

# Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 9 Number 11 • November 2003

## Our November Meeting

Our November 9 meeting will include a speech by our own Ed Buckner, currently the Southern Director of the Council for Secular Humanism. Ed has recently retired from his position as CSH's Executive Director in Amherst, NY. Ed and Diane are now back in the Atlanta area!

The AFS meeting will be at 1:00 at the **Atlanta Freethought Center**, Suite 500, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Roswell, GA. Please feel free to arrive early for snacks and conversation before the meeting.

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.

## SOS Meets at AF 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).

## Fellowship of Reason Meeting

The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of each month at 12:30 PM at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see [www.fellowshipofreason.com](http://www.fellowshipofreason.com).

## Atheists in Foxholes Celebration

The Alabama Freethought Association will have a very special 2-day celebration at Lake Hypatia on November 15 and 16 honoring all those non-believers who have served or are currently serving in our armed forces. A variety of speakers are lined up, but there will also be ample time for social interaction.

The event will begin on Saturday at 1:00 PM and will include a free evening meal and a Sunday non-prayer brunch. Contact Pat Cleveland ([paticc@yahoo.com](mailto:paticc@yahoo.com)) on or before November 8 so they can plan the meals accordingly.

For more information, see [www.alabamafreethought.org](http://www.alabamafreethought.org).

## AFS Meetings and Activities

Nov 8: AFS Hike at Chattahoochee River, 11:00 AM.  
Nov 9: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.  
Nov 14: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.  
Nov 16: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 2:00 PM.  
Nov 16: AFS Discussion Group, AF Center, 4:00 PM.

## AFS Activities

The **AFS Hike** will be at 11:00 on Saturday, November 8, at the Island Ford Branch of the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area. To get there from Atlanta, take I-400 north to the Northridge Road exit. Stay in the right lane and cross over I-400, then take an immediate right onto Dunwoody Place. Go right at the second light on Roberts Drive. The park entrance is on the right less than a mile ahead. Meet at the end of the road. For info, call Lew Southern at 770-509-8272.

The next **AFS Social** will be at Las Margaritas Restaurant at 1842 Cheshire Bridge Road (Atlanta) on Friday, November 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.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet on Sunday, November 16, at 4:00 to 6:00 PM at the AF Center.

The **Tuesday Lunch Bunch** meets every Tuesday for lunch at Panahar Restaurant at 12:30. The address is 3375 Buford Hwy, Suite 1060, in Atlanta. Come on down and enjoy the Bangladeshi food buffet and the great company.

## Elections

Per the AFS bylaws, nominations were made for officers and board members at the October meeting. (Elections will be in December.) The nominees so far are:

President: Steve Yothment

Vice President, Int. Communication: Judy Thompson

Vice President, Ext. Communication: Open

Treasurer: Bill Burton

Board Members: Lew Southern, Freya Harris, Jim Middleton, Laura Jacobs, Joel Kollin, Kate Miller, Tony King (Harriet Harris, Kelly Wilhoit and John Schwartz will continue their 2-year terms as board members.)

If you would like to run for an officer or board position, or know someone that you would like to nominate, please say so at our November meeting!

## Internet Resources

Here are some interesting Internet sites for more reading material on freethought issues:

Larry Darby's new Atheist Law Center website:

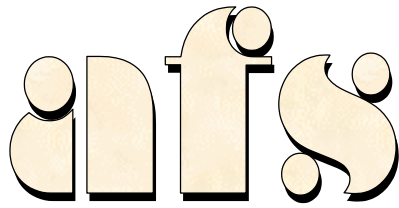
<http://www.atheistlaw.org>

The Council for Secular Humanism website:

<http://www.secularhumanism.org>

Excellent article: The Day Religion Died:

[http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/harrison\\_23\\_4.html](http://www.secularhumanism.org/library/fi/harrison_23_4.html)



**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.

Nov 9: Ed and Diane Buckner are back in Atlanta! Ed will speak on "The Fundamentals of Extremism."

