

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 11 Number 9 • September 2005

The September Meeting

The September 11 AFS meeting will feature Roderick A. Jacobs, a linguist and author, speaking on "The Language of Death."

Roderick Jacobs holds degrees from London University, Harvard, and the University of California at San Diego. His early training in linguistics was with Noam Chomsky at M.I.T. He has been teaching at GSU since 2002. He is interested in language and cognition – what language reveals about the human mind. His other professional interests include language education and second language analysis, indigenous languages of the Americas and Pacific, children's literature, literary topics, and English linguistics. His publications include books on English, including *English Syntax* (Oxford, 1995), *Studies in Language* (Xerox College Publishing) and *Syntactic Change: A Uto-Aztecan Case Study* (U. California Press, 1975). His books have been translated into German, Japanese, and Korean. In the summer of 2005 he undertook a fieldwork trip to Guatemala where he worked on Kaqchikel, a Mayan language.

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, September 16, 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 the AF Center on Sunday, September 18. In addition to discussion, we will view segments of *The Daily Show* with John Stewart.

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

AFS Meetings and Activities

Sept 11: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
Sept 14: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 7:30 PM.
Sept 16: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
Sept 18: AFS Discussion Group at AF Center, 4:00 PM.

Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on September 25 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 September Atheist Meetup

Atlanta Atheists will have a "meetup" on Sunday, September 25 at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Road, in Atlanta. The phone there is 404-255-5911.

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.

Relief for Katrina Victims

From Paul Kurtz, Chairman, Center for Inquiry (9/6/05):

The immense tragedy of Hurricane Katrina is unfolding with brutal intensity. And the need for support for its victims is apparent. I am pleased to say that SHARE, a thoroughly secular, nonreligious charity, at latest count has raised almost \$50,000.

May I thank our friends and readers for their contributions. And may we urge those of you who have not yet given, and those who have but wish to add to it, that we still welcome your donations. [AmeriCares](http://www.AmeriCares.org), a nonpartisan, public charity, has agreed to distribute the funds that we raise for the benefit of those who have suffered from Katrina. It has been designated for the "Hurricane Relief Fund." All contributions to SHARE are tax-deductible.

[SHARE \(Secular Humanist Aid and Relief Effort\)](http://www.SHARE.org) is sponsored by the Council for Secular Humanism.

To make a contribution to SHARE, go to their website at http://secure.ga3.org/05/donate_to_help_katrina_victims.

We wish to thank you again for partnering with the Center for Inquiry to make this fund drive successful!

"Leave the matter of religion to the family, the altar, the church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the church and state forever separate." (Ulysses S. Grant, 1875, *Leo Pfeffer, Church, State, and Freedom*, 1967, p. 337).



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.

Sept 11: Dr. Roderick A. Jacobs, a linguist, will speak on "The Language of Death."

Oct 9: TBD

Nov 13: TBD

Dec 11: TBD

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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Lawsuit Opposes Some Prayers at Cobb County Meetings

Five Cobb County residents represented by the American Civil Liberties Union filed a federal lawsuit on August 10 seeking to halt certain prayers that are given before county commission meetings.

The lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court in Atlanta, asks a federal judge to keep legislative prayers at county meetings free of references to specific religious denominations.

"Cobb County is a diverse county and citizens of all religions and non-religions should be welcome at government meetings," ACLU staff attorney Maggie Garrett said. "If the county chooses to begin its meetings with a legislative prayer, it should not show a bias for one particular faith over another."

The five plaintiffs include Jeffrey Selman, a plaintiff who successfully sued to get a federal court order to remove evolution disclaimers from Cobb textbooks. The lawsuit said Selman has attended about eight county meetings over the past two years and heard prayers that refer to Jesus Christ. During one commission meeting in 2003, the lawsuit said, Selman told the board he believed the sectarian references violated the U.S. Constitution and "personally offended him."

After addressing the board that day, Selman received numerous negative phone calls about his stance, the lawsuit said. This conduct made him watch the county meetings over the Internet, instead of attend them. A year ago, when he wanted to attend a Board of Zoning Appeals meeting about issues concerning his subdivision, Selman did not attend "for fear that his appearance and his well-known opposition to the sectarian prayers would negatively influence

the outcome of the board's decision," the lawsuit said.

