

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself*

An AFS Publication • Volume 12 Number 6 • June 2006

## The June AFS Meeting

The June 11 AFS meeting will feature **Oliver Halle**, an AFS member and retired FBI agent, and **Diann Cattani**, speaking on "How Good People Get Into Trouble."

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, June 16, at 7:00 PM.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on Sunday, June 18, from 4:00 to 6:00 PM. At this meeting, we will watch the video of Ed Buckner's May 24 debate with Bill Federer (assuming that the video is available at that time).

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

## Americans United Meeting

The Georgia Chapter of **Americans United for Separation of Church and State** will meet at the AF Center on Wednesday, June 21, from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. Even if you're not a member, please feel free to attend the meeting, which is open to the public. AU's National Grassroots Organizer Rena Levin will speak.

AU of Georgia will staff a booth at the **Atlanta Gay Pride Festival** this year and is looking for volunteers to help out. The event is at Piedmont Park on June 23, 24 and 25. Please contact Ed Buckner if you would like to help.

## Humanists of Georgia Picnic

The Humanists of Georgia will have a picnic at Laurel Park, 151 Manning Road, in Marietta, GA, on Sunday, June 25, from 12:00 to 3:00 PM. Please RSVP to Kathy Brooke at [kathybrooke@yahoo.com](mailto:kathybrooke@yahoo.com). (Bring a plate of food & a chair!)

## AFS Meetings and Activities

- June 10: Highway Cleanup, Glenridge Ramp, 10:00 AM.
- June 11: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
- June 16: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
- June 18: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 2:00 PM.
- June 18: AFS Discussion Group at AF Center, 4:00 PM.

## Lake Hypatia July 4 Celebration

Celebrate Freethought and Independence Day with the **Alabama Freethought Association** at its annual "Glorious Fourth" weekend at **Lake Hypatia**, near Taladega, AL.

The July 1 - 4 event will include the following speakers:

- Janice Rael, "How I Became an Everlasting God Stopper"
- Clark Adams, "How to Prevent Your Freethought Group from Looking Like a Funeral"
- Rich Deshpande, "Cyber Citizens Continuum"
- Chad Nichols, "Student Group Activism"
- Mike Morgan from Alabama NPR, "The Dollars and Sense of Public Radio"
- Eric Pepke, "Relativity: An Exercise in Freethought"
- Chris McDougal, (topic to be announced);
- Bob Truett, "What Is This Thing Called Love?"
- Hemant Mehta, "Ebay Atheism"

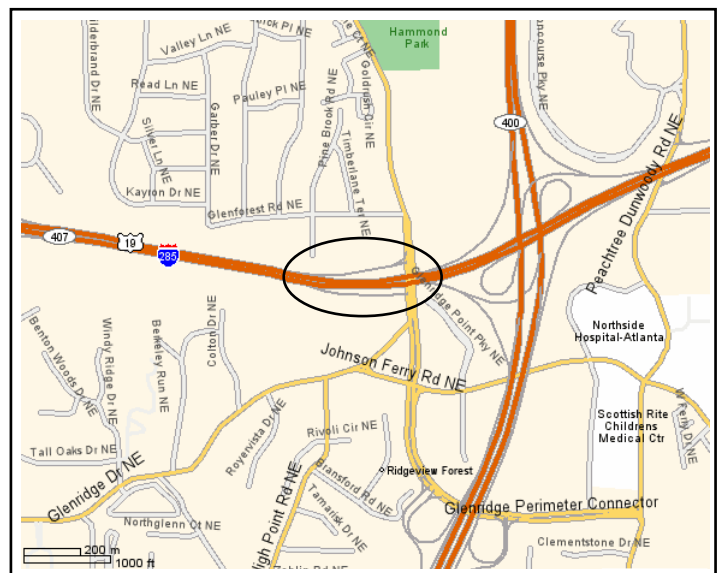
Speeches take place in the spacious, air-conditioned **Lake Hypatia Freethought Hall**. Inexpensive catered meals are held at a beautiful lakeside pavilion.

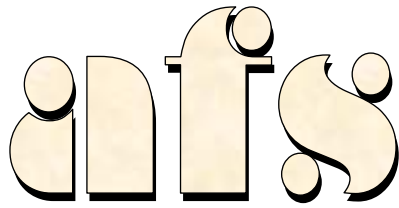
Swimming, paddling, boating, hiking, poetry-reading, relaxing and socializing are all on the agenda. See registration details at: <http://www.ffrf.org/lakehypatia/>.

