

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself.*

An AFS Publication • Volume 15 Number 3 • March 2009

## The March AFS Meeting

The March AFS meeting will be on the third Sunday of the month, March 15, at 1:00 PM and will be a joint meeting with the Humanists of Georgia. The featured speaker will be **Jim Haught**, editor of the Charleston, WV *Gazette*. His talk will be on "Holy Horrors," a slide lecture about the problem of religious atrocities, cruelties, persecutions and massacres that have occurred up to the present day.

Jim Haught is a prolific writer, having written 8 books. Perhaps his most popular work is the book *Holy Horrors: An Illustrated History of Religious Murder and Madness*, published by Prometheus Books.

The meeting will be at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Smyrna, GA, at 1:00 PM. Please feel free to arrive early for snacks and conversation. We also typically go out to lunch together after the meeting.

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 AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be at **Panahar Restaurant**, 3375 Buford Hwy, Atlanta, on Friday, March 13, at 7:00 PM.

Come meet **Hank Shiver**, who plans to be at the social.

## AFS Meetings and Activities

Mar 13: AFS Social at Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

Mar 15: AFS Meeting w/Jim Haught, AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

Mar 29: AFS Meeting w/Hank Shiver, AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

## A Second AFS Meeting in March!

AFS member **Hank Shiver** will be in town (he lives in Lake Chapala, Mexico) and will speak at another AFS meeting on the fifth Sunday of March, March 29. Hank will speak on "Thomas Paine and His Writings."

This meeting will also be at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Smyrna, GA, at 1:00 PM. We plan to go out for lunch after the meeting.

## Darwin Day a Big Success

The AFS Darwin Day Celebration with the Campus Freethinkers at Georgia Tech was a big success. We had two tables with 12 dozen free cupcakes, coffee, posters and free literature on Darwin and Evolution on the walkway near the Student Center on the Georgia Tech campus. Hundreds of students got to see our display and converse with us about Darwin and what he accomplished.

It was also great to see the Campus Freethinkers group. They are growing, with 18 or so people attending their meetings. This event no doubt has given them more exposure and will help their group expand.

A big "Thank You" goes to Michael Smith, the Campus Freethinkers' president, for organizing the event, and to members of both groups who showed up to serve cupcakes and coffee and talk about Darwin with students.

## The Northeast Georgia Atheists

Tony King ([ngoldwe@alltel.net](mailto:ngoldwe@alltel.net)) is looking to start a new group, the Northeast Georgia Atheists. The group is open to all nonreligious people living in northeast Georgia. They will have a meet-up soon. See <http://atheists.meetup.com/610/>. The group's email list is <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/negaf/>.

## Other Meetings of Interest

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AF Hall on Sunday, March 15, at 1:00 PM. This meeting will be a joint meeting with the Atlanta Freethought Society.

The **Fayette Philosophers** meet in Peachtree City, GA on Wednesdays at 7:00 PM at the Orthodontist's Office on Peachtree Pkwy near Crosstown Road. The group also meets for lunch on the first and third Saturday of the month at the Irish Bred Pub, 275 Hwy 74 N. For details, contact Shelby at [freediscussion@hotmail.com](mailto:freediscussion@hotmail.com).

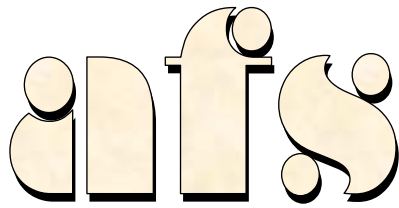
The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 1:00 PM at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

There will be a "**meetup**" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, March 8, 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, March 22, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta.

**GUST** (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Gwinnet (12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville) on Wednesday, March 11, at 7:00 PM. (See <http://gust.domek.org/>.)

**SOS**, the Secular Organizations for Sobriety, is not having regular meetings, but if you would like to learn about the group, email Donna Gore at [donnaigore@yahoo.com](mailto:donnaigore@yahoo.com).



