

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself*

An AFS Publication • Volume 12 Number 5 • May 2006

## The May AFS Meeting

The May 14 AFS meeting will feature **Charles Lance, DC, PhD**, speaking on "Chiropractic... Behind the Mystique."

Dr. Lance received a BS degree in Zoology and a PhD in Pharmacology from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He also earned a post-doctoral fellowship at The Johns Hopkins University Department of Biology. He is co-author of *The Chiropractic Theories*, a standard text in Chiropractic education. He was Director of Research at Life Chiropractic College West in San Francisco for 10 years. In 2000, he moved to Georgia to be Director of Research at Life University. He has published numerous articles on topics as diverse as anatomy, statistical theory and applications, spinal motion analysis and chiropractic theory.

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 Panahar Restaurant, 3375 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, on Friday, May 19, at 7:00 PM.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on Sunday, May 21, from 4:00 to 6:00 PM. Discussion will include **Ed Buckner**, who will present his opening remarks for the May 24 debate and will practice answering questions from the audience.

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

## 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).

## AFS Meetings and Activities

May 14: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.  
May 19: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.  
May 21: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 2:00 PM.  
May 21: AFS Discussion Group at AF Center, 4:00 PM.

**The Fundamentals of Extremism: the Christian Right in America** can be read online. See it at:  
<http://www.newbostonbooks.com/Look%20Inside.htm>

## A Debate on May 24

AFS Officer **Ed Buckner** will be in a debate on Wednesday evening, May 24<sup>th</sup>, in Toccoa, GA at the Georgia Baptist Conference Center. The debate is part of a three-day conference. Ed will debate against Bill Federer on "American History: Christian or Secular?" on the 24<sup>th</sup>; UGA biologist Mark Farmer will debate Carl Wieland on "Origins: Creation or Evolution" on the 25<sup>th</sup>.

The whole event, called "Creation to Revelation... Connecting the Dots" is sponsored by American Vision (a conservative Christian organization led by DeMar; their offices are in Cobb County, GA). For more information on the event, go to [www.americanvision.org/wsc.asp](http://www.americanvision.org/wsc.asp).

Ed's debate is from 8:30 PM to 10:00 PM. He has 15 complimentary tickets for his debate only. If you would like a ticket, e-mail him directly at [ed@buckners.us](mailto:ed@buckners.us).

## AFS to Buy a Church?

The Atlanta Freethought Society recently made an offer to purchase the Collins Springs Primitive Baptist Church in Smyrna, GA. The property is located on N. Church Road near S. Atlanta Road, about ½ mile inside the perimeter. It has easy access from I-285 at Exit 16. The building is about 27 x 48 feet and there is a large concrete pad nearby on which we could build an additional building. The property is about an acre in size. The building has historical significance: it was built in 1866! Even so, it is in good condition and has heating and air conditioning.

Buying the property could benefit AFS in terms of location, expandability, debt reduction and operating costs. However, the owner has decided to not sell the property.

Expansion plans continue for the current AF Center.





## 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.

May 14: **Charles Lantz**, DC, PhD, will speak on "Chiropractic... Behind the Mystique." He is currently writing a book with the same title.

June 11: **Oliver Halle**, an AFS member and retired FBI agent, along with **Diann Cattani**, will speak on "How Good People Get Into Trouble." Oliver wrote a book that was recently published, titled *Taking the Harder Right*.

July 9: 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 xxx-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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# Georgia OKs Bible Classes and Commandments

Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue signed a bill into law on April 20 making Georgia the first state to offer government-sanctioned elective classes on the Bible.

The governor also signed a bill permitting the display of the Ten Commandments at courthouses, an issue that has raised thorny constitutional questions.

Critics say the measures blur the line between church and state. National civil rights groups said they want to see how the laws are implemented before deciding whether to challenge them in court.

The Bible is already incorporated into classes in Georgia and other states, and some local school districts have passed measures permitting classes devoted solely to the Bible. But education analysts say the law in Georgia is the first time a state government has endorsed such courses.

