

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself.

An AFS Publication • Volume 15 Number 8 • August 2009

The August AFS Meeting

The August 9 AFS meeting will include a talk by Leonard Adams on his experiences as a Christian pastor and the steps for him in deconverting to an atheist. Leonard gave a similar talk at the July 4 Lake Hypatia event.

Mr. Adams was a preacher's son who became serious about the bible and God at seven years old. He preached his first sermon when he was eight. He was an elder at his father's church at 15 years old. He joined a 6,000-member church in Hawaii in 1992 and became a full-time staffer as a music minister. In 2000, he left Hawaii to start his own church. But his ever-increasing awareness of contradictions in his concept of God caused him to close his church in 2002 and led to his deconversion.

The meeting will be at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Smyrna, GA at 1:00PM. Please feel free to arrive early for snacks and conversation.

To get there, take I-285 (the perimeter road around Atlanta) to Exit 16 (Atlanta Road). Turn toward Atlanta. Go about a mile and then turn right onto Plant Atkinson Road. Go another mile and turn right onto N. Church Lane. Atlanta Freethought Hall will be on the right.

A Detour to AF Hall!

North Church Lane will be closed to thru traffic between Atlanta Road and Collins Springs Drive from June 1st to October 28th for bridge replacement over the CSX railroad.

To get to AF Hall from I-285, you can still take Atlanta Road towards Atlanta, but continue past N. Church Lane to Plant Atkinson Road. Turn right and go to N. Church Lane and turn right again. AF Hall will be on the right.

The AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be at AF Hall on Saturday, August 15, at 6:00PM. AFS will provide a barbecue dinner with plenty of side items, dessert and soft drinks. (The meal will cost \$15 each.) This Social will also be a celebration party for **Bruce Herr**, who is retiring from being a firefighter for 23 years. His last day on the job is August 14.

If you will attend, please RSVP to steveyoth@aol.com.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Aug 9: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

Aug 15: AFS Social, AF Hall, 6:00 PM.

Other Meetings of Interest

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at AF Hall on Sunday, August 16, at 1:00 PM. Dr. Richard Bennett will speak on Islam, the Middle East and Current Affairs. For details, see <http://humanistsofga.freewebsites.com/>.

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, August 9, 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, August 23, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta.

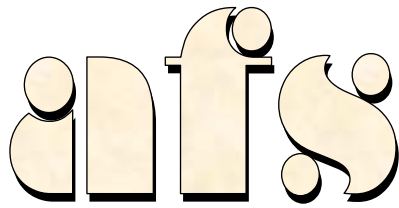
GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Gwinnet (12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville) on Wednesday, August 12, at 7:00 PM. (See <http://gust.domek.org/>.)

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.

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 **First Annual Conference of Black Nontheists** will be in Atlanta on Friday, August 7, and Saturday, August 8, at the Atlanta Fulton Public Library, Central Downtown Branch Auditorium. Gary C. Booker will host the event. His website (<http://www.garybooker.org>) notes that "Even after many centuries of being disappointed and miserably failed by organized religion, Black Americans continue to be extremely devout and show blind faith in self-destructive ways. Religious fundamentalism and bigotry continue to promote sectarianism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and anti-intellectualism in Black American communities. Mental Liberation is the final frontier of the civil rights movement." See the website for details. Norm Allen of African Americans for Humanism will also be there.

"Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church and the private school supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the church and state forever separate." –Ulysses S. Grant, from a speech to the Army, Des Moines, IA, Sept 25, 1875



**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.

Aug 9: Leonard Adams, a former Christian minister, will speak on his experiences as a church leader and why he left the Christian ministry.

Sept. 13: TBD

Oct 11: TBD

Nov 7: Massimo Pigliucci will speak. Note: this is a Saturday meeting.

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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afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Webmaster: Freya Harris

Call and leave messages on the

AFS Info Line: 404-A THEIST

Buckner's Invocation at Cobb County Meeting

On July 28, Ed Buckner, President of American Atheists and former President of the Atlanta Freethought Society, gave an "Invocation" at a meeting of the Cobb County Board of Commissioners.

