

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 13 Number 10 • October 2007

The October AFS Meeting

The October 14 AFS meeting will start with an **Ice Cream Social** at 12:00, followed by the main program at 1:00. The meeting will feature presentations by AFS officers and informative, interactive discussion with members about the direction of AFS, our programs, activities, the Atlanta Freethought Center, and other aspects of our future.

This meeting is meant to give members an opportunity to provide input in the planning of future AFS activities.

The meeting will also include **nominations** for AFS officers and board members for 2008! (See the article below.)

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. 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.

Nominations at October Meeting

The AFS bylaws require nomination of officers and board members for each year at the October meeting. Please think about whom you would like to nominate. (Current officers and board members are listed on page 2.)

Officers have 1-year terms; board members have 2-year terms. Bill Burton, Freya Harris and Jack McKinney will continue their 2-year terms into next year.

During elections in November, members will also vote on a bylaws change to add an officer position of Secretary. If the bylaws change is approved, we will need a Secretary for 2008. So, we should nominate a potential Secretary at the October meeting. Please consider a person for this position. The Secretary will be responsible for recording and maintaining Board Meeting minutes and maintaining a membership and visitor database.

Other Meetings of Interest

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AF Center on Sunday, October 21, at 12:30 PM. Dr. Richard Bennett will speak on Islam and its effects on the world.

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>.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Oct 13: AFS Highway Cleanup, Glenridge Ramp, 10:00.

Oct 14: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 11:00 AM.

Oct 14: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.

Oct 18: AFS Reading Group at Borders Books, 7:30 PM.

Oct 19: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

The October AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be at Panahar Restaurant, 3375 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, on Friday, October 19, at 7:00 PM.

Highway Cleanup is This Saturday

The Atlanta Freethought Society will have its **Adopt-A-Highway cleanup** on Saturday, October 13, at 10:00 AM. The cleanup will be on the Glenridge Ramp at Exit 26 of I-285. (This is actually 2 long ramps that connect Glenridge Drive to I-285 near GA400.) All members are invited.

The AFS Reading Group

The **AFS Reading Group** will meet monthly to discuss interesting books covering a variety of topics, including arguments in favor of freethought, the political and social impact of fundamentalism, alternative religions, philosophy, evolution, and other topics of interest to participants.

The group's first meeting will be on Thursday, October 18, at 7:30 PM at Borders Books & Music (4745 Ashford-Dunwoody Rd, Atlanta GA 770-396-0004).

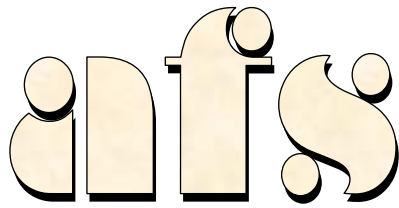
This first meeting is for planning and selection of books to read. However, the first book for the group to read and discuss at the November meeting is ***God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything***, by Christopher Hitchens.

For more information, please visit the AFS website or contact the Reading Group Co-Chairs, Forrest Greene and Brian Shriver, at bookclub@atlantafreethought.org.

Congratulations to Michael Buckner and Ed Buckner, whose essay "The US is a Free Country, *Not* a Christian Nation" was recently published in the book ***Everything You Know About God is Wrong***, edited by Russ Kick.

There will be a "**meetup**" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, October 14, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA.

Another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for October 28 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/>.



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.

Oct 14: AFS Plans for the Future – AFS officers will speak. This meeting will include an ice-cream social.

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

Dec 9: Dr. John Henderson will speak on his new book *Judging God*. This meeting will include a Potluck Lunch.

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

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Steve Yothment

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The Atlanta Freethought News

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Membership in AFS is \$25/year for
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AFS Info Line: 404-A THEIST

Sam Harris and the Atheist Alliance International Convention

The Atheist Alliance, International had its annual convention in Washington, DC on the weekend of September 28. Included in the impressive list of speakers were Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Sam Harris, Christopher Hitchens, Julia Sweeney, and others. Over 300 people attended the convention.

