

# Atlanta Freethought News

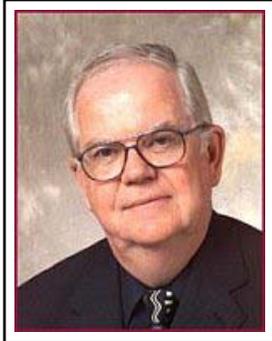
*Dare to Think for Yourself*

An AFS Publication • Volume 11 Number 12 • December 2005

## The December Meeting

The December 11 AFS meeting will feature **Dr. Richard T. Hull**, organizer of the CFI Florida Tallahassee Community, speaking on medical ethics related to when a fetus becomes an individual human being.

Dr. Hull is Professor Emeritus in philosophy at the State University of New York at Buffalo, where he held a joint appointment in the School of Medicine. He has published and lectured extensively in the areas of medical ethics, philosophy of science, and the ethics of scientific research. He holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from Indiana University.



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 **Athens Pizza House**, 1341 Clairmont Road, on Friday, December 16, at 7:00 PM. (It's on Clairmont Road near North Decatur Road in Atlanta.)

To get there, take I-85 to Exit 91, the Clairmont Road exit. Turn east at the light and go 3.5 miles to Athens Pizza House, which is on the left before you cross N. Decatur Rd.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will NOT meet this month due to the holidays.

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

## End-of-Year Check-up

If you receive this newsletter by postal mail, please check your membership label. If your expiration date is 12 2005 or earlier, please renew your membership. (Use the form on page 9.)

If you receive the newsletter by email, the editor will send a personalized email to you this month about your renewal date. Again, if it's due, please renew.

And, as always, we would sincerely appreciate your support in the form of a contribution in addition to your membership renewal. Thanks!

## The December Atheist Meetup

Atlanta Atheists will have a "meetup" on Saturday, December 17, at 12:00 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.

## 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](http://www.fellowshipofreason.com).

## Fellowship of Reason Party

The Fellowship of Reason invites all members of the Atlanta Freethought Society and the Humanists of Georgia to FOR's Holiday Party at Martin Cowan's house on Saturday, December 17. Get details from [mlcowen@yahoo.com](mailto:mlcowen@yahoo.com).

Please bring food and a wrapped gift valued at \$20 or less for a gift game. Every player will go home with a gift.

## Mel Lipman to Speak

Mel Lipman, President of the American Humanist Association, will speak on Sunday, December 18, 2005, at 1:00 PM, at the Unitarian Universalist Metro Atlanta North (UUMAN) Sanctuary, located at 11420 Crabapple Road, Roswell, GA. Go to [www.uuman.org](http://www.uuman.org) for directions.

The subject of Mr. Lipman's address is "Humanism Today and Tomorrow: Where are we, where do we want to be, and how can we get there?"

Mr. Lipman's top priority is to change attitudes towards Humanists. "It is not OK," he says, "to discriminate against fellow human beings simply because they do not believe in the supernatural."

Mel Lipman is a frequent speaker on church-state separation issues and has appeared frequently on radio and television talk shows to discuss humanist-related issues.

Everyone is invited and admission is free. For more information, contact Larry Curry at [lecurry22@yahoo.com](mailto:lecurry22@yahoo.com).

## AFS Meetings and Activities

Dec 11: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.

Dec 16: AFS Social, Athens Pizza House, 7:00 PM.



## 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.

Dec 11: Dr. Richard T. Hull, organizer of the CFI Florida Tallahassee Community, will speak on the medical ethics related to when a fetus becomes an individual human being.

Jan 8: Dr. David R. Koepsell, Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism, will speak on freethought issues.

Feb 12: Reggie Finley will speak on his family's adventure in their participation in ABC's Wife Swap television program.

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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1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite  
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# The Truth About God In School

By Charles C. Haynes, senior scholar at the First Amendment Center

Attacks on the “Godless public schools” have been at the top of the culture-war hit list for more than 40 years. Hardly a day goes by without some politician or televangelist reminding Americans of how the Supreme Court kicked God out of the schools in the 1960s – and how the nation has been sliding down a slippery slope of moral and spiritual decline ever since.

