

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 11 Number 10 • October 2005

The October Meeting

The October 9 AFS meeting will feature AFS Treasurer **Ed Buckner**, speaking on "Secular Humanist Morality."

Ed is a former AFS president, and former Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism. He is now the CSH Southern Director, and Secretary of the Georgia chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church & State.

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.

Nominations at October Meeting

The AFS bylaws require nomination of officers and board members for each year at the October meeting. Please think about whom you would like to nominate. (Current officers and board members are listed on page 2.)

Officers have 1-year terms; board members have 2-year terms. Bill Burton, Jack McKinney and Jim Middleton will continue their 2-year terms into next year.

AFS Activities

The next **AFS Social** will be at **Las Margaritas Restaurant**, 1842 Cheshire Bridge Road (Atlanta) on Friday, October 14, 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, October 16. 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.

Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on October 23 at 12:30 PM. Their guest speaker will be Ed Buckner.

AFS Meetings and Activities

- Oct 9: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
- Oct 14: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
- Oct 16: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 2:00 PM.
- Oct 16: AFS Discussion Group at AF Center, 4:00 PM.

Fellowship of Reason Meeting

The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 12:30 PM at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see www.fellowshipofreason.com.

The October Atheist Meetup

Atlanta Atheists will have a "meetup" on Sunday, October 23 at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Road, in Atlanta. The phone there is 404-255-5911.

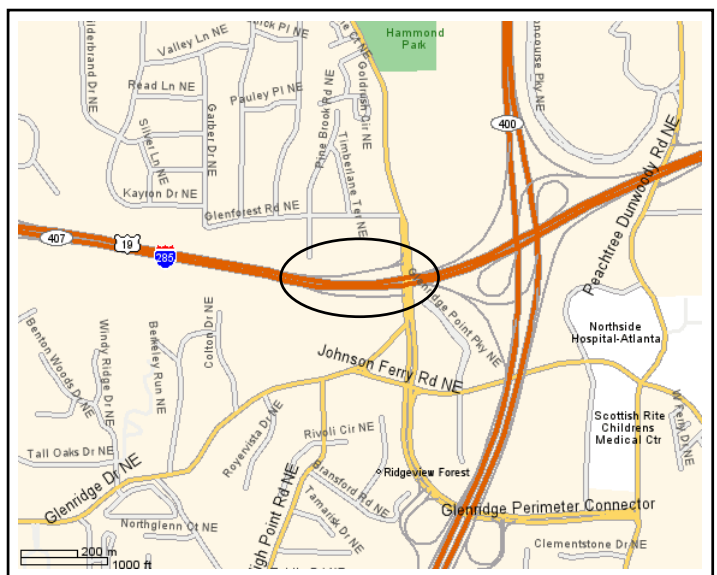
SOS Meets at AF Center

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.

Highway Cleanup is This Saturday

The Atlanta Freethought Society will participate in its fourth **Adopt-A-Highway cleanup** on Saturday, October 8, at 10:00 AM. 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 and south side of I-285.

Please park along the north ramp. We will have drinks, safety vests and trash bags for volunteers. If you haven't helped out yet, please consider it now. At the last cleanup we had 9 volunteers and it took only 1 hour.



Congratulations to **Jeffrey Selman**, who was recently elected President of the Georgia chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.



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.

Oct 9: AFS treasurer Ed Buckner will speak on "Secular Humanist Morality."

Nov 13: GSU law professor Eric Segall will speak on constitutional law.

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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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.

Visit our World Wide Web site at
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Religious Freedom Faces Attack From Inside

By Jeffrey Selman

America's founding fathers were wise to guarantee freedom of religion in our Constitution's First Amendment. However, we cannot, today, take this guarantee for granted. History has shown that government control of religion leads to disaster. Our freedoms, often without any public awareness, are being chipped away everyday. That is why I have joined other Cobb County residents to challenge the attempt by government officials to use public meetings to promote one religious belief over others.

