

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself.*

An AFS Publication • Volume 18 Number 6 • June 2012

## The June AFS Meeting

The June 10 AFS meeting will include a talk by **Gina Coiaanni**, President of Kennesaw State University's **Student Coalition for Inquiry**, on "The Ins and Outs of Being a Student Secular Leader." Gina says her talk will be about the joys and challenges that come with being a student leader on secular and skeptical matters. The group she leads is affiliated with the **Center for Inquiry** (headquartered in Amherst, NY) and with the **Secular Student Alliance**, as well as **Foundation Beyond Belief**, **American Atheists** and **Americans United for Separation of Church and State**.

June 10<sup>th</sup> is also the 215<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the proclamation on 10 June 1797 by President John Adams of a treaty with Tripoli that declared "the government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion."

The meeting will be at 1:00 at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane, Smyrna, GA. Arrive as early at 12:00 for snacks and conversation with other freethinkers! Visitors are always welcome at AFS meetings.

## A Silent Auction at AFS Meeting!

AFS will have a Silent Auction at the June 10 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 meeting, the highest bidder wins the item.

## AFS Meetings and Activities

June 10: AFS Board Meeting, AF Hall, 11:00 AM.

June 10: AFS General Meeting, AF Hall, 1:00 PM.

June 16: AFS Social, Burger King, Decatur, 12:00 noon.

June 16: MedShare Volunteer Event, Decatur, 1:00 PM.

## The June AFS Social and MedShare Volunteer Event!

The **June AFS Social** will be at the Burger King at 3928 Flat Shoals Parkway in Decatur, GA, on Saturday, June 16 at 12:00 noon. The Burger King is near Exit 48 of I-285 on the east side of Atlanta.

So why, you may ask, are we meeting at a Burger King? The lunch is a prelude to our **MedShare Volunteer Event** at 1:00 to 3:00. MedShare is just down the street from the Burger King. MedShare's address is 3240 Clifton Springs Road, in Decatur.

MedShare is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the environment and healthcare through the efficient recovery and redistribution of surplus medical supplies and equipment to underserved healthcare facilities in developing countries. Their shipments of medical supplies and equipment have brought healing and the promise of better lives to more than 85 countries and countless patients. MedShare is a top-ranked charity by CharityNavigator.org and is headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia.

Our job as volunteers will be to sort and pack medical supplies. Please arrive with closed-toe shoes. The building where we will work is air conditioned. Picture taking is allowed.

Special thanks go to Rick Pace for organizing the event.

Let's make a big showing for this volunteer event! This is our chance to show another way that freethinkers can make a difference in the Atlanta area!

"Equality is an all-or-nothing prospect. The government is not allowed to sponsor one religious position and ignore all others. Even Christians have to obey the law."

— David Silverman, President of American Atheists, regarding the Bradford County Decalogue.

## American Atheists File Suit Against Bradford County, FL Decalogue

On May 25, American Atheists filed a lawsuit against Bradford County, Florida for having a Ten Commandments monument on the courthouse lawn. The suit was filed in the U.S. District Court, Jacksonville division.

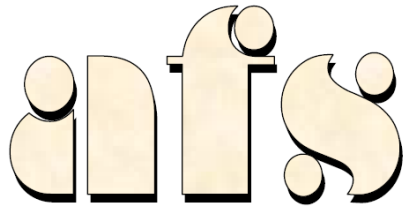
American Atheists asserts that Bradford County violated the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution and Article I, Section 3 of the Florida State Constitution, by placing the Decalogue on the lawn of the public County Courthouse.

Bridget R. Gaudette, Florida State Director, said, "Bradford County is devaluing our Constitution by putting up

this display. The Establishment Clause prohibits preference by the U.S. government of one religion over another. The Ten Commandments monument shows preference to the Judeo-Christian religions and dismisses other religious and non-religious philosophies and beliefs."

"What we need is a 6-ton granite monument of the U.S. Constitution to serve as a reminder that we are all Americans and should be treated equally, without bias," stated Ken Loukinen, Director of State Operations.

