

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself.*

An AFS Publication • Volume 16 Number 1 • January 2010

## The January AFS Meeting

The January AFS meeting will be at Atlanta Freethought Hall on Sunday, January 10, at 1:00. **Dr. Darrel W. Ray** will speak on his new book, *The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture*.

Dr. Ray is a psychologist and student of religion, sociology and anthropology. He is also founder of Recovering From Religion (<http://www.recoveringreligionists.com>).

In his talk, Dr. Ray will answer questions like:

- What makes religion so powerful?
- How does it weave its way into our political system?
- Why is sexual guilt so important in the major religions?
- Why do people believe and follow religious charlatans?
- Why are people blind to irrationalities of their religion yet clearly see those of others?

His insights on religion and religious infection have been praised by authors and experts like Dale McGowan, Dan Barker, Frank Schaeffer, Edwin Kagin, and many others. *The God Virus* has been on top of the **Science and Religion best sellers on Amazon** for several months.

Atlanta Freethought Hall is located at 4745 N. Church Lane SE, in Smyrna, GA. The nearby bridge is now rebuilt, the road is repaved, and the curbs and sidewalk are completed! No detour is necessary!

## A Chili Cookoff!

The AFS Social for January will be a Chili Cookoff on Saturday, January 16, at 1:00 PM at AF Hall. Bring your favorite prepared Chili, or just arrive hungry! AFS will provide beverages and side dishes. The meal starts at 1:00; arrive earlier if you want to prepare food before the meal.

## Election Results

Congratulations to the following AFS officers and board members elected to serve in 2010:

Steve Yothment, President	Dennis Martin, Secretary
Judy Thompson, VP, Int.	Michael Buckner, Board
Freya Harris, VP, Ext.	Tony King, Board
Diane Buckner, Treasurer	Lew Southern, Board

Mark Banks, Steven Fant and Doug Hattersley will continue 2-year board-member terms into next year.

## AFS Meetings and Activities

Jan 10: AFS Board Meeting, AF Hall, 11:00 AM.  
Jan 10: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM.  
Jan 16: A Chili Cookoff! AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

**Don't miss Ed Buckner's debate with Charles Gernazian on "Catholicism Vs. Atheism: Which Is More Reasonable?" on Thursday, January 21, in Roswell, GA! See page 5 for details.**

## Other Meetings of Interest

The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 12:30 PM. Their January 3 meeting will be at AF Hall and future meetings may be there too! To find out more, see <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

The **Fayette Freethinkers** host a lunch that is open to the public at El Reposo Restaurant in Peachtree City, GA, on every first and third Saturday at 12:00 noon. For details, send an email to [freediscussion@hotmail.com](mailto:freediscussion@hotmail.com) or visit their website at <http://www.fayettefreethinkers.org>.

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at 1:00 at AF Hall on Sunday, Jan. 17. (<http://humanistsofgea.esmartdesign.com>)

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

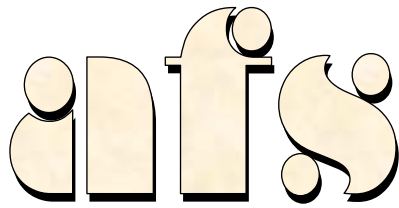
The Atlanta Skeptics will have a meetup, called **Skeptics In the Pub**, on Saturday, January 9, at 7:00 PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave., in Atlanta. For details, see <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics/>.

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** meetup group will have Dr. Todd Preuss of the Yerkes Primate Center speak on recent discoveries in human brain evolution at 7:00 PM on Saturday, Jan. 16, at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave., in Atlanta. See <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>.

There will be a "meetup" for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, January 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, January 24, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta.

Are you a black religious skeptic? Dr. Shondrah Tarrezz Nash, an Associate Professor of Sociology at Morehead State University in Morehead, Kentucky is looking to ask you questions on your views. Email her at [s.nash@moreheadstate.edu](mailto:s.nash@moreheadstate.edu) or email Steve ([steveyoth@aol.com](mailto:steveyoth@aol.com)) for details on this request. (AFS does not release member information to anyone.)



