

# Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 9 Number 4 • April 2003

## Our April Meeting

At our April 13 meeting, AFS member **Hilton Bik** will speak on "The True Meaning of the Ten Commandments." Hilton, originally from Zimbabwe, Rhodesia, studied Philosophy at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. He lived for several years in Israel, attending a seminary there. He is presently retired and lives in Athens, GA.

The meeting will be at 1:00 at the **Atlanta Freethought 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 Road, which is on the right.

## 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.

## SOS Meets at AFS Center

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

## Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center at 12:30 on Sunday, April 27.

## Fellowship of Reason Meeting

The **Fellowship of Reason** will have their next meeting at 12:30 PM on April 4 at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see [www.fellowshipofreason.com](http://www.fellowshipofreason.com).

## 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).

"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

## AFS Activities

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet on Sunday, April 20, at 4:00 to 6:00 PM at the Atlanta Freethought Center. 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, April 18, 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.

## AFS Statement on Georgia Flag

The Atlanta Freethought Society supports the reinstatement of the pre-1956 Georgia State Flag to replace the controversial flags of both the post-1956 Confederate St. Andrew's Cross (Stars & Bars) and the currently adopted flag of 2001.

The reasons for support of the pre-1956 Flag are as follows:

1. The pre-1956 flag is a design descended from the original First National C.S.A. flag (Stars & Bars) and would still honor Georgia's Confederate past.
2. The pre-1956 flag was never used negatively as a tool of racial intimidation as the Confederate Battle Flag (St. Andrew's Cross) has.
3. The pre-1956 flag recognizes freedom of religion by the absence of religious mottoes, the inclusion of which ignores the religious diversity of the State of Georgia.
4. Georgia already has an excellent State Motto: "Wisdom, Justice, Moderation."
5. The pre-1956 flag is a good compromise to the current controversy and debate.

**Conclusion:** A reinstatement of the 1920-1956 Georgia State Flag would be non-controversial to a majority of the Georgia population. It is inoffensive and recognizes the racial, cultural, and religious diversity of our fine State. All Georgians can be proud of and feel good about this flag.

## AFS Meetings and Activities

April 13: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.

April 18: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

April 20: AFS Board Meeting, AF Center, 2:00 PM.

April 20: AFS Discussion Group, AF Center, 4:00 PM.



## 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.

Apr 13: AFS member Hilton Bik will speak on "The True Meaning of the Ten Commandments."

May 11: AFS member Donna Gore will speak on "The Constitutionality of Court-Mandated Attendance at Alcoholics Anonymous."

June 8: Hervey Peoples of Longboat Key, FL, will speak on his book *The Human Question*, which was the first place winner of the Florida Writers Association Book Awards for Nonfiction.

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

**Editor**

Steve Yothment

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Vol. 9, Number 4, April 2003

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# Letters of Recommendation: From God or Darwin?

By [Barry A. Palevitz](#), Professor of Biology at University of Georgia at Athens

If you teach introductory biology, you've probably heard this refrain at least once: "I had to learn it, but I don't believe it." The "it," of course, is evolution. The admission usually comes at the end of the semester, when grades are safely in. Invariably, when you ask why, the student cites religious belief.

Somebody once said, if you're not prepared to have your basic ideas challenged, you don't belong in college. I don't expect students to accept everything they learn, but in this case, I'd like to think the logic of evolution is as simple as apples falling from trees. Yet, despite my best efforts at marshalling mountains of hard data and explaining the consistency in scientific reasoning between disciplines – be it chemistry, biology, or geology – some students simply won't accept Darwin. The germ theory of disease and the cell theory are okay, but evolution is still "just a theory."

Evolution deniers are frustrating, even maddening, especially when they're so young and should be open to new ideas. But what should I do when one of them asks for a letter of recommendation to medical school, graduate school, or worse – a preparatory program in science education? Sure she got an A in the course, but by denying evolution in the face of all the evidence, the student fails a much more important test – a fundamental understanding of the nature of science and the standards by which it operates.

Michael Dini, Texas Tech University biologist and reportedly devout Christian, agrees, so he refuses to write letters on behalf of such students. Dini isn't sneaky about his policy, by waiting to decline after students finish the course. No, Dini posts it on his Web site, so students can decide not to take intro biology or drop the course after the first class.

