

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself.

An AFS Publication • Volume 15 Number 10 • October 2009

The October AFS Meeting

The October 11 AFS meeting will include a talk by Jeffrey Selman, President of the Georgia Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. He will talk about recent news regarding Americans United, which is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to preserving the constitutional principle of church-state separation as the only way to ensure religious freedom for all Americans. (See the Americans United website at <http://www.au.org>.)

The meeting will be at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Smyrna, GA.

To get there, take I-285 (the perimeter road around Atlanta) to Exit 16 (Atlanta Road). Turn toward Atlanta. Go 0.5 miles to N. Church Lane, which is currently blocked due to construction! Follow the detour instructions below.

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.

Nominations at October Meeting

The AFS bylaws require nomination of officers and board members for each year at the October meeting. Please think about whom you would like to nominate. (Current officers and board members are listed on page 2.)

Officers have 1-year terms; board members have 2-year terms. Mark Banks, Steven Fant and Doug Hattersley will continue their 2-year terms into next year.

The AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be a Potluck Dinner at Atlanta Freethought Hall on Saturday, October 17, at 6:00 PM. We hope to have it under our pavilion, but if the weather is too cold or rainy, we can have it indoors. Please bring food according to the first letter of your last name as follows:

A-G: Bring a main dish;

H-P: Bring a desert;

Q-Z: Bring a side dish.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Oct 11: AFS Board Meeting, AF Hall, 11:00 AM.

Oct 11: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

Oct 17: AFS Social, Potluck Dinner, AF Hall, 6:00PM

Other Meetings of Interest

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at AF Hall on Sunday, October 18, at 1:00 PM. See more about their program at <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. Request details via freediscussion@hotmail.com.

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will discuss "Non-theists and Guilt" at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Gwinnett (12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville) on Monday, October 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.

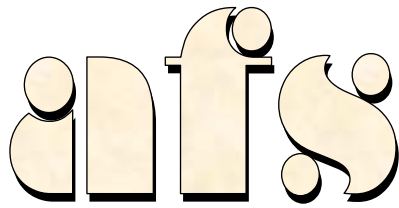
The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 1:00 PM at the Northwest Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 1025 Mount Vernon Hwy, in Atlanta. For details, see <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

The Atlanta Skeptics now have a meetup that is doing well. They had 40 people at their last meetup, now called **Skeptics In the Pub**. Their next meeting is on Saturday, October 17, at 7:00 PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave., in Atlanta. See <http://www.atlantaskeptics.com> or <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics/> for more information.

There will be a "**meetup**" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, October 11, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA.

There's another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists scheduled for October 25, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta.

"We want to stand upon our own feet and look fair and square at the world -- its good facts, its bad facts, its beauties, and its ugliness; see the world as it is and be not afraid of it. Conquer the world by intelligence and not merely by being slavishly subdued by the terror that comes from it." -- Bertrand Russell, from his book *Why I Am Not a Christian*



**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.

Oct 11: Jeffrey Selman, President of the Georgia Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, will speak about Americans United.

Nov 14: Massimo Pigliucci, noted Evolutionary Biologist, will speak on "Reason: What is It? Who Needs It?" Note: this is a Saturday meeting.

Dec 13: Todd Stiefel, former executive of Stiefel Labs, will speak on how he would like to bring his business experience to the freethought movement.

Jan 10: Darrel W. Ray will speak on his new book *The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture*.

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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What I Learned About the Religious Right

A humanist goes undercover to a right wing summit and lives to tell about it.

By Clayton Whitt, from the Sept 30 issue of *Humanist Network News*. (Reprinted here by permission.)

On September 18 and 19, 2009, over 1,800 religious right activists, pastors, and politicians converged upon Washington D.C. for a two day “pep rally” called the [Values Voter Summit](#)¹. It was a media saturated event, sponsored by FRCAction, the political wing of the Family Research Council and a veritable Who’s Who of religious right organizations.

