Number 9 - September 2018 **AFS Publication - Volume 24**

September AFS Meeting

Ed and Michael Buckner, "Religion and Politics in the Trump Era"

Our program for September will be "Politics and Religion in the Trump Era," a presentation and dis-



cussion led by father (Ed, the glib, talkative one) and son (Michael, the witty, well informed, clear writing-andarguing one) Buckner. This

Michael and Ed Buckner

will be on 9 September, Sunday at I p.m. (Come starting around noon for coffee and socializing; we'll probably go out to eat somewhere nearby afterwards.)

The Buckners will argue that the broad Christian support Trump has (especially among evangelical Christians) brings into real doubt any claims of moral superiority by theists. There will be details to support this and related claims provided as part of the program. But those who want to be well prepared to understand the subject and to participate in the discussion Ed and Michael will lead should read Michael's engaging essay, "The Moral Bankruptcy of Evangelical Christianity in America" on pages 3-4 in this issue.

Michael is a current board member for AFS and both Buckners have held various AFS leadership posts in the past. As Michael notes in his essay, the two co-wrote *In Freedom We Trust: An Atheist Guide to Religious Liberty* (Prometheus Books, 2012.)

Thank you to Steve Yothment who replaced the pavilion roof with help from Dennis Martin and Mark Banks!

Calendar

Sep 9 AFS Board Meeting II:00 a.m.
Sep 9 AFS General Meeting I:00 p.m.

Oct 14 Potluck lunch 12:00 p.m.
Oct 14 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: www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought







Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, 30339 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.

Sept 9: Ed and Michael Buckner, "Religion and Politics in the Trump Era"

Oct 14: Dale McGowan, "Getting Past Small Things Like God"

TBA

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@yahoogroups.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. The AFS Facebook page is at facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought. For calender information on AFS activities, please join the Meetup group. 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. Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

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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 30339,
phone Laura at 404-634-1005, or send
e-mail to Laura@LauraRossDesign.com
or luara.mom@gmail.com

2018 President

Laura Ross - 404-825-0258

2018 Treasurer

Diane Buckner - 770-432-3049

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Michael Buckner – 404-633-2486 Dwight Lyman – 404-825-0260 Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020 Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

Atlanta Freethought News

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AFS Wordpress specialist: Dwight Lyman
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The Moral Bankruptcy of Evangelical Christianity in America

By Michael Buckner

I have never been a fan of the Religious Right, but in the last few years, my thinking about them has shifted fairly sharply. I still don't like them, but now I don't like them for a whole new set of reasons. (I should stress at the out-



Michael Buckner

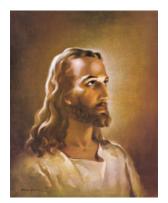
set that the various political views stated or implied in this essay belong only to the author, and not to Atlanta Freethought Society or any other organization—AFS is a 501(c)(3) organization, and cannot, should not, and does not endorse any candidate for any political office—although as will be shown, a considerable majority of my fellow non-religious Americans presumably share at least some of these ideas.)

For many years, I admit that deep down I feared that the Christian Right (the Moral Majority and its numerous descendants) were secretly a bunch of would-be theocrats, intent on subjecting America

to some kind of Protestant Fundamentalist version of Iran or the Taliban, with laws taken from Deuteronomy and Leviticus and maybe even public stonings of transgressors. Or at the very least, implementing Bible-based public policy sharply biased against gays and lesbians and transgender people, against women in general, and of course against all of us "godless" people. What I've come to realize since the 2016 election is that the Christian Right—and the "evangelical community" more generally—aren't really theocrats; by and large they're just hypocrites. American evangelicals aren't rigidly pious followers of biblical morality. Rather, they worship an American tribal God, the Long-Haired Caucasian Jesus. (See the 1940 Warner Sallman painting Head of Christ. You may think you've never heard of this particular work of art, but if you look it up, you'll probably recognize it immediately.) Not that being followers of biblical morality would be a good

thing; a consistently applied biblical morality really would be theocratic, male chauvinist, and murderously intolerant of LGBT people and all Americans who don't profess a theologically orthodox Christian viewpoint. (See my essay "The Unchristian Roots of the Fourth of July," or the book I co-authored with my father, In Freedom We Trust, for some discussions of the divergence between biblical and American morality.)

