

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 13 Number 9 • September 2007

The September AFS Meeting

The September 9 AFS meeting will include a talk by AFS member **Doug Hattersley**, a retired geologist, on "A Geological Perspective of Current Events." Doug will focus on how the geological sciences support evolution and how climate changes can occur over geologic time.

Hattersley is a graduate of the University of Dayton in Ohio where he had the good fortune of studying under a very well known glacial geologist (which makes climate change especially interesting to him). After graduation he worked for the US Department of Agriculture (Soil Conservation Service and Forest Service) in DC, NC, ID, and Puerto Rico. He has been in Atlanta since 1980 and retired here after 31 years of Federal service. He presently keeps busy with his eight grandchildren.

Also, join us for lunch after the meeting!. We typically go to a local restaurant for food and more discussion.

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 September AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be at Panahar Restaurant, 3375 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, on Friday, September 14, at 7:00 PM.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Sept 9: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 11:00 AM.
Sept 9: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
Sept 14: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

Other Meetings of Interest

The **Humanists of Georgia** will not have a regular meeting in September. Instead, they will have a picnic on September 16 from 12:00 to 3:00PM at Laurel Park, 151 Manning Road, in Marietta, GA. RSVP to Kathy Brooke if you would like to attend (kathybrooke@yahoo.com).

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 **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>.

There will be a "meetup" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, September 9, at 6:00PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA.

Another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for September 23 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/>.

Sam Harris Comments on Mother Teresa

In the August 23 issue of *Time* magazine, it came to light that Mother Teresa, the supposedly saintly nun who set up and ran a Calcutta orphanage for many years, had severe doubts about her faith. (You can see the entire article here: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1655415,00.html>.)

In an August 31 article in the *Washington Post*, Sam Harris, author of *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*, commented on Mother Teresa's doubts, saying:

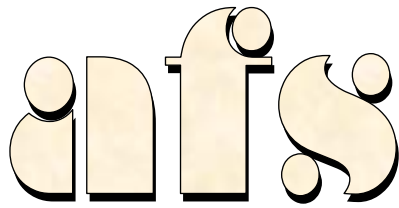
"...Now we learn that even Mother Teresa, the most celebrated exponent of this dogmatism (the holy sacrament of the Eucharist) in a century, had her doubts about the whole story — the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the existence of heaven, and even the existence of God... Theresa's recently published letters reveal a mind riven by doubt (as it should have been). They also reveal a woman who was surely suffering from run-of-the-mill depression, though even secular commentators have begun to politely

dress this fact in the colors of the saints and martyrs. Teresa's response to her own bewilderment and hypocrisy (her term) reveals just how like quicksand religious faith can be. Her doubts about God's existence were interpreted by her confessor as a sign that she was sharing Christ's torment upon the cross; this exaltation of her wavering faith allowed Teresa "to love the darkness" she experienced in God's apparent absence. Such is the genius of the unfalsifiable. We can see the same principle at work among her fellow Catholics: Teresa's doubts have only enhanced her stature in the eyes of the Church, having been interpreted as a further evidence of God's grace."

"Ask yourself, when even the doubts of experts are thought to confirm a doctrine, what could possible disconfirm it?"

(You can see Sam Harris's article here:

http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/sam_harris/2007/08/.)



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.

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*.

Jan 13: TBD

AFS Email Lists

The **AFS eNews** Announcement list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities and news. The **AFS Forum** is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation, and religion. Visit the AFS website at www.AtlantaFreethought.org for more info or to subscribe.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of free-thinkers, 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 30075-3965
or phone Steve at 678-364-8703
or send e-mail to SteveYoth@aol.com.

Atlanta Freethought Society

President

Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

VP for Internal Communication

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

VP for External Communication

Walter Beal – 404-284-xxxx

Treasurer

Ed Buckner – 770-432-3049

Board of Directors

Diane Buckner – 770-432-3049

Bill Burton – 770-469-1228

Freya Harris – 404-845-2276

Bruce Herr – 770-876-1607

Jack McKinney – 770-424-5004

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

The Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 13, Number 9, September 2007

Copyright © 2007 by the

Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc.

Signed articles are all copyright ©
2007 by their respective authors.

See page 9 of this newsletter for a
membership and subscription form.

Membership in AFS is \$25/year for
individuals, \$35 for households, and
\$10 for students/low income/under 21.

Add \$15 to receive AFNews by mail.
Sustaining members (individual) \$100
and sustaining members (households)
\$125. Subscriptions alone are \$20 for

12 issues, \$25 to Canada/Mexico,
\$30 for other addresses. Please make
checks and money orders payable to
Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc.

Visit our World Wide Web site at
www.atlantafreethought.org.

