

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself.*

An AFS Publication • Volume 17 Number 12 • December 2011

## The December AFS Meeting

The December 11 AFS meeting will feature AFS President **Steve Yothment**, speaking on "Christian Apocalypticism."

Apocalypticism is the belief that the world as we know it will soon come to an end. The Christian version of it originally involved the belief that Jesus would return soon to establish God's Kingdom. This belief was taught by the Apostles and many other Christians in the first century.

But there's a problem. Jesus did not return in the first century as so many Christian writers said that he would!

According to Yothment, this was a major contradiction in early Christianity that Christians today should recognize as problematic for their faith.

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

## Ed Buckner Debates

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

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

## No AFS Social This Month

Due to the holiday season, we will not have an AFS Social in December. Please go visit friends and enjoy the holiday!

## Silent Auction at Jan 8 Meeting!

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

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

## An Open Letter by Jack McKinney

To fellow AFS members and dear friends:

My email nickname is "Grumpyoldman." Read on to discover why.

Perhaps you read the article in *The Marietta Journal* on December 4<sup>th</sup> concerning the pastor of a Baptist Church in Woodstock who has been there 25 years. The article went on to cite many of his accomplishments including "...more than 19,000 members..." and raised "...total giving to \$20 million dollars for 2011..." That's \$1,052.63 - per person - thus far for the 11 months. Factoring a monthly average for December would increase the monthly average per person to \$1,148.32. (Madam Treasurer: What is the AFS average?)

And that's in a "down" economy in which charitable donations have been reduced considerably.

Now let's contrast that to AFS. According to my understanding we have only paid down our mortgage (loans) by about \$10,000 this year, **in spite of a matching 1-for-1 grant of \$45,000.** If I understand correctly, only about 20% of the grant has been matched so far. The opportunity expires December 31 and won't be renewed.

I believe the purpose of my letter is obvious. If you care for AFS as I do you will give it the financial support it needs in order to survive and thrive.

- Jack McKinney, Grumpyoldman - justified

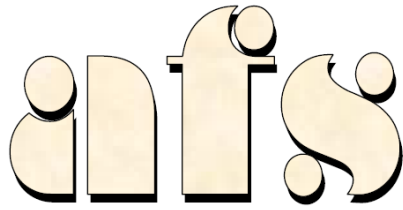
"It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." (Clifford's Credo)  
- William Kingdon Clifford, from his 1877 essay "The Ethics of Belief"

## 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.

Dec 11: AFS President Steve Yothment will speak on "Christian Apocalypticism."

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.

Mar 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

### 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

Rick Pace – 770-912-6974

Laura Ross – 404-634-1005

Lew Southern – 770-509-8272

## Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 17, Number 12, December 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](http://facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought).

**Send E-mail to**

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

**AFS Webmaster:** Michael Buckner

# FFRF Sign in Mississippi Capitol Counters Creche

The Winter Solstice Greeting Went Up on December 1.

The nation's largest association of atheists and agnostics has received permits to display its Winter Solstice message throughout December in the ground floor rotunda of the Mississippi State Capitol in Jackson.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, in tandem with the Jackson Skeptical Society, is displaying its gilt sign in the Capitol for the second year in a row, to protest a decision by the state to permit a life-sized nativity display in the rotunda.

The sign went up on December 1 and will stay up throughout the month (except for several hours on Dec. 6, due to the space being reserved for a prior permit).

The pretty gilt display contains a secular message which reads:

*At this season of the Winter Solstice,  
may reason prevail.*

*There are no gods, no devils, no angels,  
no heaven or hell.*

*There is only our natural world.*

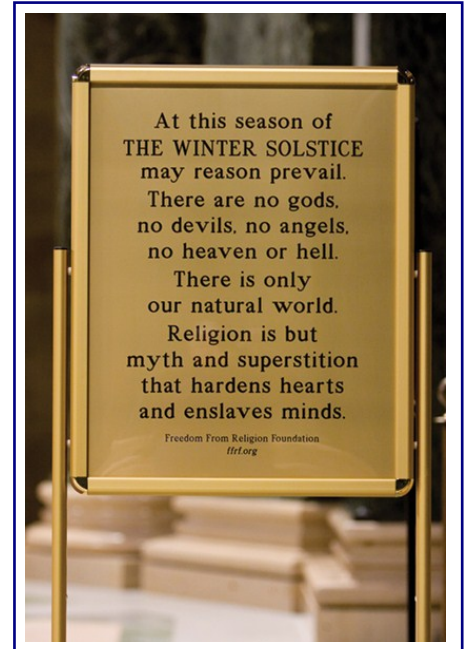
*Religion is but myth and superstition  
that hardens hearts and enslaves minds.*

"We don't think religion, or irreligion, belongs in state capitols," noted Annie Laurie Gaylor, Foundation Co-President. "But if a state is going to permit a nativity display, then we want to be sure that the views of the 16 percent of the U.S. population that is not religious are also represented."

"This sign is a reminder of the real reason for the season, the Winter Solstice," said Dan Barker, Foundation co-president and author of *Godless*, about his migration from evangelical minister to atheist.

The Winter Solstice, the shortest and darkest day of the year, takes place this year on Thursday, Dec. 22. The natural holiday signals the return of the sun and the new year, and has been celebrated for millennia in the Northern Hemisphere with festivals of light, evergreens, feasts and gift exchanges.

An engraved sign with the same wording has been erected by the Foundation for 16 Decembers in a row at the Wisconsin State Capitol in Madison.



The Madison, Wis.-based Foundation has 17,000 members nationwide, with members in every state, and works as a state/church watchdog.

FFRF thanked Mississippi members for help in coordinating the effort.

[From a Dec. 1 FFRF press release.]

## Please Renew Membership (or become a member) This Year!

By Steve Yothment, AFS President

I have some good news and some not-so-good news for AFS members. The AFS Board has decided to increase the cost of AFS membership and streamline our annual fees. We will eliminate the Household and Student rates, and change other rates per the below table. Don't get too upset, though, because there is good news to follow!

For most of us, our membership renewal is due at the end of the year. For those who receive the paper newslet-

ter, your renewal data is indicated on the label. If you don't know your renewal data, you can email Diane at [diane buckner@bellsouth.net](mailto:diane buckner@bellsouth.net) to find out what it is.

So what's the good news? You can pay your annual dues for 2012 at the current rate IF you make the payment this year! So, observe the left column below, note the amount for your category, and please pay it this year! And, of course, thank you for renewing your membership!

	Current Annual Dues:	Dues starting Jan 1, 2012:
Individual:	\$ 25.00	\$ 50.00
Household: (2 members)	\$ 35.00	-----
Additional household mems:	\$ 5.00	-----
Student:	\$ 10.00	-----
Low Income:	\$ 10.00	\$ 20.00
Add for Paper Newsletter:	\$ 15.00	\$ 0.00
Subscription Only:	\$ 10.00	\$ 30.00
Sustaining Member:	\$ 100.00	\$ 100.00
Sustaining Household:	\$ 125.00	-----
Life Membership:	\$1000.00	\$1000.00

## Americans United Settles Lawsuit On Tenn. County's Preference For Christianity

### Johnson County Commission Will Erect Local Man's Church-State Display and Alter Policy for Other Displays

A Tennessee county has agreed to erect a local man's display promoting church-state separation as part of a legal settlement, Americans United for Separation of Church and State announced on November 10.

Earlier this year, Americans United challenged the Johnson County Commission's decision to display the Ten Commandments and Christian literature in the county courthouse lobby while refusing to display Ralph Stewart's posters about the historic role of church-state separation in American law.

As part of a legal settlement to end the case, the Johnson County Commission has agreed to hang Stewart's posters in a prominent place and make changes to its policy concerning other displays.

"I'd prefer for government to stay out of the business of promoting religious documents altogether," said Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "But if government officials choose to go down this path, they must at least play fair and treat all citizens equally."

