

Atlanta Freethought News

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The September Meeting

The September 12 AFS meeting will feature Dr. Delos B. McKown, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at Auburn University, speaking on "Brain Warping: Necessary and Unnecessary."

Delos McKown, a former Campbellite minister, is a nationally known philosopher, speaker and author. One of his recently published books is *The Mythmaker's Magic; Behind the Illusion of 'Creation Science'*. See his on-line works at www.infidels.org/library/modern/delos_mckown/index.shtml.

AFS Activities

The next **AFS Social** will be at **Las Margaritas Restaurant** at 1842 Cheshire Bridge Road (Atlanta) on Friday, September 17, 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, September 19, 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.

Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center at 12:30 on Sunday, September 26. The meeting topic will be "A History of Humanism."

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.

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).

Meetings and Activities

Sept 12: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
Sept 17: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
Sept 19: AFS Board Meeting, AF Center, 2:00 PM.
Sept 19: AFS Discussion Group, AF Center, 4:00 PM.

"The invisible and the non-existent look very much alike."
—Delos McKown

Center Devoted to the Public's Appreciation of Science Expands

Center For Inquiry Launches Campaign to Expand Successes as Educational and Research Organization

Amherst, N.Y.—The Center for Inquiry - Transnational is pleased to announce the \$2.5 million expansion of its world headquarters in Amherst, NY. The expansion is part of the Center's new \$26 million "New Future Fund Campaign."

"The Center for Inquiry is dedicated to extending reason, science, and free inquiry in every area of human interest, and in developing the public's understanding of the scientific outlook and the methods of science," said Paul Kurtz, chairman of the Center.

"There is a critical need for additional space. We plan on breaking ground in the fall with an expansion of our Amherst headquarters." The new headquarters will provide new offices, additional seminar and meeting rooms, and a major addition to its growing library.

The Center for Inquiry maintains three branch offices in the United States: Los Angeles, Tampa, and Rockefeller Center in New York City. The Center for Inquiry also has branches in Germany, France, Russia, Poland, Peru, Egypt, Nepal, Uganda, and Nigeria.

The Center for Inquiry is publisher of two popular magazines, *Free Inquiry* and *Skeptical Inquirer*, in addition to many scientific and scholarly journals. The combined circulation of the magazines, journals, and newsletters published at Center for Inquiry—seventeen in all—exceeds 110,000.

The Center for Inquiry is an umbrella organization that is home to the Council for Secular Humanism, founded in 1980, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, founded in 1976, Secular Organizations for Sobriety, and other programs dedicated to the promotion of science and secular values.

One of the Center for Inquiry's newest endeavors has been the establishment of the Commission for Scientific Medicine and Mental Health. The Commission champions the importance of evidenced-based medicine and mental health practices and provides clinicians and the public unique resources to help distinguish effective from untested therapies.

Through its media outreach efforts, the Center has provided experts for interviews on national TV and radio news programs, where they address topics ranging from church-state separation to the proliferation of paranormal and irrational beliefs in 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.

September 12: Dr. Delos McKown will speak on "Brain Warring: Necessary and Unnecessary."

October 10: TBA

November 14: TBA

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

You can unsubscribe by sending an email to xxxx-unsubscribe@yahoo.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 living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

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 lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an 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
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Rallies Back Ten Commandments Displays

Nearly 100 people gathered at the McDonough, GA square on Saturday, August 7, for speeches, music, and word of a new effort to post the Ten Commandments in public buildings in 20 Georgia counties.

Ray McBerry of McDonough, state chairman of the League of the South, said his group staged the event to show support for the Henry and Barrow County commissions in placing public displays of the Commandments in their county courthouses. Henry County has announced plans to do so, and Barrow County is being sued by the American Civil Liberties Union for having done so.

McBerry did not specify which 20 counties would be targeted for the campaign, to begin immediately.

He said Georgia legislators and Gov. Sonny Perdue should "interpose themselves" between the federal courts and Georgia county officials who want to post the Commandments in public buildings.

