

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 12 Number 10 • October 2006

The October AFS Meeting

The October 8 AFS meeting will include a speech by **Dr. Dennis Martin**, titled "Calling All Agnostics! Is Agnosticism to Atheism a Leap or a Short Step?"

Dr. Martin received his PhD in Philosophy from Emory University in 1983, and has taught at Georgia Military College, Shorter College, Georgia State (GSU) and Emory University. Courses he has taught including the history of ideas, history of philosophy, critical thinking, formal logic, business ethics, contemporary moral issues, philosophy of religion, philosophy of atheism, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of human nature, and decision-making.

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.

Nominations at October Meeting

The AFS bylaws require nomination of officers and board members for each year at the October meeting. Please think about whom you would like to nominate. (Current officers and board members are listed on page 2.)

Officers have 1-year terms; board members have 2-year terms. Diane Buckner, George Page and Lew Southern will continue their 2-year terms into next year.

AFS Activities

The next **AFS Social** will be at Panahar Restaurant, 3375 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, on Friday, October 13, at 7:00 PM.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on Sunday, October 15, at 4:00 to 6:00 PM.

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.

The Freethinker Social Club

The (MySpace) **Freethinker Social Club** will have a Social Mixer/Meet & Greet on Wednesday, October 11 at 7:00 PM to about 9:00 PM at Atkins Park Restaurant & Tavern in Virginia Highlands, 754 N Highland Ave NE, Atlanta.

There will be light appetizers and a cash bar. Directions are at www.atkinspark.com or 404-876-7249. An RSVP is not required but would be helpful. RSVP via the email link on the activities page of www.atlantafreethought.org.

The October Atheist Meetup

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

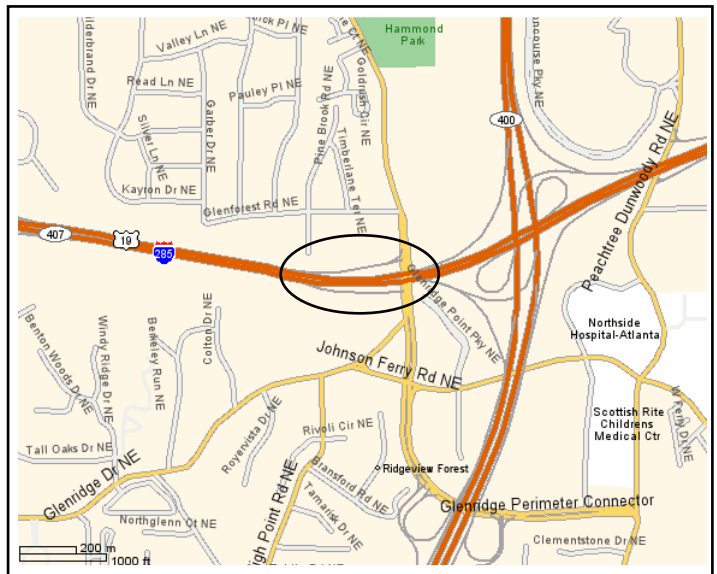
Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on Sunday, October 22, at 12:30 PM. Their speaker will be the Reverend Marty Keller, a UU minister of Jewish descent, speaking on "Being a Jewish Humanist."

Highway Cleanup is This Saturday

The Atlanta Freethought Society will have its **Adopt-A-Highway cleanup** on Saturday, October 7, 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.

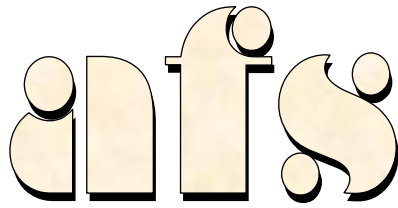
Please park along the north ramp. The Highway Department will provide safety vests and trash bags.



Don't miss Stephen Colbert's interview of Professor Richard Dawkins on The Colbert Report on Comedy Central, Tuesday, October 17, at 11:30 PM.

AFS Meetings and Activities

- Oct 7: AFS Highway Cleanup, Glenridge Ramp, 10:00.
- Oct 8: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
- Oct 13: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
- Oct 15: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 2:00 PM.
- Oct 15: AFS Discussion Group at AF Center, 4:00 PM.



**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.

Oct 8: **Dennis Martin** will speak on "Calling All Agnostics! Is Agnosticism to Atheism a Leap or a Short Step?"

Nov 12: **Clark Adams** (tentative) will speak on "How to Keep Your Freethought Group from Looking Like a Funeral" and his updated "Atheism in Media."

Dec 10: TBD.

Jan 14: TBD.

