

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 14 Number 1 • January 2008

The January AFS Meeting

The January 13 AFS meeting will feature a talk by Dr. Hos Lotfi, a neurologist originally from Iran. His talk is titled "Living Under Theocracy."

The meeting will be at 1:00 at the **Atlanta Freethought Center**, 1170 Grimes Bridge Road, Roswell, GA. (Feel free to arrive early for discussion and snacks.) To get there from Atlanta, take I-400 north past I-285 by 8 miles to Exit 7B, which is GA-140. Take GA-140 (Holcomb Bridge Road) west about 1 mile and turn left at Grimes Bridge Road. Go 0.2 miles to 1170 Grimes Bridge Road.

Election Results

Congratulations to the following AFS officers and board members elected to serve in 2008:

Steve Yothment, President	
Judy Thompson, VP, Int.	Diane Buckner, Board
Walter Bell, VP, Ext.	Tony King, Board
Ed Buckner, Treasurer	Lew Southern, Board
Brenda Shepherd, Secretary	

Bill Burton, Freya Harris and Jack McKinney will continue their 2-year terms into next year.

Also on the ballot were two Bylaws changes. The first one, for the addition of a Secretary officer position, passed unanimously. The second change, requiring board meetings at least once per quarter, passed with 92% of the vote.

The AFS Reading Group

The **AFS Reading Group** meets monthly to discuss interesting books covering a variety of topics. In December, the group discussed *Atheist Manifesto*, by Michael Onfray.

At the next meeting, each attendee will present a book to the group that they have read or are reading, and point out a particular ethical or moral challenge in the book. (This meeting will involve ethics and morals in literature.)

The next meeting will be on Thursday, January 24, at 7:30 PM at Borders Books & Music (4745 Ashford-Dunwoody Rd, Atlanta GA 770-396-0004).

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

The January AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be at Panahar Restaurant, 3375 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, on Friday, January 18, at 7:00 PM.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Jan 13: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 11:00 AM.
Jan 13: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
Jan 18: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
Jan 24: AFS Reading Group at Borders Books, 7:30 PM.

Other Meetings of Interest

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>.

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AF Center on Sunday, January 20, at 12:30 PM. This meeting will include voting for officers for the new year.

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.

A new **Freethought Discussion Group** meets in Peachtree City, GA on Wednesdays at 7:30 PM. Location of the meeting varies, so email Shelby, the discussion leader, at freediscussion@hotmail.com for location of the next meeting.

There will be a "**meetup**" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, January 13, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA.

Yet another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for January 27 at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Road, in Atlanta.

From a review of the book *Everything You Know About God is Wrong*, edited by Rush Kick:

"Rush Kick's collection isn't a complete waste of time though. There actually are some lucid, well thought out and well-executed arguments included. The best, and most heartening considering our current political climate, is *The US is a Free Country, Not a Christian Nation*, written by Michael E. and Edward M. Buckner, a father-son team. The essay uses clear historical evidence to prove that the U.S. was intended to be a secular nation since its inception."

See the whole review at:

<http://media.www.dailyvanguard.com/media/storage/paper941/news/2008/01/08/ArtsAndCulture/The-NonBelievers.Bible-3147328.shtml>



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.

Jan 13: Dr. Hos Lotfi will speak on "Living Under Theocracy."

Feb 10: Bruce Herr will speak on "Secular Humanism; Past, Present and Future."

Mar 9: TBD

Apr 13: Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church/State 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 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 Bell – 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

Tony King – 706-886-9224

Jack McKinney – 770-424-5004

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

The Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 14, Number 1, January 2008

Copyright © 2008 by the

Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc.

Signed articles are all copyright ©

2008 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 Bell

Call and leave messages on the

AFS Info Line: 404-A THEIST

House Resolution 888

From a Jan 5 Action Alert by the
Secular Coalition for America

Flush with last year's success in passing H. Res. 847, "Recognizing the importance of Christmas and the Christian Faith," Christian nationalists—those who would have the United States be governed as a Christian theocracy—are pushing H. Res. 888, another resolution which promotes a false and distorted "Christian nation" reinterpretation of our history.

