

The November AFS Meetings

Nov. 9: Bob Truett, Director Emeritus, Birmingham Zoo.
“What is this Thing Called Love?”

Nov. 22: Ryan Bell (“Year Without God” “Life After God”)
and Rev. Gretta Vosper (“With or Without God, Amen”)



Bob Truett

Our speaker on Nov. 8 is **Bob Truett** whose topic is “What is this Thing Called Love?” He has a background in zoology and a lifelong passion for studying the wild creatures that inhabit our world. He has a BS in Zoology from the University of Arkansas and was an undergraduate instructor, teaching Comparative Vertebrate Morphology and Embryology.

Upon graduation, Bob became an army officer and a U.S. Army Ranger, and in his second year of active duty married **Lisa Vila Wys** of Ponce, Puerto Rico (they’ve been together 59 years, so he’s qualified to speak on his subject!).

Bob has worked in four public zoos: Alum Rock Park Zoo in San Jose, CA; the Cincinnati Zoo; the Lincoln Park Zoo of Chicago under **Marlin Perkins**; and for 30 years was the Director of the Birmingham Zoo. He had a weekly television show on the Alabama state-wide educational TV network for 20 years.

He bought 110 acres of forest land before retiring and made a nudist park, calling it Gymno-Vita Park. It’s been in operation for 36 years and is the only park in Alabama for two-gender couples and families with children.

Our speakers on Nov. 22 are **Rev. Gretta Vosper** (author of *With or Without God, Amen*, www.grettavosper.ca/) and



Rev. Gretta Vosper

Ryan Bell, writer of the “Year Without God” and “Life After God” blogs www.lifeaftergod.org/, come together for the first time to share their respective stories about leading lives of faith within Christian traditions and how they came to let go of the theistic God and

Calendar

11/9 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.m.
 11/22 AFS 30th Anniversary 12:00 p.m.
 11/22 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: www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought

claim atheism.

Bell, a former Seventh Day Adventist pastor, decided to spend a year living as if God did not exist. Vosper came out to her congregation as an atheist in 2001 and continues to minister to a United Church of Canada congregation through a contemporary redefining and reimagining of the symbols and non-exclusive language of post-theistic faith, though it looks like the UCC now will be doing a form of a heresy trial.



Ryan Bell

Together they offer a challenge to traditional faiths and an invitation to the “nones” (those who refuse to identify with any particular faith tradition), the fastest growing demographic in the USA, especially among Millennials.

Both are members of the Clergy Project (Gretta is a board officer), a support community for current and former religious professionals without supernatural beliefs. Ryan recently started his “Life After God” project to help people wrestling and questioning in the liminal space between theism and atheism, and Gretta is a senior advisor/consultant for his project.

For the latest in upcoming AFS events, join our Meetup group!
meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society

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 8: Bob Truett, Director Emeritus, Birmingham Zoo, “What is This Thing Called Love?”

Nov 22: Ryan Bell (“Year Without God”) & **Rev. Gretta Vosper**
(*With or Without God, Amen*)

Dec 13: Sarah Green, Tennessee Regional Director for American Atheists

Jan 10: TBD

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 facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought. For calendar information on AFS activities, please join the [Meetup group](https://Meetup.com). The AFS website is www.atlantafreethought.org.

To keep up to date on the Atlanta Freethought Society calendar of upcoming events, please join our Meetup group: meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society.

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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Editor: Laura Ross
Assistant Editor: Steve Yothment

How to Contact the Editor

Send correspondence to AFS at:
4775 N. Church Lane SE,
Atlanta, GA 30080-7224,
phone Laura at 404-634-1005, or send
e-mail to Laura@LauraRossDesign.com

Atlanta Freethought Society President

Laura Ross – 404-634-1005

VP for Internal Communication

Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

VP for External Communication

Paul Broman – 678-237-2645

Secretary

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Diane Buckner – 770-432-3049

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Mark Banks – 770-354-1546

Mike Bucki – 404-550-0596

Michael Buckner – 404-633-2486

Freya Harris – Not available

Jack Egger – 770-434-0470

Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020

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Send E-mail to
afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Wordpress specialist: Dwight Lyman
AFS Facebook page: Laura Ross

Pentagon Problems: Family Research Council VP Once Paid Christian Missionaries To Spy For America

Sarah Jones in Wall of Separation

<https://www.au.org/blogs/wall-of-separation/pentagon-problems-family-research-council-vp-once-paid-christian>

