

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 12 Number 1 • January 2006

The January Meeting

The January 8 AFS meeting will feature **Dr. David R. Koepsell**, Executive Director of the **Council for Secular Humanism**, speaking on "The Law and Religious Dissent in America."

Dr. Koepsell holds a PhD in Philosophy from the University of New York at Buffalo. His dissertation was on "The Ontology of Cyberspace: Law, Philosophy, and the Future of Intellectual Property." Books that he's written include *The Ontology of Cyberspace*, *Reboot World* and *Searle, on the Institutions of Social Reality*. He's also written many articles for *Skeptical Enquirer*, *Free Inquiry*, and *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*.

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.

AFS Activities

The next **AFS Social** will be at **Athens Pizza House**, 1341 Clairmont Road, on Friday, January 13, 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 meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on Sunday, January 15, from 4:00 to 6:00 PM.

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

SOS Meets at AF Center

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

Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on Sunday, January 22, at 12:30 PM.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Jan 8: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
Jan 13: AFS Social, Athens Pizza House, 7:00 PM.
Jan 15: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 2:00 PM.
Jan 15: 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.

Darwin Day: February 12

On February 12, freethought groups around the world will celebrate the 197th birthday of Charles Darwin. (For details, see www.DarwinDay.org.) The location for our celebration is not finalized, but may be Morehouse College or Kennesaw State University. We plan to have birthday cake and a display with flyers for the event.

The coordinator for the event is Ried Crowe. If you can attend, please email Reid at riedpamc@bellsouth.net. We will have more info on the event in the February *AFNews*.

The January Atheist Meetup

Atlanta Atheists will have a "meetup" on Sunday, January 22, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Road, in Atlanta. The phone there is 404-255-5911.

Election Results

Congratulations to the following officers and board members elected to serve in 2006:

Steve Yothment, President	Diane Buckner, Board
Judy Thompson, VP, Int.	Lew Southern, Board
Freya Harris, VP, Ext.	George Page, Board
Ed Buckner, Treasurer	

Bill Burton, Jim Middleton and Jack McKinney will continue their 2-year terms as board members.

Don't Miss "The Book of Daniel"

NBC will start a new television drama series called "The Book of Daniel" on Friday, Jan. 6, at 9:00 PM. The program is about a Christian family and their problems.

The American Family Association has launched a major campaign to stop the program, because the writer for the program, Jack Kenny, is "a practicing homosexual who describes himself as being 'in Catholic recovery,' and is interested in Buddhist teachings about reincarnation and isn't sure exactly how he defines God and/or Jesus."

The characters include: Daniel Webster, a drug-addicted Episcopal priest; his alcoholic wife; his son, a 23-year-old homosexual Republican; a 16-year-old drug dealing daughter; a 16-year-old adopted son who is having sex with the bishop's daughter; and a very unconventional white-robed, bearded Jesus who talks to the priest.



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.

- Jan 8: Dr. David R. Koepsell, Executive Director of the Council for Secular Humanism, will speak on "The Law and Religious Dissent in America."
- Feb 12: Reggie Finley will speak on his family's adventure in their participation in ABC's Wife Swap television program.
- Mar 12: 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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Judge Rules Against Dover “Intelligent Design” Policy

A federal judge in Pennsylvania ruled on December 20 that a public school district in the south-central part of the state cannot require the inclusion of “intelligent design” in biology classes as an alternative to evolution.

U.S. District Judge John E. Jones III, issuing his decision in a case that was heard in the fall, ruled that the school board in Dover, Pa., violated the Constitution when it ordered high school biology teachers to read to students a short statement that cast doubt on Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution and offered intelligent design as an alternative theory on the origin and development of life. Jones ruled that the requirement unlawfully promoted a religious purpose in a public school.

The case produced one of the biggest courtroom battles over evolution since the landmark “Scopes Monkey Trial” in 1925, and it was closely watched in other jurisdictions that have seen heated debates between opponents and advocates of Darwin’s groundbreaking 19th century theory.