As a second generation Jewish American whose grandparents fled from repressive societies, I was raised, along with most Americans, to cherish liberty and to understand that we have a duty to protect the fundamental freedoms set forth in the Constitution. Forever performing that duty, I was surprised to learn, at a young age, that it is not always external forces that try to take away our freedoms.

As a child growing up, I witnessed the results of being treated like an outsider because of my family's religion. I saw my brave World War II veteran uncles excluded, time and time again, from the promises for which they had fought. Instead of finding work as military-trained airplane mechanics, they found blatant anti-Semitism. No matter what they did, they could not get any satisfaction or assistance from their government. They were Jews, and therefore they

were outsiders. Through inaction, the government essentially said to these returning veterans, "You are not one of us and do not deserve the same respect or protections as equal citizens."

While times have changed and blatant discrimination is less common, my family's experience still sticks deeply in my mind. It is unconscionable when government takes any action that alienates or relegates any of its citizenry to feel less than a full participant.

While Cobb County officials regularly invite members of the religious community to open government meetings with prayer, it in no way shows neutrality toward the various beliefs practiced in our land. The majority of the prayers are given by Christian clergy, and are made in the name of Jesus Christ.

Each time I go to a government meeting, it is clear that I, as a non-Christian, am not a full part of the political process. The actions of Cobb County leaders send a message that the government will accommodate not the differing beliefs of the people, but the specific faith of the majority of the citizenry.

This is very wrong.

All religions, all beliefs, all dissensions from those beliefs, must be viewed as equal. Religious freedom is promoted when the government stays out of religion. This is a core tenet of the American constitutional tradition

that we as citizens strive to protect and to advance.

Our government, from its very founding, was purposefully designed to be neutral toward matters of religious opinion. Even before the Bill of Rights was ratified, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington wrote to Baptist and Jewish congregations to assure both faiths that the protecting essence of "Separation of Church and State" was foremost in the founders' minds and there would not be any government intervention into the belief rights of citizens.

We stand on dangerous ground when the government decides to favor one religious belief over others. In a free society, the government should not view a Christian's faith as any more valid than that of a Jew, or a Hindu's beliefs any more correct than a Muslim's.

Cobb County is a diverse county and citizens of all religions and non-religion should be welcome at government meetings.

(Jeffrey Selman lives in Cobb County Georgia. He is a husband, father, programming consultant and patriot. He, along with four fellow Cobb parents, successfully sued to defend 'the Separation of Church and State,' and valid science education against the recent evolution disclaimer placed in science textbooks.)

[Published on September 4 in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution.*]

Intelligent Design Lawsuit Begins in Dover, PA

The lawsuit over whether intelligent design should be taught in schools alongside evolution began in federal court on September 27 with defendants' attorneys calling it a scientific theory and opponents saying it was an effort to put God in the classroom.

In the first such legal battle, lawyers sparred during opening arguments at Federal District Court in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, over whether the teaching of intelligent design—an alterna-

tive to evolution that involves a God-like creator—violates the U.S. Constitution.

The trial pits Christian conservatives against teachers and scientists in what is seen as the biggest test of the issue since the late 1980s.

"Intelligent design isn't science. It's old theology," said Eric Rothschild, lawyer for 11 parents who sued the Dover school district of central Pennsylvania over including intelligent design in its ninth-grade biology curriculum.

riculum.

"It's a clever tactical repackaging of creationism," he said, telling a packed courtroom that the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed teaching creationism—the belief that God created the world as told in Genesis—in public schools in 1987.

Pat Gillen, a lawyer for the Dover school district, said intelligent design is anchored in science and is not creationism in disguise. He also rejected the accusation that it was unconstitu-

tional to teach the theory to students.

"They (the Dover students) are merely made aware of the existence of another theory," Gillen said, adding that teaching intelligent design "helps students grasp the controversy that surrounds science."

Intelligent design says nature is so complex it must have been the work of a God-like creator and not natural selection, as argued by Charles Darwin in his 1859 *Theory of Evolution*.

