

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 13 Number 8 • August 2007

The August AFS Meeting

The August 12 AFS meeting will include a talk by AFS officer **Ed Buckner** on "Secular Schooling." This subject is the topic of his chapter in the recently-published book, *Parenting Beyond Belief: On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids Without Religion* (Dale McGowan, editor, 2007). Other authors of the book include Julia Sweeney, Dan Barker, Penn Jillette, David Koepsell, Mark Twain and Richard Dawkins.

Before the meeting (which is at 2:00), we will have a **Potluck Lunch**, starting at 1:00. Join AFS members and guests for some good food and great socializing. Please bring food according to the first letter of your last name as follows:

A-G: Bring a main dish;

H-P: Bring a dessert;

Q-Z: Bring a side dish.

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.

The meeting will be 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 August AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be at Panahar Restaurant, 3375 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, on Friday, August 17, at 7:00 PM.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Aug 11: AFS Highway Cleanup, Glenridge Ramp, 10:00.

Aug 12: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 11:00 AM.

Aug 12: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.

Aug 17: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

Aug 30: Benjamin Radford at AF Center, 7:30 PM.

August Atheist Meetups

There will be a "meetup" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, August 12, at 6:00PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA.

Another meetup for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for August 26 at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Road, in Atlanta. Learn more about Atlanta atheist meetups at <http://atheists.meetup.com/93/>.

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.

Special Program: Benjamin Radford

The Atlanta Freethought Society is proud to announce a special program for Thursday, August 30, at 7:30PM, featuring **Benjamin Radford**, managing editor of *Skeptical Enquirer* magazine. Mr. Radford will speak at the AF Center on "Paranormal? No Way! - Reflections on a Decade of Paranormal Investigation," a zany review of his varied experience as a writer and scientific paranormal investigator. He'll comment on what science says about the evidence for ghosts, Bigfoot, dowsing, crop circles and psychic powers, drawing from case studies over a decade of personal investigations into these and other topics. Skeptics and believers alike will enjoy this entertaining and informative talk.

This free event will include light refreshments at 7:00, with the program starting at 7:30. The public is invited.

Benjamin Radford has written hundreds of articles on a wide variety of topics, including urban legends, the paranormal, critical thinking, film, and media literacy. He is author of three books: *Hoaxes, Myths, and Manias: Why We Need Critical Thinking* (with sociologist Robert E. Bartholomew); *Media Mythmakers: How Journalists, Activists, and Advertisers Mislead Us*; and *Lake Monster Mysteries: Investigating the World's Most Elusive Creatures* (with Joe Nickell).

Most recently, he solved the mystery of the Santa Fe courthouse "ghost video" in June 2007. He is also the writer and director of the animated short film "Clicker Clatter," showing on Sept. 1 and 2 at Atlanta's Dragon*Con festival.

Humanists of Georgia Meeting

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AF Center on Sunday, August 19, at 12:30 PM. Speaker Jim Dawson will give a 3-hour presentation on "A New Approach," a method that provides people with the tools needed to obtain customers or increase membership in an organization.

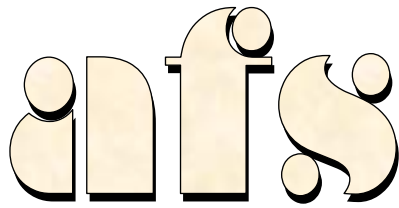
Mr. Dawson is a Managing Partner with ADI Performance, and is co-author of *Real World Customer Service Strategies That Work*, (Insight Publishing Company, 2004). He has written many articles for business and trade journals.

Since the meeting will be lengthy, food will be served.

Highway Cleanup is This Saturday

The Atlanta Freethought Society will have its **Adopt-A-Highway cleanup** on Saturday, August 11, at 10:00. 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.



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.

Aug 12: Ed Buckner will speak on "Secular Schooling," which is the topic of the chapter he wrote in the recently-published book *Parenting Beyond Belief*.

Sept 9: AFS member Doug Hattersley, a retired geologist, will speak on "A Geological Perspective of Current Events."

Oct 14: AFS Plans for the Future – AFS officers will speak.

Nov 11: Camille Ann Brewer will speak on "Freethought and Art."

