

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself.

An AFS Publication • Volume 17 Number 11 • November 2011

Two AFS Meetings in November!

This November, AFS will have two meetings with speakers. The meetings are both at 1:00PM on Sundays, Nov. 6 and Nov. 13, at Atlanta Freethought Hall.

The Nov. 6 meeting will feature **Dr. William Glasser**, who will speak on his new book, *The Autobiography of Satan: Authorized Edition*. Dr. Glasser is a literary critic, author, and President Emeritus of Southern Vermont College. He received his PhD in English, with a minor in Comparative Religions, from the University of Iowa. He has written two books on literary criticism: *Reclaiming Literature* and *The Art of Literary Thieving*.

The Nov. 13 meeting will feature **Dr. Mark Braverman**, a clinical and organizational psychologist and author of *Fatal Embrace: Christians, Jews, and the Search for Peace in the Holy Land*. He will present "an analysis of the current political situation, including the impact of Israel's settlement policy, the role of U.S. policy, and the need for a grassroots constituency for change." See more on page 3.

Atlanta Freethought Hall is located at 4775 N. Church Lane, Smyrna, GA. Visitors are welcome at AFS meetings.

The AFS Social

This month's AFS Social will be on Saturday, Nov. 19, at 1:00 at Lin Buffet (Chinese food), 3201 S. Cobb Dr., Smyrna.

Ed Buckner Debates

Ed Buckner will debate **Joe Scrivner** on the topic "Religion: Do the Benefits to Society Outweigh the Costs?" on December 1 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.

Autobiography of Satan?

Here is a description of Dr. Glasser's book, *The Autobiography of Satan: Authorized Edition*, from Amazon.com:

From the moment of his first emergence as a single spark in the dimness of prehistory, to the more enlightening force into which he has evolved across the full span of human existence, Satan has been urging human beings to open their eyes to the world around them, and to continue seeking, with unfettered minds, for ultimate answers yet to be found. To do so, he has had to struggle against the persistent attempts to stifle that urge by the "spoon-feeders," as he calls them, individuals who have insisted, within every age, and often with a bloody fist, that they, and they alone, are the possessors and guardians of the ultimate beliefs that every human being should accept and live by, without question. Satan traces the history of their many attempts to stop human beings from thinking for themselves. Throughout his account, Satan also takes his readers on a search for the ultimate source of all evil in this world, a search that, once again, requires them to break away from the spoon-fed answers they have already swallowed.

Readers will obviously enter the book with the standard concept of Satan being a supernatural figure of evil. They will leave the book, however, with a better understanding of how individuals create such mind-twisting concepts to keep people away from the "forbidden" knowledge that lies beyond the borders of entrenched beliefs.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Nov 6: **AFS General Meeting**, AF Hall, 1:00 PM

Nov 13: **AFS Board Meeting**, AF Hall, 11:00 AM

Nov 13: **AFS General Meeting**, AF Hall, 1:00 PM

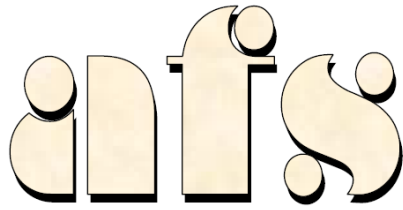
Nov 19: **AFS Social at Lin Buffet**, 1:00 PM

The Pay Down the Debt Drive!

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.

Nov 6: Dr. Bill Glasser will speak on his new book *Autobiography of Satan*.

Nov 13: Dr. Mark Braverman will speak on the current political situation in Israel.

Dec 11: Phil Sacco will speak on "The Study of Ancient People via Mythology."

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: Mark Zumbach, President of the Triangle Freethought Society, will speak.

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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FFRF Halts Social Security Pro-baptism Practice

Asking for “religious record of birth” after producing a birth certificate will no longer be done.

The Social Security Administration, following complaints by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, has halted a mandatory baptismal question previously asked of all applicants seeking benefits.

