

The September AFS Meeting

Leah Mickens “We’ve Come This Far—In Spite of Faith”

Our AFS program scheduled for 1:00 p.m. on Sunday, September 14 will feature AFS member **Leah Mickens**.



Leah Mickens

Leah Mickens is a freelance writer residing in Atlanta, GA. She graduated from the University of South Carolina, Columbia with a Master in Library Science in 2006 and received a Master of Science in Digital Media from the Georgia Institute of

Technology in 2009. She has performed archival work at major repositories of Southern history, including the King Center, the William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum and Holocaust Memorial, the Georgia State University Special Collections, the Emory University Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, the Georgia Institute of Technology Archives, and the Auburn Avenue Research Library. Leah will discuss her essay “We’ve Come This Far—In Spite of Faith” that was printed in *Free Inquiry* magazine.

The program will be preceded by conversation with other freethinkers and light snacks starting at noon. See you there!

Grounds Committee

We need help keeping the lawn mowed and weeded. Any help you can offer will be much appreciated.

Let Mark Banks know if you can. Thanks to those who’ve helped!



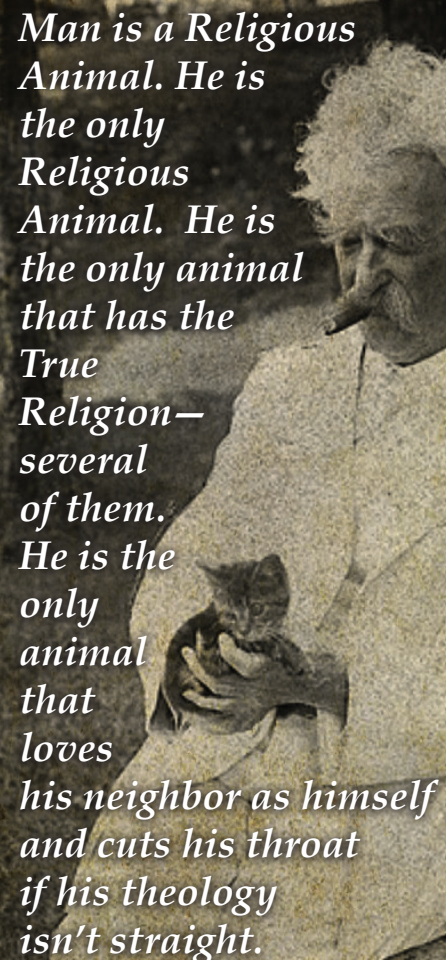
Calendar

9/14 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.m.

10/12 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.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>



Man is a Religious Animal. He is the only Religious Animal. He is the only animal that has the True Religion—several of them. He is the only animal that loves his neighbor as himself and cuts his throat if his theology isn't straight.

~ Mark Twain

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.



Sep 14: Leah Mickens “We’ve Come This Far—In Spite of Faith.”

Oct 12: TBA

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

Dec 14: TBA

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.

Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

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Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 20, Number 9, September 2014

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AFS Webmaster: Paul Broman
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Declaration signers were in contradiction to Christianity

A Letter to the Editor by Ed Buckner

Marietta Daily Journal, 9 July 2014

Nelson Price (“Declaration of Independence was declaration of dependence” *Marietta Daily Journal*, 6 July 2014) makes some interesting points, but he exaggerates one of his claims absurdly and ignores a much more important idea.

He is correct that those who identify the religious references in the Declaration of Independence as strictly deistic overstate their case but then he swings wildly too far in the “Christian nation” direction. Many of the signers were indeed Christian, but all of them were in direct contradiction to biblical Christianity. Most notably a well-known New Testament source, Romans 13:1-3, makes it unmistakably clear that rebelling against an established government, especially against a Christian king, explicitly violates God’s will and will be divinely punished. Whole books have been devoted to this subject—we analyzed it at length in our own book—but Price significantly misrepresents the consensus, which is that the Declaration was imbued with ceremonial deism.

The more important point that he ignores is the fact that the Declaration,



Ed Buckner

while important to Americans and freedom lovers worldwide, is not our governing charter. As he noted, the U.S. Constitution was agreed to a full 13 years after the Declaration of Independence, and the Constitution includes not even one idea of any importance that can be traced to Christianity or the Bible. The signers of the Declaration did indeed declare that they depended on each other. With the Constitution, the transformation to a god-free government was complete, with there no longer being any doubt as to the sole source of governmental authority: “We the People.” Religious freedom was quite important to the founders and they understood that to protect liberty, government must stand aside from religion.

And that’s worth celebrating by all Americans, religious or irreligious.

