

Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 10 Number 4 • April 2004

The April Meeting

The April 11 AFS meeting will include a talk by Dr. Scott Lilienfeld on "Science and Pseudoscience in Clinical Psychology."

Dr. Lilienfeld received his B.A. in Psychology from Cornell University in 1982 and his Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology from the University of Minnesota in 1990. He was assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at SUNY Albany from 1990 to 1994, and has been a faculty member in the Department of Psychology at Emory since 1994. He is currently the President of the Society for a Science of Clinical Psychology. His interests include personality disorders, anxiety disorders, pseudoscience and clinical psychology.

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.

AFS Activities

The next **AFS Social** will be at **Las Margaritas Restaurant** at 1842 Cheshire Bridge Road (Atlanta) on Friday, April 16, 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, April 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.

Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center at 12:30 on Sunday, April 25. The meeting topic will be "Baroque Art and Architecture."

Meetings and Activities

April 11: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
April 16: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
April 18: AFS Board Meeting, AF Center, 2:00 PM.
April 18: AFS Discussion Group, AF Center, 4:00 PM.

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.

Conventions This Spring

The **Atheist Alliance International** is holding its tenth annual conference on April 9-11 in Colorado Springs, CO. The conference, titled "Focus on the Real Family," boasts an impressive array of speakers, including actor/writer/comedienne Julia Sweeney and exiled Bangladeshi author and activist Taslima Nasrin. A wide range of children's activities are available, including childcare for ages up to four, Camp Quest for children between four and twelve, and a high school program for children over twelve. For information and registration, go to their website at <http://www.atheistalliance.org/conv2004/index.htm>.

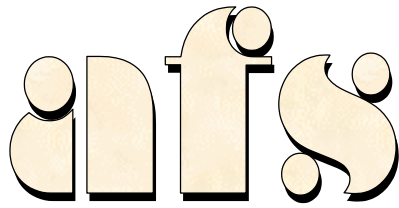
The 2004 **American Atheist** conference will be held in San Diego on April 9-11. Speakers include AA President Ellen Johnson, psychologist Susan Blackmore, and political activist Eddie Tabash. For more info, and to register, go to <http://www.atheists.org/convention/>.

The **American Humanist Association** will have its annual convention on "Humanism: Oasis in the Desert" at the Stardust Resort and Casino in Las Vegas from Friday, May 7 through Sunday, May 9, 2004. Speakers include Pledge plaintiff Michael Newdow, philosopher Daniel Dennett, and Barry Lynn, Executive Director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. To register, see <http://www.americanhumanist.org/conference/index.html>.

A week later, May 13-16, the **Center for Inquiry** is holding a weekend conference in Toronto, Canada, on "How Scientific Inquiry Helps Frame Value Judgments." Speakers include the philosopher Mario Bunge. To register, see <http://www.centerforinquiry.net/conference-2004.html>.

Books For Sale!

AFS has lots of used books for sale! At the April and May meetings, we hope to have them marked and on display. Come early for the best selection!



**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.

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

May 9: Reginald Finley will speak on "Logical Arguments Against God."

June 13: TBA

July 11: Dr. Fred Whitehead (not confirmed).

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

You can unsubscribe by sending an email to xxxx-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Atlanta Freethought News
an AFS publication

Editor

Steve Yothment

How to Contact the Editor

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

Atlanta Freethought Society

President

Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

VP for Internal Communication

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

VP for External Communication

Sue Garland – 404-875-7288

Treasurer

Bill Burton – 770-469-1228

Board of Directors

Freya Harris – 404-xxx-xxxx

Harriet Harris – 404-252-1962

Joel Kollin – 770-392-7958

Kate Miller – 770-xxx-xxxx

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

The Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 10, Number 4, April 2004
is copyright © 2004 by The Atlanta
Freethought Society, Inc.

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

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

Membership in AFS is \$25/year for in-
dividuals, \$35 for households, and \$10
for students/low income/under 21. Sus-
taining members (individual) \$100 and
sustaining members (households) \$125.

Subscriptions alone are \$20 for 12 is-
sues, \$25 to Canada/Mexico, \$30 for
other addresses. Please make checks
and money orders payable to
Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc.

