

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself.

An AFS Publication • Volume 18 Number 2 • February 2012

The February AFS Meeting

The February 12 AFS meeting will include a Potluck Lunch at 12:00 and a talk by **Maaneli Derakhshani** at 1:00 on “The Simulation Argument, Cosmic Inflation, and the Possibility of non-Creationist Intelligent Design.”

Derakhshani is a graduate student studying theoretical physics at Clemson University, a past volunteer for the Centers for Inquiry in New York and Long Island, and is a member of the Secular Student Alliance of Clemson University as well as the Clemson Philosophical Society.

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 Debate

Ed Buckner will debate **Joe Scrivner** at 7:00PM on Feb. 22. The topic: “Religion: Do the Benefits to Society Outweigh the Costs?” The debate will be at the HUC Alumni Auditorium in Birmingham, AL. Dr. Scrivner is an assistant professor of religion at Samford University. The debate is sponsored by the Birmingham Freethought Society.

The February Potluck Lunch

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

A-G: Bring a main dish;

H-P: Bring a desert;

Q-Z: Bring a side dish.

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.

The February AFS Social

The February AFS Social will be on Saturday, Feb. 18, at 1:00 at Lin Buffet (Chinese food), 3201 S. Cobb Dr., Smyrna.

AFS Meetings and Activities

Feb 12: AFS Potluck Lunch, AF Hall, 12:00 AM

Feb 12: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM

Feb 18: AFS Social at Lin Buffet, 1:00 PM

That which can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence.” – Christopher Hitchens

February 12 is Darwin Day!

Darwin Day is an international celebration of science and humanity held on or around February 12, the day that Charles Darwin was born in 1809. It celebrates the discoveries and life of Charles Darwin—the man who first described biological evolution via natural selection with scientific rigor. More generally, Darwin Day expresses gratitude for the enormous benefits that scientific knowledge has contributed to the advancement of humanity.

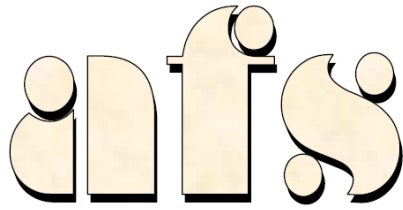
See the International Darwin Day Foundation website at <http://DarwinDay.org/>. It provides information on the life and legacy of Charles Darwin, some details on Evolution, and a directory of Darwin Day events around the world.

AFS will celebrate Darwin Day at the Feb 12 meeting with an Evolution display and Darwin birthday cupcakes!

In Darwin’s book *On the Origin of Species*, in the chapter on Natural Selection, he wrote the following words:

“How will the struggle for existence, discussed too briefly in the last chapter, act in regard to variation? Can the principle of selection, which we have seen is so potent in the hands of man, apply in nature? I think we shall see that it can act most effectually. Let it be borne in mind in what an endless number of strange peculiarities our domestic

productions, and, in a lesser degree, those under nature, vary; and how strong the hereditary tendency is. Under domestication, it may be truly said that the whole organisation becomes in some degree plastic. Let it be borne in mind how infinitely complex and close-fitting are the mutual relations of all organic beings to each other and to their physical conditions of life. Can it, then, be thought improbable, seeing that variations useful to man have undoubtedly occurred, that other variations useful in some way to each being in the great and complex battle of life, should sometimes occur in the course of thousands of generations? If such do occur, can we doubt (remembering that many more individuals are born than can possibly survive) that individuals having any advantage, however slight, over others, would have the best chance of surviving and of procreating their kind? On the other hand, we may feel sure that any variation in the least degree injurious would be rigidly destroyed. **This preservation of favourable variations and the rejection of injurious variations, I call Natural Selection.** Variations neither useful nor injurious would not be affected by natural selection, and would be left a fluctuating element...”



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.

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

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

Mar 30, 31: Brother Sam Singleton Revival (!!!) at AF Hall, 7:00PM.

Apr 8: Jim Chastain of Final Exit Network will speak.