The banishment of the Deity from the classroom is a compelling story that plays well in a nation where millions of citizens take their faith seriously. There’s only one problem:

It isn’t true.

Yes, 20 years ago many public schools did come close to being religion-free zones. In the wake of the controversial court decisions banning state-sponsored religious practices, some school officials overreacted by trying to keep all religion out. Textbooks largely ignored religion, and teachers were hesitant to teach about it. Administrators mistakenly confused student speech with government speech and told kids to leave their religion at the schoolhouse door.

But that was 20 years ago. Today, most state standards and textbooks include considerable mention of religion; student religious clubs meet on hundreds, if not thousands, of high school campuses; the sight of Christian students praying around the flagpole or in the lunchroom is not uncommon; and Muslim students are routinely given a free room to perform daily prayers.

## HOW WE GOT HERE

What accounts for this dramatic turnaround? Start with the Equal Access Act of 1984 that opened the door for student-initiated religious clubs in secondary schools. Then look at how California broke the mold in the late ‘80s by deciding to require more teaching about religion in history classes. Finally, give credit to the remarkable agreements developed in the ‘90s on how schools should deal

with everything from religious holidays to the Bible under the First Amendment – a series of consensus guides endorsed by everyone from the National Education Association to the National Association of Evangelicals.

In spite of these positive developments, some opponents of public schools stick to the storyline of the Godless school where guns get in the door but prayers are banned. These are the “Restorers,” people who long to bring back the “good old days” when one religion (historically Protestant Christianity) was preferred in school policies and practices. Still angry that the courts won’t allow school officials to promote religion with prayers over the intercom or by posting the Ten Commandments on classroom walls, the Restorers downplay or ignore all of the ways in which religion is alive and well in schools. Any concession that things have changed for the better would undermine their call for an “exodus” from “atheistic government schools,” to quote a recent direct-mail letter from a religious conservative group.

Of course, it doesn’t help that people on the other end of the spectrum – the “Removers” – are determined to scrub every vestige of religion from the classroom. Proposals to teach more about religions are attacked as backdoor ways to impose religion. Policies designed to protect students’ religious expression are seen as efforts to encourage evangelization and harassment.

All it takes are a few bad stories to obscure the progress of the past two decades and to reinvigorate the culture warriors on both sides.

Exhibit A is the recent national brouhaha in which one teacher in one California school district (Cupertino) was accused of proselytizing in the classroom by inserting his religious views into the teaching of history. The removers latched onto the incident as confirmation that teachers just can’t

be trusted to “teach about religion.” Meanwhile, the Restorers saw it as fresh evidence of public-school hostility to all things Christian.

Caught in the crossfire, it’s not surprising that some school officials are still nervous about implementing the consensus guidelines or that some teachers remain afraid to touch religion, whatever the standards say.

And it’s no mystery why many students and parents are confused about what is and isn’t allowed under the First Amendment. Nevertheless, the quiet revolution begun 20 years ago continues to spread.

All of the changes – the Equal Access Act, new standards and textbooks, consensus guides – are built on this: Under the First Amendment, public schools may not inculcate or inhibit religion. This means that school officials must be careful to protect the religious liberty rights of students of all faiths and none. And they must ensure that the curriculum includes study about religion (as distinguished from religious indoctrination) as an important part of a complete education.

## SUCCESS IN THE CLASSROOM

To see what this looks like, visit Ramona, Calif.; Davis County, Utah; Mustang, Okla.; or any one of the many other school districts that have successfully translated the national agreements into local policies and practices that take the First Amendment seriously.

Instead of lawsuits and shouting matches, these districts have come together to find common ground on how to protect student religious expression while guarding against school endorsement of religion. Visit schools in these districts and you’ll see teachers teaching about religions without controversy, students practicing their faith during the school day without interfering with the rights of others, and school officials handling potential conflicts over religion with the support and trust of their commu-

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## God in School (*continued*)

nities. Getting it right, however, won't be easy after more than 150 years of getting it wrong.

