

The January AFS Meeting

Atlanta Freethought Society President-elect **Rick Pace** (who'll officially take office at our next meeting) announced that the AFS program on January 13th (Sunday) will feature two men with claims to fame both nationally and locally, **Ed Buckner** and his son **Michael Buckner**. The Buckner's new book, *In Freedom We Trust: An Atheist Guide to Religious Liberty* (2012), has just been released by Prometheus Books of Amherst, NY. The book will be the basis of their presentation by the same title. There will be copies of the book for sale at the meeting: \$15 for members, \$18 for non-members.

Ed Buckner was the national president of American Atheists (2008–2010) and earlier served as executive director of the Council for Secular Humanism and earlier still held various offices

for AFS. Michael Buckner has been vice president of the Atlanta Freethought Society for several terms (he was just re-elected for another term). Both are renowned for their writing on behalf of secularism, church-state separation, atheism, and freethought.

The Buckners will present a summary of the case for secularism, of the idea that America is exceptional because of our historical and constitutional support for religious liberty, for keeping governments at all levels out of the religion business.

We're pleased to have two of our own explaining exactly why this a free country, and not a Christian nation—and why that is in every citizen's best interests, from atheists to fundamentalist Christians. We're proud to bring our members and other interested people in the Atlanta area the chance to see and hear great programs like this one.

The January Potluck Lunch

Before the regular January 13th 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 side dish

H-P: Bring a main dish

Q-Z: Bring a dessert

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.

AFS Blood Drive

Atlanta Freethought Society President-elect Rick Pace (who'll officially take office at our next meeting) and outgoing President Steve Yothment (who is just completing nine terms and who chose not to run for re-election) jointly announced that the AFS will co-sponsor a blood drive with the American Red Cross on New Year's Day (January 1, 2013) from noon to 4 p.m.

Pace added, "We thought this would be a great way to start off the New Year—by once again demonstrating that we are not only freethought activists and irreligious intellectuals but are also responsible members of the human community. We also hope to raise a little money at this event for the Sandy Hook School Support Fund in Connecticut, as a symbolic statement of our sympathy and concern."

The blood drive, open to members but also to anyone in the community who wants to help, will be from noon to 4 p.m. at AFS Hall. Some light refreshments will be available at the hall for all participants.

Pace added that he spoke for all members of AFS in thanking Steve Yothment for "his long, distin-

guished, and effective service as AFS president," Yothment responded by saying that he had enjoyed his time as president, was proud of the organization's stability and good standing in the local community and the larger, national, freethought/atheist/humanist community, and that he "looked forward eagerly to Rick Pace's leadership in 2013."

Calendar

- 1/1 Red Cross Blood Drive, noon to 4 p.m.
 - 1/13 Potluck Lunch, 12 noon
 - 1/13 AFS General Meeting, 1:00 p.m.
 - 2/10 AFS Board Meeting, 11:00 a.m.
 - 2/10 AFS General Meeting, 1:00 p.m.
 - 3/10 AFS Board Meeting, 11:00 a.m.
 - 3/10 Potluck Lunch, 12 Noon
 - 3/10 AFS General Meeting, 1:00 p.m.
 - 3/23 Medshare, 15-20 people 1-4 p.m. Ameribistro on Flat Shoals Pkwy after
- All events at AF Hall unless noted.*

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.

Jan 13: Dr. Ed Buckner will speak on his (and Michael Buckner's) new book, *Freedom We Trust*.

Feb 10: Reginald Finley

Mar 10: Bob Truett

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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>.

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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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New board member needed to replace Rick Pace

Atlanta Freethought News

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Sustaining Membership is \$100.

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Strange Gods: The Religious Right's Offensive Response To The Tragedy in Connecticut

Dec 15, 2012 by Rob Boston in Wall of Separation

<https://www.au.org/blogs/wall-of-separation/strange-gods-the-religious-right-s-offensive-response-to-the-tragedy-in>

As soon as I heard about Friday's horrific school shootings in Newtown, Conn., I knew it would only be a matter of time before some Religious Right extremist blamed it on the lack of mandatory prayer in public schools.

It didn't take long. First out of the crazy box was former Arkansas governor and erstwhile presidential candidate Mike Huckabee.

"We ask why there is violence in our schools, but we have systematically removed God from our schools," Huckabee said¹ during an appearance on the Fox News Channel. "Should we be so surprised that schools would become a place of carnage?"

