

The November AFS Meeting

Thomas Nehrer - *The Illusion of "Truth": The Real Jesus Behind the Grand Myth*

Our speaker for the November 9 AFS meeting will be **Thomas Nehrer**. Tom is on a 2½-month Eastern US speaking tour giving 19 talks promoting his 3rd book, *The Illusion of "Truth": The Real Jesus Behind the Grand Myth*. He recently completed a western US tour giving 25 talks.

Questioning cultural truths of small-town Middle-America, Tom jettisoned religion by age 10. In his early twenties, he left a Chemical Engineering career to travel widely seeking to better understand life.



Thomas Nehrer

Always sensitive that concepts regarding life correspond to experiential Reality, Tom explored many disciplines, philosophies and teachings, absorbing valued perspectives, but never bowing to self-aggrandized masters, popular myth or single explanation "truths." He is a member of the Mensa Society.

Tom's most recent book, *The Illusion of "Truth": The Real Jesus Behind the Grand Myth*, is a multifaceted look at Jesus of Nazareth, his message and the religion created, not from his insights into reality, but on fantasy and lore concocted about him. Tom builds on scholarly research, exposing myths to find the real Yeshua who trod the dusty roadways of first-century Judea. This book explores: Historical, social, political and traditional settings for Jesus' appearance; The mindset of ancients: how superstitious peasants imagined divine manipulation; Modern man's mindset: how causality is projected not only onto gods, but onto real world forces, luck, chance and fate, all illusory processes; How life really works: how Jesus was aware of life's meaning-based flow; the metaphysical connection of Self to Reality; Jesus' "Kingdom of Heaven within"; How beliefs create illusions.

The book provides many caveats to accepting Gospel accounts as reliable reports of any substance. It is a critical look at Christianity, its early growth and the smothering of earlier ideas throughout the first few centuries. But it also shows several things that Jesus understood correctly about how to live a meaningful life.

Tom submitted the following Op-Ed to the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* (It was not printed):

While traveling the English-speaking realm, presenting perspectives on the nature of consciousness and its interplay with reality, I'm amazed how little people really know about the religion many hold as ultimate truth.

Quick question: who wrote the first four New Testament books? Hint: it wasn't guys named Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. Those names were ascribed centuries later to early writings whose authors were and are unknown. Indeed, scholars now conclude that authorship is known for only seven or eight out of 27

NT books: most—but not all—of Paul's letters. All other names are falsely attributed—a common practice in ancient times called pseudepigrapha. Putting a famous name on something you, an unknown, wrote yourself, added authority. Epistles of Peter, James and Jude, several attributed to Paul plus all four gospels are like that—falsely attributed.

Another couple quickies: are gospel stories consistent, illustrating Jesus and his message in ways that would corroborate it from various viewpoints? Are gospels accurate when compared to historical accounts? I hope you didn't say yes to either. The four gospels vary widely in depicting Jesus, his words and events that took place—often directly contradictory. Historical and geographical references are frequently wrong, too.

How are you doing so far? Try this one: do contemporary accounts about Jesus within extensive first century Roman, Greek and Jewish historical records corroborate Jesus' life events? Actually, no historical references to Jesus exist at all – not during his lifetime or for sixty years thereafter. The only information about Jesus comes from the gospels.

How reliable are gospel reports, then? Good question! Biographical works today are thoroughly researched from other books, magazine and newspaper articles, online sources, perhaps interviews of the person or others who are knowledgeable. Gospel writers had no such sources. Jesus and anyone who'd encountered him were long gone. Whoever wrote the gospels forty to seventy years after Jesus' death had only oral traditions to go by: stories passed by word of mouth for years among superstitious, illiterate peasants—and across the Aramaic-Greek language barrier.

How reliable might that have been? That question doesn't need answering – it's obvious.

Young people attending seminary learn all of the above. They study the Bible critically, evaluating what is actually written in ancient fragments that remain. They learn of irreconcilable differences among the gospels

Nehrer Cont. pg 4

Calendar

11/9 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.m.

12/14 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.m.

Officer Ballots due

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>

[AtlantaFreethought](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, 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.



Nov 9: Thomas Nehrer, author of several books including *The Illusion of Truth: The Real Jesus Behind the Grand Myth*.

Dec 14: Ed Buckner, former president of American Atheists, will speak on "Breaking the Chains: Codrington Plantation (Barbados), Slavery, and Amazing Grace"

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. The AFS Facebook page is at <http://www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought>. 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.