Dover teachers are obliged to introduce their students to intelligent design and explain it is an alternative to evolution, but they do not delve into it in depth.

The courtroom drama is reminiscent of the famous Scopes Monkey trial, when lawyers squared off in a courthouse in Dayton, Tennessee, in 1925.

The school board says there are "gaps" in evolution, which it emphasizes is a theory, not established fact, and that students have a right to consider other views on the origins of life.

In their camp is President George W. Bush, who has said schools should teach evolution and intelligent design.

Kenneth Miller, a Brown University professor of biology, testified as a witness for the parents. He told the court

that teaching intelligent design does "a great disservice" to students because it has been discredited by top scientific groups such as the National Academy of Sciences and the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Teaching the theory leads students to believe that "science isn't to be relied upon," Miller said, adding that it forces them to make a false choice between God and science.

Miller told the court he is a practicing Roman Catholic who has no trouble reconciling his religious faith with his scientific acceptance of evolution. But he said the teaching could prompt students to equate intelligent design with God and science with atheism.

"It brings religious conflict into every science class in Dover High," he said.

At least 31 states are taking steps to teach alternatives to evolution. A CBS poll last November found 65 percent of Americans favor teaching creationism with evolution while 37 percent want creationism taught instead of evolution, and that 55 percent believe God created humans in their present form.

In testimony on the second day of the trial, a former teacher said that science teachers at the high school in

Dover repeatedly resisted the school board's efforts to force them to teach creationism on equal footing with evolution in biology class.

The conflict in Dover grew so heated that in public meetings board members called opponents "atheists," threatened to fire the science teachers and invoked Jesus' crucifixion as a reason to change the curriculum.

"We would repeatedly tell them, 'We're not going to balance evolution with creationism. It's an inappropriate request,'" said Bryan Rehm, who once taught physics in Dover and is one of 11 plaintiffs in the suit.

The board ultimately abandoned the equal time idea, stopped using the term "creationism," and instead required that ninth graders listen to a brief statement encouraging them to learn about intelligent design as an alternative to evolution.

The board wanted the science teachers to use a textbook that promotes intelligent design, "Of Pandas and People," but the teachers balked at that too, Mr. Rehm said.

[From a September 27 Reuters News Service article by Jon Hurdle and a September 30 *York Dispatch* article by Christina Kauffman.]

Robertson Blames Hurricane on Choice of Ellen Degeneres to Host Emmys

Lesbian is New Orleans native

Pat Robertson on September 11 said that Hurricane Katrina was God's way of expressing his anger at the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences for its selection of Ellen Degeneres to host this year's Emmy Awards. "By choosing an avowed lesbian for this national event, these Hollywood elites have clearly invited God's wrath," Robertson said on *The 700 Club*. "Is it any surprise that the Almighty chose to strike at Miss Degeneres' hometown?"

Robertson also noted that the last time Degeneres hosted the Emmys, in 2001, the September 11 terrorism attacks took place shortly before the ceremony.

"This is the second time in a row

that God has invoked a disaster shortly before lesbian Ellen Degeneres hosted the Emmy Awards," Robertson explained to his approximately one million viewers. "America is waiting for her to apologize for the death and destruction that her sexual deviance has brought onto this great nation."

Robertson added that other tragedies of the past several years can be linked to Degeneres' growing national prominence. September, 2003, for example, is both the month that her talk show debuted and when insurgents first gained a foothold in Iraq following the successful March invasion. "Now we know why things took a turn for the worse," he explained.

In order to avoid further tragedy, Robertson called not only for the Television Academy to find a new heterosexual host, but to bar all homosexuals and bisexuals from taking part in the ceremony.

He said employees at the Christian Broadcasting Network had put together a list of 283 nominees, presenters, and invited guests at the Emmys known to be of sexually deviant persuasions.

"God already allows one awards show to promote the homosexual agenda," Robertson declared. "But clearly He will not tolerate such sinful behavior to spread beyond the Tonys."