**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.

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

Feb 14: AFS member Mark Banks will speak on Astronomy.

Feb 28: Dr. Jeffrey B. Perry will speak on Hubert Harrison, an early 20<sup>th</sup> century black freethinker, writer, orator, educator and political activist.

Mar 14: Sean Faircloth, Exec. Dir. of the Secular Coalition of America, will speak.

Apr 11: TBD

## AFS Email Lists

The **AFS eNews** Announcement list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities and news. The **AFS Forum** is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation, and religion. Visit the AFS website at <http://www.atlantafreethought.org> for more info or to subscribe.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of free-thinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define *freethought* as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

## Atlanta Freethought News an AFS publication

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Steve Yothment

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## Atlanta Freethought News

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Membership in AFS is \$25/year for  
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Sustaining Members (individual) \$100.

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**AFS Webmaster:** Freya Harris

# Atheist Councilman Challenged by Detractors

## But the U.S. Constitution Is On His Side

Asheville, NC City Councilman Cecil Bothwell took the oath of office this past December, but he did not swear to uphold the U.S. and North Carolina constitutions “so help me God.” He merely affirmed that he would, without mentioning the Almighty. Nor did the political newcomer place his hand on a Bible.

Bothwell, you see, is an atheist—or as he often describes himself, a “post-theist.” And that has outraged some in this picturesque mountain resort who say Bothwell violated an obscure clause in the state constitution that disqualifies from elected office “any person who shall deny the being of Almighty God.”

A conservative group has distributed pamphlets warning locals that Bothwell is “Satan’s helper” and a “radical extremist” who is “bashing religion.” A supporter of Southern heritage has threatened to sue Asheville for allowing Bothwell to take office.

The controversy has lighted up talk-radio phone lines nationwide and prompted hundreds of calls and e-mails to Bothwell, a soft-spoken environmentalist who lived for 21 years in a house—which he built himself—that relied on solar power and a gravity-fed water system.

“I didn’t anticipate all this attention,” Bothwell said, after presiding at

this first City Council meeting.

Raised a Presbyterian, Bothwell began questioning Christian beliefs as a young man. He’s a member of the Unitarian Universalist church, which includes atheists and agnostics as well as believers in God.

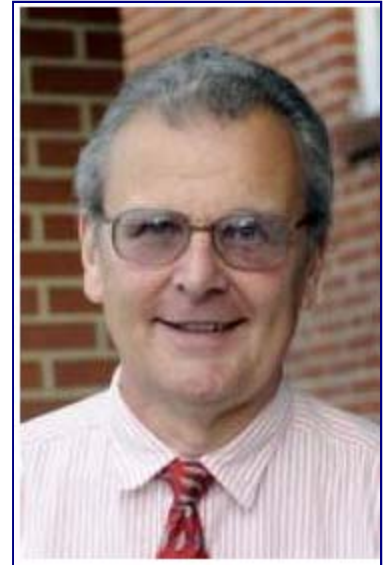
H.K. Edgerton, a former local NAACP president who has paraded wearing a Confederate Army uniform and waving a Confederate flag, said his lawyer was preparing a lawsuit against Asheville.

“If you’re an atheist and don’t believe in God and still want to hold office, I have a problem with that,” Edgerton said. “And the constitution of North Carolina has a problem with that.”

Six other states have provisions outlawing atheists in public office. The North Carolina clause was in the state constitution when it was drafted in 1868. In 1961, the U.S. Supreme Court reaffirmed that states were prohibited under the U.S. Constitution from requiring a religious test to serve in office. The court ruled in favor of an atheist in Maryland seeking to serve as a notary public.

Asheville City Attorney Robert Oast pointed out in an Asheville Tribune article that the state’s general statutes permit officeholders “with conscientious scruples against taking an oath” to affirm, rather than swear,

their oath of office—without being required to say “so help me God.”



Bothwell says his atheism is irrelevant to his duties as a councilman.