Dec 9: (tentative) Dr. John Henderson will speak on his new book *Judging God*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Atlanta Freethought News an AFS publication

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Steve Yothment

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Vol. 13, Number 8, August 2007
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membership and subscription form.

Membership in AFS is \$25/year for
individuals, \$35 for households, and
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Add \$15 to receive AFNews by mail.
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afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Webmaster: Walter Beal

Call and leave messages on the

AFS Info Line: 404-ATHEIST

Myth: Atheist Morality is Parasitic, Borrowing from Christian Culture

Are Atheists Just Living Off of Accumulated Christian Moral Capital? By Austin Cline

Myth: When atheists reject the religion in which they have been raised, they tend to keep the morality while discarding its theological foundation. Their ethical behavior is thus derivative and parasitic, borrowing its conscience from a culture permeated by religion; it cannot survive if the surrounding religious culture is not sustained. In short, morality as we know it cannot be maintained without Judeo-Christian religion.

Response: A popular argument used by Christians against atheists is to claim that atheists are only moral because they have inherited moral values from the “Christian” cultures in which they live. According to these Christians, secularists and atheists are living off the accumulated “moral capital” created by Christianity over centuries. If Christianity ceases to be a binding social, political force, that capital will no longer be created and will instead just be depleted until the well runs dry.

Basically, this argument is saying that while atheists may be moral, may believe in fairness, and may feel empathy, it’s only a temporary state of affairs. The morality, fairness, and empathy of atheists is “explained” by claiming that they aren’t immoral yet, but they will be soon enough. No matter how moral or fair atheists behave, Christians can always come back to claim that it’s only because the moral capital of Christianity hasn’t been entirely depleted yet.

Perhaps the most important thing to note about this argument is that it is unfalsifiable. If atheists behave immorally, it’s because they have used up all their accumulated moral capital and now we’re seeing the real consequences of atheism. If atheists behave morally, it’s only because they haven’t used up their accumulated moral capital and aren’t immoral yet. Not a single shred of evidence in support of this argument is ever offered, and not a single shred of evidence could ever disprove it. In short, it’s nothing more or less than a faith position designed

to perpetuate anti-atheist bigotry.

Another problem with the claim is that there are really two claims: first, that atheists have only learned their morality from the Christian context in which they live, and second that atheists’ morality can only be sustained by the continuation of a Christian context to live in. The first claim is more believable than the second: culture carries on many practices and value which were originally developed in one context and then ultimately survived its original justifications. To cite a trivial example, women’s shirts button the opposite from men’s for reasons that are no longer applicable.

It’s thus not unreasonable to suggest that at least some of the moral reasoning used by atheists is dependent upon earlier Christians’ beliefs which atheists no longer accept. This is not really a criticism, though, because the same can be said about anyone – Christians certainly employ Greek standards and reasoning which have been incorporated into Christian theology and preserved long after the original context was abandoned. If Christians can do it with Greek ideas, why can’t atheists do it with Christian and Greek ideas?

The second claim, that atheists’ morality cannot survive without reinforcement from Christian culture, is not the least bit reasonable. This claim depends upon the assumption that any ideas or arguments atheists might have inherited from Christianity cannot survive outside a Christian context, but absolutely no evidence is provided for this. Christians don’t even provide evidence for something like this happening in other contexts, much less with Christianity itself.

Sometimes Christians making this argument attempt to support it by pointing to moral and political changes in societies that have become less Christian and more secular – for example, the legalization of abortion, the tolerance of homosexuality, and increases in unwed pregnancies. This sort of “evidence” presumes the truth

of disputed Christian moral claims, however, and thus commits the fallacy of Begging the Question. Christians adopting this line of argument also ignore the ways in which these societies have changed for the better: greater equality, more democracy, etc.

There are many other serious flaws in this myth as well. For one thing, it assumes that whatever morality a person had while they were Christian, it was necessarily and entirely Christian in nature. There is no evidence for this either, but there is considerable evidence that Christians derive their moral sense from culture, society, and politics as well. The above myth also assumes that whatever morals Christianity teaches cannot be justified by or derived from any other belief system, so that once a person abandons Christianity they no longer have any basis for accepting the same moral positions they believed before. This may indeed be the case with some moral propositions, but it’s obviously not the case with others – if it were, then only Christians would be moral.

