

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself*

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## The May Meeting

The May 8 AFS meeting will feature a speech by Sgt. Kevin Benderman, a serviceman who refused a second deployment to Iraq and has filed for conscientious objector status. He is facing court martial on May 11, so this speaking event in Atlanta may be his last major speech for a while. Others at the meeting who may also speak are Kevin's wife Monica, as well as Ann Mauney of the Atlanta Peace and Justice Coalition ([www.georgiapeace.org](http://www.georgiapeace.org)), Diane Mathiowetz of the International Answer Coalition ([www.InternationalAnswer.org](http://www.InternationalAnswer.org)), and Debbie Clark of Veterans for Peace ([www.veteransforpeace.org](http://www.veteransforpeace.org)).

Sgt. Benderman will also speak on Saturday, May 7, at 3:00 to 5:00 at Georgia Tech's Clary Theater, located in the Moore Student Success Center, part of the west side of the football stadium on North Avenue (Exit 249-D).

The AFS meeting will be at 1:00 at the Atlanta Freethought Center, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Roswell, GA. (Feel free to arrive early for discussion and coffee.) 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**, 1842 Cheshire Bridge Road (Atlanta) on Friday, May 13, 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 to the restaurant.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet at 4:00 to 6:00 at the AF Center on Sunday, April 17.

The **Tuesday Lunch Bunch** meets every Tuesday at 12:30 at Panahar Restaurant, 3375 Buford Hwy in Atlanta.

## Humanists of Georgia Party

The **Humanists of Georgia** will have a Freethinkers Party on Saturday, May 14<sup>th</sup>. AFS members are invited. The party will be at John Barnes' place outside Woodbury, GA. Activities will include movies, camping, canoe rides, fishing and hiking. Food and drinks will be provided. Contact John at [jobar2@earthlink.net](mailto:jobar2@earthlink.net) for directions.

## The May Atheist Meetup

Atlanta Atheists will have a "meetup" on Sunday, May 22, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Road (in the Prado Shopping Center) in Atlanta. Ph:404-255-5911.

## AFS Yard Sale and Picnic

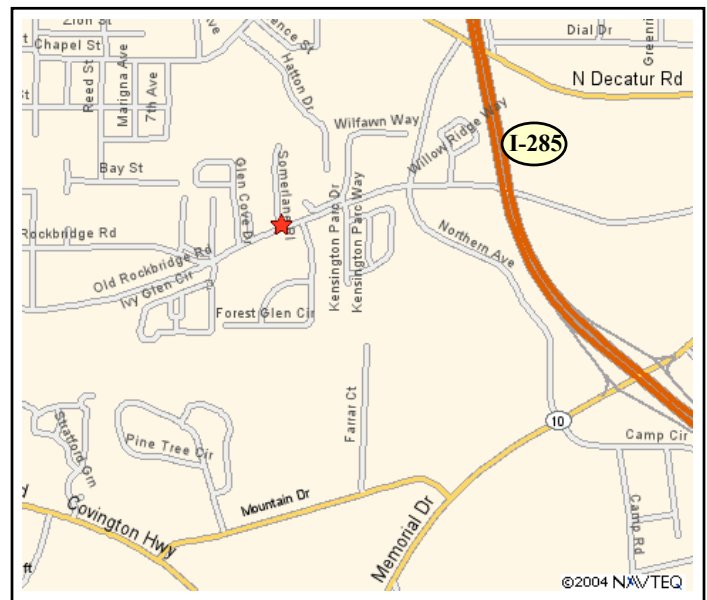
The Atlanta Freethought Society will have a **Yard Sale and Picnic** on Saturday, May 14, at the Thompson-Shapiro house, 3366 Rockbridge Road, in Avondale Estates, GA.

(To get there, get on I-285 NE of Atlanta, and exit at Memorial Drive. Go west to Northern Ave. Turn north and take Northern Ave to Rockbridge Road. Turn left and go to 3366 Rockbridge Road. See the map below.)

The sale will be from 9:30 AM to 4:00 PM. The picnic and grilling will start at 5:00 PM.

