

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself.*

An AFS Publication • Volume 17 Number 6 • June 2011

## The June AFS Meeting

The June 12 AFS meeting will include a Potluck Lunch at 12:00 and a talk by **Bob Collins** at 1:00 on "Jesus' Resurrection: Historical or Hysterical?"

Bob Collins is an ex-Christian who became an atheist while he was in seminary studying to be a conservative Christian minister. He is the author of two books, *100 False Bible Prophecies* and *100 Bible Math Mistakes*. He is working on his next book, *Jesus Christ's Resurrection: The Definitive Guide to the Evidence*. He is currently a software engineer.

The lunch and meeting will be at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, in Smyrna, GA. Arrive earlier if you like for refreshments and conversation with other freethinkers. 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 June Potluck Lunch

Before the regular June meeting, we will have a **Potluck Lunch**, starting at 12:00. Join AFS members and guests for some good food and great socializing. Please bring food according to the first letter of your last name as follows:

A-G: Bring a desert;

H-P: Bring a side dish;

Q-Z: Bring a main dish.

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.

## The June AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be an **Open Mic Night** on Saturday, June 18, at 7:00PM. Ed Buckner will emcee the event. AFS will provide snacks and soft drinks for a small cover charge. Bring your own refreshments if you like. This is an opportunity for AFS members and friends to share their jokes, poetry, music, or whatever you like.

Don't miss the Lake Hypatia July 4<sup>th</sup> Celebration! See page 6 for details.

## Other Meetings of Interest

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 **Humanists of Georgia** will meet on Sunday, June 19, at 1:00 at AF Hall. Bruce Herr will show a tribute to the comedy of Robin Williams. <http://www.georgiahumanists.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 **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](mailto:donnajgore@yahoo.com)

The **Atlanta Skeptics** will have their Atlanta Skepticamp, starting on Saturday, June 11 at 10:00AM at the Doraville Civic Center. See <http://www.atlantaskeptics.com/skepticamp>.

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** meetup will be at 7:00 PM on Saturday, June 21, at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE in Atlanta. Dr. Donald McCormick of Emory University will speak on "Vitamin and Trace Mineral Supplements." See <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>.

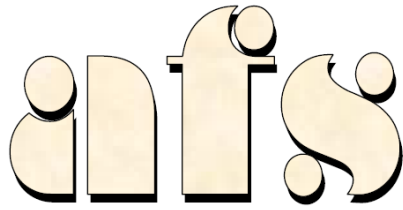
There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, June 12, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

Another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for Sunday, June 26, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

Atlanta Freethought Society has for the first time been offered a matching donation to encourage donations made specifically to pay down our debt on the hall. An anonymous donor has pledged a dollar-for-dollar match of up to \$45,000 for all contributions made in 2011 designated to pay toward the debt.

Each \$10,000 raised this way will reduce AFS costs by \$900 per year going forward and will free up future income for more progressive causes, such as activism or publishing.

To be eligible for the matching funds, donations must be clearly marked for the Pay Down the Debt Drive and must be received by the last day of 2011.



# 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.

Jun 12: A Potluck Lunch at noon, followed by Bob Collins, a former seminarian, at 1:00 speaking on "Jesus' Resurrection: Historical or Hysterical?"

July 10: Frank and Mary Hamilton will entertain us with folk music, freethought commentary and their life story.

Aug 14: "Brother Richard" Haynes, founder of Atheist Nexus, will speak.

Sept 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  
individuals, \$35 for households, and  
\$10 for students/low income/under 21.  
Membership includes AFNews by email.

**Add \$15 to receive AFNews by mail,**  
\$20 to Canada/Mexico, \$25 elsewhere.  
Sustaining Members (individual) \$100.  
Sustaining Members (households) \$125.

Life Membership is \$1000.  
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**AFS Webmasters:** Freya Harris  
and Michael Buckner

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## Cobb Holds Prayer Breakfast; AFS Members Protest

About 850 people representing Cobb County churches, businesses and government agencies attended the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Cobb County Prayer Breakfast on May 5.

The breakfast was held at the Cobb Galleria Centre and featured Bible and devotional readings and praise and worship performances.

The Cobb County Prayer Breakfast is held annually to celebrate the National Day of Prayer, an observation enacted by President Harry Truman in 1952. The prayer breakfast in Cobb County got its start in 1985 when a group of business and community leaders held the first breakfast to observe the National Day of Prayer. In 1988, the Cobb County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution endorsing the breakfast.