The dispute began in 2008 after the Johnson County Commission adopted a policy that purported to create a public forum for displays on the walls of the county courthouse lobby. Displays were to relate to development of the history or heritage of the law. After adopting the policy, the Commission unanimously approved a display sponsored by the Rotary Club of Mountain City and the Ten Commandments Warriors that features the Ten Commandments alongside excerpts from the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, U.S. Supreme Court decisions and the nation's founders.

But the Commission rejected Stewart's display, saying it did not fall within the subject matter of the public forum their policy creates—even though Stewart's material draws on many of the same historical sources as



the Ten Commandments displays.

AU's lawsuit asserted that the Commission engaged in impermissible content-based and viewpoint-based discrimination in violation of the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech. The complaint also charged that the Commission's actions were undertaken with a religious purpose, had a predominantly religious effect, endorsed religion and preferred religion over non-religion.

Under the terms of the settlement, displays will be limited to the lobby and hallways in the lower level of the courthouse. Displays must relate to American or Tennessee law or Johnson County history and must meet certain aesthetic requirements.

The county is forbidden to reject a display simply because commissioners

don't like the content. If the county purports to reject a display for aesthetic reasons, the county must provide a detailed, written explanation and propose an alternative design that would be acceptable.

In addition, officials agreed to put a disclaimer in the courthouse that makes it clear that the displays are sponsored by private citizens, not the county.

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

[From a Nov. 11 press release by Americans United for Separation of Church and State.]

On miracles: "Is it more probable that nature should go out of her course or that a man should tell a lie?" —Thomas Paine

---

---

# How An Atheist Loves the Holidays

**A Holiday Essay by Andi Durham**

**W**hen I was a little girl, Christmas was a big deal at our house. We were the house on the block with the most lights, and though I was an only child, the celebrations were memorable, whether at the school pageant, holiday bazaar, or opening gifts with mom and dad.

Our house is no longer ours and many miles of road separate me from the only place I've known as home.

But come holiday time, it's time to reminisce and think about happier days when life seemed much simpler.

Just the angle of the sun in autumn and the changing leaves brings back pleasant memories of hayrides and bobbing for apples.

As the days grow shorter, this writer, who loves gardening, has less time to spend tending the garden. As the growing season draws to a close, the onset of winter can bring on a gloomy feeling with its short, gray days, and

long cold nights.

There are few flowers to cheer me up on those damp and dour days of winter doldrums.

But every year as the lights and decorations start showing up in the stores, it gives me something to look forward to in what would be a depressing time of year.

Driving through the town in the evening, the colorful lights strung on shrubs and trees replace the flowers.

Over the years I've amassed a collection of ornaments and lights, and when the spirit moves me I might put up a tree before Thanksgiving.

The religious often complain about the commercialization of Christmas, and how it has gotten away from the true meaning. Aside from the materialism, I think the spirit of giving and charity are values that can be close to one's heart, and can be observed by anyone at any time.

As Winter Solstice comes around, the longest day of the year, I've the lengthening days to look forward to, and the promise of spring when the garden comes to life once again. The lights on the tree help to fill my house with color and warmth, and represent that renewal.

I am fortunate to have found a job in the small town where I live, and will be working retail just in time for the rush should my job hold up in this recession. No one need know I don't observe Christmas as a spiritual holiday. As I stock the shelves with shiny things and assist customers, I smile to myself and let the lights and music carry me through another winter. As I take it all in just to get by another day, they might as well assume I love Christmas.

(Andi Durham lives near Savannah, GA, but she has roots in Atlanta and hopes to move back to Atlanta soon.)

---

## A Letter to AFS Members from Mark Banks

The AFS Board has recently discussed the possibility of replacing the old church furniture (i.e., the benches or "pews") with folding tables and chairs. This would allow us to reconfigure the interior for different types of events. It would also allow us to rent our facility to a more diverse

range of clients and increase our rental revenue income. Our research has determined that the sale of the church furniture would bring in enough money to pay for the replacement tables and chairs, so there would be no cost to AFS for this change.

A significant number of members

have mentioned to me that they would like to replace the old church pews with more comfortable chairs for seating. Please let your AFS officers and board members know your preferences on this matter.

