

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself.

An AFS Publication • Volume 18 Number 1 • January 2012

The January AFS Meeting

The January 8 AFS meeting will include a talk by **Sean Faircloth** and **Dr. R. Elisabeth Cornwell**, representatives of the **Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science** (RDFRS).

Sean Faircloth is the Director of Strategy and Policy for RDFRS, and Elisabeth Cornwell is Executive Director of US Operations for RDFRS. Both will discuss the Dawkins Foundation and its programs. Faircloth will also discuss his new book, *Attack of the Theocrats! How the Religious Right Harms Us All—and What We Can Do About It*.

Sean Faircloth is formerly the Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for America where he successfully initiated the Secular Decade plan. Faircloth also served for a decade in the Maine legislature, spearheading over thirty laws. In his last term in office, he was elected Majority Whip by his caucus colleagues.

The meeting will be at 1:00 at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, located at 4775 N. Church Lane, Smyrna, GA. Come early if you like for snacks and conversation with other freethinkers. Visitors are always welcome at AFS meetings.

Ed Buckner Debates

The debate between **Ed Buckner** and **Joe Scrivner** was rescheduled tentatively to Feb. 22. The topic: "Religion: Do the Benefits to Society Outweigh the Costs?" The debate will be in Birmingham, AL. Dr. Scrivner is an assistant professor of religion at Samford University. The debate is sponsored by Birmingham Freethought Society.

Ed will also debate **John Leonard** on "Atheism or Theism: Which is Better?" on February 4 at 3:00PM at Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, 10250 Haynes Bridge Road, in Alpharetta. Email steveyoth@aol.com for debate details.

Silent Auction at Jan 8 Meeting!

AFS will have a Silent Auction at the January 8 meeting. Please bring your donated items to be auctioned.

A Silent Auction is an ascending price auction in which bids are entered on a sheet of paper near the item. At the end of the auction, the highest bidder wins the item.

The January AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be a Chili Lunch on Saturday, January 14, at 1:00 at Atlanta Freethought Hall. Bring your best Chili, or pay to enjoy Chili brought by others! (Suggested cost is \$10 per person.) AFS will provide eating utensils, drinks, side dishes, etc. This will be a fun opportunity to hang out with other freethinkers. See you there!

Election Results

Congratulations to the following AFS officers and board members elected to serve in 2012:

Steve Yothment, President	Dennis Martin, Secretary
Judy Thompson, VP, Int.	Bob Konopelski, Board
Michael Buckner, VP, Ext.	Rick Pace, Board
Diane Buckner, Treasurer	Lew Southern, Board

Mark Banks, Steven Fant and Laura Ross will continue their 2-year terms this year.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Jan 8: AFS Board Meeting, AF Hall, 11:00 AM

Jan 8: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM

Jan 14: AFS Social, Chili Lunch at AF Hall, 1:00 PM

"Gullibility and credulity are considered undesirable qualities in every department of life – except religion." – Christopher Hitchens

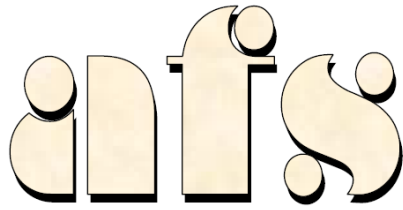
More on *Attack of the Theocrats*

The full title of Sean Faircloth's new book is *Attack of the Theocrats! How the Religious Right Harms Us All—and What We Can Do About It*. As the title implies, Faircloth describes the on-going threat of religious fundamentalism, and then provides a plan for non-theists to regain the high road on the separation of church and state.

Reviews of the book on Amazon.com are from notable authors, skeptics and science writers, including Richard Dawkins, Susan Jacoby, Bill Nye and James Randi.

Susan Jacoby notes in her review, "In this lively and historically grounded survey of the way we live now, the

author explains why the thirty-year-old assault on church-state separation affects all of us from children who are not getting a world-class education in science because of fundamentalist interference with the teaching of biology, to soldiers subjected to evangelical proselytizing on military bases. Nothing could be more timely than this reminder that the founders left God out of the Constitution to provide citizens of every faith and no faith the freedom to act on their consciences. We ignore this historic liberty, the gift of America's founding generation, at our peril."



