

# Atlanta Freethought News

An AFS Publication • Volume 10 Number 11 • November 2004

## The November Meeting

The November 14 meeting of the Atlanta Freethought Society will feature a presentation by **Ford Vox** and **Todd Stricker** on "Universism: The Future of Freethought."

According to their website at [www.universist.org](http://www.universist.org), "Universism is a progressive natural religious philosophy celebrating the mystery that surrounds us. Universists don't pretend to have the answers. As Universists, we do our best to seek answers, and the first step in our process of discovery is recognizing what we do not know. Universists apply personal reason and experience to the fundamental questions of human existence, derive inspiration from the natural uncertainty of the human state, and deny the validity of revelation, faith and dogma."

The AFS meeting will be at 1:00 at the **Atlanta Freethought Center**, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, in Roswell, GA. 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 Rd., 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, November 19, at 7:00 PM. To get there, take I-85 to the Cheshire Bridge Road exit (Exit 88) on the north side of Atlanta. Turn east at the light and go about 1.5 miles. The restaurant will be on the right.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet on Sunday, November 21, at 4:00 to 6:00 PM at the AF Center. This meeting will include a viewing and discussion of a recorded PBS program, "The Constitution: That Delicate Balance."

The **Tuesday Lunch Bunch** meets every Tuesday for lunch at Panahar Restaurant at 12:30.

## Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will not have a regular meeting this month, but will have an HGA Social on Sunday, November 14, at 4:00pm. Please RSVP to Dave Patterson ([meshmonster@yahoo.com](mailto:meshmonster@yahoo.com)) for location and directions.

## 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).

## 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).

## Atheist Meetup in Atlanta

Atlanta Atheists will have a "meetup" on Tuesday, November 16 and 7:00 PM. The informal gathering will be at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Road, Atlanta, GA. Their phone is 404-255-5911. Details: [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com).

## AU of Georgia at AF Center

The first official organizational meeting of the new **Georgia Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State** occurred on Sunday, October 10, at the Atlanta Freethought Center.

The group agreed on a plan of action and elected officers and board members. They hope to have a news conference with a news release and a celebration with a notable AU personality in the near future.

The AU of Ga. President is Bo Turner; the Vice President is Walter Bell, the Treasurer is Kathy Brooke and the Secretary is Ed Buckner. Fourteen board members were elected.

## AFS Elections

Nominations were made for AFS officers and board members at the October meeting. (Elections will be in December.) The nominees are:

President: Steve Yothment

Vice President, Int. Communication: Judy Thompson

Vice President, Ext. Communication: Freya Harris

Treasurer: Ed Buckner

Board Members: Bill Burton, Tony King, Jim Middleton (Lew Southern, Joel Kollin and Freya Harris will continue their 2-year terms as board members.)

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

## AFS Meetings and Activities

Nov 14: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.

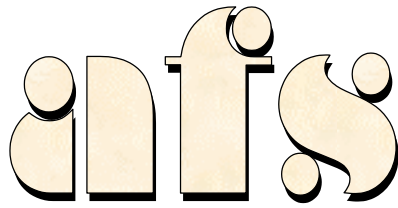
Nov 19: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

Nov 21: AFS Board Meeting, AF Center, 2:00 PM.

Nov 21: AFS Discussion Group, AF Center, 4:00 PM.

**The Fundamentals of Extremism: the Christian Right in America** can now be read online!

See it at: <http://www.newbostonbooks.com/Look%20Inside.htm>



**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.

November 14: Ford Vox and Todd Stricker of the Universist movement will speak on Universism. See [www.universist.org](http://www.universist.org) for more information.

December 12: A social event. Details will be announced in the December newsletter.

January 9: Bob Truett will speak on Freethought issues.

February 13: (tentative) Ed Kagin will speak about his new book *Baubles of Blasphemy*.

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 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**  
an AFS publication

**Editor**

Steve Yothment

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

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

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# Evolution, Creation Collide in Cobb County (again)

## Parents challenge disclaimer in biology textbook

Call it *Scopes* redux – a potential 21st century replay of the famous 1925 Tennessee case that placed Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and the biblical account of creation on trial.