To join the AFS Forum e-mail list, send a blank message to AFSforum-subscribe@yahoo.com. To join the AFS Announcements list, send a blank email to afs-announce-subscribe@yahoo.com. To join the Georgia Freethinkers Letter Writing Cooperative, send a blank email to flwc-ga-subscribe@yahoo.com.

You can unsubscribe by sending an email to xxx-unsubscribe@yahoo.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.

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

The Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 12, Number 10, October 2006
is copyright © 2006 by The Atlanta
Freethought Society, Inc.

Signed articles are all copyright ©
2006 by their respective authors.

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

Membership in AFS is \$25/year for individuals, \$35 for households, and \$10 for students/low income/under 21. Sustaining members (individual) \$100 and sustaining members (households) \$125.

Subscriptions alone are \$20 for 12 issues, \$25 to Canada/Mexico, \$30 for other addresses. Please make checks and money orders payable to Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc.

Visit our World Wide Web site at
www.atlantafreethought.org.

Send E-mail to
afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Webmasters: Freya Harris
and Walter Beal

Americans United Blasts House for Passage of Fee-Stripping Bill

AU's Lynn Says Measure Is "A Repugnant Affront To The Civil Rights of All Americans"

The U.S. House of Representatives in full political mode approved a seriously flawed bill aimed at stopping citizens from challenging government-sponsored religious activities, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

In a largely partisan vote, on September 26, the House passed the so-called "Public Expression of Religion Act," which would make it much more difficult for those seeking to uphold the First Amendment principle of church-state separation. The bill, H.R. 2679, would deny legal fees and out-of-pocket expenses to plaintiffs who win lawsuits under the First Amendment's Establishment Clause, which bans the government from promoting religion. It passed by a vote of 244-173.

With passage in the House, the bill now moves to the Senate.

The bill was introduced by Rep. John Hostettler (R-IN), who is a previous supporter of legislative measures that would allow for religious organizations to play a greater role in government. In 2002, he supported the House of Worship and Political Speech Protection Act (HR 2357), which would have altered the tax code to allow religiously affiliated groups to carry out political campaign activities and still maintain their tax-exempt status.

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United, said the House leadership is obsessed with

playing to powerful Religious Right lobbying groups that have been pressing for the legislation.

"This bill is a sop to the Religious Right, but even worse a dangerous attack on the First Amendment," Lynn said. "The House leadership is openly hostile to federal courts for upholding church-state separation and this bill reflects that motivation. The bill seeks to slam the courthouse doors on citizens who challenge government-sponsored religious activities. It is a repugnant affront to the civil rights of all Americans."

The supporters of the bill argued that the measure is needed to scuttle legal challenges to religious displays on public property. Many of the bill's supporters claimed that groups, such as Americans United, were on a campaign literally to remove crosses from cemeteries nationwide.

Lynn said that charge was scare-mongering at its worst.

"There is no such campaign," said Lynn. "In reality this bill is a broad attempt to stop all kinds of challenges to government-sponsored religious activities. If enacted, it would bar recovery of legal fees and related expenses in an array of conflicts ranging from forcing children to recite prayers in schools to taxpayer funding of religious education."

Lynn said Americans United would continue its opposition to the bill, urging the Senate to scrap the measure.

AHA RESPONDS

"This legislation is nothing more than an attempt at backdoor corrosion of church/state separation," commented Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association. "Congress knows a bill permitting the government to put the Ten Commandments in front of courthouses or mandating prayer in public schools would be unconstitutional. This legislation offers the next best thing by preventing the average citizen's access to the legal tools necessary to challenge those violations."

"In these cases compensation is only awarded when the plaintiff wins, which is a common practice in the legal system," said Mel Lipman, president of the American Humanist Association and a constitutional law attorney. "What makes these cases different for Rep. Hostettler is his belief that government should be free to promote religion without consequences even though it is a clear violation of the Establishment Clause. Somebody needs to remind the majority of House members that they swore an oath to uphold the Constitution."

"The American Humanist Association is committed to defeating this bill in the Senate," added Speckhardt. "If legal fees can be denied to attorneys defending religious liberty, which one of our freedoms will be next?"

[From a Sept 26 AU press release and a Sept 27 AHA press release.]

Ga. Christian Coalition to Change Name, Split from National Group

Sadie Fields, Director of the Georgia chapter of the Christian Coalition, announced on September 25 that the group plans to change names and split from the national group. She said the Christian Coalition's focus has shifted away from the core issues the group was founded on.

Recently, the Alabama, Iowa and Ohio chapters also split away from the Christian Coalition of America.