Leading Republican politicians, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and House Minority Leader Eric Cantor, and aspiring Republican presidential contenders Governors Mitt Romney, Mike Huckabee, and Tim Pawlenty, addressed the summit. Also speaking were Gary Bauer and William Bennett, two of the longest serving and loudest voices in the religious right movement.

As a resident of Washington D.C., who has long been fascinated by the religious right in the way that one is intrigued by one’s arch enemy, I couldn’t resist attending. After conferring with my colleagues at the American Humanist Association, I went to the Omni Shoreham Hotel, notebook in hand, to do a little field work amongst the people who are diametrically opposed to everything we humanists stand for.

By the end of the weekend, with my patience spent and my left hand cramped from prolific note taking, I walked away from the summit with these valuable lessons:

1) The religious right plays fast and loose with the facts.

For reasons obvious to most humanists in our movement, I had low expectations for the veracity of the speakers. Nevertheless, even I was shocked at some of the lies coming from the podium.

From Gov. Huckabee’s outrageous accusation that President Obama was “treating suspected terrorists like rock stars and giving them refuge in Bermuda” to Bill O’Reilly’s assertion that “with the technology that we have, there’s never a reason for a late abortion,” the weekend’s biggest stars plied the applauding audience with lie after lie.

In the first example, the truth is that the four former Guantanamo detainees who were sent to Bermuda had long ago been [cleared of any wrongdoing](#)² and therefore, were not suspected terrorists.

O’Reilly’s spin on the abortion issue ignores the fact that late term abortions are performed under rare circumstances and mainly out of medical necessity; [this article](#)³ from RH Reality Check, an organization committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health, provides more information.

2) The religious right is losing the newest generation of voters, and they know it.

At the Saturday morning plenary session, the audience heard from Esther Fleece, the 26-year old director of millennial studies for Focus on the Family. Her job is to help her organization reach out to the 18 to 29 year old voters, dubbed the “millennials,” who are becoming an increasingly influential voting bloc.

Fleece told the crowd that amongst her Christian friends, she estimated that 60 percent voted for Obama in 2008 (closely mirroring the national result of 66 percent for 18-29 year olds). She spoke of the need for the religious right to reach out to younger voters, but her solutions, such as more mentoring from older conservative

Christians and more discussion on the value of traditional marriage, seemed inadequate.

Left unmentioned was the most important fact of all: the millennial generation is more secular than ever. The 2008 American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS) found that 22% of 18 to 29 year olds have [no religious affiliation](#)⁴. Harvard political scientist Robert Putnam estimates that [this number is higher](#)⁵ at 30 to 40%. Both Putnam and ARIS researcher Juhen Navarro-Rivera believe that a [primary cause](#)⁶ of this increased secularization is backlash against the extremism of the religious right.

As Fleece pointed out, the millennial generation is much more tolerant and concerned with taking care of all people. Where does the religious right fit into this? And if the religious right loses the newest generation of voters, how will they make their influence last into the years ahead? There wasn’t a satisfactory answer given at the summit.

3) The religious right suffers from a severe lack of irony-awareness.

That’s a kinder way of saying that the hypocrisy on display was absolutely stunning.

From Carrie Prejean, the former Miss California who made headlines for her statement in opposition to marriage equality at the Miss USA pageant, saying that she is “disgusted at the way some people can be so intolerant” (this from a person who quickly became a leading religious right spokeswoman against equal rights for gays and lesbians), to both her and fellow anti-equality activist Gary Bauer’s exhortations that the religious right needs to model civil behavior for the rest of the United

¹ See <http://www.valuesvotersummit.org/>.

² See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/14/AR2009061402664.html>.

³ See <http://www.rhrealitycheck.org/blog/2009/06/02/thirdtrimester-abortions-facts-stories-and-how-you-can-help-0>.

⁴ See http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/reports/NONES_08.pdf.

⁵ See <http://www.abcnews.go.com/Politics/Story?id=7513343&page=1>.

