

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 13 Number 11 • November 2007

The November AFS Meeting

The November 11 AFS meeting will include a talk by **Camille Ann Brewer** on "Taking a Look at Contemporary Art Produced by Freethinkers." Camille will show us the work of several freethinking contemporary artists who use both religious and non-religious iconography in their work.

Camille is the principal of CAB Fine Art Services, a consulting and appraisal firm. She has worked at the Detroit Institute of Arts as the Assistant Art Curator for the Department of African, Oceanic, and Indigenous Cultures. She has also served as the Public Arts Commissioner of the Arts and Culture for the City of Richmond, California.

The 1:00 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 November AFS Social

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

AFS Meetings and Activities

Nov 11: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 11:00 AM.
Nov 11: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
Nov 15: AFS Reading Group at Borders Books, 7:30 PM.
Nov 16: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

AFS Elections

AFS officers and board members for next year were nominated at the October meeting. (Elections will be by mailed ballot this month.) The nominees are:

President: Steve Yothment

Vice President, Int. Communication: Judy Thompson

Vice President, Ext. Communication: Walter Bell

Treasurer: Ed Buckner

Secretary: Brenda Shepherd

Board Members: Diane Buckner, Bruce Herr, Tony King, Kevin Muldoon, Lew Southern

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; three more board members will be voted in.

The AFS Reading Group

The **AFS Reading Group** meets 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 next meeting will be on Thursday, November 15, at 7:30 PM at Borders Books & Music (4745 Ashford-Dunwoody Rd, Atlanta GA 770-396-0004).

The group is currently reading *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, by Christopher Hitchens. They plan to discuss the book at the November meeting.

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

Other Meetings of Interest

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AF Center on Sunday, November 18, at 1:00 PM. Jeff Nall, a community activist and freelance writer, is scheduled to speak. (See his website at www.jeffnall.com. Jeff's article "Overcoming Antagonistic Atheism to Recast the Image of Humanism" was in the July/August 2006 issue of *The Humanist*. See it here: <http://friendlyatheist.com/2006/08/09/the-humanist/>)

The **Secular Organizations for Sobriety** meets at the Atlanta Freethought Center every Tuesday evening at 8:00 PM. SOS is the secular substitute for Alcoholics Anonymous.

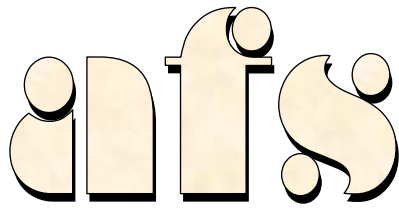
The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 1:00 PM at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

Some AFS members have suggested seeing the movie "Golden Compass" and going for drinks after the movie for discussion, some time in December. If you are interested, please tell an AFS officer or board member.

There will be a "**meetup**" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, November 11, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA.

The **Metro-Atlanta Brights & Freethinkers Meetup** is scheduled for Sunday, November 18 at 2:00 PM at the On The Rocks Tavern, 7285 Roswell Road, in Atlanta.

Yet another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for November 25 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.

Nov 11: Camille Ann Brewer will speak on "Taking a Look at Contemporary Art Produced by Freethinkers."

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

Jan 13: An Iranian speaker will speak on "Growing Up in a Theocracy."

Feb 10: AFS member Bruce Herr will speak.

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 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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The Atlanta Freethought News

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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

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Visit our World Wide Web site at

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AFS Webmaster: Walter Bell

Call and leave messages on the

AFS Info Line: 404-A THEIST

Fred Phelps and Westboro Baptist Church Found Guilty in Major Lawsuit

The virulently homophobic Westboro Baptist Church pickets the funerals of U.S. soldiers who have died in Iraq and Afghanistan as a way of venting rage at a government that they say is too tolerant of homosexuality. The group has used the same tactic against the gay community at hundreds of events nationwide.

On October 31, 2007, a federal jury in Baltimore, Maryland, found the Topeka, Kansas-based Westboro Baptist Church (WBC) guilty of violating a right to privacy and inflicting intentional emotional distress against the family of Matthew Snyder, a Marine who was killed in Iraq in 2006. Since the summer of 2005, WBC, led by Fred Phelps, has been picketing funerals of soldiers killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, with placards reading "Thank God for Dead Soldiers" and "Thank God for IEDs [improvised explosive devices]," while shouting epithets at grieving parents. Phelps believes that the soldiers represent a nation tolerant of homosexuality, and their deaths are God's direct punishment for their sins.