In 2016 it was Hillary Clinton who was the "church lady", the lifelong Methodist "dogooder." Donald Trump on the other hand was and is a completely "worldly" and blatantly corrupt narcissist, the father of five children by three different woman, who has had affairs—



"Head of Christ" by Warner Sallman, 1940

that we know of—with at least one porn star and with a Playboy Playmate, who bragged on tape about grabbing women by their you-know-whats and reportedly had a habit of barging in on half-naked underage beauty contestants, who made much of his money (however much money that may be) running gambling dens. Trump's religiosity was and is utterly unconvincing to anyone with even half a brain, yet over 80% of white evangelicals supported Trump; furthermore, Trump carried ALL major Christian sub-groups, but lost all major groups of Americans who aren't Christians by large margins. The exact numbers: White, born-again/evangelical Christians: 81% Trump, 16% Clinton. All Protestants/other Christians: 58% Trump, 39% Clinton.

All Catholics: 52% Trump, 45% Clinton. (White Catholics: 60% Trump, 37% Clinton. Hispanic Catholics: 67% Clinton, 26% Trump.) Mormons—sorry "members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints:" 61% Trump, 25% Clinton.

And on the other hand: Jews: 71% Clinton, 24% Trump. Adherents of "other faiths:" 62% Clinton, 29% Trump. And last but not least, the "religiously unaffiliated" (us, in other words, along with our fellow Americans who are "spiritual but not religious" or "apatheists"): 68% Clinton; 26% Trump. Note that you have to divide things up by race/ethnicity, not just religion, to find any major sub-group of American Christendom that was not carried by Trump. Whereas if it had been up to us atheist, agnostic, freethinking, secular humanist, and "none of above" Americans—or if it had been up to Jewish Americans, Muslim Americans, or Hindu Americans—the Methodist church lady would have won in a landslide.

Again, this wasn't a question of American Christians in general, or self-professed "evangelicals" in particular, flocking to some conservative Christian standard-bearer like **Mike Pence**. This was and is a question of the most smugly moralistic and allegedly pro-"family values" segment of the country constituting the so-far rock-solid political base of support for a man who (by their very own claimed standard of morality) is nothing more than a reprobate.

In retrospect, I suppose I should have seen it coming. The "handwriting on the wall" (to use a biblical phrase) has been clear for years. Back in 2006, Stephen Colbert (then still on Comedy Central) skewered Georgia's own Lynn Westmoreland, a Congressman who wanted to require the display of the Ten Commandments in the U.S. Congress...who it turned out struggled to actually name more than three of them. There was the man who attracted a degree of Internet derision a few years after that for having a tattoo quoting Leviticus 18:22 (which condemns male homosexuality as an "abomination"), when Leviticus 19:28 (a verse no more than a page or two away in any Bible, still widely available in hotel rooms across America) says, according to the popular New International Version, "Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the LORD." Or take the "Duck Dynasty" family, Phil Robertson and his sons, professedly devout Christians, several of whom were and are outspoken Trump supporters. From an interview with

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Moral Bankruptcy continued from page 3

the "family patriarch" Phil Robertson back in 2013 in GQ magazine:

What, in your mind, is sinful?

"Start with homosexual behavior and just morph out from there. Bestiality, sleeping around with this woman and that woman and that woman and those men," he says. Then he paraphrases Corinthians: "Don't be deceived. Neither the adulterers, the idolaters, the male prostitutes, the homosexual offenders, the greedy, the drunkards, the slanderers, the swindlers—they won't inherit the kingdom of God. Don't deceive yourself.

It's not right."

More specifically, that's a paraphrase from I Corinthians 6:9-10.

Well, check out that interview and note the pictures throughout the article: The men of Duck Dynasty not only have beards, they also tend to sport rather long hair on the rest of their heads. But in I Corinthians II:14-15, the Apostle Paul says: "Does not the very nature of things teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a disgrace to him, but that if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For long hair is given to her as a covering." Not only are both we



Phil Robertson

long hair is given to her as a covering." Not only are both verses from the New Testament, and from the letters of the Apostle Paul, they're from the same epistle, First Corinthians. (Not from some other epistle, like "Two Corinthians.")