In 2008, FFRF received a complaint from one of its members who had applied for benefits at his local Social Security Administration office. Despite the fact that he had produced a birth certificate as proof of age, he was next asked the following question: “Was a religious record of your birth made before you were age 5?” When he and his wife objected to answering this invasive question, they were told the application process could not continue until they answered it.

Regulation¹ 404.716 of the Social Security Act asks for documents proving a person’s age based on date of birth. The Act specifies a “birth certificate or hospital birth record established before age 5” or “a religious record that shows the applicant’s date of birth and was established before age 5.”

Attorney James A. Friedman, on FFRF’s behalf, wrote the Administration that FFRF “understands that, under certain circumstances, an appli-

cant may need to rely on a religious record to prove their date of birth. It is not necessary, however, to ask that constitutionally suspect question of all applications.” FFRF sensibly asked the Administration to immediately exclude the baptism question for applicants who had already provided a birth certificate.

In a reply² in May 2008, the Administration insisted that the question, “Was a religious record of your birth made before you were age 5?” was a “mandatory field that our employees must complete to process the application. This question is no more invasive than asking for a birth certificate.”

In his follow-up letter³, Friedman pointed out, “First, it is simply not necessary to ask that question of an applicant who presents the preferred evidence of age. The question on the application concerning religious records appears to favor religious applicants over non-religious and applicants of certain religious faiths who create such records over others who do not. Finally, the application question unnecessarily invades the privacy interests of applicants, forcing them to

divulge information about their and their family’s personal religious beliefs or lack of beliefs.”

Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert renewed FFRF’s complaint⁴ this June. On Sept. 28, 2011, an official with the Social Security Administration responded⁵ in writing:

“In light of your concerns, we agree that if an applicant has furnished an acceptable public record of birth, it is not necessary to ask whether he or she also has a religious record of age established before age five. Therefore, we will change our policy instructions so interviewers do not ask for a religious record of age in these situations.”

“It shouldn’t have taken five years for the Social Security Administration to accede to FFRF’s simple request,” noted FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, “but we are pleased with this response. However, we would appreciate it if those who are applying for benefits monitor the situation. Please contact FFRF immediately if you produced a birth certificate but are still asked whether you have baptismal records.”

[From an Oct. 21 FFRF press release.]

¹See the Federal Regulation here: http://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/cfr20/404/404-0716.htm

²See the SSA reply here: [http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/Soc.%20Sec.%205-7-08.pdf](http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/Soc.%20Sec.%20205-7-08.pdf)

³See the follow-up letter at <http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/James%20Friedman%20Letter.pdf>

⁴See the renewed complaint here: [http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/Rebecca's%20Letter%20to%20SSA%20\(June\).pdf](http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/Rebecca's%20Letter%20to%20SSA%20(June).pdf)

⁵See the SSA response here: <http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/SSA%20Response.pdf>

More on Dr. Mark Braverman...

Braverman is involved in the Israel/Palestine conflict. He will speak at the November 13 AFS meeting.

Mark Braverman is a clinical and organizational psychologist, having devoted his professional career to working with groups and individuals undergoing traumatic stress.

Braverman’s roots are in Israel/Palestine—his grandfather, a fifth generation Palestinian Jew, was born in Jerusalem, emigrating to the U.S. as a young man. Growing up in the United States, Braverman was reared in the Jewish tradition, studying Bible, Hebrew literature, and Jewish history.

As a young man, Braverman lived and worked in Israel. Returning there in 2006, he was transformed by witnessing the occupation of Palestine and by encounters with peace activists and civil society leaders from the Muslim, Christian and Jewish communities. Since then, Braverman has devoted himself full-time to the Israel/Palestine conflict. He has spoken about Israel/Palestine before diverse groups, focusing on his journey as a Jewish American committed to peace

and dignity for all peoples of the land, and the impact of the conflict on both Israelis and Palestinians. Braverman is a cofounder of Friends of Tent of Nations North America, a nonprofit dedicated to supporting Palestinian land rights and peaceful coexistence in historic Palestine. He serves on the Board of Directors of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions-USA, the advisory committee of Friends of Sabeel North America, and the advisory council of the Washington Interfaith

Alliance for Middle East Peace. He is the author of *Fatal Embrace: Christians, Jews, and the Search for Peace in the Holy Land*, published by Synergy Books.

