

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 11 Number 7 • July 2005

The July Meeting

The July 10 AFS meeting will feature a presentation by AFS President Steve Yothment, titled "Living in The Way."

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, July 15, 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 documentary "The God Who Wasn't There" at 4:00 to 6:00 at the AF Center on Sunday, July 17.

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 July 24 at 12:30 PM.

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 July Atheist Meetup

Atlanta Atheists will have a "meetup" on Sunday, July 24 at 4:00 PM at Summit's Tavern, 3334 Hwy 78, in Snellville, GA. The phone number there is 770-736-1333.

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.

The Fundamentals of Extremism: the Christian Right in America can be read online. See it at: <http://www.newbostonbooks.com/Look%20Inside.htm>

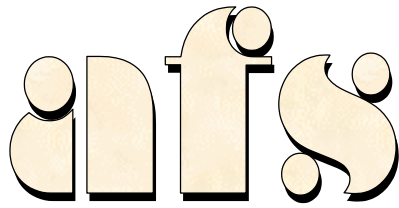
AFS Meetings and Activities

July 10: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
July 15: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
July 17: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 2:00 PM.
July 17: AFS Discussion Group at AF Center, 4:00 PM.



Ed Buckner, Jack McKinney, Jim Middleton and Steve Yothment relax near the AFS Adopt-A-Highway sign. (Thanks to all who donated their time for the cleanup!)

"The place of religion in our society is an exalted one, achieved through a long tradition of reliance on the home, the church and the inviolable citadel of the individual heart and mind. We have come to recognize through bitter experience that it is not within the power of government to invade that citadel, whether its purpose or effect be to aid or to oppose, to advance or retard. In the relationship between man and religion, the state is firmly committed to a position of neutrality." (Justice Tom C. Clark, majority opinion, U. S. Supreme Court, June 17, 1963, as quoted in "Permission to Pray," *The Rights of Free Men: An Essential Guide to Civil Liberties*, ed. James Clayton, New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1984, pp. 130-131.)



**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.

July 10: AFS President Steve Yothment will speak on "Living in The Way."

Aug 14: Johnna Gardner and attorney Burke Johnson will speak on "Advanced Directives, Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare and the Living Will."

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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For membership and subscription
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dividuals, \$35 for households, and \$10
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Supreme Court Issues Split Decision

The highly anticipated Supreme Court rulings on the public display of the Ten Commandments failed to resolve the issue Monday because the court sent "mixed messages," according to some display opponents.

"My interpretation is that, unfortunately, the Supreme Court has once again muddied and side-stepped the issue," Dave Silverman, communications director for American Atheists, told Cybercast News Service, following separate verdicts involving cases in Kentucky and Texas.

In its 5-4 ruling on June 27 in *McCreary v. ACLU*, the court said framed copies of the Ten Commandments were hung at two Kentucky courthouses with overtly religious intentions, and as a result, were unconstitutional. However, the court also issued a 5-4 decision in *Van Orden v. Perry*, stating that a Ten Commandments monument, displayed among other monuments at the Texas State Capitol, represented neutral, legal intentions.

Silverman called the Kentucky ruling a "good verdict," but added that "the Texas case conflicts with that and they (the Supreme Court) haven't clarified the conflict ... They have allowed one thing that is blatantly religious in nature and they have disallowed almost the exact same thing because it was too blatantly religious in nature."

Dan Barker, co-president of the Freedom from Religion Foundation and former Christian minister agreed. "It doesn't really settle the issue of whether the government can promote religion ... the issue will have to be revisited because basically what the court is saying is that each individual government decision has to be made locally, in context.

"The court had an opportunity to settle this thing once and for all and to remind believers that they are free to promote their views on private property. Instead they have left a big hole in the wall of separation between

church and state," Barker told Cybercast News Service.

Both men saw the Texas decision as providing loopholes for the display of the Ten Commandments.

