

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication

• Volume 13 Number 4

• April 2007

The April AFS Meeting

The April 8 AFS meeting will include a talk by AFS member **Bruce Herr** on "Beyond the Myth of God."

The 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 April 8 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 dessert!

H – P: Bring a side dish!

Q – Z: Bring a main dish!

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.

The April AFS Social

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

Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the Atlanta Freethought Center on Sunday, April 22, at 12:30 PM. Jim Dawson will speak about the plight of Georgia's forests and the importance of forest preservation in Georgia.

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 <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.

AFS Meetings and Activities

April 7: Highway Cleanup, Glenridge Ramp, 12:00AM.

April 8: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 11:00AM.

April 8: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.

April 13: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

The April Atheist Meetup

There will be a "meetup" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, April 22, 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 Saturday, April 7 at 4:00PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA. (It was earlier scheduled for Sunday, but they will be closed that day!) Learn more about this meetup at <http://atheists.meetup.com/93/?qj=sj8>.

Items and Help Needed

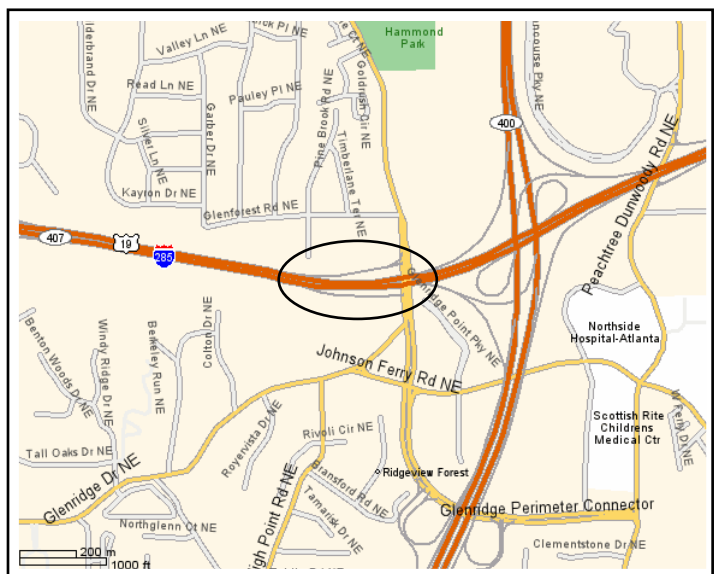
AFS needs some heavy duty storage shelves for storing cases of books and merchandise, and a 5-gallon bottle-type water dispenser. If you have either of these and would like to donate them, please contact an AFS officer.

We also need a librarian to help organize our library, and a person to help with some social functions and outings such as picnics, cookouts, etc. Again, contact an AFS officer if you can help in this way. Thanks!

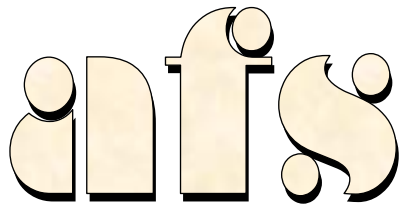
Highway Cleanup is This Saturday

The Atlanta Freethought Society will have its **Adopt-A-Highway cleanup** on Saturday, April 7, at 12:00 noon. The cleanup will be on the Glenridge Ramp at Exit 26 of I-285. (This is the long ramp that connects Glenridge Drive to I-285 near GA400.) We will clear trash on both sides of I-285.

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



"If forty million people say a foolish thing it does not become a wise one." –W. Somerset Maugham, *A Writer's Notebook* (1946), p. 76



**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.

Apr 8: Bruce Herr will speak on "Beyond the Myth of God." After the meeting we will have a potluck dinner.

May 13: Dr. David E. Giannasi, Associate Professor, emeritus, Department of Plant Biology, University of Georgia, will speak on "Comments on Religion and the Bible."

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

July 8: 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.

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Steve Yothment

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Creation Museum Evolving into Kentucky Attraction

Tyrannosaurus rex was a strict vegetarian and lived with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

There were dinosaurs of every kind aboard Noah's ark. Some dinosaurs managed to hang around until just a few hundred years ago. The legend of St. George slaying the dragon? That probably was a dinosaur.

Exhibits showing all this and more will be at the Creation Museum, a \$27 million religious showcase nearing completion in northern Kentucky.

