

David Fitzgerald - "The One Biggest Secret of All World Religions"

On Sunday, February 13, at 1:00 pm via Zoom, AFS will welcome another in a long line of nationally highly regarded speakers for our Zoom meeting for February, David Fitzgerald of Northern California—a writer known simultaneously for his light, witty touch and his careful, thoughtful scholarship. Fitzgerald, a writer of nonfiction books, science fiction, and plays, and Co-Founder and Director of the world's first Atheist Film Festival, has been called "the busiest atheist activist in the Bay area." Program chair Ed Buckner said, "Fitzgerald is a delight as a writer or speaker—his words pull you along, inform you meticulously



David Fitzgerald

well, and make you laugh aloud. Plus, Diane loves him." His writings include—

- 2010: *Nailed: Ten Christian Myths That Show Jesus Never Existed at All*. Morrisville, NC
- 2013: *The Complete Heretic's Guide to Western Religion Book One: The Mormons*. Seattle, WA.
- 2017: *Jesus: Mything in Action* (three volumes.)
- Chapter: "Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?"; in Bart Ehrman and the *Quest of the Historical Jesus of Nazareth*, (Cranford, NJ: American Atheist Press 2013)
- Chapter: "Why Mythicism Matters, or: How I learned to Stop Worrying and Love Jesus (Myth Theory)," in *Varieties of Jesus Mythicism: Did He Even Exist?* (Hypatia Press, 2021)

And, for science fiction aficionados: *The Time Shards Trilogy*.

He can be seen in several documentaries, including *Marketing the Messiah* and *Batman & Jesus*, as well as The Atheist Experience show and in podcast series including Mythvision's *The Secret History of Mormonism* and *The Myth of Jesus with David Fitzgerald*.

Calendar

Feb 13	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Mar 13	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Apr 10	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm

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

For this talk/discussion, Fitzgerald declared, "We'll talk about religion—audience participation encouraged. We'll start with this fun fact: Every religion around the world and throughout human history appears to be pretty much completely untrue—and yet, there is still a shocking commonality all of them share." Expect an entertaining and informative behind-the-scenes look into the evolutionary origins and surprising development of the top ten major world religions (plus a few other honorable mentions).

We're always proud to provide our members and visitors with top programs, and this will be another timely and interesting program. We often have speakers with a true national reputation, as this time will be. We're delighted.

The Fitzgerald program, free and open to the public, will be preceded by a few minutes of social distanced socializing starting about 12:30 P.M., for any interested. The program will start at about 1 P.M. (ET in US) on Sunday, 13 February, via Zoom. We welcome those who are not freethinkers but who just want to know more about what very diverse religions have in common in their histories. All freethinkers are of course welcome—and we hope that they will decide to join as members in due course. See below for the link to attend this meeting online—we look forward to seeing you!

AFS February Meeting Feb 13, 2022 1:00-2:30 PM (EST)

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

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.

February 13: David Fitzgerald

March 13: Timothy Binga

April 10: TBA

May 8: TBA

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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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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

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Mark Banks – 770-354-1546
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Atlanta Freethought News

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Guest commentary: I'll Pick Liberty Over Tolerance Every Time

By Ed Buckner

Galveston County Texas - *The Daily News* 12/23/21

Tolerance or liberty? We can certainly have both and should eagerly promote both. But there are times where the two conflict, and when they do, liberty is better.



Ed Buckner

If your boss says, "I don't like your political opinion, but I have no right to tell you how to vote," that's far better than, "I don't like your political opinion and I better not find out you voted for Smith," even if your boss cannot really know how you voted.

Similarly, how much does any government have any right to control your religious decisions? Can Galveston County declare this is an atheist county but you're "allowed" to be a Christian — or this is a Muslim county but you're "allowed" to be an atheist?

Possibly the most famous preacher around when the United States was officially born, Baptist John Leland (1754–1841), vigorously opposed "toleration." Leland is also credited by some as inspiring James Madison

to write and support guaranteeing religious liberty in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Modern Americans are likely to be startled, at first, on learning that an historically important man disparaged anything like tolerance. Surely toleration should be encouraged in everyone, liberal or conservative, religious or atheist.