A similar monument in nearby Dixie County was already deemed unconstitutional and is on appeal.



**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.

June 10: **Gina Colaianni**, President of Kennesaw State University's **Student Coalition for Inquiry**, will speak on "The Ins and Outs of Being a Student Secular Leader."

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

**Editor**

Steve Yothment

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## Atlanta Freethought News

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Membership in AFS is \$50/year  
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Sustaining Membership is \$100.  
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# Are Christian Fundamentalists Teaching Genocide in Our Schools?

**Thanks to Good News Clubs, evangelism in schools is already subverting the separation of church and state. Let's take another look at what they are teaching our children. – By Katherine Stewart**

**T**he Bible has hundreds of passages that may serve as the basis for instruction and inspiration. Not all of them are appropriate in all circumstances.

The story of Saul and the Amalekites is a case in point. It's not a pretty story, and it is often used by people who don't intend to do pretty things. In the book of 1 Samuel (15:3), God said to Saul:

"Now go, attack the Amalekites, and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys."

Saul dutifully exterminated the women, the children, the babies and all of the men – but then he spared the king. He also saved some of the tastier looking calves and lambs. God was furious with him for his failure to finish the job.

The story of the Amalekites has been used to justify genocide throughout the ages. According to Pennsylvania State University Professor Philip Jenkins<sup>1</sup>, a contributing editor for the *American Conservative*, the Puritans used this passage when they wanted to get rid of the Native American tribes. Catholics used it against Protestants, Protestants against Catholics. "In Rwanda in 1994, Hutu preachers invoked King Saul's memory to justify the total slaughter of their Tutsi neighbors," writes Jenkins in his 2001 book, *Laying Down the Sword: Why We Can't Ignore the Bible's Violent Verses* (HarperCollins).

This fall, more than 100,000 American public school children, ranging in age from four to 12, are scheduled to receive instruction in the lessons of Saul and the Amalekites in the comfort of their own public school classrooms. The instruction, which features in the second week of a weekly "Bible study" course, will come from the Good News Club, an after-school

program sponsored by a group called the Child Evangelism Fellowship<sup>1</sup> (CEF). The aim of the CEF is to convert young children to a fundamentalist form of the Christian faith and recruit their peers to the club.

There are now over 3,200 clubs in public elementary schools, up more than sevenfold since the 2001 Supreme Court decision<sup>2</sup>, *Good News Club v Milford Central School*, effectively required schools to include such clubs in their after-school programming.

The CEF has been teaching the story of the Amalekites at least since 1973. In its earlier curriculum materials, CEF was euphemistic about the bloodshed, saying simply that "the Amalekites were completely defeated." In the most recent version of the curriculum, however, the group is quite eager to drive the message home to its elementary school students. The first thing the curriculum makes clear is that if God gives instructions to kill a group of people, you must kill every last one:

"You are to go and completely destroy the Amalekites—people, animals, every living thing. Nothing shall be left."

"That was pretty clear, wasn't it?" the manual tells the teachers to say to the kids.

Even more important, the Good News Club wants the children to know, the Amalekites were targeted for destruction on account of their religion, or lack of it. The instruction manual reads:

"The Amalekites had heard about Israel's true and living God many years before, but they refused to believe in him. The Amalekites refused to believe in God and God had promised punishment."

The instruction manual goes on to champion obedience in all things. In fact, pretty much every lesson that the Good News Club gives involves re-

mindful children that they must, at all costs, obey. If God tells you to kill nonbelievers, he really wants you to kill them all. No questions asked, no exceptions allowed.

Asking if Saul would "pass the test" of obedience, the text points to Saul's failure to annihilate every last Amalekite, posing the rhetorical question:

"If you are asked to do something, how much of it do you need to do before you can say, 'I did it!'"

"If only Saul had been willing to seek God for strength to obey!" the lesson concludes.

A review question in the textbook seeks to drive the point home further:

"How did King Saul only partly obey God when he attacked the Amalekites? (He did not completely destroy as God had commanded, he kept the king and some of the animals alive.)"