Dec 14: Laughlin McDonald, Director of the Southern Regional Office of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) will speak on the ACLU.

Jan 11: TBA

Feb 8: John Henderson (tentative) of Asheville, NC will speak about his new book, *Fear Faith Fact Fantasy*.

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

**How to Contact the Editor**

Send correspondence to AFS at:  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500  
Roswell, GA 30075-3905  
or phone Steve at 678-364-8703  
or send e-mail to [SteveYoth@aol.com](mailto:SteveYoth@aol.com).

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For membership and subscription  
information, contact AFS at:  
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**AFS Webmaster:** Ken Cummings

Call the AFS Infoline: 770-641-2903

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# Larry Darby Starts Atheist Law Center

Larry Darby, former state director of American Atheists, Inc., has resigned from his role to lead another nonprofit atheist group. Darby is now president of the Atheist Law Center, Inc., a nonprofit group that serves as an advocate for the civil rights of atheists.

"I believe I served American Atheists very well in the past 29 months as its state director," Darby said. "I remain a member of American Atheists, and I am supportive of its mission. I am now going to devote my energies to the mission of the Atheist Law Center."

On October 16, Larry announced that the Atheist Law Center is undertaking its first project. The Law Center intends to file a brief as amicus curiae, or friend of the court, in the matter of Elk Grove Unified School District v. Michael A. Newdow.

The U.S. Supreme Court announced on the previous Tuesday that they will review the emotionally charged issue of whether a public school district policy that requires teachers to lead willing students in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, which includes the words "under God," violates the constitutional principle of separation between religion and government.

California physician Michael Newdow, who happens to be Atheist, sued his daughter's school district, contending the daily ritual of a classroom proclaiming its patriotism "under God" amounts to a government-coerced religious practice, contrary to the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U. S. Constitution. The U. S. District Court dismissed Newdow's suit and Newdow appealed that ruling to the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, which subsequently ruled in Newdow's favor. The school district petitioned the U. S. Supreme Court for a writ of certiorari, which was granted.

Darby said, "This case is a wonderful opportunity for the Supreme Court to rectify many years of judicial inco-

herence. The Atheist Law Center brief will address jurisprudence that says that the government cannot favor religion over irreligion and yet sanction 'ceremonial deism;' a jurisprudence that says there is no such thing as a de minimis violation of the establishment clause and then allows violations; a jurisprudence that treats all speech, even prayer, as 'just speech' when prayer may be plainly different; and a jurisprudence that purports to state that silent participation in a religious exercise in a coercive setting is participation all the same, but which might allow participation in the affirmation 'under God' to stand. The

Atheist Law Center will attempt to persuade the Court to reaffirm its precedents on student participation in coercive religious exercises and will on this issue be more consistent than it has been on other religion/government issues."

The Atheist Law Center is a legal advocacy organization founded on September 11, 2002 in Montgomery, Alabama. The Law Center has a website at <http://www.atheistlaw.org>, which includes press releases, atheist news and a sign-up page for an email newsletter, called the Atheist Daily Briefing.

## From the Atheist Law Center website...

"As it is, the game of allowing only one side to be heard is so well understood by our newspapers that it appears to be accepted as a matter of course, and no one seems to think it at all wrong. Where religion is concerned our newspapers are among the most cowardly in the world, and the policy of suppression is the worse because it is pursued under the cloak of concern for morality and a burning desire for truth and justice. And that gives to Canon Storr a great advantage. He is writing for readers who, in the main, will hear only one side of the case. The ignorance of the average Christian concerning the nature and origin of his religious beliefs is colossal; and he remains undisturbed because no one is permitted to enlighten him. In the heyday of its power the Christian Church found it convenient to burn the man who criticized its teaching. But the flames were as likely to serve as a beacon as they were to act as a warning. The policy of securing an avowedly open platform, and then excluding one side altogether, promised far greater safety. For perpetuating ignorance — the Mother of Devotion — no better plan could be devised. The military method of creating a desert and calling it peace is paralleled by the Christian policy of refusing the opposition a hearing and then assuming its non-existence." Chapman Cohen, "The Christian Myth" (January 1927)

