

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 12 Number 11 • November 2006

The November AFS Meeting

The November 12 AFS meeting will include guest speaker **Clark Adams**, speaking on "How to Keep Your Freethought Group from Looking Like a Funeral." He will also show his updated "Atheism in Media" presentation.

Clark Adams is the president of **Internet Infidels**. (See www.infidels.org.) He is a past president of the Humanist Association of Las Vegas and Southern Nevada, and is a facilitator of meetings for the **Coalition for the Community of Reason (CCR)**. He's an organizer and emcee for the annual July Freethinkers gathering at Lake Hypatia, Alabama. He's been published in Freethought Today and in various Freethought and humanist newsletters. His most famous original quote is "If atheism is a religion, then health is a disease."

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, November 17, at 7:00 PM.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on Sunday, Nov. 19, 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.

AFS Elections

AFS officers and board members for next year were nominated at the October meeting. (Elections will be by mailed ballot later this month.) The nominees are:

President: Steve Yothment

Vice President, Int. Communication: Judy Thompson

Vice President, Ext. Communication: Walter Beal

Treasurer: Ed Buckner

Board Members: Bill Burton, Freya Harris,

Jack McKinney, Jim Middleton

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.

The November Atheist Meetup

Atlanta Atheists will have a "meetup" on Sunday, November 26, 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, November 26, at 12:30 PM.

Time Magazine Article

Check out the lead article in the November 13 issue of *Time* magazine, titled "God vs. Science." The article's subtitle reads "We revere faith and scientific progress, hunger for miracles and for MRIs. But are the worldviews compatible? TIME convenes a debate." The article includes excerpts from a debate between Richard Dawkins and Francis Collins that occurred on Sept. 30.

AFS Meetings and Activities

- Nov 12: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
- Nov 17: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
- Nov 19: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 2:00 PM.
- Nov 19: AFS Discussion Group at AF Center, 4:00 PM.

Americans United Urges IRS to Investigate Four Churches for Political Intervention

On November 6, Americans United for Separation of Church and State asked the Internal Revenue Service to investigate four churches for intervention in partisan politics.

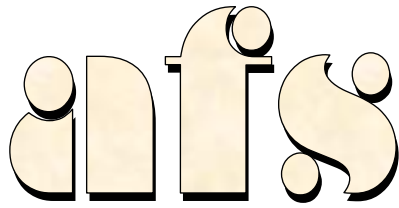
The four complaints to the IRS – two involving Democrats and two involving Republicans – came just one day before the national mid-term elections.

"Unfortunately, some churches allow candidate endorsements from the pulpit, distribute biased voter guides and host partisan rallies," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Such blatant electioneering by tax-exempt churches flouts federal law and threatens the integrity of religion."

Lynn noted that the IRS earlier this year announced a crackdown on non-profit groups, including houses of worship, that violate the Internal Revenue Code by intervening in partisan campaigns. As part of that effort, the IRS has repeatedly warned about provisions in the federal tax code that bar partisan involvement in campaigns.

[From a November 5 press release by Americans United.]

"The problem with organized religion is not that so many believe it, but that so few question it." - Neil Donald Walsch, from "Are You There, God?", an article in the October 28 *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, Page F1.



**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.

Nov 12: **Clark Adams** 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@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.

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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dividuals, \$35 for households, and \$10
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afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Webmasters: Freya Harris
and Walter Beal

Evangelical Leader Ousted

A major opponent of gay marriage, Rev. Haggard was involved with a gay man

Evangelical pastor Ted Haggard confessed on Sunday, Nov. 5, to a “lifelong” sexual problem, and said he was “a deceiver and a liar,” in a letter read to his New Life Church.

“There is part of my life that is so repulsive and dark that I’ve been warring against it all of my adult life,” he said in the letter.

Haggard apologized to his Colorado Springs, Colorado congregation and asked for their forgiveness in the letter read by pastor Larry Stockstill, a member of the board of overseers of New Life Church.