The new law allows elective classes on the Bible to be taught to high school students. Local school systems will decide whether to teach the courses.

The state Education Department has until February to craft curriculums. The law requires that the courses be

taught "in an objective and non-devotional manner with no attempt made to indoctrinate students."

The state's new Ten Commandments law was prompted by controversy over the posting of the commandments at the Barrow County Courthouse. A federal judge ordered the display removed in July.

Backers of the law made clear they were trying to craft a statute that would survive any constitutional challenges.

In a split decision last June, the U.S. Supreme Court declared exhibits of the Ten Commandments constitutional if their main purpose was to honor the nation's legal, rather than religious, traditions, and if they didn't promote one religious sect over another.

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In a related story, Gov. Ernie Fletcher of Kentucky signed a Ten Commandments bill on April 10. The bill allows placement of a Ten Commandments monument on the Capital grounds and allows posting of the Ten Commandments in public schools and local government buildings, but only as part of an historical display. The bill also requires the posting of "In

God We Trust" on the wall in the House of Representatives behind the speaker's stand.

Fletcher did not know when the monument would be put on the Capitol grounds. David Friedman, general counsel for the Kentucky chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union, said the state runs the risk of contempt of court if it places the monument before getting a federal injunction lifted that forbids it.

The U.S. Supreme Court last year ordered McCreary and Pulaski counties to remove Ten Commandments displays because their purpose was primarily religious. But the justices let stand a monument at the Texas Capitol, saying it was part of a secular display.

The Kentucky monument would be flanked by a marker listing its legislative and judicial history. The monument was donated to the state in 1971.

Beth Wilson, executive director of the state ACLU, said her organization would be reviewing the latest monument issue.

[From an April 20 AP article by Shannon McCaffrey and an April 10 article by Jack Brammer in the Frankfort, KY *Herald-Leader*.]

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## Religion: More Than Harmless Nonsense

By Alexander J. Hartman

**I**t seems to be a fairly common feeling among atheists and agnostics that to defend their beliefs and express their viewpoints would be tantamount to the very evangelism they find so offensive in religion. It's understandable that after being repeatedly barraged by religion, one might try to be above it in some way and keep one's views to one's self. Many nonbelievers quietly hold their views without explaining them for fear they might offend or seem to evangelize. There is a line, however, between trying to change others' beliefs and trying to make others' understand yours, and definitely a difference between trying to evangelize

and merely defending your own view.

There were many reasons why I left religion. I was a Pentecostal, and one of the first things I recognized as exceptionally negative about it was that very evangelical spirit. Once I had stepped back from religion I was able to look at it from a more critical standpoint and notice a lot of things I hadn't seen before. What made me such an adamant atheist, and convinced that it's a belief worth expressing and defending, is that I could see what religion does to people; religions encourage faith, believing in something without skepticism or critical analysis. By believing that you are absolutely right, you close your view to

other possibilities when the only real way to find truth is through self-skepticism. The unquestioning outlook religion preaches, calling it a virtue and naming it "faith," once learned and reinforced, is far too easy to fall into as a habit.

Ruining minds with this way of thinking has wasted immeasurable human potential and turned countless individuals (who might otherwise have gone on to contribute to human knowledge) away from a search for truth altogether. We can see many scholars throughout history who avoided drawing important conclusions from their knowledge because it went against religious doctrine, and



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## Religion: More Than Harmless Nonsense (*continued*)

many more examples of religious authority directly having impeded human advancement. Not only does the religious mindset discourage the type of behavior needed for critical analysis and intellectual advancement, but it also encourages closing one's eyes to the very existence of other ways of thinking and other views.

I often hear people speak as if Christianity were the only religion, rarely even admitting that the other Abrahamic religions (let alone any eastern, polytheistic, or naturalistic religion) could be taken seriously. Those raised to believe in any of the other religions would, of course, likely feel the same about their own beliefs.

