

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself.*

An AFS Publication • Volume 12 Number 2 • February 2006

## The February Meeting

The February 12 AFS meeting will feature **Reggie Finley**, a.k.a., the **Infidel Guy**, who will talk about his family's appearance on the ABC television show **Wife Swap** on November 28.

Reggie is a talk show host on the Internet radio program **The Infidelguy Show**. (Listen to the program for free on Wednesday and Friday nights at 8:00.) His website ([www.infidelguy.com](http://www.infidelguy.com)) also has a wealth of previous programs that include interviews with many public figures involved with religion and freethought.

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, February 17, 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, Feb. 19, 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 8:00PM. 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, February 26, at 12:30 PM.

## AFS Meetings and Activities

Feb 12: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.

Feb 17: AFS Social, Athens Pizza House, 7:00 PM.

Feb 19: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 2:00 PM.

Feb 19: 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](http://www.fellowshipofreason.com).

## The February Atheist Meetup

Atlanta Atheists will have a "meetup" on Sunday, February 26, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Road, in Atlanta. The phone there is 404-255-5911.

## Darwin Day Celebration: Feb 10

On February 12, freethought groups around the world will celebrate the 197<sup>th</sup> birthday of Charles Darwin. (For details, see [www.DarwinDay.org](http://www.DarwinDay.org).) AFS will celebrate Darwin Day at Spelman College in Atlanta from 11:00 AM to 1:00 PM on Friday, February 10 (not the 12th!). We plan to have birthday cake and a display with flyers for the event.

The coordinator is Ried Crowe. If you can attend, please email Reid at [riedpamc@bellsouth.net](mailto:riedpamc@bellsouth.net).

Driving directions to the Spelman College Parking Deck: Take I-20 West from the I-75/I-85 Downtown Connector. Get off I-20 at Exit 55B and turn right onto Lee Street. Continue straight on Lee Street past the first traffic light (Westview Drive). You will then see a parking lot on the right. Turn right onto the small road after the traffic light. Continue straight ahead, go through the gates, and take a quick right into the parking deck.

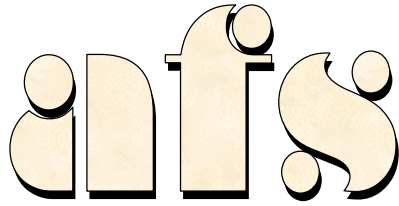
The event will be in the Manley College Center. Go to [www.spelman.edu/students/prospective/visit/map.shtml](http://www.spelman.edu/students/prospective/visit/map.shtml) and print out the map. The parking deck is at location #1 and the Manley College Center is at location #9a. It is a very short walk.

Please plan to arrive at the parking deck no later than 10:45. If you can help with setup, please arrive by 9:45. If you need more directions on the way, you can call Ried on his cellphone at 770-634-0429.

## FFRF Can Sue Federal Government

On January 13, a three-judge panel of the 7<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals reinstated the lawsuit brought by the Freedom From Religion Foundation that claims President Bush's faith-based initiative program is an unconstitutional endorsement of religion.

The panel, overturning a 2004 decision by a federal judge in Madison, WI, said the foundation has legal standing to sue over the administration's use of taxpayer funds for the program.



**Atlanta  
Freethought  
Society**

## Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at the AFS Center, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Roswell, GA, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

Feb 12: **Reggie Finley** will speak on his family's adventure in their participation in ABC's Wife Swap television program. (See [www.infidelguy.com](http://www.infidelguy.com).)

Mar 12: **John Sugg**, senior editor for the Creative Loafing group of alternative newsweeklies, will speak on the anti-evolution movement in Georgia. See his article "A Nation Under God" in the December 2005 *Mother Jones* at [www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2005/12/a\\_nation\\_under\\_god.html](http://www.motherjones.com/news/feature/2005/12/a_nation_under_god.html). See more at [www.JohnSugg.com](http://www.JohnSugg.com).

Apr 9: **Charles Lantz**, DC, will discuss scientific testing of chiropractic techniques.

To join the AFS Forum e-mail list, send a blank message to [AFSforum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:AFSforum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). To join the AFS Announcements list, send a blank email to [afs-announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:afs-announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). To join the Georgia Freethinkers Letter Writing Cooperative, send a blank email to [flwc-ga-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:flwc-ga-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

You can unsubscribe by sending an email to [xxxx-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto: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**  
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**Editor**

Steve Yothment

**How to Contact the Editor**

Send correspondence to AFS at:  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500  
Roswell, GA 30075-3905  
or phone Steve at 678-364-8703  
or send e-mail to [SteveYoth@aol.com](mailto:SteveYoth@aol.com).