Moreover, agreement on some issues — such as the place of religion in the curriculum or when students may pray together — doesn't mean agreement on everything. The latest fight over evolution and recent lawsuits over where to draw the line on student religious expression in the class-

room are stark reminders of how much work still needs to be done.

However great the challenge, schools have no choice but to move beyond the failed models of the past.

In a nation committed to religious liberty, public schools are neither the local church nor religion-free zones. They must be places where people of all faiths and none are treated with fairness and respect. In the USA, relig-

ion goes to school — but always through the First Amendment door.

(Charles C. Haynes is the co-author of *Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in Public Schools* and is a senior scholar at the First Amendment Center in Arlington, VA.)

[From a Nov 21 editorial in *USA Today*.

Reprinted here by permission. See [www.firstamendmentcenter.org](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org) for similar article by Charles C. Haynes.]

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## What I Want for Christmas By Robert Ingersoll

If I had the power to produce exactly what I want for Christmas, I would have all the kings and emperors resign and allow the people to govern themselves.

I would have all the nobility crop their titles and give their lands back to the people. I would have the Pope throw away his tiara, take off his sacred vestments, and admit that he is not acting for God — is not infallible — but is just an ordinary Italian. I would have all the cardinals, archbishops, bishops, priests and clergymen admit that they know nothing about theology, nothing about hell or heaven, nothing about the destiny of the human race, nothing about devils or ghosts, gods or angels. I would have them tell all their "flocks" to think for themselves, to be manly men and womanly women, and to do all in their power to increase the sum of human happiness.

I would have all the professors in colleges, all the teachers in schools of every kind, including those in Sunday schools, agree that they would teach only what they know, that they would not palm off guesses as demonstrated truths.

I would like to see all the politicians changed to statesmen, — to men who long to make their country great and free, — to men who care more for public good than private gain — men who long to be of use.

I would like to see all the editors of papers and magazines agree to print the truth and nothing but the truth, to avoid all slander and misrepresentation, and to let the private affairs of the people alone.

I would like to see drunkenness and prohibition both abolished.

I would like to see corporal punishment done away with in every home, in every school, in every asy-

lum, reformatory, and prison. Cruelty hardens and degrades, kindness reforms and ennobles.

I would like to see the millionaires unite and form a trust for the public good.

I would like to see a fair division of profits between capital and labor, so that the toiler could save enough to mingle a little June with the December of his life.

I would like to see an international court established in which to settle disputes between nations, so that armies could be disbanded and the great navies allowed to rust and rot in perfect peace.

I would like to see the whole world free — free from injustice — free from superstition.

This will do for this Christmas. The following Christmas, I may want more.

— Robert G. Ingersoll

[From *The Arena*, Boston, Dec. 1897]

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## What is Freethought?

**From a speech by Steve Yothment to the Freethought Club at Morehouse College on November 20.**

My talk, tonight, will be on Freethought: What is it? What is the history behind Freethought? And what are some current Freethought issues?

First of all, what is Freethought? Freethought is the practice of forming one's opinions by using reason and logic, rather than tradition, authority, established belief, preconception or prejudice. I would like to break down this definition.

Reason and logic are common tools of a freethinker. Reason is that higher level of cognitive function that involves observation, analysis, intuition and judgment. Logic is the study of arguments for the purpose of separating valid from fallacious arguments.

Freethinkers strive to form their opinions on the basis of facts and reason. An idealized statement of this attitude is "**Clifford's Credo**," an apho-

rism of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century British mathematician and philosopher William Kingdon Clifford, who wrote in his *Ethics of Belief* that "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."

Freethinkers do not base their opinions on tradition. What does that mean? A traditionalist says "We've always thought this way; There's no

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## What is Freethought? (*continued*)

need to change our opinions now." Some of the worst conditions of mankind were perpetuated by such a view. Think about opinions regarding slavery, or civil rights. Is it good to change your opinion if your opinion is not consistent with the laws of the land, or common decency? A freethinker says YES! Tradition holds no sway with a freethinker.

