

Suzi Ehtesham-Zadeh: “Trump’s America vis-à-vis The Islamic Republic: The Concentration of Power and how the Powerful Prey/Pray on the Ignorant”



Suzi Ehtesham-Zadeh

The daughter of a high-profile Iranian doctor and a small-town American science teacher, **Suzi Ehtesham-Zadeh** was born in Washington, D.C., came of age in Iran during the Shah’s era, and later traveled back to the United States to attend university, receiving a degree in philosophy from Stanford University in 1978. The Islamic Revolution began brewing during her senior year at Stanford, and shortly after graduating she returned to Iran and plopped herself down in the middle of it. She later moved to Spain, where she met and married a Spaniard, thus weaving a third cultural strand into her identity.

A career English teacher, Suzi has taught students in public schools, private schools, and universities on three continents and in three languages. She has taught ESL to children in Honduras, World Literature and Linguistics to university students in Tehran, IB Literature and Theory of Knowledge to high school students in Spain, Creative Writing to undergraduates at Boston University, and Literature and Composition to middle school, high school, and university students in Georgia.

Alongside her teaching career, Suzi has maintained a second career as a writer, editor, and translator. Rather late in life, she received an MFA degree in Creative Writing from Boston University, where she had the privilege of studying with National Book Award winners **Sigrid Nunez** and **Ha Jin** and Pen/Hemingway Award winner and *New York Times* Bestselling author **Jennifer Haigh**.

Suzi’s fiction has appeared in *The Georgia Review*, *Fiction International*, *Glassworks Magazine*, *Narrative Northeast*, *Mobius Journal for Social Change*, *Quiddity International Literary Journal*, and elsewhere. Her recent story collection, titled

AFS Calendar

Feb 9	Board of Directors Meeting	11 am
Feb 9	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm
Mar 9	Potluck Lunch	11 am
Mar 9	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm
Apr 13	Board of Directors Meeting	11 am
Apr 13	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm

All events are combo Live/Zoom unless noted and are subject to change.

Zan, was awarded the 2022 Dzanc Short Story Collection Prize and was published in June of 2024.

Suzi’s cultural identity is a bit of a moving target, which makes it a paradox that she has resided, for the better part of the past two decades, on a 6-acre mini-farm in Woodstock, Georgia.



AFS February Meeting Feb. 9, 2025 1:00-2:30 PM (eastern)

To join Zoom meeting go to this link:
us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911
Also at Atlanta Freethought Hall

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 and also presented online (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. Announced events are subject to change.



9 Feb	Suzi Ehtesham-Zadeh
9 Mar	TBA
13 Apr	TBA
11 May	TBA
8 Jun	TBA

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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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Singer Anita Bryant Leaves Legacy of Homophobia and Extremism

Rob Boston • Wall of Separation

<https://www.au.org/the-latest/articles/singer-anita-bryant-leaves-legacy-of-homophobia-and-extremism/>

Singer Anita Bryant died Dec. 16, though her death wasn't widely reported until Jan. 10. The headlines announcing her death were very similar to this one run by the Associated Press: "Anita Bryant, a popular singer who became known for opposition to gay rights, dead at age 84."

Bryant launched one of the nation's first anti-LGBTQ+ crusades in Dade County, Fla., which in 1977 passed an ordinance that barred discrimination in employment, housing and public services on the basis of sexual orientation.

A former beauty queen, Bryant was an Oklahoma native who had relocated to Florida with her husband (whom she later divorced). A fundamentalist Christian, she was appalled by the new law and began insisting, against all available evidence, that it would force Christian schools to hire gay men and women as teachers. (In fact, the law didn't apply to private schools.)

'Save Our Children'

Bryant started a campaign, dubbed "Save Our Children," to overturn the law. The emphasis on children was intentional: LGBTQ+ people were tarred as a threat to children, a threat to families, a threat to America.

If these tactics sound familiar, there's good reason for that: Christian Nationalists still use them today. In fact, much of the hate and extreme rhetoric we hear from Christian Nationalists today about LGBTQ+ rights comes from a playbook penned by Bryant.

As I noted in a Church & State article last year, "During the campaign, Bryant employed rhetoric and tactics that Christian Nationalists still use nearly 50 years later. She demonized LGBTQ+ people, asserting that they seek to recruit children, and she mobilized crowds in fundamentalist churches.

'They must recruit!'

"Homosexuals cannot reproduce, so they must recruit," Save Our Children argued. "And to freshen their ranks, they must recruit the youth of America."

