

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself.

An AFS Publication • Volume 16 Number 3 • March 2010

The March AFS Meeting

The March 14 AFS meeting will feature **Sean Faircloth**, Executive Director of the **Secular Coalition for America**, speaking on "One Nation Under the Constitution." Sean will discuss how the values of our nation's founders directly connect to the values of the secular movement and how theocratically-based injustices in America are not an historical artifact, but rather a stark, current reality that we all have a moral obligation to address.

The meeting will be at 1:00 at Atlanta Freethought Hall, but please feel free to arrive early for refreshments and conversation with other freethinkers.

Atlanta Freethought Hall is located at 4745 N. Church Lane SE, in Smyrna, GA. To get there, take I-285 (the perimeter road around Atlanta) to Exit 16 (Atlanta Road). Turn toward Atlanta. Go ½ mile and then turn right onto N. Church Lane. Atlanta Freethought Hall is on the left.

The AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be at Las Margaritas Restaurant, 1842 Cheshire Bridge Road, Atlanta, on Friday, March 19, at 7:00 PM. To get there, take I-85 to the Cheshire Bridge Road exit (Exit 88) in north Atlanta. Turn east at the light and go 1.5 miles. The restaurant will be on the right.

"The trouble with the world is that the stupid are cocksure and the intelligent are full of doubt." —Bertrand Russell

What Is the SCA?

The Secular Coalition for America is a 501(c)4 advocacy organization whose purpose is to amplify the diverse and growing voice of the nontheistic community in the United States. They are located in Washington, D.C. for ready access to government, activist partners and the media. Their staff lobbies U.S. Congress on issues of special concern to the nontheistic community.

Member organizations of the SCA are established 501(c)3 nonprofits who serve atheists, agnostics, humanists and freethinkers. Their purpose in founding the coalition was to formalize a cooperative structure for visible, unified activism to improve the civic situation of citizens with a naturalistic worldview. The SCA also enthusiastically welcomes the participation of religious groups who share the view that freedom of conscience must extend to people of all faiths and of none. Accordingly, our staff works in cooperation with a variety of other organizations where common ground exists on specific issues.

The SCA's Action Alert system is open to all who visit their website, <http://www.secular.org>.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Mar 14: AFS Board Meeting, AF Hall, 11:00 AM.

Mar 14: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

Mar 19: AFS Social, Las Margaritas Restaurant, 7:00 PM.

Other Meetings of Interest

The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 10:30 PM at AF Hall. They also have meetings for book discussion, philosophy, a classic film course, and other events. See <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet at AF Hall on March 21 at 1:00. (See <http://humanistsofgea.esmartdesign.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, visit their website at <http://www.fayettefreethinkers.org>.

The **Fayette Freethought Society** meets on the first and third Thursday of each month at the Mellow Mushroom on Hwy 74 in Peachtree City. (More: fayfreethinkers@gmail.com)

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Gwinnett (12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville) on Monday, Mar. 8, at 7:00PM. <http://brighths.meetup.com/295/calendar/12666572/>.

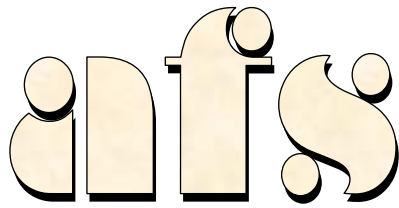
Americans United for Separation of Church and State, GA Chapter, will meet on Saturday, March 13, at 6:00PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave., in Atlanta.

Right after the Americans United meeting, The Atlanta Skeptics will have their **Skeptics In the Pub** meeting, on Saturday, March 13, at 7:00 PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave., in Atlanta. The program will include a live podcast w. Brian Thompson of The Amateur Scientist.

There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, February 14, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur, GA. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

Another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for Thursday, February 18, at 6:00 PM at Melton's App and Tap, 2500 N. Decatur Road, in Decatur.

And a third **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for Sunday, February 28, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)



**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.

Mar 14: Sean Faircloth, Executive Director of Secular Coalition for America, will speak on how our founders' values directly connect to those of the SCA.

Apr 11: Sam Singleton, the Atheist Evangelist, will have a show for us.
(See <http://www.samsingleton.com/>.)

May 9: Dr. Scott Lilienfeld will give a talk.