Atheists today often feel overwhelmed by the number of political pundits and talking heads perpetuating the myth that the United States is a Christian nation via print, radio and TV media. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the faith-based terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, it was difficult to find news amongst the tsunami of religious ceremonies broadcast by allegedly 24-hour TV news networks. Short of amassing wealth to buy a media conglomerate, the Atheist voice of reason is best heard by taking action to fight against religion encroachments into government. Sustained activism by Atheists at the local level is necessary to make continual advancements toward revival of a society guided by enlightened principles, not theocratic dogma. The dangers of doing nothing about erosion of civil rights in the United States notwithstanding, by speaking out and taking action in the public square the Atheist voice will be heard and reported by a responsible news media.



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# U.S. Supreme Court Refuses to Hear Final Appeal of 'Ten Commandments Judge' Roy Moore

Action Ends Long-Running Case With Victory for Church-State Separation, Says Americans United

On November 3, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to revive Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore's legal effort to display the Ten Commandments in the state Judicial Building in Montgomery.

The high court's refusal to hear the *Moore v. Glassroth* case means that the legal controversy is over and that Moore has lost his final appeal. The two-and-a-half-ton religious monument will not be returned to public display at the state courthouse.

"This is the end of the legal line for Roy Moore," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "The outcome does not sur-

prise me. The Supreme Court was never likely to give its blessing to Moore's misguided crusade. It is time for Moore to face facts: he's on the wrong side of the Constitution. Religious symbols belong in our homes and houses of worship, not our court-houses."

Acting on behalf of local residents, Americans United, the American Civil Liberties Union of Alabama and the Southern Poverty Law Center brought a legal challenge against Moore after the Alabama jurist arranged to display a Protestant version of the Ten Commandments in the Judicial Building in July of 2001.

A U.S. district court ruled against Moore, and on appeal he also lost before the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. Moore then defied the federal courts and announced he would not remove the monument. He was suspended from his position, and other Alabama officials had the monument removed from public display.

"The Supreme Court's decision today brings an end to Moore's grandstanding," Lynn remarked. "He has exploited the Ten Commandments for personal political gain long enough."

[From a November 3 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.]

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## Group Wanted Judge Thompson Ousted

Back on October 27, the Friday before the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the Ten Commandments case, supporters of the Decalogue had a rally at the Alabama State Capitol. At the rally, the Rev. Frank Raddish, leader of Capitol Hill Independent Baptist Ministries, based in Washington, announced his petition to remove U.S. District Court Judge Myron Thompson from the bench by Congress. Last year, Thompson ruled that Moore's placement of the granite monument in the rotunda was unconstitutional and ordered the display removed.

Raddish claimed that judges across the country, through their rulings, are undermining the constitutional right of Christians to freedom of religious expression. "We are not going to stand around any longer and watch federal judges destroy the true meaning of the United States Constitution and the Bill of Rights," Raddish said.

Thompson declined to comment on the issue. Some central Alabama ministers said they will support the effort.

"We have a runaway judicial system," said the Rev. David Floyd, pas-

tor of Marvyn Parkway Baptist Church in Opelika.

"When Judge Moore was elected by the people of this state to be our chief justice of the Supreme Court, we knew that he ran with the promise that he would place the Ten Commandments in the Judicial Building," Floyd said. "Judge Myron Thompson, who I believe has no jurisdiction concerning this matter, has made void the will of the people of Alabama."

Moore was suspended on Aug. 22 after a judicial ethics commission filed formal charges against him for refusing to comply with Thompson's order to remove the monument. Moore will face trial before the Court of the Judiciary on Nov. 12.