Atlanta Freethought Society

Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at 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 8: Sean Faircloth, Director of Strategy & Policy for the Richard Dawkins Foundation, will talk about his new book, *Attack of The Theocrats! How the Religious Right Harms Us All and What We can Do about it.*

Feb 12: Maaneli Derakhshani, a physics Ph.D. student at Clemson University, will speak on The Philosophy of Physics.

Mar 11: (tentative) Mark Zumbach, President of the Triangle Freethought Society.

Apr 8: 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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UGA Students Push to Remove Prayer from Commencement

By Adina Solomon, from the Dec. 12 edition of *The Red and Black*, the UGA Student newspaper

University commencement won't have a prayer – at least that's the hope of a group of University students.

Stephen Joiner, the public relations chair for UGAtheists, is leading a group of about 30 students, many of them members of UGAtheists, in the fight to remove the prayer said during graduation.

The group has suggested replacing the prayer, which is led by an invited religious figure, with a separate and optional ceremony.

"I like to say I'm kind of acting on behalf of the student body," Joiner said. "I feel like it's important to stand up for people who either don't know their rights are being infringed or are afraid to stand up for their rights."

Joiner said he and the group have been working to move the commencement prayer since summer, but have been met with opposition from the University.

He sent a letter earlier this semester to University Registrar Jan Hathcote and Stephen Shewmaker, executive director for legal affairs, saying the "Establishment Clause was clearly violated because this was a religious prayer at a school-sponsored event," according to documents given to *The Red & Black* by Joiner.

As an alternative to a prayer during commencement, the letter suggests holding a separate religious service before or after the graduation ceremony or a "moment of silence."

Shewmaker responded with a letter Nov. 1 saying "invocation at commencement is part of the University of Georgia's heritage," according to documents provided by Joiner.

"There have been no Supreme Court of the United States cases interpreting this issue," Shewmaker wrote.

"There have been some cases involving prayer at elementary and high school graduations or high school football games. These cases are distinguishable in that college age students are less impressionable and attendance at elementary and high school is mandatory."

Joiner and his group sent a letter Nov. 11 in response to Shewmaker's citing "a whole slew of court cases" supporting the removal of the prayer, but Joiner said they have yet to receive an answer.

Shewmaker declined to comment to *The Red & Black*. He said to instead contact Tom Jackson, vice president for public affairs.

"The invocation offered at commencement is nondenominational as to be inclusive of all religions," Jackson said. "It rotates among clergy from various faiths. If prayer is not in someone's tradition, then certainly they're not required to participate, but we ask they respect the rights of the majority who want to participate."

Joiner first became aware of the prayer said during the main commencement when he watched his wife graduate. Though the prayer doesn't promote a single religion, it mentions God.

"I realized this year, I'm graduating and I don't want them to do this same thing," Joiner said.

During the semester, the student group has been seeking counsel from the national groups Freedom from Religion Foundation and Secular Student Alliance. The group has also spoken with high school students who have encountered similar situations at their schools.

As for the upcoming commencement, Joiner isn't optimistic that the

prayer will be removed.

"I really think they're just stonewalling us at this point, which I guess isn't really surprising," he said. "I'm still gonna keep trying, but UGA has the power here, and they think their power is unchallenged."

He said he did not think the University realized there could be "serious legal repercussions."

Jackson pointed out members of many faiths—Jewish, Christian, Bahai and others—have led the prayer at commencement.

"We're very careful to instruct the person delivering the invocation that it should be inclusive and nondenominational," he said.

The University also doesn't require anyone to say the prayer or even come to graduation, Jackson said.

"It's important, but the person isn't required to be present, and I think that's what the court ruling turns on," he said. "And they can just not participate. They can just sit there for a minute and not participate while the others do."

Joiner said he doesn't want to punish or embarrass the University, but if the prayer isn't moved from the main commencement, the group will take action.

"They'll be in a really serious position if they do that because they'll have committed a crime against every single person in that audience, so that's really serious," Jackson said.

In the meantime, Joiner maintains a Facebook page called "Stop Prayer at UGA Graduation," which 53 people have liked as of Dec. 12.

"I would like if this were never a problem again for a UGA student," he said. "Graduation is about everyone. It's not about one particular religion."