However, five representatives from the Atlanta Freethought Society protested the Prayer Breakfast.

"We're here today because government officials—I know former Gov. Roy Barnes is in there, I saw him this morning, I saw Commissioner Woody Thompson go in there—government officials are standing up and praying that they may be seen of men," said Ed Buckner, chair of the activism task force at AFS. "They're hypocrites. They're not here because they want to worship God. They could go to any church they want to. They could pray in the closet as the Bible says they should, but they're here making a big show of it."

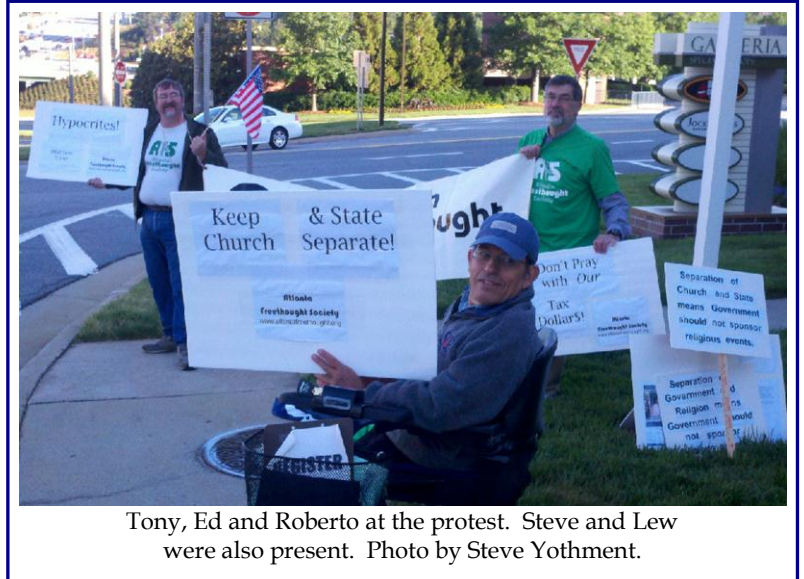
To the Atlanta Freethought Society members, the presence of politicians and government officials at the prayer breakfast violates separation of church and state.

"They're not violating it by having an event," Buckner said. "They're violating it by running it out of a county office."

Virgil Moon, director of the Cobb County Support Services Agency and president of the Cobb County Prayer Breakfast Committee Inc., runs a voicemail-only landline that provides information about the breakfast out of his office. The Marietta Daily Journal reported that while Moon's staff does answer questions regarding the breakfast, they do so outside regular office hours and are paid by the prayer breakfast committee.

"Virgil Moon seems to think that, well the Cobb prayer breakfast foundation is paying these employees so that

makes it OK," Buckner said. "What he doesn't understand is it's not a technical matter of whether they're using some private funds to pay everybody. They're giving the appearance that this is a government sponsored event, that the government is making decisions about religion."



Tony, Ed and Roberto at the protest. Steve and Lew were also present. Photo by Steve Yothment.

While no members of government or political agencies participated in the prayer breakfast program, several had tables at the breakfast including the Cobb County Republican Party, Cobb County Schools, Judge Tain Kell from Cobb County superior court, Cobb County county manager, Cobb County Board of Commissioners and the Marietta Police Department.

Moon told the *Marietta Daily Journal* that the board of commissioners table was a "comp table" and that the county did not pay to reserve it.

Joe Jerkins, Austell mayor, was also in attendance along with Austell Police Chief R.G. Starrett and the Austell Fire Chief Timothy Williams and Assistant Fire Chief Patrick Maxwell.

"I've been coming for a number of years," Jerkins said. "There are always good speakers. Charlton Heston came one year and was very good."

[From an article by Sydney Busby at <http://www.smyrna.patch.com>.]

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## Georgia County Drops Prayer Breakfast Phone Line

Freedom From Religion Foundation letters of complaint on behalf of Georgia members about government involvement in the Cobb County Prayer Breakfast led to corrective action by the county.

FFRF received information that Virgil Moon, director of the county's Support Services Agency, was manag-

ing an "information line" from his office about the May 5 event in Atlanta, which coincided with the National Day of Prayer. Moon, who also served as president of the breakfast committee, publicly confirmed that the line is "run out of his office, and that his administrative staff is in charge of answering messages requesting infor-

mation."

Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney, wrote County Manager David Hankerson in Marietta on April 28<sup>1</sup>: "It is grossly inappropriate for Mr. Moon to dedicate a Cobb County telephone line to organize and promote an inherently religious event for the National Day of Prayer. The county

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cannot expend, even temporarily, government funds and resources to coordinate this event. In order to comply with current constitutional dictates, the county must immediately discontinue the practice of expending any taxpayer dollars and public resources to organize, coordinate, or otherwise promote the Cobb County Prayer Breakfast.”

Markert added: “The county government cannot engage in any conduct that gives the appearance of endorsing religion. Therefore, the county must take immediate action to disassociate itself from this Christian event. Use of any and all county telephone lines for the purpose of dispensing any information about the prayer breakfast should be discontinued immediately. Any promotional materials giving the county number should be retracted and revised.”

Atlanta-area freethought groups had also become involved previously in the issue with protests and a picket.

Markert wrote a second letter<sup>2</sup> on May 5 to County Attorney Dorothy Bishop, detailing the recorded mes-

sage on the county line:

*“The 2011 Cobb County Prayer Breakfast will be held on the National Day of Prayer, Thursday, May 5, at the Cobb Galleria Centre. The program begins at 7 a.m. Our keynote speaker this year is Shan Cooper, vice president of Lockheed-Martin Aeronautics. Ticket price is \$20 per person or \$200 for a table of 10. Please leave your name and phone number if you would like more information or a reservation form. Thank you. Record your message at the tone. When you are finished, hang up or hold for more options.”*

FFRF’s local complainant left their name and number and received a return call from Denise Sawyer, presumably a Cobb County employee, who e-mailed a reservation form from a Cobb County e-mail address, with a breakfast information flier<sup>3</sup> attached.

Markert wrote: “The use of the county line, coupled with employees returning phone calls and e-mailing reservation forms through the county e-mail system, demonstrate the county’s apparent coordination of the event and poses serious constitutional separation of state and church concerns.

Once again, we ask that you inform us, in writing, of the steps the county is taking to remedy these concerns.”

On May 10, Bishop responded<sup>4</sup> by letter. Although denying that the county sponsored or hosted the event, she wrote, “As an aside, you may be interested to know that the challenged phone line is no longer in service, and that the sponsor, Cobb County Prayer Breakfast Inc., has informed me that in the future, one of their members companies will provide any necessary telephone line(s).”

Bishop also defended Moon serving as prayer committee president, saying it was a way of “giving back” to the community.

“Hallelujah, praise the Constitution!” said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. “It’s one thing for county employees to volunteer privately. It’s quite another to help orchestrate a Christian prayer event on county time and dime. We’re pleased to see an end to this invidious entanglement.”

[From a May 18 News Release by the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

See <http://www.FFRF.org>.]

<sup>1</sup>See [http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/cobbcounty\\_letter.pdf](http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/cobbcounty_letter.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>See [http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/cobbcounty\\_letter\\_2.pdf](http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/cobbcounty_letter_2.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>See [http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/cobbcounty\\_flier.pdf](http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/cobbcounty_flier.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>See [http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/cobbcounty\\_response.pdf](http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/cobbcounty_response.pdf)

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## A New Group: Atheist Alliance of America

### US groups separated from Atheist Alliance International are now affiliates of Atheist Alliance of America

**H**ere is an update on the proposed transition of AAI (Atheist Alliance International) into a US-focused group and an international group.

Back in October of 2010, the US affiliate groups of AAI voted to form a new umbrella organization for US affiliates. This umbrella organization would then be a member of AAI. This

new organization has now formed; affiliate groups have voted to call it “Atheist Alliance of America” (AAA). AFS is an affiliate of this organization.

AAA’s first President is Nick Lee, formerly President of AAI and of Freethinkers Association of Central Texas. AAA will have its first US Convention in Houston, Texas in Oc-

tober of 2011.

AAI, composed of 19 international groups, also has a new President, Tanya Smith, an investment banker from Melbourne, Australia. AAI is having its World Atheist Convention this week in Dublin, Ireland.

AAI’s website continues to be <http://www.atheistalliance.org>.