The jury ordered WBC to pay nearly \$11 million in damages, a sum members claim is many times more than the WBC's net assets. Fred Phelps promised to appeal the verdict. This is the first time the church has been held liable for their military funeral protests; the father of Matthew Snyder was the first individual to attempt such a lawsuit against the group.

To date, the WBC's protests have taken place in at least 22 states, attracting a great deal of publicity and inspiring a wave of grassroots anger. As a result, 38 states have introduced bills to limit protests near funerals, and at least 29 of those states have passed such measures. The constitutionality of these laws has been challenged in four states with mixed results. In addition, President Bush signed the "Respect for America's Fallen Heroes Act" on May 29, 2006, which limits protests near certain military cemeteries. Phelps has vowed to challenge the legislation, alleging that the new restrictions unconstitutionally restrict freedom of speech.

Before gaining notoriety and provoking public anger for disrespecting slain soldiers and their families, the group was known for picketing the funerals of gay people or those they perceived to be gay. In 1998, the WBC congregants set off an angry reaction when they showed up at the funeral of gay murder victim Matthew Shepard, and held up signs reading "No Fags in Heaven" and "God Hates Fags." According to the WBC website, they have staged "over 22,000" protests across the nation and around the world since 1991.

Incorporated in 1967 as a not-for-profit organization, the Westboro Baptist Church considers itself an "Old School (or, Primitive)" Baptist Church. The church is led by the septuagenarian Reverend Fred Waldron Phelps Sr., and many WBC congregants are related to Phelps by blood. His wife, several of his children and dozens of his grandchildren frequent the church.

While WBC has picketed the gay community at hundreds of events nationwide, most of the individuals protested by the Church are not homosexual. In fact, WBC most often targets people it mistakenly claims are gay or those it believes to be encouraging homosexuality. Many WBC fliers emphasize the race or religion of these individuals, suggesting that the Church's hate spreads beyond its abhorrence of homosexuality. WBC congregants believe that "God's hatred is one of His holy attributes." What appears to be anti-gay rhetoric is often a vehicle for WBC's anti-Semitism, hatred of other Christians, and even racism, though in the 1980s Fred Phelps received awards from the Greater Kansas City Chapter of Blacks in Government and the Bonner Springs branch of the NAACP for his work on behalf of Black clients.

Trained as a lawyer, Fred Phelps was disbarred in 1979 by the Kansas Supreme Court, which asserted that he had "little regard for the ethics of his profession." The formal complaint against Phelps charged that he misrepresented the truth in a motion for a new trial in a case he had brought, and that he held the defendant in the case up to "unnecessary public ridicule for which there is no basis in fact." Following his disbarment from Kansas State courts, Phelps continued to practice law in Federal courts. In 1985, nine Federal court judges filed a disciplinary complaint charging him and six of his family members, all attorneys, with making false accusations against them. The Phelpses fought the complaint but lost. In 1989, Fred Phelps agreed to surrender his license to practice law in Federal court in exchange for the Federal judges allowing the other members of his family to continue practicing in Federal court.

In 1991, WBC staged its first public demonstration, targeting a park in Topeka allegedly frequented by gays. Thousands of protests have followed, and WBC shows no sign of slowing down. In addition to speeches on the picket lines, the Church spreads its hateful message via faxed fliers and "News Releases." These faxed documents also appear at WBC's notorious website, Godhatesfags.com, along with photos of Church pickets and a schedule of upcoming demonstrations. A second website, Godhatesamerica.com, contends that the United States is "doomed" because it supports gays. According to Phelps, "God invented the Internet for us to preach on."

[From a November 2 special report by the Anti-Defamation League. For more on the Westboro Baptist Church, see http://www.adl.org/special_reports/.]

"Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect."

(James Madison, in a letter to William Bradford, Jr., April 1, 1774, *Letters and Other Writings of James Madison, Fourth President of the United States*, Vol. I, 1769-1798, Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1865, p. 14.)