Although all speeches were notable, the address by Sam Harris, titled “The Problem with Atheism,” caught most listeners by surprise. An edited transcript of the speech can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/2q9oem>.

Here is part of Sam Harris’s speech, with a response by Ellen Johnson of American Atheists on page 5.

To begin, I’d like to take a moment to acknowledge just how strange it is that a meeting like this is even necessary. The year is 2007, and we have all taken time out of our busy lives, and many of us have traveled considerable distance, so that we can strategize about how best to live in a world in which most people believe in an imaginary God. America is now a nation of 300 million people, wielding more influence than any people in human history, and yet this influence is being steadily corrupted, and is surely waning, because 240 million of these people apparently believe that Jesus will return someday and orchestrate the end of the world with his magic powers.

Of course, we may well wonder whether as many people believe these things as say they do. I know that Christopher [Hitchens] and Richard [Dawkins] are rather optimistic that our opinion polls are out of register with what people actually believe in the privacy of their own minds. But there is no question that most of our neighbors reliably profess that they believe these things, and such professions themselves have had a disastrous affect on our political discourse, on our public policy, on the teaching of science, and on our reputation in the world. And even if only a third or a quarter of our neighbors believe what most profess, it seems to me that we still have a problem worth worrying about.

Now, it is not often that I find myself in a room full of people who are more or less guaranteed to agree with me on the subject of religion. In thinking about what I could say to you all tonight, it seemed to me that I have a choice between throwing red meat to the lions of atheism or moving the conversation into areas where we ac-

tually might not agree. I’ve decided, at some risk to your mood, to take the second approach and to say a few things that might prove controversial in this context.

Given the absence of evidence for God, and the stupidity and suffering that still thrives under the mantle of religion, declaring oneself an “atheist” would seem the only appropriate response. And it is the stance that many of us have proudly and publicly adopted. Tonight, I’d like to try to make the case that our use of this label is a mistake—and a mistake of some consequence.

My concern with the use of the term “atheism” is both philosophical and strategic. I’m speaking from a somewhat unusual and perhaps paradoxical position because, while I am now one of the public voices of atheism, I never thought of myself as an atheist before being inducted to speak as one. I didn’t even use the term in *The End of Faith*, which remains my most substantial criticism of religion. And, as I argued briefly in *Letter to a Christian Nation*, I think that “atheist” is a term that we do not need, in the same way that we don’t need a word for someone who rejects astrology. We simply do not call people “non-astrologers.” All we need are words like “reason” and “evidence” and “common sense” and “bullshit” to put astrologers in their place, and so it could be with religion.

If the comparison with astrology seems too facile, consider the problem of racism. Racism was about as intractable a social problem as we have ever had in this country. We are talking about deeply held convictions. I’m sure you have all seen the photos of lynchings in the first half of the 20th century—where seemingly whole towns in the South, thousands of men,

women and children—bankers, lawyers, doctors, teachers, church elders, newspaper editors, policemen, even the occasional Senator and Congressman—turned out as though for a carnival to watch some young man or woman be tortured to death and then strung up on a tree or lamppost for all to see.

Seeing the pictures of these people in their Sunday best, having arranged themselves for a postcard photo under a dangling, and lacerated, and often partially cremated person, is one thing, but realize that these genteel people, who were otherwise quite normal, we must presume—though unfailing religious—often took souvenirs of the body home to show their friends—teeth, ears, fingers, knee caps, internal organs—and sometimes displayed them at their places of business.

Of course, I’m not saying that racism is no longer a problem in this country, but anyone who thinks that the problem is as bad as it ever was has simply forgotten, or has never learned, how bad, in fact, it was.

So, we can now ask, how have people of good will and common sense gone about combating racism? There was a civil rights movement, of course. The KKK was gradually battered to the fringes of society. There have been important and, I think, irrevocable changes in the way we talk about race—our major newspapers no longer publish flagrantly racist articles and editorials as they did less than a century ago—but, ask yourself, how many people have had to identify themselves as “non-racists” to participate in this process? Is there a “non-racist alliance” somewhere for me to join?