Dini's reasons are as much philosophical as they are scientific. "How can someone who does not accept the

most important theory in biology expect to properly practice in a field that is so heavily based on biology?" he asks on his Web site. "Such an individual has committed malpractice regarding the method of science, for good scientists would never throw out data that do not conform to their expectations or beliefs."

Dini actually sets three criteria for writing recommendations: his charges must also get an A in one of his courses, and they have to get to know him. Dini's teaching philosophy – also on the web – states that students "will base their actions on what they know to be true, rather than what they wish to be true."

Now Dini's in trouble with the Plano, Texas-based Liberty Legal Institute, which complained to the US Justice Department that the professor's policy – and therefore the publicly funded Texas Tech – is denying students' First Amendment right to religious freedom. "No professor has the academic freedom to discriminate against students on the basis of their race, sex or religious beliefs," says Kelly Shackelford of Liberty Legal in a press release.

The Justice Department has launched an inquiry, asking Texas Tech to clarify its policy on letters of recommendation. Texas Tech says it doesn't have a policy – recommendations are a matter of personal discretion.

What would you do in Dini's place? So far, Texas Tech is standing by their man, and Dini refuses to give in. Does he have the right to deny students his imprimatur if they don't accept evolution? The Lubbock chapter of American Association of University Professors (AAUP) unanimously backs Dini. According to chapter president Marc Giaccardo, the group voted to petition the university administration on Dini's behalf "based on academic freedom and his right to write recommendations according to personal criteria." Giaccardo also applauded Dini for being upfront about the policy:



"Here's a faculty member who's communicating with his students. We should stand right by him in that regard." Dini wouldn't comment directly to reporters of *The Scientist* magazine on advice of his department head.

B. Robert Kreiser, associate secretary of academic freedom in AAUP's national office, has a different take on the issue. Dini's decision "is difficult to justify," he says. While a professor can determine criteria for recommendations, Kreiser insists it's not an absolute right. If a student gets an A in the course, he clearly understands the material, so he "has to expect that the faculty member would attest to his performance," Kreiser maintains. In other words, Dini should stick to the subject matter and forget other considerations. One of my colleagues at the University of Georgia would agree. When interviewing students before writing recommendations, professors should limit the conversation to things like career goals, he insists. Personal opinions about sensitive subjects related to religion are off limits.

Kreiser makes another point: a lot of Dini's students are probably pre-meds. What difference does evolution make to a physician? On the other hand, he admits that Dini would be

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right to deny a recommendation for an anti-Darwin student applying to graduate school, say, in evolutionary biology.

But is the line between med school and grad school that distinct? Dini asks, "Can a physician ignore data that he or she does not like and remain a physician for long?" He thinks not, and supplies a list of articles to show how modern medicine depends on evolutionary principles, including the origin of infectious agents like HIV.

For me, much of the argument

comes down to our profession as biologists. Do we as scientists and educators have a responsibility to society beyond transmitting facts and awarding grades? I think we do. Should we knowingly support the advancement of students who, when in a position of authority—whether as physicians or research chemists—will ignore the weight of evidence undergirding evolution just because of subjective belief, thereby undermining our profession and the standards of science? Should we support teachers in training who,

despite their college education and our best efforts, will pass along personal biases instead of an accurate, objective reading of biology to a new generation of students? The answer to these questions is clear, at least to me. A lot more is at stake than a semester's worth of lectures.

[This article is from the March 10, 2003 issue of *The Scientist*, Volume 17, Issue 5, page 16. Copyright 2003, The Scientist LLC. All rights reserved.

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## AFS Members Address Cobb Commissioners

On March 25, Jeff Selman and two AFS members addressed the Cobb County Commissioners in a public meeting to request that they discontinue prayers at the meetings.

**Jeffrey Selman**, who last year filed suit against the Cobb County School district over evolution disclaimers in science textbooks, said the commissioners' practice is a clear violation of the separation of church and state.

"It's not the place of any state or local governments to break the law established by our Constitution," Mr. Selman told commissioners. "Everybody has a right to their own spiritual belief, but the government must be religiously neutral."

In his address, he said he'll file a lawsuit if need be, in order to bring the prayers to an end.

There's currently no plan to stop the invocations, said Cobb County spokesman Robert Quigley. He said participation in the opening prayer is "voluntary."

In an *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article on March 26, reporter Mia Taylor noted that Cobb is not alone in the practice of starting county meetings with a prayer. It happens at many government gatherings around the state.

