

# Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 10 Number 5 • May 2004

## The May Meeting

The May 9 AFS meeting will include a talk by Reggie Finley, *The Infidel Guy*, on "Logical Arguments Against God: Can We Prove that God Doesn't Exist?"

See Reggie's website at [www.infidelguy.com](http://www.infidelguy.com), which includes great radio shows, online recorded debates and many essays on freethought issues.

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, May 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, May 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.

## 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).

## Books For Sale!

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

## Lake Hypatia July 4 Celebration

Every year many freethinkers get together at beautiful Lake Hypatia, Alabama for a fun filled Fourth of July Weekend!

Primitive camping is available on the upper and lower campgrounds. Local motels are a few miles away. There is swimming in the lake or at Cady Creek lagoon, fishing, paddle boats, dining at the lakeside Pavilion, great speakers and, most of all, the experience of making new friends, renewing old friendships and mingling with fellow freethinkers.

The Celebration will be Friday through Sunday, July 2-4. See [www.alabamafreethought.org/pages/july4/index.html](http://www.alabamafreethought.org/pages/july4/index.html) for details on this event. Speakers will include:

Bob Truett, M.A., on *Nature*

Barbara Forrest, Ph.D, *Intelligent Design—The Wedge Strategy*  
Delos McKown, Ph.D, *Facts About Religion You Probably Should Know...But Don't*

Susan Sackett, M.A., on *Humanism in Star Trek*

Ed Buckner, Ph.D, *We're Mad As Hell and We're Not Going To Take It Any More...Roy!*

John Henderson, MD, on *Fear, Faith, Fact & Fantasy*

Bernard Bray, Ph.D, on *Theatre and Politics*

Fred Whitehead, Ph.D, *The Freethought Heritage of Germany*

We will have a registration form and more information on this event in the June AFNews.

## Member News

**Laura Jacobs**, who has been a member of AFS for several years and has helped out with our booths at various festivals, is recovering from major surgery due to breast cancer. Laura would welcome cards, and especially visitors, during her time off from work (several weeks, probably). You can call her at (404) 371-8791 or email her at [ljacobs@mindspring.com](mailto:ljacobs@mindspring.com). Laura lives very close to the square in Decatur at 225 E. Ponce de Leon Ave, Unit 406, Decatur, GA 30030. Her prognosis is good, and we wish her a full and quick recovery!

**Lew Southern** recently completed the back porch cement work at the Atlanta Freethought Center. Thanks for the hard work, Lew!

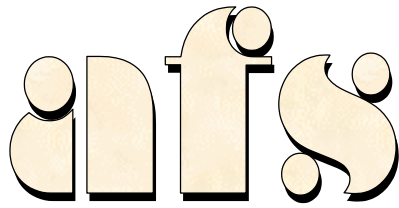
## Meetings and Activities

May 9: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.

May 14: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

May 16: AFS Board Meeting, AF Center, 2:00 PM.

May 16: AFS Discussion Group, AF Center, 4:00 PM.



**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.

May 9: Reggie Finley will speak on "Logical Arguments Against God: Can We Prove that God Doesn't Exist?"

June 13: Ross Sloan will perform multiple Robert Ingersoll speeches at Panahar Restaurant at our Fundraising Meeting and Dinner.

July 11: Dr. Fred Whitehead will speak.

August 8: TBA

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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# Moore Loses on Appeal

**F**ormer Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore lost the appeal of his November ouster on April 30 before the special Alabama Supreme Court.

Moore was removed from the state's judicial office on Nov. 13 for willfully disobeying a federal court order to remove his 5,280-pound Ten Commandments monument from the rotunda of the Alabama Judicial Building.

Moore appealed that decision shortly after his removal and has spent the last several weeks awaiting the court's decision. The former jurist blasted the court when he heard the verdict.

"The elected representatives of the people, the eight associate justices of the Alabama Supreme Court, hid behind the robes of an illegally appointed, politically selected court," Moore said. "It is political in nature. This is about the acknowledgment of God and many judges can't admit they are wrong and that they can enter unlawful orders. The rule of law is the written law and it is clear. The people of Alabama have a right to acknowledge God and no judge or group of judges has the right to take it from them."

Moore supporters were not happy with the news.