May 13: Sharon Hypatia will speak on "2012, Doom or Dumb."

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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Atlanta Freethought News

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Publisher Gets Facts Wrong on Fayette Freethought Society

Cal Beverly, publisher and editor of *The Citizen*, calls the group “proselytizing” and “militant.”
(This article is by AFS President Steve Yothment, who lives in Fayette County and is an active member of FFS.)

Cal Beverly is the publisher and editor of *The Citizen*, a newspaper of Fayette County. His paper typically has a strong right-wing slant. His editorial on January 17 has caused quite a stir in Fayette County and among members of the Fayette Freethought Society.

A link to his editorial is shown here:¹(See the footnote.) The editorial's title is “Free Thoughts About Our Freethought Chairman.”

In the editorial, Beverly complains about the new Fayette County Board of Education chairman who recently received his position by being chosen by the four members of the board in early November. (Usually, the chairman would be voted into position by the citizens, but in this case, the previous chairman recently died. The rules state that when this occurs, a new chairman should be assigned by the board members.)

Cal Beverly complains that the new chairman, Leonard Presberg, is “a staunch Democrat” (as opposed to a “Bible Belt Republican” which Beverly says he would prefer) and a “charter member of an organization called the Fayette Freethought Society... a militant atheist organization.”

He goes on to describe FFS: “We’re not talking about your garden variety village atheism here. We are talking about in-your-face, proselytizing atheism, which seeks to banish all trace of the great monotheistic religions from

every square inch of the public square.”

Continuing, he says, “These are not live-and-let-live, mind-your-business-and-I’ll-mind-mine true nonbelievers. No, these folks deeply believe that most of us religious folks (mainly of the Christian variety) are just simply stupid and that our stupid religion should be ridiculed as myths. They hold in pure contempt what most of us in Fayette County consider to be holy. They reserve their highest contempt for Christians who dare to proclaim their faith.”

Beverly goes on to say that Presberg is “a charter member of an organization that considers the worldview and religious beliefs of most Fayette Counties to be contemptible.”

Unfortunately, Beverly got it wrong at so many levels! Leonard Presberg attended one FFS meeting, and is not a “charter member.” I don’t know of any “proselytizing” events put on by FFS, and, in general, FFS members are just friendly folk, not “in-your-face” proselytizers. I don’t know of any events in which FFS members worked to “banish all traces of the great monotheistic religions” either. (We want people to recognize the fallacies of religion and to leave religion by their own choice, not to banish the religion.) We know that Christians are not “stupid,” though they may very well be deluded. And I haven’t seen any FFS members with guns (“mili-

tant”) either.

By the way, what difference does it make what party the chairman is affiliated with? I would hope that the chairman earns his position by having the capability and knowledge to do the job and not by political affiliation.

The inflammatory nature of Mr. Beverly’s editorial was more than I have seen in a long time.

Citizens of Fayette County had plenty to say about the editorial on *The Citizen* newspaper’s blog-site. As of this writing, there were 169 responses to the editorial. (And I know of several submissions that were not accepted to be on the blog-site.) Most of the responses shown on the blog-site were positive toward the Fayette Freethought Society.

Of the many responses, FFS Founder (and AFS member) Julie Williams had much to say. One of her responses on *The Citizen* newspaper’s blog-site is shown below.

In addition, Josh Akeman, a reporter for the newspaper *Fayette County News*, wrote an article and an editorial about Beverly’s editorial. They are shown on pages 4 and 5.

Of course, none of the responses on *The Citizen*’s blog-site that put FFS in a positive light were reprinted in subsequent issues of *The Citizen* newspaper. The same goes for letters-to-the-editor. Cal Beverly controls the content of his newspaper and will not allow that.

¹See Cal Beverly’s editorial at <http://thecitizen.com/blogs/cal-beverly/01-17-2012/free-thoughts-about-our-freethought-chairman>

What is Freethought?

By Julie Williams and Denise Martin, Co-Founders of the Fayette Freethought Society
(See this blog post on-line at <http://www.thecitizennews.com/node/9944>.)

