available for \$35 per year. Since some of our households have additional members, there will be a \$5 per year charge for each additional voting household member.

International members: because of international postage rates and special handling, we have been forced to add a surcharge of \$5 for members in Canada or Mexico, and \$10 for other foreign addresses.

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

Annual dues are:

Membership	Dues	# of mems	Total
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Household (2 members)	\$35	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional household mems	\$5 ea	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Low income/Student/Under 21	\$10	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Subscription only	\$20	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member	\$100	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Household	\$125	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for Canada/Mexico	\$5	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for other foreign addresses	\$10	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Extra donation (thank you!)	\$ _____	_____	\$ _____
TOTAL			\$ _____

Please send this form with payment to:
 Atlanta Freethought Society
 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500
 Roswell, GA 30075

Atlanta Freethought Society

1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500, Roswell, GA 30075
 Phone: 404-805-2020 e-mail: mirz4404@aol.com

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

Why I Am Not A Christian — \$9

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Please add:

\$4 TOTAL S&H Charge for up to 2 books,

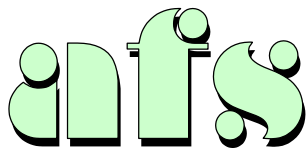
\$1.50 EACH S&H Charge for 3 to 9 books.

No S&H Charge for 10 Books or more.

(All Merchandise will be shipped USPS Priority Mail)

Send check or money order to:

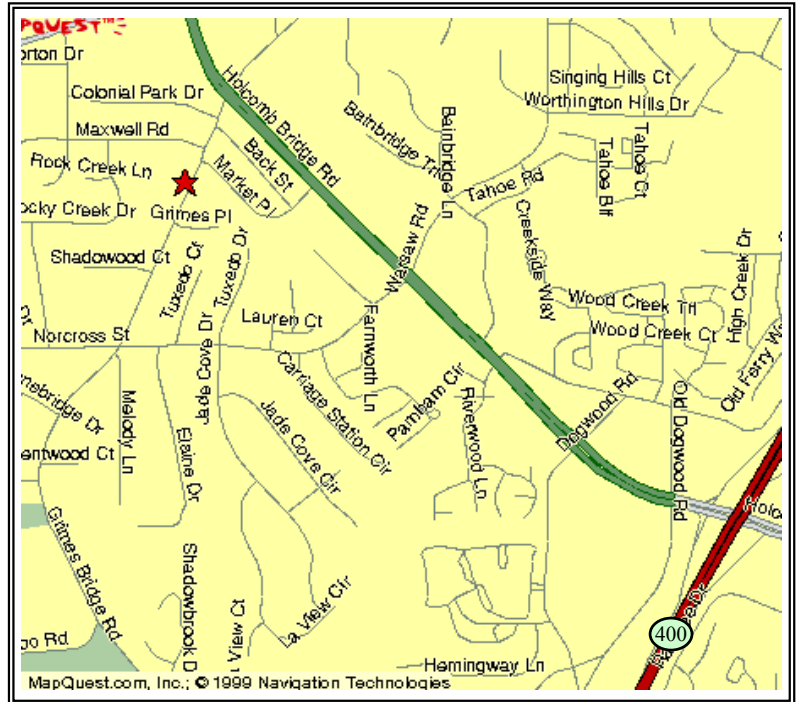
ATLANTA FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY
 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500, Roswell GA 30075



Atlanta
Freethought
Society

The March Meeting:
Sunday, March 9
1:00 PM at the AFS Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road,
Roswell, GA

This Month's Speaker:
Who Is It? Ah, a Mystery!



Atlanta Freethought News is produced by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit, member-run, educational organization created to advance freethought and protect freethinkers. Any freethought, atheist, secular humanist, agnostic, or rationalist group is granted permission to reproduce anything from our newsletter not expressly labeled otherwise (acknowledgement of AFS and author appreciated). Articles published represent the official opinion of AFS only when that is clearly stated; all other opinion is that of the individual author.



If your label indicates "02 2003" or earlier, please renew. Thanks.

Atlanta Freethought News
Atlanta Freethought Society
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500
Roswell, GA 30075