

# Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 10 Number 1 • January 2004

## Our January Meeting

Our January 11 meeting will include a speech by Dennis Martin, titled, "An Exposé of Mistaken Reasoning Concerning Human Sexuality."

Dr. Martin received his PhD in Philosophy from Emory University in 1983, and was an education administrator for St. Leo University from 1985 to 2000. He has also taught at Georgia Military College, Shorter College, Georgia State (GSU) and Emory University. Dr. Martin recently published his book *Theses on 95 Sexdecillion Indulgences*, which is a series of theses on a new theory of human sexuality. In the book, he proposes that both a revolution and a reformation will take place in the next century in which there will be a more humane view of human sexuality. (Read more about the book at [www.flirtsandspices.com](http://www.flirtsandspices.com).)

The 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.

## AFS Activities

The next **AFS Social** will be on January 16 at Meskerem Ethiopian Restaurant, 2329 Cheshire Bridge Road NE, Atlanta, GA at 7:00 PM. Their phone number is 404-417-0991. Creative Loafing Magazine recommends their veggie combo platter with some tej, an Ethiopian honey wine.

To get there from downtown Atlanta, take I-85 north and exit at GA-13 North (Exit 86). Go 1.6 miles to Lenox Road. Turn right and go 0.5 miles to the restaurant. (Lenox Road becomes Cheshire Bridge Road.)

From the north, take I-85 south to Cheshire Bridge Road (Exit 88). Turn left and go 0.4 miles to the restaurant.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet on Sunday, January 18, 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.

## 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).

## Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center at 12:30 on Sunday, January 25. This will be their annual election and planning meeting.

## 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).

## Darwin Day: February 12

On February 12, Freethought groups around the world will celebrate the birthday of Charles Darwin. (For details, see [www.DarwinDay.org](http://www.DarwinDay.org).) The coordinator for Darwin Day activities is Ried Crowe. If you have ideas for the celebration, please email Ried at [riedpamc@pellsouth.net](mailto:riedpamc@pellsouth.net). We will announce our plans for the celebration in the February AFNews.

## Election Results

Here are the results of the recent AFS election:

President: Steve Yothment	Board Members:
VP, Internal: Judy Thompson	Lew Southern
VP, External: Sue Garland	Kate Miller
Treasurer: Bill Burton	Joel Kollin

Harriet Harris, Kelly Wilhoit and John Schwartz will continue their 2-year terms as board members.

Congratulations to the new officers and board members!

Harriet Harris, chair of the election committee, reported that there were no write-in votes, and that the Bylaws amendments passed overwhelmingly.

Thanks, Harriet, for mailing and counting the ballots!

## Alabama Atheist News

Blair Scott, director of the Alabama Atheists, recently announced that his new website ([www.AlabamaAtheist.org](http://www.AlabamaAtheist.org)) is up and running. The site includes a segment called *Atheism Awareness*, a discussion of Atheist issues, and Blair's popular column, *Bible Belt Blasphemy*.

## Meetings and Activities

Jan 11: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.  
Jan 16: AFS Social, Meskerem Ethiopian Rest., 7:00 PM.  
Jan 18: AFS Board Meeting, AF Center, 2:00 PM.  
Jan 18: 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.

Jan 11: Dr. Dennis Martin, a professor of philosophy at various schools around the Atlanta area, will speak on "An Exposé of Mistaken Reasoning Concerning Human Sexuality."

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

Mar 14: Joe Beck will speak on "Religion: Stress Creator or Stress Reducer?"

Apr 11: Scott Lilienfeld will speak on "Science and Pseudo-science in Clinical Psychology."

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

You can unsubscribe by sending an email to [xxxx-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:xxxx-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com).

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists. We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about the advantages of living life free of religious dogma through speeches, debates, discussions, protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available.

We define freethought as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or, especially, lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion, primarily through having a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs and by maintaining and using our own extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

### Atlanta Freethought News an AFS publication

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Steve Yothment

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# Habersham County to Pay ACLU Fees

**H**abersham County may have to foot the bill for opposing attorneys fees in a recent Ten Commandments case because of a technicality in its insurance policy with the Association County Commissioners of Georgia. Because a judge did not award the nominal damage of \$1 in his ruling to remove the Ten Commandments from the county courthouse and aquatic center, the county's litigation insurance, the ACCG-sponsored Interlocal Risk Management Agency (IRMA), says it won't pay for opposing attorney's fees.

