

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself.*

An AFS Publication • Volume 17 Number 9 • September 2011

## The September AFS Meeting

The September 11 AFS meeting will feature a talk by **Kenneth Penegar** on his book *The Political Trial of Benjamin Franklin: A Prelude to the American Revolution*. See <http://www.algora.com/347/book/details.html>.

Penegar is a nationally known law professor, dean and author. He served on the faculties of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; the University of Tennessee (Dean for 15 years); and Southern Methodist University.

He researched *The Political Trial of Benjamin Franklin* during a yearlong residence in Britain using collections of documents and papers in libraries and archives including the British Library in London.

The meeting will be at 1:00 at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane, in Smyrna, GA. Arrive early if you like for snacks and conversation with other Freethinkers.

## An AFS Yard Sale

The Atlanta Freethought Society will have a **Yard Sale** on Saturday, September 17, at the AF Hall Pavilion. It will start at 9:00 AM and will be over by about 1:00 PM.

We are looking for lots of things to sell, so please bring all your unneeded items. We can store them in the building if you bring them to the September 11 AFS meeting.

Please contact Steve ([steveyoth@aol.com](mailto:steveyoth@aol.com)) if you can attend and help out at the yard sale. Thanks!

## The September AFS Social

The next **AFS Social** will be a lunch at 1:00 PM at AF Hall on Saturday, September 17, right after the Yard Sale. AFS will order food from a local restaurant. The cost is \$10 per person. Come hungry and enjoy the food and fellowship with other freethinkers!

## Other Meetings of Interest

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet on Sunday, Sept. 18, at 1:00 at AF Hall. See <http://www.georgiahumanists.org/>.

The **Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta** will meet on Sunday, Sept. 18, 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 **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 7:30 PM at McAlister's Deli on Holcomb Bridge Road in Roswell. For more info: [donnaigore@yahoo.com](mailto:donnaigore@yahoo.com)

The Georgia Chapter of **Americans United for Separation of Church & State** will participate in the East Cobb Parade (1210 Johnson Ferry Rd, in Marietta) on Saturday, Sept. 10 at 10:00 AM. Contact Jeff ([selmanjm1@aol.com](mailto:selmanjm1@aol.com)) for details.

**GUST** (**G**winnett: **U**nderstanding **S**ecular **T**ruths) will meet on Monday, Sept. 12, at 7:00 PM at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville, GA. <http://gust.domek.org/>

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** will meet on Sat., Sept. 24, at 7:00 PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. Kristie Macrakis, a professor at Georgia Institute of Technology, will speak on "Invisible Ink Revealed: the Secret History." <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>

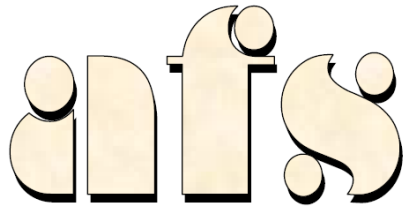
There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, Sept. 11, at 6:00 PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

Another **meetup** for Atlanta atheists is scheduled for Sunday, Sept. 25, 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 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.

Sept 11: Kenneth Penegar, on his book *The Political Trial of Benjamin Franklin*.  
(See <http://www.algora.com/347/book/details.html> )

Oct 9: TBD

Nov 13: Maaneli Derakhshani, a physics Ph.D. student at Clemson University, will speak on The Philosophy of Physics.

Dec 11: Bill Glasser will speak on his new book *Autobiography of Satan*.

## 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

### Editor

Steve Yothment

### How to Contact the Editor

Send correspondence to AFS at:  
4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Smyrna, GA 30080-7224  
or phone Steve at 678-364-8703  
or send e-mail to [SteveYoth@aol.com](mailto:SteveYoth@aol.com).

## Atlanta Freethought Society

### President

Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

### VP for Internal Communication

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

### VP for External Communication

Michael Buckner – 404-633-2486

### Secretary

Dennis Martin – 404-817-0413

### Treasurer

Diane Buckner – 770-432-3049

### Board of Directors

Mark Banks – 770-354-1546

Steven Fant – 678-793-5662

Tony King – 706-886-9224

Laura Ross – 404-634-1005

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

## Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 17, Number 9, September 2011

Copyright © 2011 by the

Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc.

Signed articles are all copyright ©  
2011 by their respective authors.

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.

Subscriptions only are \$10 for 12 issues.

Please make checks and money orders payable to Atlanta Freethought Society.

### Visit our website at

<http://www.AtlantaFreethought.org/>.

See AFS events and member views at:  
[facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought](https://www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought).

### Send E-mail to

[afs@atlantafreethought.org](mailto:afs@atlantafreethought.org).