⁶ See <http://www.usnews.com/blogs/god-and-country/2009/09/22/4-ways-the-no-religion-boom-will-alter-american-politics.html>.

What I Learned About the Religious Right (*continued*)

States, it was clear that these people probably couldn't define the word "irony."

Bauer was strikingly uncivil when, in 1999, he called the Vermont Supreme Court's legalization of civil unions for gays and lesbians as "[...the worst form of terrorism](#)"⁷."

4) The religious right has a terrifying vision for the future.

The clearest case for Christian supremacy was made at the summit by Bryan Fischer of the American Family Association. Sharing his vision of religious liberty, he directly compared advocates of separation of church and state to Hitler.

He disputed the idea that the 14th Amendment applies the Bill of Rights to state and local governments and asserted that only Congress is restricted by the establishment clause of the First Amendment. Furthermore, he

asserted that the establishment clause only prevents Congress from favoring one denomination of Christianity over another; it does not prevent the government from giving Christianity a favored status overall in the United States.

In Fischer's vision, religion and government can be very close; state legislatures and city councils are free to enact scripture-based laws, while Congress must merely be sure not to favor the Baptists at the expense of the Episcopalians. As for the rights of non-Christians? It was clear that this was of no concern to Fischer (or, for that matter, to most of the applauding audience).

The religious right doesn't have the same degree of influence now that it had in the glory days of President Reagan and the Bushes. And, as they even acknowledge, their influence is

waning amongst the younger generations. But we can't count them out. As the parade of Republican leaders at the Values Voter Summit showed, the path to success for conservative politicians still leads through our nation's most intolerant voters.

The religious right will be with us for years to come, and it is up to us to counter the influence of aspiring theocrats and take a stand for tolerance, pluralism, and secular government.

[Clayton Whitt is on the development staff of the American Humanist Association. He also writes for the AHA's blog, Rant & Reason, and has written for The Humanist magazine. He studied social sciences and Spanish at California Polytechnic State University and served in the Peace Corps in Bolivia in 2005 to 2007.]

(You can sign up to receive *Humanist Network News* for free by email at: <http://americanhumanist.org/hnn>.)

⁷ See <http://archives.cnn.com/1999/ALLPOLITICS/stories/12/27/campaign.wrap/>.

Great Links on the Internet:

See the Story of Creation by The Thinking Atheist at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ah5xFMYbP4s>.

Watch The Atheist Experience: Videos by the Atheist Community of Austin: <http://www.atheist-experience.com/>

Read about the upcoming movie "The Invention of Lying," which satirizes religion and religious believers: <http://bighollywood.breitbart.com/stkarnick/2009/10/02/invention-of-lying-anti-christian/>

Read about the upcoming controversial movie "Creation," (about Charles Darwin) at <http://www.creationthemovie.com>.

Read the new book from Americans United on "Religion in the Public Schools: A Road Map for Avoiding Lawsuits and Respecting Parents' Legal Rights" here: <http://religioninthepublicschools.com/>

Read Jay Bookman's editorial in the AJC, titled "In Oxendine's Georgia, God would return to public schools," here: <http://blogs.ajc.com/jay-bookman-blog/2009/10/05/in-oxendines-georgia-god-would-return-to-public-schools/>

Read "Fear the Atheist" by PZ Myers at:

http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/2009/09/fear_the_atheist.php?utm_source=sbhomepage&utm_medium=link&utm_content=channellink

Read about Ardipithecus (what?) at: <http://dsc.discovery.com/tv/ardipithecus/about/about.html> and <http://dsc.discovery.com/tv/ardipithecus/ardipithecus.html?campaign=dsc-int-hp-dl-ardi>

Coming On Television:

October 6 at 8:00PM: On PBS: Nova presents "Darwin's Darkest Hour," a two-hour drama on Darwin's decision to publish his ideas on evolution.

October 11 at 9:00PM: On the Discovery Channel: "Discovering Ardi," about the discovery of the oldest hominid skeleton, "Ardipithecus," found in Ethiopia, and its significance.

