

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

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The June Meeting

The June 12 AFS meeting will feature a presentation by AFS member Ried Crowe, titled "Arguments Against Intelligent Design."

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 snacks.) 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, June 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 to the restaurant.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will watch the new Freethought movie "Heart of the Beholder" at 4:00 to 6:00 at the AF Center on Sunday, June 19.

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

Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on June 26 at 12:30 PM. Their speaker will be Paul Saluk, speaking on "Language, Metaphor and Morality: How Thinking People Can Make Their Case."

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.

The **Fellowship of Reason** will have a **Yard Sale** on Saturday, June 18, hosted by David and Janet Ziebell in East Cobb County. Contact David at 770-509-5379 for details.

The June Atheist Meetup

Atlanta Atheists will have a "meetup" on Sunday, June 26 at 4:00 PM at ChocoLate Coffee, 2558 Shallowford Road, in Atlanta. The restaurant's phone is 404-321-0174.

SOS Meets at AF Center

The **Secular Organizations for Sobriety** meets at the Atlanta Freethought Center every Tuesday evening at 8:00pm. SOS is the secular substitute for Alcoholics Anonymous.

Lake Hypatia July 4 Celebration

Every year many freethinkers get together at beautiful Lake Hypatia, Alabama for a fun filled 4th of July weekend!

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

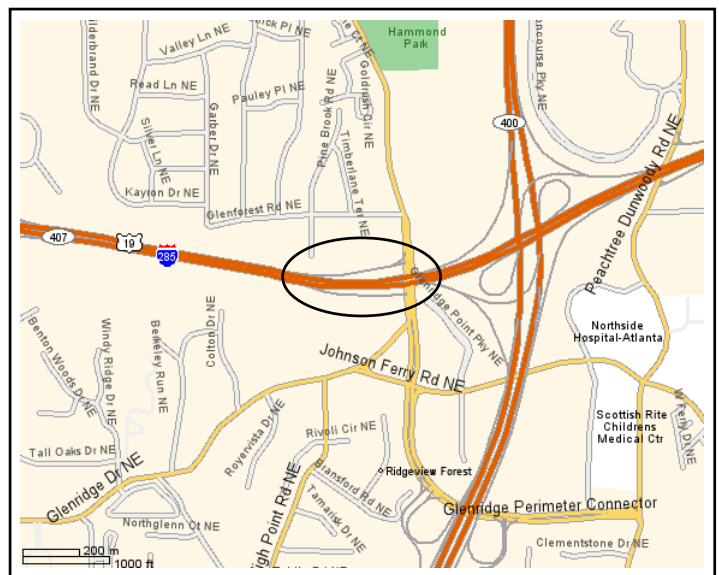
The Celebration will be Saturday to Monday, July 2-4. Go to www.alabamafreethought.org/pages/july4/index.html for details. Speakers will include Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Jo Ann Bell of the Oklahoma ACLU, and many others.

Please call 256-362-8729 to make a reservation.

Highway Cleanup is This Saturday

The Atlanta Freethought Society will participate in its second Adopt-A-Highway cleanup on Saturday, June 11 at 2:00 PM. The cleanup work will be on the Glenridge Ramp at Exit 26 of I-285. This is the long ramp that connects Glenridge Drive to I-285 near GA400. We will clean the ramps on the north side and the south side of I-285.

Please park along the north ramp. The Highway Department will provide safety vests and trash bags. We will have a short meeting on the north ramp at 2:00 to discuss safety and the work to be done.



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.

June 12: Ried Crowe will speak on "Arguments Against Intelligent Design."

July 10: TBD

Aug 14: Johnna Gardner will speak on living wills.

Sept 11: (tentative) Dr. Jacobs, linguist, will speak on "Language and Religion."

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.

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 Disclaimers Removed

Amir Mirsajedin did his work quietly. No scientist heralded him. No judge applauded. No creationist peered over his shoulder.