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Dale McGowan is asking for help in having the Fulton County School Board NOT change their Church/State Separation Policy and Procedure or their Teaching Of Religion policy: <http://parentingbeyondbelief.com/blog/?p=5844>

Opposition to Florida antievolution bill continues:

<http://ncse.com/news/2011/04/opposition-to-florida-antievolution-bill-continues-006614>

Creationists notch big win in Tennessee: [http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-501465\\_162-20052007-501465.html](http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-501465_162-20052007-501465.html)

Student challenges prayer at Bastrop graduation:

<http://www.bastropenterprise.com/features/x2132687894/Student-challenges-prayer-at-Bastrop-graduation>

Atheist high schooler receives death threats for protesting graduation prayer:

<http://www.blaghag.com/2011/05/atheist-high-schooler-receives-death.html>

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## Rapture Prophet Harold Camping's 'Really Tough Weekend'

**H**arold Camping emerged from his Alameda, California home on Sunday, May 22, to face reporters for the first time since the Rapture that never happened. Wearing a light jacket and speaking over chirping birds, Camping told reporters he was "flabbergasted" that the world did not end on Saturday. "I'm looking for answers," he told the reporters. "But now I have nothing else to say. I'll be back to work Monday and will say more then." Camping followers were similarly perplexed. "I don't think I am going to stop listening to him," one man said, heaving a deep sigh

before continuing: "I don't know, I gotta listen to him on Monday, see what he says on the radio."

"Somewhat bewildered" and "mystified" is how Camping's wife described her husband before he finally emerged from his home that afternoon. The *International Business Times* managed to capture Camping on camera, refusing to surrender any more than a few words. "Give me a day, no interviews at all today. Sorry." Camping said. "You know this is a big deal, big deal, and I've got to live with it and I've got to think it out. So, no interview."

Camping's relative silence since Saturday's anti-climactic continuation of life on Earth weighs heavy on his followers' confidence. Robert Fitzpatrick, the 60 year-old retired New York transit worker who spent \$140,000 on billboards for the coming apocalypse, responded with bewilderment as well. "I can't tell you what I feel right now," he told a crowd of reporters and tourists in Times Square Saturday evening. "I haven't understood it correctly because I'm still here."

[From a May 23 Yahoo.com news article by Adam Clark Estes.]

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More articles on the failed Rapture prediction:

Rapture Believers Perplexed After Prediction Fails: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-13489641>

Confusion, Sorrow and Doubt Follows Lunatic's Failed Judgment Day Prediction:

<http://freethinker.co.uk/2011/05/23/confusion-sorrow-and-anger-follows-loons-failed-judgment-day-prediction/>

Carry On Camping: <http://freethinker.co.uk/2011/05/24/carry-on-camping/>

Harold Camping Capitalized on Fears, Atheist Group Says:

<http://www.christianpost.com/news/harold-camping-capitalized-on-fears-atheist-group-says-50767/>

After the Rapture: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9KIMWzKj4s&feature=youtu.be>

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## FFRF Calls for Fraud Probe into Rapture Campaign

**The Freedom From Religion Foundation wants California Attorney to investigate how many people may have suffered due to Pastor Harold Camping's \$100 million campaign predicting Armageddon on May 21.**

**I**n a May 31 letter<sup>1</sup> to California Attorney General Kamala Harris, FFRF noted numerous calls for apologies by victims of Camping's "Rapture" crusade and concerns for the untold numbers of people he and his organization duped.

"Our organization seeks to hold Camping accountable in a more tangible way," said the letter from FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker. "We ask you to investigate Camping's 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, Family Stations Inc., for fraud and deceit."

Family Stations is an umbrella for Camping's religious projects, including a radio show broadcast worldwide and streaming online, an online repository of religious commentary and the distribution of sectarian tracts and pamphlets. "Through these endeavors, Camping convinced droves of his loyal listeners and adherents

that the end of the world was rapidly approaching and that people had only until May 21, 2011, to 'find' religion," the letter said.

"We understand that Family Stations Inc. maintains that the primary source of the \$100 million was the liquidation of property owned by the nonprofit, whose reported donations totaled more than \$18 million in 2009 – well before his Rapture campaign reached its zenith. It is not unreasonable to believe that at least that amount comprised part of the total advertising budget in 2010 and 2011. There are media reports of dozens of Camping's followers who liquidated their own assets to contribute tens and sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars to Camping's organization, convinced (by Camping) that they would have no need for the money or material goods after May 21 and that they were needed by Family Stations Inc.,

in order to advertise for the proclaimed Rapture. Others incurred thousands of dollars in debt through extravagant purchases and family vacations, allegedly convinced (by Camping) that they should enjoy the world before its impending destruction. Some quit their jobs, sold or abandoned their homes, packed their families and moved in preparation for the 'end of the world.'"