"Religion comes from the period of human prehistory where nobody – not even the mighty Democritus who concluded that all matter was made from atoms – had the smallest idea of what was going on. It comes from the bawling and fearful infancy of our species, and is a babyish attempt to meet our inescapable demand for knowledge. Today the least educated of my children knows much more about the natural order than any of the founders of religion."

– Christopher Hitchens, from *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, page 64

Florida Judge Says Ballot Initiative On Religion Is Misleading and Must Be Rewritten

Americans United Welcomes the Court Ruling [from a Dec. 14 press release by Americans United]

A Florida court declared on December 13 that a proposed constitutional amendment on religion is misleading and must be rewritten before being submitted to the voters.

Judge Terry P. Lewis of the Second Judicial Circuit Court of Leon County agreed¹ with Americans United for Separation of Church and State and other groups that had challenged the wording of Amendment 7 as deceptive.

Said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United, "Amendment 7 is designed to eviscerate, not protect, religious liberty in Florida. We're glad the court saw through this ruse."

Amendment 7 was scheduled to appear on the ballot in November 2012. The measure claims to advance religious freedom but, in fact, it would repeal state constitutional safeguards that prohibit the use of public funds for religious schools and other ministries.

The measure would even require the state government to fund religious groups when it makes public funds available to non-religious organizations.

A legal challenge to the amendment's wording was filed in July. The Shapiro v. Browning lawsuit was filed

on behalf of educators and religious leaders who do not want taxpayer funds to be diverted to private schools and ministries and away from public schools and public services.

Judge Lewis agreed that the ballot's wording is "ambiguous and misleading." "Whether affirmatively misleading or merely ambiguous as to the meaning and effect of the Amendment, it is in either event defective," Lewis wrote.

Under Lewis's order and Florida law, the Florida attorney general's office must rewrite the ballot language and submit new language to the court for review within 10 days. The plaintiffs will then have 10 days to object to that language.

The lead plaintiff in the case is Rabbi Merrill Shapiro, rabbi of Temple Shalom in Deltona and president of the Board of Trustees of Americans United.

In addition to Shapiro, other clergy who joined the lawsuit include the Rev. Harry Parrott of Clay County, who is a retired Baptist minister; the Rev. Harold Brockus of St. Petersburg, a retired pastor of a Pinellas Park congregation affiliated with the Presbyterian Church USA and the United Church of Christ; the Rev. Kent Siladi of Rockledge, who is the Conference

Minister for the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ; Rabbi Jack Romberg of Temple Israel in Tallahassee; and the Rev. Bobby Musengwa, who is pastor of Maximo Presbyterian Church in St. Petersburg.

Leaders in the Florida Education Association, Florida School Boards Association and Florida Association of School Administrators are also serving as plaintiffs.

Several organizations joined with Americans United in filing the lawsuit, including the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief, the ACLU Foundation of Florida, the Anti-Defamation League, the Florida Education Association and the National Education Association.

Americans United Associate Legal Director Alex J. Luchenitser, in consultation with AU Legal Director Ayesha N. Khan, assisted in preparation of the legal papers in the case. Attorney Ronald G. Meyer of Meyers, Brooks, Demma and Blohm in Tallahassee is serving as lead counsel.

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.

¹See the Summary Judgment here: http://au.org/files/pdf_documents/summary_final_judgment.pdf

In the News this past month...

Kids who accept Jesus as their Savior are told they will get a free Playstation: <http://www.krdo.com/news/29731772/detail.html>

50 Most Brilliant Atheists of All Time: <http://brainz.org/50-most-brilliant-atheists-all-time/?mid=51>

How We All Pay For the Huge Tax Privileges Granted to Religion - It's Time to Tax the Church:

http://www.alternet.org/belief/153448/how_we_all_pay_for_the_huge_tax_privileges_granted_to_religion_-_it's_time_to_tax_the_church

Christopher Hitchens About the Catholic Church, from the Intelligence Debate:

Part 1 of 2: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifSlpENb2Y>

Part 2 of 2: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZnJr_2HbXc

Sam Harris Utterly Destroys Religion: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQTCoED8Wds&feature=youtu.be>