[From a September 13 article at DatelineHollywood.com.]

Former Judge Roy Moore to Run for Governor

Ousted Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore announced his candidacy for governor on October 3, likely setting up a showdown with fellow Republican Gov. Bob Riley and turning Moore's Ten Commandments fight into a campaign issue.

Moore made the announcement in Gadsden, AL, where he first gained national recognition as a circuit judge fighting to keep a homemade wooden plaque of the Ten Commandments displayed in his courtroom.

The 58-year-old Moore, who lost his chief justice job two years ago after placing a granite Ten Commandments marker in the state's judicial building, said he has no plans to renew that fight if elected.

"But I'll tell you what I will do," he said. "I will defend the right of every citizen of this state—including judges, coaches, teachers, city, county and state officials—to acknowledge God as the sovereign source of law, liberty and government."

Baptist chaplain Len Gavin of Bessemer, a former executive director of the Alabama Republican Party and a Moore supporter, said the GOP fight will be largely between the religious right backing Moore and business interests backing Riley.

"The big check writers and the country club Republicans are not going to vote for (Moore), but the Wal-Mart Republicans will. And they've elected every Republican who has ever been elected in Alabama," Gavin said.

Riley is planning a 61st birthday celebration Saturday in Birmingham, where supporters expect him to kick off his campaign for re-election. Two Democrats, Lt. Gov. Lucy Baxley and former Gov. Don Siegelman, are already running. The Republican and Democratic primaries are June 6.

In 2000, Alabama voters elected Moore as chief justice of the state Supreme Court and the next summer he had a 5,300-pound granite monument of the Ten Commandments installed in the rotunda of the state judicial

building. A federal judge ordered Moore to remove the monument from the site, but Moore refused.

With the state facing possible financial penalties, the associate justices of the Supreme Court had the monument moved to a storage site out of public view. And in November 2003, a state judicial court kicked Moore out of office for ignoring the federal court order.

Moore took appeals all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, but lost at every level.

Since then, he has traveled the country, speaking to church and conservative groups and promoting his book about the controversy, "So Help Me God."

To those who have criticized him as a one-issue candidate, Moore said his one issue is summed up by his campaign theme: "Return Alabama to the people."

In a theatrical campaign kickoff, he signed a giant copy of his campaign platform that called for: limiting legislators to two terms; stopping legislators from holding two state jobs, such as teachers who also are lawmakers; reducing the influence of teacher lobbyists Paul Hubbert and Joe Reed; ending annual tax reappraisals of property; imposing new fines and penalties on businesses that employ illegal aliens; and opposing the expansion of gambling.

Jeff Emerson, Riley's spokesman, said much of Moore's platform is similar to Riley's in the 2002 campaign.

"And Gov. Riley has worked ever since then to implement it," Emerson said in a brief statement.

Joe Turnham, chairman of the Alabama Democratic Party, said it was significant that Moore did not talk about economic development or job creation, how he would handle the National Guard in an emergency or how he would fund Medicaid and prisons.

"When you run for governor, you have to be serious about tackling

problems," Turnham said.

"It will be an interesting test for the heart and soul of the Alabama Republican Party, and the Democratic Party stands ready to welcome those disenfranchised by an over-rigorous Republican primary," he said.

William Stewart, a political scientist at the University of Alabama who attended Moore's announcement as an observer, said the way he excited the crowd of more than 300 people was reminiscent of the way former four-term Gov. George C. Wallace handled crowds in the 1960s.

"His speaking ability is much better than the other three running for governor. He's a speaker out of the old school," Stewart said.

Stewart said it was important for Moore to lay out a platform and show he's interested in more than the Ten Commandments. Like Gavin, he expects Moore to appeal to the conservative Christians in the Republican Party, but he said Riley will pull strong support from the party's business wing, as he did in his 2002 election.