The letter continued, "Tragically, there are even reports that some of Camping's followers committed suicide to avoid the terror promised by the Rapture stories. A Florida man drowned in California as a result of his Rapture-related delusions, according to detectives, and in doing so, he pulled family members into the cold waters, endangering their lives as well. Perhaps one of the most horrifying stories related to the Rapture predictions comes from California, where

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A woman slit her children's throats and then her own in order "to prevent them from suffering through [the Tribulation]."

Many other people may not be speaking up "due to the embarrassment of losing their financial security as a result of their loyalty to a false prophet."

"The California Attorney General's Office has a duty to protect the public from predatory charities, and we hereby request that the Charitable Trusts Section investigate and, if appropriate, take legal action against Family Stations Inc. for its potential

fraudulent misuse of charitable assets," said the letter, which listed relevant portions of the California Civil Code on deception and fraud.

"Camping's actions and the actions of Family Stations seem to show that they neither behaved nor conducted business as if they sincerely believed that the world would end on May 21, and they continued to solicit donations up to, on and after that date," the letter said.

"Camping did not commit deceit and fraud in being wrong about the date of the Rapture; the question to be determined is whether he may have

committed deceit or fraud in persuading his followers to donate often large sums of money to his organization based on a claim — that the world would definitely end on May 21, 2011, and that he needed to advertise this 'fact' — while objectively conducting his business as though he knew it to be untrue."

The letter concluded, "If self-proclaimed 'prophets' are fraudulently enriching their coffers at the expense of their impressionable members, the Attorney General's Office must take action."

[From a June 1 FFRF News Release.]

<sup>1</sup>See [http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/camping\\_letter.pdf](http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/camping_letter.pdf)

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## Freethinkers Set to Celebrate July 1-3 in Alabama

**All indoor events take place in air-conditioned Freethought Hall; Meals are at the breezy Lakeside Pavilion**

**I**ndependent thinkers are gathering Independence Day weekend in Alabama to celebrate the quest for freedom from state-established religion that brought so many of America's founders to its shores.

The 21st annual Independence Day celebration, hosted by the Alabama Freethought Association, is held at Lake Hypatia, near Talladega, July 1-3. Lake Hypatia's motto is "No preaching, no praying, no walking on water." The official name for the event is the Lake Hypatia Advance (Not Retreat!). Events take place<sup>1</sup> in FFRF's southern Freethought Hall, an air-conditioned auditorium. The impressive granite Atheists in Foxholes monument is nestled amid pines adjoining the private Cleveland family grounds abutting a small lake and Talladega National Forest.

The AFA is a chapter of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the nation's largest state-church watchdog, based in Madison, Wis. AFA Director Patricia Cleveland and FFRF co-sponsor the event, which this year emphasizes activism with its usual slate of fun activities, which start at 11 a.m. Friday, July 1, and continue through brunch on Sunday. See the schedule here<sup>2</sup>.

Duncan Henderson, an Auburn, Ala., teen, will receive the Catherine

Fahringer Memorial Youth Activist Award of \$1,000. Duncan, the son of FFRF member Greg Henderson, was recently featured on "Nick News" in a segment about how his attempt to start a freethought club at school was thwarted.

Also speaking will be Benjamin Burchall, a Christian minister turned atheist. No longer "winning souls for Christ," he now nurtures minds to accept reason. Burchall formerly led the Long Beach Freethought Society and is executive director of Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta.

Other speakers are Jim McCollum, whose mother, Vashti, on his behalf, brought the landmark Supreme Court case *McCollum v. Board of Education* in which religious instruction in public schools was ruled unconstitutional. Jim will air the new Peabody Award-winning documentary, "The Lord Was Not on Trial Here," about his case. Jim is a retired attorney and educator, now living in Arkansas. His wife, Betty McCollum, who teaches philosophy and religious studies, will speak about women and religion.

FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor will be on hand, Annie Laurie to speak about current FFRF actions, and Dan ("The Singing Atheist") to give a concert. He'll also team up with ex-Mormon

Steve Benson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist for the Arizona Republic, for a special reprise of Tunes 'n' Toons, featuring Steve's cartoons and Dan's tunes.