Bryant went so far as to compare LGBTQ+ rights to "murderer rights."

Sadly, Bryant's hateful crusade was initially successful, and voters overturned the Dade County ordinance. Flush with that victory, she went on to successfully challenge gay-rights ordinances in St. Paul, Minn.; Eugene, Ore.;

and Wichita, Kan.

But eventually, Bryant and her supporters overreached. One of them, John Briggs, a California state senator, proposed Prop. 6, which would have barred gay men and women from teaching in the state's public schools as well as banned "public homosexual conduct." Critics said that provision was so broadly worded it could have made it illegal for state employees to express support for LGBTQ+ rights. Many conservatives opposed Prop. 6, which was defeated in 1978 with more than 58% voting no.

The LGBTQ+ community strikes back

Bryant's activism also put LGBTQ+ Americans on notice: They were under assault. In response, they increased their mobilization, and gay-rights activism became more high profile. Slowly, the tide began turning in America. Polls now show solid support for LGBTQ+ rights, but these rights are coming under sustained assault since Donald Trump assumed the presidency.

As for Bryant, she never wavered in her opposition to

LGBTQ+ rights. Her views were so extreme, she became toxic. Companies that had used her as a spokeswoman dropped her, and Bryant's attempts to reignite her singing career failed. As the time of her death, she was running a ministry in Oklahoma.

Anita Bryant, despite whatever else she may have accomplished, will forever be linked to religious extremism and hateful homophobia. It did not have to be that way, but it's the legacy she chose. It's an unfortunate one indeed.

Photo: Anita Bryant at a concert in 1965. Public domain photo.



Trump Administration's School Privatization Order Defies Will of the People

<https://www.atheists.org/2025/01/trump-administrations-school-privatization-order-defies-will-of-the-people/>



Again and again and again, voters have rejected school vouchers and other privatization schemes that attempt to defund and dismantle the nonsectarian public schools that 90% of U.S. families choose.

families who would have sent their children to private schools even without aid.

In states like Iowa, religious schools have more than doubled their tuition rates in order to rake in taxpayer dollars while continuing to keep certain families out. The President's order to "expand opportunities for low-income, working families" indicates he and his Administration either fundamentally fail to understand how these programs operate or, more likely, they don't actually care about the real-world impact that school privatization policies have on the tens of millions of Americans who choose public schools.

The mandate from the American people to their state and federal lawmakers is clear: Support public schools.

On January 29th, the Trump Administration issued yet another executive order that directly contradicts the will of the people. They justify their wholly unpopular position on school privatization by alluding to a "growing body of rigorous research." This is a lie.

Decades of independent research increasingly demonstrates vouchers do not work. In fact, they exacerbate racial and socioeconomic segregation and lead to declines in academic outcomes. Families in rural areas are particularly harmed by the funding cuts to public schools that accompany these voucher schemes.

And far from saving taxpayers money, privatization policies have proven to be egregiously, unsustainably expensive and rife with abuse. For what? The data shows the primary beneficiaries of so-called "school choice" are the corporations who receive exceedingly generous tax credits and the wealthy

Private and parochial schools can, by law, discriminate against students and their families. They are not held to the same rigorous standards as public schools. Until and unless private schools agree to play by the same rules — including non-discrimination protections and local control — they should not receive a single dollar of taxpayer money.

American Atheists will continue to work tirelessly with partners across the country to protect students' civil rights, defend the separation of religion and government, and ensure that non-sectarian public education receives the funding and support it needs to serve all of our nation's students.

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God's Gender: A Guerrilla Campaign to Knock Sense into Right-Wing Christians

Dwight Lyman • Preface to Atheism

<https://dwightlyman.substack.com/p/gods-gender>

From the beginning, Christians have insisted that gender is not about genitalia.

Today, all of a sudden, most American Christians have changed their minds.

Christians insist, now, that sex and gender and genitalia must all be about the same: you can't have a sex or a gender that doesn't correspond to whatever your genitalia is.

Make that your genitalia at birth. As determined at conception.

Christians didn't used to believe this.

Christians didn't believe this in the 1980's when I was a young atheist trying to make sense of Christian beliefs.

Back then, I thought I was being smart in pointing out that God should not be referred to as He or Him—for the obvious reason that God, by definition, doesn't have a penis.

Shoot, God doesn't even have a body.

My Christian friends pushed back intelligently, explaining that one's gender was distinct from one's sex: that, in fact, gender was not tied to genitalia at all. And this distinction was why God, body or not, could be masculine. And was masculine as a matter of religious faith.