**Atlanta Freethought Society**

**President**

Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

**VP for Internal Communication**

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

**VP for External Communication**

Freya Harris – 770-454-7545

**Treasurer**

Ed Buckner – 770-432-3049

**Board of Directors**

Diane Buckner – 770-432-3049

Bill Burton – 770-469-1228

Jack McKinney – 770-424-5004

Jim Middleton – 404-377-1511

George Page – 404-502-2686

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

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information, contact AFS at:  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite  
500, Roswell, GA 30075-3905

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[afs@atlantafreethought.org](mailto:afs@atlantafreethought.org).

**AFS Webmaster:** Freya Harris  
Call the **AFS Infoline:** 770-641-2903



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# The Religion of Charles Darwin

Charles Darwin's views on religion have been the subject of much interest. His work was pivotal in the development of evolution theory which some argue helps show that God is unnecessary, while others feel that attacking Darwin and restricting teaching of evolution helps to evangelize their faith. February 12 is Darwin Day, so here's a look at the Religion of Darwin from *Wikipedia*, the free online encyclopedia.

Charles Darwin was born in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, England, on February 12, 1809. It was a conservative time when English government was closely associated with the established Church of England, although many churches held differing views of Christianity as a result of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment. Darwin's extended family was strongly Unitarian, though one of his grandfathers, Erasmus Darwin, was a free-thinker even less restrained by religious dogma. Darwin's pious mother took the children to the Unitarian chapel every Sunday. After her death when he was only eight, he became a boarder at the (Church of England) Shrewsbury (public) School.

## MEDICAL STUDIES

The two universities in England, Oxford and Cambridge, were under the Church of England and required students to sign the *Thirty-nine Articles of the Anglican faith*, so many English non-Anglicans sent their children to the Scottish universities which had a better reputation in fields like medicine. Darwin initially attended the University of Edinburgh, and while he didn't care for medicine he took an active interest in natural history and learned about Lamarckism from Robert Edmund Grant.

Natural history had grown from the idea that the different kinds of plants and animals showed the wonder of God's creation, making their study and cataloguing into species worthwhile. In Darwin's day it was common for clergymen to be naturalists. The established churches (of England and Scotland) and the English universities remained insistent that species were miraculously created and man was distinct from the "lower orders," but the Unitarian church rejected this dogma and even proclaimed that the human mind was subject to physical law. Erasmus

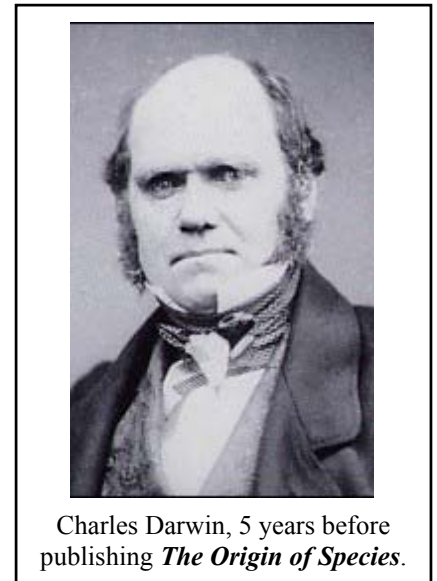
Darwin went further and his *Zoonomia* asks *..would it be too bold to imagine that all warm-blooded animals have arisen from one living filament, which the great First Cause endued with animality... possessing the faculty of continuing to improve by its own inherent activity, and of delivering down these improvements by generation to its posterity, world without end!*, anticipating Lamarckism. Many were outraged at such sacrilege. Charles would thus have had a perception of Christianity comfortable with ideas of evolution while being very aware of the outrage of the establishment and the patriotic mob.

## CAMBRIDGE: THEOLOGY & GEOLOGY

While Charles' father Robert had followed his own father Erasmus in medical practice and freethinking, he kept the latter quiet. When Charles proved unable to persevere at medical studies, a career option was for his father to purchase at auction a country parish "living" as an Anglican parson. Charles was at first uncertain, but as he later wrote: "I liked the thought of being a country clergyman. Accordingly I read with care *Pearson on the Creed* and a few other books on divinity; and as I did not then in the least doubt the strict and literal truth of every word in the Bible, I soon persuaded myself that the Creed must be fully accepted." He then followed his father's bidding by enrolling at Christ's College, Cambridge for the required BA course.

