

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself*

An AFS Publication • Volume 13 Number 3 • March 2007

## The March AFS Meeting

The March 11 AFS meeting will include a talk by Keith Nalumango, former head of programming for the Zambia National Broadcasting Corp. His talk is titled "A Bone in the Throat: Threats to a Free Press, in Africa and America."

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.

## The March AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be at Panahar Restaurant, 3375 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, on Friday, March 16, at 7:00 PM.

## Discussion Group to Meet

The **AFS Discussion Group** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on Sunday, March 18, at 4:00 to 6:00 PM. This time, we will discuss current freethought issues.

"The U.S. Congress periodically rises to the defense of the phrase 'under God' in the Pledge of Allegiance. What ostensibly motivates the legislators is the mistaken belief that the phrase 'under God' in the pledge reflects the deepest, devout intentions of America's Founders. What actually motivates them is the belief that defending the phrase will be politically, i.e., electorally, advantageous. That the tactic succeeds is a symptom of the failure in this country to educate our populace thoroughly and honestly in the details of our own history. "

"The Founders cannot be taken simply as believing Christians. Many of them (such as Jefferson, Franklin and Paine) were proponents of a rationalistic civic religion rather than a fideistic revealed religion. Some called their belief system 'deism.'"

"...Neither does the word 'God' appear in the U. S. Constitution, nor does any word that evokes divinity (except the formulaic 'year of our Lord'). "

"The Constitution embodies a thoroughgoing religious neutrality that involves a strict separation of what 18th-century political philosopher Edmund Burke called 'politics and the pulpit.' This means that if there is to be a pledge of allegiance, it must be free of any religious content."

— Bob Zaslavsky, in a March 4 Op-Ed article in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

## Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on Sunday, March 25, at 12:30 PM. They will have a speaker from the Islamic Speakers Bureau.

## Fellowship of Reason Meeting

The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 1:00 PM at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see [www.fellowshipofreason.com](http://www.fellowshipofreason.com).

## 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 March Atheist Meetup

There will be a "meetup" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, March 25, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Road, in Atlanta. The phone there is 404-255-5911.

## Another Meetup Group

A second meetup for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for March 11 at 6:00PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA. The phone there is 404-370-1717. Learn more about this meetup at [atheists.meetup.com](http://atheists.meetup.com).

## A Major Announcement on March 12

This coming Monday, March 12, the Secular Coalition for America will make a historic announcement: a member of Congress has agreed to be identified with our community.

This ground-breaking release is the much-anticipated outcome of a recent contest they initiated to seek the identity of the highest level openly nontheistic elected official. The purpose of the contest was to explore visibility problems for nontheists in public service.

Visit the SCA website at <http://www.secular.org/> for background and more information on the announcement

Best wishes,

Lori Lipman Brown, Director

The Secular Coalition for America

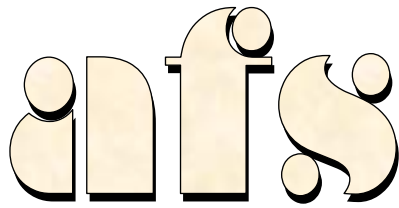
## AFS Meetings and Activities

Mar 11: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.

Mar 16: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

Mar 18: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 2:00 PM.

Mar 18: 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.

March 11: Keith Nalumango, former head of programming for Zambia National Broadcasting Corp. (ZNBC), will speak on "A Bone in the Throat: Threats to a Free Press, in Africa and America."

Apr 8: Bruce Herr will speak on Secular Inspiration. After the meeting, we will have a pot-luck dinner.

May 13: TBD

June 10: Dr. Stephen Burnett will speak on Biology and Evolution.

To join the AFS Forum e-mail list, send a blank message to [AFSforum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:AFSforum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). To join the AFS Announcements list, send a blank email to [afs-announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:afs-announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com). To join the Georgia Freethinkers Letter Writing Cooperative, send a blank email to [flwc-ga-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:flwc-ga-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

You can unsubscribe by sending an email to [xxx-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:xxx-unsubscribe@yahoogroups.com).

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define *freethought* as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

**Atlanta Freethought News**  
an AFS publication

**Editor**

Steve Yothment

**How to Contact the Editor**

Send correspondence to AFS at:  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500  
Roswell, GA 30075-3905  
or phone Steve at 678-364-8703  
or send e-mail to [SteveYoth@aol.com](mailto:SteveYoth@aol.com).