"We are, of course, disappointed but not surprised. We will continue to support all legal efforts to right this wrong," said Jim Zeigler, legal counsel for the League of Christian Voters, formed by political supporters of Moore.

In a press release on the same day, Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State said, "This is the end. This is the day when he hears the words Donald Trump made famous: 'You're fired.' This will send a clear message in places like Pennsylvania, Montana and Washington state, where we have been fighting Ten Commandment displays, that this is just an expensive, losing proposition."

In the written opinion, the court

concluded, "This Court has thoroughly reviewed the record on appeal and has carefully studied the briefs submitted by the parties. We conclude that the judgment of the Court of the Judiciary is fully supported by clear and convincing evidence, as is the sanction it imposed of removing Chief Justice Moore from office. The judgment of the Court of the Judiciary is hereby affirmed in its entirety."

In the opinion, Justice Harry Wilthers added some personal observations, noting the Moore offered both legal and biblical arguments for his failure to comply with the federal court's order. Wilthers wrote, "Even if the biblical arguments could be considered, the Bible also tells us: 'Every person must submit to the supreme authorities. There is no authority but by act of God, and the existing authorities are instituted by him; consequently anyone who rebels against authority is resisting a divine institution, and those who so resist have themselves to thank for the punishment they will receive...(Romans 13:1-7, The New English Bible)'"

Justice Wilthers also quotes several other biblical passages to support his contention that Judge Moore had no standing from a biblical perspective as well as a legal one.

[From an April 30 article by Jessica Walker and Jannell McGrew in the *Montgomery Advertiser*.]

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## STATE MUST PAY \$549,430 IN TEN COMMANDMENTS SUIT

In a related story, a federal judge ordered the state of Alabama on April 15 to pay more than half a million dollars in lawyer fees and expenses in connection with the suit to remove the Ten Commandments monument from the state judicial building rotunda.

U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson gave the state up to 30 days to pay \$549,430.53 to lawyers for people who sued to remove the monument, placed in the rotunda by Roy Moore, the state's ousted chief justice.

Plaintiff's lawyers originally asked for nearly \$850,000 in fees and ex-

penses, but they reached a settlement for the lower amount.

"The people of Alabama will not forget that the actions of former Chief Justice Roy Moore have cost the state more than half a million dollars," said Danielle Lipow, staff attorney with the Southern Poverty Law Center, which represented plaintiff Stephen Glassroth in the case.

Attorney General Troy King said, "It is regrettable, but unavoidable, that the state must pay any legal fees in this case, but we are pleased to have saved \$300,000 for the taxpayers of Alabama."

The Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which also represented plaintiffs in the case, said those who are disturbed about the cost to the state should realize that it was a result of Moore's "inappropriate conduct."

"It's really unfortunate that Judge Moore has cost the taxpayers of Alabama this much money in his utterly fruitless effort to defend the indefensible," Lynn said.

[From an April 15 article by Stan Bailey in the *Birmingham News*.]

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## MOORE SUED FOR STATE EXPENSES

In yet another lawsuit filed against ousted Chief Justice Roy Moore, a plaintiff claims Moore used arguments "calculated to lose" his Ten Commandments monument case and should pay \$550,000 that Alabama owes attorneys who sought the marker's removal.

Attorney David Gespass of Birmingham said the lawsuit seeks to have Moore reimburse the state for the \$500,000 in fees and \$50,000 in expenses accumulated by lawyers for the three groups that sued to have the monument removed.

The lawsuit, filed in Montgomery circuit court on April 30, contends Moore should have known that defending the monument as an "acknowledgment of God" was certain to lose.

"The defense that at least had an arguable chance of winning was that

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this was a display to show the Ten Commandments and its role in the development of law," Gespass said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press. "His constant response was, 'No, I was doing this to acknowledge God.'"

Gespass said the 11 plaintiffs - who

range from atheists to pastors and live mostly near Birmingham, Talladega and Mobile - were particularly upset that Moore retained the copyright to the monument, and thus the rights to any profits from its renown.

"The only benefit accruing from it was going to accrue to him and not

the state," Gespass said. "So he was collecting the money that was derived from the monolith, and he was doing it while expending state funds in engaging in what was essentially a frivolous defense of a lawsuit."