It is standard procedure for the Commissioners to have someone, usually a Christian minister, give the Invocation. But this time, Ed asked to give the Invocation, and Sam Olens, the Commissioners' Chairman, agreed for him to do so.

Back in 2005, Ed was one of seven Cobb County residents who, with the American Civil Liberties Union, filed a federal lawsuit to halt the practice of invocations before the Board of Commissioners' and the Planning Commission's meetings.

But last year, the victory from that lawsuit was overturned by the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Earlier in July of this year, Buckner spoke out during public comment against the commissioners' approval of a plan by the county's development authority to issue up to \$14 million in bonds to lend to North Cobb Christian School for renovations.

So, Ed's "Invocation" was allowed pretty grudgingly by Chairman Olens, who is currently a candidate for State Attorney General.

When Chairman Olens introduced Ed to give the Invocation, he informed the audience that they had to let him do this "under federal law."

AFS board member Jack McKinney was present, and noted that "just before the meeting, Sam Olens came hustling up the aisle to tell a woman across from me that 'We're going to have an atheist prayer.'"

Ed's Invocation can be seen at the Cobb County website, listed below. If you watch the video, you'll note that Ed not only gave a great speech, but, after the Invocation, during the Pledge of Allegiance, left out a few unconstitutional words!

Way to go, Ed!!!

Watch the video of Ed's "Invocation" at <http://communications.cobbcountyga.gov/tv23/boc2009/07-28/290.aspx>

"Invocation" for Cobb County Board of Commissioners

**By Ed Buckner, Cobb County resident
and national president, American Atheists
28 July 2009**

For any of you who are bowing your heads, I'd respectfully recommend against doing that.

I'm Ed Buckner, a Cobb County resident and taxpayer and the national president of American Atheists. According to my dictionary, an invocation is done to "call on a higher power" – and since we all know that the only supreme power in Cobb County is the citizenry, I speak now in the name of the 700,000 people who live in this county – especially the majority (yes, over half) of those 700,000 who are not members of any church, mosque, temple, or other religious organization – and even more especially, I speak in the name of the overwhelming majority – including anyone I've ever met – who do not want their government to decide for them anything regarding religion or any gods.

I speak as well for those political leaders who despair that success in politics cannot be achieved without hypocritical piety from politicians and who would prefer to run for office and to govern based on competence and political philosophy rather than on beliefs, real or pretended, in any supernatural beings. I speak on behalf of Southern Baptists who know that their own *Faith and Message* declares in chapter 17 that "Church and state should be separate," and that "The church should not resort to the civil power to carry on its work." I speak in the name of all Americans who know our history and who know, for example, that in 1797 the U.S. Senate voted unanimously in favor of, and that President John Adams then signed, a treaty with Tripoli that specified that "The government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion."

I invoke all of these people to urge Chairman **Samuel S. Olens**, Commissioner **Helen Goreham**, Commissioner **Bob Ott**, Commissioner **Tim Lee**, my own Commissioner, **Woody Thompson**, and the thousands of dedicated employees of Cobb County to work hard, ethically, and honestly on our behalf, to represent us well – all things unrelated to religion, of course – and to please avoid the arrogance of thinking you can or ever should express any religious beliefs other than your own.

For any of you who are made uncomfortable by my remarks, who think this is more a provocation than an invocation, who would prefer not to hear such comments at a meeting you came to expecting government instead of religion and philosophy, please join me in urging that the Cobb County Commissioners and Planning Commissioners cease to open their meetings with public religious invocations of any kind. For Christians, such exercises are a plain violation of Matthew 6:5-6, but more importantly they are for all of us an insult to our right to choose our own religion and religious representatives for ourselves, if we want any at all. And these invocations are a violation of the letter and intent of the Constitution of the State of Georgia, of the First Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and of the Fourteenth Amendment, ratified exactly 141 years ago today.

Go and sin no more.