“Freethought is a philosophical viewpoint that holds that opinions should be formed on the basis of science, logic and reason and should not be influenced by authority, tradition or any other dogma.”

Cal, I don’t believe you fully grasp the definition of freethought, or what

a freethinker is. Freethought does NOT necessarily mean atheism. A person can be a freethinker and still believe in god and we have many members who believe this way. They would be classified as deists, a belief system held by many of our founding fathers. We also have agnostics in our

group, secular humanists, a few neopagans/pantheists and, yes, some atheists.

The Fayette Freethought Society was founded in 2009 for those in the rural areas of Georgia who hold a secular worldview and who would like to meet socially with other free-

thinking people. I, along with two other individuals (not Mr. Stefanelli), founded the group and it has grown steadily over the past 2 years. We are parents, grandparents, teachers, nurses, students, and families who also live here and we volunteer in our community, in our schools, some of us give blood, or walk dogs for the Humane Society. We pick up trash along the highway, we meet socially for dinner and lunch, host holiday parties and movie nights, play trivia at Mellow Mushroom, and even prepared chili at the Civitan Chili Cookoff this year and rowed a Dragon Boat in the 2010 race on Peachtree Lake. In all honesty, we don't see how this can be perceived as being "militant."

Cal, is it possible that you are just feeling uncomfortable about non-Christians in our community, now that the secular population has decided to come out of the closet? We are proud to be part of this community.

It is appalling that the Editor of our only local newspaper would stoop so low as to incite hate and fear towards one of our members, Leonard Presberg, and our group as a whole. Should there be a religious or political litmus test given to future school board members and local politicians? Are you the one to administer that test and print the results in your paper? It seems as though this is what you have done to Leonard Presberg.

In a 2010 poll, Gallup noted the

increasing number of Americans with no religious affiliation (16%). It is very possible that 16% of our community is also non-religious, or non-Christian. And some of them will eventually end up on the school board or as an elected official, or maybe even as our mayor.

We all want the same things, Cal, to preserve the beauty of our community, our excellent school system and our quality of life here. That is our only agenda.

(A great book to read that offers an insightful history of freethought is *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* by Susan Jacoby.)

Julie Williams, Founder

Denise Roddy Martin, Co-founder

Freethought Society Not Happy with Public Perception

By Josh Akeman, from the Feb. 2 issue of *Fayette County News* [Reprinted here by permission.]

Plenty of controversy has arisen since the recent appointment of Leonard Presberg as chairman of the Fayette County Board of Education. Presberg was one of the board members who voted in favor of making the shift to district voting, a move made in response to a lawsuit filed against the county by the NAACP, which argued that the previous at-large voting unfairly discriminated against minority candidates. Since it became public that Presberg is a Democrat, as well as a member of the Fayette Freethought Society, a secular organization, many have called into question the wisdom of the Board's decision to appoint him as chairman.

This paper already printed an interview with Presberg, in which he expressed his feeling that his political and religious beliefs should have little bearing on his ability to serve ably on the Board of Education. However, that still left the question as to what exactly the Fayette Freethought Society does, and how involved Presberg is in its activities.

The founder of the group, Julie Williams, says that Presberg did join in 2010, but that he is not an active member, nor can she remember having seen him at any group meetings. She says he offered his house for a

screening of a documentary that one of the group members had created. She also feels that the backlash toward Presberg, and the Freethought Society, has been overblown.

"I think much of the backlash is because he voted for district voting. It's ridiculous what people are saying. Now some of our members are afraid of being singled out."

Williams says that she was moved to establish the group in 2010, mostly out of frustration at the verbal abuse that her children received for not being churchgoers. She recalled having to deal with her daughter being told by a classmate that she was going to hell.

She says the group originally met to discuss their beliefs, but has evolved over the past two years to be more a collection of like-minded friends that enjoy weekly meetings. "It's been very interesting to see the group change over time; now we're moving toward being more involved in the community as a positive presence."