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Photos from the AFS booth at Atlanta Pride

Photography by Gene Taylor



Secularism vs. Islam, and ethics vs. religion

October 7, 2014 Marietta Daily Journal

DEAR EDITOR:

Columns in the *Marietta Daily Journal* by Nelson Price and Effie Petrie, plus two letters to the editor, all on Sunday, make some good points but, taken together, they also say and imply some deeply false history and incorrect choices. Commander Petrie's guest column is the best of the four.

Several of the writers point out, correctly, that not all followers of a religion can be held responsible for some interpretations of the religion's holy book—true for Christianity as well as Islam, of course.

Several urge unbiased consideration and, at Kennesaw State University, an unbiased presentation of exhibits. I have no knowledge of KSU's exhibits and cannot comment on the fairness or comprehensiveness of any of their presentations.

But unbiased is an impossible goal: when there are millions of facts and interpretations competing to be included, the choice for inclusion will always be subjective. A balanced presentation that does not ignore major negatives or facts is the best that can be achieved.

Carol Smith, the letter writer who noted that "discussion in a history classroom about the Christian principles upon which our nation was founded may cause the loss of a teacher's job" is right but completely misguided as to why. A history teacher should be fired for teaching plainly false history like that or for promoting a religious viewpoint. Read the *U.S. Constitution* and list the Christian principles found there—for students this would be a terrible

assignment since there are none.

The most important false choices offered were Price's, implying that the source of ethics and morality has to be religion and the suggestion by several that the alternative the U.S. must offer to jihadist Islam is Christianity. Both ignore America's genuinely exceptional contribution to the world: secularism and an emphasis on individual rights.

All religions teach ethics that can be reasonably seen as immoral—for example, the historical and biblical Judeo-Christian support for human slavery and the oppression of women.

We should not urge other nations to resolve complex religious questions in favor of any religion or sect: the American way is to leave all religion up to individuals and offer no government support to any religious viewpoint at all.

Ed Buckner
Smyrna

FFRF, Dawkins, Coyne protest Georgia creationist

<http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/21646-ffrf-dawkins-coyne-protest-georgia-creationist-prof>

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has teamed up with two renowned evolutionary biologists, Richard Dawkins of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, and Jerry Coyne, to ask Georgia Southern University in Statesboro to investigate a professor for promoting creationism.

FFRF, the nation's largest association of free-thinkers, with 21,500 members, the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science and Coyne of the University of Chicago sent a joint letter Oct. 21.

The letter details complaints from students about GSU history professor Emerson McMullen's promotion of Christian beliefs. According to those reports and FFRF's subsequent investigation, McMullen "crosses ethical and constitutional lines."

McMullen allegedly uses extra-credit assignments to try to "convert" students by inviting them to write about McMullen's religious beliefs. He has reportedly also promoted Christian propaganda such as the recent movie "God Is Not Dead," which pits an atheist professor against a Christian student.

Coyne examined some of the class material FFRF uncovered and expertly took apart the unscientific claims, noting that most of what McMullen said on the topic was "completely wrong."

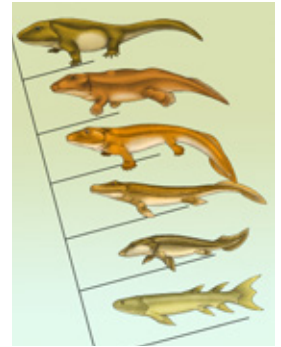
"A teacher should be free to express opinions, however ill-informed, so long as he or she makes it clear that they are no more than his opinions. He should not be free to penalize students who fail to parrot his opinions," Dawkins noted. "And if his opinions include Young Earth Creationism, my personal opinion is that he is no more qualified to teach history than a 'flat earther' is to teach geography or a proponent of the 'stork theory' is to teach reproductive physiology."

"What really disturbs us is the allegation that McMullen gives students extra credit for summing up his own views on religion! That's not teaching, that's preaching," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Coyne is the author of *Why Evolution is True* and Dawkins is the author of such books as *The Greatest Show on Earth* and *The Selfish Gene*, as well as his international blockbuster *The God Delusion*. Coyne's new book, *Faith Versus Fact: Why Science and Religion Are Incompatible*, is due out in May. Both men are honorary directors of FFRF, a national state/church watchdog with more than 400 members in Georgia.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew L. Seidel headed the investigation.