Attaching a label to something carries real liabilities, especially if the

Sam Harris: The Problem with Atheism (*continued*)

thing you are naming isn't really a thing at all. And atheism, I would argue, is not a thing. It is not a philosophy, just as "non-racism" is not one. Atheism is not a worldview—and yet most people imagine it to be one and attack it as such. We who do not believe in God are collaborating in this misunderstanding by consenting to be named and by even naming ourselves.

Another problem is that in accepting a label, particularly the label of "atheist," it seems to me that we are consenting to be viewed as a cranky sub-culture. We are consenting to be viewed as a marginal interest group that meets in hotel ballrooms. I'm not saying that meetings like this aren't important. I wouldn't be here if I didn't think it was important. But I am saying that as a matter of philosophy we are guilty of confusion, and as a matter of strategy, we have walked into a trap. It is a trap that has been, in many cases, deliberately set for us. And we have jumped into it with both feet.

While it is an honor to find myself continually assailed with Dan [Dennett], Richard [Dawkins], and Christopher [Hitchens] as though we were a single person with four heads, this whole notion of the "new atheists" or "militant atheists" has been used to keep our criticism of religion at arm's length, and has allowed people to dismiss our arguments without meeting the burden of actually answering them. And while our books have gotten a fair amount of notice, I think this whole conversation about the conflict between faith and reason, and religion

and science, has been, and will continue to be, successfully marginalized under the banner of atheism.

So, let me make my somewhat seditious proposal explicit: We should not call ourselves "atheists." We should not call ourselves "secularists." We should not call ourselves "humanists," or "secular humanists," or "naturalists," or "skeptics," or "anti-theists," or "rationalists," or "free-thinkers," or "brights." We should not call ourselves anything. We should go under the radar—for the rest of our lives. And while there, we should be decent, responsible people who destroy bad ideas wherever we find them.

Now, it just so happens that religion has more than its fair share of bad ideas. And it remains the only system of thought, where the process of maintaining bad ideas in perpetual immunity from criticism is considered a sacred act. This is the act of faith. And I remain convinced that religious faith is one of the most perverse misuses of intelligence we have ever devised. So we will, inevitably, continue to criticize religious thinking. But we should not define ourselves and name ourselves in opposition to such thinking.

So what does this all mean in practical terms, apart from Margaret Downey having to change her letterhead. Well, rather than declare ourselves "atheists" in opposition to all religion, I think we should do nothing more than advocate reason and intellectual honesty—and where this advocacy causes us to collide with religion, as it inevitably will, we should

observe that the points of impact are always with specific religious beliefs—not with religion in general. There is no religion in general.

The problem is that the concept of atheism imposes upon us a false burden of remaining fixated on people's beliefs about God and remaining even-handed in our treatment of religion. But we shouldn't be fixated, and we shouldn't be even-handed. In fact, we should be quick to point out the differences among religions...

(A large part of the speech is omitted here.)

Finally, I think it's useful to envision what victory will look like. Again, the analogy with racism seems instructive to me. What will victory against racism look like, should that happy day ever dawn? It certainly won't be a world in which a majority of people profess that they are "non-racist." Most likely, it will be a world in which the very concept of separate races has lost its meaning.

We will have won this war of ideas against religion when atheism is scarcely intelligible as a concept. We will simply find ourselves in a world in which people cease to praise one another for pretending to know things they do not know. This is certainly a future worth fighting for. It may be the only future compatible with our long-term survival as a species. But the only path between now and then, that I can see, is for us to be rigorously honest in the present. It seems to me that intellectual honesty is now, and will always be, deeper and more durable, and more easily spread, than "atheism."

Here are some interesting websites: (Click on each link to see more.)

See the Mr. Deity show at <http://www.mrdeity.com/>.