Visit our World Wide Web site at
www.atlantafreethought.org.

Send E-mail to
afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Webmaster: Ken Cummings
Call the AFS Infoline: 770-641-2903

Newdow Speaks to U.S. Supreme Court

The U.S. Supreme Court justices peppered Michael Newdow with tough questions on March 24 as he pressed the idea that it violates the Constitution for public school students to recite the words "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Newdow, who won a federal appeals court decision on the issue in San Francisco two years ago, told the high court the words were offensive to non-believers and amounted to "indoctrinating children" in government-supported theology.

"I'm an atheist. I don't believe in God. And yet every morning my daughter is required to say her father is wrong," said Newdow, a lawyer who personally argued his case. "It is like I'm being slapped in the face every time."

But Terence Cassidy, attorney for the suburban Sacramento school district where Newdow's 9-year-old daughter goes to school, told the justices the father had no legal standing to bring the case. The girl's mother, she said, has sole custody and opposes changing the pledge.

U.S. Solicitor General Theodore Olson, who argued before the high court for the Bush administration, said the court already was on record noting that reciting the pledge was a "ceremonial, not a religious, exercise."

As such, the pledge is not subjected to the same standards as praying in school or displaying crosses or other religious objects, Olson argued.

Olson also said that as long as children were not forced to say the pledge, no rights were violated.

Banning spoke briefly about the case outside the court later that day, and said Newdow "did very well" in his presentation to the court.

Eight justices will decide the case, with most decisions taking several weeks to several months. Justice Antonin Scalia, among the court's most conservative members, recused himself at Newdow's request after publicly criticizing the 2002 appeals court ruling in Newdow's favor. The high court is expected to rule by summer.

There were some hints from the justices' questions that they were skeptical of Newdow's standing to bring the suit in the first place. Others appeared unconvinced that the pledge was the type of expression that violated separation of church and state.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor pointed out the school gave students the option not to say the pledge or to leave out any part that offended. She made the distinction between the words "under God" and an enforced prayer in school, which the court has ruled out of bounds.

"Reasonable people look at the pledge and say it is not a prayer," she said.

Newdow, who appeared confident and articulate in a setting that intimidates many veteran lawyers, said there was no real distinction between praying in school and telling children to say "under God."

He dismissed the notion that kids could just say no to the pledge. Peer pressure and the perception that the school system endorsed the pledge would coerce them, he said.

Still, Justice Anthony Kennedy questioned whether Newdow was acting in his child's best interest, saying the record showed she wanted to say the pledge. Who was the injured party that demanded the "extraordinary, breathtaking power" of the U.S. Supreme Court to be brought to bear? he asked.

Newdow responded that his rights as a father were being violated. Justice David Souter appeared to back Newdow on that point, saying his interest in his daughter "is enough to give him personal standing."

Justice Stephen Breyer said the court was being asked to decide whether Congress had the right in 1954 to amend the pledge with the two words as a way to inspire national unity.

"It is not perfect, but it serves the purpose of unification at the price of offending a few people like you," Breyer said.

Newdow argued that the pledge did

not unite, but served instead to separate atheists from the mainstream.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist noted that Congress passed the law adding "under God" unanimously. "That doesn't sound divisive," he said.

"That is only because no atheist can be elected to office," Newdow swiftly responded, provoking applause from supporters and a threat by Rehnquist to expel those who applauded.

Some of the heat generated by the issue could be felt outside the court, where about 150 Christian activists and about 75 Newdow supporters held raucous, dueling rallies that stretched from early morning until after the oral arguments ended around noon.

The Rev. Patrick Mahoney of the Christian Defense Coalition led kneeling supporters in an amplified prayer that the court would overturn the ruling banning the two words. A few feet away on the broad plaza in front of the Supreme Court building, Blair Scott, head of an Alabama atheist group, led a chant of, "Church and state must separate."

Texan Randall Gorman, 61, wearing a hard hat with a decal reading "God" with a red slash through the word, said he came to Washington from Fort Worth because he wanted to back fellow atheist Newdow.

"I don't like any segment of the society compelling me to accept their beliefs," he said.

