

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself.

An AFS Publication

• Volume 15 Number 4

• April 2009

The April AFS Meeting

The April 12 AFS meeting will feature a talk by Stuart Bechman, President of Atheist Alliance International, titled "State of the Community: Atheist Alliance International."

Stuart Bechman has been involved as an active member of the U.S. freethought community since 1995. He joined Atheists United in Los Angeles in 1997, became their co-president in 2002, and their president in 2005. Stuart was active in the initial efforts to form the Coalition for the Community of Reason, which led to the creation of the Secular Coalition for America. In 2007, Stuart became vice-president of Atheist Alliance International and led a number of initiatives and projects for the organization. He was elected president of the Atheist Alliance in 2008.

In 2004, Stuart ran for a seat in the US House of Representatives. Stuart holds graduate degrees in Management Information Systems and in Sociology, and has served as a college lecturer.

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, April 17, at 7:00 PM.

Help Needed At AFS Table

AFS will have a table at the American Atheists convention this weekend. If you are attending and would like to help at the table, please email Steve at: steveyoth@aol.com

For information on the convention, see page 5.

The AFS Yard Sale

The Atlanta Freethought Society is planning to have a yard sale on Saturday, May 23. This is your chance to remove items from the basement, garage and other places that you just don't need. AFS will sell items under the pavilion near the AF Hall, roughly from 10:00AM to 3:00PM.

Come to the yard sale and help with the selling, enjoy the conversation and (hopefully) the good warm weather!

AFS Meetings and Activities

Apr 12: AFS Board Meeting at AF Hall, 11:00 AM.

Apr 12: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

Apr 17: AFS Social at Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

Other Meetings of Interest

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at the AF Hall on Sunday, April 19, at 1:00 PM. Chris Wilson, author of *Healing the Unhappy Caveman*, will speak on "Artifacts Of The Caveman Mind."

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.

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>.

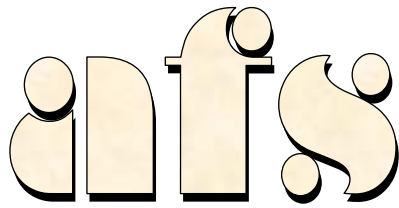
GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Gwinnett (12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville) on Wednesday, April 15, at 7:00 PM. (See <http://gust.domek.org/>.)

The Decatur atheists **meetup** (which would have been on April 12 at 6:00 PM) is cancelled this month since the Thinking Man Tavern will be closed for Easter!

There's another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists scheduled for Sunday, April 26, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta.

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.

John Barnes will have his **5th Annual Infidels Gathering** on May 16 and 17 at his place in the country on the Flint River, about 60 miles south of Atlanta. There will be food, entertainment, and a wide variety of freethinkers and unbelievers. All ages are welcome. Camping is available, and electric power, too. The main party starts at noon on Saturday and continues as long as you care to stay! Those who spend the night usually go out to eat brunch together the next day. Email jobar2@earthlink.net for details.



Atlanta Freethought Society

Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at the AF 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.

Apr 12: Stuart Bechman, President of Atheist Alliance International, will speak on "State of the Community: Atheist Alliance International."

May 10: TBD

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

July 12: TBD

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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Membership in AFS is \$25/year for
individuals, \$35 for households, and
\$10 for students/low income/under 21.

Add \$15 to receive AFNews by mail.

Sustaining members (individual) \$100
and sustaining members (households)
\$125. Subscriptions alone are \$20 for
12 issues, \$25 to Canada/Mexico,
\$30 for other addresses. Please make
checks and money orders payable to
Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc.

Visit our World Wide Web site at
www.atlantafreethought.org.

Send E-mail to

afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Webmaster: Freya Harris

Call and leave messages on the

AFS Info Line: 404-ATHEIST

Tax Funding For Baptist University Violates Kentucky Constitution, Says Americans United

Church-State Watchdog Group Urges State Supreme Court To Block Legislature's \$10 Million Grant To University of the Cumberlands

The Supreme Court of Kentucky should strike down a \$10 million state appropriation for a university affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Americans United has filed a friend-of-the-court brief along with the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky challenging tax funding of the University of the Cumberlands in Williamsburg, Ky.

"The Kentucky Constitution is clear on this matter," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Tax money may not be used to subsidize religious schools. We expect the court to uphold that important principle."