Thank you.

Mark Banks, AFS Board Member

---

## On Keeping AFS's Seating Benches **by Ed Buckner**

It has been suggested that AFS might be better off if we sold our seating benches ("pews") in favor of acquiring chairs and perhaps some tables. Some argue that chairs would be more flexible, less "churchy," and possibly more useful to tenants or potential tenants. There are indeed advantages to making such a trade, but they'd be heavily outweighed, in my opinion, by the disadvantages:

1. The benches are as comfortable as any cheap chairs and more so than

most (and anyone who wants can bring a cushion);

2. The benches are and look quite appropriate in our traditional, historical (built in 1866) building;

3. It would mean trading beautiful wood that has been restored with hundreds of man-hours (mostly Lew Southern hours) for metal or plastic;

4. Our own primary purposes, i.e., making it easy for members to hear and see a speaker or program, are best served by the benches. (The

needs of tenants must be secondary);

5. Any "churchiness" look can be seen as much as a plus (we represent social evolution beyond churches) as a minus—and many old southern courthouses of the same vintage have similar seating benches; and

6. We should not fix what isn't broken, especially when changing (and possibly changing back) is neither free nor easy.

Regards to all,

Ed Buckner

---

"It is every man's obligation to put back into the world at least the equivalent of what he takes out of it." — Albert Einstein

---

# Once Upon a Time the Religious Right Demonized Christmas

By Rob Boston, from the December 2007 issue of *Church and State* magazine

**I**t is ironic to hear Religious Right groups portray themselves as the great defenders of Christmas—their spiritual forebears hated the holiday and even banned its celebration.

The Puritans of Massachusetts Bay frowned on Christmas revelry, considering the holiday a Roman Catholic affectation. A law in the colony barred anyone from taking the day off work, feasting or engaging in other celebrations on Christmas, under penalty of a five-shilling fine.

The law was repealed in 1681, but Christmas celebrations remained unpopular in New England and other colonies for many years. That did not change after the Revolution, because many Americans viewed Christmas as a Tory custom, a reminder of the expelled British.

Although Christmas became popular in the South as early as the 1830s, other regions were apathetic. Writer Tom Flynn notes in his 1993 book *The Trouble with Christmas* that Congress did not begin adjourning on Christmas Day until 1856. Public schools in New England were often open on Dec. 25, as were many factories and offices. Many Protestant churches refused to hold services, considering the holiday “popish.”

Not until after the Civil War did Christmas begin to seriously affect American cultural and religious life. European immigration increased sharply after the war, and many of the newcomers came from countries with strong Christmas traditions. Germans, Italians, Poles, Swedes, Norwegians and others brought the holiday and many of its features, including Christmas trees and Santa Claus, to America in a big way.

The celebration spread, and in 1870 Christmas was declared a federal holiday by Congress. But practices in the states continued to vary. As late as

1931, Flynn reports, nine states still called for public schools to remain open on Christmas Day.

It might also surprise Religious Right activists to learn that many of the Christmas traditions they defend so vociferously have, at best, a tenuous connection to Christianity.

Several of the holiday’s most common features grow out of pre-Christian religions. The ancient Romans celebrated Saturnalia in mid-December, a time of general merriment, feasting and gift exchanges. Slaves were given time off and were even permitted to play dice games in public. During this period, many Romans decorated their homes with evergreens as a reminder that life would persevere through the dark days of winter.

Evergreen trees had long been viewed as a symbol of fertility by Pagan peoples. When winter came and most trees lost their leaves and appeared to die, the evergreen was a reminder that life would endure and that long days, warmer weather and a harvest would come again. Germans were early boosters of the Christmas tree and brought it to America. (The pious legend that Martin Luther decorated the first Christmas tree is not taken seriously by scholars.)

Candles, a necessary item during the dark winter period, were a common Saturnalia gift. Some scholars consider them a precursor to Christmas lights.

Originally celebrated on Dec. 17, the Roman Saturnalia eventually expanded to last an entire week, ending on Dec. 23.

So where did the Dec. 25 date for Christmas come from?