Here's how we plan to raise funds and enjoy this event:

- ▶ Bring items to the May 8 AFS meeting that you want to donate for AFS to sell.
- ▶ Volunteer to take donated items, AFS merchandise and tables from the May 8 AFS meeting to the yard sale.
- ▶ Donate \$5 to AFS for a space to sell your own things at the yard sale. Your space will be about 10 feet by 10 feet. To reserve a space, call or email Ed Buckner (770-432-3049/ [ed@buckner.us](mailto:ed@buckner.us)) or Freya Harris at (770-454-7545/ [cybercat@redjellyfish.net](mailto:cybercat@redjellyfish.net)).
- ▶ Bring a display table and chairs.
- ▶ Volunteer to work at the AFS table and help us sell our merchandise. (Let Ed or Freya know if you'll do this.)
- ▶ Bring food, including things to grill or drink. AFS will provide napkins and cups.
- ▶ Bring your appetite and join us for fun, profit, and clutter reduction. Thanks!



**The Fundamentals of Extremism: the Christian Right in America** can be read online. See it at:

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



## 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 8: Sgt. Kevin Benderman, a serviceman who refused a second deployment to Iraq and has filed for conscientious objector status. He is facing court martial on May 11, so this speaking event in Atlanta will be his last major speech before his court martial.

June 12: The meeting will include a public forum on Evolution, with special guest Rev. Phillip Satterfield of the MacLand Road Church of Christ.

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

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Steve Yothment

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For membership and subscription  
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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.

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Visit our World Wide Web site at  
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# The Senate, The Religious Right And the “Nuclear Option”

From the Website of Americans United for Separation of Church and State (April 20, 2005)

**P**ositions on federal courts should be reserved for those who understand and respect the important role separation of church and state plays in ensuring religious freedom. Candidates who attack church-state separation, insist that the United States is a “Christian nation,” fail to respect the religious diversity of the country or support state funding of religion are not suitable for service on the federal courts.

## INTRODUCTION

High-ranking congressional Republicans are increasingly arguing that efforts by Democrats to use filibuster rules to block controversial federal court nominees are examples of religious bigotry.

This new strategy, alongside threats to employ the “nuclear option” to revise filibuster rules, appears to have been undertaken at the behest of powerful Religious Right groups.

This new approach is not accidental. It’s part of a well-coordinated strategy to convince undecided Americans that efforts to block judges with extreme views are examples of bias against people of faith.

Several Religious Right organizations are now parroting this same message. On April 24, the Family Research Council sponsored a telecast to evangelical churches all over the nation asserting that the long-standing filibuster rules are really an attack on religious people and religious faith. Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist spoke (via television) at the event.

## BEHIND CLOSED DOORS: THE MESSAGE CHANGES

Frist, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay and other GOP leaders have promoted this message of bias against faith when speaking to the general public. Behind closed doors at Religious Right gatherings, however, they have extended their remarks to make it clear what’s really going on: removing the filibuster is seen as the best vehicle to stack the federal courts with judicial extremists who will change social and legal policy in America.

Speaking to the Family Research Council in March, Frist ticked off a laundry list of items he is prepared to deliver to the Religious Right. “In this Congress,” he said, “we’re going to continue to work on issues that are important to you, to me, above all to America’s future. That includes good judges, the sanctity of marriage, and, I just mentioned, the culture of life, as well as protection for the unborn.”

Days after that meeting, Religious Right pastor Rick Scarborough of Texas convened a two-day summit to discuss ways to rein in the federal judiciary and enable Bush to push his nominees through the Senate. Speaker after speaker attacked the filibuster rules and demanded implementation of the so-called “nuclear option” — voting to abolish filibuster rules so that Bush appointees could be seated with a simple majority vote.

## FILIBUSTERS: WHAT’S AT STAKE

Religious Right groups realize what is at stake in the filibuster battle — and it’s not combating religious bigotry. The fact is, 205 Bush judicial appointments have already been approved. The vast majority of these men and women are people of faith. Only a few are being blocked — and those because of their extreme views on interpreting the law, not their religious beliefs.

California Supreme Court Justice Janice Rogers Brown, for example, is being opposed for her narrow interpretation of constitutional protections. Brown apparently believes that the idea that the Bill of Rights is binding on the states, a legal doctrine known as “incorporation,” is invalid. This is an extreme view far outside the judicial mainstream. Were Brown’s view adopted, states would be free to establish official religions, impose religion on citizens and engage in other activities detrimental to religious freedom.