# Atlanta Freethought Society

## Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at the AFS Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Smyrna, GA, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

Mar 15: Jim Haight, editor of the Charleston, WV *Gazette*, will give a Power Point presentation on religious atrocities from his books *Holy Horrors* and *Holy Hatred*. This is a joint AFS/HGA meeting on the third Sunday of March.

Apr 12: TBD

May 10: TBD

June 14: Dr. A. Bowdoin Van Riper, a Southern Polytechnic University professor, will speak on Charles Darwin and Evolution.

## 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.

## Atlanta Freethought News an AFS publication

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Steve Yothment

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## Atlanta Freethought News

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# On the Legal Philosophy of American Atheists

By Edwin Kagin, National Legal Director of American Atheists

**AS** Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. observed, the law “is not a brooding omnipresence in the sky...” Understanding this basic truth can prevent much confusion in thinking about the law.

Most people would not be so uninformed or foolish as to think they know more than their doctor if told they need heart surgery or will die. Yet the same people will, without skipping a beat, presume to know what the law is, how the law works, and what a proper legal judgment should be.

A few years ago, a young counselor at Camp Quest informed me, with proud conviction, that “possession is 90% of the law.” I told him this was a testable hypothesis. All he needed to do was take someone’s car without their permission, drive it around until stopped by the police, then argue that the car was his by right of possession. He is now a fine young lawyer who does not issue such incorrect generalities. Be assured that almost everything you think you know “for certain” about the law is almost certainly wrong.

It is my honor, as National Legal Director for American Atheists, to set forth the current legal philosophy for the organization. Understanding and acceptance of this will answer many questions, and hopefully prevent hard feelings, in that the national office receives daily requests for legal advice and help on issues involving church state separation, only a fraction of which can be addressed. A process is required to help decide with which cases American Atheists should become involved. Most claims sent in do have merit. The problem is there is not world enough or time or money available to deal with any but a few of them. Assaults on our First Amendment freedoms must be triaged.

**WHAT IS “THE LAW” ANYHOW?** For openers, it consists of written statutes and local ordinances, both federal and state. We have a system of United

States Courts, created by the Constitution, that deals with federal law. The judges are appointed by the President of the United States, to serve “during good behavior,” or essentially for life.

Each state has its own laws, courts, and court rules, occasionally wildly at variance one with another. Behavior lawful in one state can get you thrown in the slammer in another. The judges are usually elected or appointed or a combination of both for a fixed term. Counties and cities can make their own laws or ordinances if they have a grant of authority from the state or federal government to do so.

There are methods of appeal to higher courts from the ruling of judges. Each state has its own appellant system; the courts of the United States have another, both ending at the United States Supreme Court. One does not “take the case all the way to the Supreme Court.” No one “takes” a case to the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS). One petitions SCOTUS to hear a case, and the odds are several thousand to one against a given case being granted review. If the high court takes a case, and makes a ruling, whether the case comes up through the federal or state system, the holdings of the court make legal rulings that become precedents binding in every court of the United States. A SCOTUS ruling may not be correct, but it is final.

In addition to written laws, the concept of the law encompasses common law as it has developed over centuries. This is the body of law, the *corpus juris*, as decided in actual justiciable cases by courts of record, and the law requires that such rulings are to be followed until changed by a higher court. And they do get changed. One day, separate but equal schools may be constitutional, then, on a different ruling of SCOTUS, the law is changed and separate but equal schools is an unlawful concept. One day, abortion may be unlawful, then the next ruling permits abortion.

SCOTUS has the power to reverse that ruling at any time.

