

The October AFS Meeting



Paul Broman

The AFS program on October 13th (Sunday) will feature one of our own, AFS board member and leader Paul Broman discussing his experiences—personal and professional—with Scientologists.

Broman noted, “I’ve done extensive—but not professional—research on Scientology and had the weird experience of working for about a year at a company dominated by Scientologists. I stayed with them until they decided to try to indoctrinate me. I’ll have tales to tell about that and will encourage others who may have had experiences to join in the discussion.”

Sunday’s meeting will include nominations for open offices (all officer positions and several board member slots) for 2014.

Also on Saturday and Sunday, AFS will staff a table, along with Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta, at the Atlanta Gay Pride Festival this weekend.

Paul Broman’s program, free and open to the public, will be preceded by conversation and socializing starting about noon—and a meal at a local eatery will follow the program, for those interested.



Calendar

- 10/12-13 AFS booth at Atlanta Gay Pride - Piedmont Park
- 10/13 AFS Board Meeting 11:00 a.m.
- 10/13 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.m.
Nominations for Officers and Board!
- 10/19 AFS march in Little Five Points Parade
- 11/10 AFS General Meeting 1:00 a.m.

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>

Atlanta Freethought & Black Nonbelievers to Staff Booth at Gay Pride Atlanta

Sat. Oct 13 - Sun. Oct 14

10:00 a.m. until dark

12th St. Entrance Piedmont Park

ALL HELP ACCEPTED!!!!



BN and AFS at the Little Five Points Halloween Festival and Parade

Saturday, October 19, 12:00 PM

Little Five Points,
Moreland & Euclid Ave.

Join Black Nonbelievers and Atlanta Freethought as we team up again! This time, we will be marching in the Little Five Points Halloween Parade. Look for us as we give out treats (no tricks) to the crowd! More information about the festivities can be found here: <http://15phalloween.com/>



Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, 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.

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

Nov 10: **Dale McGowan**, Executive Director of Foundation Beyond Belief, will speak on his new book *Atheism for Dummies*.

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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Send E-mail to **afs@atlantafreethought.org**.

AFS Webmaster: Michael Buckner
Website Help: Paul Broman
AFS Facebook Site: Laura Ross & Rick Pace

Freedom From Religion Foundation stops mandated Christian programs for probation condition

<http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/18838-ffrf-stops-mandated-christian-programs-for-probation-condition>

October 2, 2013

FFRF recently halted the practice of compelling convicted offenders to attend Miracle Lake Christian Training Center and other similar institutions as a condition of probation in Tennessee. Forced attendance for probation did not offer alternate non-religious, non-spiritual treatment options.

FFRF, a state/church watchdog from Madison, Wis., has over 20,000 members nationwide with over 300 in Tennessee.

FFRF received a complaint from an offender in Tennessee and sent letters to the Tennessee Board of Probation and Parole on Feb. 22 and the Department of Corrections on May 9 and July 12.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott explained that the core components and philosophy of the Miracle Lake Christian Training program are religious in nature since it is comprised of five phases: repentance, faith, mind renewal, life in the church and "life beyond."

Elliott wrote that state must offer non-religious options, and explained why religious programs can be detrimental: "Our organization receives a substantial number of complaints about religious drug treatment programs. Our complaints often express concern that they are being subjected to religion and pressure to conform to the religious practices of such support groups rather than receiving neutral, scientific assistance. Many describe experiencing ostracism after abstaining from participation in such overtly religious acts."

Derrick D. Schofield, the commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Correction (DOC), sent FFRF a letter on Aug. 22 stating, "I can assure you that the state of Tennessee and its agencies of government are committed to the lawful separation of church and state and of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom to practice religion as each citizen sees fit. That right includes the freedom to refrain from the practice of any religion or to be forced to attend any religious programming against their will."

Schofield added that the DOC acknowledged its responsibility to offer non-religious treatment alternatives.

—Compiled by Lauryn Seering

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, based in Madison, Wis., a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational charity, is the nation's largest association of freethinkers (atheists, agnostics), and has been working since 1978 to keep religion and government separate.

BRIAN BOLTON GRADUATE/MATURE STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST FFRF Awards \$7,850 to winning grad student essays

[http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/18791-ffrf-awards-\\$7850-to-winning-grad-student-essays#sthash.b0rXZIVp.dpuf](http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/18791-ffrf-awards-$7850-to-winning-grad-student-essays#sthash.b0rXZIVp.dpuf)

September 20, 2013

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has announced the winners for currently enrolled graduates students/25 or older in this year's essay competition. Students were asked to write about "Why the USA is not a 'Christian Nation'" in 850 to 1,000 words. There were six winners in the top five, with a tie for fifth place. FFRF also named three honorable mentions. Scholarships totaled \$7,850.