Then again, the stickers didn't put up much of a fight as Mirsajedin and 13 others began removing them from Cobb County's textbooks. Within a matter of weeks, no student here will be able to point to that crib note stuck by the school board onto the inside of the textbooks' front cover.

In a case that drew national attention, a federal judge in January found the stickers to be an unconstitutional endorsement of religion and ordered their removal. The Cobb County school system is appealing the ruling but is abiding by the order to proceed with the removal as soon as the school year ended on May 20.

Mirsajedin was not awed by the historic weight of the occasion as he painstakingly removed stickers from texts at Sprayberry High School. He was just perturbed that the paper disclaimers were not the more easily removed vinyl kind.

"This job, it's kind of ironic," the student said. But, for \$10 an hour, "it's just a job." A job that called for a putty knife and an adhesive remover called "un-du," which school officials discovered at a local crafts store.

The disclaimers stemmed from a petition drive begun in 2002 by a creationist who collected 2,300 signatures to protest the science books used in Cobb schools. Creationists generally believe as literal fact the Bible's account in the Book of Genesis of how God created the world.

In response to the creationists' protest, Cobb school board members ordered evolution disclaimers printed on stickers and placed in 13 science books used in middle and high school classes.

The disclaimers read: "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."

The school district placed 34,452 of the stickers in textbooks across the county. By May 23, several thousand had been scraped off.

The cost to remove the stickers will likely be less than \$25,000. Current and former students were hired for the project through a temporary employment agency. After one day, they were ahead of schedule. By job's end, they will have traveled to every middle and high school in Cobb County, squirting "un-du" and scraping until

the last disclaimer is gone.

Jeffrey Selman (an AFS member), who was the lead parent among a group who sued to remove the stickers, said he was thrilled they were being removed.

"I'm optimistic, but it ain't over till it's over," he said. "If they win the appeal, I'll appeal higher."

But dealing with the stickers is an effort George Stickel, who supervises Cobb's high school science curriculum, does not expect to have to repeat. He does not think the school system would again use disclaimers in textbooks even if it wins its appeal in federal court. Cobb now has a policy requiring teaching of evolution. "I feel very good about our policy," he said.

The previous policy urged that evolution not be taught because it could be "inconsistent with family teachings." The school district as recently as 10 years ago cut out pages on evolution from science textbooks.

"Times change," said Samantha Strotz, 19, a Kell High graduate who attends Valdosta State University and is on the summer's sticker removal squad. "My teacher was very by-the-book," and the book included evolution, she said.

[From a May 24 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article by Kristina Torres.]

Ky. Diocese Will Pay Record Settlement

\$120m approved to end abuse suit

Pushing the cumulative cost of clergy sex abuse to the Catholic Church near \$1 billion, the Diocese of Covington, Ky., announced on June 3 that it has agreed to set aside a record \$120 million to settle a class-action lawsuit brought by men and women who say as minors they were sexually abused by priests.

The settlement by the small diocese dwarfs the \$85 million one in Boston in late 2003, and surpasses the \$100 million settlement reached in December by the Orange County Diocese in Southern California.

"After personally meeting with more than 70 victims, I am painfully aware that no amount of money can compensate for the harm these victims suffered as innocent children," Bishop Roger J. Foy said in a statement. "Nevertheless, I pray that this settlement will bring some measure of peace and healing to victims and their loved ones."

The Kentucky settlement, which requires court approval, appears to be larger, not only in absolute terms, but also in the maximum payment to individual victims. In Boston, most

plaintiffs got no more than \$300,000; in Covington, the cap for all but the most egregious cases will be \$450,000.

Covington is a small diocese, with 88,000 Catholics and 46 parishes. In 2003, the diocese reported that it had received 158 allegations of abuse against 30 priests since 1950.

By contrast, the Archdiocese of Boston has about 2 million Catholics in 294 parishes. The archdiocese reported last year that 815 people had made allegations against 162 priests since 1950.