The group typically holds four events per month, two lunches and two dinners. They also meet each quarter to clean up the mile stretch of highway that they adopted in Peachtree City. Sometimes they travel up to Atlanta to join in events with the At-

lanta Freethought Society.

"Some people are making it out like we're getting together to make Molotov Cocktails," she added with shock. "I think it's just been an attempt by some people to rile up a community that is largely conservative and Christian. We're not trying to judge anyone's beliefs or change their mind. We have members who are religious, and plenty of members that are politically conservative. Our meetings are open to anyone who wants to come."

Several other members of the group echoed the same sentiments.

The Freethought Society has added ten members since the controversy began, indicating some support for them. "The positive outcome that I see, or hope, happening is that people in our community realize that there are many citizens who live here among them who consider themselves secular and non-religious. And we are your neighbors... we live and work in your community... we're teachers, nurses, doctors, pilots, writers, artists, students, parents... we may even be a member of your own family and you just don't know it yet. We are proud to call this community our home too, and we strive every day to make it a better place for all of us to live."

Of Course, It's Just My Opinion

An Editorial By Josh Akeman, from the Jan. 28 issue of *Fayette County News*

I happened to read a column by a local writer and editor last week. He was reflecting on the sudden furor that erupted over the recent revelations that newly appointed Board of Ed Chairman Leonard Presberg might be a Democrat, and even an atheist.

An interesting revelation, to be sure. But as I read the column, I quickly realized that I wasn't reading an informative perspective on a newsworthy story, but rather a mean-spirited attack on a person and a group of people that the writer did not know.

The bombshell that blew open the controversy was the discovery that Pressberg is a member of the Fayette Freethought Society, and even was (wrongly) attributed as a founding member. The Fayette Freethought Society is a social group made up primarily of nonreligious people, though they have some members of various faiths.

I only really need to cite one phrase from this column to explain why I was appalled and offended by what I was reading. It refers to the Freethought Society as a "militant atheist organization."

Now, as a writer, I've occasionally slipped a less than perfect adjective into a sentence. But "militant" is not one of those adjectives that you haphazardly toss out only to later think "maybe 'totally harmless' would have worked better there."

It's particularly unnerving to think that a long time editor could be so recklessly indiscriminate as to characterize a group of people as militant without any, you know, evidence.

The writer in question would like to hide behind the fact that he was writing an editorial column, not a news story, and therefore it is merely his opinion. Oh, OK.

So let's assume I want to express my opinion that the writer only goes to church on Sundays to engage in militant Christian activities. Of course, I would have no evidence to support this, and in fact even a few minutes search for evidence would yield precisely the opposite conclusion. But who cares, it's just my opinion!

Oh, as an online addendum, the writer later rightly pointed out that the Fayette Freethought Society website has been converted from fully public to private, only accessible by members, since the publication of his column. He then invites you to speculate as to what's being hidden.

But there's no need to speculate. I asked the founder of the group. She made the site private out of fear of discrimination against group members. A fear entirely generated by the publication of this person's column.

She was especially concerned for members' children, who could be bullied, as many of them have been before for their non-belief.

But really, what's the harm in expressing an opinion?

Never mind that this writer is going after real people with families, without speaking to a single one of them. Never mind that most of them have never even met Mr. Presberg, though they acknowledge he did join the group at some point.

Never mind that their only crime

seems to be having the audacity to get together for dinner, or to pick up trash along the highway as they do regularly. And never mind that many members of the Freethought Society have now been banned from posting on the writer's newspaper website, so they can't defend themselves.

Who cares? They ought to get their own newspaper if they want their opinions to be heard. Oh, coincidentally, I was on the Freethought Society site about six months ago, doing research for a story. It was indeed a harrowing experience, a list of planned subversive activities, such as: meet for lunch at a Mexican restaurant, meet for trivia night at a pizza place, meet for a book discussion. Scary stuff.

Just to satisfy my journalistic curiosity, I sat down with members of the Fayette Freethought Society Thursday night. The meeting was ominously set at a Thai restaurant. I swear I heard witches cackling at one point, but I can't be sure.