Ed Buckner
Smyrna

Over 1/3 of Americans support removing “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance

Merrill Miller - American Humanist

<http://americanhumanist.org/news/details/2014-08-over-one-third-of-americans-support-removing-under-g>

A new study by The Seidewitz Group, commissioned by the American Humanist Association with support from the Stiefel Freethought Foundation, reports that 34 percent of Americans support removing the phrase “under God” from the Pledge of Allegiance.

The study, conducted in May of 2014, responded to a 2013 poll by Lifeway Research, which stated that only 8 percent of American adults felt that “under God” should be removed from the Pledge. Unlike the Lifeway Research poll, the survey done by The Seidewitz Group included a brief description of the history of the Pledge of Allegiance, including the information that “under God” was only added as recently as 1954 in response to the Cold War and that some Americans feel that the Pledge should focus on unity rather than religion.

“The current wording of the Pledge marginalizes atheists, agnostics, humanists and other nontheists because it presents them as less patriotic, simply because they do not believe in God,” said Roy Speckhardt, executive director of the American Humanist Association. “We are encouraged by these findings, which suggest with even a small amount of education, more Americans are in favor

of restoring the Pledge to its original wording.”

One thousand American adults were surveyed. Among Christians, 21 percent supported the removal of “under God” from the Pledge. Forty-three percent of individuals of other faiths and 62 percent of individuals who identified with no particular faith also supported removing the phrase “under

God” from the Pledge of Allegiance. Over 90 percent of individuals who identify as atheists are in favor of the removal of the phrase “under God.”

The full study can be viewed here: http://americanhumanist.org/system/storage/2/7e/7/5239/Report3_-_AHA_Pledge_Survey_June_2014-2.pdf



Winter Garden ends prayers, requirement to stand for pledge

<http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/21322-winter-garden-ends-prayers-requirement-to-stand-for-pledge>

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and its local chapter, the Central Florida Freethought Community, have halted invocations at Winter Garden (Fla.) City Commission meetings.

On Aug. 28, Mayor Rees and the police chief ejected a local activist and member (<http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/21252-atheist-group-condemns-mayor-police-chief-for-ejecting-citizen-who-refused-to-stand-for-prayer>) [who FFRF pseudonymously calls John Thoreau] from the meeting for refusing to stand for the invocation and the Pledge of Allegiance. FFRF wrote a letter (<http://ffrf.org/images/lwintergarden.pdf>) protesting this appalling violation of the Constitution.

FFRF asked the Commission to “get rid of prayer altogether” and asked Mayor Rees to explain at the next public meeting “that citizens are within their rights to remain sitting for the pledge and that it does not reflect a lack of patriotism.”

The commission held a special meeting on September 5th and voted 3-2 to substitute a moment of silence for an invocation. Mayor Rees voted to keep the invocation, one of only two commissioners to do so. Four CFFC members, including Thoreau and chapter leader, David Williamson spoke out against the prayers.

“Thoreau” told FFRF Attorney Andrew Seidel, who wrote FFRF’s letter, that he is “very pleased with the commission’s decision.”

Seidel added, “We’re happy that the commission has decided to be inclusive instead of divisive. Religion has no place in the halls of government.”

Freedom From Religion Foundation debuts ‘Out of the Closet, Freethinkers’ video campaign

<http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/21251-ffrf-debuts-out-of-the-closet-freethinkers-video-campaign>

The nation’s largest freethought association is debuting a new “friendly neighborhood atheist” video campaign to showcase the growing numbers of unbelievers in the United States.

The Madison, Wis.-based Freedom From Religion Foundation, with more than 21,500 members nationwide working to keep religion out of government, is “calling all nonbelievers to come out of the closet.”

“Although the nonreligious — including one in five U.S. citizens — is a significant segment of the world population, many Americans have never knowingly met a nonbeliever,” notes FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

FFRF says you can “help dispel myths, educate and promote reason by adding your voice, face and message to FFRF’s friendly neighborhood freethinker campaign. This is your chance to proclaim you’re a freethinker and why. It’s working for the gay rights movement. Now it’s time for atheists and agnostics to come out of our closet.”

“Many faces make enlightenment work,” notes Bill Dunn, editor of FFRF’s newspaper, *Freethought Today*. Dunn is one of about 20 FFRF staffers, interns, volunteers or student workers who recorded a short video statement to launch the campaign. Raised a Catholic, Dunn recalls carrying a card in his billfold to alert emergency responders, “In case of accident, please call a priest.” Forty years after leaving the church, Dunn says, “Now if you find me alongside the road after an accident, please call an ambulance and an EMT.”