**AFS Webmasters:** Freya Harris  
and Michael Buckner

---

# FFRF Ends Football Prayers in Mississippi, Kentucky Schools

From an August 23 Press Release by the Freedom From Religion Foundation

**R**ecent letters of complaint by the Freedom From Religion Foundation have ended longstanding violations in DeSoto County, Miss., and Bell County, Ky., involving illegal prayer before school football games.

The School Board in DeSoto County, Hernando, Miss., reaffirmed on August 22 a policy it adopted eight years ago barring school prayers. The action came after FFRF's August 10 letter of complaint.<sup>1</sup>

"Our current policy is not to have prayers in football games and we're going to abide by that which we believe the law to be," said Keith Treadway, board attorney. "We will not have prayer over the PA. The principals have all expressed they are aware of the law and intend to abide by it," Treadway told the DeSoto Times Tribune.

"And we'll say 'amen' to that," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt's letter noted that students are encouraged to pray at mealtime and at graduation ceremonies, which the official policy also forbids.

Bell County School Superintendent George Thompson, Pineville, Ky., halted the practice of inviting a local pastor to "offer prayer" over loudspeakers, following FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert's August 9 letter of complaint.<sup>2</sup>

Thompson was quoted<sup>3</sup> as publicly saying, "We've always taken a position that we're going to do it until someone makes us stop. And apparently, it appears that time has come for us."

"While we're pleased at the quick action to halt this unconstitutional practice, what is so very troubling about this case is that the superintendent admitted freely to media that he knew the practice was a violation," Gaylor said.

"How many students of diverse viewpoints have been knowingly subjected to illegal Christian prayer because the superintendent hadn't yet 'gotten caught'?" Gaylor asked. "This is sending a message of contempt for our constitutional principle of separation between religion and government. It is miseducating students, and it is appalling."

These legal victories follow a letter from the public school district in Nantahala, S.C., which agreed<sup>4</sup> to better monitor invited speakers at graduation ceremonies following an FFRF complaint. Rev. Daniel "Cowboy" Stewart prayed, told the students how much they needed God and Jesus, called the devil a "roaring lion" and tied up a volunteer student with ropes and stuck a sack over his head, saying, "This is a metaphor for how the devil is out to destroy you and tie you up."

FFRF's legal team has been very busy in August already correcting state-church violations in public schools opening for fall semester throughout the nation. Among a recent complaint is one to officials in Opelousas, La., over a principal's involvement in a Roman Catholic "blessing" of a public school.

The principal, Rodney Johnson, permitted Rev. Jason Mangalath, a

priest from Holy Ghost Catholic church, on behalf of the Blood Covenant Women of God Club, to enter the school and "bless every inch" of it, reciting the Lord's prayer, giving a liturgy, and sprinkling holy water in offices, classrooms, halls and meeting rooms as his followers chanted the "Hail Mary." The superintendent told media he had refused the priest's request, and hadn't known the principal had agreed.

Among other early school-year violations reported and acted on by FFRF were teacher orientations in churches and the imposition of Christian prayer on public school employees. In Pascagoula, Miss., the principal in late July called a public prayer session at his school to invite faculty, students, parents and pastors to pray for success during the school year. Heads bowed, eyes closed, a large circle of people prayed and praised, according to local coverage. A youth pastor led the rally. A faculty member intoned, "You can take prayer out of our schools but not out of our hearts." FFRF is awaiting responses to these complaints.

"We can indeed take prayer out of public schools," commented Dan Barker, FFRF co-president. "Religion in our schools is divisive, usurps parental authority and interferes in students' rights of conscience. It is also unlawful according to decades of consistent Supreme Court rulings.

"We salute our legal staff for winning quick legal victories in Mississippi and Kentucky to stop any further prayer at school football games and commencements."

<sup>1</sup>See the FFRF Desoto County letter at [http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/desoto\\_letter.pdf](http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/desoto_letter.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>See the FFRF Bell County letter at [http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/bellcounty\\_letter.pdf](http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/bellcounty_letter.pdf).

<sup>3</sup>See the quote at [http://www.wkvt.com/wymtnews/headlines/Complaint\\_forces\\_school\\_district\\_to\\_pull\\_pre-game\\_prayer\\_128212533.html](http://www.wkvt.com/wymtnews/headlines/Complaint_forces_school_district_to_pull_pre-game_prayer_128212533.html).