The case could have political implications in this presidential election year, especially if the court upholds by a close split the finding that "under God" should be removed.

"A large percentage of the population believe(s) the country is going to hell in a handbasket, and this would further convince them," said political scientist Larry Sabato of the University of Virginia. "That would benefit President Bush, because he is seen as more likely to appoint conservatives to the Supreme Court."

NEWDOW REFLECTS ON PERFORMANCE

One day after surprising court obser-

Newdow Speaks to U.S. Supreme Court *(continued)*

vers with his polished performance before the U.S. Supreme Court, Michael Newdow was thinking about what he should have said.

"I've been kicking myself all morning, thinking about what I should have done," Newdow said to reporters.

The Sacramento, CA man memorized only the first two lines of his opening argument, preferring instead to ad-lib his part of one of the most controversial court cases of the year. "I felt that if I didn't know it by then, then I was in trouble," he said.

Many legal experts praised Newdow's presentation, but he said he could have done better: "I should have followed my instincts more. But I think I did OK."

Newdow spent the day after his Supreme Court appearance fielding phone calls from the media and hearing from well-wishers. "The whole process has been amazing," he said.

David Gordon, superintendent of the Elk Grove Unified School District, praised both Newdow and Terence Cassidy, one of the attorneys who represented the school district, on their presentations before the court. "Overall, it was an experience that far exceeded my expectations," said Gordon.

While Gordon opposed Newdow's case, he said the rookie attorney did "an excellent job" and complimented Newdow afterward. "I may not agree with him ... but all of this has been a powerful process that shows that one individual can bring an unpopular view forward," Gordon said.

Newdow has been preparing for the case since 1998 — when he sued the Elk Grove district, where his daughter attends school, over the pledge.

In June 2002, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with Newdow, ruling that Congress violated

the Constitution by adding the phrase "under God" to the pledge in 1954. After a national uproar, the ruling was stayed, and the Supreme Court later agreed to hear the case.

Since the Court of Appeals ruling, Newdow has become perhaps the nation's most famous atheist. For months, he has been dealing with constant media attention and criticism over his case. On March 24, he entered the courtroom wearing the suit his mother bought him and carrying a tattered backpack.

He said the scope of the situation hit him when he walked past the TV camera crews that morning and into the ornate Washington courtroom.

"Then I felt butterflies ... but once we started I focused on my case."

Although Newdow's presentation earned high marks from legal experts, he said the only opinions that count are those of the eight justices who will decide his case. (Justice Antonin Scalia recused himself after publicly saying the circuit judges exceeded their authority in the case.) The Supreme Court's ruling is expected in June.

Gordon said both attorneys made strong arguments. "I would hate to hazard a guess on how they'll decide. The thrilling part is that this affirms the power of the process."

Newdow is confident. "If they care about the Constitution, it will be 8-0."

RALLY AGAINST THE PLEDGE

At a March 24 rally at Linn Park, Birmingham, AL, some speakers noted that it's not enough to remove "under God" from the Pledge of Allegiance; they want the whole pledge removed from schools.

The Atheist Law Center in Montgomery, AL says that the recitation of the pledge by schoolchildren at the beginning of the school day is forced on children, who must participate or face ridicule and be viewed as outsid-

ers by their peers.

"It's a coerced loyalty oath. It's not mandatory for adults to say it, but we force our children to say it," said Carol Moore, contract analyst and secretary for the Atheist Law Center. "Even though the law says you can't force them, in a captive audience situation such as a public school, there's really no way for them to legitimately get out of it without calling attention to themselves and being singled out."

Moore presented a speech at the rally, breaking the pledge down into contract terms and telling how she feels the pledge is harmful to children.

"We require children to obligate themselves to a contract by rote recitation. We're asking them to repeat the pledge in front of their classmates, and if they decline, don't you think for one minute one of those classmates isn't going to notice," Moore said.

The rally, sponsored by the Atheist Law Center and Alabama Freethought Association, was held the same day the U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments in the Pledge of Allegiance case.

Ed Buckner, the Southern Director of the Council for Secular Humanism, spoke in favor of removing the religious reference from the Pledge of Allegiance. (See his speech on page 4.)

