

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself.

An AFS Publication

• Volume 18 Number 4

• April 2012

The April AFS Meeting

The April 8 AFS meeting will include talks by **Ted Goodwin**, President of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies and former National President of Final Exit Network, and **Jim Chastain**, President of the Final Exit Network of Florida.

Ted Goodwin is one of four persons arrested in a sting operation in 2009 by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation and charged with assisting in the commission of a suicide. Ted will talk about the events of the last three years culminating in his exoneration by decision of the Georgia Supreme Court this past February.

Jim Chastain will discuss several new efforts of the Final Exit Network along with preparation of wills, trusts, advance directives and the critical choices to be made in end of life decisions.

(You can learn more about these two organizations at <http://www.finalexitnetwork.org> and <http://www.worldrtd.net>.)

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 freethinkers. Visitors are always welcome at AFS meetings.

The April AFS Social

The April AFS Social will be a lunch on Saturday, April 14, at 1:00 at Lin Buffet, 3201 S. Cobb Dr., Smyrna.

Join us for good food and great conversation with other freethinkers.

About the Final Exit Network

Final Exit Network believes that mentally competent adults have a basic human right to end their lives when they suffer from a fatal or irreversible illness they can no longer bear, when their quality of life is personally unacceptable, and the future holds only hopelessness and misery. Such a right shall be an individual choice, including the timing and companion, free of any restriction by the law, clergy, medical profession, even friends and relatives, no matter how well intentioned.

Final Exit Network is an all-volunteer organization dedicated to counseling, support, and guidance for those clients, who themselves choose the when, how, under what circumstances, and especially IF, to proceed. Ted Goodwin stresses that "FEN does not encourage anyone to end their life, does not provide the means to do so and does not actively assist in the person's death. We do, however, believe in the ultimate human right of people to end their lives when circumstances justify, and to have support in carrying out their plan."

AFS Meetings and Activities

April 8: AFS Board Meeting, AF Hall, 11:00 AM

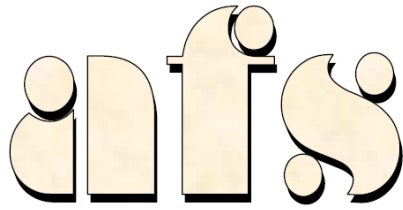
April 8: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM

April 14: AFS Social at Lin Buffet, 1:00 PM

The Reason Rally in Washington, D.C. was a big success.

(Read more about it on page 3!)





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.

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

May 13: TBD

June 10: Gina Colaianni, a blogger and Secretary of the Philosophy Student Association, will talk on Philosophy.

July 8: TBD

Aug 12: TBD

AFS Email Lists

The **AFS eNews** Announcement list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities and news. The **AFS Forum** is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation, and religion. Visit the AFS website at <http://www.atlantafreethought.org> for more info or to subscribe.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of free-thinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define *freethought* as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Atlanta Freethought News an AFS publication

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Vol. 18, Number 4, April 2012

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Back From the Reason Rally

By Bob Seidensticker, from a March 30 post on the *Galileo Unchained* website, <http://galileounchained.com/>.

I've recently returned from the Reason Rally¹, held on the National Mall in Washington D.C. There were an estimated 20,000 people there², *in the rain*, which is a lot more than I would have predicted. The organizers figured that it was the biggest secular gathering in world history by a factor of ten.

The atheist glitterati were all there—Michael Shermer, James Randi (founder of The Amazing Meeting), Richard Dawkins, Greta Christina (my favorite atheist blogger), PZ Myers, Tim Minchin (whose beat poem “Storm³” is awesome), Eddie Izzard, Jessica Ahlquist (American Atheist’s “Atheist of the year” for her lawsuit against the religious banner in her public high school), Rep. Pete Stark (the only open atheist in Congress), Sen. Tom Harkin (*not* an atheist [!] but a senator who welcomed us anyway), Penn Jillette, Todd Stiefel (whose foundation helped sponsor the event), Nate Phelps (an eloquent and estranged member of the infamous Phelps family), and many more⁴. The Rally proceeded without a break for over seven hours.