<sup>4</sup>The Macon County issue: <http://ffrf.org/legal/challenges/ffrf-makes-macon-county-schools-think-twice-about-commencement-speakers/>

---

Goodbye Religion? How Godlessness Is Increasing With Each New Generation:

[http://www.alternet.org/belief/151947/goodbye\\_religion\\_how\\_godlessness\\_is\\_increasing\\_with\\_each\\_new\\_generation/](http://www.alternet.org/belief/151947/goodbye_religion_how_godlessness_is_increasing_with_each_new_generation/)

Magician Penn Jillette Says "God, No!" To Religion:

<http://www.npr.org/2011/08/16/139676171/magician-penn-jillette-says-god-no-to-god>

The Evangelicals Engaged in Spiritual Warfare:

<http://www.npr.org/2011/08/24/139781021/the-evangelicals-engaged-in-spiritual-warfare>

Evolution Threatens Christianity:

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-faith/post/evolution-threatens-christianity/2011/08/24/gIQAuLVpbJ\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-faith/post/evolution-threatens-christianity/2011/08/24/gIQAuLVpbJ_blog.html)



---

---

# FFRF Asks Superintendent to Retract Comments

## FFRF Says Comments are “Defamatory and Untrue”

**T**he Freedom From Religion Foundation sent a second letter<sup>1</sup> to the Superintendent of Desoto County (Miss.) Schools on August 26 asking him to retract statements he made about them in a public memo to his employees. Below is the complete letter. It has some great points about the reasons for and misunderstandings of church/state litigation.

Dear Supt. Kuykendall:

It has come to our attention that you have issued widely-disseminated public comments of an untrue and libelous nature about the Freedom From Religion Foundation and our complaint over your District’s long-standing violation of imposing, hosting and broadcasting prayer at school functions.

The DeSoto Times Tribune reported on Aug. 24 that you issued a statement, quoted below:

“In my opinion, most people do not realize that this organization out of Wisconsin doesn’t really care if we have prayer in our schools. They see an opportunity to try and accuse us of breaking the law and therefore give them a chance to sue our district and win a law suit and take millions of our funds. This is money that is needed to pay teachers and educate our students.”

To say that FFRF doesn’t care about school prayer violations, that we opportunistically are looking to “take millions of your funds” needed to pay teachers and educate students is a patently untrue and disparaging statement, whose intent is to harm FFRF’s reputation as a public service organization. We ask for your immediate apology and retraction, and that you cease making such reckless, defamatory and untrue allegations against our organization.

FFRF is a 501(c)(3) educational charity whose vital and laudatory purposes include working to preserve and protect the Constitutional principle of separation between state and church. Since being founded nationally in 1978, we have diligently championed the rights of literally thousands of students and their parents. These cases involve public school districts that have unlawfully taken advantage of their civil authority to impose reli-

gion—whether prayer, religious instruction, bible creationism or other endorsements or promotions—upon a captive audience of impressionable and vulnerable students.

FFRF is directly contacted by our complainants, students, parents and residents, who are often afraid, understandably, of reprisal and need help to uphold their rights. FFRF does not go roaming the country looking for such violations. It was only in late 2008 that FFRF in fact was able to afford to hire its first staff attorney. It is our public and oft-stated goal to end all such violations without having to go to court, through education and persuasion. There is no need to reinvent the legal wheel over such clear-cut violations. It is our absolute mantra to public officials not to recklessly and irresponsibly endanger precious public resources by resisting such law, by continuing to misuse civil authority to illegally promote and endorse religion in the public schools.

Our small legal team is deluged with requests for help from students and parents around the country. As of this morning, for example, our small organization has already received more than 50 new complaints just this week about unlawful religion in public schools! That is quite an indictment of the poor job many superintendents and principals around the country are doing to uphold the law and the rights of personal conscience of students.

FFRF does not and has never made money, much less “millions,” in bringing litigation to halt illegal actions by irresponsible public officials who knowingly violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. When FFRF wins a decision in our favor, FFRF may be eligible for reimbursement for attorney fees expended in defending the Constitution, as is

proper. FFRF never receives full reimbursement for all of its time, fees and other expenses related to litigation. We do not sue to make money, we sue to uphold the Constitution. We do not take lawsuits to raise money (unlike many religious-right law firms). We raise money in order to bring lawsuits, as a last resort, if we cannot otherwise end constitutional violations. We do not sue for damages (with the exception of one of our litigants, a dad, who once asked for and received symbolic damages of \$1 and deserved far more). We do not sue to “take millions” of your funds or any other school funds.

But we consider the funds we must expend on the salaries of our non-litigation attorneys, other staff, and to hire litigation attorneys, when needed, as a necessary and essential investment in upholding the Constitution. We work to preserve Thomas Jefferson’s precious constitutional “wall of separation between church and state.” It is an investment in freedom, in defending the rights of citizens—including most especially students—to be free from government-imposed religion, as our U.S. founders intended.

In addition to requesting your immediate apology and retraction of your disparaging and untrue comments about FFRF, we would expect you to rise to the occasion by taking a leadership role in re-educating your community about the meaning and purpose of the Establishment Clause.