[From a June 4 *Boston Globe* article.]

'In God We Trust' to Hang on School Walls

The words "In God We Trust" soon will be hanging in school classrooms in Elbert and Hart counties, Georgia.

As the national motto, a framed copy of the phrase is permitted under Georgia law in elementary and secondary schools.

The Hebron Baptist Association bought more than 500 copies of the motto and gave them to the school districts this month, said the Rev. Steve Ferguson, the organization's newly hired executive director.

"This would be a reminder for

students of history, as well as a particular reliance on God, and even to an extent, now, his work in our lives and our lives as a nation," he said.

Mr. Ferguson presented the framed copies of the motto, written in white letters on top of a red, white and blue background, to school boards in both counties.

The way the national motto is treated legally differs from the Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments because the motto doesn't come from a particular religion's doctrine, he said.

"When you're talking about a motto like 'In God We Trust,' there are all sorts of religions that look to God," Mr. Ferguson said.

Hart County Superintendent Nancy Clark said she's glad this is something the school system can do, and she distributed the plaques to principals last week. She doesn't know whether any have been hung yet because of summer vacation.

[From a May 28 article by Crystal Boyles at IndependentMail.com.]

American Humanist Wins Oxford Debate

By Herb Silverman

What do I have in common with Mahatma Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Malcolm X, Richard Nixon, and Mother Theresa? We have all been invited to speak at the Oxford Union, in England.

In my case, there was a debate on whether American religion undermines American values. Those who argued against were Rich Lowry (editor of National Review), Eric Metaxas (author of 40 books and writer for Charles Colson), and Joe Loconte (William E. Simon fellow in Religion at the Heritage Foundation). Michael Lind, from our side, cancelled, leaving Welton Gaddy (president of Interfaith Alliance) and me. Each side also had a student open the debate.

The debate was not set up American style, where each side makes an opening statement and then has an opportunity to respond to the opening statement on the other side. In the British parliamentary style, each person speaks one time (approx. 12 minutes) and the only interruptions are for points of order or points of information. During my presentation, I re-

ceived one interruption from a member of the audience after I said: "I have in my hand a Godless document — the United States Constitution."

Point of Information: Isn't the "Creator" mentioned in the U.S. Constitution?

My response: No, not in the Constitution. It is mentioned in the Declaration of Independence, which is not a governing document but a call for rebellion against the British Crown. The Declaration refers to a Creator endowing people with inalienable rights to distinguish us from an empire that asserted the divine right of kings. Many of our founders were deists, believing in a deity that created the universe and laws of nature, and then retired to "deity emeritus."

Rich Lowry, who preceded me, spoke of the wonderful diversity and tolerance of Christianity in America. He cited Howard Dean as an example of a committed Christian leaving one sect to join another because of a dispute over a bicycle path. In my presentation, I said that Lowry might feel as I do, that Howard Dean is not a

committed Christian at all, but has to pretend he is in order to get elected. I also said that I know of no open atheist who has ever been elected to public office anywhere in the United States. After the debate, Rich Lowry told me he agreed with me about Howard Dean.

Despite their side outnumbering ours by three to two, our side won. The way people voted in the debate was by leaving the hall through the "aye" or "nay" door.

(Herb Silverman is the president of the Secular Coalition for America, a national 501(c)(4) lobbying organization in Washington D.C. dedicated to promoting secularism and humanism on the federal level. Members of the SCA include the American Humanist Association, the Atheist Alliance International, the Internet Infidels, the Institute for Humanist Studies, the Secular Student Alliance and the Military Association of Atheists and Free-thinkers. He lives in Columbia, SC.)

[From the June 1 issue of *Humanist Network News*.]

On ABC's This Week with George Stephanopoulos on May 2, Pat Robertson, founder of Christian Coalition of America and host of the Christian Broadcasting Network's The 700 Club, defended his comments in his latest book, *Courting Disaster*, that Democratic judicial appointments are the most serious threat America has faced in nearly 400 years. "George, I really believe that," he said. "I think they (Democratic judicial appointments) are destroying the fabric that holds our nation together."

