

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication • Volume 14 Number 2 • February 2008

The February AFS Meeting

The February 10 AFS meeting will feature a talk by Bruce Herr, titled "Secular Humanism; Past, Present and Future."

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.

The February AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be at Panahar Restaurant, 3375 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, on Friday, February 15, at 7:00 PM.

The AFS Reading Group

The **AFS Reading Group** will meet on Thursday, February 28, at 7:30 PM at Borders Books & Music (4745 Ashford-Dunwoody Rd, Atlanta GA 770-396-0004). Discussion this month is on "free will." For details, contact Forrest Greene or Brian Shriver at bookclub@atlantafreethought.org.

Darwin Day Celebration

AFS and the Humanists of Georgia are planning to have a table at Perimeter College in Decatur, GA on Feb. 12 at 12:00 noon to distribute Darwin Day literature. Please contact Steve Yohtment if you would like to help in this effort.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Feb 10: AFS Board Meeting at AF Center, 11:00 AM.
Feb 10: AFS General Meeting at AF Center, 1:00 PM.
Feb 12: Darwin Day Celebration at Perimeter College.
Feb 15: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.
Feb 28: AFS Reading Group at Borders Books, 7:30 PM.

AFS To Purchase New Property

The Atlanta Freethought Society currently meets at our own building, the Atlanta Freethought Center, in Roswell, GA. The building has been acceptable, but we have recognized that we would eventually need a bigger place. So, we have looked at dozens of properties in the Atlanta area over the past 3 years for a suitable larger property.

In July of 2006, we offered to purchase the old Collins Springs Primitive Baptist Church building with about 0.5 acres in Smyrna, GA. (See the picture below.) However, we discovered that the owner did not have a clear title, so the deal was not completed.

But a new development has occurred. The owner now apparently has a clear title. So, AFS has offered to buy the property, and the owner has accepted. The closing is scheduled for February 11!

The property is at 4755 N. Church Lane, Smyrna, GA, and is near Atlanta Road, about 0.5 miles inside I-285.



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>.

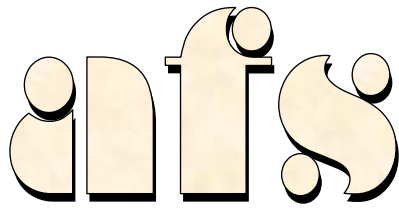
The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AF Center on Sunday, February 17, at 12:30 PM. Stephen Burnett will speak on Charles Darwin and Evolution.

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, February 10, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA.

Yet another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for Sunday, February 24, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Road, in Atlanta.



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.

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

Mar 9: Ed Buckner and Jack McKinney, on their new book, *Opinions are Like...*

Apr 13: Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church/State will speak.

May 11: Austin Dacey, author of *Secular Conscience*, will speak.

June 15: TBD

July 13: (tentative) Secular lobbyist Lori Lipman Brown 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

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Steve Yothment

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The Atlanta Freethought News

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individuals, \$35 for households, and
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Add \$15 to receive AFNews by mail.

Sustaining members (individual) \$100
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The Constitution and ‘God’s Standards’: What Would Jefferson Do?

By Lauren Smith, from a January 16 weblog at <http://blog.au.org>.

Yesterday, at a campaign stop in Michigan, Republican presidential hopeful Mike Huckabee expressed his desire that the U.S. Constitution reflect “God’s standards.”

“[Some of my opponents] do not want to change the Constitution,” he said, “but I believe it’s a lot easier to change the Constitution than it would be to change the word of the living God, and that’s what we need to do is to amend the Constitution so it’s in God’s standards rather than try to change God’s standards.”

This comment, combined with Mitt Romney’s “Faith in America” speech, Hillary Clinton’s church appearances, John McCain’s “Christian Nation” affirmation and Barack Obama’s gospel tour in South Carolina got me thinking: WWJD?

What Would *Jefferson* Do?