FFRF Lifetime Member Brian Bolton, a retired psychologist, humanist minister and university professor emeritus at the University of Arkansas, very generously endows the graduate essay competition.

- First place (\$3,000): Chris Calvey, 27, "What a Godless Constitution Looks Like," University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Second place (\$2,000): Nicole White, 22, "A Nation Founded by Christian Men is Not a Christian Nation," Louisiana State University of Baton Rouge

- Third place (\$1,000): Anna Kelly, 27, "America's Toxic Nickname," West Virginia University
- Fourth place (\$500): Max Lewis, 28, "The Myth of a Christian Nation," Brandeis University, Harvard Divinity School
- Fifth place (\$300): Kristen Webster, 30, "On Religious Fanaticism and Zombie Apocalypses," University of Virginia, College of William & Mary, University of Washington Tacoma
- Fifth place (\$300): Kristina Beverlin, 26, "Life in the Christian Nation of Kansas," University of Kansas
- Honorable mention (\$250): Daniel Urban, 33, "The United Secularists of America," University of South Alabama, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
- Honorable mention (\$250): Jessica Abernathy, 30, "Land of the Free," San Francisco State University
- Honorable mention (\$250): Roksana Stalinski, 25, "Actions and not Opinions: Why the United States is not a Christian Nation," University of Ottawa

This year FFRF awarded \$14,100 in its William J. Shultz high school essay contest and \$11,050 in its Michel Hakeem college essay contest. FFRF would also like to thank Dorea and Dean Schramm for providing honorable mentions with a \$50 bonus.

Course Conniption: Alabama Residents Throw Fit Over Arabic Language Classes In Local High School

Oct 3, 2013 by Simon Brown in *Wall of Separation (Americans United)*

<https://www.au.org/blogs/wall-of-separation/course-conniption-ala-residents-throw-fit-over-arabic-language-classes-in>

One Alabama high school decided this year to offer an Arabic language class in place of a French course, and that has a number of local residents crying: “Sacre bleu!”

Is Alabama home to a large Francophile community? Not likely. Here’s what happened (http://blog.al.com/live/2013/10/arabic_foreign_language_class.html):

Daphne High School, which is not far from Mobile, had an opening for a language instructor after its French teacher retired. So the school hired Sanaa El-Khattabi, a former University of South Alabama professor, to teach Arabic, the Birmingham News reported.

According to a Daphne High spokesperson, teaching Arabic offers students opportunities for global success. Indeed, Arabic is the official language of more than 20 countries, some of which are not overwhelmingly Muslim. Not a lot of Americans speak Arabic, so if you can master it, doors do open.

“I’m very excited about [our language program],” Alan Lee, superintendent of Baldwin County Schools, told the News. “I’m sure many parents will want their children to learn Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Japanese or Arabic.”

Lee added that multilingual people are in a prime position to land jobs in the state, given the number of international corporations with a presence there – including Airbus Americas, ThyssenKrupp, Outokumpu, Toyota and Hyundai. (There are numerous out-of-state opportunities too. The CIA is desperate for people who can speak Arabic. <http://www.marketplace.org/topics/business/cia-unusually-public-over-need-arabic-farsi-speakers>)

“The growth of international businesses in the South is increasing exponentially,” Brian Heuser, an international education policy professor at Vanderbilt University, told the News.

Maybe that’s why the school’s three Arabic classes are currently filled.

But practicality or popularity doesn’t seem to matter to some local residents, who said the school is teaching “a culture of hate.”

“When you teach Arabic, you have to teach the culture along with it,” said Chuck Pyritz, who has two boys at Daphne High. “The culture is intertwined with Islam.”

Other equally enlightened residents said much the same thing.

“This is America, and English is our language, and while I understand the alleged premise of offering Arabic at our high school, I don’t agree with it,” said Daphne resident Michael Rife. “It is not just another language; it is a language of a religion of hate. I’m concerned about our taxpayer dollars going to fund such a program, because I don’t believe it has a lot of foundational value.

“It just concerns me that we’re headed down a path of further eroding our society to a Muslim-based society, or Sharia law, and I’m not willing to let that happen without...something to say about it,” Rife added.

It isn’t just a leap in logic to suggest that if high school students learn Arabic, America will end up with Islamic law. It’s more like trying to jump across the Grand Canyon without so much as a running start.