On Holy Books

By Massimo Pigliucci

OK, so Newsweek (probably) made a mistake in reporting, based on an anonymous source, that U.S. interrogators at the infamous base in Guantanamo Bay have desecrated the Koran, allegedly by flushing it down the toilet. It's bad journalism, though no worse than what the American media have accustomed us to for the past several years. Even the use of anonymous sources is neither unusual nor necessarily a bad idea (Watergate might not have happened without the anonymous source famously referred to as "deep throat").

What is most interesting about the Newsweek debacle is the reaction of the US government, and perhaps even more so the underpinning of the widespread outrage at what the American weekly has allegedly caused as a result of its mistake.

Take the reaction by US government officials. The attack on Newsweek was all-out, with allegations of damaging American reputation with Muslims across the world. As if that needed any help since the Bush administration has gone to war on the basis of what turned out to be false information about alleged weapons of mass destruction; information, of course, provided by an anonymous source, and that former Secretary of State Colin Powell shamelessly paraded as "fact" in front of the United Nations.

It is in fact astounding, and more than a little worrisome, that the Bush administration is so eager to attack the press and use it as a scapegoat for its own foolish foreign policies. It is downright scary when so many right-wing media pundits are ready to jump on Newsweek for being "unpatriotic" (code word for doing or saying anything they don't like). It is funny (in a dark humor sense) when

the magazine is labeled as part of the "liberal media conspiracy" (a convenient rhetorical fiction invented by the extreme right), even though Newsweek has run plenty of stories that favorably covered the war on Iraq and the actions of the US military. It is dangerous when almost everybody (except an op-ed piece in the New York Times) ignored the statements of an American general (a member of the same military that Newsweek has allegedly purposely bashed and engendered) to the effect that the riots that killed several people in Pakistan had nothing to do with the publication of the incriminated article.

But let us consider the broader picture for a moment. Suppose for the sake of argument that the short, inaccurate, article in Newsweek really was the spark that led to murderous riots half a world away. In what reasonable sense are the author of the piece and editor of the magazine responsible for such a sad outcome? The reasoning behind the accusations raised against Newsweek is that we actually expect people to become violent because a book they care for has been flushed down the toilet. We may not (at least officially) condone such reaction, but we put the responsibility square on the shoulders of the journalists, rather than on the people who so easily resort to violence. You see, if not OK, it is at least understandable when religious zealots riot or kill to defend their twisted understanding of their faith. It must have been a similar feeling that prompted the former Pope, John Paul II (the one now being considered for fast-track to sainthood) to refuse to apologize for the Catholic Church's killing of Giordano Bruno in 1600. You know, Bruno may have been right about the fact that the earth is not the center of the universe, but

after all, he was a heathen...

But wait! Isn't it precisely this sort of religious intolerance that brought about the attacks on the U.S. on 9/11 2001? There may have been reasons why the terrorists did it, and these reasons surely had something to do with American foreign policy in the Middle East during the past several decades. But reasons are not the same as justifications. The terrorists who attacked the twin towers in New York and the Pentagon were fully to blame for having decided that the way to resolve cultural and political conflicts is to kill innocent people. Similarly, the only culprits in the Pakistani riots are those religious bigots and overzealous security forces who did the rioting and killing, regardless of what real or imaginary "offense" to their religion they may have used as an excuse for their senseless actions.

Here is another way to put the point. Imagine the headlines: "Creationists flush a copy of Darwin's *Origin of Species* down the toilet. Dozens killed in the resulting riots on university campuses." Of course, you will never see such a headline, except perhaps in *The Onion*. The reason is not just that not even the most ardent secular humanist actually regards Darwin's writings as sacred, but that the whole ethics of science and humanism is about tolerance for other people's views. To paraphrase Mel Brooks, a sense of humor is the humanist's best defense against the universe. Unfortunately, the one thing religious zealots seem to sorely lack is precisely a sense of humor. Yet surely God, the most perfect of all beings, appreciates a laugh here and there, even at Her own expense. After all, didn't she create the Platypus?