Other speakers at the rally included Barrow County Commission Chairman Doug Garrison; McDonough Mayor Richard Craig; the Rev. Jody Hice of Bethlehem, the head of Ten Commandments Georgia; Mike Crane of Fannin County, Southern Party candidate for the 51st state Senate district; John Campbell of the John Birch Society; Ricardo Davis of the Constitution Party of Georgia; and Judy

Rogers of Providence Reformed Presbyterian Church near Covington. Rogers traveled with former Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore, who was removed from office for his placement of the Commandments in his courthouse.

A letter from state Rep. Lynn Westmoreland of Sharpsburg, a candidate for Congress, expressed support for the rally and called for the resources of the Georgia attorney general's office to be used to "stop the ACLU from trying to force counties to remove [the Commandments] by bankrupting them."

MOORE AT BARROW COUNTY DINNER

Former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore joined Barrow County officials who are fighting a lawsuit challenging a Ten Commandments plaque in the courthouse.

Moore, who was suspended for refusing a federal judge's order to remove a Commandments monument from the Alabama Judicial Building, spoke on September 2 at a \$50-a-plate dinner to raise money to oppose the ACLU lawsuit.

"Christians are engaged in a spiritual battle," Moore told an estimated 400 people. "We do need an army and every one of you are in it."

The event was sponsored by Ten Commandments-Georgia Inc., formed to help the Barrow County government fight the ACLU lawsuit, and by

Moore's own organization, The Foundation for Moral Law, to spur donations.

County Commissioner Bill Brown said Moore's visit would revitalize interest in the case and bring in even more money to "preserve the plaque."

Moore said the issue is about more than whether the Ten Commandments can be displayed in public buildings. "The question is, can the state acknowledge God?" he said.

The American Civil Liberties Union filed the federal lawsuit almost a year ago. Since spring, it has languished in federal court in Gainesville during a long discovery process, in which both sides disclose information and evidence. That is expected to end soon, and the trial should begin sometime this fall.

To date, Ten Commandments-Georgia Inc. has raised about \$150,000 to defend the lawsuit. County Commission Chairman Doug Garrison opposes using tax money.

In April, Commissioner Brown admitted that he put up the framed copy of the Commandments anonymously in the spring or summer of 2002, never expecting the publicity or the lawsuit. He said the display was donated by a local resident.

[From an August 7 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article by Kay Pedrotti, and a September 3 article on www.AccessNorthGA.com.]

ACLU, Planned Parenthood Challenge Florida Ballot

The American Civil Liberties Union of Florida, Planned Parenthood chapters throughout the state, and a Florida family filed a legal challenge on August 2 to a ballot proposal to amend the Florida state constitution to restrict teens' access to abortion, saying the ballot proposal misleads voters and if passed will harm the most vulnerable teens.

"Encouraging teens to talk to their parents is an important part of what we do every day, but not all teens

come from a supportive and loving family," said Stephanie Grutman, Executive Director of the Florida Association of Planned Parenthood Affiliates. "Forcing teens from abusive homes or teens whose pregnancies are the result of incest to tell their parents about their abortion decision will make a bad situation even worse for some teens."

The ballot proposal would amend the constitution to authorize the state legislature to pass a law requiring pa-

rental notification before a teen can obtain an abortion. However, the proposal fails to inform voters that the amendment will take away privacy rights granted under the state constitution.

"As the mother of two teenage daughters, my main concern is that they can safely access the health care they need," said Jeanne Baker, a plaintiff in this case along with her husband, Dr. Walter Bradley, and their two daughters. "Of course I would

ACLU, Planned Parenthood Challenge Florida Ballot (*continued*)

want my daughters to come to me, but if they couldn't I would still want them to receive the best health care possible and support from another adult. This amendment could prevent that. Politicians cannot legislate good family communication where it does not already exist."

For more than 30 years, Planned Parenthood all over Florida has worked to provide, promote, and protect access to safe and comprehensive reproductive and sexuality health care counseling and services. "An overwhelming majority of our services are education and prevention designed to reduce the need for abortion in the first place," Grutman said.

"After reading the ballot proposal, there is absolutely no way voters will understand that its real purpose is to take away the privacy rights of Floridians," said Randall Marshall, Legal Director of the ACLU of Florida. "To the contrary, the ballot proposal intentionally misleads the public into thinking that a yes vote come November will protect rather than take away existing rights. This is politics at its worst."