October 11 at 11:00PM: On the Discovery Channel: "Understanding Ardi," with more details about Ardipithecus.

November 3: On PBS: Nova presents "Becoming Human," Part 1, the story of human evolution.

November 10: On PBS: Nova presents "Becoming Human," Part 2, the story of human evolution.

November 17: On PBS: Nova presents "Becoming Human," Part 3, the story of human evolution.

December 29: On PBS: Nova presents "What Darwin Never Knew," which reveals answers to evolutionary questions that even Darwin couldn't explain.

Deal Is Done For U.S. Distributor of Darwin Biopic

The movie “Creation” about Charles Darwin will be shown in the U.S. after all

After weeks of being unable to find an American distribution company, the creators of a forthcoming biopic on the life and work of Charles Darwin hit pay dirt and announced that—yes—the film will be shown in the U.S.

Indie movie distributor Newmarket announced on Sept. 24 that it has closed a deal to handle Jon Amiel’s film which has already generated controversy over its sensitive material, namely, the theory of evolution.

“Creation,” which stars Paul Bettany as Charles Darwin, and Jennifer Connelly as his wife, explores the personal agony of the famous naturalist who struggles with doubt and grief following the death of his daughter.

The movie opened the recent Toronto Film Festival and won rave reviews. The Daily Telegraph newspaper noted, “it has been sold in almost every territory around the world, from Australia to Scandinavia. However, US distributors had passed on the film amid concerns it would prove hugely divisive in a country where according to a Gallup poll conducted in February, only 39% of Americans believe in the theory of evolution.”

Production of the film has been closely followed by Christian bloggers and web sites, and only recently was mentioned in the mainstream media.

Its release “is virtually certain to provoke massive controversy” and spark new debate over evolution, science and religion according to one Telegraph reviewer. The producers have even opened a special resource service aimed at trying to answer objections from Christian organizations who

may find the film blasphemous and objectionable.

One Christian web site, Movieguide.org, is characterizing Charles Darwin as “a racist, a bigot and a 1800s naturalist whose legacy is mass murder.” It also described evolutionary theory as “half-baked,” and stridently claimed that Darwin’s work resulted in the horrific deeds of Adolf Hitler and his Nazi henchmen, along with “atrocities, crimes against humanity, cloning and genetic engineering.” The Daily Mail reported that producer Jeremy Thomas is astounded that such opinions find a wide and credulous audience fully 150 years after the publication of Darwin’s seminal work, and that religious sensibilities constitute a near-insurmountable barrier to finding an American distributor for the film.

But fortunately, Newmarket will do the job.

Darwin’s magisterial opus, “On the Origin of Species,” provided a scientific account of how life developed on earth, and served to undermine traditional accounts of human origins as depicted in the bible. While some religious believers reconciled scripture and evolution, others—including modern-day creationists—defend the notion that a deity fashioned all life including human beings.

The debate over evolution has continued since Darwin’s classic appeared 150 years ago, although earlier writings by other scientists and philosophers suggested a similar scenario for how life and the universe originated. Darwin’s methodical work, however, proved a lightning rod for those who embrace biblical literalism.

Creationism is a thriving movement, and throughout the country a battle rages over whether it should be taught in science classes as an “alternative” to Darwin’s findings. A similar movement embraces “Intelligent Design” or ID, and states that scientific evidence reveals a universe deliberately fashioned to allow the emergence of life.

Courts have ruled that creationism and ID are both religious, and do not belong in public school science classes.

All of this, along with efforts to promote the 150th anniversary of “On The Origin of Species,” has fueled controversy over the film which opened on Sept. 25 in European markets. According to Hollywood Reporter, U.S. audiences will have to wait until December to see “Creation.” Interestingly, Newmarket—which has a solid reputation for promoting independent films including “The Usual Suspects,” “Deadman,” and “Donnie Darko”—also distributed Mel Gibson’s bloody “Passion of the Christ.”