The *Scopes* trial revolved around John Scopes, a high-school teacher who broke the law in Tennessee by teaching Darwin's theory. In the case that went to a bench trial in U.S. District Court in Atlanta before Judge Clarence Cooper on November 8, a small sticker placed in 10th-grade biology textbooks has again forced a courtroom collision between science and religion. The case is *Selman v. Cobb County School District*, No. 1:02CV2325 (N.D. Ga. filed Aug. 21, 2002). (Jeff Selman is an AFS member and has spoken at several AFS functions.)

The sticker states: "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."

Six Cobb County, Ga., parents are suing to have the sticker removed, arguing that it's a thinly disguised attempt to promote classroom discussions of religious accounts of creation.

The attorney for the school board said the plaintiffs have overreacted to a sticker that does nothing more than offer respect to students and parents whose religious beliefs may conflict with the teaching of evolution.

Marietta, Ga., attorney Michael E. Manely, counsel for the parents, sees the case shaping up very much like the *Scopes* trial, in which Clarence S. Darrow forced William Jennings Bryan to defend biblical accounts of creation.

"I had hoped this would be, from the very beginning, a battle of experts," Manely said. "That was my challenge that I offered to the defendants. ... Let the judge decide where the facts lie."

Manely is litigating the case with the American Civil Liberties Union, which also participated in the 1925 *Scopes* trial.

Manely said the Cobb school district is one of dozens across the nation that are bowing to pressure to omit or remove evolution from high-school science curricula or, alternatively, include religious-based teachings in academic coursework. "We are," he said, "just the tip of the iceberg."

Marietta attorney E. Linwood Gunn IV, who is defending the school board and the school district, said the plaintiffs' case has been overstated. The litigation has unfairly pegged the school board as "a very backward, regressive group of individuals trying to attack evolution when in fact the opposite is true," he said.

Gunn said that the case will be far more narrow in scope than Manely suggests and should not be used as a vehicle to validate evolution or challenge creationism, the belief that God created the world in six days.

"They want to have this as a big show trial," Gunn said. "It's not going to be about that. It's going to be about what the Cobb County school district did in strengthening its evolution curriculum."

Atlanta attorney George M. Weaver tried unsuccessfully to intervene in the case on behalf of Cobb parents who want the schools to discuss creationism in high-school science classes. Weaver said he doubts this trial will draw the kind of attention that the *Scopes* trial did.

"It's not clear how much expert testimony, or whether any expert testimony, is going to be admitted," he said. "If there is no expert testimony, it will probably be a very short trial. ... If it gets into a battle of experts, it may have more visibility."

Gerald R. Weber, legal director of the ACLU of Georgia, said the case is one more in a series of church-state cases where "there's pretty clear pre-existing case law out there."

"The progress of church-state cases has been that the [U.S.] Supreme Court sets a line, then government entities do what they can to skirt that line. ... Here the Supreme Court has said you can't teach creationism in the public schools. You can't have an equal-time provision for evolution and creationism. These disclaimers are a new effort to skirt the line."

### WHY COBB INSERTED STICKERS

The case centers on the sticker that the Cobb school board ordered pasted inside the front cover of its 10th-grade biology textbook in 2002. The textbook, "Prentice-Hall's Biology," by Kenneth Miller and Joseph Levine, includes "a comprehensive view of evolution," Gunn said.

Gunn explained that the stickers were inserted as part of the board's determination to have evolutionary science taught in Cobb high schools. It was, for Cobb, a radical revision of its former policy, which Gunn acknowledged was the result of previous school boards' decisions "to cater to people's religious faith, maybe even in a way that was unconstitutional."

Before the county adopted the Miller/Levine textbook, Cobb banned any mention of evolution in its textbooks and prohibited teaching evolution, Gunn said.

"What we did is correct that," Gunn said. "The only thing the school board did is acknowledge there is a potential conflict [between the science of evolution and creationism] and there is a potential infringement on people's beliefs if you present it in a dogmatic way. We're going to do it in a respectful way."

Gunn also has argued in court pleadings that whether evolution is a fact or a theory is not relevant to the question of whether the sticker had a religious purpose. "I don't know what in that sticker suggests the existence of a higher being," he said in an interview last week. The plaintiffs and the ACLU "don't like the fact that we may accommodate religious beliefs."