In the end, this myth is a form of aggressive and arrogant bigotry against all non-Christians – although it may sometimes be expressed in a manner that promotes religion generally, it is usually phrased to promote Christianity in particular. It’s bigoted against atheists, obviously, because it is directed at them and is designed to argue that atheists are incapable of either being moral themselves or of sustaining a moral society. It’s also bigoted against non-Christians because it asserts that only Christianity is capable of sustaining a moral society. It is even bigoted against Jews, despite mentioning them in a half-hearted way, because a Jewish society would utilize a Jewish morality, not a Judeo-Christian morality.

(For more on atheism myths, go to: <http://atheism.about.com/od/atheismmyths/p/AtheismMyths.htm>.)

[From Austin Cline, your guide to Agnosticism/Atheism at atheism.about.com.]

Someone's Looking Out for Me

God and the Minneapolis Bridge Collapse

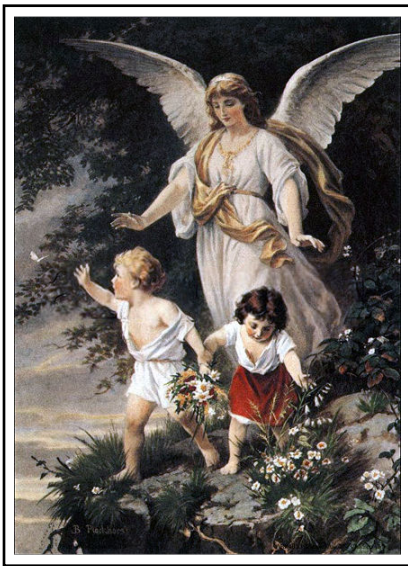
by Greta Christina

From USA Today, August 2, 2007: "Jim Koralesky, 63, who also attended the Mass [a prayer service held Thursday in honor of the bridge collapse victims], took the Interstate 35W bridge six times Wednesday before it collapsed. He was about to take it again a few minutes before 6 p.m. to go to Home Depot. But he said he ran into a friend in his parking lot and got involved in a conversation. After 15 minutes of chatting, he scuttled plans for his errand."

"'It would have put me on that bridge around that time,' he said. 'Someone's looking out for me.'"

You hear this a lot in the aftermath of disasters. People who "should have" been on the plane that crashed; people who "should have" been on the freeway that collapsed... they say it a lot. Survivors of the Columbine shooting said it: people who were at the school that day but didn't get shot. It's a strikingly common reaction to a near-miss of a huge disaster:

"Someone up there was looking out for me. I guess my guardian angel was with me that day."



And my reaction is always the same: Rage.

Trembling, teeth-grinding, physically-sick-to-my-stomach rage.

I think this is one of the most insulting, insensitive things a person could

possibly say in the aftermath of a deadly disaster.

And it's one of the things that makes me most angry about religion.

Think about it. So what are the people who actually did die — chopped liver? Where was their guardian angel? The people who did die on the collapsed bridge, the people who did get shot at Columbine — God thought they deserved it? Or maybe God just didn't care enough about them to save them? Was their guardian angel on a coffee break — or did their angel decide, "Eh, never mind, you can be on the bridge when it collapses"?

Obviously, not all religious people are insensitive enough to actually say this stuff out loud. (Especially at a service in honor of the people who did die.) But I think it's inherently implied; not in all religion, but in any religion that believes in an interventionist god or spirit that has the power to either cause or prevent the earthquake, the school shooting, the bridge collapse.

When you say that your life is blessed by God — that you have your good job, your nice home, your happy family, your health and prosperity generally, all by the grace of God — the logical implication is that people who don't have those things are cursed by God. The children born into starvation and war; the people whose homes are destroyed by tsunamis; the people who get slaughtered by crazy mass murderers; the children with birth defects or genetic diseases; the people who plunge to their death when a bridge collapses... either God doesn't like them, or God doesn't care about them.

