

Atlanta Freethought News

Dare to Think for Yourself.

An AFS Publication • Volume 18 Number 11 • November 2012

The November AFS Meeting

The Nov. 11 AFS meeting will include a Potluck Lunch at 12:00 noon and a talk by **Dr. Robert McCauley** at 1:00 on "Why Religion is Natural (And Science is Not)."

Dr. McCauley earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of Chicago in 1979. His research examines the philosophy of psychology and cognitive science, the cognitive science of religion, and naturalized epistemology. He is the author of more than 80 articles, chapters, and reviews in journals in philosophy, religion, psychology, anthropology, and education. His most recent book is *Why Religion Is Natural and Science Is Not* (Oxford, 2011).

Dr. McCauley was elected President of the Society for Philosophy and Psychology for 1997-1998 and of the International Association for the Cognitive Science of Religion for 2010-2012. He received the Emory Williams Distinguished Teaching Award in 1996 and was recognized for his outstanding teaching by the American Philosophical Association. He now serves (since 2008) as the Director of the Center for Mind, Brain, and Culture at Emory University.

The AFS meeting will be at **Atlanta Freethought Hall**, 4775 N. Church Lane, Smyrna, GA. To get there, take I-285 (the perimeter road around Atlanta) to Exit 16 (Atlanta Road). Turn toward Atlanta. Go ½ mile and then turn right onto N. Church Lane. Atlanta Freethought Hall is on the left.

The November Potluck Lunch

Before the regular Nov. 11 meeting, we will have a **Potluck Lunch**, starting at 12:00. Join AFS members and guests for some good food and great socializing. Please bring food according to the first letter of your last name:

A-G: Bring a main dish;

H-P: Bring a desert;

Q-Z: Bring a side dish.

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.

The AFS Social

This month's AFS Social will be on Saturday, Nov. 17, at 1:00 at Lin Buffet (Chinese food), 3201 S. Cobb Dr., Smyrna. It's more good food and great conversation with other free-thinkers!

AFS Meetings and Activities

Nov 11: **AFS Potluck Lunch**, AF Hall, 12:00 noon

Nov 11: **AFS General Meeting**, AF Hall, 1:00 PM

Nov 17: **AFS Social at Lin Buffet**, 1:00 PM

About *Why Religion Is Natural (and Science Is Not)*

Here's a summary of Dr. McCauley's new book, which will be for sale at the AFS meeting.

The battle between religion and science, competing methods of knowing ourselves and our world, has been raging for many centuries. Now scientists themselves are looking at cognitive foundations of religion—and arriving at some surprising conclusions.

Over the course of the past two decades, scholars have employed insights gleaned from cognitive science, evolutionary biology, and related disciplines to illuminate the study of religion. In *Why Religion is Natural and Science Is Not*, Robert N. McCauley, one of the founding fathers of the cognitive science of religion, argues that our minds are better suited to religious belief than to scientific inquiry. Drawing on the latest research and illustrating his argument with commonsense examples, McCauley argues that religion has existed for many thousands of years in every society because the kinds of explanations it provides are precisely the kinds that come naturally to human minds. Science, on the other hand, is a much more recent and rare development because it reaches radical conclusions and requires a kind of abstract thinking that only arises consistently under very

specific social conditions. Religion makes intuitive sense to us, while science requires a lot of work. McCauley then draws out the larger implications of these findings. The naturalness of religion promotes its acceptance, but the unnaturalness of science results in more skepticism against it.

Rigorously argued and well written, this book will appeal to anyone interested in the debate between religion and science, and in the nature and workings of the human mind.

Pascal Boyer, author of *Religion Explained*, said about the book: "Robert McCauley is a philosopher of science and was a pioneer in creating a cognitive science of religious thought and behavior. No one could better explain what he calls the naturalness of religion and the unnaturalness of science. In the past, discussions of 'science' and 'religion' have been as sterile as they were poorly informed. McCauley re-examines this contrast in cognitive and evolutionary terms. He shows how our mental systems make religious belief so easy and scientific thinking so difficult, and explores the consequences of these divergent ways of thinking for the future of religious organizations and scientific knowledge."