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# Evolution, Creation Collide in Cobb County (*continued*)

According to court records, the board said it adopted the sticker “to foster critical thinking among students, to allow academic freedom consistent with legal requirements, to promote tolerance and acceptance of diversity of opinion and to ensure a posture of neutrality toward religion.”

The board said it didn’t intend “to restrict the teaching of evolution, to promote or require the teaching of creationism, or to discriminate against or on behalf of a particular set of religious beliefs, religion in general, or non-religion.”

But Manely argues that the sticker, although it makes no mention of God or religion, is a disclaimer for the only accepted scientific explanation of the origin of life.

“Evolution is the underpinning of all life sciences. It’s what the foundation of science is based upon,” Manely said. Stating that evolution is only a theory is a covert way of prompting students to discuss the existence of God, he argued, and to proselytize religious theories of the origins of humankind.

“There is no critique of evolution that is not religious based,” he said, except for a theory that aliens from outer space were the source of Earth’s population.

## 'A SCIENTIFIC DISPUTE EXISTS'

In depositions appearing in court briefs, several school board members acknowledged that the intent of the sticker was to precipitate a critical discussion of evolution. Cobb school board member Lindsey Tippens testified in his deposition that he believed the sticker was sufficient to prompt discussion of evolution “as a disputed view ... because I don’t think we have the wherewithal to rewrite textbooks.”

Included among those alternative theories of evolution, he said, would be discussion of creationism, as well as intelligent design – the idea that God guided the scientific evolution of the species. “This sticker was not intended to interject religion into science instruction but simply to make

students aware that a scientific dispute exists,” Tippens added.

Manely has argued in court briefs that any dispute about evolution exists within religion – not science. “The only people who dispute it do so for religious reasons,” he said. “Evolution is a fact. No credible scientist in any biological research field disputes that evolution is a fact.”

## CASE REFLECTS 'SCOPES'

It is the potential for giving theories with religious underpinnings the same academic weight as evolution that reflects the great debate of the *Scopes* trial.

Of that case, three-time presidential candidate Bryan wrote in a closing argument he never delivered, “The case has assumed the proportions of a battle-royal between unbelief that attempts to speak through so-called science and the defenders of the Christian faith, speaking through the legislators of Tennessee. It is a choice between God and Baal.”

In the trial’s most famous episode, Bryan took the witness stand while Darrow peppered him with questions about passages in the Bible, attempting to show that it couldn’t all be considered literal. The exchanges between two of the finest trial lawyers of their day has become the stuff of plays, movies and many books.

In one sequence, Darrow asked Bryan, “Did you ever discover where Cain got his wife?”

Bryan responded, “No, sir; I leave the agnostics to hunt for her.”

Darrow asked Bryan if he believed that Joshua literally commanded the sun to stand still in order to lengthen the day. Bryan conceded that the earth moves around the sun, but allowed that he believed Joshua did prevail upon God to lengthen the day.

“Now, Mr. Bryan, have you ever pondered what would have happened to the earth if it had stood still?” Darrow asked.

“No; the God I believe in could have taken care of that, Mr. Darrow,” Bryan shot back.

At Darrow’s request, the jury found *Scopes* guilty and the judge fined him \$100. Darrow made the request saying he intended to appeal the case immediately.

The Supreme Court of Tennessee eventually overturned the verdict. *Scopes v. State*, 154 Tenn. 105, 289 S.W. 363. But 43 years would pass before the U.S. Supreme Court banned the teaching of creationism in public schools.

The trial here is unlikely to provide the drama of the *Scopes* case, but in several pre-trial orders Judge Cooper has recognized the same underlying religious debate.

The sticker “is not clearly neutral towards evolution,” he wrote. “A cursory reading of the sticker would likely posit doubt in the mind of the reader regarding the merits of evolutionary theory when those doubts might not otherwise exist.”

The Cobb school board, he continued, “decided to place the sticker in the textbook as a way to accommodate religious belief” after a group of parents “expressed concern that the instruction of evolution would be in a manner that would negate any possibility of religious belief.”

