

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself.

An AFS Publication

• Volume 15 Number 5

• May 2009

The May AFS Meeting

The May 10 AFS meeting will feature a talk by **Doyle E. Duke**, author of the book *The Amazing Deception—A Critical Analysis of Christianity*. Doyle will talk about the events in his life that caused him to question Christianity, and how research on the subject resulted in his transition from Christian to Atheist.

Doyle served in the U.S. Navy before launching a career that spanned nearly 50 years as a photographer for the *Chattanooga Times-Post* and the Hinkle Photographics commercial studio. He and his wife reside in Union Grove, Alabama. Doyle's website, <http://www.amazingdeception.com>, includes the complete text of his book and other articles.

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, May 15, at 7:00 PM.

The AFS Yard Sale

The Atlanta Freethought Society will 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. Bring items to the May 10 meeting if you like and unload your car after the meeting. (We can store items in our meeting room.) 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

May 10: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

May 15: AFS Social at Panahar Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

May 23: AFS Yard Sale, AF Hall, 10:00 to 3:00 PM.

Other Meetings of Interest

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet under the pavilion at AF Hall on Sunday, May 17, at 1:00 PM for a picnic and talent contest. HGA will provide sandwiches and drinks. Guests should bring a desert or side dish for sharing.

The **Fayette Freethinkers** 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.

There will be a "meetup" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, May 10, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA.

There's another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists scheduled for Sunday, May 24, 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 Gwinnett (12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville) on Wednesday, May 13, 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 donnajgore@yahoo.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>.

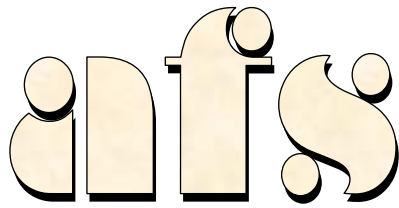
The **Fellowship of Reason Nonfiction Book Club** will meet on Saturday, May 9 at 11:00 AM in Roswell, GA, for brunch and discussion of the book *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* by Susan Jacoby. For details, send an email to allison.byrd@gmail.com.

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 non-believers. 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.

See videos from the 2009 American Atheists Convention in Atlanta here:

Dr. Richard Dawkins gave the keynote address: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbza-UtseE0>

Dr. J. Anderson Thomson spoke on "Why We Believe in Gods": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1iMmvu9eMrg>



**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.

May 10: Doyle E. Duke, author of *The Amazing Deception—A Critical Analysis of Christianity*, will speak on his transition from Christian to Atheist.

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

July 12: TBD

Aug 9: 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

Editor

Steve Yothment

How to Contact the Editor

Send correspondence to AFS at:
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Smyrna, GA 30080-7224
or phone Steve at 678-364-8703
or send e-mail to SteveYoth@aol.com.

Atlanta Freethought Society

President

Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

VP for Internal Communication

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

VP for External Communication

Freya Harris – 404-845-2276

Secretary

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Tony King – 706-886-9224

Jack McKinney – 770-424-5004

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

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Florida Judge Bans Religious Song from School

Many Church/State Separation Groups Agree with Decision

On April 15, U.S. District Judge Harvery E. Schlesinger of Northern Florida gave a Florida public school quite a scolding, followed by a very important constitutional law lesson.

Two teachers at the school included a song called "In God We Still Trust" by the country group Diamond Rio into the program of a third-grade class' end-of-the-year assembly.

The song's lyrics include these lines: "There's no separation...We are one nation under Him...Now there are those among us, Who want to push Him out...From the schoolhouse to the courthouse, They're silencing His word, Now it's time for all believers, To make our voices heard."

The song was played during class at least three times and was practiced by the whole class at least once. If students objected to the song, they were told they didn't have to sing it during the assembly – but they'd also have to forgo participating in the event at all.

After learning about the song, some parents filed a lawsuit against the teachers, the principal and St. John's County School for imposing "sectarian religious beliefs onto elementary public school students and violat[ing] their right to free exercise under the First and Fourteenth Amendments to

the Constitution."

The school voluntarily removed the song from the program after the lawsuit was filed, but Judge Schlesinger (an appointee of former President George H.W. Bush!) rightly said that was too little, too late.

In his opinion ordering the school to keep the song out of the assembly, he drove home the First Amendment's promise of church-state separation, even citing Thomas' Jefferson's "wall of separation," in his opinion.