He added, "We've made it a place where we don't want to talk about eternity, life, what responsibility means, accountability—that we're not just going to have to be accountable to the police if they catch us, but one day we stand before, you know, a holy God in judgment. If we don't believe that, then we don't fear that."

Not to be left out of the Nitwit Sweepstakes, the always-offensive Bryan Fischer of the American Family Association quickly chimed in² with this gem: "You know the question's gonna come up, where was God? I thought God cared about the little children, God protected the little children. Where was God when all this went down? And here's the bottom line: God is not gonna go where he's not wanted."

Fischer continued, "Now we have spent, since 1962—this, we're 50 years into this now – we have spent 50 years telling God to get lost, telling God, we do not want you in our schools, we don't want to pray to you in our schools, we don't want to pray to you before football games, we don't want to pray to you at graduation, we don't want anyone talking about you in a graduation speech. We've kicked God out of our public school system. And I think God would say to us, 'Hey I'll be glad to protect your children, but you've gotta invite me back into your world first. I'm not gonna go where I'm not wanted. I am a gentleman.'"

People sometimes ask me why Americans United is so adamant about keeping organized, school-sponsored forms of prayer and religious worship out of public education. On occasion I encounter those who assert, "What's the harm in a little prayer or talk about God? Isn't it good for kids?"

Huckabee and Fischer are walking examples of the harm. Remember, as soon as we start talking about official prayer in public schools, we also start talking about which religion, what prayer and whose God. The God that gets talked about or promoted in your school could easily be the God that is worshipped by people like Huckabee and Fischer.

Personally, I have no use for the God of the Religious Right – and I don't think I'm alone there. The God of the Religious Right allows 20 children and six adults to die in a school because he's in a snit over his alleged expulsion from public education.

The God of the Religious Right is mean, petty, vindictive and not very ethical. The God of the Religious Right is all hate and retribution, with no love and acceptance. The God of the Religious Right, in my opinion, is not worthy of our worship.

This is America, and supporters of the Religious Right are free to worship that God. Members of that movement are free to approach that God in fear—never joy—as is their wont. But let's be clear: They want to use our public schools, a taxpayer-supported institution that serves children of many faiths and philosophies, to push that God on your children, mine and everyone else's. They have no right to do that.

The good news is that millions of Americans reject the God of the Religious Right. They reject a God based on fear, division, violence and retribution. The God that many Americans worship is so far removed from the God of the Religious Right that we can't paper over the difference by pretending it's a minor theological tiff and that, at the end of the day, most Americans worship the same deity.

No. The entity Huckabee, Fischer and their allies tremble before and beseech is so alien to most of the devoutly religious people I know that they would not even recognize it as God.

(Millions of Americans also know that in the wake of a tragedy like this, the proper response is words that offer comfort, not divisive displays of ignorance.)

So let us make no mistake: When Huckabee, Fischer and their allies speak of bringing church and state closer together or removing a few bricks from the church-state wall to allow "a little religion" into our schools, this is the God they would set loose. This is the God they would preference by law. This is the God they would force you to support. This is the God they would foist onto your children.

If this isn't your God, or if you're one of the many Americans who recognize no God, you must speak out against offensive Religious Right foghorns like Huckabee and Fischer. You must challenge those who exploit sorrow for political gain.

And you need to stand up for the one thing that keeps the God of the Religious Right from becoming the government's favorite: the wall of separation between church and state.

1. <http://www.businessinsider.com/huckabee-fox-news-shooting-god-2012-12>
2. <http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2012/12/14/fischer-lack-of-prayer-in-public-schools-to-blame-for-conn-shootings/>



American Atheists files suit against IRS

<http://atheists.org/american-atheists-files-suit-against-irs>

American Atheists and two co-plaintiffs today filed in U.S. District Court in the Eastern District of Kentucky a lawsuit demanding that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) stop giving preferential treatment to churches and religious organizations via the process of receiving non-profit tax-exempt status under the Internal Revenue Code (IRC) procedures and definitions.

“American Atheists receives tax-exempt status under Internal Revenue Code 501(c)(3),” said American Atheists President David Silverman, “but because the organization is not classified as religious it costs American Atheists, along with all other secular non-profits, significantly more money each year to keep that status. In this lawsuit, American Atheists and the other plaintiffs are demanding that all tax-exempt organizations, including those characterized as religious by the IRS, have the same requirements to achieve tax-exempt status.”

