

The July AFS Meeting



Leo Igwe ©Vera de Kok

Our July speaker Leo Igwe is a Nigerian human rights advocate and humanist. He has specialized in campaigning against and documenting the impacts of child witchcraft accusations. His human rights fieldwork has led to his arrest on several occasions in Nigeria.

Igwe has held leadership roles in the Nigerian Humanist Movement, Atheist Alliance International and the Center For Inquiry. He earned a graduate degree in Philosophy from the University of Calabar in Nigeria and is currently performing research as a PhD candidate at the University of Bayreuth in Germany. (See more at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_Igwe.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_Igwe))

Leo will be in Las Vegas at the James Randi Educational Foundation's convention (The Amazing Meeting) on July 10 to 13. We at AFS are lucky to have him stop in Atlanta on his way home to speak at the July 14 AFS meeting. The title of his talk: "Freethought and the Problem of Witchcraft Accusations in Africa."

Calendar

7/14 Board Meeting, 11:00 a.m.

7/14 Potluck Lunch 12-1

7/14 AFS General Meeting, 1:00 p.m.

8/11 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.m.

All events at AF Hall unless noted and are subject to change.

Alabama Freethought Association Co-founder Dies



Roger Cleveland

One of the founding members of the Alabama Freethought Association, Roger Cleveland, 67, of Talladega, died over the weekend after a protracted illness, according to a statement on the organization's website.

Cleveland spearheaded the founding of the Alabama Freethought Association around 1990 after meeting leaders of the Freedom From Religion Foundation at a conference in Georgia.

Cleveland also donated land east of Talladega in the Stockdale community for a "Freethought Hall" meeting place, and as a site for Fourth of July conferences for agnostics and atheists. Hundreds attended the largest of those gatherings.

Cleveland filed suit against the state of Alabama to have crosses removed from state parks and to open up a building used as a chapel on Mt. Cheaha to non-religious groups.

Cleveland joined a suit with others against Chief Justice Roy Moore over legal fees incurred during the battle over removal of the Ten Commandments monument in the Alabama Supreme Court building. Others active in the AFA sued former Gov. Guy Hunt over his use of a state airplane to preaching

engagements and sued Moore over displays of the Ten Commandments in Gadsden and in Montgomery.

Annie Laurie Gaylor, co-president of the Madison, Wis., based FFRF, recalled Cleveland as a man of vision and vitality who worked tirelessly to establish and maintain the meeting hall and campground.

"Roger was absolutely dedicated to what he called a Freethought 'Advance,' not a retreat, in the heart of the Bible belt for Freethinkers," she said. "He wanted an outpost in Alabama."



The July Potluck Lunch

Before the regular July 14th meeting, we will have a Potluck Lunch, starting at noon. 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 dessert

Q-Z: Bring a side dish

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.





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.

The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy.

July 14: **Leo Igwe**, a Nigerian human rights advocate and Humanist leader, will speak on "Freethought and the Problem of Witchcraft Accusations in Africa."

Aug 11: A Panel Discussion on Freethought Issues, featuring AFSVP **Michael Buckner**, **Jessica Barber** of Kennesaw State Univ. Secular Student Alliance, **Mandisa Thomas** of Black Non-Believers and **Ray Dickerson** of Fayette Freethought Society

Sept 8: **Luis Granados**, author of *Damned Good Company* by Humanist Press, will speak on his book.

Oct 13: AFS Board Member **Paul Broman** will speak on his encounter with the Church of Scientology.

AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoo-groups.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@yahoogroups.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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Open seat

Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 19, Number 7, July 2013

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Bradford County, FL Ten Commandments Monument

<http://atheists.org/legal/current/bradford-county>

Introduction

On May 3, 2012, Bradford County, Florida unveiled a five-foot-tall, six-ton granite monument to the Ten Commandments in front of the Bradford County Courthouse. This monument was a gift from the group "Community Men's Fellowship" and cost \$22,000. The monument was paid for by the same person who gave a similar gift to Dixie County, FL in 2006 and which was ruled unconstitutional in 2011.