Another plaintiff, Gary Pelphrey, is a practicing Christian who is "offended that his religion has been presented with a governmental primatur, as if it, and he, as a Christian, were somehow more American or more Cobb Countian than other religions and other denominations," the lawsuit said.

Other plaintiffs are AFS members Ed Buckner, Ried Crowe and Roberto Moraes.

The lawsuit was filed against Cobb County, Commission Chairman Sam Olens and Murray Homan, chair of Cobb's planning commission.

In a related story, a federal appeals court a few months ago upheld a federal judge's ruling that prayers at an open Town Council meeting in Great Falls, SC, were unconstitutional.

Sectarian prayers were struck down in response to a lawsuit filed by Darla K. Wynne, a follower of Wicca, a pagan religion characterized by witchcraft and attention to earthly seasons. A federal judge – and then a federal appeals court – found the Town Council's prayers invoking Christ's name unconstitutional on grounds that they advanced one religion over others.

Opponents of the ruling noted that, just before the first Congress drafted the First Amendment, it approved the appointment of two legislative chaplains and gave them ample salaries.

According to John Witte Jr., director of Emory University's Center for the Study of Law and Religion, the U.S. Supreme Court has allowed all manner of religious texts, symbols and ceremonies to stand in public squares so long as parties are not coerced to

support or participate in them. "But overtly sectarian legislative prayers – particularly if they are consistently of a certain denominational accent or offered by the same person or small group of persons – cannot pass constitutional muster," Witte said. "Legislatures that maintain an open microphone and allow all manner of religious and nonreligious speakers to offer opening words before their legislative sessions are less constitutionally vulnerable."

After U.S. District Judge Cameron Currie in Columbia found the prayers illegal, the town appealed to the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond. A three-judge panel ruled unanimously that the Town Council had "exploited" an opportunity to advance one religion.

The Great Falls Town Council may engage in nonsectarian prayers as a source of strength to believers and a time of quiet reflection for all, Judge Diana Gribbon Motz wrote. "This opportunity does not, however, provide the town council, or any legislative body, license to advance its own religious beliefs in preference to all others, as the town council did here. The First Amendment bars such official preference for one religion, and corresponding official discrimination against all others."

The town appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. In June, the high court declined to hear the case.

The town council now owes \$65,490 in legal fees to Wynne's lawyer. This is a back-breaking sum for the one-stoplight town of about 2,300. The fees amount to more than a quarter of the town's annual administrative budget.

[From articles on August 10 and August 21 by Bill Rankin in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.]

"Certainly, no power to prescribe any religious exercise, or to assume authority in religious discipline, has been delegated to the General Government... I do not believe it is in the best interests of religion to invite the civil magistrate to direct its exercises... Fasting and prayer are religious exercises; the enjoining them an act of discipline. Every religious society has a right to determine for itself the times of these exercises, and the objects proper for them, according to their own particular tenets; and this right can never be safer than in their own hands, where the Constitution has deposited it." (Thomas Jefferson, just before the end of his second term, in a letter to Samuel Miller—a Presbyterian minister—on January 23, 1808; from Willson Whitman, arranger, *Jefferson's Letters*, Eau Claire, Wisconsin: E. M. Hale and Company, ND, pp. 241-242.)

First Humanist Charter School Opens in U.S.

By Duncan Crary, Director of Communications at the Institute for Humanist Studies

School is now in session at the first humanist charter school in the United States.

"Everything that we do in our curriculum is based on the humanist philosophy," said Kelly Browning, executive director of the Carl Sagan Academy.

The Academy, which is located in east Tampa, Fla., held its first classes on Aug. 4, the starting date for public schools in the state.

Named after the late Dr. Carl Sagan, astronomer and humanist, the charter school is dedicated to encouraging free inquiry, the teaching of the scientific method, rational problem-solving and democratic principles. The Academy was founded by the Humanists of Florida Association, which obtained the school's charter from the Hillsborough County School District on Nov. 17, 2004.

Here's the twist: The Carl Sagan Academy is housed in an inner city Southern missionary Baptist Church. Initially, the Humanists of Florida had hoped to acquire a building located in the neighborhoods surrounding the University of South Florida. The group also looked into housing the school at the Museum of Science and Industry. But a variety of reasons kept those plans from materializing, Browning said.