Well, funny I should ask, because today (January 16) marks the date in 1786 that Jefferson’s Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom passed the Virginia General Assembly. (Read it here: http://www.au.org/site/DocServer/va_statute_for_religious_freedom.pdf?docID-1321)

Jefferson penned the measure in 1777 upon returning from the Continental Congress. Although he later described the fight for its passage as the “severest contest” in which he’d ever engaged, he considered the statute one of his three greatest accomplishments.

The statute is an eloquent indict-

ment of the fusion of religion and government. Jefferson’s measure was revolutionary not only because it challenged 14 centuries of ecclesiastical establishments, but because it demanded that religious and civil spheres stay separate.

“Our civil rights,” he wrote, “have no dependence on our religious opinions, anymore than our opinions in physics or geometry.”

The evils of government-established churches, taxpayer support for religion, religious tests for public office and government-promoted religious belief are all addressed in turn.

Jefferson’s proposal failed when he first introduced it to the General Assembly in 1777. When he became U.S. Minister to France in 1785, Jefferson left the bill in the capable hands of his friend and colleague, James Madison.

Madison encountered fierce opposition from conservatives who found it difficult to break from tradition. Not unlike those who resist the separation of church and state today, these dissenters believed civil society would crumble without state-supported religion.

They proposed a system of plural establishments where people could pay taxes to the church of their choice.

Neither Madison nor Jefferson would stand for this compromise. Indeed, Jefferson’s statute says that “even forcing [one] to support this or that teacher of his own religious per-

suasion is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular pastor....” Madison’s famous Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments killed the proposal in 1785. (http://www.au.org/DocServer/James_Madisons_Memorial_and_Remonstrance.pdf?docID=144.)

Nothing but the absolute freedom to believe (or not) and to worship (or not) would do.

The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom has become the cornerstone of religious liberty and church-state separation in America. It was a model for church-state relations in other states and, most importantly, for the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

I agree that the Virginia Statute is one of Jefferson’s greatest accomplishments. Indeed, I think it’s one of our nation’s greatest treasures. Its language, and the struggle to get it passed are testaments to who we are as Americans, where we’ve been and where we are going.

The U.S. Constitution is not intended to enshrine anyone’s definition of “God’s standards.” Rather, it is intended to protect the rights of Americans of all faiths and none.

I hope all our presidential candidates read Jefferson’s Statute today and reflect on its wisdom.

Happy Religious Freedom Day!

Evangelical Christian Film Is Inappropriate For Public School, Americans United Tells Alabama Educators

‘Facing The Giants’ Movie Is Aimed At Evangelism, Says AU’s Lynn

A church-produced evangelical Christian movie is aimed at evangelism and is inappropriate for public schools, Americans United for Separation of Church and State has told Alabama educators.

After receiving complaints, Americans United has urged officials at Tuscaloosa City Schools to stop showing

the film “Facing the Giants.”

“This movie is not educational; it’s evangelistic,” said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. “Parents and taxpayers expect our public schools to teach, not preach.”

In a January 15 letter, Americans United attorneys noted that the film

was shown repeatedly in classrooms last semester at Paul W. Bryant High School and that the school’s principal plans to continue airing it in the future. The movie depicts the story of a losing high school football coach who turns his struggling team around by convincing them that “With God, all things are possible...”

Film Is Inappropriate (*continued*)

"Facing the Giants was produced by a Baptist church to bring about a single result: Christian conversion.... [F]ederal courts have consistently held that public-school teachers cannot present religious messages to students or use teaching materials that do so," wrote Americans United Legal Director Ayesha N. Khan, Senior Litigation Counsel Alex Luchenitser and Litigation Counsel Heather Weaver.

The AU attorneys said public schools must be neutral when it comes to religion and may not provide religious instruction to children.

The letter cites an array of quotes from the film that are obviously aimed at proselytizing.

For example, the film's coach tells

his players that "football is just one of the tools we use to honor God," and that "[God] sent his son Jesus to die for us so we can live for Him." In a locker-room pep talk, he urges his team "to remember what God has brought us... As long as we honor God, nothing is impossible... Give your best to God.... Give God the glory."