But to the extent that the school board was seeking to avoid offending students and parents, the sticker also served a secular purpose, he wrote. He agreed with the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in a 1999 ruling originating in Louisiana that “the local school board need not turn a blind eye to the concerns of students and parents troubled by the teaching of evolution in public classrooms.”

Cooper indicated that there is little to guide him. “The court acknowledges that there is not definitive controlling authority regarding many of the issues involved in this case and that there is a substantial ground for difference of opinion as to the issue of law,” Cooper wrote.

[From an November 5 article by R. Robin McDonald on [www.law.com](http://www.law.com).]

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# A Nation Divided

## Bush's mix of religion and politics polarizes the nation

In the wake of an election it is traditional for candidates on both sides to make an appeal for healing and unity, and President Bush and Sen. John Kerry both did so on November 3rd.

"We have one country, one Constitution and one future that binds us. When we come together and work together, there is no limit to the greatness of America," the president said in his victory speech.

That unity is our fondest hope, too. But history isn't on the president's side.

In his victory speech in 2000, Bush played the healer and pledged to end the partisanship that had divided Washington into warring camps. But his "with us or against us" approach to leadership only turned up the heat.

During the 2004 campaign, the president said his greatest disappointment was his inability to heal a bitterly divided America. What he meant, we fear, is that he was unable to convince everyone to see things his way.

Bush will continue to govern a nation more divided than at any time since the Vietnam War. Fault lines cross the electoral map dividing the West and Northeast coasts from the heartland, save, at this writing, for Hawaii and a small clump of blue states that touch Lakes Michigan or Superior. The populace is divided over the war in Iraq, over social issues

and, we fear, by race and religion.

White voters, exit polls show, strongly favored Bush. Hispanics preferred Kerry, and blacks cast their votes 10-1 for him. It is, however, the division by religion that is most troubling. The president, in a way not before seen in modern times, blends religion and politics. As he himself has warned Muslim nations, it is a dangerous mix, one our Constitution was created to discourage.

Many voters, particularly in red states, listed "moral values" as the most important factor in their decision, ahead of the war in Iraq, terrorism or the economy. Though broad in most contexts, the term is often a code word for opposition to abortion, gay marriage and stem-cell research.

The Bush campaign called upon America's evangelical leaders to turn out the vote for the president, and it made its opposition to gay marriage a key issue in the race. Voters driven by that issue alone may have made the difference in Ohio, where a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage passed easily on Nov 2<sup>nd</sup>. Civil rights are not won easily in America. Progress comes at a price, and the price this year was paid by Democrats at all levels.

We were disheartened to hear many voters say they voted for Bush because he better reflected the values

of a Christian nation. America is instead a diverse, secular nation, one rooted in Christianity but founded on the firm belief in the separation of church and state.

America is also in a war against Muslim terrorists, a war that many people of that faith see as a war on Muslims. Bush's blending of religion and politics at home will make it far harder to convince Iraq or any nation to establish a secular government that respects the rights of people of all faiths.

Having won the popular vote, and with an even stronger Republican hold in Congress, we expect the president to move quickly, before midterm elections can change the makeup of Congress.

He is, as he says, a man of action. And he proved it in his first term with massive tax cuts, education reform, passage of a Medicare drug benefit and profligate spending.

In his second term, President Bush may yet prove to be a uniter. One sign of that would be for him to appoint a widely respected moderate to the Supreme Court, one with a fundamental belief that the line between church and state should not be narrowed. We suspect we'll know soon enough which direction he'll take.

[From a November 4 editorial in the *Concord Monitor*.]

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## U.S. Supreme Court Agrees to Review Two Challenges to Government-Endorsed Ten Commandments Displays

The Supreme Court announced on October 12 that it will take up the constitutionality of Ten Commandments displays on government land and buildings in two separate cases, including a successful challenge by the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky to a courthouse display.

"We remain confident that the Kentucky case is firmly in line with the principle that government should not promote religion," said David A. Fried-

man, General Counsel for the ACLU of Kentucky, who argued the case before the appeals court.