The hysteria greeting a decision by the school board to abide by settled law is a symptom of the fact that students, parents and your community have been victims of miseducation. At fault is your District, for its longstanding practice of scheduling and hosting prayers over the loudspeaker at school sporting events, permitting teachers

<sup>1</sup>See the letter and more at <http://ffrf.org/news/releases/ffrf-asks-desoto-supt-to-retract-defamatory-comment-to-educate-not-proselytize/>.

---

to encourage students to pray at meals, and scheduling prayers, mostly Christian-based, at high school graduation ceremonies. The District through its example and its unlawful conduct have created a climate of ignorance and contempt for a precious constitutional principle that protects all citizens. The District's actions, further, have fostered a climate of bigotry, which sends a message to "non-adherents that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community." Justice O'Connor, *Allegheny v. ACLU*, 492 U.S. at 627.

You should not only be apologizing to our organization for your unwarranted smear, you should be apologizing to past graduates, parents and your community for your clear failure to do your job. The purpose of a public school is to educate, not to proselytize. This should be a "teachable moment," not an occasion to continue to demonstrate contempt for the law and student rights. Your district should be explaining to students and parents what the law says, and why that law was adopted—to protect their rights of conscience, to ensure that the rights of parents to instruct their children in religion and religious ritual are not usurped, and to avoid the kind of spectacle it appears your community will put on tonight—a defiant spectacle that will intimidate, embarrass and ostracize non-Christians, Jews, other religious minorities, atheists and people who simply respect the need to keep our public schools free of divisive religion.

The courts have continually reaffirmed that the rights of minorities are protected by the Constitution. As the Supreme Court has said, "fundamental rights may not be submitted to vote; they depend on the outcome of no elections." *Santa Fe Indep. School*

*v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 304-305 (2000) (quoting *West Virginia Bd. of Ed. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624, 638 (1943). "The very purpose of a Bill of Rights was to withdraw certain subjects from the vicissitudes of political controversy, to place them beyond the reach of majorities and officials and to establish them as legal principles to be applied by the courts." *Barnette*, 319 U.S. at 638. It makes no difference how many parents in the county want prayers at school events. They are free to pray privately or stop at the church of their choice to and from school events. Schools may not lawfully sponsor prayer. The *Barnette* ruling assured students and officials that their beliefs would be protected:

"If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein." *Barnette*, 319 U.S. at 642.

May we suggest that you hold an educational assembly on this matter? We would be pleased to provide one of our staff to lead such an assembly. We would also suggest that the District arrange to have the student body watch the Peabody Award-winning documentary, "The Lord Was Not on Trial Here Today," which was broadcast this year on many PBS stations. This film is about the first landmark Supreme Court decision against religious instruction in the public schools, *McCullum v. Board of Education* (1948), upon which all other Supreme Court decisions about devotional religion in the schools is based. The film features key players on both sides and shows the toll on school children when school districts improperly take sides on religion—a matter which should be left to parents, not schools.

It is important to realize that litigation against prayer and bible-reading

in the public schools was typically brought by religious parents, often Roman Catholics, which was even the case in the Supreme Court's most recent decision against devotions in schools, *Santa Fe v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290 308 (2000) challenging sports prayer. If you are going to have devotions, whose devotions? Which denomination, which church, which beliefs will be "blessed" by a school district? Inevitably, such actions exclude many students. In one such early case brought by Roman Catholic parents, *Weiss v. District Board*, a Supreme Court of Wisconsin justice wisely noted what the brouhaha in your District exemplifies:

"There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state, as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed. Let it once enter our common schools, they would be destroyed."

Those who are not impressed by constitutional dictates should perhaps open their bibles and peruse the Sermon on the Mount, which attributes to their god, Jesus, these cautionary words (Matthew 6:5-6):

"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 may 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."

May we hear from you immediately?

Very truly,  
Annie Laurie Gaylor  
Co-President

Freedom From Religion Foundation

For more on this story, see <http://www.desototimes.com/articles/2011/08/30/news/doc4e5c1ccc5e555617945922.txt>.