State groups have indicated their

concern that the national organization is taking stances on issues like the minimum wage, the environment and Internet law instead of core issues like abortion and same-sex marriage.

But the national group has also faced financial and public relations problems. It is now 1 million dollars in debt and has suffered negative publicity over the past year.

Among the bad press were revelations that former director Ralph Reed

— who ran for lieutenant governor in Georgia — had close ties with convicted lobbyist Jack Abramoff and worked with him on a campaign funded by casinos.

Fields said the Georgia group has not yet chosen a new name. She said she expects one by Nov. 1 and that the group's well-known voter guide will be handed out as usual for November's general election.

[From a Sept. 25 WVTM.com article.]

Richard Dawkins Explains His Latest Book

Buy *The God Delusion* now from Amazon.com via the link at www.atlantafreethought.org. By Richard Dawkins

I wanted to write *The God Delusion* six years ago. American friends counseled against it, and my New York literary agent was horrified. Perhaps in Britain you could sell a book that criticized religion, he said. But in the US, don't even think about it. He hated to admit it, for he was an atheist like most American intellectuals, but religion was off limits to ridicule. You had to respect religion even if you didn't subscribe to it. Wendy Kaminer was exaggerating only slightly when she remarked that making fun of religion is as risky as burning a flag in an American Legion Hall. Concentrate on science, my American friends advised. Hands off religion. Let the grandeur of science speak for itself, and religion will die a natural death by ignominious comparison. I gave way and wrote *The Ancestor's Tale* instead.

I don't regret that decision, for *The Ancestor's Tale* is the nearest approach to a proud *magnum opus* that I am likely to achieve, and I could not wish it undone. But how different the cultural landscape looks today. After four years of Bush, my literary agent changed his tune. He started begging me to write *The God Delusion*. And publishers around America are now falling over themselves to bring out atheistic books from which they would have run a mile only a few years ago. Dan Dennett's *Breaking the Spell* (thoughtful and persuasive as we have come to expect of that scientifically savvy philosopher) is selling very nicely, as are Sam Harris's scintillating and more militant *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation* (books whose almost every sentence makes you want to phone somebody and read it to them). Another that I am looking forward to is *God: the Failed Hypothesis - How science shows that God does not exist*, by the lucid and knowledgeable physicist Victor Stenger, due out next year.

On the other side, of course there have always been huge numbers of

religious books. But works like Francis Collins's *The Language of God*, and Alister McGrath's *Dawkins' God: Genes, Memes and the Meaning of Life* are a significant departure. They amount to an anxious backlash against the newly emergent scientific atheism. The same could be said of Ann Coulter's barbarically ignorant *Godless: the Church of Liberalism*. As an outsider, I observe American culture polarizing fast, and religion is at the center of the action.

America, founded in secularism as a beacon of eighteenth century enlightenment, is becoming the victim of religious politics, a circumstance that would have horrified the Founding Fathers. The political ascendancy today values embryonic cells over real people. It obsesses about gay marriage, ahead of genuinely important issues that actually make a difference to the world. It gains crucial electoral support from a constituency whose grip on reality is so tenuous that they expect to be 'raptured' up to heaven, leaving their clothes as empty as their minds. More extreme specimens actually long for a world war, which they identify as the 'Armageddon' that is to presage the Second Coming. Sam Harris, in *Letter to a Christian Nation*, hits the bull's-eye as usual:

"It is, therefore, not an exaggeration to say that if the city of New York were suddenly replaced by a ball of fire, some significant percentage of the American population would see a silver-lining in the subsequent mushroom cloud, as it would suggest to them that the best thing that is ever going to happen was about to happen: the return of Christ... Imagine the consequences if any significant component of the U.S. government actually believed that the world was about to end and that its ending would be glorious. The fact that nearly half of the American population apparently believes this, purely on the basis of religious dogma, should be considered a moral and intellectual emergency."

Does Bush check the Rapture Index daily, as Reagan did his stars? We don't know, but would anyone be surprised?

My scientific colleagues have additional reasons to declare emergency. Ignorant and absolutist attacks on stem cell research are just the tip of an iceberg. What we have here is nothing less than a global assault on rationality, and the Enlightenment values that inspired the founding of this first and greatest of secular republics. Science education – and hence the whole future of science in this country – is under threat. Temporarily beaten back in a Pennsylvania court, the 'breathtaking inanity' (Judge John Jones's immortal phrase) of 'intelligent design' continually flares up in local bush-fires. Dowsing them is a time-consuming but important responsibility, and scientists are finally being jolted out of their complacency. For years they quietly got on with their science, lamentably underestimating the creationists who, being neither competent nor interested in science, attended to the serious political business of subverting local school boards. Scientists, and intellectuals generally, are now waking up to the threat from the American Taliban. *The God Delusion* is my goodwill contribution from across the Atlantic to that awakening.