Generally, we do not take action regarding resolutions because they are ceremonial in nature and express the non-binding opinion of one chamber. They do not have the force of law. However, this resolution is so outrageous that YES votes—even with its ceremonial form—would send a dangerous message to history and civics educators across the United States. Teaching an unbiased account of our nation's founding and its governance will be curtailed; in its place supporters of this resolution clearly call for a revised history of the United States as a Christian nation.

Additionally, the resolution rejects constitutional requirements that government not establish religion. It calls on "our Nation's public buildings and educational resources" to be permitted to spread its specific revisionist history.

Rather than go into the tortured account of history in the 75 "Whereas" paragraphs of the resolution, the Secular Coalition for America advises those who would like a more in-depth analysis of the lies and distortions being taught by Christian nationalists to read *Why the Religious Right is Wrong About Separation of Church and State* by Secular Coalition for America advisory board member Rob Boston. [Editor's Note: Rob Boston will be our speaker at the April AFS meeting!] While there are certainly more recent books on the subject, Boston's book is specifically geared towards consideration of the type of revisionist history perpetuated by revisionist "historians" such as David Barton. Much of H. Res. 888's "Whereas" information comes directly from Barton's ridicu-

lous assertions.

We have seen the religious right attack science education in order to impose their theological beliefs on public school science curriculum. This is the first official attempt to encourage theological beliefs to interfere with accurate education about our nation's history.

Specifically, the resolution affirms "the rich spiritual and diverse religious history of our Nation's founding and subsequent history, including up to the current day."

A truly complete look at our nation's religious history would include religious persecution. It would include the physical violence resulting from the imposition of Protestant theology in public schools.

Such a history "including up to the current day" would include anti-Catholic, anti-atheist, and anti-Semitic activities. It would include the fact that our motto at the founding of our nation was *e pluribus unum* ("out of many, one") and the truly nefarious purpose behind changing that motto in later years. It would include the use of public school children to separate us based on who believes we are under a god and who does not.

It would include nontheistic Americans as well as other nonChristians. It would specify the differences between the deistic beliefs of many of our founders, and contemporary Christianity.

The Secular Coalition for America welcomes historical literacy; the history described in this first affirmation leaves out a tremendous part of our religious history, focusing instead on a revisionist view of an always positive, specifically Christian identity.

The second affirmation in HR 888 "recognizes that the religious foundations of faith on which America was built are critical underpinnings of our Nation's most valuable institutions and form the inseparable foundation for America's representative processes, legal systems, and societal structures."

The belief that "religious founda-

tions of faith" are necessary for civil government was rejected by the founders when they produced a Constitution free of the mention of any god or gods. In the First Amendment to the Constitution, these founders further protected Americans from government establishment of religion and government interference with their private free exercise of religion and beliefs of conscience.

When those who don't hold religious foundations of faith serve on juries, provide witness testimonies in court, or are sworn into elected offices, our U.S. Constitution protects their rights by prohibiting religious tests. Our nation has recognized that those of us without "religious foundations of faith" are capable of supporting America's representative processes, legal systems, and societal structures—based not on a god-belief, but on reason.

FROM THE AFNEWS EDITOR:

An excellent analysis of 12 of the "Whereas" statements of H. Res. 888 can be found in Chris Rodda's article "Think the 'Christmas Resolution' was Bad? Check Out H. Res. 888" at <http://www.talk2action.org/story/2008/1/4/24725/53989>. Chris skillfully shows how the resolution is filled with lies, half-truths and false history.

Chris Rodda is author of the book *Liars for Jesus: The Religious Right's Alternate Version of American History*. You can read part of this enlightening book at www.liarsforjesus.com.