Freethinkers do not base their opinions on authority, either. In our society, authority figures try to tell us what is right all the time. "Well, the Right Reverend So-and-So said it, so it must be true!" A freethinker says NO! Just because someone in authority says something does not make that thing to be true. We must look more deeply at the facts to determine the truth of a matter.

Preconceptions and prejudice are also rejected by freethinkers. How can you logically think less of a person based on the person's country of origin, or their race, gender, age, class or physical disability? As Dr. Martin Luther King said, if we judge anyone, it must be according to the "content of their character." So, freethinkers reject opinions based on preconceptions or prejudice.

Because so many popular beliefs are based on tradition or authority, freethinkers' opinions are often at odds with established dogmatic, political, social, intellectual or religious views. Most freethinkers believe that there is insufficient evidence to support the existence of such supernatural entities as ghosts, gods, angels, devils, leprechauns, reincarnation, heaven, hell, and so on. Freethinkers generally reject religious doctrine.

Even so, freethinkers usually have moral standards that are just as strong as those found in religious traditions.

### THE HISTORY OF FREETHOUGHT

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, many German atheists immigrated to the United States. They appear to be the first to refer to themselves as "freethinkers" in America. Many of them settled in Texas, founding the town of Comfort,

Texas, as well as others. Their settlements had no church buildings, and these newcomers were persecuted for their opposition to the institution of slavery. Even today, their historic existence is considered an embarrassment to Christians in that area of the country.

The first Freethought publication in the United States was probably *The Truth Seeker*, started by D. M. Bennett in 1873. This monthly publication is still published to this day.

The Freethinker magazine was first published in Britain in 1881.

The **Golden Age of Freethought** is a term sometimes used to describe the freethought boom of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It began around 1870 and lasted to about 1910. Susan Jacoby talks a lot about this time period in her book *Freethinkers*, published just last year.

The Golden Age was encouraged by the lectures of **Robert Ingersoll**, a Civil War colonel, who became a very popular public speaker at that time. He would go from town to town with advertising beforehand in the local newspapers. Since there was no TV or radio or movies at that time, people really enjoyed having a public speaker visit their town. Robert Ingersoll often spoke to audiences of 5,000 to 15,000 people at a time! And that was before there were any public address systems like what we have today!

I encourage you to search on the Internet, and find anything written by Robert Ingersoll. His writings are as applicable today as they were 120 years ago.

Before the Golden Age, there were several Americans that had Freethought views before the word was ever used.

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison had the nerve to write a U.S. Constitution without the word GOD in the document. They formed a government that was established by "We The People" rather than claim God's divine ordination of the new government.

Thomas Paine wrote *The Age of*

*Reason* in 1793. This historic work encouraged the reader to be skeptical about religion, and to rationally examine religious dogmas. It is said to be one of the most persuasive critiques of the bible and revealed religion ever written.

Abraham Lincoln worked to repair a nation torn by slavery. His Emancipation Proclamation was a monumental document that freed all slaves in the United States. Regardless of what some may say about him, he was never a member of a Christian Church. Responding to multiple demands for emancipation or no emancipation, he wrote:

"I am approached with the most opposite opinions and advice, and that by religious men, who are equally certain that they represent the Divine will. I am sure that either the one or the other is mistaken in that belief, and perhaps in some respects, both. I hope it will not be irreverent for me to say that if it is probable that God would reveal his will to others, on a point so connected with my duty, it might be supposed he would reveal it directly to me: for, unless I am more deceived in myself than I often am, it is my earnest desire to know the will of Providence in this matter. And if I can learn what it is, I will do it! These are not, however, the days of miracles, and I suppose it will be granted that I am not to expect a direct revelation. I must study the plain, physical facts of the case, ascertain what is possible, and learn what appears to be wise and right."