The film was produced by Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Ga. The Rev. Michael Catt, senior pastor of the church, told a gathering at the 2007 Values Voter Summit in Washington, D.C., that 3,000 people have been converted to Christianity by the movie.

"We never got into it [film-making]

to make money," Catt told the Summit pastors' breakfast. "We got into it to spread the gospel."

TV preacher Pat Robertson's "700 Club" reported last summer that Catt spoke at a Southern Baptist Pastors Conference in San Antonio and declared that all aspects of the movie were "bathed in prayer." (Robertson called the movie "magnificent.")

Americans United's letter urged the school officials to uphold the separation of church and state and to take prompt steps to ensure that the film is no longer shown in the Tuscaloosa City Schools District.

[From a January 15 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State]

Americans United Urges IRS to Investigate Two Religious Right Groups For Biased Voter Guides

American Family Association and WallBuilders Touted Presidential Candidate Huckabee, Says AU's Lynn

The Internal Revenue Service should investigate two prominent tax-exempt Religious Right groups that produced biased voter guides for the presidential election, according to Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

In complaints filed today with the IRS, Americans United charged that voter guides produced by the American Family Association and WallBuilders are clearly designed to promote Republican presidential candidate Mike Huckabee.

The guides, posted on the groups' Web sites, list the Republican candidates and their alleged stands on a range of issues, such as support for a human life amendment, "traditional marriage," "moral education," "business freedom" and opposition to "gay pride." Only Huckabee is assigned a "yes" stance on all of the issues.

Said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director, "These guides are not voter education, they're partisan propaganda. Tax-

exempt organizations are barred by federal law from partisan electioneering."

AU's Lynn said the organizations seem to have given the candidates no opportunity to respond to these issues and instead assigned stances based on the organizations' own "research" and subjective analysis.

Footnotes supposedly documenting the candidates' stances are often irrelevant or old. In several cases, the guides reference sources from 1994 and 1996.

The American Family Association, a Religious Right group based in Tupelo, Miss., is best known for its opposition to gay rights and risqué television programming. Its founder and chairman, the Rev. Donald Wildmon, has personally endorsed Huckabee for president.

WallBuilders, a Religious Right group based in Aledo, Texas, is known for spreading "Christian nation" revisionist historical materials. Its founder and president, David Bar-

ton, has appeared at pastors' briefings that featured Huckabee as a speaker and were intended to promote his candidacy, according to news reports.

"Wildmon and Barton are perfectly free to support any presidential candidate they choose," said AU's Lynn. "But they are not free to misuse tax-exempt resources for partisan ends."

"I am particularly outraged that these voter guides indicate that they are suitable for use in churches and other tax-exempt organizations," Lynn continued. "In fact, they are not. Any church that distributes these biased guides is risking its tax exemption and casting aside its integrity."

(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 in safeguarding religious freedom.)

[From a January 31 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.]

Listen to the Curious Minds Podcast #3 with Ed Buckner speaking on The History of Christmas and December Holidays at: <http://curiousmindspodcast.blogspot.com/2007/12/show-3-ed-buckner-phd-on-history-of.html>.

Antievolution Resolutions Spreading Through Northern Florida

From a January 24 press release by the National Center for Science Education

At least nine county school boards in northern Florida have adopted resolutions calling for the state board of education “to revise the new Sunshine State Standards for Science such that evolution is not presented as fact, but as one of several theories,” according to a Jan. 23, 2008 report from Florida Citizens for Science. (<http://www.flascience.org/wp/?p=407>) These resolutions represent a backlash to a draft set of new state science standards, which are presently undergoing revision in response to comments from the public. The state board of education is expected to consider the revised draft set of standards at its meeting on February 19, 2008.

Reviewing the draft standards at the request of NCSE and Florida Citizens for Science, Lawrence S. Lerner described them as “a giant step in the right direction.” He estimated that, evaluated by the same criteria used in the Fordham Foundation’s report *The State of State Science Standards 2005*, the draft set of standards would receive a high B, adding, “With a little bit of extra effort, Florida could bring that up to an A.” The previous set of standards, adopted in 1999, received a grade of F in the Fordham Foundation’s report.