Special Judge Roger Crittenden of Franklin County ruled against the appropriation in March of 2008. Crittenden declared that the aid for construction of a pharmacy school building and an additional \$1 million for scholarships was "a direct payment to a non-public religious school for educational purposes," adding this type

of state assistance "is not permitted by the constitution of Kentucky."

Section 5 of the state constitution bars residents from being compelled to support religion and bans the state from showing preference to any denomination over others. Section 189 bans tax aid to "any church, sectarian or denominational school."

The Kentucky Fairness Alliance, a statewide gay-rights group, challenged the legislature's special appropriation of funds for the university after the school expelled a gay student in 2006. The student, Jason Johnson, had disclosed his sexual orientation on a social networking Web site.

In their amicus brief, Americans United and the ACLU urge the Supreme Court of Kentucky to uphold the lower court ruling and strike down the aid.

The brief, filed March 31, traces the development of church-state separation in the United States and examines how that principle is protected in the Kentucky Constitution.

"This Commonwealth, its people,

and their respective religious denominations and houses of worship have been well served by the Kentucky Constitution's rigorous protections for freedom of conscience," asserts the brief. "Those essential safeguards should not now be jettisoned, as the challenged appropriations here contemplate."

"No matter how laudatory in the short run the legislature's objectives might be," the brief continues, "they cannot justify the degrading effect upon both faith and civil society that results from having religious institutions compete in the political arena for public dollars and public favor."

Dr. Paul D. Simmons, a Baptist minister and president of the Americans United Board of Trustees, is among the plaintiffs in the *University of the Cumberlands v. Pennybacker, Beshear, and McGaha* lawsuit. Other plaintiffs include the Jefferson County Teachers Association and Christina Gilgor, executive director of the Kentucky Fairness Alliance.

[From an April 1 AU press release.]

Pope Says Condoms Make the Aids Problem Worse

The Pope courted further controversy on his first trip to Africa on March 17 by declaring that condoms were not a solution to the Aids epidemic—but were instead part of the problem.

In his first public comment on condom use, the pontiff told reporters en route to Cameroon that Aids "is a tragedy that cannot be overcome by money alone, and that cannot be overcome through the distribution of condoms, which even aggravates the problems."

Pope Benedict had previously stressed that the Roman Catholic Church is in the forefront of the battle against Aids. The Vatican encourages

sexual abstinence to fight the spread of the disease.

After his election as Pope, Benedict described Aids as "a cruel epidemic which not only kills but seriously threatens the economic and social stability of the continent," but reiterated the Vatican ban on the use of condoms.

He said the "traditional teaching of the Church" on chastity outside marriage and fidelity within it had proved to be "the only sure way of preventing the spread of HIV and Aids."

Two years ago there was speculation that the Vatican might amend its ban on condoms after Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, the former Archbishop

of Milan, said that in couples where one partner had HIV/Aids, the use of condoms was "a lesser evil."

Cardinal Javier Lozano Barragan of Mexico, the Vatican Health Minister, also said condoms could sometimes be exceptionally condoned, for example when a married woman was unable to refuse her HIV-positive husband's sexual advances.

"You can defend yourself with any means," he said. A subsequent Vatican study of the issue reiterated the blanket ban on condoms, however.

In 2003, a senior Vatican official claimed condoms had tiny holes in them through which HIV can pass, exposing thousands of people to risk.

The Pope... (continued)

In 2003 a senior Vatican official claimed condoms had tiny holes in them through which HIV can pass, exposing thousands of people to risk.

The then head of the Vatican Pontifical Council for the Family, Cardinal Alfonso Trujillo, said: "The Aids virus is roughly 450 times smaller than the spermatozoon. The spermatozoon can easily pass through the 'net' that is formed by the condom."

He added "These margins of uncertainty... should represent an obligation on the part of the health ministries and all these campaigns to act in the same way as they do with regard to cigarettes, which they state to be a danger."

The World Health Organization responded at the time by saying that "These incorrect statements about condoms and HIV are dangerous when we are facing a global pandemic which has already killed more than 20 million people, and currently affects

at least 42 million."

The WHO said that "consistent and correct" condom use reduces the risk of HIV infection by over 90 per cent.

Three-quarters of all AIDS deaths in 2007 were in sub-Saharan Africa, where some 22 million people are infected with HIV, accounting for two-thirds of the world's infections, according to UNAIDS.

Rebecca Hodes with the Treatment Action Campaign in South Africa said if the pope is serious about preventing HIV infections, he should focus on promoting wide access to condoms and spreading information on how to use them.