For further developments: <http://www.wmctv.com/story/15362667/group-protests-distribution-of-gideon-bibles-at-desoto-schools>

---

Pat Robertson: Crack in Washington Monument is a Sign from God:

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/26/pat-robertson-washington-monument-crack-god\\_n\\_938075.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/08/26/pat-robertson-washington-monument-crack-god_n_938075.html)

Believers Think We Need Religion to Behave Like Good, Moral People - Here's Why They're Wrong:

[http://www.alternet.org/story/152137/believers\\_think\\_we\\_need\\_religion\\_to\\_behave\\_like\\_good%2C\\_moral\\_people\\_--\\_here%27s\\_why\\_they%27re\\_wrong](http://www.alternet.org/story/152137/believers_think_we_need_religion_to_behave_like_good%2C_moral_people_--_here%27s_why_they%27re_wrong)

---

---

# Believers: Held Captive by Fear, Guilt and Biblical Indoctrination

By Al Stefanelli, from his August 31 blog at <http://www.atheists.org/>

Ask any Christian what role the bible plays in their faith and most of them will tell you that it is the foundation of their belief. They will tell you that the bible is the *Word of God*, and that if it weren't so, then their faith it is not worth having. They view their bibles as the *solid foundation* on which they derive their total authority, and hold it to be immovable, immutable and inerrant. They say this in spite of the well-reported and researched errors, inconsistencies, forgeries and interpolations that have been found therein. How do they reconcile these obvious blunders in logic, reason, science and reality? They say you have to have faith...

However, any religion that requires the acceptance of its ideas on faith alone is admitting that its doctrines cannot stand on their own merits, nor withstand any critical examination. The belief in a god is irrational, as are those who believe. Once the leap of faith is made, it only takes short steps to abandon the standards of rationality and lose the ability to distinguish truth from falsehoods. In the examination of Christian doctrine, it doesn't take very long before the skeptic realizes it is not the bastion of wonderful moral standards that it is purported to be.

The belief that there was a divine man who died for the sins of the world is a grievous and immoral notion. It's nothing more than human sacrifice, and the tradition of taking communion is basically a blood ritual. This is especially true of Catholics, who believe in transubstantiation, which holds that after the Priest blesses the bread and wine, they are magically transformed into the actual flesh and blood of Jesus. But I digress...

## *Evangelism*

When you examine the basic doctrines of evangelism, it is very apparent that fear and guilt are the primary targets in potential converts, and you need both of these emotions present for a good, solid conversion. Those who are converted by fear alone

might walk away from their faith, as a fearful person may eventually rebel. But when you add guilt into the mix, it becomes more likely that the convert will become a lifelong adherent. A person with deep feelings of guilt is not likely to rebel. The alleged *sacrifice* of Christ has served the church very well over the millennium, as has its primitive system of reward and punishment. Be good, don't ask questions and stay in line and you will be rewarded. Be skeptical, ask questions and use your mind in a reasonable and rational manner and you are consigned to eternal punishment in the most horrible place, forever. This is fundamental to Christianity and has been present throughout the history of the church. The whole idea of heaven and hell is a perfect illustration of just how the core of Christianity is against reason, rationality and even life itself. Religion, by virtue of its requirements, elevates ignorance and non-productivity and suppresses creative and innovative thought.

One competent scientist is worth more than a thousand evangelists.

## *A Death Cult*

Christianity not only brings on feelings of guilt, but its promotion of death over life is morbid. The fact that a cross, a symbol of suffering, torture and death, is the icon of the faith illustrates that Christianity is a philosophy of death and has turned real human values into non-values. Suffering has become noble and death has become eternal life. The bloody image of a man on a cross desensitizes the faithful and causes them to believe that suffering and misery are expected and death is the only escape. Christianity teaches that all people are evil and destined to a life of pain and suffering and hope only lies in the salvation of Christ and his assurance of a heavenly reward after we die. Those who do not believe will be eternally punished.

## *This I do in the name of God...*

While most believers will agree that they hold to the tenet of *judge not lest ye be judged*, this does not mean that

God is precluded from judging anyone's actions to be immoral. Given the plethora of people who believe they are speaking in and acting on the behalf of God, you can see where this is one of the most damaging doctrines of the faith. It assures that the weak will be perpetually doomed to suffering under the strong. The weak blindly follow along because they have been convinced that their religious leaders, be it a Priest, Pastor or "Reverend," are acting in their best interests, they will eventually inherit a new earth and in the next life everything will be sorted out.

This only proves that both naiveté and willful ignorance is at the core of a faith that is contrary to the development of knowledge through reason and rationality. It clearly teaches people not to trust in reason, and to only accept—without question—the dogmas of the church. Faith is elevated above reason in every church to one degree or another and there have been countless lives wasted in the world's convents and monasteries. These lives are spent in poverty, reading the bible and praying for whatever. However, this subservience to Christ only amounts to a staggeringly immense loss of much human potential. The fact that billions of people are convinced that all the answers they need lie in the bible and thus they have no incentive at all to look beyond it. The religious withdraw from the world while the reasoned seek to improve it.

## *The Ultimate Evil*

Almost everyone will tell you that there is evil in the world, but the concept of evil has completely different meanings between Atheists and Christians. For the Atheist, evil can best be described as the abandonment of our minds to the minds of others. We reason that the ability and willingness to stand alone, even when it is unpopular, and tell the majority that they are wrong is the pinnacle of virtue. From a Christian point of view, evil is not following the orders given by the church and its representatives,



---

---

thinking independently and questioning doctrine.