"Now religious opportunists are going to want to put up enough Magna Cartas and Declarations of Independence ... to secularize what is obviously a religious statement," Barker said. He predicted that this would be "popping up all over the country."

Silverman likened it to what he called the Three Reindeer Rule at Christmas: "If you have a nativity scene with three reindeer, automatically it becomes a non-religious statement." He insisted that secular objects surrounding a religious symbol should be given no consideration. "It's still a religious statement."

Barker spoke of what he sees as the perils of religion in public life. "Religion at its core is divisive. It divides people, it splits people. It starts wars, it starts fights. It creates in-groups versus out-groups."

He also questioned the faith of those people supporting Ten Commandment displays. "Some ... think that if you have to stoop to the level of using the government to promote your faith, then you're failing on your own. Your God isn't big enough to promote Himself. You have to use the property and machinery of the government to help you along."

The American Atheists and Freedom from Religion Foundation filed amicus briefs in both the Kentucky and Texas cases.

THE ATHEIST ALLIANCE RESPONDS

Speaking for the Atheist Alliance, Steve Lowe of the Washington Area Secular Humanists read the following statement shortly after the rulings were announced:

"Tomorrow, the newspapers will say 'The conservative has found compromise, conciliation to both the religious and the secularist.' They will be wrong.

"It is true that some Christians will feel they have a victory, and it is true

that we have some small consolation that the court did not completely repeal the First Amendment, but it is not true that this is a conservative act.

"When our new government agreed to write the Constitution in order to assure the rights of the people, the very first right they gave us was freedom from religion. Even before guaranteeing free exercise of religion, first were those words you have heard so many times today, 'Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion.'

"This first principle of the rights of Americans, therefore, is the most conservative law of the land, and today the Supreme Court has weakened it.

"This solemn promise of our government is now compromised, as its author, James Madison, warned, when he said, 'Strongly guarded as is the separation between Religion and Government in the Constitution of the United States, the danger of encroachment by Ecclesiastical Bodies may be illustrated by precedents already furnished in their short history.'

"In oral arguments, Justice Kennedy suggested that we atheists could simply avert our eyes when we encounter religious displays on public land. This misses the important point that our battle is for truth, for our government to be limited to telling truth. We do not fear exposure to ideas which are not our own. Instead, we fear a government which endorses any idea about the gods, any religious or atheistic view. We fear a government that lies about its history. We fear a government that divides its people as the anointed and the unwashed.

"A secular government, neither atheistic nor religious, was Madison's mandate. That is a government which, in no case, asks the patriotic citizen to avert his eyes, and that is the most conservative principle of the United States of America."

CHRISTIAN CONSERVATIVES RESPOND

Christian conservatives said they were taking their fight for government

The Supreme Court Decisions *(continued)*

displays of the Ten Commandments to the polls, using the Supreme Court's bookend rulings for and against such exhibitions as a call to arms in the battle over judicial nominees.

Several lawyers and organizers for the Christian right said the most resonant part of the rulings was Justice Antonin Scalia's accusation, in his dissent defending one display of the Commandments, that the majority used the case to "ratchet up the court's hostility to religion."

"I am almost glad that it is so outrageous," Charles W. Colson, the evangelical Christian writer and Watergate figure, said of the ruling at a panel discussion on Dr. James C. Dobson's "Focus on the Family" syndicated Christian radio program. "People today now realize and can make no mistake about it that what happens in the court has profound effects upon religious liberty in America, and it comes in a week when there may be a resignation on the Supreme Court.

"People in churches across America had better get busy and demand the right kind of appointments to this court," he said. "There is no bigger issue on the Christian agenda."

Representative Tom DeLay of Texas, the House majority leader, called the ruling against the display in Kentucky hypocritical, given the depiction of Moses and the Commandments in the Supreme Court.

Mr. DeLay promised that Congress would "look at all avenues" in oversight of the courts.

