

Samuel W. Whitehead - "The Truth Shall Make You Free: How an All-American, Southern Boy, and Preacher Became an Atheist" (via Zoom)

Sam Whitehead was raised in a strict religious family and was a teenage preacher. At age twenty-two he began a forty-year quest of research and reflection to prove that his faith was the one "true" religion and that God was real. He



Samuel W. Whitehead

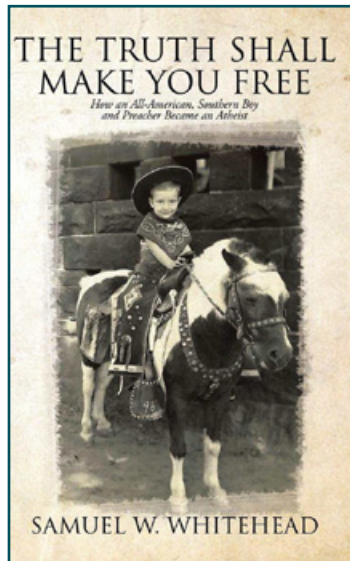
reluctantly came to the conclusion that there is no God and that no religion is real.

Staunch believers in God and readers who are trying to find their own truth will find Sam's journey compelling. It moves from Alabama to Ohio and

back to the Deep South in Atlanta. This serious work challenges believers to live up to their creed and reflects the humor in many situations along the way.

Sam was born in northeast Alabama and spent some of his early years in Cleveland, Ohio. In the late 1950s, his family moved to the Atlanta area, where he still lives.

Sam holds an MBA degree from Georgia State University with a major in finance. He retired from a lengthy and varied career with one of the largest petroleum transportation companies in the world. Most of his work was in human resources



management and public affairs. Sam has been married to his lovely wife, Vicki, on and off, for 40 years.

The talk/book:

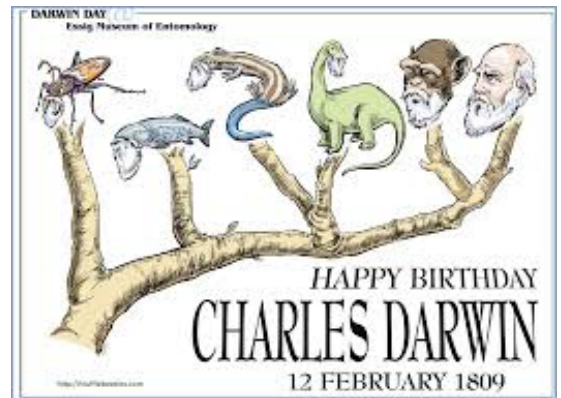
Sam will explain why an early working title of his book was "I'm an atheist and I'm not happy about it." He will speak about present significant experiences during his religious period, and how his faith destructed.

If there is time, Sam will include his experience with a talking cat, a wayward parakeet, as well as a guaranteed solution to homelessness, a Rebel with a Cause, and Paul Revere's Ride.

AFS February Meeting

February 14, 2021 1:00-2:30 PM (EST)

To join Zoom meeting go to link below:
us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911



Calendar

Mar 14 General Meeting on Zoom 1 pm
Apr 11 General Meeting on Zoom 1 pm

All events are via Zoom unless noted and are subject to change.

 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, 30339 unless presented online due to global pandemic (see link on page 1). Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:30 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.

March 14: Bill Cooke

April 11: Paul Armstrong

May 9: Jim Underdown

June 13: Kathleen Johnson

July 11: Anthony Pinn (?)