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.

Nov 11: **Dr. Robert McCauley**, Director of the Center for Mind, Brain and Culture at Emory University, will speak on “Why Religion is Natural (And Science is Not).”

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 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. 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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CFI Mourns the Death of Paul Kurtz, Its Founder

Kurtz founded CSH, CFI, *Free Inquiry* and *Skeptical Inquirer* Magazines, and Prometheus Books

The Center for Inquiry announced with great sadness on October 22 the passing of Paul Kurtz, founder and longtime chair of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, the Council for Secular Humanism, and the Center for Inquiry. He was 86. A philosopher, activist, and author, Kurtz was for a half-century among the most significant and impactful figures in the humanist and skeptic movements.

Kurtz's legacy includes the above organizations, the creation of the skeptics' magazine *Skeptical Inquirer*, the secular humanist magazine *Free Inquiry*, independent publisher Prometheus Books, and a library of books and scholarly articles that will continue to inform discussions of morality, ethics, reason, and religion for generations to come.

Kurtz graduated from NYU in 1948 and earned his Ph. D. in philosophy at Columbia University in 1952.

Academic Career. Kurtz taught philosophy at Trinity College from 1952 to 1959. He joined the faculty at Union College from 1961 to 1965; during this period he was also a visiting lecturer at the New School for Social Research. In 1965 he was recruited by the new State University of New York at Buffalo. The former University of Buffalo had recently been absorbed into the state university system; under Governor Nelson Rockefeller, the institution launched an aggressive program to recruit top young academics to its faculty. Kurtz became professor of philosophy at SUNY-Buffalo, a post he held until his retirement from teaching in 1991. At this stage of his career, Kurtz focused principally on methods of objective inquiry and the history of American philosophy. He contributed the significant entry "American Philosophy" to the influential first edition of the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1967), edited by Paul Edwards. He edited two large anthologies of American philosophy and published his best-known scholarly work, *Decision and the Condition of Man* (1968).

The Humanist Movement. It was in the late 1960s that Kurtz embarked on the pursuit whose prominence would exceed even that of his career as a philosopher, when he began his involvement with the humanist movement. In 1967 he was named editor of *The Humanist*, published by the American Humanist Association (AHA), then the nation's only significant humanist organization. He took the magazine in new directions, both by making its content more sharply critical of religion and by using aggressive techniques to expand its circulation. Arguably, *The Humanist* never enjoyed greater cultural prominence or higher circulation than during Kurtz's editorship, but his forceful style led to friction with others within AHA, including some members of its board of directors. Kurtz gave up editorship of *The Humanist* and parted ways with AHA in 1978.

Kurtz was for more than a quarter-century an influential figure in the International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU), a worldwide network of national humanist organizations founded in Amsterdam in 1952. He joined IHEU's board of directors in 1969 and served as the organization's co-chairman from 1986 to 1994. During this period, Kurtz hosted IHEU's Tenth World Congress, held at SUNY-Buffalo during the summer of 1988.

The Kurtz-founded Organizations. Kurtz would be better known for his work through organizations he founded and shaped from their inception.

In 1969 he founded Prometheus Books, a for-profit publishing company that quickly emerged as the dominant imprint in skepticism, humanism, and atheism. It would become the most prolific publisher of atheist and humanist titles in history. Since its founding it has published more than 2500 titles in what has become a broad range of genres.

Kurtz was perhaps best known for the three mutually supportive not-for-profit organizations he founded in

Buffalo and later Amherst, New York, now known as the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, the Council for Secular Humanism, and the Center for Inquiry.

Paul Kurtz



Kurtz and others founded the world's first organization devoted solely to scientific criticism of paranormal claims at an April 1976 conference at SUNY-Buffalo whose participants included author Isaac Asimov, author-mathematician Martin Gardner, and magician James Randi. The organization was originally known as the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, and became widely known by its acronym, CSICOP. Several months after its formation CSICOP launched a journal, *The Zetetic*, which later achieved great prominence as the *Skeptical Inquirer*, which continues to be published bimonthly. During its early years CSICOP encouraged the formation of local skeptics groups across the United States, and of independent national skeptics organizations across the world. These groups would form the kernel of today's international skeptical movement. In 2006, the organization shortened its name to the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, partly to show that its concerns now extended beyond its original focus on paranormal claims to include the pub-

lic understanding of science and issues in medicine and mental health.