He took the natural history course of the Revd. John Stevens Henslow who gave him tuition in theology, and Charles became particularly interested in the writings of the Revd. William Paley, especially Paley's *Evidences of Christianity and Natural Theology*, which saw a rational proof of God's existence in the complexity of living beings exquisitely fitted to their places in a happy world, proving their design by a Creator.

Darwin wrote: "I could have written out the whole of the 'Evidences' with perfect correctness, but not of course in the clear language of Paley... I do not think I hardly ever admired a book more than Paley's 'Natural Theology.' I could almost formerly have said it by heart."



During this time Cambridge was briefly visited by Richard Carlile and the Revd. Robert Taylor on an "infidel home missionary tour," causing a stir before being banned, and Taylor would be remembered by Charles as "the Devil's Chaplain," a warning example of an outcast from society who had challenged Christianity and had been imprisoned for blasphemy.

## VOYAGE OF THE BEAGLE

Before leaving Cambridge, Charles studied geology with the Revd. Adam Sedgwick, and then got the opportunity to join a survey expedition as gentleman's companion to captain Robert FitzRoy on HMS *Beagle*. Before they left England FitzRoy gave Darwin a copy of the first volume of Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology*.

The developing science of geological strata and the finding of extinct fossils appeared to contradict the Biblical account of Noah's flood, but

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## The Religion of Darwin (*continued*)

this was reconciled by theories such as Catastrophism which postulated a series of catastrophic floods each followed by the creation of new species *ex nihilo*. Lyell's book explained features as the outcome of a gradual process over huge periods of time, and in the second volume he explained extinctions by a "succession of deaths" with new species then being created. Darwin later wrote home that he was "'seeing' land forms as if he had the eyes of Lyell."

### DARWIN'S LOSS OF FAITH

In his later private autobiography, Darwin wrote of this time:

"Whilst on board the *Beagle* (October 1836 - January 1839) I was quite orthodox, and I remember being heartily laughed at by several of the officers (though themselves orthodox) for quoting the bible as an unanswerable authority on some point of morality. I suppose it was the novelty of the argument that amused them. But I had gradually come, by this time, to see that the Old Testament, from its manifestly false history of the world, with the Tower of Babel, the rainbow as a sign, etc., etc., and from its attributing to God the feelings of a revengeful tyrant, was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindoos, or the beliefs of any barbarian." (Charles Darwin: *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin* with original omissions restored. New York, Norton, 1969. p.85) (*The rainbow as a "sign of the covenant" implies that rainbows did not exist before the Biblical flood. In terms of modern science this would mean that the physics of light discovered by Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton did not apply before that time, and to Darwin it was therefore "false history" which should not be taken literally.*)

In seeking to explain his observations, by early 1837 Darwin speculated on transmutation (conversion of one object into another) and writing of "my theory." Having decided to marry, he visited his cousin Emma on 29 July 1838 and told her of his ideas on transmutation. On 11 November he returned and proposed to Emma.

Again he discussed his ideas, and she subsequently wrote beseeching him to read from the Gospel of St. John "*our Saviour's farewell discourse to his disciples,*" a section on following *the Way* which also includes "*If a man abide not in me...they are burned.*" His warm reply eased her heart's concern, but this tension would remain.

Darwin was interested in ideas of Natural "laws of harmony," and made enquiries into animal breeding. Having read the new 6th edition of the Revd. Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population*, in late November 1838, he compared breeders selecting traits to a Malthusian Nature selecting from variants thrown up by *chance* so that "every part of newly acquired structure is fully practised and perfected," thinking this "the most beautiful part of my theory." He was well aware of the controversy his theory would cause, and of the likely reaction of the scientific establishment he was trying to become part of, so was very cautious in considering all possible arguments against his theory and in discussing his theory with friends. As Richard Millner wrote: "Darwin dreamt of being beheaded or hanged; he thought a belief that went so contrary to biblical authority was 'like confessing a murder.'" (Encyclopedia of Evolution (1990), p. 113). Darwin himself wrote to his friend Joseph Dalton Hooker, "I am almost convinced... that species are not (it is like confessing a murder) immutable."

### DEATH OF ANNIE

At the end of June 1850 his bright nine year old daughter Annie, who had become a particular favorite and comfort to him, fell sick, and after a painful illness died on 23 April 1851.