Chris Ball of Newmarket released a statement saying: “We at Newmarket pride ourselves in getting behind important films that help open the door for discussion and conversation, as is the case with ‘Creation.’ While Darwin’s name has come to symbolize one side in a debate between the scientific and the theological, ‘Creation’ personifies the debate, with both sides contending, sometimes violently, within the man. In that sense, we believe that the film will appeal to both people of faith and people of science.”

[From the Sept 14 and Sept 24 issues of American Atheists News.]

“Don’t confuse the fact that I find you and your church petty, foolish, twisted and hateful to be a testimonial to the existence of your petty, foolish, twisted, hateful god.” —Dr. P. Z. Myers, Biologist, University of Minnesota

“The Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one.” —David Hume, from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748

“Faith, n. Belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel.”
—Ambrose Bierce, from *The Devil’s Dictionary*, which he authored

Atheist Group Opposes “Faith Healing” Provision in Senate Bill

American Atheists, on October 5, called for elimination of requirements in Senate legislation which would reimburse faith-based “healers” for their services.

The Senate Finance Committee has taken up the America’s Healthy Future Act of 2009 which has an amendment titled “Religious Non-discrimination in Healthcare.” The provision bans insurance companies from denying patients “benefits for religious or spiritual healthcare.” Similar legislation, the Affordable Health Choices Act, has already cleared the U.S. Senate, and has a similar provision.

Dr. Ed Buckner, President of American Atheists, warned that the measure amounts to a public subsidy for certain religious groups.

“Any adult in the legislative or executive branch of the federal government, or of any state government, who wants to use unproven, unscientific ‘remedies’ should be free to do so,” said Buckner. “But support for such irrational nonsense violates the separation of religion and government and the canons of good sense. Including faith-healing or other non-medical ‘treatment’ in health care legislation must be rejected.”

Dave Silverman, Communications Director for American Atheists, said that Christian Science and other faith-based healers already receive public money, and that the policy is not based on good science. “We need to spend that money on providing solid, fact-based medicine. Reimbursing the faith-healing industry wastes precious resources, and violates the separation of church and state,” he said.

In a related story, The Center for Inquiry’s Office of Public Policy, a group that lobbies for sound science in government policy, released a report on September 28 titled [A Fracture in our Health Care: Paying for Non-Evidence Based Medicine](#). The report is highly critical of an effort underway to amend current health care reform legislation with provisions allowing taxpayer dollars to support unsubstantiated “alternative” medical treatments, including faith-based healing.

The CFI report focuses specifically on the lack of evidence for therapeutic touch (TT), an example of the kind of non-evidence-based medicine that would be covered under the amendment. During therapeutic touch, practitioners purport to massage the patient’s “biomagnetic field” with their hands. The report exposes this as nonsense, revealing that the purported magnetic field is far too weak to affect any biochemical processes, and is billions of times less energetic than the energy our eye receives when viewing even the brightest star in the night sky. The report points out that a study published in The Journal of the American Medical Association found that “Twenty-one experienced TT practitioners were unable to detect the investigators ‘energy field.’ Their failure to substantiate TT’s most fundamental claim is unrefuted evidence that the claims of TT are groundless and that further professional use is unjustified.”

“CFI strongly opposes the wasting of taxpayer dollars on this and other non-evidence based medicine,” said

Dr. Ronald A. Lindsay, President and CEO of the Center for Inquiry.

The Center for Inquiry’s specific policy recommendations contained in the report are as follows:

- Government should spend no taxpayer dollars in support of any alleged medical treatments or healing protocols, such as Therapeutic Touch, that have no grounding in experiment or in our understanding of basic scientific fact.
- Any health care reform bill Congress passes should prohibit the use of taxpayer dollars to cover non-evidence-based medicine.
- Congress should greatly reduce or eliminate funding for the NIH National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, as a decade of study has shown that most alternative cures work no better than placebos.