For example, in order to qualify for nonprofit

tax-exempt status, any religious or secular organization must demonstrate it exists to benefit the public. After that basic element is established, religious non-profits are almost always declared automatically tax-exempt under the current IRC rules and definitions. However, secular non-profits face a lengthy application and a fee, which can be as high as \$850.

“Religious organizations and churches are treated differently from secular organizations,” explained American Atheists National Legal Director Edwin Kagin. “The exemptions are applied in a way that discriminates solely on the basis of whether an entity’s members express beliefs and practices accepted as religious. The IRS treats your organization better if you profess belief in a supernatural deity.”

The lawsuit also covers discrepancies in how secular and religious organizations are treated in maintaining their tax-exempt statuses. Secular nonprofits complete Form 990 annually, which details information about finances, donors, volunteers, and personnel; the IRS estimates it requires 211 hours to complete the Form 990, which is then public information. Religious nonprofits are exempted from filing the Form 990, so there is no public record about their finances, donors, volunteers, or personnel.

“The IRS hands religious organizations a fundraising advantage,” Silverman said. “It puts American Atheists at a significant disadvantage when it comes to fundraising because many Americans choose not to reveal their atheism for fear of prejudice and discrimination.”

American Atheists and its co-plaintiffs are asking the Court to find that such disparity of treatment between religious and secular non-profit organizations is unconstitutional and require the IRS to make the tax-exempt filing process uniform for all nonprofit organizations.



American Atheists 50th Anniversary National Convention

March 28-31, 2013 • Austin, Texas

Featuring: A.C. Grayling, Congressman Pete Stark, Katherine Stewart, Jay Jay French, Cara Santa Maria, Dave Silverman, Matt Dillahunty, Teresa MacBain, Seth Andrews, Hemant Mehta, and many more!

The convention includes our 1st Annual Art Show and Silent Auction! Download your application at

<http://atheists.org/artshow> before all the spaces are gone!

Download your application at <http://atheists.org/convention2013>

Get the latest updates on Twitter: [#AACON13](https://twitter.com/AACON13)



Our Love-Hate-Love Affair With Violence

Americans can be notoriously prudish about sex, yet our entertainments are stuffed with violent acts.

Could this go all the way back to the Bible? **By Valerie Tarico**

(<http://www.alternet.org/does-bible-make-americans-more-violent?akid=9848.219868.VbA8IS>)

My friend Li is an Evangelical Christian and, in keeping with her family values she keeps an eye on what her children view and read. In the summer, she took her 12-year-old daughter to the *Hunger Games*. “It’s the perfect movie for her,” Li commented. “No swearing and no sex.” No swearing; no sex. Just people stalking and killing each other.

The Motion Picture Association of America agrees with Li’s priorities. So did the writers of the Bible. Our love-hate-love affair with violence goes way back.

It goes way back, and it also appears to be changing. In his 2011 book, *The Better Angels of our Nature*¹, Stephen Pinker lined up information from a wide variety of sources to show that human societies are less violent now² than ever in recorded history. Violence dropped precipitously with the agricultural revolution, and then again with the Enlightenment and more recently, with the emergence of universal human rights. In the U.S., recent decades have seen a decline in murder rates and gun ownership. This finding is counterintuitive for several reasons. We have become more sensitized to kinds of violence that once were accepted as normal, like child and wife abuse; modern weapons of war have made killings more dramatic; we forget how brutish our ancestors really were; and thanks to media, modern incidents of violence produce shockwaves of trauma that once were impossible. All of this obscures a long and vast trend line toward—it sounds weird to say it—a kinder, gentler world. A medieval British man was fifty times more likely to die at the hands of another man than is his modern descendant.

We might be even farther along this path were it not for a love affair with fantasy violence that, if anything, appears to be growing.

The Motion Picture Association of America has been rating sex, violence and profanity in movies since 1968, with the goal of limiting how much of each children absorb—or at least giving parents a tool that lets them make the judgment call. In 2006, the Annenberg Public Policy Center reviewed³ the top grossing movies since the rating system began. In fact, they reviewed movies all the way back to 1950. They found that explicit sex and violence had both increased over time, but that “ratings creep” affected only violence. Explicit sex is still reserved for “R” rated films; explicit violence is not.