MRF Success: <http://www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org/2011/12/travis-afb-success-partially-with-pictures/>

Kentucky Prepares To Turn its Largest Hospital Over to Religious Fanatics:

http://www.alternet.org/newsandviews/article/756164/kentucky_prepares_to_turn_its_largest_hospital_over_to_religious_fanatics/#paragraph4

Fox Apologizes to Jews for Poll on Who Murdered Jesus:

http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/12/30/fox-apologizes-to-jews-for-poll-on-who-murdered-jesus/?hpt=hp_t3

American Heathen Radio: (Their Internet Radio broadcast on Jan 28 will have Al Stefanelli.) <http://theamericanheathen.com/>

That's Not How the Song Goes, Cee Lo: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2012/01/01/thats-not-how-the-song-goes-cee-lo/>

The Magic of Reality: How We Know What's Really True by Richard Dawkins

A Review of Richard Dawkins' New Book by Ben Akerley

This dazzling, oversized, coffee-table-worthy, unputdownable gem differs dramatically from the previous ten blockbuster offerings from the world's preeminent expositor of science in three important respects: (1) The layout consists of roughly half text and half exquisite, vividly colorful, imaginative illustrations from award-winning graphic artist Dave McKean. These visually stunning and captivating drawings immeasurably enhance the message of the printed word. (2) Whereas all his previous output primarily captured the imagination and stimulated the intellect of sophisticated adult readers, this classic targets a family audience and could easily serve as an enthralling general science primer suitable for literate children as well as a refresher course survey for those of us grownups who unfortunately never had exposure to truly superior science education but rather had to settle for basic and mostly inferior instruction. (3) All twelve chapters follow a simple question and answer format covering such diverse and intriguing topics as the first humans, the life cycle of stars, earthquakes, origins of the universe and the making of a rainbow.

In most cases, the first part chronicles the universal myths and fables

which the ancients concocted in an attempt to comprehend the natural world surrounding them followed by the modern, scientific explanation as this master storyteller makes the reality-based answers as thrilling as Homer, as profound as Job and every bit as entertaining as Kipling.

The former Oxford professor patiently elucidates how the fables and myths from the Judeo-Christian tradition as well as from pagan sources endure throughout the ages as great stories whereas science details wonderful sets of experimentally testable theories about things we don't know and may never fully understand so that it becomes our task to learn how to differentiate between the two divergent approaches.

The author underscores the striking similarity between animal evolution and language evolution and explains why there are so many different animals and so many different spoken tongues as a result of how language drifts the same way that species drift.

In a particularly refreshing, self-deprecating admission, this peerless and indefatigable investigator confesses: "I'm not going to talk about it [quarks] in this book. That's not because I think you wouldn't understand it. It's because I don't under-

stand it." He employs the same unvarnished candor with respect to how a rainbow tells us that time and space began with a big bang "because not being a cosmologist, I don't understand it myself." All of this, he emphasizes, helps us to accept the boundaries of science and how important it is for scientists to recognize their own limitations. However, at the same time, what is unknown is not necessarily unknowable.

As an outstanding example of why this scholar uses "magic" in his title, in Chapter 2 ("Who was the first person?"), he finishes his explanation with these sublime words of wisdom which beautifully capture the essence of this entire ambitious undertaking: "What is a fact beyond all doubt is that we share an ancestor with every other species of animal and plant on the planet. All are our cousins. Every last one of them. Isn't that a far more wonderful thought than any myth? And the most wonderful thing of all is that we know for certain that it is literally true." His final sentence reads: "The truth is more magical—in the best and most exciting sense of the word—than any myth or made-up mystery or miracle. Science has its own magic—the magic of **reality**."

(Ben's email is benakerley@aol.com.)

Christopher Hitchens (1949-2011)

By John Rafferty, President of Secular Humanist Society of New York

"Human decency is not derived from religion. It precedes it." —Christopher Hitchens

He got one thing spectacularly right: God is *not* great. I did not always agree with Hitchens; who could? His unflagging defense of the Iraq War never made sense to me, and some of his views of women were Victorian-era sexism shod in Doc Martens.