Judgement Day: Intelligent Design On Trial

The Special 2-Hour Documentary Airs Nationwide on PBS on November 13 at 8:00 PM

Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial is a special two-hour documentary about the Kitzmiller v. Dover court case, in which teaching “intelligent design” in the public schools was ruled to be unconstitutional. The program will air nationwide on PBS at 8:00 PM on November 13, 2007.

“Judgment Day captures on film a landmark court case with a powerful scientific message at its core,” explains Paula Apsell, NOVA’s Senior Executive Producer. “Evolution is one of the most essential yet, for many people, least understood of all scientific theories, the foundation of biological science. We felt it was important for NOVA to do this program to heighten

the public understanding of what constitutes science and what does not, and therefore, what is acceptable for inclusion in the science curriculum in our public schools.”

In addition to the documentary itself, there is a generous website, featuring interviews with Kenneth R. Miller on evolution, Phillip Johnson on “intelligent design,” and Paula Apsell on NOVA’s decision to produce the documentary; audio clips of Judge John E. Jones III reading passages from his decision in the case and of various experts (including NCSE’s Eugenie C. Scott) discussing the nature of science; resources about the evidence for evolution and about the background to the Kitzmiller case;

and even a preview of the documentary. Teachers will be especially enthusiastic about the briefing packet for educators; further resources for educators, including a teacher’s guide, a two-session on-line course, and a number of lesson plans, are to be released shortly.

For information about the program, see <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/id/>.

For a preview of the program, see http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/preview/i_3416.html.

For the educators briefing packet, see <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/id/media/nova-id-briefing.pdf>.

[From the Nov. 4 newsletter of the National Center for Science Education at <http://www.ncseweb.org>.]

The “Montgomery Mystery” is Finally Revealed

A tragedy shrouded in a mystery occurred back on June 24 in Montgomery, Alabama. The congregation of the Thorington Road Baptist Church waited for their senior pastor, the Rev. Gary M. Aldridge, to arrive and lead the 10:00 Sunday morning service. But the pastor never showed up that morning.

Church members checked the pastor’s house. His wife was out of town at the time. They found the 51-year old pastor at his home. He was dead.

Church officials immediately issued a press release asking the community to “please refrain from speculation” about what led to Rev. Aldridge’s demise, adding that “We will begin the healing process under the strong arm of our Savior, Jesus Christ.”

A preliminary report from the Alabama Department of Forensic Sciences said Aldridge died of accidental asphyxiation – that is, suffocation. Initial reports by Dr. Stephen Boudreaux, a medical examiner, said there were no injuries to Aldridge’s body.

In a June 26 interview, Boudreaux ruled out suicide as a cause of death.

Montgomery County District Attorney Ellen Brooks sealed the case when the official autopsy report conducted by Boudreaux was sent to Forensic Sciences on July 13. Boudreaux received a letter from the district attorney’s office instructing him not to release any of his findings.

In a July 11 letter to the Department of Forensic Sciences, the *Montgomery Advertiser* requested a copy of “any and all information” pertaining to Aldridge’s death. The next day, the *Advertiser* received a written response from Forensic Sciences saying “...report(s) cannot be released to the public at this time because the District Attorney has determined that the case is still under investigation. Your request will be kept on file in the event that it may be released at a future date.”

Following an Aug. 17 news conference at Montgomery City Hall, Brooks referred a reporter’s questions about the case to Montgomery Police Chief

Arthur Baylor. Montgomery police officials repeatedly said there was no more information to report in the case.

So, exactly how did the Rev. Aldridge die? This mystery was left unexplained for over 3 months, until a copy of the autopsy report was finally given to the *Montgomery Advertiser* on October 12. A photocopy of the report can be seen at www.thesmokinggun.com.

The autopsy report revealed that the conservative minister had a sexual fetish for rubber, extreme bondage and autoerotic asphyxiation. (The details in the report are too disturbing to include here. The *Montgomery Advertiser* also would not give many details from the report.) Rev. Aldridge died because he could not loosen a plastic cord that was around his neck.

Aldridge served as the church’s pastor for 16 years. He was a graduate of Liberty University and was a one-time employee of Jerry Falwell.

[From articles in the *Montgomery Advertiser* and www.thesmokinggun.com.]