Scientists divide into two schools of thought over the best tactics with which to face the threat. The Neville Chamberlain 'appeasement' school, as I have called it in my book, focuses on the battle for evolution. Consequently, its members identify fundamentalism as the enemy, and they bend over backwards to appease 'moderate' or 'sensible' religion (not a difficult task, for bishops and theologians despise fundamentalists as much as scientists do). Scientists of the Winston Churchill school, by contrast, see the fight for evolution as only one battle in a larger war: a looming war between supernaturalism on the one side and

Richard Dawkins Explains His New Book (*continued*)

rationality on the other. For them, bishops and theologians belong with creationists in the supernatural camp, and are not to be appeased.

The Chamberlain school accuses Churchillians of rocking the boat to the point of muddying the waters. The philosopher of science Michael Ruse wrote:

“We who love science must realize that the enemy of our enemies is our friend. Too often evolutionists spend time insulting would-be allies. This is especially true of secular evolutionists. Atheists spend more time running down sympathetic Christians than they do countering creationists. When John Paul II wrote a letter endorsing Darwinism, Richard Dawkins’s response was simply that the pope was a hypocrite, that he could not be genuine about science and that Dawkins himself simply preferred an honest fundamentalist.”

A recent article in the *New York Times* by Cornelia Dean quotes the astronomer Owen Gingerich as saying that, by simultaneously advocating evolution and atheism, “Dr Dawkins probably single-handedly makes more converts to intelligent design than any of the leading intelligent design theorists.” This is not the first, not the second, not even the third time this plonkingly witless point has been made (and more than one reply has aptly cited Uncle Remus: “Oh please please Brer Fox, don’t throw me in that awful briar patch”).

Chamberlainites are apt to quote the late Stephen Jay Gould’s ‘NOMA’ – ‘non-overlapping magisteria’. Gould claimed that science and true religion never come into conflict because they exist in completely separate dimensions of discourse:

“To say it for all my colleagues and for the umpteenth millionth time (from college bull sessions to learned treatises): science simply cannot (by its legitimate methods) adjudicate the issue of God’s possible superintendence of nature. We neither affirm nor deny it; we simply can’t comment

on it as scientists.”

This sounds terrific, right up until you give it a moment’s thought. You then realize that the presence of a creative deity in the universe is clearly a scientific hypothesis. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a more momentous hypothesis in all of science. A universe with a god would be a completely different kind of universe from one without, and it would be a scientific difference. God could clinch the matter in his favour at any moment by staging a spectacular demonstration of his powers, one that would satisfy the exacting standards of science. Even the infamous Templeton Foundation recognized that God is a scientific hypothesis – by funding double-blind trials to test whether remote prayer would speed the recovery of heart patients. It didn’t, of course, although a control group who knew they had been prayed for tended to get worse (how about a class action suit against the Templeton Foundation?). Despite such well-financed efforts, no evidence for God’s existence has yet appeared.

(Note: A significant amount of text was omitted here. See www.Richard-DawkinsFoundation.org for the complete article.)

We explain our existence by a combination of the anthropic principle and Darwin’s principle of natural selection. That combination provides a complete and deeply satisfying explanation for everything that we see and know. Not only is the god hypothesis unnecessary; it is spectacularly unpar-simonious. Not only do we need no God to explain the universe and life; God stands out in the universe as the most glaring of all superfluous sore thumbs. We cannot, of course, disprove God, just as we can’t disprove Thor, fairies and the Flying Spaghetti Monster. But, like those other fantasies that we can’t disprove, we can say that God is very very improbable.

The non-existence of God is the main conclusion of the first half of my book. The second half is devoted to ques-

tions that arise from it:

- Why, if religion is false, do so many people believe in it? (I am one of those who see it as an unfortunate by-product of otherwise useful psychological predispositions).
- Where, if not from religion, does our morality come from? Don’t we need religion, in order to be good? (I cannot believe that those who advocate a morality based on the Bible have actually read it. We not only shouldn’t get our morals from religion, we don’t. Believers and unbelievers alike participate in a slowly shifting moral *Zeitgeist* rooted in Darwinian rules of thumb).
- Even if religion is false, doesn’t it do some good? (Yes, but only by accident). And weren’t Hitler and Stalin atheists? (The answer is: No for Hitler, yes for Stalin, and your point is... ?)
- Religion may be nonsense, but isn’t it harmless nonsense, like astrology and crystal balls? Why be so hostile? (Scientists have a particular reason to be hostile to any systematically organized effort to teach children to reject evidence in favour of faith, revelation, authority and tradition. Religion teaches people to be satisfied with petty, small-minded non-explanations or mysteries, and this is a tragedy, given that the true explanations are so enthralling. Moreover, such hostility as I have is limited to words. I am not going to bomb anybody, behead them, stone them, burn them at the stake, crucify them, or fly planes into their skyscrapers, just because of a theological disagreement.)