Not only did he call the lyrics "patently religious" and "proselytizing," he said, "The lyrics to the song take aim at one [of] our nation's fundamental principles: the separation of church and state.

"The Constitution's prohibition of the state's 'establishment of religion' mandates that the government treat religions equally," Judge Schlesinger noted. "Inherently in this equal treatment is the separation of church and state, which ensures that the government does not make 'adherence to religion' relevant to a person's standing in the community."

"By encouraging students to sing 'there is no separation, we are one nation under Him,'" he concluded, "the school is effectively endorsing a religious view that is contrary to well-

established constitutional law."

The judge noted that the school is under pressure from other parents to cave in and put the song back into the program. So he ordered it be kept out. Schlesinger noted that, despite the school's voluntary removal of the song, the teachers had already infringed on the students' First Amendment rights and caused "irreparable injury."

"These lyrics endorse a specific viewpoint of preference for religious sectarianism," he wrote. "Further... this song antagonizes and degrades those whose beliefs differ from the ones espoused by its lyrics..."

Dr. Ed Buckner, President of American Atheists, praised the ruling but regretted the need for legal intervention. "It has been over 46 years when coercive prayer and other religious exercises in our public schools was struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court," said Buckner. "We still see evidence that some teachers and school officials flaunt the law, and are attempting to enlist our children in religious proselytizing and indoctrination."

[From an April 17 blog by S. Bathija at <http://blog.au.org/> and an April 23 press release by American Atheists.]

Religious License Plates Draw Concern in Florida

Back on Friday, April 24, religious specialty plates offered by Florida Senators Ronda Storms and Gary Siplin made it onto Florida bill SB642 even though many members had not seen images of those plates and none was produced for the debate.

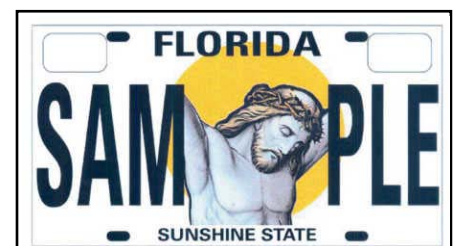
Siplin didn't mince words when asked what his "Trinity" plate looks like, saying, "It has a picture of my Lord and savior Jesus Christ." Storms' "I Believe" plate would benefit Faith in Teaching, an Orlando company that funds faith-based programs at schools. Its design features a cross over a stained-glass window.

Several members of the Senate had concerns about approving plates they had not seen. And one questioned using religious symbols at all.

"The issue is whether the state of Florida ought to be producing license plates with religious images on them," said Sen. Ted Deutch, D-Boca Raton, "and I don't believe that we should."

On the following Monday, Florida Governor Charlie Crist said he would approve the license plates if the bill makes it to his desk.

However, opposition by the ACLU, the Anti-Defamation League, and Americans United for Separation of



Church and State were apparently helpful. The Senate bill was changed on April 28 to not include the two license plates, and the Florida House is not considering the bill.

[From April 24 and 29 articles by Amy Hollyfield at <http://www.tampabay.com> and an April 27 AU press release.]

Christian Groups Upset That Obama will Speak at Notre Dame

This week, Bishop Thomas Wenski of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orlando, Fla., will take the unusual step of celebrating a Mass of Reparation, to make amends for sins against God. The motivation: to provide an outlet for Catholics upset with what Wenski calls the University of Notre Dame's "clueless" decision to invite President Barack Obama to speak at its commencement and receive an honorary doctorate May 17.

The nation's flagship Catholic university's honoring of a politician whose abortion rights record clashes with a fundamental church teaching has triggered a reaction among the nation's Catholic bishops that is remarkable in scope and tone, church observers say.

At least 55 bishops have publicly denounced or questioned Notre Dame in recent weeks, employing terms ranging from "travesty" and "debacle" to "extreme embarrassment."

The bishops' response is part of a decades-long march to make abortion the paramount issue for their activism, a marker of the kind of bishops Rome has sent to the U.S. and the latest front in a struggle over Catholic identity that has exposed rifts between

hierarchy and flock.

Almost immediately after Notre Dame invited Obama and he accepted, anti-abortion and conservative Christian groups launched protests, and bishops began either making statements or releasing letters written to the university president, the Rev. John Jenkins.