During Annie's long illness Darwin read books by Francis Newman, a Unitarian evolutionist who called for a new post-Christian synthesis and wrote that "*the fretfulness of a child is an infinite evil.*" With Annie's death Darwin lost the last embers of his faith in a beneficent God and saw Christianity as futile. Darwin wrote at

the time, "Our only consolation is that she passed a short, though joyous life." For three years he had deliberated about the Christian meaning of mortality. This opened a new vision of tragically circumstantial nature.

On Sundays, Emma took the children to church. After Annie's death, Darwin sometimes went with them as far as the gate of the churchyard, and then he would go for a walk.

### THE ORIGIN OF SPECIES

Darwin continued to avoid public controversy and to accumulate evidence supporting his theory against the anticipated arguments. In 1858 the knowledge that Alfred Russel Wallace had a similar theory forced early joint publication of Darwin's theory. The reaction to Darwin's theory, even after publication of *The Origin of Species* in 1859, was more muted than he had feared. In 1860 seven liberal Anglican theologians caused a much greater furor by publishing a manifesto titled *Essays and Reviews* in which they sought to make textual criticism of the Bible available to the ordinary reader, as well as supporting Darwin. Their new "Higher Criticism" represented "the triumph of the rational discourse of logos over myth." It showed that the Bible should not be read in an entirely literal manner, thus becoming "a bogey of Christian fundamentalists ... but this was only because Western people had lost the original sense of the mythical."

The Christian fundamentalists were as vocal, and in an 1860 letter to his collaborator Asa Gray, Darwin expressed his doubts about the teleological argument, which claimed nature as evidence of god:

"With respect to the theological view of the question: This is always painful to me. I am bewildered. I had no intention to write atheistically, but I own that I cannot see as plainly as others do, and as I should wish to do, evidence of design and beneficence on all sides of us. There seems to me too much misery in the world. I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have design-

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## The Religion of Darwin (*continued*)

edly created the Ichneumonidae with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars or that a cat should play with mice.

### RELIGION AS AN EVOLVING SOCIAL CHARACTERISTIC

In his 1871 book *The Decent of Man*, Darwin clearly saw religion and “moral qualities” as being important evolved human social characteristics. Darwin’s frequent pairing of belief in God and religion with topics on superstitions and fetishism throughout the book can also be interpreted as indicating how much truth he assigned to the former.

### ENQUIRIES ABOUT RELIGIOUS VIEWS

Fame and honors brought a stream of enquiries about Darwin’s religious views. A typical response was “I am sorry to have to inform you that I do not believe in the Bible as a divine revelation, & therefore not in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.” At other times, he was more guarded, telling a student studying under Haeckel that he “did not believe that there ever has been any Revelation. As for a future life, every man must judge for himself between conflicting vague probabilities.”

In a letter to a correspondent at the University of Utrecht in 1873, Darwin expressed agnosticism:

“I may say that the impossibility of conceiving that this grand and wondrous universe, with our conscious selves, arose through chance, seems to me the chief argument for the existence of God; but whether this is an argument of real value, I have never been able to decide... The safest conclusion seems to me to be that the whole subject is beyond the scope of man’s intellect.”

In 1876 Darwin wrote the following regarding his publicly stated position of agnosticism: “Formerly I was led... to the firm conviction of the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. In my Journal I wrote that whilst standing in the midst of the grandeur of a Brazilian forest, ‘it is not possible to give an adequate idea of the higher feelings of wonder, admiration, and

devotion, which fill and elevate the mind.’ I well remember my conviction that there is more in man than the mere breath of his body. But now the grandest scenes would not cause any such convictions and feelings to rise in my mind.”

In 1879 a letter came asking if he believed in God, and if theism and evolution were compatible. He replied that a man “can be an ardent Theist and an evolutionist,” citing Charles Kingsley and Asa Gray as examples, and for himself, he had “never been an Atheist in the sense of denying the existence of a God.” He added that “I think that generally (and more and more as I grow older), but not always, that an Agnostic would be a more correct description of my state of mind.”

In an 1881 after-dinner conversation with guest Ludwig Buchner, a German atheist, Darwin agreed that Christianity was “not supported by the evidence,” but he had reached this conclusion only slowly: “I never gave up Christianity until I was forty years of age.”