On May 3, 2012, the 2012 National Day of Prayer, the monument was unveiled and dedicated with Christian prayer services. American Atheists organized a protest led by then-Florida State Director Bridget Gaudette and Starke resident Dan Cooney. This protest drew counter-protesters from Christians.

On May 24, 2012, American Atheists and Daniel Cooney, a resident of Bradford County and member of American Atheists, filed suit in the United States District Court, Middle District of Florida. The civil complaint can be read in its entirety here.

In the complaint, American Atheists and Mr. Cooney demanded a declaratory judgement stating that the display of the monument violates the United States Constitution, specifically the Establishment Clause and an injunction requiring the removal of the monument.

Response from Bradford County

Following American Atheists' lawsuit, on June 11, Bradford County Manager Harry Hatcher requested that the Community Men's Fellowship remove the Ten Commandments monument from the Bradford County Courthouse. Two weeks later, the group wrote that they had "prayerfully considered [his] request and have determined that [they] will not comply with the County's order."

Following the order, the Community Men's Fellowship filed a lawsuit seeking to prevent the removal of the monument from the courthouse property, alleging that doing so would infringe on their First Amendment rights.

On July 27, 2012, Bradford County filed a motion to dismiss the lawsuit from American Atheists, because, in part, the monument was placed and maintained by a private organization (the Community Men's Fellowship). However, this ignores the fact that

courts have held repeatedly that a reasonably observer would interpret the placement of such a monument, regardless of who maintains it, as a government endorsement of religion. In our response to the motion to dismiss, American Atheists illustrates this point.

Mediation and Settlement

On January 8, 2013, District Judge Timothy Corrigan referred this case to mediation. American Atheists engaged in mediated discussions with Bradford County and the Community Men's Fellowship.

On May 30, 2013, American Atheists announced a settlement with Bradford County. In this agreement, American Atheists would agree to drop our lawsuit as long as Bradford County allowed us to place a monument to the secular foundation of our nation's laws on the courthouse grounds.

This marks the first time that such a monument, sponsored by an atheist group, will be placed on public land.

More photos from Starke, FL can be found on page 5!



Atheists put bench near Commandments

Monument a response to public religious symbol.

By **Brendan Farrington**
Associated Press

STARKE, Fla. — A group of atheists unveiled a monument to their nonbelief in God on Saturday to sit alongside a granite slab that lists the Ten Commandments in front of the Bradford County courthouse.

As a small group of protesters blasted Christian country music and waved "Honk for Jesus" signs, the atheists celebrated what they believe is the first atheist monument allowed on government property in the United States.

"When you look at this monument, the first thing you will notice is that it has a function. Atheists are about the real and the physical, so we selected to place this monument in the form of a bench," said David Silverman, president of American Atheists.

It also serves another function — a counter to the religious monument that the New Jersey-based group wanted removed. It's a case of if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.

American Atheists sued to try to have the stone slab with the Ten Com-

mandments taken away from the courthouse lawn in this rural, conservative north Florida town best known for the prison that confines death row inmates. The Community Men's Fellowship erected the monument in what's described as a free speech zone. During mediation on the case, the atheist group was told it could have its own monument, too.

"We're not going to let them do it without a counterpoint," Silverman said. "If we do it without a counterpoint, it's going to appear very strongly that the government actually endorses one religion over another, or — I should say — religion in general over non-religion."

About 200 people attended the unveiling. Most were supportive, though there were protesters, including a group from Florida League of the South that had signs that said "Yankees Go Home."

"We reject outsiders coming to Florida — especially from outside what we refer to as the Bible Belt — and trying to remake us in their own image," said Michael Tubbs, state chairman of the Florida League of the South.

"We do feel like it's a stick in the eye to the Christian people of Florida to have these outsiders come down here with their mon-

ey and their leadership and promote their outside values here."