## Highway Cleanup is This Saturday

The Atlanta Freethought Society will have its **Adopt-A-Highway cleanup** on Saturday, June 10, at 10:00 AM. The cleanup will be on the Glenridge Ramp at Exit 26 of I-285. (This is the long ramp that connects Glenridge Drive to I-285 near GA400.) We will clear trash on both sides of I-285.

Please park along the north ramp. The Highway Department will provide safety vests and trash bags.





**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.

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

Aug 13: 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

**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 – 404-845-2276

**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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For membership and subscription  
information, contact AFS at:  
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Membership in AFS is \$25/year for in-  
dividuals, \$35 for households, and \$10  
for students/low income/under 21. Sus-  
taining members (individual) \$100 and  
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[afs@atlantafreethought.org](mailto:afs@atlantafreethought.org).

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

# AFS Will Probably Buy a Former Church Building After All !

By Ed Buckner, AFS Treasurer

The front-page story of the May issue of *AFNews* looks now as if the main part of the story—though not the last sentence—will in fact turn out to be correct. After at first advising us that they were not interested in selling a former church building to us, the developers have now agreed, informally at least, to sell it to us. This is not, as of this writing (early June) quite settled yet—many details need to be worked out and agreed on, and nothing is real in real estate unless it is in writing and signed off by all parties. But it now seems likely that we will be buying a building that housed the Collins Springs Primitive Baptist Church from 1866 until about four years ago.

The building and the half-acre or so it sits on are located inside the I-285 perimeter, just downhill from a view of the Atlanta downtown skyline, and only a block away from historic Atlanta Road. (See the map.) If someone were traveling from Atlanta to Marietta or back anytime in the last 170 years or so, the road now called Atlanta Road was the most direct route. (Its called “Marietta Boulevard” once it crosses the Chattahoochee River a mile or so on towards Atlanta; “Marietta Street” by the time it reaches Little Five Points in downtown Atlanta.) It once had a streetcar connecting the two towns. (Marietta is the older of the two towns, as proud Cobb County

citizens know.) General William Tecumseh Sherman passed this way in 1864, and a map of the area from that time shows on it a “Collins Springs Church” on the land we expect to buy. Fortunately for us, Lew Southern came by 142 years later and saw the great potential.

Primitive Baptists, Cobb County, and AFS buying a building rich in history, a building that used to be a church—interesting, I think. Others will, of course, see it all differently.

We don’t know exactly why the CSPBC went out of business, but their members dwindled to too few, and they sold their building (and the cemetery across the way, though the developer deeded the cemetery back to a group who now are responsible for it) to a developer who reportedly wanted to buy it so a new nearby Kroger could sell beer and wine. So the final blow to this particular church was, in a sense, the alcohol laws designed to hurt alcohol sales, not designed to encourage church building sales.

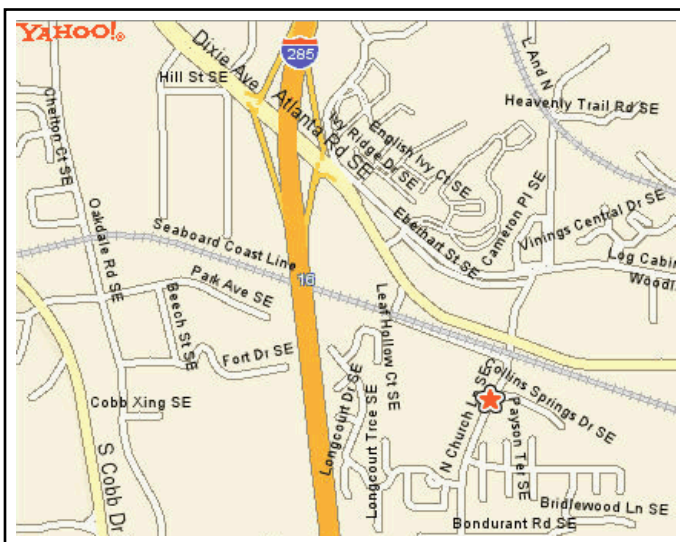
I was until quite recently ignorant of Primitive Baptists, knowing only that they practiced foot-washing and called themselves “primitive.” I’m unlikely ever to join one of their churches or adopt their theology, but there are admirable qualities in some of what they believe.