A third affirmation in the resolution "rejects, in the strongest possible terms, any effort to remove, obscure, or purposely omit such history from our Nation's public buildings and educational resources."

This paragraph is clearly an attempt to encourage the courts not to enforce the U.S. Constitution. When the U.S. Supreme Court decides that public display of a religious symbol on government property is constitutional, it has determined that such a

House Resolution 888 (continued)

display is being presented from a historical viewpoint (generally amidst symbols from many other perspectives, both religious and secular). When the U.S. Supreme Court decides that public display of a religious symbol on government property is unconstitutional, they find that the way the display is presented constitutes a government endorsement of religion.

For Congress to suggest curtailment of any attempt to uphold this constitutional distinction—to give special government endorsement to “such history” (i.e., the Christian nationalist history recounted in this resolution)—insults the very purpose of the judi-

cial system, the separation of powers, and the Bill of Rights. We must never agree to allow any majority religion (or minority religion, for that matter) to be outside the limitations of the Bill of Rights.

A fourth affirmation of the resolution “expresses support for designation of a [sic] ‘American Religious History Week’ every year for the appreciation of and education on America’s history of religious faith.”

As mentioned above, the Secular Coalition for America would oppose the imposition of the revisionist history proposed in this resolution as the referenced education. A well-rounded,

fact-based, unbiased, inclusive religious history of the United States would be a welcome change from the type of misrepresentations throughout H. Res. 888.

However, even if we were to see truly inclusive “religious/historical literacy,” it would have to include the extensive contributions of nontheistic Americans and appreciate our part in the history of the United States. Limiting such a history week to only a history of faith is obviously meant to leave out the significant contributions of Freethinkers (the historical identifier often used to refer to nontheistic Americans).

Americans United Asks IRS to Investigate Liberty University

Liberty Chancellor Used School Resources To Promote Presidential Candidate, Says Church-State Group

Liberty University Chancellor Jerry Falwell Jr. violated federal tax law by using school resources to endorse Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee, Americans United for Separation of Church and State told the Internal Revenue Service on December 4.

In a complaint filed with the federal tax agency, Americans United noted that Falwell hosted the candidate at Liberty University and then sent an email message on Liberty University letterhead endorsing Huckabee.

In a “Liberty News Alert” dated Dec. 1, 2007, Falwell wrote, “Recently, Governor Mike Huckabee called to brief me on the progress of his campaign for the presidency. I invited the Governor to speak to the Liberty University students in Convocation on November 28. He graciously accepted. I was so impressed with the Governor’s sincerity and his positions on the issues that are important to conservative Christians that I personally endorsed Governor Huckabee before he left Lynchburg.”

Falwell goes on to say, “My father

strongly supported Governor Huckabee when no one thought that he had any chance to succeed in the presidential race. I believe with all my heart that, if my father had witnessed Governor Huckabee’s surge in the polls and his ascension to first place in the Iowa polls, he would have endorsed Gov. Huckabee without hesitation.”

The alert was accompanied by an article from a university-run online publication implying that Huckabee is God’s candidate.

Americans United sent a letter to IRS officials, asking them to investigate the matter. The letter notes that on Nov. 19, the IRS issued a press statement reminding charities and churches about the ban on politicking and asks the tax agency to back that up with enforcement in this case.

“Falwell surely knows that these types of political endorsements are illegal,” remarked the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. “Tax-exempt religious institutions may not be used to support or oppose candidates for public office.”

Falwell seems to be following in the

footsteps of his late father Jerry Falwell Sr. In 1993, Falwell Sr.’s Old Time Gospel Hour had its tax exemption retroactively revoked for the years 1986 and 1987 and the ministry was required to pay \$50,000 because of involvement in partisan politics.

Pastors and heads of 501(c)(3) non-profit groups are free to endorse candidates as private individuals, but the Internal Revenue Code does not allow them to use institutional resources, such as official publications, Web sites and other forms of communication, to back or oppose candidates.