Joining Patricia Cleveland to speak about organizing in the bible belt will be Mark Zumbach, director of the Triangle Freethought Society, FFRF's Raleigh-Durham, N.C., chapter, and Bill Dusenberry, an organizer of the new Oklahoma chapter in Tulsa.

The event includes the traditional Poetry Reading led by Alice Cleveland, a nature demonstration by retired zookeeper Bob Truett, the annual "Atheists vs. Agnostics" volleyball match and a freethought trivia game. Tongue-in-cheek "debaptisms" can be performed by the lake.

The Cleveland family generously opens up their personal grounds for participants who reserve in advance for RVs or primitive camping. Showers and washrooms are available on-site. There are many motels in the area.

You can register online<sup>3</sup> or download a registration form here<sup>4</sup> and mail it to Alabama Freethought Society, PO Box 571, Talladega, AL 35161. Registration is \$35 per FFRF member, \$40 per nonmember, \$5 per FFRF student member and \$10 per nonmember student.

Four catered meals will be offered (Friday night, Saturday lunch, Saturday dinner, Sunday brunch) and are \$12 per adult, \$6 per student. (There's an inexpensive hot dog/veggie dog

lunch offered by a private couple on Friday.)

There are no nearby restaurants so order meals now. Meal orders and early registrations must be in hand by

June 22. There is a \$10 late fee per person for registration after June 22. No meals may be ordered after that date.

See you all at Lake Hypatia!  
[From a May 24 FFRF News Release.]

<sup>1</sup>See <http://ffrf.org/outreach/lake-hypatia/lake-hypatia-events/>

<sup>2</sup>See <http://ffrf.org/outreach/lake-hypatia/agenda-july-4-2011-weekend/>

<sup>3</sup>See <http://ffrf.org/outreach/lake-hypatia/lake-hypatia-advance-registration/>

<sup>4</sup>See <http://ffrf.org/uploads/afa/2011regAFA.pdf>

Mark Palmer's article was in the Tallahassee Democrat on May 5:

## 'Atheists live our lives, trying to be kind and helpful'

By Mark Palmer  
SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

A common criticism of atheists is that because we disbelieve in any divine lawgiver, we must therefore lack moral law, such that atheists may happily commit evil. I contend that this criticism is an imaginary problem and a denial of reality.

There are many atheists among your friends, neighbors and family. Some, however, may still be "in the closet." By and large, we atheists do not run amok, committing crimes and desecrating bibles. We live our lives, trying to be kind and helpful members of our professions, families and communities.

I contend that theism does not produce a certain, objective morality; that theism may likely support an evil morality; that atheism does not address morality at all; and that humanism, a moral stance embraced by atheists and many others, does provide a good morality upon which to base law and social norms.

When I use the term "theism," I mean monotheistic belief systems such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam that incorporate an

all-knowing, law-giving god.

Theistic morality is uncertain. What is theistic morality? First, the lazy answer: good and evil are whatever your god says they are. This platitude is woefully inaccurate. If some god were actually out there speaking from a podium, we would all gather and listen. Instead, theistic morality might be whatever ancient humans wrote about morality in archaic manuscripts. This is also inaccurate. Consider the many theistic sects, each interpreting their old books differently. Accordingly, theistic morality is the consensus interpretation of modern sect leadership of the ancient sect leadership's writings regarding morality, which allegedly sprung from that sect's god. This is hardly a sure moral foundation. Some theists might now argue that your sect leadership has correctly interpreted this chain of moralistic hearsay while all others are wrong. Note, however, that those numerous other sects assert likewise of yours. And so we thousands of philosophically separate groups,

### Freethinkers' Forum OPINION

theist and secular, must still wend our own ways among the moralities.

Theism often leads believers to act evil and call it good. Because theistic morality is whatever sect leadership says their god says it is, then that leadership may tell the believer to commit any dastardly deed and proclaim such deed as holy. The true believer must comply, or else must fight against the will of a god. When the 9/11 hijackers crashed the planes, killing thousands, they proclaimed with their last breaths, "God is great!" To them, these vile acts were holy. Why? Because the leadership of their subset of Islam said so. Theistic morality is the abdication of individual moral responsibility. I am not arguing that all religions produce zealous murderers, but it's a common historical result.

