

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 12 Number 12 • December 2006

The December AFS Meeting

The December 10 AFS meeting will include a talk by an Atlanta area public school teacher. Her talk will be on church/state and religion issues, especially as they apply to public schools.

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.

Potluck Dinner After AFS Meeting

Right after the December 10 AFS Meeting, we will have a Potluck Dinner. Please bring food according to the first letter of your last name as follows:

- A – G: Bring a side dish!
- H – P: Bring a main dish!
- Q – Z: Bring a desert!

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.

AFS Activities

The next **AFS Social** will be at Panahar Restaurant, 3375 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, on Friday, December 15, at 7:00 PM.

The **AFS Discussion Group** will not meet this month due to the holidays.

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 December Atheist Meetup

Atlanta Atheists will have a "meetup" on Saturday, December 23, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Road, in Atlanta. The phone there is 404-255-5911.

This event will include a gift exchange! Please bring a gift worth \$5.00 to \$10.00 if you would like to participate. If possible, have it relate to freethought in one way or another. Be creative!

AFS Meetings and Activities

Dec 10: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
Dec 15: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

A Holiday Poem

"Twas some weeks before Christmas, and all thru the town,
decorations were hung over trees not yet brown.
"Why the rush?" I did muse, "to be merry and gay,
when we've not even set our Thanksgiving buffet?"

Yet the 'Christians' were out, and they dared to declare,
"You won't let us be Christians! It just isn't fair!
We want to hear 'Christmas' when we go to the stores,
To buy our big-screen TVs and dress our daughters like
whores!"

I puzzled a bit at their public distress;
Surely Jesus would not have endorsed such a mess!
It was he, after all, who was heard to intone,
"When you pray, go away, thou shalt do it alone!"
(Matthew 6:5-6)

"You have every freedom in this land of ours,
To go pray in the courthouses, schools, even bars!
The problem, you see, is that if you had your druthers
You'd dictate the prayers that should be said by all
others!"

"But our nation," they cried, "is a Christian-y land,
We're being oppressed! You don't understand!
The Founding Fathers were God-fearing all!
They would want us to celebrate Mass at the mall!"

I puzzled some more, for a cursory glance
Through the history books showed a very slim chance
That the great men who founded our Nation would care
If you're Christian or Jewish or something more rare!

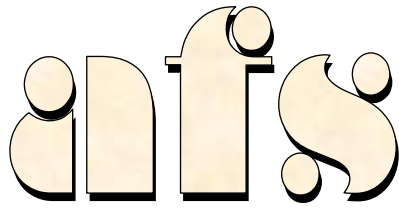
Washington, Jefferson, Adams, and Paine,
State-sponsored worship they all did disdain.
One can imagine just how much more
They would have detested religion pushed by a store!

"Besides," I then thought, "I'm as Christian as you,
but have many friends - Atheist, Muslim, and Jew.
My 'Happy Holidays' doesn't slight your belief,
And doesn't offend theirs - so what's your beef?"

But my words of good sense fell on ignorant ears,
Who continued to rail against their imaginary fears.
So to you, dearest friends, these two words I transmit;
Happy Holidays to all - even to the hypocrites.

[From a Nov. 29 post on www.democraticunderground.com
by "teenagebambam." See www.tinyurl.com/y29p2w.]

"There is nothing which can better deserve our patronage than the promotion of science and literature. Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness." —George Washington, address to Congress, 8 January, 1790



**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.

Dec 10: An elementary school teacher will speak on church/state and religion issues in public schools. A potluck dinner will follow the meeting.

Jan 14: Thomas Nisley, Ph.D., an assistant professor at Southern Polytechnic State University, will give a presentation on "God has a Foreign Policy? Israel and U.S. Foreign Policy."

Feb 11: 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

The Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 12, Number 12, December 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 in-
dividuals, \$35 for households, and \$10
for students/low income/under 21. Sus-
taining members (individual) \$100 and
sustaining members (households) \$125.

Subscriptions alone are \$20 for 12 is-
sues, \$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

Dixie Courthouse Unveils the Ten Commandments

The FFRF says it will sue.

Dozens of Dixie County, FL residents took a few extra minutes on the way home from church Sunday, Nov. 26, or on the way to work Monday morning to drive past the Dixie County courthouse to see for themselves if what they had heard was true. It was.