In his campaign kickoff, he did not mention Riley by name, but did criticize the governor's unsuccessful attempt to get \$1.2 billion in new taxes approved and his administration's switch to annual property appraisals, which increases property taxes quicker than Alabama's old system of appraising property every four years.

In Moore's speech, he encouraged others who believe in his campaign theme to run for public office next year. Former Covington County Circuit Judge Jerry Stokes, who ran unsuccessfully for the Alabama Supreme Court last year as a Moore ally, said he's considering running again in 2006 and expects others to run.

"Judge Moore is right. We've got to have more than a quarterback. We need lineman and blockers," Stokes said.

[From an October 3 AP article by Phillip Rawls.]

Judge: No Pledge in Schools

A federal judge ruled on September 14 that reciting the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools is unconstitutional.

In granting legal standing to two families represented by an atheist who lost his previous battle before the U.S. Supreme Court, Judge Lawrence Karlton ruled that the pledge's reference to one nation "under God" violates school children's right to be "free from a coercive requirement to affirm God."

Feelings are mixed among school officials about what the latest ruling means for students and the lessons they learn in the classroom. Some showed support for the decision, while others declared that schools will not be silenced until forced by law to do so.

In making the decision, Judge Karlton said he was bound by precedent of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which in 2002 ruled in favor of Sacramento atheist Michael Newdow that the pledge is unconstitutional when recited in public schools.

The Supreme Court dismissed the case last year, saying Newdow lacked standing because he did not have custody of his elementary school daughter he sued on behalf of.

Newdow, an Elk Grove, CA attorney and a medical doctor, filed an identical case on behalf of three unnamed parents and their children.

RESTRAINING ORDER TO BE SIGNED

Karlton said he would sign a restraining order preventing the recitation of the pledge at the Elk Grove Unified, Rio Linda and Elverta Joint Elementary school districts in Sacramento County, where the plaintiffs' children attend.

The order, however, would not extend beyond those districts unless it is affirmed by the 9th Circuit, in which case it could apply to nine western states, or the Supreme Court, which would apply to all states.

The Becket Fund, a religious rights group that is a party to the case, said it would immediately appeal the case to the San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. If the court does not change its precedent, they plan to appeal to the Supreme Court.

The decisions by Karlton and the 9th Circuit conflict with an August opinion by the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Richmond, Va. That court upheld a Virginia law requiring public schools lead daily Pledge of Allegiance recitation, which is similar to the requirement in California.

A three-judge panel of that circuit ruled that the pledge is a patriotic exercise, not a religious affirmation similar to a prayer.

"Undoubtedly, the pledge contains a religious phrase, and it is demeaning to persons of any faith to assert that the words 'under God' contain no religious significance," Judge Karen Williams wrote for the 4th Circuit. "The inclusion of those two words, however, does not alter the nature of the pledge as a patriotic activity."

ATTORNEY GENERAL TO FIGHT RULING

Attorney General Alberto Gonzales said on September 15 that the Justice Department will fight to overturn the federal court ruling. Gonzales said the pledge is one of several expressions of national identity and patriotism that mention God but don't violate the Constitution's ban on state-sponsored religion.

The high court "has affirmed time and again that such official acknowledgments of our nation's religious heritage, foundation and character are constitutional," Gonzales said.

[From a September 15 Lodi, CA *News-Sentinel* article by Sara Cardine, and a September 15 AP article by Mark Sherman.]

AAI Salutes Ruling as Upholding American Values

From a September 17 Press Release

The Atheist Alliance International celebrates U.S. District Judge Lawrence Karlton's decision, which prohibits school districts from coercing children to recite the religious oath in the Pledge of Allegiance as a victory for all Americans. "All children need to learn that we are indeed 'one nation, indivisible,' that tolerance and inclusiveness are important American values," said Bobbie Kirkhart, AAI president.

The organization notes that the 1954 insertion, "under God" excluded not only atheists but children whose families follow Hinduism, the Native

American Church, Wicca, Buddhism, and many other world view.