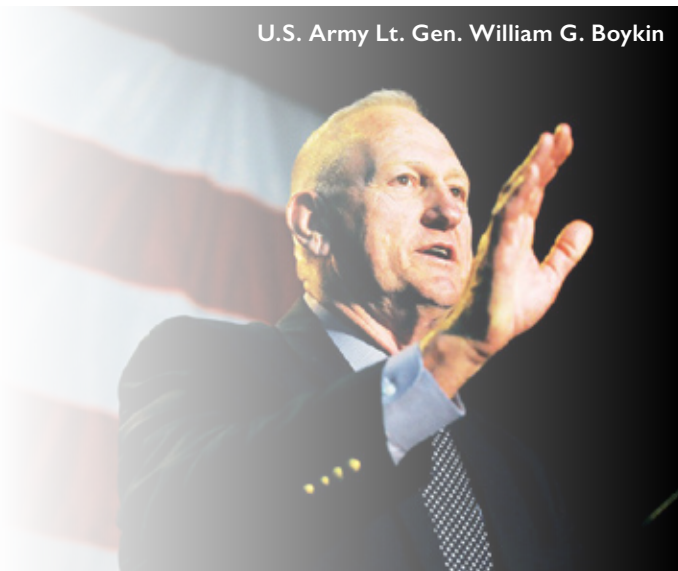
The Pentagon paid evangelical missionaries to spy on North Korea, The Intercept's Matthew Cole reported on Monday.

Ken Hiramine, formerly the president of Humanitarian International Services Group (HISG), acted as a Pentagon spy from 2004 to 2006. But before Hiramine was a spy, he was an aid worker. He was not, however, a secular aid worker. Instead, he was a missionary who used shipments of donated clothing to disguise smuggled Bibles. He had to be cautious because North Korea, whose regime enforces an idiosyncratic version of communism, forbids proselytization.

If Hiramine managed to penetrate the insular state, reasoned Pentagon officials, perhaps he could smuggle surveillance equipment, too. And since it has been extremely difficult to gather any intelligence on the notoriously secretive North Korean government, defense officials were apparently open to unusual solutions.

"Hiramine, in his role as CEO of HISG, tapped Christian missionaries, aid workers, and Chinese smugglers to move equipment into and around North Korea — none of whom had any idea that they were part of a secret Pentagon operation," Cole wrote.

Sam Worthington, who heads an international network of non-governmental organizations, told Cole that the program "violated international principles." It may have also violated the First Amendment. These missionaries—with the exception of Hiramine—carried out their evangelistic work on the government's dime.



U.S. Army Lt. Gen. William G. Boykin

U.S. Army Lt. Gen. William G. Boykin

Thus the Pentagon may have directly funded Christian proselytization.

But that didn't trouble the Pentagon official who created the program. During his tenure as deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence, U.S. Army Lt. Gen. William G. "Jerry" Boykin created and managed the program until he retired in 2007. He now works for the Family Research Council (FRC) as its executive vice president.

Cole called the program Boykin's "brainchild." He used his position not only to pay Hiramine and his missionaries to spy, but to create work for his

Membership Renewals & Board and Officer Elections

Next month is Atlanta Freethought membership renewal time. Your dues go to paying down our mortgage on AF Hall, purchasing supplies and refreshments, printing this newsletter, repair of equipment, paying Georgia Power and the water bill, internet services, and paying honorariums to our fantastic speakers.

Atlanta Freethought is a completely member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputations of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists, and humanists.



Be sure to help fund this important work by paying your dues. Individual membership is \$50 a year per person or \$20 per year for low income. Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Some of the AFS Board Members and all of the Officers' term limits are up at the end of December 2015, so it is time for elections. To vote for the candidates or even to run for office, you must have paid your yearly dues for 2015. Ballots will be mailed to all who have paid their dues and must be mailed back or brought to the December 13 meeting.

fundamentalist friends.

The Pentagon needed to hide the source of HISG's funding, so it funneled the money through a private fund expressly created for the purpose. That fund—the New Millennium Trust—donated the money in turn to the Working Partners Foundation. Boykin appointed a "dear friend" to head the latter foundation. A Pentagon source called the project a "jobs program" for Boykin's friends and former colleagues.

Boykin, of course, is a notable extremist. In 2004—the same year he tapped Hiramine to spy—the U.S. Department of Defense reprimanded him for sectarian speeches he made while in uniform.

He's not so fond of President Obama. In 2013,

"Missionary" Continued next page

Freedom From Religion Foundation objects to Mississippi park filled with Christian displays

<http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/24542-ffrf-objects-to-miss-park-filled-with-christian-displays#sthash.sy8ij76c.dpuf>

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has sent a letter of complaint to the city of Collins, Miss., asking that the city remove its large collection of Christian displays from Bettie D. Robertson Memorial Park.