[From an April 30 AP article by Kyle Wingfield.]

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## Lawmakers Won't Allow Backup Location for Rally

Alabama lawmakers are in hot water with an atheist organization, which claims the legislators denied the group equal treatment by refusing to sponsor a "rainy day" location for its planned rally at the Capitol just because its members don't believe in God.

Larry Darby, president of the Montgomery-based Atheist Law Center, said Rep. Jay Love and Sen. Larry Dixon, both Montgomery Republicans, turned down his requests for sponsorship of the old Archives chamber as a backup location for the center's "Rally for Reason & Picnic on the Capitol Lawn," an event scheduled for May 6.

Darby said the group wanted to use the chamber in the event of inclement weather. He claims his group is being denied equal treatment because of its atheist beliefs.

The center's rally falls on the same day as the National Day of Prayer, which state leaders and residents will observe with a special service on the front steps of the Capitol.

"They are discriminating against me because I am an atheist," Darby said. "Both Rep. Love and Sen. Dixon are showing favoritism for a Christian business, and they are discriminating against an atheist organization."

Darby called the legislators' rejections "low-down, mean and un-American."

Love confirmed he had denied Darby's request for the alternate site because of the group's beliefs.

"I don't support his group, and I don't support his cause," Love said. "There's no way that I'm going to help further his cause. He wanted to

do this on the same day as the National Day of Prayer, and I would just consider it a spit in the face of faith-based groups for me to sponsor his group in the state Capitol."

In order for groups or individuals to hold an event inside the Capitol, they must have a state sponsor, such as a legislator, an agency department head or the governor.

Sen. Vivian Figures, D-Mobile, is sponsoring the "rainy day" location - the Capitol auditorium - for the National Day of Prayer event.

Darby said he wrote a letter to Figures requesting sponsorship.

Figures said on April 12 she had not received the letter.

Asked if she would sponsor a "rainy day" site inside the Capitol for the atheist event, the senator replied, "Of course not. I do believe in prayer, and I believe in God and atheists don't believe in God. I know there is a God, so why would I sponsor something that would be the total opposite of that?"

As constituents of Dixon and Love, the atheists should have been granted sponsorship, regardless of their beliefs, Darby said.

Love said legislators reserve the right to deny sponsorship to any group.

"He (Darby) has spent a lifetime protesting any kind of government involvement in religion, and for him to request the use of a government building by what I consider a religious group, which are the atheists, I'm just agreeing with him on this particular position," Love said.

In a letter to Darby, Dixon also declined the group's request.

"My question to you is why try to draw me into a conflict?" the senator wrote. "I am a practicing Christian and would never try to draw you into a controversial act, especially when it could and probably would create problems for you as this would for me. ... You can meet and protest all you want," Dixon wrote in conclusion. "However, please don't try to involve me."

"He (Darby) is trying to involve me in his religious politics," Dixon said. "I do not intend to become a pawn in whatever his mission is."

Dixon also said that if Darby's event had been on another day besides the National Day of Prayer, he would have arranged a site for the group to meet inside the Capitol.

"If he wants to arrange his rally in any part of the Capitol the next day, I'll be glad to arrange it," Dixon said. "But I'm not going to help him protest the National Day of Prayer."

In a May 3<sup>rd</sup> Atheist Law Center announcement, Darby said, "Alabama politicians have learned nothing from the Roy Moore debacle. Religious bigotry thrives in Alabama's Government despite the fact that taxpayers are charged with over \$500,000 in legal fees because of Moore's attempt to force his religious views on all citizens of Alabama. It is past time for Alabama voters to replace all pious politicians with men and women who understand fundamental concepts of liberty and the constitutional rule of law."

[From an April 14 article by Jannell McGrew in the *Montgomery Advertiser*.]

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# Theocratic Dreams: The Emergence of Christian Fascism in America

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

**A**t a gathering organized by the Center for Christian Statesmanship, House Majority Whip Tom DeLay (now House Majority Leader) declared, "I know there are some people that are worried about the faith-based initiative that the president supports. And most of the distress is about that, 'We don't want the federal government coming into our business.' Well, my answer to that is, don't accept the money. But I see it as a great opportunity to bring God back into the public institutions of the country. God has been removed from all of our public institutions."