The museum, in Boone County, is being built by a nonprofit group called Answers in Genesis. It is scheduled to open on Memorial Day. Museum and Northern Kentucky tourism officials expect it to be a boon to the region, bringing in at least 250,000 visitors in its first year.

It already is getting media attention. Newspapers and television stations from Europe, Asia and Australia have visited, and CNN was there recently.

But mainstream scientists, who have dubbed it The Fred and Wilma Flintstone Museum, say the museum's message is just plain wrong.

The museum is based on a literal interpretation of the Bible: The world was created in six 24-hour days, some time between 6,000 and 10,000 years ago. Humans appeared on Day 6, and

they didn't evolve from anything.

Ken Ham, an Australian who is Answers in Genesis' \$120,000-a-year founder and president, says the museum opening will be a significant event in Christendom.

"No one else has ever built a place where you can experience biblical history and merge it with the science," he said.

But Eugenie Scott, a former University of Kentucky anthropologist who is director of the California-based National Center for Science Education, said the information provided in the museum "is not even close to standard science."

Scott visited the museum recently as part of a British Broadcasting Corp. radio program. Although she didn't get a tour, she saw enough to know that the museum will be professionally done. And, she says, that's worrisome.

"There are going to be students coming into the classroom and saying, 'I just went to this fancy museum and everything you're telling me is rubbish,'" Scott said.

Daniel Phelps, president of the Kentucky Paleontological Society, says the museum will embarrass the state because of the "pseudoscientific-nutty things" it espouses, and because it portrays evolution as the path to ruin.

But the Rev. Bill Henard, senior pastor of Lexington's Porter Memorial Baptist Church, said that Sunday school classes and other groups from his church are likely to visit.

"I think people will enjoy . . . being able to see a different side from what some scientific findings have shown," he said. "I think you would be surprised to know how many people hold to a young-Earth creation."

More than a century and a half after British naturalist Charles Darwin published *The Origin of Species*, which suggested that life evolved over millions of years from one-cell organisms, quite a few people agree with Henard, pollsters say.

When the Gallup Poll asked people about their views in March 2006, 47 percent of Americans polled said God created humans pretty much in their present form some time in the last 10,000 years. That belief was strongest among those with less education, regular churchgoers, people 65 and older, and Republicans.

"The evolutionists use dinosaurs to promote their world view; we're going to use that to promote our world view," Answers in Genesis spokesman Mark Looy said.

[From an April 1 article by Andy Mead in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution.]

Senator Calls for Answer on Creation of Universe

Tennessee state senator Raymond Finney proposed to use the legislative process to get an answer to the question of whether the universe was created by a "Supreme Being."

Under Senate Resolution 17, introduced by the Maryville Republican, the answer would come from state Education Commissioner Lana Seivers "in report form" no later than Jan. 15, 2008.

Finney, a retired physician, said that his objective is to formally prod the Department of Education into a dialogue about the teaching of evolution in school science classes without

also teaching the alternative of "creationism," or "intelligent design."

The move would thus renew a debate that has raged off and on in the Tennessee Legislature since at least 1925, when the 64th General Assembly enacted a law forbidding the teaching of evolution, setting the stage for the famous John Scopes "monkey trial" in Dayton, Tenn., later that year.

Finney said there is no doubt in his own mind that everything in the universe, including human beings, was created by a Supreme Being.

"There has never been any proof offered that Darwin's theory of evolu-

tion is correct," he said.

"I'm not demanding that she (Seivers) do anything," he said, "just asking, 'Are you sure we're doing the right thing?'"

He said the resolution is "giving her the opportunity to say, 'You're wrong. There is no creationism.'"

As the resolution is written, if Seivers does answer no to the first question — stating that the universe was not created by a Supreme Being — she would be offered "the General Assembly's admiration for being able to decide conclusively a question that has long perplexed and occupied the at-

Senator Calls for Answer... (continued)

tention of scientists, philosophers, theologians, educators and others.”

But if she answers yes, or states that the answer to the creation of the universe is uncertain, then there is a follow-up question that must also be answered: Why is creationism not being taught in Tennessee schools?

Finney said he suspects that Seivers would answer that the means of creation of the universe is uncertain. Seivers was not available for comment.