Charlotte Stein, a part-time FFRF staffer who just came back from a stint in Morocco in the Peace Corps, noted she’s come to three conclusions that dictate how she leads her secular life. “One: I find people of faith to be more exclusionary and less accepting. Two, I’d rather work to please the people around me whom I care about than something that to my knowledge doesn’t exist. And three, I would rather help people than pray for them.”

University of Wisconsin-Madison law student Jarvis Idowu, one of FFRF’s capable legal interns, notes: “The religions of today are the entertainment of tomorrow. Everyone, I hope, is an atheist about Zeus and Apollo and Poseiden. I just added Jesus and Muhammad to that list.”



“I’m an atheist because our universe is far more amazing than the paltry miracles of the bible. I’m an atheist for the same reason you are an atheist about Allah, Osiris and Thor,” says FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.

“We’re undertaking this campaign because we think freethinkers are our movement’s best advertisement, and we’re very proud

of the statements of our staff and other members,” says Co-President Dan Barker. His video briefly recounts his odyssey from evangelist to godless, noting, “I threw out the bathwater, and there was no baby there.”

Also posted are brief statements by bible scholar and agnostic Bart Ehrman; Michael Nugent, co-founder of Atheist Ireland; Candace Gorham, the North Carolina author of *“The Ebony Exodus Project: Why Some Black Women Are Walking Out on Religion — and Others Should Too”* and Mandisa Thomas, founder of Black Nonbelievers, among others.

FFRF asks participating nonbelievers to record a brief statement of 60 seconds or less, upload it to YouTube and submit it to FFRF to post on its website with many other “out of the closet” freethinkers. Directions for participating in the campaign are found here: <http://ffrf.org/video-landing>.

Study: Science and Religion Really Are Enemies After All

Chris Mooney

<https://richarddawkins.net/2014/09/study-science-and-religion-really-are-enemies-after-all/>

Are science and religion doomed to eternal “warfare,” or can they just get along? Philosophers, theologians, scientists, and atheists debate this subject endlessly (and often, angrily). We hear a lot less from economists on the matter, however. But in a recent paper, Princeton economist Roland Bénabou and two colleagues unveiled a surprising finding that would at least appear to bolster the “conflict” camp: Both across countries and also across US states, higher levels of religiosity are related to lower levels of scientific innovation.

“Places with higher levels of religiosity have lower rates of scientific and technical innovation, as measured by patents per capita,” comments Bénabou. He adds that the pattern persists “when controlling for differences in income per capita, population, and rates of higher education.”

That’s the most salient finding from the paper by Bénabou and his colleagues, which uses an economic model to explore how scientific innovation, religiosity, and the power of the state interact to form different “regimes.”

The three kinds of regimes that they identify: a secular, European-style regime in which religion has very little policy influence and science garners great support; a repressive, theocratic regime in which the state and religion merge to suppress science; and a more intermediate, American-style regime in which religion and science both thrive, with the state supporting science and religions (mostly) trying to accommodate themselves to its findings.

It is in the process of this inquiry on the relationship between science, religion, and the state that the researchers dive into an analysis of patents, both in the United States and across the globe. And the results are pretty striking.

Victor J. Stenger dies

A tribute by National Center for Science Education

<http://ncse.com/news/2014/08/victor-j-stenger-dies-0015842>



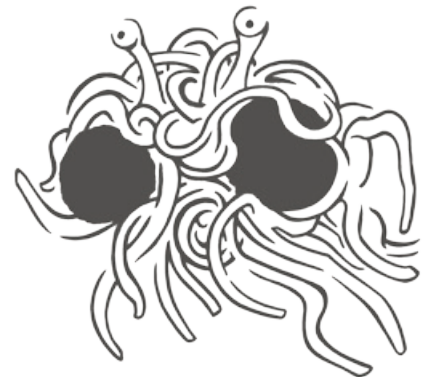
Victor Stenger

The physicist and popular science writer Victor J. Stenger died on August 27, 2014, at the age of 79. Toward the end of his long career as a research scientist, Stenger began devoting his efforts toward popular writing. He continued explaining physics and arguing for atheism long after retiring from his academic career. Among his works (all published by Prometheus Books) were *Not by Design* (1988), *Physics and Psychics* (1990), *The Unconscious Quantum* (1995), *Timeless Reality* (2000), *Has Science Found God?* (2003), *The Comprehensible Cosmos* (2006), *God: The Failed Hypothesis* (2007), *Quantum Gods* (2009), *The New Atheism*

(2009), *The Fallacy of Fine-Tuning* (2011), *God and the Folly of Faith* (2012), and *God and the Atom* (2013). A final book, *God and the Multiverse*, is forthcoming in 2014.