The legislature introduced the ballot proposal after the Florida Supreme Court twice struck down laws requiring teens to involve their parents in their abortion decisions. Both times the court held that the laws violated

the express right to privacy in the Florida Constitution.

Today's challenge asks the court to block the ballot proposal from appearing on the November ballot.

The case is *ACLU of Florida v. Hood* and was filed in the Circuit Court of the Second Judicial Circuit in and for Leon County, Florida. Lawyers for the Plaintiff include, Diana Kasdan and Louise Melling of the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project, Marshall and Rebecca Steele of the ACLU of Florida, Inc., and Helene Krasnoff of Planned Parenthood Federation of America.

[From an Aug. 2 ACLU press release.]

Americans United Tells IRS to Investigate Florida Church

May Have Violated Federal Tax Law, Watchdog Group Says

A Miami church that hosted a Democratic rally on August 29 should be investigated by the Internal Revenue Service, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

On August 29, Americans United asked the IRS to investigate Miami's New Birth Baptist Church, which hosted a rally featuring speeches by Democratic National Committee Chairman Terry McAuliffe and former Democratic presidential candidate Al Sharpton.

During his remarks, McAuliffe attacked Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush, telling the crowd, "Bush has misled us for four years and will not mislead us the next four years. Get out and vote, and we'll send Bush back to Texas."

Sharpton, addressing the crucial role Florida played in the 2000 election, remarked, "Didn't nobody give us the right to vote. People lost their

lives. We can't sit here 40 years later and let somebody buy the vote, somebody hustle the vote, pimp the vote. We've got to win Florida."

Local Democratic officeholders also attended the rally, including U.S. Rep. Kendrick Meek, state Sen. Frederica Wilson and state Sen. M. Mandy Dawson.

The Sun-Sentinel noted that the church's pastor, Bishop Victor T. Curry, "made no apologies for turning his Sunday service into a political rally..."

Americans United Executive Director Barry W. Lynn said the church-based partisan rally seems to be a clear violation of federal tax law that bars houses of worship and other 501(c)(3) tax-exempt groups from intervening in political campaigns.

"Americans do not want to see houses of worship turned into partisan political conventions," said Lynn. "It violates tax law, and it undercuts

the integrity and purpose of religious organizations. I urge the IRS to open an investigation of this church's activities."

In his letter to the IRS, Lynn noted that churches may engage in non-partisan forms of voter education and register people to vote. The rally at New Birth Baptist Church, he said, went far beyond that.

"This event seems to have gone beyond legitimate voter education about issues," observed the Lynn letter. "Rather, the event was partisan in its approach and included only Democrats. It promoted Democratic candidates while disparaging Republicans. I believe this event constitutes intervention in a political campaign on behalf of a candidate in clear violation of federal tax law. I urge you to take appropriate action to correct this abuse of the law."

[From an August 31 Americans United press release.]

"It may be useful to note our belief that most citizens of the United States willingly recite the Pledge of Allegiance and proudly sing the national anthem. But the rights embodied in the Constitution most particularly in the First

Amendment protect the minority — those persons who march to their own drummers. It is they who need the protection afforded by the Constitution and it is the responsibility of federal judges to ensure that protection."

— Conclusion to the *Opinion of the Court* by the US Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit on August 19, 2004.

In the case, the Federal Court of Appeals ruled that Pennsylvania Act 157, which required parental notification if public school students refused to pledge allegiance to the flag or to sing the national anthem, was unconstitutional.

PBS Documentary Tackles “The Question of God”

The Public Broadcasting Service recently announced that it will broadcast “The Question of God,” a two-part series that contrasts the worldviews of two of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century—C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud. The documentary was produced by Tatge/Lasseur Productions in association with WGBH (PBS-Boston) and Walden Media.

Walden Media hosted five screenings of a condensed version of the program at Biola University in August. The preview generated an enthusiastic response.

The four-hour series will air nationally in two parts on PBS stations, Sept. 15 and 22. It is based on the work of Harvard University Professor Dr. Armand Nicholi, a practicing psychiatrist and author of “The Question of God: C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud Debate God, Love, Sex and the Meaning of Life.”

Nicholi has taught a popular course on Lewis and Freud at Harvard for more than 30 years. It came about from his students’ response to a class he initially taught on the philosophical work of Freud.