Former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican Mary Ann Glendon turned down a prestigious Notre Dame medal on April 27 because she was to have shared the stage at the commencement ceremony with Obama. In a letter to Father Jenkins, Glendon indicated that she was "dismayed" that Notre Dame would award the president an honorary degree, and that she was upset with the university for "honor[ing] a prominent and uncompromising opponent of the Church's position on issues involving fundamental principles..."

Notre Dame issued "talking points" in response to the widespread criticism of its decision, which indicated that "President Obama won't be doing all the talking. Mary Ann Glendon, the former U.S. ambassador to the Vatican, will be speaking as the recipient of the Laetare Medal." Glen-

don said in her letter that she understood this to mean that her speech "would somehow balance the event." But that speech now won't occur since she has refused to be there.

Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council indicated in his April 27 "Washington Update" that the decision to invite Obama to speak is "drenched with controversy" due to Obama's positions on abortion and gay rights. Perkins said that more than 334,000 people have signed a petition asking Notre Dame to rescind the invitation.

More controversy erupted on April 25 due to an article by Ken Connor at <http://www.christianpost.com/>. In the article, Connor noted that President Obama's staff asked Georgetown University (a Jesuit university) to remove all signs and symbols from their hall before the President delivered his speech to the assembly. Connor said that "The University was only too willing to strip the hall of its religious symbols in order to land such a prominent speaker." A concern among many Catholics is that all religious symbols will be removed from the commencement ceremony since Obama will give his speech there.

Obama Praised for Downplay of Prayer Day

American Atheists Still Urges Government to Not Promote Faith

Amidst reports that the White House will not hold a special ceremony when President Obama declares the National Day of Prayer on Wednesday, American Atheists is still calling the holiday an unconstitutional promotion of religion.

Under the Bush administration, there were lavish, official ceremonies to mark the presidential endorsement of NDOP. News stories, however, show that this year, President Obama may not host such an event even though he will sign the Proclamation.

Dr. Ed Buckner, President of American Atheists, charged that the National Day of Prayer is an unconstitutional

endorsement of religion, and is increasingly divisive in a pluralistic, free society.

"No government—federal, state or local—has any business encouraging Americans to pray, or telling them when and how to exercise religious beliefs," said Buckner. "Doing so immediately excludes and marginalizes an estimated 15% of our population who have no religion. That's nearly 45 million Americans, most of whom are patriotic, hard-working Americans."

Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists, said that President Obama would be right to not place too much emphasis on the

Proclamation signing.

"President Obama regularly acknowledges that Atheists and other nonbelievers are part of our American social landscape, and we thank him for that. We think it is appropriate that he spend his time dealing with complex economic, military and other political problems instead of volunteering as window dressing for the religious right which is behind the National Day of Prayer."

Mr. Silverman added that NDOP is a "wedge issue" and is inappropriate in a free society.

[From a May 5 American Atheists press release.]

What's Wrong With the National Day of Prayer?

By an act of Congress, the first Thursday in May is designated the "National Day of Prayer." Across the country, people are urged to gather for prayer. Religious services are often held at the seats of local, state and federal governments. From a press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State...

Is the National Day of Prayer a good idea? Americans United for Separation of Church and State says "NO!" Consider the following:

Americans don't need the government to tell them when or how to pray.

Americans have the right to pray for whomever they want and in what manner they like. But we don't need an officially designated government proclamation to do that. Our people are free to engage in worship whenever they want. Allowing government to set aside certain days for prayer and worship implies that the state has some say over our religious lives when it does not. It is simply not the business of government to advise when, if and how people pray.

The U.S. Constitution mandates separation of church and state. This means it is the job of religious leaders, not government officials, to call people to pray. Americans are free to heed or ignore such prayer requests as they see fit. The NDP is problematic because it presumes that Americans should take direction on their religious lives from the government. It suggests that they will engage in certain religious activities because the government recommends they do. People do not need government directives to pray or take part in any other form of worship.

The National Day of Prayer has been hijacked by the Religious Right, which uses it to promote religious bigotry.

In recent years, most NDP activities have been coordinated by the "National Day of Prayer Task Force," an organization based in Colorado Springs and run by Shirley Dobson, wife of Religious Right radio broadcaster James Dobson, founder of Focus on the Family.

