

The August AFS Meeting

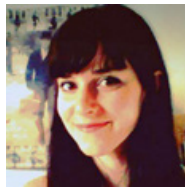
On Sunday, August 11th, Atlanta Freethought Society will feature a diverse and distinguished panel of freethinkers talking about a wide range of interesting ideas. Come hear what these organizations have to say and be part of the discussion. The panel, discussing "Advancing Freethought," will feature **Mandisa Thomas, Michael Buckner, Jessica Barber, and Ray Dickerson.** (**Bob Glassley** will serve as an alternate in case any of the principals cannot make it.) **Rick Pace** will moderate.

Diane Buckner, Treasurer of AFS, noted that an earlier panel moderated by Pace was "one of our most interesting and engaging programs. We're lucky to have Rick Pace moderate and he has assembled a great panel":



Ray Dickerson - Founder of the Spalding Freethought Society. 37 yrs old, Dickerson was brought up mostly in Henry County, Georgia. A former Christian whose son died in 2008, Dickerson has been an

atheist ever since.



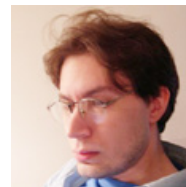
Jessica Barber - Student at Kennesaw State University; she will finish up her undergraduate degree in Philosophy this Fall. She was the President of the Philosophy Student Association and active member for many

years; she spends her time investigating the nature of human consciousness, phenomenology, and neuroplasticity. Barber plans to go to graduate school after teaching English in Japan.



Mandisa Thomas - A native of New York City, a founder and current President of Black Nonbelievers, Inc. Thomas has been a guest on 89.3 WRFG radio, has been featured as a speaker with organizations

such as American Atheists and CFI, and has been profiled in *JET* magazine. She serves as a board member with Foundation Beyond Belief, and works closely with other freethought leaders in the Atlanta area.



Michael Buckner - An honor graduate of the University of Chicago, a former leader of the Georgia Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and Vice President of the Atlanta Freethought Society.

Buckner is the co-author (with Ed Buckner) of *In Freedom We Trust: An Atheist Guide to Religious Liberty* (Prometheus Books, 2012).



Atlanta Star Party

Stargazing, food, drinks and conversations with astronomers... and as if that wasn't enough, it's for a great cause

too! Atlanta Skeptics is proud to present the 5th Annual Atlanta Star Party, an annual charity cocktail party, held the day before Dragon Con. Some details for 2013:

When: August 29, 2013, 7:00 p.m.

Who: This year, we're proud to welcome astronomers **Phil Plait, Pamela Gay, Nicole Gugliucci** and **Derek Demeter**, who will be speaking at the event.

Where: We're very excited to have the Emory Math and Physics Department host us again at The Emory Math & Science Center, 400 Dowman Dr., Atlanta, GA 30322.

Why: All proceeds from the Star Party go to [CosmoQuest](http://cosmoquest.org/) <http://cosmoquest.org/>. And, as always, we throw this party in memory of Jeff Medkeff <http://atlantastarparty.com/jeff/>.

Tickets are here <http://atlantastarparty.com/tickets/>! Get them now and go here <http://atlantastarparty.com/blog> for the latest news.

Calendar

- 8/11 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.m.
- 8/31 Dragon Con parade
- 8/31 AFS prepares breakfast for Ronald McDonald House
- 9/14 Paint exterior of AFS Hall (Rain date 9/21). AFS will provide paint, brushes, etc. You provide labor.

All events are at AF Hall unless noted and are subject to change. Be sure to like AFS's Facebook page for updates: <https://www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought>

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.

Aug 11: A Panel Discussion on Freethought Issues, featuring AFS VP **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.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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Atlanta Freethought News

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Membership in AFS is \$50/year per person,
\$20 for low income.
Membership includes AFNews by email or mail.
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Sustaining Membership is \$100.
Life Membership is \$1000.
Subscriptions only are \$30 for 12 issues.

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AFS Facebook Site: Laura Ross & Rick Pace

Living an atheistic life in a Christian world

By Duane Winn

The Toccoa Record

Thursday, July 11, 2003, Pg. B3

He has sometimes felt like a stranger in a familiar land.

The feeling, which he likens to being a “fish out water,” has subsided as the conviction in his belief has deepened over the past 30 years.