Another major push for Freethought occurred as a result of Charles Darwin writing his famous work *The Origin of Species* in 1859. This book established evolution by common descent as the dominant scientific theory of diversification in nature, which clashed with religious orthodoxy and caused people to question their traditional ideas about the world.

In 1919, after a long battle, women finally won the right to vote when the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was passed. The

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## What is Freethought? (continued)

suffrage movement was led by many people, but some of the bigger names were Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Margaret Fuller and Carrie Chapman Catt. These leaders of the movement were mostly non-religious people, because the common view of the day from the bible was that the husband is the head of the wife, and that the wife should be subservient to her husband. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 went further to improve equal rights for women.

In 1925, the Scopes Monkey Trial in Dayton Tennessee pitted Clarence Darrow, speaking for Evolution education in public schools, against William Jennings Bryan, who wanted to banish Darwin's theory of Evolution from American classrooms. This public trial educated people all across America about the issue.

In the 1960's, Civil Rights for African Americans was a major issue. Unlike the suffrage movement, this movement was organized by religious and non-religious people alike. It resulted in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., though he would not call himself a Freethinker, inspired great action and concern for rights of African Americans with his famous "I Have a Dream" speech.

In 1973, women won a major victory in the US Supreme Court decision of Roe vs. Wade. In it, abortion in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> trimester was declared to be legal. The Religious Right was outraged. Ever since that decision, the Religious Right has worked to overturn Roe vs. Wade in whatever way they can.

In 1960, presidential candidate John F. Kennedy declared unequivocally that he believed "in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute - Where no Catholic prelate would tell the President (should he be Catholic) how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote - where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference - and where no man is denied

public office merely because his religion differs from the President who might appoint him or the people who might elect him." Kennedy went on to make it clear that he regarded the Jeffersonian wall of separation not as a flexible metaphor, but as the foundation of the American system of government.

However, today, looking at current Presidential politics, you would never know that a U.S. president was so concerned about church/state separation.

In the 1980s, Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority declared that the United States is a Christian Nation, and that the government should openly promote religion. More recently, Pat Robertson of the 700 Club and James Dobson of Focus on the Family have pushed for government support of religion.

Church/State separation has been a major issue for freethinkers for a long time. Current issues in this regard are:

- **Abortion rights, and upholding Roe vs. Wade.** The Religious Right is making inroads into reversing that decision by pushing for US Supreme Court nominees that may overturn the decision.
- **Teaching of Evolution in public schools, rather than Creationism or "Intelligent Design."** There is currently a court case in Dover, PA on this issue. A ruling will probably be made on the case before the end of the year.
- **Gay Rights.**
- **Women's Rights.**
- **Teacher-led prayer in public school.**
- **Providing public funding for religious education in the form of vouchers.**
- **The Ten Commandments posted on government property.**
- **In God We Trust** on coins.
- **Under God** in the Pledge of Allegiance.

We freethinkers often work with other groups like the ACLU or Americans United for Separation of Church and State to help bring the government back to religious neutrality, which we think is the ideal posi-

tion of government. When the government is religiously neutral, it does not impinge on the rights of any religion, and that's how it should be! Remember that the role of government, according to the Constitution, is to provide for the common defense, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty. This means that the federal government should indeed have a military that defends us from other countries that want to take us over. The government should also provide police service, fire department service, build roads and bridges, provide education and other things.

But we contend that it's not a proper role of government to promote or instill religion in the citizens. The government should be religiously neutral. If you want to learn about religion, you can go to a church of your choice, or a mosque or temple. We think that's a good system. Keep the government out of the church, and the church out of government. This ensures religious freedom for all.

The **Atlanta Freethought Society**, for which I am the President, is basically a club for freethinkers. We have social activities, and a monthly meeting in which we try to get a speaker to speak on current social issues of interest. We expect our monthly meeting to be educational for our members, so that they more clearly understand freethought issues.

We also like to have fun. Our social activities provide a place for like-minded freethinkers to hang out together and enjoy each other's company.