Despite its official-sounding name, the NDP Task Force is a private group with no connection to government. Nevertheless, the organization has

taken the lead in sponsoring Prayer Day events in many cities and states. The Task Force is exclusionary and does not permit participation by non-fundamentalist Christians. The materials it distributes promote a rigid fundamentalist outlook not shared by most Americans.

On the NDP's Web site, volunteers are required to sign a statement of faith reflecting fundamentalist tenets, list church affiliation and provide clergy references. Volunteers are ordered to make sure no non-Christians speak at NDP events. (Non-Christians may only attend as long as they agree to remain silent.)

"The National Day of Prayer Task Force was a creation of the National Prayer Committee for the expressed purpose of organizing and promoting prayer observances conforming to a Judeo-Christian system of values," reads the Web site. "People with other theological and philosophical views are, of course, free to organize and participate in activities that are consistent with their own beliefs."

But even this is not accurate. The use of the term "Judeo-Christian" is deceptive. In fact, the Task Force promotes Christian fundamentalism at every turn. There is nothing "Judeo" about the Task Force's outlook. Volunteers are told, "In both public and private life, we ask that you demonstrate the commitment you have made to Jesus Christ in the following areas: spiritual maturity, emotional stability, healthy personal relationships, financial responsibility, and a stable living situation."

Volunteers, says the Task Force, must show "a passionate devotion to advancing Christ's Kingdom and the cause of prayer in our nation." They are required to affirm that they will "ensure a strong, consistent Christian message throughout the nation" and must endorse a statement reading, "I

commit that NDP activities I serve with will be conducted solely by Christians while those with differing beliefs are welcome to attend."

The Task Force's Mission Statement reads that it seeks to "communicate with every individual the need for personal repentance and prayer, mobilizing the Christian community to intercede for America and its leadership in the seven centers of power: Government, Military, Media, Business, Education, Church and Family."

The group's "Vision and Values" include: "publicize and preserve America's Christian heritage" and "foster unity within the Christian church."

The National Day of Prayer has become a vehicle for spreading misinformation about American history and society.

In years past, the Task Force has used the NDP to promote bogus "Christian nation" history and advocate for erroneous claims that fundamentalist Christians are being persecuted in the United States or denied their right to spread their faith.

The NDP Web site sells a school curriculum called "Drive Thru History" that promotes a bogus version of American history promoted by David Barton, a Texas Religious Right activist who argues, against all evidence, that the United States was founded as a "Christian nation."

NDP materials also recycle fallacious Religious Right attacks on public schools. The NDP Web site criticized public schools for advocating such things as "pluralism, 'tolerance,' and the rejection of absolute truth."

It goes on to assert, "While the textbooks used in colonial days promoted a faith-based worldview, today's curricula are replete with materials that accept and, in some cases, even condone, immoral activities and lifestyles. Meanwhile, revisionist teachings about our country's founding remove any reference to the Christian under-

What's Wrong with the National Day of Prayer? (continued)

pinnings that have long set our nation apart and helped it thrive."

The National Day of Prayer is not historical.

The NDP is of recent vintage. It was created by Congress in 1952. The scheduling of the event used to change, but it was codified by Congress in 1988 (with pressure from the Religious Right) as the first Thursday in May.

Prior to 1952, some presidents issued proclamations calling for days of prayer—but not all did. Thomas Jefferson refused to issue such proclamations, observing, "Fasting & prayer are religious exercises, the enjoining them an act of discipline. Every religious society has a right to determine for itself the times for these exercises, & the objects proper for them, according to their own particular tenets; and this right can never be safer than in

their own hands, where the Constitution has deposited it."

Acting at the behest of Congress, James Madison issued a few prayer proclamations during the War of 1812 but later wrote that he regretted the move. Governmental religious proclamations, Madison observed, "seem to imply and certainly nourish the erroneous idea of a national religion." He warned that there would always be a tendency "to narrow the recommendation to the standard of the predominant sect."

President Andrew Jackson opposed these proclamations as well. Asked to issue one in 1832, Jackson refused, writing, "I could not do otherwise without transcending the limits prescribed by the Constitution for the President and without feeling that I might in some degree disturb the se-

curity which religion nowadays enjoys in this country in its complete separation from the political concerns of the General Government."

The National Day of Prayer Is Unnecessary.