A local resident reported that the park includes three large crosses, a statue of Jesus carrying a cross, a globe reading “City of Collins” above a picture of Jesus and a bible verse, a miniature church, and Christmas light figures, including Jesus walking on water. Some of the figures are featured in an annual “Christmas in the Park” light display, but remain up year round.

“All of the above religious displays are unconstitutional,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell in a letter to the city on



Oct. 19. “The Establishment Clause prohibits government sponsorship of religious messages,” she said, and in particular, “the religious significance of the Latin cross is unambiguous and indisputable.”

“In its current state, Bettie C. Robertson Memorial Park is tremendously unwelcoming to non-Christian citizens,” Cavell wrote. “Citizens of all faiths and no faith have an equal right to use city parks without being surrounded by symbols promoting any one religion. A city cannot have a ‘Christian’ park.”

FFRF’s letter concludes asking the city to immediately remove all religious displays from the park “to eliminate the appearance of government endorsement of religion.”

“Missionary” Continued

he lamented the fact that the military cannot forcibly remove Obama from office.

“People I’ve spoken to would like to see the military ‘fulfill their constitutional duty and take out the president,’” he told WorldNetDaily. “Our Constitution puts a civilian in charge of the military and as a result a coup would not be constitutional. You’re not going to see a coup in the military.”

Boykin also accused Obama of plotting a “Marxist insurgency” backed by a secret military force in 2010. He has argued repeatedly that Islam doesn’t merit First Amendment protection and advocated a ban on the construction of mosques. And, like most Religious Right figureheads, he’s a firm believer in the myth of Christian “persecution.”

At one point not long ago he became enraged by reports that the Military Religious Freedom Foundation’s Mikey Weinstein met with Pentagon officials to discuss proselytization within the ranks, and Boykin claimed that Christians would face imminent persecution as a result.

“If this policy goes forward, Christians within the military who speak of their faith could be prosecuted as enemies of the state. This has the potential to destroy military recruiting across the services as Americans realize that their faith will be suppressed by joining the military. Our brave troops deserve better. If chaplains and other personnel are censored from offering the full solace of the Gospel, there is no religious freedom in the military,” he blustered.

There was, of course, no “policy” to criticize. It has long been illegal for members of the military to proselytize their brothers and sisters in arms.

But in a twist worthy of Alanis Morissette, it’s Boykin himself who put Christians in danger. He has in effect painted a target on every Christian missionary and aid worker deployed to a hostile country. Moreover, he arguably violated the religious freedom rights of HSG employees. Most had no idea they were participating in a Pentagon-funded program. They simply believed they were performing ordinary aid work—albeit with an evangelical ethos. It’s reasonable to speculate that many likely would have objected to the prospect of working for the Pentagon.

Boykin no longer works at the Pentagon and can no longer put anyone else in direct danger. But his decision to put missionaries in harm’s way without their consent should end his career as a voice on supposed “religious freedom,” too.

FOLLOWING 'FRIENDLY FIRE' BOMBING IN AFGHANISTAN

Nonbelief Relief gives grant to Doctors Without Borders, seeks donations from nonbelievers

<http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/24382-nonbelief-relief-gives-grant-to-doctors-without-borders-seeks-donations-from-nonbelievers#sthash.J2FEFUam.dpuf>

Nonbelief Relief (<http://ffrf.org/get-involved/nonbelief-relief-inc>), a new humanitarian agency for “atheists, agnostics, freethinkers and their supporters to improve this world, our only world,” is announcing its first grant: \$20,000 to Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières).



Nonbelief Relief is a venue for nonbelievers to give assistance as nonbelievers.

“We think it’s important that it be known that secularists are just as charitable, if not more charitable than the religious, but have simply lacked the infrastructure to give as a united group under the

banner of freethought,” says Nonbelief Relief President Annie Laurie Gaylor, who also serves as co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

The Nonbelief Relief board voted to give the grant following the Oct. 3 aerial bombing by the U.S. military of a Doctors Without Borders hospital in Kunduz, Afghanistan, killing 22 people: 12 staff members and 10 patients, including three children. Another 37 people, including 19 staff members, were injured.

The AC-130 aircraft “raked the medical compound with bursts of cannon fire, potentially even using high explosive incendiary munitions, for more than an hour,” according to The Washington Post.

“The attack constitutes a grave violation of International Humanitarian Law,” Doctors Without Borders noted, calling it an “attack on the Geneva Conventions” and a “war crime.” It’s seeking an unprecedented independent investigation by the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission.

The hospital is the only facility of its kind in northeastern Afghanistan and has provided free high level “life- and limb-saving trauma care” for four years. Last year, more than 22,000 patients received care there and more than 5,900 surgeries were performed.