The church, however, had space available because it had previously housed a charter school that had failed. (According to the St. Petersburg Times, 50 of the 300 charter schools which have opened in Florida since 1990 have failed.)

"Our future goal is to have our own building," Browning said. "But the fact that we can be located inside a Southern Baptist Church really demonstrates that one of the wonderful parts of humanism is respect for differences."

And how are the humanists being perceived?

In general, the primarily African-American congregation has been very

welcoming and helpful, Browning said. There is a small group that is not happy with the idea of a humanist school located in their church. "But they're warming up to us," she said. "They're coming to the understanding that we want to service this population by providing a quality education based on science."

Charter schools are publicly funded, but are not restricted by the same rules that govern public school districts. Students enrolled at charter schools do not pay tuition.

Right now, Browning said there is an abundance of charter schools operated by religious groups.

"By law, they should be secular," she said. "But you and I both know that if (a school is) being run by a church, there's always going to be that overriding message."

Just because humanism is a secular philosophy, that doesn't mean the teachers at the Carl Sagan Academy can proselytize atheism, though.

Already Browning said she has fielded calls from parents concerned "that you're all a bunch of atheists." That may be true. But Browning said the school is prohibited from proselytizing atheism, just as religiously operated charter schools are prohibited from proselytizing theism.

The school's academic philosophy does not attempt to "convert" students to nonbelief. Instead it strives to equip students with the means to think for themselves about the world.

"It's more of a pedagogical approach," said Virginia Kohl Lieberman, curriculum director. "As a former science teacher, I took great pains to be sure that we had texts that do not suggest anything such as 'intelligent design'."

In creating the curriculum, Lieberman said the Academy followed the models of Prof. John Dewey of the Chicago School and Carl Rogers, humanist psychologist and 1964 Humanist of the Year. The emphasis is on student centered learning.

Apparently that approach is working. Speaking to the St. Petersburg Times, Seventh-grader DeAnna Revvere said: "Most of the teachers at my old school, when they teach you stuff you've got one chance to get it right...This school, you can get individual attention for help."

There are 55 students enrolled at Carl Sagan Academy, with two sections of 6th Grade and one section of 7th Grade. Next year, the school will open its first 8th Grade class.

Fifty-three students are African-American. Two students are Latino. Browning said one goal for the next year is to recruit a more culturally diverse student population. Another future goal is to reach full enrollment at 198 students.

Five teachers – two full-time and three part-time – make up the Carl Sagan Academy faculty. Among the faculty, one is a dedicated science teacher, one is a dedicated language arts teacher and one is a dedicated math teacher – meaning they have a specialized background in their subject area.

"It's extremely exciting. The school looks fabulous," said Jennifer Hancock, executive director of the Humanists of Florida Association. "We're starting to look towards what lessons we have learned. What went right and what went wrong with the opening. How do we make it better?"

In Florida, organizations can run up to 15 charter schools.

"We do want to open 15 around the state," Hancock said. "This is a really good start."

[The Carl Sagan Academy charter application, submitted by the Humanists of Florida Association, was made possible through a \$7,500 grant from the Institute for Humanist Studies Grant Fund. The IHS Grant Fund awards more than \$100,000 annually to humanist organizations throughout the world.]

[From the August 31 issue of *Humanist Network News*.]

Kentucky County Rejects Religious Display at Courthouse

Magistrates in Marion, Ky, have reversed a mid-July decision to allow a local ministerial group to erect a Ten Commandments monument on the courthouse lawn.

The reversal on September 1 came in the wake of a recent inquiry by the Kentucky chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union regarding the July vote and the county's policy for placement of monuments on public property.

The ACLU recently won a U.S. Supreme Court decision against the display of the Ten Commandments in the McCreary County, Ky., courthouse, successfully arguing it violated the Constitution's First Amendment protection against government establishment of religion.

Crittenden County Attorney Alan Stout advised the magistrates the monument was "clearly against the Supreme Court's decision" and warned he did not feel the county could win a court challenge that could cost thousands of dollars in legal fees. The county would have no insurance coverage and would have to bear its

own costs, he said.