A recurring theme of my book is consciousness-raising. Just as Darwinian biology raised our consciousness to the power of science to explain things outside biology, and just as feminists taught us to flinch when we hear “One man one vote”, I want us to flinch when we hear of a “Christian child” or a “Muslim child”. Small children are too young to know their views on life, ethics and the cosmos. We should no more speak of a Christian child than of a Keynesian child, a

Richard Dawkins Explains His New Book (*continued*)

monetarist child or a Marxist child. Automatic labeling of children with the religion of their parents is not just presumptuous. It is a form of mental child abuse.

Academic studies of Nobel Prize-winners, and other intellectual elites such as the US National Academy of Sciences and the Royal Society, all report an overwhelming preponderance of atheists. One would presume that a fair proportion of our elected rulers would also be drawn from the intellectual elite. Given that 93% of the National Academy does not believe in any kind of personal god, a statisti-

cian would expect that at least some members of Congress, if not a majority, would also be atheists. Yet, as far as I can discover, the number of avowed atheists among the 535 members of Congress is not 93%, not even 10%. It seems to be zero. What is going on here? I think we all know.

In 2001, the American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) based in the City University of New York, reported some surprising figures. The great majority of the US adult population call themselves Christian: 160 million adults. But what group takes second place? Jews? No. For all their

formidable electoral clout, the 2.8 million Jews are massively outnumbered by the nearly 30 million non-religious or secular Americans. Organizing atheists is like herding cats. But if the unbelievers of America could only get their act together a tenth as effectively as the legendarily powerful Jewish lobby, what might they not achieve? Maybe at least some candidates for high office would gain the courage to tell us what they truly believe. And still get elected.

[From Richard Dawkins' September 20 weblog at www.RichardDawkins-Foundation.org.]

Camp Quest: It's Beyond Belief

By Livia Edwards, 22, biology major, former camper, and current staff member

I spent a week of my summer at the greatest camp on earth. Camp Quest this year was fantastic, and I'm so disappointed it's over already. This was my third year as a staff member, but I've been going to the camp as a camper since I was about 12, so I've been at camp for nine years total!

For those of you who aren't familiar with the program, Camp Quest is the first residential summer camp in the history of the United States for the children of Atheists, Freethinkers, Humanists, Brights, or whatever other terms might be applied to those who hold to a naturalistic, not supernatural world view. In a country where most of the people are religious, it's often difficult for children of secular families to express their beliefs, out of fear of being ostracized. Camp Quest is a safe haven for these kids, where they can discuss their thoughts without being called a "devil worshipper."

Campers learn about famous atheists and freethinkers in history, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, Albert Einstein, Charles Darwin, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, as well as more modern fig-

ures like Yoko Ono and John Lennon, Ted Turner, Lance Armstrong, and Christopher Reeve. These are just a few of the people that my dad, Fred Edwards, tells the kids about during mealtimes, all to emphasize the fact that good, moral people that are free-thinkers can do great things, and our kids are not alone in their views.

Of course, we do normal camp stuff too. This year, the entire camp spent a day canoeing through gorgeous scenery down the Little Miami River. We also went horseback riding, my personal favorite. Campers have the opportunity to rock climb, try archery, and hike. We also go swimming every day. It was especially fun this year because the shower area was refurbished to look like a water park. Fountains, sprinklers, and colorful buckets that dump water on you do a lot to take your mind off of how cold that first dive in the pool will be!

If you can't tell, I love it there. This year I was a counselor in the cabin for 13-17 year old campers. I also hosted our annual Talent Night, and during activity time I teach drama to the kids. Activities are a time when campers

can get to know staff members that aren't necessarily their cabin counselors. They can tie die or create other arts and crafts to mold their artistic side. They can learn about the weather, and practice their future job as a TV weatherperson by doing a forecast for the next day. They can play sports, learn about biology, or have a grand battle with foam swords!