“I don’t find any need in my day-to-day life for God to explain things to me,” he said. “When religion gets tangled up with government, it always causes problems.”

And while his fellow council members are bemused by the whole affair, Bothwell said, he’s not worried about being forced from office. He said the controversy was manufactured by political opponents “who don’t want to see a progressive on the council.”

Bothwell ran on a platform of energy conservation, government trans-

### North Carolina officeholders, including Asheville City Council members, may take one of two oaths of office:

**SWEAR:** “I, (name), do solemnly and sincerely **swear** that I will support the Constitution of the United States; that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to the State of North Carolina, and to the constitutional powers and authorities which are or may be established for the government thereof; and that I will endeavor to support, maintain and defend the Constitution of said State, not inconsistent with the Constitution of the United States, **to the best of my knowledge and ability; so help me God.**”

**AFFIRM:** “I, (name), do solemnly and sincerely **affirm** that I will support the Constitution of the United States; that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to the State of North Carolina, and to the constitutional powers which are or may be established for the government thereof; and that I will endeavor to support, maintain and defend the Constitution of said State, not inconsistent with the Constitution of the United States, **to the best of my knowledge and ability.**”

Affirming, rather than swearing, also exempts an officeholder from a requirement in North Carolina law to “lay his hand upon the Holy Scriptures, in token of his engagement to speak the truth and in further token that, if he should swerve from the truth, he may be justly deprived of all the blessings of that holy book and made liable to that vengeance which he has imprecated on his own head.”

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## Atheist Councilman... (continued)

parency and campaign finance reform. But what really upset his opponents, he said, was his book "The Prince of War," which is highly critical of the Rev. Billy Graham, who lives outside Asheville.

Another newly elected council member who took the oath in December is Esther Manheimer, a lawyer. She replied, "I do," to an oath that included the phrase "so help you God." She noted that the clause in the N.C. Constitution banning nonbelievers is unconstitutional. "Mr. Bothwell, therefore, is entitled to hold office to the same extent I am," she said.

On December 14, the first City Council meeting for new members opened with a prayer. There was no mention of God—only a plea for "justice and peace" and for the safety of U.S. troops overseas.

The council rotates responsibility for the opening prayer. Bothwell said he doesn't object, although he would prefer a moment of silence.

When his turn comes, he said, he may read from Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* or Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*.

Bothwell predicted that the furor would pass, allowing him to focus on

political objectives, which include retrofitting businesses and homes to reduce energy consumption. That's what many voters who elected him want, he said.

After nearly thirty years in this eclectic city in the southern Appalachian Mountains, he said, his progressive—and sometimes contrarian—views are well known.

"We have a lot of characters in town," Bothwell said. "And I may be one of them."

[From a Dec. 20 article by David Zucchino at <http://www.latimes.com>.]

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But the story isn't finished! American Atheists has named Cecil Bothwell its Courageous Elected Official of 2009. Yep, Cecil is now a CEO.

Bothwell will speak and be honored at the organization's national convention April 2-4 in Newark, N.J.

Ed Buckner, president of AA, said the group created the award specifically to honor Bothwell and his courageous stance.

"There's no way to measure this, so we can only speak from speculation, but it's our best guess that if you took 10,000 elected officials, there are probably 500 or 1,000 in office who

are atheists or agnostic," Buckner said. "But almost none of them will say anything to let that fact be known. In fact, it's quite courageous for Mr. Bothwell not to do the oath where you have to swear on the Bible."

His organization has no problems with Christians serving in office, Buckner said. But it does have a problem with groups who want to ban atheists from serving simply because they don't believe in God.

"It should be a routine thing, but the American public has the idiotic, absurd notion that religion and morality are the same thing," Buckner said.

Regarding the award, Bothwell said he's "enormously honored to be recognized in this way, but also sad that simple honesty about who I am and what I believe seems unusual or worthy of particular note." He said he's got a couple hundred e-mails and calls and even seen himself hailed as a hero.

"And all I have done is be true to myself," he said. "It doesn't feel particularly courageous. It just seems normal, and I'd hope that all elected officials would do the same."