Jun 13: Mike Ledo will tell us about his new book, *On Earth As It Is In Heaven: The Cosmic Roots of the Bible*

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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individuals, \$35 for households, and
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SCA Makes History with Administration Briefing

On February 26, 2010, the Secular Coalition for America, along with a unified delegation of members of the secular movement from across the country, sat down with White House representatives for an official policy briefing — **the first of its kind for American nontheists**. The event opened up new channels of dialogue between American nontheists and the Obama administration, serving as the latest indication that we are gaining significant momentum, and that secular Americans, numbering in the tens of millions, are a constituency that must be included in national policy decisions.

Member groups in the SCA include:

- American Atheists
- American Ethical Union
- American Humanist Association
- Atheist Alliance International
- Camp Quest
- Council for Secular Humanism
- Institute for Humanist Studies
- Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers
- Secular Student Alliance
- Society for Humanistic Judaism

Since the meeting, rightwing groups have been telling the media that the SCA is a “hate-filled” coalition, but the truth is that the message could not have been more compassionate and constructive. They used this historic opportunity to raise issues such as protecting children from religiously-based medical neglect, ending military proselytizing, and curtailing religious discrimination. SCA President Herb Silverman responded to some of the far-right’s attacks in his Washington Post On Faith column. (See page 5.)

The positive, inclusive agenda that the SCA took to the administration included the following:

- Liz Heywood, who as a child suffered terribly due to religiously-based medical neglect (Ms. Heywood was unable to attend due to weather, so her testimony was read by SCA Legislative Director Sasha Bartolf).
- Jason Torpy, President of the Military Association of Atheists & Free-

thinkers, and Kathleen Johnson, Vice President of American Atheists, addressed religious coercion and equality for nontheists in the US military.

- SCA Executive Director Sean Faircloth outlined the problems of religious discrimination and misuse of taxpayer funds in the Faith-Based Initiatives program.

closing remarks to the administration:

“It is not our disbelief that brings us before you today. Rather it is our deep belief in the light of reason -- and our confidence that the light of reason and justice will lead us all to a better and more compassionate world.”

Dr. Ed Buckner, President of American Atheists, was present at the meet-



Secular Coalition for America President Herb Silverman delivers opening remarks at the briefing with administration officials

The news media took note of the significance of the meeting, with coverage by ABC News, USA Today, the Washington Post, and the McClatchy News Service (appearing in the Miami Herald, the Denver Post, the Sacramento Bee and other large papers). All over the blogosphere, the event remains a topic of impassioned discussion. Over at the Christian Broadcasting Network, one rightwing pundit warned that the SCA and its allies are “influential” and “very effective.”

The Secular Coalition for America plans over the coming months and years to expanding its base of issues, increase its lobbying efforts, and generate new and innovative ways for secular Americans to connect, network, and get active throughout America. As Sean Faircloth said in his

ing. On the previous day, he told the news media, “We are delighted that we will get the chance to speak to and hear from the Obama administration at the briefing with the Secular Coalition for America tomorrow. We will not be seeking support for Atheism from the federal administration, because we know they must be neutral and because we are confident that our conclusions can compete and win in the marketplace of ideas, unaided by government. We seek an end to special rights for religious ideas and beliefs—in all regulations, laws, procedures, and pronouncements. The privileging of religiosity violates the First Amendment and good sense.”

After the meeting, Dr. Buckner praised the Obama Administration for “giving us our rightful seat at the table

ble in the discussion of public policy.”

“Over 13% of the population is considered ‘non-religious,’ and this includes millions of Atheists, Freethinkers, Humanists, Rationalists, and other citizens,” said Buckner. “We are committed to the separation of church and state and to equality for non-believers in the political arena. Religious speakers must not continue to be given special privileges.”

Representatives from American Atheists included: Dr. Buckner; AA Vice President and National Spokesperson Dave Silverman; Vice President and Military Director Kathleen Johnson; Indra Zuno, AA general member, translator, and writer; Ellen

Birch, Chair of the AA Life Membership Committee; and Camille Brewer, AA general member, political/freethought activist and art expert.

As part of the official briefing, American Atheists Vice President and Military Director Kathleen Johnson told White House representatives: “I have witnessed firsthand how service members who are openly non-theist have been harassed by their commanders, leaders, and peers, and have been disrespected by their subordinates for failing to hold certain religious beliefs.”

Johnson called for the Obama Administration to “demonstrate its commitment to improving the climate for

non-theists by ensuring nominees to key senior leadership positions answer hard questions intended to identify if they hold views detrimental to non-theists and if so, that such views be considered a disqualification for that officer.”