After the Dover school board issued the requirement last year, 11 parents filed a lawsuit in federal court to block it on grounds that intelligent design was actually a thinly veiled new version of biblical creationism, which the U.S. Supreme Court has already ruled cannot be taught in public schools.

In the meantime, all eight of the school board incumbents who favored teaching intelligent design were defeated in an election in November by candidates who opposed including it in the curriculum.

In his ruling, Jones said several members of the Dover Area School Board repeatedly lied during the trial to cover their motives for promoting intelligent design even as they professed religious beliefs, the Associated Press reported.

“The citizens of the Dover area were poorly served by the members of the Board who voted for the ID [Intelligent Design] Policy,” Jones wrote.

Jones said advocates of intelligent design “have bona fide and deeply held beliefs which drive their scholarly endeavors,” adding that he did not believe the concept should not be studied and discussed, AP reported. But he concluded that “it is unconstitutional to teach ID as an alternative to evolution in a public school science classroom.”

Specifically, Jones said the school board’s policy on intelligent design violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

In defending the board’s policy, witnesses in a six-week trial last fall argued that intelligent design is a scientific theory and stressed that including it in the curriculum advanced secular goals of opening students’ minds to another possible explanation for the origin of life.

But Jones wrote in his 139-page opinion that “the secular purposes claimed by the Board amount to a pretext for the Board’s real purpose, which was to promote religion in the public school classroom.”

Jones sharply criticized some of the school board members, writing “It is ironic that several of these individuals, who so staunchly and proudly touted their religious convictions in public, would time and again lie to cover their tracks and disguise the real purpose behind the ID Policy.”

The case stemmed from the school board’s decision last year to require 9th grade biology teachers to read four paragraphs to students regarding intelligent design at the start of lessons on evolution.

“Because Darwin’s theory is a theory, it continues to be tested as new evidence is discovered,” the statement said. “The theory is not a fact. Gaps in the theory exist for which there is no evidence.”

The required statement went on to say, “Intelligent design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin’s view.” It referred students to the book, *Of Pandas and*

People, if they were “interested in gaining an understanding of what intelligent design actually involves.”

During the trial, Michael J. Behe, a Lehigh University biochemistry professor and one of the intellectual founding fathers of intelligent design, testified that “the appearance of design in aspects of biology is overwhelming” and that “intelligent design is based on observed, empirical, physical evidence from nature.”

He acknowledged under questioning that he is a Roman Catholic and believes the intelligent designer is God. But he said intelligent design must succeed or fail as a scientific theory.

A lawyer for the parents, Witold Walczak of the Pennsylvania American Civil Liberties Union, called intelligent design a “clever tactical repackaging of creationism” that cannot be science “unless science is redefined to include the supernatural.”

One of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, Bryan Rehm, a parent who also taught physics at Dover High School, testified that school board members exerted continual pressure not to “teach monkeys-to-man evolution” and said openly of teach creationism alongside evolution.

In a statement, the advocacy group People for the American Way hailed the judge’s ruling today as “a victory for the First Amendment’s requirement of government neutrality toward religion.”

The group’s president, Ralph G. Neas, said, “The court recognized that ‘intelligent design’ is nothing more than religious creationism in disguise, and that, as such, it may not be taught as science in public schools. This decision is a resounding victory for science education, for public school students, and for the Constitution.”

The ruling was also saluted by Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association, who called it “a resounding victory for science education.” He said in a statement, “Religious concepts like intelli-

Judge Rules Against Dover (*continued*)

gent design and creationism have no place in taxpayer-funded public schools."

The Dover case is among several that have brought the teaching of evolution into courtrooms recently. In Cobb County, Ga., earlier this month, a federal appeals court heard arguments on whether it was constitutional to place stickers challenging evolution in a school system's biology textbooks.

