

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself

An AFS Publication

• Volume 14 Number 7

• July 2008

The July AFS Meeting

The July 13 AFS meeting will feature a talk by **Lori Lipman Brown**, director of the Secular Coalition for America, on "Making Our Voices Heard on Capitol Hill."

Since September of 2005, the SCA has been explicitly representing nontheists (atheists, humanists, freethinkers, and other nontheistic Americans) in Congress. Ms. Brown will report on how the SCA's efforts are being received by Congress members and staff, the media, and theistic church/state separation allies. She will discuss the current church/state issues and what we can do to help protect our secular government.

Lori Lipman Brown served as Nevada State Senator from 1992 to 1994. Her legislative efforts focused on public education, mental health care and the repeal of consensual sex crimes, which resulted in her being named Civil Libertarian of the Year by the Southern Nevada chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and Legislator of the Year by the Nevada chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

Brown has been a frequent political commentator on television and radio and a regular columnist in a variety of print media. A former private practice lawyer, she taught constitutional law, American history, and education law for the University of Phoenix, and women's studies for the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Brown was also a high school English, speech and drama teacher in the Clark County school district.

She obtained her J.D. from Southwestern University School of Law in 1983, and her B.A. in communications from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 1981.

New Location for AFS Meetings

Please note that the July meeting will be at our newly **air-conditioned** property, **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Smyrna, GA, at 1:00 PM. (Please feel free to arrive early for snacks and conversation.)

To get there, take I-285 (the perimeter road around Atlanta) to Exit 16 (Atlanta Road). Turn toward Atlanta. Go ½ mile and then turn right onto N. Church Lane. Go only 300 feet to Atlanta Freethought Hall, which is on the left.

The July AFS Social

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

No July Reading Group Meeting

The **AFS Reading Group** will NOT meet in July or August. (It's summertime! Enjoy the great outdoors!) The group will return in September, meeting at Wordsmiths Books, 545 N. McDonough St., in Decatur, GA, to discuss the book *The Blood of the Lamb: A Novel* by Peter De Vries. Order the book now so you can read it before this meeting!

The Reading Group is run by Forrest Greene and Brian Shriver. Email them at bookclub@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Meetings and Activities

July 13: AFS Board Meeting at AF Hall, 11:00 AM.

July 13: AFS General Meeting at AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

July 18: AFS Social, Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 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 Atlanta Freethought Hall on July 20 at 1:00 PM. Atheist activist Jeff Nall will speak about the New Progressive Alliance. For more information, see <http://www.geocities.com/gahumanists/>.

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.

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Gwinnett (12

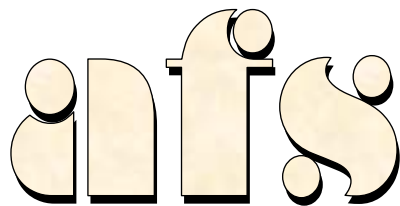
Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville) on Wednesday, June 16, at 7:00 PM. For details, see <http://gust.domek.org/>.

A **Freethought Discussion Group** meets in Fayetteville, GA on Wednesdays at 7:30 PM at Starbucks on Hwy 54. The group also meets for lunch on the first and third Saturday of the month. For more information, contact Shelby Weddle, the group's leader, at freediscussion@hotmail.com.

There will be a "**meetup**" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, July 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 Sunday, July 27, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta.

"Faith is the great cop-out, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate the evidence." — Richard Dawkins



**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.

July 13: Secular lobbyist Lori Lipman Brown will speak on "Making Our Voices Heard On Capitol Hill."

Aug 10: Dennis Martin will speak on "What Does 'Free' in 'Free-thinking' Mean?"

Sept 14: Chris Wilson will speak on his new book *Healing The Unhappy Caveman*. (See <http://www.enlightenedcaveman.com/>.)

Oct 12: Dr. Niall Shanks will speak on his new book *God, the Devil, and Darwin: A Critique of Intelligent Design Theory*.

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 <http://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.

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Americans United Files Lawsuit Challenging South Carolina's 'I Believe' License Plate

Religious Liberty Watchdog Group Says License Plate Violates Constitution By Giving Preference To Christianity

Americans United for Separation of Church and State filed a lawsuit in federal district court on June 19 on behalf of several religious leaders and a religious organization whose First Amendment rights are violated by South Carolina's "I Believe" license plate.