Students complained that Freud’s philosophy “was one sustained attack on the spiritual worldview,” Nicholi

said. They suggested a counterpoint to Freud would be a welcome addition to the course.

The professor recalled reading Lewis’ “The Problem of Pain” at a crucial point in his own medical education and considered the work of the Oxford literature professor as a possible addition to the course.

“When I began to read Lewis seriously I realized there was a tremendous parallelism between the two men,” Nicholi said. “Freud was father of the new literary criticism. Lewis knew Freud’s work and probably used Freud’s arguments to defend his atheism,” he said.

Nicholi suggested that when Lewis became a Christian, he responded to Freud’s arguments, the same ones he had previously embraced. Adding Lewis to the course ignited the class discussion, the professor related.

“The Question of God” explores the timeless issues that confront all people today: How do we find meaning and purpose? What is happiness? How do we cope with suffering and death? Does God exist?

Using drama and interviews with biographers and historians, the PBS series brings Lewis and Freud together in dialogue and debate. While the program does not pick a winner, it

does present the Christian worldview of Lewis as a credible alternative to Freud’s atheism. The viewer must make up his own mind.

Interspersed throughout the documentary Nicholi leads a panel discussion featuring seven thoughtful men and women discussing the questions and ideas raised by Lewis and Freud. In a contemporary setting the panelists explore the implications of choosing a secular or spiritual worldview.

“Both men considered the problem of pain and suffering, the nature of love and sex, and the ultimate meaning of life and death. Each of them thought carefully about the alternatives to their positions,” said Stanley Mattson, Ph.D., president and founder of the C.S. Lewis Foundation, which works to advance the renewal of Christian scholarship in mainstream colleges and universities. “While they never actually met, Nicholi has done us a great service in offering us their arguments, placed side by side.”

Nicholi is a member of the C.S. Lewis Foundation’s Faculty Forum Council of Academic Advisors.

Walden Media says they will have free discussion materials available online in PDF format at walden.com.

[From a Christian Examiner article at www.christianexaminer.com.]

Cheney Opposes Ban on Same Sex Marriage

Vice President Dick Cheney stuck to his guns on gay marriage by reiterating his position Tuesday, Aug. 24, that it is an issue that should be left to the states to decide. In a televised, town meeting format, Cheney, appearing with his wife Lynne, stated that he did not favor a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriages in all 50 states. The Cheneys’ daughter Mary is a lesbian.

The vice president had declared while campaigning with George W. Bush in 2000 that he preferred leaving the issue to the states. Like many traditional conservatives, Cheney viewed domestic matters such as marriage,

divorce and child custody as a prerogative of local and state sovereignty and not an issue for the federal government.

In his comments yesterday, Cheney acknowledged that he disagreed with President George W. Bush on this issue, but added that it was the president who determined social policy for the administration.

As the Republican National Convention approached, there was movement in some party circles to make a constitutional amendment banning all gay marriages a plank of the Republican platform. An effort to pass such an amendment failed earlier this year

in the U.S. Senate when it did not even receive a majority of the vote.

Mary Cheney, the former Coors Beer spokeswoman for gay and lesbian matters, continues to play an increasingly activist role in her father’s re-election campaign and national Republican politics generally. How she will reconcile her sexual orientation with the needs of the party is an issue that is bound to surface and resurface before the November election.

[From the August 25 issue of Humanist Network News, a weekly e-zine of the Institute for Humanist Studies, www.humaniststudies.org.]

Florida Appeals Court Rules Against School Voucher Law

Americans United Says Court Decision Is Victory For Public Schools, Taxpayers

A Florida school voucher program provides tax aid to religion in violation of the state constitution, a state appeals court has ruled.

In an Aug. 16 ruling in a case brought by Americans United for Separation of Church and State and its allies, the 1st District Court of Appeals found that the Florida Opportunity Scholarship Program (OSP) violates Article I, Section 3 of the state Constitution, which mandates that “[n]o revenue of the state ... shall ever be taken from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid ... of any sectarian institution.”

The decision upholds a 2002 ruling by a trial judge that invalidated the

statewide voucher law because of the state constitutional provision against public financing of religious institutions.