[From the June 2005 *Rationally Speaking* at www.rationallyspeaking.org.]

"Lord Acton famously said, 'Absolute power corrupts absolutely.' But I think it is the absoluteness, as much as the power, that is the corrupting factor in the equation. Absolute certainty, of the sort expounded by Osama bin Laden, or Timothy McVeigh, or the North Carolina pastor who kicked people out of his church for voting Democrat, can denature the heart and make way for monstrous crimes. If that is the case, then the highest virtue, the humanizing virtue, is not faith but doubt."

— Chauncey Mabe, Books Editor for the South Florida *Sun-Sentinel*, in a May 22 article.

The Role of Faith in the Search for Truth

By Wayne Adkins

Learning the truth about religion is like attaining the elusive lean body. We all say we want it, but few are willing to put in the work it requires. Most people are content to take what their parents give them as truth. That is why a child born in Iraq is likely to become Muslim while a child born in Utah is more likely to become Mormon and a child born in Alabama is more likely to become a protestant Christian. It's not that the argument for Islam is any more compelling in Iraq than it is in Alabama. It's just that we are, to a great extent, products of our environments.

At some point a person might begin to question what they are given as truth. What's with all these contradictions in the Bible? Why doesn't God condemn slavery? Most clergy are ready for such questions with canned answers or recommendations for a good apologist to read. Why? It is because most people don't want to abandon their notions of truth, even when they doubt it. They just want an answer that will quell the uneasiness they feel while allowing them to retain their notions of what the truth is. In other words, any plausible explanation will do.

The problem is that truth is lost in the process. If you are married and your spouse starts coming home late because they are having an affair, would you want to know the truth, even if you didn't like it, or would you be pacified with any and all plausible explanations given? "I was working late." "I had a flat tire." "I ran out of gas." "I ran into an old buddy from high school." Would you accept every excuse given so you could retain your faith in your spouse? That is what most people do when it comes to religion.

Suppose you wanted to buy a building and the seller assures you the roof doesn't leak. As you tour the building you come upon a puddle. The seller tells you it could have blown in from a nearby window, but assures you the roof doesn't leak. You

continue and find another puddle. "That seeps up through the concrete floor," you are told. Another puddle is explained as the product of a leaky sink drain. You feel a drop of water fall on your head and look up. The seller quickly points out that it could have been condensation from the air-conditioning ducts. You walk on and still more water falls on you and you point out to the seller that there are no ducts overhead now and water is running down the rafters. He tells you that his kids have super soaker water canons and that they could have been playing with them and sprayed the ceiling. He then tells you with a straight face that it couldn't have come through the roof because it is impervious to leaks. As you look across the room, the floor is covered in water and the seller is telling you the roof doesn't leak. How can you buy that?

Enter faith. When people confront the clergy about problems with the God myth and the clergy can see that their plausible explanations aren't playing well, they play the faith card. "It all comes down to faith," we are told. Faith is what bridges the gap between compelling evidence and belief. The Bible says faith is required for salvation. If a person was given enough compelling evidence, maybe they would believe without faith. After all, Thomas wasn't praised by Jesus for his skepticism in the Bible, he was scolded for it and told, "Blessed are they who have believed without seeing." There is just one problem with all of this. For faith to have any value it must be placed in a true proposition.

Ask your average Christian what will happen to a Muslim when he dies and they will tell you that unless he placed his faith in Jesus Christ he is going to hell. Misplaced faith is apparently useless. Suppose you knew an adult who still had faith that Santa Claus is real. Would you consider them a fool for having faith in such a preposterous thing? How do you

know you are not a fool for believing the Bible is the inspired, infallible word of God? If faith only has value when placed in a true proposition, how do you know that what you have placed your faith in is true? Has your faith served you well if there really is no God? It cannot end with faith or you are just rolling the dice and hoping that your parents, despite the odds, took you to the one church that has the truth. You must consider the evidence to determine if you have placed your faith in a true proposition and if the evidence is not compelling, why would you want to believe it?