Listen to the Infidelguy radio show at <http://www.infidelguy.com>.

See Joshua Gough's excellent blog at <http://joshuagough.blogspot.com/>.

Peruse the great essays on the Secular Web at <http://www.infidels.org/>.

Listen to the official podcast of Skeptic magazine at <http://www.skepticality.com/>.

Read the Blasphemous Blog of Edwin Kagin at <http://edwinkagin.blogspot.com/>.

See the Internet Infidels information pamphlet at <http://www.infidels.org/infidels/pamphlet.pdf>.

Read "Jesus is Not Returning" at http://statenews.com/index.php/article/2007/09/jesus_is_not_returning.

Read Sam Harris's "On Faith" articles at http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/sam_harris/.

See our November speaker's website at:

<http://www.cabfineart.com/>.

See our December speaker's website at:

<http://johnhenderson-god.com/>.

A Response by American Atheists President Ellen Johnson

From a Guest Column in the October 3 issue of Humanist Network News

"ATHEIST is really a thoroughly honest, unambiguous term, it admits of no paltering and no evasion, and the need of the world, now as ever, is for clear-cut issues and unambiguous speech." —Chapman Cohen

Sam Harris did not set out to be an atheist spokesperson. Like Dr. Michael Newdow, the media thrust them both into that spotlight and they became defacto spokespersons.

Dr. Newdow once proclaimed, at our Godless Americans March on Washington, that Atheism should be considered a religion. Sam Harris proclaimed, at an Atheist convention, that we should not use the word "Atheist." Mr. Harris was fed up after having to repeat some explanation about Atheism three times. I think he said he had to do that in two different books and in one speech. Mr. Harris is an academic and may not be used to Atheist activism.

Blacks are still dealing with bigoted notions that they are lazy and on welfare. Jews are still dealing with claims that they are cheap or that they run the media. Italians are still having to deal with claims that they are all in the mafia, etc. Yet, we don't seriously suggest that they change, or not use, their names in order to stop having to refute certain bigoted ideas. Should gays call themselves "non-heterosexuals" in order to be accepted?

Mr. Harris cannot see why we need a name for a group of people who are "against" something, or who don't believe in something. Take racism he says. There isn't any term for people who are against racism. We give ourselves a name because we are proud of who we are. A group needs to be identified in some way. And we want to be a "group." We aren't just against something. We *are* something.

Is the American Cancer Society just "against" something because they fight against cancer? Are they a "negative" organization? Is Greenpeace a negative organization because they are against pollution? Sounds silly doesn't it? Yet we buy into this nonsense when it is said about us.

In the end, the theist doesn't give a damn what we call ourselves. You can call yourselves "sugar" and they will still hate you and lie about you if you are an activist or if you don't accept Jesus Christ as your personal savior.

While we remain hung up on arguments over defining ourselves the extremist right wing theists in America are defining the socio-political agenda for America and they don't give a damn what you think about their names.

From my experience, Christian fundamentalists are more concerned about our "activism" than what we call ourselves. They will attack anyone, atheist or theist, who challenges their privileged position in society. Remember Lisa Herdahl in Mississippi? She challenged organized school prayers there and she was a Christian. She was viciously attacked by the religious community for her efforts. Episcopal Bishop John Shelby Spong has received sixteen death threats in the last 30 years because of his liberal religious views. Trying to distance ourselves from our atheism is not the answer.

But behind the call to change our name is always the desire for respectability by atheists. Atheists want the



approval of others and so they try to hide who they are and the face they present to the world is one of shame and fear. When you act like you are ashamed of who you are, people will treat you like you should be. It is not the answer.

To say we should not have a name is to not exist. For far too long there have been words in our society that were considered taboo. If you didn't say them, those things didn't exist. We cannot allow ourselves to be made invisible by those who want the approval of others. At American Atheists we don't allow our adversaries to dictate what we call ourselves nor do we allow them to determine our actions.