**Atlanta Freethought Society**

**President**

Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

**VP for Internal Communication**

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

**VP for External Communication**

Walter Beal – 404-284-xxxx

**Treasurer**

Ed Buckner – 770-432-3049

**Board of Directors**

Diane Buckner – 770-432-3049

Bill Burton – 770-469-1228

Jack McKinney – 770-424-5004

Freya Harris – 404-845-2276

George Page – 404-502-2686

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

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information, contact AFS at:  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite  
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**Send E-mail to**

[afs@atlantafreethought.org](mailto:afs@atlantafreethought.org).

**AFS Webmaster:** Walter Beal

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# Standing And Waiting: Supreme Court Hears Crucial Case

## On The Right To Sue

By Rob Boston

The U.S. Supreme Court heard oral arguments on February 28 in an important case that could affect a citizen's right to defend the separation of church and state in court.

At issue in *Hein v. Freedom From Religion Foundation* is a dispute over "standing" - the right to sue.

Taxpayers don't automatically have the right to sue just because they don't like how their money is being spent. In cases dealing with the "establishment of religion," however, the Supreme Court in 1968 carved out an exception to that rule. The Founders were concerned about tax funding of religion, the court noted, and therefore taxpayers should have the right to challenge the practice through legal action.

Most lawsuits of this nature challenge congressional appropriations. The *Hein* case is different because the funds being challenged come from White House discretionary funds. The White House used the money to put on various conferences promoting its

"faith-based" initiative, a practice that riled the Wisconsin-based Freedom From Religion Foundation.

The arguments presented on February 28 were somewhat obtuse and legalistic, but even a layperson could understand how much is at stake. If the high court refuses to recognize the right of taxpayers to challenge government funding of religion emanating from the executive branch, the defense of the separation of church and state becomes all the more difficult.

Unfortunately, some justices appear to be willing to embrace that approach. Andrew J. Pincus, the attorney who argued the case on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, faced especially aggressive questioning from Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito. Justice Antonin Scalia was similarly aggressive, hurling a line of sarcastic questions at Pincus.

After the argument, advocates on both sides took questions from the media on the portico of the Supreme

Court. Representatives from the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty (BJC) were on hand. Americans United has worked with this group for many years. Its staff and supporters hold fast to the traditional Baptist view that religious freedom is not secure without a high wall of separation between church and state.

"As soon as government starts to meddle in religion, for or against it, or take sides in matters of religion, favoring one over another, someone's religious liberty is denied and everyone's is threatened," said BJC General Counsel K. Hollyn Hollman in a press statement.

Amen to that. The only way we can make certain that our religious liberties are secure is to hold the courthouse door wide open for those who seek to use the legal system to protect that fundamental right. A right that cannot be defended in court quickly becomes worthless.

[From the February 28 Americans United weblog at <http://blog.au.org>.]

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## Coming Soon: Government-Funded Churches? also by Rob Boston

The stories in newspapers on the arguments presented to the Supreme Court on Feb. 28 (see above article) are startling for one thing: They show how extreme the Bush administration's view on church-state relations is. Unfortunately, a high court majority may be poised to accept it.

*The New York Times* and other media outlets noted [a telling exchange](#) between Solicitor General Paul D. Clement and Justice Stephen G. Breyer. Breyer asked Clement if a taxpayer should have the right to challenge a law that commemorated the Pilgrims "by building a government church at Plymouth Rock where we will have the regular worship in the Puritan religion?"

"I would say no," Clement replied.

Breyer pressed further, asking about a law that required the government to build churches "all over America" that

represent a single denomination. "Nobody could challenge it?" he asked.

Clement's shocking reply: "There would not be taxpayer standing."

So, in a nutshell, here is the Bush administration's position: The federal government can actually start building churches, and you as a taxpayer should have no right to go to court to stop it. This view was also adopted by several Religious Right groups in legal briefs.

Chief Justice John Roberts tried to help Clement out by asserting that people opposed to government-built churches would still have the legal right to sue simply by asserting that they were victims of religious discrimination. That's cold comfort coming from this court. During argument, Justice Antonin Scalia pooh-poohed the idea that people should be able to sue over government promotion of re-

ligion simply because it offends them.

Justice Samuel Alito also lobbed softballs at Clement, leading Clement at one point to actually thank Alito for a friendly question.

Americans United warned the nation that Roberts and Alito were likely to harbor extreme views on church-state relations. Their line of questioning indicates that they have similarly crabbed views about the right of taxpayers to challenge the diverting of public funds for religious purposes.

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison crafted the church-state wall largely because they were opposed to the idea of forcing people to support religion against their will through taxation. To assert that taxpayers should have no right to challenge government-funded churches rips out the very heart of the First Amendment.

[From AU's Mar. 1 entry, [blog.au.org](http://blog.au.org).]