The 2012 American Atheists Convention⁵ was on the following two days and had 1300 attendees. The theme this year was “Come Out,” and many speakers talked about both the need for that and for dealing with the challenges that coming out as an atheist can impose on someone living in America today.

Here is a summary of some of the highlights of the two events:

- Roughly ten Christian protesters held signs at the Rally. Discussing apolo-

getics with Christian sign carriers is one of my hobbies, but each was surrounded by lots of atheists, sometimes conversing thoughtfully and sometimes haranguing. The only one that I talked to at length admitted that he had no arguments in favor of Christianity but was just mindlessly on the Mall, witnessing for Jesus. I wondered what the point was, since he’s not informing anyone of anything. He had no new arguments, and simply stating the tenets of Christianity (all he seemed capable of doing) to atheists better informed than the average Christian was pointless.

- Taslima Nasrin⁶ from Bangladesh spoke of the Muslim response to her writings—riots, burned cars, and house arrest. After hearing this, it was hard to compare any struggle atheists might have in coming out with hers.
- Physicist Lawrence Krauss said that philosophers asking “Why is there something rather than nothing?” is like Johannes Kepler asking “Why are there five planets?” It’s an irrelevant and outdated question!
- Richard Dawkins spoke of a poll⁷ his foundation did in the UK. Of self-identified “Christians,” many accepted non-Christian beliefs (ghosts, fate, reincarnation), many don’t believe in the power of prayer, many don’t read the Bible and know very little about it, and some don’t even believe that Jesus was a historical figure. Conclusions: most “Christians” aren’t, and we shouldn’t accept Christians’ self-identification but rather ask what they mean.

- Jerry DeWitt⁸ gave a nice talk. He is a cheerful ex-pastor who left religion

half a year ago through the Clergy Project⁹, a group trying to find a soft landing for doubting pastors.

- PZ Myers gave an interesting quote from Sean Carroll¹⁰: “The reason why science and religion are actually incompatible is that, in the real world, they reach incompatible conclusions.” On trying to juggle science and religion, Myers noted: “Squatting in between those on the side of reason and evidence and those worshipping superstition and myth is not a better place. It just means you’re halfway to crazy town.”

Myers noted that religion is a natural part of the human mind. Okay, and smallpox is natural, too. That doesn’t mean you resign yourself to it.

- Greta Christina drew parallels with the gay movement and noted that for many straight people, simply knowing a gay person was key to dismantling their prejudices. Similarly, we need to come out (where practical) to help Christian America dismantle its anti-atheist prejudices. One important difference: when you come out as gay, you’re not telling straight people that they’re wrong. That’s not really true with atheism.

On the subject of atheist accommodationists (“Do you have to be so shrill?”) versus confrontationists (“Don’t mince words—tell it like it is!”), Greta Christina likened the atheist movement to a toolbox. If you’re a hammer, be the best hammer you can be and let the other tools be the best they can be.

Here are a few other things from

¹See the Reason Rally website at <http://www.reasonrally.org/> and more details at http://en.wikipedia.com/wiki/Reason_Rally/.

²See great pictures and videos of the Reason Rally at

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2012/03/26/a-massive-reason-rally-recap-with-videos-and-behind-the-scenes-pictures/>

³See Tim Minchin’s “Storm” beat poem here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0W7Jbc_Vhw

⁴The Reason Rally Speakers: <http://reasonrally.org/speakers-2/>

⁵See more about the American Atheists Convention here: http://atheists.org/events/2012_National_Convention

⁶Taslima Nasrin bio: http://www.amazon.com/Taslima-Nasrin/e/B000APUMNU/ref=sr_ntt_srch_lnk_9?qid=1333126844&sr=1-9