Stenger was a consistent and vehement opponent of creationism in all of its forms. In his “Physics, Cosmology, and the New Creationism,” his contribution to Andrew J. Petto and Laurie R. Godfrey’s *Scientists Confront Creationism: Intelligent Design and Beyond* (2007), for example, he contended, “Modern variations of the ancient argument from design form the basis of the new creationism — so-called ‘intelligent design’ theory. These arguments amount to nothing really new and are just restatements — in ostensibly more sophisticated language of the common-sense view — that the universe and life appear to be too complex to have happened without supernatural intervention. However, the new creationism poses as science. Despite their pretense of scientific legitimacy, several of the claims of this new ‘science’ are provably wrong” (emphasis in original).

Stenger was born in Bayonne, New Jersey, on January 29, 1935. He received a B.S. in electrical engineering from Newark College of Engineering in 1956, followed by a M.S. in 1958 and a Ph.D. in physics in 1963 from the University of California, Los Angeles. He was a member of the Department of Physics at the University of Hawaii from 1963 to 2000, with stints visiting at the University of Heidelberg, Oxford University, and the Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare in Italy. After he retired from the University of Hawaii, he was adjunct professor of philosophy at the University of Colorado. A Fellow of the Center for Inquiry and the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, he served as president of the Hawaii Humanists from 1990 to 1994 (and was named the Hawaii Humanist of the Year in 1992) and as president of Colorado Citizens for Science from 2002 to 2006.



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.

The 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>.)

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) normally meets at 7:00 on the 2nd Monday of every month at Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Gwinnett, 12 Bethesda Church Road, Lawrenceville, GA. However, their next meeting is Mon. Sept. 8th. The topic is "Rights and Responsibilities for the Non-Theist." (<http://www.meetup.com/brights-295/>.)

Recovery from Religion - Morrow Chapter is having the September meeting at Barnes & Noble Booksellers Southlake, 1939 Mount Zion Road, on Sat. September 13 at 1:00 pm.

We will meet to discuss issues directly related to religious indoctrination, struggles faced, and how to better overcome them. For more information and resources, please visit www.recovering-fromreligion.org. (<http://www.meetup.com/Recovering-From-Religion-Morrow-Chapter/>)

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta atheists** on Sunday, September 14, at 6:00 p.m. at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/>)

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

IIG Atlanta will have its monthly meetup on September 20 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/AtlantaSkeptics/events/197442482/>.

Atlanta Skeptics will have its Sept. 20 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.atlantaastronomy.org>)

Atlanta Astronomy Club will have its September 20th beginners astronomy meeting from 2-2:30 and the general meeting from 3-5 at Fernbank Science Center, 156 Heaton Park Drive, Atlanta, GA 30307. (<http://www.atlantaastronomy.org>)

Black Nonbelievers will have their Sept 20 general meeting at 2:00 p.m. at Atlanta Public Library - Main Downtown Branch, 1 Margaret Mitchell Square. There will be a special presentation on the acclaimed children's book series, *Jupiter Strong*. Created by Kelly Abel and Frank Edwards, they will be discussing the origins, as well as the importance of fostering critical thinking in children.

Please join us for this fun, yet very informative event - and bring your entire family! Refreshments will be provided, and there will be merchandise available for purchase. For more information and to order the series online, please visit www.jupiterstrong.com. General information can be found at www.blacknonbelievers.org (<http://www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers/>)

The Atlanta Science Tavern is meeting at Manuel's Tavern, Sat., Sept 27, 7:00 pm, \$3.00 for non-students. The topic is "**Vulnerability, adolescent brain development, and the emergence of psychosis**" by **Elaine Walker**, Candler Dobbs Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience, Emory University.

Schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders typically have their onset during late adolescence or young adulthood. While the specific origins are still unknown, researchers are gaining new insights by studying brain changes that occur during adolescence and prior to the first sign of clinical symptoms. The findings from this research

are providing new insights into both normal and abnormal brain development, and are setting the stage for clinical trials of preventive intervention.

This presentation will provide an overview of the congenital origins of vulnerability to psychosis, from molecular genetics to psychosocial stress, and describe the nature and trajectory of the brain mechanisms that appear to give rise to the first psychotic episode. (<http://www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern>)

Another **meetup for Atlanta atheists** is scheduled for Sun., September 28 at 4:00 p.m. at Five Seasons Brewery, 5600 Roswell Rd, in Sandy Springs. (<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists>)

Sunday Assembly Atlanta normally meets on the third Sunday, but will meet on the 28th in September. The meeting will be held at 6:00 p.m. at SAA Venue, 3580 Pierce Dr., Suite 160, Chamblee and the theme this month is "Equality."