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# Americans United Slams Justice Department 'First Freedom Project' For Hypocrisy

**Effort Is Another Attempt By The Bush Administration To Undercut Church-State Separation and Placate the Religious Right, Says AU's Lynn**

**On** February 20, U.S. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales unveiled an expanded project allegedly designed to protect religious liberty, an effort that, according to Americans United for Separation of Church and State, reeks of hypocrisy.

"Expecting the Bush administration to defend religious liberty is like asking Col. Sanders to babysit your pet chicken," said Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "This administration has repeatedly worked to destroy true religious freedom by merging church and state."

As part of the new initiative, dubbed the "First Freedom Project," Gonzales unveiled a 43-page report detailing the department's intervention in several cases dealing with religion over the past six years. He vowed that the department would do even more in this arena.

Gonzales announced the new effort during a Feb. 20 speech before the Southern Baptist Convention's Executive Committee.

AU's Lynn said the report documents the administration's skewed

views on religion and government.

For example, Lynn noted that the report speaks frequently about the Justice Department's commitment to protecting Americans from religious discrimination in the workplace. A few pages later, however, it recounts how the department defended the Salvation Army's supposed right to take taxpayers' money to run public social services and still fire staff people who do not agree with its fundamentalist dogma.

Observed Lynn, "Thanks to the Justice Department, the Salvation Army could literally place newspaper ads reading, 'Help Wanted for Government-Funded Jobs: No Jews, Buddhists, Muslims, Liberal Christians, Atheists Or Gays Need Apply,' and this would be perfectly acceptable to Gonzales. This is a perverse way of supposedly defending our religious freedom rights."

Lynn also noted that the Justice Department filed a brief in a Florida case arguing that banning religious school vouchers would somehow violate the U.S. Constitution — a claim the

Supreme Court has never endorsed.

Forcing Florida taxpayers to support religious schools, in fact, would violate their right to support only the religious institutions of their choice, Lynn said.

The First Freedom Project has been run by Eric Treene, an attorney who was formerly employed at the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, a group that works to undermine the separation of church and state.

Lynn said Gonzales' manner of promoting the new initiative is telling. It was unveiled before the leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention, an ultra-conservative religious denomination aligned with the Bush administration, and Gonzales granted an exclusive interview to TV preacher Pat Robertson's "700 Club" to promote the initiative.

"Religious liberty is for everyone," said Lynn. "But it seems clear this new initiative has more to do with keeping the administration's Religious Right allies happy than advancing a great constitutional principle."

[From a Feb. 22 AU press release.]

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## A New Book, by CFI's Victor Stenger

The latest success in an "atheist literary wave" is *God: The Failed Hypothesis* (\$28, Prometheus Books) in which Victor Stenger—a fellow of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry and a research fellow of the Center for Inquiry—argues that science has advanced sufficiently to make a definitive statement on the existence or nonexistence of the traditional Judeo-Christian-Islamic God.

After evaluating all the scientific evidence, Stenger concludes that beyond a reasonable doubt the universe and life appear exactly as we might expect if there were no God. He convincingly shows that not only is there

no evidence for the existence of God, but scientific observations actually point to his nonexistence. Stenger invites readers to put their minds—and the scientific method—to work to test this claim.

Bestselling authors Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris have praised the book, saying:

"Marshaling converging arguments from physics, astronomy, biology, and philosophy, Stenger has delivered a masterful blow in defense of reason. *God: The Failed Hypothesis* is a potent, readable, and well-timed assault upon religious delusion. It should be widely read." —**Sam Harris**, author

of the *New York Times* best seller *Letter to a Christian Nation*

"I learned an enormous amount from this splendid book." —**Richard Dawkins**, author of the *New York Times* best seller *The God Delusion*

•Every Barnes & Noble and Borders store in the country has this book on their new release front table.

•The advertising campaign includes print publications the *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times Book Review*, *Reason*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, and banner ads at SeedMagazine.com and ScienceBlogs.com.

[From a February 21 press release by the Center for Inquiry, Transnational]

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# Dumbing Down Evolution To Kill It by Edward Humes

On Darwin's birthday, vocal opponents of his theory fundamentally misunderstand what they don't believe in.

When I first arrived at the Ronald Reagan Federal Building and Courthouse in Harrisburg, Pa., for what was billed as the second coming of the Scopes "monkey trial," a man mingling with the media gaggle handed me an invitation to a lecture titled "Why Evolution Is Stupid." The fellow advised me to come hear the truth about Charles Darwin's dangerous idea. Then he jerked a thumb toward the courtroom and said, "You're sure not going to hear it in there."