OTHER REACTIONS

A press release issued the same day by Americans United for Separation of Church and State said that the decision is a significant blow to Religious Right-led efforts to sneak fundamentalist dogma into public schools under the guise of science.

"This is a tremendous victory for public schools and religious freedom," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director. "It means that school board members have no right to impose their personal religious beliefs on students through the school curriculum."

It was Americans United and the Pennsylvania ACLU that brought the *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* lawsuit on behalf of Dover parents who opposed the Dover policy.

"Public schools should teach science

in science class, and let parents make their own decisions about religion," said Lynn. "It's a simple idea that the Religious Right has never been able to grasp."

MORE LITIGATION MAY FOLLOW

A federal prosecutor said on December 21 that testimony in the Dover intelligent design case is under review to determine if perjury charges should be pursued.

U.S. Middle District Attorney Thomas A. Marino said the decision will take time because there is "a lot of reading to do" to determine if the statements rise to the level of a crime.

"I want to question a couple of people who were present," he said. They will not include Judge John E. Jones III, who presided over the case, he said.

In his opinion, Jones accused some of those who testified during the six-week trial in Harrisburg of lying, singling out former board members Alan Bonsell and William Buckingham, the leading proponents of the policy.

Both men testified during the trial, which ended last month, and both gave sworn statements in depositions on Jan. 3. During the trial, Jones and lawyers for parents opposed to the policy confronted the men about the discrepancies and evasiveness in their

answers to questions about their motivations and efforts to raise money for a pro-intelligent design textbook, *Of Pandas and People*.

During the trial, after questioning by Jones and lawyers, Buckingham and Bonsell acknowledged that Buckingham raised money for the books in his church, then wrote a check for \$850 to Bonsell's father, who bought the books and donated them to the school district. Neither man disclosed the transaction in their deposition.

"The inescapable truth is that both Bonsell and Buckingham lied at their Jan. 3, 2005, depositions about their knowledge of the source of the donation for *Pandas*," Jones said in his ruling. "This mendacity was a clear and deliberate attempt to hide the source of the donations by [Bonsell and Buckingham] to further ensure that Dover students received a creationist alternative to Darwin's theory of evolution."

Jones also questioned the credibility of statements by other school officials and former board members.

[From a December 20 *Washington Post* article by William Branigin, a December 20 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and a December 22 *Patriot-News* article by John Beauge & Bill Sulonof.]

Excerpts from Judge Jones' 139-page Ruling *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District*

(The whole document is at http://www2.ncseweb.org/kvd/main_docs/kitzmiller_342.pdf)

FROM PAGE 1:

On October 18, 2004, the Defendant Dover Area School Board of Directors passed by a 6-3 vote the following resolution:

Students will be made aware of gaps/problems in Darwin's theory and of other theories of evolution including, but not limited to, intelligent design. Note: Origins of Life is not taught.

On November 19, 2004, the Defendant Dover Area School District announced by press release that, commencing in January 2005, teachers

would be required to read the following statement to students in the ninth grade biology class at Dover High School:

The Pennsylvania Academic Standards require students to learn about Darwin's Theory of Evolution and eventually take a standardized test of which evolution is a part.

Because Darwin's Theory is a theory, it continues to be tested as new evidence is discovered. The Theory is not a fact. Gaps in the Theory exist for which there is no

evidence. A theory is defined as a well-tested explanation that unites a broad range of observations.

Intelligent Design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin's view. The reference book, *Of Pandas and People*, is available for students who might be interested in gaining an understanding of what Intelligent Design actually involves.

With respect to any theory, students are encouraged to keep an open mind. The school leaves the discussion of the Origins of Life to

Excerpts from *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* (continued)

individual students and their families. As a Standards-driven district, class instruction focuses upon preparing students to achieve proficiency on Standards-based assessments.