Send E-mail to
afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Webmaster: Walter Beal

Call and leave messages on the

AFS Info Line: 404-ATHEIST

Tossing the Round Peg: The Power and Joy of Secular Parenting

By Dale McGowan

“Hey Dad.”

“Yeah Connor.” He was six at the time, and “Hey Dad” could be a prelude to anything.

“I think God is pretend.”

Hm. *Is that right*, I thought. I could have said *Congratulations!* Or I could have said *Go to your room*. Instead, I asked him why he thought so.

“Because astronauts went way up into space and they never saw him.”

Oh, okay. Easy one. “But people who believe in God say he’s an invisible spirit, and that he’s everywhere—so astronauts wouldn’t see him.”

“Oh.” A pause. “Then I think he’s real.”

“How come?”

“Because the people who wrote the Bible said he was real.”

“Yeah, that’s true. They did.” Pause. “But...hey, wait a minute. How do we know they were right? People wrote a lot of other books that said completely different things.”

I find it hard to imagine a conversation of quite those twists and turns going on in most religious households. They’d be duty-bound to set the child straight after line three. And many atheist parents do little better, opting for *Congratulations!* and ending the inquiry just as decisively.

I advocate a third route: I want my kids to work it out for themselves.

That doesn’t mean I’m indifferent about where they end up. I *want* them to reject religion. I think religion is an absolute cancer. But I only want them to join me in that assessment if they come to it on their own. It’s too important to do any other way.

That may seem self-contradictory, but it isn’t. I also want my kids to reject racism, but not on my mere say-so. They must see *why* it is bad. If instead I tell them racism is bad because I say it’s bad, and my authority later fades in their eyes—as to some degree it must—opinions founded on my authority alone are likely to fade along with it. An opinion founded on their own reason, on the other hand, is only likely to be dethroned *by* their own

reason.

They’ll grow up knowing my opinions, and I’m sure they’ll consider them, but if I really want them to reject racism and religion, the very best thing I can do is encourage them to develop their thinking skills. Both racism and religion fall to tatters under critical examination. So we must teach our kids to think well, then trust them to do so.

In matters of religion, that means keeping them off-balance and undecided until they are old enough to make their own decisions. If in the meantime they’ve trained their minds well, I’m confident those decisions will be good ones.

If I had to choose a single sentence as the foundation of my parenting, it might be *Teach them to think well, then trust them to do so*.

When I started pulling together *Parenting Beyond Belief: On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids Without Religion*, the first comprehensive book on parenting without religion, that idea was at the heart of it. And somehow, amazingly, after I brought twenty-five other writers into the book, from Richard Dawkins and Penn Jillette to the Rev. Dr. Kendyl Gibbons, the same foundational idea could still be seen running like a golden thread through the entire manuscript.

As the contributions began rolling in and the collection coalesced, I marveled at the emerging consensus. I’ll say that again: a group of twenty-five freethinkers from a wide range of perspectives were coming to *consensus*—a general agreement on the basic challenges, principles, and joys of parenting without religion.

A few of the central challenges they identified:

- Helping kids to be freethinkers in a world that stigmatizes and fears religious doubt;
- Teaching empathy for people who are stuck in religious mythology;
- Being honest about our own opinions and values without indoctrinating our kids;

- The relative lack of infrastructure and resources for secular families.

Notice that death and morality are both missing. These are discussed in detail, and they are indeed challenging, but they’re no more challenging for secular than for religious parents. They’re just different. We seemed to agree on that as well.

There’s also a fair consensus that we often overestimate the power of religion to seduce our children. To the contrary, religion requires a tremendous amount of propping up and special effects to take root. All we have to do is withhold the props and it falls over under the weight of its own absurdities. If we’ve raised good thinkers, they won’t fail to notice that the silly thing is face down.

The need for props is amazing, if you think about it. Christianity offers release from our single greatest human terror—death—for the mere cost of an uttered sentence. Yet it’s so preposterous a collection of nonsense that they have to back up this free gift with the threat of eternal combustion if you refuse it.

Penn said it best in his essay “Passing Down the Joy of Not Collecting Stamps”:

You don’t have to worry too much about your kids. You don’t ever have to teach Atheism. You don’t have to teach an absence of guilt for things they didn’t do. As Atheist parents, you just have one more reason to keep your kids away from priests. Tell your kids the truth as you see it and let the marketplace of ideas work as they grow up. I don’t know who said, “Atheism is a religion like not collecting stamps is a hobby” ...but some guy or gal said it, and it’s a more important idea than any Jesuit ever came up with. You have to work hard to get kids to believe nonsense. If you’re not desperately selling lies, the work is a lot easier.