After a cover was taken off the 1,500-pound granite bench Saturday, people rushed to have their pictures taken on it. The bench has quotes from Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Madalyn Murray O'Hair, the founder of American Atheists. It also has a list of Old Testament punishments for violating the Ten Commandments, including death and stoning.

"Some people think it's an attack simply by us exerting our existence. They put a monument on a public lawn that, if you put it in context, says atheists should be killed," Silverman said. "It is an attack, but it's an attack on Christian privilege, not an attack on Christians themselves, and not so much an attack on Christianity."

At one point someone in a car driving by tossed a toilet seat and a roll of toilet paper at the crowd. Neither struck anyone. At another point, Eric Hovind, 35, of Pensacola jumped atop the peak of the monument and shouted his thanks to the atheists for giving him a platform to declare Jesus is real. Atheists shouted at him, and he stepped down after about a minute. One



David Silverman, president of American Atheists, poses for photos on the bench during the unveiling of an atheist monument outside the Bradford County Courthouse on Saturday in Starke, Fla. MATT STAMEY / ASSOCIATED PRESS

man yelled that religion is a fairy tale.

"The problem is it's not a fairy tale," Hovind said.

"We definitely have freedom of religion, not freedom from religion."

Hovind and Tubbs did say they respect the right

of the group to install the monument, even if they disagree with the message behind it.

And the atheists said they expected protesters.

"There always are," said Rick Wingrove, the director of a Washington

D.C.-area office of American Atheists. "We protest their events, they protest our events. As long as everybody's cordial and let people speak. This is our day, not theirs. We're fine with them being here."

Only “in the name of” religion

by John Carver

<http://johnjustthinking.com/2013/06/07/only-in-the-name-of-religion/>



John Carver

Christians, as do other religionists, naturally do things that are motivated, justified (or excused) by their religion. Frequently, they do so explicitly in the name of their religion. Many of those things, such as hospitals and relief efforts, are humane, gentle, and ethical even in the opinion of persons of other religions or of none. Acting in the name of religion has produced much that is good and much that is bad.

But this post is about the disparaging use of the term “only in the name of religion.” The term indicates that some unseemly religious action doesn’t represent real religion, but a misguided or perverted version of religion. Used this way, the term demands that we not impugn religion just because an extremist claims religious reasons for bad actions. I’ll step back a bit to explain why my secular point of view finds this “only in the name of religion” dismissal to be unconvincing.

Religion’s distortion of reality, rewriting of history, unethical treatment of the faithful as well as of dissenters and bullying control of civil authority can be demonstrated so easily that religious people themselves can cite examples. Their recognition of these unsavory features of religion, however, seems to be much easier when the unsettling features are linked to others’ religions or even their own religion far enough in the past. Modern Catholics, for example, are as horrified by the Inquisition as are non-Catholics.

But as to the current time, one’s own religion is not only innocent of such insalubrious acts, but claims a measure of immunity from being criticized. No matter how completely off-the-wall a religion’s tenets, overt criticism is by social consent reserved only for religions distant in geography, time, or dogma. With the shortcomings of religion being so obvious, one way to avoid denigration striking too close to home is to claim that whacky or beligerent religions are not real religions at all! (A good Protestant friend of mine is sure that Catholics are not Christians. She is exceptional, however; such opinions among Protestants are usually reserved for Mormons and Scientologists.)

So it is that embarrassing behavior of those in a despised religion can be dismissed as being “only in the name of religion.” That way the sacred banner of true religion is saved from stain by association. Moslem mistreatment of women, for example, can be said to be not due to real religion but in the name of religion. Similarly, persons in an otherwise acceptable religion who go off the rails enough to defy being swept under the rug, are said to be acting “only in the name of religion” but not due to real religion. After all, religion (well, real religion) must be honored as a force for good in the world. Heinous and psychotic beliefs and acts may be linked to false religion, but assuredly not to ours, hence use of the distancing term.