Declaration of the Free by Robert G. Ingersoll (1899)

July 21, 2009 marks the 110th anniversary of the death of Robert Green Ingersoll. Called "The Great Agnostic" by newspapers of his day, Ingersoll was a great orator, an enlightened humane freethinker, a visionary, as well as a combatant against superstition and hypocrisy. So, here is one of the last poems that he wrote...

We have no falsehoods to defend;
We want the facts.
Our force, our thought, we do not spend
In vain attacks.
And we will never meanly try
To save some fair and pleasing lie.

The simple truth is what we ask,
Not the ideal;
We've set ourselves the noble task
To find the real.
If all there is is naught but dross,
We want to know and bear our loss.

We will not willingly be fooled,
By fables nursed;
Our hearts, by earnest thought, are
schooled
To bear the worst;
And we can stand erect and dare
All things, all facts that really are.

We have no God to serve or fear,
No hell to shun,
No devil with malicious leer
When life is done.
An endless sleep may close our eyes.
A sleep with neither dreams nor sighs.

We have no master on the land —
No king in air —
Without a manacle we stand,
Without a prayer,
Without a fear of coming night,
We seek the truth, we love the light.

We do not bow before a guess,
A vague unknown;
A senseless force we do not bless
In solemn tone.
When evil comes we do not curse,
Or thank because it is no worse.

When cyclones rend — when lightning
blights,
'Tis naught but fate;
There is no God of wrath who smites
In heartless hate.
Behind the things that injure man
There is no purpose, thought, or plan.

We waste no time in useless dread,
In trembling fear;
The present lives, the past is dead,
And we are here,
All welcome guests at life's great feast,
We need no help from ghost or priest.

Our life is joyous, jocund, free —
Not one a slave
Who bends in fear the trembling knee,
And seeks to save
A coward soul from future pain;
Not one will cringe or crawl for gain.

The jeweled cup of love we drain,
And friendship's wine
Now swiftly flows in every vein
With warmth divine.
And so we love and hope and dream
That in death's sky there is a gleam.

We walk according to our light,
Pursue the path
That leads to honor's stainless height,
Careless of wrath
Or curse of God, or priestly spite,
Longing to know and do the right.

We love our fellow man, our kind,
Wife, child, and friend.
To phantoms we are deaf and blind,
But we extend
The helping hand to the distressed;
By lifting others we are blessed.

Love's sacred flame within the heart
And friendship's glow;
While all the miracles of art
Their wealth bestow
Upon the thrilled and joyous brain,
And present raptures banish pain.

We love no phantoms of the skies,
But living flesh,
With passion's soft and soulful eyes,
Lips warm and fresh,
And cheeks with health's red flag
unfurled,
The breathing angels of this world.

The hands that help are better far
Than lips that pray.
Love is the ever gleaming star
That leads the way,
That shines, not on vague worlds of
bliss,
But on a paradise in this.

Camp Quest in Florida

Camp Quest Florida is finally here. See <http://www.florida.camp-quest.org> to access camper registration and staffer volunteer application forms.

There are six operating CQ's in the USA: Ohio (the oldest), California, Michigan, Minnesota, Smoky Mountains, and now Florida! There is one CQ in Ontario, Canada and a new CQ in the UK. The camp serves children from freethinking families. The goal

is to provide a fun and safe environment that nurtures and cultivates the inquisitive, rational, and ethical nature in our children. Campers are given a chance to make friends, ask questions, analyze answers, and ask more questions about humanity and our natural world.

Camp Quest Florida will be held this winter from 12/25/09 to 1/1/10. Children (and their families) are wel-

come to stay with us at Birch State Park in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. This is Florida's first secular camp for kids and it is pleased to announce that The Amazing Randi will visit to perform magic and share thoughts on skepticism. This is a very special and exciting opportunity!

Thank you,
Elizabeth Spike
CQ FL 2009 Director

"If there is one thing for which we stand in this country, it is for complete religious freedom, and it is an emphatic negation of this right to cross-examine a man on his religion before being willing to support him for office."

— Theodore Roosevelt, in a letter to J. C. Martin, Nov 9, 1908

Letters to the Editor

The following letter by Tony King was printed in the *Toccoa Record* on July 30.