He’s right, you know. We often have too little confidence in reason. I’m confident that if my kids develop a love of reality and the ability to think

The Power and Joy of Secular Parenting (*continued*)

think well, they will not run to religion no matter how pretty the stories. Those first two steps, of course, are essential, so I put my energy there, not in fending off exposure to religion.

Which gets to another, perhaps surprising consensus among the authors—that our kids must be religiously literate. Exclusive exposure to a single religion leads to ignorant, blinkered thinking, but exposure to multiple religions reveals religion as a human cultural artifact and denies any one of them the high ground.

The study of religion — as opposed to indoctrination *into* religion — aids our understanding of the religiously-saturated world around us. It can also inoculate our kids against the more poisonous religious ideas. Here's Rev Roberta Nelson, a Unitarian humanist minister, in her essay, "On Being Religiously Literate":

Choosing not to affiliate or join a religious community does not shield a parent from religious questions. If you do not provide the answers, someone else will — and you may be distressed by the answers they provide.

I allow religious ideas to wash over my kids from every direction—*every* direction, not a single one. That's crucial. They hear about baby Jesus and baby Hercules in the same breath. Jehovah gets no more air time than the Everlasting Brahmin, and Jesus no more than Mithras. Skepticism is such a central value in our home that I don't have to watch and worry and screen out ideas.

There are two exceptions—two bits of intellectual terrorism that I will not permit my children to consider: the idea of hell, and the related notion that doubt is bad. Both of these are designed to paralyze thinking, so I won't allow the serious consideration of either in our home.

My stomach sank just two weeks ago when my nine-year-old daughter Erin came home from school with the news that her three best friends all agree she's going to burn in hell.

"Sweetie," I said, kneeling before her, "what'd they say that for?"

"They were talking about church and stuff," she said, "and they asked if I believe in God and go to church. And I said no, I don't believe in God, and I don't go to church. And then their eyes got really big and they said, 'Oooh, you're gonna burn in Hell.'"

I waited for the first teardrop to appear.

"I'm so sorry they said that, punkin. How did that make you feel?"

Instead of tears, she *shrugged*. "It was pretty mean," she said. "But also silly."

I looked at her in amazement. It is silly, of course, a profoundly stupid and childish idea, but how did she come to that so directly? It took me years and years to shift Hell from "terrifying" to "terrifying but unlikely" to "silly."

And then I remembered. Of course. She's been *inoculated*.

I said the idea was never seriously considered in our home, but that doesn't mean we never talked about it. If I'd hidden the idea of Hell from my daughter all these years, protecting her from even hearing of it, the sudden invocation of the flames by her friends could have burned a fear into her that would take some serious undoing. But we've talked about religious ideas for years. I've always made my opinions clear, but I go to great lengths to let her know that other good people think differently. "Dad, did Jesus really come alive after he was dead?" "I don't think he did, no. I think that's just a made-up story to make people feel better about death. But talk to Grandma Barbara, I know she thinks it really happened. Then you can make up your own mind, and even change your mind back and forth about it a hundred times if you want." That's the usual approach.

But Hell is an exception. Hell gets no hearing from me. I will not allow my children to be terrorized by anyone with the sick fantasy of an after-life of eternal punishment, especially

one meted out for honest doubts. If ever there was a religious idea with human fingerprints all over it, Hell is it. So I've always told my children that Hell is not only fiction, it's also...

That's right. She was using my exact word. *Silly*.

Even if there is a God, I've told them repeatedly, he's not going to care if you guess wrong about him. That sounds like a human king, not the all-wise creator of the universe. He might care about how good you are, or even respect your honest doubts more than the dishonest belief of people who are just trying to avoid Hell. But in any case, the idea that any god worth his salt would create a hell to punish his children for guessing wrong is just plain silly.

Just as we inoculate our kids against diseases by putting small amounts of the bad stuff into their arms to build resistance, we have to inoculate them against toxic ideas that can paralyze their abilities to think freely. Specifically invite fearless doubt and they can live without medieval ignorance and fear trailing them through their one and only life. Tell them about Hell, then don't just 'disagree' with it: laugh it to smithereens.

Moral development is another important topic in the book, and psychologist Jean Mercer's piece does a marvelous job of walking us through the Theory of Mind model and Kohlberg's six stages of moral development: fear of punishment; hope for reward; social approval and disapproval; the recognition of laws or rules as valuable in themselves; the "social contract" level, in which laws and rules are seen as desirable, but potentially changeable; and the final stage, in which a person thinks in terms of universal ethical principles and is occasionally willing to defend such principles even at the risk of punishment or disapproval.

The consensus of contributors is that moral development is an understandable process, and that kids can be consciously involved in their own moral development.