In 1980, two years after his departure from the American Humanist Association, Kurtz launched a new, more explicitly nonreligious humanist organization, the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (CODESH). The word "Democratic" was added to demonstrate the group's opposition to Communist totalitarianism, an important consideration since non-theism was then strongly associated with Communism in the public mind. The new organization's first act was to release *A Secular Humanist Declaration*, a position document originally signed by 57 distinguished activists and academics. Its release was covered in a front-page story in the *New York Times*. The Council simultaneously launched a journal, *Free Inquiry*, with Kurtz as its publisher and founding editor. *Free Inquiry* quickly became the most respected and highest-circulation humanist magazine in the U. S. It continues to be published bimonthly.

In 1996, in response to the collapse of European Communism, the organization shortened its name to the Council for Secular Humanism. It maintains a network of independent local groups, operates North America's only freethought museum, and engages in a variety of educational and advocacy activities. Since 2007 the Council has been lead plaintiff in a lawsuit that challenges contracts between the state of Florida and explicitly religious social service providers.

In 1991, Kurtz founded a third major non-profit organization, the Center for Inquiry in Amherst, NY, which eventually became an advocacy organization. Its agenda encompassed both CSICOP's skepticism and CODESH's secular humanism, placing both in a broader cultural and intellectual context. From its transnational headquarters at Amherst, the Center conducted a wide range of educational programs, including an online master's degree program in conjunction with the University at Buffalo. Its research libraries hold the world's largest collections of humanist, skeptical, and related literature.

Awards and Recognitions. Paul Kurtz received numerous awards. In 1992 he was named a Fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. In 1996 the main-belt asteroid Kurtz 6629 was named in his honor. In 2000 he received the International Rationalist Award at the Second International Rationalist Conference at Trivandrum, India. In 2001 he received the Charles P. Norton Medal, the highest award bestowed by the State University of New York at Buffalo. In 2009 he received the Eupraxopher Award, a special lifetime achievement award, from the Center for Inquiry, as well as the Philip J. Klass Award from the National Capital Area Skeptics. In 2010 he received a lifetime achievement award at The Amazing Meeting (TAM) sponsored by the James Randi Educational Foundation.

Publications. Paul Kurtz wrote or edited more than fifty books for scholarly or general audiences. Among the better-known are *Exuberance: A Philosophy of Happiness* (1977); *Forbidden Fruit: The Ethics of Humanism* (1988); *Eupraxophy: Living without Religion* (1989); *The Transcendental Temptation: A Critique of Religion and the Paranormal* (1991); *The New Skepticism: Inquiry and Reliable Knowledge* (1992); and *What Is Secular Humanism?* (2006). His works have been translated into multiple languages. He composed a great number of essays, including editorials that appeared in every issue of *Free Inquiry* magazine from its founding in 1980 until 2009.

Kurtz was also organized humanism's most prolific composer of position documents. When he joined the humanist movement, it was still strongly influenced by the *Humanist Manifesto* of 1933. Drafted and signed by Unitarian, the original *Manifesto* explicitly envisioned humanism as a new religion. In Kurtz's view, a more secular formulation was needed. As editor of *The Humanist* he led a campaign for a new and more relevant *Manifesto*. *Humanist Manifesto II* was published in 1973, having been co-drafted by Kurtz and fellow humanist leader Edwin H. Wilson. Where its

predecessor was religious, *Manifesto II* explicitly rejected religiosity. In a passage reflecting Kurtz's writing style, it declared: "Some humanists believe we should reinterpret traditional religions and reinvest them with meanings appropriate to the current situation. Such redefinitions...perpetuate old dependencies and escapisms; they easily become obscurantist, impeding the free use of the intellect. We need, instead, radically new human purposes and goals."