Representative Ernest Istook, Republican of Oklahoma, said he planned to try to revive a proposed constitutional amendment to permit government displays of the Commandments as well as school prayer and the recitation of the phrase "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance.

"Those people who want to express their religious beliefs on public property should enjoy the same rights that we provide to those protesting the war in Iraq," Mr. Istook said.

KY TO REMOVE TEN COMMANDMENTS
Leaders of two eastern Kentucky

counties grudgingly accepted the Supreme Court's ruling that framed copies of the Ten Commandments wouldn't be allowed to hang in their courthouses.

McCreary County Judge Executive Blaine Phillips said he will abide by the ruling of the Supreme Court, but he encouraged residents of the county not to give up the fight.

BARROW COUNTY MULLS THEIR CASE

The Barrow County, GA Commission will wait until after a July 7 court conference to decide how to proceed in a lawsuit challenging a Ten Commandments display in the Barrow County Courthouse, said Commission Chairman Doug Garrison.

"It appears that the Supreme Court is attempting to justify their decisions to post or not post the Ten Commandments based on the motives of the groups or individuals who initially displayed them," said Michael Griffin, executive director of Ten Commandments-Georgia, a private group that has vowed to raise money to cover the local government's legal fees. "This certainly muddies the water when it comes to applying legal precedent in these matters," Griffin added. "The split decisions on both cases indicate that the court itself is having a hard time applying the Constitution and historical facts."

The American Civil Liberties Union in September 2003 filed a federal lawsuit against Barrow County on behalf of "John Doe," an anonymous resident who wanted a Ten Commandments display removed from a breezeway in the Barrow County Courthouse. In March, Judge William O'Kelley granted the county's request to put the lawsuit on hold until the Supreme Court ruled on the legality of Ten Commandments displays on public property.

Instead of accepting the ACLU's demand to remove the document, Barrow County opted to fight the lawsuit. "It's not a slam dunk against us," said Barrow County Commission Chairman Doug Garrison. "There's still some fight left in us."

While no dates have been set for the case to resume, Gerry Weber, legal director of the ACLU of Georgia, said the group will ask O'Kelley to schedule a trial as soon as possible.

"Now, there is no delaying what we feel will be inevitable – that the display will be ruled unconstitutional," Weber said.

Legal concerns have become so pronounced in some areas that policies sometimes differ even within the county limits. In Hart County, GA, the courthouse boasts a framed copy of the Judeo-Christian doctrine, but the city of Hartwell has banned such displays. Others have tempered their efforts by surrounding the commandments with other historical documents.

The ACLU's lawyers said the Supreme Court rulings strengthen their case against Barrow County, particularly because the display is not surrounded by other historical legal documents.

"Lone displays are much more obvious violations," said Maggie Garrett, an ACLU staff attorney.

Barrow County commissioners plan to discuss the rulings with Virginia attorney Herb Titus in a conference call before the July 7 court conference.

As of July 1, Barrow County has spent \$264,747.54 in legal fees on the lawsuit. The county has recouped all but \$52,311.40 from private donations, including money from Ten Commandments-Georgia.

THE WALTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

AFS member John Schwartz has alerted AFS members via the AFS Forum email list that the Ten Commandments recently went on display in the Walton County Courthouse in Monroe, GA. The display is surrounded by other documents.

John and other AFS members expect to attend the next county commissioners meeting to persuade them to remove the religious text.

[From a June 28 Athens Banner-Herald story, a June 29 New York Times article by David Kirkpatrick, and a June 25 CNSNew.com article.]

Creationism's Blind Eye

By Richard Dawkins

Richard Dawkins is Charles Simonyi Professor of Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University

Science feeds on mystery. As my colleague Matt Ridley has put it, "Most scientists are bored by what they have already discovered. It is ignorance that drives them on." Science mines ignorance. Mystery – that which we don't yet know; that which we don't yet understand – is the mother lode that scientists seek out.

