

# Atlanta Freethought News

*Dare to Think for Yourself.*

An AFS Publication • Volume 18 Number 10 • October 2012

## The October AFS Meeting

The October 14 AFS meeting will include a Silent Auction, nominations for next year's AFS officers and board, and a talk by **Dr. Dennis Martin** on "Secular Humanist Views on Will and Willusionism." The meeting will be at 1:00 at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane, in Smyrna, GA.

Regarding his talk, Dennis says that accepting secular humanism as a world view also includes accepting such things as atheism, scientific method, evolution, the relativity of values, etc. Sam Harris' *Free Will* (2012) and Daniel Wegner's *The Illusion of Conscious Will* (2002) have now asked secular humanists to accept the idea that conscious free will is an illusion. This view has been nicknamed "willusionism" and is based on recent work in neuropsychology.

After a short video demonstrating recent experiments, Dennis will discuss the evidence and arguments for willusionism. This will not be a re-hash of the traditional freedom vs. determinism problem. Instead, Dennis will consider and invite the audience to discuss three questions:

- 1) Must secular humanists accept willusionism?
- 2) What are the consequences of accepting willusionism?
- 3) How might theists interpret (or misinterpret) these claims?

Dr. Dennis Martin has a mathematics degree from Georgia Tech, and a PhD in philosophy from Emory. He teaches at three colleges in the Atlanta area and for two colleges online. He serves as secretary of the Atlanta Freethought Society, being a member for nine years.

## Nominations at October Meeting

The AFS bylaws require nomination of officers and board members for each year at the October meeting. Please think about whom you would like to nominate. (Current officers and board members are listed on page 2.)

Officers have 1-year terms; board members have 2-year terms. Bob Konopelski, Rick Pace and Lew Southern will continue their 2-year terms into next year.

## Rob Boston to Speak at HGA Meeting

**Rob Boston**, Senior Policy Analyst for Americans United for Separation of Church & State, will speak at the Humanists of Georgia meeting on October 21 at 1:00 PM. The topic is "Rescuing the Secular State from the Religious Right." The meeting will be at UUMAN (Unitarian Universalist Metro Atlanta North), 11420 Crabapple Road, Roswell, GA.

Boston has worked for Americans United since 1987. He's an assistant editor and contributor to AU's *Church*

## Silent Auction at October Meeting!

AFS will have a Silent Auction at the October 14 meeting. Please bring your donated items to be auctioned.

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

## The Rockwood Creek Cleanup

AFS members are invited to join the Sierra Club in a River Cleanup in Marietta. We will help clean up Rottenwood Creek which feeds into the Chattahoochee River. The work will be from 9:00 AM to 12:00 noon on Saturday, October 20. After the cleanup, the Sierra Club will provide a lunch of hamburgers and hotdogs fresh off the grill, and drinks. Participants are asked to bring a side dish to share.

The location: Pioneer Village, on the campus of Life University. We will clean up the creek from the campus down to Hwy 41. The Sierra Club will provide trash bags, pickup sticks and rubber gloves. Be prepared to get dirty and wet.

Directions: Go to 1269 Barclay Circle, in Marietta.

From Hwy 41, turn onto Barclay and go about ¾ mile. Drive under the pedestrian walkway, then turn left. Park in the gravel parking lot on the right. Then, walk down into the Pioneer Village to join the work group.

Please join us for a fun activity and a chance to meet some new people.

## The AFS Bike Ride

On Saturday, October 27, we will have a Bike Ride on the Silver Comet Trail starting at 10:00 AM. Let's meet at the Silver Comet Depot where you can rent a bicycle (or bring your own). The address: 4342 Floyd Road, Mableton, GA.

To get there, take I-20 west from Atlanta and turn right onto Fulton Industrial Blvd (Exit 49). Go north for 0.5 miles and turn left on Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive. Go 7 miles. (MLK Dr. becomes Floyd Rd.) The Silver Comet Depot will be on the left just before you cross the Silver Comet Trail.

"What can be asserted without evidence can also be dismissed without evidence." — Christopher Hitchens



## 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.

Oct 14: **Dr. Dennis Martin** on “Secular Humanist Views on Will and Willusionism.”