Johnson also called for those holding non-theist convictions to enjoy the status of “a protected class throughout the Armed Services on par with the protections afforded to women, minorities, and those belonging to minority faith groups.”

[From an article at www.secular.org and American Atheists’ Feb 26 *AANews*. You can subscribe by sending a blank email to aanews_on@atheists.org .]

Our Secular Coalition Visit to the White House

By Herb Silverman, President, Secular Coalition for America

Representatives from the Secular Coalition for America met with White House officials on February 26 to discuss issues of concern to secular Americans. We were grateful to have a place at the table, with a chance to hear from Obama administration representatives, and for them to hear from us about issues that affect all Americans. This historic meeting marked the first time in history that a presidential administration has met for a policy briefing with the American nontheist community.

The Secular Coalition for America includes 10 national nontheistic member organizations, and its mission has two goals: to increase the visibility of, and respect for, nontheistic viewpoints in the United States; and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government as the best guarantee of freedom for all. Aside from the discussion of our issues with White House officials, the mere presence in that place for about 60 of our representatives from around the country marked a proud moment for all secular Americans.

Before giving particulars, I want to dispel some grossly unfair but predictable media comments that show why we are working so diligently to

fulfill our mission. In response to the news that we would meet at the White House, the advocacy group called In God We Trust ripped the Obama administration “for meeting to plot political strategy with 60 atheist activists.” Its chairman, Bishop Council Nedd, said we represent “some of the most hate-filled, anti-religious groups in the nation.”

Then Sean Hannity claimed on Fox News that the Obama administration is giving special treatment to atheists, and that religious groups “have not received this treatment from the Obama White House.” I suppose in Hannity’s America a two-hour meeting with Secular Americans is “special treatment.” But a recent two-day meeting sponsored by the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, with more than 60 religious leaders gathered at the White House, was not special. Perhaps meetings between White House officials and religious leaders really are nothing special, since they occur on a regular basis. And President Obama has met with and paid deference to numerous religious leaders, including Pope Benedict, which brings me to another media alert about the Secular Coalition for America.

The headline in a press release from the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights stated, “Obama Aides Host Catholic Bashers.” Catholic League president Bill Donohue referred to representatives of the Secular Coalition for America as “some of the biggest anti-religious zealots in the nation,” and that many of us “would crush Christianity” if we could. (Interestingly, my dictionary defines “zealot” as a fanatical adherent to a cause, especially a religious one.) The Catholic League ended its diatribe with, “It is important that the public learn of the contents of this meeting. We will do what we can to find out what happened.” What on earth are they expecting—an atheist plot to take over the government?

Apparently, the Catholic League’s crack investigative team never thought to contact any of the Secular Coalition representatives at the meeting. So for the Catholic League and others who would rather opine than investigate, I’ll make it easy for you by telling what happened at the meeting.

Administration officials included Tina Tchen, Director of the White House Office of Public Engagement; Paul Monteiro, Associate Director of the White House Office of Public

Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs; Bryan Samuels, Commissioner of the Administration on Children, Youth and Families in the Department of Health and Human Services; Mazen Basrawi, Counsel to the Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights at the Department of Justice; and Bill Carr, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Military Personnel.

These are the topics we addressed:

Childhood medical neglect and abuse: We seek to close legal loopholes for the religiously based medical neglect of children, because no child should ever have to suffer for lack of medical attention, regardless of a parent's motivation. Liz Heywood, a survivor of a childhood bone disease left untreated by her Christian Science parents, was scheduled to speak, but unable to attend due to weather-related travel difficulties. Sasha Bartolf, Legislative Director of the Secular Coalition, read her moving statement.

Military proselytizing and coercion: We seek to ensure that the men and women who risk their lives to protect American values, including freedom of conscience, are respected at all levels of the U.S. military. No service members should ever be coerced into

religious participation, subjected to proselytizing, or discriminated against because of their religious beliefs or lack thereof. Those who spoke included Kathleen Johnson, Vice President and Military Director for American Atheists, and past President of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers. She is a retired Army First Sergeant and a Department of the Army civilian. Jason Torpy also spoke. He is a former Army Captain, Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran and West Point graduate, who serves as president of the Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers. MAAF is a nontheist community with members in all branches around the world.