Mystics exult in mystery and want it to stay mysterious. Scientists exult in mystery for a very different reason: It gives them something to do. Maybe we don't understand yet, but we're working on it. Each mystery solved opens up vistas of unsolved problems, and the scientist eagerly moves in.

Admissions of ignorance and mystification are vital to good science. It is therefore galling, to say the least, when enemies of science turn those constructive admissions around and abuse them for political advantage. It is worse than galling. It threatens the enterprise of science itself. This is exactly the effect creationism or "intelligent design theory" (I.D.) is having, especially because its propagandists are slick, superficially plausible and, above all, well financed. I.D., by the way, is not a new form of creationism. It simply is creationism disguised, for political reasons, under a new name.

It isn't even safe for a scientist to express temporary doubt, as a rhetorical device before going on to dispel it.

"To suppose that the eye with all its inimitable contrivances for adjusting the focus to different distances, for admitting different amounts of light, and for the correction of spherical and chromatic aberration, could have been formed by natural selection, seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest degree." You will find this sentence of Charles Darwin quoted again and again by creationists. They never quote what follows. Darwin immediately went on to confound his initial incredulity. Others have built on his foundation, and the eye is today a show-piece of the gradual, cumulative evolution of an almost perfect illusion

of design. The relevant chapter of my *Climbing Mount Improbable* is called "The fortyfold path to enlightenment" in honor of the fact that, far from being difficult to evolve, the eye has evolved at least 40 times independently around the animal kingdom.

The distinguished Harvard geneticist Richard Lewontin is widely quoted as saying that organisms "appear to have been carefully and artfully designed." Again, this was a rhetorical preliminary to explaining how the powerful illusion of design actually comes about by natural selection. The isolated quotation strips out the implied emphasis on "appear to," leaving exactly what a simplemindedly pious audience – in Dover, Pa., for instance – wants to hear.

Deceitful misquoting of scientists to suit an antiscientific agenda ranks among the many un-Christian habits of fundamentalist authors. But such *Telling Lies for God* (book title of the splendidly pugnacious Australian geologist Ian Plimer) is not the most serious problem. There is a more important point to be made, and it goes right to the philosophical heart of creationism.

The standard methodology of creationists – indeed, all their arguments are variants of it – is to find some phenomenon in nature which, in their view or even in reality, Darwinism cannot readily explain. Darwin said: "If it could be demonstrated that any complex organ existed which could not possibly have been formed by numerous, successive, slight modifications, my theory would absolutely break down."

Creationists mine ignorance and uncertainty, not as a spur to honest research but in order to exploit and abuse Darwin's challenge. "Bet you can't tell me how the elbow joint of the lesser spotted weasel frog evolved by slow gradual degrees!" If the scientist fails to give an immediate and comprehensive answer, a default conclusion is drawn: "Right, then, the al-

ternative theory, 'intelligent design,' wins by default."

Notice, first, the biased logic: If theory A fails in some particular, theory B must be right! We are encouraged to leap to the default conclusion without even looking to see whether the default theory fails in the very same particular. I.D. is granted (quite wrongly, as I have shown elsewhere) a charmed immunity to the rigorous demands made of evolution.

Notice, second, how the creationist ploy undermines the scientist's natural – indeed, necessary – rejoicing in uncertainty. Today's scientist in America dare not say: "Hmm, interesting point. I wonder how the weasel frog's ancestors did evolve their elbow joint. I'm not a specialist in weasel frogs; I'll have to go to the university library and take a look. Might make an interesting project for a graduate student."

No. The moment a scientist said something like that – and long before the student began the project – the default conclusion would become a headline in a creationist pamphlet: "Weasel frog could only have been designed by God."

I once introduced a chapter on the so-called Cambrian explosion with the words, "It is as though the fossils were planted there without any evolutionary history." Once again, this was a rhetorical overture, intended to whet the reader's appetite for the explanation that was to follow. Sad hindsight tells me now how predictable it was that my remark would be gleefully quoted out of context. Creationists adore "gaps" in the fossil record.