America does not need an official, government-mandated "National Day of Prayer." Religious individuals who feel strongly about the country are free to pray for it at any time. They do not need to be directed or encouraged by government.

Government should refrain from sponsoring religious worship. It would be best if the National Day of Prayer were ended entirely. If that is not possible, the event, at the very least, should be pried free from the suffocating grasp of the Religious Right.

We Can Learn from Israel and Palestine

By AFS member **Woody Bass**, from his blog at <http://www.woodybass.com>

I am by no means a perfect person. I make mistakes just like anyone else. However, as I grew up I learned one very valuable lesson: Learn not only from your own mistakes but, more importantly, from the mistakes of others. I rarely ever make the same mistake twice or repeat another's mistake. I am a better person because of it.

We of the human race can learn a lot from history, but for whatever reason we are either not very knowledgeable of history or we choose to ignore it all together.

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict has been making news for as long as I can remember. Actually, generations of our ancestors have been hearing about the conflict for about the last 4000 years.

The entire conflict is a battle over religious differences and "holy territory." You would think that within a span of 4000 years they could learn to accept each other's differences and learn to "love thy neighbor." Nevertheless, they can't—or won't.

Perhaps the real issue is they are more stubborn than they are believers in their respective faiths.

The ironic thing about religion is that for the life you are supposed to lead to get closer to god and into the gates of heaven, more atrocities and death have occurred in the name of god than probably any other single unnatural cause of death in the history of man.

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict will never end unless they can put religious differences aside and accept their differences. It may also mean the "precious holy land" they are fighting over has to become a completely separate neutral territory to both countries.

We can learn a very valuable lesson from this and other similar conflicts.

Religion and politics should never mix. Our Founding Fathers understood that. They knew their history well, and because of that, they founded the United States of America so that we "shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion."

There are people out there who go out of their way to convince everyone that this county is supposedly a "Christian Nation." Not true. They will also try to tell you that their freedom to practice their faith is under attack. Also, not true. No one in this country is telling anyone that he or she cannot believe as they chose, or that they cannot follow a particular faith.

There are many reasons why the "faithful" in this country should support the Separation of Church and State. What we have been witnessing for centuries occurring between Israel and Palestine is just one of the many mistakes that history is trying to warn us not to repeat.

The faithful in this country should respect that our republic does not in any way interfere with or prohibit an individual's personal freedom to practice their faith. It does this by having a Constitution that strictly prohibits the government from trying to establish religious dogma.

[Reprinted by permission.]

Truth: An Atheist's Greatest Desire

Only Science and Rational Evidence Lead to Life's Foundational Truths

By Nickolas Conrad

We all have but one life to live. In this finite time we have but a moment to understand who we are and where we come from. Unable to prove that we live beyond mental and physical death any more than the ant we crush with our index finger, our life is immeasurably precious. One day we will all face our own deaths and, before the silence of the stars, we have only a short time to examine our place within the cosmos.

Understanding our existence truthfully and honestly is the quest of many atheists and agnostics. There is nothing more beautiful than the pursuit of truth and to glimpse—for but a second—the strange creature that we are. To do this, we cannot accept answers simply because our parents told them to us as children.

To really seek the answers, we must ask uncomfortable questions and confront the issues that some people might prefer to keep in the closet. As an atheist, I refuse to sit complacently and accept stories that smack of superstition. If all cultures believe in contradictory ideas of reality, we need a method to understand what the truth really is.

In the present day, this means the use of empirical evidence that can be demonstrated and repeated—the opposite of hearsay and faith. Faith is

believing in something despite the evidence, for with evidence, faith is superfluous. Conversely, modern science and rationality have provided a way for us to examine our claims. So powerful is this method that the language of science has become universal, nearly every society on earth having adopted its practice. Yet religions have remained separated by geography because they cannot convincingly prove their own claims.

Many people say atheists are no different than religious thinkers because atheists “believe” in empirical facts—a kind of faith. This claim is nonsense. Everyone alive, as far as I know, accepts the fact that they live in a physical and empirical world. Every time we open our eyes we confirm a physical reality.

Further, atheism is not a religion; it is not a religious proposition so much as the lack of one. Atheists do not have to prove God does not exist anymore than atheists must prove that leprechauns do not exist. We must take reality for what is, leaving out our assumptions and desires as much as possible. We build our understanding from experience and measure it with our reason.