Unfortunately it’s quite clear that some people genuinely believe teaching Arabic is a threat to their Christian faith. Some of them are so threatened by this that they’re perfectly happy to deny their children the opportunities that learning a foreign language can bring.

“They’re trying to indoctrinate our children with this culture that has failed,” Rife said. “Why should we want to teach our kids a failed culture when we have a culture that has been successful? All we have to do is follow our Christian culture, which has brought this nation to the pinnacle of success...I don’t see why they would want to teach this.”

Donna Rife, another resident and grandmother to two Daphne students, said it’s unfair to teach Arabic in a public school since Christianity has been “silenced.”

“If they want to speak their language, that is their privilege in this country,” she said. “But don’t silence another voice, such as Christianity...We are not a Muslim nation, and yet they’re trying to bring this kind of nonsense into (schools). I am absolutely against it.”

It’s safe to say Donna Rife isn’t a big supporter of church-state separation, unless it’s her church that’s being separated from government. In reality, she’s just another hypocrite who stands up for what she believes at the expense of common sense.

“Arabic leads right into the Muslim teaching, and that is where the danger is and that is what I am absolutely against,” Donna Rife added. “Let them teach that in their mosques—but keep it out of our schools.”

It continues to amaze me that these devout Christians think their faith is so fragile that it cannot stand up to language classes that have nothing to do with religion.

But the larger issue is, of course, this supposed concern that teaching Arabic is the same as forcing Islam on students. It’s not, and it’s not even close. The school should not be forcing Islam or any other religion on anyone, but we have no evidence that any sort of proselytizing has occurred. We don’t even know if El-Khattabi is a practicing Muslim.

What we do know is that these “concerned residents” would be perfectly happy if some sort of Christian cultural class was being taught in public schools. They’d be thrilled, in fact.

We also know that they find a sudden love for church-state separation when they think another faith is being favored. Real church-state separation isn’t conditional, and that seems to be something fundamentalists will never understand.

Beyond sui generis

September 17, 2013 by John Bruce Carver

<http://johnjustthinking.com/2013/09/17/beyond-sui-generis/>



John Bruce Carver

A recent CNN internet op-ed by Rachel Held Evans (“Hey Atheists, let’s make a deal,” Sept. 14) criticized atheists for quoting “the most extreme, vitriolic voices within Christianity and proclaim[ing] that they are representative of the whole.” To be fair, she admitted that her fellow Christians do pretty much the same thing in order to “rail against the evils of atheism.” Evans’s plea is that “we resist the urge to use the latest celebrity [meaning highly visible atheist or religionist] gaffe as an excuse to paint one another with broad brushes.”

All in all, not a bad point, especially since she points out “it’s important for both believers and atheists to decry irresponsible views and hateful rhetoric, especially from within our own communities.” My interest was further piqued by her version of Rodney King’s plaintive appeal, “Why can’t we all just get along?”

I agree that an entire community of belief or disbelief should not be held responsible for its most bizarre members. I should not paint all Christians with the same brush because a few Christians say inane things. There are atheists whose statements embarrass me and whom I can’t support. I certainly don’t want to be grouped with Pol Pot or Joseph Stalin any more than Ms. Evans wants to be grouped with Pat Robertson or—I can only imagine—Cardinal Timothy Dolan.

On the other hand, while wacky positions voiced by Pat Robertson or Rick Santorum don’t represent all Christendom, they do in fact represent millions in the US alone. That makes their views fair game in criticizing at least part of Christianity. All views of Catholic prelates with regard to birth control and even abortion are not embraced by all Catholics, but to argue that they don’t represent a large part of Christianity falls flat. Please note that I am not making a case against all religious people. Certainly some Christians are more of good will and exemplary ethics than many atheists. In other words, on most counts religionists and atheists are mixed bags.

So a little self-examination is due on my part. My antipathy toward religion is no secret. (My reasons are in some cases intellectual—e.g., massive claims with no evidence—and in other cases pragmatic—e.g., impairment of reasoned thinking—but need not be argued here.) The antipathy, however, is against religions, not whole classes of religious persons. But since I regularly indict religion by citing the words of individual religious persons (see my August 31 posting, “Religions’ effects on non-religious issues”), is it possible I fall into the trap Ms. Evans wrote of?