Parents who believe that this nation operates under the god of Christianity, Judaism and Islam have ample opportunity to teach their children in home and church. Parents who believe this nation operates under the principles of law have a right not to have the schools contradicting our Constitution. All children have a right to be taught how to live in a pluralistic society with respect for our common values of freedom and responsibility.

The organization deplors the hy-

perbole of some religious leaders who see the absence of religion in the classroom as an attack on religion. "Certainly," says Ms. Kirkhart, "most religious people have enough faith in their god that they don't need their beliefs constantly reinforced by the state, yet the idea that the absence of religion is somehow anti-religious suggests the opposite. No atheist is calling for a daily oath, 'one nation, without God, indivisible.' I hope that we can soon return to the pledge we recited when we fought and won the two world wars and become 'one nation, indivisible' again."

Societies worse off 'when they have God on their side'

By Ruth Gledhill, Religion Correspondent for the UK Times Online

Religious belief can cause damage to a society, contributing towards high murder rates, abortion, sexual promiscuity and suicide, according to research published today.

According to the study, belief in and worship of God are not only unnecessary for a healthy society but may actually contribute to social problems.

The study counters the view of believers that religion is necessary to provide the moral and ethical foundations of a healthy society.

It compares the social performance of relatively secular countries, such as Britain, with the US, where the majority believes in a creator rather than the theory of evolution. Many conservative evangelicals in the US consider Darwinism to be a social evil, believing that it inspires atheism and amorality.

Many liberal Christians and believers of other faiths hold that religious belief is socially beneficial, believing that it helps to lower rates of violent crime, murder, suicide, sexual promiscuity and abortion. The benefits of religious belief to a society have been described as its "spiritual capital". But the study claims that the devotion of many in the US may actually contribute to its ills.

The paper, published in the *Journal of Religion and Society*, a US academic journal, reports: "Many Americans agree that their churchgoing nation is an exceptional, God-blessed,

shining city on the hill that stands as an impressive example for an increasingly sceptical world.

"In general, higher rates of belief in and worship of a creator correlate with higher rates of homicide, juvenile and early adult mortality, STD infection rates, teen pregnancy and abortion in the prosperous democracies.

"The United States is almost always the most dysfunctional of the developing democracies, sometimes spectacularly so."

Gregory Paul, the author of the study and a social scientist, used data from the International Social Survey Program, Gallup and other research bodies to reach his conclusions.

He compared social indicators such as murder rates, abortion, suicide and teenage pregnancy.

The study concluded that the US was the world's only prosperous democracy where murder rates were still high, and that the least devout nations were the least dysfunctional. Mr. Paul said that rates of gonorrhoea in adolescents in the US were up to 300 times higher than in less devout democratic countries. The US also suffered from "uniquely high" adolescent and adult syphilis infection rates and adolescent abortion rates, the study suggested.

Mr. Paul said: "The study shows that England, despite the social ills it has, is actually performing a good deal better than the USA in most indi-

cators, even though it is now a much less religious nation than America."

He said that the disparity was even greater when the US was compared with other countries, including Japan, France and the Scandinavian countries. These nations had been the most successful in reducing murder rates, early mortality, sexually transmitted diseases and abortion, he added.

Mr. Paul delayed releasing the study until now because of Hurricane Katrina. He said that the evidence accumulated by a number of different studies suggested that religion might actually contribute to social ills. "I suspect that Europeans are increasingly repelled by the poor societal performance of the Christian states," he added.

He said that most Western nations would become more religious only if the theory of evolution could be overturned and the existence of God scientifically proven. Likewise, the theory of evolution would not enjoy majority support in the US unless there was a marked decline in religious belief, Mr. Paul said.

"The non-religious, pro-evolution democracies contradict the dictum that a society cannot enjoy good conditions unless most citizens ardently believe in a moral creator.

"The widely held fear that a Godless citizenry must experience societal disaster is therefore refuted."

[From a September 27 article in the *UK Times Online* by Ruth Gledhill.]