The CEF and the legal advocacy groups that have been responsible for its tremendous success over the past ten years are determined to "Knock down all doors, all the barriers, to all 65,000 public elementary schools in America and take the Gospel to this open mission field now! Not later, now!" in the words of a keynote speaker at the CEF's national convention in 2010. The CEF wants to operate in the public schools, rather than in churches, because they know that young children associate the public schools with authority and are unable to distinguish between activities that take place in a school and those that are sponsored by the school.

In the majority opinion that opened the door to Good News Clubs, Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas reasoned that the activities of the CEF were not really religious, after all. He said that they could be characterized, for legal purposes, "as the teaching of morals and character development from a particular viewpoint."

<sup>1</sup>See the Child Evangelism Fellowship website at <http://www.cefonline.com/>.

<sup>2</sup>Read about the Supreme Court case at [http://www.oyez.org/cases/2000-2009/2000/2000\\_99\\_2036#sort=ideology](http://www.oyez.org/cases/2000-2009/2000/2000_99_2036#sort=ideology).



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As Justices Souter and Stevens pointed out in their dissents, however, the claim is preposterous: the CEF plainly aims to teach religious doctrines and conduct services of worship. Thomas's claim is particularly ironic in view of the fact that the CEF makes quite clear its intent to teach that no amount of moral or ethical behavior can spare a nonbeliever from an eternity in hell.

Good News Clubs should not be in America's public elementary schools. As I explain in my book *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children*, the club exists mainly to give small children the false impression that their public school supports a particular creed. The clubs' presence

has produced a paradoxical entanglement of church and state that has ripped apart communities, degraded public education, and undermined religious freedom.

The CEF's new emphasis on the genocide of nonbelievers makes a bad situation worse. Exterminist rhetoric has been on the rise among some segments of the far right, including some religious groups. At what point do we start taking talk of genocide seriously? How would we feel about a nonreligious group that instructs its students that if they should ever receive an order to commit genocide, they should fulfill it to the letter? When does a religious group qualify as a "hate group"? Should schools be involved in choosing which passages

of scripture are appropriate in the public school context? But wouldn't that involve the state in regulating religion? And isn't that precisely why we used to keep religion out of the public schools in the first place?"

Katherine Stewart is the author of *The Good News Club: The Christian Right's Stealth Assault on America's Children*. She spoke last month in Atlanta to a packed crowd at a joint meeting of the Georgia Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State and the Atlanta Science Tavern. See Katherine's website at <http://www.thegoodnewsclub.com/>.

[This article was in *The Guardian* on May 30, 2012 and is reprinted here by permission.]

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## FFRF Contests Two Georgia School Commencement "Services"

**From a June 5 News Release by the Freedom From Religion Foundation**

**D**ivine intervention won't help a Georgia superintendent defend the religious sermons he delivered during two May 26 graduation ceremonies in Perry, Ga.

Freedom From Religion Foundation Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel has written two letters to Houston County Schools Superintendent James Hines requesting he refrain from blurring the lines between religion and government in future commencement addresses.

Seidel's June 4 letter<sup>1</sup> addressed FFRF's concerns over a near sermon which Hines delivered at Veterans High School. As news of this violation made headlines, FFRF was tipped off to another series of violations at a neighboring high school. Seidel's June 5 letter<sup>2</sup> notes that Hines once again sanctioned an overtly sectarian

commencement ceremony at Perry High School.

During his address at Veterans High School, Hines told students and audience members they should live with faith in God.

Seidel contends that this is one of the more egregious school graduation violations FFRF has handled recently, considering the ceremonies took the shape of a church service.

FFRF initially received complaints from its members, including U.S. soldier Wes Bryant who was dismayed by the sectarian musical performance and religious speech he witnessed at his niece's graduation ceremony at Veterans High School.

Bryant said that the invocation was scheduled and given as part of the ceremony and the audience was asked to stand during these prayers.