Nov 11: **Dr. Robert McCauley**, Director of the Center for Mind, Brain and Culture at Emory University, will speak on Religion and Science.

Dec 9: **Tom Flynn**, editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine, will speak on “The Trouble with Christmas.”

Jan 13: **Dr. Ed Buckner** will speak on his (and Michael Buckner’s) new book, *In Freedom We Trust*.

## AFS Email Lists

The **AFS Announcements** email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to [AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoo.com) to subscribe. The **AFS Forum** email list is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation and religion. To subscribe to this list, send an email to [AFSForum-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:AFSForum-subscribe@yahoo.com). For information on other AFS email groups, visit the AFS website at <http://www.atlantafreethought.org>.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Atlanta Freethought News an AFS publication

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Steve Yothment

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## Atlanta Freethought News

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# Christian Prayers Dropped at UTK after FFRF Complaint

UTK Chancellor agrees to conform to an earlier court decision allowing only non-sectarian prayers.

**A**s a result of a recent complaint by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, it appears sectarian prayer by Christian clergy over the loudspeakers at University of Tennessee-Knoxville football games will be dropped.

FFRF complained<sup>1</sup> on September 13 to Chancellor Jimmy Cheek about the practice in which an announcer asks all attendees to rise for the invocation, delivered by a Christian member of the clergy who invariably invokes Jesus Christ.

A letter<sup>2</sup> from Cheek was faxed to FFRF on September 19 which indicated the University would conform its practice to *Chaudhuri v. State of Tennessee*, a decision FFRF brought to the school's attention, in which the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals held that nonsectarian prayer or a moment of silence at public universities is permissible.

<sup>1</sup> See [http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/UT-Knoxville\\_letter.pdf](http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/UT-Knoxville_letter.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> See <http://ffrf.org/uploads/legal/UTKnoxresponse.pdf>

Editor's Note: Media articles on UTK's response show that UTK *will* continue prayer before football games. A detail buried in the text is that it will be *non*-sectarian prayer. For example, see these articles:

Cheek Upholds Prayer at UT Sponsored Events: <http://tnjn.com/2012/sep/19/cheek-upholds-prayer-at-ut-spo/>

UT Says They Will Continue Prayer before Football Games: [http://blog.al.com/live/2012/09/university\\_of\\_tennessee\\_says\\_t.html](http://blog.al.com/live/2012/09/university_of_tennessee_says_t.html)

"While we are pleased that UTK is moving in the right direction, the wisest policy is to drop prayer entirely," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Students, alums and fans come to the games to watch players, not to recite prayers! Prayer hosted by a public university is unnecessary, embarrassing and divisive. It's just plain bad manners to knowingly inflict prayer on those of us who are not religious and believe nothing fails like prayer."

Religious rituals hosted and endorsed by a public university excludes the one in four young persons who is nonreligious, according to PEW, and more than 430,000 Tennessee adults who identify as nonreligious ( American Religious Identification Survey 2008).

To ensure nonsectarianism, Gaylor said UTK must cease inviting clergy, who are inextricably identified with

their denomination, to lead prayer. As a sophomore at the University of Wisconsin-Madison she stopped graduation prayers, pointing out it excludes many students, including foreign students, and unites church with a state-funded institution.

"I have no faith in prayer, but I do have faith in the power of secular students to mobilize and educate."

FFRF, which is based in Madison, Wis., has more than 18,500 members, including 285 in Tennessee. FFRF has halted illegal prayer at many public schools in Tennessee, at high school graduations, sporting events and even in kindergarten. "We believe the same Establishment Clause precedent which protects public school students at lower levels from school-sponsored prayer should be applied to public university students," she said.

[From a Sept. 19 FFRF press release.]

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## "Pulpit Freedom Sunday" Turns Clergy Into Outlaws

This past Sunday, Oct. 7, many ministers across the nation purposefully violated the law from their pulpits. Called "Pulpit Freedom Sunday," the day was marked by the Alliance Defending Freedom (formerly the Alliance Defense Fund) for preachers to openly endorse and oppose candidates for political office, in violation of IRS regulations and just in time for the November elections.