Manifesto II was signed by 114 activists and thought leaders at first publication, and would eventually attract 261 distinguished signers. Its release garnered worldwide media attention including a front-page story in *The New York Times*.

The previously mentioned *A Secular Humanist Declaration* (1980) was drafted solely by Kurtz. It offered a secular humanist interpretation of many of the ideas developed in *Manifesto II*, but steeped in the recognition that an unquestionably nonreligious humanist institution needed to be created, close to but slightly outside of a larger humanist movement that included both religious and nonreligious humanists.

In the late 1990s Kurtz began to compose a new successor document. Originally he planned to title it *Humanist Manifesto III*, asserting the right to do so as the sole living co-author of *Manifesto II*. After the American Humanist Association asserted ownership of the *Manifesto* title and threatened legal action, Kurtz retitled his document *Humanist Manifesto 2000*.

Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism was issued in 1999 with about 200 signatures. It was book-length, far lengthier than the previous *Manifestos*, and represented the fullest statement of Kurtz's vision for humanism as a planetary commitment transcending national and ethnic identities. Besides challenging religion and championing the scientific outlook and freedom of thought, Kurtz called for a popularly elected global parliament, a World Court, a global environmental monitoring institution, and a new international tax to aid the developing world. These internationalist

contentions engendered substantial controversy within the humanist movement.

Kurtz consistently asserted that morality should be rooted in human flourishing and happiness, not on supernatural revelation. He attached high priority to individual liberty in a robustly democratic culture. His ethics were primarily utilitarian, but he tempered his utilitarianism with a strong commitment to basic liberties. As early as 1969 he had written that “there are two basic and minimal principles which especially seem to characterize humanism. First, there is a rejection of any supernatural conception of the universe and a denial that man has any privileged place within nature. Second, there is an affirmation that ethical values are human and have no meaning independent of human experience.” Repeatedly he characterized secular humanism less as a set of moral or philosophical prescriptions than as a process, a template for the conduct of ethical inquiry.

Two further contentions strongly influenced Kurtz’s thought and writing beginning in the mid-1980s. The first was his growing sense of humanism as necessarily planetary. He argued that since the principal problems confronting humankind were global in scope, they required transnational solutions. This view was accompanied by an assertive cosmopolitanism that viewed traditional religious, ethnic, and national identities as archaisms to be jet

tioned whenever possible.

In addition, he sought an authoritative answer to the question “If secular humanism is not a religion, what is it?” His solution was to coin a new word, *eupraxophy* (in later years spelled *eupraxisophy*). Formed from Greek roots meaning roughly “good wisdom and practice in conduct,” the word was meant to label a novel category of intellectual and moral systems that met some of the social needs served by religions without the supernaturalism or authoritarianism of traditional faiths. Kurtz made his most extended argument for the coinage in his 1989 book *Eupraxophy: Living without Religion*. Kurtz’s arguments for eupraxophy were received respectfully, and some activists eagerly restyled themselves “eupraxophers.” Ultimately, however, the term failed to maintain traction and it is infrequently used in the movement today.

Later Life. While Kurtz’s son Jonathan had succeeded him as president of Prometheus Books, Kurtz continued to exercise day-to-day control of the non-profit organizations he had founded well past his eightieth birthday. After 2005 there was heightened concern on the part of the organizations’ directors to implement a specific succession process. In June 2008, attorney and philosopher Ronald A. Lindsay succeeded Kurtz as president and CEO of the Center for Inquiry, the Council for Secular Humanism, and the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry.

Lindsay was Kurtz’s personal selection for the position. Kurtz continued to serve as board chair until June 2009, when Buffalo investment advisor Richard Schroeder was elected Chair and Kurtz assumed the new position of Chair Emeritus. Kurtz faced this process with increasing reluctance, and on May 18, 2010, he announced his resignation from all of his remaining positions at the three nonprofit organizations. His office continued to be reserved for his use whenever the Center for Inquiry – Transnational in Amherst was open.