So, that's a little bit about Freethought. It's amazing to me that most people in America haven't even heard of the word Freethought, or freethinker. I would encourage you to visit websites like **Infidels.org** or search for and read anything by **Robert Ingersoll**. There's a lot of information out there on the subject.

Are there any questions?  
(There were many.)

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# Why Can't We All Be Japanese?

Several weeks ago, a groundbreaking study on religious belief and social well-being was published in the [Journal of Religion & Society](#). Comparing eighteen prosperous democracies from the US to New Zealand, author Gregory S. Paul quietly demolished the myth that faith strengthens society.

Drawing on a wide range of studies to cross-match faith – measured by belief in God and acceptance of evolution – with homicide and sexual behavior, Paul found that secular societies have lower rates of violence and teenage pregnancy than societies where many people profess belief in God.

Top of the class, in both atheism and good behavior, come the Japanese. Over eighty percent accept evolution and fewer than ten percent are certain that God exists. Despite its size – over a hundred million people – Japan is one of the least crime-prone countries in the world. It also has the lowest rates of teenage pregnancy of any developed nation.

(Teenage pregnancy has less tragic consequences than violence but it is usually unwanted, and it is frequently associated with deprivation among both mothers and children. In general, it is a Bad Thing.)

Next in line are the Norwegians, British, Germans and Dutch. At least sixty percent accept evolution as a fact and fewer than one in three are convinced that there is a deity. There is little teenage pregnancy, although the Brits, with over 40 pregnancies per 1,000 girls a year, do twice as badly as the others. Homicide rates are also low – around 1-2 victims per 100,000 people a year.

At the other end of the scale comes America. Over fifty percent of Ameri-

## Religion fosters bad behavior

cans believe in God, and only 40 percent accept some form of evolution (many believe it had a helping hand from the Deity). The US has the highest rate of teenage pregnancy and homicide rates are at least five times greater than in Europe and ten times higher than in Japan.

All this information points to a strong correlation between faith and antisocial behavior – a correlation so strong that there is good reason to suppose that religious belief does more harm than good.

At first glance that is a preposterous suggestion, given that religions preach non-violence and sexual restraint. However, close inspection reveals a different story. Faith tends to weaken rather than strengthen people's ability to participate in society. That makes it less likely they will respect social customs and laws.

All believers learn that God holds them responsible for their actions. So far so good, but for many, belief absolves them of all other responsibilities. Consciously or subconsciously, those who are “born again” or “chosen” have diminished respect for others who do not share their sect or their faith. Convinced that only the Bible offers “truth”, they lose their intellectual curiosity and their ability to reason. Their priority becomes not the world they live in but themselves.

The more people prioritize themselves rather than those around them, the weaker society becomes and the greater the likelihood of antisocial behavior. Hence gun laws which encourage Americans to see each other not as fellow human beings who deserve protection, but as potential aggressors who deserve to die. And hence a healthcare system which looks after the wealthy rather than the ill.

## By Martin Foreman

As for sex... Faith encourages ignorance rather than responsible behavior. In other countries, sex education includes contraception, reducing the risk of unwanted pregnancies. Such an approach recognizes that young people have the right to make their own choices and helps them make decisions that benefit society as a whole. In America, faith-driven abstinence programs deny them that right – “As a Christian I will only help you if you do what I say.” The result is soaring rates of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

Abstinence programs rest on the same weak intellectual foundation as creationism and intelligent design. Faith discourages unprejudiced analysis. Reasoning is subverted to rationalization that supports rather than questions assumptions. The result is a self-contained system that maintains an internal logic, no matter how absurd to outside observers.

The constitutional wall that theoretically separates church and state is considered irrelevant. Religion has overwhelmed the nation to permeate all public discussion. Look no further than Gary Bauer, a man who in any other western nation would be dismissed as a fanatic and who in America is interviewed deferentially on prime time television.

Despite all its fine words, religion has brought in its wake little more than violence, prejudice and sexual disease. True morality is found elsewhere. As UK *Guardian* columnist George Monbiot concluded in his [review](#) of Gregory Paul's study, “if you want people to behave as Christians advocate, you should tell them that God does not exist.”