The IRS explains on its website:

"Under the Internal Revenue Code, all section 501(c)(3) organizations are absolutely prohibited from directly or indirectly participating in, or intervening in, any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for elective public office... [P]ublic statements of position (verbal or written) made on behalf of the or-

ganization in favor of or in opposition to any candidate for public office clearly violate the prohibition against political campaign activity."

ADF encourages churches to blatantly break this law, then flaunt their unlawful activity by sending recordings of their sermons to the IRS. ADF publishes lists of churches that participate.

The regulations are in place so that nonprofit organizations (and their donors) do not receive a government subsidy in the form of tax exemption for their political endorsements. Imagine the political hanky-panky should churches be allowed to use their considerable wealth to directly endorse and influence partisan political elections, with no financial accountability to the public! Imagine the political candidates pandering directly for

votes by marshalling congregations to directly campaign for them, as well as fund them. The purity of both church and state would be contaminated.

ADF, a theocratic group, believes that churches should be given special treatment, and be allowed to engage in partisan activity while maintaining their tax-exempt status. ADF has openly stated that one reason it promotes the Pulpit Freedom Sunday is because it hopes the IRS will enforce its regulations against a church so that it will have the means to challenge the restriction in litigation.

This brazen disrespect for the law is based on inaccurate constitutional claims. ADF claims the restrictions violate the Establishment Clause by excessively entangling the government with churches' internal affairs.



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However, churches choose to be subject to restrictions on political activity as a condition of claiming tax-exempt status, just like all other groups classified as 501(c)(3) organizations, including the Freedom From Religion Foundation. ADF claims the restrictions violate free speech protections, even though clergy are perfectly free to say whatever they like from the

pulpit if they do not claim tax-exempt status, or to endorse as individuals outside a church context. Churches are not required to be tax-exempt, and the government is not required to subsidize churches' political ideologies.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation encourages members and the public to be on watch for unlawful political activity at churches on "Pulpit

Freedom Sunday" or any other day. The FFRF website on Churches and Political Lobbying Activity<sup>1</sup> explains what is and is not allowed, and includes instructions on how to submit a complaint to the IRS directly, or contact FFRF to do so on your behalf.

[From an Oct. 4 FFRF press release.]

<sup>1</sup>See <http://ffrf.org/faq/state-church/item/14005-churches-and-political-lobbying-activities>

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## FFRF Involved in Ten Commandments Display in GA Capitol

**The Commandments are part of a larger display. (From an October 8 FFRF press release.)**

A display of the Ten Commandments went up in the Georgia Capitol on September 10. The Decalogue is part of a larger display titled "Foundations of American Law and Government" which includes various historical documents. Needless to say, the Ten Commandments are not "historical." Georgia's legislature in July 2012 passed a trouble-making law providing for this display in Georgia's public buildings.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor wrote<sup>1</sup> to Capitol Museum Director Timothy Frilingos on Sept. 13, informing him of the exclusionary nature and proselytizing message of the display and the many historical inaccuracies contained within it. Frilingos responded<sup>2</sup> that same day to say that he was "compelled" to authorize the display by the legislation. Gaylor responded<sup>3</sup> on October 8, pointing out that the legislation merely "authorized" the display, and it remained an unwise decision. FFRF also wrote Governor Nathan Deal.

While the law states that the purpose of the display is "to educate and inform the public about the history and background of American law," the facts say otherwise. The displays

are donated by private groups or individuals, many by Christian churches. The Capitol's display, donated by an individual, is the popular version sold by Ten Commandments-Georgia, Inc., a group which lists its mission as "To educate Georgians by distributing a copy of the Ten Commandments to every home in the state [and] encouraging the public display of historical documents that inform citizens of our country's biblical heritage." It lists one of its purposes as "Displaying the Ten Commandments in our homes, churches, businesses, and public buildings."

Rep. Terry England (R-Auburn), who sponsored the bill in Georgia's legislature, sits on the group's Trustee Board. The group's Honorary Board includes Dan Cathy of Chik-Fil-A and Judge Roy Moore, who was removed as Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court for refusing to remove a Ten Commandments display from the Alabama Judicial Building, as well as several other right-wing extremists.

The display's explanation for the inclusion of the Ten Commandments is wildly inaccurate. It claims that the Ten Commandments "profoundly influenced" the Western legal tradition

and the Declaration of Independence, neither of which is true. The display as a whole contains other inaccurate claims; for example, the display also includes the current national motto, "In God We Trust," which can hardly be said to be a foundation of American law or government, since it was adopted in 1956.