See Sam Harris’s talk at the AAI Convention here: <http://richarddawkins.net/article,1805,Sam-Harris-at-AAI-07,RichardDawkinsnet>
Greta Christina on Atheists and Anger: http://gretachristina.typepad.com/greta_christinas_weblog/2007/10/atheists-and-an.html
An animated map showing the history of religion: <http://mapsofwar.com/images/Religion.swf>

Earmark Promoting Creationism In Louisiana To Be Removed From Federal Appropriations Bill

Americans United Hails Decision To Remove the Controversial Provision

A controversial provision that would have steered \$100,000 in federal funds to a creationist group in Louisiana will be removed from a federal appropriations bill.

U.S. Sen. David Vitter (R-La.) inserted the earmark into the Appropriations Committee's report on a bill allocating money for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services and Education. Vitter wanted to designate the funds to a Religious Right group called the Louisiana Family Forum (LFF) "to develop a plan to promote better science education."

Critics decried the measure, saying the move was a backdoor effort to bring creationism into Louisiana's schools. Vitter finally acquiesced.

"This is great news for the children of Louisiana," said Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. "The federal courts have repeatedly held that teaching creationism in pub-

lic schools is unconstitutional."

Americans United worked extensively to educate senators about the problems with the earmark. Lynn said the move by Vitter avoids a legal battle.

More than 30 educational, scientific and religious groups joined forces to oppose the earmark. On Oct. 10, they sent a joint letter to every member of the Senate, asking that the provision be removed.

On October 17, Vitter requested that the earmark be removed. On the floor of the Senate, the Louisiana Republican insisted that the money was not designed to promote creationism and blamed the controversy on groups promoting "hysterics."

"The project, which would develop a plan to promote better science-based education in Ouachita Parish by Louisiana Family Forum, has raised concerns among some that its intention was to mandate and push creationism

within the public schools," Vitter said. "That is clearly not and never was the intent of the project, nor would it have been its effect. However, to avoid more hysterics, I would like to move the \$100,000 recommended for this project by the subcommittee when the bill goes to conference committee to another Louisiana priority project funded in this bill."

Americans United and its allies pointed out, however, that the LFF has a long history of promoting creationism and that it is clearly a sectarian group.

"If Sen. Vitter's aim was to improve science education in Louisiana, I have to wonder why he did not direct these funds to a scientific group or a museum," said Lynn. "Boosting science education is an odd task for a religious group."

[From an October 18 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.]

Religious Right Seeks To Muscle GOP During "Values Voter Summit"

Americans United says conference was designed to win submission from Republican candidates

A collection of major Religious Right groups was seeking to flex some muscle on the Oct. 20 weekend, screening Republican presidential hopefuls and demanding they show fealty to the fundamentalist political agenda, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The so-called "Values Voter Summit" in Washington, D.C., was sponsored by the Family Research Council Action, Focus on the Family Action, the Alliance Defense Fund, American Family Association Action and Gary Bauer's American Values group. Every major GOP presidential hopeful was slated to appear.

"This may be the biggest collection of theocrats in one room since the Salem Witch Trials," said the Rev. Barry

W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Their goal is simple: to consolidate their power within the GOP and elect a president who is in their pocket. They want to ramp up their efforts to run everyone else's lives according to a narrow and rather hateful definition of Christianity. They are holding out the threat of a third party as their trump card to keep the Republicans in lockstep."

Lynn said recent media reports have indicated that the Religious Right is divided on which candidate to back, although several leaders have vowed to oppose Rudy Giuliani.

Such divisions, Lynn said, should not be mistaken for weakness. Americans United noted in a recent report that the nation's top Religious Right

groups are bringing in more money than ever. Dobson's Focus on the Family, for example, took in \$142.2 million in 2006, a \$4.4 million increase over the previous year, while the Family Research Council collected \$10.3 million in 2006, an increase of over \$900,000 over the previous year.

"Focus on the Family, the Family Research Council and their ideological allies are determined to use the power of the government to force their theology on all Americans," Lynn said. "They are looking for the candidate who will best help them achieve that goal. That's what this weekend is about."

[From an October 19 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.]

Read some great articles about Science and Religion here: <http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/science/>

Justice Department Lets Religious Group Discriminate With Public Funds

By Joseph L. Conn, from the October 22 Americans United weblog at <http://blog.au.org/>

It's an outrage that any American can be denied a government-funded job because he or she can't profess the tenets of this or any other religion.