Fixing faith-based initiatives: We seek to make certain that religious organizations receiving federal funding for social welfare programs cannot discriminate in hiring on the basis of religion; that program beneficiaries are never subject to proselytizing; and that secular options are made equally available to those in need. Sean Faircloth, Executive Director of the Secular Coalition and former Majority Whip in the Maine legislature, spoke on unfulfilled promises by the Obama administration to fix abuses that un-

constitutionally funnel money to religious institutions.

So there you have the Secular Coalition for America agenda presented to White House officials. We think these secular values are also American values. It's not religion bashing or Christian bashing to mention that government neutrality toward religion is not the same as government hostility, that the government should not favor one religion over another or religion in general over non-religion, and that over 30 million Americans are good without God.

Those who continually accuse the Secular Coalition for America of hate-filled religion bashing apparently haven't even checked our website. You'll see policy statements consistent with our positive mission. We may disagree with some religious activities and discriminatory remarks directed toward nontheists, but you will find no blanket condemnation of religion.

Of course, nothing will stop rants from those who would prefer to denigrate and stereotype rather than examine the evidence.

[From Herb Silverman's Feb 28 On Faith column in the Washington Post (<http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com>)]

Helen Kagin, Freethought Activist, Dead at 76

Helen Kagin died on February 17 in Cincinnati, of complications following lung surgery for cancer. She was 76. She was retired from medicine (anesthesiology); she co-founded Camp Quest, a camp for the children of freethinkers, and was active in many freethought groups.

Helen died 410 years to the day after another freethought hero, Giordano Bruno, burned at the stake for his courageous opposition to dogma. She and her husband, Edwin Kagin, are Life Members of American Atheists and former honorees as Atheists of the Year (2005).

Helen worked closely with Edwin and others organizing countless demonstrations and meetings, including the Rally for Reason which attracted

hundreds of pro-science supporters who peacefully protested outside the opening of the Creation Museum in Petersburg, KY.

"Back in Their Burkas Again," one of Edwin Kagin's most famous poems, was based on an idea by Helen Kagin and composed by Edwin in collaboration with her. She delighted in participating in performing a dance set to the poem/song that has now been seen on YouTube many thousands of times. You can see it here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=LmVxswvuJZI

Helen's courage and intelligence, her easygoing, almost invariably upbeat nature will be missed throughout the Atheist and freethought community. She was an outstanding wife, mother, and friend to so many.



See Helen Kagin's Memorial here: <http://edwinkagin.com/Helen.htm> .

Edwin Kagin asks that expressions of sympathy in the form of donations be used to send kids to Camp Quest. (See <http://www.camp-quest.org/>.)

[From emails and the Feb 17 AANews.]

Study Confirms Atheists “Just as Ethical as Churchgoers”

The old canard that people who do not believe in a “Supreme Being” are untrustworthy, without morals, and unethical has received yet another rebuke.

According to a new study¹ published in the journal *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, atheists are “just as ethical as churchgoers,” and religion is only one way through which people can manifest a moral code. Dr. Marc Hauser of Harvard University reported that his research team was investigating the foundations of moral behavior.

“The research suggests that intuitive judgments of right and wrong seem to operate independently of explicit religious commitments,” said Hauser.

Ed Buckner, President of American Atheists, said that the study should

help dispel one of the many great lies about non-religious Americans.

“Nearly 13% of the US population, according to surveys, have ‘no religion’; that’s about 40 million people,” said Buckner. “Surveys indicate, however, that a near-majority of people would not support an otherwise qualified atheist candidate for public office and falsely believe that ‘there are no Atheists in foxholes.’”

Both perceptions are incorrect. “At least a few TV preachers and other demagogues almost certainly and knowingly encourage these misunderstandings, intentionally lying to shore up their own power and prestige. Atheists are already serving in government, the armed forces, and the professions (even in the clergy);

most just don’t openly advertise the fact that they have no religious beliefs,” added Buckner.

Dave Silverman, Vice President and Communications Director for American Atheists added that the study discussed whether religion was an evolutionary adaptation which contributed to group solidarity and social cohesion. “It’s a fascinating question that may never be resolved,” said Silverman. “The point remains, though, that you can, indeed, be good without a god. In fact, you can be excellent! The ethical actions of millions of Atheists, Freethinkers, Secular Humanists and other non-religious people are proof of that.”

[From a Feb 16 *To Affiliates* email from American Atheists.]

¹ The study is available at <http://www.cell.com/trends/cognitive-sciences>. For more details, see “Atheists ‘just as ethical as churchgoers’” at: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/7189188/Atheists-just-as-ethical-as-churchgoers.html>.