“Years ago, before I became affiliated with secularist groups, I felt like I was the only person that felt the way I did about my beliefs and how I feel toward religion,” he said. “For a long time I felt like I was drowning in a sea of religion because everywhere around me there seemed to be public religious expressions. There were all these religious people, and don’t get me wrong, I get along well with most of them, but there has, over the past 30 years or so, been a dominant theme of religious people becoming very antagonistic in their religion toward people who are of a different religion or don’t subscribe to any religion at all.”

And therein lies a rub.

He believes there is a clear double standard when it comes to expressions of matters of faith, especially when you live smack dab in the middle of predominantly conservative, largely Christian, north-east Georgia.

What he has found, to state things clearly, is that it’s a free country if you’re a Christian. But if you’re an atheist, you are strongly encouraged to keep your views to yourself or suffer the consequences.

He rarely heeds the admonition.

He affixes bumper stickers to his Toyota Corolla that proclaim his secularist beliefs.

He is a frequent writer of letters to the editor to *The Toccoa Record* who takes issue with what he views as Christian extremism.

He said the invocation before the Toccoa City Commission meeting is nothing more than a form of evangelizing.

If Christian music is being played in a public setting, such as a restaurant, he’s liable to object.

When he recites the Pledge of Allegiance, he is slightly out of rhythm with everyone else because he leaves out the “Under God” part. He also blacks out a portion of the motto on the version of any paper currency he’s carrying, specifically, the phrase that includes “In God We Trust.”

And he’s unapologetic about his belief that a small group of politically active Christians are trying to overturn the United States Constitution in favor of a theocracy.

William King, 49, of Toccoa, is living his spiritual life against the grain in small-town Georgia, where faith is interwoven into the fabric of life as once textile mills formed the sinew of the local economy.

According to a study, 71 percent of Stephens County residents formally proclaim an affiliation with one of 54 congregations.

The bulk of believers (67 percent) are members of the Southern Baptist Convention. (There are no statistics from the same statistical profile that quantifies how many area atheists there are.)

There was a time when King fit squarely into the accepted way of faith.

His father was a Baptist, his mother a member of the Pentecostal Holiness tradition. He recalls his father taking him to Calvary Baptist Church where he later became a member.

“It was just like any other Christian home,” King said. “I was taught about the Bible, to learn how to read the Bible. I was involved in church activities.”

When he was a senior at Stephens County High School, King began looking heavenward less and less for the answers to life. He still defined himself as a Christian, but his reading of the Bible began to cast doubt on the chronicle as the revealed word of God. He also read widely on other topics, such as the history of Christianity and other religions, which fueled his unrest even more.

Shopping around for a college, King took his advisor’s suggestion and enrolled at Truett-McConnell College, a then two-year college in Cleveland affiliated with the Baptist Church.



William King

The transition to college life was made easier when several of his school classmates attended school there, but he never grew accustomed to the gossip mongering that took place, he said, in a supposedly Christian setting.

King transferred to the University of Georgia to

Continued page 4

Nothing Fails Like Government Prayer

by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker

Some conservative Christians like to point out that although there was no prayer during the Constitutional Convention of 1787, which resulted in the successful longest-lived constitutional democracy in history, there was indeed formal Christian prayer spoken 13 years earlier during the Continental Congress in 1774. Many believers point to that earlier prayer as evidence that the United States was founded as a Christian nation.

But remember that this was before the First Amendment, before the Revolutionary War, and before our country, as we know it, even existed. There was no prohibition of laws “respecting the establishment of religion.” There were no U.S. laws at all. The Continental Congress was not the formation of the United States of America: it was a botched first attempt to form a confederation which turned out to be too loose and too weak to be called a nation.

The results of that 1774 Congress, blessed by “our Heavenly Father, high and mighty King of kings,” were not only wholly inadequate, they were a dismal failure. The prayer, delivered by the Episcopal Reverend Jacob Duché, asked the “Lord of Lords” to “defeat the malicious designs of our cruel adversaries...[and] constrain them to drop the weapons of war from their unnerved hands in the day of battle!”

In other words, “God, don’t let there be a war.” The King of Kings was supposed to supernaturally stop the King’s Army from even firing a shot.