Here's some of what Leland wrote in 1790:

"... religion is a matter entirely between God and individuals. No man has the right to force another to join a church: Nor do the legitimate powers of civil government extend so far as to disable, incapacitate, proscribe, or any ways distress in person, property, liberty or life, any man who cannot believe and practice in the common road."

Government should protect every man in thinking and speaking freely and see that one does not abuse another. The liberty I contend for is more than toleration. The very idea of toleration is despicable; it supposes that some have a pre-eminence above the rest to grant indulgence.

Nor was Leland alone in such views. The Rev. John Witherspoon, the only clergyman to sign the Declaration of Independence (president of Princeton, teacher to James Madison), declared, "Tolerance is not enough, since it implies superiority or condescension. The only religious principle worthy of adoption in a republic is the liberty to worship as one wishes, or not at all."

Thomas Paine, crucial philosophical leader during the American Revolution, declared in the *Rights of Man* (1791) that "Toleration is not the opposite of intolerance, but is the counterfeit of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes to itself the right of withholding Liberty of Conscience, and the other of granting it."

John Adams, key revolutionary leader and second president wrote, "I will not condescend to employ the word toleration. I assert that unlimited freedom of religion, consistent with morals and property, is essential to the progress of society and the amelioration of the condition of mankind."

All of us should prefer individual tolerance but not want governmental toleration — in short, we should trust in freedom, with liberty for all.

Ed Buckner is a former resident of League City, who now lives in Atlanta, Georgia.



I'm driven to respond to observations about age

By Ed Buckner

Galveston County Texas - *The Daily News*
1/25/22

Leonard Woolsey's ("**To go on a drive, one must first get car into drive,**" *The Daily News*, Jan. 22) engages in self-deprecating humor about how old and decrepit he has gotten. No reasonable person should try to top him in that regard, but few think I'm reasonable.

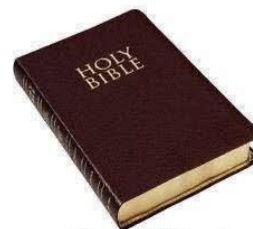
A while back I found a Lee Child book (a Jack Reacher thriller) that I was sure I hadn't read, *The Hard Way*. A big fan of the series, I was pleased and started reading. Well along into the book, I ran across allusions to towns like Thetford and "Bishop's Pargeter." I knew about Thetford — birthplace of Thomas Paine in 1736 — but not Bishop's Pargeter. So, I went online and did a search for that town and successfully located a reference to it and an explanation that the town was a fictional place in the book.

Astonishingly, the reference was in a review of the book by — wait for it — Ed Buckner. Not only had I already read the book, I had written a mini-review of it for Goodreads years earlier.

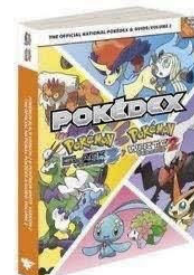
For some of us, getting a new-fangled car to go isn't the only problem. For some of us, everything old is new again pretty much every day.

Ed Buckner

Atlanta, Georgia



Proof that
God exists



Proof that
Pokemon exists

New Report Forecasts Christian Nationalist Movement's Strategic Actions in 2022

atheists.org

On Jan 4, 2022, the religious equality watchdog American Atheists sounded the alarm on Christian nationalists' likely strategy for 2022. This warning draws on the large body of research and trends published today in the organization's *2021 State of the Secular States report*. Now in its fourth annual edition, this report provides the most comprehensive review ever of state-wide laws and policies affecting church-state separation and religious equality in all 50 states, Washington D.C., and Puerto Rico.

“Overall, 2021 was the worst state legislative session for civil rights in more than a decade,” said American Atheists' Vice President of Legal and Policy **Alison Gill**, who authored the report. “Unless the media and advocates shine a light on white Christian nationalists' unprecedented attacks on our democracy, this extremist movement's momentum will only increase in 2022.”



Based on the state legislative data from 2021, **American Atheists anticipates the continuation of at least three dangerous trends: 1) a wave of harmful state-level Religious Freedom Restoration Acts (RFRA), 2) denial of health care legislation, and 3) legislative attacks on public schools.**

From 2016 until 2020, not a single state RFRA became law. Public opinion was largely against RFRA for targeting LGBTQ people's rights. Last year, legislative activists took advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic to rebrand

RFRA as necessary to “protect” churches from limitations on in-person gatherings. Yet these laws are virtually indistinguishable from those introduced in previous years—and just as discriminatory. In 2021, three states—Arkansas, South Dakota, and Montana—passed RFRA. Since these bills succeeded, American Atheists forecasts attempts to pass even more RFRA in 2022.