Late in 2010, Kurtz announced the founding of a new organization, the Institute for Science and Human Values. It released a manifesto-style document titled *Neo-Humanist Statement of Secular Principles and Values* with more than 150 signers and announced a new quarterly journal, *The Human Prospect*.

Conclusion. Ultimately, Paul Kurtz did much to shape the American and world humanist movements during the final third of the twentieth century. He was a prodigious organizer, responsible for much of the social landscape through which nonreligious Americans moved before the emergence of the so-called New Atheist movement in the middle 2000s. His most enduring legacy may be the Center for Inquiry, which continues to stand as the movement’s largest and most active organization.

[This article is from Kurtz’s obituary at http://www.centerforinquiry/paul_kurtz_obituary/]

In the News:

How a Georgia Family Scored a Touchdown for the Constitution:

<http://blog.au.org/church-state/november-2012-church-state/featured/prayer-proselytizing-and-high-school-football>

Anniston Star comments on Boy Scout Coverup:

http://annistonstar.com/view/full_story/20551373/article-Hidden-files--Boy-Scouts%E2%80%9999-documents-highlight-the-horror-of-child-sex-abuse

Josh Moon’s Just Saying: Religious Freedoms Not at Risk: No Need for the Outrage:

<http://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/article/2012/11/04/COLUMNISTS17/311030058/Josh-Moon-s-Just-Saying-Religious-freedoms-not-risk-no-need-outrage>

Pennsylvania Legislators’ “Year of the Bible” Declaration Legal but Ill-Advised, Judge Says:

<http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/business/legal/pennsylvania-legislators-year-of-the-bible-declaration-legal-but-ill-advised-judge-says-658594/>

Atheist Billboard Attacks Romney’s Faith, but Mormons Say It’s Misleading:

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/10/21/atheist-billboard-attacks-romneys-faith-but-mormons-say-its-misleading/>

Jerry Coyne, Annie Laurie Gaylor and Michael Shermer in Mexico City:

<http://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2012/11/05/sunday-in-mexico-city/>

Richard Dawkins Visits Anti-Masturbation Conference: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYr48dvZ5As>

IRS Urged to Investigate Billy Graham Evangelistic Association's Politicking

FFRF Questions the "Vote Biblical" Campaign (From a Nov. 5 FFRF press release.)

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has filed a report with the Internal Revenue Service over illegal political campaigning by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association (BGEA).

BGEA, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, has run full-page ads publicizing Billy Graham's call for the electorate to "vote biblical values." The ads have appeared in several "swing state" newspapers in preparation for the heated presidential election. Throughout the month of October, BGEA published articles favorable to Romney, which included a statement by Billy Graham: "What impresses me even more than Gov. Romney's successful career are his values and strong moral convictions."

"The context of the ads and publications by BGEA evidence its intent to endorse candidate Mitt Romney," wrote FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor in an October 31 letter¹ to

¹See the October 31 letter at <http://ffrf.org/images/uploads/legal/BillyGrahamEvangelisticAssociationIRS.pdf>

the IRS.

"Tax exempt non-profit groups are to be conducted with educational and charitable purposes, not for the purpose of political campaign advocacy. When non-profit groups become involved in political elections, they should be investigated and lose their tax-exempt status," said Gaylor.

Gaylor noted that BGEA had \$122 million in net assets in 2011 and spent over \$3.5 million on advertising and promotion.

Revs. Billy and Franklin Graham met with Romney on Oct. 11. It was reported that Billy Graham told Romney: "I'll do all I can to help you. And you can quote me on that."

A week after the Oct. 11 meeting, BGEA began publishing full-page political ads in national and local newspapers. The ads state that they are paid for by the BGEA and feature a large photograph of Billy Graham.

One version of the ad reads:

"On November 6, the day before my 94th birthday, our nation will hold one of the most critical elections in my lifetime. We are at a crossroads and there are profound moral issues at stake. I strongly urge you to vote for candidates who support the biblical definition of marriage between a man and woman, protect the sanctity of life and defend our religious freedoms. The Bible speaks clearly on these crucial issues. Please join me in praying for America, that we will turn our hearts back toward God."