It didn’t work out that way.

As many as 50,000 fighters, from both sides, were killed in battle, wounded, or died in prison. About 1 in 20 military-age males lost their lives. (Today, that would represent millions of lives.) Why didn’t the “high and mighty Lord” cause them to drop their weapons?

The history of governmental prayer offers us an often too bloody object lesson of the truth: “Ask and ye shall not receive.”

[NOTE: FFRF attorney Andrew Seidel reminds me that “True to the flexibility of religious thinking and principles, the Rev. Duché later abandoned his fellow colonials in their fight for independence and defected to the British. He was convicted of treason against Pennsylvania and decamped to the warm bosom of his King. Not one of the brighter stars in our founding history.”]

<http://ffrf.org/news/blog/item/18230-nothing-fails-like-government-prayer>

William King, cont. from page 4

pursue a degree in anthropology.

Courses in classical Hebrew language, which he said revealed serious inconsistencies in the Bible, and extensive reading into the history of religion, including Christianity’s sad tale of the Crusades, the Inquisition and witch hunts, lead him to conclude that Christianity could be a canard.

A case point: if the conquest of Canaan is true, for example, “The Hebrew tribes that took over Canaan were very violent and in fact, no different that what European settlers did to the American Indians,” King said.

“Basically it was a land conquest grab and a genocide. The genocide part really stuck in my mind as not being compatible with an all-loving, all-caring God. Yahweh, as depicted in the Old Testament, was very jealous, vindictive and very bloodthirsty.”

King who said he was still in a seeking mode at this stage of his life, took a Bible correspondence course from the Worldwide Church of God spearheaded by Herbert W. Armstrong.

When it came down to the Book of Revelations, he had questions about the church’s interpretation of the mythological figures represented in the chapter as being predictive of modern-day weapons and warfare, which signify the end of the world.

He wrote Ben Kinchlow of The 700 Club to seek his viewpoints on the matter. What he got in return was not an answer, but a warning to be cautious about “getting his theology” from a cult.

“Here was one Christian group accusing the other of being cultists. That was a big letdown. My questions weren’t being answered,” he said.

As a result of that exchange, and the information he gathered through his college studies, independent reading and personal observation, King said he became an atheist in his mid-20’s.

“I didn’t just suddenly wake up one morning and say, ‘I’m going to be an atheist.’ It happened over a long period of time,” King said.

Other than having a few people scrawl sentiments on his bumper stickers, urging him to think again about his stance on religion, King said he hasn’t been subjected to serious harassment over his beliefs.

No effigies in his yard or dead animals on his doorstep or anything like that.

Yet it’s difficult for most people, King acknowledged, to get past his atheism and consider other facets of his position.

“Some people I talk to get it and they understand where I’m coming from,” said King.

“But a literalist Christian, a fundamentalist Christian, it’s a big stumbling block because they have blinders on. They haven’t learned how to think. They’ve been taught. It’s been driven through their head that the Bible is the only true history of God on earth.”

This really riles King, though, when a discussion disintegrates and people mistake his atheism for something else.

“I am an American citizen, and my American citizenship has been called into question several times because of my nonbeliefs,” said King.

King’s vision of paradise is not unlike John Lennon’s secular paean to universal understanding in his song “Imagine.”

It’s a place where people can live in peace because they respect each other and views that are different than their own.

King is skeptical that will ever come to pass.

He views America as still a free country, but one that is becoming increasingly polarized over flashpoint issues like religion.

Prayer And The Power Company: Alabama Official Stands By Controversial Invocation Before Regulatory Meeting

Aug 1, 2013 by Simon Brown in Wall of Separation

<https://www.au.org/blogs/wall-of-separation/prayer-and-the-power-company-alabama-official-stands-by-controversial>

A controversy over prayer is brewing in Alabama, and for once some state residents believe a public official may have gone too far with a display of official piety.

Yesterday, Twinkle Cavanaugh, the elected president of the Alabama Public Service Commission, said she stands by a prayer that was delivered last month at a service commission meeting¹, despite a poll taken by the news site AL.com that found 79 percent of voters think it wasn't appropriate in that context.

Remember, this is Alabama, folks. Most people there aren't exactly big fans of church-state separation, so that means the prayer must have been really bad. And it was.