Our own approval is enough. Our history is one to be proud of and American Atheists will never back down on wearing our name proudly. You cannot lead the way by looking back and we aren't going back. I invite atheists to stand proud and use the name atheist proudly and when you want people to refer to you remember the words of Mr. "T" who said, "Let them call me Mr. 'T.'"

From Religious Beliefs to Evil Deeds

By Richard Dawkins

Nobody is suggesting that all religious people are violent, intolerant, racist, bigoted, contemptuous of women and so on. It would be absurd to suggest such a thing: just as

absurd as to generalize about all atheists. I am not even concerned with statistical generalizations about the majority of religious people (or atheists). My concern here is over whether

there is any general reason why religion might be more or less likely to bias individuals towards all those unpleasant things in Christopher Hitchens's list: to make them more likely to

exhibit them than they would have been without religion. I think the answer is yes.

Religion changes, for people, the definition of good. Atheists and humanists tend to define good and bad deeds in terms of the welfare and suffering of others. Murder, torture, and cruelty are bad because they cause people to suffer. Most religious people think them bad, too, but some religions (for example the religion of the Taliban) sanction all of them under some circumstances. For non-religious people, the behavior of consenting adults in a private bedroom is the business of nobody else, and is not bad unless it causes suffering – for example by breaking up a happy family. But many religions arrogate to themselves the right to decide that certain kinds of sexual behavior, even if they do no harm to anyone, are wrong.

The actions of the Taliban, their vile bullying of women, their sanctimonious hatred of all that might lead to enjoyment, their violence, their ignorant bigotry, their hatred of education, their cruelty, seem to me to be as close to pure evil as anything I can imagine.

Yet, by the lights of their own religion they are supremely righteous – really good people.

The nineteen men of 9/11, having washed, perfumed themselves and shaved their whole bodies in preparation for the martyr's paradise, believed they were performing the highest religious duty. By the lights of their religion they were as good as it is possible to be. They were not poor, downtrodden, oppressed or psychotic; they were well educated, sane and well balanced, and, as they thought, supremely good. But they were religious, and that provided all the justification they needed to murder and destroy. Their madrassas and their mullahs had given them good reason to think they were on a fast track to paradise.

Polls suggest that 13% of Muslims in Britain regard the 7/7 London bombers as blessed martyrs. Neighbors and friends expressed bewilderment that such nice, gentle, kind, youth-clubbing, cricket-loving young men could do such terrible things. But once you understand what they truly and sincerely believed – that it was

Allah's will that they blow up buses and subways – it becomes all too easy to understand.

It is easy for religious faith, even if it is irrational in itself, to lead a sane and decent person, by rational, logical steps, to do terrible things. There is a logical path from religious faith to evil deeds. There is no logical path from atheism to evil deeds. Of course, many evil deeds are done by individuals who happen to be atheists. But it can never be rational to say that, because of my nonbelief in religion, it would be good to be cruel, to murder, to oppress women, or to perpetrate any of the evils on the Hitchens list.

The following quotation from the Nobel prize winning physicist Steven Weinberg has become well known, but it is so devastatingly true that it is worth quoting again and again: "With or without [religion] you'd have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, it takes religion."

[From Dawkins' "On Faith" articles at http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/richard_dawkins/.]

Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Jack McKinney's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on Sept. 30.

Ed Buckner's letter was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on October 8.

Those breaking law deserve no benefits

In his op-ed column "Southern Baptists, push immigration reform," (@issue, Sept. 25), Sean McKenzie, a Methodist, challenges Southern Baptists to force government to make legal citizens of all illegal aliens. He quotes the Bible and castigates Southern Baptists for their failure to coddle illegals. The evangelistic tone of his article reads more like a Taliban edict and makes one wonder why he is a Methodist if he so admires the Southern Baptists.