The Supreme Court began incorporating portions of the Bill of Rights early in the 20th century. In the 1940 case of *Cantwell v. Connecticut*, the justices specifically incorporated the First Amendment. The incorporation doc-

trine is now an important part of American constitutional law and is no longer considered controversial. Even conservative justices on the U.S. Supreme Court accept incorporation. Yet Brown has her doubts. The opposition to her elevation to the federal bench is based primarily on this radical view and others she holds that are anchored firmly in her legal philosophy. Her religious beliefs have nothing to do with the opposition she had engendered and are not relevant to the discussion.

William Pryor, who was placed on the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals by a recess appointment, is similarly opposed due to his legal theories and past statements. During his tenure as Alabama attorney general, Pryor made numerous public statements attacking church-state separation. His opponents say he lacks respect for minority faiths and believes in majority rule. Pryor is not being opposed due to his religious beliefs — indeed, most of his opponents would be hard pressed to tell you what church he attends — the criticism springs from his long track record of hostility toward the separation of church and state, a fundamental principle of American life that underscores religious liberty.

## THE PLAN TO STACK THE COURTS

By championing justices like Brown and Pryor, the Religious Right and their allies in Congress promote a simple plan of court stacking. Once the filibuster rule is out of the way, ultra-conservatives in Congress will be free to work with Bush to load the courts with far-right ideologues. In time, these judges will overturn existing court precedent on issues such as tax aid to religion, religion in public education, reproductive freedom, gay rights and others.

When speaking to conservative audiences, DeLay has been clear about his goal: He wants to see the courts knock down the wall of separation between church and state. In an April 13 interview with *The Washington Times*, DeLay asserted, “The reason the judi-



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# The Senate, The Religious Right And the “Nuclear Option” (continued)

ciary has been able to impose a separation of church and state that’s nowhere in the Constitution is that Congress didn’t stop them.” DeLay has been a consistent critic of church-state separation during his tenure in Congress and has frequently addressed Religious Right organizations.

The Constitution provides for a system of check and balances. Ultra-conservatives in Congress and their Religious Right allies are angry that federal courts have struck down some of their blatantly unconstitutional proposals. In response, they have cooked up various schemes: mass impeachment of judges, stripping the federal courts of their ability to hear certain types of cases or abolishing courts wholesale. All of these proposals and more were openly discussed by speakers at Scarborough’s conference, despite their radical nature.

But these proposals are really just rhetorical red meat. They sound good in a fiery speech, and talking about

them keeps the Religious Right’s shock troops happy, but they are unlikely to gain traction precisely because they are so radical. Nothing in the Constitution, for example, allows for impeachment of judges just because some members of Congress do not like the decisions they hand down. In fact, the separation of powers would seem to preclude such actions. Attempts by Congress to demand that the courts interpret the Bill of Rights in a certain way would spark a confrontation between two branches of government. While some Religious Right activists on the ground want to see that fight, few in official Washington really want to provoke it.

That leaves the Religious Right with one useable option: Convince the Senate to implement the nuclear option and after that stack the courts with judges who have extreme legal philosophies, judges who will voluntarily rule in ways that please the Religious Right.

## WHAT MOTIVATES OPPONENTS

The Religious Right’s opponents are determined to prevent this from happening. They are determined to stop aggressive Religious Right groups from using the courts to convert their narrow theologies into laws that everyone must follow. They seek to protect the integrity of the courts and to buttress our tradition of church-state separation.

That’s what this fight is about. It has nothing to do with “religious bigotry.” It has everything to do with what type of country we’ll leave the next generation. Will it be a multi-faith republic where people of all faiths (and none) live together in peace thanks to the separation of church and state or will it be a quasi-theocracy where the Religious Right has been handed the power by federal courts to meddle in everyone else’s lives?

We must make every effort to see that it is the former, not the latter.

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## What’s the difference?

Pictured at right is a religious school supported by about 200 families. They have 40 acres of land, modern classroom buildings, a lodge, and athletic fields.

Below it is the Atlanta Freethought Society facility, supported by about 200 members. It consists of 2 small condos, only one of which is used for Freethought purposes.