The invocation was given by John Jordan, a member of East Memorial Baptist Church in Prattville, and "a dear friend" of Cavanaugh's. She asked everyone to stand, and then Jordan said some pretty offensive stuff.

"We've taken you [God] out of our schools and out of our prayers," Jordan said. "We have murdered your children. We've said it's okay to have same-sex marriage. We have sinned and we ask once again that you forgive us for our sins."

He also prayed that everyone be able to put God first and closed by invoking the name of Jesus.

Some people were nonplused. Why was a statement like this being delivered before a body charged with the task of regulating public utilities? In response to the backlash, Cavanaugh really dug in her heels, saying: "I don't back down. It's important that we call on the Lord."

She expanded upon that in a statement to the Huffington Post²: "My Christian faith guides me in everything that I do, and I'm proud that the Alabama Public Service Commission opens each meeting seeking His divine guidance and thanking God for the blessings He has given us. I make no apologies as a Christian elected into public service by the people of Alabama. Without a doubt, our nation needs more prayer, not less."

Cavanaugh seems to be saying that her actions are just an expression of her faith, but one Alabama newspaper columnist thinks something a bit more sinister may be going on here. John Archibald, writer for the Birmingham News, said Cavanaugh is using her piety to distract state residents³ from the fact that Alabama Power, which claims to pro-

vide electricity "at rates below the national average," is actually raking in huge profits at great expense to the public.

Archibald noted Cavanaugh is the head of a state "quasi-judicial regulatory body," and she is supposed to be holding meetings on Alabama Power's rate structure. That should be her only concern, he wrote. But Cavanaugh doesn't want ordinary citizens to focus on her actual duties, so she brings in distractions like Jordan, hoping her constituents won't notice that a powerful utility company is getting a sweet deal.



"[Alabama Power's rate] structure... is high for residential customers and low for industry," Archibald wrote. "It allows the company to write off an \$8 million salary for CEO Charles McCrary as Operations and Maintenance, at a government-regulated monopoly. It lets the company take a

return on equity 30-40 percent higher than the national average, according to testimony today that was not disputed, and allows it to take hundreds of millions in higher profits that could be saved by ratepayers and pumped back into the economy."

Of course Americans United doesn't take a stand on how power companies are regulated. What we can tell you, though, is that Cavanaugh is showing an obvious favoritism toward Christianity, and that is neither appropriate for her position nor is it constitutional.

Americans United will be arguing a case this fall before the U.S. Supreme Court that may decide the limits of prayer before government meetings, but regardless of how that turns out, elected officials like Cavanaugh need to remember that they weren't put into office to be pastors and that they serve a diverse constituency – even in a place like Alabama.

Cavanaugh needs to drop the public piety and focus on power prices.

1 (http://blog.al.com/breaking/2013/07/twinkle_cavanaugh_addresses_pra.html)

2 (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/25/alabama-prayer-gay-marriage_n_3651756.html)

3 (http://www.al.com/opinion/index.ssf/2013/07/alabama_public_service_commiss_1.html)

**WE ARE ALL ATHEISTS
ABOUT MOST GODS.
SOME OF US JUST GO ONE GOD FURTHER.**

**THERE'S PROBABLY NO GOD.
NOW STOP WORRYING AND ENJOY YOUR LIFE.**

WWW.NOGOD.ORG.NZ
WWW.HUMANIST.ORG.NZ
WWW.NZARH.ORG.NZ

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 meet on Saturday, Aug. 17th at Manuel's Tavern at 6:00 p.m. (<http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics>). The topic is **How Misunderstandings of Basic Statistics Lead People to Believe in Weird Things**. We constantly misjudge the likelihood of events, from believing we are psychic when predicting who is calling on the phone, to worrying about being in a plane crash. We'll discuss how even experienced scientists fall foul of bad statistics and why you should be careful when judging published papers.

The Atlanta Science Tavern will meet on Saturday, August 24th at 7:00. The cost per person will be \$3. The topic will be **Molecular Methods and Shoe-Leather Epidemiology for the Control of TB in Georgia**.