The main hospital building housing the intensive care unit, emergency rooms and physiotherapy ward was repeatedly and “very precisely” hit during bombing raids at approximate 15-minute intervals between 2:08 and 3:15 a.m. “Patients who were unable to escape burned to death as they lay in their beds,” said a Doctors Without Borders press release.

“President Obama expressed regret over the tragic incident and offered his thoughts and prayers on behalf of the American people to the victims, their families and loved ones,” a White House statement said.

“Regret, thoughts and in particular prayers do not accomplish a thing,” said Dan Barker, Nonbelief Relief vice president and FFRF co-president.

“We know that ‘Nothing fails like prayer,’ in the words of FFRF’s principal

founder, Anne Nicol Gaylor. Freethinkers believe in ‘Good works, not long prayers,’ as Anne Royall, our country’s first secular lobbyist, put it,” Barker added.

Others on Nonbelief Relief’s board are: Lisa Strand, FFRF’s director of operations; Stephen Hirtle, FFRF’s chair and professor at the University of Pittsburgh; and Madison, Wis.-area businessman Jim Zerwick, who proposed the donation to Doctors Without Borders.

FFRF is the sole member of the charity. Individuals and FFRF members may add their donations to Doctors Without Borders by designating an online donation for Nonbelief Relief.

**Do not pass by my
epitaph, traveler.**

**But having stopped, listen
and learn, then go your
way.**

**There is no boat in Hades,
no ferryman Charon.**

**No caretaker Aiakos, no
dog Cerberus.**

**All we who are dead below
Have become bones and
ashes, but nothing else.**

**I have spoken to you
honestly, go on, traveler.**

**Lest even while dead I
seem talkative to you.**

**— Ancient Roman
Tombstone**

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 donnajgore@yahoo.com.

We Agnostics Atlanta meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Galano Club, 585 Dutch Valley Rd NE, Atlanta, GA 30324. Clubhouse phone number: (404) 881-9188. This is an Alcoholics Anonymous group.

Alpharetta Freethinkers Humanists & Atheists Meetup is a brand-new group meeting on the north side. Be sure to check out their meetup page for upcoming events. (www.meetup.com/Alpharetta-Freethinkers-Humanists-Atheists-Meetup/.)

Marietta Skeptic/Humanist Meetup has various get-togethers and discussion groups. Several upcoming events. (<http://www.meetup.com/Marietta-Atheists-Meetup/>)

The Peachtree City Humanists meet often for discussions at Starbucks, lunch, dinner at She's Bistro, and more. Several upcoming events each month. (www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH/.)

The Southern Crescent Freethinkers sponsor Navigators, Owl & Ibis: A Confluence of Minds, and meet for dinner, etc. Several upcoming events each month. (www.meetup.com/Southern-Crescent-Freethinkers)

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. (www.fellowshipofreason.com.)

The Georgia chapter of **Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF)** meets on the first Sunday of each month at AF Hall from 2:00-4:00 and you can learn more about their topics at www.meetup.com/Freedom-From-Religion-Foundation-of-Georgia.

Atlanta Astronomy Club will have their general meeting on Nov 14 from 3-5 pm at Fernbank Science Center, 156 Heaton Park Drive, Atlanta. Lots more events are available so check out the website (www.atlantaastronomy.org)

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta atheists** on Sunday, Nov. 8, at 6:00 p.m. at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/)

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) has their monthly meeting on Monday, Nov. 9, 6:00 p.m. at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Road, Lawrenceville. The topic is "Gratitude." (www.meetup.com/brights-295/.)

Recovery from Religion - Morrow Chapter meets on the second Saturday of each month at 1 p.m. at Barnes & Noble Booksellers Southlake, 1939 Mount Zion Road, Morrow, GA, however the next meeting listed is Nov. 14. There is no proselytizing of any kind allowed at these meetings. For more information and resources, please visit www.recoveringfromreligion.org. (www.meetup.com/Recovering-From-Religion-Morrow-Chapter/)

Atlanta Atheists Parents Meetup will have a play date at Medlock Park, 874 Gaylemon Cir, Decatur near the North Decatur/ Embury Hills area Nov. 15 at 11-2. If the weather is too cold or rainy

it will be at Leapin Lizards, 185 Sams St, Decatur, GA 30030. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheist-Parents-Meetup/.)