There are way too many activities at Camp Quest to possibly name here, and even if I tried, I still wouldn't do it justice. At camp, so many of us feel connected to a community that doesn't seem to exist where we live, and I believe this is why so many of us return year after year. We feel safe here, we have friends here, and you only need try us out to become a part of our family!

Camp Quest Classic is held annually in southwestern Ohio. Other Camp Quests are located around the country in Tennessee, California, Minnesota, Ontario, and Michigan.

Want more information about Camp Quest? Visit www.camp-quest.org to request details and see camp pictures.

"Religious controversies are always productive of more acrimony and irreconcilable hatreds than those which spring from any other cause." — George Washington, letter to Sir Edward Newenham, June 22, 1792.

From *2000 Years of Disbelief* by James A. Haught.

‘Jesus Camp’ Founder in Midst of Controversy

Film spurs hate mail from those who say she is attempting to turn kids into Christian terrorists

“Jesus Camp,” a documentary feature film that follows evangelical Christian children at a religious summer camp, won prizes and critical praise on the summer festival circuit, but it wasn’t until its quiet opening in the Midwest that a news clip about the film hit YouTube.com, inciting a whirlwind of controversy.

Already the movie, which opens nationally Oct. 6, has split the Christian community and horrified those who fear the ascendance of the religious right on the national stage.

Bloggers of all stripes have been so disgusted by the bits of the film they have seen on the Web that the film’s central subject, camp founder Pastor Becky Fischer, has become a public figure, bombarded with hateful e-mails and bracing for media appearances, including a scheduled appearance on ABC’s “Good Morning America.”

The film follows Rachael, 10, Levi, 13, and Tory, 11, engaging and articulate children from Midwestern towns who attended Fischer’s Kids on Fire Bible camp in Devils Lake, N.D., in 2005. The filmmakers, Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady, take a straightforward look at their subjects.

The film’s cherub-faced children cheer when asked if they’d be willing to give up their lives for Jesus, pray over a cardboard cutout of President Bush and sob as they plead for an end to abortion. One is home-schooled by a mother who teaches that “science doesn’t prove anything.”

“THIS IS WAR”

At one point in the film, Fischer shouts to the children, “This is war! Are you part of it or not?” She proudly compares her work to the indoctrination of young boys by extremist Muslims in Pakistan and elsewhere. The film intersperses footage of Fischer and the children with clips of radio talk-show host Mike Pappantonia, a liberal Methodist, excoriating

conservative Christians like Fischer.

Fischer is disappointed by the way she appears in the film. “I do understand they’re out to tell a story and they felt they found it with some of the political things,” she said by phone from her home in Bismarck, N.D. “And they’re out to show the most dramatic, exotic, extreme things they found in my ministry, and I’m not ashamed of those things, but without context, it’s really difficult to defend what you’re seeing on the screen.”

More controversy over the film erupted earlier in September when Rev. Ted Haggard, whose constituency at the National Association of Evangelicals is 30 million strong, took a public stance against it, saying that the film makes evangelicals look scary. His condemnation apparently chilled the film’s opening in 13 theaters in Colorado, Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma and Missouri on Sept. 15.

Even before its release, lurid fascination with the film’s trailer bloomed on the Internet. A Sept. 17 ABC News report on the movie turned up on YouTube.com shortly after it aired, and by the next day, the segment was the Web site’s most-viewed clip, with about 200,000 downloads in a matter of hours.

When Fischer arrived home on September 26 after a few days touring with the filmmakers, her e-mail inbox was loaded with hate mail. She spent the next two days writing lengthy explanations to the most common accusations — “How dare you brainwash those kids!” and “Are you raising up Christian terrorists or another Hitler Youth movement?” — then she posted them on her Web site on September 28.

“I’ve gotten thousands of hits on my Web site from those people,” she said. “I’m wearing sunglasses in the airports. It’s really making me nervous.”

Haggard, who appears in the film noting that when evangelicals vote, they determine an election, acknowledged he hated the film and called it propaganda for the far left. He said the filmmakers take the charismatic, evangelical jargon too literally and portray the children’s and Fischer’s “war talk” as violent and extremist, when it’s just allegorical.

“NONE OF IT’S CLARIFIED”

“It doesn’t mean we’re going to establish a theocracy and force people to obey what they think is God’s law,” he said. “None of that’s clarified in the movie.”

Ewing and Grady said they want the film to make a broad statement about how politics and faith have become inexorably intertwined in America. Yet the conversations that have been sparked by the movie are less about the stark differences between people with different ideologies and more about the interest in bridging them.