Many evolutionary transitions are elegantly documented by more or less continuous series of gradually changing intermediate fossils. Some are not, and these are the famous "gaps." Michael Shermer, the founder of *Skeptics* magazine, has wittily pointed out that if a new fossil discovery neatly bisects a "gap," the creationist will declare that there are now two gaps. But in

Creationism's Blind Eye (*continued*)

any case, note yet again the unwarranted use of a default. If there are no fossils to document a postulated evolutionary transition, the default assumption is that there was no evolutionary transition: God must have intervened.

It is utterly illogical to demand complete documentation of every step of any narrative, whether in evolution or any other science. Only a tiny fraction of dead animals fossilize, and we are lucky to have as many intermediate fossils as we have. We could easily have had no fossils at all, and the evidence for evolution from other sources, such as molecular genetics and geographical distribution, would

still be overwhelmingly strong.

On the other hand, evolution makes the strong prediction that if a single fossil turned up in the wrong geological stratum, the theory would be blown out of the water. When challenged to say how evolution could ever be falsified, evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Haldane famously growled: "Fossil rabbits in the Precambrian." No such anachronistic fossils have ever been found, despite discredited creationist legends of human footprints interspersed with those of dinosaurs.

The creationists' fondness for gaps in the fossil record is a metaphor for their love of gaps in knowledge gen-

erally. Gaps, by default, are filled by God. You don't know how the nerve impulse works? Good! You don't understand how memories are laid down in the brain? Excellent! Is photosynthesis a bafflingly complex process? Wonderful! Please don't go to work on the problem, just give up, and appeal to God. Dear scientist, don't work on your mysteries. Bring us your mysteries, for we can use them. Don't squander precious ignorance by researching it away. Ignorance is God's gift to Dover.

[From a July 3 article in the *Philidelphia Enquirer* and at *Philly.com*. Another form of this essay appeared in the *London Times*.]

ACLU Releases "Science Under Siege"

The American Civil Liberties Union released a report on June 21 examining government policies and practices that have hampered academic freedom and scientific inquiry since September 11, 2001.

The report sheds new light on how these policies curtail basic rights and put all Americans at risk. "Attacks on scientific freedom have the same effect on our democracy as attacks on political freedom," said Anthony D. Romero, Executive Director of the ACLU. "Curtailing scientific freedom in the name of national security is bad for science, bad for freedom and simply not effective in increasing the safety of America."

The report, *Science Under Siege*, connects the dots between several different areas where misguided government policies are affecting science. Among the abuses the ACLU examines in the report are:

- moves to overclassify information and designate whole areas of research as "sensitive but unclassified;"
- outright censorship and prescreening of scientific articles before publication;
- exclusion of foreign students from ac-

cess to research projects;

- suppression of environmental and public health information; and
- increased restrictions on materials and technology commonly used in basic scientific research.

Throughout the report, the ACLU challenges claims by the Bush administration that such policies are ultimately beneficial for national security, and points to documented cases in which the administration has distorted scientific and academic inquiry for particular political purposes.

"This report makes clear the extent to which the Bush administration has hampered the pursuit of knowledge and scientific inquiry," said Tania Simoncelli, the Technology and Science Fellow with the ACLU's Technology and Liberty Project. "It has diminished America's standing as a magnet for students and intellectuals around the world, had a chilling effect on many practicing scientists, and set terrible precedents for the government control of information."

According to the ACLU, restrictions on the free flow of information have jeopardized America's current global leadership in the sciences. In addition

to policies implemented post-9/11, the report notes an ongoing erosion of environmental and public health standards, including mercury emissions, global climate change, sexual education and mountaintop removal mining.