A belief I hear from many nonbelievers, and which I think greatly contributes to our lack of self-expression, is that if religion is nonsense, it's harmless nonsense that gives people purpose and fulfills some need. But the Crusades, the Inquisitions, Witch Hunts, the Holocaust, ethnic cleansing, Protestant and Catholic Ireland, fanaticism, and the post 9/11 world have shown us that religion is far from harmless. Religion is not only an excuse in the hands of a few inherently dangerous individuals, religion actually encourages the insanity. By promising some wonderful place after death, or a world that would be perfect if only it were freed from heretics, the otherwise normal barriers imposed by common sense are often obliterated, thus allowing people to commit atrocities while believing they're doing good. The individuals taking it to extremes would never go so far if they weren't in societies that encourage those beliefs at some level, telling them it's all right to treat the outsiders differently because, of course, they're wrong no matter what — and we'd be better off without them anyway. Religion encourages atrocities by equipping people with the psychological capacity for extreme acts.

There's nothing special about any religion that could make its adherents above this. Any society with an ambient religion can fall into a mindset of vindicated hatred. It was not so long ago that Christianity itself was right there, plundering, killing, and torturing in the name of "God."

The idea that religion is the only option for filling our human need for purpose and morality is false. Look at what people get from religion: an idea of what they need to base their actions on and a hope that through their own actions they might be able to do "good," as defined by their religion, of course. But with religion, what people base their actions on are egotistical goals of righteousness and immortality in accord with archaic moral codes, indisputable dogma, and archaic beliefs passed down from different times which disregard the current state of the world. Look at the world. It's rife with religious morals. See the result.

Sure, there are a number of good moral precepts in religion, but those often end up being ignored by the people who most need to follow them. Without religion, people might instead look at the world objectively and begin to base their actions and morals on making the world how they think it ought to be—here and now—rather than on trying to get into an afterlife or adhering to whatever moral code someone else long-dead wrote for them.

Take away the subservience to religion and, to fill the need for virtue and purpose that is given as an excuse for religion, people will look to the world around them, and based on what they see and what they think is good, will decide on their own and attempt to make their actions good accordingly.

Some people say that people would welcome hedonistic and possibly malevolent without the fear of religion.

But the ones whose behavior would collapse without religious instruction are the ones who don't feel the need for purpose and virtue anyway. Fortunately, however, most people do feel some need to fulfill a sense of purpose and do good, and the few who don't are often the ones who are especially dangerous within religion, with its justification for irrationality.

No, religion is not just harmless nonsense. Religion encourages a destructive mindset and it enables people to commit horrible and absurd acts, both individually and collectively. As long as religion is present, it prevents to at least some degree the formation of rational morality based on observation of the real world, precisely the type of behavior that is most needed now.

It's time for rational thinkers and nonbelievers to explain the virtue of their very lack of belief, and to stand up for living in an objective world. Nonbelievers need to realize that religion is not just a delusion, it's not just a little comfort to the weak and downtrodden: it is a dangerous force in this world.

Despite hating evangelism and zeal in religion, rationalists, non-theists and secularists need to learn a bit about it. The evangelical religions preach the need for conversion to save nonbelievers, but it's the nonreligious who now have a rational claim to that line of thought. Those who still believe need to be given the chance to understand our view, and decide between rationality and irrationality, between dangerous false hopes and real, possible, "salvation" from ourselves and by ourselves.

Atheism is certainly worth defending, so long as humanity is.

[From the Secular Web website, "a drop of reason in a pool of confusion."  
<http://www.secweb.org/index.aspx?action=viewAsset&id=685>.