Judge-Executive Fred Brown told monument supporters he felt it would be better displayed on a vacant corner lot at the county seat town's main intersection.

He suggested the lot could be purchased and landscaped and the monument erected for \$100,000. He proposed the county's 70 or so churches, along with interested individuals, band together to buy it and place it there.

He suggested the churches and individuals commit \$100 a year for 10 years to pay for the property.

"It's easy to say we should fight the ACLU," Brown said, "but if the fiscal court spends big money defending a lawsuit, I think it would pretty much be malfeasance if we indebted the county on something we've been advised not to do."

Brown said fiscal court members had discussed deeding a part of the courthouse property to the group for the display or possibly rewording the commandments "so they weren't exactly how God gave them to Moses"

but felt the county would still have liability.

The Rev. Tony Alexander, who had asked the magistrates for permission to place the monument on the courthouse lawn and has been raising money for a monument, said it would be placed on private property.

"They're going up," he said. "The Ten Commandments are going up. They're going to go up; they're going to be lit; and they're going to look nice. The ACLU and the devil may have won the battle, but the Christians have won the war."

But the Rev. Frank McCallam, a former president of the county's ministerial association, suggested other ways supporters could demonstrate their commitment to their religious beliefs.

He proposed spending the money instead to provide food and clothing for needy people in the community.

"I don't believe the ACLU would stop us from giving away food and clothing," he said.

[From a September 5 story by John Lucas in the *Courier and Press News*.]

Pat Robertson calls for Assassination of Hugo Chavez

Television preacher Pat Robertson's call for the killing of a foreign leader is chilling, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

During his "700 Club" broadcast on Aug. 22, Robertson lit into President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela as an American enemy that needed to be done away with.

"You know, I don't know about this doctrine of assassination, but if he [Chavez] thinks we're trying to assassinate him, I think that we really ought to go ahead and do it," Robertson told his audience. "It's a whole lot cheaper than starting a war. We have the ability to take him out, and I think the time has come that we exercise that ability."

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United, said

Robertson's call for violence should be condemned by American officials.

"It is deplorable for a Christian preacher to go before his vast audience and urge the American government to murder a foreign leader," Lynn said. "His bloodthirsty commentary is over the top, even by Pat's rather elastic standard."

"This is just the kind of religious fanaticism that the world does not need more of," Lynn said. "President Bush should immediately disavow Robertson and his extremist rhetoric."

Lynn noted that Robertson has a long history of outrageous commentary, including shrill attacks on Islam. Most recently, Pat has been urging his "700 Club" audience to pray for more vacancies on the U.S. Supreme Court so that current justices can be replaced by President Bush with "righteous"

judges.

Matt Cherry, executive director of the Institute for Humanist Studies, commented that "Pat Robertson's remarks are yet another troubling example of religious extremism used to incite violence. Yet, his outrageous views are often overlooked because of his political influence. If a Muslim cleric said this about a foreign leader, Americans would call to have him locked up. But when Pat Robertson says it, we can be sure that he will still be welcome in the corridors of power."

Three days after the statement, Robertson denied he said that Chavez should be killed, but then apologized, saying "Is it right to call for assassination? No, and I apologize for that statement. I spoke in frustration that we should accommodate the man who thinks the U.S. is out to kill him."

Survey Shows Christian Interpretation of New Orleans Disaster

The Universist Movement is raising concern with the overwhelming opinion of Christian leaders on the destruction of New Orleans. A variety of mainstream Christian voices ranging from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary to the Archdiocese of New Orleans are united in the opinion that Hurricane Katrina was the will of God. Russell Moore, Dean of Southern Seminary, interprets the Hurricane as part of God's curse of Eden and cites ominous words from Revelations that declare, "nothing unclean will ever enter [Heaven]." "The hope," Moore writes, "is for Biloxi, Miss., and all of the created universe, to be redeemed and restored in Christ. There will come a day when the curse is reversed, and the Gulf Coast along with the entire cosmos fully reflects the glory of a resurrected Messiah." Archbishop Alfred C. Hughes has said, "I'm convinced that God is going to purify us through this."