Raddish said he, along with other religious leaders across the state, will launch a nationwide "impeachment drive" against the federal judge. Supporters will take their petitions to their congregations and communities and then mail them to members of Congress, he said.

"Those petitions will go to their U.S. congressmen in Alabama and U.S. senators, and that petition will

ask those men that we have elected to investigate Judge Myron Thompson and to impeach and remove him from office," Raddish said.

The Rev. Ed Nettles, pastor of Freewill Baptist Church in Montgomery, is one minister who does not agree with the petition effort.

"It does not show Christ's love. It shows something totally opposite, and that is revenge," Nettles said. "They are acting out of malice and revenge, which is totally against Christian principles. I would say to them to allow the court system to hear the entire case to the United States Supreme Court and we honor what the Supreme Court states."

Larry Darby, former state director of American Atheists Inc. and current president of Atheists Law Center, doubted that the impeachment effort will succeed. He described the petition as "ridiculous."

"Judge Thompson's a good judge. He's done nothing wrong," Darby said. "I don't think he is in danger of losing his position."

[From an October 27 article by Jannell McGrew in the *Montgomery Advertiser*.]

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# Supreme Court Will Hear Pledge Case

**O**n October 14, the U.S. Supreme Court said it would decide in 2004 if the recitation in public schools of the Pledge of Allegiance with the phrase "under God" is an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion.

A California law requires the pledge to be recited once each day at public elementary schools, although no child is required to join in.

Atheist Michael Newdow sued in 2000 and claimed his daughter, who attended the second grade at a public school near Sacramento, had to listen to the teacher-led pledge and that it constituted a "daily indoctrination" with "religious dogma."

The Supreme Court said it would also consider whether Newdow had the legal right to challenge the school district policy. He did not have custody of the child when he brought the lawsuit. The mother, Sandra Banning, who has custody, says she wanted the girl to say the pledge.

## SCALIA NOT PARTICIPATING

Justice Antonin Scalia, one of the court's most conservative members who normally votes for government

displays of religious phrases or symbols, will not take part in the pledge case. Newdow urged Scalia to remove himself from the case after Scalia gave a speech in January in Fredericksburg, Virginia questioning whether courts should remove religious symbols and phrases from public life.

"We could eliminate 'under God' from the Pledge of Allegiance. That could be democratically done," he said. But he added that would be "contrary to our whole tradition."

On the same day as the Supreme Court's announcement, the 2.8 million-member American Legion said it will be involved in the case, to "fight for the right of public-school teachers and students to voluntarily observe the time-honored tradition."

"The American Legion filed a friend-of-the-court brief in support of the constitutionality of the Pledge of Allegiance at federal court in San Francisco," said American Legion National Commander John Brieden. "The American Legion is committed to take this fight all the way to the highest court in the land. Teachers

leading students in the Pledge of Allegiance is as constitutional as 'In God We Trust' stamped on our nation's currency and references to 'God' in the oaths taken in our courts."

In a press release on October 14, the Rev. Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State said, "This is the most controversial religion-in-schools case since the school prayer decisions of the early 1960s... No one should feel coerced to take part in a religious exercise to express patriotism. A country founded on religious freedom should not be afraid to recognize that love of God and love of country are not the same for some people. Requiring a daily religious loyalty test for school children is simply wrong."

Lynn noted that the Pledge of Allegiance was originally secular. Written in 1892 by a Baptist minister, the Pledge was recited for several decades without any religious references. Congress added the phrase "under God" to the Pledge in 1954 in response to fears of Communism.

[From press releases by AU (Oct. 14) and the American Legion (Oct. 16).]

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"Science is not religion and it doesn't come down to faith. Although it has many of religion's virtues, it has none of its vices. Science is based upon verifiable evidence. Religious faith not only lacks evidence, its independence from evidence is its pride and joy, shouted from the rooftops... There's all the difference in the world between a belief that one is prepared to defend by quoting evidence and logic and a belief that is supported by nothing more than tradition, authority, or revelation." – Richard Dawkins in *The Humanist* magazine.