The ACLU recommends a series of reforms including a halt to overclassification, the elimination of the "sensitive but unclassified" designation, the removal of censorship and publication restrictions, dropping unnecessary restrictions on foreign students and scholars, maintaining the fundamental research exemption and protecting science from undue political interference.

"The future security of our nation will flow from our global scientific strength and leadership," said Barry Steinhardt, Director of the ACLU's Technology and Liberty Project. "Attempts to achieve security through control and repression of information will never work, and will only undermine that leadership. The administration must reverse its misguided and damaging policies."

Science Under Siege is available at www.aclu.org/scientificfreedom.

"Our guiding principle has been James Madison's — that 'the Religion...of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man.'" — Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, concurring opinion, *McCreary County v. ACLU*, June 27, 2005.

Where is the Moral Outrage?

From a June 16 Press Release by the Council for Secular Humanism

Perhaps the evangelicals are right – perhaps America is in a moral free fall. After relentless media disclosures, Capitol Hill testimony, and the recent damning “Downing Street Memo,” a belated reversal in American public opinion may be underway. Polls say a slim majority now realizes that we who opposed the Iraq war from its inception were right: there were no weapons of mass destruction, Saddam Hussein’s noxious regime posed no global threat, and it was never linked to September 11.

So ... why did the Bush Administration invade Iraq? How disquieting that today, most Americans still respond to that question with a figurative shrug and some mumbled rhetoric about freeing the Iraqi people from Saddam or bringing democracy to the Middle East.

Those are laudable goals. But they are not the reasons why America went to war. America unleashed its devastating arsenal, killing and wounding (literally) uncounted numbers of innocent Iraqi civilians, bringing about the deaths of almost 1700 Americans and the wounding of thousands more – and all of the reasons the Bush Administration offered at the time for doing this are now known to be untrue. Even if worthwhile things occurred as a result of the campaign – something proponents will argue, and we will dispute – such results are afterthoughts at best, accidents at worst.

The moral question is, when America’s leaders chose this terrible path, did they have compelling reasons?

Testifying on May 17, 2005, before a U.S. Senate subcommittee probing the oil-for-food scandal, the rambunctious British M.P. George Galloway answered that question for the ages. Riposting Sen. Norm Coleman (R-Minn.), a war supporter, Galloway announced: “Senator, in everything I said about Iraq, I turned out to be right and you turned out to be wrong and 100,000 people paid with their lives; 1600 of them American soldiers sent to their deaths on a pack of lies; 15,000 of them wounded, many of them disabled forever on a pack of lies.”

That is the truth, and – apparently – most Americans now know it. So ... where is the moral outrage? Rep. Walter Jones (R-N.C.), a former Iraq hawk, made headlines in June when he admitted to ABC’s *This Week* that “the reason of going in for weapons of mass destruction, the ability of the Iraqis to make a nuclear weapon, that’s all been proven that it was never there.” The arch-conservative Rep. Jones, not normally a man slow to judgment, could not muster moral outrage at this. The most he would say is “we’ve done about as much as we can do,” then call for a timetable for withdrawing U.S. troops someday.

Where is the moral outrage? In Iraq, the United States of America en-

gaged in precisely the sort of behavior we condemn in our adversaries. Our leaders leapt to the ultimate human rights violation – “pre-emptive” warfare – for reasons that were either simply untrue or worse, known to be untrue. Today America stands discredited among nations, an aggressor, its moral authority shattered. Does

“... The desire for regime change was not a legal base for military action.” – *British Attorney General Peter Goldsmith, quoted in the “Downing Street memo”*

saying “we’ve done about as much as we can do” come anywhere near capturing the enormity of the needless carnage? Does it come anywhere near capturing what our beloved country has done to Iraq ... or to itself?

Where is the will to admit that we as a nation have done wrong? Where is the demand that those who led us down this twisted path be called to account?

Where is the moral outrage?

And if our nation is incapable of moral outrage even in the face of so reprehensible a provocation as this ... whither America?