AU Asks IRS To Investigate Liberty University

Senior University Officials Used School Resources To Endorse Candidate, Says AU

On Feb. 22, Americans United for Separation of Church and State asked the Internal Revenue Service to investigate a pattern of partisan politics at Liberty University, asserting that Chancellor Jerry Falwell Jr. used school resources to intervene in a November House of Delegates election.

In a letter¹ to the IRS, Americans United says Falwell and other Liberty officials used the official school newspaper, *Liberty Champion*, to repeatedly attack incumbent Shannon Valentine and endorse her opponent, Scott Garrett. Garrett won the election by about 200 votes after returns came in from a precinct heavily populated by Liberty students.

“We have documented a clear pattern of partisan intervention orchestrated by top Liberty officials,” said Americans United Executive Director Barry W. Lynn. “I believe the evidence is clear that Liberty officials have violated the law.”

AU’s letter – the result of more than three months of investigating – makes the following allegations:

- Falwell and other university officials used *Liberty Champion*, ostensibly a student publication but one that is actually subject to university control, to run a series of articles attacking Valentine and endorsing Garrett.
- University officials twice arranged for a “voter guide” published by the Virginia Family Foundation to appear in the *Champion*. The guide distorted Valentine’s views and was stacked to endorse Garrett. Copies of the Oct. 27 issue of the newspaper were mailed to all Lynchburg residents.
- On Election Day, Ergun Caner, a top university official, drove around campus with the College Republicans, rounding up voters.
- Falwell and other Liberty officials later boasted that their actions had swayed the election to Garrett. They have vowed to intervene in future

elections.

“This is one of the most blatant and dishonest attempts to influence an election by a non-profit religious organization I have ever seen,” Lynn said. “We hope the IRS acts swiftly to stop Liberty’s overt partisan politicking.”

In his letter to the IRS, Lynn noted that Falwell has vowed to repeat these partisan activities. “Falwell has already stated that he hopes the results of the Nov. 3 election will impact the decisions of the Lynchburg City Council elections,” wrote Lynn. “The audacity of this move is, I submit, nothing short of breathtaking.”

Americans United is a religious liberty watchdog group based in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1947, the organization educates Americans about the importance of church-state separation in safeguarding religious freedom.

[From a Feb. 22 AU press release. See <http://www.au.org>.]

¹ See the letter at: <http://www.au.org/media/press-releases/archives/2010/02/letter-to-irs-re-liberty-u.pdf>

Our Founders Were NOT Fundamentalists

By Harvey Wasserman

A recent issue of the New York Times Sunday Magazine¹ highlights yet another mob of extremists attempting to rewrite history in order to serve a narrow religious agenda—this time by using new curriculum standards currently being set by the Texas State Board of Education as an opportunity to baptize our children’s textbooks.

This endless, angry, escalating assault on our Constitution by crusading theocrats should be obliterated with just a few simple facts about our Founding Fathers and our nation’s early years. Thus, I present to you, a few short history lessons:

1) Presidents two through six—John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, James Monroe and John Quincy Adams—were all freethinking deists and Unitarians. The Christian precepts they embraced were moderate, tolerant and open-minded.

2) President George Washington became an Anglican as required for military service under the British, and he occasionally quoted scripture. But he vehemently opposed any church-state union. In a 1790 letter to the Jews of Truro, he wrote, “(The) government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistances, requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens.” Washington rarely went to church and, by some accounts, refused last religious rites.

3) Adams signed the 1796 Treaty of Tripoli which says, “The government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.”

4) Jefferson produced a personal Bible, from which he edited out all references to miracles in the life of Jesus, whom he considered both an activist and a mortal.

5) Thomas Paine’s *Common Sense* sparked the American Revolution

with nary a mention of Jesus or Christianity. His deist Creator established the laws of nature, endowed humans with free will, then left.

6) The Constitution never mentions the words “God,” “Jesus” or “Christ.”

7) Revolutionary America was filled with Christians whose commitment to tolerance and diversity was completely adverse to the violent, racist, misogynist, anti-sex nature of the Puritans, whose “City upon a Hill” meant a totalitarian state. Inspirational preachers like Rhode Island’s Roger Williams and religious groups like the Quakers envisioned a nation built on tolerance and love for all.