But Bruce Opie, legislative liaison for the Department of Education, said state policy has been “over the last several years” that it is appropriate to teach students about creationism in religion or sociology classes, but not in biology classes.

“As far as his (Finney’s) question embedded in this resolution, I am a

little bit confused,” said Opie. “It’s awfully interesting that he wants an answer from the person sitting as commissioner.”

The State Board of Education actually decides curriculum for public schools, he said, and Seivers is basically bound by those board decisions.

As a Senate resolution, the measure needs approval only by the Senate — where Finney and fellow Republicans have a majority of members — to become effective as a formal request to Seivers. The Democrat-dominated House need not take any action.

Opie said department officials would welcome discussion with Finney about his questioning proposal, which has not yet been scheduled for a vote in any committee. Finney said he was not certain when he would

bring the resolution up for a vote.

Department officials are analyzing the Finney proposal and have not taken a formal position on it, Opie said, but, “I could possibly see us flagging it.” Legislation opposed by the administration is said to carry a “flag” or to be “flagged.”

In 1925, the Tennessee General Assembly passed a famous statute banning the teaching of evolution. Teacher John Scopes was charged with violating the law and went on trial that same year. Scopes was convicted and fined \$100, but the conviction was overturned two years later by the state Supreme Court. The statute was repealed by the Legislature in 1967.

[From a Feb. 27 article by Tom Humphrey in the *Knoxville News Sentinel*. Reprinted here by permission.]

AFS Tears Down a Wall

At the March AFS Board Meeting, the board decided to tear down a wall at the AF Center, expanding the size of the meeting room. (At the same time, we continue to look for another property with even better features.)

The destruction and reframing was performed on March 24. In addition, Walter Beal reorganized the front room.

We hope AFS members like the improvements to the building.



(Photos by Ed Buckner and Steve Yothment)



Lew took the first swings.

Walter, Steve and Jack at work.



Thanks to Ed and Diane Buckner, Steve Yothment, Walter Beal, Lew Southern and Jack McKinney for the fine work!

Congressman Holds No God-Belief

Rep. Pete Stark (D-Calif.) is the first Congress member in history to acknowledge his nontheism

There is only one member of Congress who is on record as not holding a god-belief.

Rep. Pete Stark (D-Calif.), a member of Congress since 1973, acknowledged his nontheism in response to an inquiry by the Secular Coalition for America. Rep. Stark is a senior member of the powerful House Ways and Means Committee and is Chair of the Health Subcommittee.

Although the Constitution prohibits religious tests for public office, the Coalition's research reveals that Rep. Stark is the first open nontheist in the history of the Congress. Recent polls show that Americans without a god-belief are, as a group, more distrusted than any other minority in America. Surveys show that the majority of Americans would not vote for an atheist for president even if he or she were the most qualified for the office.

Herb Silverman, president of the

Secular Coalition for America, attributes these attitudes to the demonization of people who don't believe in God. "The truth is," says Silverman, "the vast majority of us follow the Golden Rule and are as likely to be good citizens, just like Rep. Stark with over 30 years of exemplary public service. The only way to counter the prejudice against nontheists is for more people to publicly identify as nontheists. Rep. Stark shows remarkable courage in being the first member of Congress to do so."

In October, 2006 the Secular Coalition for America, a national lobby representing the interests of atheists, humanists, freethinkers, and other nontheists, announced a contest. At the time, few if any elected officials, even at the lowest level, would self-identify as a nontheist. So the Coalition offered \$1,000 to the person who could identify the highest level atheist,

agnostic, humanist or any other kind of nontheist currently holding elected public office in the United States.

In addition to Rep. Stark only three other elected officials agreed to do so: Terry S. Doran, president of the School Board in Berkeley, Calif.; Nancy Glista on the School Committee in Franklin, Maine; and Michael Cerone, a Town Meeting Member in Arlington, Mass.

Surveys vary in the percentage of atheists, humanists, freethinkers and other nontheists in the U.S, with about 10% (30 million people) a fair middle point. "If the number of nontheists in Congress reflected the percentage of nontheists in the population," Lori Lipman Brown, director of the Secular Coalition, observes, "there would be 53-54 nontheistic Congress members instead of one."

[From a March 12 press release by Lori Lipman Brown for the Secular Coalition for America.]