"It is always to be taken for granted that those who oppose an equality of rights never mean that exclusion should take place on themselves." – Thomas Jefferson, *On First Principals of Government*

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# Americans United Urges Rumsfeld to Fire Controversial General

Official Who Says U.S. Is Engaged In Holy War Against Satan Shouldn't Be Making Policy, Charges AU's Lynn

Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld should fire a top-ranking Pentagon official who has repeatedly told evangelical Christian audiences that the U.S. struggle against terrorism is a religious conflict against Satan, according to Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Gen. William G. Boykin, who recently was named deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence, said the United States is being attacked because we are a Christian nation, insisted that Muslims worship idols and said the real enemy of America is not Osama bin Laden or Saddam Hussein but Satan.

The Rev. Barry Lynn, AU's executive director, said, "Boykin literally believes that the United States government is engaged in a holy war. That's totally unacceptable for someone in a top government post. A man who sees the conduct of U.S. foreign policy as some sort of Christian religious crusade should not be making policy. I urge Secretary Rumsfeld to remove Lt. Gen. Boykin from his post and distance the Bush administration from Boykin's extreme views."

According to NBC News and other sources, Boykin has repeatedly appeared before evangelical Christian

groups, often in uniform, and characterized the U.S. war with terrorism in stark religious terms.

In a June appearance in Oregon, Boykin reportedly said that Islamic extremists hate the U.S. "because we're a Christian nation, because our foundations and our roots are Judeo-Christian." Boykin said the real enemy is not Saddam Hussein or Osama bin Laden. "The enemy," he said, "is a guy called Satan."

In a January speech in Daytona, Fla., Boykin recalled his efforts to capture an Islamic militant in Somalia who had said he would be protected by Allah.

Said Boykin, "Well, you know what I knew, that my God was bigger than his. I knew that my God was a real God, and his was an idol."

After the militant was captured, Boykin told him, "Mr. Atto, you underestimated our God."

On October 23, Democratic presidential candidate Joe Lieberman said the Army general should be reprimanded for his criticism of Muslims, calling those comments the "mirror opposite" of Osama bin Laden's vilification of Christians and Jews.

In an interview with Associated Press reporters and editors, Lieber-

man said Boykin should be held to account for casting the United States' fight against terrorists in religious terms with comments that were "wrong theologically" and "very bigoted."

Lieberman said such divisive remarks could contribute to a "global theological conflict" that would endanger people throughout the world. "That's exactly what bin Laden and al-Qaida want to do, and these remarks unfortunately give material, give fuel to the fire that bin Laden wants to start all around the world against the rest of us," he said.

Lieberman also noted that President Bush was "a bit slow" to react to Boykin's remarks.

Bush's first public response to Boykin came on October 22, when he told reporters aboard Air Force One en route to Australia from Indonesia that he had repudiated the general's views in discussions with leaders of Muslim Indonesia.

"I said he didn't reflect my opinion," Bush said. "Look, it just doesn't reflect what the government thinks."

[From an Oct. 21 AU press release and an Oct. 22 AP article by Nedra Pickler.]

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## October Board Meeting Minutes

In attendance: Judy Thompson, Kate Miller, Kelly Wilhoit, Steve Yothment, Joel Kollin, Harriet Harris, Bill Burton

Minutes taken by: Harriet Harris

Time/Date of meeting: 3:00 PM, October 26, 2003

- ▶ The minutes of the September meeting were approved as they appeared in the October newsletter.
- ▶ Treasurer Bill Burton reported a bank balance of \$768 and filed a detailed account of income and expenditures.
- ▶ Kate reported that progress has been arduous - both with the city of Roswell and with Fulton County - in her quest for property tax exemption on our two condos. She will continue on this effort.
- ▶ Kate has been handling e-mail sales of our books through Amazon. Per her request, the board agreed that she could give a 20% discount on large orders.
- ▶ Our election process was discussed at length, and we are looking into ways to improve it. Joel agreed to suggest

changes to the bylaws for next year. Meanwhile, in accordance with our current bylaws, members will receive nominee information and ballots by mail no later than Nov. 23. Steve and Harriet will prepare and distribute the election material.