In an October 8 press release, FFRF urged their Georgia members to contact Georgia officials to remove the Ten Commandments from the walls of its State Capitol.

Their suggested sample wording: "Please remove the Ten Commandments from the State Capitol. It is divisive and historically inaccurate. The Ten Commandments are a religious document, and have no relation to the 'Foundations of American Law and Government.' The display unconstitutionally endorses religion and excludes the nearly 1 million Georgians who are non-Christians. They should not be made to feel like outsiders in their Capitol building, the pinnacle of Georgia state government, and the state government should not lend credence to the misinformation and obvious religious agenda of the Ten Commandments display."

<sup>1</sup>See Gaylor's letter at <http://ffrf.org/images/uploads/legal/GeorgiaCapitol10Commandments.pdf>

<sup>2</sup>See Frilingos' response at <http://ffrf.org/images/uploads/legal/GeorgiaCapitol10CommandmentsResponse.pdf>

<sup>3</sup>See Gaylor's response at <http://ffrf.org/images/uploads/legal/GeorgiaCapitol10CommandmentsResponse.pdf>

Here is more coverage on the issue:

From WSB-TV: <http://www.wsbtv.com/news/news/local/ten-commandments-posted-ga-capitol/nR7Hx/>

From the Atlanta Journal-Constitution: <http://www.ajc.com/news/news/ten-commandments-displayed-at-state-capitol/nR5Bj/>

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Georgia Congressman Paul Broun Says Evolution, Big Bang are "Lies Straight From the Pit of Hell":  
[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/06/paul-broun-evolution-big-bang\\_n\\_1944808.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/06/paul-broun-evolution-big-bang_n_1944808.html)

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# Latest Pew Forum Research Shows Number of Godless Continues to Rise

## Secularism is On The Rise; Protestantism is Lowest in History

**In** an October 9 press release, American Atheists celebrated the latest Pew Research Center poll<sup>1</sup> showing that, once again, the number of people in the U.S. who do not believe in any god, or who are non-religious (aka “nones”) is on the rise. The results indicate a 4.8% increase in the number of “nones” in the last year, with a total increase of 25% over the last five years. This continual rise is contrasted by a steady decline, across the board, in the number of people who are religious. For the first time in history, Protestants no longer hold the majority.

This report is a confirmation of the social shift occurring in the U.S., allowing scores of atheists to come out openly, and moving the U.S. from a predominantly religious nation to a more secular nation.

David Silverman, President of American Atheists said, “We’re seeing a marked shift in the religion bias of our country. Many atheists are ‘coming out’ and openly declaring their non-belief to friends, family, and co-workers. The prejudice still exists, but

the statistics prove that the stranglehold of religion is quickly fading away, and being replaced by a more tolerant, secular society.”

The term “nones” comprise a demographic of Americans who classify their religion as “nothing in particular” or simply “none.” According to the report:

- \* From 2007-2012, the “nones” have risen from just over 15% to just under 20% of all U.S. adults.
- \* Eighty-eight percent of the “nones” say they are not looking for a religion indicating their ties with religion are permanently broken. These unaffiliated people, according to the survey results, “think that religious organizations are too concerned with money and power, too focused on rules and too involved in politics.”
- \* The “nones” are comprised of: atheists (12%), agnostics (17%), and nothing in particular (71%).
- \* The growth in the number of religiously unaffiliated Americans is largely driven by generational replacement, the gradual supplanting of older generations by newer ones.

32% of adults under 30 are now religiously unaffiliated, compared to only 9% for those 65 and over. And young adults today are much more likely to be unaffiliated than previous generations were at a similar stage in their lives.

- \* The percentage of Protestants has dropped over the last 30 years from 62% of adults in 1972 to 48% of adults in 2012. The percentage of Catholics has held steady at about 25% over the same period, in part because of immigration from Latin America.

The new survey is by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life, conducted jointly with the PBS television program Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly.

American Atheists says it has seen tremendous growth over the past 50 years. There has been a marked change in the numbers of atheists ‘coming out’ as displayed by the Reason Rally held on the National Mall in Washington D.C. on March 24, 2012, drawing a crowd of nearly 30,000 non-believers.