It's the problem of suffering all over again. Except instead of the problem being, "Why does God cause/allow suffering?" the problem now becomes, "Why do people think that God is personally protecting them from suffering when he seems perfectly happy to throw millions of others to the

wolves?"

I get it that it's hard to believe in dumb luck. It's hard to believe that your life could be radically changed — or ended — by tiny incidents of pure random chance. It can make you feel very small, and make your life feel very much out of control. (And feeling that your life could be changed or ended by government mismanagement and a reflexive, unthinking, "low taxes always good" approach to fiscal policy... that can really make you feel small and out of control.)

But if the alternative is a belief in a God who kept you chatting with your friend so you wouldn't be on the bridge when it collapsed — but didn't do the same for several other perfectly wonderful people — then I'll take dumb luck any day. When terrible things happen for completely random reasons, there's something comforting about not believing that there's someone out to get you.

And I get that people who have been fortunate in life — either in a general "health and prosperity" way or in a more specific "I could easily have been on that bridge when it collapsed" way — often feel a sense of humility and gratitude, and want to express that somehow. While I do think the "Somebody up there likes me" trope is arrogant and insulting, I think most people who use it don't mean it that way. Not consciously, anyway. As a friend recently told me, one of the hardest parts of letting go of a belief in a conscious guiding spirit is letting go of the impulse to say "Thank you" for the good things in your life. And it's an impulse I both understand and respect.

But there has to be a better way to express that feeling than with the insulting, self-centered assertion that "Someone's looking out for me." Especially when you're at the memorial service of the people nobody was looking out for.

[From www.gretachristina.com.

Thanks, Greta!]

Bible Classes Must Meet Constitutional Requirements, Americans United Tells South Carolina Education Officials

Church-State Watchdog Group Advises Educators To Reject Biased And Flawed Curriculum Materials

Americans United for Separation of Church and State urged South Carolina education officials on August 3 to make certain that two new public school courses designed to teach about the Bible meet constitutional requirements.

"Public school courses about the Bible must be objective, balanced and fair – not Sunday School lessons," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Any approach that is not even-handed will spark a lawsuit."

Under a measure signed into law June 18, the South Carolina Department of Education has been charged with adopting academic standards and appropriate instructional materials for two optional courses on the Bible: History and Literature of the Old Testament and History and Literature of the New Testament.

In a letter to State Superintendent of Education Jim Rex and other officials, Americans United advised South Carolina educators to follow specific steps to assure that the classes remain focused on objective education, not religious indoctrination.

The letter, signed by Americans United State Legislative Counsel Dena

S. Sher and the Rev. Robert M. Knight, president of AU's Charleston Chapter, advises Rex that in order to survive a legal challenge, the courses must present the Bible in a secular, objective and academic manner.

The classes must also, AU insists, expose students to critical perspectives on the Bible and a diversity of biblical interpretations; refrain from portraying the Bible as literal, religious truth; and not present a particular sectarian point of view. Several court cases are cited to back up these assertions.

The Americans United letter notes that two prominent Bible curriculum packages being offered to public schools are flawed.

The National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools' "The Bible in History and Literature" is evangelical in nature, and portions of it have already been declared unconstitutional in public schools by a federal court.

The Bible Literacy Project is offering a textbook, *The Bible and Its Influence*, that is also flawed. The book, AU charges, is tilted toward an evangelical point of view, contains errors and lacks any discussion of biblical criticism.

The letter stated, "The State Board of Education should also consider developing training materials and resources for teachers of these courses. Ensuring that courses on the Bible are taught objectively and on a secular basis is not an easy task – teachers should be provided with all the help they need to present the course material in a manner that respects all faiths and religious traditions and neither disparages nor encourages a commitment to a set of religious beliefs."

AU's Lynn said South Carolina officials must be careful as they take this step.

"School officials are being urged to wander into a potentially dangerous constitutional thicket by state legislators who pass laws establishing these classes," said Lynn. "Americans United intends to make sure that the courses do not become vehicles for proselytizing."

The South Carolina controversy comes during a renewed nationwide push for public school classes "about" the Bible. Georgia and Texas have passed laws encouraging such classes, and other state legislatures have considered them.

[From an August 3 AU press release.]