ABANDON SCHIZO SEXUAL ATTITUDES

I have been thinking lately about the abortion issue and the Great Flood myth of the Bible.

To re-familiarize ourselves with the two camps of the abortion issue, those who are for abortion call themselves Pro-Choice, and those who oppose them call themselves Pro-Life or Anti-abortionists. The Pro-Choice camp wishes the procedure to remain legal and available to women who may, for any number of reasons, decide it is not an option for them to give birth. Their opponents, the Pro-Lifers, who are mostly composed of Christians, are against abortion mainly for religious reasons. According to them, it is not right to terminate a pregnancy. They claim it is against their God and his law of "Thou shalt not kill" (Ex. 20:13). The more hardcore among the Pro-Life camp call doctors who perform abortions "baby killers," and some of them have even gone so far as to bomb abortion clinics. If one can't persuade by argument, one could probably be more effective by turning to terrorism, like Eric Rudolph. The monotheistic religions do have a history of that sort of thing. I have yet to hear of an instance wherein a Pro-Choice advocate has bombed a church, synagogue, or mosque.

So which side is right? Is it the Pro-Choice stance? Or is it the Anti-Abortionist stance? Maybe neither is completely right. How can one side or the other be completely wrong, as each perceives the other to be?

I can see to a point both sides of the argument. But maybe, just maybe, there should be a compromise. Surely, there is room for reason and logic to solve this supposedly insurmountable problem. This does not have to be an issue where both camps are dug

into their positions and are not willing to give-and-take among one another. There has been way too much emotion involved.

According to Genesis 6:5-9:17, God had Noah build a huge ship to float and ride out the flood that he used to destroy humankind, because God did not like what people were doing. The entire population of Earth was evil.

Interestingly enough, the myth of the flood is much older than this Jewish version. The first people to record it were the Sumerians. In their original version, the god Enlil decided to get rid of humans with a flood because they were being too noisy and keeping him awake. The god Enki decided to save mankind, telling the pious king of Nippur, Ziusudra, to build a huge boat. This same flood myth is told by the Akkadians, who called the boat-builder Atrahasis, and by the later Babylonians, who called him Utnapishtim. No matter which version you are talking about, the genocide was complete as a few survived on a boat. Though no numbers were given, one can suppose a lot of people had died.

You are now wondering, no doubt, what possible connection could that have with abortion?

Let's do some number crunching. Let's suppose, for the sake of argument, that the Judeo-Christian version of the myth is true. Let's suppose that the world population before the flood was 2 billion. And let's suppose that a little more than half of that population were women. 51% of 2 billion is 1.02 billion. And let's also suppose that of that last number, 25% were pregnant women, numbering 255 million. So, whatever trimester those antediluvian women were in, supposing they were not all carrying just one child, a third

(85 m.) were carrying multiples, half of which were with twins (43 m.) and the rest triplets (42 m.), giving a total of 382 million fetuses in wombs (170 m. single + 86 m. twins + 126 m. triplets), and they all died. That would mean 382 million fetuses died in a Great Flood by an act of God. And that is not counting the children below age 7 who drowned. That would indeed make God the father of all baby killers. All those children, infants, and unborn must have been evil too.

It seems to me that the best way to remove the controversy over abortion is to ensure that not only is it available to women for whom it is necessary, but that also there is less need for it to happen. One of the best ways to prevent an abortion from happening in my mind is to ensure that there is sex education and to make contraceptives readily available. Abstinence is only one answer, but it is not the only answer, nor is it the most effective. We must face this fact realistically: we humans are sexual beings and we are going to have sex. The sex drive is strong and part of our natures, and there is nothing wrong or bad about it, and we as human beings have a right to participate in the fullness of our being. We need to abandon our schizophrenic attitudes towards sexuality and sexual reproduction and recognize it as being part of who we are. If people are going to have sex and do not want children, they must be taught and learn to practice safe sex and to correctly use both condoms and birth-control pills. At least that way, there will be very few abortions.

That would be the most sane and reasonable thing to do. But no, we mustn't do that, because that would be against somebody's religion.