FROM PAGE 46:

Throughout the trial and in various submissions to the Court, Defendants vigorously argued that the reading of the statement is not “teaching” ID but instead is merely “making students aware of it.” In fact, one consistency among the Dover School Board members’ testimony, which was marked by selective memories and outright lies under oath, as will be discussed in more detail below, is that they did not think they needed to be knowledgeable about ID because it was not being taught to the students. We disagree.

FROM PAGE 49:

In summary, the disclaimer singles out the theory of evolution for special treatment, misrepresents its status in the scientific community, causes students to doubt its validity without scientific justification, presents students with a religious alternative masquerading as a scientific theory, directs them to consult a creationist text as though it were a science resource, and instructs students to forego scientific inquiry in the public school classroom and instead to seek out religious instruction elsewhere.

Furthermore, as Drs. Alters and Miller testified, introducing ID necessarily invites religion into the science classroom as it sets up what will be perceived by students as a “God-friendly” science, the one that explicitly mentions an intelligent designer, and that the “other science,” evolution, takes no position on religion. Dr. Miller testified that a false duality is produced: It “tells students . . . quite explicitly, choose God on the side of intelligent design or choose atheism on the side of science.”

FROM PAGE 61:

Moreover, a review of the letters and editorials at issue reveals that in letter after letter and editorial after editorial, community members postu-

lated that ID is an inherently religious concept, that the writers viewed the decision of whether to incorporate it into the high school biology curriculum as one which implicated a religious concept, and therefore that the curriculum change has the effect of placing the government’s imprimatur on the Board’s preferred religious viewpoint. These exhibits are thus probative of the fact that members of the Dover community perceived the Board as having acted to promote religion, with many citizens lined up as either for the curriculum change, on religious grounds, or against the curriculum change, on the ground that religion should not play a role in public school science class.

FROM PAGE 68:

The Discovery Institute, the think tank promoting ID whose CRSC developed the Wedge Document, acknowledges as “Governing Goals” to “defeat scientific materialism and its destructive moral, cultural and political legacies” and “replace materialistic explanations with the theistic understanding that nature and human beings are created by God.” In addition, and as previously noted, the Wedge Document states in its “Five Year Strategic Plan Summary” that the IDM’s goal is to replace science as currently practiced with “theistic and Christian science.” The IDM accordingly seeks nothing less than a complete scientific revolution in which ID will supplant evolutionary theory.

FROM PAGE 72:

However, we believe that arguments against evolution are not arguments for design. Expert testimony revealed that just because scientists cannot explain today how biological systems evolved does not mean that they cannot, and will not, be able to explain them tomorrow. As Dr. Padian aptly noted, “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.” To that end, expert testimony from Drs. Miller and Padian provided multiple examples where Pandas asserted that no natural explanations exist, and in some cases that none could exist, and

yet natural explanations have been identified in the intervening years. It also bears mentioning that as Dr. Miller stated, just because scientists cannot explain every evolutionary detail does not undermine its validity as a scientific theory as no theory in science is fully understood.

FROM PAGE 73:

Professor Behe admitted in “Reply to My Critics” that there was a defect in his view of irreducible complexity because, while it purports to be a challenge to natural selection, it does not actually address “the task facing natural selection.” Professor Behe specifically explained that “[t]he current definition puts the focus on removing a part from an already-functioning system,” but “the difficult task facing Darwinian evolution, however, would not be to remove parts from sophisticated pre-existing systems; it would be to bring together components to make a new system in the first place.” In that article, Professor Behe wrote that he hoped to “repair this defect in future work;” however, he has failed to do so even four years after elucidating his defect.

FROM PAGE 78:

Although in Darwin’s Black Box, Professor Behe wrote that not only were there no natural explanations for the immune system at the time, but that natural explanations were impossible regarding its origin. However, Dr. Miller presented peer-reviewed studies refuting Professor Behe’s claim that the immune system was irreducibly complex. Between 1996 and 2002, various studies confirmed each element of the evolutionary hypothesis explaining the origin of the immune system. In fact, on cross-examination, Professor Behe was questioned concerning his 1996 claim that science would never find an evolutionary explanation for the immune system. He was presented with fifty-eight peer-reviewed publications, nine books, and several immunology textbook chapters about the evolution of the immune system; however, he simply insisted that this was still not

Excerpts from *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* (continued)

sufficient evidence of evolution, and that it was not "good enough."