⁷The RDF poll on UK Christians: <http://richarddawkins.net/articles/644941-rdfrs-uk-ipsos-mori-poll-1-how-religious-are-uk-christians>

⁸See more about Jerry DeWitt and Recovering From Religion at <http://recoveringfromreligion.org/pages/JerryDeWitt>

⁹See more on the Clergy Project at <http://www.clergyproject.org/>

¹⁰Sean Carroll’s article: <http://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2009/06/23/sean-carroll-on-the-compatibility-of-faith-and-science/>

my notes:

- This chart from a 2009 Gallup poll¹¹ documents the long-term change in religious preference in the U.S. and shows that the increase in atheism and erosion in Christianity has been fairly steady and not just a recent phenomenon. In 2009, American adults with religious preference of “none” was at 13% and rising.
- The Secular Student Alliance has grown from 50 chapters in 2007 to

250 a year ago and even more today. Campus Crusade for Christ has three times as many chapters, but it has an annual budget¹² of *half a billion dollars* and is losing chapters.

- Too often, the Christian says, “Morality is built on a foundation of God’s existence!” and the atheist response is a tepid, “But we are moral, too.” We need to take morality back. *Our* morality is superior—it’s built on something besides myth and

wishful thinking.

Curiously, no one talked about what I like to talk about: critique of Christian apologetics. I’m not sure what to make of this. Does no one care about this topic? Has everyone already moved on, comfortable in their conclusion that the emperor has no clothes?

Ah well, I guess I’ll just be the best hammer I can be.

— Bob Seidensticker

¹¹See the Gallup poll results at <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124793/This-Christmas-78-Americans-Identify-Christian.aspx>

¹²See “Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ” at <http://uncpress.unc.edu/books/T-8082.html>

FOR MORE ON THE REASON RALLY, SEE:

Atheist Organizer Takes “Movement” to Nation’s Capital:

http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/23/atheist-organizer-takes-movement-to-nations-capital/?hpt=hp_c2

Thousands of U.S. Atheists Turn Out for Reason Rally:

<http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2012/03/24/thousands-of-u-s-atheists-turn-out-for-reason-rally/>

Thousands of U.S. Atheists Turn Out for Reason Rally: (same title, different story)

<http://news.yahoo.com/thousands-us-atheists-turn-reason-rally-221111895.html>

What I Learned at the Reason Rally: <http://www.ffrf.org/news/blog/what-i-learned-at-the-reason-rally/>

A Massive Reason Rally Recap (by the Friendly Atheist):

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/friendlyatheist/2012/03/26/a-massive-reason-rally-recap-with-videos-and-behind-the-scenes-pictures/>

The 36 Best Signs at the Reason Rally: <http://www.buzzfeed.com/mjs538/the-best-signs-at-the-reason-rally>

Local Minister Steps Down; Says She’s an Atheist

A member of the Clergy Project, Teresa Macbain moves from pastor to confirmed non-believer

A methodist pastor in Tallahassee, FL says she’s been leading a double life. She’s been hiding the fact she doesn’t believe in God.

Lake Jackson Methodist Church has been in Tallahassee for a century. In one hundred years they’ve never had a confirmed atheist pastor—until last week.

“I think it’s a challenge for the church. It’s a challenge for each one of us but it’s not new. Two thousand years ago even Peter denied Christ,” said Antonio Fernandez, the district superintendent for the church.

Teresa Macbain resigned from her position as pastor on March 30. She

had been Lake Jackson’s pastor for three years. But Monday of last week she spoke from a different pulpit. She was a surprise guest speaker at the American Atheists Conference.

In a youtube video recording¹ of her speech, she told the audience, “You were the ones who were going to burn in hell and I’m happy to say, as I stand before you, I’m going to burn with you.”

She revealed that she was a member of the Clergy Project. It’s an online community that aims to be a safe place for clergy members who are secret non-believers.