[From a Dec 19 article by John Boyle at <http://www.citizen-times.com>.]

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## Atheists In Office: Déjà Vu All Over Again

**By Herb Silverman, Founder and President of the Secular Coalition for America**

I am reminded of my South Carolina experience when I hear that some folks in Asheville, North Carolina want to remove Cecil Bothwell from City Council. What he and I have in common is not just that we are atheists, but that we are open about it. The constitutions of both North and South Carolina bar atheists from holding public office.

I first heard about the South Carolina exclusion in 1990. I'm no constitutional scholar, but I knew that Article 6 of our U.S. Constitution explicitly states that there may be no religious tests for public office. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1961 that this provision also applies to the states. So I assumed this was just an anachro-

nism, and could easily be changed. I was wrong. I wound up running for public office, first as a gubernatorial candidate and then as a notary public, in order to challenge this unconstitutional provision. It took eight years and a unanimous verdict of the South Carolina Supreme Court to state the obvious, that no religious test for public office may be applied, not even in South Carolina.

Our state wasted about \$100,000 trying to keep me from becoming a notary public. None of the political leaders in South Carolina, and certainly not the lawyers advising them, believed they would prevail legally if I continued to pursue my case. Yet, those same politicians showed that

they would rather waste time and money on a lost cause than risk the wrath and lose the votes of the state's well-organized religious right. But South Carolina is known as a state that fights lost causes. Et tu, North Carolina?

Atheists are now eligible to run for any office in South Carolina, which means the provision against atheists is unenforceable. However, the South Carolina Constitution can only be amended by a referendum in which the majority of voters approve the change. This is not likely to happen anytime soon. It took a referendum in 1998 for South Carolina to remove its anti-miscegenation laws from the State Constitution. Even then, 38% of

## CATHOLICISM V. ATHEISM: *Which Is More Reasonable?*

### A DEBATE:

**DR. ED BUCKNER**, President of American Atheists, will debate  
**CHARLES GERNAZIAN**, Director of Catholic-American Center  
on Law and Religion

JOINTLY SPONSORED BY THE CATHOLIC-AMERICAN CENTER ON LAW AND RELIGION INC.  
([www.Catholic-American.org](http://www.Catholic-American.org)) and AMERICAN ATHEISTS, INC. ([www.atheists.org](http://www.atheists.org))

**Location:** St. Andrew's Catholic Church - PARISH HALL ([www.standrewcatholic.com](http://www.standrewcatholic.com))  
675 Riverside Road, Roswell, Georgia 30075

**Date:** **Thursday, January 21, 2010**

**Time:** 7:30 – 8:30 P.M. – Main Debate (Followed By a Break)  
8:40 – 9:30 P.M. – Question and Answers with Audience Participation

**Format:** A non-confrontational and respectful debate in which the two opposing worldviews are presented, assessed, and challenged. Audience participation will be encouraged. A question and answer session will follow the debate.

**Admission Fee:** No admission fee. An optional donation to the sponsoring organization of your choice will be appreciated as well as shared with St. Andrew's Catholic Church for hosting the event. All contributions to the sponsoring organizations are tax deductible:

Catholic-American Center on Law and Religion, Inc.  
PO Box 49213, Atlanta, GA 30359

American Atheists, Inc.  
PO Box 158, Cranford, NJ 07016

South Carolinians voted against allowing blacks and whites to marry, though the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1967 that states could no longer prevent interracial marriage.

I noticed in recent newspaper articles that both Bothwell and I were called "avowed" atheists, though neither of us had taken vows. I once had a discussion with a public editor about why the local paper always put an adjective before "atheist," but did not apply one to people of religious faiths. I was told it was unnecessary for those who belonged to communities of worship, but the newspaper had only the word of one person who says he or she is an atheist. I asked which is more likely, that a religious person in this country would pretend to be an atheist or that an atheist would pretend to be religious? The paper conceded I had a point, but it continues to "avow" me. Even worse, I've been introduced on radio as a

"so-called atheist" or an "admitted atheist." I wonder what the reaction would be were someone introduced as a "so-called Jew" or an "admitted Southern Baptist."