"You see," he further divulged, "I don't believe there is a separation of church and state. I think the Constitution is very clear. We have the right and the freedom to exercise our religion no matter what it is anywhere we choose to do it. We have an opportunity to once again get back into the public arena."

To a degree, DeLay is correct. Americans do have the right to practice their religion anywhere they choose—so long as they neither trammel the freedoms of others nor violate our Constitution in doing so. But what DeLay and many others fail to recognize is that the freedom to practice religion is not extended to our government bodies. Moreover, he makes abundantly clear the real motivation behind the initiative in his admission it is a way of "standing up and rebuking this notion of separation of church and state..."

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.

Since September 11, 2001, Americans of all beliefs have decried Islamic fundamentalism, vowing to protect

themselves from such extremism and the terrorism it lends itself to. Yet the short years since have proven detrimental to religious freedom and liberty in general, leading to the nagging question: could America slip into a fundamentalist mode that parallels those nations we are desperately seeking to defend ourselves against?

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. Moreover, 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. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, professor of psychology at the University of Haifa in Israel, points out that in societies where fundamentalism has taken control, the societies had never become fully secularized before fundamentalism took hold. So it would seem such fear might border on delusion. Yet there may, remotely, be some warrant to such paranoia.

R. Scott Appleby and Martin E. Marty wrote in *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2002, that "Deadly violence does occur, however, when brands of fundamentalism clash..." As scholars of the Fundamentalism Project, they point to cases of various fundamentalisms colliding with each other within specific confines, such as in Pakistan or Africa. There may be some parallels given the fact that those Americans most in favor of war with Iraq have been conservative, and particularly, fundamentalist Christians. While Saddam and his regime may not be fundamentalist, America's association of the Middle East with Is-

lamic fundamentalism, along with 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.

On June 18, 2002, Brad Knickerbocker wrote in *The Christian Science Monitor* that extreme militia and "patriot" groups (most of which are Christian based) see war on terrorism "as justification for their existence" and that a Timothy McVeigh type could be tempted to join forces with foreign terrorists "perhaps to precipitate the kind of race war envisioned in 'The Turner Diaries'..." These militias are dangerously equipped with the skills and weaponry to reign the kind of fear, chaos, and destruction often seen in theocratic societies. And because most Christian extremists use religion as a grant to carry out God's bidding, as they narrowly perceive it, militias could easily influence and fuel the fundamentalist climate.

Considering seventy-nine of the world's eighty-two armed conflicts during the brief period of 1989 to 1992 were within, rather than between countries, the possibility should not altogether be dismissed. The one, and in some cases only, difference between Christian and Islamic theocrats is their use of the Bible, versus the Koran, to justify their oppressive ideology and desire for holy war.

Given there are approximately 400 militia-type groups in the U.S., with Christian Identity numbering in the area of 40,000 alone, the implications are profound. In her book, *The Battle for God*, Karen Armstrong, one of the foremost commentators on religious affairs in the U.S. and Great Britain says it is improbable that fundamentalism could gain enough popularity in the U.S. Nonetheless, she acknowledges that in an emergency state such as economic or environmental catastrophe, Christian fundamentalism could gravely change the face of our nation. She pointed out that some Christian sects are becoming increase-

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ingly militant. Says Armstrong: "Christianity, after all, was able to adapt to capitalism, which was alien to many of the teachings of Jesus. It could also be used to back a fascist ideology that, in drastically changed circumstances, might be necessary to maintain public order."

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

Add to this our recent economic decline; that both Bush's policies and war costs are likely to further plummet our economy; and that we are at war with a country in which its 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 prediction could, though implausible, become reality.

Though much of the savagery we read about today comes from other fundamentalisms, Christian fundamentalists are not immune from such barbarisms. Psychoanalyst Robert M. Young reports in "Fundamentalism and Terrorism" that under Argentina's "anti-left and officially Christian dictatorship" that following "highly technical and agonizing torture" of prisoners, they were flown in helicopters; their abdomens were cut open; and they were dropped into the sea as shark feed.