William A. King, Toccoa

Watch Pastor Harry Hardwick of Landover Baptist Church at the American Atheists Convention in Atlanta:

Part 1: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aD7-VGA82Wo> Part 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNT19ulsNHw&feature=related>

James Randi talks about the bible: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WSzQC1zKesU>

Christopher Hitchens talks about an "Axis of Evil" in a July 9, 2009 speech: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_C2SpCAsN8

Pat Condell wants to "Ban the Burka!" See it here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIkxlzTZc48>

The U.S. of A. and It's Great Belief-Neutral Government

By Jeffrey Selman and Ryan Hale,

Presidents of the two Georgia Chapters of Americans United for Separation of Church and State

A July 4 full-page ad in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* titled "In God We Trust" argues that America's government has some sort of religious foundation. Several Founding Fathers, presidents, Supreme Court justices and others are quoted. The ad was placed by an Oklahoma-based firm called Hobby Lobby and a Texas outfit known as Wall Builders.

The problem with such arguments is that they rely on quotations that are either wrenched from context or that fail to cite the full thinking of the individuals quoted.

The ad, for example, quotes James Madison, considered the father of the Constitution, who lauds the importance of being "a subject of the Governor of the Universe." Similarly, a quote by Thomas Jefferson is employed that says liberties are "the gift of God."

The implication is that if the Founders said these things, they must have believed government and religion (in this case Christianity) should have some official connection.

But this a tremendous leap not supported by the facts. Jefferson, Madison, and other early leaders were quite capable of using religious rhetoric yet still support the separation of church and state. Like politicians today, they may have employed religious language to emphasize certain points. This does not mean they support mixing church and state.

Far from it. Jefferson and Madison are both acknowledged as champions of church-state separation. Jefferson wrote the Virginia Statute for Religious Liberty, legislation that ended

Virginia's state-established church. He later spoke of the First Amendment as erecting "a wall of separation between church and state."

Madison was in full agreement. In fact, it was Madison who pushed Jefferson's disestablishment bill through the Virginia legislature and wrote "The Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments," a powerful document that attacked the idea of government-supported religion.

Jefferson and Madison took these stands because they valued the role of religion in the lives of the people. They were aware that efforts to force religious worship by the state had failed miserably in Europe and spawned centuries of oppression, violence and war. They wanted none of that for these shores. They believed the best way to ensure religious freedom for everyone, Christian and non-Christian, was to separate church and state and leave decisions about how and when to pray to each individual's conscience.

Madison's First Amendment contains a twin guarantee of freedom. It states that the government will not pass any law "respecting an establishment of religion" or prohibit the "free exercise" of faith. The effect is to prevent government meddling in sacred matters, an area far beyond the scope of the government's duties.

Early observers to our nation understood this system—and most lauded it. Ironically, Hobby Lobby's ad quotes Alexis de Tocqueville speaking about the importance of religious freedom to Americans. It fails to point

out that the ministers and religious leaders de Tocqueville talked to attributed the strength of religion in America to church-state separation.

"[T]hey all attributed the peaceful dominion of religion in their country mainly to the separation of church and state," Tocqueville wrote in his masterpiece *Democracy in America*. "I do not hesitate to affirm that during my stay in America I did not meet a single individual, of the clergy or the laity, who was not of the same opinion on this point."

But perhaps the most shocking omission of the ad is its quote by Benjamin Franklin. The ad quotes Franklin pleading for prayers during the Constitutional Convention. It does not note that his appeal failed and that no government-sponsored prayers took place during that event.

Religion has stood on its own for more than 230 years in this country. It does not need the prop of the state. Today there are some who argue that our system of church-state separation, which has given us more religious freedom than any people in world history, is somehow faulty and should be rejected.

We must vigorously oppose such misguided appeals. The reckless mixing of religion and government has provided nothing but misery in much of the world (think Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the Balkans). Americans of good will of many faiths and no particular faith must stand together to resist any effort to weaken our church-state wall.

[This letter was submitted to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, but the editors chose to not print it.]