The Universist Movement has conducted a wide-ranging survey of sermons from Sunday September 4, 2005. The survey reveals a pervasive consensus of opinion across the breadth of Christendom. A few examples among thousands of sermons follow:

J. Edward Norton, of Independent Presbyterian Church, Memphis, Tenn., quoted Charles Spurgeon, who said, "Happy storm that wrecks us on such a rock as this. Oh blessed Hurricane that drives the soul to God and God alone.... The Lord will magnify his might in the midst of your distress."

Mark Chanski, of Reformed Baptist Church, Holland, Mich., said, "I believe that there is a message from God brought to light in every dark providence." This disaster represents "the blast of God's judgment against sin." Chanski cited the Southern Decadence Festival as an example of New Orleans' sin. "The trumpets of God that are sounded throughout history are warning blasts, birth pangs about the arrival of the final ultimate birth and letting out of the wrath of God. Birth pangs are present here."

Ian Brown, of Londonderry Free Presbyterian Church, Northern Ireland, said, "If Hurricane Katrina was a contest between the power of God and the power of man, there has only been one winner." God punished the pollution of man, Brown preached. "It is an accepted fact that New Orleans was the most decadent large city in America. Politicians often referred to it as a banana republic, a city that thrived on corruption. It held several events each year celebrating undiluted sensual pleasure. People traveled in from far and wide to participate in the debauchery and the festivals that were held there. They celebrated the worst in human nature, and numbing ordinary sensibilities."

Chris Hodges, Church of the Highlands, Birmingham, Ala., said, "If there's ever been a city that's needed to be swept clean of the sin and the wickedness it's New Orleans, and it's those gambling casinos along the gulf coast. And I'll tell ya, I think there's a shakin' goin' on that God's gonna use to bring us to a new day. I'm praying for revival, and I'm encouraging you the church - lift up your heads, don't be discouraged, this is our finest hour. This is what Christians do best."

Steve Wilkins, of Auburn Avenue Presbyterian Church, Monroe, LA, said, "God is the ruler of the storm." He cited Psalm 127:25: "He commands and raises the stormy wind which lifts up the waves of the sea." "It's only when you've got a problem, it's only when God sends trouble, that you learn that you need to pray to Him," Wilkins said.

Alfred C. Hughes, Archbishop, Archdiocese of New Orleans, said, "I'm convinced that God is going to purify us through this."

James E. Adams, of Cornerstone Church, Mesa, Ariz., said, "The voice of the Lord, seven times the voice of the Lord, echoes down through this storm, and God's power is made known right before us here."

Bob Vincent, of Grace Presbyterian Church, Alexandria, LA, said, "If we will not be enlightened by the light of

Christ, we will be consumed by the chaos of pagan darkness... No aspect of our nature has escaped the influence of sin."

Alan Dunn, of Grace Covenant Baptist Church, Flemington, New Jersey, said, "As we near the time of the second coming, we are to anticipate that there will be an increase of these dynamics, and we'll see many people believing in false religion - so much so, that Jesus asks the question in Luke 18:8: 'When the son of man comes, will he find Faith on the earth?'"

A.T. Stewart, of Westside Baptist Church, Mableton, Georgia, said, "As wicked as New Orleans is, I don't think it's any more wicked than Atlanta, New York, or San Francisco. But what I do believe, is that this destruction is God's call on this nation to repent." "Do we think we can continue to flaunt our sins before God and murder over a million unborn children every year? And flaunt immorality and sinfulness, and pornography all over the Internet, do we think we can continue to do this and God's just going to weep and look the other way?"

Tim Bourgeois, of Tree of Life Christian Church, Canoga Park, Cal., said, "When there are storm winds, they don't just meet because a low pressure area happens to meet with a high pressure area in the upper atmosphere and suddenly this wind just randomly, naturally occurs, and waters randomly fall along with it. This is God's word at work in the midst of his creation." Bourgeois preached that the Hurricane was God's judgment, and that those still alive have been spared by God's mercy, and Christians need to take this opportunity to convert them.

David Harrell, of Calvary Bible Church, Joelton, Tenn., said, "America flaunts her sin in the face of a holy God. Ours is a culture of religious hypocrisy. Ours is a culture in defiance of God's holy law. There is a disbelief in our society that God will ever judge, and certainly there is the utter

Church Survey...

rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ and his word. Like those who refused to heed the warning to flee the wrath of the hurricane, I fear that millions continue to turn a deaf ear to creatures who beg them to repent, to flee from the wrath to come, the wrath of holy God, an eternal wrath, that will utterly eclipse what we saw with Katrina."