God's Dupes

Moderate believers give cover to religious fanatics — and are every bit as delusional. By Sam Harris

Pete Stark, a California Democrat, appears to be the first congressman in U.S. history to acknowledge that he doesn't believe in God. In a country in which 83% of the population thinks that the Bible is the literal or "inspired" word of the creator of the universe, this took political courage.

Of course, one can imagine that Cicero's handlers in the 1st century BC lost some sleep when he likened the traditional accounts of the Greco-Roman gods to the "dreams of madmen" and to the "insane mythology of Egypt."

Mythology is where all gods go to die, and it seems that Stark has secured a place in American history simply by admitting that a fresh grave should be dug for the God of Abraham — the jealous, genocidal, priggish and self-contradictory tyrant of the Bible and the Koran. Stark is the first of our leaders to display a level of in-

tellectual honesty befitting a consul of ancient Rome. Bravo.

The truth is, there is not a person on Earth who has a good reason to believe that Jesus rose from the dead or that Muhammad spoke to the angel Gabriel in a cave. And yet billions of people claim to be certain about such things. As a result, Iron Age ideas about everything high and low — sex, cosmology, gender equality, immortal souls, the end of the world, the validity of prophecy, etc. — continue to divide our world and subvert our national discourse. Many of these ideas, by their very nature, hobble science, inflame human conflict and squander scarce resources.

Of course, no religion is monolithic. Within every faith one can see people arranged along a spectrum of belief. Picture concentric circles of diminishing reasonableness: At the center, one finds the truest of true believers — the Muslim jihadis, for instance, who not

only supportsuicidal terrorism but who are the first to turn themselves into bombs; or the Dominionist Christians, who openly call for homosexuals and blasphemers to be put to death.

Outside this sphere of maniacs, one finds millions more who share their views but lack their zeal. Beyond them, one encounters pious multitudes who respect the beliefs of their more deranged brethren but who disagree with them on small points of doctrine — of course the world is going to end in glory and Jesus will appear in the sky like a superhero, but we can't be sure it will happen in our lifetime.

Out further still, one meets religious moderates and liberals of diverse hues — people who remain supportive of the basic scheme that has balkanized our world into Christians, Muslims and Jews, but who are less willing to profess certainty about any

God's Dupes (*continued*)

article of faith. Is Jesus really the son of God? Will we all meet our grannies again in heaven? Moderates and liberals are none too sure.

Those in this spectrum view the people further toward the center as too rigid, dogmatic and hostile to doubt, and they generally view those outside as corrupted by sin, weak-willed or un-churched.

The problem is that wherever one stands in this continuum, one inadvertently shelters those who are more fanatical than oneself from criticism. Ordinary fundamentalist Christians, by maintaining that the Bible is the perfect word of God, inadvertently support the Dominionists – men and women who, by the millions, are quietly working to turn our country into a totalitarian theocracy reminiscent of John Calvin's Geneva. Christian moderates, by their lingering attachment to the unique divinity of Jesus, protect the faith of fundamentalists from public scorn. Christian liberals – who aren't sure what they believe but just love the experience of going to church occasionally – deny the moderates a

proper collision with scientific rationality. And in this way centuries have come and gone without an honest word being spoken about God in our society.

People of all faiths – and none – regularly change their lives for the better, for good and bad reasons. And yet such transformations are regularly put forward as evidence in support of a specific religious creed. President Bush has cited his own sobriety as suggestive of the divinity of Jesus. No doubt Christians do get sober from time to time – but Hindus (polytheists) and atheists do as well. How, therefore, can any thinking person imagine that his experience of sobriety lends credence to the idea that a supreme being is watching over our world and that Jesus is his son?

There is no question that many people do good things in the name of their faith – but there are better reasons to help the poor, feed the hungry and defend the weak than the belief that an Imaginary Friend wants you to do it. Compassion is deeper than religion. As is ecstasy. And it is time

that we acknowledge that human beings can be profoundly ethical – and even spiritual – without pretending to know things they do not know.

Let us hope that Stark's candor inspires others in our government to admit their doubts about God. Indeed, it is time we broke this spell en masse. Every one of the world's "great" religions utterly trivializes the immensity and beauty of the cosmos. Books like the Bible and the Koran get almost every significant fact about us and our world wrong. Every scientific domain – from cosmology to psychology to economics – has superseded and surpassed the wisdom of Scripture.