“No one’s going anywhere, and no one’s going to change their minds,” Grady said. “So some sort of compromise has to happen, or we’re just going to become more and more divided.”

All the controversy surrounding the film, Grady said, “speaks to the fact that this is a conversation that people are dying to have.”

Grady and Ewing, who last year won awards for their documentary “The Boys of Baraka” about a group of inner-city American kids attending a school in Africa, said everyone was enthusiastic about participating in the project. But as Fischer explained, no one, including the filmmakers, expected the film to be so political.

The Bible, she said, instructs people to “pray for those in authority over us and in government positions so we can live a peaceful life.”

[From a Sept. 29 article by Gina Piccalo in the Los Angeles Times.]

“Ignorance is the soil in which the belief in miracles grows.” — Robert Ingersoll, from *Ingersoll the Magnificent*, p. 195.

Clipped

Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Jack McKinney's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on October 1.

Jeffrey Selman's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on September 26.

Paranoia is all we have to fear

The media, in all their many forms, are saturated with reports, columns, letters, vents, etc., expressing fear of terrorists, liberals, conservatives, identity thieves, pandemics, crooked politicians, sexual-predator clergymen, corporate tycoons, etc.

My bank teller won't cash my check, the one that she witnessed me signing, unless I sign it again on the back "for my protection." My doctor wants my examining room door closed to "protect patient confidentiality," even though all I'm doing is sitting there waiting for him to make an appearance.

The government seems bent on taking away our rights until we no longer have any, also "for our protection." Religions feed on fear. Other countries, many our former allies, are emboldened to speak harshly against us and our administration because they perceive us as a threat to their way of life.

Forget AIDS and the bird flu pandemic. Let us work on, as I see it, our No. 1 problem — paranoia. Otherwise, stressed out as we are, our quality of life will deteriorate to the point that we no longer find it worth fighting for.

JACK MCKINNEY
Kennesaw

Responses to Mike King's column, "Cobb prayer, Osborne High left behind, UGA fraternity," @issue, Sept. 14

Key points spell out true intent

The plaintiffs in the Cobb County prayer case did not ask the court to prevent the County Commission from having an invocation. They merely sought to make the prayers more welcoming for every Cobb resident who attends government meetings, including those Cobb residents who do not worship Jesus.

The majority of the courts have ruled with the plaintiffs on this issue and held that pervasively sectarian government prayers violate the U.S. Constitution. U.S. District Court Judge Richard Story, who ruled against the plaintiffs in the Cobb case, even acknowledged that his is the "minority view."

King's column overlooked these points.

JEFFREY SELMAN
Marietta

More on the Money

By AFS Treasurer Ed Buckner

We still don't know where we're going to wind up—where we are now, with renovations, or in a new (to us) building somewhere. (Ideas and suggestions are still welcome.) *But we do know one thing: AFS members came through financially for 2006.* We set a fund-drive goal of \$20,000 for the year, thinking—but not knowing—

that if we could raise that much we could have a good year and make some serious progress battling irrationality, paying off debts, and advancing freethought.

As of the end of September, we've raised **\$20,106.38** in dues, subscriptions, and contributions. Formal letters acknowledging any contributions

above \$100 will be sent out in January [we're a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational organization, so there may be positive tax consequences for you]. In the meantime, thanks! Thanks for your confidence in the current leadership and thanks, especially, for supporting freethought and AFS.

"The national government will maintain and defend the foundations on which the power of our nation rests. It will offer strong protection to Christianity as the very basis of our collective morality. Today Christians stand at the head of our country. We want to fill our culture again with the Christian spirit. We want to burn out all the recent immoral developments in literature, in the theater, and in the press — in short, we want to burn out the poison of immorality which has entered into our whole life and culture as a result of liberal excess during recent years." —Adolf Hitler, from *The Speeches of Adolph Hitler, 1922-1939*, Vol. 1, Michael Hakeem, Ph.D. (London, Oxford University Press, 1942), pp. 871-872.

"All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind and monopolize power and profit." —Thomas Paine (1737-1809), American political theorist and writer, from "The Author's Profession of Faith," pt. 1 of *The Age of Reason* (1794).

Become a Member!

(Or renew your membership with this form!)



If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiastically invite you to join the Atlanta Freethought Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed monthly newsletter the *Atlanta Freethought News*, voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment of the superb speakers we have coming up, as well as the social and activist events that we sponsor!

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$25 per year.

Household memberships: A household is defined as two members sharing one newsletter, and is available for \$35 per year. Since some of our households have additional members, there will be a \$5 per year charge for each additional voting household member.