On Saturday, the board ousted Haggard from the 14,000-member church, which he founded more than 20 years ago. In a one-page statement issued Saturday afternoon, the board said, “Our investigation and Pastor Haggard’s public statements have proven without a doubt that he has committed sexually immoral conduct.”

Also on that Saturday, Haggard resigned as president of the National Association of Evangelicals, an umbrella group representing more than 45,000 churches with 30 million members. The group named a new interim president the same day.

Haggard had previously admitted that he bought methamphetamine and got a massage from Mike Jones, a former prostitute. Jones said the prominent pastor had paid him for sex over a three-year period.

Haggard, in an interview with reporters on Friday, denied having sex with Jones and said he did not use the drug and threw it away.

In the letter read Sunday, Haggard took responsibility for his actions, saying “I am guilty of sexual immorality” and noted that “the things I did opened the door for additional allegations.”

He asked the congregation to also forgive his accuser, who Haggard said has revealed “the deception... that was in my life.”

An overflow congregation responded to the announcement with a standing ovation.

In a separate letter from Haggard’s wife, also read by Stockstill, Gayle Haggard said while her heart is broken, she remains “committed to him, until death do us part.” Haggard, 50, and his wife have five children.

Haggard initially denied knowing Jones. His admissions Friday sent shock waves through evangelical circles, where many leaders had rallied to his defense when the allegations surfaced earlier in the week.

Although Time magazine had put Haggard on its list of the nation’s 25 most influential evangelicals, citing his White House access, White House spokesman Tony Fratto insisted that it was inaccurate to portray Haggard as having close White House ties.

In an interview with reporters on Friday, Jones said he decided to go public about his sexual relationship with Haggard because of the pastor’s support for a constitutional amendment banning same-sex marriage that is on the ballot Tuesday in Colorado.

“For someone who is up there preaching that marriage should only be between a man and a woman, and he’s going behind his wife’s back and seeing a gay man for sex — I felt like I owed it to the gay community to expose the hypocrisy,” Jones said.

But Jones’ account of events also came under scrutiny Friday after the results of a polygraph test he volunteered to take for Denver’s KHOW radio, where he originally made his allegations Wednesday.

The polygraph examiner concluded Jones showed some “deception.” However, the examiner said because Jones was exhausted at the time the test was administered, it would need to be redone after he slept and ate to get more trustworthy results.

Jones told reporters that the part of

the test he failed was on the question of whether he and Haggard had sex.

“I don’t understand why I failed the part about Haggard,” he said. “That’s the reason he contacted me to begin with.”

Haggard had told reporters earlier in the week that he did not know Jones. But Friday, he said a Denver hotel where he was staying referred him to Jones for a massage, and Jones “told him about” the methamphetamine. He did not identify the hotel.

Jones told reporters he did not sell methamphetamine to Haggard, but he said he gave Haggard a contact to obtain the drug and saw him use it on multiple occasions. He also said he was “not listed with any concierge” at a Denver hotel.

Asked about Haggard’s continued denials of a sexual relationship, Jones noted that Haggard had denied even knowing him until he released voice mails he had kept from Haggard.

An expert hired by KUSA concluded the voice on the messages was probably Haggard, and a more detailed analysis was under way. The pastor admitted Friday that he did call Jones “to buy some meth, but I threw it away.”

Jones has said he met Haggard three years ago when the pastor answered his escort ad, pretending to be a man from Kansas City named “Art.” He said their sexual encounters continued monthly until August.

Haggard’s middle name is Arthur.

Jones, who said he no longer works as a prostitute, told reporters he only learned Haggard’s true identity several months ago, when he recognized him after seeing him on TV.

“You can’t put yourself in the position he was in and want respect and people to follow your words when you’re actually doing the opposite behind their backs,” Jones said.

[From a Nov 5 CNN.com article.]