"Instead, his opposition to condoms conveys that religious dogma is more important to him than the lives of Africans," said Hodes, head of policy, communication and research for the group.

Hodes said the pope was right that condoms are not the sole solution to

Africa's AIDS epidemic, but added they are one of the very few proven measures to prevent HIV infections.

Even some priests and nuns working with those infected with the AIDS virus question the church's opposition to condoms amid the pandemic ravaging Africa. Ordinary Africans do as well.

"Talking about the nonuse of condoms is out of place. We need condoms to protect ourselves against diseases and AIDS," teacher Narcisse Takou said in Yaounde.

Stanley Obale Okpu, a civil servant working in the ministry of urban development in Cameroon, said: "What the pope says is an ideal for the Catholic church. But he needs to look at the realities on the ground. One should be aware of these realities. In the case of Cameroon—and Africa as a whole—condoms are very necessary ... You need condoms to prevent AIDS and for birth control."

Americans United Issues Statement on Tony Dungy Appointment To Obama Faith Council

Church-State Watchdog Group Expresses Disappointment At Selection

Americans United for Separation of Church and State expressed disappointment at the Obama administration's decision on March 30 to ask former football coach Tony Dungy to serve on the president's Advisory Council on Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

"God & Country," the religion blog of *U.S. News & World Report*, said that Dungy has been asked to serve on the council, but he has not yet decided whether to do so.

Dungy, former coach of the Indianapolis Colts football team, has well-known ties with intolerant Religious Right groups. In 2007, for example, he spoke at a fund-raising dinner for the Indiana Family Institute, a James Dobson-affiliated group that opposes gay rights, reproductive rights and separation of church and state.

"I am surprised and disappointed

that Dungy has been asked to serve on the council," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "His view that civil-marriage law should reflect religious doctrine is not in keeping with the Constitution."

Added Lynn, "It is extremely important for the advisory council to uphold civil rights and civil liberties, and I am concerned that Coach Dungy is far from the best person to do that."

Dungy, in his remarks at the Indiana Family Institute dinner, supported an Indiana constitutional amendment to ban same-sex marriage and suggested that public policy ought to reflect religious doctrine.

"I feel like telling people when they look at this issue of same-sex marriage . . . I'm not on anybody's side," Dungy said. "I'm on the Lord's side."

According to *U.S. News*, Dungy accepted the Indiana Family Institute's Friend of the Family Award and said he "embraced" the IFI's support for the gay marriage ban.

"IFI is saying what the Lord says," Dungy said. "You can take that and you can make the decision on which way you want to be."

"We're not trying to downgrade anyone else," Dungy added. "But we're trying to promote the family—family values the Lord's way."

Lynn said it is important that the advisory council not advocate views such as Dungy's that undercut church-state separation.

Concluded Lynn, "I look forward to working with President Obama and his staff as he develops his administration's position on the faith-based funding issue."

[From a March 31 AU press release.]

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, 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.

Letters From AFS Members

Jack McKinney wrote this letter to the American Tinnitus Association and was pleased to get a favorable response from them. Writing a letter to a company about undesired religious activities in a business can really obtain positive results!

Dear J. B.,

Thank you for taking the time to write to us about the ATA support group meeting you attended last month. Needless to say, it was a surprise to learn of the inappropriate forum used to present our materials. We must now re-write our self-help group formation guidelines to spell out clearly what we have just assumed was understood. It hasn't been necessary in the past but apparently the time has come. Be assured that ATA does not align itself with nor endorse any religious group.

Please accept our apology for your understandable dismay. I am enclosing a copy of the letter we sent to Jim Morris, the group facilitator in Powder Springs.

Sincerely,

Barbara Tabachnick, Client Services Coordinator

Dear Jim,

It's been a month now since your first meeting. I know the tremendous effort you made to get this off the ground. We appreciate it and hope that it was a success.

We received a letter yesterday from someone who attended your meeting expressing a serious concern -- a concern we need to share with you. The writer states that the opening remarks were, "This will be a ministry of the First United Methodist Church and we'll open the meeting with a prayer." This person felt misled.

We are extremely aware of the importance that spirituality plays in the lives of many people. A belief in a higher power is, for some, amazingly curative. It is not, however, the intent of ATA to align itself with any religious group or take an overt religious stance. The reason is two-fold:

1. It would exclude and possibly offend so many people who are of a different faith or of no faith at all.
2. The purpose of ATA group meetings is to discuss tinnitus and hearing-related issues.