So, what’s the difference? Well, for one thing – millions of dollars. Others are the absolute differences in philosophies and the level of financial commitment by each organization’s supporters.

Unfortunately ours is an economy-based society where money talks – and those with the most money usually speak the loudest. It could be said that the effectiveness of AFS is proportional to the amount of money available to promote our causes.

Therefore, when you are asked to respond to our Fund Drive, please think in terms of the **maximum** you can afford and be as generous as possible.

Jack McKinney



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# Our Godless Constitution

By Brooke Allen

**I**t is hard to believe that George Bush has ever read the works of George Orwell, but he seems, somehow, to have grasped a few Orwellian precepts. The lesson the President has learned best—and certainly the one that has been the most useful to him—is the axiom that if you repeat a lie often enough, people will believe it. One of his Administration’s current favorites is the whopper about America having been founded on Christian principles. Our nation was founded not on Christian principles but on Enlightenment ones. God only entered the picture as a very minor player, and Jesus Christ was conspicuously absent.

Our Constitution makes no mention whatever of God. The omission was too obvious to have been anything but deliberate, in spite of Alexander Hamilton’s flippant responses when asked about it: According to one account, he said that the new nation was not in need of “foreign aid”; according to another, he simply said “we forgot.” But as Hamilton’s biographer Ron Chernow points out, Hamilton never forgot anything important.

In the eighty-five essays that make up *The Federalist*, God is mentioned only twice (both times by Madison, who uses the word, as Gore Vidal has remarked, in the “only Heaven knows” sense). In the Declaration of Independence, He gets two brief nods: a reference to “the Laws of Nature and Nature's God,” and the famous line about men being “endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights.” More blatant official references to a deity date from long after the founding period: “In God We Trust” did not appear on our coinage until the Civil War, and “under God” was introduced into the Pledge of Allegiance during the McCarthy hysteria in 1954 [see Elisabeth Sifton, “The Battle Over the Pledge,” April 5, 2004].

In 1797 our government concluded a “Treaty of Peace and Friendship be-

tween the United States of America and the Bey and Subjects of Tripoli, or Barbary,” now known simply as the Treaty of Tripoli. Article 11 of the treaty contains these words:

As the Government of the United States...is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion—as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquillity of Musselmen—and as the said States never have entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mehomitan nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries.

This document was endorsed by Secretary of State Timothy Pickering and President John Adams. It was then sent to the Senate for ratification; the vote was unanimous. It is worth pointing out that although this was the 339th time a recorded vote had been required by the Senate, it was only the third unanimous vote in the Senate’s history. There is no record of debate or dissent. The text of the treaty was printed in full in the *Philadelphia Gazette* and in two New York papers, but there were no screams of outrage, as one might expect today.

The Founding Fathers were not religious men, and they fought hard to erect, in Thomas Jefferson’s words, “a wall of separation between church and state.” John Adams opined that if they were not restrained by legal measures, Puritans—the fundamentalists of their day—would “whip and crop, and pillory and roast.” The historical epoch had afforded these men ample opportunity to observe the corruption to which established priesthoods were liable, as well as “the impious presumption of legislators and rulers,” as Jefferson wrote, “civil as well as ecclesiastical, who, being themselves but fallible and uninspired men, have assumed dominion over the faith of others, setting up their own opinions

and modes of thinking as the only true and infallible, and as such endeavoring to impose them on others, hath established and maintained false religions over the greatest part of the world and through all time.”

If we define a Christian as a person who believes in the divinity of Jesus Christ, then it is safe to say that some of the key Founding Fathers were not Christians at all. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Tom Paine were deists—that is, they believed in one Supreme Being but rejected revelation and all the supernatural elements of the Christian Church; the word of the Creator, they believed, could best be read in Nature. John Adams was a professed liberal Unitarian, but he, too, in his private correspondence seems more deist than Christian.

George Washington and James Madison also leaned toward deism, although neither took much interest in religious matters. Madison believed that “religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprize.” He spoke of the “almost fifteen centuries” during which Christianity had been on trial: “What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the Clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry, and persecution.” If Washington mentioned the Almighty in a public address, as he occasionally did, he was careful to refer to Him not as “God” but with some nondenominational moniker like “Great Author” or “Almighty Being.” It is interesting to note that the Father of our Country spoke no words of a religious nature on his deathbed, although fully aware that he was dying, and did not ask for a man of God to be present; his last act was to take his own pulse, the consummate gesture of a creature of the age of scientific rationalism.