I had gone to Harrisburg just over a year ago to research a book, expecting cutting-edge arguments for the theory of evolution pitted against an upstart movement called "intelligent design," which claims there is evidence of a master designer inside living cells. And hear them I did, in frequently riveting (and occasionally stupefying) detail, as the judge considered whether teaching intelligent design in public schools breached the wall separating church and state.

And yet that invitation and the angry, volatile town meeting it led me to that week proved even more enlightening. It showed me an essential truth of this nation's culture wars that seems especially relevant today, Darwin's 198th birthday: There are really two theories of evolution. There is the genuine scientific theory, and there is the talk-radio pretend version, designed not to enlighten but to deceive and enrage.

The talk-radio version had a packed town hall up in arms at the "Why Evolution Is Stupid" lecture. In this version of the theory, scientists supposedly believe that all life is accidental, a random crash of molecules that magically produced flowers, horses and humans—a scenario as unlikely as a tornado in a junkyard assembling a 747. Humans come from monkeys in this theory, just popping into exist-

tence one day. The evidence against Darwin is overwhelming, the purveyors of talk-radio evolution rail, yet scientists embrace his ideas because they want to promote atheism.

These are just a few highlights of the awful and pervasive straw-man image of evolution that pundits harp about in books and editorials and, yes, on talk radio, and this cartoon version really is stupid. No wonder most Americans reject evolution in poll after poll.

But then there is the real theory of evolution, the one that was on display in that Harrisburg courtroom, for which there is overwhelming evidence in labs, fossils, computer simulations and DNA studies. Most Americans have not heard of it. Teachers give it short shrift in schools because the subject upsets too many parents who only know the talk-radio version. But real evolution isn't random; it doesn't say man came from monkeys. Those claims are made up by critics to get people riled up—paving the way for pleasing alternatives like intelligent design.

Real evolutionary theory explains how life forms change across generations by passing on helpful traits to their offspring; a process that, after millions of years, gradually transforms one species into another. This does not happen randomly but through nature's tendency to reward the most successful organisms and to kill the rest. This is why germs grow resistant to antibiotics and why some turtles are sea animals and others survive quite nicely in the desert, and why dinosaurs—and more than 99% of all other species that have ever lived on Earth—are extinct.

The environment changes. The recipe for survival changes with it. And life changes to keep up—or it dies. Darwin's signature insight is both brilliant and elegantly simple.

The real theory of evolution does not try to explain how life originated—that remains a mystery. The truth is that many scientists accept evolution and believe in God—and in a natural world so complete that it strives toward perfection all on its own, without need of a supernatural designer to keep it going.

The judge in Pennsylvania eventually found that real evolution was not stupid; that intelligent design was religion, not science, and that the school board in Dover, Pa., whose actions had precipitated this replay of Scopes, was out of line. Judge John E. Jones III was rewarded for his sensible and well-documented ruling with death threats. Such is the power of talk-radio evolution.

Meanwhile, a creationist history of the Grand Canyon is on sale in national park shops. A major American museum expressed interest in having me speak about my new book but decided the subject of evolution was too "political" right now to risk it. And teachers across the nation tell me they feel compelled to downplay or skip evolution lessons to avoid controversy; one L.A.-area high school instructor said she is the only one of five science teachers on her faculty to even mention evolution in class, notwithstanding a clear state mandate to teach it.

Judge Jones has since told me that his only regret in the case is that he did not bend the rules to allow live TV coverage so more people could see the powerful evidence supporting his decision. Because the one thing the prophets of talk-radio evolution have, it seems, is the loudest megaphone.

*Edward Humes is the author, most recently, of "Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion and the Battle for America's Soul."*

[From a February 12 op-ed article in the LA Times.]

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

# AFS Celebrates Darwin Day at the State Capitol

The Atlanta Freethought Society had a table at the Georgia State Capitol Building on Darwin Day, February 12. It all turned out very well; the weather cooperated (it was sunny with very little wind), we had a nice display (see below) and we got to talk to a lot of people about Charles Darwin (and science and religion).

AFS members who participated included Steve Yothment, Ed and Diane Buckner, Lew Southern, Phil Gerry, Tony King, Bill Burton and

George Page. We had about 90 birthday cupcakes and coffee to give away.

The cupcakes were not going very well until a bus-load of grade-school students came by and their supervisor said they could each have a cupcake. They wipe out our supply in about 5 minutes! But it was still a lot of fun.