You wouldn't buy a car without test driving it. You wouldn't buy a home without having it inspected. Why would you choose a religion, arguably the decision that will most influence the rest of your life, by walking into the closest church to your house or going to a church like the one your parents attended and accepting at face value that you have been given the truth about God?

Faith is an impediment to the sincere search for truth. It is a shortcut that allows a person to avoid the hard work of searching for truth for their self. It allows a person to say "This is what I believe" without being able to articulate why. I would encourage you to fearlessly pursue the truth wherever it leads you. When someone says "How do you know this is true?" be prepared to answer them with evidence. Show me a person who says they believe in God simply by faith and I'll show you someone who hasn't really looked for the truth about God.

Wayne Adkins is a former fundamentalist Christian who became an atheist after two years of bible college. He is now a military officer recently returned from a year in Iraq...a real live atheist in a fox-hole. He has written a manuscript debunking biblical inerrancy and the existence of God which can be found at www.nakedemperor.netfirms.com.

[This article written for *Atlanta Freethought News*. Thanks, Wayne!]

Moore Misses Church's Role

Here's a letter by James L. Evans, Pastor of Auburn First Baptist Church. The letter appeared in the *Decatur Daily* on May 28 and in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on June 1. It is reprinted here by permission.

In his new book, "So Help Me God," Judge Roy Moore makes the claim that he is bound by his oath as a public official, by the very words "so help me God," to acknowledge God as the foundation of our government. The failure to do this, he argues, erodes the "moral foundation of law." In fact, he writes, such erosion is already at work. Godless atheists and secularists have been busy for the past 50 years trying to remove God from the public sphere.

And in his view, they have succeeded. The removal of prayer and Bible reading from schools are symptoms of God's absence from our public lives. This absence of the divine presence from public life has resulted in increased crime, a rising drug problem, unwed mothers and an overall decline in the moral fabric of our society. Until we return God to the center of our public lives, this decline will continue and get worse.

Such claims have been in the air since the Supreme Court ruled in the 1962 landmark case *Engle v. Vitale* that teacher-led prayer in public schools violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment. There are many faithful Christians who believe there is an undeniable link be-

tween this ruling and every social ill that has appeared since.

But if we blame all of our country's current problems on the failure of the state to acknowledge God, what does that say about the church? After all, isn't the church a "public acknowledgment of God?" When congregations pray, aren't they engaged in public prayer? When the Bible is read in church, doesn't that count as public Bible reading?

To put the matter more pointedly, is the church such an inadequate institution that if God is not acknowledged in the courthouse and schoolhouse, God is removed from the public sphere?

People of faith who accept these arguments need to realize how they demean the role of the church in the world. After all, wasn't it the faith community that was ordained by God to provide settings for worship, instruction and for breaking the bread of communion? And can you really acknowledge God properly without these things?

This diminished view of the church is evident in Moore's book. In the one and only paragraph in the whole book that approaches any traditional Christian testimony, Moore says he

"walked the aisle," and later met with the preacher for two hours. That's it; that's all we get on the role of the church in his spiritual pilgrimage. From there his life is heavy on the founding fathers but light on the teaching of Jesus.

I am not suggesting that Moore is not a Christian or that his Christian experience is not valid. What I am suggesting is that Moore's views are part of a growing trend in evangelical Christianity which seems to believe that unless the state acknowledges God, God has not been acknowledged. Such a notion invalidates the role of the church entirely.

Where this takes us, of course, is where we are. The acknowledgement of God that takes place week in and week out in local faith communities is discounted. Meanwhile, there is weeping and wailing because a monument of the Ten Commandments is not on display at the courthouse.