Tom Paine, a polemicist rather than a politician, could afford to be perfectly honest about his religious be-

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## Our Godless Constitution (*continued*)

liefs, which were baldly deist in the tradition of Voltaire: "I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.... I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church." This is how he opened *The Age of Reason*, his virulent attack on Christianity. In it he railed against the "obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness" of the Old Testament, "a history of wickedness, that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind." The New Testament is less brutalizing but more absurd, the story of Christ's divine genesis a "fable, which for absurdity and extravagance is not exceeded by any thing that is to be found in the mythology of the ancients." He held the idea of the Resurrection in especial ridicule: Indeed, "the wretched contrivance with which this latter part is told, exceeds every thing that went before it." Paine was careful to contrast the tortuous twists of theology with the pure clarity of deism. "The true deist has but one Deity; and his religion consists in contemplating the power, wisdom, and benignity of the Deity in his works, and in endeavoring to imitate him in every thing moral, scientific, and mechanical."

Paine's rhetoric was so fervent that he was inevitably branded an atheist. Men like Franklin, Adams and Jefferson could not risk being tarred with that brush, and in fact Jefferson got into a good deal of trouble for continuing his friendship with Paine and entertaining him at Monticello. These statesmen had to be far more circumspect than the turbulent Paine, yet if we examine their beliefs it is all but impossible to see just how theirs differed from his.

Franklin was the oldest of the Founding Fathers. He was also the most worldly and sophisticated, and was well aware of the Machiavellian

principle that if one aspires to influence the masses, one must at least profess religious sentiments. By his own definition he was a deist, although one French acquaintance claimed that "our free-thinkers have adroitly sounded him on his religion, and they maintain that they have discovered he is one of their own, that is that he has none at all." If he did have a religion, it was strictly utilitarian: As his biographer Gordon Wood has said, "He praised religion for whatever moral effects it had, but for little else." Divine revelation, Franklin freely admitted, had "no weight with me," and the covenant of grace seemed "unintelligible" and "not beneficial." As for the pious hypocrites who have ever controlled nations, "A man compounded of law and gospel is able to cheat a whole country with his religion and then destroy them under color of law"—a comment we should carefully consider at this turning point in the history of our Republic.

Here is Franklin's considered summary of his own beliefs, in response to a query by Ezra Stiles, the president of Yale. He wrote it just six weeks before his death at the age of 84:

Here is my creed. I believe in one God, Creator of the universe. That he governs it by his providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable service we render to him is doing good to his other children. That the soul of Man is immortal, and will be treated with justice in another life respecting its conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental points in all sound religion, and I regard them as you do in whatever sect I meet with them.

As for Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of whom you particularly desire, I think his system of morals and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have, with most of the present dissenters in England, some doubts

as to his divinity; though it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble. I see no harm, however, in its being believed, if that belief has the good consequence, as it probably has, of making his doctrines more respected and better observed, especially as I do not perceive that the Supreme takes it amiss, by distinguishing the unbelievers in his government of the world with any particular marks of his displeasure.

Jefferson thoroughly agreed with Franklin on the corruptions the teachings of Jesus had undergone. "The metaphysical abstractions of Athanasius, and the maniacal ravings of Calvin, tintured plentifully with the foggy dreams of Plato, have so loaded [Christianity] with absurdities and incomprehensibilities" that it was almost impossible to recapture "its native simplicity and purity." Like Paine, Jefferson felt that the miracles claimed by the New Testament put an intolerable strain on credulity. "The day will come," he predicted (wrongly, so far), "when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter." The Revelation of St. John he dismissed as "the ravings of a maniac."

Jefferson edited his own version of the New Testament, "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth," in which he carefully deleted all the miraculous passages from the works of the Evangelists. He intended it, he said, as "a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus." This was clearly a defense against his many enemies, who hoped to blacken his reputation by comparing him with the vile atheist Paine. His biographer Joseph Ellis is undoubtedly correct, though, in seeing disingenuousness here: "If [Jefferson] had been completely scrupulous, he would have described him-

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## Our Godless Constitution (*continued*)

self as a deist who admired the ethical teachings of Jesus as a man rather than as the son of God.”