At the November 13 AFS meeting, Braverman will present an analysis of the current political situation, including the impact of Israel's settlement

policy, the role of U.S. policy, and the need for a grassroots constituency for change that will include churches, the activist community and the academy.

Announcing: “The Clergy Project”

Groups support pastors and priests leaving the pulpit (From an Oct. 14 FFRF.org News Release)

The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Science and Reason and the Freedom From Religion Foundation have announced the formation of a new group to help clergy who have “seen the light” to move beyond faith.

The Clergy Project—a private, invitation-only “safe house” community of current and former pastors, priests and rabbis who no longer hold the supernatural beliefs of their religious traditions—was started in March 2011 with 52 members. It has now grown to almost 100 “apostates.” Since the unveiling of the public informational website, clergyproject.org, on October 7, 2011, the group expects to attract hundreds more.

“We know there must be thousands of clergy out there who have secretly abandoned their faith but have nowhere to turn,” says Dan Barker, a former evangelical preacher who “lost faith in faith” after 19 years of preaching the gospel. “Now they do have a place to meet, a true sanctuary, a congregation of those of us who have replaced faith and dogma with reason and human well-being.”

“The Clergy Project: Moving Beyond Faith” was started by evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, philosopher Daniel Dennett, researcher Linda LaScola and Barker. Dennett and LaScola’s 2010 study, “Preachers Who Are Not Believers¹,” was the source of some of the initial members of the project. Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion* (whose foundation, richarddawkins.net, provided most of the initial support for the project), has been concerned for many years about helping ministers who no longer believe.

Barker, who is now co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF.org; they also provided

some of the initial support), has been collecting records on former preachers for decades, and was the source of dozens of clergy members. These include many still-active pastors who have contacted Barker after reading his book *Godless: How An Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists*, and his previous book, *Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist*.

The current administrators of The Clergy Project are “Adam” and “Bob,” both active pastors in Southern U.S. states who have lost their faith and are looking for an exit strategy. The logo for the group was designed by “John,” another active U.S. preacher. Another participant, “Lynn,” writes:

“The Clergy Project has been a life-saver for me. I am an active Methodist pastor who is also an atheist. I began the ministry full of great dreams and full faith in what I preached. However, over time I began to realize that the ‘truth’ I was preaching wasn’t so true. I resisted my doubts at first, but the nagging in my brain wouldn’t stop. So I embarked on a journey of researching and discovering that what I had believed for so long wasn’t true.

“I’m still in the pulpit, as I stated above. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, I made a commitment to my church and my denomination to serve this appointment. Second, the financial issue. If I walk away now, my family will suffer greatly. Trust me, this decision to stay for now hasn’t been an easy one. Every week I feel like a fraud. Every week I struggle with the fact that I’m lying when I stand before my congregation. I’m leading a double life.”

The toughest issue for these religious leaders is financial. Most of them would leave the pulpit immedi-

ately if they were able to change careers readily. Former clergy help by sharing their own success stories of finding gainful secular employment.

Welcoming new members to The Clergy Project, Dawkins writes:

“It is hard to think of any other profession which it is so near to impossible to leave. If a farmer tires of the outdoor life and wants to become an accountant or a teacher or a shopkeeper, he faces difficulties, to be sure. He must learn new skills, raise money, move to another area perhaps. But he doesn’t risk losing all his friends, being cast out by his family, being ostracized by his whole community.

“Clergy who lose their faith suffer double jeopardy. It’s as though they lose their job and their marriage and their children on the same day. It is an aspect of the vicious intolerance of religion that a mere change of mind can redound so cruelly on those honest enough to acknowledge it. The Clergy Project exists to provide a safe haven, a forum where clergy who have lost their faith can meet each other, exchange views, swap problems, counsel each other—for, whatever they may have lost, clergy know how to counsel and comfort. Here you will find confidentiality, sympathy and a friendly place where you can take your time before deciding how to extricate yourself and when you will feel yourself ready to stand up and face the cool, refreshing wind of truth.”