The new plate features the words, "I Believe," accompanied by a depiction of a large, bright-yellow Christian cross superimposed on a multicolored stained glass church window. It is similar to a proposed license plate that failed in Florida, shown here:



Plaintiffs in the case include four South Carolina clergy: the Rev. Dr. Thomas A. Summers, Rabbi Sanford T. Marcus, the Rev. Dr. Robert M. Knight and the Rev. Dr. Neal Jones, and the Hindu American Foundation.

The *Summers v. Adams* lawsuit charges that the Christian plate gives

preferential government treatment to one faith. It asks the court to prevent South Carolina officials from producing the plates.

"The state has clearly given preferential treatment to Christianity with this license plate," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director. "I can't think of a more flagrant violation of the First Amendment's promise of equal treatment for all faiths. I believe these plates will not see the light of day."

The South Carolina legislature unanimously passed legislation to produce the license plate, and South Carolina Lt. Gov. Andre Bauer said he is willing to put up the required \$4,000 to produce the plate, with the money to be reimbursed by the state later. The legislature has not proposed or made available a similar specialty plate for any other faith.

Gov. Mark Sanford allowed the bill to become law without his signature.

In South Carolina, an individual can apply for a vanity plate less than seven characters long, but symbols and emblems are not permitted. Other specialty plates are created either by DMV approval or through the legisla-

ture. Plates approved by the DMV are subject to signification regulations, including "no slogans, names or other text."

The Americans United lawsuit says the Christian license plate violates the separation of church and state as well as freedom of speech. It notes that other religions will not be able to get similar license plates expressing differing viewpoints, nor can a comparable "I Don't Believe" license plate be issued.

The lawsuit was filed in Columbia, S.C., in the U.S. District Court for South Carolina.

"The state has made believers of non-Christian faiths feel that they are second-class citizens," Lynn said. "Under our Constitution, that's impermissible."

Attorneys working on the case include AU Legal Director Ayesha N. Khan, AU Litigation Counsel Heather Weaver and AU Madison Fellow Nancy Leong. Aaron J. Kozloski of Capitol Counsel, a Columbia, S.C. law firm, is serving as local counsel.

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

Another License Plate Available in South Carolina

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry, located in Charleston, SC, have worked with the state's DMV to produce a specialty plate that reads "In Reason We Trust," in contrast to another specialty plate that reads "In God We Trust."

The group's website gives instructions on how to obtain the plate. (See

<http://lowcountry.humanists.net/>.) The specialty plate costs an extra \$30.00.

SHL member Bill Dusenberry, who was an AFS member when he lived in Georgia several years ago, originally proposed the idea and did much of the work to see it become a reality.

The South Carolina DMV website shows the "Secular Humanist plate" at

<http://www.scdmvonline.com/VehPlateSpecialty.aspx>.



George Carlin Dies at 71

The famous atheist comedian, George Carlin, died on June 23 in Santa Monica, CA. Known for his famous routine on "Seven Words You Can Never Say On Television," he was a television staple through the 1970s, serving as host of the "Saturday Night Live" debut in 1975. He had

23 comedy albums, 14 HBO specials, was in many movies.

G. Carlin's Biography: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Carlin

Touched By...: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niqVVENiY2c>

Religion Is BS: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MeSSwKffj9o>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SyWEBbFWU1o&feature=related>

AU To Monitor Implementation of New Anti-Evolution Law

National Group Says Litigation Will Follow If Measure Is Used to Promote Religion in Public Schools

Americans United for Separation of Church and State warned Louisiana officials on June 27 that lawsuits will result if the state's new anti-evolution law is used to introduce religion into public school classrooms.

On June 26 Governor Bobby Jindal signed the legislation (SB 733), which allows teachers to use "supplemental materials" when discussing evolution. The measure was pushed by the Louisiana Family Forum and the Discovery Institute, two Religious Right groups that advocate creationism, and is widely seen as an effort to water down instruction about evolution.

"I am very disappointed that Gov.