During the legislative session, the House and Senate each sponsor a "chaplain of the day." Lawmakers take turns daily introducing a clergyman who is often their own hometown preacher. The pastors then give

a speech, quote Bible Scripture or say a prayer.

Fulton County has had a chaplain on staff full-time for fifteen years, who's paid about \$70,000 annually. Part of his duties are to deliver the opening prayer at each county commission meeting.

But Mr. Selman told commissioners in his speech that "The government has no justification for having anyone lead a government gathering in religious prayer. Just because it has been the custom to issue a specific

prayer in Cobb County and the Georgia State governments does not make it any less illegal."

AFS member **Ried Crow** became concerned a year ago after attending a commission meeting that began with what he called a "very evangelical" prayer. (See his speech in the box below.)

AFS member **Ray Knisley** also spoke to the commissioners.

[Some facts in this article are from a March 26 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article by reporter Mia Taylor.]

### Ried Crowe's Speech at the Commissioners' Meeting

Commissioners,

I am an upstanding, tax-paying Cobb County resident. I am also a proud atheist. As such, I consider it an insult to feel coerced by this group to observe the sectarian practices of somebody else's religion in order to participate in the doings of my local government.

However, my opinions on this issue do not matter. This is because there is only one thing that does matter as it pertains to governmental endorsement of religion: the U. S. Constitution. This document serves as the supreme authority in our nation, and its very first amendment reads, in part, "Congress shall pass no laws respecting the establishment of religion..."

This Establishment Clause has been interpreted time and time again by our Supreme Court as meaning that our government cannot promote one form of religion over another, or even religion over non-religion. (The Fourteenth Amendment ensures that these prohibitions even apply to state and local governments.)

The Christian prayer we heard here tonight clearly violates the spirit of the First Amendment.

For the sake of the ideal of religious freedom that all Americans hold dear, I urge this commission to cease the unconstitutional practice of the sectarian invocation that must be endured by citizens that simply want to be active members of our community by attending this gathering.

Thank You Very Much,  
Ried Crowe

# Pledge of Allegiance Ruling Condemned

**O**n March 20, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to condemn a federal appeals court's ruling that leading children to pledge allegiance to the flag in public schools is unconstitutional because of the pledge's reference to God.

The non-binding resolution, passed 400-7 with 15 members voting present, states that the phrase "one nation under God" in the pledge reflects the religious faith central to the founding of the nation and that its recitation is a patriotic act, not a statement of religious faith.

It urged the Attorney General to appeal the decision of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to the Supreme Court and encouraged the continued voluntary recitation of the pledge in school classrooms.

"The 9th Circuit continues to get it wrong," said House Judiciary Committee Chairman James Sensenbrenner, R-Wis. He said the court had refused to rehear the case at a time when the nation is preparing for "an impending war to defend the values upon which our great nation is founded."

The court last summer ruled in favor of Michael Newdow, a Sacramento atheist who said his daughter shouldn't be subjected to collective recitations of the pledge. On February 28, the court stood by that ruling.

Bush administration officials have also criticized the ruling.

The House resolution (HR132) claims the appeals court rulings are

sions that voluntarily reciting the pledge and similar patriotic expressions is consistent with the First Amendment.

Lawmakers not supporting the resolution questioned whether Congress should be telling the judicial branch how to interpret the law. They opposed a provision in the resolution stating that the president should nominate federal court judges who interpret the Constitution correctly.

"It doesn't stop at expressing disapproval," said Rep. William Delahunt, D-Mass., who voted "present." "It goes further in a way that I believe would set an unwise and dangerous precedent." He said it sends a "not-so-subtle message" to judges that "they had better tailor their constitutional views to those of the congressional majority if they wish to be confirmed."

Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., said the 9th Circuit decision was "exactly consistent" with the Supreme Court rulings over the last 40 years on school prayers. The court, he said, "has said that we cannot ask schoolchildren to recite a prayer or a belief in God in the classroom setting, even if we allow the dissenters to walk out of the room."

Earlier in the month, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay threatened to punish the Judicial Branch for the Circuit Court decision regarding the Pledge of Allegiance. "Congress for so long has been lax in standing up for the Constitution," he told reporters, "There are ways to

express ourselves – for instance, we could limit the jurisdiction of the judicial branch. Article III, Section 2 of the Constitution allows us to do that. I think that would be a very good idea to send a message to the judiciary they ought to keep their hands off the Pledge of Allegiance," he said.