*Paging Dr. Pascal...*

Pascal's Wager basically states that it is a safe bet to believe in God, because if you are wrong you have lost nothing and if you are right, you've gained everything. I will not bore you with yet another discourse on why Pascal's Wager is a failing proposition, but suffice to say, this is what a believers argument will almost always eventually come down to. They are so held captive by fear, guilt and biblical indoctrination that even when presented with irrefutable arguments, they cannot help but to eventually don their blinders and tell us that we need to "just believe."

The problem with this request is that Atheists are not given to superstitions, and we will not be held captive in mindless incredulity and servitude to a non-existent being who is obvi-

ously not looking out for our best interests. Our freedom is based on reality because we understand truth to be the degree in which a statement corresponds with reality. We further reason that reality is limited to what is perceived through rational thought and empirical evidence. While fear, guilt and indoctrination remain the ally of the church, reason remains our most powerful ally.

To "just believe" chokes progress. Imagine a world without the contributions of Edison, Einstein, Darwin, Stanton, Curie, Freud, Russell, Dawkins and all the other brilliant scientific and philosophical minds? Blind faith removes pluralism from the mindset and does not allow for freedom against the restraints of religious orthodoxy.

Freedom is a wonderful thing, but it does not exist in the captive life of the believer. There is nothing attract-

ive to the reasonable person in the blind adherence to ancient superstitions or self-effacing prostration before divine tyrants known only through the revelation of primitive cultures that had no concept of anything even remotely consistent with modern science.

*Our Answer Is No*

When the evangelist spouts off about hell and damnation, we say, "No!" When the creationists speaks on their mythology and says it's on par with evolution, we say, "No!" When the preacher cries that they are speaking and acting on God's behalf, we say, "No!" When the blind admonish us to "just believe," we say, "No!"

We choose freedom over slavery, because only the freethinker is truly free.

Al Stefanelli, Georgia State Director  
American Atheists, Inc.

From <http://atheists.org/blog/2011/08/31/believers-held-captive-by-fear-guilt-and-biblical-indoctrination>

---

## Americans United Urges Supreme Court to Deny Religious Groups an Overly Broad Right to Discriminate

### AU Calls For a Narrow Interpretation of the "Ministerial Exemption"

Americans United for Separation of Church and State asked the Supreme Court on August 9 not to grant religious groups a sweeping right to ignore anti-discrimination laws.

AU filed a friend-of-the-court brief<sup>1</sup> in a case pending before the justices called *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*. The case deals with a Michigan religious school that fired a teacher because of a medical condition.

The brief notes that religious organizations have long had the right to limit employment to people who share their theology when those employees have clear religious duties—a concept known as the "ministerial exemption."

Some courts, AU says, have taken this concept too far.

The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive

director of Americans United, said the Supreme Court should use the case to make it clear that the ministerial exemption is not an unrestricted license to discriminate.

"Discrimination on the basis of race, sex, disability and other features is offensive to American values," Lynn said. "Religious groups should have the leeway to choose key staff according to religious criteria, but employees should be protected from discrimination that isn't motivated by the groups' religious beliefs."

The AU brief urges the Supreme Court not to deny judicial access to Americans who face discrimination by religious groups.

"[C]ourts have extended the exception far beyond what is required by the [Constitution]," reads the brief. "They have converted the ministerial exception into a shield for all forms of discrimination and retaliation, regard-

less of motivation. And they have prevented judicial redress of even the most flagrant racial or sexual harassment, even when motivated by naked animus unrelated to any religious belief."

The brief asserts that a Roman Catholic Church or Orthodox Jewish congregation that does not ordain women should not be required to hire them as clergy. But, it goes on to say, "the First Amendment does not permit an otherwise egalitarian church to fire a female Sunday-school teacher (or its leaders to sexually harass her) when the firing resulted from an individual pastor's purely personal belief that women should not work outside the home."

Other organizations signing the brief are the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation, the ACLU of Michigan, the National Council of Jewish Women, the Sikh Council on

<sup>1</sup>See the court filing at <http://www.au.org/media/press-releases/archives/2011/08/2011-08-09-hosanna-tabor.pdf>

---

Religion and Education and the Unitarian Universalist Association.

The brief was drafted by Americans United Litigation Counsel Gregory M. Lipper and Madison Fellow Robert

Shapiro in consultation with AU Legal Director Ayesha Khan.

Americans United is a religious liberty watchdog group based in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1947, the or

ganization educates Americans about the importance of church-state separation in safeguarding religious freedom.

[From an August 9 AU press release.]