"The Ten Commandments advocate believing in God, observing the Sabbath and not worshipping idols," Friedman added, noting that different faiths have different versions of the document. "Those are religious beliefs that should be left to each individual. Especially in a courthouse, people should not be made to feel like out-

siders in their own community because they may not share the prevailing religious view."

In the Kentucky case, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals found that Ten Commandments postings in courthouses in McCreary and Pulaski counties "conveyed a message of religious endorsement" in violation of the Constitutional principle of free exercise of religion.

When the Court last considered this

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## Supreme Court (continued)

issue in 1980 – in a challenge also brought by the ACLU of Kentucky – it reversed a lower court ruling that had upheld a state law requiring the posting of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms. Since that time, the ACLU and others, acting on behalf of local communities and religious leaders, have successfully challenged Ten Commandments postings and monuments in Alabama, Georgia, Indiana, Maryland, Nebraska, Ohio, Tennessee and West Virginia.

“Given the amount of litigation surrounding this issue in recent years, it is not surprising that the Supreme Court would want to clarify often-conflicting rulings below,” said ACLU

Legal Director Steven R. Shapiro.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State was pleased to hear about the Supreme Court decision to hear the cases, expecting the court to use the cases to clarify the law and “say unequivocally that the state has no business promoting religion.”

“Religious symbols belong in houses of worship, not courthouses, city halls and public schools,” said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. “If government officials are eager to post something that deals with the foundation of American law, they need look no further than the U.S. Constitution.”

On October 23, Larry Darby of the

Atheist Law Center announced that he had secured consent from the Florida-based Liberty Counsel and the ACLU of Kentucky to intervene as amicus before the U.S. Supreme Court in one of the cases. The Center has teamed up with Camp Quest, Inc., a Kentucky Corporation, in this effort.

Larry also says that the Secular Coalition for America, representing Atheist Alliance International, the Institute for Humanist Studies, the Internet Infidels and the Secular Student Alliance, is likely to be involved with this historic endeavor.

[From Oct. 12 press releases by the ACLU and Americans United and the Oct. 23 issue of Atheist News Service.]

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## Barrow County Wants To Delay Lawsuit

**B**arrow County Commissioners voted 4-3 not to spend any more taxpayer money on an American Civil Liberties Union lawsuit challenging the constitutionality of a Ten Commandments plaque in the county courthouse.

The vote, a tie broken by Commission Chairman Doug Garrison, came late on October 26 at a Barrow County Commission meeting in a closed session following the regular meeting.

The vote also instructed the county’s lead attorney, Herb Titus of Virginia Beach, Va., not to incur any more expenses in the case other than those surrounding a motion to stay.

Garrison said the county wants to put the case on hold until the U.S. Supreme Court rules on the constitutionality of Ten Commandments displays on government land and buildings when it hears appeals early next year involving displays in Kentucky and Texas.

Garrison said U.S. District Court Judge William O’Kelley could rule on the motion as early as November 5. If the motion is not granted, then the commission will have to meet again to decide how it will continue paying the cost of defending the case.

The ACLU filed suit in federal court in Gainesville last year, charging that a Ten Commandments plaque in a courthouse corridor violates constitutional separation of church and state.

Garrison said U.S. Supreme Court rulings could greatly affect Barrow County’s case. And Commissioner Norma Jean Brown, who made the motion to stop using tax money, said the motion to stay would give Ten Commandments-Georgia Inc. more time to raise money for the lawsuit.

The fund-raising group was organized by Jody Hice, pastor of Bethlehem First Baptist Church, to help raise money to cover the county’s legal expenses. Since the ACLU filed suit in

September 2003, Ten Commandments-Georgia has raised most of the money used by the county in its defense. But donations have dwindled as the case has languished in a lengthy discovery process.

On Oct. 11, commissioners voted to use public money to pay the majority of an \$81,000 legal bill from Titus, with the assurance that Ten Commandments-Georgia would reimburse the funds within six months.

At the same meeting, the county received a \$10,000 check from Ten Commandments-Georgia and \$800 in other donations. And at the start of the October 26 meeting, Hice presented commissioners with a \$10,000 check from Ten Commandments-Georgia.