When people feel threatened, they simplify, or regress, says Young. They "eliminate the middle ground" and divide "the world into safe and threat, good and evil, life and death." President Bush's worldview is much the same. He has declared, "Every nation in every region now has a decision to make. Either you are with us,

or you are with the terrorists," and has made similar statements on more than one occasion. The very person leading our country has divided the whole world into good and evil, black and white; no gray can exist.

Fascism is defined as a political philosophy both authoritarian and anti-democratic in nature in which the state is placed above the individual, requiring absolute obedience to a glorified leader. Likewise, this has been the policy of the Bush Administration. Fareed Zakaria reported in *Newsweek*, March 24, 2003, on Bush's "arrogant empire." Bush is demanding and authoritarian in his relations even with foreign nations. As Zakaria points out, "President Bush's favorite verb is 'expect.'" And Donald Rumsfeld's favorite quote is an Al Capone line: "You will get more with a kind word and a gun than with a kind word alone."

The Administration's authoritarian antidemocratic nature has been played out in a number of ways. Ari Fleischler told Americans in 2001 to "watch what they say." This slogan appears to be no slip of the tongue. On February 13 of this year, in New Mexico, Andrew O'Connor was handcuffed, refused counsel, and interrogated for hours on his political views, particularly war with Iraq, by the Secret Service for stating in a chat room that Bush "was out of control."

Christian fundamentalists have glorified Bush, as well, another requisite for a fascist leader. In March, pamphlets produced by In Touch Ministries were distributed to thousands of Marines calling on them to pray for Bush, despite the inside out nature of the request.

The ramifications of the war with Iraq, regardless of its outcome, are sobering. Should Bush's war backfire, our economy, foreign relations, and our own safety are all at risk, and depending on the severity of any crisis, it could ultimately lead to serious reaction from America's Christian fundamentalists. Scholars commonly refer to them as reactionary; their predictably unpredictable nature could pose real danger.

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 Southern Baptists, Reconstructionists, Mormons, or any other Christian faith that believes its particular doctrines and interpretations are correct and desires to be the controlling religious force in America.

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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## Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Ray Knisley's letter was in the Rockmart Journal on April 7, 2004.

### Georgia Senate fails democracy

In the March 17 issue of The Rockmart Journal, an article by Sen. Nathan Dean boasts of "work[ing] into the night" to "perfect legislation to meet the needs of our constituents." Evidently the centerpiece of this work was to pass Senate Resolution 786, which "encourages the display of The Ten Commandments and the acknowledgement of God by local governments and the State of Georgia."

He goes on to allege that his religious beliefs should be set in stone on the people's property "for our well being as citizens." Please permit me to respond to Senator Dean and to this soiled Senate resolution.

Our Constitution's First Amendment is unequivocal: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." This precious law is the brightest star in the firmament of our republic. It is the essential foundation operative to keep our nation free of tyrants.

Indeed, it is the necessary principle of every liberty we enjoy. Its result has proved its intent and has mostly restrained internecine religious strife. No wonder, then, that it is the first to be attacked by the enemies of democracy.

The most dangerous of our Constitution's enemies in our time are the theocrats who tirade in the name of God. A theocracy, a government system that Senator Dean and the Georgia Senate demand as the more perfect government to rule the State of Georgia, is defined in my dictionary as "Government by God," or by priests or preachers acting solely on authority from God through revelation. Those who support this social system are

#### Ray Knisley

Guest columnist

theocrats. It is irreconcilable with democracy.

Democracy is defined in my dictionary as "free and equal representation of people." Abraham Lincoln defined it best, in my view, and paid infinitely more in its service than the members of our present Georgia Senate, who bask in its very sun while they rebuke it and try to topple it.

In his "Gettysburg Address" speech, Lincoln rightly portrayed democracy as a government "of the people, by the people, for the people" and he hoped it would "never perish from the earth." The Georgia Senate, instead of trampling on our precious liberty, ought to read Lincoln's words and abide their lesson rather than try to overturn them for ephemeral justification. Lincoln was a lover of freedom for all the people and he placed constitutional integrity, and his own, above demagogic interests.

A religion-ruled country, as witness all the Islamic nations, including Afghanistan (Iraq is not a nation, it is an occupied state) is forever anathema to democratic principles. Those horrendous agents who inflicted the 9/11 attacks upon America were theocrats.