The three accomplishments Jefferson was proudest of—those that he requested be put on his tombstone—were the founding of the University of Virginia and the authorship of the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom. The latter was a truly radical document that would eventually influence the separation of church and state in the US Constitution; when it was passed by the Virginia legislature in 1786, Jefferson rejoiced that there was finally “freedom for the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and the Mohammedan, the Hindu and infidel of every denomination.” Note his respect, still unusual today, for the sensibilities of the “infidel.” The University of Virginia was notable among early-American seats of higher education in that it had no religious affiliation whatever. Jefferson even banned the teaching of theology at the school.

If we were to speak of Jefferson in modern political categories, we would have to admit that he was a pure libertarian, in religious as in other matters. His real commitment (or lack thereof) to the teachings of Jesus Christ is plain from a famous throw-away comment he made: “It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg.” This raised plenty of hackles when it got about, and Jefferson had to go to some pains to restore his reputation as a good Christian. But one can only conclude, with Ellis, that he was no Christian at all.

John Adams, though no more religious than Jefferson, had inherited the fatalistic mindset of the Puritan culture in which he had grown up. He personally endorsed the Enlightenment commitment to Reason but did

not share Jefferson’s optimism about its future, writing to him, “I wish that Superstition in Religion exciting Superstition in Politicks...may never blow up all your benevolent and philanthropic Lucubrations,” but that “the History of all Ages is against you.” As an old man he observed, “Twenty times in the course of my late reading have I been upon the point of breaking out, ‘This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it!’” Speaking ex cathedra, as a relic of the founding generation, he expressed his admiration for the Roman system whereby every man could worship whom, what and how he pleased. When his young listeners objected that this was paganism, Adams replied that it was indeed, and laughed.

In their fascinating and eloquent valetudinarian correspondence, Adams and Jefferson had a great deal to say about religion. Pressed by Jefferson to define his personal creed, Adams replied that it was “contained in four short words, ‘Be just and good.’” Jefferson replied, “The result of our fifty or sixty years of religious reading, in the four words, ‘Be just and good,’ is that in which all our inquiries must end; as the riddles of all priesthoods end in four more, ‘ubi panis, ibi deus.’ What all agree in, is probably right. What no two agree in, most probably wrong.”

This was a clear reference to Voltaire’s *Reflections on Religion*. As Voltaire put it:

There are no sects in geometry. One does not speak of a Euclidean, an Archimedean. When the truth is evident, it is impossible for parties and factions to arise.... Well, to what dogma do all minds agree? To the worship of a God, and to honesty. All the philosophers of the world who have had a religion have said in all ages: “There is a God, and one

must be just.” There, then, is the universal religion established in all ages and throughout mankind.

Of course all these men knew, as all modern presidential candidates know, that to admit to theological skepticism is political suicide. During Jefferson’s presidency a friend observed him on his way to church, carrying a large prayer book. “You going to church, Mr. J,” remarked the friend. “You do not believe a word in it.” Jefferson didn’t exactly deny the charge. “Sir,” he replied, “no nation has ever yet existed or been governed without religion. Nor can be. The Christian religion is the best religion that has been given to man and I as chief Magistrate of this nation am bound to give it the sanction of my example. Good morning Sir.”

Like Jefferson, every recent President has understood the necessity of at least paying lip service to the piety of most American voters. All of our leaders, Democrat and Republican, have attended church, and have made very sure they are seen to do so. But there is a difference between offering this gesture of respect for majority beliefs and manipulating and pandering to the bigotry, prejudice and millennial fantasies of Christian extremists. Though for public consumption the Founding Fathers identified themselves as Christians, they were, at least by today’s standards, remarkably honest about their misgivings when it came to theological doctrine, and religion in general came very low on the list of their concerns and priorities—always excepting, that is, their determination to keep the new nation free from bondage to its rule.