Hice said that a possible stay in the case would give Ten Commandments-Georgia more time to raise money.

[From an Oct. 28 article by Beth Hatcher in the *Athens Banner-Herald*.]

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## Hart County Votes to Display Ten Commandments

After more than two hours of discussion, and encouragement from members of Ten Commandments-Georgia to “take a stand,” Hart County Commissioners voted on November 9 to post the Ten Command-

ments in the Hart County courthouse.

Chairman Dan Reyen said it was the most difficult issue for him since becoming a commissioner.

“It is a no win situation for a commissioner – if you vote against it be-

cause of the possibility of a lawsuit, you’re considered a heathen. If you vote for it, you’re putting yourself in for the possibility of spending a lot of the county’s money,” he said.

[From the November 9 *Hartwell Sun*.]

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# Reject My Mother's Bigotry

The following article by Tess Fields appeared in the October 29 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

I am the daughter of Sadie Fields, president of the Christian Coalition of Georgia. I was appalled by the column my mother wrote justifying her bigotry, and I feel compelled to respond ("Can't let the few hurt society as a whole," @issue, Oct. 25).

The first time there was a definitive split between my mother and me, I was in the seventh grade. My best friend's name was Lisa. She was Jewish. Concerned about what our pastor had stated about Jews in the afterlife, I went to my mother and asked her if Lisa was going to burn in hell. My mother's response, "If she does not accept the Lord Jesus then yes, she will go to hell." Right there, she lost me. I have disagreed with her ever since.

I was 24 years old when my mother, through a series of mishaps, found out I was gay. My mother came over to where I worked, screaming, and told me I was "dead" to the family. She called me "sick," "crazy" and "of the devil." She said that I would never see my family again.

For more than five years after that day, I heard nothing from my family. No birthday cards, no invitations to Christmas or Thanksgiving events. It wasn't just the loss of my immediate family that was difficult, but the loss of my extended family as well. Since my mother refused to be in the same room with me, it forced my aunts and uncles to choose sides. I have not been to a family reunion in more than a decade.

When my partner, Trisha, and I decided to have a child, we were not unlike most couples making this decision. We considered whether or not we were emotionally and financially ready. We considered the ways that it would change our lives and our relationship with each other.

After two years of planning, I gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. Trisha, during the pregnancy, held my hair out of my face when I vomited from morning sickness. She attended birth

ing classes, cooked organic meals for me every single night, and calmed my fears about the labor. We bought baby books and argued about names, started a college fund, and perused garage sales for the best deals on cribs.

The only thing unusual about our pregnancy was the critical necessity of a lawyer.

Given my mother's abject hostility toward gay and lesbian people, in the process of my pregnancy we had to spend thousands of dollars protecting ourselves from her potential interference. In spite of the fact that she has never, in more than a decade, visited me, and has written numerous articles comparing me to pedophiles and people who have sex with animals, according to the law, my mother has more rights to our child than Trisha.

What if I died during the birth? What if something happened to me before the lawyers could get the adoption finalized? These were the kinds of fears that our family had to face, and we felt robbed. Expecting a child should be a wonderful moment in a couple's life. Pregnancy, in and of itself, can be challenging, but the greater excitement of a baby on the way seems to balance these fears for most people. My family, however, had to be concerned about my mother's extremism, and what legal grounds she had if she decided to try and take Trisha's child. And then we had to prepare, meticulously, if that threat were ever realized.

A friend once told me that becoming a parent does two things: It teaches you to love in a whole new way, and it teaches you to fear in a whole new way. It was not until I became pregnant that I understood completely what she meant.

While some people may disagree about gay marriage, passing a constitutional amendment ensuring that one group of people is singled out to be treated differently is wrong. The state's constitution is for protecting our most basic and important rights.

It should not be used to settle partisan, religious, or ideological disputes. And it should never be changed in a way that hurts people. But Amendment One would deny thousands of gay and lesbian Georgians and their families access to health care, fair survivor rights and the ability to make lifesaving medical decisions. We may disagree about social issues such as marriage, but those disagreements do not belong in the state constitution.