Some have cited the universality of 12-Step programs like AA, which chooses to end each meeting with the Serenity Prayer. In that organization, belief in a higher power is part of the program, and *still* it offends some. Our ATA-supported support groups are intended to offer a broad focus of tinnitus-related discussion topics, with one exception: religion.

I do apologize for not having spelled this out more clearly. You are completely free to hold a tinnitus meeting at any time through your church but it cannot be ATA-affiliated as well.

Please complete and return the Meeting Evaluation Form.

Regards,

Barbara Tabachnick, Client Services Coordinator

AMERICAN TINNITUS ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 5 Portland, Oregon 97207

Enclosed is a notice I received indicating THE AMERICAN TINNITUS ASSOCIATION "is happy to announce the beginning of a new Tinnitus Self-Help Group..." [at First United Methodist Church in Powder Springs, GA.]

I went out of my way to attend the meeting and the opening remarks stated:

"This will be a ministry of the First United Methodist Church and we'll open the meeting with a prayer."

I feel that I was misled.

I would like to know if the American Tinnitus Association approves and supports the use of their name and resources as a means of religious proselytizing.

I am looking forward to your early reply with considerable interest.

J. B. McKinney

Donna Gore's letter was in the *Roswell Beacon* on March 13.

Pro-Lifers: Put up or Shut up

The thing about people who are against stem cell research is: they offer no solutions. Right now, the leftover embryos from fertility clinics are destroyed in Biohazard Waste disposal. This has been going on for years, and nobody complains about it. Why is it okay to throw them out, but not to use them for medical research? Can someone explain that to me, because I don't get it.

I don't hear them offering any solutions. What do they propose be done with these embryos? Are they going to have them surgically implanted in their own bodies, carry them to term, and raise them?

Whenever I meet someone who claims to be "pro life" the first thing I ask them is, "How many crack babies have you adopted?" Then I ask them if they protested the war in Iraq. The "pro life" movements harps on and on about "saving babies" but they don't actually offer to take the responsibility themselves. They're all for "saving babies" so long as they are not the ones bearing the burden. Save the babies -- somebody save the babies (but not me!). They need to step up to the plate, and open their homes, and their wallets to the "babies." Until then, they need to shut the hell up.

Just to give you an idea, when the Octuplet story was making headlines, the Department of Agriculture estimated that for a single mother, the cost of raising 14 children through age 17 ranges from \$1.3 million to \$2.7 million. So many of the "pro life" crowd are conservative Christians who are against abortion but also against welfare. Well, they can't have it both ways. If women are forced to have children they can't afford to take care of, somebody has to foot the bill.

They're the biggest bunch of hypocrites on this planet.

Donna Gore, Roswell

Gingrich to Launch Outreach to Christians

He criticizes Washington bureaucracy that just doesn't 'get it'

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich plans to launch a new outreach to Christians and religious conservatives, because Washington's bureaucracy just doesn't "get it," he said in an interview.

Gingrich told Dan Gilgoff of U.S. News that his organization, called Renewing American Leadership, has some of the nation's top Christian activists on its board.

Gingrich said he's been affected personally by the changes in America society; specifically the attacks on established Christianity and its traditions.

"I am very sobered that my grandchildren might live in a secular society that might drive God out of public schools in such a way that they are now antireligious centers of propaganda," he said.

"Part of my journey began with (Reagan aide) Mike Deaver," he said. "And he was doing good with Alcoholics Anonymous around the city of Washington. It's clear that this is the most effective anti-addiction program in the world. And a federal bureaucrat tells him, 'We would love to strengthen and increase the program but we can't because the first step is God. He goes, 'Can you develop an 11-step program?' And Deaver broke up. He said, 'I don't think you get it.'"

Gingrich said what he's seen in the past few years has convinced him that "we're in a crisis in which the secular state, if allowed, will fundamentally and radically change America against the wishes of most Americans."

Gilgoff reported Gingrich this spring will speak to a handful of large gatherings organized by David Barton, who worked with the Republican National Committee's outreach to pastors in 2004.

The former House speaker said he will release this fall a movie about the

role Pope John Paul II played with his 1979 trip to Poland in the fall of the Soviet Union.

"You've had such rising hostility to religious belief that I wanted to reach broadly into the country and dramatically raise public awareness of threats to religious liberty," Gingrich said in the interview.