The scope of a given court ruling depends on the jurisdiction of the court—the area over which that court has power. A city court ruling affects only that city, and a state court holding, or a federal opinion, affects only the area served by that court. The appeal courts have a wider net. The Supreme Court of a state can make precedents that bind all courts of that state. A federal court usually covers a specific geographical portion of a state. A United States Court of Appeal covers several states. If, by way of example, a bad decision is made in a federal court in Louisville, Kentucky, it is binding only in about half of the state. If that bad holding is appealed to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals, which covers all of Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio and Tennessee, and that bad ruling is affirmed, the party taking the appeal has expanded a local horror story into bad law for four states. If SCOTUS takes the case and affirms the bad ruling, a major legal disaster has occurred that affects the way the law will be decided throughout the entire United States and in every court therein. If one has any concern for the future of our freedoms, one should proceed with caution. This is not a suitable sport for amateurs.

**BAD FACTS MAKE BAD LAW.** It should be considered an act of legal negligence to take a case to a higher court where it is predestined that the court will rule against a meritorious cause, and thereby make bad law not only in that case, in that region of the country, but, depending on which appellant court is chosen, make bad law for a wider area, where the bad ruling will be the law until the case is ultimately, if ever, overruled. By building on bad precedents, the very concept of separation of religion and government could be destroyed. The religious right understands this. We would be well advised to understand

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## Legal Philosophy (*continued*)

it as well.

Legislative bodies, nationally and in each state, create written statutory law. Judges, who are required to be fair and objective, rule on the interpretation of the laws passed by these bodies, and state (when appropriate) whether a given law is or is not constitutional. The Constitution of the United States and its Amendments is the supreme law of our land, followed by Treaties between nations, then by statutory laws. An independent judiciary decides if a given law is constitutional and, if so, how it is to be interpreted. The Legislative and Judicial branches of government are created by the Constitution, as is the third branch of government, the Executive, consisting of the President of the United States or the Governor of a state or commonwealth. Neither Congress nor the legislative body of any state may lawfully pass legislation contrary to the Constitution, nor may the Executive branch lawfully enforce such laws.

If this is not confusing enough, consider that the prejudices, beliefs, politics, religion, etc., of the judges on a court determine in large measure how they will view a legal question. They may or may not be conscious of these factors, but they are there. It has something to do with being human. Thus, judges with liberal backgrounds are likely to decide an issue one way and judges who are proudly conservative will decide another way. There are many emotionally charged and controversial issues these days, issues for which there is no plain and clear answer, such as gay marriage. In such cases, only the personal architecture of the individual judges deciding the questions will form the basis for decision. The Constitution could not predict, and give answers for, every fact situation that might arise. This is where mature, well-grounded, legal judgment is needed. Law can be quoted to support any idea, noble or base. Go to a law library and look at the rows of law books containing decisions. Someone lost every one of

those cases.

It is the philosophy of American Atheists to win cases and create favorable law. This is a change from the past policy of the organization. That philosophy was to file the case, no matter how unlikely a court victory might seem, to make the point urged. If something was wrong, it was felt that action should be taken regardless of the outcome. That philosophy had merit when different people were on the higher courts. In the 1960s, a lawyer could bring a civil rights violation before the courts, be quite sloppy in pleading practice and, in the interests of substantial justice, the courts might well carve out an opinion that granted relief and comported with due process of law considerations and the Bill of Rights. That was a golden age of civil rights litigation. The religious right hated every moment of it.

**THINGS HAVE CHANGED.** The persons of high vision on our highest court have gone to honored places in the history of the law. Justices Black, Douglass, Warren, Marshall and many other great defenders of freedom are no more. By virtue of the philosophy of their appointers, persons of less noble character and less shining intellect have taken their places. The past few years have seen an erosion of civil liberties and a battering against the Wall of Separation between Church and State that is without equal in our history. Irreparable damage to the First Amendment has been done that may not be repaired within the life span of our republic. The forces that would establish a theocracy are not only beating on the gates of freedom, they are trying to pull down the wall of separation from within. Mean spirited people are in positions of power, and those who would destroy us are able to vote and sit on juries. Many are able to rule on legal cases and create binding precedent.