FFRF contends that the BGEA activities constitute campaign intervention even though they have not explicitly used the word "endorsement."

"Billy Graham and his association have attempted to skirt restrictions on their non-profit status and use their vast resources to intervene in political campaigns," Gaylor added.

A Problem: IRS is Not Enforcing Rules on Churches and Politics

By Steve Yothment

The above story is similar to actions recently taken by Americans United for Separation of Church and State. In the November issue of *Church & State*, Rob Boston noted several church/state violations related to electioneering.

Some Religious Right organizations have 501(c)(4) tax exemptions that allow them to endorse candidates. Houses of worship, by contrast, are 501(c)(3) groups that are barred from endorsing or opposing candidates.

One problem is that the "voter guides" published by groups like Family Research Council Action, a 501(c)(4) group, are distributed in churches so that the partisan activity becomes an action of the church which is not permitted.

For example, FRC Action rated Obama and Romney on 14 issues in their voter guide, but even the descriptions of the issues were slanted. Obama was described as backing "mil-

itary social engineering" for allowing gays to serve openly in the military. The guide also accused Obama of supporting "special employment rights based on sexual behavior," when in fact he advocates giving gay workers many of the same rights already extended to others.

Priests for Life and Ralph Reed's Faith & Freedom coalition also published slanted voter guides.

On Oct. 7, the Alliance Defense Freedom sponsored its annual "Pulpit Freedom Sunday," during which pastors were encouraged to openly defy the law by endorsing or opposing candidates from the pulpit.

In New Your City, several people contacted Americans United after a Catholic church ran an article in its bulletin endorsing Romney. The Church of Saint Catherine of Siena's Sept. 2 bulletin contained a column by the Rev. John Farren, a member of the congregations pastoral staff. Titled

"From Father Farren, O.P.," the essay reprinted an appeal by several former U.S. ambassadors to the Vatican calling on Catholics to vote for Romney. The appeal, which Farren reproduced in full, criticizes the Obama administration and concludes, "We urge our fellow Catholics, and indeed all people of good will, to join with us in this full-hearted effort to elect Governor Mitt Romney as the next President of the United States."

Americans United received a copy of the bulletin from a person who attended a service there and forwarded it to the IRS with a letter of formal complaint.

A similar incident occurred in El Paso, Texas, where the church bulletin for St. Raphael Catholic Church had the statement "I am asking all of you to go to the polls and be united in replacing our present president with a president that will respect the Catholic

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Conrad Goeringer of American Atheists has Died

From a Nov. 5 Press Release by American Atheists

American Atheists announced on Nov. 5 that Conrad Goeringer died peacefully in his sleep on Saturday, November 3, 2012.

Mr. Goeringer was an integral part of American Atheists for many years in many ways. He labored tirelessly for years as an activist, leader, and writer. His work helped lay the foundation for the growth we are now seeing within the atheist movement.

Mr. Goeringer's selfless service to his fellow atheists within American Atheists included such serving as Communications Director, American Atheist magazine staff editor and writer, speaker, and author.

David Silverman, President of American Atheists said, "Those who have been with American Atheists for a few years will remember Conrad's booming voice and welcoming smile when he emceed the national convention. He was a friend to many, and an

invaluable resource to those lucky enough to work with him. He will be missed, and indeed he already is."

Ed Buckner, Former President said, "Conrad Goeringer was a writer, an historian of atheism, and a man who spent his life and career at the core of American Atheists. His life, words, and work connected Madalyn Murray O'Hair, Ellen Johnson, and Frank Zindler to the leaders we have now – and without a doubt his activism, his words, and his work had a major impact on thousands of members and on atheists beyond American Atheists as well. He is missed."

Frank Zindler, Former President and long-time friend said, "Conrad bid fair to be the most 'faithful of the faithless' whom Madalyn Murray O'Hair drew into her inner circle of Atheist activists and came to treat as though he were another son. Conrad devoted his life unreservedly to the

advancement of Atheism in general and to the rescue of American Atheists in particular after the murder of the Murray-O'Hair family. The debt we owe to 'Comrade Conrad' is far too great to tally."