This “in the name of” business can be unfathomable to unbelievers. Wild stories with no evidence (raised from the dead, really?), ridiculous worship rituals (transubstantiation, really?), anti-science defensiveness (six thousand year old earth, really?), and such are the stuff of all religions, so it is hard for us to pick one as, so to speak, God’s Truth, and all the others as instances of fake, “only in the name of” material.

Just about the only way to avoid the conclusion that all religions are nuts is for a person to be born into one, in which case all religions except one are nuts. Being born into a creed seems to be a dubious way to discover truth, but it has worked for most people through history. Just try to find

Christians brought up as Muslims, Hindus brought up as Christians, and all the other permutations including their reverses; don’t omit abandoned religions of the past and those yet to be devised. (Remember that Mormonism didn’t pop up until relatively recently, so there’s no reason to think we’ve seen them all and, incidentally, no reason to think the one true religion has yet been found.) At a more detailed level, consider how many Lutherans become Catholic, how many Eastern Orthodox become Christian Scientists, and so on ad infinitum. Be sure to include the numerous varieties of Christianity that existed before Rome declared orthodoxy centuries after the reputed Jesus. Even if, against these uncountable religious options, “no one comes to the Father but through [Jesus],” even that definitive pathway is, to say the least, rather poorly lit.

Someone like me is not armed with the super-human knowledge of absolute truth that believers claim to possess. So being able to tell the difference between real religion and false religion is impossible, especially since false religion so frequently means simply “not my religion.” Real religion and the religious cover of a deceptive religion look exactly the same. Besides, if persons say they are acting on the basis of their religion, who am I (who is anyone) to say they are not simply because their religion isn’t accepted as real? It is real religion, not some fake version of it, no matter how batty an observer thinks it is. Besides, there is no stupid, crazy, or hurtful individual or group behavior that a “mainline” religionist would like to dismiss as “only in the name of religion” that is more stupid, crazy, or hurtful than the behavior over time of one or more of what are largely perceived as real religions.

When religionists admit as “evidence” ghost stories, talking serpents, 72 virgins, ancient compromised texts as God’s Word, alchemy communions, people crawling out of graves, and prayer-driven divine intervention into physics—it is hard to distinguish one form of nuttiness from another. Once you give such credence to religious thinking, you can never be sure where the zigzag use of pseudo-reasoning will come out—sometimes in a humane place, sometimes not. But there’s scant chance we’re due for reforming religious thought anytime soon. So in the spirit of “if you can’t beat ’em, join ’em,” I am disposed to define religion as a human activity that is “only in the name of logical thinking.”

John Carver is a longtime member of AFS and writes a blog called JohnJustThinking.com.

Photos from Starke, Florida

(Unless noted, all photos by Ed Buckner)



Other Meetings of Interest in Metro Atlanta

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. Several upcoming events in June. See <http://www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH/>.

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) meet often for discussions, etc. For more information, see <http://gust.domek.org/>.

The Atlanta Skeptics will not be meeting this month at Manuel's Tavern, but feel free to go to the Atlanta Science Tavern for Trivia Night as follows. (<http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics>)

The Atlanta Science

Tavern will host a science trivia contest called **Into Darkness** on Saturday, June 20th at 7:00 p.m. with suggested donation of \$3.

Gather at 7pm., find a seat, form a team and order your dinner and drinks. The trivia competition begins promptly at 7:30.

Please join Atlanta Science Tavern for this fourth installment of our wildly popular Science Trivia Challenge. If you've tried the usual bar team trivia and longed for more than the occasional science question, then this is the trivia competition you've been waiting for.

Format

The competition will consist of 2 halves consisting of 8 questions each, with a bonus question following each half. Unlike conventional team trivia, all of the questions are multiple-part questions of varying degree of difficulty. This gives every team an opportunity to participate in every question, while allowing those with special expertise to distinguish themselves.

The best way to get an idea of what the Science Trivia Challenge is about is to take a look at the slide shows that were used

as presentations in December 2011, May 2011 and December 2010.