Both ceremonies included Christian worship songs: Mark Harris' "Find Your Wings" was performed at Veterans High School and Chris Tomlin's "How Great is Our God" was sung at Perry High School.

"Public schools should not be seeking out songs that exclude students and create a divisive environment. Bullying is rampant in schools and on social media and Houston County Schools should be striving to find inclusive, secular songs that all can enjoy without compromising their own personal beliefs," argued Seidel.

Seidel pointed out that as superintendent Hine sets the tone for the entire county. That he would not know or honor the Constitution is "shocking."

<sup>1</sup>See the June 4 letter at <http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/HoustonCountyGA-VeteransHSGrad.Prayer.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup>See the June 5 letter at <http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/HoustonCountyGA-PerryHSGrad.Prayer.pdf>.

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North Carolina pastor wants concentration camps for gays and lesbians: <http://tinyurl.com/6rzscxj>

Michael Shermer: The Baloney Detection Kit: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Qw4-17eR3Y&feature=youtu.be>

Nine Great Freethinkers and Religious Dissenters in History: <http://www.alternet.org/story/155590/>

Richard Dawkins gives a Christopher Hitchens Tribute (May 26, 2012): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QfZISH7NHBg>

David Silverman of American Atheists talks on the growth of Atheism in America: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2H\\_c4cjkLg&feature=youtu.be](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2H_c4cjkLg&feature=youtu.be)

# Register Now for Lake Hypatia 2012 (June 29–July 1)

The Popular Freethought Event is Near Talladega, AL

The 23rd annual Independence Weekend Celebration<sup>1</sup> at Lake Hypatia, Ala., is set for June 29 - July 1, Friday through Sunday, at FFRF's southern Freethought Hall near Talladega. Lake Hypatia's motto is "No preaching, no praying, no walking on water."

The agenda for 2012 includes well-known speakers from the freethought community. In addition to the program, you will be able to relax and enjoy lake activities such as boat rides with "Cap'n Jon," swimming, and fishing. You may also play softball and/or volleyball, or join Karon Park for her arts and crafts workshop in Freethought Hall. Special activities for children will be hosted by Camp Quest innovator **Aleta Ledendecker** during the film festival and during other selected parts of the program.

Lake Hypatia is hosted by the Alabama Freethought Society, an FFRF chapter and its director **Patricia Cleveland**, and co-sponsored by the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

The master of ceremonies for this year's Freethought Advance will be **Ed Buckner**, a familiar face to many attendees. Ed is a former president of both American Atheists and the Atlanta Freethought Society. He is a life member of American Atheists, Council for Secular Humanism, FFRF and AFS. He has spoken and debated widely on diverse topics. Ed is co-editor, with Michael Buckner, of *Quotations That Support Separation of Church and State*.

Among the 2012 speakers is Alabama chapter member **Bob Truett**. Bob is a regular fixture at the Freethought Advance being requested time and again by attendees. Bob always provides a naturalist's twist to any talk. This year Bob's talk will be "King Kong Plays God" a whimsical freethought criticism of a king-like god who demands blood sacrifice. In

addition to enjoying Bob's own brand of humor, in the process there's a good possibility you will learn a thing or two about mankind's closest relatives, the great apes.

**Lecia Brooks** is Director of Outreach for the Southern Poverty Law Center. She leads the Center's outreach efforts on key initiatives and social justice issues nationwide, giving presentations promoting tolerance and diversity. Ms Brooks, a graduate of Loyola Marymount University, has been with the SPLC since 2004. She serves also as director of the Civil Rights Memorial Center in Montgomery, Alabama, an interpretive center designed to provide visitors to the Civil Rights Memorial with a deeper understanding of the civil rights movement. Brooks will speak on how the SPLC pursues its primary goals of fighting hate, teaching tolerance, and seeking justice.

**JT Eberhard** is a campus organizer and high school specialist with the Secular Student Alliance. He is author of the blog What Would JT Do?<sup>2</sup> and has been a contributing author to AtheismResource.com. Before joining the SSA, JT was most known as a debater on atheism and LGBT rights and as the co-founder of the Skepticon annual conference. JT's talk at the 2012 Freethought Advance will be titled "Reason as a Moral Obligation."