I have never experienced the supernatural and never has it been scientifically demonstrated. The factual

existence of gods and leprechauns must be supported by evidence and proof from those who claim them to be real.

Additionally, never have I confirmed that a supernatural being is watching over me. Indeed, if I told you Zeus was watching over you, you would not believe me. In this way, we are all atheists of Zeus. The same reason modern day religious thinkers do not believe in Zeus is the same reason atheists do not believe in the modern day God. Atheists just extend their critical analysis one god further.

Finally, the reason atheists and agnostics sometimes passionately engage in debate is because we believe religious thought is distorting reality. To truly create the most inclusive and harmonious society, it is imperative we understand the truth of who we are. From this knowledge we can create the proper regulations and controls to cultivate a more humane and inclusive morality.

Atheists and agnostics wish to probe into the uncomfortable assumptions of all times and of all cultures. It is not that we wish to upset people. We wish to find the truth.

[From an April 27 op-ed by Nickolas Conrad in The Daily Evergreen. See <http://www.dailyevergreen.com/story/28679>. Printed here by permission.]

See and browse the new American Atheists website at <http://www.atheists.org>.

Read about Atheist Alliance International, a positive voice for Atheism, at <http://www.atheistalliance.org/>.

See current issues on Church/State separation at <http://www.au.org>.

Read Ed Buckner on secular rule: <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2009/may/04/atheist-says-secular-rule-important-to-faithful/>.

Read “The End of Christian America” from the April 13 Newsweek magazine at <http://www.newsweek.com/id/192583>.

Read about “40 Million Nonbelievers in America? The Secret Is Almost Out” at <http://www.alternet.org/story/139788>.

Read “U.S. Soldiers Told to Hunt People for Jesus” at http://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/press-releases/thp_bagram.html.

Read “Proselytizing Rampant in U.S. Military” at http://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/press-releases/harpers_newsstand.html.

And, just for the record...

Paragraph VI. Separation of church and state. No money shall ever be taken from the public treasury, directly or indirectly, in aid of any church, sect, cult, or religious denomination or of any sectarian institution.

—From Article I [“Bill of Rights”], Section II [“Origin and Structure of Government”] of the Constitution of Georgia

Camp Quest and Camp Inquiry

Summertime camps boom: The 'Godless alternative' for non-believers

A British camp, to be held in Somerset, England at the end of July, is the first that Camp Quest has held outside of North America

Atheists have become the latest group to cash in on Britain's booming summer camp industry by creating the country's first-ever retreat for irreligious children. Billed as a "godless alternative" to traditional religious summer camps, the five-day retreat is being hosted by Camp Quest, an American organization which uses the advertising slogan "Beyond Belief" and has a growing following in the States.

Camp Quest was founded in 1996 as an alternative to the Boy Scouts of America, which insists on members signing a "Declaration of Religious Belief". In response Camp Quest set up an alternative summer camp for the children of "atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers and all those who embrace a naturalistic rather than supernatural world view."

The organization has steadily grown in popularity and Camp Quest now holds annual gatherings in five American states and in Ontario.

Samantha Stein, the 23-year-old organizer of the British version, attended a Camp Quest in Michigan in 2007 and decided to open up an equivalent camp in the UK.

"When I got back from Michigan I began researching summer camps in the UK and I was surprised by how many had a distinctly religious affiliation," she said. "There are many summer camps that cater for children with religious beliefs but there was nothing for children who are not religious and want to be able to discuss rational humanism with other non-believers."

Camp Quest hopes that non-religious parents who might have been put off from sending their children to a faith-based retreat will now consider it instead. The organizers remain adamant, however, that the camp will not have a proselytizing "atheist agenda."

"We don't teach children not to believe in God, we simply tell them it's OK not to believe in God," said Edwin Kagin, the 68-year-old founder of Camp Quest.

Miss Stein said you do not have to be an atheist to attend. "Most who have signed up come from non-religious backgrounds but the camp would be open to anyone who was religious as well," she said.

The five days in Somerset will consist of traditional outdoor activities such as canoeing and cycling, combined with discussions about religion and non-belief. The centerpiece of the camp is an ongoing discussion where participants are encouraged to try to disprove the existence of unicorns, which serve as a metaphor for God.