“This is a tremendous victory for public schools and taxpayers,” said Americans United Legal Director Ayesha Khan. “Americans should never be taxed to support religious schools, and this decision upholds that vital principle. Public funds should be devoted to public schools.

“This decision has national importance,” she continued. “Two-thirds of the states have constitutional protections that are similar to Florida’s. This ruling is certain to discourage enactment of voucher plans in those states

as well.”

Florida’s voucher law was enacted in 1999 at the behest of Gov. Jeb Bush. The law, which has been in effect during the state’s appeal, allows students attending poorly performing public schools to apply for vouchers to attend religious and other private schools.

The 1st District Court in *Bush v. Holmes* concluded that the Florida voucher law violates the “clear language of the Constitution.”

Recent analysis of state constitutions by Americans United found that 37 have language that bars tax funds for sectarian institutions.

[From an Aug. 15 AU press release.]

The RM 2493 Hoax Lives On

The Baptist Standard, a news-magazine of Texas Baptists, reported on August 20 that a 30 year-old rumor is again circulating, now on the internet, about Federal Communications Commission Petition 2493, also called RM 2493. The petition was supposed to be an attempt to get the FCC to remove religious programming from American radio and television.

“Help Dr. Dobson,” the e-mail pleads. “An organization has been

granted a Federal Hearing ... by the Federal Communications Commission in Washington, D.C. Their petition, Number 2493, would ultimately pave the way to stop the reading of the gospel of our Lord and Savior on the airwaves of America. They got 287,000 signatures to back their stand! If this attempt is successful, all Sunday worship services being broadcast on the radio or by television will be stopped.”

The e-mail asks readers to attach

their names to the e-mail and forward it to “everyone you think should read this.” The long list of names will “show that there are many Christians alive, well and concerned about our country.”

RM 2493 was indeed filed with the FCC – 30 years ago. In 1974, Jeremy Lansman and Lorenzo Milam asked the FCC to prevent religious organizations from obtaining licenses to operate broadcasting channels reserved for education. They also asked the FCC to place a freeze on new licenses to religious-oriented stations while it considered whether existing license-holders were providing diverse programming.

The FCC unanimously denied RM 2493 – 29 years ago. The FCC issued a statement Aug. 1, 1975, noting the First Amendment requires the commission “to observe a stance of neutrality toward religion, acting neither to promote nor inhibit religion.”

See <http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/petition/fcc.htm> and <http://www.fcc.gov/mb/enf/forms/rm-2493.html> for details, and read the actual FCC ruling at <http://www.fcc.gov/mb/audio/decdoc/letter/1975-08-13-religious.html>

Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Bill Jager’s letter was in the *Anchorage Daily News* on August 7, 2004:

Patrick Henry took religion’s side, but John Adams said the opposite

In response to Robert A. Partain III’s letter to the editor, “Patrick Henry said it long ago: Christians founded our nation,” July 31: Yes, Patrick Henry argued that it was necessary to be a Christian to have good government. Patrick Henry and those who believed like him lost that argument.

The conclusions reached by the founders (who included Christians, Unitarians and deists) when writing the U.S. Constitution were quite different. The U.S. Constitution has given all citizens individual religious freedoms. With that freedom, Mr. Partain is free to believe in any god he chooses without government interference. Individual freedom is a constitutional value. When a government imposes religious beliefs onto its citizens, it is tyranny, not freedom.

John Adams, the second president of the United States (one of this country’s Founding Fathers), on June 10, 1797, signed a treaty with Tripoli, stating, “As the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion ...”

— Bill Jager, Anchorage

Mustangs, Monists and Meaning

The dualist belief that body and soul are separate entities is natural, intuitive and with us from infancy. It is also very probably wrong.

By Michael Shermer

When I was 17 in 1971, I purchased my dream car—a 1966 Ford Mustang—blue with a white vinyl roof, bucket seats and a powerful eight-cylinder 289-cubic-inch engine that could peg the speedometer at 140 miles per hour. As testosterone-overloaded young men are wont to do, however, over the course of the next 15 years I systematically wrecked and replaced nearly every part of that car, to the extent that by the time I sold it in 1986 there was hardly an original piece remaining. Nevertheless, I turned a tidy profit because my “1966” Mustang was now a collector’s classic. Even though the physical components were not original, the essence of its being—its “Mustangness”—was that model’s complete form. My Mustang’s essence—its “soul”—was more than a pile of parts; it was a pattern of information arranged in a particular way.