The county was sued by two Clarkesville residents and the American Civil Liberties Union last year over its display of the Commandments, and U.S. District Court Judge William O'Kelley ruled in favor of the plaintiffs Nov. 17, ordering the Commandments removed.

Habersham is currently appealing that decision, but because monetary damages were not awarded by the judge, the ACCG said the county's IRMA coverage could not be used to pay for the appeal. Now, because of the same provision in the policy, IRMA will not cover Habersham for the \$70,000 the ACLU is asking for in attorney's fees.

John Smith, claim manager for the ACCG, said that IRMA contacted the county the previous week to notify them that it would not fund an appeal or pay for the opposing parties' attor-

ney's fees. Currently, that amount has been filed by the ACLU for about \$70,000 and is awaiting O'Kelley's approval.

Should O'Kelley approve the opposition's fees, Smith said the ACCG does not have to pay for the attorney's fees because O'Kelley did not include any monetary damages in his Nov. 17 ruling against the county. The plaintiffs had asked for \$1, the nominal amount, when it filed the suit. However, O'Kelley did not include the \$1 amount in his ruling as a damage. According to Smith, the absence of that \$1 in the ruling eliminates their obligation to pay for the attorney fees.

"Our coverage does not apply to claims seeking relief or redress in any form other than money damages," Smith said. "Money damages does not include any sums awarded for plaintiffs attorneys fees in any case in which money damages are not sought or not awarded."

In this case nominal damage of \$1 was sought, but not awarded.

"If the judge had awarded the \$1 asked for in the suit, this could have changed our obligation," Smith said. "It came down to the judge not asking for money which affects what we can pay and not pay."

## COUNTY NOT HAPPY

On December 19, Habersham County Commission Chairman Doug Vermilya said he was not happy about the ACCG's notification it would

not pay for attorney's fees.

"All along we were led to believe they would pay our costs," Vermilya said. "We've brought this up several times with them. It's very frustrating."

"To know they would deny coverage on an appeal wasn't a surprise. But to find out they wouldn't pay for coverage over what we'd already been through was a big surprise," he said.

Smith admitted that ACCG had planned to cover the attorney's fees, but it never considered the nominal monetary damage would not be included in O'Kelley's ruling.

"If he had awarded any money damages, then we would have up to \$1 million to pay on that claim," he said. "Obviously, [the case] ended up in a middle ground. The plaintiff won but there's no money. No one could have guessed how it would end up."

The county has said repeatedly that it did not want to use taxpayer dollars to defend the case. So far, it's done that successfully through attorney's from the Florida-based firm Liberty Counsel and Cornelia attorney Doug McDonald, who have volunteered their time for free.

Lead attorney Dennis Cronin was paid about \$50,000 using IRMA money, and Smith confirmed that IRMA would cover all of Cronin's fees, except for those used on an appeal.

[From a December 23 article by Benjamin Price in the *Northeast Georgian*]



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# Florida Gov. Jeb Bush Dedicates First Faith-Based Prison

Nearly 800 inmates from 26 faiths attended the dedication ceremony of what Gov. Jeb Bush called the nation's first faith-based prison — a facility focused on encouraging the spirituality of inmates of all faiths.

Along with regular prayer sessions, the Lawtey Correctional Institution will offer religious studies, choir practice, religious counseling and other spiritual activities seven days a week.

"There are already faith-based dorms in 10 Florida prisons, so operating an entire faith-based prison was the next logical step," said Sterling Ivey, spokesman for the Florida Department of Corrections.

Mr. Ivey said the idea for Lawtey's new mission came from state Corrections Secretary James V. Crosby.

Mr. Crosby proposed the idea to Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, who was "enthralled," said Mr. Ivey. The governor says he and his older brother, President Bush, share the view that the best way to rehabilitate criminals is to "lead them to God."