A conspicuous improvement in the draft set of standards is the treatment of evolution. In the previous set of standards, the e-word — “evolution” — was altogether absent. In the draft set, it is not only used but even featured

as a “big idea” around which the standards are organized. Newspapers around the state hailed the change, with the *Tallahassee Democrat*, for example, writing (October 23, 2007), “For science education in our state to be competitive, it must include the teaching of evolution and the explicit acknowledgment that empirical evidence over the past century and a half strongly supports it.”

But the county school boards in Baker, Clay, Hamilton, Holmes, Jackson, Madison, St. Johns, Taylor, and Washington counties—all in northern Florida—have adopted virtually identical resolutions opposing the improvement. Wired Science’s Brandon Keim reports (January 22, 2008), “So far, not a single superintendent from those ... school boards has been available for comment. At least Willard Fair, chairman of the state Board of Education, ... was willing to say on the telephone that he had no comment whatsoever.” (<http://blog.wired.com/wiredscience/2008/01/anti-evolution.html>)

Reporters in Florida were luckier in securing comment from supporters of the resolutions, however. The *Jacksonville Times-Union* (January 17, 2008) reported, “Some school superintendents say the resolutions reflect the religious nature of their constituents in Northeast Florida.” The paper quoted Baker County Superintendent Paula Barton as saying, “To be honest with you, we are a strong Christian community here.” The paper reported

Nassau County Superintendent John Ruis as describing himself as a strong believer in biblical creationism. (http://www.jacksonville.com/tu-online/stories/011708/met_237288652.shtml)

Similarly, according to Ron Matus’s story in the *St. Petersburg Times* (January 24, 2008), Dixie County school superintendent Dennis Bennett explained, “We just wanted to get it on the record that we’re a Judeo-Christian community and we believe in academic freedom,” and Ken Hall, a school board member in Madison County, commented, “We’re not asking that evolution not be taught, just that it be taught as a theory, one of several. I’m a Christian. And I believe I was created by God, and that I didn’t come from an amoeba or a monkey.” (http://www.sptimes.com/2008/01/24/State/North_Florida_weighin.shtml)

In his report, Matus observed that existing case law suggests that the state board of education “would face an uphill court battle if it were to include alternative theories” as the resolutions urge. He also noted, “in the scientific community there is virtually no debate on the fundamental soundness of Charles Darwin’s theory. Scores of scientific societies and organizations have issued statements in support of evolution, including the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the National Academy of Sciences and the National Science Teachers Association.”

Atlanta Archbishop Pleads Guilty to Perjury

Sentenced to 10 Years Probation and a \$1,000 Fine

The continuing saga of Archbishop Earl Paulk reached a notable milestone on January 16, when he turned himself over to authorities to face charges that he lied under oath about his sexual affairs.

A warrant for the arrest of Paulk was issued the preceding day after a probe by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. The 80-year-old pastor of the

Cathedral of the Holy Spirit at Chapel Hill Harvester Church made a deal with the Cobb County Sheriff’s Office to surrender within 48 hours.

The felony perjury charge against Paulk resulted from a lawsuit against him, his brother Don and the Church by Mona Brewer, a former church employee. The lawsuit alleged that Earl Paulk manipulated Brewer into

an affair from 1989 to 2003 by telling her it was her only path to salvation.

In a 2006 deposition for the lawsuit, the archbishop said under oath that the only woman he had ever had sex with outside of his marriage was Brewer. But the results of a court-ordered paternity test revealed that Paulk is the biological father of his brother’s son, D. E. Paulk, who is now

Atlanta Archbishop Pleads Guilty (*continued*)

head pastor at the church. In the lawsuit, eight women have given sworn depositions that they were coerced into sexual relationships with Earl Paulk.

Earl and Don Paulk have several other lawsuits against them from former members of the church, alleging they were coerced into sexual affairs,

but this is the first time criminal charges have been filed against the archbishop.