“Primitive” is part of their name to

signify that they consider themselves the “true” or “pure” or “original” Baptists—the ones closest to the source of Baptist beliefs. In 1814, a missionary outreach was established by the Baptists, or by some of them. The Primitive Baptists, believing as they did in predestination and that it was up to God, not man, to pick who was to be saved, split over the missionary efforts. They were even sometimes known as “anti-missionary Baptists.” They also disliked the notion of a church becoming overly caught up with money matters, and they opposed not only missions but also paid staff for their churches (preachers had to have day jobs), Sunday Schools, fancy buildings or decorations, and musical instruments.

Primitive Baptists considered washing each other’s feet, among other things, symbolic of an egalitarian spirit that denied anyone the status to feel superior to anyone else. John Leland, a Baptist preacher famous for and instrumental in establishing the separation of church and state, was an early leader of the anti-missionary Baptists. My son Michael and I added two quotations from Leland to our quotes book over a decade ago.

When a future President of the U.S., then Col. Andrew Jackson, first came in 1820 to the area that would later become Cobb County, it was land that was inhabited and controlled by Cher-



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## AFS Will Probably Buy... (continued)

okee Indians. Jackson was there, at first at least, to uproot and relocate the "white men" who were illegally encroaching on this Indian territory—but the infamous "Trail of Tears" changed all that, leading in due course to Newt Gingrich becoming Speaker of the House. (The whole history is interesting, but you don't have time for all that, do you?)

Cobb County, Georgia, is, for many reasons, famous nation-wide (even internationally), both in the past and currently, for lynching at least one Jew and many black people, fighting science and evolution, supporting Protestant Christianity while opposing church/state separation, vilifying gay rights, and otherwise not being a shining beacon of enlightenment. But many, many Cobb Countians have worked hard to reverse the ugliest of these tendencies—and the evil ideas are certainly not restricted to Cobb.

There may be those who learn of our purchase—perhaps even among our own members—who think it is or should be seen as a combat maneuver: as freethinkers closing down and tak-

ing over a church, or freethinkers sticking it to the self-righteous Christians of Cobb County right in their own back yard. More militant atheists may see an opposite problem: what are proud irreligious people doing moving into a church, for goodness sake? I would point out, however, that this is an historic but unpretentious building that will seat 125 to 150 people, is inside I-285, and will meet our meeting room needs—and that it has not been a church for several years now. We certainly had nothing to do with the church's decline or collapse, and we should not pretend we did. We have many members in Cobb—40 percent of the AFS board lives in Cobb, more than in any other county—members who have worked to educate those in Cobb who have tarnished her reputation so badly. As a former AFS officer, Steve Kilbride, once said of living in Cobb, somebody needs to live here to stand up for what's right.

We should, of course, always give priority to good speakers and programs, educating ourselves and oth-

ers, and maybe having a debate or two in this building. We should continue, as our charter demands, to advance freethought and criticize religion, as it deserves to be criticized. But we are also a community of people, a group that has some important things in common with each other. It pleases me to think about our using and occupying a place where, for many generations, a community of people shared their beliefs and important times in their lives, trying as best they could to support each other in happy times and in those painful times when some of them buried children or others they loved in the cemetery across the street from where the former church building is now. I think we should see this building and grounds, if we do buy it, as a place where we can be at home as well as a place to press our freethought ideas. We should have ice cream socials, picnics, and yard sales there, as well as good programs. I could be wrong, but I think Sam Howell and Dot Larson, if they were still alive, would approve.

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### Other Announcements:

- AFS has some Advanced Screening Movie Passes for the Monday, June 12, 7:00pm showing of *The Lake House* at AMC Phipps Plaza 14. Contact Steve Yothment if you would like tickets for this show.
- Karon Park is trying to organize a trip to Dayton, Tenn later this month to attend a re-enactment of the Scopes Trial. Please contact Karon at [kpark782@aol.com](mailto:kpark782@aol.com) if you would like to attend this event.

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## Julia F. Eubanks

It is our sad duty to report that one of our own, an AFS (and HGA) member for many years, Julia Flynt Eubanks, died on May 19, 2006. She was born in Dublin, Georgia in 1924. She served in the Marine Corps during World War II. She was a graduate of Valdosta State University and University of Georgia. She was a medical microbiologist and retired as a Lab Unit Director after 34 years with the state health system. She filled her retirement years with travel, gardening, volunteer activities and time spent at the beach with her children and grandchildren. When her health limited her activities she remained an avid reader, music lover and enjoyed watching televised games of UGA football and Braves baseball. She is survived by her brothers, Jimmy and Roy; her children, Lola and Beverly; four grandchildren and her beloved cat Lady. She was a friend, counselor and confidant to her family and will be sorely missed. The body was cremated. Family and close friends will gather in remembrance at a future

date. In lieu of flowers the family suggests donations to organizations Julia supported: the American Cancer Society, Doctors without Borders, Heifer Project International, Plan USA (Childreach), Project Hope, or the Atlanta Community Food Bank. For more information, please contact Wages & Sons, (770) 469-9811.