In a bold move that clearly circumvents the will of Congress, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) is allowing religious groups to discriminate in hiring on religious grounds in publicly funded programs.

According to an op-ed in *The Hill* newspaper, DOJ has agreed to let World Vision, an evangelical relief agency, hire and fire based on religion while spending \$1.5 million in federal anti-gang funds.

The article says the DOJ money comes through the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act and is subject to the non-discrimination provisions of the Safe Streets Act. Congress specifically mandated that all grant recipients must abide by non-discrimination provisions, including religious nondiscrimination, when hiring staff for these programs.

But what's a little civil rights provision to our nation's Department of Justice? Torturing logic, the DOJ has ruled that World Vision leaders have some sort of religious liberty right to

employ only those who meet their religious tests even if they're spending public dollars.

And World Vision's tests are quite specific. The faith-based group's Web site says employees must subscribe to The Apostles' Creed and a Statement of Faith. So in order to get a job there, you have to profess that "the Bible is the inspired, the only infallible authoritative Word of God," and that "there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit."

You also have to believe in "the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory." (There's a lot more, but you get the idea.)

Such religious tests are fine for privately funded religious groups, but it's hard to see what those beliefs have to do with working in a government-funded, presumably secular, anti-gang program. And it's an outrage that any American can be denied a govern-

ment-funded job because he or she can't profess the tenets of this or any other religion.

Non-evangelical Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Wiccans, Atheists and Americans of an array of other faith perspectives all pay taxes to support our government. They shouldn't be denied a job their tax money funds because they are of the "wrong" religious belief.

Apparently, the DOJ is increasingly helping religious groups get public funds while circumventing the clear civil rights mandates of Congress. At a recent conference for Hispanic youth sponsored by the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, DOJ staffer Steve McFarland told religious social service providers that they can simply sign a "certificate" asserting that the publicly funded services that they are performing are a result of a religious exercise in order to trump federal anti-discrimination provisions.

This situation is truly unacceptable. Isn't it time for members of Congress to step in and demand that the DOJ enforce our nation's civil rights laws?

Letters to the Editor from AFS Members

Jack McKinney's letter (below) was in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* on October 13. His other letter (at right) was in the *Marietta Daily Journal* on October 25.

The un-Intelligent Designer is more like it

In her Oct. 6 column, Lorraine Murray displayed a "boarding house reach" for her conclusions ("Our world imperfect, but God is flawless," Faith and Values). She wrote, "Our longing for perfection is a clue to heaven." Can anyone say that makes sense? By her reasoning, my longing for a slice of pizza could be interpreted likewise. Nonsense!

She also wrote, "Because, in truth, we were made for another world." Truth is based on facts, right? So what facts does Murray have to prove her point? I suggest none.

Her column was headlined "God is flawless." Excuse me, but I would say it was a flaw when the so-called Intelligent Designer, as reported in the Bible, neglected to build a woman until later, thereby completing the procreation process.

Murray is a serial "poetic license" abuser.

JACK MCKINNEY
Kennesaw

Local government used to kneel to local preachers

The article ("200 years and still serving," *Kennesaw Neighbor Newspaper*, Thursday, Oct. 18, 2007) contains some interesting comments by the long time Cobb County preachers worth addressing.

For instance, Nelson Price is quoted as saying a poll reveals 96 percent of teens don't go to church today. Dare I suggest that it is because their thinking has "evolved"?

They also fondly recall the times when they used religion to prevent people from purchasing alcohol and "all the stores closed on Sundays and Marietta High School wouldn't schedule any after school activities on Wednesday nights." Yes-sir, those were the "good old days" -- for them. Government knelt at their feet and did their bidding.

There are still too many issues where government and religion intermingle. Exempting the religion industry from paying their fair share of taxes is a major injustice. Maybe Mr. Price's "teens" will someday correct that wrong.

Jack McKinney, Kennesaw, GA
Member, Board of Directors, Atlanta Freethought Society

Coalition Letter to Senate regarding “Creation Science” Earmark

In a noteworthy cooperative effort, 34 organizations wrote the following letter to the U.S. Senate on Oct. 10 urging removal of the “Creation Science” Earmark from an Appropriations Report. It was removed on Oct. 17.