Paul Kurtz, editor-in-chief

Tom Flynn, editor

David Koepsell, associate editor

DJ Grothe, editorial associate

Benjamin Radford, publications director, the Center for Inquiry

O’Connor Was Swing Vote On High Court; Replacement Must Respect Individual Freedom, Says Americans United

Justice Sandra Day O’Connor’s resignation is likely to have a dramatic effect on the future direction of the Supreme Court and her replacement must be a strong supporter of the Bill of Rights, according to Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

“Justice O’Connor was a key swing

vote on church and state and many other social issues,” said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director. “We must insist that President Bush replace her with a nominee who respects individual freedom.”

“O’Connor was a conservative,” Lynn continued, “but she saw the

complexity of church-state issues and tried to choose a course that respected the country’s religious diversity. Her resignation potentially opens the door to the greatest change in the court’s direction in modern history.”

Lynn noted that O’Connor’s support for separation of church and state was not consistent. She ruled against

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor Resigns (*continued*)

government-sponsored religion in public schools but supported tax subsidies to private religious schools through vouchers and other forms of aid. Most recently, she opposed government display of the Ten Commandments in a pair of decisions handed down earlier this week.

O'Connor was a strong supporter of free exercise of religion and opposed efforts to give the government increased power to curb religious

practices.

Lynn said Bush should avoid selecting an extreme nominee who will unleash a bitterly divisive battle over his or her confirmation.

Said Lynn, "The best way to make sure this process works is for the president to seek the advice of Senators from both parties and select a mainstream nominee who can achieve broad, bi-partisan support, just as presidents from both parties have

done in the past.

"During the 2000 election, President Bush said he admires justices like Antonin Scalia," Lynn said. "Putting another Scalia on the high court would be a mistake. It would only escalate already divisive 'culture war' issues and spark a string of decisions that could fragment Americans along religious lines."

[From a July 1 AU press release.]

Americans United Blasts Istook "Religious Freedom" Amendment Constitutional Scheme Would Undercut Individual Freedom, Invite Majority Rule On Religion

Americans United for Separation of Church and State urged Congress on June 30 to defeat a proposed constitutional amendment that would allow officially sanctioned prayer in public schools, display of religious symbols at public buildings and other governmental promotions of religion.

U.S. Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.) announced that morning at a small press gathering in front of the U.S. Supreme Court that he is introducing a so-called "Religious Freedom Amendment" that would "reverse this week's Supreme Court ruling against the Ten Commandments, and also correct a series of similar rulings that we believe are wrong."

But civil liberties advocates say Istook's proposal is an invitation to disaster.

"Istook's scheme is a direct attack on individual freedom," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director. "It would allow government officials to meddle in religion, and it would take away church-state safeguards that have given Americans more religious freedom than any people in history. Rep. Is-

took is opening the door to majority rule in religious matters, and that would be a disaster in our diverse nation. This misguided gambit would subject public school students to prayer and preaching they don't believe in. And it would give a green light to politicians all over the country to decorate our public buildings like churches.

"Istook and his Religious Right allies desperately want to do away with church-state separation," Lynn continued. "They are determined to use the government to force their set of religious beliefs on the American public. We will not let them succeed."

Istook's proposed constitutional amendment states: "To secure the people's right to acknowledge God according to the dictates of conscience: The people retain the right to pray and to recognize their religious beliefs, heritage, and traditions on public property, including schools. The United States and the States shall not establish any official religion nor require any person to join in prayer or religious activity."

Istook has attempted unsuccessfully

to push a similar amendment through Congress in the past. During the announcement of his latest measure, he claimed that the "First Amendment is being misused by intolerant people..." The lawmaker said the misuse of the First Amendment starts with the "claim that the issue is 'separation of church and state,' as though those words appear in the Constitution. They don't."

Americans United has opposed Istook's crusade, noting that it is based on false assumption that the government is hostile to religion. Public school students, says Americans United, are already allowed to voluntarily pray at school and religious voices are frequently heard in the public square.