Everything of value that people get from religion can be had more honestly, without presuming anything on insufficient evidence. The rest is self-deception, set to music.

(Sam Harris is the author of *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*.)

[From a March 15 op-ed article in the Los Angeles Times.]

Also In the News...

"Contrary to what we are often told, the idea that Darwin set science and religion at each other's throats is absurd." Read "Evolution Myths" by Jim Endersby in the U.K. Times Online: <http://tinyurl.com/2bsa2v>

For more comments on Pete Stark, the Congressman who recently admitted no god-belief, read "The Ultimate Taboo" by Ellen Goodman at truthdig.com: http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/20070322_the_ultimate_taboo/

On March 28, the Center For Inquiry released a position paper on the Proper Interpretation of the Establishment Clause. The thoroughly researched paper is authored by Edward Tabash, a First Amendment scholar, prominent civil rights attorney, and a specialist in church-state litigation. See it here: <http://www.cfidc.org/opp/Tabash-position-paper-07.pdf>

Convinced that every source of information that doesn't conform to their rigid ideology has a "liberal bias," conservatives have their own website: <http://www.conservapedia.com>. It's like Wikipedia, but with a strongly conservative slant.

"Creation 'Science' Is the Christian Right's Trojan Horse Against Reason." Read this enlightening article by Chris Hedges of Truthdig.org at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/49811>

NEWSWEEK invited Sam Harris, the author of *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*, and Rick Warren, pastor of the Saddleback Church in Orange County, Calif., and author of *The Purpose-Driven Life*, to discuss the ultimate question: Is God real? See the introduction at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17889147/site/newsweek/> See the actual debate at: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17889148/site/newsweek/>

"Sunday Alcohol Bill Rubs Rural Ga. Wrong Way." Read about Georgia Blue Laws in this story by James Salzer in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution: <http://www.ajc.com/metro/content/metro/legis07/stories/2007/03/18/0319metlegbooze.html>

"Think Again: Is the Establishment Clause Unconstitutional?" Stanley Fish asks, "In what situations should the separation of church and state be enforced?" Read more at: <http://www.fish/blogs/nytimes.com/?th&emc=th>

Excerpt from a Debate

On May 24, 2006, Ed Buckner debated Bill Federer at the American Vision Conference in Toccoa, GA, on the Separation of Church and State. Here is part of Ed's second rebuttal in the debate.

I talked about obscure history before—now let's talk a bit about not-at-all obscure government. I'm going to give all of you a list of key features of a national government. When I finish with the list, I'll tell you two things all these characteristics have in common, and I'll ask Bill Federer to show you why I'm wrong—if he thinks I am.

Imagine a national government that:

- Has all of the main governmental leaders either elected by the people or appointed by those who are elected
- Gives men *and* women the vote
- Grants citizenship without regard to race or ethnicity, religious preference, or geographic origin
- Gives everyone due process and equal protection under the law, including the right to be tried by a jury of one's peers
- Protects *individual* rights, including those in the minority on any given issue—protection from the majority as well as from governments
- Has three separate branches and a clear dedication to keeping the three—legislative (with two houses), executive, and judicial—separate
- Keeps the military under civilian control
- Defends freedom of speech, even for those who strongly criticize the government
- Protects freedom of the press
- Protects the rights of citizens to get together and to ask the government

for help

- Protects the rights of all citizens to believe whatever they like regarding religion, to express those ideas, and, generally, to practice whatever religion each individual chooses, including choosing to believe in or practice no religion
- Has the strong support and approval of her citizens of widely varying religions, political viewpoints, and attitudes

One thing all these qualities have in common, as I know you as proud and patriotic Americans already know, is that they are all true of only one government in all of world history—the United States government, as designed and, for the most part, as operated under our Constitution, as amended.

The second thing that is true of all these characteristics is that not one of them—not a single one—is described or recommended in the Judeo-Christian Bible. (And yes, I know about Isaiah 33:22. We can argue about that if Mr. Federer wants to.) Some of the American political principles all of us cherish so dearly—such as religious freedom or democratically elected leaders or equal rights for women—seem to be *against* what the Bible proclaims as correct for governments. But *all* of the key characteristics of our government, *all* of what makes the American form of government what it is, of what makes it the envy of much of the world—*all* of these characteristics are *not* biblical, *not*

Christian, in origin.