Note: Don't believe Professor McMullen could have such blatantly unscientific ideas? Check out his personal website: <https://sites.google.com/algeorgia-southern.edu/etmcmull/>



FFRF protests commission's 'direct deposit' to Baptist ministry

<http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/21643-ffrf-protests-commission-s-direct-deposit-to-baptist-ministry>

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, a national state/church watchdog, sent a letter Oct. 27 to the Covington County Commission in Andalusia, Ala., denouncing the commission's unconstitutional donation of \$3,000 in county funds to the Covington Baptist Association.

The commission voted Oct. 8 to appropriate \$3,000 in taxpayer funds to the Baptist group to start a monthly men's ministry program. *The Andalusia Star News* described the program's goal: "to get more men to church."

Katherine Paige, FFRF legal fellow, sent a letter to the commission detailing why the grant is unconstitutional. "The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits any 'sponsorship, financial support, and active involvement of the sovereign in religious activities.'"

"Funding a Baptist ministry violates this principle of neutrality, especially when the program is explicitly Christian and clearly meant to influence people to convert to Christianity," Paige wrote. FFRF is asking the commission to rescind the grant and recover the \$3,000 from the ministry.

"There couldn't be a more flagrant violation of the Constitution than a direct cash donation to a Christian ministry for the purpose of promoting church-going," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. FFRF noted that the Alabama Constitution explicitly bars the use of taxes or any public funds for "maintaining any minister or ministry." (Ala. Const. Art. § 3).

Nehrer from pg 1

and other books, about myth reported as fact, misaligned scriptural references and impossible reports...

Impossible reports? Many gospel accounts would have been impossible to know decades later: what happened at Jesus' trial, what soldiers said to their officer, what people in remote locations were thinking, what went on behind closed doors, etc.

Seminary studies point out problems of errors and changes introduced during ancient copying of papyrus manuscripts and the unreliability of translating ancient phrases. Uncial Greek, the original script of NT manuscripts had no punctuation or spaces between words, no paragraphs. Quote marks in your English Bible indicating direct quotes were imposed by translators. Gospel writers didn't really know, decades later, what Jesus or anybody else really said.

Having learned all of that in seminary, strangely, budding preachers and priests go forth in the world and...

Do they tell congregations about Biblical flaws, forgeries, inconsistencies, errors, myth reported as fact, incorrect scriptural references and distortions? Somehow they never mention that. They rehash old devotional dogma, those stock phrases meant to keep believers donating tithes and offerings.

The gospels, on thorough examination, are fiction, expressed originally to convince illiterate peasants of

Center for Inquiry Urges Federal Government to Protect Contraceptive Mandate

http://www.centerforinquiry.net/opp/blog/center_for_inquiry_urgues_federal_government_to_protect_contraceptive_mandat/

The Center for Inquiry (CFI) has submitted formal comments to the Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Treasury, urging policymakers at the federal agencies to keep religious exemptions to the contraceptive mandate as narrow as possible.

This summer, in response to a number of court cases, the federal government proposed new changes to the health care regulations requiring for profit corporations and nonprofit organizations to cover preventive health services such as contraception without charging a co-payment.

In *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, the Supreme Court ruled that closely held corporations were entitled to sue under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, and that the contraception mandate placed a “substantial burden” on their sincerely held religious objections against certain forms of contraception. At the same time, religious nonprofits have been challenging the prior accommodation provided by HHS, under which organizations are not required to involve themselves in the provision of preventive services they oppose on religious grounds, but instead are merely asked to send a form to their insurer, which would then provide the opposed services to those covered by the plan. The plaintiffs in these cases claim that sending this form to insurers violates their religious freedom.

Accordingly, HHS sought input on how a closely held corporation should be defined, so that the Supreme Court’s finding in *Hobby Lobby* can be effectively implemented; and on what type of accommodation should be granted to religious non-profits, so that employees can still access preventive health care without a co-pay, but the claims of conscience by religious charities can be respected.