The Clergy Project membership currently includes many evangelical Christian pastors, some liberal clergy, Lutherans, Episcopalians, Roman Catholic priests, a deconverted rector in the Church of Ireland, missionaries to Africa, Southern Baptist pastors, a Mormon elder, a number of Pentecostal preachers, one rabbi, an Orthodox

¹See the original essay for “Preachers Who Are Not Believers” at <http://www.epjournal.net/filestore/EP08122150.pdf>.

monk who was thrown out of his monastery when he announced his lack of faith and a missionary in Southeast Asia. A former imam who lives in the U.K. may also join.

Jerry DeWitt, a former Pentecostal preacher in Louisiana who can now use his real name, was the group's first "graduate." He publicly announced his rejection of faith and left the ministry this summer. Some of the project members have been interviewed on Freethought Radio² and on other media. (Those interviews can be heard at clergyproject.org.)

All applicants to the project are

²Listen to Freethought Radio at <http://www.ffrf.org/radio>.

³See the Clergy Project Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/The-Clergy-Project/203725383030148>.

carefully screened in order to protect the confidentiality of existing members. "If the identities of the active ministers were revealed to their congregations and community, all *heaven* would break loose," quips Barker. No more than two "screeners" (who are current project members) know the actual identity and location of each member (held in strict confidence), and each active clergy must use a pseudonym within the group.

The Clergy Project exists in three parts: 1) a confidential forum by invitation only; 2) a public website (clergyproject.org) announcing and

describing the project, with instructions on how to apply for membership; and 3) a Facebook page³ where nonclergy members of the public can potentially interact with the project.

"This is an exciting project," says Barker. "How often are we given a chance to 'Save a Preacher!'"

Daniel Dennett, author of *Breaking the Spell*, and who is currently working on part two of the "Preachers Who Are Not Believers" study), adds: "I am very happy to witness the launching of this vessel, and to offer my wishes to all who are getting on board for a safe journey to better places."

Kentucky Court of Appeals Rules Against American Atheists

American Atheists says it will appeal the ruling

American Atheists sued the Commonwealth of Kentucky back in 2008 after a law was passed requiring the Kentucky Department of Homeland Security to state that they could not protect the state without the help of "Almighty God." In addition, that sentiment was required by law to be placed in brochures, discussed and promoted at meetings with the public, and a plaque built to denote the mandated belief in the power of "Almighty God" to protect the Commonwealth.

In 2009, Franklin Circuit Judge Thomas Wingate sided with American Atheists and struck down the law. However, the Commonwealth appealed that decision to the Kentucky Court of Appeals, who released their ruling on October 28th. The decision was 2-1 against American Atheists.

The appellate judges compared Kentucky's law to Ohio making "With God, All Things Are Possible" its official state motto, which the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati upheld as constitutional in 2001, they wrote.

"The Kentucky legislature has not attempted to compel belief or participation in any form of religious exer-

cise, nor does it seek to prefer one belief over another. A simple reference to a generic 'God' acknowledges religion in a general way," Judge Lurance VanMeter of Lexington wrote in the majority opinion. VanMeter was joined by Judge Thomas Wine of Louisville.

In a dissenting opinion, Special Judge Ann O'Malley Shake of Louisville said Kentucky's law crossed a constitutional line. Among other things, she said, the law has criminal penalties, including up to 12 months in jail, for anyone who fails to comply.

Unlike the Ohio state motto, which is "passive," Shake wrote, Kentucky's law "is a legislative finding, avowed as factual, that the commonwealth is not safe absent reliance on Almighty God. Further, (the law) places a duty upon the executive director to publicize the assertion while stressing to the public that dependence upon Almighty God is vital, or necessary, in assuring the safety of the commonwealth."