This does not mean that the American form of government is or should be anti-Christian. Like the followers of every other religion and of none, Christians' religious beliefs and practices are strongly protected by our form of government, and that must always be the case.

There were, of course, major influences on American political ideas that can be said to derive in a general way from religious ideas. Christianity and Judaism, more than most religions, do stress the worth of individual believers, and that can be seen as a very important forerunner of American ideals regarding individuals. The idea that rights are inherent—that they derive from something other than governments—while probably not Christian in origin, was deistic and therefore religious in origin—and that ideal is certainly crucial to American democracy. But almost nothing in our official and actual form of government is biblical or Christian.

So, Mr. Federer, if you agree with me, isn't it obvious that strong separation of church and state is a great strength of American government, for Christians and for everyone else, and that our form of government is plainly not peculiarly Christian in form? If you disagree with me, could you please explain where in the Bible can be found a discussion of representative, democratic, republican government and religious freedom?

Judge: Florida Town Must Keep Cross Off City-Owned Water Tower

Supported by American Atheists, a local resident challenged the Cross as an unconstitutional establishment of religion

A federal judge ruled on March 19 that the city of Starke, Florida violated the constitutional separation of church and state by placing and maintaining a metal Christian cross perched atop a city water tower.

Backed by American Atheists, member John Bevill filed suit to remove the religious display in 2005. Represented by attorney Frank Shooster, Mr. Bevill

cited the federal and state constitutional prohibitions on establishment of religion, adding that he was "alienated and demeaned by a sense that in the eyes of the community, his absence of religious belief renders him a second-class citizen."

U.S. District Court Judge John H. Moore II agreed, and issued a 13-page Order for Summary Judgment on be-

half of the plaintiffs. The city acknowledged that it put up the lighted metal cross on the tower in the 1970s at the behest of a municipal Superintendent. The local government also provided "un-metered electricity," made repairs to the cross, and replaced lights when necessary. The cross was a conspicuous fixture in Starke, and was clearly visible to people traveling on a local

Judge: Cross Must Come Down (*continued*)

U.S. highway route.

In its response to the original complaint, the city first challenged Mr. Bevill's "standing" and that of American Atheists. The town also questioned whether Bevill had also sustained any sort of "injury." The strategy is stock-in-trade when governments are challenged for impermissible practices, especially regarding the First Amendment. Judge Moore quickly disposed of these objections and cited another case where citizens objected to the presence of "a large, lighted cross located in a state park."

His opinion then turned to the larger issue of whether or not the Starke cross violated the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

"Visually, the Cross on the water tower is indistinguishable from the ubiquitous crosses found on any number of churches within the State of Florida and across the country symbolizing Christianity," Moore wrote. He also noted that the cross, a pre-eminent symbol of the Christian religion, was perceived as such. "Since this lawsuit was filed, bumper stickers reading 'I support HIS CROSS' and containing a picture of the City's water tower were printed and have been

visible on vehicles; letters have been written to the *Bradford County Telegram* (a newspaper) referring to the lighted structure as a 'cross' and stating that the purpose of the 'cross' is 'to remind us in this town that Jesus died on the cross for our sins...' "

In addition, the Motion noted that a local Baptist congregation had prayed for Mr. Bevill, and that even a City Commissioner – identified as Larry Davis – stated in a response to the suit, "It really makes you mad to know that someone wants to take down something that represents Christ on the cross."

There were more oleaginous claims made in an effort to justify the presence of the cross.

"The Court will not entertain the idea that the Cross is actually a lowercase 't' standing for the Bradford County High School football team the 'Tornadoes,'" Moore warned. The judge also cited the precedent established in the historic *LEMON v. KURTZMAN* case in 1971.

"Under the *LEMON* analysis or 'test,' a governmental practice violates the Establishment Clause if it does not have a secular purpose, if its primary effect is to advance or inhibit religion,

or if it fosters excessive government entanglement with religion," noted Judge Moore. "The Establishment Clause will preclude the challenged governmental action if ANY one of the factors listed above is violated..."