Gingrich told Gilgoff there's a need for organizations to support traditional and conservative America.

"You look at the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals outlawing saying 'one nation under God.' You look at the current [White House] effort to impose the secular state as a matter of conscience on people who believe profoundly that abortion is an act of murder, and we go from tolerating abortion to telling doctors you can only serve if you cooperate in abortion," Gingrich said.

"You look at the current effort in Connecticut to impose a legal order that would destroy the Catholic Church. And you have to ask yourself, when you have this kind of continued assault on religion, whether you need to reach out to the whole country and talk about these kind of issues," he continued.

Gingrich said the "overtness of the assault on religious liberty has risen dramatically," and he has decided "it's time to challenge head-on secular domination in the West."

He also expressed some criticism of President Obama.

"The gap between his rhetoric and symbolism and his actual policies is so radically different. The stimulus package had a lot of money in it for sex education and included a prohibition against any money being used in buildings used for religious purposes," he said.

"Every evidence is that they're going to move on a Freedom of Choice

Act, which would remove every limit on abortion at the state level. He has appointed people with very close ties to abortionists who offer late-term abortions. The evidence we have so far is that he's going to move methodically to limit the use of freedom of conscience and impose abortion on institutions."

Nor did Gingrich agree that the clout of economic or social conservatives or Christians is weakening.

"The Obama financial mess and the Geithner misstatements and the tax increase proposals? All those are driving fiscal conservatives back to a realization that if you're liberal on social policy you're also bankrupting the country fiscally. There is a much greater openness to working together now than even a month ago," he said.

Gingrich said President Reagan's huge success was because he "brought together three big streams of American thought: national security, economic growth, and belief in core historic values, and many of those are inherently religious. You can't have an honest discussion of American history without recognizing the depth of religious influence. Look at Lincoln's second inaugural, which is 703 words long and includes 14 references to God and two quotes from the Bible."

But he said now the nation has an "educational system (that) has grown rabidly anti-religious."

The report said that Gingrich's organization recently partnered with the American Family Association to promote anti-tax rallies around the nation on April 15.

Gingrich told a meeting of the Conservative Political Action Committee, or CPAC, last month that the Reagan revolution needs to be revived.

[From a Mar. 20 WorldNetDaily report at <http://wnd.com/> and Dan Gilgoff's blog at <http://www.usnews.com/>.]

Read "Why Abortion is Biblical" by Brian Elroy McKinley at <http://www.elroy.net/ehr/abortion.html>.

Read "Jesus is just alright with him" at http://www.salon.com/env/atoms_eden/2009/04/03/jesus_interrupted/?source=newsletter.

The Growing Clout of Atheists and Non-Believers

Mobilized by the theocratic bombast of Bush-era Republicans, America's growing number of atheists are pushing for greater recognition. (By Michelle Goldberg of *The Guardian*.)

In recent years, non-religious Americans have won a modicum of public acknowledgment. Not long ago, politicians insulted them with impunity or at best simply overlooked them. But the heightened public religious fervor of the Bush years led the country's infidels to organize as never before, turning atheist authors like Sam Harris into celebrities and opening lobbying offices in Washington, DC, just like religious interest groups do.

Politicians have responded. In his inaugural address, Barack Obama—doubtlessly realizing that secularists constitute a big part of his base—described America as “a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus ... and non-believers.” Even Mitt Romney came to express second thoughts about leaving atheists and agnostics out of his high-profile Campaign speech on faith. The United States is not Europe—it will likely be a long time before they have a publicly agnostic president—but it is becoming more tolerant of the godless.

It has to be: no religious group in the United States is growing as fast as those who profess no religion at all. The latest American Religious Identification Survey¹, which Trinity College published last week, shows that the number of non-religious Americans

has nearly doubled since 1990, while the number of people who specifically self-identity as atheists or agnostics has more than tripled. An astonishing 30% of married Americans weren't wed in religious ceremonies, and 27% don't expect to have religious funerals. This suggests whole swaths of the culture are becoming secular, since one can assume that non-believers in religious families often acquiesce to traditional marriage rites and expect to be prayed over when they're dead.

The irony, though, is that even as the country becomes more secular, American politics are likely to remain shot through with aggressive piety. What we're seeing is not a northern European-style mellowing, but an increasing polarization. In his recent book *Society without God: What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell Us About Contentment*, the sociologist Phil Zuckerman described the secularized countries of Scandinavia as places where religion is regarded with “benign indifference.” There's consensus instead of culture war. That's not what's happening in the United States. Instead, the center is falling out.