## Lenore M. Brewer

Another of our members for many years, Lenore Matthews Brewer, died on May 17, 2006. She was also a member of Humanists of Georgia. Lenore was the wife of Homer Brewer (also a member and supporter of AFS). A memorial service was held Saturday, May 20th, 2006 in the chapel of The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta. Family members requested that, in lieu of flowers, contributions may be made to the UUCA Endowment fund at UUCG, 1911 Cliff Valley Way, N.E., Atlanta, GA 30329. For more information, contact Wages & Sons of Stone Mountain, (770) 469-9811.

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# Feds Send Back Cobb Evolution Sticker Case

**A** federal appeals court declined to rule on May 24 on the constitutionality of the controversial Cobb County evolution disclaimers in public school science books. The court said it did not have enough information to make the decision.

The ruling was the latest twist in a nationally watched case that has raised questions of local authority over schools and whether Cobb's sticker—which called evolution a “theory, not a fact”—runs afoul of the First Amendment.

The ruling means more arguments from lawyers and, perhaps, a new trial.

Yet both sides claimed to be pleased with the decision, even as a three-judge panel of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals chided them for sloppiness and questioned whether U.S. District Judge Clarence Cooper got his facts straight.

The Cobb County school system was ordered in January 2005 to remove the stickers from the inside front cover of 35,000 biology textbooks after the U.S. District Court judge ruled they represented an unconstitutional endorsement of religion. To comply, school staff and students scraped the stickers from all the books.

It had been the school's policy since 1995 to tear out chapters on evolution from science textbooks out of “respect for the family teachings of a significant number of Cobb County citizens.” But, in the spring of 2002, when the school district selected a new biology book that contained 101 pages on evolution, school officials decided to affix a disclaimer sticker instead of removing the section.

Parents of some students sued, claiming that the stickers violated the First Amendment clause that separates church and state. The district court judge ruled in their favor, saying the argument that evolution is a theory and not a fact was a distinction made by religiously motivated individuals.

At the heart of the federal appeals court ruling is whether school officials

had been pressured into adopting the stickers. The lower court said school officials responded to a 2,300-signature petition that demanded the disclaimer, but the appeals court panel was never presented a copy of the petition or evidence that one was ever submitted before the school system opted for the stickers.

The 11th Circuit gave Judge Cooper two options: “Start with an entirely clean slate and a completely new trial” or “supplement, clarify and flesh out the evidence” with new court proceedings.

Attorney Emily Meazell, who represented before the appeals court five parents who sued to make Cobb remove the disclaimers, said, “There are places the record could have been better established. We have everything we need to do that the next time around.”

She added: “We think it's a great chance to address some of the problems. The bottom line: The stickers are still not in the textbooks.”

It was noted in the court case, and also in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, that the stickers stemmed from a drive begun by creationist Marjorie Rogers. According to news accounts, Rogers collected 2,300 signatures on a petition and helped prompt the school board to stick the disclaimers on the inside front covers of 13 science books used in middle and high schools.

The appeals court, however, said there was no petition fitting that description contained in evidence it reviewed.

That is problematic, it said, because Cooper's ruling says the disclaimers send “a message that the school board agrees with the beliefs of Christian fundamentalists and creationists” and cites the petition as a specific example.

Rogers told the newspaper in December that she gave the petition to the board before it decided to buy new science books that contained chapters on evolution. She also said that one of the petition's three options was for the board to put disclaimers

in the new books.

Jeffrey Selman, the Cobb parent who led the lawsuit, said he remained confident the decision will go his way.

[From a May 26 AP article by Giovanna Dell'Orto and a May 26 *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* article by Kristina Torres and Bill Rankin.]

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## Letter to the Editor

Kathy Sayeg's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on May 27. Her letter was a response to an article by Bill Hendrick on May 20 titled “Atheists jump at chance to debate, tout morals.” That article quoted AFS officers Steve Yohtment and Ed Buckner.

### A better world the only goal

While I was disappointed to learn that many religious leaders continue to hold false views concerning atheists, it was a pleasant surprise to see our voice finally included in the Faith & Values section.

War, slavery, child abuse and the oppression of women are just a few things justified in the name of religion. Perhaps it's easy to sin when you believe that your deity will forgive you.