Disruption of Hindu Chaplain's Senate Prayer Shows Religious Right's Intolerance, Says Americans United

Religious Right Activists Want Government To Reflect Only Their Faith, Says AU's Lynn

Americans United for Separation of Church and State complained on July 12 about the disruption by Religious Right activists of a Hindu chaplain's prayer to open the U.S. Senate.

"This shows the intolerance of many Religious Right activists," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director. "They say they want more religion in the public square, but it's clear they mean only their religion."

"America is a land of extraordinary

religious diversity, and the Religious Right just can't seem to accept that fact," Lynn continued. "I don't think the Senate should open with prayers, but if it's going to happen, the invocations ought to reflect the diversity of the American people."

Hindu Chaplain Rajan Zed, a Nevada resident, gave the opening prayer in the Senate at the invitation of U.S. Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.). As he began his remarks, two protestors interrupted the proceedings, asking

for forgiveness from Jesus Christ for the "abomination" of failing to pray to the "one true God." (The sergeant-at-arms had to restore order.)

Religious Right groups have been agitating against the Hindu leader's prayer since it was announced. The Rev. Donald Wildmon's American Family Association has asked his members to complain to their senators about the invitation. The group's news service reported that "Christian nation" activist David Barton said that

Disruption of Hindu Chaplain's Senate Prayer (continued)

Hinduism has few followers in the United States and that prayer to a "non-monotheistic god" is "outside the American paradigm."

Said AU's Lynn, "The Religious Right promotes a deeply skewed version of American history. Our founders wanted separation of church and state

and full religious liberty for all faith traditions. This episode shows we have a ways to go to achieve that goal." [From a July 12 AU press release.]

Letters-to-the-Editor from AFS members:

Jack McKinney's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on July 17.

Ed Buckner's letter was in the *Marietta Daily Journal* on July 27.

A miracle? Credit doctors and medicines

Miracles and prayers – two of the most overused, abused and misleading words ever written, or uttered ("An oversized thank you," Metro, July 11).

In the entire history of mankind, there has never been a single provable instance of a so-called miracle, nor of a prayer being answered, and all the claims and Bible quoting to the contrary won't change that fact.

Although the story indicated that 9,000 patients contract "Herpes simplex encephalitis" in the United States annually, it failed to



BOB ANDRES / Staff

By way of billboards displayed in Georgia, Ron Tripodo hails the healing of his wife, Patsy, as a miracle. Critics say he should instead give thanks to the doctors and medicines.

emphasize that many of them also received medical treatment and survived. Consequently, Patsy Tripodo's recovery is not unique and to call it a miracle is, at best, a gross exaggeration.

I'm glad she is recovering. I wish that her husband Ron

Tripodo had assigned thanks where it is due – to the physicians and medicines that made it happen.

JACK MCKINNEY

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

DEAR EDITOR:

For two weeks in a row MDJ columnist Laura Armstrong has shown that she misunderstands church-state separation. On July 15 she claimed that, "America's separation of church and state, rigorously enforced for Christians and Jews, is disregarded more and more when it comes to Muslim practices in public venues." She gave no examples in that column. The examples she offered in her more recent column show that she does not want equal liberty, just special consideration for Christian institutions. All religions must be treated equally under the law, with none supported by government.

Armstrong shows again in her latest column ("The lil' chapel that endured," July 22) that she either cares nothing for liberty or wants it only for those who agree with her. She wrote "the only alternative" she "can think of" is "that those opposed to the chapel staying onboard Dobbins are anti-Christian or anti-religion." She needs to read American history and our Constitution. All people, of every religious belief and of none, benefit from strict separation because it keeps the strong physical power of the state and the strong emotional power of religion apart, for the benefit of all.

As Benjamin Franklin observed in 1780, only weak religions need to be propped up by governments. Only people who have no confidence in their religious beliefs want government support for those beliefs, while no one wants such support for other religious beliefs.

The Christian chapel is not authorized for Dobbins for exactly the same reason that no mosque or temple would be authorized: the Americans serving there are Reservists with ready access to whatever religious organizations and buildings they want nearby. There are something like 150 Christian churches within five miles of Dobbins, according to MapQuest.