FROM PAGE 79:

We therefore find that Professor Behe's claim for irreducible complexity has been refuted in peer-reviewed research papers and has been rejected by the scientific community at large. Additionally, even if irreducible complexity had not been rejected, it still does not support ID as it is merely a test for evolution, not design.

FROM PAGE 80:

The assertion that design of biological systems can be inferred from the "purposeful arrangement of parts" is based upon an analogy to human design. Because we are able to recognize design of artifacts and objects, according to Professor Behe, that same reasoning can be employed to determine biological design. Professor Behe testified that the strength of the analogy depends upon the degree of similarity entailed in the two propositions; however, if this is the test, ID completely fails.

Unlike biological systems, human artifacts do not live and reproduce over time. They are non-replicable, they do not undergo genetic recombination, and they are not driven by natural selection.... Professor Behe's only response to these seemingly insurmountable points of disanalogy was that the inference still works in science fiction movies.

FROM PAGE 82:

Accordingly, the purported positive argument for ID does not satisfy the ground rules of science which require testable hypotheses based upon natural explanations. ID is reliant upon forces acting outside of the natural world, forces that we cannot see, replicate, control or test, which have produced changes in this world. While we take no position on whether such forces exist, they are simply not testable by scientific means and therefore cannot qualify as part of the scientific process or as a scientific theory.

FROM PAGE 83:

Before discussing Defendants' claims about evolution, we initially note that

an overwhelming number of scientists, as reflected by every scientific association that has spoken on the matter, have rejected the ID proponents' challenge to evolution. Moreover, Plaintiffs' expert in biology, Dr. Miller, a widely-recognized biology professor at Brown University who has written university-level and high-school biology textbooks used prominently throughout the nation, provided un rebutted testimony that evolution, including common descent and natural selection, is "overwhelmingly accepted" by the scientific community and that every major scientific association agrees...Despite the scientific community's overwhelming support for evolution, Defendants and ID proponents insist that evolution is unsupported by empirical evidence. Plaintiffs' science experts, Drs. Miller and Padian, clearly explained how ID proponents generally and Pandas specifically, distort and misrepresent scientific knowledge in making their anti-evolution argument.

FROM PAGE 89:

After this searching and careful review of ID as espoused by its proponents, as elaborated upon in submissions to the Court, and as scrutinized over a six week trial, we find that ID is not science and cannot be adjudged a valid, accepted scientific theory as it has failed to publish in peer-reviewed journals, engage in research and testing, and gain acceptance in the scientific community. ID, as noted, is grounded in theology, not science.

FROM PAGE 138:

The proper application of both the endorsement and Lemon tests to the facts of this case makes it abundantly clear that the Board's ID Policy violates the Establishment Clause. In making this determination, we have addressed the seminal question of whether ID is science. We have concluded that it is not, and moreover that ID cannot uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious, antecedents.

Both Defendants and many of the leading proponents of ID make a bed-

rock assumption which is utterly false. Their presupposition is that evolutionary theory is antithetical to a belief in the existence of a supreme being and to religion in general. Repeatedly in this trial, Plaintiffs' scientific experts testified that the theory of evolution represents good science, is overwhelmingly accepted by the scientific community, and that it in no way conflicts with, nor does it deny, the existence of a divine creator.

To be sure, Darwin's theory of evolution is imperfect. However, the fact that a scientific theory cannot yet render an explanation on every point should not be used as a pretext to thrust an untestable alternative hypothesis grounded in religion into the science classroom or to misrepresent well-established scientific propositions.