What Bothwell and I also have in common is that some people judge us more by our beliefs than by our behavior. H.K. Edgerton, a North Carolina voter, is threatening a lawsuit to remove Bothwell from office. Here is one of his reasons: "I have problems with people who don't believe in God." Edgerton continued, "I'm not saying that Cecil Bothwell is not a good man." This reminds me of the time in 2003 I was invited to give an invocation at a Charleston, South Carolina, City Council meeting. As I got up to speak, half the council members walked out because they knew I was an atheist. Those who stayed to listen said my invocation was fine.

One councilman justified the walk

out by quoting from Psalm 14: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is not one who does good." He then told me it was not personal. In other words, his religious beliefs compelled him to ignore or demonize an entire class of people he was elected to represent. Frankly, I would rather it had been personal.

That walkout vividly showed that we are still engaged in one of the last civil rights struggles in which blatant discrimination is viewed as acceptable behavior. Of course, bigotry exists everywhere, but it is especially lamentable when government officials defend public acts of intolerance at government functions. What would have been the reaction had city council members walked out because a Jew, a Muslim, or a Buddhist was giving an invocation?

Prior to 1990, I was apathetic about my atheism, feeling I had better things

to do than talk about the nonexistence of gods. When I began to view atheism as a civil right issue, I helped found the Secular Coalition for America, whose mission is to increase the visibility of, and respect for, nontheistic viewpoints. The Secular Coalition held a contest for people to nominate the person they believed was the

highest-ranking elected leader with no god beliefs. As a result, Rep. Pete Stark (D-Calif.) became the first in the history of Congress to publicly acknowledge he doesn't believe in a god. Does anyone think there aren't scores more who feel the political need to remain in their atheist and agnostic closets? It is my hope that

one day politicians like Cecil Bothwell and others will be judged on the content of their character and the issues they find important, rather than on their professed religious beliefs. That would be my idea of true religious freedom.

[From the Dec. 14 "On Faith" section of The Washington Post.]

## Americans United Warns Louisiana Education Board Not To Adopt Review Policy That Favors Creationism

**Proposed Policy For "Supplemental Materials" In Science Class Is Flawed And Should Be Rejected**

A new policy under consideration by the Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education is slanted to favor creationism and should be revised, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

Due to lobbying by the Religious Right, Louisiana legislators approved a law in 2008 that allows for "supplemental materials" to be used in public school science classes. The Board has developed a policy for reviewing these materials that is seriously flawed, says Americans United.

"It's obvious what's going on here," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Louisiana's elected officials are once again trying to undercut the teaching of evolution and slip creationism into science classes. This effort must fail."

In a letter sent to the Board, Americans United warns that the proposed review policy is constitutionally suspect because it appears to open the door for creationist concepts to be taught in public schools.

The Board calls for allowing

challenged materials to be reviewed by a panel that could easily be stacked with people sympathetic to creationism. It would bypass the expert opinion of the Louisiana Department of Education.

"The proposed procedure for reviewing challenged supplemental material is unnecessarily complicated and appears designed to provide a forum for promoting creationism," asserts AU's letter.

The letter notes that the Board's proposal "would create the opportunity for a show trial with 'experts' presenting reports" that attempt to portray creationist supplemental materials as scientifically sound and supported by empirical evidence.

The Louisiana Family Forum, a state affiliate of Religious Right leader James Dobson's Focus on the Family, pushed for adoption of the new law and will likely try to use it to get creationist materials into public schools.

In fact, AU's letter points out, the U.S. Supreme Court and several lower federal courts have struck down the teaching of creationism in public

schools. The Board's proposed policy, AU says, is "unfair and illogical" and "appears to have the unconstitutional purpose of promoting religion."

The letter was written by Dena S. Sher, Americans United's state legislative counsel. It was sent to Jeanette Vosburg, executive director of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

[From a Jan. 5 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, <http://www.au.org>.]