<sup>1</sup>See the Pew Center’s report at <http://www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx>

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## In the News:

Historian says piece of papyrus refers to Jesus’ wife:

[http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/49075679/ns/technology\\_and\\_science-the\\_new\\_york\\_times/#.UFjmwq6YTzQ](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/49075679/ns/technology_and_science-the_new_york_times/#.UFjmwq6YTzQ)

Boy Scouts Helped Alleged Molesters Cover Tracks, Files Show:

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-boy-scouts-files-20120916,0,6937684.story>

Jewish Students in Roswell, GA Contend with Christian Students: <http://www.jewsonfirst.org/12a/Schools1.aspx>

FFRF Says Preachers’ Housing Allowance Should Be Struck Down:

<http://www.tennessean.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=2012310060074>

## New Articles:

If God Weren’t Invisible: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jYkxWO4Op6c>

5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today:

[http://www.alternet.org/story/153727/5\\_founding\\_fathers\\_whose\\_skepticism\\_about\\_christianity\\_would\\_make\\_them\\_unelectable\\_today](http://www.alternet.org/story/153727/5_founding_fathers_whose_skepticism_about_christianity_would_make_them_unelectable_today)

4 Ways Christianity Sneaks Into Our Secular Government – And Why it Matters;

<http://www.alternet.org/belief/4-ways-christianity-sneaks-our-secular-government-and-why-it-matters?paging=off>

Public Challenge: Show me a miracle: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/crossexamined/2012/09/public-challenge-show-me-a-miracle/>

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# Christian TV Networks Prepare for Live Coverage of Jesus' Return

## Daystar TV and the Trinity Broadcasting Network Are Ready

Should the body of the Christian deity figure's son somehow drop down from outer space and suddenly appear hovering in the sky over Jerusalem, America's two leading Christian television networks are prepared to cover the holy event live. You'll even be able to watch it on your iPad.

According to *The Los Angeles Times*<sup>1</sup> both Daystar TV and the Trinity Broadcasting Network have set up cameras in studios overlooking the Mount of Olives, where scripture says the Christian Messiah will touch down one day. Both networks recently acquired studio space in Jerusalem as part of a miniature dust-up in their niche industry over who is doing more to preach the gospel to Jews.

Daystar in particular has been very

aggressive in deploying their messaging on Israeli airwaves, having launched the first 24-hour Christian network in the country back in 2006. The network's website also features a live video stream from the Mount of Olives<sup>2</sup> that's compatible with a host of mobile devices like iPhones, iPads, Androids and Blackberries—just in case viewers need to catch the Messiah's return on the go.

Many evangelical Christians believe that the final battle for mankind will take place in Jerusalem, and that once it ends all the Jews will come to worship Jesus. But in the meantime, evangelicals have fostered a friendly relationship with Israelis believing that they gain favor with their deity figure by supporting the Jews, who they see

as God's chosen people.

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life<sup>3</sup> said in 2011 that 78.4 percent of Americans consider themselves to be Christian, but just 26.3 percent identify as evangelical. A wide majority of evangelical leaders also said they believe their influence on American society is waning<sup>4</sup>.

Nevertheless, there will almost assuredly be a market for Armageddon-themed media going forward: a Reuters/Ipsos poll<sup>5</sup> published in May found that 22 percent of Americans believe the world will end in their lifetime.

[From an Oct. 1 article by Stephen Webster at <http://www.rawstory.com/>.]

<sup>1</sup>See the story at <http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-israel-evangelical-20121001,0,6110978.story>

<sup>2</sup>See the live Israel Webcam at <http://www.daystar.com/israel/live/>

<sup>3</sup>See the Pew Forum report at <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>

<sup>4</sup>See "Evangelicals' Declining Influence": [http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2011/06/poll\\_evangelica.html](http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2011/06/poll_evangelica.html)

<sup>5</sup>See the poll results at <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/01/us-mayancalendar-poll-idUSBRE8400XH20120501>