[From a Nov. 13 article by Martin Foreman at [www.godwouldbeanatheist.com](http://www.godwouldbeanatheist.com).]

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“What influence, in fact, have ecclesiastical establishments had on society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the civil authority; in many instances they have been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny; in no instance have they been the guardians of the liberties of the people. Rulers who wish to subvert the public liberty may have found an established clergy convenient allies.” — **James Madison**, *A Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, addressed to the Virginia General Assembly, June 20, 1785

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# Lies

From a book still being written, by Jim Middleton

People today are duplicitous about lying. Usually, someone will bring up the Commandment that says one should not bear false witness, and allege that it means “don’t lie.” No it doesn’t. It means don’t bear false witness. *Witness* is as in a court or other judicial hearing. Of course one ought not to testify falsely when the object is to seek the truth, or, Truth. But the testifying is messed up today: police officers are the best liars you can find anywhere.

Sometimes lying is all right, and sometimes is even the *best* course of action. Imagine a truthful response to “Hey buddy, can you spare a dime?” It might be along the lines of “Sure I can spare a dime, but there’s no way I’m going to give money to a total stranger who looks and acts like a bum.” It’s much kinder simply to say “No,” even though that’s a lie. Also, there’s the proverbial “Does this dress make me look fat?” With any luck, the dress is very flattering and you can answer truthfully; but, many women who would ask the question already know the answer is “Yes.” Who would dare to give that truthful answer? Only those who are tired of the relationship.

One very problematic area includes the question “Is there a Santa Claus?” On the one hand, Santa is a nice little myth that children grow up on, and what’s the harm of allowing some fantasy in a child’s life? On the other hand, however, the myth can take on a life. The child expects all manner of frivolous toys and such because that’s what Santa does. Santa does not bring clothes, shoes and other useful things. Santa brings *fun*.

And the problem broadens when the question is “Is there a God?” People who believe in God will quickly

answer in the affirmative, but the real truth is simply that they *believe* there is a god. No one who is credible has seen God; scientific studies indicate prayer does not work; bad people thrive while good people suffer, and so on, *ad nauseum*.

The child’s belief in God invites beliefs that do not work: a belief that one has help from On High; a belief that a good life and good works will be positively rewarded; and a belief that this life amounts to little, and that there is an afterlife that is great, and that lasts forever. Of course the duplicity sets in. God helps those who help themselves; God gave you certain talents, and you must use them in order to enter Heaven; God always answers prayer, but He sometimes says “No” — when it’s the best for you. God has a Big Plan that we mere mortals do not comprehend.

Are lies about Santa and God and such all right, or not? There will always be those who insist that such lies are for the benefit of children and others with child-like minds; and, there will always be those who insist that such lies are damaging and the world would be better off without them. As one who was damaged by the lies, I go with the latter group.

There are times when it is definitely not all right to lie. The classic fraud wherein one lies to another in order to obtain money or property is bad, and has even been made a crime in some cases. Any time one person tells a lie that will cause damage to another, society must agree that the lie is bad.

Back to those lying police officers, how can it be bad to lie in order to convict a criminal? The statement itself looks right; but, do not overlook the presumption. The object of the testimony is to determine the truth,

i.e. is this person a criminal? By having false testimony in the hearing, we have corrupted the very process that is intended to avoid corruption. By having police officers lie, we have falsification from the very ones who are supposed to prevent falsification. Surely, no one will say this is good.

Besides damaging others, lies sometimes damage oneself. When personal integrity demands the truth, it would indeed be damaging to lie. If we have not personal integrity, we have not much to recommend us.

A time not to lie is when one has an important duty to tell the truth. This is probably illustrated no better than in the dating couple attempting to get to know each other, perhaps looking forward to a lasting relationship. I sometimes know in the first date that she and I are too different to be together. Sometimes she may know even before that. And why would anyone lie at such a time, considering that a bad mating affects both — not just one.