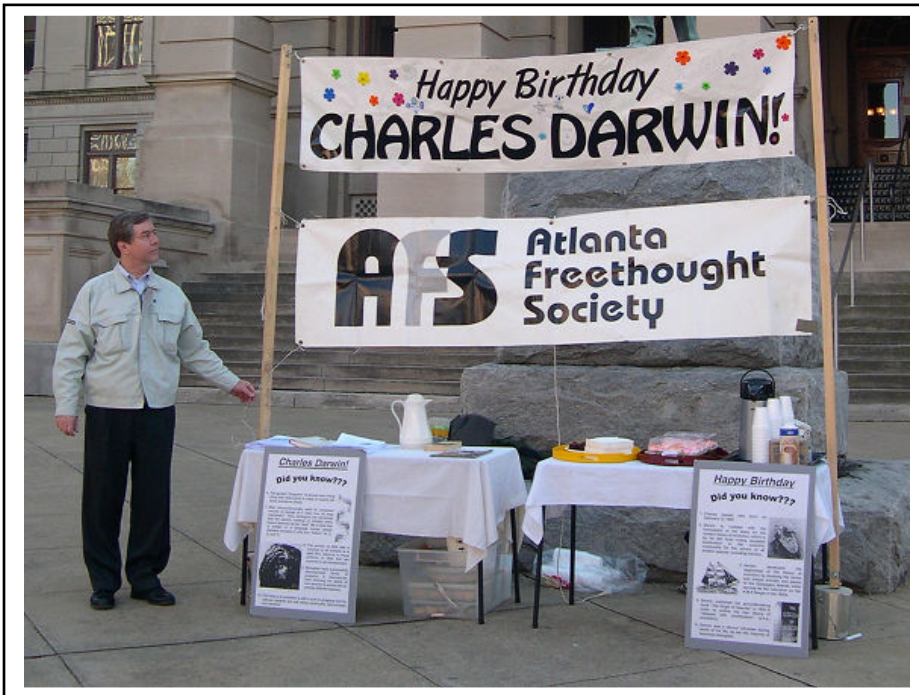
We had the expected assortment of people come by. Some with strong religious views were sure that Darwin was wrong. Others were grateful that we were there. Two science teachers

appreciated our presence very much.

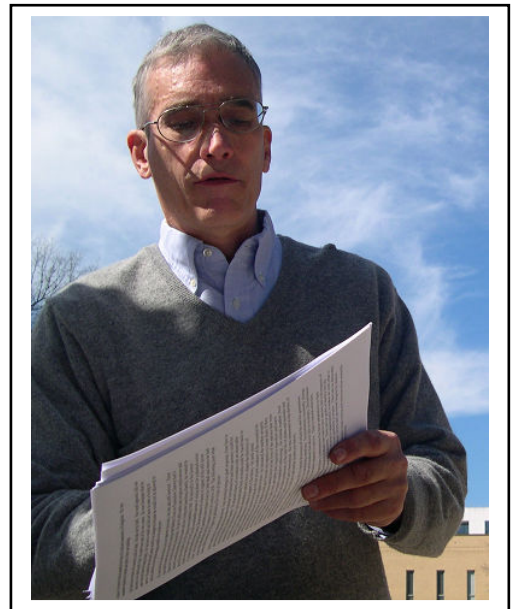
One religious fellow had an interesting comment. He said "Your problem is that you think with your mind instead of with your heart." I interpreted it to mean that he thought we should decide things based on emotion or religious faith, rather than reason or science.

I'll stick with thinking with my mind any day.