Prizes

Prizes will be awarded in the form of Manuel's gift certificates as follows:

\$50 - 1st place

\$30 - 2nd place

\$20 - 3rd place

Teams

Teams of high school and college students are welcome, but we encourage people, especially those with particular expertise, to mix it up to help keep the teams balanced. It's fun to treat this is a opportunity get to know other Science Tavern members. (<http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern>)

The Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta will be having their monthly meetup on Saturday, July 21, 2:30-4:30 p.m. at Atlanta Public Library Main Downtown Branch, 1 Margaret Mitchell

Square, Atlanta (<http://www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers>)

The SOS (Secular Organizations for Sobriety)

meets on Tuesdays at 7:30PM in Roswell. For more information, send an email to donajgore@yahoo.com.

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta atheists** on Sun-

day, July 14, at 6:00 p.m. at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

Another **meetup for Atlanta atheists** is scheduled for Sun., June 23, at 4:00 p.m. at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Sandy Springs. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists>)

IIG Atlanta will maybe have a general meeting Saturday, July 20 at 4:30 p.m. at Manuel's Tavern (602 N Highland Avenue Northeast, Atlanta, GA 30307). We're a new, ambitious group affiliated with IIG-West and exist to promote critical thinking about the paranormal, supernatural and unexplained. We also offer \$50,000 for anyone who can demonstrate evidence of the occult or paranormal under properly controlled conditions. We look forward to meeting you! Questions? Visit IIGAtlanta.com or contact Shaune Beattie by gmail: shaune.beattie@gmail.com. (<http://www.meetup.com/IIG-Atlanta/>).



Become a Member!

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

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

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$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.)

Thank you for your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

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"Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect."

—James Madison, 1774

We still have these great books for sale:

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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 (2nd edition)—\$11

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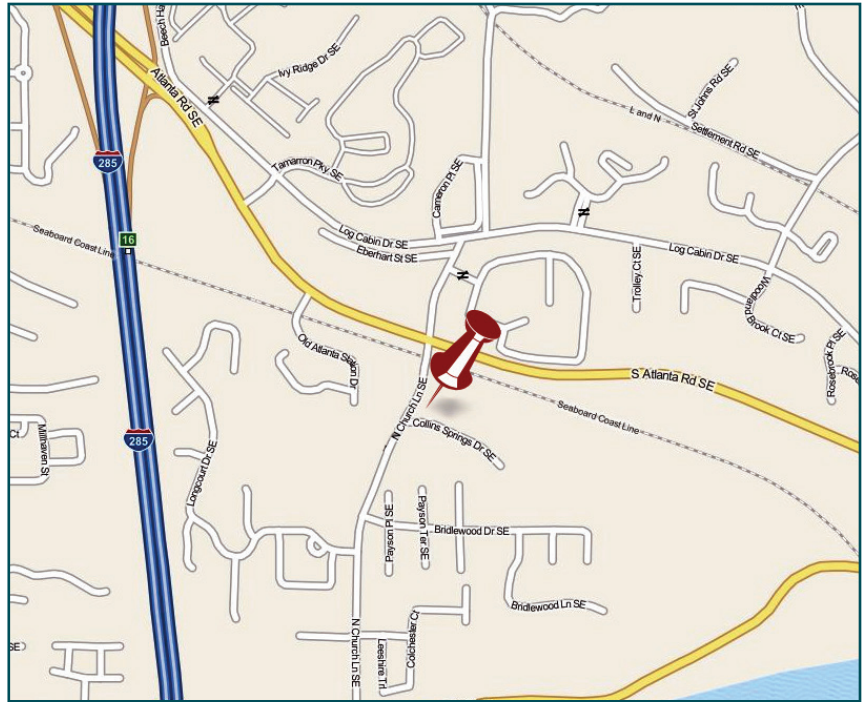
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*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*

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

**This Month's Speaker:
Leo Igwe**



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