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"I cannot conceive of a God who rewards and punishes his creatures, or has a will of the type of which we are conscious in ourselves. An individual who should survive his physical death is also beyond my comprehension, nor do I wish it otherwise; such notions are for the fears or absurd egoism of feeble souls." — Albert Einstein, *The World as I See It*, 1949

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# Time to Change Nation's Mindset that Atheists Shouldn't be Elected

By Robert Weitzel

*"No, I don't know that atheists should be considered as citizens, nor should they be considered patriots. This is one nation under God." — George H.W. Bush*

According to a report in the Lancaster New Era newspaper, our Evangelical and truth-challenged president, George W. Bush, told a gathering of Old Order Amish, "I trust God speaks through me. Without that, I couldn't do my job."

Born-again Christian Tom Delay, ex-representative and former House majority leader, was arguably one of the most powerful and most ethically challenged politicians in Washington. He is currently under indictment in Texas for money laundering in violation of campaign finance laws. Like Bush, DeLay gives credit to the Lord. "God is using me all the time ... to stand up for a biblical worldview in everything that I do. ... He is training me."

Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist is a member of the National Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., and a champion of the Religious Right's agenda. In September 2005 the group Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington identified him as one of the 13 most "corrupt" members of Congress.

A University of Minnesota study published in the April issue of the American Sociological Review found that atheists are America's most unaccepted minority, one that parents are least willing to allow their children to marry. A telephone survey of over 2,000 households revealed that Americans ranked atheists last, after Muslims, recent immigrants, gays and lesbians and other minority groups, in "sharing their vision of American society."

Penny Edgell, the study's lead researcher, said, "It seems most Ameri-

cans believe that diversity is fine, so long as every one shares a common 'core' of values that make them trustworthy and in America, that 'core' has historically been religious."

Recall that the core value shared by Bush, DeLay and Frist is a religious one. Recall also their trustworthiness.

Atheists and agnostics make up approximately 10 percent (30 million people) of the U.S. population. Every 10th person in America is a "person of nonbelief" a sizable minority. However, there are no openly atheist members of Congress and quite possibly none in any other elected offices in the country.

A 1999 Gallup poll found that 49 percent of Americans would vote against an atheist on the grounds of their atheism alone. Simply having a naturalistic view of the universe makes a candidate unelectable in American politics.

In a 2004 New York Times interview, Ron Reagan Jr. was asked if he would like to follow in his father's footsteps and become president. He responded, "I would be unelectable. I'm an atheist. As we know, that's something that people won't accept."

An unblinkered view of American politics should convince any thinking voter that being a person of faith does not ensure that a politician is motivated by that faith to act morally or ethically. Considering the rogue's gallery of current Washington politicians, one would be justified in coming to the opposite conclusion.

This is not to denigrate people of faith who use their religion as the rock upon which to anchor their belief in a just and peaceful world and their ef-

forts to that end. But it is equally likely these people, faith or no, would be fighting the same battle. That is because of who these people are, not what brand of religion they profess. Atheists as well can be found fighting the "good fight," just anchored to a different rock.

Physicist and Nobel Laureate Steven Weinberg once observed that "With or without (religion) you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion." One need only consider politics-as-usual in America or the sectarian conflicts in places such as Northern Ireland, the Middle East, or India and Pakistan to appreciate the gravity of Weinberg's observation.

In an April 17 New Yorker piece, Seymour Hersh quotes a senior member of the House Appropriations Committee regarding President Bush's developing plans to bomb Iran's nuclear facilities. Referring to the president, the House member said, "The most worrisome thing is that this guy has a messianic vision."

If we are to take him at his word, Bush really does believe he is God's Middle East savior. This is an apocalyptic delusion.

Maybe it is time to give "people of nonbelief," who harbor no messianic delusions, an elected piece of the public square. They could do no worse than some "people of faith" are currently doing.

[From an April 22 article in *The Capital Times* of Madison, WI. Reprinted here by permission. Robert Weitzel ([rweitz@tds.net](mailto:rweitz@tds.net)), writes frequently for newspapers and magazines.]

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## 'National Day of Prayer' Events Politicize Religion, Divide Country, Says American United

The Dobsons and Politicians Are Using Religion To Further Political Agenda, AU Charges

Religious Right leaders and politicians used the National Day

of Prayer (NDP) to politicize religion and divide Americans, says Ameri-

cans United for Separation of Church and State.