---

## Stefanelli Targets Peachtree City Council Prayers

**Invocations have mainly a Christian view; AI tells Peachtree City he's prepared to sue**

**T**he Georgia State Director of American Atheists has made an unusual prayer request to Peachtree City, GA officials; Let others pray, too, or settle the matter in court.

Al Stefanelli, a former minister turned atheist activist, wants city officials, who start each council meeting with a prayer, to use invocations of other groups as a way to acknowledge the diverse beliefs of city residents, including atheists. If that's not possible, he said the city should end the pre-meeting prayer.

Stefanelli moved to Peachtree City last fall and later became director of the Georgia chapter of American Atheists, Inc. He said he has been approached by people of different faiths who are concerned about the council's pre-meeting prayer.

"I'm looking to make sure the City Council's invocation is representative of the people who live in Peachtree City," said Stefanelli.

But Mayor Don Haddix says he will continue to start the meetings with his prayer. "The prayer is generic and can apply to a multitude of religions," he said. "I'm going to keep doing the

prayer before the meeting because if I went to no prayer, he wins."

Stefanelli said Haddix's stance leaves his group with no choice but to go to court.

"He's made it very clear he has no intention of changing this, so it looks like it's going to end up in litigation," Stefanelli said. "It could be solved so easily."

One city official has taken a more compromising view.

"If I were mayor, I'd start our meetings with the Pledge of Allegiance and then we'd move into city business," Councilmember Kim Learnard said. "Being a city leader does not make me a religious leader."

In an August 8 letter to Haddix and the City Council, Stefanelli asked that a "rotation of representatives of the different religions in Peachtree City, as well as representatives of the non-believing community, be permitted to offer the invocation at the start of the City Council meetings."

Stefanelli called the wording of the current prayer "significantly patronizing of the Judeo-Christian religion by

virtue of the references to 'Heavenly Father' and 'In His wonderful name'"

The letter noted that while Peachtree City residents are overwhelmingly Christian, there is a significant portion who identify with Islam, Hindi, Buddhism and Neo-Paganism. Stefanelli said there are also residents who ascribe to no religion, naming atheism, agnosticism, humanism and secularism.

Haddix said Stefanelli's claims of religious paternalism are not true.

"I'm not specifying a male or female deity or a deity of either gender," Haddix said. "In the ancient religions, the position of authority was always referred to in the masculine but that did not mean the person in authority was a male."

Haddix said the issue has drawn attention everywhere he goes, largely in his favor.

"I'm stunned this has gotten such legs," he said. "The support for me to keep doing what I'm doing is amazing."

[Condensed from an article by Tammy Joyner in the Sept. 2 issue of the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.]

See these links for details on this story:

Public Prayers Attacked: <http://www.11alive.com/news/article/202575/40/Public-prayers-attacked-in-Peachtree-City>

Prayer Before Meetings Sparks Controversy: <http://www.wsbtv.com/news/28980440/detail.html>

---

### In the News:

Atheists Sue to Get Cross Removed from Ground Zero (with video of Ed Buckner's comments):

<http://www.wsbtv.com/news/29054615/detail.html>

Commissioners adhere to court ruling against pre-meeting invocation:

<http://www.jdnews.com/news/county-94072-invocation-commissioners.html>

Kentucky Gives Creationist Theme Park 75% Tax Discount:

<http://www.care2.com/causes/kentucky-gives-creationist-theme-park-75-percent-tax-discount.html>

Girl Spanked to Death in the Name of God:

<http://www.cnn.com/video/?/video/bestoftv/2011/08/15/exp.ac.tuchman.punishment.cnn>

South Carolina Preacher Accused of Raping Women Behind Church:

<http://www.ajc.com/news/nation-world/sc-preacher-accused-of-1127876.html#.T1luJ2Nk28g.email>

Attention Governor Perry: Evolution is a Fact:

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-faith/post/attention-governor-perry-evolution-is-a-fact/2011/08/23/gIQAuIFUYJ\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/on-faith/post/attention-governor-perry-evolution-is-a-fact/2011/08/23/gIQAuIFUYJ_blog.html)

---



# Become a Member!



(Or renew your membership with this form or online at [www.AtlantaFreethought.org](http://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!