Dear Senator:

We, the undersigned religious, civil rights, education, science, and advocacy organizations write to urge you to remove an earmark from the Fiscal Year 2008 Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and Related Agencies Appropriation Bill’s Committee Report. The Fund for Improvement of Education, under Title III, contains an earmark for uses that, if funded, would be blatantly unconstitutional. The earmark would fund curriculum that promotes teaching creationism in the science classroom, even though uniformly prohibited by federal courts.

The requested funding would go to the Louisiana Family Forum (LFF) “to develop a plan to promote better science education.” According to *The New Orleans Times-Picayune*, the earmark “will pay for a report suggesting ‘improvements’ in science education in Louisiana, the development and distribution of educational materials and an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Ouachita Parish [Louisiana] School Board’s 2006 [science curriculum] policy.”^[1]

The Louisiana Family Forum’s mission is to “persuasively present biblical principles in centers of influence,” including schools.^[2] One way the LFF seeks to accomplish its mission is by advocating for teaching creationism in the science classroom. For instance, the LFF played a leading role last year in Ouachita Parish, Louisiana School Board’s adoption of a “science curriculum policy”^[3] that “opened the door to biblically inspired teachings in science class.”^[4] The policy uses a creationist ploy — “teaching the controversy” — that allows teachers to point out the alleged “weaknesses” of evolutionary theory. This is despite the fact that courts have consistently held this tactic to be unconstitutional and that “the scientific consensus around evolution is overwhelming.”^[5] Constitutional and scientific issues aside, underwriting LFF’s study of

this questionable “science curriculum policy” for which it has already been a vigorous advocate is a dubious use of federal funding, to say the least.

Another LFF strategy in its quest to bring creationism to science class is promoting creationist “addenda” (deceptively called “evolution addenda”) that public-school teachers can use to supplement state-approved science textbooks. One such addendum, published by the LFF as a “Fact Sheet,” promotes discredited arguments from both the young-earth and intelligent-design creationist movements.^[6] Among other constitutional problems, the addendum substitutes biblical explanations for scientific ones by attributing the “billions of fossils” on Earth to “violent floods in the past” and by questioning whether chemical origins of life happened “accidentally” or “by purely natural processes.” Moreover, alluding to supernatural explanations undermines modern scientific methodology, in which scientists seek natural rather than supernatural explanations.^[7]

This addendum was written by Dr. Charles H. Voss, a retired electrical engineering professor and close ally of the LFF. Voss is also vice president of the young-earth creationist Origins Resource Association (ORA), which is devoted to bringing creationism into science classes.^[8] Voss has written similar, equally problematic, addenda for Louisiana’s state-approved biology textbooks. They are available at his website, TextAddOns.com, to which the LFF posts a link. He authored an ORA “pamphlet outlining Scriptural and scientific arguments showing that God did NOT use evolution as His method of creating.”^[9] His addenda are clearly among the “improvements” in science education and “educational materials” for which the LFF advocates — and for which the U.S. Constitution forbids taxpayer funds to be spent. There is no doubt that the LFF’s intent is to bring creationism into science classrooms with

federal taxpayer dollars.

The federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court, have consistently and repeatedly held that creationism in all its variations (“creation science,” “young-earth creationism,” “intelligent design,” and other anti-evolution doctrines) cannot be taught in the public schools. In *Epperson v. Arkansas*,^[10] the Supreme Court struck down a state statute prohibiting the teaching of evolution in public schools, explaining that “the First Amendment does not permit the State to require that teaching and learning must be tailored to the principles or prohibitions of any [religion].”^[11] Subsequently, in *Edwards v. Aguillard*,^[12] the Supreme Court invalidated a Louisiana statute requiring the “balanced treatment” of evolution and “creation science” in the public schools. The Court declared the law unconstitutional because its “preeminent purpose...was clearly to advance the religious viewpoint that a supernatural being created humankind.”^[13]

Other courts have similarly invalidated public schools’ attempts to teach thinly disguised religious beliefs regarding the origins of life.^[14] Most recently, the court in *Kitzmiller v. Dover*, joined by local, national, and international media, recognized that the school board in Dover disserved the students, parents, and teachers in the community by dragging them into a “legal maelstrom, with its utter waste of monetary and personal resources.”^[15]