Many scholars believe that date came from another Roman festival, one that became popular around the middle of the third century—the feast

of Sol Invictus, the unconquered sun.

During this festival, various gods related to the sun in the Roman pantheon were honored. The festival was most popular during the reign of the emperor Aurelian (270-275 A.D.), who attributed his military victories to the sun god and may have wanted to establish a solar deity as supreme in the Roman pantheon. Images of Sol Invictus remained popular and appeared on Roman coinage even during the reign of Constantine the Great (306-337 A.D.).

There is some evidence that early Christians celebrated the festival alongside Pagans, and that church leaders, seeing these practices underway, simply appropriated the date for the birth of Jesus as Christianity grew and became the dominant religion of the empire throughout the fourth and fifth centuries.

Michael Grant, the late scholar of the ancient world, noted in his 1985 book *The Roman Emperors* that Dec. 25 was “a bequest of the solar cult to Christianity, converted into Christmas Day.”

Legal codes laid down by the emperors Theodosius I and later Justinian made Christianity the state religion and banned Paganism. Church leaders were generally tolerant of people taking old practices and adding a Christian gloss to them. Overt worship of Pagan gods disappeared but the Dec. 25 date—and many residual practices associated with the old festival—remained.

As strange as it may seem, when Religious Right legal groups go to court to battle the “War on Christmas,” they may really be defending practices historically associated with the worship not of the son of God but the sun in the sky.

*Rob Boston is associate editor for Church and State magazine.*

---

Fundies Upset Obama Didn't Mention God in Thanksgiving Address:

<http://godfatherpolitics.com/2300/obamas-thanksgiving-address-fails-to-mention-god/>

Dan Barker speaks at Skepticon 4: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dup6xkvj1S0>

---

---

# Positive Humanism: Dr. Bart Ehrman

The following is an excerpt from the transcript of Dr. Ehrman's speech in the Nov-Dec 2011 issue of *The Humanist*. He spoke after receiving the Religious Liberty Award at the AHA's 70<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference in Boston, Mass.

**I**n my part of the world, in the South, humanists are largely known as negative opponents of all things religious, strident protesters against values that people in my world hold near and dear. So forgive me if I'm being overly obvious, but in my opinion, for humanism to strive and to succeed in these places, it's not enough to protest. Humanism must make a positive impact on people's lives and be looked upon, even by outsiders, as a good and healthy phenomenon. Among other things, humanists need to provide social outlets that mirror what believers have in their churches. When someone leaves the womb of the church, they need to have somewhere else to go. They need warm, loving, welcoming, safe communities of like-minded people where

they can establish social networks and find fellowship with people who share their world views, their loves, hates, concerns, passions, and obsessions. They need context within which they can discuss the big issues of life, not just politics but also life-and-death issues. They need places where they can celebrate what is good in life and where they can work to overcome what is bad.

Humanist organizations need to become as recognizable as the Baptist church on the corner and the Episcopal church up the street. They need to be seen as the first responders when an earthquake hits Haiti, to be seen as major forces in the fight against poverty, homelessness, malaria, AIDS, and other epidemics. They need to be seen as vibrant and viable alternatives

to the religions of the world, which often do so much harm while trying to do good. Whatever else we might say about organized religion, it cannot be denied that it is often the catalyst for much of what is good in the world. But it shouldn't be the only catalyst, especially since so many people are silenced, oppressed, and harmed by religion. In other words, people must be liberated not only *from* something but also *for* something. That, in my opinion, should be the leading goal and objective of every humanist organization.

*Dr. Bart Ehrman is the James E. Gray Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he has taught since 1988.*

Read more of Dr. Ehrman's speech at <http://thehumanist.org/november-december-2011/biblical-scholarship-and-the-right-to-know/>

---

## Other Meetings of Interest in the Atlanta Area

The **Humanists of Georgia** usually meet on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of the month at AF Hall, but will not meet this month.