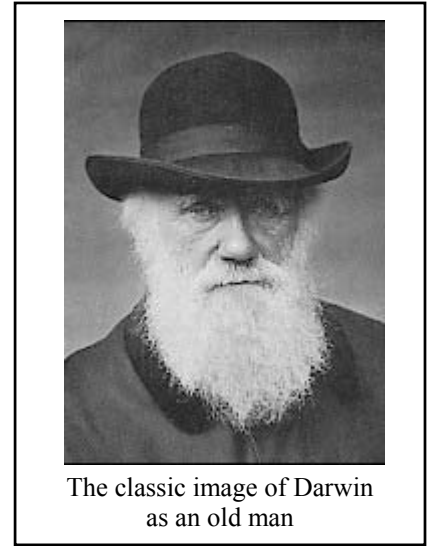
### POSTHUMOUS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Darwin decided to leave a posthumous memoir for his family, and on Sunday, 28 May 1876, he began *Recollections of the Development of my mind and character*. He found this candid private memoir easy going, covering his childhood, university, life on the Beagle and developing work in science. A section headed “Religious Belief” opened just before his marriage, and frankly discussed his long disagreement with Emma. At first he had been unwilling to give up his faith, and had tried to “invent evidence” supporting the Gospels, but just as his clerical career had died a slow “natural death,” so too did his belief in “Christianity as a divine revelation.” “Inward convictions and feelings” had arisen from natural selection, as had survival instincts, and could not be relied on. He was quick to show Emma’s side of the story and pay tribute to “your mother, so infinitely my superior in

every moral quality... my wise adviser and cheerful comforter.”

*The Autobiography of Charles Darwin* was published posthumously, and quotes about Christianity were omitted by Darwin’s wife Emma and his son Francis because they were deemed dangerous for Charles Darwin’s reputation. Only in 1958 did Darwin’s granddaughter Nora Barlow publish a revised version which contained the omissions. This included statements such as the following:

“By further reflecting that the clearest evidence would be requisite to make any sane man believe in the



miracles by which Christianity is supported, – that the more we know of the fixed laws of nature the more incredible do miracles become, – that the men at that time were ignorant and credulous to a degree almost incomprehensible by us, – that the Gospels cannot be proved to have been written simultaneously with the events, – that they differ in many important details, far too important as it seemed to me to be admitted as the usual inaccuracies of eyewitness; – by such reflections as these, which I give not as having the least novelty or value, but as they influenced me, I gradually came to disbelieve in Christianity as a divine revelation. The fact that many false religions have spread over large portions of the earth like wild-fire had some weight with me. Beautiful as is the morality

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## The Religion of Darwin (*continued*)

of the New Testament, it can hardly be denied that its perfection depends in part on the interpretation which we now put on metaphors and allegories." (p.86)

"Thus disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but at last was complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress, and have never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was correct." (p.87)

"I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my father, brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine." (p. 87)

"The old argument of design in nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to me so conclusive, fails, now that the law of natural selection had been discovered. We can no longer argue that, for instance, the

beautiful hinge of a bivalve shell must have been made by an intelligent being, like the hinge of a door by man. There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the wind blows. Everything in nature is the result of fixed laws." (p.87)

"At the present day (ca. 1872) the most usual argument for the existence of an intelligent God is drawn from the deep inward conviction and feelings which are experienced by most persons. But it cannot be doubted that Hindoos, Mahomadans and others might argue in the same manner and with equal force in favor of the existence of one God, or of many Gods, or as with the Buddhists of no God... This argument would be a valid one if all men of all races had the same inward conviction of the existence of one God: but we know that this is very far from being the case. Therefore I cannot see that such

inward convictions and feelings are of any weight as evidence of what really exists." (p.91)

"Nor must we overlook the probability of the constant inculcation in a belief in God on the minds of children producing so strong and perhaps inherited effect on their brains not yet fully developed, that it would be as difficult for them to throw off their belief in God, as for a monkey to throw off its instinctive fear and hatred of a snake." (p.93)

Charles Darwin died on 19 April, 1882. After his death, it was claimed that he underwent a death-bed conversion to Christianity. This was a common myth frequently applied to famous non-believers. Family members refuted the claim on many occasions.

[From [www.Wikipedia.org](http://www.Wikipedia.org) under the subject *Charles Darwin*. Please see the website article for many other details of Darwin's life, and numerous footnotes for this article. ]

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## Democrats in 2 Southern States Push Bills on Bible Study

**D**emocrats in Georgia and Alabama, borrowing an idea usually advanced by conservative Republicans, are promoting Bible classes in the public schools. Their Republican opponents are in turn denouncing them as "pharisees," a favorite term for politicians who exploit religion.