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## National Day of Prayer *(continued)*

The annual event, which takes place by federal law on the first Thursday of each May, gives Religious Right groups and their allies in public office a platform to push their political agenda, Americans United charges.

In recent years, religious broadcaster James Dobson and his wife Shirley have assumed a leadership role in promoting the observance. Dobson's Focus on the Family and Focus on the Family Action are Religious Right organizations that oppose church-state separation and seek to impose a fundamentalist Christian viewpoint through government action.

"James Dobson has shamelessly exploited the National Day of Prayer to advance his divisive political agenda," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "This merger of religion and politics is exactly what our nation's founding fathers hoped to avoid."

Lynn noted that James Madison,

the Father of the Constitution, said governmental prayer proclamations "certainly nourish the erroneous idea of a national religion" and warned that public officials would use such proclamations to advance their political agenda. Thomas Jefferson, as president, refused to issue prayer proclamations and said the Constitution forbids the federal government from "intermeddling with religious institutions, their doctrines, discipline, or exercises."

Lynn added that most NDP activities are now coordinated by the National Day of Prayer Task Force, a private group headed by Shirley Dobson. This year, as in years past, the NDP Task Force distributed materials promoting an inaccurate "Christian nation" view of history and distorting federal court rulings that uphold church-state separation.

Lynn noted that this year, Mrs. Dobson even boasted about her group sponsoring the "National Day of Prayer Official Website," although she

does not say who gave the group this designation. (The Dobsons usually travel to the White House for an NDP observance there with President George W. Bush, although Bush has not given the NDP Task Force an official character.)

The NDP Task Force encourages local groups to exclude non-fundamentalist Christians from NDP events. The NDP Web site goes so far as to assert that only Christian groups that endorse the Lausanne Covenant, an evangelical statement from the 1970s, should be invited to take part.

"The Dobsons' events are deeply divisive," said Lynn. "They intentionally exclude millions of Americans who differ with the Religious Right's narrow religious and political agenda. Rather than make a big public display of piety, politicians would do better to use May 4 to rededicate themselves to the spirit of the First Amendment and oppose those forces that do not value religious diversity or religious liberty." [From an April 27 AU press release.]

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## Congress Moves to Except Religious Schools From Gay Rights Laws

Private Christian colleges would be excepted from local and state non-discrimination laws under a proposed amendment to the Higher Education Act. The move would allow the schools to legally reject gay students.

The amendment, proposed by Rep. Chris Cannon (R-Utah), would prevent accrediting boards from making adherence to non-discrimination laws a requirement.

The measure passed the House on April 14 and is now before the Senate.

Brigham Young, University of Notre Dame, Baylor, Pepperdine and Samford universities have all been lobbying heavily for passage of the bill.

Although few boards specifically make adherence to non-discrimination laws a requirement for accreditation the schools say they want assurances they will not be targeted in the future.

"This is really a pre-emptive move on the part of these schools," BYU spokesperson Carri Jenkins told the Deseret Morning News.

Pressure from the school has increased as a result of the Soulforce Equality Ride, a cross country protest of universities and colleges that do not permit gays to enroll.

In early April, 30 riders were arrested over two days of demonstrations at BYU, which is affiliated with the Mormon Church.

The Equality Ride began last month in Washington D.C.. Riders have been arrested at Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, Oklahoma; Regent University in Virginia Beach, Virginia which is affiliated with Christian Broadcaster Pat Robertson; and at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia.

On April 14 another ten riders were

arrested at the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

Democrats in both houses of Congress oppose the amendment.

When the bill passed in a Senate committee Democrats wrote that "we believe that the amendment is not warranted in light of current practices by accrediting agencies and could have tremendous implications for the independence of accrediting agencies in determining appropriate standards for accreditation."

The committee also inserted language in the bill stating that it is not meant to allow an institution to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age or disability. The provision does not include sexuality.