Okay, I could see they had a point.

This was the 1980's and I (who previously had never thought about the distinction between sex and gender) was forced to realize that the issue was more complex than my simplistic gender = genitalia assumption.

So I backed off on referring to God as It.

Fast-forward to today.

Now most Christians have changed their mind. They have decided that sex = gender = genitalia is exactly right.

Even more so, it's got to be the genitalia you were born with.

Here's the new Christian theology: If you were born with a vagina (or with XX chromosomes, in some accounts) you are the female sex and gender, and if you were not then you are not. If you were born with a penis (or with XY chromosomes, in some accounts) you are the male sex and gender, and if you were not then you are not.

What about God?

Was God born with penis or vagina or chromosomes of any sort?

No.

God wasn't even born.

Therefore: God is neither male nor female, neither masculine nor feminine.

Hmm....

That's right, Christians now think the atheist back in 1980 was right all along.

God is an It after all.

Here's my modest proposal:

I propose that atheists—and transgender people and Democrats and old-fashioned Christians—start referring to God as It in every instance.

And each time a Republican refers to God as He or Him, call them out for their wokeness.

Indeed, thinking the way these Christian Republicans think, it should be illegal to misgender God as male or female.¹ (Certainly it's blasphemous, so why not write it into our laws? We are a Christian nation, right?²)

God is an It. This is their theology.

If you refer to God as He or Him, you are being woke (separating gender from genitals)—and we will call you out.

We should do this repeatedly. Maybe they will start to understand (or remember) why they used to believe that gender was not about genitalia or sex chromosomes.

And why being woke is maybe intelligent.

Let's treat it as a guerrilla campaign to knock some sense into the Christian world.

1 Yes, some Christians misgender God as female and not just male. I was born into Christian Science, a denomination which every Sunday presents the "spiritual" translation of the Lord's Prayer, beginning, "Our Father-Mother God, all-harmonious..." in place of "Our Father which art in heaven..." As far as I know, this has never been controversial.

2 I kid. Writing theological positions into Federal law is a good way to push Christians into war with other Christians, given that there are 45,000 denominations all with differing theologies. Those of us who are non-Christian might not be happy either.

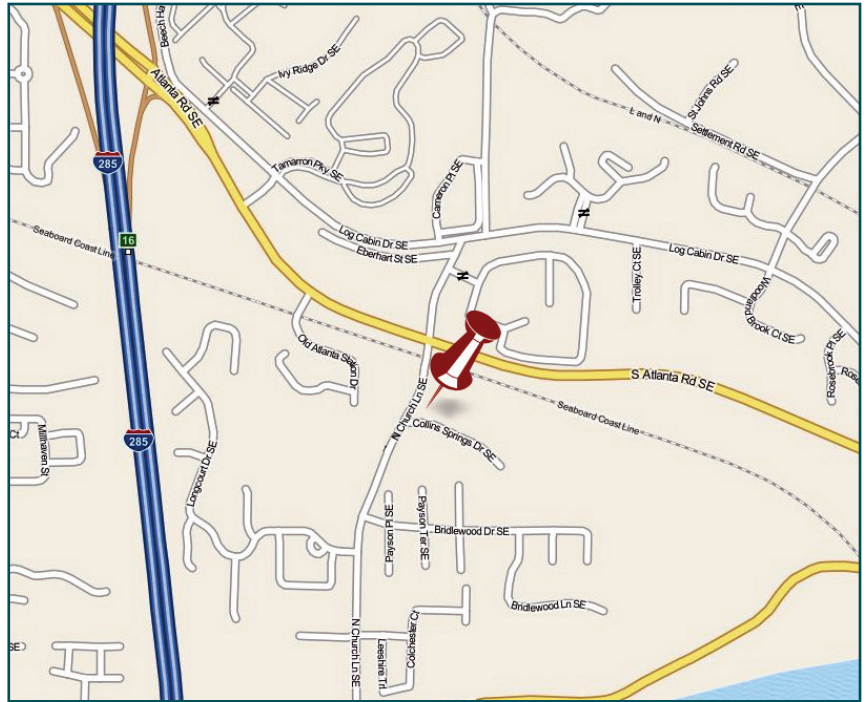


*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



AF Hall
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Atlanta, GA 30339

Suzi
Ehtesham-Zadeh
Feb. 9 1:00 pm Eastern
(At Hall and on Zoom)



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