FROM PAGE 139:

The citizens of the Dover area were poorly served by the members of the Board who voted for the ID Policy. It is ironic that several of these individuals, who so staunchly and proudly touted their religious convictions in public, would time and again lie to cover their tracks and disguise the real purpose behind the ID Policy.

Those who disagree with our holding will likely mark it as the product of an activist judge. If so, they will have erred as this is manifestly not an activist Court. Rather, this case came to us as the result of the activism of an ill-informed faction on a school board, aided by a national public interest law firm eager to find a constitutional test case on ID, who in combination drove the Board to adopt an imprudent and ultimately unconstitutional policy. The breathtaking inanity of the Board's decision is evident when considered against the factual backdrop which has now been fully revealed through this trial. The students, parents, and teachers of the Dover Area School District deserved better than to be dragged into this legal maelstrom, with its resulting utter waste of monetary and personal resources.

Appeals Judges Skeptical About Cobb Ruling

Federal appeals court judges gave a hostile reception on December 15 to a lower court decision that ordered Cobb County to scrape off evolution disclaimer stickers from almost 35,000 science textbooks.

The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals is not expected to rule until 2006, but the three judges' skeptical questioning indicated they may be poised to side with the Cobb school board in the now-famous sticker case. Earlier this year, U.S. District Judge Clarence Cooper found that the stickers, which say evolution is a "theory, not a fact," improperly endorsed religion.

Judge Ed Carnes, who dominated the questioning, said the three-sentence disclaimer seemed to him to be "literally accurate."

Every time the U.S. Supreme Court has discussed evolution, the court called it a theory, Carnes noted. "I don't think y'all can contest any of the sentences," he told a lawyer who argued the case for parents who filed suit against the stickers. Carnes, an appointee of the elder President George Bush, said he was hard-pressed to see how a finding could be made that the sticker is an endorsement of religion.

STORM OF PROTEST

The Cobb school board adopted the 33-word stickers on March 28, 2002, amid a storm of protest from parents who disagreed with a new science curriculum that allowed evolution instruction. Since 1995, the board had curtailed the teaching of evolution, leading some teachers to rip sections on evolution from science textbooks.

The disclaimers were placed inside the front pages of Cobb science textbooks in the fall of 2002. The stickers read: "This textbook contains material on evolution. Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things. This material should be approached with an open mind, studied carefully and critically consid-

ered."

Cooper, who presided over a four-day trial in the case last year, ruled in January that the sticker "conveys an impermissible message of endorsement [of religion] and tells some citizens that they are political outsiders while telling others they are political insiders." He ordered them removed from textbooks this past spring.

During the December 15 40-minute arguments, Carnes said he was concerned Cooper "got the facts wrong ... some of the key facts."

Judge Bill Pryor, the court's newest member appointed by President Bush, agreed, saying that Cooper relied on facts that "are just contradicted by the record."

And Judge Frank Hull wondered how Cooper could have found that the sticker's language misleads biology students when there was no evidence to support that view. "The order's problematic," said Hull, who was appointed by former President Bill Clinton.

Carnes took issue with Cooper's finding that a petition with 2,300 names opposing the purchase of new biology textbooks with evolution instruction had been presented to the board before it agreed to place stickers on the books in March 2002. The court record indicates the petitions were presented to the board six months later, in September 2002, Carnes said.

At the end of the arguments, Carnes took the highly unusual step of calling Atlanta lawyer Jeffrey Bramlett, who argued on behalf of parents who filed suit against the stickers, back to the podium before the packed courtroom. Carnes suggested that Bramlett may have misled the court in his legal brief on exactly when the petitions were presented to the school board. Bramlett was told to write a letter to the court explaining how the confusion occurred.

But Carnes may have been misin-

formed by an incomplete trial record. On March 29, 2002, the day after the school board agreed to affix the stickers to science textbooks, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reported that Marjorie Rogers told the board she had collected petitions signed by 2,300 people who were dissatisfied with the new science texts.

In an interview after the court hearing, Rogers, a self-avowed six-day biblical creationist, said she gave the petitions to the board before it decided to buy new science books with chapters on evolution.