Atheism says nothing about morality. Atheism is merely a non-belief in gods. Your non-belief in Zeus or Ohrmazd does

not affect your morality just as non-belief in gods does not affect an atheist's morality. At this point some theists trot out the old argument that Joseph Stalin and Mao Zedong were atheists and evil. Assume they were. Even so, they were not evil because of atheism. They were evil for the same reason that the worst religions are evil: indisputable dogma. Stalin and Mao were evil because they had absolute power. Their edicts were indisputable and compulsory regardless of reason, logic or justice; any dissenter risked death. Emperor Nero's repeated massacring of Christians and Pope Alexander VI's unbridled support of thievery, murder and slavery did not happen because they were atheists — they weren't — but because, like Stalin and Mao, they had absolute power.

Humanism is the moral system of most modern atheists. Humanism stands in direct opposition to dogma and absolute power. Humanism is based on the foundation of reason, freedom and empathy. Humanism puts species first and tribe second. As such, human-

ism may serve as a non-theistic (not anti-theistic) moral framework for a diverse, democratic society. The freedom to question, speak, experience, work, love and learn is the default good of humanism. To harm people or their property, or to enforce unequal rights is the evil. Humanists understand that we have one earth to share and that we are all in this together.

Our freedom-loving culture is composed of peoples with varied viewpoints. We embrace the freedoms of speech and belief. We generally extol variety and individuality. Our cosmopolitan species must be willing to define good and evil in a manner that exalts empathy, freedom and humanity as a whole, or we will continue to suffer the crusades, jihads, and genocides of warring dogmas.

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Sex and Secularism: A Fascinating Study from Darrel Ray and Amanda Brown:

<http://www.atheismresource.com/2011/sex-and-secularism-a-fascinating-study-from-darrel-ray-and-amanda-brown>

Download the entire study from here: <http://ipcpres.com/>

Atheists Do It Better: Why Leaving Religion Leads to Better Sex by Greta Christina: <http://www.alternet.org/story/150978/>

Sex Improves Dramatically After Leaving Religion: A survey of over 14,500 People: <http://www.ipcpres.com/index.php?id=42>

Atheists Have Best Sex Lives, Claims Psychologist:

<http://abcnews.go.com/Health/atheists-best-sex-lives-claims-kansas-psychologists-survey/story?id=13679076>

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# This Isn't the United States of Jesus

This Letter-to-the-Editor by Tony King was printed in the May 26 issue of *The Toccoa Record*

**I**n his letter of May 12, Mr. Milton A. Pierce lamented that there were not enough people in attendance on the grounds of the Stephens County Courthouse to observe the National Day of Prayer.

According to the Constitution (First Amendment), government should be neutral towards religion and neither should be supporting it nor discouraging it.

Furthermore, according to the Georgia State Constitution, Section II, Par. VII: "No money shall ever be taken from the public treasury, directly or indirectly, in aid of any church, sect, cult, or religious denomination or of any sectarian institution."

Official governmental recognition and encouragement of a National Day of Prayer as well as funding it through taxpayer dollars violates the separation of government from religion clause of the U.S. Constitution.

If the government officially made statements and funded through public monies a "National Day of No Prayer," it would be a violation of the Constitution as well.

It just simply is not the business of government to tell you how you should observe or support any religion, or not. Why is this so hard for conservative religionists to understand?

According to Matthew 6:5-7, Jesus said "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward."

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

"But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much repetition."

This appears to be not a suggestion but a commandment.

If Christians are so concerned with the correctness of their faith and claim that they love Jesus and honor his words, then why do they continually ignore this commandment by their god?

Apparently, many Christians usually cherry pick scripture when it suits their own extra biblical purposes, which in the case of Mr. Pierce and others who share his disregard for the Constitution, is the establishment of a theocracy.

This is the United States of America, not the United States of Jesus.

So, according to their own sacred scripture, anyone who prays publicly with much repetition (Lord...Lord...Lord) as I have so often observed among them at football stadiums, civic organization gatherings, official government meetings and family reunions, then that makes all who participate in such prayers hypocrites.