**Congratulations to Donna Gore, whose letter-to-the-editor was printed in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution on January 5:**

HEALTH CARE

### **Religious disapproval no basis for restrictions**

Why are they even talking about abortion? It's a legal medical procedure. If we are making restrictions to health care based on a small group's religious beliefs, then why stop at abortion? Some religions disapprove of organ transplants, blood transfusions and genetic counseling – why not include those procedures as well?

If the Jehovah's Witnesses insist that blood transfusions not be covered, will the Congress appease them (or do they not have a lobbyist with sufficient funds to grease congressional palms)?

DONNA GORE, ROSWELL

"The word God is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weakness, the Bible a collection of honorable, but still purely primitive, legends which are nevertheless pretty childish. No interpretation no matter how subtle can (for me) change this. For me the Jewish religion like all other religions is an incarnation of the most childish superstition. And the Jewish people to whom I gladly belong have no different quality for me than all other people. As far as my experience goes, they are also no better than other human groups, although they are protected from the worst cancers by a lack of power. Otherwise I cannot see anything "chosen" about them."

– Albert Einstein, in a letter to philosopher Erik Gutkind, January 1954.

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# Council for Secular Humanism Wins Victory in Case Challenging Faith-Based Prison Programs

By Derek Araujo, VP and General Counsel, Center for Inquiry (From [www.centerforinquiry.net](http://www.centerforinquiry.net).)

**T**he Council for Secular Humanism won an important victory on December 15 in its case challenging the use of Florida taxpayer dollars for faith-based substance abuse transitional housing programs in Florida prisons. CSH alleges that the faith-based component of the taxpayer-funded programs include Christian religious indoctrination. The decision by the Florida First District Court of Appeal reversed a lower court ruling that dismissed CSH's lawsuit entirely. The case, titled *Council for Secular Humanism v. McNeil*, may now proceed to discovery and trial before the lower court.

CSH and co-plaintiffs Richard and Elaine Hull initially filed suit in Leon County Circuit Court challenging the legality of statutes authorizing government payments to faith-based organizations for social services. The two faith-based organizations in question, Prisoners of Christ, Inc. and Lamb of God Ministries, Inc., have contracted with the Florida Department of Corrections to provide faith-based services to individuals with substance abuse problems. Richard and Elaine Hull, two associate members of CSH, are Tallahassee residents and Florida taxpayers.

CSH based its complaint on the Florida Constitution, not the Establishment Clause of the United States

Constitution. CSH made a deliberate decision to seek relief under the Florida Constitution because it has a very broad prohibition on aid to religious institutions. Specifically, the "No-Aid" provision of the Florida Constitution expressly mandates that no revenue of the state can be provided "directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution."

In September 2008, the trial court dismissed CSH's suit by granting the defendants' motions for judgments on the pleadings. With the two individual plaintiffs, CSH appealed the trial court's decision.

On December 15, the appellate court ruled that CSH had properly alleged a cause of action that the Florida statutes authorizing payments to the defendants violate the No-Aid provision of the Florida constitution. The court found that the trial court was wrong to prevent CSH's claim from going to trial, because CSH alleged "that not only are Prisoners and Lamb of God sectarian institutions, but the programs themselves are fundamentally carried out in a sectarian manner in violation of [the Florida constitution]. . . . It is only after the facts are developed with respect to the purpose and effect of the faith-based programs which are the subject of this action

that these arguments can be addressed definitively."

The appellate court upheld the lower court's dismissal of another claim challenging the requirement that transition housing specialists consult with chaplains regarding inmate placement in the faith-based programs. The appellate court also dismissed CSH's claim challenging the specific contracts between the state department of corrections and the faith-based institutions, finding that CSH lacked taxpayer standing to bring that claim. The court stated, however, that this "will be a minor consequence," because that claim is "essentially subsumed under" CSH's challenge of the statutes authorizing payments to the defendants. As the appellate court noted, "the trial court will necessarily be required to examine the contracts" to determine whether the statutes violate the Florida constitution.