Non-believers Have a Lobbyist in Washington

Lori Lipman Brown, the nation's first lobbyist representing non-religious Americans in the halls of U.S. Congress, arrived in Washington on September 19 to begin her job as the first director of the [Secular Coalition for America](#).

Her first order of business: oppose a bill allowing federally-funded Head Start programs to base hiring decisions on the religious beliefs of appli-

cants. Her second: manufacture time for a frenzy of interviews with network TV, newspapers and radio.

Brown, a former Nevada state senator, had not penciled major media appearances into her first week's calendar. But a **USA Today** article, [Non-believers raising voice in capital](#), rapidly spread word of the secular lobbyist's Congressional debut through media circles.

Following up on an earlier press release by the Institute for Humanist Studies (IHS), **USA Today** interviewed Brown and showed her visiting the Thomas Jefferson Memorial in Washington, D.C. The story was syndicated on Yahoo, and secured the most read political story of the day.

Brown plans to work for non-believers in three ways:

- As part of broad coalitions fighting

policies rooted in religious beliefs, such as limits on stem cell research and access to emergency contraception.

- In alliances with groups opposed to policies they believe breach the wall between church and state, such as giving taxpayer money to faith-based service programs.
- On causes Brown concedes are hard for politicians and the public to swallow, such as eliminating references to God from the U.S. oath of citizenship. She plans to stay out of the Pledge of Allegiance controversy for now because “the courts are on our side.”

Brown says she doesn’t expect immediate success on tough issues but, as the only advocate for non-believers in Washington, it’s her job to raise them.

“We want to get people thinking about what they do that excludes us,” she says. “The things that ... perpetuate the idea that we are outsiders – that we can’t be patriotic or that we can’t be moral or ethical – when in reality our community is tremendously active in making the world a better place to live.”

Brown, who taught college-level constitutional law as well as high school English, is taking a pay cut. “It’s important to do the work, even if you’re not a highly-paid lobbyist,” she says. “At least there’ll be an atheist voice in the mix.”

[From a September 21 article in *Humanist Network News* by Mary Ellen Sikes and a September 19 *USA Today* article by Jill Lawrence.]

Letters to the Editor:

Bill Jager’s letter was in the *Anchorage Daily News* on September 27, 2005.

Respect demanded by one side shows little respect for the other

We are a nation divided, not united, under God. Public school administrators demand that non-Christians respect the words, “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance when recited in public school classrooms. Respect in this instance is being used to coerce the minority into submission while showing no respect to those who do not share the Christian belief that the United States is a nation under God.

Respect is a two-way street, if no respect is shown to the minority, why should respect be given to the majority?

We are a very diverse nation with many religious beliefs and others with no beliefs at all. The right thing for the government to do is to remain neutral on religious matters and remove, “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance (“Pledge to flag is ruled illegal with ‘under God,’” Sept. 15).

— Bill Jager
Eagle River

September Board Meeting Minutes

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

Absent: Judy Thompson (VPI)

Date/Time: September 14, 2005, 7:00 PM

Minutes: The minutes of the August meeting were amended by striking the paragraph headed Treasury; and, by adding that Jack made a motion that Steve prepare proposals for new floor plans, and the motion carried. With these amendments, the minutes were approved.

Treasurer’s Report (Ed Buckner): Ed submitted a written report that focuses on facts needed to decide on expansion of the meeting space. He pointed out that, considering income, expenses and cash on hand, the finances look good. However, if we consider outstanding debts to be paid, and necessary expenses due soon, finances appear somewhat tight.

Ed made a motion that we not ask our tenant to leave; rather, that we offer a 6 month extension at the present rent of \$750 per month, or a 1 year extension at a rent of \$800 per month. Bill seconded the motion.

Ed stated that, though Judy is absent, she should have a proxy vote, and the board unanimously agreed. Since Ed had recently talked to Judy, he represented her viewpoint.