**THE CONSTITUTION IS NOT A SUICIDE PACT.** We do not have to take every wrong to court and thereby give some theocrat the right to say the

wrongful behavior is lawful and let that ruling become part of the body of the law future judges must follow. This is both the glory and danger of the legal doctrine of *stare decisis*, which means to stand on decisions that have gone before. Brilliant, bold, freedom friendly rulings of prior courts are being systematically swept away by courts that are rendering disastrous rulings in cases with poor facts that provide them with seemingly rational reasons to rule in abominable ways.

American Atheists declines to give those theocrats the ability to destroy the dream of our founders that citizens would enjoy the right to not be religious. We will respectfully decline to do battle on any issues other than those where the facts and the law compel a favorable ruling no matter how biased the court against us. And thus we will, brick by brick, rebuild the Wall.

**LITIGATION IS EXPENSIVE.** For every case presented to us, we must ask, "Is this a hill worth dying on?" We do not need to waste thousands of dollars on lawsuits that, given the facts at issue, the state of the law at this time, and the disposition of a given court, are doomed to certain failure. And in losing such actions, we do not need to be creating even more bad law for our descendants to clean up. We cannot make good law and ensure freedom by litigating bad, or even marginal, facts. And we will not gain credibility by losing cases, permitting the other side to mock our efforts and to laugh at us. "There go those Atheists again. They will lose like they always lose. When will they learn to sit down and shut up?" We must not give them that ammunition.

There are plenty of civil liberties abuses against Atheists these days. Many are better addressed by protests, letter writing, political action, interviews, debates, oratory and by using all of the free-speech options still left to us, rather than by reflexively resorting to legal actions.

We can afford to be picky and wait

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## Legal Philosophy (*continued*)

for cases we can win based on the present state of the law. Then, we can make some positive changes. We can cause even the most blinded-by-heavenly-light jurists to see that the actions complained of in our lawsuits are unlawful and are not to be permitted in a free nation that, in its founding document, prohibited its government from making laws "respecting an establishment of religion."

There of course may be exceptions to this policy. We will litigate, regardless of consequences, if a situation is

so egregious we cannot let it pass unchallenged. We will litigate if the perceived consequences of not litigating would be worse than the possible adverse consequences of litigating. This will have to be based on sound legal judgment and decided on a case-by-case basis.

The word will get out to those bent on imposing their religion upon us that, if American Atheists threatens a lawsuit, they had best pay attention. Because they will know from our record that American Atheists will

probably win.

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*Edwin Kagin is cofounder, with his wife Helen, of Camp Quest, a summer camp at which young people can feel that "it's okay to not believe in a god." He is on the Board of Directors of American Atheists and is the author of a popular book Bubbles of Blasphemy, originally published by the Atlanta Freethought Society.*

*This article originally appeared in the January 2009 issue of American Atheist, and is reprinted here by permission.*

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## Atlanta Area News

### Angel Food Ministries Sued

A lawsuit filed in Walton County Superior Court alleges that the founders of Angel Food Ministries used the nonprofit to enrich themselves through sweetheart deals, kickbacks from food vendors and by rerouting money to themselves through their church.

The suit filed on February 25 by two board members of Angel Food Ministries, Craig Atnip of Texas and David Prather of Georgia, asks a judge to bar Joe and Linda Wingo and their sons, Andy and Wesley, from the premises of the nonprofit near Monroe and to protect the assets of the ministry.

The Wingo family runs the \$100 million Angel Food Ministries, which they began in 1994 and whose purpose is to help feed the poor. More than 200 metro Atlanta area churches participate in the food program.

"We have taken this action in an effort to preserve and protect Angel Food Ministries, a national food charity," Atnip said in a phone interview Friday afternoon.

The FBI raided the offices of the ministry earlier this month. The agency declined to say what it was looking for, but the suit said that Atnip and Prather talked to agents and a federal prosecutor from the Middle District of Georgia. The two testified before a federal grand jury about the Wingos, who have hired criminal defense attorneys with Angel Food money, the suit says.