August 8: Kenneth Copp

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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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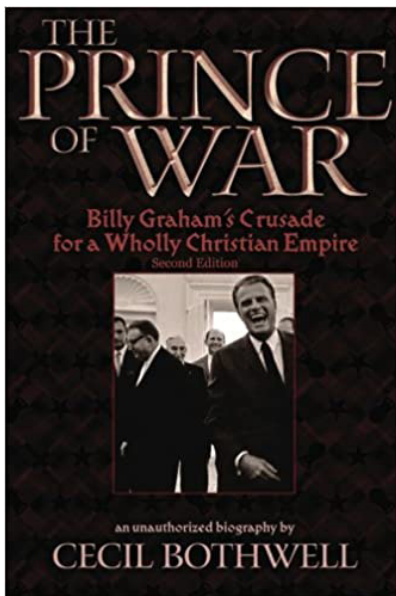
Review of Cecil Bothwell's *The Prince of War*

By Freya Harris

After I exchanged e-mails with Cecil Bothwell about my Noah's Ark book, he sent me a free copy of this, his exposé of notorious evangelist **Billy Graham**. I thank Bothwell for the book, and having read it I can definitely recommend it.

Billy Graham was one of the most influential evangelists of the latter half of the 20th Century, and he had fingers in a lot of pies. He hobnobbed with Presidents and business tycoons while he sought to build up his religious empire that encompassed radio and TV stations, magazines, and non-profit organizations. He professed to be a spiritual leader and a devout Christian, while raking in the cash and encouraging war and violence. He was never above out-and-out lying in order to make a point or further a pet cause.

The Prince of War is a good read, with short but meaty chapters, each of which reveals a different facet of Graham and the sway he held. Bothwell exposes Graham's opposition to labor unions and the Civil Rights movement, his support of the Vietnam War and other conflicts, and his indifference towards the suffering of native peoples who were displaced or slaughtered to



make way for corporations to exploit resources such as oil. Bothwell is seldom judgmental, allowing the facts and findings to speak for themselves most of the time. He dissects Graham's character, exposing him as a moral chameleon who clearly opposed the Reverend Dr. King's civil rights crusade and then claimed he was in the vanguard, even though he once advised the beloved civil rights leader to "put the brakes on a little bit."

Graham claimed time and again that we are in the "end times" and the Apocalypse was just around the corner. (Same song, second verse...) Recordings of him talking with President Nixon expose his anti-Semitism, and Nixon's as well. He took stances

on issues for political expediency and for the benefit of his wealthy friends, rather than for moral or ethical reasons. He claimed to regret things he said earlier in his career in hopes that people would forget attitudes and expressions that had become unacceptable in mainstream society. Graham was a wind sock, not the wind, pointing in whatever direction political attitudes were going at the time for the sake of his image.

Bothwell pulls no punches, laying bare a multitude of Graham's sins, if not all of them. Even if he did cherry-pick, he found plenty of toothsome cherries. Far from being a genuine Christian, Graham was in the preacher business for the money, power and prestige. Millions believed in him and his crusade, unaware of what was really going on behind the scenes. He was part of the dangerous right-wing conspiracy to "Christianize" the United States, and indeed, the entire world - with a brand of Christianity that is a far cry from the charity, humility and tolerance that Yeshua bin Yusef preached. Bothwell's thoroughly-researched book shows just how deep-seated far-right evangelists are in government and business, and how much sway they have, which is why people like us need to get organized so we can fight back.

You can buy this book at <http://www.braveulysses.com>.

Arkansas Legislature Passes Church Superspreader Bill, Allows People to "Kill Themselves" and the Community with COVID-19

atheists.org

On February 2nd, the public policy watchdog American Atheists condemned passage of **Arkansas's church superspreader bill (HB 1211)** in the Senate (31-0 with 4 not present). This bill passed the Arkansas House of Representatives on January 28 and the Senate Committee on State Agencies and Governmental Affairs, chaired by noted Christian nationalist **Jason Rapert**, on February 1st. It will now go to the governor's desk.

During the floor vote, Rapert read the title of American Atheists' press release from yesterday—"Christian Nationalist Jason Rapert Fast Tracks Arkansas's Church Superspreader Bill, Disregards COVID-19 Infections and Deaths". Nonetheless, he failed to consider its contents—that HB 1211 will increase the **likelihood that churches will become deadly COVID-19 hotspots**. State Senator **Linda Chesterfield** admitted as much when she said, "I'm going to vote for the bill...people have the right to decide whether or not they want to kill themselves."