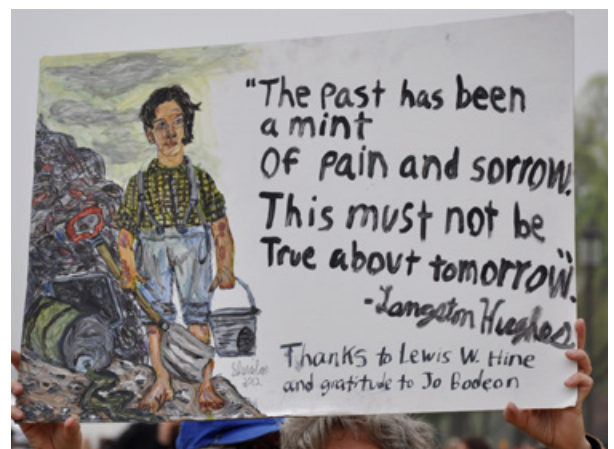
I hope not. To the extent I transgress from time to time, I offer no defense. My intended target of attack is what I’m convinced is a flawed, pervasive, pampered (treated with kid gloves) method of thinking, not individuals caught up in it except as they are in a position to represent that method. I have positive relationships with many religious persons, quite a few of them family and close friends. (I hope you’ll pardon the “some of my best friends are……” sound of that sentence!) While they know my views, I feel sure none of them think I disrespect them or hold them in contempt due to their religiousness. They believe they can hate the sin, but love the sinner (inaccurately attributed to Jesus; St. Augustine and Gandhi are better sources), and seem instinctively to accept that I live by an atheist’s equivalent.

It’s as important to me to be fair about spokes-persons’ representativeness as it is to expose the wackiness that so often arises out of religion. I am committed to the demonstration of what unreasonable, even bizarre, conclusions are possible when reason is diluted or warped by religious thinking. Yet I wish to be cognizant of the inaccuracy and unfairness that accompanies painting with too broad a brush.

Here is how I’ve tried to balance those concerns and to create criteria on which I’m willing to be judged: I claim the right to quote as a religious absurdity or stupidity (1) any statement by a person with significant religious following or religious “credentials” such that he or she can be considered a voice of some meaningful population of religious people, (2) when that statement is instigated by or based on religion (religious people say things out of any number of beliefs, not just religious ones; an opinion on global warming by a religious figure would not pass my test unless his or her statement is obviously based in religion rather than, say, an economics position), and (3) when that statement (in my honest opinion) would be found unwarranted or insufficiently reasoned by people not of his or her religious persuasion.

I consider those conditions to justify considering a single religious individual’s statement to be a fair demonstration of the unreasonable or detrimental thinking religion is capable of causing or accommodating. Religionists should feel free to exercise the same latitude. May we all struggle to find paint brushes’ golden mean.

[Comments on, challenges to, or requests about this or any other posting can be sent to johnjustthinking@bmi.net.]



CC by Jennifer Boyer

Other Meetings of Interest in Metro Atlanta

Atlanta Astronomy Club meetings are usually held on the 3rd Saturday of each month at AF Hall. The October program, on the International Space Station, will be on the 19th at 8:00 pm. <http://www.atlantaastronomy.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. <http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>.

The Fayette Freethought Society hosts lunches, dinners, book discussions, civic activities and more. <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 October. <http://www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH/>.

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

The Atlanta Skeptics is having their monthly meeting at Manuel's Tavern, Saturday, October 19th at 6:00 p.m. The topic is **"Secular Ethics and Skepticism."** Blinn Combs will introduce secular ethics and how to understand morals and ethics from a skeptical viewpoint.

May we plausibly discuss ethical issues without appeals to the divine? What problems remain for us once we have left such appeals behind? How does a skeptical approach to moral arguments help us to think more clearly about moral issues?

Along the way we will discuss issues in the field known as meta-ethics, and consider some common pitfalls into which the scientifically minded sometimes stumble when discussing the intersections of science and morality. <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics/>.