So my fellow, fair-minded Georgians, I am writing to encourage you not to follow my mother's lead. Learn from our example. For all of the struggles my family experienced while I was growing up, none has been more damaging to its foundation than my mother's religious extremism and fervent black and white ideology. We have not been in the same room together for more than 11 years. My mother's religion has left us not merely splintered, but broken. It leaves no room for compromise or even mutual respect for people that have different ideologies.

But most importantly, I have this to say. If we lose this battle on Nov. 2, I want to let my gay and straight friends in Georgia know that we will not lose the war. Celebrate and be proud of who you are and the strong families that you have created. Spit in the eye of your oppressor with the ultimate revenge; be happy, be successful and live your life fully and completely, as God intended.

For those of you voting no on Amendment One, thank you for standing up for families like mine. Thank you for making the world a safer place for our son. Thank you for helping ensure that he receives good health care. Regardless of what happens to me, he will continue to grow safely in the arms of his loving mother and grandparents. Thank you for not allowing a form of religious extremism that leaves families shattered and broken to be written into law, becoming a way of life for all.

# Letters to the Editor from AFS members

Ray Knisley's letter was in the *Cedartown Standard* on Sept. 2, 2004.  
Delos McKown's letter was in the *Montgomery Advertiser* on Oct. 14, 2004.

## Prayer issue concerns reader

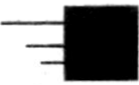
**P**LEASE permit me to direct your attention to the headline story in the *Cedartown Standard* of August 5, 2004, captioned "Ministers to pray at schools." Although the story is vague in details, it implies that a certain agreement has been struck between school officials and a religious group calling itself the "Cedartown Christian Ministerial Association" who wishes to take their prayers into the Polk County public schools. Schools that were confirmed to participate included Cedartown Middle School and Cedartown High School, according to the newspaper article. This is about as appropriate an act as taking science into Sunday school.

The article indicated that church "goodie baskets" were sent to Northside Elementary school. It is not a stretch to conclude that this gift was a Trojan Horse of religious materials meant for distribution in the school.

The U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that public schools cannot promote or advance religion, and cannot encourage students to pray or practice religion.

The court has also noted that the federal courts possess a "heightened concern with protecting freedom of

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**Letter forum**

To the Editor  
P.O. Box 308  
Cedartown, Ga 30125

conscience from subtle coercive pressures in the elementary and secondary schools."

However, public schools are not to be "religion free" zones. Public school officials have a responsibility to ensure that our student's religious liberty rights are not infringed upon at school. Government-run schools may teach about religion. Students may bring their Bibles to school and they may read the Bible and other religious books during their free time. They may form religious clubs and they may pray, only not disruptively, on their own at any time.

But public schools may not coerce any student to take part in religion.

I think the school officials who aided the Cedartown Christian Ministerial Association, if any did, should be reminded of these court rulings and of their proper official duties and limitations.

A spokesperson for the CCMA said he desires "unity in the community." Very well. The best way to maintain unity is to make sure that our children have a well and enough lessons in civics, the study of the right and duties of citizens. I trust that the Polk school system maintains this high standard. Apparently the CCMA does not. I would remind those good folks of the wise old adage "teach folks how to be good citizens and you have solved the problem of life."

**RAY KNISLEY**  
Rockmart

*C*ongress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

THE FIRST AMENDMENT  
UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION

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**The Cedartown Standard**

## Bush's Stand on Research Reactionary

Since the Bible nowhere forbids abortion nor condemns its practice, it follows that embryonic stem cell research should cause no divine displeasure. Some misguided Christians assume that fetuses have souls in utero (rather than at first breath as in Genesis 2:7), because Jehovah called Isaiah forth from the womb (Isaiah 49:1), knew and sanctified Jeremiah in the womb (Jeremiah 1:5), and separated Paul in the womb (Galatians 1:15-16) that he might preach Christ to heathens. This no more follows logically than it follows that these favored fetuses were breathing in

utero. Being all-knowing, the Bible God would know all conceptuses, embryos, and fetuses in the womb, but this does not stop his callous disregard for spontaneous abortions, ectopic pregnancies and the punitive starvation of newborns (Hosea 9:11-14). In his opposition to federally funded research for unrestricted embryonic stem cell research, our president is not behaving as a principled conservative but as a biblically ignorant reactionary.