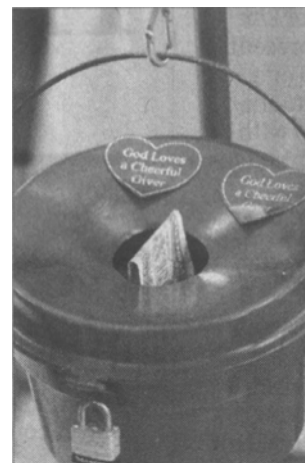
Personally, I am not opposed to foreigners or aliens, but I am opposed to anyone enjoying the benefits of our society illegally or through chicanery.

JACK MCKINNEY
Kennesaw

Charitable deductions

Agencies should open their books

I agree for the most part with Robert B. Reich. Donations that actually help the poor should earn a substantially higher tax deduction than those that merely enrich the culture. But no deductions should be allowed for contributions to organizations that do not account for how the money is spent. Gifts to churches – and to the Salvation Army that Reich praised – either should not entitle one to a deduction at all or should do so only if the organizations voluntarily do more than the law requires and submit to audits that reveal how the money is used.



ED BUCKNER
Smyrna

Religious Right Offers Misleading Advice About Church Politicking, Says Americans United

Rel. Right Promotion of Church Electioneering May Be Part of Third-Party Presidential Plan, Says AU's Lynn

Five Religious Right organizations have joined forces to advise religious leaders on the role of religion in politics, but the advice they are offering is flawed and should be ignored, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

In a joint letter Oct. 1, the Alliance Defense Fund, Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council, Concerned Women for America and the James Madison Center for Free Speech attacked Americans United for allegedly intimidating evangelical pastors who want to speak out on social issues.

"The groups' claim," said Americans United Executive Director Barry W. Lynn, "is completely bogus. It is an attempt to distract attention from the real issue: the Religious Right's campaign to build a church-based political machine."

"No one," he continued, "disputes that pastors may speak out on social, political and moral issues. What federal tax law does not allow is electioneering for candidates by churches and other tax-exempt organizations."

AU's Lynn said James Dobson, Tony Perkins and other Religious Right leaders must be worried that evangelical clergy are continuing to reject their plan to politicize churches.

Dobson and Perkins recently participated in a top-tier Religious Right meeting to discuss a possible third-party nominee for president if Republicans advance a candidate who fails the movement's litmus tests on abortion and gay rights. Evangelical church support would be critical to make that move viable politically.

"I suspect that this joint letter is laying the groundwork for a third-party presidential gambit," said Lynn, who

is an ordained minister. "I doubt if it will work. More and more pastors are catching on to the Religious Right's con. They realize that the Religious Right wants to turn their churches into cogs in some candidate's political machine, and they want no part of it.

"Pastors understand," Lynn continued, "that Sunday morning is a time for helping people connect with God, not for issuing slanted 'voter guides' that are little more than instructions on whom to vote for."

"Every AU advisory on churches and politics has made it clear that discussion of issues is broadly protected," Lynn added. "Dobson, Perkins and other Religious Right leaders know this, but continue to engage in fear-mongering by telling pastors that their right to talk about issues is in danger."

The Religious Right's letter also refers to loss of tax exemption as a "remote possibility." Yet the IRS has continually signaled that it is cracking down in this area. One church lost its tax exemption for attacking a candidate (an action that was upheld by a federal appeals court).

Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network had its tax exemption revoked retroactively for political activity and was required to make a significant payment to the Internal Revenue Service. The late Jerry Falwell's Old Time Gospel Hour suffered the same fate and had to pay \$50,000 to the IRS. Other ministries have been issued warnings or audited.

Ironically, one of the signers of the Religious Right letter, Dobson's Focus on the Family, was subjected to a year-long IRS audit over allegations of partisan politicking. Dobson, more than most, should know that the IRS

takes this matter seriously.

After spending several paragraphs on the red-herring topic of issue advocacy, the Religious Right letter goes on to admit that Americans United is right about pulpit politicking.

"'Active' electioneering cannot be done by a church," reads the Religious Right missive. "Active electioneering involves actions such as endorsements of candidates and expenditures of funds to expressly advocate the election or defeat of a particular candidate for political office."