- ▶ It was noted that there currently is no nominee for Vice President, External Communications. Board members suggested Larry Curry, Sue Garland, Ron Haney, Diane Buckner and Lew Southern as possible nominees. Steve agreed to call these people to see if they would be interested in the position.
- ▶ The lock on the office door has become difficult to unlock and needs to be replaced. Steve offered to donate a new lock, and to have appropriate keys made.
- ▶ The board discussed refinancing of the mortgage. Steve, Joel and Harriet will meet separately to develop ideas on how to refinance the mortgage and will give recommendations at the next board meeting.

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# Theocratic Dreams: The Reshaping of America

By Kimberly Blaker, editor and coauthor of *The Fundamentals of Extremism: the Christian Right in America*

Most Americans, Christian or otherwise, recognize the importance of church and state separation, whether for the protection of church from the government or government from the church. But a large and powerful minority despises freedom of religion in its truest sense: the freedom to practice any religion, or no religion, according to the dictates of one's own conscience. This was most evident in the recent Ten Commandments case in which Alabama's Chief Justice Roy Moore refused to obey a federal court order for the monument's removal.

Unfortunately, the events of September 11 have paradoxically played right into the hands of America's Christian right. This movement has flourished in our fear-ridden nation in spite of the obvious lessons of Osama bin Laden's jihad. American theocrats have even managed to draw support from many moderates, as extreme right politicians have further fused God and Jesus with government, patriotism, and the warding off of Islamic fundamentalist evils.

It is difficult to conceive of our democratic, pluralistic nation (at least in theory, if not always in practice) ever giving way to the fundamentalism seen in Afghanistan or other turbulent states. Yet there may, remotely, be some warrant to such paranoia.

R. Scott Appleby and Martin E. Marty wrote about the deadly violence that occurs when fundamentalisms collide. There may be some parallels given that those Americans that most favored war with Iraq are conservative and fundamentalist Christians. While Saddam and his regime may not be fundamentalist, America's association of the Middle East with Islamic fundamentalism and Christian fundamentalists' admitted desire for war with the Middle East to bring about the tribulation may well be a strong motivating factor in our current conflict.

Karen Armstrong in *The Battle for God* says it's improbable that fundamentalism could gain enough popularity in the U.S. But she acknowledges that in an emergency state such as economic or environmental catastrophe, Christian fundamentalism could gravely change the face of our nation.

An emergency state is perhaps what should concern us at this particular moment in American history. To a degree, we've been in such since 9-11. Support for the Christian right movement has dramatically increased since that fatal day, and Christian conservatism has increasingly been played out in the public square.

Add to this our economic decline; that Bush's policies and war and reconstruction costs are likely to further plummet our economy; and that we are occupying a country where terrorist supporters are likely to retaliate by bombing or loosing biological or chemical weapons on U.S. soil. Should America fall victim to another significant terrorist assault in the not-so-distant future, given the significant erosion of the wall between church and state and the ravaging of Constitutional protections since 9-11, Armstrong's suggestion could, though implausible, become reality.

The ramifications are sobering. Should Bush's goals continue to backfire, our economy, foreign relations, and our own safety are all at risk. Depending on the severity of any such crisis, it could ultimately lead to serious reaction from America's Christian fundamentalists.

In contrast, if Bush is successful, he'll not only be elevated by and maintain the support of the religious right, he'll likely gain the support of a segment of mainstream Americans blinded by elation as to his political agenda. A second term in office could prove fatal to American liberties.