Democrats in both states have introduced bills authorizing school districts to teach courses modeled after a new textbook, *The Bible and Its Influence*. It was produced by the nonpartisan, ecumenical Bible Literacy Project and provides an assessment of the Bible's impact on history, literature and art that is supposedly academic and detached, if largely laudatory.

The Democrats who introduced the bills said they hoped to compete with Republicans for conservative Christian voters. "Rather than sitting back on our heels and then being knocked in our face, we are going to respond in a thoughtful way, said Kasim Reed, a

Georgia state senator from Atlanta and one of the sponsors of the bill. "We are not going to give away the South anymore because we are unwilling to talk about our faith."

In Georgia, the proposal marked a new course for the Democratic Party. The state's Democrats, including some sponsors of the bill, opposed a Republican proposal a few years ago to authorize the teaching of a different Bible course, which used a translation of the Scriptures as its text, calling it an inappropriate endorsement of religion. The sponsors say they are introducing their Bible measure now partly to pre-empt a potential Republican proposal seeking to display the Ten Commandments in schools.

In Alabama, a deeply religious state where Democrats support prayer in the schools and a Democratic candidate for governor recently introduced her campaign with the hymn "Give Me That Old Time Religion," the Bible

class bills reflect Democrats' efforts to distance themselves from the national party.

"We have always had to somewhat defend ourselves from the national Democratic Party's secular image, and this is part of that," said Ken Guin, a representative from Carbon Hill, Democratic majority leader in the State House and a sponsor of the measure.

Democrats in other states are moving in the same direction, jumping into a conversation about religion and values that some party leaders began after the 2004 election, when President Bush and the Republicans rode those themes to victory.

In Indiana, Democratic legislators are among the leaders of a bipartisan effort to preserve the recitation of specifically Christian prayers in the Statehouse. In Virginia, Gov. Timothy M. Kaine relied heavily on religious themes and advertised on evangelical radio stations to win election last fall.



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## Bible Bills (continued)

In an interview, Howard Dean, chairman of the Democratic National Committee, promised that Democrats would do a better job talking about values to religious voters. "We have done it in a secular way, and we don't have to," he said, adding, "I think teaching the Bible as literature is a good thing."

Christian conservatives, however, say they have been pushing public schools to offer courses on the Bible for decades, and Republicans in both Alabama and Georgia say some schools already offer such electives.

"Their proposal makes them modern-day pharisees," State Senator Eric Johnson from Savannah said in a statement. "This is election-year pandering using voters' deepest beliefs as a tool."

Saying he found "a little irony" in the fact that the Democratic sponsors had voted against a Republican proposal for a Bible course six years ago, Mr. Johnson added, "It should also be noted that the so-called Bible bill doesn't use the Bible as the textbook, and would allow teachers with no belief at all in the Bible to teach the course."

Betty Peters, a Republican on the Alabama school board who opposed the initiative in that state, also dismissed the initiative as "pandering."

Democrats, she argued, had adopted a new strategy: "Let's just wrap

ourselves in Jesus."

For the last dozen years, most efforts to promote teaching the Bible in public schools have come from the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools, a conservative Christian group based in Greensboro, N.C., that advocates using the Bible as the primary textbook. The group says about 320 school districts in 37 states offer its curriculum.

But its curriculum often draws attacks from civil liberties groups. Democratic sponsors of the Bible class bills say their efforts would help shield local school districts from First Amendment lawsuits, in part by recommending a more neutral approach.

The textbook they endorse was the brainchild of Chuck Stetson, a New York investment manager and theologically conservative Episcopalian who says he was concerned about public ignorance of the Bible.

Mr. Stetson helped produce *The Bible and Its Influence* as the centerpiece of a course that seeks to teach about the Bible and its legacy without endorsing or offending any specific faith.

The textbook came to the attention of Democratic legislators in Alabama and Georgia through the advocacy of R. Randolph Brinson, a Republican and founder of the evangelical voter-registration group Redeem the Vote.

Mr. Brinson, who said he was working with legislators in other states as well, described his pitch to Democrats as, "Introducing this bill will show the evangelical world that they are not hostile to faith."

Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, argued that *The Bible and Its Influence* was "problematic" because it omitted "the bad and the ugly uses of the Bible," like the invocation of Scripture to justify racial segregation.

Conservative Christian groups have been skeptical, too. "This appears to be a calculated effort by the Democrats to try to out-conservative the conservatives," said Stephen M. Crampton, a lawyer for the American Family Association, a conservative Christian group that supports the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools.