**Dr. Darrel W. Ray** is the founder of Recovering From Religion<sup>3</sup>, as well as the author of *The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture* and *Sex and God: How Religion Distorts Sexuality*. He has been a psychologist for over 30 years. He has been a student of religion most of his life and holds a MA degree in religion as well as a BA in Sociology/Anthropology and a Doctorate in psychology. The title of Dr. Ray's talk at Lake Hypatia will be "Sexy Evolution (or, What the Pope Doesn't Know About Human Sexuali-



ty)." Each species has a unique reproductive strategy. Unfortunately, the Pope's view of sexuality almost opposite of what we are really like. Dr. Ray explains the difference between human sexuality and religious sexuality.

**Dale McGowan** edited and co-authored *Parenting Beyond Belief*, which Newsweek called "a compelling read," and *Raising Freethinkers*, the practical sequel. He also edited *Voices of Unbelief*, an historical anthology of atheist and agnostic documents due for release in September of this year. He writes the secular parenting blog The Meming of Life, teaches non-religious parenting workshops across the United States, and is founding executive director of Foundation Beyond Belief, a humanist charitable organization whose members have raised over a quarter million dollars for charity. In 2008, Dale was named Harvard Humanist of the Year by the Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard University. He lives near Atlanta with his wife Becca and their three children. McGowan's presentation will be titled "Secular Parenting."

**Judy Green**, a board member of the **International Freethought Film Festival**<sup>4</sup> will show two 90-minute selections from the 2011 International Freethought Film Festival.

The International Freethought Film Festival celebrated its first season in 2011. This niche film festival is sponsored by the Freethought Film Festi-

<sup>1</sup>See more at <http://ffrf.org/outreach/lake-hypatia/>. Register at <http://ffrf.org/outreach/lake-hypatia/lake-hypatia-advance-registration/>.

<sup>2</sup>See JT's blog at <http://freethoughtblogs.com/wwjtd>. See JT's articles at <http://www.atheismresource.com/>.

<sup>3</sup>See the Recovering From Religion website at <http://www.recoveringfromreligion.org/>.

<sup>4</sup>Read about the Freethought Film Festival Foundation at <http://freethoughtfilmfest.org/>.

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val Foundation (FFFF) and celebrates films that challenge the status quo, in fact, the unchallengeable. This includes the examination of truth claims by governments, religions, pseudoscientists, psychics, astrologers, and the like. Selected entries also include films that expose human rights violations and tales of those who, against the odds, affect positive change by questioning authority. The mission statement of the FFFF is "Promoting reason, critical thinking and freedom of inquiry through the medium of film."

The Cleveland family generously opens up their personal grounds for participants who reserve in advance for RVs or primitive camping. Showers and washrooms are available on-site. There are many motels in the area.

You can register online<sup>1</sup> or download a registration form to mail in to Alabama Freethought Society, PO Box 571, Talladega, AL 35161.

Registration is \$35 per FFRF member, \$40 per nonmember, \$5 per FFRF student member and \$10 per non-member student.

Four catered meals will be offered (Friday night, Saturday lunch, Saturday dinner, Sunday brunch) and are \$10 per adult, \$5 per student. (There will be an inexpensive hot dog or veggie dog lunch offered by a private couple on Friday.)

There are no nearby restaurants so order meals now. Meal orders and early registrations must be in hand by June 24.

**Out of respect for other attendees, please do not bring your pets to Lake Hypatia.**

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## 'Ten Commandments' Judge Roy Moore Running Again for Chief Justice

By David Edwards, from *The Raw Story*, <http://www.rawstory.com/>.

**T**he man who is likely to be Alabama's next chief justice is warning that secular government will lead to Islamic law in the United States.

In an interview with conservative talk show host Steve Deace on May 25, Roy Moore opined that "a government that is denying God" was also allowing Sharia law to take hold.