[From an April 18 article by Paul Johnson at [www.365gay.com](http://www.365gay.com).]

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# Christians Sue for Right to Not Tolerate Policies

Many codes intended to protect gays from harassment are illegal, conservatives claim.

**R**uth Malhotra went to court last month for the right to be intolerant. Malhotra says her Christian faith compels her to speak out against homosexuality. But the Georgia Institute of Technology, where she's a senior, bans speech that puts down others because of their sexual orientation.

Malhotra sees that as an unacceptable infringement on her right to religious expression. So she's demanding that Georgia Tech revoke its tolerance policy.

With her lawsuit, the 22-year-old student joins a growing campaign to force public schools, state colleges and private workplaces to eliminate policies protecting gays and lesbians from harassment. The religious right aims to overturn a broad range of common tolerance programs: diversity training that promotes acceptance of gays and lesbians, speech codes that ban harsh words against homosexuality, anti-discrimination policies that require college clubs to open their membership to all.

The Rev. Rick Scarborough, a leading evangelical, frames the movement as the civil rights struggle of the 21st century. "Christians," he said, "are going to have to take a stand for the right to be Christian."

In that spirit, the Christian Legal Society, an association of judges and lawyers, has formed a national group to challenge tolerance policies in federal court. Several nonprofit law firms — backed by major ministries such as Focus on the Family and Campus Crusade for Christ — already take on such cases for free.

The legal argument is straightforward: Policies intended to protect gays and lesbians from discrimination end up discriminating against conservative Christians. Evangelicals have been suspended for wearing anti-gay T-shirts to high school, fired for denouncing Gay Pride Month at work, reprimanded for refusing to attend diversity training. When they protest tolerance codes, they're labeled intolerant.

erant.

A recent survey by the Anti-Defamation League found that 64% of American adults — including 80% of evangelical Christians — agreed with the statement "Religion is under attack in this country."

"The message is, you're free to worship as you like, but don't you dare talk about it outside the four walls of your church," said Stephen Crampton, chief counsel for the American Family Assn. Center for Law and Policy, which represents Christians who feel harassed.

Critics dismiss such talk as a right-wing fundraising ploy. "They're trying to develop a persecution complex," said Jeremy Gunn, director of the American Civil Liberties Union's Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief.

Others fear the banner of religious liberty could be used to justify all manner of harassment.

"What if a person felt their religious view was that African Americans shouldn't mingle with Caucasians, or that women shouldn't work?" asked Jon Davidson, legal director of the gay rights group Lambda Legal.

Christian activist Gregory S. Baylor responds to such criticism angrily. He says he supports policies that protect people from discrimination based on race and gender. But he draws a distinction that infuriates gay rights activists when he argues that sexual orientation is different — a lifestyle choice, not an inborn trait.

By equating homosexuality with race, Baylor said, tolerance policies put conservative evangelicals in the same category as racists. He predicts the government will one day revoke the tax-exempt status of churches that preach homosexuality is sinful or that refuse to hire gays and lesbians.

"Think how marginalized racists are," said Baylor, who directs the Christian Legal Society's Center for Law and Religious Freedom. "If we don't address this now, it will only get

worse."

Christians are fighting back in a case involving Every Nation Campus Ministries at California State University. Student members of the ministry on the Long Beach and San Diego campuses say their mission is to model a virtuous lifestyle for their peers. They will not accept as members gays, lesbians or anyone who considers homosexuality "a natural part of God's created order."

Legal analysts agree that the ministry, as a private organization, has every right to exclude gays; the Supreme Court affirmed that principle in a case involving the Boy Scouts in 2000. At issue is whether the university must grant official recognition to a student group that discriminates.

The students say denying them recognition — and its attendant benefits, such as funding — violates their free-speech rights and discriminates against their conservative theology. Christian groups at public colleges in other states have sued using similar arguments. Several of those lawsuits were settled out of court, with the groups prevailing.