Patient zero is on a long international flight. He is not coughing and looks well. But three weeks later, you get a letter in the mail stating you have been exposed to tuberculosis on your flight and to report to your local health department as soon as possible. Months later it's still all over the news: Multiple drug resistant TB on an airplane. And you were sitting right next to him.

This is a story that actually happened in Atlanta in 2007. Could it happen again? Join us for our August meetup at Manuel's and meet David Maggio of the Georgia Department of Public Health (Facebook page), the man who keeps infectious passengers off airplanes to keep you safe, and hear about some of the amazing stories behind the Georgia TB Program.

Only since 2010 has a national online database been available to track the DNA fingerprints of *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, the

bacteria that causes TB. Hear about how these emerging technologies are being used to keep you safe and about the emerging threats that stand in the way. Driven by the HIV epidemic, TB is the number two killer by infectious disease worldwide, accounting for nearly 5,000 deaths each day, and one new infection every second. Learn about how molecular genotyping and shoe-leather epidemiology are protecting you and your family from this deadly disease. (<http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern>)

The Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta will be having **Sikivu Hutchinson** on Sat. Aug 24 at 4:00 at Holiday Inn Atlanta Airport-North, 1380 Virginia Avenue (<http://www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers>). Sikivu Hutchinson is an African American feminist, atheist, activist and author. She is the author of *Moral Combat: Black Atheists, Gender Politics, and the Values Wars* (2011), as well as the newly released *Godless Americana: Race & Religious Rebels*. She is also the founder of the Black Skeptics group, which is based in Los Angeles, CA.

Join for an electrifying presentation, followed by a reception at the Blue Moon Farm. You can reserve a room at the Holiday Inn for a reasonable rate if you're coming from out of town; this is a do not miss!! Admission for the lecture is \$15 - \$25 to include the reception. Reserve in advance online at www.blacknonbelievers.org.

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

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta atheists** on Sunday, Aug. 11, 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., Aug. 25, 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 now offer **\$100,000** for anyone who can demonstrate evidence of the occult or paranormal under properly controlled conditions. Tell your friends! 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!

Annual dues are:

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Low Income	\$20	_____	Address:	_____
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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:

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 Faulken-berry); 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

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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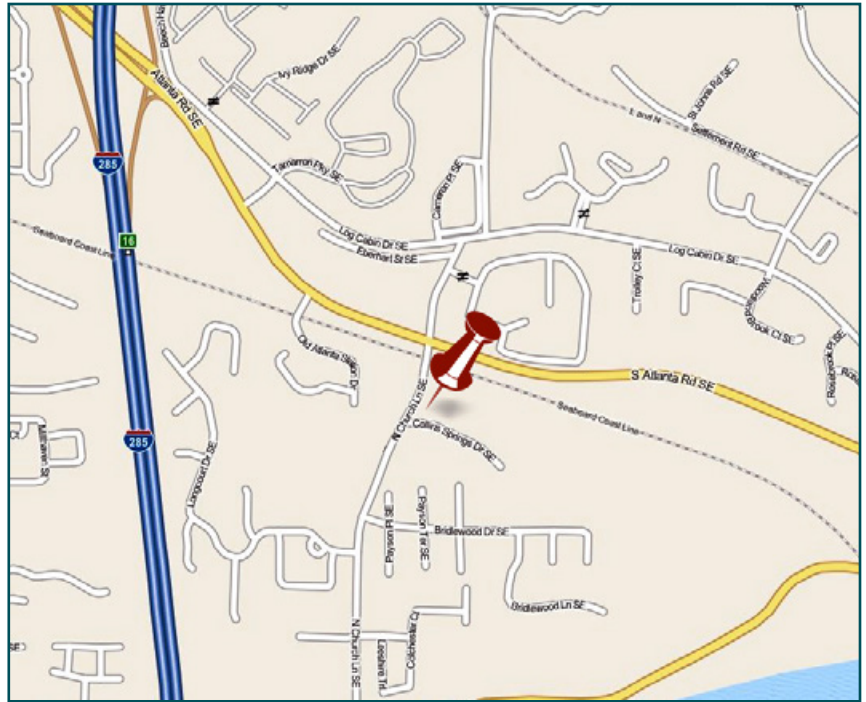
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*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*

**The August 11 Meeting:
1:00 at AF Hall,
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Smyrna, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Panel Discussion**



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