In response to Mr. DeLay's statement, the Council for Secular Humanism issued a press release. "If Mr. DeLay seeks to restrict or limit judicial power, this would radically alter the Constitution and be further evidence that the United States is in danger of becoming a theocracy," said Paul Kurtz, chairman of the Council for Secular Humanism, in the press release. "Both the House and the Bush administration seem determined to break down the wall of separation between Church and State." "We believe that the Constitution needs defense today and any effort by Mr. DeLay to limit the power of the judiciary would be an unfortunate assault on our constitutional system," he said.

"House Majority Leader Tom DeLay's call for legislative interference in the judicial process regarding the Pledge is un-American," said Ed Buckner, executive director of the Council for Secular Humanism. "DeLay either understands the crucial principles of judicial review established by Marbury v. Madison, 1803, and is ignoring them for emotionally-charged political pandering, or he is too ill-educated to be a Congressman and should resign."



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# Some on City Council Snub Atheist's Invocation

An atheist's invocation didn't exactly get a blessing from the Charleston, SC, City Council on March 25.

Several council members walked out of the meeting when Herb Silverman, a self-described atheist, rose to speak.

Some who left said it was inappropriate for an atheist to give an invocation. Silverman said that was just plain rude.

"I think it's outrageous behavior," said the College of Charleston math professor. "What would we say if the first time an African-American got up to speak at City Council, a bunch of whites walked out, or if a rabbi got up to give an invocation and a bunch of people got up to leave?"

But some of the half-dozen or so council members who left said their religious beliefs compelled them to leave.

Councilman Wendell Gilliard said the idea of an atheist giving the invocation was particularly wrong when war is going on in Iraq.

"We've got young men and young women over there fighting for our principles, based on God," he said. "I think it's about time we started standing up for something in this country."

Councilman Robert George said that he would not have been comfortable had he stayed.

"He has a right to speak, and I have a right to walk out," he said. "He can worship a chicken if he wants to, but I'm not going to be around when he does it."

Several council members stayed during the invocation, however. Some said they felt like they at least should hear what Silverman had to say.

"Charleston has a great tradition of respecting religious differences," said Councilman Paul Tinkler. "I felt that Dr. Silverman's position should be respected."

The invocation is a tradition at council meetings, and council members take turns performing it. Occasionally, council members will invite a pastor to give the invocation. In this case, Councilman Kwadjo Campbell invited Silverman to speak in his place after Silverman asked for the opportunity.

Campbell, who is not an atheist, said he felt that Silverman had a right to be heard, but that other council members had a right to leave if they wanted.

Silverman said an invocation is not necessarily a prayer and can be a way to give advice.

In this case, he briefly talked about minorities' rights and the need to treat everyone with "respect and dignity." He ended with quotes from Abraham Lincoln and Harry Truman.

Silverman said that atheists simply want acceptance and said that many are hesitant to proclaim their beliefs.

"I really do view this as a civil rights issue. Discrimination against nonbelievers is the last civil rights struggle in which blatant discrimination is viewed as acceptable behavior," he

said. "We should be judged more by our behavior than by our professed religious beliefs."

In an email to the AFNews editor, Herb noted that The April 5 Letters to the Editor page of the *Charleston Post and Courier* was devoted to the City Council walkout of his invocation. Under the headline "Silverman Invocation Flap Stirs Readers," seven letters were printed with only one defending the walkout. "This is six times the number of daily letters ever printed by the *Post and Courier* that puts the behavior of an atheist in a more favorable light than the behavior of Christians," he said. "Some of the

"What divides us is not so much our religious differences in this diverse country but the degree of commitment we have to equal freedom of conscience for all people. We are gathered today, both religious and secular members of our community, with the shared belief that we must treat our fellow human beings with respect and dignity."

supportive letters were written by Christians. The one unfavorable letter said, "It is about time that Christians let the world feel the weight of our faith and have them deal with it."

To read all the letters, go to: [http://charleston.net/stories/040503/let\\_05letters.shtml](http://charleston.net/stories/040503/let_05letters.shtml).

(A paragraph from Herb's invocation is shown in the block above.)

[From a March 27 article by Jason Hardin in the *Charleston Post and Courier*.]