In California, however, the university may have a strong defense in court. The California Supreme Court recently ruled that the city of Berkeley was justified in denying subsidies to the Boy Scouts because of that group's exclusionary policies. Eddie L. Washington, the lawyer representing Cal State, argues the same standard should apply to the university.

"We're certainly not going to fund discrimination," Washington said.

As they step up their legal campaign, conservative Christians face uncertain prospects. The 1st Amendment guarantees Americans "free exercise" of religion. In practice, though, the ground rules shift depending on the situation.

In their lawsuit against Georgia Tech, Malhotra and her co-plaintiff, a devout Jewish student named Orit Sklar, request unspecified damages.



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## Christians Sue ... (continued)

[From an April 10 *L.A. Times* article by Stephanie Simon.]

But they say their main goal is to force the university to be more tolerant of religious viewpoints.

Malhotra said she had been reprimanded by college deans several times in the last few years for expressing conservative religious and political views. When she protested a campus production of "The Vagina Monologues" with a display condemning feminism, the administration asked her to paint over part of it.

She caused another stir with a letter to the gay activists who organized an event known as Coming Out Week in the fall of 2004. Malhotra sent the let-

ter on behalf of the Georgia Tech College Republicans, which she chairs; she said several members of the executive board helped write it.

The letter berated students who come out publicly as gay, saying they subject others on campus to "a constant barrage of homosexuality."

Soon after, Malhotra said, she was called in to the dean's office. Students can be expelled for intolerant speech, but she said she was only reprimanded.

A Georgia Tech spokeswoman would not comment on the lawsuit or on Malhotra's disciplinary record, but

she said the university encouraged students to debate freely, "as long as they're not promoting violence or harassing anyone."

The open question is what constitutes harassment, what's a sincere expression of faith — and what to do when they overlap.

"There really is confusion out there," said Charles C. Haynes, a senior scholar at the First Amendment Center, which is affiliated with Vanderbilt University. "Finding common ground sounds good. But the reality is, a lot of people on all sides have a stake in the fight."

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## Atheism: A Liberating World View

By Gilbert D. Shapiro

**A**theists are "seen as a threat to the American way of life by a large portion of the American public," according to a national survey conducted by the University of Minnesota.

The research, reported in April's *American Sociological Review*, sadly confirms to me that many of our citizens are uninformed and undereducated. The conclusions are an insult to an estimated 30 million Americans who are honest, rational, moral and unfortunately far too quiet.

It is therefore time for atheists to "come out of the closet" and shout out loud the famous line, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it any longer!"

I certainly do not speak for all atheists, but I think I can briefly clear up some misconceptions and clarify a few atheist positions.

Let's first affirm that atheism is not a religion. It is quite simply a fundamental worldview that asserts that to date there has been no evidence for the existence (reality) of gods. Logically, it is therefore incumbent on believers to support their claims rather than the reverse.

The evidence that we do have argues quite strongly that the Judeo-Christian deity does not exist. For example, God is traditionally described as all-powerful, -knowing, -present

and -good and not of time or space. Like square circles and married bachelors, it is an incoherent statement on its face and proven so by a simple reality check.

Scientific research just published in the *American Heart Journal* has found that praying for someone's health to improve is ineffective. Miracles (events that violate natural laws) have never been documented. Indeed, there has never been confirmation of a divine intervention or, for that matter, anything supernatural.

Spirituality, regrettably for many, has never been shown to be anything more than just heightened human awareness. The suffering and misery resulting from tsunamis, earthquakes, famines, etc., are testimonies that nature is exquisitely indifferent to all living things.

Evolution, a nondebatable scientific truth (like gravity), denies the divine character of man as portrayed in the Bible. Faith, the underpinning and the engine that runs religion, is defined as belief without reason. In the rational world, if one has supportable reasons for a position, then one would not need faith. For atheists therefore, all belief has to be based on reason, logic and rational thought.

Atheists have observed that the deeper the religious belief the more

there is a lack of intellectual integrity.