The Republican candidate explained that he had no regrets after the Alabama Court of the Judiciary stripped him of the chief justice title in 2003 because he rejected a federal court order to remove his Ten Commandments monument from the state courthouse.

"I firmly believe that only God can heal our land and he is waiting for the American people to wake up to what's going on around them about a government that is denying God and in doing so is bent on taking away those rights and liberties and freedoms given to us by God, in contradiction to the very organic law from which we are based," Moore explained. "I never regretted what I did, I did exactly what I knew I was to do and that is to stand firm and not let some federal judge tell me to remove a monument, which he had no right to do anyway."

"What they fear most is my acknowledgment of the sovereignty of God," he continued, adding that the federal judge had "violated not only our Constitution but the case law of the United States Supreme Court which says our religious freedom comes from God, and if it doesn't come from God people have to realize we will lose it and that is happening in our country today with Sharia law and the allowance of religious practices for other groups but not Christians."

Earlier this year, Moore overwhelmingly won the GOP nomination in a bid to take back the title of chief justice. The Republican Party has pledged to give him its full support.

"The Alabama Republican Party stands firmly behind Judge Roy Moore to serve as the next Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court," Alabama Republican Party Chairman Bill Armistead said earlier this month. "Judge Moore embodies the conservative values and beliefs of the citizens of our state and the Republican Party in Alabama stands behind him 100%."

In recent months, Moore and his Foundation for Moral Law have been fighting to allow the small town of Sylvania to use a Bible verse on their

welcome signs.

"The Freedom from Religion Foundation has an agenda to remove any acknowledgement of God or religion from the public square and are trying to bully towns like Sylvania with threatening letters that grossly misrepresent the Constitution," Moore told the Times-Journal. "Sylvania refuses to be bullied by the anti-religious sentiment of the FFRF. The First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution stands for freedom of religion, not freedom from religion, and we look forward to representing Sylvania in this important matter."

The Anniston Star Editorial Board has argued that a candidate for chief justice of the Alabama Supreme Court should not "promote his own particular brand of religion and tie it to questionable constitutional interpretations."

"One can – and should – question the propriety of an Alabama chief justice GOP nominee heading a foundation dedicated to a constitutional position on which he might one day have to rule," the editorial board wrote. "Here is a prime example of the sort of controversy on which a chief justice should avoid taking a public stand."

"He has disappointed us again."

Hear Roy Moore's interview at <http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/roy-moore-warns-secular-government-leads-sharia-law>.

The Steve Deace Podcast: <http://stevedeace.com/headline/deace-show-podcast-05-25-12/>

Moore Steps Into Welcome Sign Fight: <http://www.wsfa.com/story/18430239/moores-organization-steps-into-welcome-sign-fight>

Roy Moore defends Bible verses on welcome signs: [http://blog.al.com/wire/2012/05/roy\\_moore\\_defends\\_alabama\\_town.html](http://blog.al.com/wire/2012/05/roy_moore_defends_alabama_town.html)



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# FFRF Reminds City to Separate Government & Religion

## Local Pastors in Columbus, GA Want a School Prayer Referendum

The Freedom From Religion Foundation sent a warning letter<sup>1</sup> on May 24 to Columbus, GA Mayor Teresa Tomlinson to head off endorsement by the City Council of a proposed statewide referendum to allow organized prayer and bible study in public schools.

FFRF works to defend state-church separation and has over 18,000 members nationwide, including more than 350 in Georgia.

Local pastors – Chaplain Paul Voorhees and Dr. Joe Coley – and several supporters stood before the mayor and council<sup>2</sup> on May 22 to ask for their “blessing” of the effort spearheaded by Voorhees, who insisted more than once to the room that “We are a Christian nation.” (That’s historically inaccurate. Voorhees, who owns Ranger Joe’s military store, also told a TV station last year that “God was at His best when he created the American soldier.”) WTVM-TV had a news story on the council meeting<sup>3</sup>.

FFRF Attorney Andrew Seidel took issue in FFRF’s letter with Voorhees’ claim that “our jails are safer than our schools,” because “in our jails we have bible study, we have prayers and we have church.”