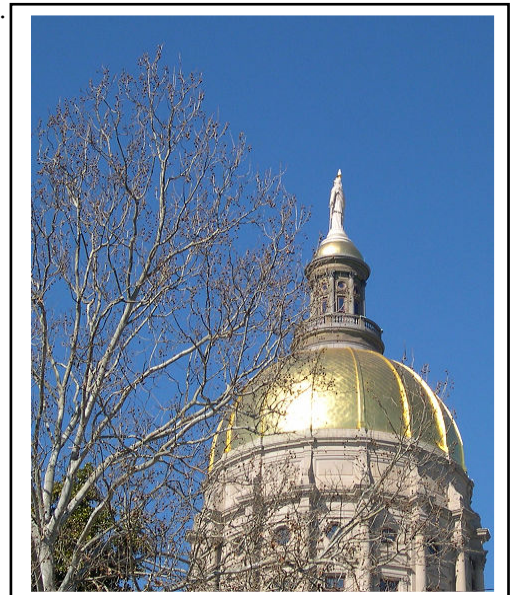
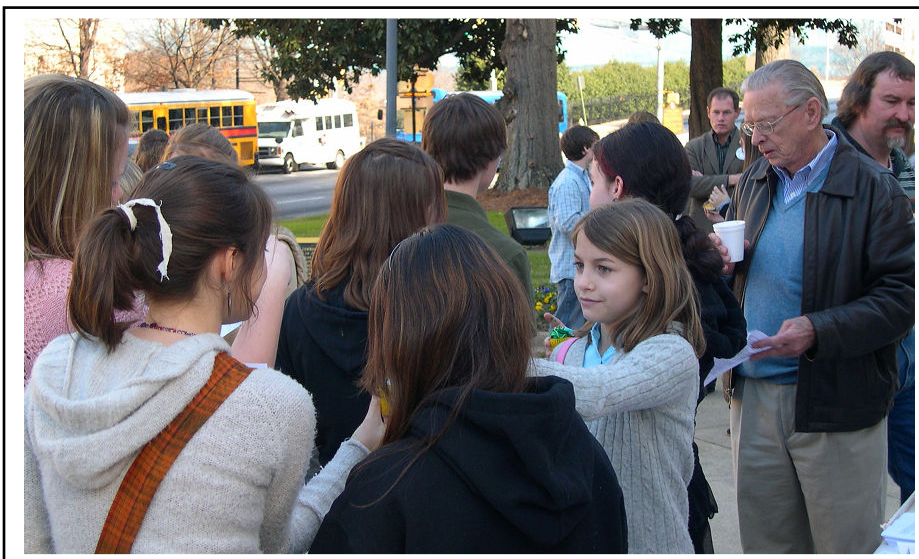
Happy Birthday, Charles Darwin.  
- Steve Yothment



Steve Yothment helped set up the display. Children (below) enjoyed cupcakes.



Phil Gerry handed out literature. The gold dome on the Capitol Building.



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# AFS Members In The News

(The editor hopes this will be a regular column in the newsletter.)

**D**onna Gore has been concerned about her local newspaper, the Roswell Beacon, running a column by Ann Coulter. If you don't know about Ann Coulter, she is known to say highly offensive and inaccurate things about people, usually with a strongly conservative and right-wing stance.

So Donna wrote to the Roswell Beacon on March 2, saying, "Your newspaper is being mailed to my home, I don't know why. I don't remember subscribing to it. Thanks, but I do not wish to receive it."

The president and publisher of the newspaper, John Fredericks, responded by email, saying, "It is free. It may take up to 4 weeks to remove your address."

Donna responded, "Okay, thank you for removing me from your mailing list. I appreciate your effort to help the community but I can't overcome one thing."

"I was enjoying reading the paper until I saw Ann Coulter's column. Sorry, I just can't take seriously any publication that would run her column. The woman is deranged. Just my opinion."

"I believe in free speech and would defend to the death your right to print it. I just won't look at it."

"Thanks anyway."

Well, wouldn't you know it, Ann Coulter was in the news this weekend. She spoke in Washington at the 34<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the Conservative Political Action Conference about the Democrats' slate of presidential hopefuls. After talking a bit about Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, she said, "I was going to have a few comments on the other Democratic presidential candidate, John Edwards, but it turns out that you have to go into rehab if you use the word 'faggot,' so I'm - so, kind of at an impasse, can't really talk about Edwards, so I think I'll just conclude here and take your questions." The audience applauded.

In an email response to the New York Times later that day, Coulter responded to critics of her comments by saying, "C'mon, it was a joke. I would never insult gays by suggesting that they are like John Edwards. That would be mean."

In a written statement, Sen. Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts said, "Ann Coulter's words of hate have no place in the public sphere much less our political discourse. Not only should she apologize but those who participated in the conference with her should denounce her shameful and divisive actions."

"Ann Coulter's use of this anti-gay slur is vile and unacceptable," said Neil G. Giuliano, president of the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, "and the applause from her audience is an important reminder that Coulter's ugly brand of bigotry is at the root of the discriminatory policies being promoted at this gathering."

So, getting back to Donna's correspondence with the Roswell Beacon, she responded, "True, it is 'just an opinion.' But writers can give their opinions without resorting to calling other people names. That's what PROFESSIONALS DO. Mudslinging and trash talk belong in the 'National Inquirer,' not in a reputable newspaper. People like this are so far out on the fringe that those who associate

with them compromise their own reputation and put their credibility on the line. See:

<http://www.cnn.com/2007/POLITICS/03/04/coulter.edwards/index.html>

<http://blog.johnedwards.com/story/2007/3/3/133240/0355> "

"If I want to read this kind of degrading trash, I'll grab one of the tabloids at the grocery check-out counter."

John Fredericks of the Roswell Beacon responded: "I agree. Give us a week or two to get her replaced. Thanks for reading the Beacon."