The implications beseech us to examine how to protect faith, freedom,

and security in America and to act resolutely in doing so. The solutions, while seemingly simple, will not be easy to actuate. These would be to convince all Americans of their duty to participate in the political process by deeply familiarizing themselves with candidates backgrounds *before* voting and then getting to the voting booths; convincing politicians to uphold our Constitution and Bill of Rights, even when a majority of the population (or seeming majority) is in opposition, and especially during times of high national security; and finally, the next to impossible, convincing religious conservatives that dismantling the wall between church and state most surely would result in their own loss of religious freedom—the right to practice Christianity according to their own denominational beliefs, versus being required to adhere to that of some other Christian faith.

But, as George Grant, a far right activist reveals, "Since only about sixty percent of the people are registered to vote and only about thirty-five percent of those actually bother to go to the polls, a candidate only needs to get the support of a small, elite group of citizens to win." To beat the religious right, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, atheists, and all other faiths must come together and make a concerted effort to diffuse the Christian right.

Unfortunately, secularization, that which freedom and democracy are dependent upon, also gives rise to fundamentalism. We are in the ultimate catch-22. Religious extremism will not go away, so we and future generations must stringently strive to maintain the wall between church and state and all American freedoms lest our more than two-century-old democracy fade into the annals of American history.

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# Clipped

## Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Ried Crow's letter (on left) was in the Birmingham *Post Herald* on September 20.

Ried's letter (on right) was in the Jacksonville (FL) *Times-Union* on October 25.

### Laws are blend

I have a few simple questions for those Bible thumpers who so often assert in their letters that our laws are somehow based on the Decalogue:

1. Can the Bible beaters please, please, *please* produce for me just one single modern law — local, state or federal — that is based on the First Commandment (i.e., “Thou shalt have no other gods before me”)? Ditto for the Second (“no graven images”), Third (“no taking the name of the Lord in vain”), Fourth (“keep the Sabbath holy”), or Fifth (“honor thy parents”).

2. Many of our laws are most assuredly based on some of the tenets of Marxism (such as our strong federal union statutes). Why don't fundamentalists ever seem to champion displays of socialist manifestos? How is this not hypocrisy at its pinnacle?

Our laws are, in part, based on a blend of many different historical legal and religious codes. The religious right claims that the Ten Commandments should receive preferential treatment by getting honored above all of these other legal precedents only because it happens to contain evangelical content that coincides with their own dogma.

Clearly, this is wrong for America. Way to go, Judge Thompson!

Ried Crowe  
Powder Springs, GA

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

#### Constitution should rule

In a letter Monday (“Majority should rule”), the writer uses the majority rules argument to support her misguided claim that the Pledge of Allegiance should be allowed to have the “under God” phraseology in it due to the fact that most Americans happen to agree with her.

It is this kind of illogical and dim-witted view of the issues that lead to the legalization of slavery and other clearly unconstitutional practices in our nation's history.

The letter is wrong because we are not a nation under God, but a nation under the constitution. The rights guaranteed by this august document apply (in theory) to every single citizen, not just those that happen to be in a particular majority of some kind. Thus, those of us that feel that our religious freedoms of conscience are abridged by public displays that state, in part, “Thou shalt have no other gods before Me,” are just as oppressed as those that are told by their government that they must be Muslims, Buddhists or atheists.

If the writer would like to say “one nation, under God” when reciting the pledge, then she is perfectly free to do so. After all, our beloved constitution guarantees her the right to free speech. However, our government clearly does not have the right to attempt to coerce every other American to do likewise, as the constitution also bans theocratic governance.

RIED CROWE,  
engineer, Powder Springs, GA

Ed Buckner's letter was in the Marietta Daily Journal on October 11.

### Religious liberty too important to be destroyed by government

Robert Rogers of Acworth (Letters, Oct. 9), knows of no facts on the side of church/state separation, so let me give him a few:

If a Christian organization in Cobb County, like the YWCA, wants to hire only Christians, it should have that right. But any program supported with tax dollars must not discriminate based on religion. Therefore, Georgia Christian Coalition leader Sadie Fields and Gov. Sonny Perdue and Mr. Rogers are not supporting a “wonderful idea” - they're undermining religious liberty and government accountability.