In the early 1990s, the Cathedral at Chapel Hill claimed about 10,000 members and 24 pastors, and was a media powerhouse. The church was able to build a Bible college, two schools, a worldwide TV ministry and

a \$12 million sanctuary in Decatur, GA, outside Atlanta.

Church membership is now down to about 1,500. The church has 18 pastors, most of them volunteers. The Bible college and TV ministry have shut down, due largely to the complaints about the sexual scandals.

[From multiple sources.]

CleanFlicks Founder Arrested

Charged with forcible sexual activity with a 14-year-old girl, Daniel Thompson was known for editing videos to make them more “family friendly.”

ChristianityToday.com reported on January 30 that the co-founder of CleanFlicks, a video editing service once used by many Christians, has been arrested in Utah for allegedly paying a 14-year-old girl for sex.

Daniel Thompson, who ran CleanFlicks until the courts shut it down in 2006, had more recently operated Flix Club, a family-friendly edited-movie video business in Orem, Utah. He was arrested on January 24 on two charges

of forcible sexual abuse and two charges of forcible sexual activity with a 14-year-old. He is now out on bail.

Thompson's business partner at Flix Club, Isaac Lifferth, was also arrested on similar charges.

Thompson reportedly told police that Flix Club, which carried videos in which objectionable content had been edited out, was only a front, and that he and Lifferth were also involved in making and distributing porn movies.

Flix Club was forced to close last year after a federal court ruled that movie-editing businesses violated U.S. copyright law when they “sanitized” films by removing nudity, sex, profanity, and other objectionable content.

According to police reports, Thompson and Lifferth allegedly paid two 14-year-old girls \$20 each to perform oral sex, and Lifferth allegedly had intercourse with a 16-year-old girl multiple times.

AU Cautions Baptist Convention About Partisan Politicking

SBC President's Call For United Evangelical Front Against Giuliani Raises Tax Law Issues, Says AU

Americans United for Separation of Church and State has cautioned the top official of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) that using his denominational news agency to oppose Republican presidential candidate Rudy Giuliani raises federal tax law issues.

In a Jan. 24 letter, Americans United advised SBC President Frank Page that the Internal Revenue Code prohibits the use of tax-exempt resources to support or oppose candidates for public office.

Americans United acted after learning of a Jan. 21 analysis distributed by Baptist Press, the SBC's official news agency. The analysis stated in part, “Page said he agrees with James Dobson of Focus on the Family that a united front against Giuliani is needed and that ‘evangelicals can realistically defeat him.’ Even a ticket with Giuliani on top and Huckabee for vice

president ‘would be problematic for Dr. Dobson and myself,’ Page said.”

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director, urged Page to review the requirements of tax law.

“Since you are the top official of the Southern Baptist Convention and Baptist Press is the denomination's official news agency,” wrote Lynn, “Southern Baptists and other readers could easily get the impression that you are using the denomination's tax-exempt resources to oppose Giuliani's candidacy.... [W]e encourage you to review the provisions of the Internal Revenue Code and to refrain from activities that might endanger the tax-exempt status of the Southern Baptist Convention.”

The Internal Revenue Code bars religious leaders serving in their official capacities from involvement in political campaigns. When church leaders use their pulpits, church newsletters

or other official resources of their organizations to advocate or oppose candidates, federal tax law is violated.

In its letter, Americans United notes that the Baptist Press article identifies Page as SBC president and gives no indication that he is being interviewed as an individual citizen rather than as the top official of the Southern Baptist Convention. (The Southern Baptist Convention is the nation's largest Protestant denomination.)

AU's Lynn says he hopes Page and other religious leaders take the time to learn about the law.

“We should have learned by now that churches should not become political machines,” said Lynn. “If clergy are a bit fuzzy on federal tax law, now is a good time to get sound information. With a presidential campaign underway, it's especially important for everyone to play by the rules.”

[From a January 24 AU press release.]