A six-ton block of granite bearing the Ten Commandments had been installed atop the courthouse steps. Inscribed at the base was the admonition to "Love God and keep his commandments."

"There are no negatives there to live by," said Skipper Jones, former owner and publisher of the county's weekly newspaper. Jones served as spokesman for Joe Anderson Jr., one of the leaders of the effort to have the monument constructed and situated at no cost to the county.

"Mr. Anderson was involved with others and took a very active role in seeing this was accomplished because he feels this is something the country needs to get back to," Jones said.

The concept of a Ten Commandments monument was endorsed by county commissioners, according to the minutes of the Jan. 19 regular board meeting.

Former Commissioner John Driggers broached the subject on behalf of an unnamed county resident, asking whether the board was "bold enough" to allow the monument to be placed at the courthouse. After then-county attorney Joey Lander told the board he would defend any lawsuits stemming from the decision for free, commissioners voted in favor of allowing the project to proceed.

Although Lander has resigned as county attorney, he told *Gainesville Sun* reporters on Nov. 27 that he would uphold his offer.

"I will gladly represent them for free but I wouldn't want to challenge someone to file a lawsuit," Lander said. "If the commissioners were willing to make the bold statement, I am willing to do my part to represent the

county in their bid to keep them (the commandments) there."

A number of lawsuits regarding the display of the Ten Commandments have been filed over the past half century, including some that have made their way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

In a high-profile case, Alabama's judicial ethics panel voted unanimously in 2003 to remove Chief Justice Roy Moore from office for installing and then refusing to remove a 2.6-ton Ten Commandments monument from the rotunda of the state's Supreme Court building. The monument was eventually removed from the state building.

Brandon Hensler, director of communications for the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida said, "There are certainly values in the Ten Commandments that are enshrined in the law and should be upheld, like 'Thou shalt not murder.'"

But he continued, "If there are residents of Dixie County who understand our country's constitutional values and that it is the role of churches – not of government – to urge people to love God and keep his commandments, we would be interested in speaking with them."

County Coordinator Arthur Bellot said he had not heard any negative comments, "but I have had several positive comments."

Among the county businessmen involved in the project was Ben Barber, owner of Dixie Monument, who spent two weeks engraving the monument.

"This was made from American black granite with white variegation that was quarried in Pennsylvania in May," Barber said. "Then it went to Georgia for shaping and polishing before it got to me for engraving. A block of granite that big – 12,000 pounds – costs about \$20,000."

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

The monument's placement immediately drew national attention, including a segment on the Fox network's Hannity and Colmes nightly program. On Dec. 3, the Freedom From Religion Foundation announced that it intends to sue the county over what it says is an illegal display of a religious icon on public property.

"We plan to sue, but we do need at least one local plaintiff who lives in Dixie County or who has very regular business at the courthouse," said foundation co-president Annie Laurie Gaylor.



The foundation identifies itself as "an association with nearly 8,000 mostly atheist and agnostic members nationwide" that "works to protect the constitutional separation of church and state."

In a letter faxed to Dixie County commissioners on Friday, Gaylor wrote, "Dixie County has no business telling citizens which god they must have, how many gods they must have or that they must have any god at all!"

The letter also cited recent court rulings that ordered displays of the Ten Commandments to be removed from courthouses. The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta, which would serve as the federal appellate court for a Florida case, ordered former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore to remove the Ten Commandments monument he had placed

The Dixie Decalogue (*continued*)

in the Alabama state courthouse. A year ago, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Kentucky officials violated the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution when they allowed a Ten Commandments display inside a courthouse.

"This should be a no-brainer," Gaylor said. "I don't like to prophesy, but this should be clear to a court. Definitely, the law is on our side in this case."

County officials were perplexed by Gaylor's assertions.

"I really don't see why this is anybody's business outside of Dixie County – why it is the business of someone who does not pay taxes here,

who does not live here, who does not intend to ever live here," said county coordinator Arthur Bellot. "We did not invite this. It was something private individuals did for the county."

Both the foundation and county officials said they have heard from organizations and attorneys willing to defend their positions in court. What is missing from the brewing legal battle is a specific plaintiff—someone with standing such as a county resident or someone who must routinely pass the monument to enter the courthouse.