Macbain wrote a testimonial for the

site under the fake name “Lynn.” At the time she had not yet resigned from her duties.

She wrote, “Every week I struggle with the fact that I’m lying when I stand before my congregation. I’m leading a double life.”

Fernandez says Macbain was going through difficult times with her family. He thinks it shook her faith.

The church will appoint a new full-time pastor in June. In the meantime, church members will carry out the Sunday services.

[From an April 3 story by Danielle Eldredge at <http://www.wctv.tv/>.]

¹See the video of Teresa Macbain’s speech and more at:

<http://richarddawkins.net/videos/645470-update-wctv-video-teresa-macbain-coming-out-american-atheists-conference-march-26-2012>.

“For me, it is far better to grasp the Universe as it really is than to persist in delusion, however satisfying and reassuring.” — Carl Sagan (1934-1996)

“The deepest sin against the human mind is to believe things without evidence.” — Aldous Huxley

“Faith is a cop-out. It is intellectual bankruptcy. If the only way you can accept an assertion is by faith, then you are conceding that it can’t be taken on its own merits.” — Dan Barker

Exposing the Easter Myth: He is Risen – Trick or Treat!

By Dan Barker, FFRF Co-President, from the FFRF Blog (<http://www.ffrf.org/blog/>)

It is that time of year again: ghosts and zombies, graveyards, disguises and spooky stories. That's right. Easter is upon us, the season that celebrates the revivification of an executed corpse, a story so fantastical that it makes Halloween look like child's play.

Zombies? Look at this phantasmagorical tale in the Gospel of Matthew, at the time Jesus was crucified:

"The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many." (Matthew 27:51-53)

This little "Night of the Dead Living" story is lobbed so quickly into the Easter narrative that I want to say, "Wait a minute, back up! If this really happened, it's more interesting than Jesus' resurrection!"

It should be relatively easy for a god to revive (in the religious scheme of things), but all these regular people, crawling out of the graves that their rotted bodies had occupied for years, maybe centuries, well, that is news! Tell me more. What did they look like? Were their joints creaky? What did they smell like!? Did they stumble back to their shocked families and former spouses with arms outstretched? Did they get their jobs back? This would be the most amazing headline in history!

But I want to focus on that word "appeared" in the final sentence: "They . . . *appeared* to many people."

The story is a legend

Much has been written about how the Easter legend has origins in ancient spring mythologies. The very word is of pagan origin, from the fertility goddess Eostre (Ishtar, Astarte). The story has been critiqued on many other fronts. In *Godless*, I list many of the internal contradictions in the accounts related by Paul, Mark, Matthew, Luke and John. According to scholars, these episodes show signs of legendary growth, from the early

simple stories of Paul and Mark to the more elaborate exaggerations of Luke and John, decades later.

But as I was reading through the passages again, something jumped out at me, something I never saw when I was a believer. The resurrection is a ghost story! I used to preach that Jesus rose bodily from the grave: The stone was physically moved (by angel or earthquake) in order for the material person of Jesus to walk out, with heart beating and lungs pumping air. Like a regular guy.

Most Christians think this is critical, showing that Jesus didn't simply "die and go to heaven" like Grandma or anybody else whose spirit (they believe) ascends while the corpse rots, but that a solid miracle occurred, conquering death in every way. The empty tomb was an empty physical tomb – a real rock was rolled away to make way for a real body.

But if we look at the actual words of the text, this is not at all what happened. The New Testament authors change the words they use to describe Jesus after the resurrection.

Vision or hallucination?

Before Easter morning, in all of the gospels, Jesus is described in normal narrative terms, meeting people, sitting, standing, coming and going. He was seen, watched, heard, touched and followed. But when the stone was rolled away from the tomb, suddenly Jesus is not just passively seen – he actively appears.

Like a ghost.