Federal funding of the LFF’s efforts to introduce creationism in public-school science classrooms will similarly harm the religious liberty of students and their families. As the Supreme Court has explained, the “preservation and transmission of religious beliefs and worship is a responsibility and a choice committed to the private sphere,” for “religious beliefs and religious expression are too precious to be either proscribed or prescribed by the State.”^[16] Parents — not schools

The Coalition Letter (*continued*)

– have the right to direct the religious upbringing of their children. Our nation is becoming more and more religiously diverse and Louisiana’s students and their families reflect this diversity. One specific religion’s view of the origins of life should not be taught to the exclusion of others. Doing so sends the message to those who disagree “that they are outsiders, not full members of the [school] community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the [school] community.” [17]

Finally, federal funding of the LFF will weaken rather than strengthen science education. “Creationism, intelligent design, and other claims of supernatural intervention in the origin of life or of species are not science because they are not testable by the methods of science.” [18] Including these religious ideas in science classes “compromises the objectives of public education” [19] and negatively affects students. Teaching creationism “threaten[s] . . . students’ understanding of the biological, physical, and geological sciences” and “deprive[s] students of the education they need to be informed and productive citizens in an increasingly technological, global community.” [20] The scientific literacy of students is at risk, which in turn puts our nation’s competitiveness and ability to continue to achieve major advances in technology and public health at risk.

Not only would granting federal funding for the LFF’s program be unconstitutional, it also would be bad policy that would infringe upon students’ religious freedom and undermine their education in the important discipline of science.

We urge you to remove this harmful and unconstitutional earmark.

Sincerely,
American Association of School Administrators
American Association of University Women

American Civil Liberties Union
American Humanist Association
American Institute of Biological Sciences
American Jewish Committee
American Jewish Congress
Americans for Religious Liberty
Americans United for Separation of Church and State
Anti-Defamation League
Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty
Biological Sciences Curriculum Study
Center for Inquiry
Colorado Evolution Response Team
Disciples Justice Action Network
Equal Partners in Faith
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Kansas Citizens for Science
National Center for Science Education
National Council of Jewish Women
National Education Association
National Science Teachers Association
Oklahomans for Excellence in Science Education
Organization of Biological Field Stations
Protestant Justice Action
Secular Coalition for America
Sikh Council on Religion and Education
Society for the Study of Evolution
Texas Faith Network
Texas Freedom Network
The Interfaith Alliance
Union for Reform Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
Women of Reform Judaism

[1] Bill Walsh, *Vitter Earmarked Federal Money for Creationist Group*, New Orleans Times-Picayune, Sept. 23, 2007, at 1.

[2] www.lafamilyforum.org.

[3] http://www.opsb.net/downloads/forms/Ouachita_Parish_Science_Curriculum_Policy.pdf.

[4] Walsh, *supra*.

[5] *Science and Creationism: A View from the National Academy of Sciences* (2d ed. 1999), <http://www.nap.edu/html/creationism/appendix.html>.

[6] www.lafamilyforum.org/site100-01/1001014/docs/origin~1.pdf.

[7] *Science and Creationism*, www.nap.edu/html/creationism/evidence.html.

[8] <http://originsresource.org/>.

[9] <http://originsresource.org/pubs/didgod.pdf>.

[10] 393 U.S. 97 (1968).

[11] *Id.* at 106.

[12] 482 U.S. 578 (1987).

[13] *Id.* at 591.

[14] See *Freiler v. Tangipahoa Parish Bd. of Educ.*, 185 F.3d 337, 348 (5th Cir. 1999) (striking down an oral disclaimer casting doubt on evolution and referring to “biblical” alternatives), *cert. denied*, 530 U.S. 1251 (2000); *Peloza v. Capistrano Unified Sch. Dist.*, 37 F.3d 517, 522 (9th Cir. 1994) (holding that a science teacher was properly required by his school district to teach evolution and refrain from discussing his religious views); *Daniel v. Waters*, 515 F.2d 485, 491 (6th Cir. 1975) (striking down statute requiring schools teaching evolution to devote equal time to other theories, including Biblical account of creation); *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area Sch. Dist.*, 400 F. Supp. 2d 707 (M.D. Pa. 2005) (holding that intelligent design, an “un-testable alternative hypothesis grounded in religion” cannot be taught alongside evolution in the science classroom, nor can evolutionary theory, “well-established scientific propositions,” be misrepresented); *Selman v. Cobb County Sch. Dist.*, 390 F. Supp. 2d 1286, 1312 (N.D. Ga. 2005) (striking down a textbook disclaimer sticker telling students that evolution is “just a theory”); *McLean v. Ark. Bd. of Educ.*, 529 F. Supp. 1255, 1258-64 (E.D. Ark. 1982).