As CFI writes in its comments:

“CFI addresses these two separate situations with one common goal, which is shared by the government: to ensure women have complete access to preventive care, including contraception, without co-pay. It is essential that this right of women is not sacrificed to assuage the concerns of organizations and individuals who, if they oppose any particular form of contraception, are not required to utilize that method, but simply allow for coverage of it. CFI believes a woman’s right to access legal forms of health care should

not be dependent on the religious beliefs of her employer, and that, while freedom of religion is a cherished and important principle on which the United States was founded, said freedom does not involve a right to impose one’s religious beliefs on other people. Any rules by the Departments should therefore start from this point: no woman should be denied access to the benefits of the

contraception mandate. Any rule exempting either for profit employers or nonprofit organizations must be drawn as narrowly as possible, consistent with existing laws and court rulings. The government must avoid taking the easy path of drawing broad exemptions to avoid challenges. The opponents of the Affordable Care Act, and in particular of the contraception mandate, have made clear that no exemption by

the government will be broad enough to satisfy them. The nonprofit cases have demonstrated this clearly — any proposal by the government has been met with a chorus of disapproval from certain religious groups which are inflexible in their opposition, such as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty (Becket Fund). They do not seek a workable accommodation under the contraception mandate; instead, they seek the abolition of the mandate itself. The Departments have a duty to craft rules subject to the restrictions of RFRA and existing case law. But they have an equally important duty to protect the right of women to safe, affordable legal preventive care.”



Nehrer from pg 4

“truths” that weren’t valid then—and they aren’t valid now.

But they do preserve, remarkably, Jesus’ insightful parables – metaphor phrased to communicate a unique awareness of how life works on a personal basis: the Kingdom “within”. Just as good jokes pass along verbatim while repeated stories change, parables survived decades of oral traditions—even though the disciples and Jesus’ peers never grasped them.

Visionaries throughout time have recognized a Oneness in life’s function, an inner-outer connection wherein each of us creates patterns in life. My books

and many international talks specify explicit inner elements of mind that lead to outer issues—inner change always yields outer improvement. Jesus could see that connection, but couldn’t communicate it with his primitive contemporaries – not even his disciples. Their flawed impressions, built on by Paul and proto-Christian church fathers injected common, regional myth and lore about Jesus into orthodoxy, virtually ignoring his message.

Christianity perpetuates itself via fear and ignorance. If believers bothered to explore what is commonly known about the origins of the Bible and their religion, they would at least be able to make considered decisions about what to believe. But no creed reveals to its adherents the real story taught in its own seminaries.

I, however, aware of Jesus’ meaning as well as religious fantasy and its roots, have no problem doing so.

Other Meetings of Interest in Metro Atlanta

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

Sunday Assembly Atlanta has moved to a new venue and does not yet have a November meeting listed on their meetup page, but they do have other activities listed, so be sure to check them out. For more about the global movement, check out: <http://sundayassembly.com/about/> (<http://www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly/>)

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 November. (<http://www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH/>)

Fellowship of Reason meets on the first Sunday of every month at 10:30 AM at AF Hall. There are meetings for book discussion, philosophy, a classic film course, and other events. (<http://www.fellowshipofreason.com>)

Atlanta Atheists has first Sunday meetups each month: the place varies. Check Meetup for info on the December get-together. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

The International Freethought Film Festival is in its fourth season. IFFF 2014 will take place in Atlanta, Georgia from November 7th-9th at the Cinefest Film Theater. The categories of films that we screen range from live action, animation, documentary, experimental and narrative features and shorts. The films are captivating, thought provoking, entertaining and the selections reflect our mission statement—promoting reason, critical thinking and freedom of inquiry through the medium of film. The festival is being put on by **Atlanta Coalition of Reason** and **Black Nonbelievers**.

The International Freethought Film Festival is a niche film festival for the bold. Examples of themes in the Freethought niche are those that challenge what some societies and cultures deem unchallengeable, such as religion or government policies. The examination of truth claims that are of interest to skeptics, such as paranormal claims, alternative medicine, UFO's, psychics and astrology, fits this niche. Films that shed light on Human Rights violations, and stories of women and men who take a humanistic approach to affect positive change in society, have a home at IFFF. The clash between scientific findings and religious/superstitious traditions is a common theme among submissions as well.

Visit www.freethoughtfilmfest.org for trailers, synopses and ticket information. The weekend passes are only \$35 each. <http://www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers/events/210525532/>

Recovery from Religion - Morrow Chapter is having the November meeting at Barnes & Noble Booksellers Southlake, 1939 Mount Zion Road, on Sat. Nov. 8 at 1:00 pm.