The suit alleges the Wingo's enriched themselves by at least \$2.7 million. It includes \$600,000 the Wingos directed from Angel Food to their church, which was given to the Wingos for a "housing allowance."

The suit claims that Andy Wingo, who was the food buyer for Angel Food Ministries, took kickbacks from food buyers, and that other family members knew about it.

The suit also says that Joe Wingo set up a North Carolina

corporation to buy a personal jet, then leased the jet to Angel Food Ministries for a profit of \$10,000 a month.

The suit further alleges that the Wingos spent more than \$850,000 for personal goods using Angel Food credit cards.

[From a February 27 AJC article by Christopher Quinn.]

### GBI Raids Assisted Suicide Organization

Two people were arrested on February 25 after a Georgia Bureau of Investigation raid of an alleged nationwide assisted suicide group. GBI agents said the group, the Final Exit Network, is based in metro Atlanta and used the internet to recruit people who wanted to die.

The group's president and a volunteer were arrested in a sting in which a GBI agent posed as a potential candidate. Thomas Goodwin, 63, of Kennesaw and Clair Blehr, 76, of Atlanta are charged with tampering with evidence, assisting suicide, and racketeering and influence. They are being held at the Forsyth County jail.

The raids included a company called Nu Life Products in Lolo, Montana, which authorities say supplied items used in suicides. The Final Exit Network Website says people can send \$50 to Nu Life Products to receive a complete "exit bag kit."

Investigators said the pair was part of a national suicide assisted network based in Cobb County. People wanting to die paid \$50, filled out forms, and sent in medical records. Once chosen, network members, called "exit guides," would contact the person.

Authorities said a hood would be placed over the person's head while they suffocated on helium. Agents maintain that Goodwin and Blehr helped a Cumming man, who was not terminally ill, kill himself last June.

The eight-state investigation began after the coroner investigating that death noticed something was not right.

[From Feb. 26 stories on FoxNews.com and AJC.com.]

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A big "Thank You" goes to Linda Thomas for donating the speaker cabinets now used at AF Hall in our public address system! And thanks to Neil Ionone for delivering them to the hall!

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# AMERICAN ATHEISTS NATIONAL CONVENTION

APRIL 10, 11, 12, 2009 in... ATLANTA, GEORGIA !!

At the Emory Conference Center Hotel/Emory Inn, 1615 Clifton Road, Atlanta, GA 30329

## Confirmed Speakers at this time include:

### **Ed Buckner**

President, American Atheists, Inc.

### **Richard Dawkins**

Evolutionist/recognized author

### **Michelle Goldberg**

Noted Author, Journalist

### **Mike Malloy**

Nationally-syndicated talk radio personality

### **James Morrow**

Award-winning novelist

### **Dr. J. Anderson Thomson**

Psychiatrist, researcher, author

### **Nate Phelps**

Estranged son of Pastor Fred Phelps

### **John Lombard**

Beijing Secular Activist

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

### Friday, April 10,

- 10:00 AM WELCOME CEREMONY**  
Meet the VIPs and introduction of American Atheists, Inc. President ED BUCKNER
- 11:30 AM MICHELLE GOLDBERG**  
followed by \*Book signing\*
- 2:00 PM MIKE MALLOY**
- 3:30 PM JOHN LOMBARD**
- 5:00 PM TBD**
- 7:00 – 9:30 PM Silverbell Room, Open Banquet, Award Ceremony, Members Meeting**

### Saturday, April 11

- 10:00 AM DR. J. ANDERSON THOMSON, Jr.**
- 11:30 AM DR. RICHARD DAWKINS**  
followed by \*Book signing\*
- 2:00 PM NATE PHELPS**
- 3:30 PM JAMES MORROW**  
followed by \*Book signing\*
- 5:00 PM MASS DE-BAPTISM CEREMONY featuring FRANK ZINDLER and EDWIN KAGIN**
- 7:00 – 9:00 PM Silverbell Room, Open Banquet, Honor Lifetime/Gift and Legacy Members**

### Sunday, April 12

Dining Room; Breakfast. Arrive anytime between 8:00 and 11:00 AM and be greeted by AA board members and state directors who will be eager to chat with you, enjoy a cup of coffee, etc.