"This is not just fluffy policy. This is serious policy," Gov. Bush told reporters, proclaiming that Florida is now "home to the first faith-based prison in the United States."

Not all inmates were pleased with the prison's new religious focus. In fact, 111 prisoners requested transfers to other jails, but their beds were quickly filled with inmates from other corrections centers around the state. With 792 prisoners at this time, Lawtey is already nearing capacity, Mr. Ivey said.

The governor said he hopes Lawtey's new format leads to increased spirituality among inmates and a sharp drop in Florida's recidivism rate, now at 38 percent.

"Wouldn't it be nice if we could figure out a way to lower that 38 percent closer to zero percent, for your family and your community?" Bush asked to rousing applause.

"It is imperative for government to work in close and careful coordination with community and faith-based or-

ganizations," Gov. Bush said. "Government alone will never solve the problems tearing the fabric of our society."

Inmates at Lawtey represent at least 26 different religious faiths, according to Mr. Ivey. He said the inmates include Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, Mormons, Rastafarians, adherents of American Indian beliefs, and Buddhists.

"We've developed a cocoon, a place where they can practice their faith and not have the severe negative pressures and interactions that naturally take place in some of our institutions," said Correction Secretary James Crosby Jr.

Mr. Ivey estimates between 35 percent to 40 percent of the curriculum will be dedicated to religion. "The majority of classes will be devoted to self-betterment, including topics such as anger management, parenting, job training, how to write letters and balancing a checkbook," he said.

Mr. Ivey said there's been a "tremendous public response" to the prison's change in function. "The number of supportive e-mails we've received has been overwhelming," he said.

"Eighty-eight [inmates] indicated they don't have a professed faith, but they still wanted to be part of this program," Mr. Ivey said.

Published reports indicate that the American Civil Liberties Union is considering bringing a lawsuit to block Lawtey's new program on the grounds that it violates the constitutional separation of church and state.

Howard Simon, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida, called the prison part of "a major constitutional showdown" over government funding for religious programs.

ACLU attorneys are awaiting the outcome of a test case challenging a Florida state voucher program that uses tax dollars to send students to religious schools.

Mr. Ivey says he doubts there will be a lawsuit over the faith-based prison. "We haven't been sued over our faith-based dorms," one of which is in a women's prison, he said.

However, Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, said the faith-based prison was "clearly an unconstitutional scheme."

In a statement, Mr. Lynn said: "A state can no more create a faith-based prison than it could set up faith-based public schools or a faith-based police department... Governor [Jeb] Bush is trying to merge religion and government."

He noted that his group filed a lawsuit to block a state-sponsored fundamentalist Christian program operating with tax dollars at an Iowa prison. The case, which challenges state funding of Charles Colson's Inner Change program for jail inmates, is pending in federal court.

InnerChange has sparked debate (and a lawsuit) because it requires inmates to study the Bible and obliges them to become active church members for three months following release, drawing criticism that it amounts to religious indoctrination.

Included in the ceremony was a testimonial by Marlin Cliburn, inmate No. 575042, recently transferred to Lawtey, where he is serving 6 1/2 years for aggravated assault, auto theft and fleeing officers. "My life was headed down the wrong road," said Cliburn, a Baptist. "I've kind of seen the light. I've been screwing up my whole life. I see this as a turning point in my life."

During the dedication ceremony, many prisoners jumped to their feet and clapped in rhythm as a gospel singer sang "His Eye Is on the Sparrow." Some shouted "Sing it!" and "Amen!"

[From a Dec. 24 *Christian Science Monitor* article by Jacqui Goddard, a Dec. 25 *Washington Times* article by Joyce Howard Price, and a Dec. 25 AP article by Brendan Farrington.]

April 9-11, 2004

# The Atheist Alliance International Convention in Colorado Springs

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Yes! I want to reserve for the following programs:

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(Student ID and proof of age will be required at desk)
- High school, program only (meals not included) no cost for kids 13-18
- Meals with group for high school and adult students, \$75
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# The Pledge of Allegiance: Another View

by Daniel R. Pyron (See the author's website at <http://www.members.tripod.com/~dpyron>.)