We will be discussing what equality means, why it's important and how we can make it happen! To equalize, we will:

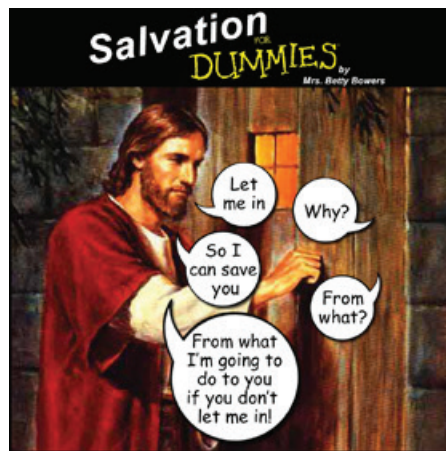
- Learn what it means to be equal (and unequal)
- Discover how we all experience equality and inequality a little differently
- Find out what we all share in common, no matter who we are
- Sing songs of troubled times and equal experience - And a few surprises!

Our lineup:

- MC forthcoming - Laura Hopkins will share "I'm doing my best"
- Scott Szymanski will share his experience of equality, how we can define it and some small, everyday ways we can bring it about
- The Joes will be leading the music

After the Assembly, we will be having our usual potluck! Make sure everyone gets an equal chance at the fixins! Our venue is wheelchair accessible. *Per our new normal, this will ONLY be posted on Meetup. Please RSVP on Meetup. For more about the global movement, check out: <http://sundayassembly.com/about/> (<http://www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly/>)

Freedom From Religion Foundation has not yet posted an event for September. Last month they met at Atlanta Freethought Hall on the 4th Sunday, so watch this space for further information. <http://www.meetup.com/Freedom-From-Religion-Foundation-of-Georgia/>



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Sustaining memberships: One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.

Life memberships: Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A life membership lasts a lifetime.

Paper newsletter: We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.)

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

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

—James Madison, 1774

We still have these great books for sale:

Why I Am Not A Christian—\$8

Lucid, comprehensive, engaging answer to Christian apologists by Keith Parsons. Respectful but devastating to all Christian claims. A wonderful follow-up to Bertrand Russell's great essay with the same title.

An Uppity Old Atheist

Woman's Dictionary—\$8

By the late, great Carol Faulkenberry (illustrated by Amanda Faulken-berry); like Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*—but better: more biting, funnier. Guaranteed to make you laugh out loud and to challenge at least one idea you hold.

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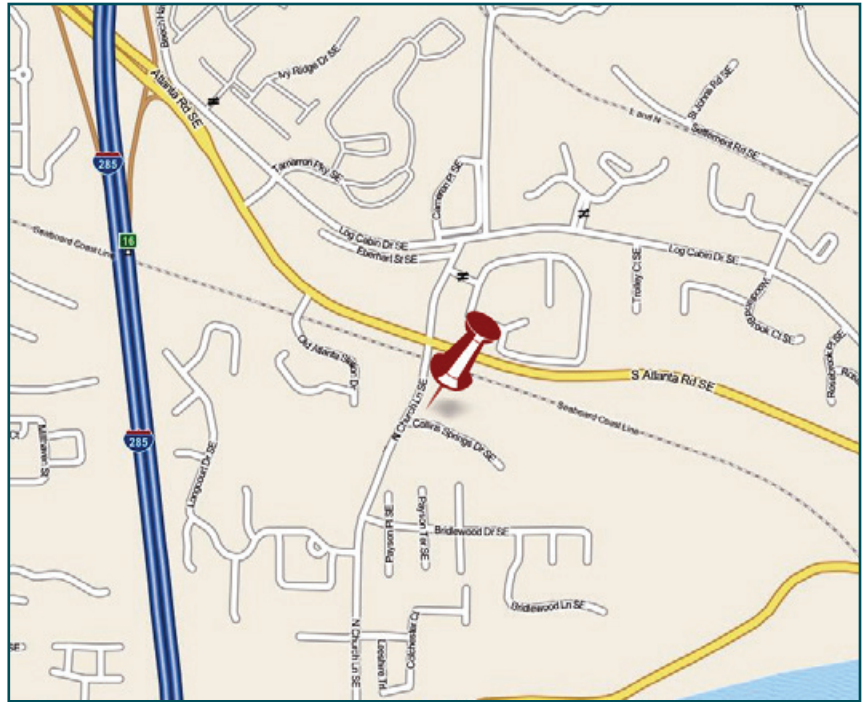
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*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**The September 14th
Meeting:
1:00 at AF Hall,
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Leah Mickens**



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