World history is blood-soaked with religion-ordered horrors. Our founding fathers were wise to the world. At the "Miracle in Philadelphia" in 1787, the Constitutional Convention disavowed the existent colonial theocracies and made their abdication absolute for membership in the several United

States of America. They did not beat around the bush. They excised all religious dependence and crafted every word of our laws in secular, this-world concerns. Nowhere is there any reference to God.

Said John Adams, a major leader in the Revolutionary War, one of the committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence, and second president of The United States:

"Although the detail of the formation of the American governments is at present little known or regarded either in Europe or in America, it may hereafter become an object of curiosity. It will never be pretended that any persons employed in that service had interviews with the gods, or were in any degree under the influence of Heaven, more than those at work upon ships or houses, or laboring in merchandise or agriculture. It will forever be acknowledged that these governments were contrived merely by use of reason and the senses."

Said Ulysses S. Grant, 18<sup>th</sup> President and hero of the Civil War against human bondage:

"Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church and the private schools, supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the church and the state forever separated."

Senator Dean and the Senate members should rescind their confused resolution 768 and if they are going to work into the night at taxpayer expense, I suggest they work for the people's common welfare. They could start with helping that number of citizens who are disbarred from our democracy on account of their privations.

*Ray Knisley is a Cedartown resident.*

### IRS Raids Kent Hovind's Home

Internal Revenue Service agents are investigating a Pensacola, FL man who operates a creationist theme park and museum and who they say is evading taxes on more than \$1 million in income.

On April 14, federal IRS agents raided the home and businesses of Kent Hovind, 51, confiscating all computer and paper records of finan-

cial activity since January 1997.

The creation-science evangelist argues against evolution around the world. He also sells literature and videos supporting his views and charges admission to his Pensacola theme park and museum through a number of entities.

But in a sworn statement made to obtain the search warrant, IRS agent

Scott Schneider said none of Hovind's enterprises has a business license in that county or has tax-exempt status as a nonprofit enterprise.

"Since 1997, Hovind has engaged in financial transactions indicating sources of income and has made deposits to bank accounts well in excess of \$1 million per year during some of these years, which would require the

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filing of federal income taxes," wrote Schneider.

The statement is based on financial records plucked from Hovind's garage from July 2002 through March 2004, statements from a former employee, Internet research and public records.

Hovind, who has not been charged, says he is being targeted because of his religious beliefs. He adamantly denies wrongdoing.

Hovind has a May 18 court date to face three misdemeanor charges arising from his refusal to obtain a permit to construct a metal building on his

property. Hovind said the building meets or exceeds building codes, and he objects to the permitting process as an undue expense on the church.

[From an April 17 article by Brett Norman in the *Pensacola News Journal*.]

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## 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, AFS member **Bruce Herr** presents his "Commandments." Send your comments to [bruceherr@email.com](mailto:bruceherr@email.com).

### The Herr Ten Commandments

1. Don't attribute to a god what you have accomplished yourself.
2. Act civilized. Have good manners. Do not lie, cheat or steal. Do not hurt others mentally or physically. Be tolerant of others who don't live up to your standards.
3. Frequently contemplate the ideas of kindness, patience, acceptance, compassion and empathy.
4. Be a positive force. Try to have only positive thoughts, words and actions.
5. Be grateful for what you have. Have a reverence for the people and things in your life.
6. Don't criticize. Rise above criticism and work to be accepting. Be kind and loving to other people.
7. Fill your mind with courage and hope. Feel courage to meet your personal challenges and have hope that future events will turn out well.
8. Endure difficult people who aggravate or annoy you. Try to not let others take advantage of you.
9. Your family is most important. Spend lots of time with your children and see that they are thoroughly educated. That way, it will be easy for them to honor you.
10. Be kind to our planet. Don't waste electricity, water or other resources. Recycle. Walk or ride a bicycle whenever possible. Use lots of birth control.