Jindal signed this unwise and unnecessary measure," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, Americans United executive director. "Louisiana has a long and unfortunate history of trying to substitute dogma for science in public school classrooms. Let me state clearly and upfront that any attempts to use this law to sneak religion into public schools through the back door will not be tolerated."

Lynn urged Louisiana residents to monitor the situation in their local communities and report any potential violations to Americans United. He noted that the organization has a new chapter in Louisiana and that activists

on the ground will be watching developments in the state very closely.

Supporters of the bill, including the Discovery Institute and Sen. Ben Nevers, its primary sponsor, have insisted that the measure is not intended to promote religion. Americans United says it will hold them to that.

"I've heard from plenty of people in Louisiana who are embarrassed by this law and are concerned that it's just another attempt to bring religion into the public schools," said Lynn. "I call on all concerned residents of Louisiana to help us make sure that public schools educate, not indoctrinate."

[From a June 27 AU press release.]

On the Expensive, Time-Consuming but Satisfying Process of Renovating Fine Old Historic Buildings in Smyrna...

By Ed Buckner, AFS Treasurer

As everyone surely knows, saving and renovating historic buildings is anything but cheap or easy. Restoration of a fine old Smyrna building—it dates from the 1800s—has so far cost, beyond the cost of purchasing it, over \$500,000 plus many in-kind donations of work, and is now finally near completion; it will cost more before it's done. More money needs to be raised, to no one's surprise.

I refer, of course, to the circa-1883 Taylor-Brawner House purchased in 2004. The land the house sits on and the old hospital building nearby were bought by the City of Smyrna and the renovation, *still* not quite complete, has cost about seven million dollars; they've spent \$25,000 just on providing a fiber internet network in the building; another two million dollars has been spent on the land to turn it into a park.

And why would I bring all that up? As you undoubtedly know by now, AFS has bought a Smyrna building that is older (1866) and possibly even more important to Smyrna/Oakdale's history, built as it was to replace a building (along the main Marietta-to-Atlanta route) that was destroyed by federal troops in the Civil War (or The War Between the States, if you prefer). After only four to five months, *our* restoration is nearly complete, and the result is delightful to all who have seen it. It has taken hundreds of volunteer man-hours (some women-hours, too) from dozens of volunteers and from a few people hired to do work on the floors, the [alleged] lead-paint-and-asbestos abatement, the septic tank line, the trees, and security. The man-hours have been extremely unevenly distributed, with far more work done, especially lately, by **Mark Banks, Doug Hattersley, Dennis Martin, Steve**

Yothment, Phil Geary, Bruce Herr, and, possibly more than everyone else combined, by **Lew Southern**. It has cost more than we planned—most notably to abate possibly imaginary risks for something approaching thirty percent of what we've spent—more than on any other item:

Testing/"Abatement" for lead paint/asbestos	\$4,250.00
Hardware, lumber, trim, plumbing,	
locks, paint, food, misc., etc.	3,389.27
Trees—arborist and tree/stump removal	2,825.00
Refinishing floors in main meeting room	2,075.00
Doors & trim	941.09
Bricks	619.04
Security equipment/service	474.00
Septic line clearing	400.00
Flooring, foyer	396.32
<u>Disposal skiff & services.....</u>	<u>390.00</u>
TOTAL SO FAR	\$15,759.72
(Heating/Air and some minor items are still to go.)	

We've had major contributions to support this effort—including one donation of \$10,000, from a donor who wants no publicity, explicitly to use for renovations—and we have pledges from a few others (now is *definitely* the time to meet your pledge, if you haven't yet and you can), but we're out of money. Once we sell the two office condos, we'll be in better shape—still in debt, to be sure, but much less so. So, the point—you knew I had one, right?—is that we could sure use some financial contributions, large or small, to make sure we can finish this work and meet our financial obligations in the meantime. Please help if you can.