Many parents naively trust that media targeted at young children are developmentally harmless even though brain science suggests otherwise⁴. They similarly tend to assume that a G-Rating means a movie is low on violence. In reality, it may mean simply that the violence is less realistic or designed to trigger laughter rather than fear. A Harvard study published in 2000 reviewed every animated feature film produced between 1933 and 1999, 74 in total⁵. At the time, the findings⁶ made headlines because they were startling:

- Every single film had at least one violent act. The amount of footage devoted to violence ranged from 6 seconds to 24 minutes.
- Most of the films showed physical fighting as a means of resolving conflict.
- Characters used weapons including swords and guns and every-day objects.
- In half of the movies at least one character gave violence a thumbs-up at some point by cheering or laughing.

A follow up⁷ in 2004 showed that G-rated movies, like all others, gradually are becoming more violent. A 2007 study⁸ sampled 77 PG-13 films and tallied

2251 violent actions, with nearly half causing one or more death. Researchers classified most of the incidents as “happy violence” meaning it was “cool, swift, and painless.” Today, by the age of 11, the typical American kid has seen almost 8000 murders⁹ on TV. Why? Because we like it that way. Movies that are rated R for violence make more money than those that are rated R for other reasons. We are attracted to violence and we are inured to violence. Most Americans—not just my friend Li—find murder to be more acceptable fare for children than sex or swear words.

Our peculiar hierarchy of priorities may be due in part to the influence of Abrahamic religion on Western Civilization and the unique standing accorded to the Bible in American Christianity specifically. The Bible amalgamates the mythology and legal codes of a specific kind of culture: a clan-based tribal society in which herdsman struggling for survival in an arid and increasingly denuded environment. Males competed to control females and territory while maintaining the purity of bloodlines and inheritance; gods that were modeled on warlords competed for fealty. Consequently, while codes governing sexuality and blasphemy were strict, codes governing violence were complicated.

Yahweh himself originated as a war god¹⁰. Non-Hebrews were regarded with hostility and indeed, much of the founding story of the Israelite people comprises tales of triumphal genocide. The violence in the Bible is so extreme that it defines¹¹ vast portions of the book:



[Edmund Leach] looked at the Bible through the eyes of a communications engineer and asked: what message are these authors trying to get through to the reader? The answer, Leach thought, was that they were trying to obscure

the fact that mankind began through incest (Adam and Eve) and so the strategy was to compile a list of atrocities so heinous that, in the end, the original incest would come to look like a harmless act.

Whether history or mythology or some fusion of the two, the Bible stories, when tallied¹², include an estimated 25 million violent deaths. And yet, like any people, the internal narrative of God’s Chosen Ones is one of yearning for peace and prosperity,

Cont. page 6

Cont. from page 5

the dream of an idyllic past in which the lion lay down with the lamb; an idyllic future in which men will beat their swords into plowshares and the lamb and lion will lie down together again.

Like the ancient Israelites, we Americans see ourselves as peacemakers. During the midwinter holiday season, Peace on Earth is sung from choir lofts and hung in shopping malls. We complain about our role as “policeman to the world.” And yet, if we could see ourselves as others see us¹³, we would see a people who, like the ancient Israelites have created unparalleled archetypes of violence: the Rambo, the mushroom cloud, the Tommy Gun, the Cowboy. Hollywood ensures that, even independent of the world’s best funded military, violence is one of our top exports.

I once rode a bus to a then small town in Mexico called San Cristobal de las Casas. The ride was my introduction to a new phenomenon that would become a bane during subsequent budget travel: video on buses and trains. It was also my first awakening to the level of violence we Americans export to the world as storytellers. Real dialogue can be hard to translate; psychological or social nuance almost impossible. But sex and violence are universals, which means they are even more ubiquitous in the movies that cross cultural and economic lines than those that don’t.

On this particular bus ride, the gratis entertainment was about a serial killer who was making snuff films. As we swayed around mountain switchbacks, the sound blared. Men, traditionally clad women, and small children pressed against each other, with no option but to face the screen depicting death scene after death scene. My savage hope was that the other passengers were motion sick like me and that the pairing of the film and switchbacks was conditioning a permanent visceral aversion to sexual violence. Later that year, on an all-night bus, I would find myself assaulted by my first movie about people hunting people. The male lead was a hunky white supremacist, a farmer by day who secretly liked to hunt Blacks.