The Power and Joy of Secular Parenting (continued)

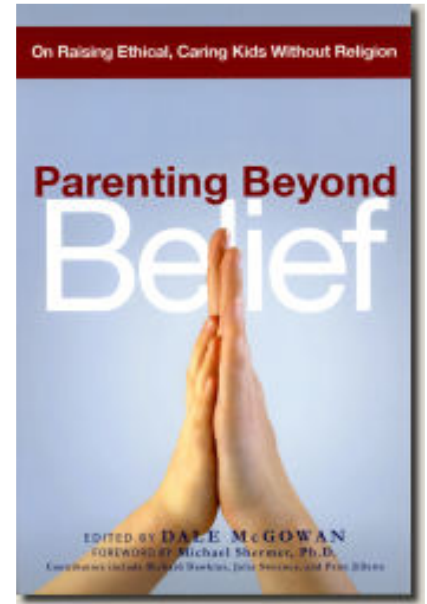
The topic of dealing with death is handled brilliantly by Kendyl Gibbons, perhaps the leading UU humanist in the United States. But death is also a prominent feature of six other essays in the collection. The consensus on death? Well, we're all opposed to it.

But as for parenting, there's general agreement to never treat death as an untouchable subject. Touch it all over. The more familiar, the less frightening. It's a lifelong challenge, but our kids will be all the further along if they don't have to waste time erasing heaven (and hell) from their conceptual maps.

Then there's the wonder thread. Humans need wonder. Fortunately, the wonder inherent in a scientific worldview utterly trumps the religious imagination. This is the focus of my own essay titled "Teaching Kids to Yawn at Counterfeit Wonder" in which I compare the vague and colorless hyperbole of religious wonder—*God is wonderful, no, really, really wonderful, really especially great and powerful, super-special and eternal and large and clean*—to the genuinely jaw-dropping wonder of science.

- If you condense the history of the universe to a single year, humans would appear on December 31st at 10:30 pm.
- We are star material that knows it exists.
- A complete blueprint to build you exists in each and every cell of your body.
- The faster you go, the slower time moves.
- Your memories, your knowledge, even your identity and sense of self exist entirely in the form of a constantly recomposed electrochemical symphony playing in your head.
- All life on Earth is directly related by descent. You are a cousin not just of apes, but of the sequoia and the amoeba, of mosses and butterflies and blue whales.

There is no surer way to strip religion of its ability to entice our children into ignorant fantasy than to show them the way, step by step, into the far more intoxicating wonders of the real world. Help kids to fall madly in love with that incredible universe and they will never even try to fit the round peg of supernatural religion into the square hole of reality.



[Dale McGowan is editor of the recently published book *Parenting Beyond Belief: On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids Without Religion*. The book is for loving and thoughtful parents who wish to raise their children without religion and includes essays by Richard Dawkins, Julia Sweeney, Penn Jillette, Mark Twain, Dan Barker, our own Ed Buckner, and several other authors. Find out more about the book at www.parentingbeyondbelief.com.]

Freethought issues in the news, via the internet:

Not So Fast, Christian Soldiers! <http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/la-oe-aslan22aug22.1.3708009.story?ctrack=1&cset=true>

Dave Silverman's insightful weblog: <http://nogodblog.com>

A Talking Jesus toy at Wal-Mart: <http://www.tennessean.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20070831/FEATURES01/708310378>

"Sacrifice of Reason," by Sam Harris: http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/sam_harris/2007/08/the_sacrifice_of_reason.html

Time magazine's story on Mother Teresa's loss of faith: <http://www.daylightatheism.org/2007/08/mother-teresas-loss-of-faith.html>

Greta Christina on Mother Teresa and faith: http://gretachristina.typepad.com/greta_christinas_weblog/2007/08/where-is-my-fai.html

Pagan Station, free music for freethinkers: www.freewebs.com/paganstation Listen: <http://www.live365.com/stations/paganstation>

Richard Dawkins confronts a medium who informs him that his father wishes to talk to him from the Great Beyond. One problem: Dawkins' father is still alive! http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article2198063.ece

The Least Religious Countries: <http://www.gadling.com/2007/08/23/least-religious-countries/>

Atheism: Contemporary Rates and Patterns, by Phil Zuckerman: <http://www.pitzer.edu/academics/faculty/zuckerman/atheism.html>

"Religion Beat" reporter is convinced it's all baloney!: <http://www.latimes.com/search/la-me-lostfaith21jul21.0.785320.story>

The Top Ten Myths About Evolution: http://metapsychology.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=book&id=3784&cn=167

The new controversial Time Warner film "The Golden Compass": <http://www.lifesite.net/ldn/2007/aug/07082004.html>

What is Roy Moore doing now? Find out here: http://www.au.org/site/News2?abbr=cs_&page=NewsArticle&id=9352

Letters-to-the-Editor from AFS Members

Ignorance, not secularism, is the enemy

As a secularist, I admire Thomas Jefferson and hold him to be one of the most intelligent and esteemed of our Founding Fathers, a hero of the American Revolution. I am familiar with many of the man's writings concerning the relationship between government and religion.