"My earlier views of the unsoundness of the Christian scheme of salvation and the human origin of the scriptures, have become clearer and stronger with advancing years and I see no reason for thinking I shall ever change them."

— Abraham Lincoln, said to Judge J. S. Wakefield after Willie Lincoln's death

"There is something feeble and a little contemptible about a man who cannot face the perils of life without the help of comfortable myths. Almost inevitably some part of him is aware that they are myths and that he believes them only because they are comforting. But he dares not face this thought! Moreover, since he is aware, however dimly, that his opinions are not rational, he becomes furious when they are disputed."

— Bertrand Russell, from *Human Society in Ethics and Politics* (1954)

The Amazing Deception: A Critical Analysis of Christianity

A Book Review by Steve Yothment (2nd edition, 348 pages)

The first edition of Doyle E. Duke's book was titled *The Amazing Deception: A History of Christianity*; the second edition is renamed *The Amazing Deception: A Critical Analysis of Christianity*. Lengthened about one hundred pages, the second edition has many more citations in the form of footnotes, more references, a larger bibliography, and two more chapters on a study of Paul. Much to his credit, the copious footnotes always include a reference to a book or website from which the reader can verify certain claims and find out more on a particular subject. Duke often refers to the *Original Catholic Encyclopedia* website (<http://oce.catholic.com/>) website for validation of claims about the Catholic Church. (I wouldn't be surprised if he read the entire encyclopedia!)

Duke says in the Preface of the book that his purpose is fourfold:

- 1) Trace the birth of Christianity and investigate the validity of the New Testament.
- 2) Call attention to the confusion and contradictions throughout the New Testament, errors produced by early Church writers (and rewriters) attempting to validate their favorite doctrines.
- 3) Reveal the evolution of Christianity, from non-violent pacifists to a fanatical theocracy that felt justified in eliminating all opposition to their perceived will of God.
- 4) Give a warning of the latent dangers inherent within a religion that still perceives its goal as worldwide conversion.

He accomplishes all of these, and more, in his book.

Duke views the bible and Christianity in a way that is very similar to many liberal bible scholars like Bart Ehrman, Burton Mack, and Barrie Wilson. In Duke's view, there really was a Jesus who lived in Palestine in the first century who was crucified by the Romans. He may very well have been a great teacher, but he upset the *Pax Romana*, the Roman peace, order,

and stability that the Romans wanted to establish throughout the Roman Empire. That's why he was crucified. The later stories that the Jews were somehow responsible for his death were written to appease Roman sensibilities. He didn't perform miracles, he didn't rise from the dead, and he's not the savior of the world.

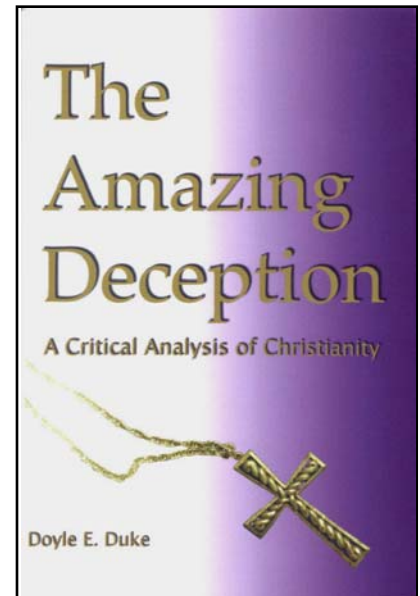
Duke notes that the four Gospels of the New Testament were written by Greek-speaking people after the first Jewish War (which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD) for two reasons:

- 1) To dissociate Christianity from its Jewish roots, and
- 2) To cover up any anti-Roman sentiment in the Christian story of Jesus.

The anti-Jewish sentiment among Roman-occupied countries was very high after the Jewish War. That's why the Gospels depict Jesus as a harmless preacher and healer who was antagonistic to the Jewish leaders (the Scribes and Pharisees). That's why Pilate is portrayed as sympathetic toward Jesus and why the Gospels hold the Jewish people accountable for the crucifixion of Jesus.