Gaylor said the foundation has been contacted by several of its Florida members, but not by anyone in Dixie County, and she concedes that

it's possible no residents or regular courthouse visitor will step forward. She said in some cases where there is possible retribution, courts have withheld the names of plaintiffs.

"I am hopeful that if we asked the court, a plaintiff's name would not have to be revealed, but you can't always get that," Gaylor said.

Bellot said Dixie County won't back down.

"This is a national issue, and we have other things to do here," Bellot said. "They will do whatever they are going to do. Let the fighting begin."

[From a Nov. 28 and a Dec. 3 article in the *Gainesville Sun* by Karen Voyles.]

"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

Kent Hovind Guilty on All Counts

Kent Hovind, a Pensacola, FL preacher and evangelist, is the founder of Creation Science Evangelism and owns Dinosaur Adventure Land, a creationist theme park dedicated to debunking evolution. For years he claimed he is employed by God and has no income or property because everything he owns belongs to God.

But the IRS didn't see it that way. On November 2, a 12-person jury deliberated for 2 1/2 hours before finding Hovind and his wife guilty of all counts in their tax fraud case.

Kent Hovind was found guilty of 58 counts, including failure to pay \$845,000 in employee-related taxes. He faces a maximum of 288 years in prison.

His wife Jo Hovind was charged and convicted in 44 of the counts involving evading bank-reporting requirements. She faces up to 225 years in prison but was allowed to remain free pending the couple's sentencing on January 9.

Reverend Hovind briefly held onto her arm as the verdict was read. Neither reacted at first. But minutes later,

she held her face in her hands.

"Nobody likes to pay taxes," Assistant U.S. Attorney Michelle Heldmyer said in her closing argument. "But we do because it's the law, and he is not above the law."

The jury also granted the prosecution's request for the Hovinds to forfeit \$430,400. That amount equals the value of the checks signed and cashed by Jo Hovind in the 44 counts.

U.S. District Judge Casey Rodgers released Jo Hovind until sentencing but denied Kent Hovind's request to be released. He most likely will be detained at either Escambia County Jail or Santa Rosa County Jail until sentencing. Heldmyer said Kent Hovind was a flight risk and a "danger to the community."

His attorney, Alan Richey, argued that the Internal Revenue Service pursued his client because of his religious beliefs.

Kent Hovind, whose life's mission is to debunk evolution, says he and his employees are workers of God and therefore exempt from paying taxes. He pays his employees in cash and does not withhold their taxes or pay

his share as an employer.

Jo Hovind's attorney, Jerold Barringier, argued that his client was a simple piano teacher and grandmother who was not aware of bank-reporting regulations concerning large amounts of cash. Any cash transaction at a bank more than \$10,000 triggers a currency-transaction report forwarded to the IRS. She was found guilty of using several methods to take out just enough money to avoid triggering the report.

The Hovinds and their attorneys declined comment.

Richard Hogan, an acquaintance of Kent Hovind who observed the last day of the two-week trial, said he felt especially bad for Jo Hovind.

"He was the leader, and she probably went along with him," said Hogan. He first met the Hovinds when their children were home-schooled.

"It's pretty tough to fight Goliath," Hogan said. "The first time the IRS calls, you should go ahead and deal with it. It didn't have to come down to this."

[From a Nov. 3 article by Nicole Lozare in the *Pensacola News Journal*.]

Religion is *Not Necessarily* Evil by Thomas Barefield

A response to last month's "Religion is Evil" article

I hope the AFNews editor has received a few responses to Mike Cornellison's "Religion is Evil" article. It's fine to criticize religion from a philosophical point of view, but I think to come out and call it evil is uncalled for. But in case he hasn't received replies, here is a sort of rebuttal, "Religion is Not (Necessarily) Evil."

For the past few years, I've been posting on a couple of Internet forums. Here I am, trying to convince skittish Christians that atheists are mostly just looking to be left alone, and have no desire to perpetrate some kind of Anti-religion Atheist/Gestapo Ideocracy on them. And then I read (with a certain amount of dismay) Mike Cornellison's article titled "Religion is Evil," and it seems that all this time I've been wrong!