Conrad Goeringer



July 23, 1949 – November 3, 2012

MORTALITY by Christopher Hitchens

A Book Review by Ben Edward Akerley

On June 8, 2010, while on a book tour for his best-selling memoir *Hitch-22*, Christopher Hitchens was stricken in his New York City hotel room with excruciating upper body pain that resulted in a lethal diagnosis—stage 4 esophageal cancer (Hitch reminds us there is no stage 5). Ironically, in the autobiography he was promoting, he had declared unequivocally that he would want to face death with both eyes open, never suspecting that he would get to carry out that resolve just 18 months later. On 12/15/11, one of the most important intellectuals of the last forty years bid us farewell at the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, TX, where he joked that he had been living dyingly.

His valedictory opus, *Mortality*, consists of seven completed chapters sent successively to his editor at *Vanity Fair* which the scribe with his undiminished mordant sense of humor satirized as dispatches from Tumorland.

The editor later decided to include a fragmentary eighth chapter which was still a work in progress.

Near the end, the horrific loss of his voice was vastly superseded by the terror of no longer being able to write since he had stated: "Writing is not just my living and my livelihood, but my very life." He proved that affirmation by continuing to write on an astonishing array of subjects in addition to penning this final volume despite the death sentence he had been handed. Never one to wallow in self-pity, he confessed to habitually indulging in hard drinking and smoking and that burning the candle at both ends often gives a lovely light.

The religious who have commented extensively on his cruel fate fall into two camps: (1) those who sincerely believe he deserves this tragic end as God's revenge and (2) those who earnestly pray for the salvation of his soul. Hitch was flattered to a point

that at least the latter petitioners thought he was worth saving. He also quipped with tongue-in-cheek about the unlikely event of a deathbed conversion: "If I convert, it is better that a believer dies than that an atheist does."

The writer previously subscribed wholeheartedly to Nietzsche's famous adage: "Whatever doesn't kill me makes me stronger." However, after enduring the severely debilitating side-effects of his medical battle with the big C, he equates the rigors of oncological treatment with torture in both the physical and psychological sense.

This slim tome reveals a devout non-believer who refuses to cower in the face of the unknown as he describes how disease transforms our experiences and radically changes our relationship to the world around us. Would that we all might emulate his noble example and confront the Grim Reaper with the same dignity, grace, wit and fearlessness of this staggering

literary giant whose untimely passing at age 62 leaves a void impossible to

fill. *Mortality* was published in Septem-

ber 2012 and has 104 pages. It sells for \$14.36 at Amazon.com.

(Continued from Page 6)

Church in this country." Please pass this on to all of your Catholic friends."

Americans United also reported this incident in a formal letter to the IRS.

However, a sticky fact remains. It turns out that the IRS has not been auditing churches for political endorsements for the past 3 years.

In an Associated Press article¹ on Nov. 3, Rachel Zoll reported that Russell Renwick, a manager in the IRS Mid-Atlantic region, recently said the

agency has suspended audits of churches suspected of breaching federal restrictions on political activity. The reason for this has to do with a 2009 federal court ruling which required the IRS to clarify which high-ranking official could authorize audits over the tax code's political rules. The IRS has yet to do so.

Attorneys who specialize in tax law for religious groups, as well as advocacy groups who monitor the cases, say they know of no IRS inquiries in

the past three years into claims of partisanship by houses of worship. IRS church audits are confidential, but usually become public as the targeted religious groups fight to maintain their nonprofit status.

Groups like Americans United will continue to closely monitor this situation. We would like to see some activity by the IRS that shows they are again looking into partisan politicking by 501(c)(3) organizations.

¹See the article at <http://www.ajc.com/ap/ap/top-news/irs-not-enforcing-rules-on-churches-and-politics/nSwpW/>

Other Meetings of Interest in the Atlanta Area

The **Humanists of Georgia** will probably meet for lunch only this month on Sunday, November 18, at 1:00PM. Location is still TBD. For details: <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 **Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta** will meet at the South Fulton Library, 4055 Flat Shoals Road, Union City, GA on Sunday, Nov. 18 at 2:30PM. See <http://blacknonbelievers.org/>.