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“How strange it is to create a graven image out of a document that says we are not supposed to have any graven images.” — Brent Walker, Executive Director of the Baptist Joint Committee, commenting on Ten Commandments monuments



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# April Board Meeting Minutes

Present: Steve Yothment, Judy Thompson, Freya Harris,  
Ed Buckner, Diane Buckner, Bill Burton, Lew  
Southern, Jim Middleton

Date/Time: 17 April 2005, 2:00 PM

Minutes taken by: Bill Burton

- ▶ It was determined that a quorum was present.
- ▶ The minutes of the February Board meeting were approved with minor grammatical changes and removal of the sentence "A loss for the month of \$1,699.07 was incurred."
- ▶ **Treasurer's Report**  
Report (Ed Buckner): A printed report for February 19 - April 16 shows, among other things, that sales of *Baubles of Blasphemy* accounted for an unusually large income from AFS publishing sources during the last month (\$2,547 for *Baubles* and \$235 for other sources). We should expect this volume of sales to continue only if we initiate special sales and special sales opportunities. Total income was \$6,432. Total expenses were \$6,454. The bank balance as of April 16 was \$3,909. Ed discovered that there is an additional \$2,165 in the PayPal account. This adds up to a current balance of \$6,074.  
APPROVED WITHOUT OBJECTION.
- ▶ **Fundraising**  
Proposed (Ed Buckner): AFS needs to produce a new fundletter and start the fundraising with members that have been most responsive in the past.
- ▶ **Publishing**  
Report (Bill Burton): *A Skeptic's View* will shortly be ready for the printer. The ISBN numbers have been found.
- ▶ Discussion: (Jack McKinney, observer) Jack brought a contribution for the AFS Newsletter which showed two photographs, one showing a large church with sprawling grounds that is supported by a small Christian congregation and the other showing the AFS Center location in its office condominium. The point was made in accompanying text that the physical facilities of AFS are far inferior to what should be possible given the size of our membership. Steve agreed to publish Jack's exposé in the AFS newsletter.

- ▶ **Adopt-a-Highway**  
Report (Steve Yothment): There was a successful gathering of AFS volunteers for the stretch of highway designated for AFS as part of the State Adopt-a-Highway program. Several large bags were filled with roadside rubbish. The road area is the Glenridge Ramp, which connects I-285 to Glenridge Drive at Exit 26.
- ▶ **AFS Motto Competition**  
Report (Steve Yothment): The mottos that have been submitted were discussed. "Dare to Think for Yourself" was the most popular with the Board members. Judy suggested, and the Board agreed, that Steve investigate if this phrase is copyrighted before we use it as a motto.
- ▶ **Yard Sale**  
Proposal (Freya Harris): That the AFS sponsor a yard sale to be held in the office park parking lot. Ed suggested that a letter to the Condominium Association, be drawn up requesting permission (which Ed agreed to do). If the Association allows it, the yard sale will be held on May 15<sup>th</sup>, with a rain date of May 29<sup>th</sup>. AFS members will be asked to bring for-sale items and individuals can set up separate sales tables for a fee.  
APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY.
- ▶ **Speakers**  
Proposal (Bill Burton): Bill is organizing a panel for the May 8 AFS meeting, to be made up of leaders of Georgia anti-war groups he is involved with, to report on the current state of anti-war protest in Georgia. The groups are part of the local Atlanta Peace and Justice Coalition (APJC), which sponsors anti-war vigils, demonstrations, and speaking engagements by activists and Iraq War veterans in the Greater Atlanta area.
- ▶ **AFS Multimedia Project**  
Proposal (Jack McKinney, by permission from the Board): That AFS should have an ongoing project to produce multimedia resources - videos, slide shows, etc. The proposal was well received.
- ▶ **Next Meeting**  
The next meeting of the Board will take place in May on the third Sunday at 2:00 p.m.

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## The Treasurer Needs Your Help — and Not Just Money

by Ed Buckner, [edbuckner@atlantafreethought.org](mailto:edbuckner@atlantafreethought.org)

Partly because I've been remiss, I need AFS members and subscribers to do a few things to help me out:

- ▶ If you're overdue on your dues/subscription, please pay.
- ▶ If your label shows an incorrect date for your expiration, either too late or too early, please write or e-mail me and tell me the correct expiration month.
- ▶ Anytime you send a check to AFS (and hey, the more often the better), please note on it what it is for ("June pledge" or "Dues through 2008" or "25 copies of *Baubles of Blasphemy*," or "donation," etc.).