**A**fter considering the issues that surround the Pledge of Allegiance, I've come to the conclusion that its problems go well beyond "in God we trust."

I can support a civic ritual about loyalty to America, the "American Revolution" or patriotism. These are good things in themselves despite the perversions some use these ideals for.

The American Revolution, understood as many of our founding fathers and mothers understood it, has just begun and is very far from finished. Democracy was not the finished product but the goal. The pursuit of happiness has not yet lead to its capture.

So, I suggest we look at the whole pledge.

Patriotically, the target of the pledge – the flag – is wrong. To pledge loyalty to the symbol over the reality of

America is a mistake. It is far easier to wrap treason in the flag than in the Constitution. The best target for a Pledge of Allegiance is to the ideals of America.

But ideals need to be linked to the concrete. The current pledge uses the concreteness of a flag, but the link to our nation's ideals is missing. A much better link between our nation and its ideals is provided by the Constitution itself. It is at once a concrete document, a statement of our ideals, and greatest symbol of our nation.

We need a Pledge which includes all Americans, is true to our ideals and which is honest. Every American should be able to recite a new Pledge without making exceptions for this line or that. Further, a good new civic ritual needs to draw upon the words, rhythm and ideas which are

familiar – so there can be both a freshness and a familiarity.

With all this in mind I suggest the following:

I pledge allegiance to the Constitution of the United States of America and to the Republic based upon it, One Nation, E Pluribus Unum, striving for Liberty and Justice for all.

Now that is better; it has religious neutrality and shows allegiance to ideals over cloth, ideals which summarize the dream of America, the long term goals of the American Revolution which had only just begun in 1776.

A pledge of allegiance to the nation should not be used to push religious opinions. This is a pledge of one's citizenship, not one's religion.

What do you think? If you would like to comment, please email me at [drpyron@juno.com](mailto:drpyron@juno.com).

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## Georgia Legislature Poised for Faith-Based Agenda

Legislation to allow religious groups to receive state money to serve the needy languished in the last General Assembly session. But the environment has changed.

Now, Gov. Sonny Perdue has publicly embraced a new version of the proposed constitutional amendment, introducing it last month as part of his legislative package for the 2004 session.

And controversial court decisions around the nation – allowing gay marriage and forbidding the posting of the Ten Commandments in public buildings – have galvanized religious activists in Georgia and elsewhere.

State funding of faith-based organizations tops a religious agenda for this winter that is also expected to include another crack at requiring a 24-hour waiting period for abortions and resolutions supporting the Ten Commandments and opposing same-sex marriage.

The political dynamics changed in

2003 with the inauguration of Perdue, Georgia's first Republican governor since Reconstruction, and the GOP takeover of the Senate.

Here are key religion-based bills either already pending or likely to be introduced into the General Assembly during the 2004 session:

► H.R. 941, S.R. 560 – A constitutional amendment, subject to voter approval, allowing religious organizations to receive state funding for their charitable activities. Pre-filed for 2004 session.

► S.B. 23 – The "Woman's Right to Know Act" would require women seeking an abortion to wait at least 24 hours, during which they would be given information on potential risks of the surgery and alternatives like adoption. Passed Senate in 2003, buried in House committee.

► Not yet introduced – A resolution supporting the display of the Ten Commandments in government buildings.

► Not yet introduced – A resolution

urging Congress to amend the U.S. Constitution to affirm that marriage is between a man and a woman.

The proposed constitutional amendment also is benefiting from the momentum already built for government funding of faith-based organizations at the national level.

Encouraged by federal court rulings upholding the principle, the Bush administration is aggressively pursuing a faith-based initiative.

Indeed, the right of religious groups to receive federal funds but not state money for their human-services programs is at the crux of Perdue's legislation.

It would repeal the so-called "Blaine amendment," a provision inserted into the constitution of Georgia and many other states in the late 1800s to prohibit religious groups from receiving state funds.

[From a Dec. 26 article by Dave Williams of the Morris News Service for the *Savannah Morning News*.]

# Clipped

## Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Ed Buckner's letter (below left) was in the *Marietta Daily Journal* on December 2.

Ed's letter (below right) was in the *Marietta Daily Journal* on December 13.