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"Hitler and Stalin were atheists. What have you got to say about that?" The question comes up after just about every public lecture that I ever give on the subject of religion, and in most of my radio interviews as well. It is put in a truculent way, indignantly freighted with two assumptions: not only (1) were Stalin and Hitler atheists, but (2) they did their terrible deeds because they were atheists. Assumption (1) is true for Stalin and dubious for Hitler. But assumption (1) is irrelevant anyway, because assumption (2) is false. It is certainly illogical if it is thought to follow from (1). Even if we accept that Hitler and Stalin shared atheism in common, they both also had moustaches, as does Saddam Hussein. So what? The interesting question is not whether evil (or good) individual human beings were religious or were atheists. We are not in the business of counting evil heads and compiling two rival roll calls of iniquity. The fact that Nazi belt buckles were inscribed with "*Gott mit uns*" (God with us) doesn't prove anything either, at least not without a lot more discussion. What matters is not whether Hitler and Stalin were atheists, but whether atheism systematically influences people to do bad things.

There is not the smallest evidence that it does. —Richard Dawkins, from his book *The God Delusion*, page 272

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"I agree that it's very difficult to come to an absolute definition of what's moral and what is not. We are on our own, without a god, and we have to get together, sit down together and decide what kind of society we want to live in. Do we want to live in a society where people steal, where people kill, where people don't pull their weight paying their taxes, doing that kind of thing? Do we want to live in a kind of society where everybody is out for themselves in a dog-eat-dog world? And we decide in conclave together that that's not the kind of world in which we want to live. It's difficult. It's a moral decision which we take as individuals - and we take it collectively as a collection of individuals. If you want to get that sort of value system from religion I want you to ask yourself - whereabouts in religion do you get it? Which religion do you get it from?

They're all different. If you get it from the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition then I beg you - don't get it from your holy book! Because the morality you will get from reading your holy book is hideous. Don't get it from your holy book. Don't get it from sucking up to your god. Don't get it from saying "Oh, I'm terrified of going to hell so I'd better be good." That's a very ignoble reason to be good. Instead - be good for good reasons. Be good for the reason that you've decided together with other people the society you want to live in: a decent humane society. Not one based on absolutism, not one based on holy books and not one based on sucking up to... looking over your shoulder to the divine spy camera in the sky."

—Richard Dawkins, from a discussion with Johathan Sacks on BBC on Sept. 12, 2012

(See the video at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roFdPHdhgKQ&t=59m29s>.)

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# What is Florida's Amendment 8 – the Misleadingly-Titled “Religious Freedom” Amendment?

By Simon Howard, Executive Director, ACLU of Florida

For 127 years, Florida's constitution (and that of 36 other states) has protected one of our oldest American values, the separation of church and state, by the following principle:

“No revenue of the state or any political subdivision or agency thereof shall ever be taken from the public treasury directly or indirectly in aid of any church, sect, or religious denomination or in aid of any sectarian institution.”

The provision applies to every religious group. No group is singled out. It requires that government funds not be used to fund any religion. It requires that religious programs are to be funded by parishioners, not taxpayers.

The provision was re-enacted by the voters in 1968, 1978 and again in 1998.

The constitutional principle barring government funding of religion—the heart of separation of church and state—prohibits taxpayer funds for churches or religious purposes. Religiously-affiliated charities continue to receive contracts from government agencies—but these contracts are for programs that serve the needs of the community (hospitals, soup kitchens, vocational training, substance abuse counseling and many others), not to further religion.

But there is a new Amendment for voters to vote on in November. It is Amendment 8, which seeks to repeal the above provision on church/state separation and replace it with the following:

“Except to the extent required by the First Amendment to the United States Constitution, neither the government nor any agent of the government may deny to any individual or entity the benefits of any program, funding, or other support on the basis of religious identity or belief.”

Think about what that says. This goes beyond the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and creates an entitlement under the Florida Constitution for any individual or entity (whatever that may be!) that calls itself a religion to receive any government “benefit.” No oversight or accountability is required for how the taxpayers' funds are spent.

The “benefit” could include not only a voucher for religious education at a church-run school but a health program that denies information about contraception to victims of human trafficking.

For example, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has refused to provide contraception or referrals for contraception in programs funded by grants under the Trafficking Victims Protection Act. The Bishops claim they have a religious freedom right to get the government contract and withhold services that violate their religious beliefs—regardless of the requirements of the contract and even though the funds were allocated to cover the full range of health care services for this vulnerable population. A federal court has ruled that, under the U.S. Constitution, a religious group cannot use taxpayer funds to impose its beliefs by denying vital health care services. The Bishops have appealed.