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## Minutes for March AFS Board Meeting

In attendance: Judy Thompson, Tony King, Kelly Wilhoit, Steve Yothment, Harriet Harris, Bill Burton, Lew Southern, Joel Kollin, John Schwartz

Minutes taken by: Joel Kollin

Time/Date of meeting: 2:00 PM, March 16, 2003

- ▶ The Board voted to participate in the Gay Pride Festival, which is on June 27-29. Laura Jacobs will coordinate our participation. Members will be asked to volunteer to serve at our booth.
- ▶ Ray Knisley suggested in writing that we call our physi-

cal location "Atlanta Freethought Center" rather than "AFS Center." After some discussion, the board agreed. Steve will inform Ray of our decision.

- ▶ Judy suggested that we register "Atlanta Freethought Center" and "Freethought Press" with our bank so that these names will be considered valid on checks to AFS. The board agreed.
- ▶ Steve Yothment agreed to work with our renter to get a lease renewal for one year on our second office.
- ▶ Joel, Tony and Bill agreed to meet to analyze the budget and make suggestions for meeting our obligations.

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# Freethought News

## RILEY CALLS FOR PRAYER SOLDIERS

In Hoover, AL, on March 8, Alabama's Republican Gov. Bob Riley asked 700 Alabamians to enlist as prayer soldiers on two war fronts: one in Iraq, the other right here at home.

"There is another war that is going on in this country," Riley said in his keynote address at the Christian Coalition of Alabama's 2003 Friends of the Family Celebration. "This one is far more insidious. It's one that you just can't go and attack. It's a war for the absolute soul of this country.

"God looked down on this country because this country was founded on the rock — and that rock was our lord and savior Jesus Christ," Riley said. "And when the storms came and the rains came, the rock, it did not move. But over the last 15 or 20 years, something began to erode.

"If we are going to save this country, if we are going to re-establish that belief in God, it's up to us," Riley concluded to enthusiastic applause. "If we don't do it, who will?"

The speech highlighted an evening of religious and patriotic pageantry at the Wynfrey Hotel, complete with a pre-dinner reception, music and individual introductions of head table guests.

The gala is an annual event, during which the Christian Coalition presents its "Friend of the Family" awards to federal lawmakers whose voting records are 100 percent in line with the group's agenda, including opposition to abortion and gambling.

In his address, the governor also implored those gathered to pray daily for President Bush, especially as the

country heads toward war with Iraq. Riley said he visited Bush two weeks ago in Washington.

"The president told me, 'I know I am doing what is right for this country,'" Riley said. "And, ladies and gentlemen, I believe he is right in the mission he is trying to achieve... The first thing you should say every morning is, 'Thank God George Bush is our president.'"

If war in Iraq becomes a reality, Riley said, American troops would not be fighting for oil or out of imperial conquest, but "for our right to worship as we see fit."

The speech concluded a week during which the Riley administration's weekly Bible studies — one for Cabinet officers, one for gubernatorial staff — drew national attention. The sessions are held outside business hours.

Toby Roth, Riley's chief of staff, appeared on March 5 on an MSNBC cable news show to debate AFS member Larry Darby, State Director for American Atheists, about the appropriateness of the study groups.

"I'm going to continue to worship as I see fit whether Mr. Darby likes it or not," Riley roared at the Christian Coalition meeting. First lady Patsy Riley, who introduced her husband, asked attendees to pray that Darby "sees our Lord Jesus."

The Rileys and Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore headed the guest list for what amounted to a Who's Who of Alabama politics. Also present were 22 Alabama officeholders; 19 Republicans and 3 Democrats.

[This article is from a March 9 article by Bill Barrow in the *Mobile Register*.]

## BIRDS OF A FEATHER...

Alabama Gov. Bob Riley has joined Chief Justice Roy Moore in his effort to keep his Ten Commandments monument in the state judicial building. He asked a federal appeals court to overturn U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson's ruling that the monument is unconstitutional.

Riley's legal adviser, Troy King, told the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in a friend of the court brief filed on March 17 that Thompson "seems to find constitutional fault in the fact that the chief justice actually believes in the Ten Commandments that are depicted in his particular display.

"Many Alabamians and Americans believe that the Ten Commandments are true and relevant and worthy of obedience today," King wrote, "and it is unjust that the chief justice should be penalized in this litigation for professing that belief himself."

The federal suit to force the removal of the monument was filed by lawyers who said they are offended by the monument.