American evangelicals have higher-than-average divorce rates—higher rates, in fact, than those of non-religious Americans. (See the article from Baylor University—a Baptist institution. Full disclosure: I'm divorced myself. Then again, I'm not the one going around pestering everybody else about their "family values.") According to a widely-reported 2009 study conducted by the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, American Evangelicals don't have premarital sex at a noticeably lower rate than other Americans (80% among evangelicals vs. 88% for Americans in general). The allegedly "family values" crowd don't have any better family values than the rest of us. These aren't even theocrats, just tribalistic bigots and xenophobes.

As a secular humanist I am certainly not saying that tattoos, or long or short hair, are anything other than esthetic choices, without moral or ethical significance. I have no general disapproval of premarital sex; the sex lives and love lives of consenting adults are none of my business. "No fault" divorce is a clear improvement over the days when people—perhaps especially women—too often lived lives of quiet desperation, trapped in loveless and even abusive marriages. What I am saying is that the morality of the self-professed "moral majority" crowd is a shallow, pick-and-choose morality in which white evangelicals wield a handful of Bible verses—ones that don't personally inconvenience them—as clubs to justify their bigotry. To use language they should understand, their religion is a "whited sepulchre", a whitewashed tomb, dazzling and clean on the outside, but full of rot and decay on the inside (Matthew 23:27).

In contrast to the often seemingly sex-obsessed morality of the Christian Right, Jesus is reported as having said "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God" (Luke 6:20) and "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19:24). Whatever one thinks about the propriety of income taxes, or what the most desirable schedule of tax brackets and rates should be—or the importance of multi-trillion-dollar deficits to the long-term health of the American republic—these supposed "Words of God" are very hard to square with the Christian piety of an Administration and a Congress whose only notable legislative achievement to date has been passing a

tax cut whose benefits vastly disproportionally accrue to the wealthiest fraction of one percent of Americans. **Paula White**, the woman who is reportedly Trump's "closest spiritual adviser" is a proponent of "Prosperity Theology" (and a woman pastor—"I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet"; I Timothy 2:12—once again, the Apostle Paul would not approve); of course, the rise of the "Prosperity Gospel" mega-churches was another sign of the moral rot of American evangelicalism.

The rise of Trump isn't just a political crisis; this isn't just a question of a president whose political priorities and public policies are possibly unwise. This country is in a moral crisis, in which the most basic values of fundamental decency-truth over lies, altruism over selfishness, kindness over cruelty—are under public attack. But this has nothing to do with, and is in fact even opposed to, calls for more religiosity. You can find many quotes from the Founding Fathers about the importance of morality and virtue in a republic like ours, and while at least some of those quotes are just fabrications by the "Christian Nation" revisionist history crowd, there is no question that the men who founded our country really did believe that morality and virtue are necessary to preserving the United States as a free country and a constitutional republic. For what it's worth, I think they were right about that. What the great secular humanist leader Paul Kurtz referred to as "the common moral decencies"—"altruism, integrity, honesty, truthfulness, and responsibility"are vital to any society, but especially one in which power rests with the people at large. (I'm not quite sure why the late Dr. Kurtz listed "honesty" and "truthfulness" separately; that's how they appear in the Affirmations of Humanism. Then again, in the Age of Trump—well-documented as one of the most mendacious politicians ever-emphasizing the importance of telling the truth isn't necessarily a bad thing.)

So, while the virtue of the people really is necessary to maintain a free and democratic society, as atheists, freethinkers, and humanists we now have no reason whatsoever to be the least bit defensive about our ethics or morality. Not that we ever did, but now there can't even be any pretence that religious piety and being an ethical and moral person are necessarily related. Of course this is not to say that those of our fellow Americans and human beings who do have religious beliefs can't also be moral or ethical—some of them, I'm sure, are good people!—only that the rise of Trump clearly demonstrates the utter moral bankruptcy of the "Religious Right."

Trump Had A Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. Let's Find Out What The Religious Right Thinks About That.

By Rob Boston/Wall of Separation Blog

www.au.org



You might have noticed that Tuesday, August 21st was not a good day for President Donald Trump.
Paul Manafort, Trump's former campaign manager, was found guilty of eight counts of financial crimes,

including five tax fraud charges, two counts of bank fraud and a charge of concealing foreign bank accounts.