Also, for members who come, even occasionally, to meetings, we need ongoing contributions of the following (besides for the yard sale, that is):

- ▶ Medium-sized cardboard boxes — bigger than a shoebox but smaller than a box that holds ten reams of newspaper — to mail books in
  - ▶ Packaging tape
  - ▶ Packing material such as styrofoam "peanuts" or bubble-wrap
- Thanks.



# Become a Member!

(Or renew your membership with this form!)



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

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

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

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

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

## Annual dues are:

Membership	Dues	# of mems	Total
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25	_____	\$ _____
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<input type="checkbox"/> Subscription only	\$20	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member	\$100	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Household	\$125	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for Canada/Mexico	\$5	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for other foreign addresses	\$10	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Extra donation (thank you!)		_____	\$ _____
<b>TOTAL</b>			\$ _____

Please send this form with payment to:  
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 Roswell, GA 30075

# Baubles of Blasphemy

By Edwin F. Kagin

## ORDER FORM

Purchaser: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel. \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

If company or organization, representative: \_\_\_\_\_

Ship to address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Copies: 1 copy \$20 \_\_\_\_\_ (gross)

\_\_\_\_\_ copies (if 2 to 9 copies) X \$19 = \_\_\_\_\_ (gross)

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**AFS members, deduct 25% from gross before adding shipping. Members of any freethought, humanist, or atheist group, please deduct \$1 per copy ordered from gross before adding shipping.**

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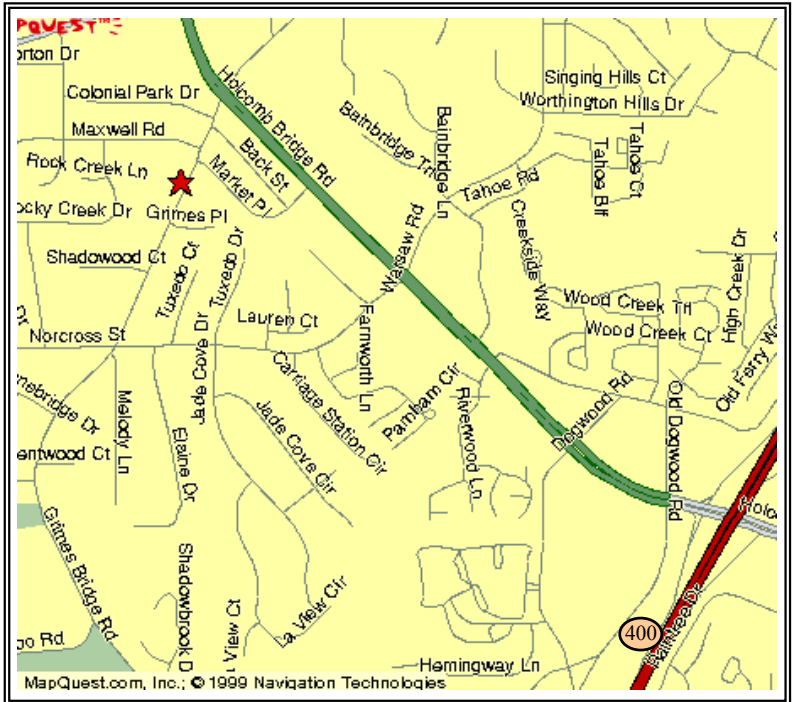
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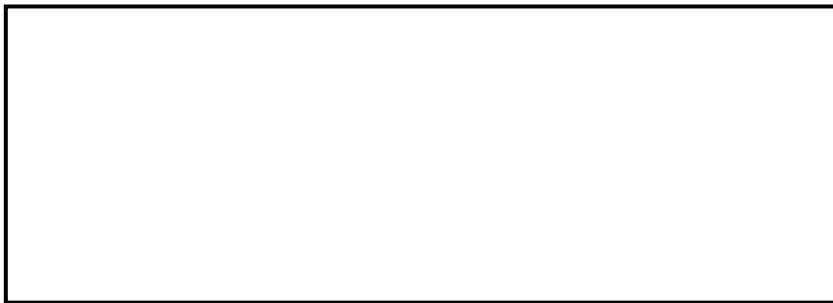


**The May Meeting:  
Sunday, May 8  
1:00 at the AF Center  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road  
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:  
Sgt. Kevin Benderman**



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