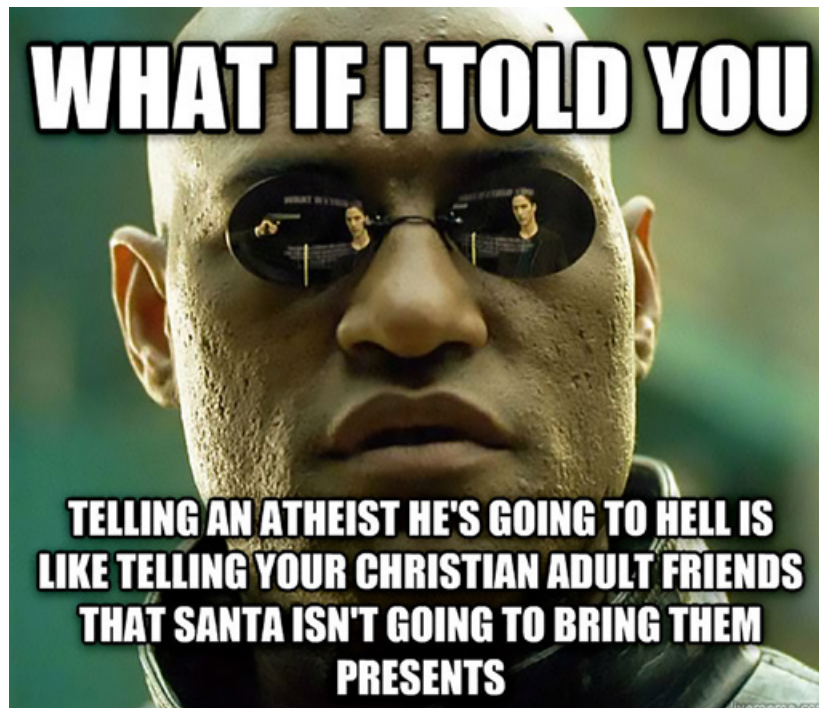
The Atlanta Science Tavern is meeting Saturday, October 26, 7:00 pm, \$3.00, Manuel's Tavern. The topic is **"How the Lessons of Biological Evolution Guide our Search for the Origin of Life,"** presented by Nicholas Hud from GA Tech and Mark Farmer of UGA.

They will discuss our current understanding of the origin of RNA, arguably the most important molecule in living cells, and

current theories regarding the origin of cellular life, the fundamental unit of all living organisms. The search for the origin of RNA is largely being pursued by "bottom up" approaches to the origin of life, which involves understanding how prebiotic chemical reactions could have given rise to the first genetic materials. <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern>

The Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta is getting ready to celebrate their **3rd Annual Halloween Party!** <http://www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers>

Saturday, October 26, 2013, 10:00 PM at Dazed Arts Gallery (across from Credit Union of Atlanta), 668-101 Metropolitan Pkwy, Atlanta, GA.



It's time for the one of the best parties of the year! BN will be jammin and having a scary good time for the Halloween season! \$20 in advance, more at the door. Food and drinks included, and there will be prizes for the best costumes! To pay online: https://www.paypal.com/cgi-bin/webscr?cmd=_s-xclick&hosted_button_id=GNZJXQ7ACQBH6 <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 donnajgore@yahoo.com.

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta atheists** on Sunday, October 13, 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., October 27 at 4:00 p.m. at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Sandy Springs. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

IIG Atlanta will have a general meeting Saturday, October 19 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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"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

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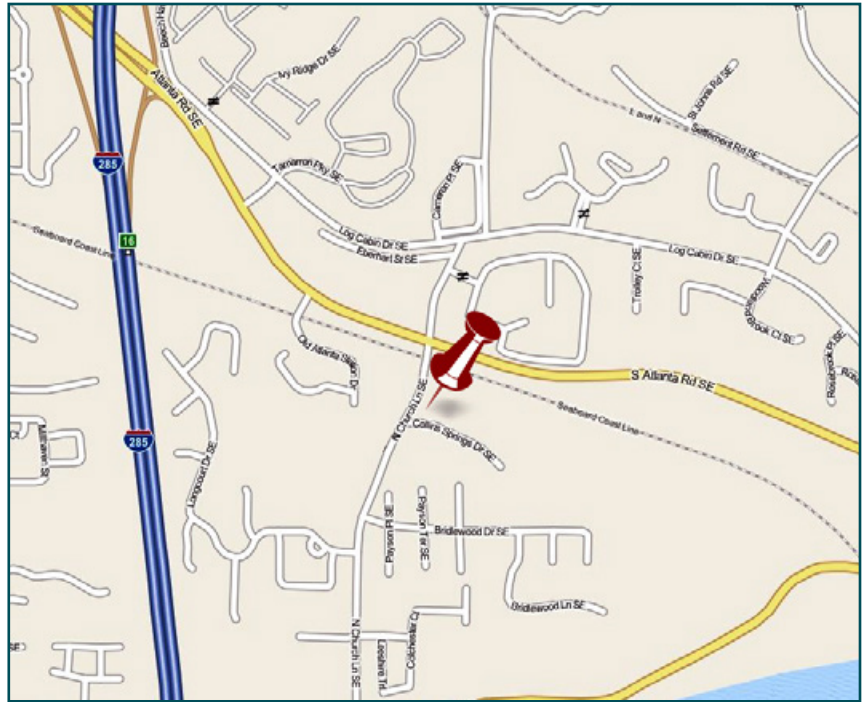
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4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA 30080-7224

Dare To Think
For Yourself!



**The October 13
Meeting:
1:00 at AF Hall,
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Paul Broman**



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