“Falwell seems determined to misuse tax-exempt resources, just like his father did,” said Lynn. “The IRS needs to step in and break this chain of flagrant disregard for the law.”

Americans United is a religious liberty watchdog group based in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1947, the organization educates Americans about the importance of church-state separation, safeguarding religious freedom.

[From a Dec. 4 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.]

“The Christian religion and Masonry have one and the same common origin: both are derived from the worship of the sun. The difference between their origin is, that the Christian religion is a parody on the worship of the sun, in which they put a man whom they call Christ, in the place of the sun, and pay him the same adoration which was originally paid to the sun.” —Thomas Paine, from *Origin of Freemasonry*, published posthumously in 1818.

Ads Call For Protection of Religious Freedom

On the eve of New Hampshire and South Carolina Primaries, New Ads Press Presidential Candidates on Role of Religion and Government (From a Jan. 4 Press Release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State)

For the first time in a presidential election and on the eve of the New Hampshire and South Carolina primaries a new series of television and newspaper ads is being launched to urge presidential candidates to protect religious freedom.

At a time when presidential candidates in both political parties are injecting religion into their campaigns at unprecedented levels, the new ads are designed to help provide a clearer understanding of where candidates stand on key issues at the intersection of religion and politics. The ads are scheduled to lead up to the New Hampshire and South Carolina primaries later this month.

First Freedom First, a joint project of Americans United for Separation of Church and State and The Interfaith Alliance Foundation, is launching the new print and TV ads to encourage voters to ask presidential candidates their positions on a wide range of issues, from end-of-life options to protecting the right of all Americans to worship...or not.

The first advertisements feature legendary actors Jack Klugman and James Whitmore and are designed to remind candidates and voters that religion has a place in American life, but

not as a political tool.

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, noted, "The separation of church and state is what makes America a great nation. At their core, the ads are designed to prompt important conversations about where candidates stand on the critical issue of religious liberty as enshrined in the First Amendment."

Lynn continued, "All Americans, whether religious or not, have a right to know where candidates stand on issues that have a real, direct impact on their lives, such as sound science, academic integrity and protections against religious discrimination. The ads and related questions on the First Freedom First Web site are designed to help start the discussion between voters and candidates."

The Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, president of The Interfaith Alliance Foundation, said, "Religion has played an unusually large role in the 2008 election, and unfortunately, it has been used as a gimmick or a divisive tool rather than a unifying force. First Freedom First focuses on important issues that are at the intersection of religion and public policy issues that our next president must be prepared

to deal with."

In the TV and print ads, Jack Klugman and James Whitmore raise such questions as, "Who will decide my end of life care: politicians and religious right leaders, or my doctor and me?" The ads also ask candidates what they will do to protect the right of all Americans to worship...or not.

The First Freedom First Web site features ten sample questions for voters to ask candidates, such as "Do you think public schools should sponsor school prayer or, as a parent, should this choice be left to me?" and, "Do you think my pharmacist should be allowed to deny me doctor-prescribed medications based on his or her religious beliefs?"

Klugman noted that he volunteered to participate in the ad campaign, saying, "I think these ads speak for a lot of people, both believers and non-believers, who understand that this country is founded on a basic respect for everyone's right to believe whatever they want. It's time we got back to principles that have always made America a great democracy."

The ads, produced by Progressive Media Agency, will run up to the primaries in New Hampshire and South Carolina.

AFS Survey Results

The Atlanta Freethought Society included a survey for members to fill out with the recent ballot mailing. 41 members responded to the survey. The results are shown below.

Members were asked to circle a number between 0 and 3 to show what they thought is important. "0" = no importance; "1" = slightly important; "2" = moderately important; "3" = very important.

The average of all responses is shown below.

Paid advertising for AFS/freethought: 1.83
Reducing AFS debt: 2.32
Better monthly programs: 2.06
Publishing books: 1.64
Community service/charity: 1.86
Better building: 1.78
Part-time staffer to keep office open: 0.56

If we buy a "better" building, what should it have?