In Duke's view, Jesus was a Jewish teacher who taught the Torah, i.e., the Law of Moses. Jesus's view was that the Law would remain applicable forever. In contrast, Paul taught that the Law of Moses was no longer applicable. This is a very major contradiction in the New Testament.

Duke shows how Jesus' teachings and his eschatology were very similar to those of the Essene community at Qumram. In Duke's view, Jesus's donkey ride into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday was a treasonous act. This and his other actions, like causing a disruption in the temple and gathering large crowds to speak to them, caused the Romans to become very concerned that he was a subversive character who was trying to start an insurrection against the Romans. So, they took him into custody, prosecuted him as a criminal and crucified him.



So, where do the doctrines of Christianity come from? It was actually the Apostle Paul who founded Christianity. Duke devotes three chapters to Paul, covering his background, his missionary journeys and his teachings. Paul had a Hellenistic background, being born in Tarsus of Cilicia which was a religious center for Mithraism. Duke notes how many characteristics of Mithraism were incorporated into Paul's view of Christianity. It was Paul who developed the doctrine of faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. With this new doctrine, Paul taught that it was no longer necessary to observe the Law of Moses.

Duke shows the contrast between Jesus's disciples who continued to observe the Law, and Paul's converts, who did not. Jesus's disciples insisted that Christians should observe the Law. This, after all, is what Jesus taught them to do! But Paul taught that the Law was "done away with in Christ." Thus, the contradiction.

So, which doctrine prevailed? It was Paul's version of Christianity that won the competition for survival. Duke points out the historical factors that made it this way, mostly, that the Jews and the Jewish religion became very disrespected because the Jewish

The Amazing Deception (*continued*)

people caused disruptions and insurrections against Roman authority, and the Romans would not stand for it. Thus, the Jews were vilified, and observance of the Jewish Law was not to be accepted in Christianity in any part of the Roman Empire.

Duke also has a great chapter on the Gnostics, apologists and early writings of the second and third centuries. This chapter has a cornucopia of information on many various Christian documents from that era. Included are many footnotes and annotations for further study.

In the next chapter, Duke discusses the New Testament Canonization and how that took place. Surprisingly, many doctrines of Christianity still were not established by the fourth century when the canon of the New Testament was selected. Emperor Constantine, who made Christianity the religion of the Roman Empire, called several Councils for the purpose of establishing doctrine. Often Constantine himself presided over the Councils (for example, the Council of Nicea in 325 AD), and he influenced the outcome tremendously, even though he did not have much knowledge of the details of Christianity.

The canon of the New Testament was established over a series of these Council meetings. The final canon was decreed at the third council of Carthage in 397AD, resulting in the books of the New Testament that we know of today.

Starting in the fourth century, the

Emperor was considered the head of the secular kingdom, and the pope was considered the spiritual head of the church. Here, we see the beginning of the joining of church and state. The Roman Church helped the Roman government to establish peace by turning the minds of the people to spiritual matters; the Roman government helped the Roman Church by persecuting or killing those who disagreed with the established doctrine. The results were horrific. There were many massacres of groups of people with different beliefs than those of the Roman Church. The doctrine that it was actually preferable to kill heretics because of their beliefs developed through the centuries so that, by the 11th to 17th centuries, Inquisitions, Pogroms and Crusades resulted in the deaths of millions.

The chapter on The Character of The Church discusses the persecution of non-believers, the lack of ethics of church leaders throughout the middle ages and the doctrine of the infallibility of the Church. The sad historical account in this chapter alone will convince most any reader that the Roman Catholic Church has dealt unethically with many people. Duke also does a very good job at picking apart the doctrine of the church's supposed infallibility.

Duke notes that the Catholic Church has used the doctrine of *Apostolic Succession* to their advantage for years. This doctrine says that Apostles were endowed with the ability to pro-

pagate 'revealed truth' to their disciples, going all the way back to the Apostle Peter. If you accept that doctrine, then you must admit that the Catholic Church has always been right in what it teaches. But Duke shows that the doctrine is a fraud.