In favor of expanding the space: we sometimes have over-flow crowds; a big room will attract more people; a big room could

be used for other events, such as lectures.

Against the expansion: we usually don’t fill the meeting room we now have; finances are important, and we are not in a financial condition that allows liberal spending; we lose the amount of the rent as monthly income, but gain additional expenses of utilities etc.

The motion carried, and Ed agreed to talk to Dr. Tu.

Meeting Room: There was a general discussion concerning the meeting space expansion. Steve provided two floor plans, and several people made suggestions for various modifications. It was also mentioned that we may wish to purchase a different property and sell the present condos. It was agreed that all avenues should be explored and that the discussions should continue, though no action will be taken immediately.

Speakers: In Judy’s absence, Ed is looking for a speaker for the October meeting. Present considerations are: a professor of constitutional law from Georgia State University; Judy, discussing health care in Germany; and, Ed Buckner. Ed will also pursue other ideas.

Publicity: Jack suggested that we file an *amicus curiae* brief in the Cobb County suit concerning the sectarian prayer. It was decided that Ed will ask the ACLU attorney if such an action would hurt the case. If not, we shall investigate the possibility of filing a brief.

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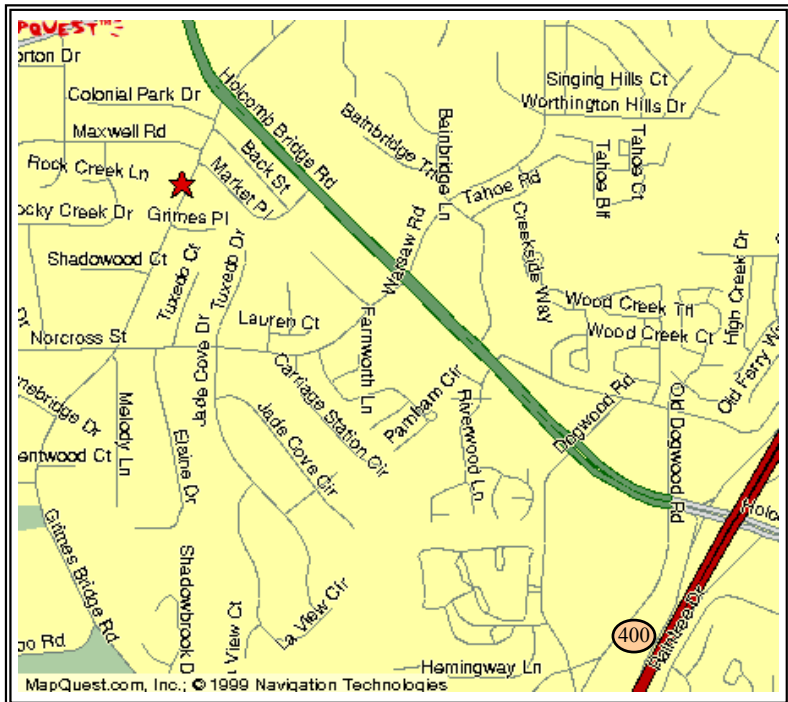
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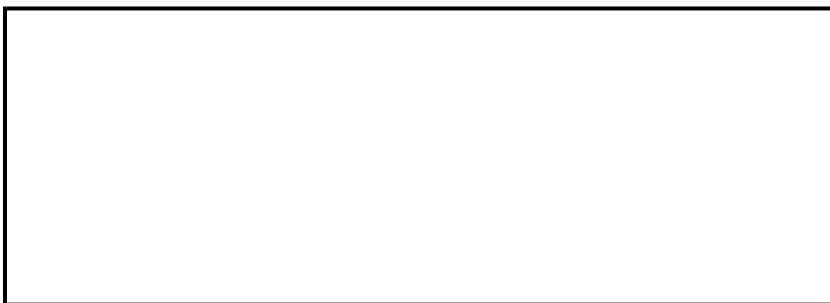


**The October Meeting:
Sunday, October 9
1:00 at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Ed Buckner**



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