“I do not feel obliged to believe that the same God who endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect had intended for us to forgo their use.” — Galileo

A QUIZ: WHO SAID IT? from www.seekerthoughts.blogspot.com

1. "As the government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion..."
 - A. John Adams
 - B. Joel Barlow
 - C. George Washington
2. "I hope I live to see the day when, as in the early days of our country, we won't have any public schools. The churches will have taken them over again and Christians will be running them. What a happy day that will be!"
 - A. D. James Kennedy
 - B. Jerry Falwell
 - C. George W. Bush
3. "As to Jesus of Nazareth...I have... some doubts as to his divinity; though it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it."
 - A. Albert Einstein
 - B. John Dewey
 - C. Benjamin Franklin
4. "And often it is necessary to deceive, and to do the greatest benefits by means of this device, whereas he who has gone by a straight course has done great mischief to the person whom he has not deceived."
 - A. Bill Clinton
 - B. Anton LaVey
 - C. John Chrysostom
5. "Accordingly, it must and dare not be considered a trifling matter but a most serious one to seek counsel against this and to save our souls from the Jews, that is, from the devil and from eternal death. My advice, as I said earlier, is: First, that their synagogues be burned down, and that all who are able toss in sulphur and pitch; it would be good if someone could also throw in some hellfire. That would demonstrate to God our serious resolve and be evidence to all the world that it was in ignorance that we tolerated such houses, in which the Jews have reviled God."
 - A. Sadaam Hussein
 - B. Anwar Sadat
 - C. Martin Luther
6. "Communism was the brainchild of German-Jewish intellectuals."
 - A. Jerry Falwell
 - B. Adolf Hitler
 - C. Pat Robertson
7. "When a man strikes his male or female slave with a rod, and the slave dies under his abuse, the owner must be punished. However, if the slave can stand up after a day or two, the owner should not be punished because he is his [owner's] property."
 - A. Moses
 - B. Mohammad
 - C. Jefferson Davis
8. "The courts are merely a ruse, if you will, for humanist, atheistic educators to beat up on Christians."
 - A. Jerry Falwell
 - B. Adolf Hitler
 - C. Pat Robertson
9. "Secular schools can never be tolerated because such a school has no religious instruction, and a general moral instruction without a religious foundation is built on air; consequently, all character training and religion must be derived from faith . . . We need believing people."
 - A. Jerry Falwell
 - B. James Dobson
 - C. Adolf Hitler
10. "In this hour I would ask of the Lord God only this: that, as in the past, so in the years to come He would give His blessing to our work and our action, to our judgment and our resolution, that He will safeguard us from all false pride and from all cowardly servility, that He may grant us to find the straight path which His Providence has ordained for [us]..."
 - A. Jerry Falwell
 - B. Adolf Hitler
 - C. Pat Robertson
11. "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible."
 - A. George Washington
 - B. John Adams
 - C. Thomas Jefferson
 - D. None of the above

ANSWERS:

- 1: B. From the Treaty of Tripoli, written by Joel Barlow and ratified unanimously by Congress on June 10, 1797.
- 2: B. Jerry Falwell, in *America Can Be Saved*, 1979
- 3: C. Benjamin Franklin, in a letter to Yale President Ezra Stiles.
- 4: C: John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, from *Treatise on the Priesthood, Book I*.
- 5: C. Martin Luther, Protestant Reformer, "The Jews and Their Lies" (1543).
- 6: C. Pat Robertson, *The New World Order*, (1991), p. 17.
- 7: A. Moses, quoting Jehovah in Exodus 21:20-21 (NIV)
8. C. Pat Robertson, The 700 Club, October 2, 1990.
- 9: C: Adolf Hitler, April 26, 1933, from a speech made during negotiations leading to the Nazi-Vatican Concordat of 1933.
- 10: B. Adolf Hitler, from a speech at Wurzburg on June 27, 1937.
- 11: D. None of the above. Though widely attributed to George Washington, there is no evidence of its validity.

WRONG on the Money!

by AFS Treasurer Ed Buckner

I reported in last month's AFNews that, as of the end of September, we've raised **\$20,106.38** in dues, subscriptions, and contributions. We have in fact only raised **\$13,313.96**.