The atheists I know are only interested in creating a better world for our fellow humans, so we hold only ourselves accountable for our good or bad behavior without expectation of reward.

It's time to encourage an end to the prejudice and bigotry against atheists. Humans who make fraudulent claims about those with different beliefs are certainly not standing on moral high ground.

**KATHLEEN SAYEG**  
Griffin

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# Religion and Politics: A Critique of the new Religious Left

By Barry F. Seidman, a secularist radio show host for WBAI in New York

After nearly forty years of retreat, the American Religious Left is once again on the advance. And on the face of it, even secular Americans might have reason to cheer a religious movement focused on alleviating poverty, safeguarding the environment, improving criminal justice and opposition to war—as opposed to the Religious Right’s obsession with abortion and gay marriage.

As the movement’s most prominent leader, Jim Wallis, founder of leftish Christian evangelical magazine *Sojourner’s* put it in his 2004 book *“God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get It: A New Vision for Faith and Politics in America”*:

“Promoting and pursuing a progressive social agenda with a concern for economic security, health care, and educational opportunity doesn’t mean you have to put faith in God aside...”<sup>1</sup>

But however much praise Wallis and his followers deserve for joining the good fight against Christo-Fascists like Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Tim LaHaye, and President Bush, the coupling of religion and politics, is as dangerous for the Left as it is for the Right, because absolutism, authoritative supernaturalism and the actual tenets of the Abrahamic religious texts can never be reconciled with democracy and freedom.

Central to Wallis’ message is the belief that at the heart of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam lays a golden and pristine platonic realm where the ethics of social justice, brotherly love and global peace drive God’s big-brained creation. Wallis points to Martin Luther King Jr. as an example of liberalism and spirituality joining hands to spark major progressive reforms. Wallis argues, “Martin Luther King Jr., ...with his Bible in one hand and the Constitution in the other...reminded us all of God’s purposes for justice, for peace...”<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult to argue against what Dr. King accomplished; just as it can

seem difficult to critique the Religious Right when they (mis)talk about “family values.” But both arguments are misleading. As we shall see, when the Right talks about values, they are actually promoting literal biblical dogma—dogma that includes diatribes against women, children, homosexuals, compassion, and “the other.” And even if King believed that his courage and strength derived from religion, when it came to actually doing what was necessary, he advocated for secular, humanistic change in our society... change that would never be made if he stuck to the Bible’s message.

What are the actual tenets of the Abrahamic religions, and can Wallis’s progressive vision be found there? In Hector Avalos’ new book, *Fighting Words: The Origin of Religious Violence* (2005), Avalos examines the Abrahamic religions with an eye towards explaining the kinds of behavior we associate with the Christian Right in America, the Jewish Right in Israel, and the Islamic Right in the Middle East. What he discovers will be sure to disturb anyone with a liberal impression of God.

Avalos’ main argument is that violence stems from real or perceived scarcities of resources. When we look at the Bush Administration’s invasion of Iraq, we see the very real concern with the dwindling oil reserves on Earth, and how the oil-made members of the current administration would risk personal economic disaster if the Iraqi oil were to actually serve the Iraqi people. But in addition to real resources, “perceived resources” can also become the focus of violence—and all too often, these resources have been created by our religious books.

According to Avalos, one of these perceived resources stems from what he calls “group privileging.” For example, the Jewish belief that Israel is that chosen land—and that Jews are a chose people—necessarily elevates Jews in their own eyes above all other

people on earth. This perceived scarcity—the scarcity of being God’s “favorite”—can be seen in Israel’s current policy toward the Palestinians.

Avalos argues:

...The type of Zionism that centers on Israel as the essential homeland for Jews rests on a religious belief in scriptural claims. In the absence of belief that God has given the land to the Hebrew people, the conflict may never have continued into the present. ...Far from being mainly a political problem, modern Zionism represents the recrudescence of religious claims first enunciated in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>4</sup>

Avalos argues that the idea of group privileging also sparked religious violence by inculcating the idea among Jews that God helped them destroy other peoples — peoples the Jews saw as a threat, conveniently: the Hittites, Gergashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Jebusites and the modern Palestinians

(In an interesting aside, Avalos argues that “shalom” does not mean “peace” as is commonly misunderstood. Rather, shalom means “repayment” or “retaliation.” Avalos argues that shalom was a word meaning domination or hegemony of Jews over all, and severe retribution for any who go against the Jewish way of life.)