"There is no question that the Congress of the United States is not empowered to make any religious declarations on behalf of Americans," Buckner said. "Our liberty is too important and their power is too limited to allow the members of Congress to behave so outrageously."

[This article is from a March 26 article by Michael Hedges in the *Houston Chronicle*, a March 26 article by Jennifer Garza in the *Sacramento Bee*, and a March 28 *Atheist Daily Briefing* from the Atheist Law Center.]

Congratulations (and thanks!) to AFS VP **Sue Garland**, who appeared on the AIB cable TV show "Faith and the City" on March 17 and 18. Sue represented the secular point of view on the topic of Ten Commandments displays in Georgia public buildings.

Stop the Loyalty Oath Lies Now!

Here is a speech by former AFS President Ed Buckner, given at the March 24 rally in Linn Park, Birmingham, AL. Ed is currently the Southern Director of the Council for Secular Humanism.

We are here to say to many politicians and preachers, to way too many of them, that it is time to stop lying about the Pledge of Allegiance and religious liberty. It is time to tell the truth. Whether we should even have an official loyalty oath at all in a free country is an open question, one that will be addressed later this morning, but there is no question that the Congress of the United States is not empowered to make any religious declarations on behalf of Americans. Our liberty is too important and their power is too limited to allow the members of Congress to behave so outrageously. The 9th Circuit Court had it exactly right when they declared, in *Newdow v. Elk Grove*, that government must stay out of religious questions, that government cannot endorse any religious ideas. And, since we are here in Alabama, we are here to say, in a better context than it has sometimes been said in, that "We dare defend our rights!"

And we say, to those politicians and preachers who need to hear us, THOU SHALT NOT LIE by saying that schoolchildren can freely and voluntarily avoid saying the Pledge if they happen to be irreligious or to follow a "wrong" religion or political philosophy, and choose not to participate. We all know that children who choose to be different can pay a terrible price for that. We know that the courts have already ruled, led by an Alabaman, a judicial giant, that participation in saying the pledge must be voluntary—but we also know that it really isn't, especially for school-age children. For their sakes, we must stop the lies, and stop them now.

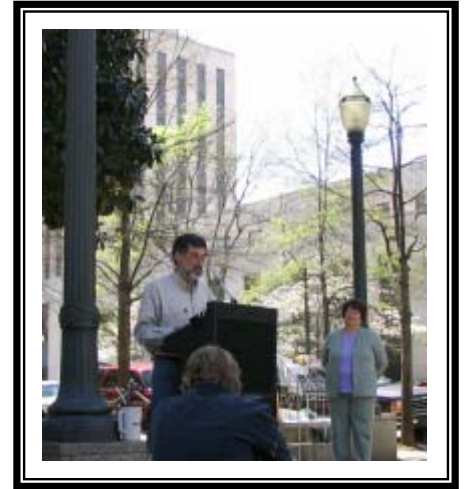
THOU SHALT NOT LIE by saying that those of us who want religion out of the Pledge of Allegiance are attacking religion by asking for neutrality. Some of us may indeed be hostile to religion, but what we demand from government is neutrality, not hostility to ourselves or to anyone else. We

must stop the lies, and stop them now.

THOU SHALT NOT LIE by saying that taking "under God" out of the Pledge would deprive religious people of any of their rights. Every American citizen has, and must continue to have, the right to believe in any gods he wishes, and must have the right as well to pledge his allegiance to any such god. What he does not have, must never have, is the right to force anyone else to adopt his beliefs or pledge to his god. We must stop the lies, and stop them now.

THOU SHALT NOT LIE by saying "This is a Christian nation." It is not. It never has been. It never should be. The god-free U.S. Constitution itself shows this plainly. A Treaty between Tripoli and the U.S. was agreed to in November, 1796 (while George Washington was still President) and later unanimously ratified by the U.S. Senate and declared to be the law of the land by President John Adams in 1797. That treaty declared, and I quote, "The Government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion." If you want democratic concepts about a republic, ideas about just laws being derived from the consent of the governed, you have to read American documents like the Constitution. The Bible, like all other "holy" texts, says nothing about self-government. In fact, the Bible told good Christians to obey, not to rebel against King George III, because "There is no authority but by act of God, and the existing authorities are instituted by him." [Romans 13]. This is a free country, not a Christian nation. And America is a free country because it is a secular nation, and it has to stay secular if it is to stay great. We must stop the lies, and stop them now.