American Atheists is disappointed in the ruling. Dave Silverman stated, "Naturally, we are disappointed in this ruling, but we are encouraged

that one of the three judges on the panel agrees that using a governmental entity to endorse a specific god is illegal. We will appeal this ruling and continue this fight to protect our Constitution and the Separation of Church and State. This is not over."

American Atheists says it will appeal the decision to the Kentucky Supreme Court using a petition for a Writ of Certiorari¹. Edwin Kagin, National Legal Director for American Atheists said, "Senior Judge Shake stated it very well in her scathing dissenting opinion when she said '[these laws] go beyond merely acknowledging the historical role of religion and instead require dependence upon Almighty God to secure the Commonwealth's safety.'"

Mr. Kagin continued, "American Atheists will use this decision as an opportunity for a higher court to rule correctly and further avoid the move toward theocracy represented by this case. Judge Shake laid out very well the basis for the petition for a Writ of Certiorari."

(See this footnote² for more details on the appeal ruling.)

[From an Oct. 28 press release by American Atheists.]

¹See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Certiorari>.

²For more details, see <http://www.kentucky.com/2011/10/29/1938427/court-upholds-kentucky-law-requiring.html>.

American Atheists Applauds Supreme Court For Not Hearing Utah Cross Case

From an October 31 Press Release by American Atheists (<http://www.atheists.org>)

American Atheists said on Oct. 31 that it is applauding the United States Supreme Court's decision to not hear the Utah cross case after the Court of Appeal for the 10th Circuit ruled against the state in the case.

American Atheists, along with several Utah plaintiffs sued to remove twelve large steel crosses erected by the State of Utah to honor fallen troopers. Edwin Kagin, the National Legal Director for American Atheists stated, "We have presented this case and won at the 10th Circuit Court of Appeal. The Supreme Court correctly declined to review the case further, therefore the decision stands. We are

looking forward to the state of Utah upholding the opinion of the Court of Appeal and removing the crosses."

Dave Silverman, President of American Atheists noted, "We have no problem with honoring fallen troopers: they should be honored. Erecting divisive religious icons that violate the very constitution the fallen troopers had sworn to uphold is not the way to honor those troopers who gave the ultimate sacrifice for the citizens of their state."

"It is our hope," added Mr. Silverman, "now that the appeals process is over and the courts have found the crosses unconstitutional that the State

of Utah will find a more honorable and non-divisive way to honor their fallen troopers. The fallen troopers, their loved ones and the citizens they swore to protect deserve such recognition."

Edwin Kagin commented on why Christians should support the decision, "The attitude that the cross is not a Christian symbol should be repugnant to all of those believers who believe it to be a sign of the son of god having died on a cross to save everyone who believed in him and that, as he conquered death, so will those who believe this story conquer death. That is what the crosses are to them."

Cross Removed (?) From Water Tower

Petulant Mayor Breaks Cross to Avoid a Lawsuit

Whiteville, Tenn., certainly isn't "Pleasantville" for non-Christians with James Bellar behind the civic wheel, but the mayor of that Tennessee town finally agreed that a water tower cross had to go.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has, for now called off plans to sue the town over the First Amendment violation. But the national state/church watchdog with 17,000 members, including over 200 in Tennessee, called Bellar's remedy "bizarre," and says it will closely monitor the situation.

Mayor James R. Bellar sent a letter¹ on Oct. 25 to FFRF's attorney advising him that "there is no longer a Latin cross atop the Whiteville water tower." Bellar attached an invoice² of nearly \$4,000 from a crane service. He inexplicably asked the firm to lop off one arm of the Latin cross, leaving what looks a bit like a gallows (or a broken cross).

FFRF sent a polite response³ to the Mayor, despite his many statements

defaming FFRF and its potential plaintiff as "terrorists."

"We hope that this action will send a message to other municipalities to honor the Establishment Clause of our First Amendment, and to respect freedom of conscience, including the diversity of beliefs and of nonbelief, by keeping religion out of government," FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor wrote.