Therefore, I must remind everyone that it is not we secularists who are "ravaging" Jefferson's dream; rather, it is those in favor of theocracy who are torturing and misinterpreting Jefferson.

The words "Separation of Church and State" are Jefferson's own (Letter to the Danbury Baptist Association of Connecticut, 1801).

The Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom of 1786, a document which Jefferson drafted and is still part of Virginia's state constitution, states "that to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves, is sinful and tyrannical; that even the forcing him to support this or that teacher of his own religious persuasion, is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor," and also states "that our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry; that therefore the proscribing any citizen as unworthy of the public confidence by laying upon him an incapacity of being called to offices of trust and emolument, unless he profess or renounce this or that religious opinion, is depriving him injuriously of those privileges and advantages to which in common with his fellow-citizens he has a natural right;" and "that to suffer the civil magistrate to intrude his powers into the field of opinion, and to restrain the profession or propagation of principles on supposition of their ill tendency, is a dangerous fallacy, which at once destroys all religious liberty."

In an Aug. 10, 1787 letter to his nephew, Peter Carr, Jefferson stated to the young man this advice: "Fix reason firmly in her seat, and call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion. Question with boldness even the existence of a God; because, if there be one, he must more approve of the homage of reason, than that of blindfolded fear."

Jefferson did advocate reading the Bible, but not uncritically, for he did not believe in inerrancy.

Again, the same letter to Carr: "Read the Bible, then as you would read Livy or Tacitus; those facts in the Bible which contradict the laws of nature must be examined with more care, and under a variety

of faces. Here you must recur to the pretensions of the writer to inspiration from God. Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are that its falsehood would be more improbable than a change in the laws of nature, in the case he relates. Do not be frightened from this inquiry by any fear of its consequences. If it ends in a belief that there is no God, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort and pleasantness you feel in its exercise, and the love of others which it will procure you. If you find reason to believe there is a God, a consciousness that you are acting under his eye, and that he approves you, will be a vast additional incitement."

Even though the College of William and Mary was Jefferson's alma mater, he had lost confidence in it, in part because the college had religious biases and also it had lacked a science program.

Jefferson founded the University of Virginia in 1824 to remedy that situation because other universities of his time allowed only the fields of medicine, law, and religion. Under Jefferson's guidance, the University of Virginia became the first in the United States to allow specializations in such diverse fields as astronomy, architecture, botany, philosophy, and political science.

In his Dec. 27, 1820 letter to William Roscoe, Jefferson explained "This institution will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it."

The new university was based on a daring vision of higher education, completely separated from religious doctrine, which was very controversial then. Instead of centering the new university around a church, which was common in Jefferson's lifetime, it was centered around a library.

In an October, 1814 letter to Thomas Cooper, Jefferson stated, "a professorship of theology should have no place in our institution" and the University of Virginia never had a divinity school or department, and was established independent of any religious sect.

Two hundred years ago, Jefferson applied a pair of scissors to the KJV.

He cut out the virgin birth, all the miracles, the Resurrection, and then pasted together what was left and called it The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth (now called the Jefferson Bible).

In essence, Thomas Jefferson did not believe in Jesus' divinity, the Trinity, resurrection, miracles, or any other supernatural aspect described in the Bible. Jefferson's re-

Jack McKinney's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on August 25.

Ed Buckner's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on August 25.

Tony King's letter was in the *Toccoa Record* on August 23.

An inadequate map for a moral course

Anyone who has taken the trouble to study the morality of one version or another of the Ten Commandments objectively and carefully knows that, holy or not, they are wholly inadequate moral guides.

They don't, for example, condemn slavery, child abuse or rape, and they don't allow for religious liberty.

But Dreher suggests a false choice. Dreher claims that the choice we have is between human and divine authority.

But in truth, the only choices we have are among widely varying human authorities, many of whom claim to be presenting us with the absolute commandments of a god.

ED BUCKNER
Roswell

The non-religious aren't a threat

How dare Rod Dreher imply that those of us without religion represent a danger to society. A danger to religion, perhaps, but to society, no. Dreher, unfortunately, is misguided.

JACK MCKINNEY
Kennesaw

ligion was Deism. He tried to live Jesus' philosophy. He is not the Christian hero and uncritical inerrancy-believing Bible reader that many would claim him to be.

And based on his writings, it is in my humble opinion that Jefferson would be very dismayed at today's attempts to have government dictate any religion, Christianity included, as the official religion of state and of American culture.