THOU SHALT NOT LIE by saying that "Being patriotic means being religious." The two have nothing to do with each other. Being patriotic to this



country must mean being devoted to protecting freedom, including—maybe even especially including—the freedoms of those who disagree with the majority of their fellow Americans. Love of country has no connection to religious belief, as many, many thousands of American nonbelievers have proven with service and sacrifices of all kinds, including of their very lives. For their sakes and our own, we must stop the lies, and stop them now.

THOU SHALT NOT LIE by saying that "Dissent is un-American." There is in fact nothing more American than dissent. Questioning authority is our heritage. If it becomes unacceptable to say loudly or to write plainly that we disagree with the authorities, then everything worthwhile about the Constitution, about America herself, will be gone. It must not happen. We must stop the lies, and stop them now.

THOU SHALT NOT LIE by saying that inserting "under God" in the Pledge does not support religion. Any who say it does not should be asked if inserting "under Allah"—if having a pledge that included "One Nation, under Allah, Indivisible"—would support Islam. Or if having a pledge that included "One Nation, Without God, Indivisible" would support atheism. Or if inserting "under Canada" would support geographic awareness. If "under God" does not support reli-

Stop the Loyalty Oath Lies Now! (*continued*)

gion, then it is nothing but an empty, meaningless phrase--and it should not be used for that reason. We must stop the lies, and stop them now.

And, finally, THOU SHALT NOT LIE by saying that the Congress can help keep this country, this great country, "One Nation Indivisible" by dividing that stirring phrase with a re-

ligious declaration. Not all Americans agree on the nature of any supernatural power nor whether there exists such a power at all. These are perilous times and we do indeed need to be strong and united. But to be united, we must not be asked to endorse what we cannot in good conscience endorse. We must renew our dedication

to freedom and our support for our Constitution and our rights. Congress cannot decide religious questions nor should it pretend it can--and the pretense threatens the unity we must have. We have to stand up and say, "We must stop the lies, and stop them now." And we must mean what we say. Thank you.

The Rational Commandments

The Old Testament of the Bible has the "Ten Commandments," a short-form religious and moral code. But freethinkers through the years have often said that they can do better on a moral code. In this monthly column, we will present some great suggestions from freethinkers on how to live responsibly.

This month: Dr. John Henderson's **Seven Commandments**, from his book *God.com; A Deity for the New Millennium*, page 37. (Buy this book at the AFS bookstore!)

Dr. Henderson starts his commandments with an admonition. He says his commandments do not come from "on high." They are not delivered on gold plates, tablets of stone, or even written in concrete. They are subject to change and amendments. They should be discussed frequently and changed as technology advances and society changes its mores. He leaves it to freethinkers to pick them apart, criticize them, and come forth with better guidelines. (Please send in your suggestions! We will have a new set of "Commandments" each month!)

The Seven Commandments

1. You will accept responsibility for all of your actions.
2. You will honor and respect those individuals who have nurtured, cared for, taught, and been kind to you.
3. You will not commit murder.
4. You will not steal.
5. You will not lie.
6. You will be charitable with those assets which are not necessary for your health and well-being.
7. You will use your sexuality in such a manner as not to hurt yourself or others.

March Board Meeting Minutes

Present: Steve Yothment, Judy Thompson, Lew Southern, Bill Burton, Kate Miller, Joel Kollin, Freya Harris

Minutes taken by: Steve Yothment

Time/Date of meeting: 2:00 PM, March 21, 2004

- ▶ Board members folded pledge forms and stuffed envelopes during the meeting.
- ▶ The Minutes of the previous (February) meeting were approved as they appeared in the newsletter.
- ▶ Judy reported that she is setting up a PayPal account for AFS so we can receive funds through the internet.
- ▶ Judy reported that our April speaker will be Scott Lilienfeld, speaking on "Debunking Recovered Memories." Judy will contact Sue to put an ad in Creative Loafing for the meeting.
- ▶ Steve agreed to put out a meeting notice early so that Judy can forward it to other (skeptical) lists.
- ▶ The board agreed to have the June 13 meeting at Panahar Restaurant. There will be a brunch before the meeting. We will advertise that people can come to the meeting and not eat if that is what they want. The schedule for

the meeting is: arrive at 11:30; eat at 12:00; have the meeting at 1:00.