This decision is an important win for the Council for Secular Humanism and for all defenders of religious liberty and the separation of church and state. By bringing this case, the Council for Secular Humanism is protecting the religious liberty of all Americans, whether religious or secular. No one should be compelled to subsidize any religion with their tax dollars.

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## Great Links on the Internet:

Reggie Finley (The Infidel Guy, <http://www.infidelguy.com>) is now affiliated with a fun children's science education program, intended for afterschool science clubs, birthday parties and "science parties." Read about it here: <http://big-thinkers.com>.

See Acharya S's new website and blog, Freethought Nation, here: <http://freethoughtnation.com/>.

This video received the award for "Excellence in Humanist Communication" from the Harvard University Humanist Chaplaincy. It's been viewed over 2.5 million times! <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fdVucvo-kDU>

Ten questions that every intelligent Christian must answer: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zDHJ4ztnldQ&feature=related>

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**Coming On Television:** January 6, 13 and 20 on PBS (Check your local listing): The Human Spark: What Is the Nature of Human Uniqueness? It's a 3-part series with Alan Alda. For a preview, see <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/humanspark/>.

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# Dawkins' *The Greatest Show On Earth: The Evidence For Evolution*

## A Book Review by Ben Ackerley

Only a prodigiously gifted writer can capture the essence of the evolutionary argument with the uncanny ability to distill it and make the scientifically complex so easy for lay readers to grasp. Richard Dawkins has accomplished that and much more in this splendid volume, replete with plentiful, full-color pictures, the latest in his ten-book output.

He abbreviated the title from a slogan on a gift T-shirt: THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH, THE ONLY GAME IN TOWN. The original working title "Only a Theory?" then served to head his first chapter, but as the author wryly comments, followed by a cautionary question mark to guard against creationist quote mining. His primary purpose in this undertaking confirms unhesitatingly the veracity of the fact of evolution—as incontrovertible as any in the whole field of science. And he coins the term "theorem," adapted from the mathematical term "theorem," to mean an obviously supported fact.

The researcher cites some exceptional examples of evolution occurring during one human lifetime—the change in the size of elephant tusks, the enlarged head in a certain species of lizard and the remarkable feat of creating 45,000 generations of *E. coli* bacteria under laboratory conditions during only two decades. However, in the normal course of events, scientists resemble detectives who arrive on the scene of a crime but didn't witness the event and must reconstruct what must have happened based only on the surviving clues.

He tackles head-on the creationist argument that there are gaps in the fossil record—aka missing links—despite the abundant evidence for the seamless march of natural history so

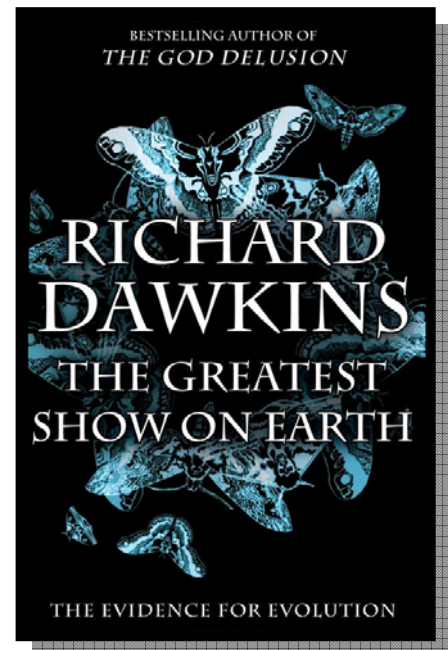
overwhelmingly present and entirely secure that any fossils, gaps included, only provide an evidentiary bonus. Adaptation and natural selection are the watchwords for evolution because it cannot peer into the future and anticipate needed change. However, if an Intelligent Designer (a shameless and religiously-motivated specious euphemism for a Creator) did exist, the naturalist gives numerous examples of such poor design that those defects strongly suggest Unintelligent Designer as a much more appropriate moniker.