Those who want to preserve the chapel can certainly spend the money needed to put the chapel on private property where it belongs. They do not have the freedom to act in the name of all citizens to endorse a particular religion. Ms. Armstrong and others need to develop confidence in their own religion, not try to use the power of government to force me to help support it.

Ed Buckner
Treasurer, Atlanta Freethought Society
Smyrna

"I now return the same to the House of Representatives... because the Bill, in reserving a certain parcel of land of the United States for the use of said Baptist Church, comprises a principle and precedent for the appropriation of funds of the United States for the use and support of religious societies, contrary to the Article of the Constitution which declares that 'Congress shall make no law respecting a religious establishment.'"

– James Madison, from his veto message, Feb 28, 1811 (The Papers of James Madison, Presidential Series, 3:193)

Paleontology Society Upset with Creation Museum

From a July 17 Press Release by the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology

Professional paleontologists from around the world are concerned about the misrepresentation of science at the newly opened Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky. The Creation Museum has been marketed to the public as a “reasoned, logical defense” for young-earth creationism by Ken Ham, the President and CEO of Answers in Genesis, which runs the Creation Museum. The Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, a worldwide scientific and educational organization concerned with vertebrate paleontology, contends that the museum presents visitors with a view of earth history that has been scientifically disproven for over a century.

The Creation Museum’s fossil exhibitions, though artistically impressive, include a vast number of scientific errors, large and small. These errors range from implying that the Earth’s sedimentary rocks were deposited by a single biblical Flood, to claiming that humans and dinosaurs lived alongside one another, to denouncing the reality of transitional fossils.

“Ken Ham is not recognized as a scientist or educator among experts in the fields of geology and paleontology, and his views on the interpretation of Biblical texts are extremist. Visitors to his ‘museum’ may arrive knowing little about these sciences, but they will leave misled and intellectually deceived,” said Dr. Kevin

Padian, Professor and Curator, University of California, Berkeley and President of the National Center for Science Education.

The fossil exhibits at the Creation Museum discount the last 150 years of paleontological and geological discovery. Not only are transitional fossils, including snakes with limbs and dinosaurs with feathers, abundant in the fossil record, but radiometric dating allows paleontologists to pinpoint the timing of major events in the ancient history of the earth.

For example, *Tyrannosaurus rex* existed over 65 million years ago, whereas modern humans didn’t show up on the scene until 200 thousand years ago. They never walked side by side. The Creation Museum neglects to include this critical data in its analysis of the history of life on earth. “Most of us in the public view museums as places to get the latest information on scientific discovery. In this case, the Creation Museum is using the disguise of science museums and centers without including an iota of science inside,” said Dr. Kristi Curry Rogers of the Science Museum of Minnesota.

“That’s the real danger of such a place - undermining the basic principles of science, eroding the public’s confidence in science, and causing a general weakening of science education in the country,” commented Dr.

Glenn Storrs of the Cincinnati Museum Center.

Dr. Catherine Badgley, a professor at the University of Michigan and president of the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology, remarked, “according to the Creation Museum, the history of life is short, sin-ridden, and laden with moralizing imperatives. In contrast, the real fossil record shows that this long history is brimming with discoveries of new kinds of animals, plants, and environments, inviting people to use their unusual minds to question, to reason, and to wonder at life’s remarkable variety.”

Founded in 1940, the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology is the leading North American scientific and educational organization concerned with vertebrate paleontology. The society has 2,200 members from 40 countries; members include professionals, students, artists, preparators, and others interested in vertebrate fossils. The purpose of the society is to advance the science of vertebrate paleontology, including the history, evolution, comparative anatomy, and taxonomy of vertebrate animals, as well as the field occurrence, collection, and geological context of fossil vertebrates. The society is also concerned with the conservation and preservation of fossil sites. It publishes *The Journal of Vertebrate Paleontology*, a leading journal in the field.

The Pat Tillman Case By Steve Yothment

The news media has been very active recently on the story of Pat Tillman. As you probably know, Pat Tillman is the former NFL player who became an Army Ranger and was killed in Afghanistan in 2004. Several weeks after the funeral, his family was told that he actually died in a friendly-fire incident. The Associated Press reported last month that Army medical examiners were suspicious about the close proximity of the three bullet holes in Pat Tillman’s forehead

and tried without success to get authorities to investigate whether his death amounted to a crime.