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## April Board Meeting Minutes

Present: Steve Yohtment (presiding), Judy Thompson, Lew Southern, Bill Burton, Kate Miller, Sue Garland, Freya Harris, Harriet Harris

Minutes taken by: Harriet Harris

Time/Date of meeting: 2:00 PM, April 18, 2004

- ▶ The Minutes of the previous (March) 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.
- ▶ Lou reported that he had installed a concrete step outside the double glass doors of our meeting room.
- ▶ Treasurer Burton reported a bank balance of \$4,837, with some outstanding bills.
- ▶ Pledges were discussed. (AFS recently distributed a pledge solicitation letter.) Sue will create a chart, to be displayed in the meeting room, that will track the progress of pledges as they arrive. Steve and Bill will design and produce a membership card that can be laminated. It will have a logo and information about AFS.
- ▶ The board discussed managing booths at various festivals. Member Laura Jacobs, who has been in charge of setting up a booth at the upcoming Gay Pride Festival, is suddenly scheduled for surgery within a few days and therefore will be unable to continue in that capacity. The Board voted to nevertheless participate in the festival, unless, by the end of this month, we find another festival in which we can participate before the year is out.
- ▶ Sue will look into the possibility of our participating in the Decatur Square Arts Festival.
- ▶ Kate will look into the possibility of our participating in the Roswell Arts Festival.
- ▶ The board agreed for AFS to promote and participate in the Lake Hypatia (Alabama) July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebration. Judy will be in charge of our booth there.
- ▶ Sue Garland and Kate Miller agreed to be contacts for assisting Laura Jacobs through her surgery and recovery.



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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!

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

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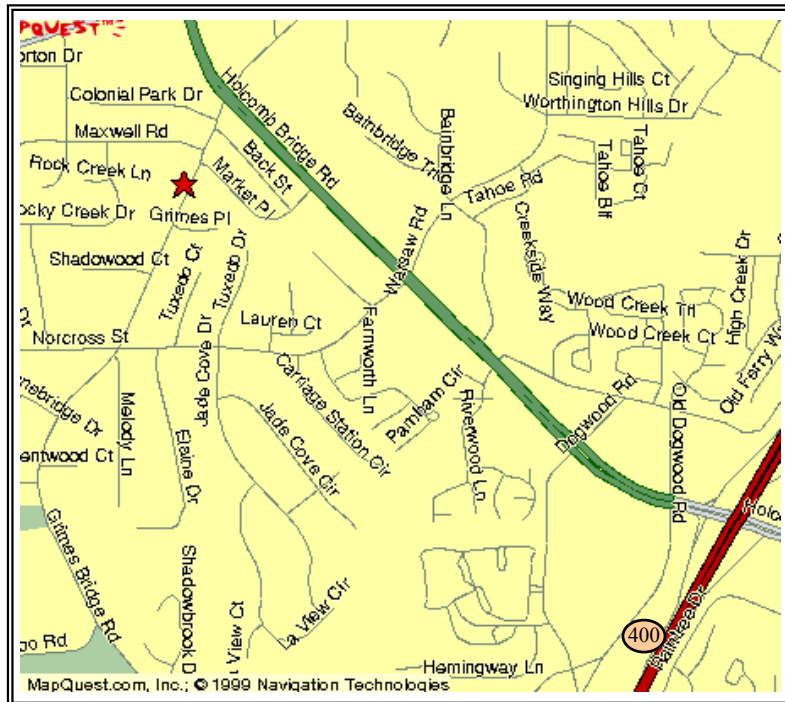
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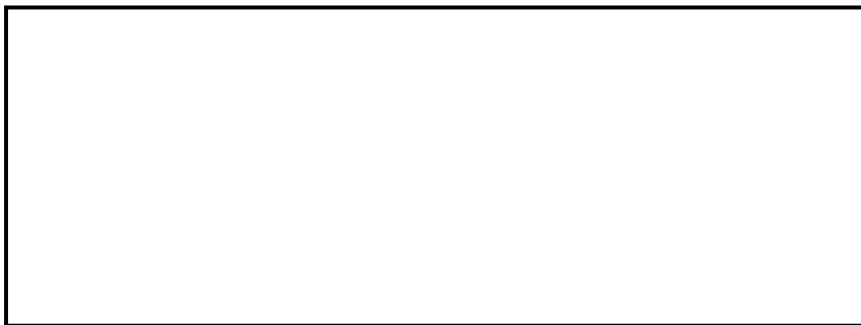


**The April Meeting:  
Sunday, May 9  
1:00 PM at the AF Center  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road  
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:  
Reggie Finley**



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