Kitchen: 1.97 Nursery: 1.26
Library: 2.33 Bookstore: 2.17
An office: 2.14

More seating (room for about 65 now): 2.51
Close to I-285: 1.95 Close to center of Atlanta: 1.67
Nice neighborhood: 2.00 Plenty of parking: 2.16
Close to public transportation: 1.81

Thanks to all who participated in the survey. The AFS Board will consider these results in future planning of our facilities.

Powerful Civil Rights Group Calls Atheism a Civil Right

By Ruth N. Geller, editor of Humanist Network News, the weekly e-zine of the Institute for Humanist Studies

The right to not believe in a higher power is now considered a civil right to be defended like any other by one well-established civil rights organization in Washington, D.C.

The Secular Coalition of America (SCA) is the first nontheist group invited to join the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights (LCCR).

"It's an amazing civil rights group," said Lori Lipman Brown, director of the SCA. "I can't overemphasize the importance of being officially included in civil rights movements. We now have 190 plus groups as potential allies."

SCA, which is a national lobbying group for atheists, humanists, freethinkers and other nontheistic Americans, is now a member of an organization which has fought on behalf of every major civil rights law since 1957.

The LCCR was formed in 1950 by three powerhouses of the civil rights movement: A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; attorney Roy Wilkins of the NAACP; and Arnold Aronson, a leader of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

The Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, and 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968—were all pushed to passage with the help of LCCR and the coalitions it helped to form and mobilize.

More recently, the LCCR has contributed to the first-ever White House Conference on Hate Crimes and worked to strengthen federal legislation in this area. It has also

helped obtain significant increases in federal funding for civil rights enforcement.

The Conference has a diverse body which includes secular, political, and religious organizations such as the United Church of Christ, the Episcopal Church - Public Affairs Office and the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, among others.

The SCA seeks to bring more attention to the presence of the non-theistic community in the U.S. and lobbies for separation of church and state.

Brown said they applied for membership to the larger organization because they found some of their issues overlapped. For example, both the LCCR and the SCA lobbied against the Defense of Marriage Bill and against the nomination of Supreme Court Justice Alito.

"They are very active in dealing with judicial nominations," said Brown of the LCCR.

SCA sent a detailed information packet about their group in the fall of 2006. They were accepted as a member organization by LCCR's board in 2007 along with seven other groups.

Brown said she was not aware of any LCCR members opposed to accepting the SCA as a member.

However, as freethinkers are, by their very definition, free to think, at least one prominent atheist on the SCA's on advisory board, questions the need to fight for the civil rights of non-believers at all.

This October, noted atheist-author Christopher Hitchens, told Humanist Network News (Re: [The New Atheists](#), HNN, Nov. 28) "...we are not an op-

pressed minority and shouldn't act with self-pity or complaint as if we were..."

Hitchens said that, to him, "it's not a civil rights question."

"It depends on how you define civil rights," responded Brown. "To demand that we be treated equally is not calling ourselves victims."

Attorney Derek Araujo, who is affiliated with both the American Humanist Association's legal center in Washington, D.C., and the Center for Inquiry's First Amendment taskforce, told HNN last year, "I think in a way that it is, and this is not to trivialize other civil rights issues. It's not to say that atheists have suffered the same amount of discrimination" as racial minorities.

"But I think in many ways it is a civil rights issue because there is a common perception in the public, contrary to what the Constitution says, that an atheist should not be electable to public office," said Araujo.

"I think it is important, of course, to litigate in the courts. I'm all for standing up and defending the Church-State separation and defending our rights in court," said Araujo. "...but I think that needs to be done in parallel with a broad political organization," he added.

It appears that a large secular group such as SCA joining up with the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, with its diverse member organizations, is a step in that direction.

Editor's Note: The Institute for Humanist Studies is a founding member organization of the Secular Coalition for America.