King said the monument "coerces nobody's allegiance," and "It is the governor's belief that the monument, while, perhaps, offensive to some, is not offensive to the Constitution."

Joe Conn, a spokesman for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which is representing plaintiffs in the case, defended Thompson's ruling, saying it was based on "a long line of previous rulings ... and does not turn on the strength of Judge Moore's religious belief."

[From a March 19 article by Stan Bailey in the *Birmingham News*.]

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"Atheism is the natural human condition regarding religion; atheism means 'without theism.' Atheism involves the mental attitude that unreservedly accepts the supremacy of reason and aims at establishing a life-style and ethical outlook verifiable by experience and the scientific method, independent of all arbitrary assumptions of authority and creeds or supernatural agency.

Where theists base their world view on fear of eternal torment by a loving god, atheists live by the philosophy of materialism, which is predicated on ideas of the pre-Socratic Greek philosopher, Demokritos.

Materialism declares that the cosmos is devoid of imminent conscious purpose; that it is governed by its own inherent, immutable, and impersonal laws; that there is no supernatural interference in human life.

Materialism restores dignity and intellectual integrity to humanity. It holds that we are capable of creating a social system based on reason and justice.

Materialism's 'faith' is in humankind and their ability to transform the world culture by their own efforts. This is a commitment which is in its very essence life-asserting. It considers the struggle for progress as a moral obligation that is impossible without noble ideas."

— Larry Darby, in a letter printed in the *Birmingham Post Herald* on March 27.

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## Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Ried Crowe's letter was in the *Birmingham Post Herald* on March 6.  
Delos McKown's letter was in the *Birmingham Post Herald* on March 27.

### First Amendment is clear on religion

In Loyd C. Brannon's Feb. 26 letter ("Out in left field"), he tries to portray a church/state separation advocate, Pastor James L. Evans, as being somehow ignorant of the Constitution's First Amendment ideals. Let me suggest that, in reality, it is Brannon who is out of touch as it pertains to these issues.

First, Brannon claims the First Amendment's Establishment Clause only means that our government cannot establish a state religion (such as the Church of England). Wrong, Mr. Brannon. The Supreme Court has consistently ruled that it means that Congress (and, by extension via the 14th Amendment, state and local governments) cannot endorse, promote or advance the religious ideals of any particular religion. Furthermore, religion cannot be promoted over non-religion. The famous "Lemon Test" that resulted from the *Lemon v. Kurtzman* decision of 1971 defines this in no uncertain terms.

Next, Brannon boldly claims "this is a Christian nation and was so from the beginning." This bit of propaganda is a typical favorite of fundamentalists with a Christian agenda that refuse to recognize the fact that the articles of the Constitution, which serve as America's blueprint, are entirely secular. They do not mention, much less promote, Brannon's god, or the god(s) of anybody else.

Finally, Brannon gets offensive by stating that "(Americans) celebrate Christmas, not Ramadan." This is a lie and a slap in the face to the millions of upstanding citizens who observe Ramadan; ditto for those who celebrate Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, the Winter Solstice, or the countless other traditionally non-Christian festivities that are found around the time of Christmas.

*Ried Crowe  
Powder Springs, GA*

### Not much good government in Bible

Gov. Bob Riley is reportedly engaging in Bible study and prayer sessions with his governmental underlings.

Anyone reading with as much as half an eye can see the Old Testament is theocratic throughout and after King Saul's time, monarchical. What do these folks expect to find in theocratic, monarchical Scriptures relevant to good government in secular democracies and/or republics?

In the Gospels, Jesus expects the Kingdom to Heaven to abolish and supersede the various human kingdoms and empires of this world — all within the lifetimes of his original disciples (Matthew 10:23, 16:28; Mark 13:30). No wonder he had nothing relevant to say to the leaders of human governments, then or now.

In Romans 13:1-6, Paul tells Christians simply to be submissive to one's rulers. When did Americans ever believe in nothing but meek submission to government, without recourse to protest at the ballot box or to corrective action, legislative or judicial?

As for prayer, well, we all know, if the truth be admitted, that nothing fails more often than prayer. Alabama's manifold problems cannot be solved by pious panhandling for holy handouts.

*Delos B. McKown  
Auburn, AL*

Larry Darby's letter was in the University of Alabama's *Crimson-White* newspaper on April 4.  
Hank Shiver's letter was in the *Birmingham Post Herald* on April 2.