Why I Am an Atheist

By Joe Holman, a former
Christian minister

#1) I am an atheist because the god believer has the burden of proof when trying to establish the existence of a god and has not met that burden. The burden of proof is on the god believer to prove that a god exists. It is not up to the atheist to disprove what has never been established in the first place. So often I am told, "You cannot prove that there is no god." This is backwards reasoning. I am not obligated to disprove that a leprechaun is standing beside you. You must first prove to me that one is there. Otherwise, I am under no obligation to accept your leprechaun hypothesis. The default position would be "anti-leprechaunism" you could say. Is it possible that a leprechaun is next to you? Sure, but I have no reason to believe such a thing, and until I do I will keep being an "anti-leprechaunist!" The same applies to gods and goddesses of all varieties. On all counts, the theist fails to meet his burden of proof and therefore, atheism stands by default.

#2) I am an atheist because all the world's religions have failed to demonstrate that they are ways to a god. They are all based on the ignorance of man trying to explain the world in terms he can understand. Religions (or the notions that later became religions) were built to enable man to feel that he controlled his destiny and the natural world around him, yet these religions exhibit no signs that a supernatural being is behind them, not one. None of them have been able to demonstrate supernatural origins at all. None of them have been able to tell us what science has told us about the origin of our universe. Why don't any of them speak of the big bang as our origin? Basically, there is nothing about any of them that compels the educated mind of today to give them a second look. Every religion is just as desperate and hopeless as the next. All of them are trying to heighten man's place in a world of catastrophe and pain. How sad!

#3) I am an atheist because all I know is the natural world. All of my

senses are for the natural world. My desires and longings are fleshly in nature. No deity has manifested himself in our purely physical world. One thing about these gods and goddesses is their terrible timing and planning! Their strange methodology and tendencies to keep hiding when we need them the most is undeniable.

I am supposed to believe that a being invisible to the naked eye is lurking above the heavens, is great enough to guide my life, hear my every prayer, and direct my every step, but for some strange reason, refuses to manifest himself directly to his highest creation, man? I have never heard from this being even once. I must ask, why? I used to think this a selfish line of questioning, but now I can find not one good reason to keep guessing why a god who loves and wants so much for us would refuse to acknowledge his physical existence. Very simply, I am weary of anyone who claims ownership of our bodies and even our very "souls," and yet I am compelled to dispute his existence! Not only that, I see no miracles, no resurrections, no signs in the heavens, no accurate revelations to man. I observe absolutely nothing that makes me look "beyond the clouds" for a god.

The mystic and the psychic tell me there is a "third eye" I can open by meditating and using the right drugs. They tell me nonsense like the idea that I only use 10% of my brain and that the other sections are roped off for "the spiritual man to uncover." This is a spooky world for the mystic. He accepts telekinesis, psychic surgery, UFO abductions, crop circle phenomenon, Ouija boards, and pseudo-scientific claims on every level. He believes in an immortal nature within man, a human spirit that can leave and enter the body with the right "enlightenment." Haunted houses and unexplained phenomenon are exaggerated to be ghostly encounters when these explanations grossly fail to pass the tests of critical examination.

When all of the hoopla is cleared

away, I am left with nature, mundane and boring as it sometimes can be. If I am confined to live in and abide by the rules of a natural world, then I must try to explain my world on the very same principles. Again, all I can see and verify is the natural, so it makes no sense to draw crazy conclusions that there is a "non-matter" entity out there that runs the show. The law of rationality demands that I draw only those conclusions that are warranted by the evidence: I see, hear, feel, touch, and smell nature. I am obligated to find the simplest answer that accounts for my observational data and sensory perceptions of the world.

#4) I am an atheist because being so enables me to make honest decisions about things in the world around me. Not being committed to a doctrine enables me to study the world and accept what I see as a valid explanation of itself. The religious man, particularly the fundamentalist, is enslaved to a doctrine, a belief system that must be right at all costs. He must reason backwards, finding evidences that back up his preconceived ideas. His eternal soul rests on justifying what he already believes to be true. Therefore, his objectivity is lost in the process.

For instance, the Christian must accept all bible discrepancies and atrocities as just and right actions from a just and right God. He must accept everything the book reveals, lock, stock and barrel. He cannot discriminate based on reason what he will or will not accept. One of the biggest benefits of science is that science is self-correcting, unlike theology! When a scientist and his work are found to be wrong, his next step is to correct it, or if he can't, he must throw it out. Science rectifies itself whereas archaic theology will always remain the same.