Many liberal-minded Christians, I have found, do not advocate for the angry, retributive God of the Hebrews. In fact, they often point out how Christianity is different (superior?) to Judaism as they wish to distinguish themselves from the Jews. This turning point from the Old to New Testament is then where Wallis and other liberal religionists begin their arguments for the so-called “Prince of Peace.”

But Avalos finds plenty of perceived scarcities directly in the New Testament. One such scarcity is the idea of “sacred space.” In John 2:14-17 we find an account where Jesus whips people in a church for selling animals and then goes on to wreck the place.

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## A Critique of the new Religious Left (*continued*)

Christian apologists have argued that this violence was justified because of blasphemy committed in a so-called house of God. Avalos argues then that, “since Jesus is a paradigm of Christian conduct, his actions came to influence some of the violence linked to sacred places we see in later Christian history.”<sup>7</sup> Avalos here is referring to the Crusades, among other historic Christian atrocities.

But Jesus did much more than this to ensure the cult-like following he would soon receive. Proclaiming himself the voice of God, he prepared the needy and fearful for future battles they were to endure while spreading Christianity. One such method is most probably the same sort used by Islamic fundamentalists when recruiting suicide terrorists. In Luke 14:26-27, Jesus says, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brother and sister, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.” Mighty strong words no doubt meant to dedicate his followers to develop an artificial kinship with non-family members who would then fight as blood kin to the death for their perceived resource—God him/herself.

Even apart from his discussion of religious-created scarcities, Avalos uses a close reading of the Bible to reject the view that Christianity essentially espouses love and peace. He argues that in Romans 12:14, we do not really see an example of Christians loving their enemies at all, though this section is often cited by Christians for this very reason. The section begins, sure enough, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” But what most liberal Christians then ignore is the rest of the section, “If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads” (Romans 12:20). Heaping burning coals on their heads? Avalos suggests that read as a whole, the commandment to be nice is a way to build up the potential for violence

against an enemy. The nicer one is to one’s enemy, the more they will deserve the violence done to them in the end.

Avalos understands Christian “love” this way:

“Love was ... primarily meant for other Christians. Those who believe in Christ will receive eternal love. Those who do not believe will receive an eternal torture in a fiery lake. “Love,” as a set of concepts described in the New Testament, is not really a response to violence in our world. Christians (argue for) unrelenting violence, from the punishment of individuals to the Crusades ... The definition of love is itself dependent on a scarce resource, namely access to God’s mind and divine communication.”<sup>9</sup>

So even if the Religious Left has developed a healthier and somewhat more liberal understanding of human society based on compassion, interconnectedness, fairness, and justice, it is just as sure that they did not base these views on actual scripture. They merely attempt to make scripture fit their liberal beliefs, because the Bible is anything but liberal. They are in actuality practicing buffet religiosity, and doing so believing the ‘good parts’ of the Bible are meant for all of humanity.

It is my argument, then, that the lure of religion (for both progressives and conservatives) lies in what the humanist philosopher, Dr. Paul Kurtz, has referred to as the “transcendental temptation.”<sup>10</sup>

Simply put: the marvel of life, the fear of death, and the very real need for spiritual nourishment are perhaps the main reasons people give up or suspend reason for faith. They can not see the beauty of life, of very existence, as something wonderful unto itself. They instead search for meaning in the universe when there can only be meaning within themselves. They try to eschew a depression rooted in the thought of their own mortality by clinging to thousand-year-old myths of everlasting life.

They spend far too much time making believe there really is an afterlife, instead of living their one very real life in the here and now. As I often hear atheists say: This is the one life—here on Earth. This is not a dress rehearsal.

Liberal religionists have not been able to mature past the need for a “parent figure” lest they fear they will find themselves alone in the universe. Yet they do this while sometimes never enjoying their own relationships with other people—people with whom they share this life. We are indeed not alone.

I take for granted—but not lightly—that the religious Right has a very unhealthy, and quite primitive understanding of the universe, and a very narrow, narcissistic interpretation of their role in the human diaspora. And because of this, they have followed the ancient teachings found in Judaism, Christianity and Islam to a fault. Or perhaps, as Avalos might argue, they have this unhealthy and false worldview because they believe in their so-called holy books.

But members of both the Religious Right and Left subscribe to the same ethics of hegemony and domination as did their ancestors who wrote their unscientific understanding of ethics on papyrus thousands of years ago. They both create just-so stories and impart their beliefs on everyone else while nurturing insidious territorialism. The ancients did not have the scientific knowledge or the intellectual maturity necessary to live together with all of humanity in mutual respect, free of myths and separatist values. What is our excuse?