The survey did uncover several sermons insisting God has nothing to do with the weather. However, the rare laissez-faire theologians are no match for the overwhelming consensus of the Christian community and

the Bible itself. There is a point at which liberal Christians must recognize they are not Christian at all – and that's a good thing. Universists argue that the problem is not God's control of the weather, but with a religion that lends itself so easily to such interpretation. This is 2005, but Christianity's variety of denominations were unified this week in thought circa 1205.

New Orleans was one of the world's great cities. It had problems that were the proper province of public policy and social science to address, like any city. But the condem-

nation of New Orleans across the Christian community highlights the distrust for human creativity, culture and passion that comes from giving so much honor and respect to a select few ancient texts. The world has moved on since the dawn of Christianity and its heights in the Dark Ages. The Christian response to the loss of New Orleans represents the failure of an outdated system of thought to understand the value and meaning of one of the modern world's most precious jewels.

[From a Sept 6 article by Ford Vox at <http://universist.org/neworleans.htm>.]

AFS Members In Print

Steve was quoted in an August 19 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article on the "Moment of Silence" declared by Governor Perdue to pay tribute to our troops.

In the article below, AFS President Steve Yothment was one of 11 people (well, one of them was a dog!) featured in the lead article of the August 24 *Creative Loafing* magazine. The title of the tongue-in-cheek article was "Atlanta's 11 Least Influential People." Steve still wants to know if he was ranked higher or lower than Fred, a mixed-breed dog destined for euthanasia at Fulton County Animal Services.

Steve Yothment, president of the Atlanta Freethought Society, said taking a moment to reflect on the cost of war "is a good thing." He said it will give people an opportunity to not only contemplate what they can do to support the troops but also "the path of the U.S. in its war in Iraq."

Yothment said he appreciates [Gov.] Perdue calling for the "moment of silence" rather than a "moment of prayer."

"I feel strongly that the government should not be telling people when or if to pray," Yothment said. "I'm a strong advocate for separation of government and religion."

Steve Yothment

Fighting God is a losing battle, engineer finds

The Atlanta Freethought Society has about 120 members. The society's president, Steve Yothment, figures a good membership recruitment campaign could push that number up to about 200.

"The idea of the Atlanta Freethought Society is to educate ourselves and others of the advantages of living life free from religion," Yothment says.

The group Youthment's challenging, Georgia's Christians, number roughly 6.9 million.

Talk about an uphill battle.

President Bush said two weeks ago that the theory of intelligent design, which states that scientific evidence supports the Bible's account of the creation of the earth and life, needs to be taught in science classes. Gov. Sonny Perdue

has floated a bill that would give taxpayer money to churches. And the Boy Scouts of America, a so-called private religious group, recently held its annual jamboree on federal property and received \$7 million from the feds last year.

Yothment and his fellow free-thinkers are at the center of these firestorms. "A lot of our efforts are through letters to the editor," he says. "Sometimes we'll do demonstrations. But that's not so common, actually. Usually, it's letters to the editor."

Even though his success is about as likely as Gov. Perdue sharing a joint with Adam Frisch, Yothment is comforted by the perception that he's got something, if not God, backing him.

"We have reality on our side," he claims.

— MICHAEL WALL

Jack McKinney's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on August 13, 2005.

Naive or just stupid?

The Church of England will permit gay clergy to enter into a civil partnership if given "assurances that they will abstain from sex" ("Anglicans limit civil partnerships," Faith & Values, Aug. 6). I'm trying to decide whether the Church of England (Episcopalian in America) is being naive or stupid in expecting obedience to such a restriction. I can't understand how people allow religious institutions such as this to rule their lives.

JACK MCKINNEY
Kennesaw

August Board Meeting Minutes

Present: Yothment (President), Judy Thompson (VPI), Freya Harris (VPE), Ed Buckner (Treasurer), Diane Buckner, Bill Burton, Lew Southern, Joel Kollin, Jack McKinney, Jim Middleton

Date/Time: August 21, 2005, 2:00 PM

The minutes of the July Board meeting were approved without objection.