Another favorite ploy of the ID school argues that the theory of evolution contradicts the Second Law of Thermodynamics, but that charge, says Dawkins, only reveals that the ID people comprehend the Second Law even more dimly than Darwin's greatest discovery. In one of his most memorable analogies, he portrays anti-evolutionists as history-deniers notoriously comparable with Holocaust deniers. And because of poorly taught science, creationists can blatantly propound the fallacy that we descended from monkeys whereas the historical record clearly shows that the only link between monkeys and humans is our sharing of a common ancestor.

With regard to the tired and tiresome creationist argument: "Teach children that they are animals and they will behave like animals!" he insists that even if such an unfounded accusation were true, it would not and could not negate or nullify the truth of the scientific record.

The former Oxford professor fittingly titles his last chapter "There is grandeur in this view of life." Since belief in an afterlife with guaranteed survival beyond the grave goes hand in glove with belief in creationism, he

underscores the inescapable fact that our very existence is almost too surprising to bear. As we contemplate and focus on the staggering complexity, the ineffable elegance, the splendiferous forms most beautiful and wonderful and the breathtaking beauty of our planet Earth, the fantasy of another life in the hereafter would be tantamount to complete denial of the rationalist-humanist philosophy that



this world is all we can ever possibly be certain about. And a nice, neat, succinct, three-word summation of that outlook which Dawkins so eloquently paints for us, comes to us from the title of American poet Edward Markham's exquisite gem: "Earth is Enough."

[Ben Akerley wrote this review for [www.thefrontpageonline.com](http://www.thefrontpageonline.com), where all of his articles and book reviews are archived under "Ben Akerley." It is reprinted here by permission. Ben is the author of *The X-Rated Bible: An Irreverent Survey of Sex in the Scriptures*.]

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"The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction: jealous and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic, homophobic, racist, infanticidal, genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capriciously malevolent bully. Those of us schooled from infancy in his ways can become desensitized to their horror."

—Richard Dawkins, from *The God Delusion*, Bantam Press, 2006, p. 31.



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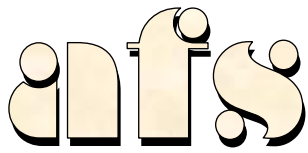
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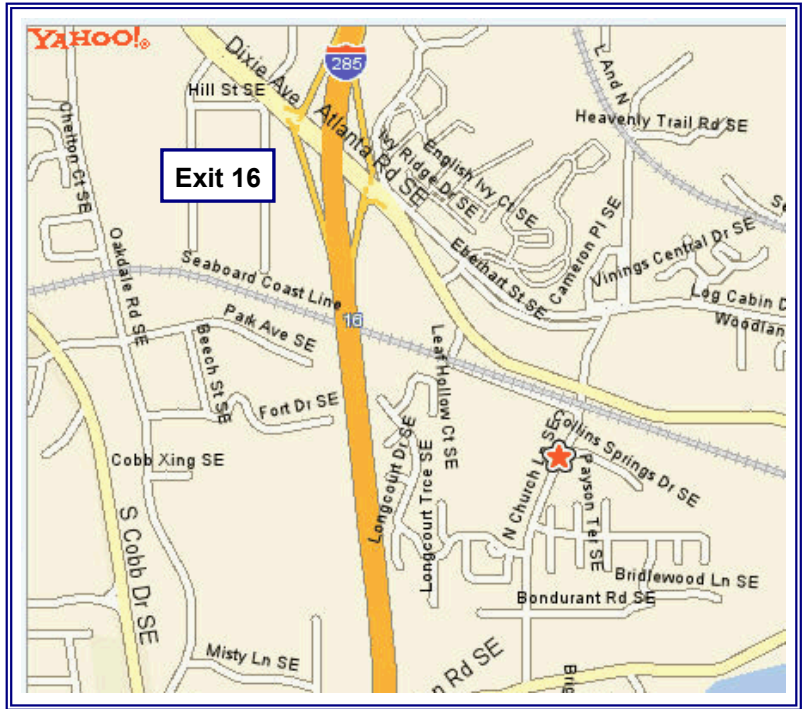
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