"To mention any curriculum by name is suggestive of some backroom deal cut with the publishers," Mr. Crampton said.

Editor's Note: The Georgia Bill, S.B. 79, recently passed in the Senate. It is pending in the House. See the bill at [http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2005\\_06/fulltext/sb79.htm](http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2005_06/fulltext/sb79.htm).

[From a January 26 *New York Times* article by David D. Kirkpatrick.]

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## Georgia Ten Commandments Bill Has Support

**A** proposed state bill for posting the Ten Commandments has broad support among both Democrats and Republicans. But some Democratic leaders say the bill is just election-year antics that will cost taxpayers dearly.

The bill (H.B. 941) passed overwhelmingly last week in the Georgia House and now heads to the Senate. It requires the state attorney general "to defend and bear the costs of defending" resulting legal challenges.

Republican House members representing Barrow County are the bill's chief sponsors. The American Civil

Liberties Union sued the Barrow County Commission after a copy of the Ten Commandments was posted at a local courthouse. The county lost the suit and spent more than \$250,000 in its defense.

Ed Helton, Walker County Democrat party chairman, said he is disgusted with politicians in this situation, which he calls "incredibly stupid."

"Their focus is needed on real issues, like 10,000 auto workers' jobs being sucked out of Georgia, instead of legislation that's for the sole intent of getting their rear ends re-elected," Helton said. "It's going to be chal-

lenged. They're going to spend hard-earned taxpayer money defending it and it's still going to lose."

A representative of Americans United for Separation of Church and State says inclusion of the "costs of defending" language in the bill is an indication that, considering the success of lawsuits against public postings, there could be a lot of money wasted.

"I'm sure the state of Georgia has better things to spend taxpayer funds on than unsuccessful Ten Commandments lawsuits," AU's Rob Boston said.

[From a February 5 *Catoosa County News* article by Tim Carlfeldt.]

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# January Board Meeting Minutes

Present: Steve Yothment (President), Judy Thompson (VPI), Freya Harris (VPE), Ed Buckner (Treasurer), Diane Buckner, Bill Burton, Jack McKinney, Jim Middleton  
Date/Time: January 15, 2006, 2:00 PM

Call to Order: Steve Yothment called the meeting to order, and noted that a quorum was present.

Minutes: The minutes of the October 2005 meeting were approved as presented.

Treasurer's Report: For his report, Ed had handouts showing Income and Expenses for the year 2005, and showing the proposed 2006 budget with the years 2001-2005 shown for comparison.

Ed moved that the treasurer provide financial reports every calendar quarter. Bill seconded the motion, and the motion carried. Jack stated that the by-laws require quarterly reports; and, Jack asked that the reports be sent by e-mail before the board meeting. Ed agreed to do so.

Judy pointed out that the loans shown in the financial report show principal and interest as one sum. She stated that the two need to be separated because interest is an expense item while principal is a capital item.

Ed reported that, when money is received, it is difficult to determine if the money is a contribution or dues. It was agreed that, if someone makes contributions, he/she will be kept as a member.

Ed stated that, financially, we have the choice either to publish a new book or to expand our space. Bill said we need more members for expansion. Judy said that, in the past, when we did something, the money appeared; thus, we should base fund-raising on need.

Ed asked that we adopt the new budget without an item for a new publication, stating that it is a matter of both money and focus.

Judy said a prospective speaker had asked for a larger honorarium than our usual, and stated the choices of: refuse the speaker; raise all honoraria; or, make an exception for one speaker. Ed suggested that we budget more, and allow the program chair to pay more on an individual basis. Ed moved to amend the proposed budget for honoraria to be \$1,500, Lew seconded, and the motion carried. Freya suggested that we make more effort to publicize the program, and seek mutual publicity. All were in agreement.

Judy moved to accept the 2006 budget as amended. Freya seconded, and the motion carried.

Thank-you Letters: Steve has a list of those who contributed last year, and will send out thank-you letters that will serve as receipts for tax purposes. He will send to large contributors, and will include as many others as he can reasonably handle.

Darwin Day: Reid Crowe is in charge of our Darwin Day program. It will probably be held at Morehouse College, but that is still subject to confirmation by Reid. Also, Reid will obtain a Darwin Day banner that can be used in the future.

Programs: Judy announced that the programs now planned include: Reggie Finley, presenting his experiences in the TV show

Wife Swap; John Sugg, editor of Creative Loafing; and Charles Lantz, DC, on scientific testing of chiropractic techniques.