Black Nonbelievers will have their Sunday Nov. 15 meeting at 3 p.m. at the Metropolitan Branch - Atlanta-Fulton Library System, 1332 Metropolitan Parkway, Atlanta. The topic is "Surviving the Holidays: An Ongoing Series." The holiday season can be challenging for anyone, but more so for many Nonbelievers - especially if dealing with overly religious family members and friends. They will discuss the various perspectives about the season, whether it is tough (or not), and if being a member of BN has helped in any way. As always, refreshments will be provided. (www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers/)

Secular Atheist Study the Scriptures (SASS) of Gainesville has an event called "Genesis: Tackling the Biblical Creation Myth" on Sun. Nov 15 at 3 pm, at the Lake Lanier Club, 2350 Avonlea Way, Gainesville. (www.meetup.com/Secular-Atheist-Study-the-Scriptures-SASS-Gainesville/)

Sunday Assembly Atlanta is in the process of creating the November assembly, but at press time, information was not available.

They will meet Nov. 15 at 6:00 at First Existentialist Congregation, 470 Candler Park Dr NE, Atlanta. Please check out the meetup page for more information. (www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly/)

There will be a third Sunday meetup for **Atlanta Atheists** on Sunday, Nov. 15, at 7:00 p.m. at Salt Factory, 952 Canton Street, Roswell. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/)

Atlanta Skeptics - This month's meeting is a Special Event hosted by **Needles in a Haystack - Liberal Minds of North Fulton**. It will be held Sat., Nov. 21, 3-6:45 p.m. at Unitarian Universalist Metro Atlanta North Congregation, 11420 Crabapple Rd, Roswell, GA. Jeff Selman will share his experiences in the case of Evolution Vs Creationism where he brought the case to get Cobb County to

remove stickers on the biology text books. This is a potluck dinner so bring food and drink (alcohol is encouraged). There's a donation of \$5 to cover cost of the room. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics)

The Atlanta Science Tavern at press time does not have anything listed this month for the Nov. 22 Manuel's Tavern lecture series, and Manuel's will be closing for renovations in December. Be sure to check the meetup page. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern)

Atlanta Atheists Parents Meetup will have a play date at East Cobb Park, 3322 Roswell Rd, Marietta, near Marietta and Sandy Springs, Nov. 22 at 11-2. If the weather is too cold or rainy it will be at Catch Air at Town Center Market, 2505 Chastain Meadows Parkway Northwest, Suite #103, Marietta, GA 30066. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheist-Parents-Meetup/)

Another **meetup for Atlanta Atheists** is scheduled for Sun., Nov. 22 at 4:00 p.m. at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Rd, Sandy Springs. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/)

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



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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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"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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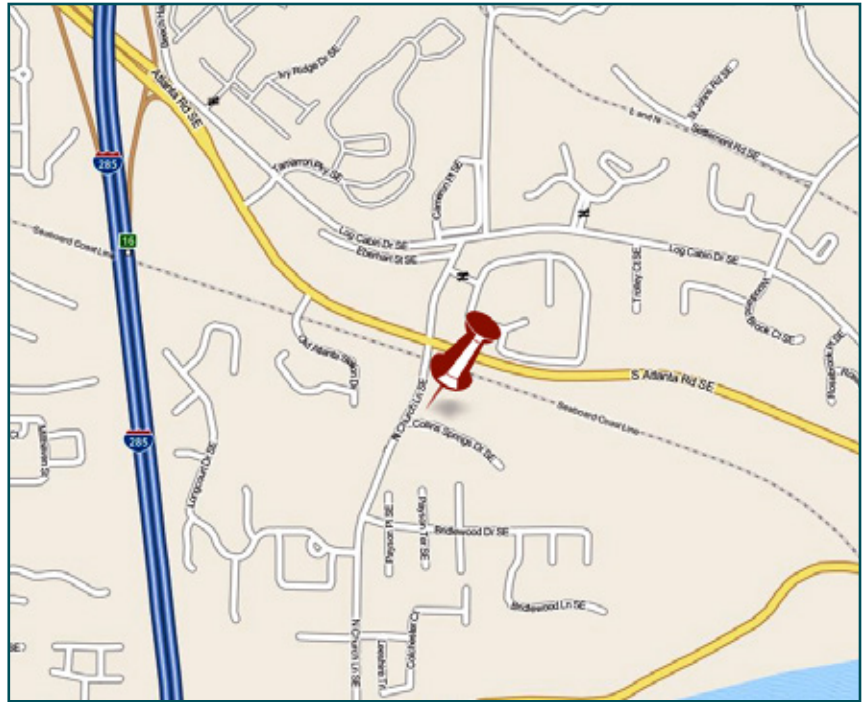
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*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**November meetings
1:00 at AF Hall,
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA**

**11/8: Bob Truett
11/22: Gretta Vosper
& Ryan Bell**



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