The Religious Right's "guidelines" include a chart of do's and don'ts asserting that church distribution of voter guides is permissible. In fact, the IRS warns churches not to distribute voter guides that are biased or that examine a narrow range of issues.

One IRS document warns, "Although any document that identifies candidates and their positions close in time to an election has the potential to result in political campaign intervention, preparation or distribution of voter guides, because of their nature, present a particular risk for non-compliance."

Lynn advised pastors to reject the Religious Right's unsolicited and unhelpful advice. Pastors should view the website <http://projectfairplay.org/> or the IRS website on Election Year Activities for 501(c)(3) Organizations at <http://www.irs.gov/newsroom/article/0,,id=154712,00.html>.

Editor's Note: See the Alliance Defense Fund's letter to pastors here: <http://www.telladf.org/UserDocs/PastorsGuidelinesLetter.pdf>. See AU's letter to pastors here: <http://projectfairplay.org/letter/>.

[From an October 3 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.]

"Roughly, science is what we know and philosophy is what we don't know."

— Bertrand Russell, *The Quotable Bertrand Russell* (ed. Lee Eisler, Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1993), p. 219.

"Anything you don't understand, Mr. Rankin, you attribute to God. God for you is where you sweep away all the mysteries of the world, all the challenges to our intelligence. You simply turn your mind off and say God did it."

— Dr. Arroway in Carl Sagan's *Contact* (New York: Pocket Books, 1985), p. 166.

A New Generation Is Skeptical and Frustrated with Christianity

A new study by The Barna Group of Ventura, CA conducted on 16- to 29-year-olds shows that the new generation is more skeptical of and resistant to Christianity than were people of the same age just a decade ago.

The study of Christianity's slipping image is explored in a new book, entitled *unChristian*, by David Kinnaman, the president of The Barna Group.

The study shows that 16- to 29-year-olds exhibit a greater degree of criticism toward Christianity than did previous generations when they were at the same stage of life. In fact, in just a decade, many of the Barna measures of the Christian image have shifted substantially downward, fueled in part by a growing sense of disengagement and disillusionment among young people. For instance, a decade ago the vast majority of Americans outside the Christian faith, including young people, felt favorably toward Christianity's role in society. Currently, however, just 16% of non-Christians in their late teens and twenties said they have a "good impression" of Christianity.

While Christianity has typically generated an uneven reputation, the research shows that many of the most common critiques are becoming more concentrated. The study explored twenty specific images related to Christianity, including ten favorable and ten unfavorable perceptions. Among young non-Christians, nine out of the top 12 perceptions were negative. Common negative perceptions include that present-day Christianity is judgmental (87%), hypocritical (85%), old-fashioned (78%), and too involved in politics (75%) - repre-

senting large proportions of young outsiders who attach these negative labels to Christians. The most common favorable perceptions were that Christianity teaches the same basic ideas as other religions (82%), has good values and principles (76%), is friendly (71%), and is a faith they respect (55%).

Even among young Christians, many of the negative images generated significant traction. Half of young churchgoers said they perceive Christianity to be judgmental, hypocritical, and too political. One-third said it was old-fashioned and out of touch with reality.

CHRISTIANITY AS ANTI-GAY

Interestingly, the study discovered a new image that has steadily grown in prominence over the last decade. Today, the most common perception is that present-day Christianity is "anti-homosexual." Overall, 91% of young non-Christians and 80% of young churchgoers say this phrase describes Christianity. As the research probed this perception, non-Christians and Christians explained that beyond their recognition that Christians oppose homosexuality, they believe that Christians show excessive contempt and unloving attitudes towards gays and lesbians. One of the most frequent criticisms of young Christians was that they believe the church has made homosexuality a "bigger sin" than anything else. Moreover, they claim that the church has not helped them apply the biblical teaching on homosexuality to their friendships with gays and lesbians.