Manafort's troubles aren't over yet. In September, he'll be tried on separate charges that he worked as a lobbyist for foreign countries without registering and laundered some of the money he made while doing it.

Also on August 21st, Michael Cohen, Trump's former personal lawyer, agreed to plead guilty to eight counts of campaign finance violations, tax fraud and bank fraud. Cohen, you will recall, is the guy who arranged to give adult film star Stormy Daniels \$130,000 in hush money so she'd keep quiet about a 2006 sexual tryst she allegedly had with Trump. As a CNN headline notes, Cohen has implicated Trump in the hush money scheme.

But wait, there's more! U.S. Rep. Duncan Hunt-

er (R-Calif.), one of Trump's earliest and most enthusiastic supporters, was indicted August 21st. He's accused (among other things) of stealing a quarter of a million dollars in campaign funds to take fancy trips and buy luxury goods.

Gosh, it sure sounds as if the president has surrounded himself with some people of questionable morals – and he may even be guilty of shady dealings himself. Surely the nation's Religious Right groups have something to say about this? After all, if these things were happening to a Democratic officeholder, if this amount of sleaze were oozing

out of the White House and flowing down Pennsylvania Avenue, I feel certain they'd speak out.

Alas, no! I visited the websites of three leading Religious Right groups this

Alas, no! I visited the websites of three leading Religious Right groups this morning where I saw nothing about Manafort, Cohen or Trump's ethical lapses.

At the Family Research Council (FRC), the top story is a hysterical, error-laden screed about a bill in California that would allegedly make it illegal to sell Bibles. (In reality, the measure places new curbs on "gay conversion" therapy for minors.) The only thing about Trump on the organization's homepage is an item at the bottom lauding him as a champion of religious freedom.

Over at the American Family Association, the group is unloading on the city of Chicago for being too violent. A video asserts that this is because people no longer respect the police. The rest of the homepage features the usual litany of AFA gay-bashing. The AFA's OneNewsNow site, a font of "fake news" if there ever was one, mentions Trump's troubles in passing but only in the context of highlighting a rally he held last night in West Virginia.

Ralph Reed's Faith & Freedom Coalition is focused on attacking Planned Parenthood and pushing Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the Supreme Court. Trump's troubles simply don't exist.

Now, I do expect all of these organizations to say something about these developments eventually. Sooner or later, they'll offer defenses of Trump. It seems that these self-appointed guardians of virtue, who are so quick to condemn LGBTQ people, progressives, feminists, non-believers, reproductive rights advocates, etc., can only condemn wrongdoing these days when it falls on one side of the political aisle.

The sadly deluded Americans who have chosen to cast their lot with these organizations may swallow this nonsense, but the rest of us know what's going on: The leaders and followers of the Religious Right decided to align with Trump, and now they're being dragged into his expanding pit of moral quicksand.

Good luck getting out of that.



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Other Meetings of Interest in Metro Atlanta

The Atlanta Science Tavern has several meetings planned. Please check meetup page for more information. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern)

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 similar to Alcoholics Anonymous group.

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

The Peachtree City Humanists participate in social and educational activities such as dinners, lunches, coffees, outdoor recreation, discussion groups, and book clubs with topics that include science, psychology, philosophy. (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)

Recovery from Religion - Morrow Chapter meets monthly at Barnes & Noble Booksellers Southlake, 1939 Mount Zion Road, Morrow, GA. Join the Meetup group for more information. 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)

There will be a **meetup for Decatur Atheists** Sun, Sept 9, 6 pm, Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) will meet at 7-9 pm, Mon. Sept 10 at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Rd, Lawrenceville. At press time, the topic had not yet been announced. (www.meetup.com/brights-295)

Freedom From Religion Foundation of Georgia will have a movie night/meeting on Sat, Sept 15, at Atlanta Freethought Hall from 7-9 pm. (www.ffrfga.org - email is ffrfofga@gmail.com)

Atlanta Astronomy Club will meet on the third Friday at 7:30 pm each month at Fernbank Science Center, 156 Heaton Park Dr, Atlanta, GA 30307 unless otherwise noted. This month's meeting will be Sept 21. Check website for more info. (www. atlantaastronomy.org)

There will be a **Third Sunday Meetup for Atlanta Atheists** Sun, Sept 16, 2 pm, Lean Draft House, 600 Hopkins St SW, Atlanta. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

Sunday Assembly Atlanta's upcoming assembly will be held

on Sun. Sept 23, 6:00 pm at First Existentialist Congregation, 470 Candler Park Dr NE, Atlanta. Note that the meeting is a week later than normal and starts 30 minutes later. At press time the subject had not yet been announced.