The good news is that no one stole any of our money. The bad news is that your treasurer, while generally competent and trustworthy, is woefully inept at Excel. It seems that sub-totaling a column and then adding the sub-total as well as the individual cells into a subsequent total will give a *badly* incorrect sum.

Here's hoping someone will contribute another \$6,792.42 just to keep me from looking stupid.

In the meantime, I still say, "Thanks! Thanks for your confidence in the current leadership and thanks, especially, for supporting freethought and AFS."

The complete works of Charles Darwin is available online at <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>.

Religion is Evil

by Mike Cornellison

I believe that religion has been a force for evil in world history and in the lives of people. I will start out with a few sweeping accusations, and in the following paragraphs explain my reasoning.

Most religion is based on distorted and politicized history and myth, and most believers remain largely ignorant about the true historical origins of their faith. Curing this ignorance would kill the dependent beliefs (except for the hopelessly dishonest).

Religious leaders protect their influence through blackmail: doubters are cast as arrogant sinners who have turned away from God. This intimidates most believers from asking difficult questions.

Distortion of history and intimidation are evil enough in themselves, but the perpetuation of the religious belief system causes much greater problems than these.

Religion discourages people from taking responsibility for their lives and problems: they rely instead on false hopes (prayer, divine intervention); they passively wait for God to correct all injustices in the afterlife; they accept suffering as God's will, or a path to greater personal sanctity.

Religion replaces difficult moral choices and challenges with easy formulas: repent and be forgiven; you are saved by faith in God. Righteousness in life becomes a simplistic set of beliefs and behaviors, replacing the need for thought, careful judgment, open-mindedness, and moral courage. Thus religion makes it easier to be immoral and irresponsible.

Religion provides justification for self-righteousness and persecution. Throughout history, powerful leaders have used religion to control their subjects and destroy their enemies: the divine right of kings, the Inquisition, witch burnings, stonings, uncounted wars, popes of old, and mullahs of today.

There is a core set of religious beliefs, common to most religions:

- There is a God who defines required beliefs, and required and forbidden behaviors.
- There are historical persons, sent by God, to deliver this message to Man.
- It is Man's obligation to hear this message and to believe and to obey.
- Those who do not believe and obey will suffer a terrible fate in the afterlife.
- There are anointed agents of God who interpret and direct religious and moral thinking, and it is Man's obligation to hear and obey these agents (or else).

Some religions (e.g. Buddhism) do not fit this mold. These also do not claim divine revelation, an exclusive path to God, or moral guides who demand obedience.

When you step back from the details and reduce religion to the above core principles, the absurdity of the whole idea should be clear to any honest mind:

- Why would God communicate with Man through obscure messengers in ancient times? Is this a reasonable method to reach all mankind? Is it not more reasonable to believe that deluded people were pushing their own agendas? Why should one believe otherwise?
- How can one choose the "one true religion" among the many claimants to this title?
- What happens to the great majority of persons who are never exposed to the ancient revelations, and therefore have no way to reach God?
- Why would God hate and torture persons (hellfire) who do not accept his one true religion? In a human, this would be the behavior of an egomaniac, condemned in every culture. Does God behave like Stalin?
- What does God gain from Hell? Revenge? Ego gratification? Do you like this God?
- Even if you believe that Hell is a proper fulfillment of divine justice, the punishment does not reverse the evil that was done – it just adds more evil.

I will now pick on Christianity, which is my own background. From what I have read of Islam, it seems even more unreasonable.

In Christianity, the core belief is that God suffered and died to atone for the sins of Man (or the Original Sin of Adam), thus making Man worthy to be loved by God. Is this a sound idea? Would you accept the suffering of a mother as atonement for the crimes of her child? Does this make her evil child more lovable? Are babies born with Adam's sin on their souls? Does this idea of Original Sin and Redemption make sense?

Christianity contains a great contradiction: Jesus told us to love our enemies, but God throws his enemies into eternal hellfire. God loves only those who love and obey Him, reducing God to an egomaniac like Stalin.