- ▶ The Lake Hypatia July 4 Celebration is on the weekend of July 3 and 4. Joel would like to speak about the Lake Hypatia event at the next meeting. Freya will add a link to the Lake Hypatia website.
- ▶ The July AFS meeting is on July 11. Judy will try to get Dr. Whitehead to speak at this meeting.
- ▶ Bill reported that our current balance is \$5,404.39, although several bills will soon be due for payment.
- ▶ Bill gave Steve a list of renewed and new members. Steve will update his mailing list.
- ▶ Bill is still working on the cover art for Mike Ledo's book, *A Skeptic's View of the Christian Bible*. The cover should be ready within a month. Steve will review the cover art before books are ordered.
- ▶ Freya will set up a bookstore for selling used books at our next two meetings. Steve will indicate in the newsletter that we will have used books for sale at the meetings.

Gay Marriage Ban Amendment Passes

Georgia voters to decide issue in November

Conservatives celebrated and subdued gay rights supporters vowed to continue fighting on April 1 after the Georgia Legislature gave final approval to a proposed constitutional ban on same-sex marriage.

The proposal, one of the most divisive issues to confront Georgia lawmakers in years, now moves to the state's voters, who must approve it in a Nov. 2 referendum before it can become part of the state constitution.

After two hours of intense debate, the Democratic-controlled state House of Representatives narrowly endorsed the referendum, which passed the Republican-run Senate early in the legislative session.

"I feel very gratified that the House gave the people the right to have a voice," said Sadie Fields, executive director of the Christian Coalition of Georgia, a key supporter of the proposed ban.

But gay rights advocates said the passage of Senate Resolution 595 just clears the way to make discrimination part of the Georgia Constitution. Several opponents of the proposed ban hugged one another and wiped away tears outside the House chamber as they vowed to continue their battle at the ballot box.

"I think we fought the good fight," said state Rep. Karla Drenner (D-Avondale Estates), the state's only openly gay lawmaker. "The conservatives won, but gay people are not going away."

The House voted 122-52 for the gay marriage ban. The final tally was just two votes more than the two-thirds majority needed in the 180-member House for passage of a proposed con-

stitutional amendment.

Gay rights advocates will begin an immediate campaign to defeat the proposal in November, said Allen Thornell, director of Georgia Equality, the state's largest gay rights group, which like the Christian Coalition had lobbied daily on the legislation. Metro Atlanta is believed to have the third-largest number of gay residents in the nation, and many of them made their first trip to the Capitol this year to lobby against the ban.

"Today was a step backwards," said state Rep. Nan Orrock (D-Atlanta), the Democratic whip in the House and a staunch opponent of the amendment. "But we'll be back. We will continue to fight this battle. The forces of tolerance and inclusion and fair-mindedness ultimately are the forces that will move this state forward. We will not take this setback standing still."

The vote followed three months of controversy that roiled the Capitol and strained traditional political alliances within the Democratic Party. The Georgia debate took place amid a growing national conversation about gay marriage. More than two dozen state legislatures are considering some form of gay marriage ban this year. Earlier that week, Massachusetts approved a same-sex marriage ban but, unlike Georgia, permitted gay civil unions.

Gay rights advocates contend that the ban would dangerously broaden existing Georgia law, which already prohibits same-sex marriage. The constitutional amendment not only would bar same-sex marriage in Georgia but would prohibit the state

from recognizing any same-sex union approved in another state.

Opponents of the amendment argued that its broad language could affect domestic partnership benefits offered by some Georgia companies. Supporters said it would have no impact on the policies of private companies.