"There wouldn't have been any reason to give it to them in the fall," she said. "They were done to try and persuade them not to buy the books." One of the petition's three options, she said, was for the board to put disclaimers in the new books.

The Cobb school board's attorney, Linwood Gunn, asked the 11th Circuit to look at the stickers in the context of the time when they were adopted. The board was then in the process of strengthening its teaching of evolution.

"If they wanted to restrict evolution instruction, they would have done nothing," Gunn said. "They would have maintained the status quo. ... All they did was improve evolution instruction."

Carnes seemed to agree. He suggested it may be appropriate for the court to "look at the whole sweep of events, instead of just 33 words on the sticker."

After the hearing, Gerry Weber, legal director of the Georgia ACLU, which also represents the parents who sued Cobb's school board, compared the sticker to a "cigarette warning" that singled out evolution among all scientific theories.

"The only reason evolution was given this treatment was to satisfy persons of a particular faith," he said.

[From a December 16 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article by Bill Rankin.]

"The man who does not do his own thinking is a slave, and is a traitor to himself and to his fellow-men." - Robert Ingersoll

A 12-Step Program for Religious Addiction

By Steve Yothment, with help and encouragement from Jack McKinney

In a recent email to AFS leaders, Jack McKinney made some observations about addiction. "All people are essentially born free of habits, both good or bad," he said. "We basically are introduced to substances or practices that, from continued use or practice, become habits. The overuse, or abuse, of these habits is known as addictions. Specifically, we're dealing here with the bad habits associated with tobacco, alcohol, drugs, gam-

bling, sex, theft, etc."

"It occurred to me that religion is another practice that fits in with those bad habits mentioned above. No one is born religious. They are introduced to it, and brainwashed with it, until it becomes a habit. Zealots and others of their ilk certainly fit the profile of addicts."

"...[There is a] religion-based, 12-step program known as AA, or Alcohol Anonymous in which religion,

prayer, faith, fear, etc., is used to break people of their alcohol addiction. ... Why can't we develop a 12-step program designed to break people of their religious addictions?"

As a result, Steve suggested 12 steps and Jack provided improvements to his suggestion. The result is shown here. AFS members are encouraged to modify and improve the list. This may make an informative pamphlet published by AFS.

12 Steps to a Religion-Free Life

1. Realize that you've never seen a god or angel. There is no real proof of such things.
2. Recognize that god-fearing people are wiped out in tornadoes and floods just like the heathen. There is no "protection" from a deity.
3. Recall your past efforts at prayer and realize that prayer doesn't work.
4. Realize that your thoughts and consciousness are nothing more than electro-chemical processes in your physical brain. So, when you die, your thoughts and consciousness cease, which means that you will not experience "heaven" or "hell" when you die.
5. Recognize that it's better to think for yourself than to just believe anything you're told.
6. Recognize that the "inerrancy of the Bible" is a preposterous fraud designed by mere men to discourage people from thinking for themselves.
7. Recognize that the history of religion reveals that religion has been very hurtful to many people.
8. Recognize that religion opposes liberty in many ways.
9. Recognize that morality comes from society, not religion.
10. Recognize that religion isolates people and causes social divisions that are contrary to the well-being of a society. We must be concerned about the well-being of all people in society, not just those of one religious view.
11. Recognize the value of science and the intense work of scientists to better understand our world, with the result that there are tremendous advancements that help mankind far more than religion.
12. Recognize that it's far better for government to be neutral on religion, and not in any way force religion on its citizens.