Okay, this is the newsletter of a Freethought society, so I guess religion is fair game for criticism. But just because we are nonbelievers is no excuse to let shoddy arguments slip by on the theory that no one is going to bother to correct them. I'll bet you an autographed copy of *The God Delusion* that there is an article in some Christian newsletter somewhere coming to the exact same conclusion about atheism (that it's "evil"), and probably using much the same kind of argument ("Atheism discourages people from taking responsibility for their sin"). I just hope that someone over there is open-minded enough to argue with him. So, with all due respect to Mr. Cornellison, a little more thought and a little less freewheeling would not come amiss. I agree that in so far as religions tend to discourage believers from questioning their faith, this may not be the most enlightened attitude in the world. But "evil?" I don't think so.

"Religion discourages people from taking responsibility for their lives and problems." Oh, do you mean religious people like Socrates, Paul of Tarsus, Charlemagne, Mohammed, Joan of Arc, Thomas More, Mohandas Ghandi, Martin Luther King, John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and George Bush? Are these the passive little wall-flowers you're talking about? Or maybe you're talking about those religious people who build hospitals, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, halfway houses and international disaster relief agencies. One of their main teachings may be that if you leave things to God, he will sort them out in his own good time, but from my observations, I'd say that's a teaching more often honored in the breach than in the observance!

"Religion replaces difficult moral choices and challenges with easy formulas." Well, I'll grant you that it does, in general. But most people are not philosophers by nature, and are more comfortable with easy formulas.

And you have to admit that, for the most part, those formulas tend to work pretty well. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" is not a bad rule of thumb! Plus, that doesn't mean that a sincere believer will not sometimes run afoul of a difficult situation calling for study and meditation. (There are Christians on both sides of the abortion divide, to take just one example.) It happens all the time. To dismiss them all as mindless puppets is to do them a serious disservice.

"Religion provides justification for self-righteousness and persecution." Since when has Mankind ever needed justification for these two sins apart from his own pig-headedness? Granted that religious persecution and self-righteousness are exceptionally nasty

examples of the above, but we cannot sit back smugly in our ivory towers and claim that religion is completely to blame for this. Religious faith has also, from time to time, provided people with the courage to resist persecution, and even actively fight against it.

Next, Cornellison gives a quick run through some of the "core principles" of religion, particularly Christianity. I'm not even going to try to sort through that mess. Likewise, I'm not going to argue against his claim that the Bible is mainly mythology. However, while I may not believe in their mythology, that is no reason for me to ridicule it or pick it apart. Philosophers have indeed found some rich pickings in the Bible (Kierkegaard, anyone?), so I'm just going to pass over this with a snide, "don't knock it if you haven't tried it."

I want us to remember that religion didn't just fall from the sky — it was invented by human beings! Like anything subject to natural selection, it evolves, and if the ideas that come under the umbrella of religion had no usefulness, then religion would not have lasted as long as it has.

Yes, there have been horrible atrocities committed in the name of religion. Yes, extreme examples of religious suppression can put grotesque shackles upon people's minds. But religious teachings have also been responsible, more or less, for some pretty nice stuff over the centuries (Bach! — the Cistine Chapel! — the Red Cross!). As free-thinkers and atheists, it should be possible for us to honorably state our conviction that religion is not for us without necessarily calling it "evil."

— Thomas Barefield,
tbarefield26@hotmail.com.

Congratulations to **Dr. Wes McCoy**, a North Cobb High School science teacher and outspoken opponent of the school board's 2002 move to slap evolution disclaimers in science textbooks. He is now the co-recipient of the 2007 Scientific Freedom and Responsibility Award, given by the **American Association for the Advancement of Science**. Dr. McCoy, who began teaching at North Cobb High in 1978, is being honored for his work with fellow teachers on how to teach evolution in the classroom, as well as efforts to educate community and faith-based organizations about evolution.

Supreme Court Accepts Case Dealing with Taxpayer Challenge to Bush ‘Faith-Based Office’

The case deals with a narrow, but important, church-state issue, says Americans United’s Lynn

The U.S. Supreme Court agreed on Dec. 1 to decide whether taxpayers may challenge the Bush administration’s use of general appropriations to promote its “faith-based” agenda.

In 2005, the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that three Wisconsin taxpayers had legal standing to challenge President George W. Bush’s creation of a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and other promotion of his faith-based initiative.

The Bush administration asked the high court to overrule the decision, arguing that under current court pre-

cedent, taxpayers may only challenge congressional appropriations of funds if the money goes to religious organizations. The executive branch’s use of general appropriations to set up its faith-based office and promote a faith-based agenda are not fit subjects for legal challenge, the administration argued.