Whereas atheists would change their position the minute there was evidence for a god or for the supernatural, religionists are so hard-wired and vacuum-sealed in their beliefs that they freely admit that their position is not even open for discussion.

Atheism is the liberating view incorporated in the philosophy of secular humanism. Its central theme is that man alone is solely responsible for his destiny on earth. Morality has been shown to be a product of human development over thousands of years; no deity is necessary to counsel us about right and wrong.

Atheists are continually amazed that Americans can reason with such clarity and critical thinking on most aspects of life except when it comes to God and religion.

God, faith, religion, and the supernatural are, in the atheist's worldview, the causes of the delusional wishful thinking that has at best, wasted man's time and at worst, been responsible for his most awful behaviors.

[From an April 19 Op-ed article in the *Arizona Daily Star*. Reprinted here by permission. In fact, Dr. Shapiro ([gdshapiro@comcast.net](mailto:gdshapiro@comcast.net)) invites any freethinker magazine or newsletter to reprint the article.]



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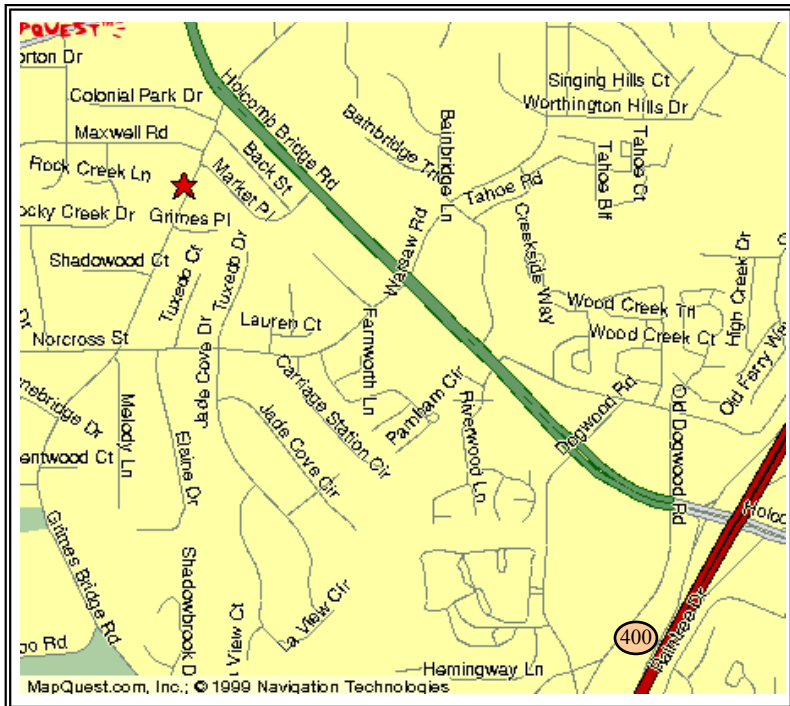
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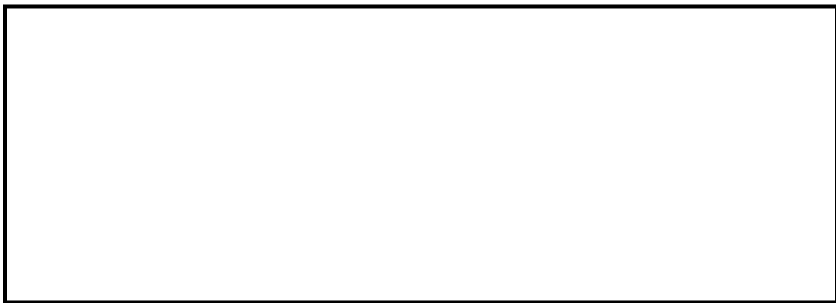
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**The May Meeting:  
Sunday, May 14  
1:00 at the AF Center  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road  
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**This Month's Speaker:  
Charles Lantz, DC, PhD**



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