"Why have those countries with a strong Church-State alliance displayed such an eagerness to enforce religious dogmas and eliminate dissent through the power of the state? Why has Christianity refused, whenever possible, to allow its beliefs to compete in a free marketplace of ideas? The answer is obvious and revealing. Christianity is peddling an inferior product, one that cannot withstand critical investigation. Unable to compete favorably with other theories, it has sought to gain a monopoly through a state franchise, which means: through the use of force. —George H. Smith, from Atheism: The Case Against God

"Religious controversies are always productive of more acrimony and irreconcilable hatreds than those which spring from any other cause." —George Washington, letter to Sir Edward Newenham, June 22, 1792. From *2000 Years of Disbelief* by James A. Haught

Letter to the Editor

Congratulations to Ed Buckner, whose letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on December 21.

Complaints have no basis in fact

The annual holiday traditions are in full swing, with Wal-Mart, the American Legion in Peachtree City and Gov. Sonny Perdue making the same old complaints about political correctness and Christians somehow being deprived of their holiday, etc.

The Bible suggests that Jesus (if he was a real person) was born in the spring, not in December. The only grounds Christians have for claiming that this is their holiday season is that they stole the winter festival fair and square from the pagans — and changed its name — a long time ago.

It wasn't a grinch that stole Christmas; it was the Christian church. Happy holidays to all.

ED BUCKNER

**Buckner, of Smyrna,
is treasurer of Atlanta
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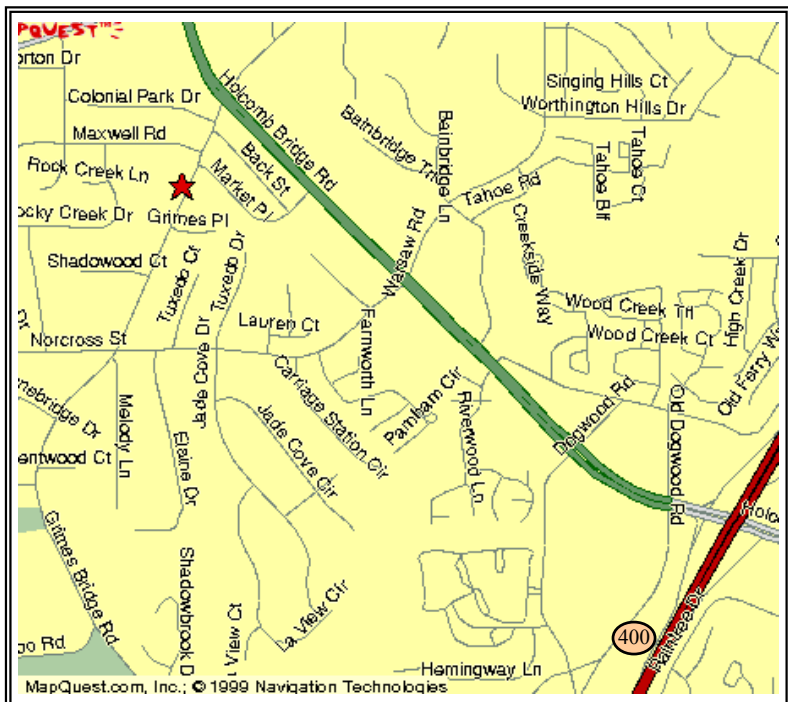
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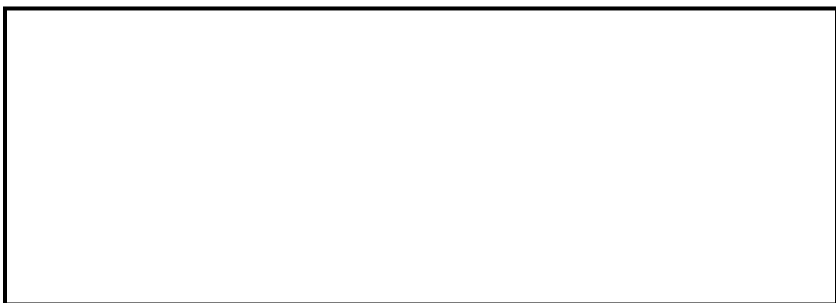
Atlanta Freethought Society

**The January Meeting:
Sunday, January 8
1:00 at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Dr. David R. Koepsell**



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