After receiving four letters of complaint from FFRF and a demand letter⁴ on behalf of FFRF by Nashville attorney Alvin Harris, Bellar initially announced on Oct. 3 that he would move the cross. Then he changed his mind.

On Oct. 17, Bellar told reporter Daniel Wilkerson, of WBBJ-TV⁵ in Jackson, Tenn., that "Somebody has to stand up to these atheist sons of bitches, and you can quote me on that."

"We're looking a little cross-eyed at the mayor's strange action and, his vindictive and unprofessional statements, but we are satisfied, for now, that there is no longer a Latin cross on



governmental property," said Gaylor.

Gaylor warned that if the town restores the Latin cross (an action hinted at in the mayor's letter), it will sue.

"What is most flabbergasting is the decision by this intemperate mayor to waste nearly \$4,000 in tax dollars to mutilate a religious symbol, rather than remove it. A careful administrator would not have indulged in such folly. The town could even have made some money had it auctioned the cross to bidders. We would encourage the town council to investigate the mayor's action," said Gaylor.

[From an Oct. 26 FFRF press release.]

¹See the letter & invoice here: <http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/Bellar%20Letter.pdf> and <http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/Bellar%20Invoice.pdf>

³See the FFRF response here: <http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/FFRF%20Response%20to%20Bellar.pdf>

⁴See the attorney's letter here: [http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/WhitevilleLtr\(9.29.11\).pdf](http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/WhitevilleLtr(9.29.11).pdf)

⁵See the WBBJ-TV report here: <http://www.wbbjtv.com/news/local/Whiteville-Mayor-Continues-Fight-for-Cross-132020418.html>

Other Meetings of Interest in the Atlanta Area

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet on Sunday, Nov. 20, at 12:30 at AF Hall. Kim Parlmer, a second year semi-nary student at Emory University and a “non-practicing atheist” will speak. <http://www.georgiahumanists.org/>.

The **Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta** will meet on Sunday, Nov. 20, 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 7:30PM at McAlister’s Deli on Holcomb Bridge

Road in Roswell. For more info: donnaigore@yahoo.com

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet on Monday, Nov. 14, at 7:00PM at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville, GA. <http://gust.domek.org/>

The **Atlanta Skeptics** will meet at 7:00 PM on Saturday, Nov. 19, at Manuel’s Tavern, with the Atlanta Science Tavern group. (See below.) <http://www.atlantaskeptics.com/>

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** will meet on Sat., Nov. 19, at 7:00PM at Manuel’s Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. Lee Alan Dugatkin, a biology professor at University of Louisville, will speak on “Mr. Jefferson and the Giant Moose.” See <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>.

There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, Nov. 13, 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, Nov. 27, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

A Delayed Apology From Harold Camping

He says he was wrong to predict Christ’s return, but will he return the money?

What happens when you make a bold public prediction—say, for the end of the world—and it doesn’t come true? Don’t acknowledge it; just pretend it didn’t happen and get on with life. Maybe no one will notice.

That’s what Harold Camping has done up to October 30 about his May 21 prediction of the Rapture and October 21 prediction of the end of the world.

For a stock broker or farmer or scientist—professions where evidence is important—repeatedly and reliably missing predictions would demand a change in profession. But within Christianity, this kind of inept song and dance seems to work. Indeed, Camping gets hubris points for claiming that the non-Rapture on May 21 only *seemed* to be a non-event and that God actually did judge the world.

“Men occasionally stumble over the truth, but most of them pick themselves up and hurry off as if nothing had happened.” —Winston Churchill

Camping’s Family Radio web site (www.familyradio.com) has deleted all references to its embarrassing and awkward predictions.

The Christian Post reported on October 30 that he finally apologized.

With his speech sounding somewhat slurred and labored, Family Radio Stations Inc. founder and chairman Harold Camping sought to address why Christ failed to return on Oct. 21 as the bible teacher had predicted.

Camping confessed, after decades of falsely misleading his followers, that he was wrong and regrets his misdeeds.