Amendment 8 is an attempt to legalize this practice in Florida by amending the state Constitution.

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The *Tampa Bay Times* printed an article<sup>1</sup> by columnist John Romano on October 7 that explained the Amendment pretty well:

“You are being manipulated... If you plan to vote in the Nov. 6 general election, you are going to run across an amendment on the ballot that has

to do with striking down a 127-year-old provision in the state Constitution. The official title for this proposed measure is Amendment 8. On the ballot, it has another name: Religious Freedom.”

“Catchy, isn't it? Except this is what the amendment is really about: money.”

“Basically, this law would eliminate a previous amendment to the Constitution that says government revenue cannot be given to religious groups... In other words, this fight for ‘religious freedom’ is striking down a law that is actually the epitome of fairness when it comes to religious groups.”

“So why is Amendment 8 called Religious Freedom? The authors were hoping to sway voters with an exploitative and misleading title.”

“...Critics contend Amendment 8 is nothing more than a backdoor attempt to resume the fight for vouchers for private schools in Florida. This is why school boards across the state have come out against this amendment.”

“...If the first two words of your amendment are a blatant misrepresentation, I'm going to have a hard time believing anything that follows.”

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Americans United for Separation of Church and State says the following about Florida's Amendment 8 on their website<sup>2</sup>:

“The goal of Amendment 8 is to allow taxpayer money to flow to religious schools and houses of worship. Passage of the Amendment would strip the religious freedom protections currently enshrined in the Florida Constitution, thus allowing for direct funding of religious organizations that provide faith-based social services and opening the door to taxpayer funded vouchers for religious schools.”

<sup>1</sup>See John Romano's article at <http://www.tampabay.com/news/politics/elections/dont-be-fooled-by-floridas-amendment-8/1255243>

<sup>2</sup>See AU's statement at <http://www.au.org/content/florida-amendment-8> Learn more at <http://www.voteno8.com>

See also: “Florida's Amendment 8: Bad for Religion, Bad for Taxpayers”:

<http://blog.au.org/church-state/october-2012-church-state/editorial/florida-s-amendment-8-bad-for-religion-bad-for>



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## Other Meetings of Interest in the Atlanta Area

The **Humanists of Georgia** will meet on Sunday, Oct. 21, at 1:00 PM at UUMAN (Unitarian Universalist Metro Atlanta North), 11420 Crabapple Road, Roswell, GA. Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church and State will speak on "Rescuing the Secular State from the Religious Right." For details, see <http://www.georgiahumanists.org/>.

The **Fellowship of Reason** meets on the first Sunday of every month at 10:30 AM at AF Hall. They also have meetings for book discussion, philosophy, a classic film course, and other events. See <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

The **Fayette Freethought Society** hosts lunches, dinners, book discussions, civic activities and more. See details at <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, October 20, at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. Program: Introduction to Skepticism & Dragon-Con SkepTrack wrap-up. See <http://www.atlantaskeptics.com/>.

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

**GUST** (**Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths**) meets on 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesdays at 7:00PM at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville, GA. <http://gust.domek.org/>

The **Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta** will meet at the Netherworld haunted house on October 27 at 10:00PM at 323 Walker Street in Atlanta. See <http://blacknonbelievers.org/>.

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** will meet on Saturday, Oct. 27, at 7:00PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. Steve Potter of Georgia Tech will speak on "The Ethics of Making Hybrid Robots with Living Brains and Artificial Bodies." <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>

There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, Oct. 14, at 6:00PM 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, October 28, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

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Congratulations to **Tony King**: his Letter-to-the-Editor was printed in the *Toccoa Record* on Sept 20, 2012.

### Hired to work, not be proselytized

The workplace is not a church. There is a growing problem with religion being allowed to run rampant on the job. This is a problem because primarily we live in a society that is composed of individuals from many religious backgrounds.

Christianity is just one of many religions within the American experience.

It is being shown favor in not only our government, which violates separation of church and state, but also in work environments across the country.

The workplace is not a church.