“The United States can ill afford to continue wasting precious resources on unproven—and often disproven—medical techniques. (In the process of) reining in the ballooning cost of medical care, every dollar of health care funding is needed to provide tested, proven medical treatment to those who require it. It is inexcusable to squander scarce resources by funding unsubstantiated, non-evidence-based medical techniques that have no basis in theory or experiment,” states the report.

A downloadable PDF version of the full report is available online at www.centerforinquiry.net/touch.

[From press releases by American Atheists and the Center for Inquiry.]

Camp Quest Florida 2009 is On the Horizon!

Camp Quest Florida is accepting registrations for campers 8 to 17 years old until November 20, 2009.

Don’t put off signing up and reserving a spot for your camper this Winter. Families are welcome to join us too. The camp will run from 12/25/09 to 1/1/10. Campers will

receive three meals a day, a bunk bed in a single sex cabin with a CQ FL counselor of the same gender, a CQ FL t-shirt, a field trip to John Pennekamp Underwater State Park, visits to the beach, a short day hike, a canoe trip on a lagoon to see Florida wildlife, celebrate Festivus and New Year’s

Eve, participate in critical thinking activities and other fun arts and crafts and games, and enjoy a special visit from The Amazing Randi!

Your camper will make friends, have fun, and create memories to last a lifetime! To register for Camp Quest, go to <http://www.florida.camp-quest.org>.

The Vatican Comments on Charges of Pedophilia

Sexual abuse is rife in other religions, says Vatican

The Vatican has lashed out at criticism over its handling of its pedophilia crisis by saying the Catholic church was “busy cleaning its own house” and that the problems with clerical sex abuse in other churches were as big, if not bigger.

In a defiant and provocative statement, issued following a meeting of the UN human rights council in Geneva, the Holy See said the majority of Catholic clergy who committed such acts were not pedophiles but homosexuals attracted to sex with adolescent males.

The statement, read out by Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican’s permanent observer to the UN, defended its record by claiming that “available research” showed that only 1.5% to 5% of Catholic clergy were involved in child sex abuse.

He also quoted statistics from the Christian Scientist Monitor newspaper to show that most US churches being hit by child sex abuse allegations were Protestant and that sexual abuse within Jewish communities was common.

He added that sexual abuse was far more likely to be committed by family members, babysitters, friends, relatives or neighbors, and male children were quite often guilty of sexual molestation of other children.

The statement said that rather than

pedophilia, it would “be more correct” to speak of ephhebophilia, a homosexual attraction to adolescent males.

“Of all priests involved in the abuses, 80 to 90% belong to this sexual orientation minority which is sexually engaged with adolescent boys between the ages of 11 and 17.”

The statement concluded: “As the Catholic church has been busy cleaning its own house, it would be good if other institutions and authorities, where the major part of abuses are reported, could do the same and inform the media about it.”

The Holy See launched its counter-attack after an international representative of the International Humanist and Ethical Union, Keith Porteous Wood, accused it of covering up child abuse and being in breach of several articles under the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Wood said the Holy See had not contradicted any of his accusations. “The many thousands of victims of abuse deserve the international community to hold the Vatican to account, something it has been unwilling to do, so far. Both states and children’s organizations must unite to pressure the Vatican to open its files, change its procedures worldwide, and report suspected abusers to civil authorities.”

Representatives from other religions were dismayed by the Holy

See’s attempts to distance itself from controversy by pointing the finger at other faiths.

Rabbi Joseph Potasnik, head of the New York Board of Rabbis, said: “Comparative tragedy is a dangerous path on which to travel. All of us need to look within our own communities. Child abuse is sinful and shameful and we must expel them immediately from our midst.”

A spokesman for the US Episcopal Church said measures for the prevention of sexual misconduct and the safeguarding of children had been in place for years.

Of all the world religions, Roman Catholicism has been hardest hit by sex abuse scandals. In the US, churches have paid more than \$2 billion in compensation to victims. In Ireland, reports into clerical sexual abuse have rocked both the Catholic hierarchy and the state.