But he got it right about "lying, thieving" Mother Teresa and the Pope's cover-up culpability in the church's abuse scandal, and about dozens of other frauds, hypocrites and villains, often going way over any

line of propriety in his indignation. Of the just-deceased televangelist and political meddler Jerry Falwell, while other commentators observed the usual speak-no-ill-of-the-dead rule, Hitch opined, "If you gave Jerry Falwell an enema, you could bury him in a matchbox."

Beyond humor and wit, he defined positive atheism, saying, "Atheism stikes me as morally superior, as well as intellectually superior, to religion. Since it is obviously inconceivable that all religions can be right,



(This article is from <http://www.shsny.org/>)

the most reasonable conclusion is that they are all wrong. Does this leave us shorn of hope? Not a bit of it. Atheism, and the related conviction that we have just one life to live, is the only sure way to regard all our fellow creatures as brothers and sisters."

And in his 2007 best-selling *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, Hitchens wrote the textbook for what is now called "new atheism": "Faith is the surrender of the mind; it's the surrender of reason, it's the surrender of the only thing that makes us different from other mammals. It's our need to believe, and to surrender our skepticism and our reason, our

yearning to discard that and put all our trust or faith in someone or something, that is the sinister thing to me. Of all the supposed virtues, faith must be the most overrated."

Indeed, in accepting the Freethinker of the Year Award of the Atheist Alliance of America in 2011, he said: "We have the same job we always had: to say that there are NO final solutions; there is NO absolute truth; there is NO supreme leader; there is NO totalitarian solution that says if you would just give up your freedom of inquiry, if you would just give up, if you would simply abandon your critical faculties, the world of idiotic bliss can

be yours."

Hitchens, in my opinion our time's inheritor of the mantle of Aristophanes, Juvenal, Swift, and Orwell, continued at that "same job" even as he fought the battle with esophageal cancer that he knew he could not win.

"Death is certain," he wrote in the *Portable Atheist*, "replacing both the siren-song of Paradise and the dread of Hell. Life on this earth, with all its mystery and beauty and pain, is then to be lived for more intently: we stumble and get up, we are sad, confident, insecure, feel loneliness and joy and love. There is nothing more; but I want nothing more."

"The person who is certain, and who claims divine warrant for his certainty, belongs now to the infancy of our species. It may be a long farewell, but it has begun and, like all farewells, should not be protracted."

—Christopher Hitchens, from *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*, page 11

Congratulations to Ed Buckner, whose December 28 letter-to-the-editor was printed in the *Marietta Daily Journal*.

Fein Partly Right But Seriously Wrong on Christmas

DEAR EDITOR:

MDJ columnist Melvyn Fein ("Keep Celebrating," Dec. 19) is right about some important things regarding Christmas, but he's wrong about others. He's right that:

- * This is a good season to emphasize love (as are many other seasons) and reaching out to others.
- * Christmas trees and Santa Claus can be fun, worthwhile, and enriching ("confession" from one of Cobb County's known atheists: when my son was little, decades ago, we always put up and decorated—no angel—a tree, and Santa visited our house every year.)
- * Happy childhoods increase the chances of developing happy grown-ups and so should be planned for.
- * Anyone who says "Merry Christmas" or "Happy Holidays" at this time of year—as long as they don't snarl when they say it—should be appreciated, not attacked.

But Fein also declares that "history is history" and should not be ignored or "disinfected"—and then he distorts or fails to recognize actual history. He misrepresents what "public" means or what people like me have to say about "public" spaces. And he insults, pointlessly and snidely, those of us who care about religious liberty and the very real dangers of government sponsorship of religious ideas. Consider:

- * Some founders were Christian, but nothing like all were. And all contributed to founding a secular—plainly not a Christian—nation, with careful, conscious intention.

- * Public spaces can reasonably include spaces owned by churches, individuals, businesses, etc. No church-state separationist I know, including me, wants to restrict anyone from displaying whatever religious icons he wishes in such spaces. The problem only occurs when someone wants to display religious—or "irreligious," for the same reason—exhibits sponsored by governments, in the name of all of us. Would anyone join me in objecting to a sign at the courthouse, any time of the year, that truthfully declared, "Cobb County will be better off when every citizen realizes that there are no gods"?