#5) I am an atheist because faith is a flawed system to live by. "Where does faith come in?" the Christian asks. "No where at all," I reply. Faith is a flawed system to live by. Think about it for a minute. Every religious

Why I Am an Atheist (*continued*)

American every Sunday or Saturday goes to his/her church with the same belief that God is encouraging their actions. The Seventh Day Adventist feels that God has led him to accept the Ten Commandments as still binding today. He disagrees with his Baptist and Methodist neighbors he adores so much. Meanwhile, the Baptist and Methodist neighbors go to their own churches and sing another worn out verse to "Amazing Grace." They listen to the charming preacher and get their feel-good pills for the week. They've been told that their sins are forgiven. They are saved by faith alone. The Church of Christ Scientist believes that God has forbidden the use of medications. Their children can die for lack of them, but by faith, they walk their spiritual walk onward believing they are pleasing God. The Mormon arrives at his worship hour waiting to be encouraged and strengthened for taking such criticism from the rest of Christianity that he has been receiving all week for following Joseph Smith, that great prophet who founded their church. He is happy to sing another verse of, "Give Me Back My Prophet," in his Mormon hymn book.

What's wrong with this picture? The problem with this picture is faith. This I-don't-know-but-I-believe-God-is-with-me idea is the very cause of the division Christianity keeps producing. Everyone in our scenario above is a victim of faith. He believes God is with him but has no way of establishing the truth of the matter. In a way, believers, especially the evangelical type, are salesman: they (a) create a need for their product by convincing people they have a problem. And (b) they show why their product is the ideal cure, and that (c) brand(s) X (other faiths and religions) are not as good as theirs! There are conversions every which way, into and out of every religion worldwide. What does God really want? Which church is *his* church? Does he even desire Sunday worship at all? You will never know for sure, but you can "have faith," empty and not so reassuring as it is.

This system will never work for one who must have answers. Go to your local library and educate yourself on matters of science if you long for better assurance of facts. Those who desire closure and security will never find it in Christianity. It is not there to be had. No assurance can be called "blessed assurance."

#6) I am an atheist because I got tired of playing the guessing game. This was probably the hardest aspect of Christianity to cope with. Christianity was a game, a guessing game where you tried with all your heart to find out what God wanted for you, but never could make sense of anything that happened around you. I grew tired of trying to guess just where and how God was involved in my life.

The same guessing game would sprout up every time a tragedy sprung up on one of God's people. Brother Bob was killed in a car wreck on the way to a gospel meeting. He was going to preach the gospel of Christ that night, but was killed thanks to a drunk driver. Surely God would have wanted this brother alive? He was going to preach his word. Brother Bob was walking in the light and following the Lord. What happened? It was in God's power to prevent this tragedy. That puts this tragedy on God. I thought God was supposed to be there for us in times of need. Were there too many preachers and this was God's way of firing brother Bob? Was he going to preach soul-damning error and the Lord was doing us all a favor by eliminating him? Did he have some sordid sin in his life that God was tired of seeing and decided that it was time for brother Bob to cash in his chips? Was brother Bob's family being chastened by God by his death to strengthen them, or how about me maybe?

When I would pray and ask God for something and got no answer, the mind naturally begins to consider why. "Maybe God did not grant my prayer request because it was not in accordance with his will for me? Maybe God will answer it, but will do

it in his own time. How long will that be and how do I know when I receive such an answer? When the prayer is answered, how do I know it would not have happened anyway? What if God told me no? But wait, my request was definitely in accordance with his will I know, so why do I see no results? Maybe I am not praying long and hard enough. Guess I'll just keep praying and waiting for something to happen."

When it comes to the will of the gods, the questions and possibilities are as endless as the grains of sand on planet earth. Too many strange things happen not to question the nature of these things. I must confess, if what some theists say is true and God has a "secret plan that we humans will just never understand," then I've got to hand it to him, he has done the best job anyone could ever do! No one could possibly make sense of all the tragedies, unexplained deaths, religious confusion, natural phenomenon, and heartache that he allows to go on every day of this life. I never knew or could know if and what God ever did. I had to live each day with the same confusion everybody else faced with no way to identify what was and was not God's will. I decided I was finished guessing and ready to start knowing! It all got old. I couldn't take it any longer.