Some apologists claim that misguided humans have distorted the original truth brought to us by Jesus, St. Paul, etc. Perhaps the idea of Hell was invented by religious leaders to intimidate and subjugate their followers, and the necessary words were put into the mouth of Jesus by later writers. If this is true, then how are we supposed to know what is true and what has been invented or distorted? Whom can we trust if the agents of God are misleading us, or the divine scripture has been manipulated?

Some apologists attempt to raise Christian religion to the level of philosophy, turning dubious religious dogma into analogies representing sophisticated moral principles and eternal truths. But one can arrive at these same principles without the incredible baggage of Christianity. Is it not more logical to believe that it is all claptrap? There is an incredible burden of proof (logic and history) and a long tradition of obvious evil for Christianity to overcome.

The Christian Bible is far more myth than history. In the case of the Old Testament, this is obvious enough, but this is also true for the New Testa-

Religion is Evil (*continued*)

ment. None of the four evangelists knew Jesus personally – they wrote 30 to 100+ years after his death. They recorded a verbal tradition. They were motivated by desires to defend and spread their faith. Just like the proselytizers of today, they wrote to get results. We have no more reason to trust them than the founders of Astrology.

Citations from the New Testament in other Christian writings do not appear until about the year 150, and these are not the same as in later texts. The obvious conclusion is that the New

Testament was still being revised 150 years after Jesus had left the scene.

Understanding the early Church as a historical process is sufficient to explain everything. There is no need to posit divine intervention. Anyone who believes that the New Testament is the word of God does not base this belief on history or logic, but on faith alone, and an incredible suppression of inconvenient historical data and logical thought.

If Christianity (or Islam or others) is illogical and based on distorted his-

tory, is this evil? Perhaps it could be considered an innocuous pastime, or even an influence for good. I disagree. For the reasons I have already given, freeing people from the obligation to think critically has been a bad influence on both their personal lives and the lives of others, sometimes contributing to great historical disasters and widespread suffering and death (e.g. the Crusades, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, etc.).

Religion is clearly evil.

Atheist Books Find a Market in U.S.

A fresh wave of atheistic books has hit the market this autumn, some climbing onto best-seller lists in what proponents see as a backlash against the way religion is entwined in politics.

"Religion is fragmenting the human community," said Sam Harris, author of *Letter to a Christian Nation*, No. 11 on the New York Times nonfiction list as of October 15.

There is a "huge visibility and political empowerment of religion. President George W. Bush used his first veto to deny funding for stem cell research and scientists everywhere were horrified," he said in an interview.

Religious polarization is part of many world conflicts, he said, including those involving Israel and Iran, "but it's never discussed. I consider it the story of our time, what religion is doing to us. But there are very few people calling a spade a spade."

His *Letter*, a blunt 96-page pocket-sized book condensing arguments against belief in quick-fire volleys, appeared on the Times list just ahead of *The God Delusion*, by Richard Dawkins, a scientist at Oxford University and long-time atheist.

In addition, Harris's *The End of Faith*, a 2004 work which prompted his *Letter* as a response to critics, is holding the No. 13 Times spot among

nonfiction paperbacks.

Publishers Weekly said the business has seen "a striking number of impassioned critiques of religion--any religion, but Christianity in particular," a probably inevitable development given "the super-soaking of American politics and culture with religion in recent years."

Paul Kurtz, founder of the Council for Secular Humanism and publisher of *Free Inquiry* magazine, said, "The American public is really disturbed about the role of religion in U.S. government policy, particularly with the Bush administration and the breakdown of church-state separation, and secondly with the conflict in the Mideast."

They are turning to free thought and secular humanism and publishers have recognized this, he added.

"I've published 45 books, many critical of religion," Kurtz said. "I think in America we have this notion of tolerance ... it was considered bad taste to criticize religion. But I think now there are profound questions about age-old hatreds."

Dr. Timothy Larsen, professor of theology at Wheaton College in Illinois, says any growth in interest in atheism is a reflection of the strength of religion.

That happened late in the 19th cen-

tury America when an era of intense religious conviction gave rise to voices like famed agnostic Robert Ingersoll, he said.