"It's not just about the people who choose to go to church. Their choices put the lives of everyone in the community in danger," said **Alison Gill**, Vice President for Legal and Policy at American Atheists.

A **2020 CDC report** found that a rural Arkansas church's superspreader events transmitted the virus to people outside of the church, leading to at least 26 additional confirmed COVID-19 cases, which included a hospitalization and death.

"Today, lawmakers showed they care more about pandering to fringe church leaders than protecting all Arkansans," said Gill. "During the hearing, **Senator Hammer**, one of the bill's sponsors, admitted he closed down his church for two months due to COVID-19—yet wants to let other churches stay open and become COVID-19 hotspots. This is irresponsible and deadly."

Late January, the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences **warned about a spike in coronavirus deaths in the coming weeks**.

"Arkansas's church superspreader bill will only aggravate Arkansas's coming wave of coronavirus infections and deaths," said **Nick Fish**, president of American Atheists. "When Arkansans ask who's to blame, they need only look to their legislators."

Bills Granting Houses Of Worship Special Treatment During Pandemics Are Pending In Several States

By Rob Boston / Wall of Separation Blog

au.org

Several state legislatures are considering bills that would make it harder for the government to protect public health in the face of a pandemic. At last count, Americans United's Public Policy Department tallied bills like this in 36 states.

AU recognizes the importance of religious freedom, but we also realize that during a deadly pandemic, officials must have the ability to take steps to protect the people. This may include restrictions on all types of mass gatherings, both religious and secular. The flock of bills we're seeing in the states are designed to give houses of worship special treatment by allowing them to meet when comparable secular institutions are closed. Carve-outs like this will only make it harder to overcome the coronavirus or future pandemics.

Here's a round-up of some bills that are moving or are expected to move soon:

Arkansas: **HB 1211** gives religious organizations a broad exemption from COVID restrictions. It passed the state House by a vote of 75-10 with no debate. The bill would severely limit the power of the governor, which may lead to more deliberation in the state Senate. A witness who testified in favor of the bill admitted its language came from Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), a Christian nationalist legal group. We've seen similar language in other states, which suggests that ADF is shopping the bill to friendly legislators nationwide.

North Dakota: Lawmakers took a bill that dealt with other issues, gutted it and replaced it with language designed to make it more difficult for

state officials to issue orders closing houses of worship during a pandemic. The measure, **SB 2181**, has already passed the state Senate.

Missouri: The Missouri Senate held hearings on **three different bills** that would place various cumbersome restrictions on the governor's ability to issue emergency orders. One bill, **SB 21**, would prohibit orders that impose "any restrictions, directly or indirectly, on the free exercise of religion," a standard so broad it could make these orders difficult or impossible to enforce.

AU's Public Policy Department is monitoring similar bills in other states. We believe these measures are misguided and dangerous.

Religious freedom is a cherished right of the American people, but it confers no right to harm others by exposing them to a potentially deadly sickness. Americans United is working to ensure that we protect religious freedom even as we take steps to ensure the health and well-being of our people. You can read more about **this important work here**.

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

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It's Time To Move Beyond The National Prayer Breakfast

By Rob Boston / Wall of Separation Blog

au.org

Several of us on the Americans United staff tuned into the **National Prayer Breakfast** on February 4th. This annual event, while it is often portrayed as interfaith and inclusive, is sponsored by the Christian nationalist group The Family and is saturated with Christian rhetoric. Nevertheless, it draws politicians from both sides of the aisle every year. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, this year the breakfast was virtual and featured a series of pre-recorded videos.

Americans United is no fan of this event. While it's privately sponsored, the breakfast tends to merge the worst features of civil religion and "Christian nation" mythology. Several members of Congress are honorary co-sponsors and speak at the event, and every U.S. president has participated since the event's inception – giving the breakfast the feeling of an official, government-sponsored program. The overwhelming message is that prayer and religion are the natural go-to's for Americans in the face of any obstacle. It fails to recognize the true scope of religious and non-religious thought in this vast nation.