“This is a relatively narrow question,” said Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, “but it’s quite important. We believe that no tax money should be spent to advance religion. It’s essential that the justices uphold the principle that tax-

payers can go to court when their money is being used to advance religion.”

Hein v. Freedom From Religion Foundation will be the first church-state case to come before the high court since two Bush appointees – Chief Justice John Roberts and Associate Justice Samuel Alito – have taken seats there.

Said AU’s Lynn, “Both Roberts and Alito expressed general support for church-state separation during their confirmation hearings. This case will be a good opportunity for them to put that viewpoint to good use.”

[From a Dec. 1 AU press release.]

Bush Appoints Abstinence-Only Proponent to Oversee Title X

The Bush administration on Nov. 21 appointed a new chief of family-planning programs at the Department of Health and Human Services who believes in abstinence-only sexual education. He works at a Christian pregnancy-counseling organization that regards the distribution of contraceptives as “demeaning to women.”

Eric Keroack, medical director for A Woman’s Concern, will become deputy assistant secretary for population affairs and oversee Title X, the program in the Office of Family Planning that is provided with \$288 million “to provide access to contraceptive supplies and information to all who want and need them with priority given to low-income persons.” The office helps more than five million people

annually at 4,600 clinics nationwide.

A Woman’s Concern supports sexual abstinence until marriage, opposes contraception and does not distribute information promoting birth control at its six centers because, as its website states, “the crass commercialization and distribution of birth control is demeaning to women, degrading of human sexuality and adverse to human health and happiness.” It also states that condoms provide little protection against sexually-transmitted diseases and still posits the discredited link between abortion and breast cancer.

Keroack has had a career dedicated to abstinence-only and anti-choice programs. He serves on the Medical Advisory Council for the Abstinence

Clearinghouse and is a member of the Federal Expert Panel commissioned to define the guidelines for most governmental funding of abstinence education in public schools. His past research has posited a theory that sex before marriage causes hormonal changes that lead to relationship failure.

Keroack’s professional history suggests a mismatch, to put it mildly, with Title X’s goal of educating women about contraception and helping them get it.

The appointment, which does not require Senate confirmation, was the latest conservative backlash by the Bush administration since Democrats won control of Congress.

[From the Nov. 22 issue of *Humanist Network News*.]

“I suspect the reason [for why people believe in a creator God] is that most people, though not belonging to the ‘know-nothing’ party, nevertheless have a residue of feeling that Darwinian evolution isn’t quite big enough to explain everything about life. All I can say as a biologist is that the feeling disappears progressively the more you read about and study what is known about life and evolution.”

“I want to add one thing more. The more you understand the significance of evolution, the more you are pushed away from the agnostic position and towards atheism. Complex, statistically improbable things are by their nature more difficult to explain than simple, statistically probable things.”

– Richard Dawkins, from the *New Humanist*, the Journal of the Rationalist Press Association, Vol 107 No 2

“Who can overestimate the progress of the world if all the money wasted in superstition could be used to enlighten, elevate and civilize mankind?” – Robert Green Ingersoll, from “Some Mistakes of Moses.”

Muslim Elected to U.S. Congress Will Take his Oath of Office on the Koran (So, What's the Problem?) by Steve Yothment

The American Family Association sent out an email Action Alert on Nov. 29 about its concern that new congressman Keith Ellison, D-Miss., a Muslim, will take his oath of office with his hand on the Koran, and not the Bible. In the Action Alert, the AFA's chairman Donald E. Wildmon said, "He should not be allowed to do so – not because of any American hostility to the Koran, but because the act undermines American civilization."

The Action Alert continues, "First, it is an act of hubris that perfectly exemplifies multiculturalist activism – my culture trumps America's culture. What Ellison and his Muslim and leftist supporters are saying is that it is of no consequence what America holds as its holiest book; all that matters is what any individual holds to be his holiest book."

Continuing, "Forgive me, but America should not give a hoot what Keith Ellison's favorite book is. Insofar as a member of Congress taking an oath to serve America and uphold its values is concerned, America is interested in only one book, the Bible. If you are incapable of taking an oath on that book, don't serve in Congress. In your personal life, we will fight for your right to prefer any other book. We will even fight for your right to publish cartoons mocking our Bible. But, Mr. Ellison, America, not you, decides on what book its public servants take their oath."