8) The United States was founded less on Judeo-Christian beliefs than on the Greco-Roman love for dialog and reason. There are no contemporary portraits of any Founder wearing a crucifix or church garb. But Washington was famously painted half-naked in the buff toga of the Roman Republic, which continues to inspire much of our official architecture.

9) The great guerilla fighter (and furniture maker) Ethan Allen was an aggressive atheist; his beliefs were common among the farmers, sailors and artisans who were the backbone of Revolutionary America.

10) America’s most influential statesman, thinker, writer, agitator, publisher, citizen-scientist and proud liberal libertine was—and remains—Benjamin Franklin. He was at the heart of the Declaration, Constitution and Treaty of Paris. The ultimate Enlightenment icon, Franklin embraced a deism marked by pragmatic love of diversity. He also deeply admired the Ho-de-no-sau-nee (Iroquois) Confederacy of what’s now upstate New York. Inspired by the legendary peacemaker Deganawidah, this democratic congress of five Native tribes had worked “better than the British Parliament” for more than two centuries. It gave us the model for our

federal structure and the images of freedom and equality that inspired both the French and American Revolutions.

In addition, far from living up to the pious image the religious right

“God made the idiot for practice, and then He made the school board.” – Mark Twain

likes to paint of them, the Founders in fact would likely be *despised* by today’s fundamentalists for their un-Christian behavior. Franklin’s joyous, amply reciprocated love of women would evoke their limitless rage. Jefferson’s paternities with his slave mistress Sally Hemmings, Paine’s attacks on the priesthood, Hamilton’s bastardly philandering, the grassroots scorn for organized religion—all would draw howls of righteous right-wing rage.

This may be why theocratic fundamentalists are so desperate to sanitize and fictionalize what’s real about our history. God forbid our children should know of our Founders who embraced the Sermon on the Mount but renounced the Book of Revelation, or Native leaders who established democracy in America long before they saw the first European.

Faith-based tyranny is anti-American. So are dishonest textbooks. It’s time to fight them both.

[From a Feb 14 article by Harvey Wasserman at <http://www.freepress.org>.

Reprinted here by permission.]
(Harvey Wasserman is author of many books, runs <http://www.solartopia.org> and is senior advisor to Greenpeace USA. See <http://www.harveywasserman.com>. His books include *Solartopia! Our Green-Powered Earth*, *H. Wasserman’s History of the U.S.*, *A Glimpse of the Big Light: Losing Parents, Finding Spirit*, and *Passions of the Potsmoking Patriots: Our Famous Founders’ Secret Lives*.)

¹ See the article at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/14/magazine/14textbooks-t.html?ref=magazine>

Why Logic Does Not Persuade Religious People

By Darrel Ray, Ed. D.

Have you ever argued with a religious person only to hear them respond with well-practiced dogma that they probably learned in Sunday School years ago? You quickly see that, from their perspective, logic plays no part in the discussion. They see, hear and feel their invisible god-friend clearly and are amazed that you cannot see it. How can you not see and feel the love of Jesus or the power of Allah?

As you talk with these staunch believers, you may also notice that they do not hear certain things you say. Your evidence and logic seems to go right over their heads. They may be highly intelligent, yet they firmly hold that they can talk with their god or that their invisible friend is with them and monitoring their thoughts at all times. It appears that the logical part of their brain is turned off. Yet when you talk to them about something like the way they solved a mechanical problem or organized the bake sale, their brain seems to function quite logically. What is going on?

The most important thing to understand is that presenting logic to these unwaveringly religious persons is *not*

the answer. Religion very selectively turns off specific logical functions in the brain and leaves other areas untouched. Religion creates strong emotional pathways that can override the higher brain functions when necessary. This override is so powerful that it can cause people to behave in ways that are consistently illogical. In fact, religion infects and controls people in just about the same way that schizophrenics are overwhelmed with emotional messages in their brains. Schizophrenics cannot reason their way out of their emotions and compulsions any more than you can rid yourself of the Herpes virus once it gets into your system. Religion infects and controls people in much the same way: Their logical system remains intact—except for the parts that deal with religion. Their religious beliefs are rerouted through an emotional channel that can overrule the rational system when needed.

When discussing religion with a steadfast believer, you will often notice their eyes glaze over, they miss important points in the discussion, and they cannot understand key ideas about science. This glaze-over is evi-

dence that you have triggered the religious-override system. No learning or understanding will take place after that point. The religious person's mind is now overcome with emotion.