Secularism is not the enemy. The true enemy is ignorance: ignorance of the words of Jefferson and our other Founding Fathers, and ignorance of what religious freedom truly means.

—William A. King, Toccoa

Calif. Pastor Prays For Demise of Americans United Staff

AU's Lynn Says Pastor Offers Outlandish Attack Instead of Answering Concerns of Improper Electioneering

On August 15, Americans United for Separation of Church and State denounced the tactics of a political pastor in California who has urged followers to pray for the demise of staff members of the religious liberty watchdog group.

On August 14, Americans United asked the Internal Revenue Service to investigate the First Southern Baptist Church of Buena Park, CA for a potential violation of federal tax law barring electioneering by non-profit groups. Dr. Wiley Drake, pastor of the church, issued a press release on church letterhead endorsing Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee and subsequently offered the endorsement on a church-affiliated radio show.

Instead of responding to Americans United's concern of illegal activity, Drake issued a plea to his supporters to join in "imprecatory prayers" (curses) every morning for Americans United and its staff.

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director, said it is telling that Drake declined to respond to his group's charges of tax law violations.

"Instead of addressing our concerns of illegally melding religion and partisan politics, Dr. Drake has launched an outlandish attack on us," said Lynn. "Calling for curses on us might distract Drake's supporters, but it won't help him with the IRS. I trust the tax agents will investigate Drake's use of church resources to endorse a candidate for public office."

Drake's attack included some florid rhetoric.

"In light of the recent attack from the enemies (sic) of God I ask the children of God to go into action with Imprecatory Prayer," Drake said, in an Aug. 14 press statement issued from the First Southern Baptist Church of Buena Park. "Especially against Americans United for Separation (sic) of Church and State."

"The righteous have dominion," Drake said, "but only through imprecatory prayer against the ungodly."

Drake singled out two Americans United staff members whose names appeared as contacts on the press release. The pastor's missive said the imprecatory prayers should "specifically target" Americans United Com-

munications Director Joe Conn or Communications Associate Jeremy Leaming.

"They are those who lead the attack," Drake said.

In a message left in Lynn's voicemail, Drake said he had been urging his supporters to take similar action against Lynn for many years and would continue to do so.

In a section of his press release called "How To Pray," Drake includes a long list of biblical citations that call on God to smite enemies. For example, the alleged enemies of God "shall be judged," "condemned," and "his days be few...." Additionally, supporters should pray that the enemy's "children be fatherless, and his wife a widow," and "his children be continually vagabonds, and beg; let them seek bread also out of their desolate places."

"Let there be none to extend mercy unto him," Drake quoted, "Neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children."

[From an August 15 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.]

AU Commends Pres. Bush for Apologizing to Wiccan War Widow

President Says Veteran's Wife Should Have Been Included in Meeting with Families of Fallen Servicemen

On August 30, Americans United for Separation of Church and State commended President George W. Bush for his apology to a Wiccan war widow who was excluded from a private meeting with veterans and their deceased family members in Nevada earlier that week.

Roberta Stewart, whose husband Sgt. Patrick Stewart was killed in combat in Afghanistan, was not invited to meet with Bush and other family members of soldiers who have died in combat. Other members of Sgt. Stewart's family were invited to the meeting.

Stewart told local media that she was concerned that her exclusion was an intentional snub for her leadership in an Americans United-sponsored

lawsuit that forced the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to allow the Wiccan symbol of faith on government-issued grave markers.

Today, Bush called Stewart and apologized for failing to invite her to the meeting with veterans' families. He also said he does not believe the Wiccan faith should be discriminated against.

Said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director, "The president has done the right thing, and his apology to Stewart should be commended. All veterans of war, regardless of their faith, should be honored and treated with the utmost respect, especially from their commander-in-chief. We are pleased the president recognized his

slight of Stewart was wrong."

On August 29, Lynn called on the President to apologize to Stewart for leaving her out of the Nevada meeting.

Stewart's husband died when his Chinook helicopter was shot down in Afghanistan in 2005. The Stewarts practice Wicca, and she requested that the VA issue her husband's memorial marker engraved with a symbol of their faith, the pentacle. The VA denied her request, and in 2006, Americans United sued the federal agency on behalf of Stewart, two other widows, Circle Sanctuary and Isis Military Mission.

On August 30, during an interview on Lynn's nationally syndicated radio program, Stewart also commended

AU Commends Pres. Bush (*continued*)

Bush for apologizing.

"I just now got off the phone and personally spoke with President Bush," Stewart told Lynn. "I am happy to say that he did give me his deepest condolences. I will give him the benefit of the doubt and I do have to give him kudos that he at least took the time to call, give his condolences, and apologize for the VA problem.