[15] *Kitzmiller*, 400 F. Supp. 2d at 765.

[16] *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992).

[17] *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309-310 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (O’Connor, J. concurring)).

[18] *Science and Creationism*, <http://books.nap.edu/html/creationism/conclusion.html>.

[19] *Id.*

[20] Am. Assoc. for Advancement of Sci., *Statement on the Teaching of Evolution* (Feb. 16, 2006), http://archives.aaas.org/docs/resolutions.php?doc_id=443.

“...If devotion to truth is the hallmark of morality, then there is no greater, nobler, more heroic form of devotion than the act of a man who assumes the responsibility of thinking...” – Ayn Rand, from *Atlas Shrugged*

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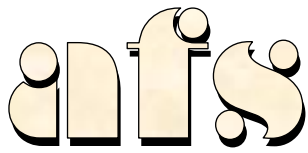
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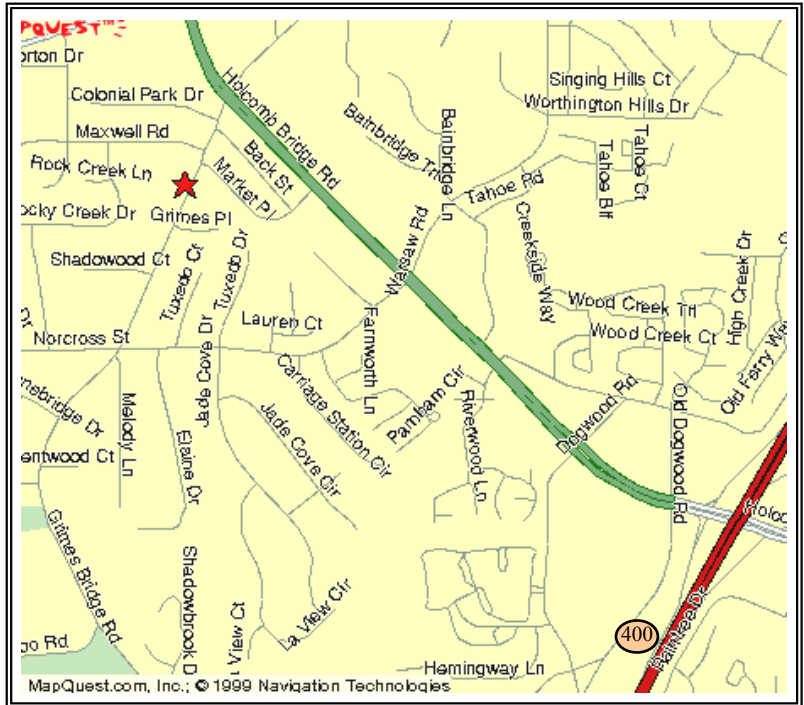
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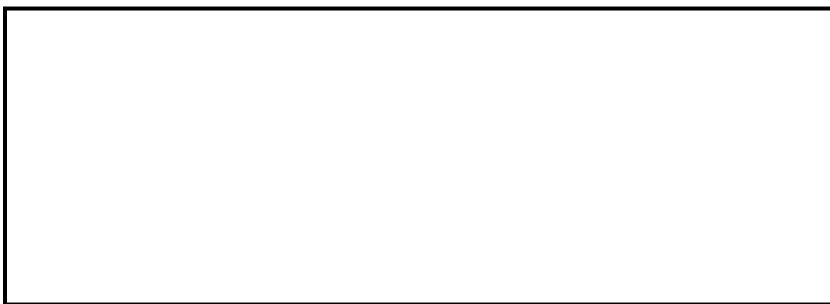
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Sunday, November 11
1:00 at the AF Center
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This Month's Speaker:
Camille Ann Brewer



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