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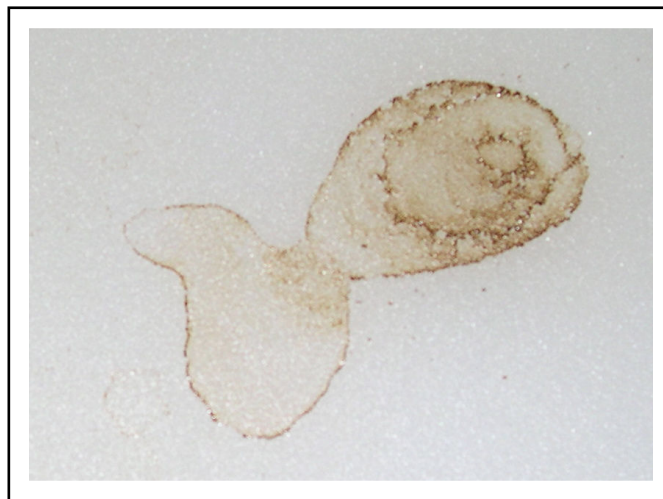
Our own Ed Buckner will speak at the Alabama Freethought Association meeting on April 15 at Lake Hypatia, AL. The title of his speech will be "Our Founding Fathers."

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Jack McKinney reports that he spilled some coffee recently onto a glass cutting surface, and the resulting stain looks a little like a fish. Not being the religious type, he didn't apply any significance to it, but the question did occur, "What if we sold this on Ebay?" Maybe someone would like to have it. What do you think?

Who knows? This may depict one of the actual fishes that Jesus supposedly multiplied into thousands!

Jack says that the first \$10,000 will get the glass cutting surface, stain and all!



# CSER Launches New Jesus Project

By Nathan Bupp

"What if the most influential [character] in human history never existed?" Without any assumptions or conclusions in view, that is the daunting task of the new Jesus Project, announced on January 28th at the University of California at Davis before an audience of Biblical and Koranic experts.

The Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion (CSER), a project of the Center for Inquiry/Transnational, announced the new project at conclusion of its January 25-28 "Scripture and Skepticism" conference at the University of California at Davis. Articles featuring the new endeavor have already appeared in the Ottawa Citizen (January 10) and the Buffalo News (January 29).

The Jesus Project will be devoted to examining the case for the historical existence of Jesus, based on a rigorous application of the historical critical method to the gospels and related literature.

Unlike the "Jesus Seminar," founded in 1985 by the late University of Montana Professor Robert Funk, the new Project regards the claim that Jesus of Nazareth was an historical figure as a "testable hypothesis." R. Joseph Hoffmann, chair of the Committee since 2003 and former lecturer at Oxford University, said that the project has been called for by a number of scholars who felt that the first Jesus Seminar may have been—for political reasons—too reluctant to follow where the evidence led. "When you have pared the sayings of Jesus down to fewer than twenty, one begins to wonder about the survivors," Hoffmann said.

According to Hoffmann, the goal is not to "disprove" Jesus or to sensationalize the question of his existence, but to acknowledge the question and examine it impartially—without theological or apologetic constraints. "The Jesus Project is an attempt to evaluate every scrap of evidence for the historical Jesus, but it is also an attempt to evaluate the quality of the evidence itself—something that earlier projects did not do explicitly. This new project will be more inclusive and rigorous in its approach. It will include scholars from a variety of areas outside biblical and religious studies, including archaeologists, social historians, classicists and people in historical linguistics," said Hoffmann.

The Jesus Project will be limited to 50 members; scholars plan to meet twice a year, with geographical venues changing each year. The meetings and discussions will also be open to the public. The work of the seminar will consist of the writing of unanimous opinions, and where that is not possible, majority and minority opinions, written as articles, which will be gathered and published once a year under the CSER imprint with Prome-

## Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Jack McKinney's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on March 4.

### Alcohol sales

Responses to "Booze bill corked up after pleas from pastors," **Metro, March 1**

#### Christians don't own everyone's Sunday

The bill to allow Sunday sales of alcoholic beverages has been put on hold by pastors and religious groups. One pastor, Aaron McCollough, was quoted as asking, "Can you name me one positive moral value this bill will lift up?" Will somebody please explain to this person that it is not the duty of the Legislature to deal with "moral values."

The president of Georgia's Christian Coalition, Jim Beck, is quoted as threatening to "defeat any senator who votes for the bill. ..." People who use that kind of rhetoric are usually referred to as "thugs." He refers to the "sanctity of the Sabbath." Christians have developed the bad habit of believing they own Sunday. They simply cannot tolerate the idea that they have no right to prevent the public at large from spending their Sundays doing activities that are not of a religious nature.