Before the resurrection, even when the disciples thought Jesus might have been a spook, the narrator assures us he was not, using normal vision to describe the scene, as in the famous story of walking on water:

"But when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, 'Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.'" (Mark 6:49-50)

Notice: He didn't "appear" to them, no matter what they might have im-



aged. They "saw" him, the writer assures us. In the New Testament, if it is a vision or ghost, words like "appeared" or "showed himself" are used, otherwise it is a natural viewing. The narrator of Mark is obviously emphasizing this distinction because otherwise there would have been no miracle. Any old ghost can float above a lake.

The opposite happens before the resurrection, with the author of Matthew careful to state that what happened was not material. At the transfiguration of Jesus on a high mountain, Moses and Elijah "appear" to Peter, James and John. Boo! These guys had been dead for centuries, so it could hardly have been their physical bodies on that summit.

Jesus agrees:

"Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead." (Matthew 17:9)

Notice he did not say, "Tell no one what you saw." In Greek, the word "vision" is from the same root as "appear."

But after the crucifixion, the writers strangely alter their vocabulary when referring to Jesus. Here is the earliest account we have of Easter, written by Paul about 25 years after the supposed event:

*"Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and he was buried, and he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and he **appeared** to Cephas, then to the twelve."*

Then he **appeared** to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he **appeared** to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he **appeared** also to me." (I Corinthians 15:3-8)

That's the same word – appeared – that Matthew used to describe the zombies, and the angel who spoke to Joseph when Mary was pregnant, and the ghost of Moses on the mountain. Paul could have simply reported that "the disciples and apostles saw Jesus, and so did I."

Saying that he "appeared" is an unusual way to describe meeting a real person. This doesn't happen with Jesus until after he is dead.

Suppose you asked me if my neighbor was home, and I said, "Yes. I went up to the door, and he appeared to me. I know he was there because when I entered the dining room, he showed himself to me again!" You would think I was talking about a haunted house.

The plot thickens

The next Easter story is in Mark, written about 40 years after the sup-

posed event:

"Now after he rose early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene. . . . After this he appeared in another form to two of them, as they were walking into the country. . . . Later he appeared to the eleven themselves as they were sitting at the table." (Mark 16:9-14)

Mark, the writer of the first gospel, also switches to "appeared." But "in another form?" What is that all about? When Luke later describes this scene on the road to Emmaus, he writes that the men's "eyes were kept from recognizing him." (Luke 24:13-31)

Jesus was obviously disguised in some way. Halloween costume! After they ate a meal, it gets spooky: "Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight." Whooo! Trick or treat!

Is this the way to describe a real person? Luke does present the next scene at the table in Jerusalem using relatively normal words (standing, eating, touching his body), and avoids the word "appeared" that Paul used to describe the same event, but it obviously didn't seem real to the 11 disciples.

Jesus magically "stood in the midst of them" (the opposite of the vanishing act) and "they were startled and terrified and thought that they were seeing a ghost." He then went outside and "was carried up into heaven." I hate to eat and run.

John, about 60 years after the alleged event, who never used "appeared" in the narrative prior to describing the resurrection, tells his first resurrection tale using normal words, but then says:

"After these things, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberius. . . . This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead." (John 24:1,14)

He "appeared?" He "showed himself?" This is not the way to talk about a man meeting his friends. (And no, I will not try for a crude joke here.)

The Easter story may be meaningful to millions, but it was not a human body that walked out of that tomb. It was probably a black cat.

[This story originally appeared in the March 2012 Freethought Today with the title "Ghostbuster Bags Zombie Jesus."]

Ten Commandments Removed from Fentress County (Tenn.) Schools

Fentress County Schools Director received a written complaint.

The ongoing debate surrounding the separation of church and state has made its way to several East Tennessee schools in recent weeks.

The school board in Lenoir City announced it has suspended the practice of reciting prayers at several events, including board meetings and football games.

At Pine Haven Elementary School in Jamestown, parents said several displays of the Ten Commandments were recently removed after the Fentress County schools director received a written complaint.