The analogy applies to humans and souls. The actual atoms and molecules that make up my brain and body today are not the same ones that I was born with on September 8, 1954, a half-century ago this month. Still, I am “Michael Shermer,” the sum of the information coded in my DNA and neural memories. My friends and family do not treat me any differently from moment to moment, even though atoms and molecules are cycling in and out of my body and brain, because these people assume that the basic pattern remains unchanged. My soul is a pattern of information.

Dualists hold that body and soul are separate entities and that the soul will continue beyond the existence of the physical body. Monists contend that body and soul are the same and that the death of the body—the disintegration of DNA and neurons that store my personal information—spells the end of the soul. Until a technology is developed to preserve our patterns with a more durable medium than the electric meat of our carbon-based protein (silicon chips is one suggestion), when we die our patterns die with us.

The principal barrier to a general acceptance of the monist position is that it is counterintuitive. As Yale University psychologist Paul Bloom argues in his intriguing book, *Descartes’ Baby* (Basic Books, 2004), we are natural-born dualists. Children and adults alike speak of “my body,” as if “my” and “body” are dissimilar. In one of many experiments Bloom recounts, for example, young children are told a story about a mouse that gets munched by an alligator. The children agree that the mouse’s body is dead—it does not need to go to the bathroom, it can’t hear, and its brain no longer works. Yet they insist that the mouse is still hungry, is concerned about the alligator, and wants to go home. “This is the foundation for the more articulated view of the afterlife you usually find in older children and adults,” Bloom explains. “Once children learn that the brain is involved in thinking, they don’t take it as showing that the brain is the source of mental

life; they don’t become materialists. Rather they interpret ‘thinking’ in a narrow sense and conclude that the brain is a cognitive prosthesis, something added to the soul to enhance its computing power.”

The reason dualism is intuitive is that the brain does not perceive itself and so ascribes mental activity to a separate source. Hallucinations of preternatural beings (ghosts, angels, aliens) are sensed as real entities, out-of-body and near-death experiences are perceived as external events, and the pattern of information that is our memories, personality and “self” is sensed as a soul.

Is scientific monism in conflict with religious dualism? Yes, it is. Either the soul survives death or it does not, and there is no scientific evidence that it does. Does monism extirpate all meaning in life? I think not. If this is all there is, then every moment, every relationship and every person counts—and counts more if there is no tomorrow than if there is. Through no divine design or cosmic plan, we have inherited the mantle of life’s caretaker on the earth, the only home we have ever known. The realization that we exist together for a narrow slice of time and a limited fraction of space elevates us all to a higher plane of humanity and humility, a passing moment on the proscenium of the cosmos.

[Michael Shermer is publisher of *Skeptical* magazine (www.skeptic.com) and author of *The Science of Good and Evil*.]

“Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion and Government in the Constitution of the United States, the danger of encroachment by Ecclesiastical Bodies may be illustrated by precedents already furnished in their short history.” — James Madison, from “Madison’s Detached Memoranda,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 1946, Vol. III, No. 4, p. 555

“The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries.” — James Madison, in a letter objecting to the use of government land for churches, 1803, quoted from James A. Haught, ed., *2000 Years of Disbelief*

“Congress should not establish a religion, and enforce the legal observation of it by law, nor compel men to worship God in any manner contrary to their conscience.” — James Madison, explaining to Congress during the House Debate what the First Amendment means to him, 1 Annals of Congress 730, August 15, 1789

Counties Defy Court Order

Many local government leaders are openly defying a federal court ruling banning religious-specific prayers at meetings soon after a Virginia town council voted to appeal the decision.

A three-judge panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals recently ruled that the Great Falls, Va. Town Council no longer could invoke Jesus' name at government meetings, setting a precedent that ends a centuries-old American tradition in some states. The ruling applies to all government meetings in South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland.

Many South Carolina government leaders supported the Great Falls Town Council's unanimous vote to appeal on August 5.