However, the real issue is whether to allow citizens to exercise their right to vote for or against a matter of public interest. To prevent that right is a throwback to the Dark Ages. It's 2007 and it's time to tell the religion industry that our minds are our own.

I demand that I, and my fellow citizens, be allowed to decide for ourselves what we want to do on OUR Sundays.

**JACK MCKINNEY**

**McKinney, of Kennesaw, is a member of the board of directors of the Atlanta Freethought Society.**

theus Books. The work of the Project is limited to five years; at which point a final report will be issued by the committee members.

The work of the Project is being financed through sponsors and donors. Patrons of the committee receive certain benefits; members in the associate category receive free admission to the open sessions of the Jesus Project. Information on becoming a patron, sponsor, or associate of the Jesus Project is available by writing to the project administrator, Gwyneth MacRae, at [gmacrae@centerforinquiry.net](mailto:gmacrae@centerforinquiry.net).

CSER was founded in 1983 and is a research committee in the Religion and Science division of the Center for Inquiry in Amherst, New York. CSER encourages the use of the historical and applied sciences in the study of religion and provides educational programs for the public as part of its religious-literacy initiatives.

*Nathan Bupp is director of communications for the Council for Secular Humanism.*

*The article is from [http://ga1.org/secular\\_humanism/notice-description.tcl?newsletter\\_id=3904847](http://ga1.org/secular_humanism/notice-description.tcl?newsletter_id=3904847)*

"The way to see by faith is to shut the eye of reason." -- Benjamin Franklin, from *Poor Richard's Almanack*, 1758.



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“Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect.” —James Madison, 1774

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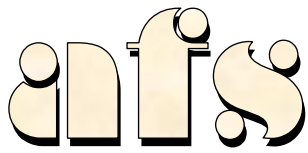
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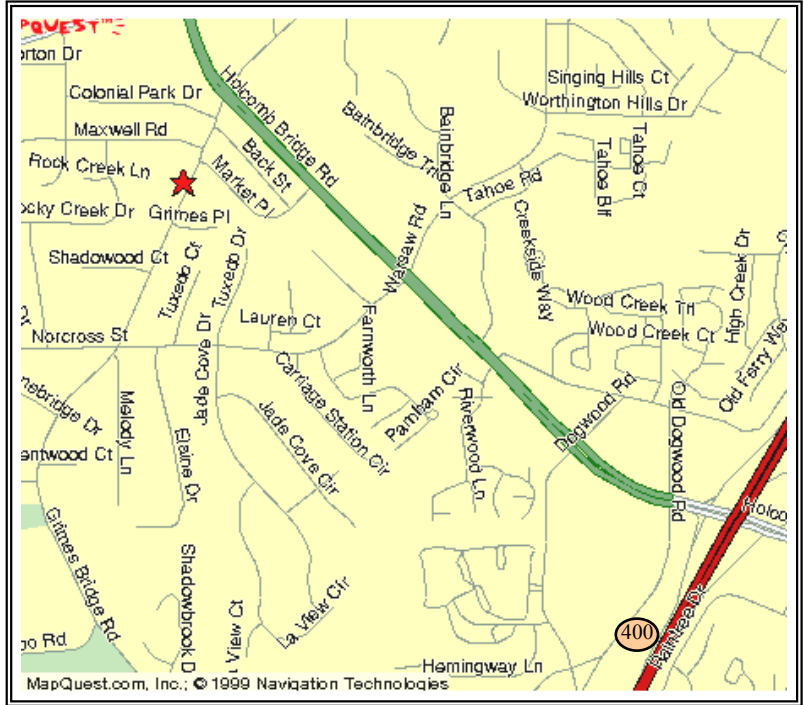
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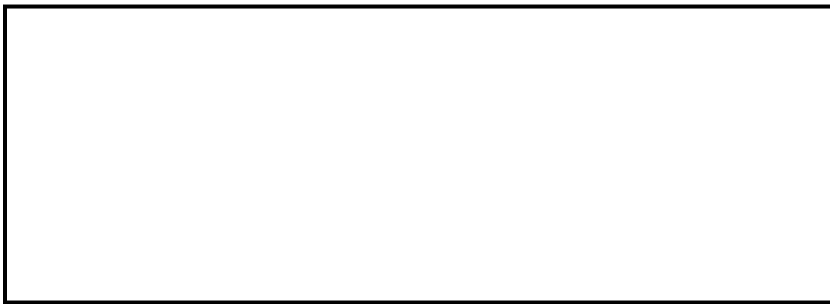
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**The March Meeting:  
Sunday, March 11  
1:00 at the AF Center  
1170 Grimes Bridge Road  
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:  
Keith Nalumango**



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