For Christianity, he said, "It's very important for people of faith to realize how unsettling and threatening their posture and rhetoric and practice can feel to others. So it's an opportunity for the church to look at itself and say 'we have done things ... that make other people uncomfortable.' It is an opportunity for dialogue."

Larsen, author of the soon-to-be-published *Crisis of Doubt*, added that in some sense atheism is "a disappointment with God and with the church. Some of these are people we wounded that we should be handling pastorally rather than with aggressive knockdown debate."

These are also probably some of the same people Harris says he's hearing from after his two books.

"Many, many readers feel utterly isolated in their communities," he said. "They are surrounded by cult members, from their point of view, and are unable to disclose their feelings."

"I get a lot of e-mail just expressing incredible relief that they are not alone ... relieved that I'm writing something that couldn't be said," Harris added.

[From an October 18 article by Michael Conlon for Reuters.]

"Infidels in all ages have battled for the rights of man, and have at all times been the fearless advocates of liberty and justice." — Robert G. Ingersoll, from "The Gods," 1872

Bush 'Faith-Based' Initiative Was Used for GOP Campaigns, Former White House Official Charges in New Book

White House Faith-Based Office is "Deplorable Sham" and Should Be Shut Down, Says AU's Lynn

A new book by a former staffer in the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives details how the much-ballyhooed Bush "faith-based" initiative was cynically manipulated by Republican operatives to help GOP candidates locked in close races.

David Kuo's forthcoming book, *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction*, also asserts that applications for federal faith-based funds were sometimes rejected by reviewers because they came from non-Christian applicants, that civil rights rollbacks sought by the administration were unneeded and that Bush's conservative Christian allies were derided behind their backs and bought off with White House cufflinks and other trinkets.

Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which has led opposition to President George W. Bush's faith-based initiative, said the information is confirmation of critics' longstanding complaints.

"This is proof that the faith-based initiative was a deplorable sham from day one," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director. "This initiative was never about helping the poor; it was about shameless partisan politicking. It has undercut the constitutional separation of church and state, and it has been horrible public policy.

"The White House faith-based office ought to be shut down today, before more taxpayer money is misused," Lynn said. "Kuo's book confirms evidence that Americans United brought forward four years ago. The

faith-based initiative is a travesty that has gone on far too long."

Kuo alleges that White House strategist Karl Rove and other Republican leaders staged a series of supposedly non-partisan events around the faith-based initiative in states with tight House and Senate races.

According to Kuo, 20 events were held, and Republican candidates subsequently won 19 of those races. Discussing the book on MSNBC's "Countdown" on October 11, Keith Olbermann remarked, "The [faith-based] office was literally a taxpayer-funded part of the Republican campaign machinery."

In the book, Kuo writes that in 2002, "The office decided to hold roundtable events for threatened incumbents with faith and community leaders, using the aura of the White House power to get a diverse group of faith and community leaders to a 'nonpartisan' event discussing how best to help poor people in their area."

Kuo says faith-based office staffers spent a lot of their time trying to prove that religious groups were often denied federal funds because they discriminated in hiring on religious grounds. In fact, staffers were able to find few examples of such conduct. That absence of such evidence dramatically undercuts the Bush administration's demand that Congress revise civil rights law so that religious groups will be better able to apply for funds.

Kuo also said that non-Christian groups were sometimes excluded from faith-based funding, even though White House officials insisted the

money would be available to all.

Kuo quotes one official who rated grant applications. He told Kuo, "When I saw one of those non-Christian groups on the set I was reviewing, I just stopped looking at them and gave them a zero. A lot of us did."

While the White House was happy to take evangelicals' votes, it had nothing but contempt for their leaders, Kuo asserts. He alleges that staffers in Rove's office referred to Religious Right leaders as "nuts" and writes, "National Christian leaders received hugs and smiles in person and then were dismissed behind their backs and described as ridiculous, out of control and just plain goofy."

To placate them, the evangelical leaders were given White House cufflinks or pens, Kuo writes.

Americans United's Lynn said the new revelations underscore charges AU made four years ago about the faith-based initiative.