In the last chapter, Light Unto The World, Duke shows how the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment Era finally allowed people to start to use science, reason and logic in analyzing Christianity, and many found it to be incompatible with what they knew about the world. For many, then and now, Christianity was found to be The Amazing Deception.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Doyle Duke was the featured speaker at the May AFS meeting. His background: He served in the U.S. Navy, then worked for three years for the *Chattanooga Time-Post*, and twenty-eight years for a photographics company. His passion for scenic photography and love of the Rocky Mountains led to numerous excursions from Arizona to Alaska, and has produced an extensive private photographic collection. He and his wife reside in Union Grove, Alabama, where he makes frequent contributions to the local paper, *The Arab Tribune*, while working on his memoirs.

The text of Doyle's book, with other interesting links, can be found at <http://www.amazingdeception.com>. Or, if you prefer, you can buy a copy of his book from the AFS bookstore.

Federal Judge Orders Government Seizure of Creationism Park in Pensacola

A judge's ruling on July 31 said the nine properties that make up Dinosaur Adventure Land will be used to satisfy \$430,400 in restitution owed to the federal government.

Kent Hovind, who founded the park and his ministry, Creation Science Evangelism, is serving 10 years in federal prison as a result of a tax-fraud conviction for failing to pay more than \$470,000 in employee taxes in a long-running dispute with the In-

ternal Revenue Service. He was found guilty in November 2006 on 58 counts, including failure to pay employee taxes and making threats against investigators. He claimed he didn't have to pay the taxes because he and his assistants were "employed by God."

U.S. District Judge Casey Rodgers' 16-page order gives the government the green light to divide up the nine properties in and around the 5800 block of North Palafox Street and be-

gin to sell them until the \$430,400 forfeiture amount is satisfied. The properties have a combined value of more than what the Hovind owes, according to court records. Any excess property available after the sale will be returned to Hovind.

Court documents indicate Hovind made a series of quick transfers to conceal his ownership of the properties at risk for seizure.

[From *Pensacola News Journal*, July 31.]

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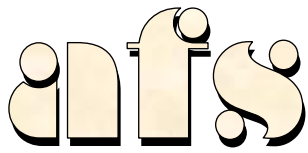
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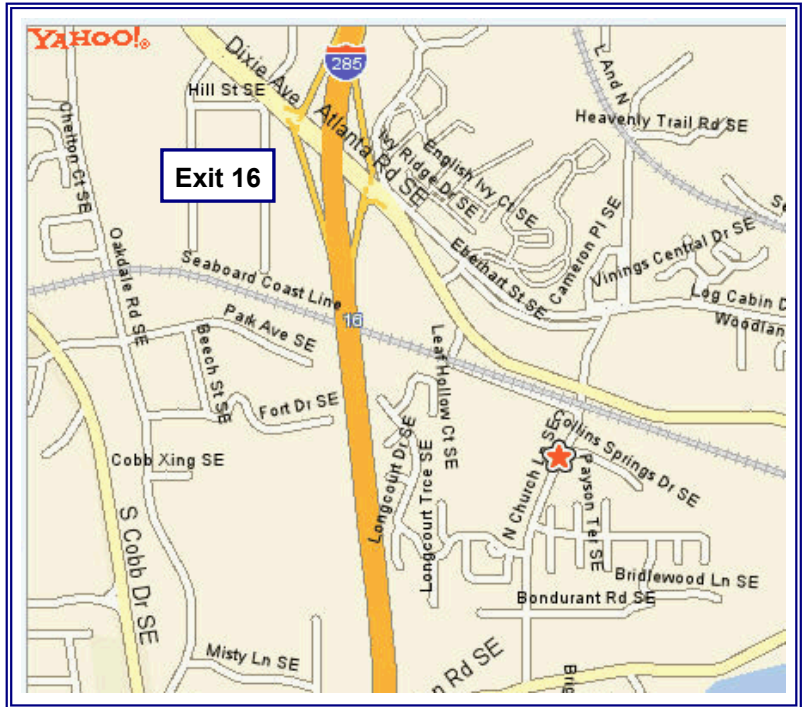
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This Month's Speaker:

Leonard Adams



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