Jesus said on the occasion of establishing the church that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. I guess we'll have to hold our breath and hope he was right.

James L. Evans can be reached at faithmatters@mindspring.com.

Opponents Can Reject Science Benefits

This letter by Delos McKown, a popular AFS speaker, was in the June 4 issue of the *Montgomery Advertiser*

President Bush and his political ilk will eventually recognize that they are going to lose in their attempts to impede embryonic stem cell research and prevent therapeutic cloning, and that scientific research knows no national boundaries but flees to congenial soil, taking some of the best brains with it. They will realize that the desire to live long, healthy and happy lives as free as possible of disease, debility and unnecessary suffering are more powerful, in aggregate, than the superstition (religious or oth-

erwise) that every conceptus has a natural, inherent or God-given right to life. But there will still be an opportunity to witness to their belief in this alleged right.

When, a decade or so hence, powerful new therapeutic procedures will almost certainly have been discovered as a result of the research at issue and when Bush and his political ilk find themselves a decade or so older and stricken with diseases and debilities that do not respond to current treatments as well as they would to the

predicted new treatments, they can simply say no.

They can refuse any and all therapeutic benefits for themselves or their dependent loved ones stemming from the kind of research that so affronts their moral or religious principles. What a glorious testimony.

If, having rejected the kind of research at issue, they were to permit benefit from it, they would simply be hypocrites.

Delos B. McKown
Auburn

May Board Meeting Minutes

Present: President Steve Yothment, presiding
VPE Judy Thompson, recording secretary
VPE Freya Harris, Treasurer Ed Buckner, Bill
Burton, Diane Buckner, Lew Southern, Jim
Middleton, Jack McKinney

Date/Time: May 15, 2005, 2:00 PM

► April minutes corrections:

Delete reference to discovering PayPal balance. Correct location of Adopt a Highway: Glenridge ramps at I-285. Minutes were approved unanimously as corrected.

► Treasurer's report:

We're trying to keep a \$2500 balance in the bank account to avoid a service charge.

The AFS yard sale on May 14 brought in more than \$300. It was a good location, and we had good signage. The participants agree they enjoyed the sale and the cookout that followed it. We contributed more than 50 people hours to the sale. Next time, we'd like more lead time to prepare and promote it in the newsletter. We might want to use some paid advertising to increase traffic. Overall, we considered it a success.

We are now making regular payments on the Suite 400 mortgage in excess of the accruing interest.

The mortgage on Suite 500 is scheduled to be paid off in November 2005.

We're paying about \$20 a month for Answer Phone service. Ed noted that we don't get many messages on it, possibly because the out-going message is out of date. Steve and Freya will work on keeping the message current. We've increased the cover price of Tales of the Rational so that we'll make a small profit on sales through Amazon after their mandatory discount. Ed's working on listing Baubles of Blasphemy with Amazon.

Ed's getting information from PayPal to put a link on our website. When he gets the code, Freya will install it.

► Fundraising:

Steve has the fundraising letter ready. Ed will get revised contribution figures to insert. Steve will generate labels

and will mail the letters with the budget this week.

► Board vacancy:

Steve appointed Jack McKinney to fill an open board position. The board confirmed the appointment.

► Publishing:

The new edition of Bloopers is ready to go to print. Steve will generate the cover. Bill and Ed will get revised printing quotes. We'll send it to the printer as soon as possible.

► Adopt a Highway:

Our sign has not been installed yet. Steve will call DOT. Freya will publish dates of future cleanups on our website.

► Programs:

June: Ried Crowe, "Arguments against Intelligent Design" Not scheduled yet: Johnna Gardner LCSW, on Living Wills; Dr. Jacobs, linguist, on Language and Religion. Jack will invite AJC Editor Jay Beckman to attend and/or speak to us.

Judy welcomes suggestions for other speakers.

► Books:

Freya will reduce our used book inventory. We discussed places to donate our discards.