Charles Darwin: A Life In Science

By Gary Whittenberger, an AFNews subscriber. Originally printed in the Feb. 4 Tallahassee Democrat.

Charles Darwin was born, the fifth of six children, on Feb. 12, 1809, in Shrewsbury, England. Tuesday, February 12, 2008, will mark the 199th year since the birth of the great biologist, so now seems an appropriate time to reflect on the man. So significant was his contribution to the scientific understanding of our world that some people have called Charles Darwin the "Man of the Millennium" and "the greatest scientist of all time."

As is sometimes the case with great men, Charles did not distinguish himself as anything special in intellect or talent as a child. He did not do well in many of his subjects in school, and as a young adult he made several shifts in his career goals. His stern and wealthy father kept pushing him to be successful at something. Charles began his college education by going to medical school, but soon discarded medicine as a career path primarily because he could not tolerate the expressions of pain from those who underwent surgeries conducted at the time without the aid of anesthesia. Encouraged by his father to try something else, Charles went to study for the ministry. Although he did complete his degree in theology, his heart was not in it and he spent much of his time during his college years studying science, especially geology and biology. Throughout his childhood and early adulthood, Charles was an amateur naturalist and enjoyed observing animals and collecting plant and animal specimens of various kinds. Finally, Charles was offered the opportunity of a lifetime which would ultimately change the course of history.

In 1831, when he was only 22 years old and after securing the reluctant permission of his father, Darwin became a naturalist on board the H.M.S. Beagle, whose captain and crew were tasked with mapping routes especially around South America. Darwin spent five years on the voyage during which he suffered sea sickness much of the time and was nearly killed on a

few occasions, either by violent seas or aggressive natives. Nevertheless, during his explorations of strange lands Darwin studied the native plant and animal life and sent back to England over 5000 specimens. He paid special attention to finches and other animals on the Galapagos Islands. During the voyage of the Beagle, Darwin began to ponder the revolutionary idea that species could change into new species over long periods of time.

In 1836, Darwin returned to England, and shortly thereafter was married. In 1842, he wrote a 35-page outline about his theory of how species develop. From his recollections and copious notes about his voyage on the Beagle, examination of the specimens he collected, correspondence with animal breeders and scientists, and extensive reading (especially of the writings of Thomas Malthus on overpopulation), he developed the core of the theory of evolution. He thought that variations in living things occurred naturally, that these variations were either harmful, neutral, or helpful to the survival and reproductive interests of plants and animals, and that the helpful variations tended to be preserved in successive generations in the struggle for survival. He thought that because of "natural selection, successive generations would become so different from earlier generations that, over long periods of time, new species would emerge. At the time Darwin did not understand the mechanisms of variation; he had no familiarity with the work of Gregor Mendel in regard to genetics; and yet Darwin provided the foundation for evolution, a theory which was expanded and supported over the next two centuries. Darwin gave the written outline for his theory of evolution, sealed in an envelope, to his wife Emma, and told her to open it and publish it after his death. He thought that his theory would be considered too controversial and revolutionary at

the time, especially by the church, and he feared social repercussions to himself and his family. Nevertheless, for the next 16 years, as Darwin became more and more a "free thinker," he continued to assemble the evidence to support his theory in which he had great confidence.

In 1858, Darwin received a letter from Alfred Wallace, another naturalist, who described his idea which was very similar to Darwin's theory of evolution. This correspondence spurred Darwin to work vigorously on preparing a publication. Finally, in November 1859, Charles Darwin's famous book "The Origin of Species" was published, and the first 1250 copies were sold out in one day! As expected, the book sparked controversy, but gradually over the next few decades Darwin's thesis came to be accepted by the scientific community. Darwin's 1871 book "The Descent of Man" and his 1872 book "The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals" applied the principles of evolution to humankind. Throughout his later years, Darwin continued to collect evidence for evolution and wrote yet another book, this one on earthworms.