"On Monday we were informed that the Ten Commandments had been taken out of the school," said Christy Kearns, the parent of a 5-year-old and a 6-year-old who attend Pine Haven Elementary School. "Members of the community are a little upset that they

were taken down. We feel like our rights were violated too when they took down the Ten Commandments."

Fentress County Director of Schools Mike Jones sent the following statement via email to a local TV station:

"We are continuing to monitor the situation. We are concerned with the education environment and protecting First Amendment rights," wrote Jones.

Media representatives from groups such as the **ACLU**, **Americans United**, and the **Freedom From Religion Foundation** said they were unaware of the situation in Jamestown.

Church leaders have stated that the removal of the Ten Commandments from public schools damages the community.

"Yes, we are in a secular society, but the people in that society still have

faith. That faith can certainly make a difference for morality," said Fred Allred, pastor at Faith Baptist Tabernacle.

As for Kearns, she wants the Ten Commandments displayed on the walls of her children's elementary school.

"At least we're trying. At least we're standing up as Christians and a community to let our voices be heard," said Kearns.

Parents said the principal of Pine Haven Elementary School, Daryl Rains, is also a preacher at a local church. Several websites list Rains as a reverend and religious leader at Al-lardt First Baptist Church.

[From a March 21 story by Jim Matheny at <http://www.wbir.com/>.]

Religious Exemptions Are Not Valid in Health Care Insurance

By Gary Whittenberger, from the Tallahassee Freethinker blog (<http://thetallahasseeffreethinker.blogspot.com/>)

The relation of church and state, or religion and government, can be very complex and controversial, as borne out by a current issue on the national stage. In implementation of the Affordable Care Act of 2010, the Obama administration recently required religious nonprofits to include birth control devices and procedures in any health care insurance program they provided for their employees and to ensure that the employees would pay no deductibles or copays when acquiring birth control. This action was met by a barrage of criticism mostly by Catholic leaders who claimed that the requirement violated their religious beliefs. In a response just a couple of days later, the Obama administration implemented a compromise which requires the insurance companies, not the religious nonprofits themselves, to pay for the employees' birth control devices and procedures. However, several legislators, mostly Republicans led by Senate minority leader Mitch McConnell, have said that they will introduce new legislation to exempt religious nonprofit employers from carrying health insurance on their employees which includes any device or procedure which violates an employer's moral or religious beliefs, perhaps even if the medical intervention is paid for by the insurance company! This new move by the President's opponents goes beyond birth control and frames the whole issue as one of religious freedom. McConnell said "They don't have the authority under the First Amendment of the United States Constitution to tell someone in this country or some organization in this country what their religious beliefs are."

McConnell seems mistaken on all points. Neither the original nor the

compromise regulation from the Obama administration tells anyone what their religious beliefs will be. Religious beliefs are not the kind of thing that are changed by legislation or regulation; they are changed only by the believer himself. Are we not free to believe anything we wish? Also, the new requirement does not violate the First Amendment. Instead, adding religious exemptions to the requirement is what would violate the First Amendment since the exemptions would show government favoritism to some religious sects over others and to religious worldviews over nonreligious ones. Although the "free exercise of religion" clause of the First Amendment permits us to engage in various forms of worship of the divine, it does not entitle us to violate the moral and legal codes of the wider community. We still have a democracy, fortunately not yet a theocracy, in this country.

Employers have a moral duty to provide health insurance coverage for their employees which includes all legally permissible medical devices, services, and procedures. They should not be exempted from this moral duty for religious reasons any more than they should be exempted from a moral prohibition, e.g. against sexual molestation, for religious reasons. A moral duty and a moral prohibition make equal demands on individuals and groups, and there are no valid religious reasons for exemptions. To be legitimate, the latter would require that God himself had clearly and specifically communicated his objections about employers providing comprehensive health insurance coverage to their employees, and no religious leader has provided any good evidence that God has spoken on the

matter. Any person can make the religious claim that God wants employers to provide comprehensive health insurance to their employees, and any other person can make the opposite religious claim, but these claims cancel or neutralize each other since God has remained silent, despite the arrogant assertions of some religious leaders to the contrary. Religion cannot provide any valid foundation for exemption from a moral duty which has been implemented as a law or government regulation.