Coincidentally, I also happened to hang out with some friends of mine later that night. The two experiences were really quite similar. Not because my friends are militant atheists, but because every last person I met from the Freethought Society is kind, friendly, and well-meaning, just like my friends. Just like most people.

I can't just stand by and let them be smeared, any more than I could allow that to happen to my friends. And nobody else should stand by and allow it either. It is not okay.

But that's just my opinion.

See this article on-line at http://www.fayettedailynews.com/article.php?id_news=9436. Much thanks go to Josh Akeman for his kind and rational words about the Fayette Freethought Society, and for permission to reprint his editorial here.

Here are more links on the Fayette County issue:

Freethought Chairman leads our schools: <http://thecitizen.com/articles/01-17-2012/freethought-chairman-now-leads-our-schools>

Deceptive Presburg should resign: <http://thecitizen.com/articles/01-24-2012/deceptive-presburg-should-resign>

New Chairman must answer publicly: <http://thecitizen.com/articles/01-31-2012/new-boe-chairman-must-answer-publicly>

Presberg deserves shot at leading BOE: <http://thecitizen.com/articles/01-24-2012/presberg-deserves-shot-leading-boe>

Josh Akeman's article in *Fayette County News*: http://fayettedailynews.com/article.php?id_news=9465

And please do read the comments to Cal Beverly's editorial on-line! They show that not all citizens agree with him.

“Bible Man” OK’d by Jackson County, Ala. School Board

The Freedom from Religion Foundation has sent a complaint; further action is probable

A parent’s complaint about religious assemblies during the school day brought more than 100 people supporting the assemblies to a called meeting of the Jackson County (Ala.) School Board meeting on January 30. Board members retired with their attorney into closed executive session to consider the five-page complaint sent last month by the **Freedom from Religion Foundation** on behalf of the parents. After an hour’s deliberations, board members returned to the room to announce, to applause, that they would not be banning the Bible Man from schools, despite the complaint about his monthly meetings with county elementary children.

While the board deliberated, the standing-room-only crowd prayed, sang and shared stories of the “Bible Man,” as Horace Turner Jr. is called. The Bible Man began his ministry at least 35 years ago in schools in the northeast Alabama county. The ministry is now conducted by his son. Bible Man leads assemblies with elementary children to tell stories from the Bible, said superintendent Kenneth Harding. It’s a schedule similar to that of the county’s 4-H leaders, who come to schools once a month.

“We know it’s going to be a fight,” Harding said. “But our constituents are pretty adamant about what they want for their children. Hopefully we can meet the law and keep the man, too.”

FFRF co-president Annie Laurie Gaylor said on Feb. 1 that the First Amendment watchdog group, which is based in Wisconsin, will be following up on their complaint. “This is totally unacceptable,” said Gaylor. “Public schools are not to be a conduit for missionaries. It’s improper to

proselytize in an elementary school. This is predation—with the blessing of the school district.”

Officials say the meetings have always been voluntary, but Gaylor says courts have said elementary school children can’t discern what is required and what is not.

“The courts have told us what we can and cannot do pretty explicitly,” said John Porter III, attorney for the Jackson County school system, speaking from his office Wednesday. “What we are trying to do is to work out a legal way for Mr. Turner to continue to come to the schools.”

A state lawmaker says any parent who objects to the Bible Man should consider home-schooling their children. “We were established to be a godly nation, a Christian nation,” said Alabama Sen. Shadrack McGill, a Republican from the state’s Eighth District. “We need God in government. We need God in the public school. The more we trend away from God, the more we suffer—morally and spiritually.”

McGill says his views about the Bible Man are shared by the majority of his constituents.

The Foundation’s five-page, single-spaced complaint lays out dozens of legal precedents set in cases involving religious activities organized by public schools around the country. The Foundation lists the **Alabama Free-thought Society**, as a member group.

The complaint also notes there is public prayer at football games and a school-organized prayer breakfast for football players and cheerleaders that was held at a local church. All of these activities, the complaint states, are violations of the First Amendment to the Constitution, which bars the government from establishing religion.