Delos B. McKown  
Auburn



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# October Board Meeting Minutes

Present: Steve Yohtment (presiding), Judy Thompson, Bill Burton, Lew Southern, Harriet Harris, Freya Harris, Kelly Wilhoit, Jack McKinney

Minutes taken by: Harriet Harris

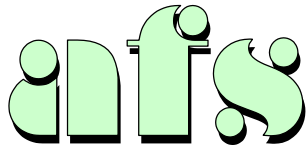
Time/Date of meeting: 2:00 PM, October 17, 2004

- ▶ The September Minutes were approved as they appeared in the October newsletter.
- ▶ The upcoming election of officers and board members was discussed. Steve and Judy said that they would run for their current positions. Freya said she would like to run for VPE position. Steve mentioned that Ed Buckner

would like to run for Treasurer position. Lou, Joel and Freya are in the middle of their 2-year terms. Steve asked Jack if he would like to be election committee chair. Jack will consider it.

- ▶ Finances were discussed. Although we continue to remain in the black (barely), we are scheduled to assume occupation of the other side of our building in about a year, at which time our expenses relative to income will increase. Ideas for increasing income were introduced. Jack had several ideas. No decisions were made, but the ideas will be further considered by the board.

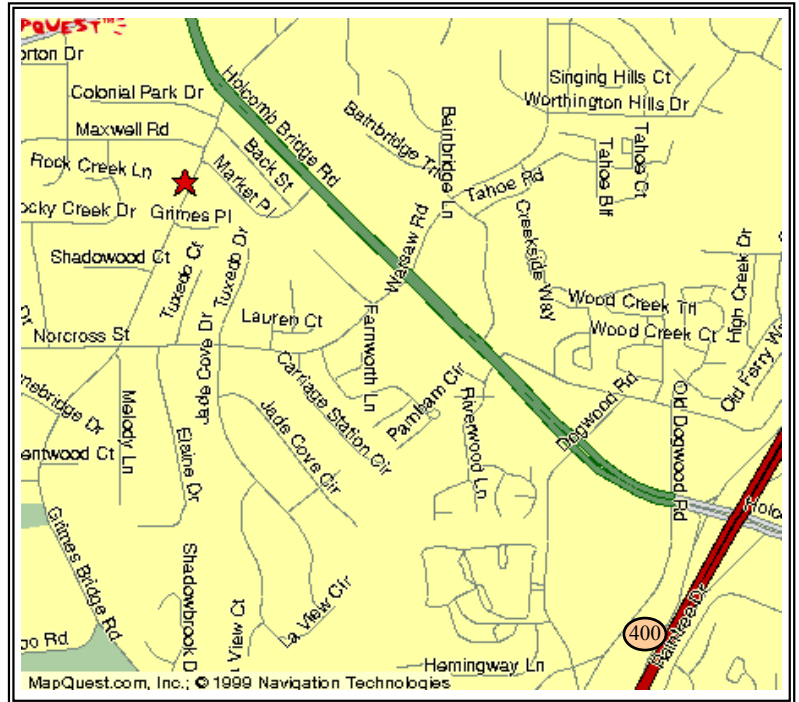
**“It was the Universal opinion of the Century preceding the last, that Civil Government could not stand without the prop of a Religious establishment, and that the Christian religion itself would perish if not supported by a legal provision for its Clergy. The experience of Virginia conspicuously corroborates the disproof of both opinions. The Civil Government, tho' bereft of everything like an associated hierarchy, possesses the requisite stability and performs its functions with complete success; whilst the number, the industry, and the morality of the Priesthood, and the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of the Church from the State.” – James Madison, in a letter to Robert Walsh written "late in his life," in Robert L. Maddox, *Separation of Church and State: Guarantor of Religious Freedom* (1987) p. 39, quoted from Ed and Michael Buckner, "Quotations that Support the Separation of State and Church"**



Atlanta  
Freethought  
Society

**The November Meeting:  
Sunday, November 14  
1:00 at the AF Center  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road  
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speakers:  
Ford Vox, Todd Stricker**



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