Warned by attorneys that their case would probably be unsuccessful, officials in the municipality of Starke ordered last month that the cross be removed. According to an article on the Gainesville.com web site, "When a city of Starke work crew refused to remove the cross, Starke officials contracted with Gainesville Regional Utilities. It's (sic) employees removed the cross, leaving only a radio aerial on top of the tower that can be seen by motorists traveling through the city on U.S. 301."

Edwin Kagin, National Legal Director for American Atheists, described the federal ruling as "a great victory for the First Amendment separation of church and state."

"No government, whether federal, local or state, should be promoting sectarian religion and using public money to build and maintain religious displays," Mr. Kagin added.

[From the March 24 issue of *American Atheists AANews*.]

No Congressional Meddling In Religion, Says Americans United

Politicians Should Stick To Legislating And Leave Decisions About Religion to Individual Americans, Says AU's Lynn

A group of U.S. lawmakers that is planning to urge Americans to get "back to prayer," should stop meddling in religion and get back to work, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

On March 28, U.S. Rep. J. Randy Forbes (R-Va.) and congressional allies held a press conference at the Capitol to "officially call America back to prayer and encourage people to sign up to pray for our nation for five minutes each week."

"Lawmakers should stick to their constitutional duties and leave religious decisions to individuals," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Congressional meddling in religion is an affront to the First Amendment principle of church-state separation. Religion is too important to become a political football."

Lynn noted that the nation's Founding Fathers were against mixing religion and government. James Madison,

often called the Father of the Constitution, noted in 1788, "There is not a shadow of right in the general government to intermeddle with religion. Its least interference with it would be a most flagrant usurpation."

"There are a host of political issues of utmost importance to Americans," said Lynn. "Rep. Forbes and other members of Congress should work on those and leave decisions about religion to the American people."

[From a March 28 AU press release.]

"For the poor wretches (Christians) have convinced themselves, all in all, that they are going to be immortal and live for all time...by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist himself and living according to his laws...receiving such things without any accurate evidence. So, if any imposter and trickster, able to use such situations, comes along to them, in a trice he suddenly becomes very rich by imposing upon these simple men." – Lucian, about 180 AD, from a translation of *The Passing of Peregrinus*, an ancient text. See <http://www.textexcavation.com/luciantestimonium.html> .

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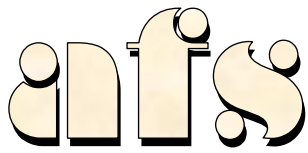
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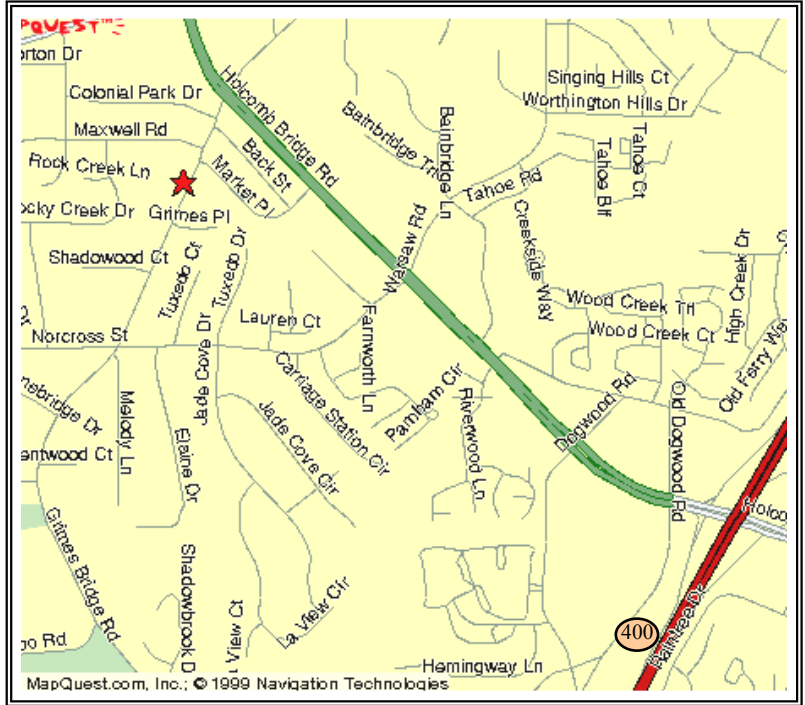
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**The April Meeting:
Sunday, April 8
1:00 at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
Roswell, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Bruce Herr**



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