The Ryan Report, published last May, revealed that beatings and humiliation by nuns and priests were common at institutions that held up to 30,000 children. A nine-year investigation found that Catholic priests and nuns for decades terrorized thousands of boys and girls, while government inspectors failed to stop the abuse.

[From a Sept 28 article in the UK’s *Guardian* newspaper.]

Center for Inquiry Joins Coalition Partners in Urging Attorney General to Rescind Faith-Based Rule Allowing Discrimination in Hiring

The Center for Inquiry added its signature on September 17 to a letter from a coalition of 57 other organizations committed to civil rights and religious freedom urging Attorney General Eric Holder to review and withdraw a rule connected to “faith-based” funding that groups believe pave the way for discriminatory hiring practices.

The Department of Justice Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) in June of 2007

crafted a legal memo arguing that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) grants religious organizations leeway to discriminate, as they see fit, on religious grounds when hiring staff in taxpayer-funded programs.

The joint letter¹ sent to Holder presents a case against this interpretation of the RFRA. “CFI found it imperative to demonstrate our vigorous support for the withdrawal of this rule,” said Toni Van Pelt, Policy Director for the

Office of Public Policy, the lobbying arm of the Center for Inquiry. “We are strongly opposed to religious discrimination in hiring and to the misuse of taxpayers’ funds for religious purposes. We hope that the Obama administration will see fit to reverse this assault perpetrated by the Bush administration on fundamental rights guaranteed under the first amendment.”

Calling the Bush administration’s

¹See http://www.centerforinquiry.net/uploads/attachments/coalition_letter.pdf.

interpretation of RFRA “far-fetched,” the letter declares “The OLC Memo’s interpretation that the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 provides for a blanket override of statutory nondiscrimination provisions is erroneous and threatens core civil rights and religious freedom protections,” and is “not justified under applicable legal standards.”

The organizations argue that RFRA, passed in 1993, was “in essence intended to provide robust protection of free exercise rights, restoring a standard of strict scrutiny to federal laws that substantially burden religion.” But RFRA, they say, was not intended to gut federal civil rights laws because the government has a compelling interest in enforcing them.

The Center for Inquiry, along with many other groups that endorsed this letter, is a member of the Coalition Against Religious Discrimination. The Coalition argues that religious groups that accept public funds should be required to meet federal civil rights laws.

[From a September 17 press release at <http://www.centerforinquiry.net>.]

Letters to the Editor (from AFS Members)

Gary Whittenberger’s letter was in the *Tallahassee Democrat* on Sept. 23, 2009. Gary was responding to a “My View” column that praised the faith-based Horizon program for improving the behavior and attitudes of inmates.

Ed Buckner’s letter was in the *Marietta Daily Journal* on Sept. 18, 2009. Ed was responding to a Sept. 13 column by the Rev. Dr. Nelson Price.

Re: Faith offers promise for prisons

There are at least two problems with MacMillan’s advocacy of his Horizon faith-based prison programs. The first problem is that although he presents rates of improvements on four behavioral indices for inmates in his programs, he does not present similar rates for proper control groups. Without a scientific analysis of outcomes, the efficacy of the Horizon program cannot be adequately determined. I speculate that his programs are skimming the cream off the top, i.e. attracting inmates who already have higher probabilities of improvement.

The second problem is that he is pushing religion, indeed a particular brand of religion, on a captive population. It doesn’t matter that MacMillan calls the Horizon program “fully multifaith”, it must nevertheless embody a particular religious doctrine of which MacMillan approves, which rules out other religious beliefs. For example, I doubt that Horizon teaches that God does not answer prayers in those “faith-specific studies”. If the state is financing Horizon, which appears to be the case, and is not at the same time financing and offering “competing” non-religious or other religious programs of character building *in the same prisons*, then it is favoring one religious worldview over another, something which is prohibited by the Florida constitution.

Although MacMillan’s goals are admirable, it appears that his way of achieving those goals is flawed.