When an employer's work force is composed of individuals who adhere to various faiths or to no faith at all, it does not really make sense to allow adherents of one religion to use the job environment for the proselytizing of co-workers. That is inappropriate.

No matter which religion it is, whether it is Christianity, Judaism, or Islam or any of the other religions, it should not be allowed to be used for public display within the work environment.

Displays of Jesus banners at work stations, religious symbols on corporate billboards, and scripture verses and religious salutations on corporate letters and invoices create an environment in which employees who do not adhere to that particular religion are made to feel unwelcome.

It also creates feelings of resentment towards those offending employees who chose to use their work environment to push their faith upon their co-workers.

Job performance can suffer in the offended employee. An offended employee may also put on display counter messages in the form of T-shirts and banners and posters of his or her own making as a form of self-defense.

Furthermore, a religiously saturated workplace can offend customers and potential customers who are not adherents to the religion that is on display.

Management and business owners may not know at the outset if the people they are trying to woo as customers are adherents of Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, or Paganism, as they make tours of business property that they wish to make an investment towards.

A religiously charged work environment is not good business. The workplace is not a church.

Business owners, management, supervisors, and human resource directors would do well to take all of the above into consideration.

Christian employees should also take into consideration how they would feel if they were in the reverse situation. Imagine living in a society that is dominated by Islam.

Imagine what it would be like to be forced to live with a religious environment on a daily basis that you would not feel comfortable in.

A religion that you do not agree with that is in your face all the time. Just imagine how that would feel. That is how I feel.

I was hired to do a job. I was not hired to be proselytized.

William A. King  
Toccoa



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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.

**Sustaining memberships:** One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.

**Life memberships:** Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A life membership lasts a lifetime.

**Paper newsletter:** We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.)

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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

Compiled by **Edward M. Buckner** and **Michael E. Buckner**; ammunition against Christian-nation mythologists. Quotes from America's revolutionaries, constitution framers, Presidents, court decisions. Sources carefully documented; extensive index. Comb-bound—lies flat for easy copying.

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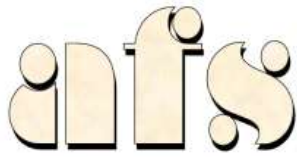
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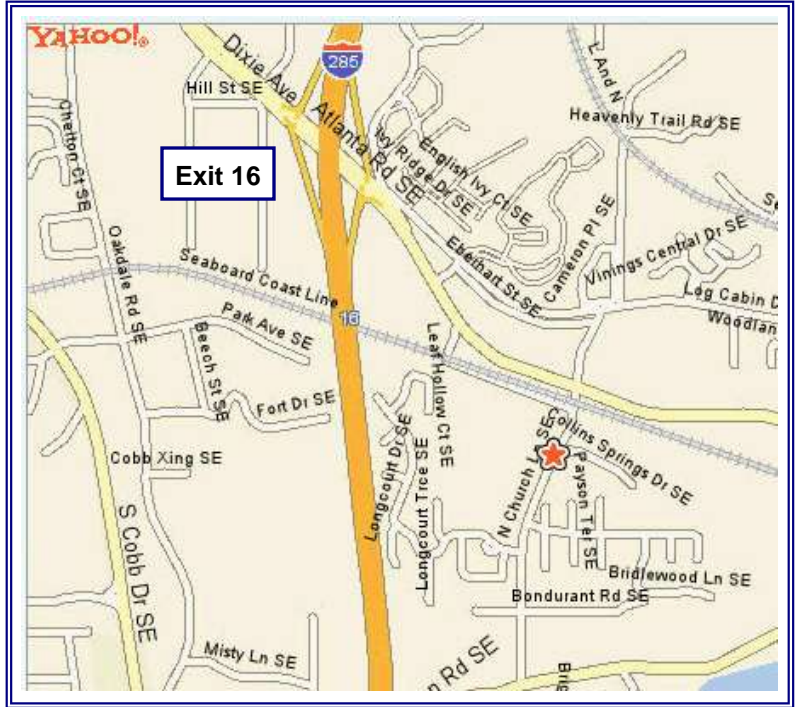
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**The October 14 Meeting:  
1:00 at AF Hall,  
4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Smyrna, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:  
Dr. Dennis Martin**



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