#7) I am an atheist because I got tired of trying to find connections where there were none. One big tendency of the human mind is to see connections where none exist. Let's look at the Christian apologist's approach to finding evidences of bible inspiration.

The Christians have long maintained that certain events in the Old Testament are foreshadowings of the New Testament, particularly in the life of Christ. For example, theists say that Joseph and Jesus are types of each other. Joseph was rejected by his brothers, and after spending time in a pit (a symbol of the grave), Joseph was exalted and his brethren revered him. Jesus was rejected by his people and after his crucifixion, was exalted,

Why I Am an Atheist (*continued*)

and his brothers (in faith) revered him.

In the first judgment of the earth in the days of Noah, God swore he would never again use water to vanquish evil. Instead, just the opposite of water, fire is to be God's new weapon of choice (2 Peter 3:10).

Any time a freethinker finds fault with Christ's decision to wait over two thousand years to come back to earth, theologians are excited to point out that the skeptics are "fulfilling the prophecy of Peter" in 2 Peter 3:5; "In the last time mockers shall come walking after their lusts and saying, 'where is the promise of his coming?'"

In Exodus 32, the people of Israel sinned by worshipping the golden calf. God was angry with the people for their sins and purposed to destroy Israel. Moses acted as a mediator for the people in persuading God to spare them. Theologians draw attention to how Christ does the same for us before the father (1 Timothy 2:5). Not to mention, both were marked for death at birth, and both had a radiant face.

The above scriptural comparisons are examples of how the Christian theist reasons. In light of these cited instances, it seems to be happy hunting ground for the theist. He has so many "foreshadowing evidences" of inspiration. Of course, to reason this way is unfounded. There are no connections between the events of the Old Testament characters and the New Testament's Son of God that are genuine. Jesus and Joseph have only as much in common as the myth makers of the New Testament wanted Christ to be like. Even if the Christ myth was based on a real individual, the cited connections are far from remarkable. The same is obvious of Moses and Christ. There can be no "prophetic connections" because the New Testament was written after the Old. All of the Jewish qualities seen in Jesus were so created to appeal to the Jews and pagans, respectively. Peter's "prophecy" of mockers is all but indicative of a distinct saintly voice trying to slow down the inevitable decline of faith in a mythical savior who stood his disciples up and has never

returned, or at best, proved to be a savior who abandoned his cult because of inevitable human mortality.

I can remember being so charmed with these and a hundred more little "examples of inspiration" I thought I found. But as I said, theists find connections where there are none. Obscure passages come to life for them because of their burning convictions that passages do, in fact, say what they so badly want to believe about them. Without this bridge-building, passage-connecting "faith," a study of the bible is only a study of an ancient text reflecting the views of the time in which it was written. Without blind and overly-optimistic faith, the "good book" is nothing more than an ancient capsule of obsolete theology from an age long gone. It will fail every critical test and offers little to a new and modern world.

#8) I am an atheist because man is an animal and not a special creation or divinely destined creature. Animals, regardless of intelligence, are animals, and animals are beasts of nature, products of a savage world, hardly worthy of the standards of a Heaven or Hell. Perhaps the late Charles Lee Smith, President and founder of the America Association for the Advancement of Atheism, said it best in his debate with O. C. Oliphant: "The descendants of apes need no savior." [The Oliphant-Smith Debate, p. 34. 1929] How true! Geology, biology, and just about every other academic field will verify this fact.

A stout look at our physical make-up will reveal that we humans eat, sleep, procreate, and defecate—along with the rest of the animals. We get goose bumps when we are cold or scared to help our "fur" stand taller and thus, have a better chance of survival. Our fingers have nails on their ends, remnants of claws from a very long time ago. They are made of keratin, the same substance which composes all claws. To this day, members of our society suffer herniated disks and foot and arch problems due to our lack of adaptation to walking upright on land. This kill-or-be-killed na-

ture of the world shows a very cruel god, in fact, an infinitely evil god, if one exists at all! What would we do to a genius scientist who, if he had a choice in the matter, chose to set up a system of life where higher life forms eat the lower ones! We would find it unthinkably cruel, but we give God a pass on it! As I said, infinitely evil!