“The medical evidence did not match up with the, with the scenario as described,” a doctor who examined Tillman’s body after he was killed told investigators. Another doctor said that the bullet holes were so close together that it appeared the Army Ranger was cut down by an M-16 fired from a mere 10 yards or so away.

More recently, the Pentagon con-

ducted a criminal investigation and ruled that Tillman’s death at the hands of his comrades was an accident.

A 2,300 page report of the investigation was released to the AP on July 27 by the Defense Department due to a Freedom of Information Act request.

The report revealed new information from the testimony of a chaplain who debriefed the entire unit days after Tillman was killed. The Chaplain said that Spc. Bryan O’Neal told him that he was hugging the ground at

Tillman's side, "crying out to God, 'help us.' And Tillman says to him, 'Would you shut your (expletive) mouth? God's not going to help you; you need to do something for yourself, you sniveling...'"

Some atheist organizations have shown concern about the new evidence, wondering if Tillman was shot on purpose by one of his comrades, specifically because he was an atheist.

However, Kathleen Johnson, The American Atheists Military Director,

and founder of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, who is currently serving in the US Army in Baghdad as an Army CID agent, reported the following to the Atheist Alliance International Board of Directors on August 4:

"I'm pretty darn certain, for a variety of reasons, that Pat Tillman was not murdered and was not shot at the close range that has been reported in the media lately. I am an Army CID agent, and I have seen some of the

original investigations and reports and have talked with the civilian firearms examiner who conducted the bullet trajectory analysis. Believe me, as an open Atheist in the military, if I thought for a second there was any indication at all that he was murdered, especially for being an atheist, I would act."

(The CID is the Army's Criminal Investigation Command, which investigates crimes within the Army.)

U.S. District Court Allows Voting in Churches

The Southern Florida Case Could Have Had National Implications

Summary judgment was lost on July 31 in *Rabinowitz v. Anderson*, the case launched by the Appignani Humanist Legal Center (AHLC) in its constitutional test of voting in churches. The case was filed November 29, 2006, in response to a specific abuse during the recent midterm elections.

U.S. District Judge Donald L. Middlebrooks disagreed with the AHLC's overwhelming evidence that the pervasive use of churches as polling stations violates the constitutional principle of government neutrality on religion. But the stakes in this case were unusually high. A decision favorable to the AHLC could have set the wheels in motion to outlaw the use of churches as polling places across the nation, resulting in the reassignment of polling places from coast to coast. The judge didn't appear up to making that bold move.

Judge Middlebrooks wrote, "This is not a case where a governmental actor actively placed a religious icon or message at a voting location, or on another piece of government property." He also said, "Voting in a secular election, even in the presence of religious objects, is not equivalent to state-sponsored prayer at a public school graduation." For the complete decision, go here:

<http://www.americanhumanist.org/press/SummaryJudgement.pdf>

"We're saddened by this decision," said Roy Speckhardt, executive direc-

tor of the American Humanist Association (AHA), "but the struggle isn't over. We haven't ruled out an appeal in this case and will relaunch this case in another jurisdiction, challenging a similar abuse. We have members all over the United States who have answered our call to report these abuses or be plaintiffs."

Churches are the most common polling locations in America. This means that, during the process of voting, many citizens are surrounded on all sides by religious symbolism and, sometimes, politicized religious propaganda. This not only creates a religiously charged and politically biased atmosphere, but it also serves to promote the specific church hosting the polls.

Rabinowitz v. Anderson highlighted this flagrant disregard of church-state separation. The polling place of plaintiff Jerry Rabinowitz was at Emmanuel Catholic Church in Delray Beach, Florida. Even before entering the voting area he had to walk past a church-sponsored "pro-life" banner framed by multiple crosses. Then, inside, where he checked in and where he voted, Rabinowitz faced prominent religious symbols and slogans.