Campers are told that two unicorns live in the area and cannot be seen, heard or touched. The adult counselors pretend to believe in the unicorns on the basis that an ancient book handed down through the generations says they exist. The children are encouraged to try to prove that the unicorns do not exist. If anyone is successful they will be awarded a £10 note which has a picture of Charles Darwin on it and is signed by leading atheist academic Richard Dawkins.

In the US the prize is a "godless" \$100 bill from before 1957, which was when the U.S. placed the phrase "In God We Trust" on all its notes. No

child has definitively disproved the existence of unicorns and won the prize. "The idea of the unicorn debate is not to prove God doesn't exist, it is to illustrate that having such debates with religious people is futile because in the end faith trumps everything," said Miss Stein.

AND DON'T FORGET CAMP INQUIRY

Camp Inquiry is the Center for Inquiry's summer program for children ages seven to sixteen.

This year, Camp Inquiry will take place from July 6 through the 12 at Camp Seven Hills in Holland, New York. Camp Seven Hills has 620 acres of woodland paths, hills, meadows, and streams; the perfect setting for an unforgettable camping experience.

Camp Inquiry will be run by a staff of fully screened and trained counselors, teachers, and a trained medical professional.

Camp Inquiry works to help young people confront the challenges of living a non-theistic lifestyle in a world dominated by religious belief and pseudoscience. Grounded on the conviction that kids can begin establishing habits of the good and ethical life early on, Camp Inquiry adopts a three-part focus: the arts and sciences, the skeptical perspective, and ethical character development. Campers, teachers and counselors, address key issues around individual identity while forging trusting relationships, establishing a sense of local and global community, and developing a respect for the natural world.

[From an April 29 article by Jerome Taylor at <http://www.independent.co.uk/> and a May 4 press release at <http://www.centerforinquiry.net/>.]

"As an atheist, I believe in life before death, not life after death." —Edwin Kagin of American Atheists

"When a Religion is good, I conceive it will support itself; and when it does not support itself, and God does not take care to support it so that its Professors are obliged to call for help of the Civil Power, it is a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one." —Benjamin Franklin, 1706-1790

"The hope of the world is still in dedicated minorities. The trail blazers in human, academic, scientific, and religious freedom have always been in the minority. —Martin Luther King, Jr., 1929-1968

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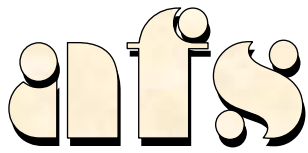
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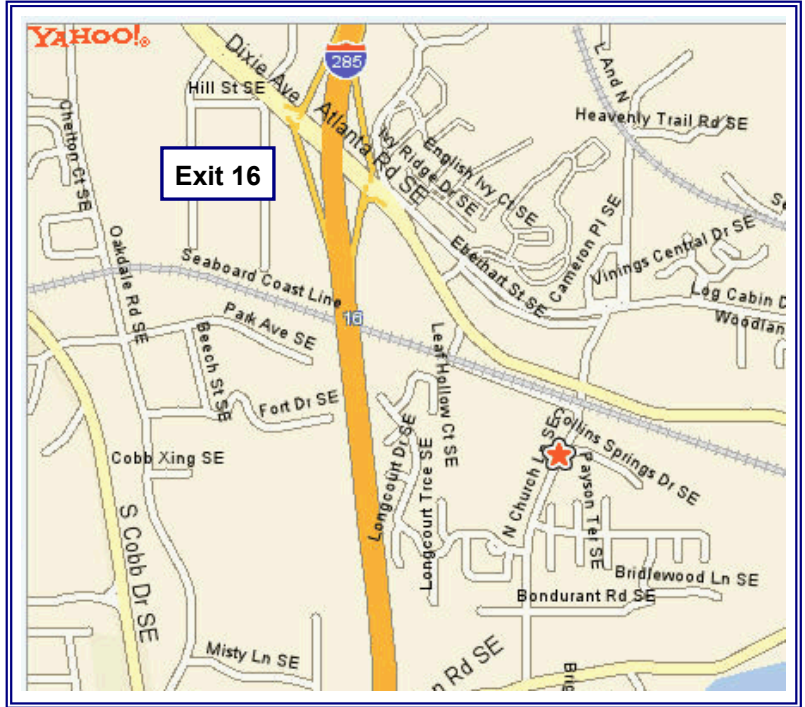
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**This Month's Speaker:
Doyle E. Duke**



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