Gary Whittenberger

Creationists attacking the core of science

DEAR EDITOR:

A respectable newspaper should certainly publish columnists and letters with a wide range of perspectives regarding politics, science, religion, and any other topic of interest. But publishing columns by a hypocritical and dishonest preacher, one who presses hard for governmental endorsement of the Ten Commandments, but who himself ignores the one about bearing false witness, should be avoided out of editorial self respect and respect for the honesty and decency of your religious readers.

The Sept. 13 column by the Rev. Dr. Nelson Price (“Creationism increasingly proving to be good science”) was not just misguided or misleading, not just based on a different philosophy or worldview from my own, and not just poorly argued. It was all of those things, but, far worse, it was thoroughly, fundamentally dishonest. Price uses arguments and out-of-context quotations to support points that are the precise opposite of the ones the authors he cites - Richard Dawkins, Richard Lewontin, Albert Einstein, etc. - intended and forcefully argued. And Price had every reason to know this, because the claims he sets forth have been around for many years and these false representations related to the claims have been around for that long and have been repeatedly, publicly, and comprehensively refuted.

The so-called creation-evolution debate is not about pitting all religious ideas against all science, but the “debate” is not one within the institutions of science at all. It is an attack by religious advocates, representing only a minority of religious perspectives, on the very core of the scientific enterprise. I know that this is only an assertion on my part and it is certainly not true just because I say it is. But even a superficial survey of leading scientists of all sorts will reveal overwhelming evidence of its truth.

Ed Buckner

President, American Atheists

“I combat those only who, knowing nothing of the future, prophesy an eternity of pain – those who sow the seeds of fear in the hearts of men – those only who poison all the springs of life, and seat a skeleton at every feast.” – Robert G. Ingersoll

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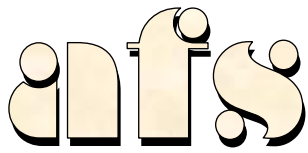
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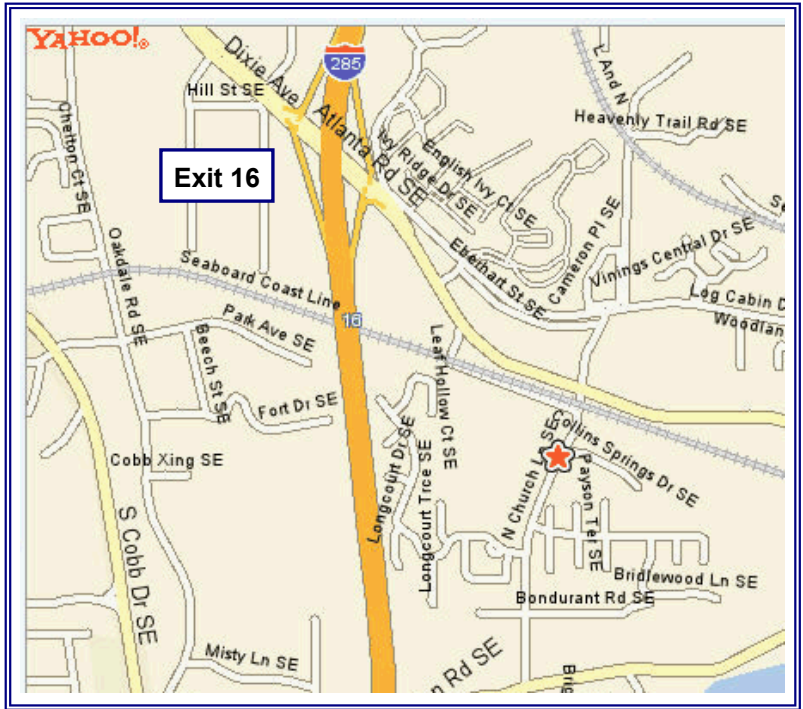
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1:00 at AF Hall
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**This Month's Speaker:
Jeffrey Selman**



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