Charles Darwin died of a heart attack, in the arms of his wife, on April 19, 1882, at the age of 73. Ironically, even though "Origin" was opposed by most representatives of the Anglican Church of England at the time, Darwin was buried in Westminster Abbey. Of course, there were those who came before Darwin who contributed to the theory of evolution, but Darwin offered the idea of natural selection which is evolution's cornerstone, and he meticulously assembled the evidence to make his case. Darwin's contribution to the scientific understanding of our world was probably best summed up by world-renowned biologist Theodosius Dobzhansky who said in 1973, "Nothing in biology makes sense except in the light of evolution."

Letters To The Editor by AFS Members

The following letter by Tony King was in the *Toccoa Record* on January 24.

Fighting Religious Zealots, Not Religious Freedom

The Declaration of Independence is only important in that it was a rebellious statement of separation from mother England, forming our own nation; going our own way since England's government had been so repressive.

The God-talk in the Declaration are Deist expressions, being composed by a Deist individual, Thomas Jefferson.

The document that is more relevant to us today since our founding as a nation is the Constitution of the United States; it is a godless document. Though it does mention the word "religion" it does not mention any divine being, Christian or otherwise.

Not all of our Founding Fathers were Christian. Though many of them had attended various churches of various denominations throughout their lives, patriots and heroes such as the above men-mentioned Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, Ethan Allen, and James Madison, were all Deists; John Adams was Unitarian.

The faith of our Founding Fathers, whether Christian, Unitarian, Jewish, or Deist, was not quite the same as that of today's Evangelicals.

Though the Constitution does not state the phrase "separation of church and state," these words were originally penned by Jefferson in his letter (Jan. 1, 1802) to the Danbury Baptists Association in Connecticut, and not, as Mr. Barnes had stated, by judges.

Jefferson at that time in his position as President was responding to the Danbury Baptists' previous letter stating their concerns regarding their liberty of religious expression within their state.

It is unfortunate that some letter writers quote from the Constitution yet do not seem to understand what it means.

We do have freedom of religion. Freedom for the religious who are Christian, Jew, Muslim, Native American, Wiccan, Pagan, etc.

In the early days people were excluded from office because they were not Presbyterian, or Congregationalist, or because they were Catholic.

Therefore in this context the reason why there is a prohibition against religious tests for public office as stated in the Constitution, is that no one should be prohibited from holding public office because of his or her particular religious beliefs, and I would also state because of lack of any religious belief.

I never said that nobody should be allowed to pray. That is not my position. My position is rather, and this is a very important distinction, that our government officials should not in their official capacity as officers of the state be participating in religious functions, be it leading a group of people in prayer or officiating at a religious event on government property on our dime.

And teachers cannot officially lead their classrooms in prayer or any other religious function in their capacity as government workers, though the children can of their own accord pray before and after school time, or during their lunch break, but not during class, unless silent.

And even though I admit that nowadays government bodies on all three levels open their business day with prayer, I submit that this is a violation of the First Amendment by entangling religion with government.

What kind of prayer is usually said before each government official meeting? A Christian one. Now, what if some of that governmental body are not Christians, but rather Jews, Wiccans, or Unitarians or a few agnostics?

Would a prayer by a rabbi, imam, or priestess be appropriate or even welcome? It would not. Christians would resent someone not of their faith offering a non-Christian prayer.

So why should a Christian prayer, or any prayer, be given special privilege in government? It is entanglement!

This is why I feel threatened: On Dec. 18, 2007, U.S. Rep. Randy Forbes introduced a resolution, co-sponsored by 31 other Representatives, that contains 75 "whereas" statements, many of which are historically inaccurate.

It is another attempt by conservative Evangelicals to paint a portrait of America as a "Christian Nation" instead of what it really is, a secular nation that happens to have a predominant number of its citizens who are Christian.

The statements are revisionist history. H.R. 888 makes four "resolved" statements, the most disturbing of which states that religion is "inseparable" from the American legal system and societal structures, which clearly fails the Lemon test (Lemon v. Kurtzman, U.S. Supreme Court, 1971), and violates the First Amendment.

Resolve No. 4 states that the U.S. House expresses support for designation of an "American Religious History Week" every year for the appreciation of and education on America's history of religious faith.