According to the American Religious Identification Survey, Christianity is losing ground in the United States, but evangelical Christianity is not. Just over a third of Americans are

still born-again. Meanwhile, the main-line churches, beacons of progressive, rationalistic faith—the kind that could potentially act as a bridge between religious and non-religious Americans—are shrinking. “These trends ... suggest a movement towards more conservative beliefs and particularly to a more ‘evangelical’ outlook among Christians,” write the report's authors.

In some ways, there's a symbiotic relationship between evangelicals and secularists. The religious right emerged in response to a widespread sense of cultural grievance stemming from the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. Today's newly organized atheists and agnostics were mobilized by the theocratic bombast of Bush-era Republicans. More than ever, one's religion is tied up with one's political choices rather than family history.

That means faith won't fade into the background. If European secularism is defined by disinterest in organized religion, American secularism is largely defined by opposition to it. Thus non-believers in the United States are increasingly becoming an organized interest group, demanding their share of civic respect. The more they want to escape organized religion, the less they can ignore it.

[From <http://www.alternet.org/>. Posted on March 18.]

¹See <http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/>.

²See http://www.nyupress.org/books/Society_Without_God-products_id-7888.html.

Local Pastor Accused of Fleecing Flock

Pastor Alan Thompson, 35, of the Calvary Baptist Church in Covington, GA, is charged with two counts of financial identity fraud and one count of financial transaction fraud. He's accused of stealing the identities of some of his parishioners. He was arrested and charged on March 26.

One of Thompson's victims, according to police, is a former pastor at the church. Covington Police Detective Daniel Seals said Thompson used information from church records to fill out credit card applications on the internet.

“Right now I have three victims that have made reports,” Detective Seals said. “I'm currently talking to at least two more.”

Detective Seals said Pastor Thompson ran up one card to \$2,700. He is waiting on the credit card companies to respond to subpoenas to learn what he purchased. “This is a trusted individual, the most trusted individual you might say in our community,” he said. “He took information from those who trusted him and used it for his own gain.” [From a Mar. 27 report by Kevin Rowson on 11alive.com.]

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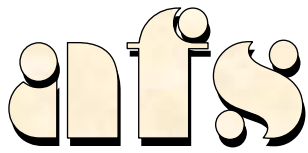
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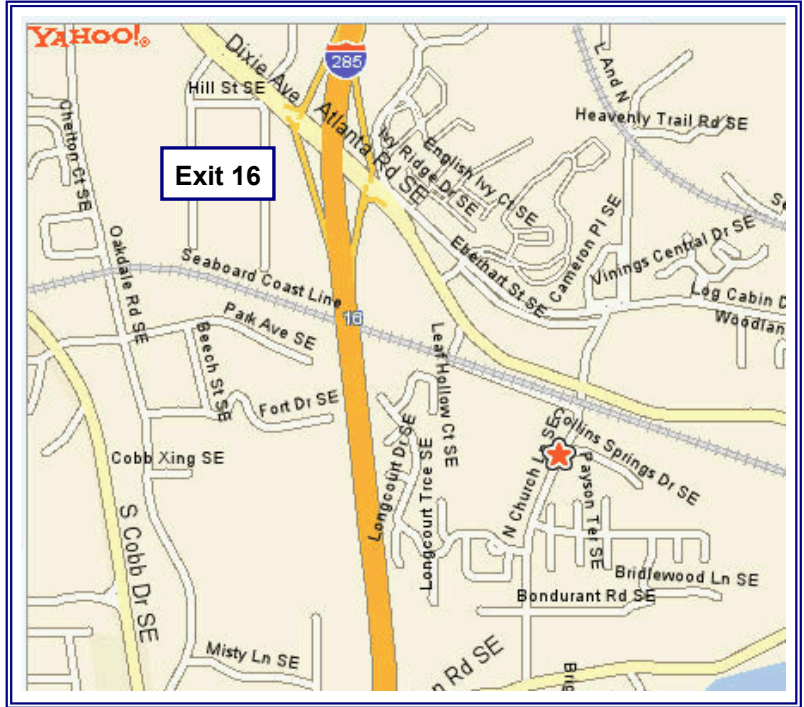
The April 12 Meeting:

1:00 at AF Hall

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

This Month's Speaker:

Stuart Bechman



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