► Merchandise:

Judy will order new merchandise before the July 4 celebration at Lake Hypatia, cost not to exceed \$500.

► Membership:

Jack has been contacting writers of letters to the AJC editor who seem compatible with our purposes. He'd like leads from members who read other newspapers. He has gotten some favorable responses.

We'd like to exhibit at more neighborhood festivals. Freya will do some research. Please tell her if you know of a suitable one.

► HGA:

Bill will look in previous minutes for our agreement with the Humanists of Georgia, so we can bring our records up to date.

The meeting adjourned at 3:15 PM.

"You say that to sneer at religion is only a step from sneering at morality, and then only another step to that which is vicious and profligate. The Jews entertained the same opinion of the teachings of Christ. He sneered at their religion. The Christians have entertained the same opinion of every philosopher. Let me say to you again – and let me say it once for all – that morality has nothing to do with religion. Morality does not depend upon the supernatural. Morality does not walk with the crutches of miracles. Morality appeals to the experience of mankind. It cares nothing about faith, nothing about sacred books. Morality depends upon facts, something that can be seen, something known, the product of which can be estimated. It needs no priest, no ceremony, no mummery. It believes in the freedom of the human mind. It asks for investigation. It is founded upon truth. It is the enemy of all religion, because it has to do with this world, and with this world alone." – Robert Ingersoll, in a debate with the Rev. Dr. Henry M. Fields, 1887.

Henry M. Field, *Faith or Agnosticism?: The Field-Ingersoll Discussion* (Austin, Texas: American Atheist Press, 1988) (series of articles from the *North American Review*, 1888)

"When a Religion is good, I conceive it will support itself; and when it does not support itself, and God does not take care to support it so that its Professors are obliged to call for help of the Civil Power, it is a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one."

– Benjamin Franklin, from a letter to Richard Price, October 9, 1780

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Baubles of Blasphemy

By Edwin F. Kagin

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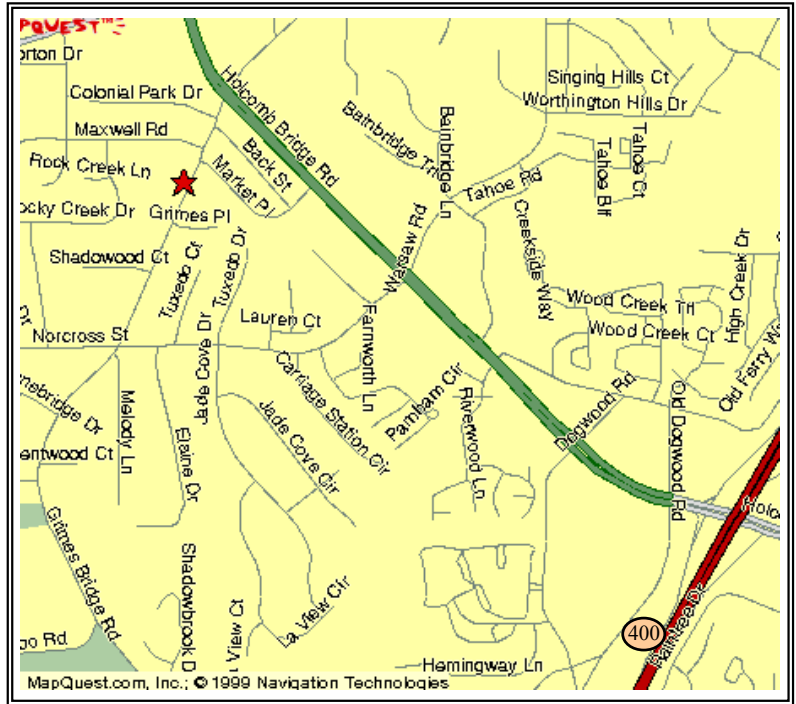
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Atlanta Freethought Society

**The June Meeting:
Sunday, June 12
1:00 at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Ried Crowe**



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