"He apologized for the exclusion

and the error that was made and said that he admired me for my spirit and thanked me for accepting his apology and said that he hoped he would have the opportunity to someday meet me," Stewart continued. "I was very pleased with the way the conversation went, very pleased that he did call and put this right."

Lynn asked Stewart if the president touched upon her Wiccan faith. She

replied that the president told her that "he would not discriminate against someone because of their religion."

Earlier this year, the VA settled Americans United's lawsuit and announced that it would recognize the pentacle as a symbol of faith for use on soldiers' gravestones, markers and memorials.

[From an August 30 AU press release.]

Wiser Than Solomon

By Bobbie Kirkhart

It is well known that many feminists of the Nineteenth Century were abolitionists, but there was another cause common in the movement then, as it is today: the humane treatment of children. Perhaps the greatest advocate of children's rights was **Lucy Colman**.

As a child in the 1820s, Colman questioned the Bible of her conventional religious upbringing. As an adult, she became a Universalist, then later a spiritualist. Finally, she broke from all supernatural belief systems.

After the death of her second husband, she was forced to work as a teacher and was paid \$350 a year for a job that would have paid \$800 if she were a man. Administrators assigned her the most difficult students, in retribution for her refusal to resort to corporal punishment; yet, she had the best behaved classes in the school.

Colman was afraid of public speaking, but was urged by Susan B. Anthony to write a paper opposing corporal punishment in schools, which she read to a State Convention of Teachers in New York. The paper

caused a sensation. One teacher, a minister, asked, "What will you do with the words of the wisest man, Solomon, 'spare the rod and spoil the child'?" She replied that the civilization of the 19th century had outgrown Solomon. She was met with complete, stunned silence, then the hisses and shouts of "She is an Infidel!" When he accused her of trying to take away the Bible, she replied, "If your Bible is a bundle of rods, or a license for adultery, the loss of it will be a blessing."

Colman left teaching and got family support while she became an abolitionist speaker, traveling from town to town speaking on the subject of slavery. Anti-slavery speeches were rowdy affairs, and the ministers in each town caused her the most trouble.

When a minister charged her with weak morals, as she ignored the commands of the Bible by speaking in public with no covering over her head, Colman pointed out that her heckler had a smooth face, in violation of the Biblical command. When the man vehemently denied any such passage being in the Bible, Lucy

opened her Bible and read the command to the audience.

She was a Vice President of the Secular Union and remained active in the Freethought organizations. In her *Reminiscences* she wrote: "the Protestant religion, in all its different creeds, is a mild mixture compared to what it was seventy years ago. And perhaps for the reason that its hideousness is so nicely covered, there is more need that Liberals be on the alert. Christianity is the more dangerous when it gives its attention to this life. Christianity demands entire subordination to its edicts, no matter that it keeps out of sight the damnation of infants in another world, if it subjugates all children to its decrees by teaching them, not only in Sunday-schools but in public schools supported by the public at large, the doctrines taught in the Bible. Until the majority of the people are emancipated from authority over their minds, we are not safe."

[Bobbie Kirkhart is a former president of Atheist Alliance, International, and was a contributing author to *Parenting Beyond Belief*.]

"Instead of loving God, we (should) love each other. Instead of the religion of the sky — the religion of this world — the religion of the family — the love of husband for wife, of wife for husband — the love of all for children. So that now the real religion is: Let us live for each other; let us live for this world, without regard for the past and without fear for the future. Let us use our faculties and our powers for the benefit of ourselves and others, knowing that if there be another world, the same philosophy that gives us joy here will make us happy there."

"Nothing can be more absurd than the idea that we can do something to please or displease an infinite Being. If our thoughts and actions can lessen or increase the happiness of God, then to that extent God is the slave and victim of man."

— Robert Ingersoll (1890), from *Has Freethought a Constructive Side?*

Become a Member!



(Or renew your membership with this form or online at www.AtlantaFreethought.org!)

If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiastically invite you to join the Atlanta Freethought Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed monthly newsletter, the *Atlanta Freethought News*, voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment of the superb speakers we have coming up, as well as the social and activist events that we sponsor!

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$25 per year.

Household memberships: A household is defined as two members sharing one newsletter, and is available for \$35 per year. Since some of our households have additional members, there will be a \$5 per year charge for each additional voting household member.

Paper Newsletters: Due to printing and mailing expense, we add a surcharge of \$15 for members to receive a paper newsletter in the mail rather than our email version newsletter. We encourage all members to receive the newsletter by email to save on paper, postage and printing expenses.

International members: Because of international postage rates and special handling, we have been forced to add a surcharge of \$5 for members in Canada or Mexico, and \$10 for other foreign addresses for members who receive the paper newsletter.