- * Christians did not invent "love" or celebrating at this season of the year or Christmas trees or gift exchanges or most of the other details of the season—they "borrowed" traditions that preceded Christianity in every case. History is history.

- * And, as to Cal Thomas's latest ("Death of an Atheist," Dec. 20): many, many people, some of them much wiser than Mr. Thomas, were beaten in theism v. atheism debates by Christopher Hitchens. Maybe that's why Thomas waited until Hitchens is dead and cannot respond to "debate" him in print.

Reason's Greetings and a Happy 2012 to all my fellow MDJ readers.

Ed Buckner, Smyrna

Former President, American Atheists

When Ignorance Presents a Teaching Moment

By Al Stefanelli, from his December 23 blog at http://freethoughtblogs.com/alstefanelli/2011/12/23/evolution_evangelism/

"Today, the theory of evolution is an accepted fact for everyone but a fundamentalist minority, whose objections are based not on reasoning but on doctrinaire adherence to religious principles" – James D. Watson

I was approached the other day by an individual whom I've known for about a year. He asked me if I "believe" in evolution, to which I answered that the question is not whether one believes in evolution, but if they understand it. I explained that there is a vast amount of knowledge that validates evolution, and further explained the difference between the vernacular use of the word "theory," and the definition according to the scientific community. He looked a little perplexed, and I could tell he was searching for some sort of reply. What he came up with initially made me cringe, "If we came from apes, why are there still apes?"

Now, mind you, I am used to getting this type of reply from the tried and true of the church—the adults, whose minds I refer to as being like cement—permanently set and all mixed up. But my conversation was not with an adult. I was talking to a teenager, and after the initial internal wincing upon hearing his query regarding the coexistence of apes along side of humans, I became angry. No, not at him—not by a long shot. I looked at it as a genuine teaching moment. My anger was directed toward his parents and his school for the immense level of failure that has been foisted upon him.

The Gift Of Ignorance...

It both saddens and angers me that so many parents and educators believe that the bible is a gift from God, that it is inerrant in its content and perfectly suitable for teaching from. They deem it perfectly acceptable to replace perfectly good science with bronze-age fairy tales that have been thoroughly debunked for many generations. It pains me to the very core of my being that creationism is even considered worthy of sharing the same dais as evolution. It angers me that Christian mythology, particularly the creation myth, is given any more cre-

dence than the Epic of Gilgamesh, or Santa Claus, or the Easter Bunny, or any other myth or fairy tale.

Creationism doesn't belong as a comparative to anything even remotely connected to reality, and passing it off as anything other than the myth that it is should be seen as nothing short of abusive and neglectful toward our children. Parents who teach their kids creationism instead of evolution fail in their duties to properly prepare their children for life outside of the nest, and educators who persist in neglecting their duties by insisting that creationism (in any of its forms) be taught either in place of or along side of evolution should have their professional licenses revoked.

Pot, Meet Kettle...

To add insult to injury, these parents and educators turn around and tell our children that *we're* the ones who are delusional, and *we're* the ones who are being ignorant, and that *we're* the ones who are insane, and that *we're* the ones who are living a lie, and that *we're* the ones who should not be trusted and we are actually "*working for*" another equally non-existent entity they call "*Satan*."

They have the audacity to infer that our facts are fiction and their fiction is fact. They tell our children that we have "*exchanged the truth for a lie*," when all along they are the ones who are living in a fantasy world filled with talking snakes, talking donkeys, magical trees, zombies walking the earth, a man living in the belly of a fish for three days, the "*sun stopping*," and a whole host of other things that have no place in the real world. They are lying to our children, damaging their intellect and denying them much-needed critical thinking skills.

We Have A Responsibility...

As I was explaining to this young man about the basics of evolutionary theory, the thought occurred to me that his parents would quite likely be

extremely pissed off at my meddling. For a brief moment I thought that perhaps I should not get involved with breaking down the faith of someone else's kid, and that by doing so I would be just as guilty as they are in trying to teach creationism to my kids. But it was a very brief moment, and I quickly remembered that, as unbelievers, we have a responsibility to the future of our species to do whatever we can to disseminate the science and eliminate the myth.