In addition to attempting to correct his erroneous teachings on the Rapture and God’s day of final judgment on the world, Camping, 90, also confessed, “incidentally,” that he was wrong to claim that God had stopped saving people after May 21—the date on which God’s so-called “spiritual” judgment had begun.

This is undoubtedly a radical shift for Camping, who has staunchly claimed since 1992 that he had discovered a special numerical system in the Bible that allowed him to calculate the exact dates of certain events, such as the Great Flood, the Crucifixion and the day of Jesus Christ’s return to Earth.

Camping first falsely predicted that the world would end on Sept. 6, 1994, then again on May 21, 2011, and finally on Oct. 21.

On Oct. 24, 2011, The Christian Post also reported in an interview with a member of Camping’s Bible ministry that the Alameda, Calif., Bible teacher was no longer able to lead Family Radio or his ministry due to health problems.

[From an Oct. 30 post by Bob Seidensticker on www.galileounchained.com and a Nov. 2 article by Nocola Menzie at www.christianpost.com.]

More on Harold Camping:

Lest We Forget: Harold Camping’s Prediction Fails Again: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3xWQyOCBA08&feature=share>
Doomsday Prophet Wrong Again: <http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/business/2011/10/harold-camping-doomsday-prophet-wrong-again/>
You can come out now, Harold! World Survives Rapture... AGAIN: <http://tinyurl.com/3goaaxx>

Jacksonville, FL Principal Stirs Controversy over Memo

Announcing Prayers at the Flagpole, he says First Amendment is only for Christians

An elementary school principal's memo¹ that promoted a prayer session and stated that the First Amendment applies only to Christians has raised the ire of a national secular rights group. The school is in Jacksonville, FL.

Clay Hill Elementary Principal Larry Davis sent the memo to his 40-member staff last month to let them know about a weekly prayer session that is held near the school's flagpole and led by a local pastor.

In the memo, Davis quoted from an article by Pastor Steven Andrew, which was published on the website USA Christian Ministries.

"Pastor Steven Andrew states: 'Our children need God back in schools,' and he is calling Christians nationwide to bring back the Holy Bible and Christian prayer to schools," the memo said. "The First Amendment was for Christianity, not other religions."

The Freedom from Religion Foundation, a secular rights group, sent a letter to the school district asking for the prayer sessions to be stopped. Annie Laurie Gaylor, the group's co-president, said she was "horrified" by the language in Davis' memo.

"That would be like saying the constitution only applies to white people," Gaylor said.

Davis also said he didn't see why a non-Christian would have a problem with the memorandum's language.

"This is his opinion and what he says," Davis said about Andrew's ar-

ticle. "To me it just looked like it all went together with the morals. I don't think it was a stretch at all for him to make those comments or for me to share them."

When asked what he thought the memo might say to the non-Christian parents and students in his school district, Superintendent Ben Wortham said he had "no comment."

Wortham would also not comment on any disciplinary measures Davis might face because of the memo, saying it is a personnel issue.

Pastor Ron Baker of Russell Baptist Church in Green Cove Springs, who conducts the prayer sessions at Clay Hill and three other Clay County schools, said he doesn't agree with the quoted passage Davis included in the memo.

"If a Muslim wants to pray at the pole, go ahead, I don't care, that's fine," he said. "A Buddhist, I don't have a problem with that."

The Freedom from Religion Foundation said Davis' promotion of the event violates the separation of church and state. Gaylor said the pastor should not be on the school's campus.

"We regard school violations as the most egregious because they involve small children, a young and impressionable audience," Gaylor said. "This is really preying on children, preying with an 'E.'"

Davis sees it differently.

"I don't find any problems with it," he said. "It's not an endorsement."

Davis said he'll comply with whatever the Clay School Board decides based on its attorney's advice. Wortham said Davis went too far.

"I think we're over the line in terms of what is allowed in the public schools for an administrator to be, in a sense, promoting this," he said.

In response to a letter from the Freedom from Religion Foundation, Wortham asked Baker to stop the prayer sessions. Baker initially agreed but changed his mind and has continued the prayer sessions at the four schools. About 150 people showed up to pray on Oct. 17 at Clay Hill.