AFS Member Podcasts and Websites

There are several AFS members who have their own podcast or website. A podcast is an internet audio program that you can listen to, usually for free! We think you will enjoy these:

John Snider and David Driscoll host their American Freethought podcast at <http://www.americanfreethought.com>.

Robynn McCarthy and Derek Colanduno host Skepticity, the Skeptic Magazine podcast: <http://www.skepticity.com>.

Reggie Finley still has his Infidel Guy show. Listen at: <http://www.infidelguy.com>.

Also, Tony King's website: http://www.geocities.com/ngoldwe_2000/ Bruce Herr's website: <http://www.theseccularhumanist.org>

Romney's "Faith In America" Speech

A statement by Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor of the Freedom From Religion Foundation

We've read John F. Kennedy's 1960 address to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association, and have to say, Mitt Romney, you're no JFK.

Romney's "Faith in America" speech on Dec. 6, advertised as a paean to religious liberty, was simply calculated to calm the typical fears about Mormonism held by his target audience: born-again Christians.

To be fair, not one presidential candidate today would dare repeat the hallowed words of John F. Kennedy. Today's candidates, brainwashed by religious pollsters and religious media, compete with each other to see who can wear the most religion on their sleeves. Hillary Clinton reveals how she prays to God to help her control her weight. John Edwards must grin and bear it when a CNN anchor asks him what's the biggest "sin" he's ever committed. Nothing is nonsacred on the campaign trail. When a ranting man at the recent Utube/CNN debate demanded that GOP candidates pledge that they believe in the bible literally, the candidates pretty much obliged him.

Who out there among today's presidential candidates would dare say:

"I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute; where no Catholic prelate would tell the President—should he be Catholic—how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote; where no church or church school is granted any public funds or political preference, . . .

"I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish; where no public official either requests or accept instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source; where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace. . ."

That America doesn't exist today. Churches are granted public funds and political preference. No candidate

has openly criticized Bush's "faith-based initiative," which has no accountability or oversight. Catholic schools are the main beneficiaries of the limited voucher programs now in place. The Pope openly dictates to Catholic politicians and voters, threatening their eternal souls. Bush, a Methodist, actually flew to the Vatican during his 2004 reelection campaign asking the Pope to fire up the U.S. bishops, complaining that "not all the American bishops are with me" on social issues. (Those social issues included opposition to gay rights, which, with Roman Catholic and fundamentalist Protestant help, proved instrumental in getting out the religious-right vote in key states.)

Today we have "Patriot Pastors" overtly organizing to elect candidates from a particular party, televangelists such as the late Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson openly endorsing particular candidates, and religious bodies just about everywhere seeking to impose their will directly and indirectly upon the general population.

In an ideal world, the personal religious views of presidential aspirants should be a non-issue--provided those candidates agree to keep their private religious views personal. It was an embarrassing spectacle to hear a Mormon candidate parrot belief in Jesus Christ. Kennedy had the dignity not to pander.

Romney's hodgepodge speech offered a little something for everyone—except nonbelievers. Even Pres. Bush has publicly admitted that America includes nonreligious citizens. But the 14% of adults in the United States who are not religious apparently don't exist in Romney's world view. "We are a nation 'Under God' and in God, we do indeed trust" means "we" who do not believe in a god are not part of this nation?

Those of us who are freethinkers can hardly be expected to concur with Romney's strange equation: "Freedom requires religion just as religion re-

quires freedom. . . Freedom and religion endure together, or perish alone." Huh?

Romney needs a fact-checker. He misleadingly stated that the nation's founders "sought the blessings of the Creator." There was indeed prayer at the First Continental Congress, which adopted the failed Articles of Confederation. Romney piously concluded his talk with a prayer attributed to Sam Adams from that event. But he failed to mention that there was no prayer at the constitutional convention that crafted our living and godless constitution.