### Sunday afternoon group outing.

Major tour: Noon to 5:00 PM, Sunday, April 12, 2009

Destinations: Stone Mountain and its many attractions, then on to the historical Ku Klux site and on to Sweet Auburn -- the birthplace and resting place of Dr. Martin Luther King.

\$50 per person. Includes box lunch, transportation and all admissions.

Accessible for handicapped and limited mobility.

**\*\* Late breaking news:** Judge Luigi Tosti will also be a speaker at the Convention. He will tell the story of how he defied the illegal display of crosses in court buildings in the otherwise-secular Italian judicial system. On February 17 (just last month), he was acquitted of a jail conviction for refusing to enter courtrooms unless crucifixes were removed. The final court decision was that “no crime was committed.”

Register now at [http://www.atheists.org/store/index.php?main\\_page=index&cPath=23\\_22](http://www.atheists.org/store/index.php?main_page=index&cPath=23_22).

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# The Right to an Education

By Marco M. Pardi

The business community has a vested interest in the preparation of future employees, including not merely their academic development but also their ethics.

I have taught full and part time university and college Anthropology classes for 17 years, from 1969 to the present. Over that time I have seen variations in higher education come and go; among them, "No Grade," the elimination of the F as a means of pretending a student did not fail, "Grade Inflation," the upward creep of grades in an environment of intensifying diversity and increasing litigation, and lax application of accreditation standards in cases of certain classes of institutions. These and other trends ebb and flow, although grade inflation is still very much with us.

Particularly in the Evangelical era, beginning largely with the merging of the Falwell empire and the Reagan White House, and gaining great strength in the G. W. Bush administrations, we have seen a large increase in the proportions of students who, while taking science classes, reject the foundations of science. Proudly vocal and increasingly aggressive under their banner of divine "revealed wisdom," they employ religious web site based tactics for ambushing high school biology teachers, an echelon which is typically composed of people who, rightly, have learned more about how to teach science than how to do science. An examination of the web sites cited by these students, and/or the local clerics whose pronouncements they value, discloses that the web sites are filled with erroneous "facts" supported by spurious evidence and impossibly primitive logic. The clerics, in the same analysis, are neither theological scholars nor are they usually even conversant in the latest scholarship; they are teachers of the official line in the same echelon (in all fairness) as high school biology teachers. Yet, carrying their erstwhile successful tactics

with them from the high schools, these students enter college science classes.

Anthropology is, among many other things, the study of the origins and development of Mankind. As such, it very heavily employs: an understanding of evolutionary processes; the processes of gathering evidence; the nature of evidence; and, the interpretation of evidence. Properly presented, it lays out the parameters of science, particularly in the milieu of belief systems, common or otherwise. And, while some two year colleges admit as instructors those who have only satisfied certain degree requirements, without a day's worth of actual scientific practice, many of us have decades of experience in the practice of the disciplines we teach.

Never comfortable with the slogan that college teaching is an "opportunity to change minds," I have always strived by my own slogan, "What you believe is your business; what you know is mine." Yet, although I have not recently received the death threats and home and car vandalism I used to, I am increasingly encountering students in my science classes who make certain points clear. Specifically, they reject the foundations of science if, in their very narrow interpretation of theology and/or Biblical/Koranic scholarship, they feel they detect a conflict. And, they make it clear that any perceived disagreement with their preconceived positions will be taken as an insult warranting civil legal action. In short, litigation has moved beyond grade disputes, and is now in the realm of content disputes.