Seidel said, “We would like to caution you against taking Voorhees’ proposal seriously – violating the Constitution will not decrease crime.” He added, “The purpose of schools is to educate, not to promote religion. Schoolchildren are young, impressionable and vulnerable to adult and peer pressure... The exercise of religion must be left to the individual and

religious education left to the family.”

Voorhees claimed to have the support of “50,000 bible-thumpers” for his unconstitutional proposal, but he’s offending a significantly larger population by implying that the nonreligious are criminals, Seidel said.

The American Religious Identification Survey shows that there are over 650,000 “nonreligious” Georgians and over 950,000 non-Christian Georgians. Nationwide, there are almost 50 million nonreligious Americans. The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life “Religion Among the Millennials” (2010) shows that fully one-in-four adults under age 30 are atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular.”

In claiming that prayer would make schools safer, Voorhees is implying that millions of nonbelieving Americans and Georgians are criminals, an idea that’s insulting and ignorant.

The claim is also countered by hundreds of scientific studies. Dr. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, a clinical psychologist and expert in cult religions, wrote, “The claim that atheists are somehow more likely to be immoral has long been disproven by systematic studies.”

Voorhees’s assertion is also scientifically testable. In fact, worldwide studies show when any given factor of societal health is measured, the least-religious countries:

- Have the lowest rates of violent crime and homicide.
- Are the best place to raise children.
- Are the best place to be a mother.
- Have the lowest rates of corruption.

- Have the lowest levels of intolerance against racial and ethnic minorities.
- Score highest when it comes to women’s rights and gender equality.
- Have the greatest protection and enjoyment of political and civil liberties.
- Are better at educating their youth in reading, math and science.
- Are the most peaceful.
- Are the most prosperous.
- Have the highest quality of life.

The pattern of lower religiosity to higher societal well-being holds true for the U.S. States that tend to be among the most religious. They typically:

- Have the highest rates of poverty.
- Have the highest rates of obesity.
- Have the highest rates of infant mortality.
- Have the highest STD rates.
- Have the highest rates of teen pregnancy.
- Have the lowest percentage of college-educated adults.
- Have the highest rates of murder.
- Have the highest rates of violent crime.

Seidel noted that even if the council were to reject the weight of science in favor of Voorhees’s erroneous statements, they would be in direct violation of the Constitution. “We hope that this council will not misdirect precious time and resources in a foolish and divisive attack upon our Constitution.”

[From a May 24 FFRF News Release.]

<sup>1</sup>See the letter at [http://www.ffrf.org/uploads/legal/columbus\\_prayer\\_letter.pdf](http://www.ffrf.org/uploads/legal/columbus_prayer_letter.pdf).

<sup>2</sup>See Voorhees’ talk at the council meeting at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4hY9EgIT8J8>.

<sup>3</sup>See the WTVM-TV story at <http://www.wtvm.com/story/18599762/several-pastors-in-columbus-want-prayer-back-in-schools>.

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Staff of Christian University in Rome, GA Resign in Doves After Refusing to Sign ‘Personal Lifestyle Statement’:  
<http://christiannews.net/staff-of-christian-university-resign-in-doves-after-refusing-to-sign-personal-lifestyle-statement/>

Villa Rica Church leads effort to remove evolution education in public schools:  
[http://www.unity-in-christ.org/Articles/christians4science\\_is\\_an\\_apologe.html](http://www.unity-in-christ.org/Articles/christians4science_is_an_apologe.html)

Bill Haslam, Tennessee Governor, Signs Controversial Sex Education Bill: <http://tinyurl.com/7h7djno>

Conservative Preacher Says Women’s Voting Rights ‘One of America’s Greatest Mistakes’: <http://tinyurl.com/7unbjrp>

Christian Conservatives vs. Sex: The Long War Over Reproductive Freedom: <http://tinyurl.com/83vjdhj>

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## Other Meetings of Interest in the Atlanta Area

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet on Sunday, June 17, at 12:30 PM at Atlanta Freethought Hall. For details, see <http://www.georgiahumanists.org/>.