Lynn noted that Americans United, in a coalition of other public interest groups, has fought Istook's proposed amendment before and would do so again.

"Istook's proposal is a danger to American democracy," Lynn said. "It must be stopped. We urge lawmakers to reject this bid to ruin our First Amendment rights."

"Government may not coerce a person into worshiping against her will, nor prohibit her from worshiping according to it. It may not prefer one religion over another or promote religion over nonbelief. It may not entangle itself with religion...

And government may not, by 'endorsing religion or a religious practice,' 'make adherence to religion relevant to a person's standing in the political community.' When we enforce these restrictions, we do so for the same reason that guided the Framers — respect for religion's special role in society... When the government associates one set of religious beliefs with the state and identifies non-adherents as outsiders, it encroaches upon the individual's decision about whether and how to worship... Tying secular and religious authority together poses risks to both."

— Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, concurring opinion, *McCreary County v. ACLU*, June 27, 2005.

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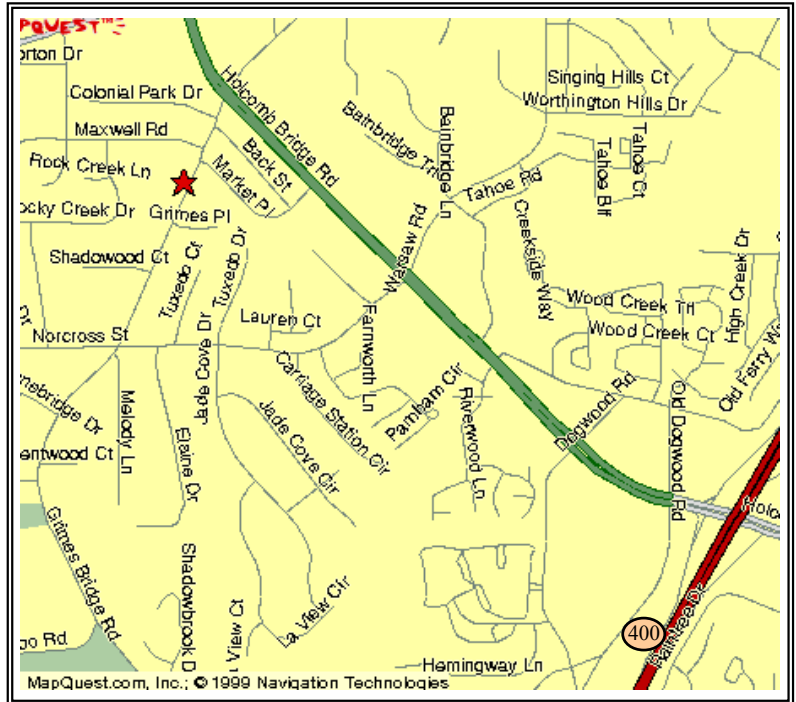
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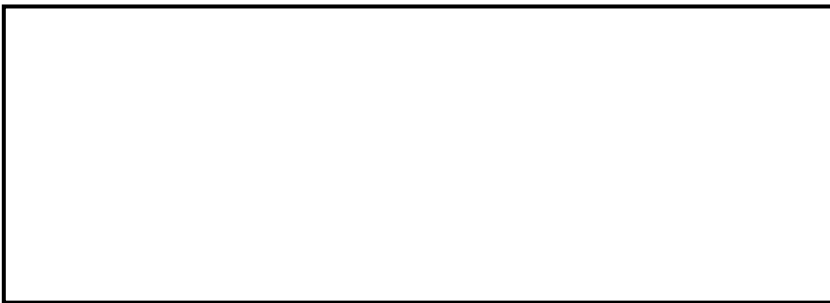
Atlanta Freethought Society

**The July Meeting:
Sunday, July 10
1:00 at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
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**This Month's Speaker:
Steve Yothment**



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