Treasurer's Report (Ed Buckner): Currently there is about \$4,000 in the checking account and \$1,700 in the PayPal account. Fulton County property-tax bills will be due in the near future on the two office suites. Some of our loan creditors have agreed to accept payments on interest and to forego payments on loan principal until our financial position improves in the better collection months of the fall.

Treasury: Ed Buckner proposed that AFS produce a new fundraising letter. The board unanimously agreed.

Speakers: Judy Thompson reported that the September AFS meeting will feature a talk by Dr. Roderick A. Jacobs, an author and educator in the fields of transformational and generative grammar and linguistics and the father of an AFS member. Dr. Jacobs is the former chair of the Department of English as a Second Language at the University of Hawaii and now lives in Decatur. His talk will be on the subject of dreams and their symbolism.

Telephone info line: Steve agreed to update the telephone info line to include AFS's web address, meeting time, and location.

Public Advertising: Board members expressed the need for better exposure in the media. Freya will contact Creative Loaf-

ing. Steve will contact Air America (1690 AM radio).

Maintenance: Lew Southern reported that several ceiling tiles have been replaced. Some painting of the interior walls in Suite 500 will be done this Saturday.

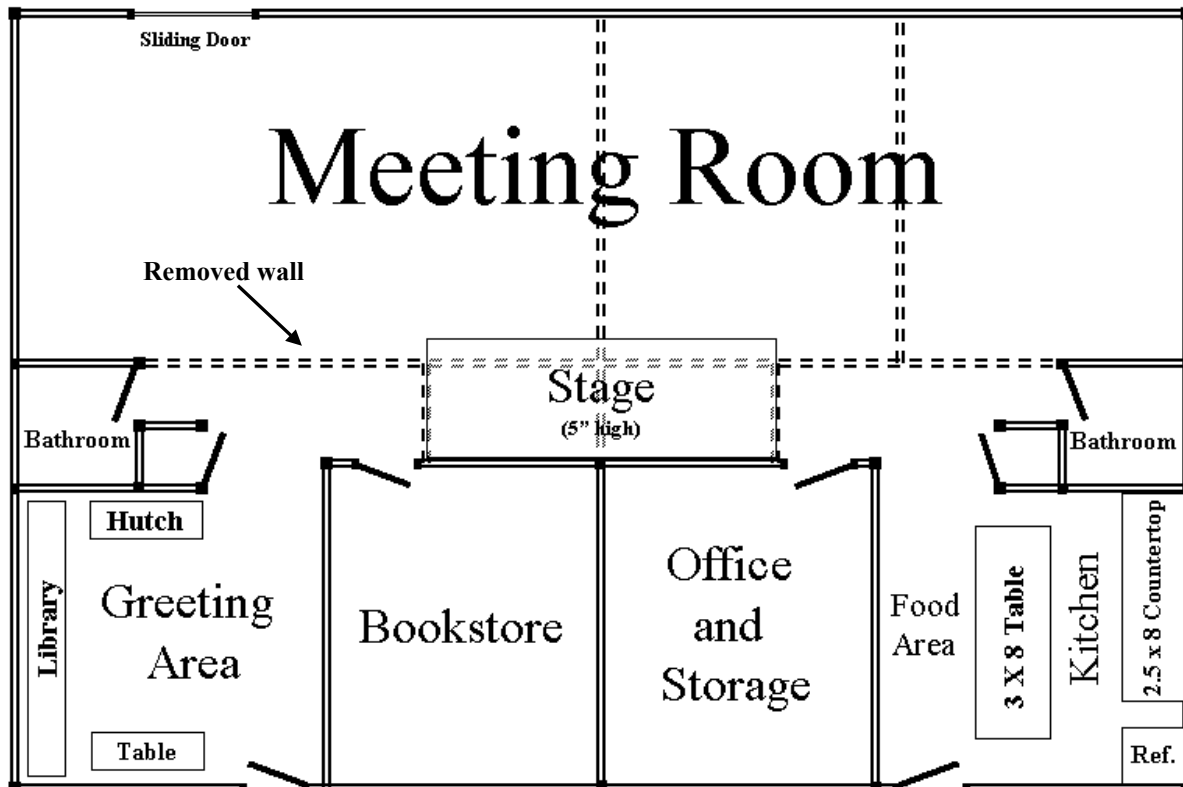
Video Camera: Board members discussed whether AFS should purchase a video camera to record our public meetings; Jim and Joel volunteered to explore the camera market.