The **Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta** will meet on Sunday, June 17, 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](mailto:donnajgore@yahoo.com).

**GUST** (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet on Monday, June 11, 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, June 16, at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. James Severin will talk on the lies & myths of "The War of Northern Aggression." <http://www.atlantaskeptics.com/>

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** will meet on Sat., June 23, at 7:00PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. Engineering professor (and comedian) Pete Ludovice will speak on the lighter side of science and technology. See <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>.

There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, June 10, 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, June 24, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

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If you are going to DragonCon in Atlanta on September 1, please consider marching in the parade in the "Cheerleaders for Science" group. Margaret Downey of Freethought Society is organizing this group and has a banner for the parade.

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Congratulations to Ed Buckner, whose Letter to the Editor was published in the May 16 issue of the *Marietta Daily Journal*.

### Shall Bible really be guide on gay nuptials?

DEAR EDITOR:

President Obama has declared his personal support for same sex marriage, Dr. Reuel Hamilton has asked, eloquently, how that threatens anyone else's marriage, and two other writers to the *MDJ* have both insisted that we should follow the Bible on the matter.

Why should we accept biblical teachings on this but not support:

- stoning rebellious teenagers to death as God in Deuteronomy 21:18-21 commands;

- keeping women subservient to men, as Paul insisted was needed in 1st Corinthians 11:3-15 and 14:26-35; or

- taking other humans as slaves, as explained as a proper thing in Leviticus 25:44-50?

And no, these are not verses taken out of context — read them for yourself and the whole book they're found in.

MDJ readers will, I hope, join me — and oppose the Bible and (letter to the editor writers against gay marriage) John Creech and Jim Storey — in supporting religious liberty, keeping government out of religious decisions, and opposing selective Bible-quoting to make antiquated points.

**Ed Buckner**  
Former President  
American Atheists  
Smyrna



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(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 \$50 per year.

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“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

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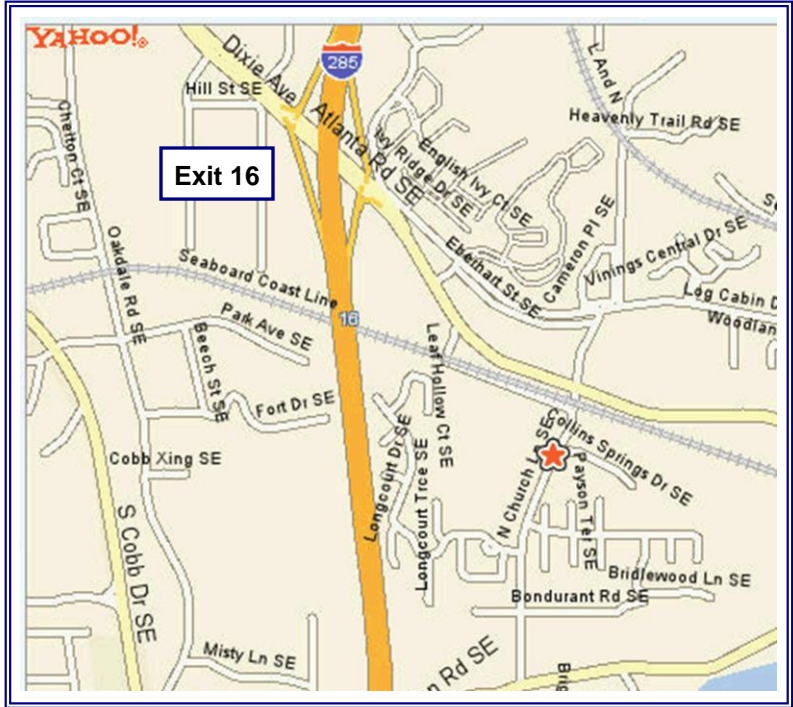
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Atlanta  
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Society

**The June 10 Meeting:  
1:00 at AF Hall,  
4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Smyrna, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:  
Gina Colaianni**



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