During the 2002 elections, AU issued a report noting that James Towey, then head of the faith-based office, traveled to states and districts with close races to host "seminars" on how religious leaders could get federal money. He was usually accompanied by Republican candidates. The pattern was repeated in 2004.

Concluded Lynn, "All of this just underscores why the faith-based initiative is such a bad idea. The White House politicized the initiative, and many religious leaders have ended up being manipulated. I hope this sorry incident is a lesson to them."

[From an Oct. 12 AU press release.]

"Fear paralyzes the brain. Progress is born of courage. Fear believes; courage doubts. Fear falls upon the earth and prays; courage stands erect and thinks. Fear retreats; courage advances. Fear is barbarism; courage is civilization.

Fear believes in witchcraft, in devils and in ghosts. Fear is religion, courage is science."

— Robert G. Ingersoll, from "The Ghosts," 1877

"For those searching for truth — not the truth of dogma and darkness, but the truth brought by reason, search, examination and inquiry — discipline is required. For faith, as well intentioned as it may be, must be built on facts, not fiction.

Faith in fiction is a damnable false hope." — Thomas A. Edison

Clipped

Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Ed Buckner's letter was printed in the *Marietta Daily Journal* on October 12.

Letter wrong; Individual prayer allowed in school

DEAR EDITOR:

Re: Chad Williams' Letter to editor, "School prayer might prevent violence," Oct. 4 MDJ

The Marietta Daily Journal, with plenty of help from some of your ill-informed readers like Mr. Williams, is perpetuating big lies about school prayer. The cartoon in Friday's edition showing the teacher promising not to tell on students who want to pray continues this misinformation.

There is no reason at all to believe that more praying by anyone in any schools would reduce the horrific violence that occurs there—rarely. The recent incidents did not even involve violence by anyone who worked at or attended the schools. It came from outsiders, men unlikely to have known or cared whether anyone was praying in the school. The murderer of the Amish girls was not only religious, he even apparently blamed God for his misery and indirectly for his actions.

Mr. Williams's profound lack of understanding is shown not only by his reference to the need for self-realization

by Madalyn Murray O'Hair—who died more than 10 years ago—but more by his inability to reason logically. He implies that a majority vote in favor of forced government prayer would make it right and make it effective. He apparently does not understand that our Constitution and the First Amendment protect individual liberties against majorities and governments.

Mr. Williams may be willing to change his religious beliefs and practices based on a majority vote, but none of the rest of us need accept this. No American court has ever ruled, or even been asked to rule, that anyone, whether a sixth-grader, a teacher or a principal, cannot pray in school. The only restrictions have been to prohibit government agents from deciding religious matters for students, leading others in prayer, or endorsing a religious belief.

Ed Buckner
Southern Director
Council for Secular Humanism Smyrna

October 2006 Board Meeting Minutes

Present: Steve Yothment (President), Judy Thompson (VPI), Freya Harris (VPE), Jack McKinney, Lew Southern, Jim Middleton and Bill Burton.

Date/Time: October 15, 2006, 2:10 PM

Minutes taken by Jim Middleton.

Before the meeting was called to order, there was a discussion concerning the presence of a quorum. It was determined that a quorum was present; and, the president called the meeting to order and declared that a quorum was present.

Minutes: The minutes of the September 17 meeting were approved as presented.

Treasurer's Report: The Treasurer was absent, but he had prepared a report that was sent by e-mail to all board members. The board accepted the report.

Property: Lew reported that the Collins Springs Primitive Baptist Church property is still a viable home for AFS. The property could perhaps be purchased with a quitclaim deed, and the title subsequently cleared.

One proposal by Lew is that a group of AFS members purchase the CSPBC property with an agreement with AFS that AFS will use the property and maintain it, paying only interest on the purchase amount. When title is cleared, the group will convey the property to AFS. The group will get legal opinions before pursuing the proposal.

The board authorized Lew to continue his pursuit of the CSPBC property. When the group is ready to purchase the property, the AFS board will vote on the proposed agreement with the group.