International members: because of international postage rates and special handling, we have been forced to add a surcharge of \$5 for members in Canada or Mexico, and \$10 for other foreign addresses.

Thank you for all your support and we look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

Annual dues are:

Membership	Dues	# of mems	Total
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Household (2 members)	\$35	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional household mems	\$5 ea	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Low income/Student/Under 21	\$10	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Subscription only	\$20	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member	\$100	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Household	\$125	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for Canada/Mexico	\$5	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for other foreign addresses	\$10	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Extra donation (thank you!)		_____	\$ _____
TOTAL			\$ _____

Please send this form with payment to:
 Atlanta Freethought Society
 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500
 Roswell, GA 30075

Baubles of Blasphemy

By Edwin F. Kagin

ORDER FORM

Purchaser: _____ Tel: _____

E-mail address: _____

If company or organization, representative: _____

Ship to address: _____

Billing address: _____
 (if different) _____

Copies: 1 copy \$20 _____ (gross)
 _____ copies (if 2 to 9 copies) X \$19 = _____ (gross)
 _____ copies (if 10 to 49 copies) X \$16 = _____ (gross)
 _____ copies (if 50+ copies) X \$15.50 = _____ (gross)

AFS members, deduct 25% from gross before adding shipping. Members of any freethought, humanist, or atheist group, please deduct \$1 per copy ordered from gross before adding shipping.

TOTAL (before shipping): _____

All sales to Georgia addresses, please add 7% sales tax here: _____

Shipping and handling:

1st book, Media Mail, U.S. Addresses \$3.00
 Additional copies, Media Mail, U.S. Addresses 1.75 each
 1st book, Priority Mail, U.S. Addresses 5.25
 Additional copies, Priority Mail, U.S. Addresses 2.00 each

Shipping and handling: _____

TOTAL: \$ _____

Please pay with check or money order in U.S. funds.

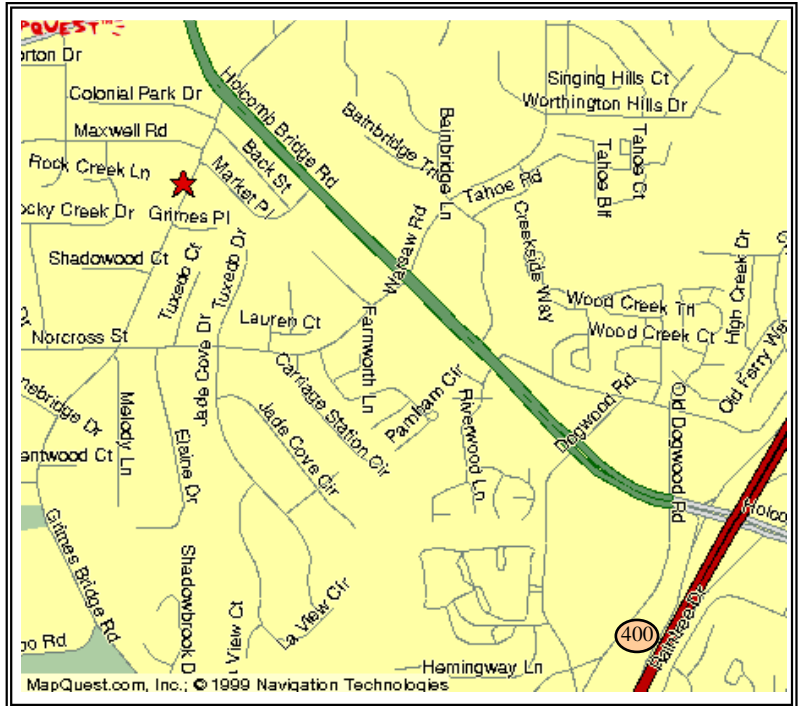
Send all orders to: **FREETHOUGHT PRESS**
ATLANTA FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY
1170 GRIMES BRIDGE RD, SUITE 500
ROSWELL GA 30075



Atlanta
Freethought
Society

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

**This Month's Speaker:
Dr. Dennis Martin**



Atlanta Freethought News is produced by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit, member-run, educational organization created to advance freethought and protect freethinkers. Any freethought, atheist, secular humanist, agnostic, or rationalist group is granted permission to reproduce anything from our newsletter not expressly labeled otherwise (acknowledgement of AFS and author appreciated). Articles published represent the official opinion of AFS only when that is clearly stated; all other opinion is that of the individual author.



If your label indicates 09 2006 or earlier, please renew. Thanks.

Atlanta Freethought News
Atlanta Freethought Society
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500
Roswell, GA 30075