In movies, of course, it is the bad guys who do the unprovoked killing. Any violence perpetrated by the protagonist, meaning by us at a fantasy level, is vengeance or justice. Most people are deeply ambivalent about violence. We are both attracted and repelled by it. We enjoy and fear it. It turns us on and it horrifies us. Consequently, to get the satisfaction of a good blockbuster we need those bad guys to instigate things. The violence we like best is righteous violence, and—in movies and stories—most violence is just that. It protects innocence and restores justice. It safeguards women and children and the homeland.

Ironically, those who most relish the fantasy

power of righteous violence are those who in real life are most likely to perpetrate¹⁴ unrighteous violence. Masculinity, the substance of action films, is defined by the *Oxford Online Dictionary* thus¹⁵: possession of the qualities traditionally associated with men: a need for men to prove their masculinity through domination over women. Hypermasculine men hit women more¹⁶, and a woman being pregnant is no deterrent¹⁷. In the real world, tough guys are good guys until suddenly, sometimes, they are not. In the real world, most murders¹⁸ are triggered by the same motives we find so satisfying on the screen: righteous anger, a sense of violated fairness or honor, the outrage of feeling wronged, the conviction that the one murdered was the bad guy.

Most of us will never kill. These days, most of us don’t even hit. Even so, if we hope to continue the trend¹⁹ toward less violence, the challenge is not whether we can call up the heroism to face down villains and demons like those in our stories but whether we can continue to face away from our own dark fascinations. Alexander Solzhenitsyn posed the painful conundrum: “If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

Who of us is willing even, to miss the next blockbuster? In *The Hunger Games*, the bad people are the citizens of the Capitol who demand that outlying districts provide sacrificial contestants for their high tech version of the Roman Coliseum. Movie viewers and readers root for the kids and scorn those who give them no choice but to kill or be killed, those who watch the blood sport for entertainment. But the books and movie work only because we, as readers and viewers, ignore the disturbing obvious: we are the Capitol. *The Hunger Games* were staged for us; we are and always were the only intended audience. Suzanne Collins offered us a chance to watch kids hunting and killing each other, and we ate it up. Did she laugh we flocked to the book stores and theater, as we downloaded DVD’s and shared dog-eared copies and checked sequel release dates? Did she cry? Did she care? Do we²⁰?

Valerie Tarico is a psychologist and writer in Seattle, Washington and the founder of *Wisdom Commons* (<http://www.wisdomcommons.org/>). She is the author of “Trusting Doubt: A Former Evangelical Looks at Old Beliefs in a New Light” and “Deas and Other Imaginings.” Her articles can be found at Awaypoint.Wordpress.com.

1. <http://www.thegatesnotes.com/books/personal/the-better-angels-of-our-nature>
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ramBFRtIUzk
3. <http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/Downloads/Releases/ACI/MPPAA%20Ratings%20Study%20in%20JAH.pdf>
4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BoT7qH_uVNo
5. <http://jama.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=192741>
6. <http://www.kidsrisk.org/faqs1.htm>
7. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1435631/#R11>
8. <http://www.spotlight.ucla.edu/impact/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/pg-13-movies.pdf>
9. <http://www.common sense media.org/advice-for-parents/impact-media-violence-tips>
10. <http://www.biblicalheritage.org/God/el-goi.htm>
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12. <http://dwindlinginunbelief.blogspot.com/2010/04/drunk-with-blood-gods-killings-in-bible.html>
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17. <http://www.articlesbase.com/pregnancy-articles/determinants-of-physical-spousal-abuse-of-women-during-pregnancy-in-nigerian-635101.html>
18. <http://aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/cfi/101-120/cfi110.html>
19. <http://mensantiviolencecouncil.com/>
20. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0cKlnqzt9GQ&list=UUDOawdnA6jiBOhqpl6VO2Q&feature=player_embedded

2012 in Review: How Blasphemy Laws Are Stifling Free Expression Worldwide

As the year draws to a close, [The Electronic Frontier Foundation] is looking back at the major trends influencing digital rights in 2012 and discussing where we are in the fight for free expression, innovation, fair use, and privacy.

By **Jillian C. York**

<https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/12/2012-review-how-blasphemy-laws-are-stifling-free-expression-worldwide>



As a recent Pew Forum study reveals, blasphemy laws are widespread¹, with laws penalizing blasphemy, apostasy, or defamation of religion (including religious “hate speech”) present in 94 countries.