Just what is Cal Thomas really afraid of?

**C**al Thomas' column ("Definition of 'Marriage,'" Nov. 21) may be right that definitions of marriage should be dragged into the presidential campaign. But he is foolishly wrong and probably dangerous to suggest that biblical authority is the right basis for deciding.

This is and must remain a society governed by secular authority, not religious authority, if we are to keep the freedom, peace and security we have. This is directly related to terrorism. We cannot hope to win the war against terrorism and for freedom except by



Ed Buckner

remaining a nation under secular government. If those Muslim extremists who claim that America is fighting a war against their religion carry the day, the world will suffer from endless, irresolvable war — a fight to the death between religions.

Many modern Christians such as Mr. Thomas claim that marriage is a one-man, one-woman affair "established by God as the best arrangement for fallen humanity to organize and protect itself and create and rear children." But cultural anthropologists have established beyond any reasonable doubt that marriage, in various forms, predated Judaism along with more recently created religions.

Biblical definitions of marriage not only are not the original definitions Mr. Thomas claims they are; they also do not match what he considers ideal. The Bible nowhere condemns polygamy and is replete with marital definitions that modern Americans — except for Mormon fundamentalists — reject. For one example among many, see Second Samuel, Chapter 12, for the story of how the Lord Himself provided multiple wives for King David — and threatened to take those same wives away and bestow them on David's neighbor if David did not shape up.

Definitions of secular "marriage" should indeed be made with an understanding that marriage and family are foundational to our society and with a view toward pro-

## Protect minority rights as you would your own

**DEAR EDITOR:**  
Recent letter writers Darl Arbogast and James Clinkscales (published Dec. 6) continue to miss the main point. Both wrongly suggest that the issue turns on whether Christians or religious people are in the majority. The Council for Secular Humanism, an international organization, is supported by many thousands of people, including many intellectuals and other leaders. The Council publishes a highly respected journal of opinion — "Free Inquiry" — and supports Centers for Inquiry around the world.

We had hundreds of people attend our most recent national and international conferences — far too many for the SUV Mr. Clinkscales joked about. But if he is trying to suggest that we secular humanists are in the minority, outnumbered by Christians in this nation and especially in Cobb County, he is certainly right.

Mr. Clinkscales wrote that I, as a nonbeliever, should not be allowed to use "Lord" in any context. If he and other believers are content to believe

and practice their religions only in their own homes and churches, I would be glad to give up discussions of their sacred books and their God. By the way, I capitalize terms like "Lord" and "God"

out of respect for believers, not because I accept their beliefs. But believers cannot bring their religious ideas into the public arena, in a free society, and then demand that those ideas be above criticism. Reasoned defense of religious liberty for all and of separation of church and state does



not constitute "haranguing about and against religion."

Supporters of the Ten Commandments like Mr. Arbogast are free to believe that the Constitution is somehow based on those Commandments, but they are wrong. Thomas Jefferson, like many others since, pointed out that those who claim the connection cannot logically support that claim.

The framers of the Constitution recognized that religious truth cannot be determined by majority vote and that religious liberty must extend to all or it is secure for none.



Ed Buckner

Ed Buckner,  
Smyrna,  
Southern Director,  
Council for Secular Humanism

tecting individuals and children as well as society. Religious bodies have — and must continue to have — the right to define marriage for their own members, subject only to restrictions based on substantial dangers to children, to individual rights or to society. Most Americans would, for example, deny the right to have multiple wives — or husbands — even to those who can claim, based on Bible verses or the writings of Joseph Smith, that multiple marriage is a religious duty.

I do not think that depriving gay men and lesbian women of the rights and responsibilities that come with marriage — by continuing the "special rights" now reserved for heterosexuals — can be justified. But any attempts to justify those special rights must be made on bases *other* than religious grounds.

Ed Buckner  
Southern Director, Council for  
Secular Humanism, Smyrna

# Clipped

## Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Ried Crowe's letter was in the Tallahassee (Florida) Democrat on November 9.

Larry Darby's letter was in the Illinois Leader on December 3.

Richard Awtrey's letter was in the Florida Times-Union on October 24.