Man is an animal, despite his big brain, his relatively hairless physique, his proudly upright posture, and his washed and deodorized body! DNA, used to conduct paternity tests and tell us who the father and mother of a child is, will tell the story of our evolutionary descent and kinship with every other life form on earth. We share over 98% of our DNA with our closest cousins, the chimpanzees. Other forms of life, beginning with mammals, going on down through amphibians, reptiles, and bacteria show successively less genetic similarity to us. This conclusively proves our kinship to the animal kingdom.

#9) I am an atheist because Christianity (and all theism) manifests self-centered arrogance, the height of unfounded pride, and pompous egotism. Often the atheist is accused of being the arrogant one in a discussion of spiritual vs. materialistic matters, but the Christian is the guilty one. I can imagine no more arrogant a philosophy than one which states that intelligent man is the greatest and most prized creation in the universe. Isn't this convenient? The mighty silverback with his strength, or the bull elephant is not so loved, nor is the industrious otter the #1 creation, though he works so tirelessly to build a great home and dam that is truly a work of wildlife art. In addition to being a great builder, the otter manages to not kill his own kind as humans do. It is man who is capable of so much more than every other creature. He is the greatest. On top of our many accomplishments, we have sky spirits that take special interest. Wow! Now our heads are getting even bigger!

The arrogance of Christianity is seen in the purpose of God for man. I must ask why the omnipotent creator

Why I Am an Atheist (continued)

of heaven and earth needs lowly me to do anything? The child likes to play in his backyard and pretend that the general has called him on a secret and very important mission to accomplish. The same type of childish motive is found in Christianity. I am commissioned to bring a message to those around me who do not have it, in order to establish their hearts as dwelling places for God. Souls are at risk! The mission is crucial! Why didn't the Almighty bother to take the time and implant his important knowledge in everyone's mind? Why does the Almighty need me to do anything he could do by the slightest of thoughts? If there is humility in serving God and trusting some unknown higher power to reveal the deep mysteries of life, then where is the humility in believing in only one god? Why not a god for the trees, the animals, the different rocks, and the seas, and mountains? Are polytheists more humble?

This god business is a big business and has gone through a lot of changes through the last few millennia. The seafarer of old watched the stars. The old world farmer trusted the sun and the gods of vegetation. Today, the good Bible-believing Christian trusts his three-in-one god to give him purpose, hope, and a home beyond the clouds, which brings us to the next little arrogant aspect of Christianity, eternal life. Why I must live on after the grave is arguably the most selfish thing of all. Once I arrive, what makes me so important that I am indispensable? Why must I abide forever? Isn't it interesting how we hear so little about the great before and so much about the great beyond? The arrogance of Christianity is definitely a comforting religious notion for man, for it tells him how undeniably important he is to the universe itself. He is at the center of it and it revolves around him. Can't I live out my days here in dignity with sobriety and honesty? The real humility of materialism says "Yes" while arrogant theism says "No." If it were up to believers in fundamentalist Christianity, there would-

n't even be a space program!

#10) I am an atheist because the natural sciences bankrupt the bible, and theism in general. Astronomy, usually held to be one of the most awe-inspiring proofs of God, was one of my biggest hurts of faith. I did not see a hand of God declaring his glory in the heavens. I see a myriad of stars, some brighter and more glorious than our own.

I see one planet teeming with life amidst gaseous, lethal pockets of stardust and radiation, pure chaos in action! Our solar system bears the scars of its cruel evolution. The planet Mercury is so close to the sun that she scorches on one side and freezes on the other. Venus, though originally much like earth, has been consumed by heat hot enough to melt lead! A runaway greenhouse effect got started making the planet unlivable. Earth, Mars, and the two planets we've just mentioned dwell closer to the sun because of their slower orbital speed, whereas the planets that dwell further away do so because of higher orbital speed. This suggests a natural explanation for our solar system and not a divinely created one. Planets like Saturn and Uranus have rings because of collisions with massive meteors ages ago. Moons have craters for the same reason. Moons themselves form by way of catastrophes. Our earth wobbles on its axis which resulted in the ice ages. Were it not for a decent electromagnetic field, we would cook in cosmic solar radiation. We are one planet of nine planets, orbiting a star which is only one of several hundred billion in just our galaxy. At least 125 billion other galaxies exist rendering earth as relatively insignificant. Astronomy testifies to man's departure as the supremely important being in the universe! Earth is barely fit for our survival and it won't be forever.