While in most countries, laws criminalizing certain types of speech apply to the Internet, some countries have recently crafted specific laws to ban or criminalize online expressions of blasphemy. Still others have cracked down on online speech using existing laws. Here’s a roundup of some of the worst offenders in 2012:

Saudi Arabia

It should come as no surprise that ultra-conservative Saudi Arabia is strict on speech, but this year the country outdid itself when it extradited Hamza Kashgari², a young journalist who had penned an earnest letter to the Muslim prophet on Twitter, from Malaysia. A few months later, the country began mulling over new laws³ to “combat the criticism of the basic tenets of Islamic sharia” online.

Kuwait

In nearby Kuwait, the Information Minister announced in May plans to pass new laws⁴ regulating the use of social networking sites amidst growing tensions between the country’s Shi’a majority and Sunni minority. The proposal came after writer Mohammad al-Mulaifi was detained for “insulting the Muslim Shi’ite majority” on Twitter.

Bangladesh

In March, a Bangladesh court blocked access⁵ to five Facebook pages deemed to be blasphemous to Islam, while also demanding that content hosts and creators be brought to justice over “uploading indecent materials.” The court order also stated, chillingly, a desire to find ways of easily facilitating future blockages of websites and pages.

Bangladesh was also among several countries that blocked access to the ‘Innocence of Muslims’ video on YouTube.

Tunisia

In Tunisia, where activists have fought hard to keep the Internet open, two young men were arrested⁶ in April for posting cartoons of the Muslim prophet and sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment. One is serving his sentence, while the other fled to Europe.

Greece

The embattled European country arrested a Facebook user⁷ for blasphemy in October after he created a page satirizing a famous Greek Orthodox monk, a worrying development in a country where the Internet has otherwise been traditionally free.

Afghanistan, Iran, Russia, Singapore, Pakistan

Along with Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia, these countries blocked access (either by issuing a court order to Google or by force) to the ‘Innocence of Muslims’ video on YouTube, with some blocking YouTube altogether.

YouTube

A dishonorable mention goes to YouTube, which blocked access⁸ to the controversial ‘Innocence of Muslims’ video in Egypt and Libya without government prompting. The Arabic Network for Human Rights Information, a group based in Egypt, condemned YouTube’s decision⁹.

1. <http://www.pewforum.org/Government/Laws-Penalizing-Blasphemy-Apostasy-and-Defamation-of-Religion-are-Widespread.aspx>
2. <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/02/saudi-journalist-faces-threats-militants>
3. <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/07/week-internet-censorship-china-saudi-arabia-sweden-UAE>
4. <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/05/kuwait-prepares-crack-down-social-media>
5. <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/03/week-censorship-uk-uae-pakistan-bangladesh>
6. <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/04/week-censorship-troubling-developments-tunisia-palestine>
7. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Europe/2012/1002/Blasphemy-in-democracy-s-birthplace-Greece-arrests-Facebook-user>
8. <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/09/youtube-blocks-access-controversial-video-egypt-and-libya>
9. http://www.ifex.org/international/2012/09/28/anhri_v_ban/

Other posts in this series can be found at <https://www.eff.org/deeplinks/2012/12/2012-review-year-digital-freedom>



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. 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 has drinking skeptically at 4 Seasons Brewery on Jan. 4 at 7:00, and a formal meeting at 7:00 PM on Saturday, Jan. 19, at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. They will have a lecture on Alternative Medicine. See more about it at <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics/>.

The Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta will combine their meeting with First Existentialist Congregation on Sun. Dec. 29 11 a.m., 470 Candler Park Dr NE, in Atlanta. See <http://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.

The Atlanta Science Tavern will meet on Sat., Jan 6, at 7:00PM at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta. Anthony Martin will talk about Exploring Tracks and Prints, Marks and Holes on Georgia's Barrier Islands. See more at <http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern/>

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta atheists** on Sunday, Jan. 13, at 6:00PM at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

Another **meetup for Atlanta atheists** is scheduled for Sun., Jan. 27, at 4:00 PM at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Sandy Springs. (<http://www.meetup.com/>)

IIG Atlanta will have a general meeting Sun. Jan 9 at 4:00 p.m. in the Crows Nest at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, in Atlanta, right before the Atlanta Skeptics meetup. The organization exists to promote critical thinking about the paranormal, supernatural and unexplained and also offers \$50,000 for anyone who can demonstrate evidence of the occult or paranormal under properly controlled conditions. <http://www.meetup.com/IIG-Atlanta/>.