William A. King  
Toccoa

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## In The News:

Religious Belief is Human Nature, huge New Study Claims:

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/05/12/religious-belief-is-human-nature-huge-new-study-claims/>

Apocalypse Now: Why Believers Will Grow Stronger If the World Doesn't End:

<http://healthland.time.com/2011/05/17/apocalypse-now-why-believers-will-grow-stronger-when-the-world-doesnt-end/?iid=WBeditorpicks>

Read more: <http://healthland.time.com/2011/05/17/apocalypse-now-why-believers-will-grow-stronger-when-the-world-doesnt-end/#ixzz1NKY3Tt3D>

Half of New Testament Forged, Bible Scholar Says:

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2011/05/13/half-of-new-testament-forged-bible-scholar-says/?iref=obnetwork>

Graduations at Cherokee Megachurch Despite Suit Threat:

[http://www.ajc.com/news/cherokee/graduations-at-cherokee-megachurch-956323.html?sms\\_ss=email&at\\_xt=4ddc2170cd7b108b%2C0](http://www.ajc.com/news/cherokee/graduations-at-cherokee-megachurch-956323.html?sms_ss=email&at_xt=4ddc2170cd7b108b%2C0)

Judge upholds religious class at SC school: <http://www.midlandsconnect.com/news/story.aspx?id=605424>

Hitchens' Address to American Atheists: [http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/2011/04/hitchens\\_address\\_to\\_american\\_a.php](http://scienceblogs.com/pharyngula/2011/04/hitchens_address_to_american_a.php)

Christopher Hitchens: most provocative quotes:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8448250/Christopher-Hitchens-most-provocative-quotes.html>

'Intelligent design' in Tenn. schools?:

<http://cosmiclog.msnbc.msn.com/news/2011/04/08/6433919-intelligent-design-in-tenn-schools>

Florida lawmakers take up religion in funding, courts:

<http://beta2.tbo.com/news/breaking-news/2011/apr/11/florida-lawmakers-take-up-religion-in-funding-cour-ar-51161/>

Lacking a Mommy or Daddy is "Morally Wrong":

<http://www.care2.com/causes/civil-rights/blog/gays-raising-kids-is-like-losing-a-parent-to-9-11-video/>

Museum Restores Jefferson's Unique Bible: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/15/museum-restores-jefferson\\_n\\_836253.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/15/museum-restores-jefferson_n_836253.html)

Study Links Willingness to Cheat, Viewpoint on God:

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-beliefs-morals-20110430.0.4211564.story>

The 11 best unintentionally sexual church signs: <http://www.someecards.com/2011/04/12/unintentionally-sexual-church-signs>



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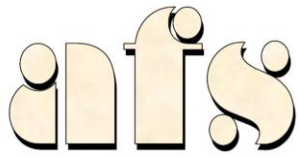
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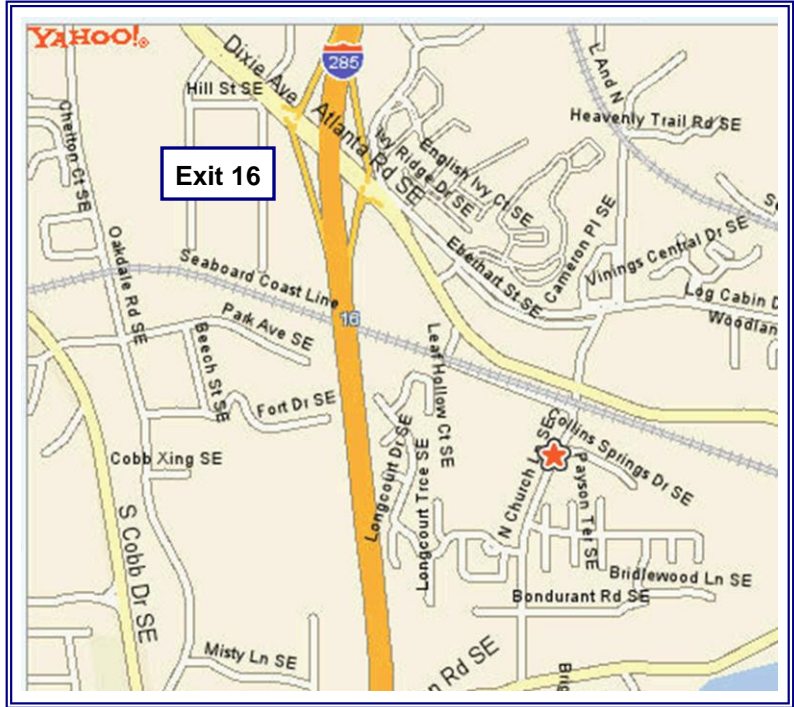
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**This Month's Speaker:  
Bob Collins**



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