"Such a religiously-charged environment can serve to intimidate or unduly influence a person's vote," added AHA president and constitutional law professor Mel Lipman. "Recent studies reveal that environmental cues have a measurable effect on elec-

toral results. Therefore, the government must provide a neutral setting for voters, free from religious or other influences. Sadly, due to Judge Middlebrooks' decision, many barriers still stand in the way of guaranteeing this kind of atmosphere on voting day for all Americans."

The AHLC will continue to oppose the constant encroachments made on church-state separation by the Religious Right. "Despite this setback, we will continue to send a clear message to politicians at every level that violations of religious liberty and church-state separation simply can't be tolerated," said Lipman. "We the people value our religious and voting freedoms and will remain vigilant so these freedoms are respected."

The Appignani Humanist Legal Center is part of the American Humanist Association. Consisting of over two dozen humanist lawyers and backed by humanists from coast to coast, it is the first nontheistic legal center in the nation's capital.

For details on this case, go to: <http://www.humanistlegalcenter.org/cases/cp/cppressrelease.html>

The American Humanist Association (www.americanhumanist.org) is the oldest and largest Humanist organization in the nation. The AHA is dedicated to ensuring a voice for those with a positive outlook, based on reason and experience, which embraces all of humanity.

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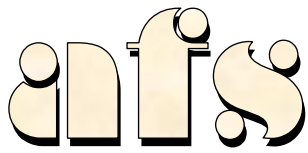
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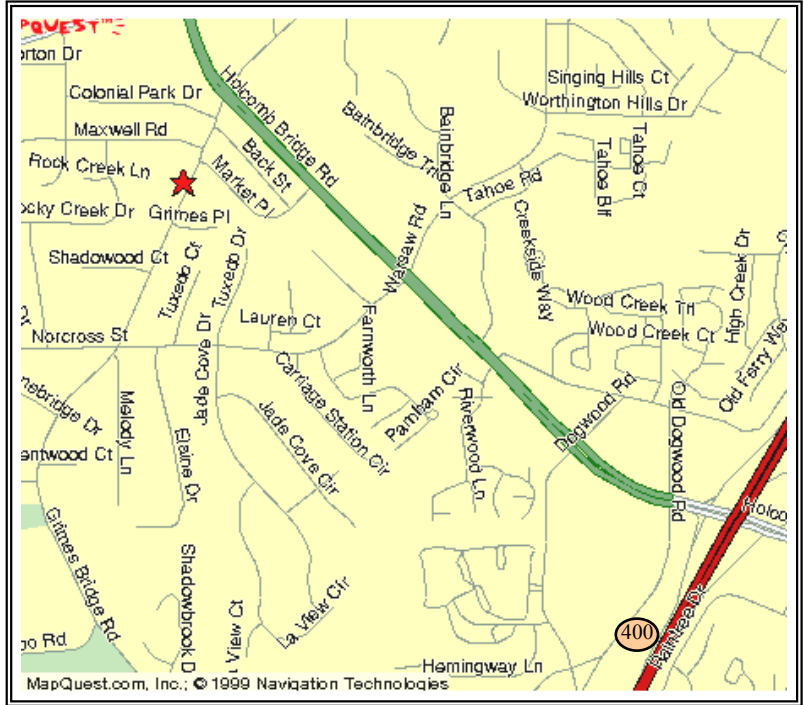
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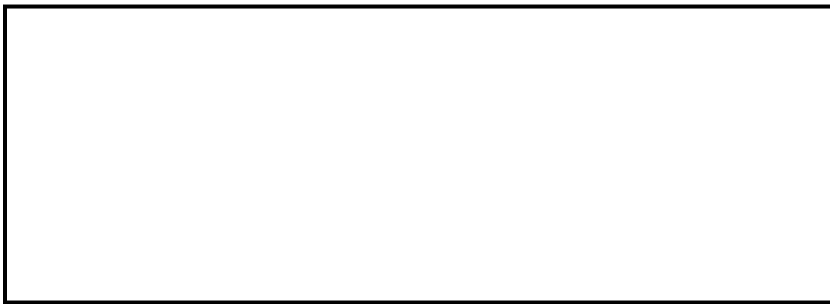
**Atlanta
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Society**

**The August Meeting:
Sunday, August 12
1:00 at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
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**This Month's Speaker:
Ed Buckner**



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