A New Year - A New Atlanta Freethought News Design - A New Editor by Laura Ross

When you opened your mailbox or email and picked up this month's *Atlanta Freethought News*, you may have been startled at the redesign. I have taken over the newsletter from President Emeritus/longtime editor/current VP of Internal Affairs Steve Yothment. I am very excited about doing the newsletter. I have been a graphic artist since 1985 and am currently freelancing, and setting up newsletters has always been a favorite activity, rather like working a puzzle. I decided to change the software that was used to set up AFN, using Adobe InDesign. The typeface I am using is Gill Sans.

I am also very excited to be working with new President-Elect Rick Pace, who has a lot of ideas he would like to enact. He said he would like to do some updates such as a new logo and also have us interview the members of Atlanta Freethought to tell their stories. We'd also like to have articles written by our members in the newsletter.

Also, running ads may be a way of directing business to our members or bringing in local support. Perhaps classified ads as well? It will bring in money, so that membership dues and donations can be used for other projects.

I am open to other ideas for the newsletter. It is a work in progress.

About me, I am married to member Dwight Lyman and am the mother to two daughters: Halley Ross, who lives in Melbourne, Australia, and Maia Ross, who will be graduating from high school in May. We have three cats and one dog as well. Besides AFS, I am also involved with Atlanta Skeptics, Atlanta Science Tavern, Independent Investigations Group (IIG), the podcasting

track at Dragon*con, etc.

I just served a two-year term on the AFS Board of Directors and was re-elected in December. Thank you to all who voted for me!

I also do an eclectic journal-type podcast called Freethought Show (<http://freethoughtshow.com>) and often record lectures at AF Hall and share them on the podcast (You may have noticed me sitting in the front row with my trusty hand recorder.) The show is available on iTunes, on Stitcher, or you can just listen to it from the website. Several lectures from the past couple of years were posted in November, when I was podcasting every day. But as of right now, the podcast is a weekly show, more or less!

If you are on Facebook, be sure to go to Atlanta Freethought Society's Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/atlantafreethought>. You are welcome to share links and images you have found there. As of this writing, we have 620 "likes" on the page and we would love to have more.

Again, I am very excited to be your new editor!

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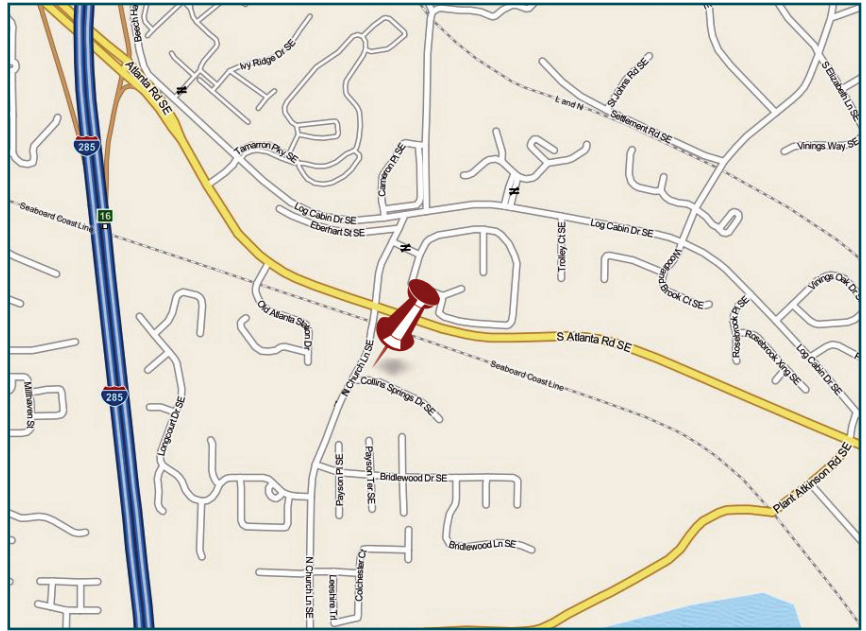
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**The January 13 Meeting:
1:00 at AF Hall,
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Smyrna, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Ed Buckner**



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