As already mentioned, many Catholic employers have insisted on an exemption from providing health insurance for their employees which covers birth control. What will be next? Will Jehovah's Witness employers insist on the exclusion of blood transfusions from the insurance policies for their employees? Will Christian Scientist employers insist on the exclusion of any medical procedure not paired with intercessory prayer? Will some fundamentalist Protestant employers demand the exclusion of treatments for AIDS? None of these demands for exceptions has any valid foundation, religious or otherwise. The moral duty to care for one's fellow human beings, in this case by sharing in the cost of health insurance, defeats these shallow and dogmatic calls for exceptions.

Obama should have stuck to his original position or gone even further to ensure universal comprehensive health care for all Americans. At this point, however, we should join together in making it clear to our legislators that we will not tolerate any more religious excuses for failure to do the right thing, morally and legally.

[Gary Whittenberger is a retired psychologist living in Tallahassee, FL.]

More Links:

The Week of Reason: Part one, the Reason Rally: <http://wilmingtonfavs.com/tag/freedom-from-religion-foundation/>

Richard Dawkins at Fort Brag Rock Beyond Belief: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53uHoGXbniE&feature=youtu.be>

What do you say to grieving non-believers? By Greta Christina:

<http://freethoughtblogs.com/greta/2012/04/02/what-do-you-say-to-grieving-non-believers/>

Listen to Dan Barker's musical freethought special here: <http://ffrf.libsyn.com/dan-barker-s-musical-freethought-special>

Other Meetings of Interest in the Atlanta Area

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet on Sunday, April 15, at 12:30 PM at the AF Hall pavilion. It's a cookout rather than a regular meeting. Bring food! See you there!

The **Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta** will meet on Sunday, April 15, 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 **SOS** (Secular Organizations for Sobriety) meets on Tuesdays at 7:30PM in Roswell. For more information, send an email to donnajgore@yahoo.com.

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet on Monday, April 9, 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 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 **Peachtree City Humanists** meet often for discussions at Starbucks, lunch, dinner at She's Bistro, and more. See <http://www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH/>.

The **Atlanta Skeptics** will meet at 7:00 PM on Saturday, April 21, at Manuel's Tavern. There will be a discussion of the myths and legends associated with the sinking of the Titanic. See <http://www.atlantaskeptics.com/>.

There is an "Intro to the Atlanta Skeptics" meeting at 7:00PM on Wednesday, April 11, at Manuel's Tavern.

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** will meet on Sat., April 28, at 7:00PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. Jacobus de Roode, Assistant Professor of Biology at Emory University, will talk on self-medication in monarch butterflies. <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>

There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, April 8, 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, April 22, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

In the News:

Televangelists Accused of Defrauding \$50 Million from Trinity Broadcasting Network:

<http://www.theblaze.com/stories/televangelists-accused-of-defrauding-50-million-from-trinity-broadcasting-network/>

Federal lawsuit says Pa. House resolution for Year of the Bible violates US Constitution: <http://tinyurl.com/7of4emk>

Anti-Religion Group Sues, Claims Pa. "Year of the Bible Resolution" Is Unconstitutional:

<http://global.christianpost.com/news/anti-religion-group-sues-claims-pa-year-of-the-bible-resolution-is-unconstitutional-72232/>

Atheists Sue Over Pennsylvania Decree of Year of the Bible:

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/sns-rt-atheists-pennsylvanian2e8erwrp-20120327,0,7924241.story>