After promising not to "confuse the particular teachings of my church with the obligations of the office and of the Constitution," Romney immediately vowed: "When I place my hand on the bible and take the oath of office, that oath becomes my highest promise to God." Art. II, Sec. 1 of the US Constitution, providing the presidential oath of office, contains no reference to a god or the bible. But, of course, Romney was signaling to fundamentalists that he would use their book, not the Book of Mormon.

While pretending to affirm the separation of church and state, Romney used his speech to attack it: "In recent years, the notion of the separation of church and state has been taken by some well beyond its original meaning. They seek to remove from the public domain any acknowledgment of God" and to establish a "new religion in America—the religion of secularism." Secularism is not a religion—secularism is what safeguards religious freedom for all, including us dissenters, and including the nation's tiny minority of Mormon adherents.

As the difference between JFK's and Romney's speeches reveal, in recent years the notion of the separation between church and state has been debased, disrespected and routinely dissed. The deterioration since 1960 in respect for this pinnacle constitutional precept is mind-boggling.

Romney's "Faith In America" Speech (*continued*)

Instead of affirming the constitution's prohibition of a religious test for public office, Romney's speech pan-

dered to the notion that candidates must be publicly pious, and fed the myth that good citizenship requires

religious faith.

[From a Dec. 7 news release by the Freedom From Religion Foundation.]

Albert Einstein's Views on Politics:

"Laws alone cannot secure freedom of expression; in order that every man present his views without penalty there must be a spirit of tolerance in the entire population." — Albert Einstein, *Out Of My Later Years* (1950)

"One strength of the Communist system... is that it has some of the characteristics of a religion and inspires the emotions of a religion." — Albert Einstein, *Out Of My Later Years* (1950)

"An autocratic system of coercion, in my opinion, soon degenerates. Force always attracts men of low morality, and I believe it to be an invariable rule that tyrants of genius are succeeded by scoundrels. For this reason I have always been passionately opposed to systems such as we see in Italy and Russia to-day." — Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It* (1949)

"I am an adherent of the ideal of democracy, although I well know the weaknesses of the democratic form of government. Social equality and economic protection of the individual appeared to me always as the important communal aims of the state. Although I am a typical loner in daily life, my consciousness of belonging to the invisible community of those who strive for truth, beauty, and justice has preserved me from feeling isolated." — Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It* (1949)

"My passionate sense of social justice and social responsibility has always contrasted oddly with my pronounced lack of need for direct contact with other human beings and human communities." — Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It* (1949)

My political ideal is democracy. Let every man be respected as an individual and no man idolised. It is an irony of fate that I myself have been the recipient of excessive admiration and reverence from my fellow-beings, through no fault, and no merit, of my own. The cause of this may well be the desire, unattainable for many, to understand the few ideas to which I have with my feeble powers attained through ceaseless struggle. I am quite aware that for any organization to reach its goals, one man must do the thinking and directing and generally bear the responsibility. But the led must not be coerced; they must be able to choose their leader." — Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It* (1949)

Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation wrote a nice Christmas op-ed, titled "Peace on Earth? Keep Religion Separate." It was published on Dec. 22 in the Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel: <http://www.jsonline.com/story/index.aspx?id=699264>

Bart Ehrman's New Book: *God's Problem*

By Steve Yothment

The December 31 issue of Newsweek magazine had some interesting observations about the recent rise of atheist authors, like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and Christopher Hitchens. In the article "Moderates Storm The Religious Battlefield" (<http://www.newsweek.com/id/81388>), writer Lisa Miller notes that Dr. Bart Ehrman, a prolific bible scholar with a Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary, has written a book to be released on February 19, titled *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question – Why We Suffer*.

Bart Ehrman is the author of other popular books, like *Misquoting Jesus*:

The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why, and *Lost Scriptures: Books that Did Not Make It into the New Testament*.

Ehrman is also a popular lecturer on Jesus and the Bible for The Teaching Company (<http://www.teach12.com>).