"Buddha didn't die for me. Allah didn't die for me. My religion says Jesus did," said Caldwell Pinckney, a Berkeley County, South Carolina councilman. "Nobody can dictate that to me. They cannot dictate the relationship between me and God."

Pinckney said he would continue to pray as he wishes until ordered to do otherwise.

Charleston County Councilman Tim Scott described the ruling as part of a continuing attack on Christianity, and he said he hopes his council will fight back by including Jesus in its prayers.

"We've had Christ-specific prayers even since the ruling," Scott said. "We are at war in defining what Americans believe on a values basis."

Some local atheists maintain that generic prayers should not be permitted either. Alex Kasman, a board member of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, thinks the word God should be eliminated from all government meetings.

"What's really called for is a complete separation between religion and government," he said. "This is just a small step in the right direction."

Lawyers who represent local governments acknowledge the risk in continuing with religion-specific prayers, but many say they will wait

to advise council members until the 4th Circuit Court announces whether it will rehear the case. In his six years as Berkeley County's attorney, Mark Stokes said there never has been a complaint about prayer, and he doesn't expect a lawsuit. Attorneys for Charleston and Dorchester counties did not return telephone calls for comment.

"I'm just taking a wait-and-see approach," Stokes said. "I'm not going to express an opinion (to council) until the decision comes out."

Such an approach could spell costly lawsuits for governments already strapped for cash, legal experts say.

O'Neal Smalls, a law professor at the University of South Carolina, noted that the ruling's precedent applies now.

"Until that decision is determined, it is a precedent," Smalls said. "(Governments) could be sued."

The lawsuit that prompted this debate began in 2001, when Darla Kaye Wynne sued the Great Falls Town Council for invoking Jesus Christ during meetings. Wynne practices Wicca, a neo-pagan, earth-centered religion. She said the prayers were used to ostracize her from the community. After she won a U.S. district court decision, the council appealed, bringing the case to the 4th circuit's three-judge panel.

Council is appealing that decision to the circuit's full panel of 13 judges. If the appeal is denied, town attorney Brian Gibbons said they would bring the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.

"We'll exhaust all legal remedies to address this," Gibbons said.

Some lawyers think the ruling, if upheld, may only serve as a "narrow" precedent, meaning that it isn't applicable to all cases involving sectarian prayer at government meetings.

Leon Stavrinakis, a lawyer and Charleston County councilman, said he hopes that's the case. If religious-specific prayers end up costing taxpayers money, though, the practice should end, he said.

"I don't have any problems with it,"

Stavrinakis said of sectarian prayer. "But it does run afoul of the law. The minute somebody sues, and it costs taxpayers' money, then we need to change what we're doing."

Dorchester County Council Chairman Randy Scott described a more drastic approach.

When asked about how the 4th Circuit Court might enforce its ruling, Scott didn't take long to reply.

"They can do what they want to," he said. "We're going to pray how we've always prayed—in Jesus' name."

SOUTH CAROLINA JOINS APPEAL OF BAN ON PRAYER AT GOVERNMENT MEETINGS

South Carolina Attorney General Henry McMaster announced on August 10 that he filed to the full 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. He said the ruling, as it stands, raises First Amendment issues.

"It's clear that a government entity like a Town Council can have a prayer that favors a particular religion provided they do not go too far in promoting that religion," McMaster said.

Advocates for the separation of church and state described McMaster's move as politically motivated, but most didn't think it would affect the ultimate outcome of the Great Falls' case. Herb Silverman, president of the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, said he expected the attorney general to support the appeal.

"This goes along with a long tradition of government officials wasting taxpayer money for their own religious causes," Silverman said. "I wish they would respect the separation of church and state. Even though the majority of people are Christian, we are not a Christian country."

Rob Boston, spokesman for Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, said he doesn't expect the "political grandstanding" to make a difference. "Re-hearings are very rare things."

[From an August 8 article in the *Charleston Post and Courier* and an August 11 update, by Michael Gartland.]