Teacher Must Remove "In God We Trust" Banners From Classroom After SCOTUS Denies Case:

<http://www.theblaze.com/stories/teacher-must-remove-in-god-we-trust-banners-from-classroom-after-scotus-denies-case/>

Other Interesting Sites:

How the Fundamentalist Mind Compels Conservative Christians to Force Their Beliefs on You: <http://tinyurl.com/6te4h22>

How Religion's Demand for Obedience Keeps Us in the Dark Ages:

http://www.alternet.org/belief/154604/how_religion%27s_demand_for_obedience_keeps_us_in_the_dark_ages

Captive Virgins, Polygamy, Sex Slaves: What Marriage Would Look Like if We Actually Followed the Bible:

<http://www.alternet.org/story/154721/>

Muslim Marriage Guide Oks Wife Beating: <http://www.newsmax.com/Emerson/Muslim-Marriage-Gift-Islamic/2012/03/29/id/434277>

Ben Ehrmann: Why I Am An Atheist:

http://www.alternet.org/newsandviews/article/875975/ben_ehrmann%3A_why_i_am_an_atheist/

Some interesting statistics on Wikipedia: <http://opensite.s3.amazonaws.com/wikipedia.jpg>

Atheist Cartoons: <http://www.atheistcartoons.com/>

Is Free Will an Illusion?: http://chronicle.com/article/Is-Free-Will-an-Illusion-/131159/?sid=cr&utm_source=cr&utm_medium=en

Book Review of Sam Harris's new book *Free Will*: <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1739797/posts>

Another review of the book *Free Will*: <http://www.americanhumanist.org/HNN/details/2012-03-book-review-sam-harris-free-will>

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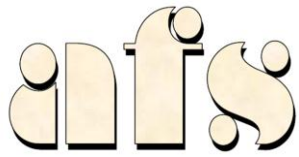
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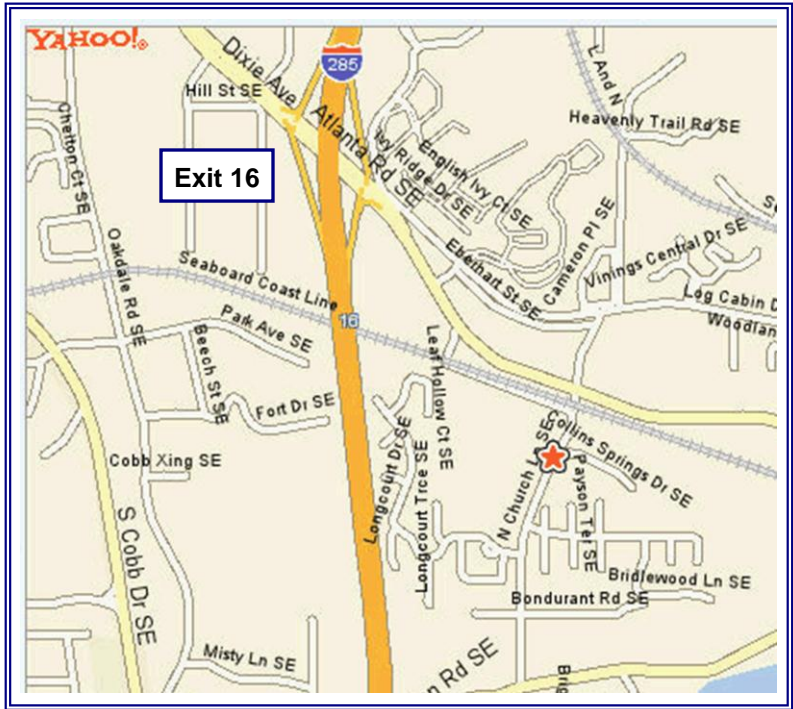
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**The April 8 Meeting:
1:00 at AF Hall,
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Smyrna, GA**
**This Month's Speakers:
Ted Goodwin
Jim Chastain**



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