For now, Turner will not be returning to the North Sand Mountain School, which is where the student attends whose parents filed the complaint. But he will continue at several other schools.

John Porter, the school system’s attorney, said that allowing the Bible Man to make his presentations during an open period in which other activities are also offered on a voluntary basis might meet the demands of the law.

An online petition posted at **iPetitions.com** had 938 signatures as of Feb. 3 and dozens of comments about what the Bible Man has meant to children over the years.

The FFRF complaint states that the Bible Man talks have included telling the children that Jesus died on the cross for their sins. Turner also gives children who have had birthdays during the month toy coins embossed with a Bible verse from the Christian New Testament.

While McGill said the assemblies were always voluntary, Freedom From Religion co-president Annie Laurie Gaylor said that the courts are very clear in noting elementary children, in particular, cannot discern what is required and what is not. Also, she said, peer pressure to attend would be significant.

“We cannot put the power of religious interpretation in the hands of the Bible Man, the Quran Man or anyone else,” Gaylor said. “We cannot offer indoctrinal classes in public schools. It’s disingenuous to say this does not violate the establishment clause of the First Amendment.”

[From articles at <http://www.FFRF.org> and *The Huntsville Times* website, <http://www.al.com/>.]

“The only position that leaves me with no cognitive dissonance is atheism. It is not a creed. Death is certain, replacing both the siren-song of Paradise and the dread of Hell. Life on this earth, with all its mystery and beauty and pain, is then to be lived far more intensely: we stumble and get up, we are sad, confident, insecure, feel loneliness and joy and love.

There is nothing more; but I want nothing more.”

—Christopher Hitchens, from *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Non-Believer*, 2007

Americans United Applauds Federal Appeals Court Ruling Against California's Proposition 8

Americans' Civil Rights Should Not Be Subject To Whims of Religious Majorities, Says AU

A federal appeals court made the right call today (Feb. 7) in striking down California's Proposition 8, says Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

In its *Perry v. Brown* decision¹, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled against Proposition 8, a measure that withdrew the civil marriage rights of same-sex couples in the state.

"No American's right to marry should be subjected to a veto from aggressive and well-funded religious groups," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United, which filed a friend-of-the-court brief in the case. "Our nation is a democracy, not a theocracy. Our laws should reflect equality and fairness, not discrimination and intolerance."

Added Lynn, "Opponents of same-sex marriage have been unable to muster any arguments other than it offends their theology. We have a

secular government, and dogma should not and cannot be transformed into law."

In a November 2008 referendum, voters narrowly approved Proposition 8, a ballot measure that revoked the right of same-sex couples to obtain civil marriages. The referendum was dominated by lavishly funded political front groups representing the Roman Catholic bishops, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) and fundamentalist Protestant churches.

Americans United asserts that powerful religious interest groups must not be allowed to change civil marriage laws to reflect their doctrinal teachings.

Americans United filed its friend-of-the-court brief jointly with the Howard University School of Law Civil Rights Clinic. It notes that historically opponents of marriage rights

for slaves and interracial couples argued that such unions were a threat to the social order and the institutions of marriage and family. Opponents also claimed that such marriages violated their interpretation of the Bible.

Observes the brief, "Even though reliance on religious doctrine as the basis for public policy is as improper today as it was in the days of anti-miscegenation laws, today opponents of marriage between two persons of the same sex use (their) Biblical interpretations to suggest that homosexuality is unnatural because it is against God's will. Indeed, like their anti-miscegenationist counterparts, opponents of marriage for same-sex couples almost always attempt to clothe their arguments in literal and selective interpretations of the Bible."

Today's ruling is certain to be taken to the U.S. Supreme Court.

[From a Feb. 7 AU press release.]