Some opponents also accused Republicans of using the proposed ban as a ploy to increase conservative voter turnout in November. Conservatives countered that they are just trying to ward off attacks on their core value system and to preserve marriage as a sacred bond that exists exclusively between a man and a woman. They argued that a constitutional ban is necessary because "activist judges' have overturned statutory gay marriage bans in other states.

"We cannot let judges in Boston, or officials in San Francisco, define marriage for the people of Georgia," declared Rep. Bill Hembree (R-Douglasville). Hembree, a leading House spokesman for the amendment, said the ban will build a "wall of defense around the institution of marriage" and is needed to "protect the family structure that has existed for 6,000 years."

"We shouldn't have to explain to 6-, 7- and 8-year-olds why men are kissing each other," said Mangham, whose vote was critical in Wednesday's passage. "I don't like having to explain that to my kids. I will continue to support their right to do what they do, but they will not have the sanctity of marriage."

[From an April 1 AJC article by Jim Tharpe.]

Judge Sends Cobb Evolution Issue to Trial

Suit says stickers in text promote a religious view

On April 5, a federal judge in Atlanta kept alive a lawsuit that seeks to have Cobb County remove disclaimers about evolution from its textbooks.

In an important decision in the 2-year-old case, U.S. District Judge Clarence Cooper found the issue should go to trial, expected sometime later

this year.

"We're very excited about this," said attorney Michael Manely, who represents Jeff Selman and five other

Cobb parents who sued the system in August 2002 after the stickers were placed in the science books. Their lawsuit contends that the placement of the stickers restricts the teaching of evolution, promotes and requires the teaching of creationism and discriminates against particular religions.

The sticker at issue, placed on the inside front cover of Cobb science books, says, "This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully and critically considered."

Cooper weighed the constitutionality of the issue by applying a three-pronged test handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1971. In order to get the lawsuit dismissed, the Cobb school board had to show that the sticker was adopted with a secular purpose; that its primary effect neither advances nor inhibits religion; and that it does not result in an excessive entanglement of government with religion.

In an 18-page order, Cooper said the school board satisfied him on the first prong of the test.

But Cooper noted that while the sticker does not remind students that

they have the right to maintain beliefs taught by their parents and has no biblical reference, the sticker encourages students to consider alternatives other than evolution. "Indeed, most of the board members concurred that they wanted students to consider other alternatives," Cooper wrote in finding the sticker could have the effect of advancing or inhibiting religion.

Cooper also found that "the practical effect of students being encouraged to consider and discuss alternatives to evolution could implicate excessive entanglement concerns."

[From an April 5 AJC article by Bill Rankin.]

Senate Votes for Ten Commandments Display

The Alabama Senate reacted to the removal of the Ten Commandments from the Alabama Judicial Building by passing a proposed constitutional amendment on March 30 that calls for their display in public buildings.

The 28-0 vote by the Senate sends the proposed constitutional amendment to the House for consideration. If approved by the House, the legislation will go before Alabama voters in the primary election June 1.

The legislation's sponsor, Sen. Gerald Dial, D-Lineville, got an identical measure approved by the Senate 25-0 in a September special session, but the session ended before the House could consider it.

"Hopefully we've started it early enough this session to get it passed," Dial said.

The constitutional amendment stems from the battle by former Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore to display his 5,300-pound Ten Commandments monument in the rotunda of the Alabama Judicial Building.

Last year, Moore refused to follow a federal judge's orders to remove the monument from public display. That resulted in Moore's colleagues on the Alabama Supreme Court having the monument moved into storage in August and Moore being ousted as chief justice in November.

Dial's constitutional amendment authorizes the display of the Ten Commandments on state property and at public schools. Dial's bill allows the Ten Commandments to be displayed alone without other historical documents surrounding them.

Gov. Bob Riley and Acting Chief Justice Gorman Houston are displaying the Ten Commandments with other historical documents in the Capitol and the Judicial Building. Their displays have not been challenged in court.

Opponents of Dial's legislation contend it will be unconstitutional under federal law. As a concession to them, Dial included language that prohibits any state money being spent to defend his legislation.