### Bill offers too much protection for clergy

In 1782, Thomas Jefferson wrote, "Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned..." He was referring to the Dark Age, the apex of Christian power, immorality, corruption and inhumanity.

Alabama House Bill 262 would require clergy to report child abuse, unless the information is obtained via confession or counseling.

That bill offers protection to the more treacherous of the priestly pedophiles and their accomplices.

While children might be terrorized into silence by such men of God, this bill offers nothing less than government protection of higher ranking officers, such as Mobile's Archbishop Lipscomb, who has taken a sacred oath of first loyalty to a foreign government, the Vatican.

More than 200 years ago, the framers divorced God from government because they were aware of the evils of faith-based governments.

Jefferson wrote in 1814, "In every country and in every age, the priest has been hostile to liberty. He is always in alliance with the despot, abetting his abuses in return for protection to his own."

Citizens who are concerned about the erosion of liberty should be wary of Judge Roy Moore, Gov. Bob Riley and the Legislature.

*Larry Darby  
Alabama State Director  
American Atheists Inc.*

### Don't want him

I don't think Gov. Bob Riley or the Christian Coalition wants people like me in this state. I am not a right-wing Christian, so I am part of the problem with Alabama. I don't do drugs, get drunk, abuse my wife and family, steal, murder, slander, spend time in jail or show up at church. I support my family, pay taxes, enjoy my home, donate time and money to charities, enjoy my retirement from the military and try to make this world a better place, yet I am not good enough for Riley.

"God looked down on this country because this country was founded on the rock — and that rock was our lord and savior Jesus Christ," Riley said. Riley could not be farther from the truth.

The founding fathers said, "The United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion" in the Treaty of Tripoli. Without the Christian religion, there is no Jesus. You can't have one without the other. The U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights are the most sacrilegious documents written by man, as a guide for governments.

Our Alabama state laws were written by Christians and enforced by Christians. Alabama is near the top in all things bad in a state and near the bottom in all things good. What are we to choose, quality of life or religion?

*Rev. Hank Shiver  
Talladega, AL*



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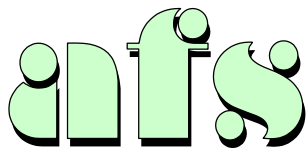
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“Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect.” - James Madison, 1774

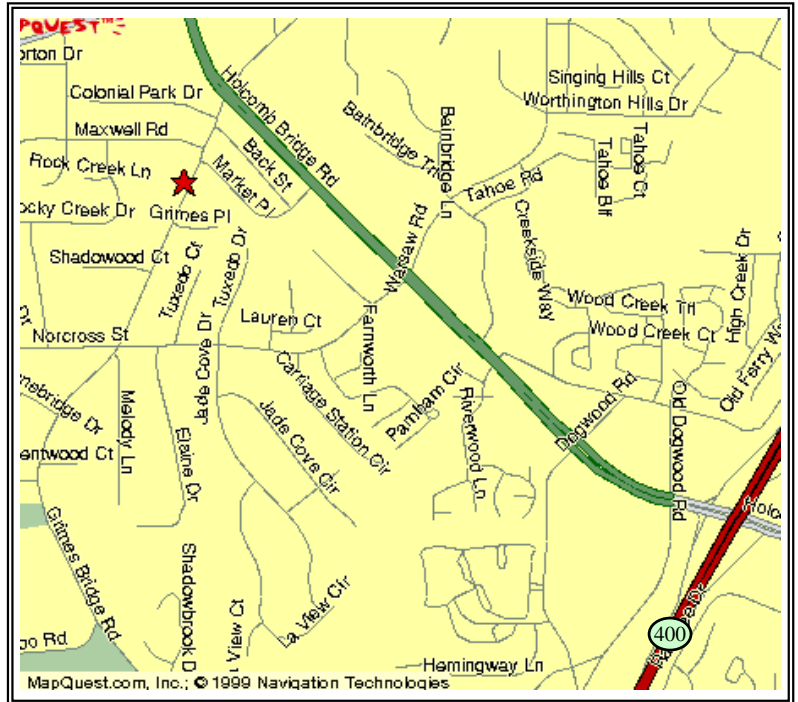
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The April Meeting:  
Sunday, April 13  
1:00 PM at the AFS Center  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road,  
Roswell, GA

This Month's Speaker:  
Hilton Bik



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