Annual dues are:

Membership	Dues	# of mems	Total	
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual	\$25	_____	\$_____	Name _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Household (2 members)	\$35	_____	\$_____	Address _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional household mems	\$5	_____	\$_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Low Income/ Student/under 21	\$10	_____	\$_____	Phone H: _____ W: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Paper version of newsletter	\$15	_____	\$_____	Email addr: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Subscription only	\$10	_____	\$_____	Please list names of additional household members: _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member	\$100	_____	\$_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Household	\$125	_____	\$_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Life Member	\$1000	_____	\$_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for Canada/Mexico	\$5	_____	\$_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Postage for other foreign addresses	\$10	_____	\$_____	
<input type="checkbox"/> Extra donation (thank you!)		_____	\$_____	
<b>TOTAL:</b>			\$_____	

Please send this form with payment to:

Atlanta Freethought Society  
4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Smyrna, GA 30080-7224

## Atlanta Freethought Society

4775 N. Church Lane SE Smyrna, GA 30080-7224

[www.atlantafreethought.org](http://www.atlantafreethought.org) [afs@atlantafreethought.org](mailto:afs@atlantafreethought.org)

“Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect.” —James Madison, 1774

### *Why I Am Not A Christian* — \$8

Lucid, comprehensive, engaging answer to Christian apologists by **Keith Parsons**. Respectful but devastating to all Christian claims. A wonderful follow-up to Bertrand Russell's great essay with the same title.

### *An Uppity Old Atheist Woman's Dictionary* — \$8

By the late, great **Carol Faulkenberry** (illustrated by Amanda Faulkenberry); like Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary* —but better: more biting, funnier. Guaranteed to make you laugh out loud and to challenge at least one idea you hold.

### *Quotations That Support the Separation of State and Church (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)* — \$11

Compiled by **Edward M. Buckner** and **Michael E. Buckner**; ammunition against Christian-nation mythologists. Quotes from America's revolutionaries, constitution framers, Presidents, court decisions. Sources carefully documented; extensive index. Comb-bound—lies flat for easy copying.

*Please add:*

**\$4 TOTAL S&H Charge for up to 2 books.**

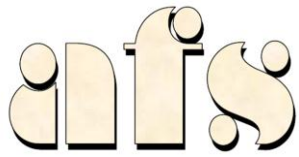
**\$1.50 EACH S&H Charge for 3 to 9 books.**

**No S&H Charge for 10 Books or more.**

*(All Merchandise will be shipped USPS Priority Mail)*

*Send check or money order to:*

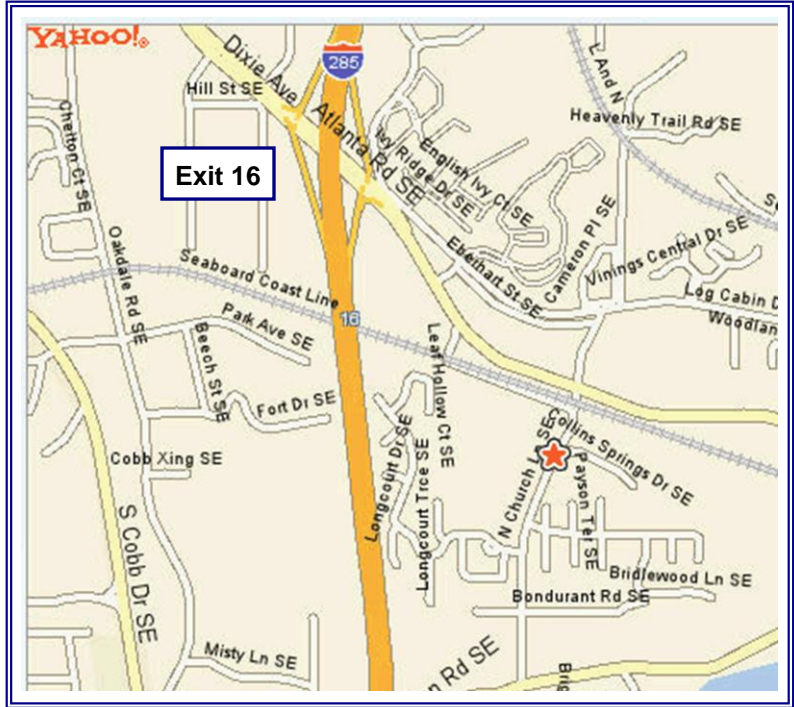
**ATLANTA FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY**  
4775 N. Church Lane SE Smyrna, GA 30080-7224



Atlanta  
Freethought  
Society

**The September 11 Meeting:  
1:00 at AF Hall,  
4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Smyrna, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:  
Kenneth Penegar**



*Atlanta Freethought News* is produced by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit, member-run, educational organization created to advance freethought and protect freethinkers. Any freethought, atheist, secular humanist, agnostic, or rationalist group is granted permission to reproduce anything from our newsletter not expressly labeled otherwise (acknowledgement of AFS and author appreciated). Articles published represent the official opinion of AFS only when that is clearly stated; all other opinion is that of the individual author.



If your label indicates "8 2011" or earlier, please renew. Thanks.

Atlanta Freethought News  
Atlanta Freethought Society  
4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Smyrna, GA 30080-7224