This is also a potluck supper. All are welcome. SAA is an extremely active community with a large number of upcoming events including rock chorus, secular support, mindfulness meditation, wonder club, urban wonder, book club, makers night out, volunteering, queer beyond belief group, public speaking series, trivia nights, etc. (www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly)

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta Atheists** Sun, Sept 23, 4 pm, 5 Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Rd, Prado Shopping Center, Sandy Springs. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

Ethical Humanists of Atlanta: Next meeting is Sun, Sept 23 12:30-2 pm at Manuel's Tavern, 603 N. Highland Ave, Atlanta. "Our shared task is to live decently, compassionately, and caringly in the world we inhabit." Come join the conversation. Ethical liv-

ing is the philosophy of making decisions for daily life which take into account ethics and moral values, particularly with regard to consumerism, sustainability, environmentalism, wildlife and animal welfare.

Any recently made decision have you questioning its ethical or moral value?

Maybe you're teetering or avoiding making a choice due to uncertainty.

There's no guarantee questions will be answered, nor an action plan fully evolved, but trust good conversation to occur. Come and let's learn from one another; building forward one step at a time. (www.meetup.com/Ethical-Humanists-of-Atlanta)

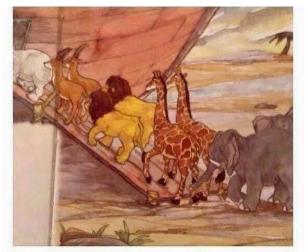
Atlanta Skeptics has "Drinking Skeptically" on the first Friday of each month. 5 Seasons Brewing, Prado

Shopping Center, 5600 Roswell Rd, Sandy Springs. (www. meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics)

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

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)

Black Nonbelievers will have their 2018 Convention at Sea starting Sat, Nov 24. Black Nonbelievers will host their second annual Convention at Sea in 2018 aboard the Carnival Sensation sailing out of Miami, Florida and going to Grand Turk (Turks and Caicos), and the Dominican Republic! Join them for some great shore excursions, ship activities, and their convention. Cabins start at \$750 per person double occupancy. Speakers for 2018 include: Jeremiah Camara, Bridgett Crutchfield, Candace Gorham, Monette Richards, Mandisa Thomas, Detryck Von-Doom. Please register here - You won't want to miss out this time! (www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers)



Good luck breeding those lions!

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(Or renew your membership with this form or online at www.AtlantaFreethought.org!)

as the social and activist events that we sponsor! voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment of the superb speakers we have coming up, as well Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed monthly newsletter, the Atlanta Freethought News, If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiastically invite you to join the Atlanta Freethought

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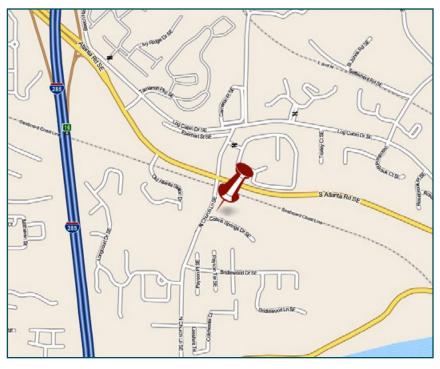
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ls artwork for sale? Yes / No \$Upon sale owner agrees to pay AFS a 33.3% fee.
Terms: All artwork displays will be submitted to Atlanta Freethought Society art committee for approval (afs@atlantaf-reethought.org). Installation & removal will be done by artist/owner overseen by AFS art committee. Damage to building will be repaired by artist/owner. The owner assumes all risk for artwork at all times. AFS will not be responsible for any damage or loss while artwork is in our posession.
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I:00 at AF Hall 4775 N. Church Lane SE Atlanta, GA 30339

Ed & Michael Buckner



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