### The propaganda of Christianity

Regarding Zanoza's November 28 column, "Will Christ disappear from Christmas this year?" Government should not promote the mythology of Christianity or that of any other religion.

When Government favors one religion over another or religion over irreligion, it sends the message that if you don't subscribe to the beliefs of the pious politicians presently in power, you are less than enfranchised.

Even the religion fully sanctioned by Government, known as ceremonial deism, is Government discrimination against Atheists because we are citizens who live without any religion whatsoever.

Ceremonial deism is discriminatory because Atheists have to use money bearing a religious slogan; our children who attend Government schools are forced to hear daily recitation of a religious loyalty oath; and any number of Government functions begin with some sort of supplication to a make-believe being.

The only references to religion in the Supreme Law of the Land are exclusionary. Any branch of Government or agency thereof used to accommodate religion is misused to deprive Atheists of the liberty to live without religion.

While Government should not prohibit the free exercise of religion, which is appropriate for houses of worship and homes, Government must begin to abridge the free exercise of religion by those pious politicians and Priestcraft who wish to use the machinery of Government to advance their brands of religion.

Perhaps theocrats only want to manipulate Government to get our taxpayer money to prop up their own favorite, and apparently failing, religions, such as through the Bush regime's lawless faith-based initiatives. But I worry that these theocrats are actually working to install a theocracy, which by necessity would destroy our constitutional republic and the American way of life.

Larry Darby, President, Atheist Law Center, Inc., Montgomery, Alabama

### Thank founders for separating church, state

In Jessica Norris' misguided Nov. 2 letter ("The United States of America is losing its religion"), she contends that "the removal of God from our national government offices is an abomination" and that our country is becoming less religious.

If Norris feels this way because of recent court cases that declared certain public Ten Commandments displays to be unconstitutional, then she has folks such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to thank.

These "abominable" men helped draft the Constitution and its Bill of Rights, which are entirely secular and don't contain the slightest wisp of religious promotion, Christian or otherwise. The Supreme Court has consistently ruled that one of the primary intents of this "blueprint for America" was to ensure that our federal, state and local governments do not endorse or promote any one religion over another.

As an atheist, I only wish that Norris' second assertion were right. However, as a rationalist, I know that the statistical facts reveal how wrong she is. Because of our constitutionally guaranteed

freedom of religious conscience and separation of church and state, America is more religious than every other major Western nation, while domestic fundamentalism is on the rise, not the decline.

I suggest that folks like Norris and others who would like to honor the Decalogue erect monuments on whatever private property they wish and stop trying to hijack our governmental edifices for their own theocratic agendas.

Ried Crowe

## Gays should be accepted as created

Ever since an openly homosexual Episcopal priest, the Rev. V. Gene Robinson, was elected to the bishopric last summer, a furor has raged, not only in the U.S. Episcopal Church but in the worldwide 77-million member Anglican Communion, of which it is a part.

Local readers reflected this outrage with letters to the editor, one on Aug. 20 ("Follow God's principles"), going on to say that "the leadership of the Episcopal Church ... has adopted a position that encourages sin."

In some cultures, being left-handed is looked down upon as, well, if not sinful, at least indicating a substandard person. According to present day thinking, being homosexual, like being left-handed, is not a matter of choice.

Homosexuals mature with that propensity through no conscious choice of their own. Since they are so created, why should they not be entitled to indulge in sexual activity, without stigma, as are heterosexuals? As with heterosexuals, such activity

*It should be remembered that the Bible was written back in cruel and far less tolerant times.*

should, of course, be between consenting adults, but as aberrant as it may seem, is homosexual activity really a sin?

Turning to the Bible, Leviticus and several of Paul's letters do condemn homosexuality, but only male homosexuality. In dealing with "dishonorable passions" in Romans 1:26-27, Paul does mention women but not specifically as regards to homosexuality, although he does for men. Perhaps lesbianism was not then regarded as sinful.

In any case, were the pronouncements of Paul infallible? Remember that he said, among his several statements belittling women, "Man is the image and glory of God but woman is the glory of man" and "I suffer not a woman to teach nor usurp authority over the man." Although

to admittedly varying degrees, churches today do not accept this secondary status for women.