Ed informed the board that the Center for Inquiry will have a road show in Atlanta around April 7-9. We may cooperate with them and obtain speakers or the like. Nothing is firm on this yet.

Judy will obtain H&R Block coupons to give out at the next meeting. Use of the coupons will result in a discount for the user plus a donation to AFS.

Space Renovation: For the planned renovation, Jack McKinney and Lew Southern were appointed as committee chairs, with Jack in charge of planning and Lew in charge of execution.

Diane asked if we would accept cast-offs, and the response was in the affirmative, but no junk.

Committees: Steve said he wanted special responsibilities for board members, along the lines of Jack's writing letters to people who have letters published in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. Steve suggested Dennis Martin as membership chair, and George Page as public relations chair.

Adjournment: Lew moved that we adjourn, the motion was seconded, and the motion carried.

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## Letter to the Editor

Congratulations to Jack McKinney, whose letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on January 21.

### Interference a two-way street

Covenant Christian Academy in Loganville expelled a girl for kissing another girl at a party in a private home, off campus ("School defends expulsion over kiss," Metro, Jan. 11). She and her father are suing the school for \$1 million.

The school reportedly cited a defense of "ecclesiastical abstention" that prohibits courts from interfering in a church's internal politics.

Sounds fair enough to me — if that same defense can be used to prohibit churches from interfering in the internal politics of government.



**Jessica Bradley's** suit alleges invasion of privacy and breach of contract.

**JACK McKINNEY**  
Kennesaw



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By Edwin F. Kagin

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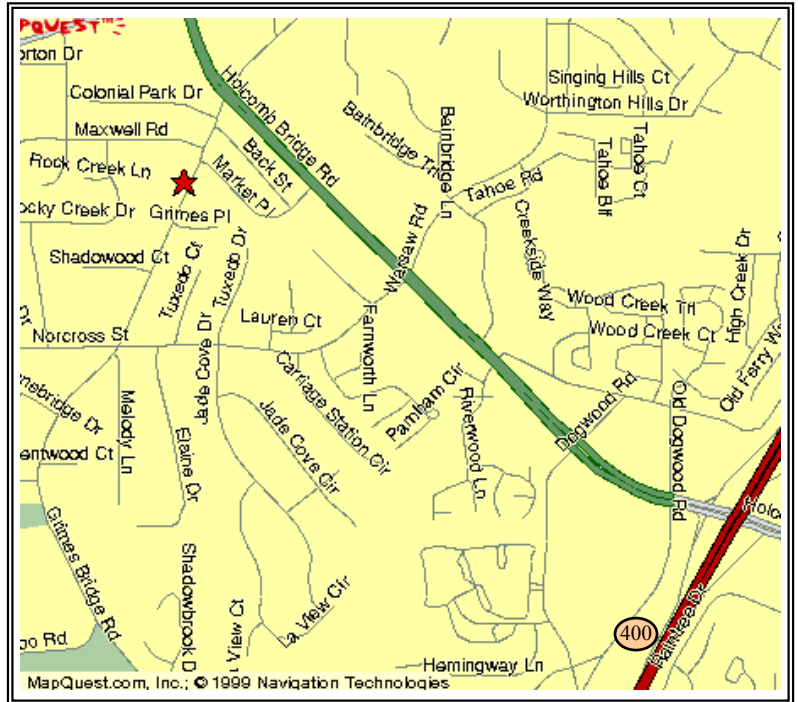
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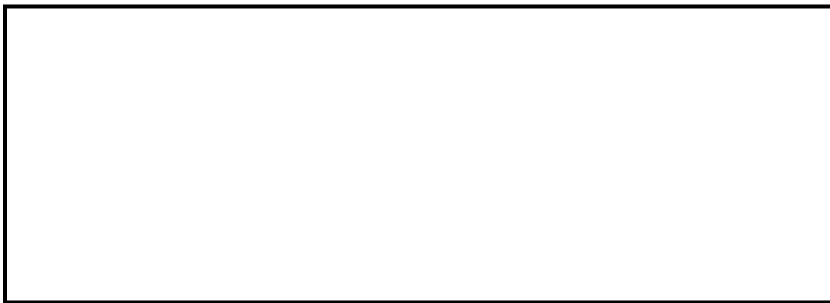
Atlanta  
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**The February Meeting:  
Sunday, February 12  
1:00 at the AF Center  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road  
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:  
Reggie Finley**



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