In his latest book, for the first time, Ehrman concedes that, in spite of his Christian credentials, he "can no longer believe in the Christian God." An all-loving and all-powerful God, he concludes after years of struggle, would not cause so much suffering.

It's an old problem in theology called *theodicy*, but Ehrman's book, *God's Problem*, contains so much earnest humility that he will find sympathetic readers even among believers.

"Some people think they know the answers," he writes. "Or they aren't bothered by the questions. I'm not one of those people."

It may be that more moderate writers like Bart Ehrman will have an even greater influence on people's attitudes about religion than the recent round of atheist authors.

"Ehrman's clarity and modesty," the article concludes, "is something to emulate. What's dangerous about the world today is not belief in God—or secularism or unbelief—but ruthless certainty. If 2008 is the year when we can begin, in private and in public, to concede that we don't know all the answers, then let us say 'amen.'"

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	_____	\$_____	Name _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Household (2 members)	\$35	_____	\$_____	Address _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional household mems	\$5	_____	\$_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Low Income/ Student/under 21	\$10	_____	\$_____	Phone H: _____ W: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Paper version of newsletter	\$15	_____	\$_____	Email addr: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Subscription only	\$20	_____	\$_____	Please list names of additional household members: _____
<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. A 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 to 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.

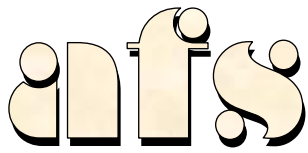
\$1.50 EACH S&H Charge for 3 to 9 books.

No S&H Charge for 10 Books or more.

(All Merchandise will be shipped USPS Priority Mail)

Send check or money order to:

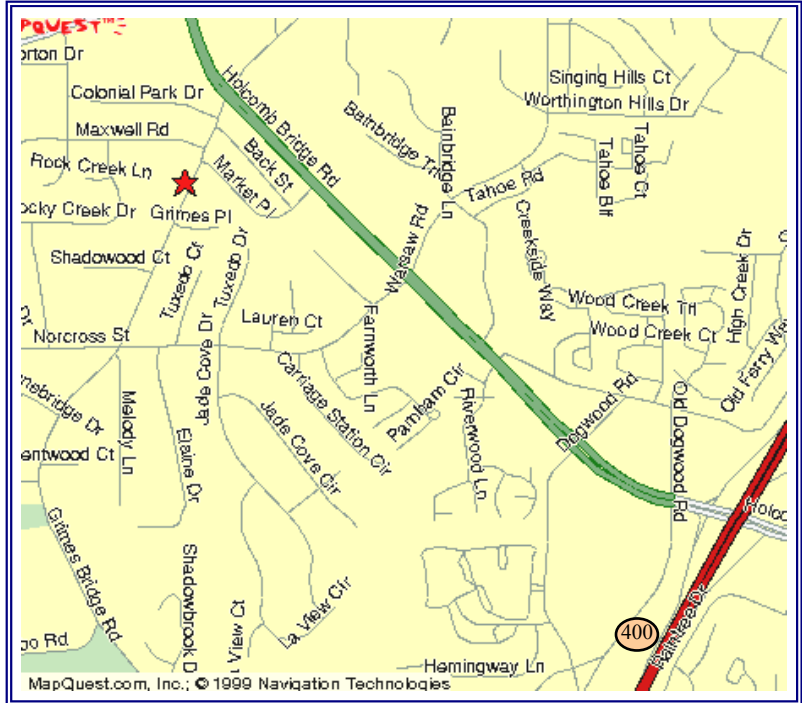
ATLANTA FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY
1170 Grimes Bridge Rd, Ste 500, Roswell, GA 30075-3965



Atlanta
Freethought
Society

The January Meeting:
Sunday, January 13
1:00 at the AF Center
1170 Grimes Bridge Road
Roswell, GA

This Month's Speaker:
Dr. Hos Lotfi



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 "01 2008" or earlier, please renew. Thanks.

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