Also in 2021, two states—Arkansas and Ohio—passed bills that allow hospital CEOs, hospital boards, employers, and even insurance companies to deny any health care service based on personal religious beliefs. In the past, state legislatures had passed denial of care bills that only focused on specific services, such as abortion or contraception. American Atheists anticipates a flurry of dangerously broad denial of care bills in 2022.

The organization also predicts increasingly sophisticated legislative attacks on public schools. For example, hybrid bills that combine anti-trans youth policies with religious denials of health care have appeared. Similarly, Florida passed legislation

Christian Nationalist cont. on page 5

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Miss. Mayor Says His Religious Beliefs Give Him The Right To Purge Library's LGBTQ-Themed Books

au.org

By Rob Boston - Wall of Separation Blog

Books are increasingly under fire in the United States – literally in some cases.

Tennessee Pastor **Greg Locke** of Global Vision Bible Church held a mass book burning last week, targeting volumes he considers to be “demonic.” NBC News reported that during the event, which was livestreamed on Facebook, “churchgoers hurl books and other items deemed associated with ‘witchcraft’ into a massive bonfire on the church’s parking lot in Mount Juliet, Tennessee.”

In the same state, a school board in McMinn County captured national headlines after it voted last month to remove the graphic novel *Maus*, a retelling of the Holocaust, from the eighth-grade language arts curriculum.

Not to be cut out of the action, the mayor of a small city in Mississippi has apparently decided that his religious beliefs give him the right to decide what everyone else in town can read at the public library.

Mayor **Gene McGee** of Ridgeland, a community of about 24,000 residents in Madison County, is holding back \$110,000 in funding for the county library system, reported *Mississippi Free Press*, an online news site.

Tonja Johnson, executive director of the county libraries, told the *Free Press* she reached out to McGee after she failed to receive a quarterly payment from the city. What he told her was surprising.

“He explained his opposition to what he called ‘homosexual materials’ in the library, that it went against his Christian beliefs, and that he would not release the money as long as the materials were there,” Johnson said.

Johnson, who seems to have the patience of Job, told the *Free Press* that she carefully explained to McGee that the library is not a religious institution and that it must serve the entire community – but the mayor was unmoved.

McGee is behaving like a Christian nationalist tyrant, but he probably doesn’t even have the power to withhold the funds, which the city’s board of aldermen has already approved. However, it doesn’t appear that the board is in any hurry to rein him in.

McGee said he acted because members of the community complained about some of the books in the library.

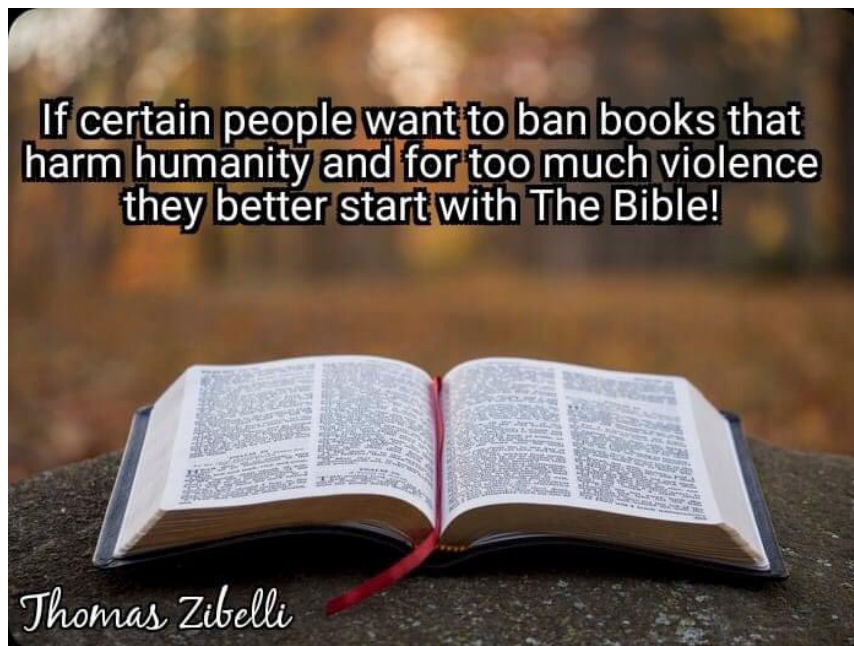
“We’re holding [the money] right now because we found a large number of citizens who have complained about displays of sexual, whatever you want to call it, content,” McGee said. “We’re just responding to those citizens’ complaints, and that’s the position we’re in.”