How do you handle this situation? Recognize that triggering the override system has effectively ended any productive discussion. Hammering logic down the throat of a religious person does only one thing: it strengthens the override pathway in their brain. To keep the person as a friend or acquaintance, you must develop and maintain a relationship that effectively ignores the "god virus" within them. Ignore their god references but pay attention to the emotional message and respond to their human concerns without reference to their invisible friend. Focusing on their emotions will give you a far better chance of eventually enlightening them than any amount of logic at that moment.

(Dr. Darrel Ray is a practicing clinical psychologist and author of *The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture*. His program at AFS in January was well received. See his website at: <http://www.thegodvirus.net>.)

Interesting Links on the Internet:

"Yamani or Your Life" by Christopher Hitchens at: <http://www.slate.com/id/2247256/>.

Greta Christina on the First Cause Argument: <http://tinyurl.com/yl2dewg>.

Creationists seek to stop the teaching of global warming:

<http://www.mnn.com/family/education-activities/stories/creationists-seek-to-stop-the-teaching-of-global-warming>.

"How My Six Year Old Boy Debunked Intelligent Design": <http://www.atheistnexus.org/profiles/blogs/how-my-six-year-old-boy>

Creation Museum Founder Says Nations's Foundation is "Shaky": <http://www.christiannewswire.com/news/6321613081.html>

Dale McGowan will have a "Parenting Beyond Belief" talk and discussion in Peachtree City, GA on April 24:

http://www.neighbornewspapers.com/detail.html?sub_id=156953&edit_result=live&msg=Item+saved.

Liberals and atheists are smarter:

http://www.neighbornewspapers.com/detail.html?sub_id=156953&edit_result=live&msg=Item+saved.

Bill Maher video on Religion (from his HBO Special on Feb 13, 2010):

<http://atheistplanet.blogspot.com/2010/02/bill-maher-on-religion-from-his-new-hbo.html>

Keith Olbermann and Rob Boston video about Glen Beck's and David Barton's next target: Separation of Church and State: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3036677/#35339907>

Brief Bible Blunders (video, 12 episodes): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2EmxXdZ6Zc&feature=related>

The "Real" Paul (video): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDSUTjxNuiU&feature=related>

"The Verdict Is In," video by Dr. Ray Hagins: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsZ7z2AveUw&feature=related>

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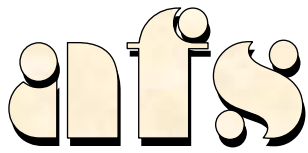
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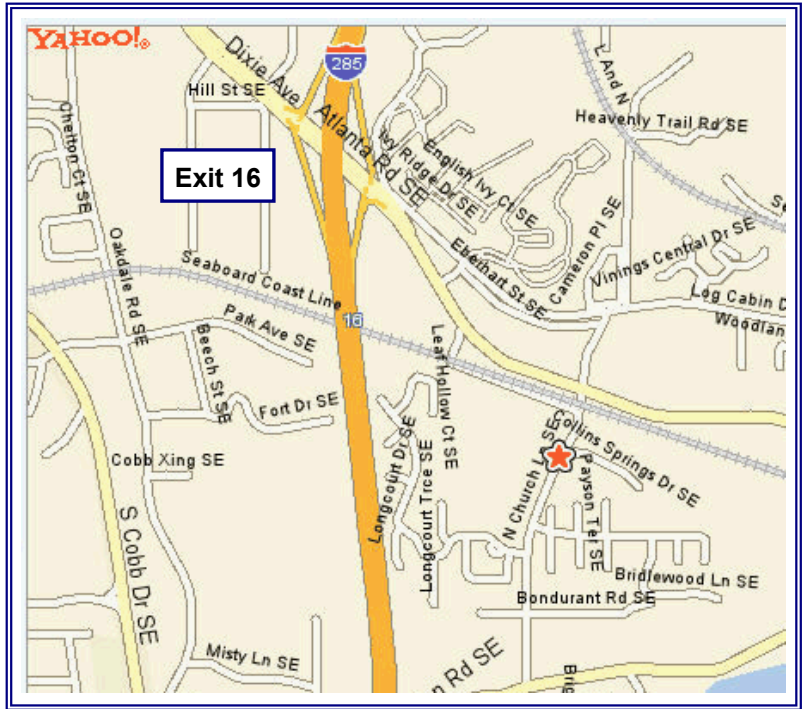
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This Month's Speaker:

Sean Faircloth



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