The **Atlanta Skeptics** will meet at 7:00 PM on Saturday, November 17, at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. "Card Colm" Mulcahy, a math teacher at Spelman College, will speak on Martin Gardner, a founder of modern skepticism. 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 donnajgore@yahoo.com.

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet on Monday, Nov. 12 at 7:00PM at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Road, in Lawrenceville, GA. Topic for this meeting: "The Emotional Case for Non-Belief." <http://gust.domek.org/>

The **Atlanta Science Tavern** will meet on Saturday, November 10, at 7:00PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. Dawn Adams, a science teacher at Wheeler High School in Cobb County, will speak on the model internship program she helped develop there in the school's Center for Advanced Studies. (AST will meet earlier this month to avoid meeting on the Thanksgiving weekend.) See <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>

There will be a **meetup** for Atlanta atheists on Sunday, Nov. 11, 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, November 25, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Atlanta. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

Interesting New Articles on the Internet:

The Gospel According To Obama:

<http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/10/21/to-some-obama-is-the-wrong-kind-of-christian/?iref=allsearch>

The Dark Side of Thomas Jefferson:

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/The-Little-Known-Dark-Side-of-Thomas-Jefferson-169780996.html?c=y&story=fullstory>

Why Are Believers Ignorant About Atheists?: (by Greta Christina)

http://www.salon.com/2012/06/30/why_are_believers_ignorant_about_atheists/

Texas Attorney General Stirs Up Wrath Against Atheists:

<http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/15959-texas-ag-stirs-up-wrath-against-atheists>

What the Bible Says about Rape: <http://www.alternet.org/gender/what-bible-says-about-rape>

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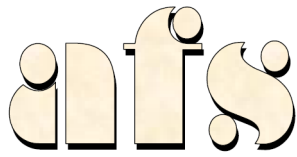
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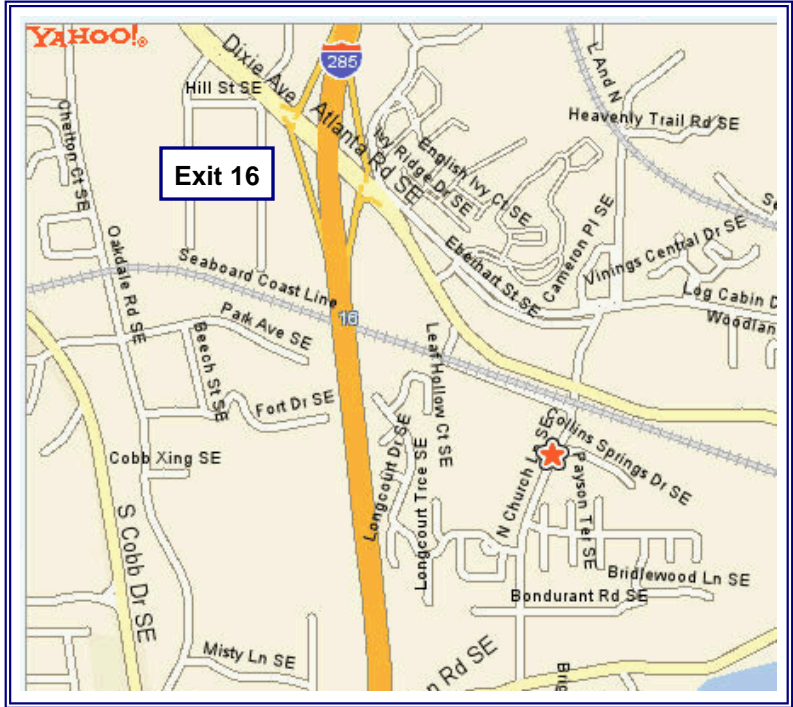
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Atlanta Freethought Society

The November 11 Meeting: 1:00 at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE Smyrna, GA This Month's Speaker: Dr. Robert McCauley



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