"One of the objections was the state has no money and it would cost the state millions to defend this in court. Proponents will raise the money to defend this so it wouldn't be any problem for the state," Dial said.

[From a March 30 AP article by Phillip Rawls.]

Atheists Get Organized: GAMPAC

Atheists and other nonbelievers launched a political action committee on March 4 to endorse candidates and lobby lawmakers to remove all traces of religion from the government.

But organizers acknowledged that they face a major problem: Most politicians won't want public support from their new group, which calls itself the Godless Americans Political Action Committee, or GAMPAC.

So American Atheists President

Ellen Johnson, who announced the formation of the group, proposes an unusual approach: GAMPAC could use the threat of endorsement to pressure lawmakers into siding with the group on issues.

"If a candidate says, 'Don't endorse me,' we will have to say we have the right to endorse somebody, but perhaps we can talk about what we can get in terms of promises from that candidate to help us out in return for

not endorsing him," Johnson told a sparsely attended news conference at the National Press Club.

The designated political director of the PAC, Jeffrey Lewis, told a reporter later that he "personally wouldn't" use such a pressure tactic.

He said his plan is to endorse candidates and send contributions.

"If they send it back, it's on them to send it back," he said.

[From a March 4 AJC article.]

Become a Member!

(Or renew your membership with this form!)



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

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

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

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

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

Annual dues are:

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

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

Atlanta Freethought Society

1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500, Roswell, GA 30075
 Phone: 404-805-2020 e-mail: mirza404@aol.com

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

Why I Am Not A Christian — \$9

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

Tales of the Rational:

Skeptical Essays About Nature and Science — \$17

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

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

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

Bible Bloopers: Evidence That Demands a Verdict, Too!

(A Skeptic Answers Josh McDowell) — \$15

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

Quotations That Support the

Separation of State and Church (2nd edition) — \$11

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

Please add:

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

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

No S&H Charge for 10 Books or more.

(All Merchandise will be shipped USPS Priority Mail)

Send check or money order to:

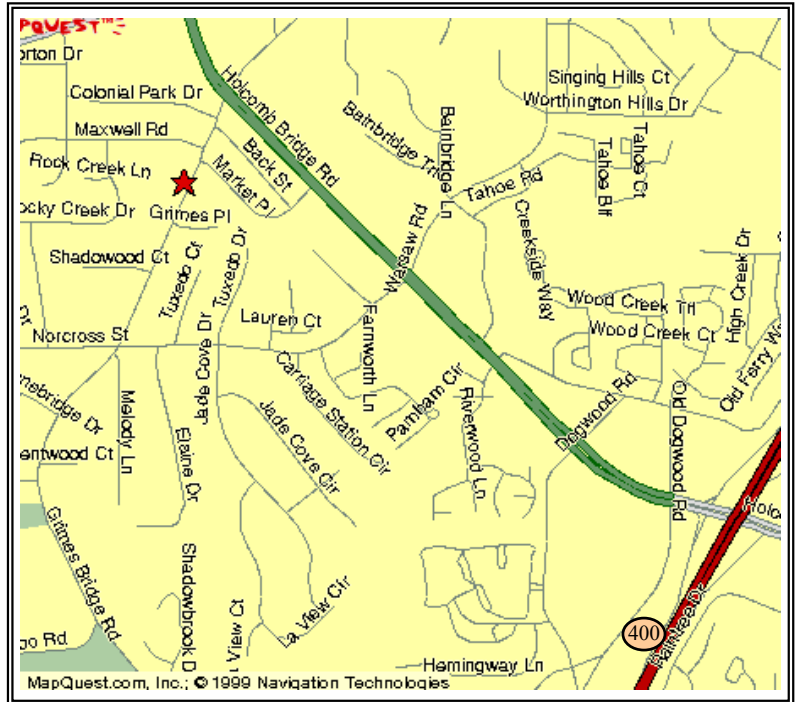
ATLANTA FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY
 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500, Roswell GA 30075



Atlanta Freethought Society

**The April Meeting:
Sunday, April 11
1:00 PM at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Scott Lilienfeld**



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



If you label indicates "02 2004" or earlier, please renew. Thanks.

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