I recently presented this development to three classes as an example of culturally induced cognitive dissonance and its sequelae. Citing an archetypical religiously based student in a State college science class, I noted that, in classes such as mine, the student obtains a seat under false pretenses; they have no interest in science, no respect for science, and no intention of ever using it or its princi-

ples. The student, who claims to honor honesty as a virtue and dishonesty as a sin, is engaged in a direct conflict. Not only is this enrollment fundamentally dishonest, it locks out other students for whom the class is closed due to admission caps. And, many of these religiously based students are attending classes on scholarships that are funded by State lottery proceeds; itself a behavior which is morally repugnant to the religious systems since it is gambling.

The rejoinders included such claims as, "The course is required." Herein, then, lies yet another conundrum for the anathema averse student: Getting the degree (the End) justifies the means (the dishonesty inherent in taking the science class, gambling money or no gambling money). As I pointed this out, the grumbling faded to silence. Not mistaking silence for agreement, I proceeded with the day's material. Yet, a wealth of experience lies behind my periodic pulse checks of the academic community. I have too often heard the default position of the non-thinker versus the thinker; "Logic is the tool of the Silver Tongued Devil, seeking to lead the flock astray."

Multiple indicators clearly portray American scientific and business capacities (as measured by the quality of the thinkers in each arena) as dropping precipitously behind the rest of the Post-Industrial world. Indeed, the scientific community and the business community increasingly overlap. Yet, until such time as these communities cease to view colleges and universities as mere feed lots providing the next season of livestock from which they can pick, and begin to work in concert to participate in the academic and ethical quality of the classroom experience, we will continue to see this decline.

I have sometimes come close to suggesting to such students that they should enroll in the patently Fundamental "universities" and see how

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## The Right to an Education *(continued)*

well prepared they would be to enter the work force with a curriculum based strictly on the Bible or the Qu'ran. But, the eight years worth of G.W. Bush's staggeringly ignorant

federal appointees (from such schools) I saw during my career with the Federal Centers for Disease Control & Prevention remind me that, without due diligence, society can turn down

that path again.

*Marco M. Pardi is an adjunct faculty member in the Georgia University system and is author of the book Death: An Anthropological Perspective.*

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## Americans United On Resignation of James Dobson

### Watchdog Group Vows to Continue Opposing Narrow Vision of the Religious Right

**T**he founder of Focus on the Family, Dr. James C. Dobson, announced on February 27 that he is stepping down as chairman of that organization.

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, issued the following statement:

"James Dobson's decision to resign as chairman of Focus on the Family is unlikely to make much of a difference in the day-to-day operations of that organization. Dobson intends to continue his daily radio program and monthly mailings. He has also said he will keep handing out political endorsements. Many who listen to Dobson's daily radio broadcast may not even be aware of this change.

"Focus on the Family is merely re-

arranging the deck chairs on its big, intolerant ship."

"I do not expect this change to mean we will see any moderation in the rhetoric of Focus on the Family or its arm in Washington, the Family Research Council. For years, FOF has been the leading voice of religious extremism and intolerance in America. It has led the attack on the legal rights of gay and lesbian Americans, worked assiduously to undermine reproductive rights, assaulted the religious neutrality of public schools and labored to replace science with far-right, fundamentalist dogma."

"James Dobson's vision of America is of a divisive and narrow-minded nation, a country where an exceedingly limited version of Christianity—the type hewn to by Dobson and his fol-

lowers—is welded to the raw power of the state. In his misguided quest for an officially 'Christian America,' Dobson would trample on the rights of millions. I am thankful that so many Americans reject Dobson's disturbing vision."

"Despite my differences with him, if Dobson were truly retiring, I would wish him well. But I know that Dobson and so many other leaders of the Religious Right intend to remain active, working to force their exclusionary worldview onto the rest of us."

"For that reason, Americans United will continue to strongly oppose the agenda of Dobson and Focus on the Family no matter what title he uses."

[From a February 27 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.]