It should be remembered that the Bible was written back in cruel and far less tolerant times. For breaking religious laws at least in this country, we no longer execute people, much less by burning or stoning. On homosexuality, The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions advises, "The (biblical) considerations were formed at a time when the "natural nature" of homosexuality and particularly the genetic contribution to this widespread human condition were not known."

It is noted that Robinson has been in a long, stable relationship with his partner. Since his election to the bishopric entailed fighting strongly entrenched opposition, he was obviously regarded by his backers as a highly qualified individual worth battling for. Accordingly, he should make a very effective bishop.

**BOB AWTRY,**  
retired,  
Fernandina Beach

*"Reason is the greatest enemy that faith has: it never comes to the aid of spiritual things, but, more frequently than not, struggles against the Divine Word...*

*Whoever wants to be a Christian should tear the eyes out of his reason." —Martin Luther*



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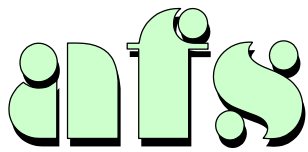
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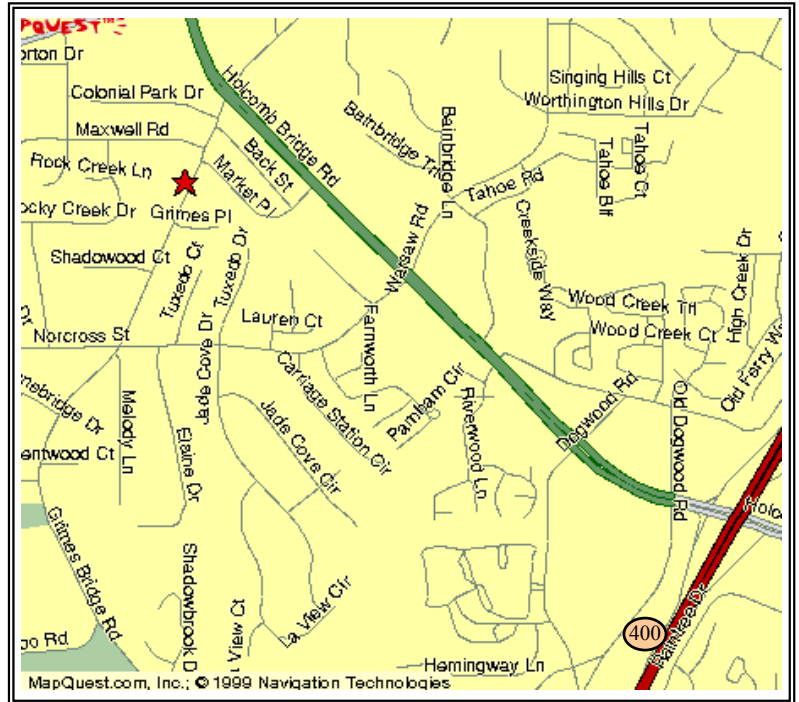
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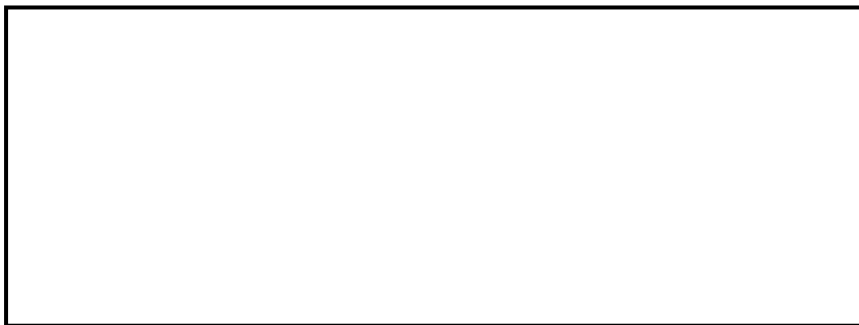
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**The January Meeting:  
Sunday, January 11  
1:00 PM at the AF Center  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road  
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**This Month's Speaker:  
Dr. Dennis Martin**



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