What we must understand is that while fundamentalists of every shade try to relive the golden years of religious violence here in the 21st Century, it is imperative that we do not fail to expose their creation of false scarcities. There is no supernatural realm, no gods or angels. Never was. There is no “sacred” land, people or ideas. What there *is* we can find in the beauty of Earth’s deserts, polar caps, mountain ranges and seas—and inside

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## A Critique... (continued)

Barry Seidman is a humanist/freethought leader and special events coordinator for the Council for Secular Humanism and the Center for Inquiry.

each one of us. We can enjoy the diversity of life on this planet as the one species capable of contemplating what life actually is. This is the crux of scientific humanism. The Left would be making a severe mistake in indulging the "transcendental temptations" of our collective past, for the truly progressive society is the one which has finally put away its childhood toys

and vices, and begun to evolve toward a planetary humanism.

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=about\\_us.display\\_staff&staff=wallis](http://www.sojo.net/index.cfm?action=about_us.display_staff&staff=wallis)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.afscme.org/publications/public\\_employee/2005/pemj0514.htm](http://www.afscme.org/publications/public_employee/2005/pemj0514.htm)

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.visionarylead.org/E-Newsletter/Articles/gods\\_politics.htm](http://www.visionarylead.org/E-Newsletter/Articles/gods_politics.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Avalos, Hector: Fighting Words: The Origin of Religious Violence. Page 130

<sup>5</sup>ibid, Pages 169-170 <sup>6</sup>ibid, Pages 164-166

<sup>7</sup> ibid, Pages 180-181 <sup>8</sup> ibid, Page 205

<sup>9</sup> ibid, Page 230

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.secularhumanism.org>

<sup>11</sup>Kurtz, Paul: The Transcendental Temptation: A Critique of Religion and the Paranormal (Prometheus Books, 1991)

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## May 2006 AFS Board Meeting Minutes

Present: Steve Yothment (Pres.), Judy Thompson (VPI), Freya Harris (VPE), Ed Buckner (Treasurer), Diane Buckner, Bill Burton, Jack McKinney, Jim Middleton, Lew Southern, George Page  
Date/Time: May 21, 2006; 2:00 PM. Minutes by: George Page

Call to Order: Steve Yothment called the meeting to order. A quorum was established.

Minutes: The board meeting minutes of April 16, 2006 were accepted as amended via previous email messages.

Financial Report: There is no official report this month due to the switch to quarterly reports. The approximate balance of funds is \$11k. \$3.5k is in the PayPal account and the remainder is in the checking account. The treasurer reminded the board that the PayPal account is not FDIC insured but it is collecting 4.69% interest. Ed mentioned that he does not intend to put more than half of the AFS funds into the PayPal account at any given time.

The board advised the treasurer to investigate other banks for better rates. (United American and Integrity Bank were two that were mentioned as possibilities.) Another suggestion was made to put funds into a short term CD but the point was made that the funds would be unavailable for the duration of the term. Another alternative is a money market account but we may have to have an account in whatever bank we were to open the money market account. Once the treasurer investigates these alternatives, the board is to be notified of the findings by email and a vote can be taken at that time.

Yard Sale: We made \$395 at the yard sale at the time of the meeting. The board commends Judy Thompson for hosting the event and all the volunteers who participated.

Space Renovation\Relocation: The board received a rejection of our initial offer of \$50,000 for the Collins Springs Primitive Baptist Church (CSPBC) property. Unofficially, Ed asked the real estate agent if the owners would be interested if an offer of \$125k were made. He was told that we would not hear back before the end of the week (Memorial Weekend).

The question was asked about how to proceed with the other condo space. We may have to ask if Dr. Du would still be interested in purchasing his unit.

The suggestion was made that before we make another official offer on the CSPBC property, we would need to have the property/building appraised. Also, the property has a limited use stipulation that it cannot be used as a school due to the proximity to the Kroger store. It was speculated that the exterior cannot be altered due to the historic aspect of the building.

Lew reported that the chief inspector liked the latest drawing of the renovation plan. He received the ADA specs. The by-laws still need to be reviewed. Before we could pick up the permit for a renovation we must have estimates for the work.

Ed contacted our insurance carrier regarding the issue of liability insurance on the renovation project. All contractors have to carry workers compensation and we need to receive the certificate of insurance from the carrier, not the contractor. The issue of AFS members working on the renovation project is a little ambiguous as a member cannot sue the society.