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

Road in Roswell. For more info: [donnajgore@yahoo.com](mailto:donnajgore@yahoo.com)

**GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths)** will meet on Monday, Dec. 12, 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, Dec. 17, at Manuel's Tavern with a recap on the Year in Skepticism by Tim Farley. See <http://www.atlantaskeptics.com/>

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** will meet on Sat., Dec. 10, at 7:00PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. This month, they will have a Science Trivia Contest. See <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>.

There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, Dec. 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, Dec. 18, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

---

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

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

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

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

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

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

---

## A Book Review by Ben Akerley (benakerley@aol.com)

### *God, No!: Signs You May Already Be an Atheist and Other Magical Tales* by Penn Jillette

**P**enn Jillette serves as the louder and much larger (6' 7", 280 lbs.) half of the world-famous magic duo Penn & Teller who have the longest-running show ever (*Penn & Teller: Bullshit!*) on Showtime (8 years), nominated for an amazing 16 Emmy awards. They have also performed blockbuster shows on the Vegas strip as well as on Broadway and appeared as frequent guests on most major TV talk shows. Teller, also an ardent but not as outspoken nonbeliever, was busily occupied with other projects so his performing partner had to go solo on this literary outing.

Anticipating that his atheist manifesto will be interpreted as an attack on Christians, the author declares: "I haven't found Christ. I'm not even looking for him. I don't need or want salvation." The entertainer self-identifies as a hard-core atheist, which he defines as not even believing that other people believe in God and he calls agnostics "just cowardly and manipulative atheists." So it should come as no surprise that he departs radically from other anti-God advocates who eschew any form of proselytizing and instead, aggressively exhorts all atheists to take full advantage of every opportunity to preach and promote their unbelief and feel impelled to share their scientific, rational stance with anyone who will listen. Unlike many critics of religion who emphasize only the harmful and negative effects of belief, this spokesman acknowledges the bountiful contributions of writers, artists and musicians inspired by religion (he cites Bach in particular) and how culturally deprived we would all be without their monumental and invaluable artistic treasures.

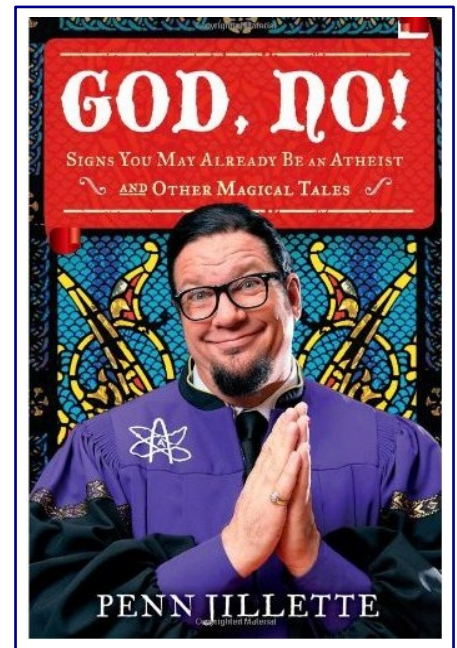
Raised in the Congregational Church, his road to unbelief began when he attended Sunday night youth group meetings where his non-stop questions and challenges became so threatening that the pastoral leader genuinely feared that Jillette's burgeoning skepticism just might convert other members to atheism.

But the real coup-de-grace to any lingering doubts about God came after one cover-to-cover read-through of the Bible, an experience the author insists serves as the best, most sure-fire way for anyone exposed to Judeo-Christian programming and indoctrination to quickly abandon their gullible and naive beliefs.

The structure of the work consists of ten chapters with the Ten Commandments as headings and each title followed by the Penn Commandments. For example, the Fifth Commandment (honoring parents) comes out as: "Be there for your family. Love your parents, your partner and your children. (Love is deeper than honor, and parents matter, but so do spouse and children.)" The Seventh Commandment (re: adultery) reads: "Keep your promises. (If you can't be sexually exclusive, don't make that deal.)"