Humanists of Georgia: Steve reported that records show that the Humanists of Georgia (HGA) made a donation to AFS of \$4,000 in March 2001. HGA meets (for free) almost every 4th Sunday of the month at the AF Center. In the December 2000 Board meeting, a board member proposed HGA rent of \$50 per meeting. Steve noted that if rent was charged since December 2000, the amount AFS would have received up to now would be about \$2400, which is still less than the donation amount.

Suite 400 Rental and Future Expansion of AFS Center: AFS has made fundraising efforts in the past aimed at securing an adequate financial position that would allow us to terminate the rental of Suite 400 and expand the meeting room. Currently, the monthly rental from Suite 400 is \$750. The Board decided unanimously to postpone the decision on the expansion until the September Board meeting. In the meantime, Steve agreed to draft a plan for the expansion, which will involve removal of one or more non-bearing walls and other structural changes.

Next Meeting: Due to travel plans of some AFS officers in mid-September, the board unanimously agreed to meet in September at a special time and date: Wednesday evening, September 14th, at 7:30 p.m.

Here is one of the proposed building layout changes that will be discussed at the September 14 AFS Board Meeting:



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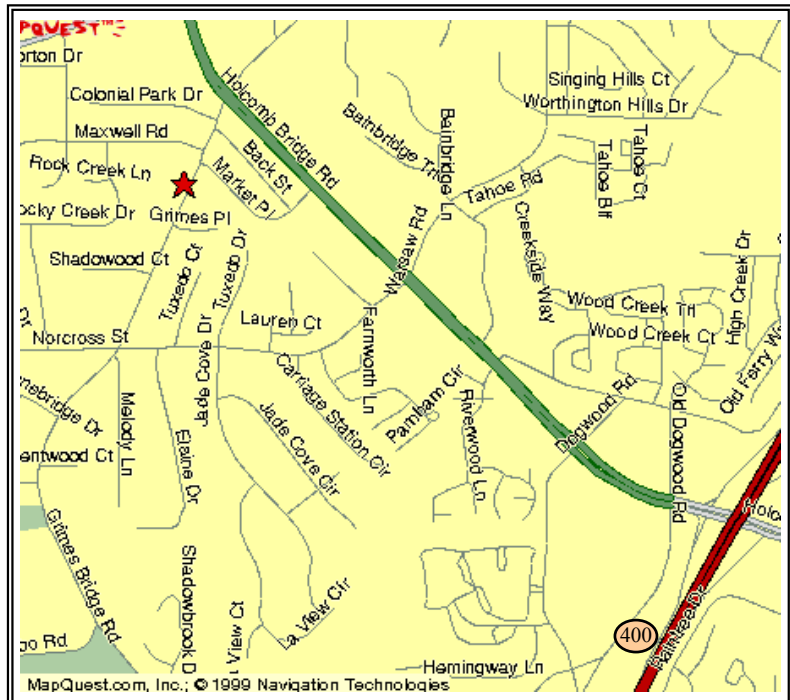
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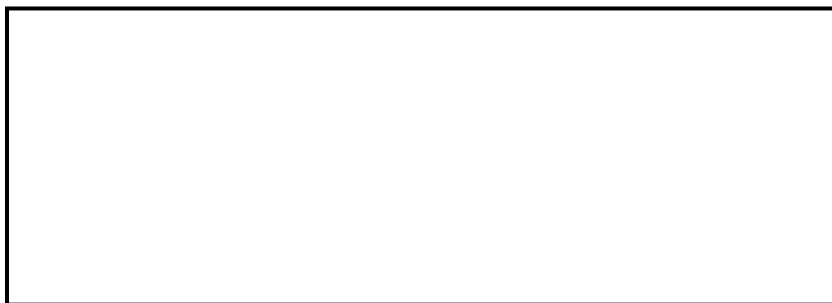


**The September Meeting:
Sunday, September 11
1:00 at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Roderick A. Jacobs**



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