In this case, I was approached and was asked for my input. This is rare, indeed. Especially in the deep South. Many of you may be wondering if I am suggesting that we start handing out information pamphlets on evolution, or offering invitations to Secular events and Freethought Group meetings. If so, wouldn't that be an invasion of privacy on the rights of a parent to indoctrinate their kids however they see fit, even if what they are teaching is total, complete bullshit?

Geese And Gander...

Well, yeah, that is exactly what I am suggesting. Getting little cards, pamphlets and fliers that serve in directing youth to information about the science and facts of evolution are not hard to find. As far as it being an invasion of privacy on the rights of parents, I say, "*Too bad*." I don't really care how much they might jump up and down and shout "*How dare you approach MY kid?*" For all I care, they can call the police. It's not illegal to talk to a child.

They wouldn't have a leg to stand on, anyway. How many Christian adults believe it is perfectly OK to hand out *their tracts* to our children? How many times do evangelists single out kids in the mall or at the state fair or a carnival and invite them to *their churches* and youth events? How many of them like to pass out cute little bibles with instructions on what to read and what to believe about what

they have read? How many stories have you read or heard about that reveal the tactics of youth evangelism, including those done right on the campuses of our public schools?

Go Ye Therefore...

So, this is my challenge to my fellow atheists for 2012. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations... Do as you are able. If you don't have a pile of unused cash lying around, you can always print out a one-page summary of evolution (preferably one that does not mock religion) with website addresses for more information, including one that has a good FAQ. Go to Wal-Mart and make 100 copies. It will cost you five bucks or so. Find a kid, ask them if they believe that God created the universe. If they say yes, put a copy in their hands and walk away.

If you are wondering where to get these one-page summaries, Google is

¹See <http://homepages.ihug.co.nz/~edmin/Pamphlets/Pamphlet%2002%20-%20Evolution%20in%20a%20Nutshell.pdf>

your friend¹. (See the footnote.)

If you have some extra cash, you can even purchase pre-printed tracts. This will cost a little more, but you can fit a lot more on a well-designed tri-fold pamphlet to hand out. You can spend fifteen bucks and buy 100 CD-R's and spend a day downloading copies of Darwin's book (they are free) and/or any one of a thousand other free resources available on the web and hand a CD to a kid. You can also just go out and buy copies of actual books to give away.

There is no shortage of information on evolution that is geared toward our youth, and most of it is free for the download.

Freethought Groups? Darwin Day is coming up in February, so now is a good time to start planning for and promoting an event with handouts, pamphlets, etc., and building up in-

terest in your community by talking to the local youth.

Be Proactive...

There is much to be said for the old axiom, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." Fully grown humans tend to be a tenacious lot, resistant to change, stuck in tradition and willing to blindly go where everyone else has gone before. This is why the church spends so much time and money on youth evangelism. Get 'em while they're young, so they say. Common knowledge states that if a child is not indoctrinated by the time they are eighteen or so, they will likely not become so.

Our children are fair game according to the methods of the evangelist. Let's give the church a run for its money and get out there with your photocopies, tracts, books, pamphlets and brochures and get them into the hands of those curious young minds.

Other Meetings of Interest in the Atlanta Area

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet on Sunday, Jan. 15, at 12:30 PM at AF Hall. This meeting will include a HumanLight Celebration and socializing with snacks.

The **Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta** will meet on Sunday, Jan. 15, at 2:00 at the Tenth Amendment Media Group's Conference Room, 2245 Godby Road, Ste. 111, in College Park, GA. See <http://blacknonbelievers.org/> for details.

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

The **SOS** (Secular Organizations for Sobriety) meets on Tuesdays at 7:30PM at McAlister's Deli on Holcomb Bridge Road in Roswell. For more info: donnajgore@yahoo.com

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet on Monday, Jan. 9, at 7:00PM at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville, GA. Dan Barber will speak. <http://gust.domek.org/>

The **Fayette Freethought Society** hosts a lunch at El Rancho Restaurant in Peachtree City, GA, on every first and third Saturday at noon. They also meet on other days for Book Club, philosophy and science discussions and civic activities. <http://www.meetup.com/Fayette-Freethought-Society/>

The **Atlanta Skeptics** will meet (?) at 7:00 PM on Saturday, Jan. 14, at Manuel's Tavern. (We don't know who their speaker will be yet!) See <http://www.atlantaskeptics.com/>

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** will meet on Sat., Jan. 21, at 7:00PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. Paul Gleeson, Consul General of Ireland, will speak on "Dublin, the European City of Science for 2012." See <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>.