"I think if I were to stop, it somehow sends the message that I think it must be wrong," Baker said. "Why wouldn't I want to pray for the safety and security of that school, pray for all those teachers and administration, pray for all those students?"

Baker said he isn't violating any district policies and believes he isn't violating the law with the prayer sessions.

Wortham said the district's attorneys are researching the issue and he will present options to the School Board.

In the meantime, Wortham said he is not going to call authorities on Baker for continuing the prayer sessions on school campus.

Baker said he will be at Clay Hill's flagpole on Monday at 8:15 a.m. ready to pray with anyone who's there.

[From an Oct. 20 article by Topher Sanders at m.jacksonville.com.]

¹See the memo at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/69672261/Memo-Newsletter-from-Principal-Larry-Davis>.

²See the FFRF letter at <http://www.scribd.com/doc/69672871/Freedom-from-Religion-Foundation-s-letter-to-Clay-County-Schools>.

In the News, Online:

Cobb County Youth Pastor Found Guilty of 2 Murders: <http://www.ajc.com/news/cobb/former-youth-pastor-found-1198165.html>

Gingrich Says Atheists Can't Be Trusted:

<http://www.secularnewsdaily.com/2011/10/26/gingrich-says-atheists-cant-be-trusted-disregards-50-million-secular-americans/>

Richard Dawkins: "Somebody as intelligent as Jesus would have been an atheist." A Video Interview:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/video/2011/oct/24/richard-dawkins-video-interview?newsfeed=true>

The Evangelical Rejection of Reason: <http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/277-75/7950-the-evangelical-rejection-of-reason>

See the Current Issue of Secular World Magazine at: <http://www.atheistallianceamerica.org/current-issue.html>

Do People Choose to be Atheists? <http://atheism.about.com/od/atheismquestions/a/beliefchoice.htm?nl=1>

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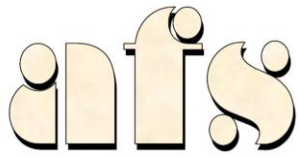
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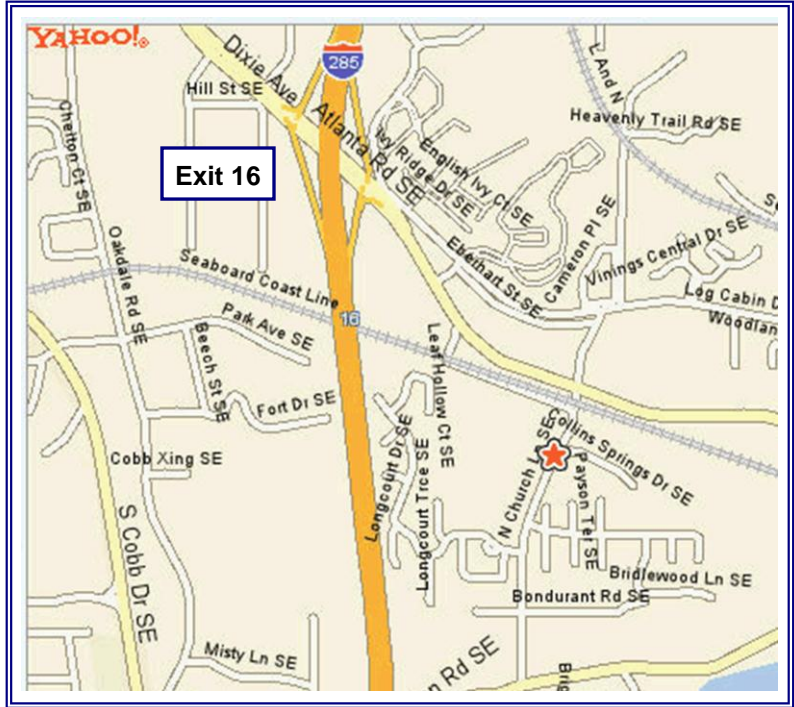
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