But it happens. The girl I was dating, whenever she discovered something that I liked, said she liked it too. Again, why would anyone lie at a time like this? Of course I believed her. I was so sure that she wouldn’t lie about such things that I was hard to convince that it was a lie. Thus, over many years of a miserable existence together, one-by-one I found that the various things were lies. At the very last minute, when we were signing the Consent Order, she confessed to the last lie. However, she did all right. She got the house, furniture and car. I got my freedom, and felt so good I didn’t mind losing the other stuff. Not at first anyway.

And that’s the truth!

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Congratulations to Target, Kroger, Office Max, Walgreens, Sears, Staples, Lowe's, J.C. Penney, Dell and Best Buy stores. In a November 29 email to Christian supporters, the American Family Association complained that these stores did not have the word “Christmas” in their November 28 advertisements in two major newspapers that were checked. However, they did have the word “Holiday” 59 times. Only one major advertiser had the word “Christmas” in their advertisements. The AFA called for followers to complain to the stores so that “next year we will see scores of retailers recognizing “Christmas” as a Christian holy day instead of a secular “holiday.” (Thanks to Hank Shiver for this information.)

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By Edwin F. Kagin

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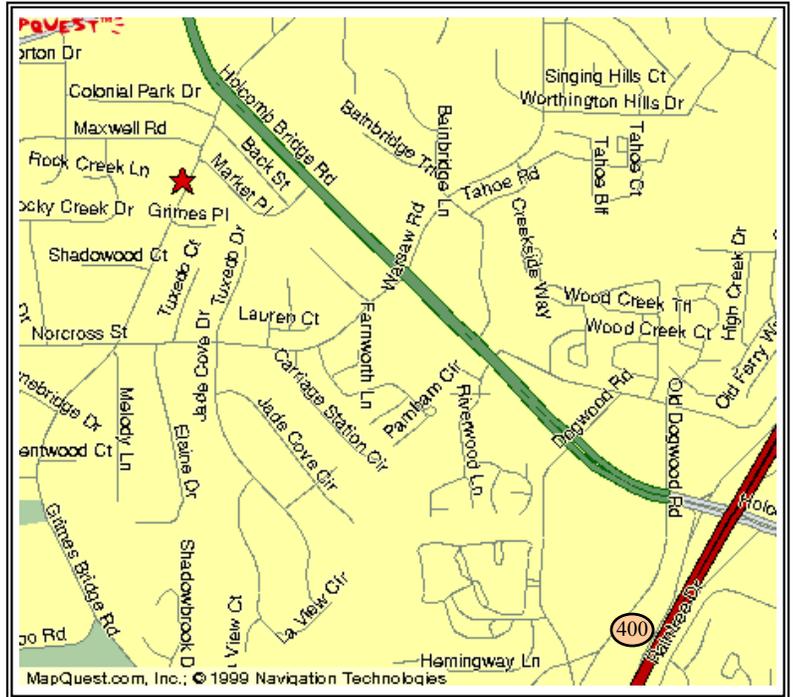
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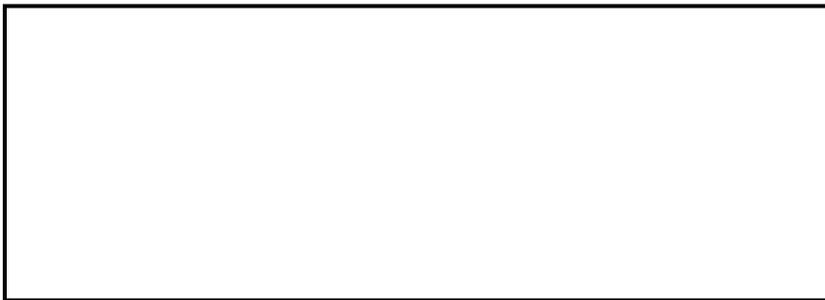


**The December Meeting:  
Sunday, December 11  
1:00 at the AF Center  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road  
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:  
Dr. Richard T. Hull**



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