It was mentioned that the gas is off in Suite 400; thus, we must be concerned with the possibility of frozen pipes. Lew volunteered to watch the property, and possibly turn off the water and drain the pipes if a hard freeze is expected.

Elections: In view of the imminent election, ballots must be sent out soon. Judy will send the list of nominations to Steve, and Steve will print the ballots. A group will meet on November 12, 2006, to stuff ballots into envelopes.

Newsletter: It was mentioned that we ought to have a "drop-dead" date for mailing the newsletter. The board agreed, and the date set is the Monday before the AFS meeting.

Miscellaneous: There was a discussion about who can be involved in the election. It was agreed that a candidate for election cannot serve on the election committee. Lew was appointed chair of the election committee.

There was further discussion on what constitutes a quorum. After reading the by-laws related to a quorum, our interpretation is that the bylaws indicate that the Board of Directors consists of the six elected directors plus the four officers, or five if an Editor of the Monthly Publication has been appointed. Therefore, according to the bylaws, a quorum consists of: at least four directors and two officers, or three directors and three officers, or two directors and four officers. Therefore the initial determination of a quorum was correct.

There being no further business, the meeting was concluded at 3:25 PM.

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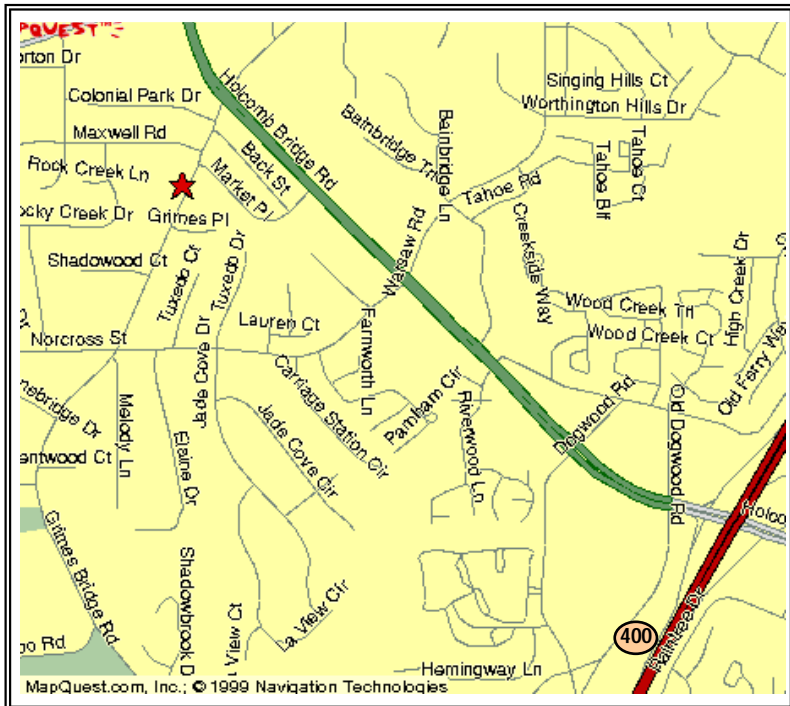
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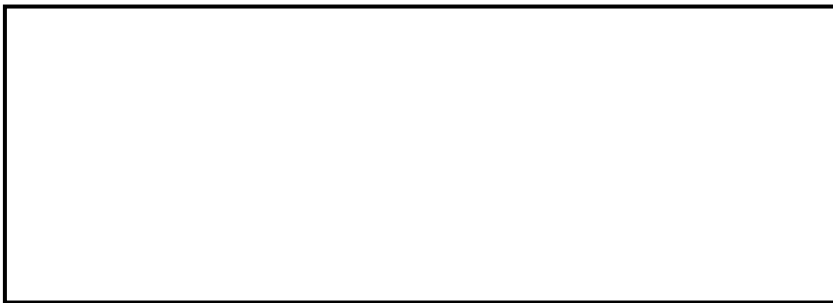


**The November Meeting:
Sunday, November 12
1:00 at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Clark Adams**



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