Well, there are so many problems with those statements, that it's hard to know where to start! But, let's start

with the U.S. Constitution. Article VI of the Constitution clear states, "The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."

Placing your hand on a bible or any other book for that matter is not required as part of taking the oath of office. In fact, the article specifically says that there shall be no religious test as a qualification to any office. So, Mr. Wildmon's statement that Mr. Ellison should take the oath on the bible is just wrong. The government specifically cannot control what, if any, book he takes his oath with because the Constitution forbids any religious test!

Secondly, Mr. Wildmon says, "Mr. Ellison, America, not you, decides on what book its public servants take their oath on." Wrong again! The Constitution sets the laws regarding taking the oath of office, and it specifically requires no religious test. So, the government cannot mandate any religious text be involved when taking the oath of office. The only reason politicians have placed their hands on a bible while taking the oath of office in the past is because they wanted to. (If I were taking the oath, there would be no religious text involved. But I don't mind them using a religious text as

part of the ceremonial act, since it has no bearing on official actions of the person in office.) My point is that it's only the person who takes the oath of office who gets to decide this, not anyone else, and certainly not the government!

Thirdly, Mr. Wildmon says that placing the hand on the Koran is "an act of hubris that perfectly exemplifies multiculturalist activism." No, it is not! We have religious freedom here is the USA! Mr. Ellison has a constitutional right to place his hand on whatever book he wants! And we should embrace multiculturalism in America, not shun it! That is part of what makes our country so interesting.

Finally, Mr. Wildmon implies that America is Christian only, and that all other religions must take a back seat to Christianity in America, with such statements as "America is interested in only one book, the Bible." Well, it just isn't so. There is a diversity of different religions here in America, and U.S. citizens have a constitutional right to practice whatever religion they choose, or none. We must not discriminate against others based on their religious beliefs. It is abhorrent.

It is alarming to read so many statements in one mailing from one organization that are so contrary to U.S. law and to common decency. I sure hope that the Christians on Mr. Wildmon's mailing list recognize the errors in that mailing. The religiously-based animosity in that Action Alert should not be tolerated by those who receive it.

AFS Member Help Needed for a New Project

The Atlanta Freethought Society would like to do some research on the amount of coverage in newspapers of religious vs. secular articles. This project will start with an analysis of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. We need 7 members who would be willing to rate articles in limited sections of the newspaper on how much they promote religion or secularism.

The purpose of the project is to show newspapers if they are lopsided in their coverage, and perhaps to get more publicity for AFS.

If you would like to participate in the project, please contact Jack McKinney for details and coordination of the effort. His email address is grumpyoldman@bellsouth.net.

Supreme Court Action Yet Another Blow to Private School Voucher Movement, Says Americans United

Americans United for Separation of Church and State applauded the Supreme Court's refusal on November 27 to hear an appeal of a case from Maine that sought to force local education officials to provide tax support for private religious schools.

Without comment, the high court today declined to hear the case *Anderson v. Durham School Department*.

"This is yet another sign that the Supreme Court is not interested in forcing any state or jurisdiction to adopt voucher programs," said Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "It is time for the groups that have pursued this misguided legal strategy to give up."

Maine law allows some parents

living in rural areas that lack public high schools to send their children to private, non-sectarian institutions at state expense. Citing church-state separation concerns, Maine lawmakers have excluded private religious schools from the plan.

A handful of Maine parents, backed by the pro-voucher group Institute for Justice, challenged the law, asserting that it discriminated against religion.

The Maine Supreme Judicial Court disagreed, ruling in April that state officials had a valid interest in protecting the separation of church and state. The U.S. Supreme Court's refusal to hear the case today on November 27 ends the controversy.

Lynn noted that although the high court upheld voucher plans in 2002, the justices have shown little sympathy for arguments that failure to provide tax subsidies for private sectarian education is a form of religious discrimination.

"Some Maine parents wanted to pass their parochial school tuition bills to the taxpayers," Lynn observed. "The courts are making it clear there is no 'right' to force someone else to pay for your religion."

Americans United and allied groups intervened in the case in the Maine courts, representing taxpayers in the state who oppose government funding of religion.