Would they mean all the varieties and brands of religious faith? I doubt it. These 75 whereas and four resolve statements are based on Christian Nationalist ideology and Christian Dominionist theology as spread about by the revisionist David Barton.

Another threatening statement is Mike Huckabee's announcement on Jan 14, and these are his words: "I believe it's a lot easier to change the Constitution than it would be to change the word of the living God, and that's what we need to do is to amend the Constitution so it's in God's standards rather than try to change God's standards." This kind of talk should make every American citizen stop and think very hard.

If anyone is doubtful concerning the above facts, then I challenge people to investigate them. Satisfy your own curiosity by going to the public library or search the Internet and look up all these relevant words: Deism, Enlightenment, Separation of Church and State, Lemon Test, Christian Nationalism, Christian Revisionism, David Barton, Dominionism, as well as the biographies and letters of our Founding Fathers.

I am quite happy in my skepticism, and I am not "ate up."

Sub-atomic particles have been verified by scientific observation in a supercollider, therefore atoms have been seen. I have loved someone and love many friends and relatives, emotions being a result of observable chemical processes in the brain; one can see the results of not having oxygen by objectively observing the deadly results; the same cannot be said for the subjective "transcendent."

And I have attended churches several times in my youth. The received myths do not make any sense once you start thinking about them. Religion and the claimed "God's works" are quite subjective and reliant on imagination and extreme emotion.

I am not fighting religious freedom. I am fighting religious zealots who want to deny others their freedoms, whether religious or not, by establishing religious tyranny through religious terrorism.

William King, Toccoa

Listen to AFS members John Snider and David Driscoll interview UNLV professor Dr. Maurice Finocchiaro (author of *Retrying Galileo*) in American Freethought Podcast #9 at <http://www.americanfreethought.com/>.

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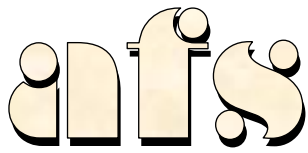
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The February Meeting:

Sunday, February 10

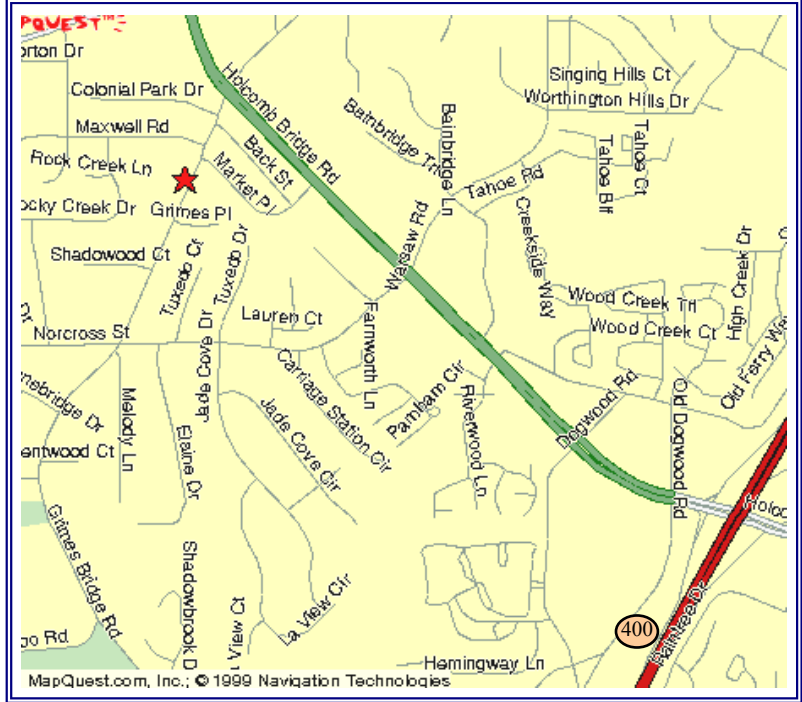
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This Month's Speaker:

Bruce Herr



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