Whether its astronomy, biology, cosmology, or zoology, the natural sciences forever remove God's role as ruler of the universe.

#11) I am an atheist because God's living room has been getting smaller

and smaller each generation: As we said, the sciences, with one voice, with one voice, force God out of the picture. He must find a new home in the world. Now God lives only in the gaps of our knowledge of the world. Those gaps are closing quickly. We used to think that the earth was flat. The bible even tells us so, "The pillars of the earth tremble" (Job 9:6). Now we know better. We used to think that earth was at the center of the universe and unmoving. The bible even tells us so, "Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever" (Psalm 104:5). Now we know better. We used to believe that stars are just points of light in the sky. Indeed, the bible tells us so.

The bible mentions two creations, the creation of the sun, and the creation of the stars, "And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also" (Genesis 1:16). Notice how God created the greater light (the sun) to rule the day, and then as an afterthought, "made the stars also!" This shows that the ancient writers of Genesis had no understanding as to the nature of stars. (If the bible were the product of inspiration, it should!). Again, now we know better! We used to believe that the earth was six thousand years old. The bible implies every bit as much by adding up the ages of the patriarchs and comparing the genealogies of Jesus which go all the way back to creation (Matthew 1/Luke 3). Since Jesus said man was created "from the beginning of the creation" (Mark 10:6), this leaves no time for additional eons to be inserted to account for the ancient (billions of years old) earth that almost all scientists in the world recognize to be the obvious truth.

These are a handful of thoughts, a summation of why I am an atheist. To me, it seems clear that the thinking person is forced into this position.

[For details on Mr Holman's ministerial education and experience, see his weblog at <http://ministerturnsatheist.org/>. This article reprinted by permission.]

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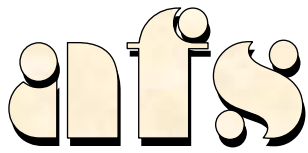
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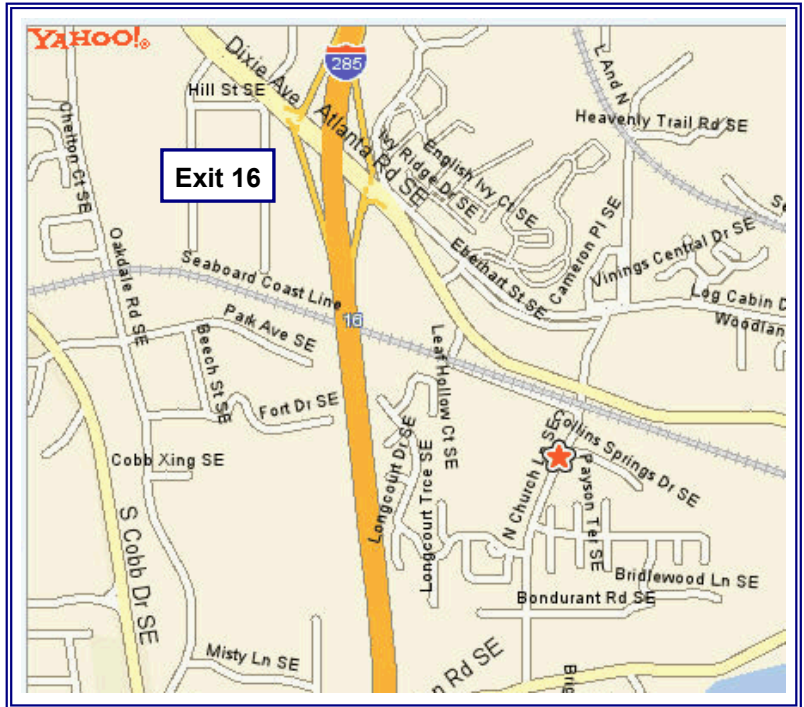
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