The author himself admits that he does a great deal of rambling in this treatise and he veers off in many directions and on many tangents such as: The Tea Party; a visit to a gay bathhouse in San Francisco strictly as an "observer"; his determination to experience weightlessness on a flight on the so-called "vomit comet"; his many woes with the TSA when flying, and atheist parenting. It might come as a real surprise to most readers to learn that as daring and intrepid as many of his exploits have been, the

prestidigitator has never once tasted even a drop of alcohol or used any recreational drugs in his whole life. In his literary pasture, there are no sacred cows and anyone and everything become fair game as a target for his scathing, irreverent humor. He freely and continuously employs most of the taboo items on George Carlin's infamous FCC-censored list of 7 Dirty



Words throughout the narrative, but his hilarious approach, particularly in describing some of his more memorable sexcapades, provides very entertaining reading.

He forcefully reminds us that since 9/11, we must conjoin the two terms "religious terrorism" to describe what blind faith can lead to and that the enemy is not Islam, or God, but rather faith. He soberly ends his fanciful diatribe with this stern admonition: "We must stop glorifying faith. F\*\*k faith."

The 231 page book was published in August 2011 by Simon & Schuster. Current Amazon.com price is \$14.97.

---

Penn Jillette: An Atheist's Guide to the 2012 Election: <http://bigthink.com/ideas/41032>

Take the Christmas Quiz: <http://www.skepticmoney.com/ultimate-christmas-quiz-%E2%80%93-with-answers/>

Five Myths about Young Adult Church Dropouts:

<http://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/534-five-myths-about-young-adult-church-dropouts>

Catholic Diocese of Orange County Agrees to Buy Crystal Cathedral for \$57 Million:

<http://www.ajc.com/news/nation-world/crystal-cathedral-to-be-1231527.html#.TsZMyjIGZrg.email>



# 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.**

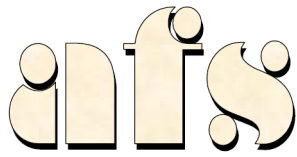
**\$1.50 EACH S&H Charge for 3 to 9 books.**

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

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

*Send check or money order to:*

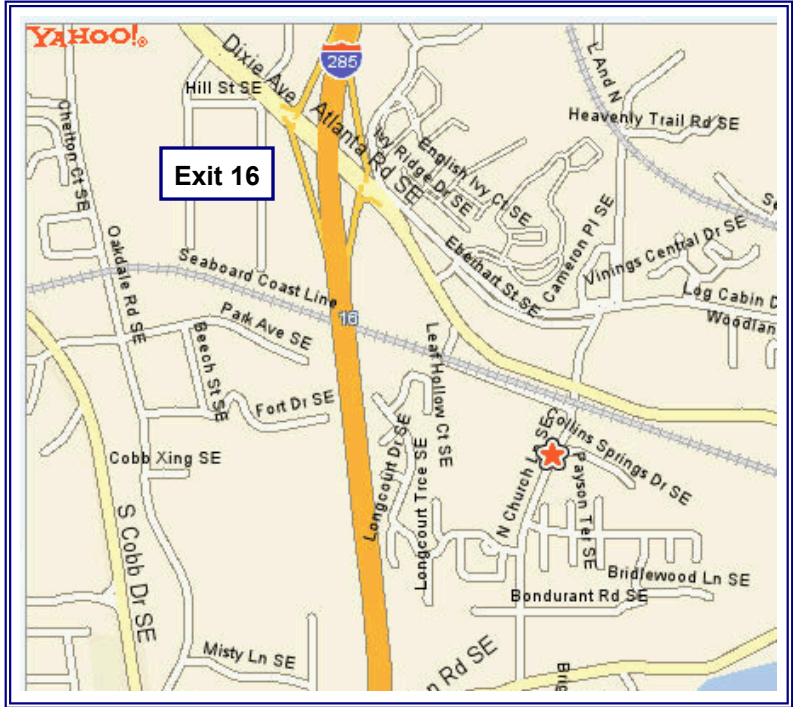
**ATLANTA FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY**  
4775 N. Church Lane SE Smyrna, GA 30080-7224



Atlanta Freethought Society

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

This Month's Speaker:  
**Steve Yothment**



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 "12 2011" or earlier, please renew. Thanks.

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