CHANGING ALLEGIANCES

One reason that Christianity's im-

age is changing is due to the shifting faith allegiances of Americans. Simply put, each new generation has a larger share of people who are not Christians (that is, atheists, agnostics, people associated with another faith, or those who have essentially no faith orientation). The new book refers to this group as "outsiders" because they are describing what Christianity looks like from an outsider's perspective. Among adults over the age of 40, only about 25% qualify as outsiders, while among the 16 to 29 segment, 40% are outsiders. This represents a significant migration away from the dominant role that Christianity has had in America.

NOT A PASSING FAD

The book emphasizes that this is not a passing fad wherein young people will become "more Christian" as they grow up. While Christianity remains the typical experience and most common faith in America, a fundamental recalibration is occurring within the spiritual allegiance of America's upcoming generations.

"Older generations more easily dismiss the criticism of those who are outsiders," Kinnaman said. "But we discovered that young leaders and young Christians are more aware of and concerned about the views of outsiders, because they are more likely to interact closely with such people. Their life is more deeply affected by the negative image of Christianity. For them, what Christianity looks like from an outsider's perspective has greater relevance, because outsiders are more likely to be schoolmates, colleagues, and friends."

[From www.barna.org.]

"Religion is based, I think, primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown, and partly, as I have said, the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing -- fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. Fear is the parent of cruelty, and therefore it is no wonder if cruelty and religion have gone hand-in-hand. It is because fear is at the basis of those two things. In this world we can now begin a little to understand things, and a little to master them by the help of science, which has forced its way step by step against the Christian religion, against the Churches, and against the opposition of all the old precepts. Science can help us to get over this craven fear in which mankind has lived for so many generations. Science can teach us, and I think our own hearts can teach us, no longer to look round for imaginary supports, no longer to invent allies in the sky, but rather to look to our own efforts here below to make this world a fit place to live in, instead of the sort of place that the Churches in all these centuries have made it." — Bertrand Russell, from *Why I Am Not a Christian*

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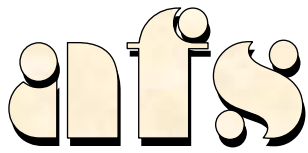
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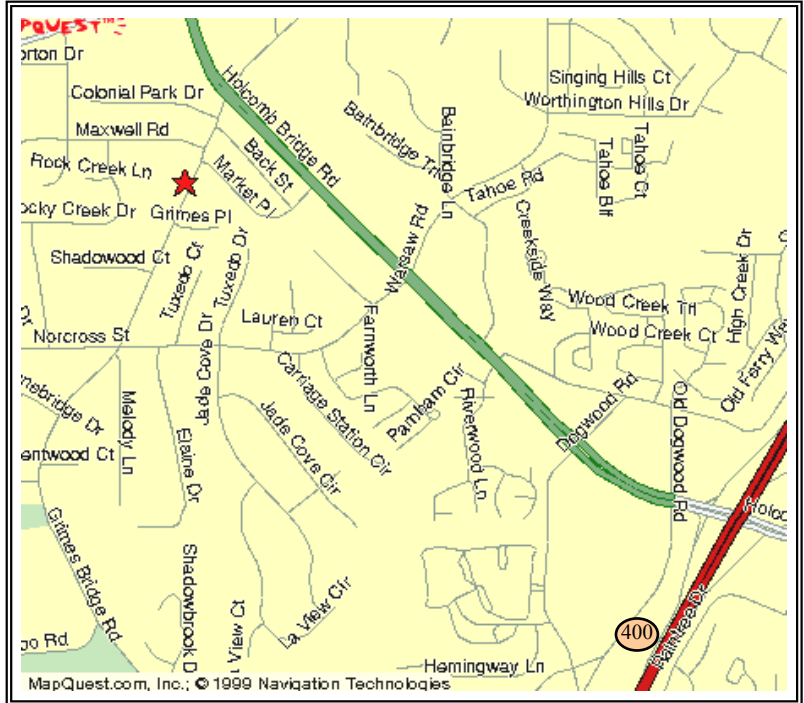
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“Plans for the Future”
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