There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, Jan. 8, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

Another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for Sunday, Jan. 22, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

Dr. Christopher Lynn to Speak at Alabama Freethought Association Jan. 15 Meeting

Dr. Christopher Lynn will speak at the AFA's January 15, 2011 meeting in Lake Hypatia, AL (near Talladega) on "Transcendental Medication: Consilience through the Neuroanthropology of Speaking in Tongues and Internet

Gaming." The meeting will include a 12:00 potluck lunch and 1:00 program.

Dr. Lynn is a biological anthropologist in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Alabama. His dissertation at SUNY-Albany fo-

cused on the relationship between glossolalia and biological stress among New York Apostolic Pentecostals. He currently teaches courses on Anthropology and Evolution at U of A.

For details: <http://ffrf.org/outreach/afa/>

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(Or renew your membership with this form or online at www.AtlantaFreethought.org!)

If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiastically invite you to join the Atlanta Freethought Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed monthly newsletter, the *Atlanta Freethought News*, voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment of the superb speakers we have coming up, as well as the social and activist events that we sponsor!

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$25 per year.

Household memberships: A household is defined as two members sharing one newsletter, and is available for \$35 per year. Since some of our households have additional members, there will be a \$5 per year charge for each additional voting household member.

Paper Newsletters: Due to printing and mailing expense, we add a surcharge of \$15 for members to receive a paper newsletter in the mail rather than our email version newsletter. We encourage all members to receive the newsletter by email to save on paper, postage and printing expenses.

International members: Because of international postage rates and special handling, we have been forced to add a surcharge of \$5 for members in Canada or Mexico, and \$10 for other foreign addresses for members who receive the paper newsletter.

Thank you for all your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

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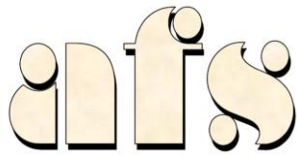
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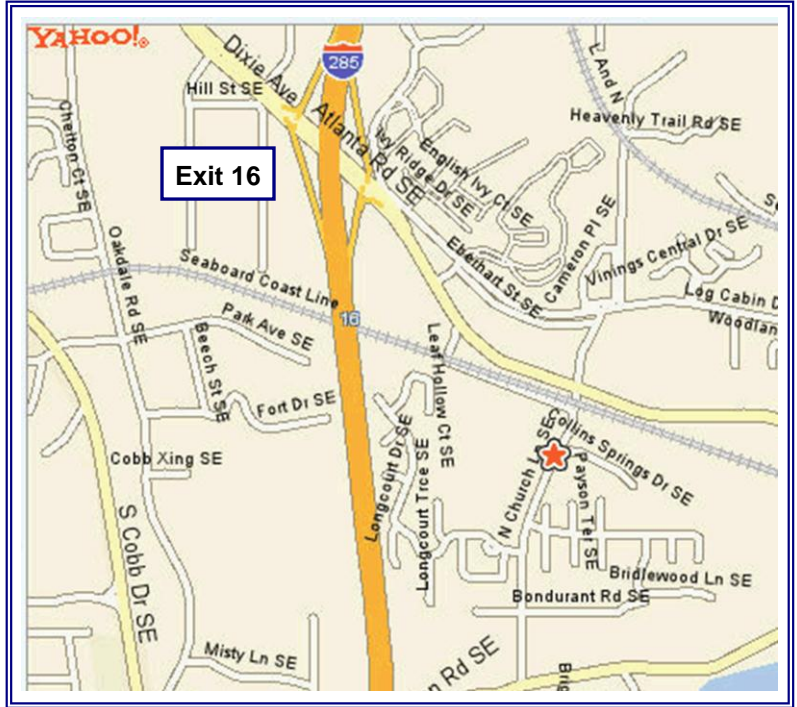
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**The January 8 Meeting:
1:00 at AF Hall,
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Smyrna, GA
This Month's Speakers:
Sean Faircloth and
Dr. Elisabeth Cornwell**



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