It's the monthly meetup for the Morrow chapter of Recovering from Religion! We will meet to discuss issues directly related to religious

indoctrination, struggles faced, and how to better overcome them.

There is no proselytizing of any kind allowed at these meetings. For more information and resources, please visit www.recoveringfromreligion.org. (<http://www.meetup.com/Recovering-From-Religion-Morrow-Chapter/>)

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta atheists** on Sunday, Nov. 9, at 6:00 p.m. at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) normally meets on the 2nd Monday of every month at Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Gwinnett, 12 Bethesda Church Road, Lawrenceville, GA. Their next meeting is at 7:00, Mon. Nov 10th. (<http://www.meetup.com/brights-295/>)

IIG Atlanta will have its monthly meetup on November 15 at 4:30 at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N Highland Avenue Northeast, in the Crows Nest. 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 \$100,000 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: shaune.beattie@gmail.com: <http://www.meetup.com/IIG-Atlanta/>.

Atlanta Skeptics will have its Nov. 15 regular meeting at Manuel's Tavern in the North Avenue room (come in the front door, turn right and head all the way back). Social and dinner starts at 6 pm. The meeting is still in the planning stages, so be sure to check with the Meetup page. (<http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics/>)

Black Nonbelievers will have their Nov. 18 general meeting at 2:00 pm at

Atlanta Public Library -Main Downtown Branch, 1 Margaret Mitchell Square, featuring guest speaker, Dr. Duav Evans. (<http://www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers/>)

Atlanta Astronomy Club will have our annual "How to buy a Telescope" program. It will be on Saturday Nov. 22nd at 3:00 pm at the Fernbank Science Center. The program will go over the different types of telescopes, pros & cons of each type, and cost involved. This should help with the decision making process for telescope purchasers. (<http://www.atlantaastronomy.org>)

Freedom From Religion Foundation will be meeting on Sunday, Nov. 23 at 2:00, venue to be announced. Check Meetup for more info. <http://www.meetup.com/Freedom-From-Religion-Foundation-of-Georgia/>

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

The Atlanta Science Tavern has not yet provided information about the Manuel's Tavern November 29 meeting at press time (usually last Saturday at 7:00 pm). They have a lot of side projects so check on the Meetup group for more information. (<http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern>)



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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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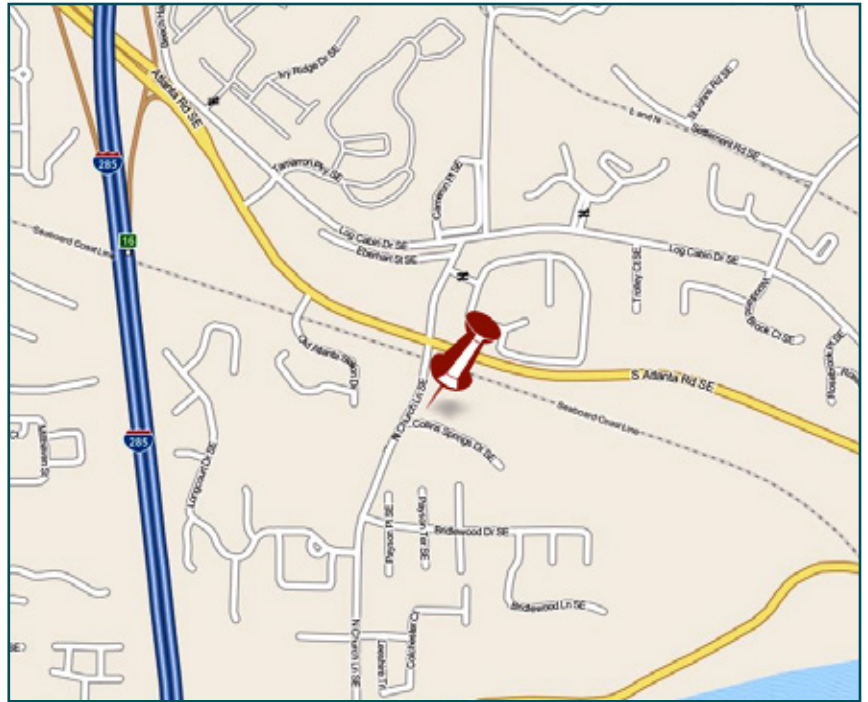
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*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**The November 9th
Meeting:
1:00 at AF Hall,
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Thomas Nehrer**



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