Thank you for all your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

Annual dues are:

Membership	Dues	# of mems	Total
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Household (2 members)	\$35	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional household mems	\$5	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Low Income/ Student/under 21	\$10	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Paper version of newsletter	\$15	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Subscription only	\$20	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member	\$100	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Household	\$125	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for Canada/Mexico	\$5	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for other foreign addresses	\$10	_____	\$ _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Extra donation (thank you!)	\$	_____	\$ _____
TOTAL:			\$ _____

Please send this form with payment to:
 Atlanta Freethought Society
 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Suite 500
 Roswell, GA 30075-3965

Atlanta Freethought Society

1170 Grimes Bridge Rd, Ste 500, Roswell, GA 30075-3965

www.atlantafreethought.org afs@atlantafreethought.org

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

We still have these great books for sale:

Why I Am Not A Christian — \$8

Lucid, comprehensive, engaging answer to Christian apologists by **Keith Parsons**. Respectful but devastating to all Christian claims. Wonderful follow-up to Bertrand Russell's great essay with the same title.

An Uppity Old Atheist Woman's Dictionary — \$8

By the late, great **Carol Faulkenberry** (illustrated by Amanda Faulkenberry); like Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*—but better: more biting, funnier. Guaranteed to make you laugh out loud and the challenge at least one idea you hold.

Quotations That Support the Separation of State and Church (2nd edition) — \$11

Compiled by **Edward M. Buckner** and **Michael E. Buckner**; ammunition against Christian-nation mythologists. Quotes from America's revolutionaries, constitution framers, Presidents, court decisions. Sources carefully documented; extensive index. Comb-bound—lies flat for easy copying.

Please add:

\$4 TOTAL S&H Charge for up to 2 books.

\$1.50 EACH S&H Charge for 3 to 9 books.

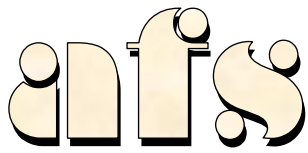
No S&H Charge for 10 Books or more.

(All Merchandise will be shipped USPS Priority Mail)

Send check or money order to:

ATLANTA FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY

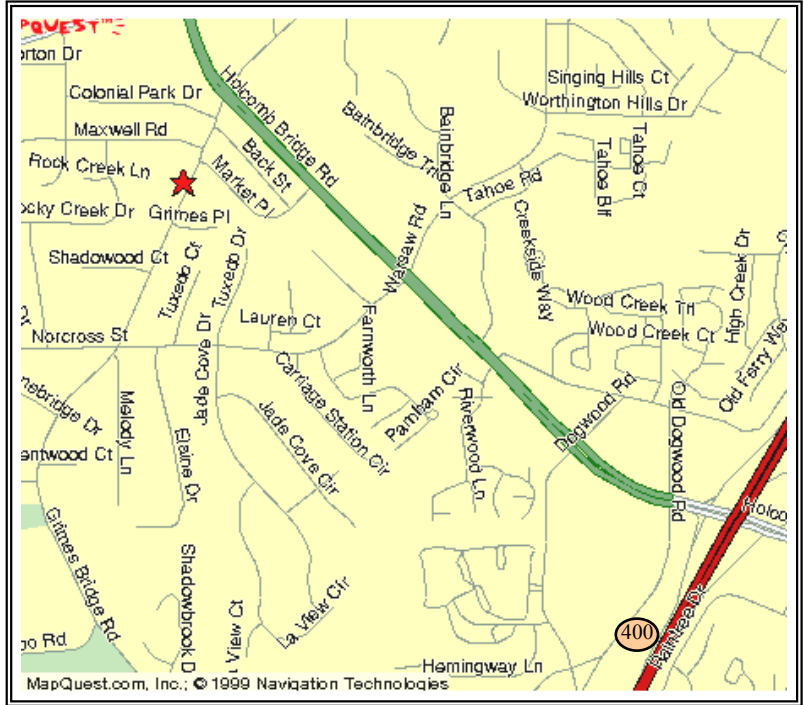
1170 Grimes Bridge Rd, Ste 500, Roswell, GA 30075-3965



Atlanta
Freethought
Society

The September Meeting:
Sunday, September 9
1:00 at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
Roswell, GA

This Month's Speaker:
Doug Hattersley



Atlanta Freethought News is produced by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit, member-run, educational organization created to advance freethought and protect freethinkers. Any freethought, atheist, secular humanist, agnostic, or rationalist group is granted permission to reproduce anything from our newsletter not expressly labeled otherwise (acknowledgement of AFS and author appreciated). Articles published represent the official opinion of AFS only when that is clearly stated; all other opinion is that of the individual author.



If your label indicates 9 2007 or earlier, please renew. Thanks.

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