August Board Meeting Minutes

Present: Steve Yothment (presiding), Judy Thompson, Sue Garland, Bill Burton, Lew Southern, Harriet Harris, Hank Shiver

Minutes taken by: Harriet Harris

Time/Date of meeting: 2:00 PM, August 15, 2004

- ▶ The June Minutes were approved as they appeared in the July newsletter.
- ▶ Treasurer, Bill Burton, reported a balance of \$3,410 - with some current monthly bills outstanding.
- ▶ Publishing possibilities were discussed.
 - 1) Ed Buckner will edit Edwin Kagin's upcoming book "Baubles of Blasphemy."
 - 2) Bill Burton will finalize the introduction of Michael Ledo's book "A Sceptic's View of the Bible."

3) Hilton Bik has written a small volume called "The Ten Commandments"; the board agreed for Bill to coordinate publication of this book with the author.

▶ Hank Shiver suggested three projects for the board to consider. They were:

- 1) Participate in the Adopt-A-Mile highway program whereby we would pick up trash along a portion of highway.
- 2) Present cash awards at local junior-high and high-school science fairs.
- 3) Offer an AFS lifetime membership.

Board members expressed interest and asked Hank to investigate details regarding the first two - which are directed at enhancing our public image - so that we might consider some specific action.

"Rulers who wished to subvert the public liberty, may have found an established Clergy convenient auxiliaries. A just Government instituted to secure & perpetuate it needs them not." – James Madison, in *A Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, addressed to the Virginia General Assembly, June 20, 1785

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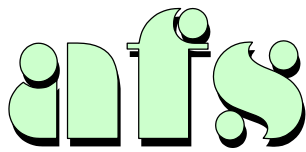
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The September Meeting:

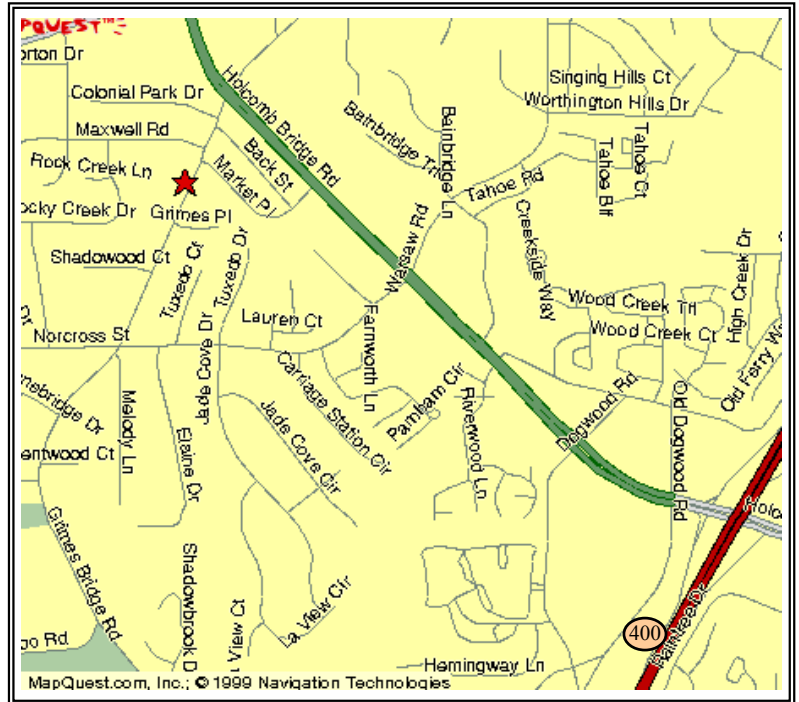
Sunday, September 12

1:00 at the AF Center

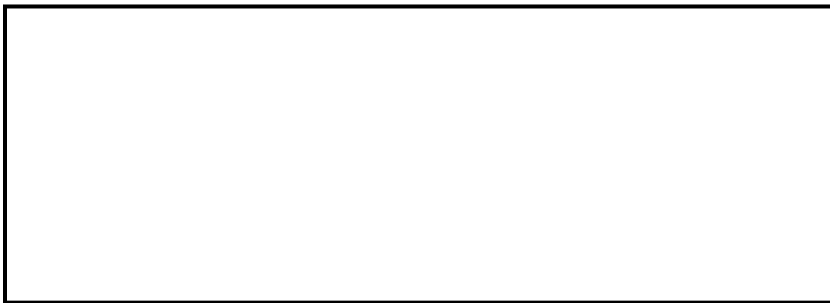
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Roswell, GA

This Month's Speaker:

Dr. Delos McKown



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