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## SCA Meets with Obama; Religious Group Outraged

**B**ack on February 6, a Religious Right group launched a vicious attack on the Secular Coalition for America and the Obama Administration. The extremist group, In God We Trust, announced a \$1 million fundraiser based on their hysteria over the SCA's access to the Obama transition team.

In God We Trust rightly pointed out that no "newly elected President has ever sat down with lobbyists for the American atheist movement to plot legislative strategy." The SCA is very proud to be the first to gain this kind of access. In the three and a half years the SCA has been lobbying in the nation's capital, their influence has grown to the extent that they are now being included in executive branch policy meetings where they can voice

the secular perspective on a range of issues such as employment discrimination, faith-based initiatives and abstinence-only sex education.

The SCA said in a February 12 press release that it is a huge victory for American nontheists for the SCA to be welcomed to these discussions, and that we should not let the Religious Right condemn the new administration for its willingness to hear the SCA's views.

The Secular Coalition says it is not radically left (they are in fact non-partisan), but that they are completely secular and they do urge every elected official and the new administration to honor America's secular heritage.

In an interview, Bishop Council Nedd of In God We Trust said, "Clearly, the administration is plan-

ning to push the radical left's vision of a completely secular United States down the throats of ordinary Americans."

Nedd pointed out that Congress recently inserted a ban on religious institutions benefiting from the President's "stimulus" bill. The ban could include colleges with divinity schools.

"The Obama administration is faking right in order to attempt to placate religious voters while running hard left and plotting strategy with the atheist Secular Coalition for America," said Nedd.

It is clear that the Religious Right fears the power that the SCA now has. The Secular Coalition is opening new doors of government to advance the secularist view in ways that were unthinkable just a few months ago.

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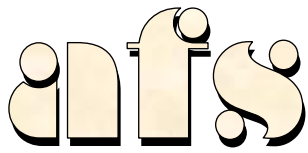
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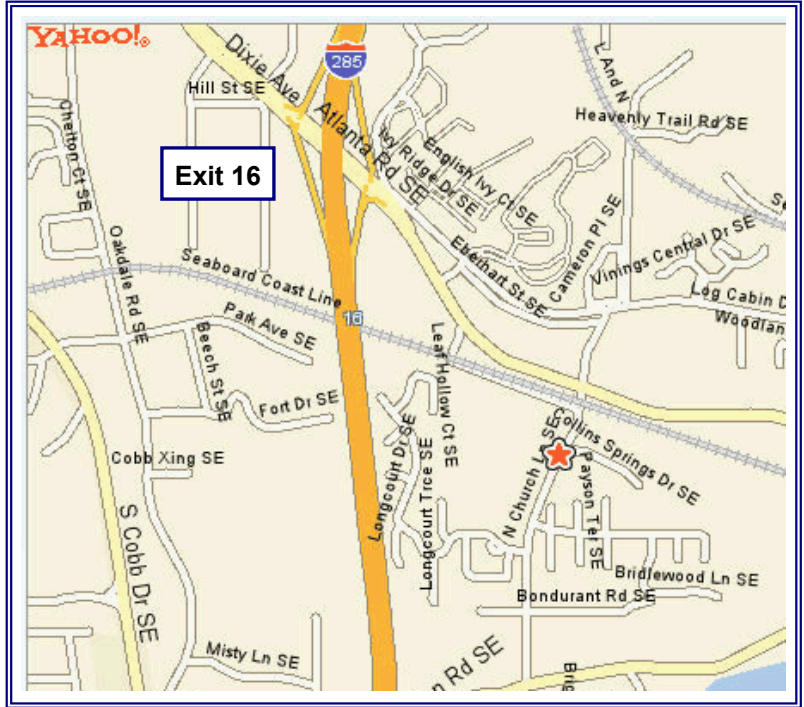
**The March 15 Meeting:**

**1:00 at AF Hall**

**4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Smyrna, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:**

**Jim Haught**



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