¹See the ruling here: <http://howappealing.law.com/Proposition8-cta9ruling-020712.pdf>

In the News:

Catholic bishop resigns, admits he has 2 kids:

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/45871047/ns/us_news-life/t/catholic-bishop-resigns-admits-he-has-kids/#.TwSVhDN_npk.email

60 NYC Churches Brace for Feb. 12 Eviction From Schools:

<http://www.crosswalk.com/news/60-nyc-churches-feb-12-eviction-from-schools.html?ps=0>

Former President of ORU Richard Roberts Arrested For DUI, Speeding:

http://www.newson6.com/story/16586113/former-president-of-oral-roberts-university-arrested-for-dui-speeding?hpt=hp_t3

Lawsuit Challenges Whiteville's Christian Water Tower Display: <http://www.commercialappeal.com/news/2012/jan/21/cross-cause/>

Eddie Long Crowned As King: <http://www.americanfreethought.com/wordpress/2012/02/04/eddie-long-crowned-king-of-the-jews/>

'Extremist' speaker withdraws from speaking at West Point Prayer Breakfast after protests:

<http://usnews.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/01/30/10273196-extremist-speaker-withdraws-from-west-point-event-after-protests>

Jackson County School Board Sides with "Bible Man":

<http://www.waaytv.com/news/local/story/Jackson-County-School-Board-Sides-with-Bible-Man/9L6CFjmae0WRdggZi-StQA.csp>

Could Prayer Before Augusta Commission Meetings Be Illegal?:

<http://www2.wjfb.com/news/2012/jan/18/could-prayer-augusta-commission-meetings-be-illegal-ar-3069642/>

Atheism in America: <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/d2239780-4d4e-11e1-8741-00144feabdc0.html>

Mitt Romney's family baptized Ann Romney's atheist father into Mormon church a year AFTER his death:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2093241/Mitt-Romneys-family-baptized-Ann-Romneys-atheist-father-Mormon-church-year-AFTER-death.html>

Sex and God: How Religion Distorts Sexuality (by Darrel Ray): http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gp_L4yvOZCM

"Atheism is a religion like abstinence is a sex position":

<http://richarddawkins.net/videos/644833-new-rule-atheism-is-not-a-religion-unbaptizes-mitt-romney-s-dead-father-in-law>

Stephen Colbert's Defense of Planned Parenthood:

<http://gawker.com/5791100/watch-stephen-colberts-defense-of-planned-parenthood>

Other Interesting Links:

Attend the Reason Rally in Washington, D.C. on March 24: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XI7SAk2hCLU&feature=youtu.be>

New article by the Smithsonian: How Thomas Jefferson Created His Own Bible:
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/How-Thomas-Jefferson-Created-His-Own-Bible.html>

Jefferson's Blasphemy on Display at the Smithsonian:
<http://www.americanhumanist.org/HNN/details/2012-01-jeffersons-blasphemy-on-display-at-the-smithsonian>

Sam Harris: The Fireplace Delusion: <http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/the-fireplace-delusion>

A new Atheism News Service has started: <http://www.atheismnews.com/>

Read Gary Whittenberger's new article "On Visions and Resurrections": <http://www.skeptic.com/eskeptic/12-02-01/>

See the new Atheist Alliance of America website: <http://www.AtheistAllianceAmerica.org/>.

Proposed New Calendar Would Make Time Rational: <http://www.wired.com/wiredscience/2011/12/rational-calendar/>

Christopher Hitchens' response to "Does Science Make Belief in God Obsolete?": <http://www.skeptic.com/eskeptic/12-01-04/#feature>

Sam Harris interviews Lawrence Krauss, author of *A Universe From Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather Than Nothing*:
<http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/everything-and-nothing/>

God, Government and Roger Williams' Big Idea:
<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/God-Government-and-Roger-Williams-Big-Idea.html>

Other Meetings of Interest in the Atlanta Area

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet on Sunday, Feb. 19, at 12:30 PM at AF Hall. Scott Smith will talk about The Callaway Foundation and its use of fundamentalist Christianity in the mill village of LaGrange, GA in 1935. He is the author of the book *Legacy: The Secret History of Proto-Fascism in America's Greatest Little City*.