Not surprisingly, the books under fire are LGBTQ-themed. One of them, *The Queer Bible*, is a collection of essays by and about notable LGBTQ people. Another book, *Grandad’s Camper*, is a children’s book. Johnson said the library has a formal process that residents can use to challenge books. While verbal complaints were lodged about both volumes, no formal challenges were filed, she said.

Friends of the Ridgeland Library set up a fundraising campaign to make up for some of the lost funds. The group had hoped to raise a few thousand dollars but within a matter of days had pulled in **\$75,000**.

It’s great that folks want to help, but Ridgeland’s library can’t always rely on the kindness of

strangers. Someone must confront McGee and inform him that, while he may be mayor, that doesn’t mean he’s a supreme dictator with the power to cast any books that displease him into metaphorical (or literal) fires.



Christian Nationalist cont. from page 4

focusing on “parental rights,” grouping together such disparate items as 1) preventing schools from requiring masking or vaccination 2) forcing teachers to “out” LGBTQ students to their parents and 3) preventing the teaching of any material of which a parent religiously disapproves.

“White Christian nationalists may not physically attack the Capitol again, as on January 6. But the movement is assaulting the rights of atheists, racial and religious minorities, LGBTQ people, and many others with their extremist legislation,” said **Nick Fish**, president of American Atheists. “Now that we know their strategy, advocates, the media, and lawmakers must shine a light on these attempts to wield religion as a weapon. Our democracy is on the line.”

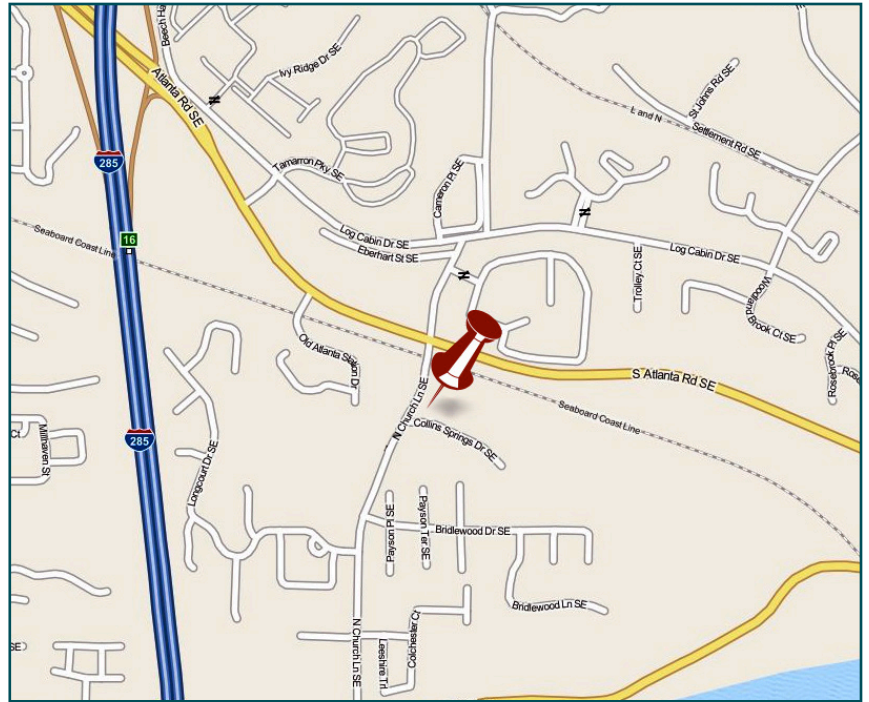
View the full report at www.atheists.org/states or in pdf format.

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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

**David Fitzgerald
2/13/22 1:00 pm EST
(via Zoom)**



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