[From a Nov. 27 AU press release.]

GOD REST YE, UNITARIANS

God rest ye, Unitarians, let nothing you dismay;
Remember there's no evidence
There was a Christmas Day;
When Christ was born is just not known,
No matter what they say,

O, Tidings of reason and fact, reason and fact,
Glad tidings of reason and fact.

Our current Christmas customs come
From Persia and from Greece,
From solstice celebrations of the ancient Middle East.
This whole darn Christmas spiel is just
Another pagan feast,

O, Tidings of reason and fact, reason and fact,
Glad tidings of reason and fact.

There was no star of Bethlehem,
There was no angels' song;
There couldn't have been wise men
For the trip would take too long.
The stories in the Bible are historically wrong,

O, Tidings of reason and fact, reason and fact,
Glad tidings of reason and fact.

by Christopher Raible, a retired UU minister

Letters to the Editor

Congratulations to Jack McKinney, whose letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on Nov. 10.

Sheriff doesn't need choir

The hubris of Clayton County Sheriff Victor Hill ("Grand jury not a fan of sheriff's choir," *Metro*, Nov. 7) is astonishing. His claim that formation of a gospel choir is "a service, a function of the Sheriff's Office" defies belief.

According to the article, choir members are paid by the county to sing when they should be working, or are awarded county-paid "comp time" if singing while off duty. One choir member is quoted as saying, "We're just singing our praises to God." This is a classic example of government-sponsored proselytizing and another small step toward an American theocracy.

To describe a religious choir as a function of any governmental agency is not only ludicrous, it is dangerous to the checks and balances dictated by the separation of government and religion.

JACK MCKINNEY

McKinney, who lives in Kennesaw, is on the board of directors of the Atlanta Freethought Society.

"I think religion has always tried to turn hatred towards gay people. From my point of view, I would ban religion completely... Organized religion doesn't seem to work. It turns people into really hateful lemmings and it's not really compassionate." —Pop star Elton John, in a Nov. 11 Music Monthly Magazine article in The Observer newspaper.

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.

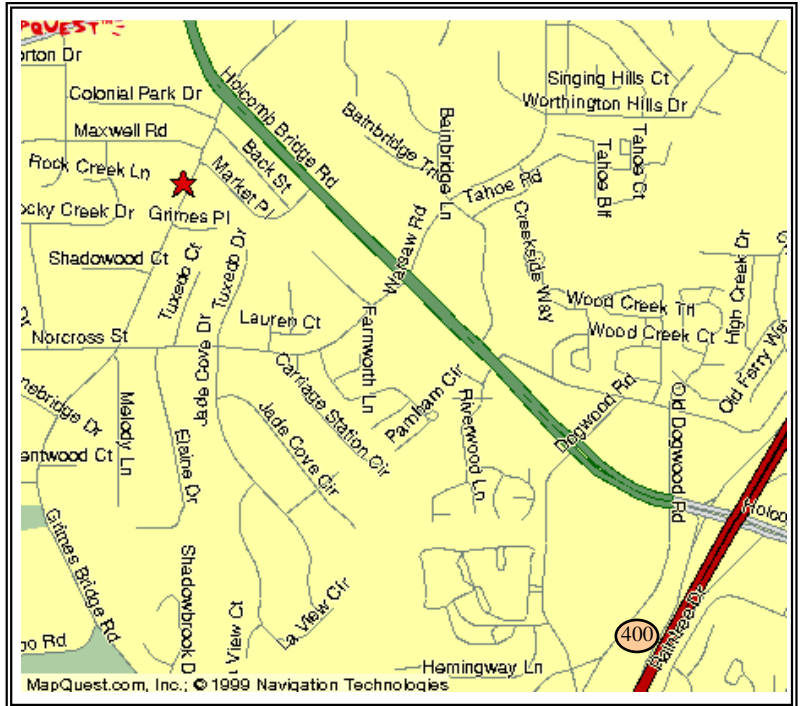
Send all orders to: **FREETHOUGHT PRESS**
ATLANTA FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY
1170 GRIMES BRIDGE RD, SUITE 500
ROSWELL GA 30075



Atlanta
Freethought
Society

**The December Meeting:
Sunday, December 10
1:00 at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
A Public School Teacher**



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 I I 2006 or earlier, please renew. Thanks.

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