The **Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta** will meet on Sunday, Feb. 19, 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>.

Frontiers in Science Public Lecture featuring Doug Osheroff, Nobel Prize Winner: "How Advances in Science Are Made." Monday, Feb 13 at 6:00PM at Georgia Tech, Clough Undergraduate Learning Commons, Room 152, 266 Fourth St. NW, Atlanta, GA.

The **SOS** (Secular Organizations for Sobriety) meets on Tuesdays at 7:30PM in Roswell. For more information, send an email to donnaigore@yahoo.com.

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet on Monday, Feb. 13, at 7:00PM at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville, GA. <http://gust.domek.org/>

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

The **Atlanta Skeptics** will meet at 1:00 PM on Saturday, Feb. 18, at Manuel's Tavern. LaVerne Knight-West will talk on the African Holocaust. See <http://www.atlantaskeptics.com/>

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** will meet on Sat., Feb. 25, at 7:00PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. Annie Shanley, a doctoral student in Art History at Emory, will speak on the glass industry of Egypt 3,500 years ago. See <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>.

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

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

"Faith is the surrender of the mind; it's the surrender of reason, it's the surrender of the only thing that makes us different from other mammals... Of all the supposed virtues, faith must be the most overrated." — Christopher Hitchens

"The priesthood have, in all ancient nations, nearly monopolized learning.... And, even since the Reformation, when or where has existed a Protestant or dissenting sect who would tolerate a free inquiry? The blackest billingsgate, the most ungentlemanly insolence, the most yahooish brutality is patiently endured, countenanced, propagated, and applauded. But touch a solemn truth in collision with a dogma of a sect, though capable of the clearest proof, and you will soon find you have disturbed a nest, and the hornets will swarm about your legs and hands, and fly into your face and eyes.

— John Adams

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

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

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

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

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

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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.

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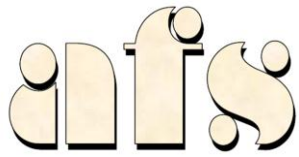
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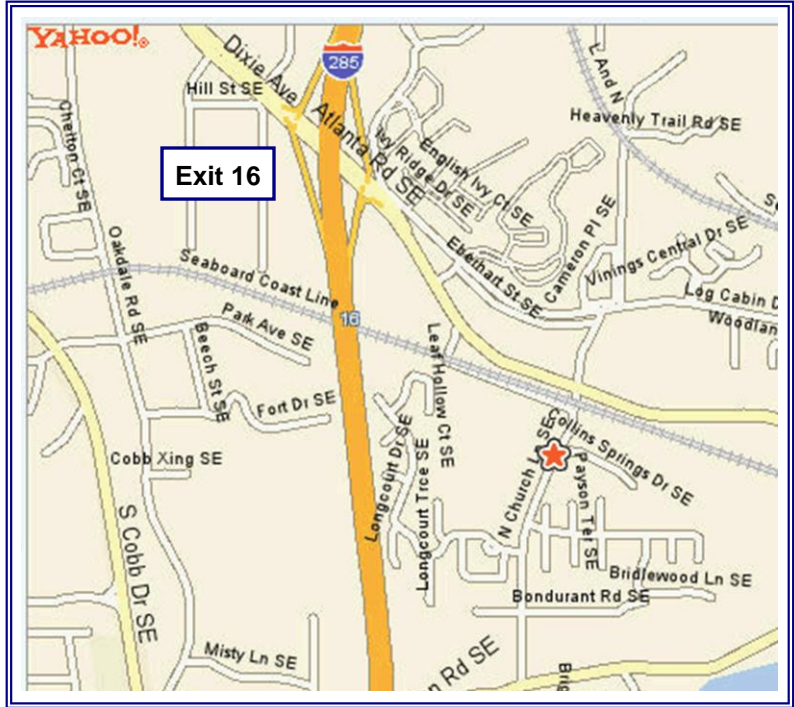


Atlanta
Freethought
Society

The February 12 Meeting:

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

**This Month's Speaker:
Maaneli Derakhshani**



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