The words “separation of church and state” are not in the U.S. Constitution or Bill of Rights, but the idea certainly is. There are many ideas in the U.S. Constitution that are not called there by the words we use for them - including “religious liberty,” “freedom of religion,” “individual rights,” “separation of powers,” “judicial review” and many more. By the way, even the words are in the Georgia Constitution - in Article I, Section 2, paragraph 6.

Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and other founders did use words such as “separation of church and state” and “total separation of government and religion.”

Many people have lost not only their liberty, but their lives because of the entanglement of religion and government — in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, throughout Europe in the Christian/Dark Ages era, and, in the 19th century, in this nation. As just one example, disputes over whether to use the Catholic or King James versions of the Bible for school Bible readings in the 1840s led to riots, burned homes and deaths in the Philadelphia area.

The Ten Commandments are religious.

If Mr. Rogers's logic is followed, he would have to argue that a document posted in the courthouse that began “Thou shalt have no gods at all...” was somehow not anti-religious and was acceptable under our Constitution. (It would not be.)

There is not a shred of support in the Ten Commandments nor the Bible for individual rights or for establishing a democratic republic.

Supporting separation of church and state is not anti-religious; religious people in this nation are now and must remain free to believe and to practice their religions.

The crucial fact that the governor, Ms. Fields and Mr. Rogers miss is that religious liberty exists either for all or it is secure for no one. And if government is allowed to make religious decisions for us, religious liberty will be lost. Those of us who support separation of church and state do not want the government to be anti-religious any more than we want it to be religious. We know that religious liberty is far too important to let any government or any majority destroy it.

Ed Buckner of Smyrna is southern director of the Council for Secular Humanism.



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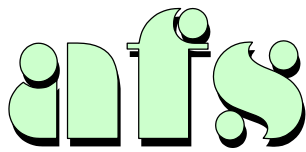
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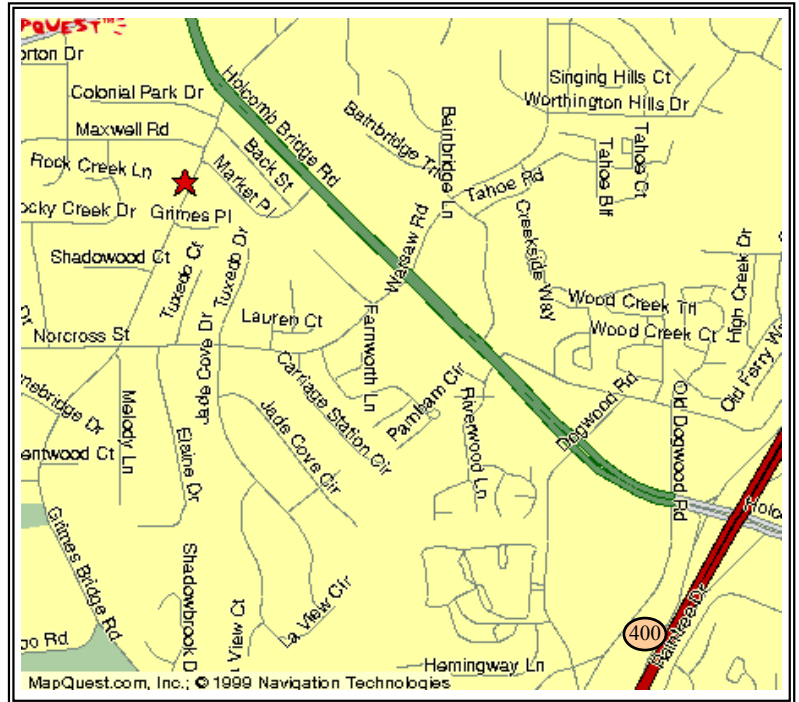
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