Fund Drive Letter: The letter is not officially on hold, but due to the open ended nature of the renovation\relocation of AFS, we want to include whichever direction we end up taking in the final letter. Steve asked that we take the time to review the letter and with a few minor changes, Lew made the motion to go forward with the letter including those changes. George seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

Phone message service: The message service costs approximately \$20 per month. Various options were discussed on the issue of keeping/utilizing the messaging service. Diane made a motion to discontinue using the message service as soon as contractually possible, Freya seconded the motion and the board voted to pass the motion with two members abstaining.

Other Business: Jack addressed a section of the Humanists of Georgia newsletter where they stated that they (paraphrased) needed everyone to pay their dues in order for HGA to pay their rent to AFS. Steve will review the terms of our rent agreement with HGA and the status of their prepayment of rent.

Jack also reported that he contacted the gas companies that could service the AFS Center. Ed and Jack will continue to pursue the best option for a gas provider.

Speakers: The next speakers (on June 11) will be Oliver G. Halle and Diann Cattani, who will make a presentation on ethics.

The board wishes to show its appreciation to Ed for stepping in at the last minute and giving the presentation at the May 14 AFS meeting. The board discussed asking Charles Lantz back to speak at a later AFS meeting. Judy will make that decision.

If anyone has any suggestions for a speaker or a subject to be discussed at future AFS meeting, please contact Judy Thompson.

Adjournment: There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:30 PM.

The next meeting of the board of directors is scheduled for Sunday June 18 at 2 PM.



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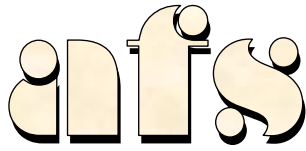
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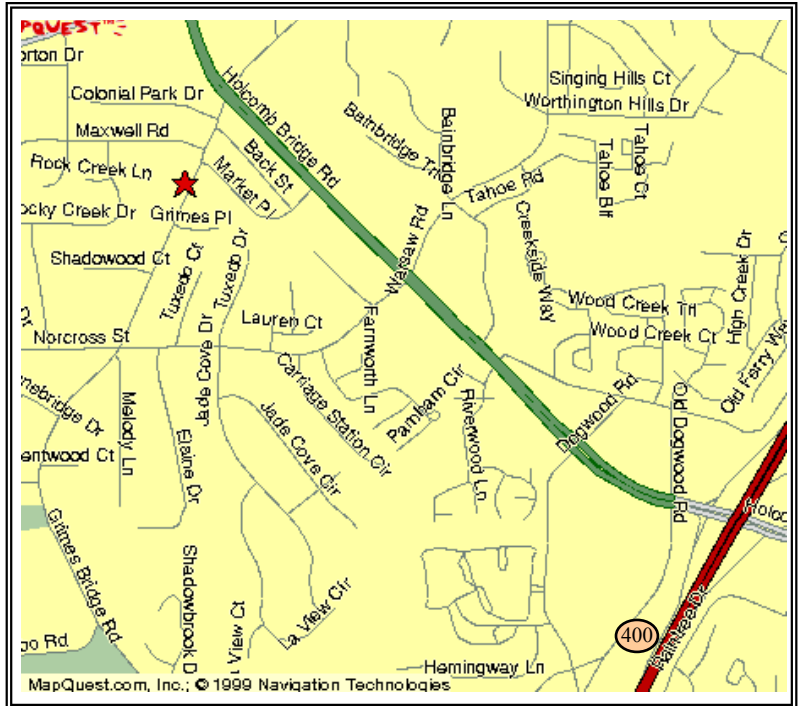
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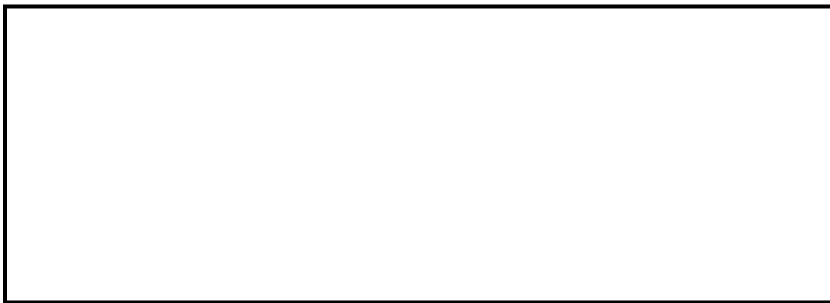
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**The June 11 AFS Meeting:  
1:00 at the AF Center  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road  
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**This Month's Speakers:  
Oliver Halle and  
Diann Cattani**



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