For the past four years, President **Donald Trump** used the event to either **unveil harmful policy proposals** or **belittle and insult** others. Aware that President **Joe Biden** would address the event this year, AU was hopeful for a change in tone, even as we acknowledge the limitations of the event.

AU President and CEO **Rachel Laser** **told the Associated Press** that if the event must occur, it would be better to get it out of the hands of The Family.

"We would love to work with the administration to figure out a way to change the sponsorship of an event like this and to make it a place for Americans of all different religious beliefs," Laser said. (AU has also advocated for the Biden administration to use language that **includes the non-religious**.)

Biden's message this morning was brief, and ironically, his remarks were among the more secular ones offered. Biden stressed some of the same themes he has been highlighting since the election: he called for unity and reminded us that if Americans work together, there's little we can't achieve.

And while the tone of the event was very Christian, with prayers in the name of Jesus and a performance by a Christian rock band, I was pleased to hear U.S. Sen. **Chris Coons** (D-Del.) during his introduction of Biden say that our new president will be "a

president for all Americans – Americans of faith and Americans who practice no particular faith."

The National Prayer Breakfast's roots stretch back to the 1950s, an era when "God and country" rhetoric was employed to fend off the threat of "godless communism." It's an echo of an America where the white Protestant power structure was still ensconced, and the best outsiders could hope for was not true equality but a measure of toleration.

The America of 2021 looks nothing like the America of 1951. There are still plenty of Christians of all stripes in our country, but they live alongside Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Humanists, Pagans, atheists and millions of Americans whose beliefs aren't so easily categorized – all enjoy the same rights.

Most Americans embrace this diversity, but The Family, the group that sponsors the Prayer Breakfast, is stuck in the same tiresome mold of white Christian nationalism.

We can do better. While it was a relief this year not to see the breakfast descend into the kind of embarrassment it often was during the Trump years, that hardly means the event is worth saving. This year ought to be its last.

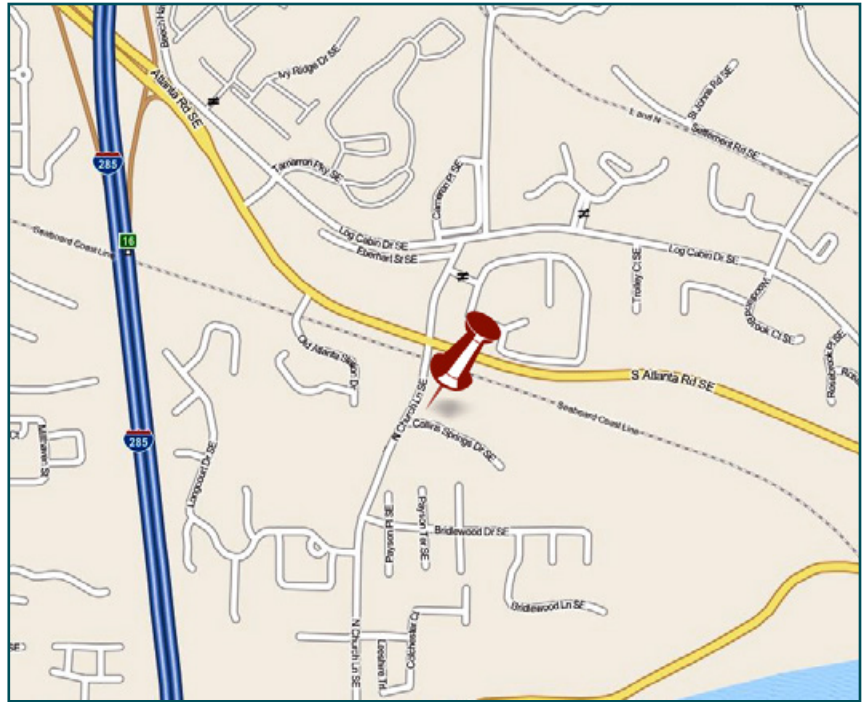


*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**AF Hall
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA 30339**

**Sam Whitehead
2/14/21 1:00 pm EST
(via Zoom)**



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