

Antonio Daza: “An Atheist Runs for Congress in the Heart of the ‘Purple’ Bible Belt”

AFS is proud to have a major Atlanta political leader and a highly regarded and popular speaker, **Antonio Daza** to deliver a talk and lead us in discussion on Sunday, 12 March. Daza is among the most important American freethinking political leaders in the United States. He will talk to us about “An Atheist Runs for Congress in the Heart of the ‘Purple’ Bible Belt.”



Antonio Daza

Daza noted, by way of introduction, “As an immigrant, a refugee, a member of the LGBTQ+ community, a small business owner, and an atheist, I am qualified to see where we fall short of addressing true liberty for all people in the United States. As one who has escaped dictatorship, I had a front-row seat witnessing how democracy was overthrown in my home country of Venezuela. Democracy is not a permanent, indestructible system. Democracy is not just a subjective idea. Democracy is a real thing that, if it is taken away, impacts your life in unimaginable ways. I’ve seen it happen, and I am watching it happen again right now in this country.” The nominee of the Democratic Party for the 11th Congressional District against entrenched incumbent Barry Loudermilk, Daza won an impressive 113,571 votes in November 2022 and seems destined for even more success in future elections.

Antonio Daza was a political activist in his home country of Venezuela against the Chavez regime. In 2003, he joined his family in the United States and was granted political asylum until he became a U.S. citizen. In 2008, after years of building a career as a professional ballroom dancer and instructor, Daza opened his own small business. In 2021, he graduated *cum laude* with a major in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Oglethorpe University; and a little over a year ago married his partner of 17 years.

Antonio is an award-winning business owner with 15+ years of experience executing business plans, exceeding revenue goals, nurturing client relations, and navigating positive change management while

addressing business needs. In addition, he has been a dedicated business leader recognized nationally and internationally for steadily using project management tools and processes to deliver business objectives successfully.

Calendar

Mar 12	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Apr 9	General Meeting Live & Online	1 pm
May 14	General Meeting Live & Online	1 pm

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

In addition, Antonio is a passionate, high-energy community outreach leader with philanthropy experience and a record of surpassing goals for capital campaigns and fundraising initiatives while driving continuous improvements across various nonprofit operations.

Antonio Daza is an action-oriented political organizer with a substantial track record of success directing and driving long-range outcomes, developing policies, and cultivating procedures; a lifelong advocate for freedom, justice, and equality.

Expect to learn much more about elections, voting, and the advantages and problems—if any—of running while an atheist or gay man. There will be time for some questions.

Because AFS is a 501-c-3 educational organization, we do not endorse candidates or parties in public elections. But we are certainly interested in such elections, many of our members are quite avid political activists, and AFS Hall is, as it happens, in the 11th Congressional District.

The Daza program, free and open to the public, will be preceded by a few minutes of Zoom-based socializing starting about 12:30 P.M. Eastern Daylight Time in the US, for any interested.

AFS March Meeting

Mar. 6, 2023 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 (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.



- 12 Mar Antonio Daza - An Atheist Runs for Congress
- 9 Apr Keith Parsons - Between the Rabid Right and the Looney Left
- 14 May Samantha McGuire of American Atheists
- 11 June Rob Boston or Rachel Laser of Americans United
- 9 July Dan Barker

AFS Email List

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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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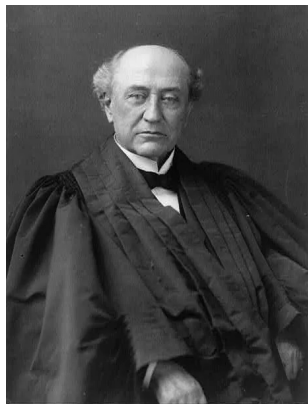
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Just How Supreme is the Supreme Court?

By Ed Buckner • [Letters to a Free Country](#) • edbuckner.substack.com



**Justice Brewer
(1837-1910)**

A US Supreme Court Justice (David Josiah Brewer) declared in an 1892 Supreme Court case, *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*, that the US is a “Christian Nation.” Who could argue with that? It’s the supreme law of the land and it’s settled, right?

In the same sense that *these* matters are now supreme, settled, fixed, right?—

[African Americans] had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order, and altogether unfit to associate with the white race, either in social or political relations; and so far inferior, that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might

justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit.

and

... the underlying fallacy of the plaintiff’s argument to consist in the assumption that the enforced separation of the two races stamps the colored race with a badge of inferiority. If this be so, it is not by reason of anything found in the act, but solely because the colored race chooses to put that construction on it.

and

Segregation of white and Negro children in the public schools of a State solely on the basis of race, pursuant to state laws permitting or requiring such segregation, denies to Negro children the equal protection of the laws guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment—even though the physical facilities and other “tangible” factors of white and Negro schools may be equal.

and

State criminal abortion laws, like those involved here, that except from criminality only a life-saving procedure on the mother’s behalf without regard to the stage of her pregnancy and other interests involved violate the Due Process Clause of the **Fourteenth Amendment**, which protects against state action the right to privacy, including a woman’s qualified right to terminate her pregnancy.

and

... independent expenditures, including those made by corporations, do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption. That speakers may have influence over or access to elected officials does not mean that those officials are corrupt. And the appearance of influence or access will not cause the electorate to lose faith in this democracy.

and

The **Fourteenth Amendment** requires a State to license a marriage between two people of the same sex and to recognize a marriage between two people of the same sex when their marriage was lawfully licensed and performed out-of-State.

These and many more examples of statements made by the US Supreme Court as part of official decisions declared by the Court are not likely to be statements seen now as true or reliable universally (even by all judges). (Aside from *Church of the Holy Trinity* [1892], the above statements come from *Dred Scott v. Sandford* [1857], *Plessy v. Ferguson* [1896], *Brown v.*

Board of Education [1954], *Roe v. Wade* [1973], *Citizens United v. FEC* [2010], and *Obergefell v. Hodges* [2015].) You may think, as I do, that some of these statements are true and others not, but some of them directly contradict others of them, so no one can think they are all true.

It is therefore quite clear that merely because a US Supreme Court decision states something, that fact does not, by itself, mean the statement is true.

What power does the United States Supreme Court have then? Immense power. The power to require racial integration of public schools, the power to require States to permit abortions—and then the power to reverse that. The power to require States to recognize marriages of people of different races or of the same sex. The power to declare that “Negroes” have no rights that white people are bound to honor and later, that separate but equal facilities are all that is needed. But not unlimited or permanent power and not power derived from vague conclusions of opinion. The power the Court has, whether used wisely or correctly or not, comes from the US Constitution and, ultimately, from “We the people”—the sole authority invoked in the Preamble to the Constitution. (As to the impermanence of Court decisions, those decisions can be changed because of civil war or popular upheaval, by amendment or by reversals from the Court itself—extraordinarily difficult to bring about, though all derived from the Constitution and the people.)

But what of the truth of what Justice David Josiah Brewer wrote in 1892, that the United States is a “Christian nation”? Brewer described a long list of pre-constitutional history and events to shore up his point, and he later (1905) wrote a short book on the subject that made clear he was making a limited, cultural (not constitutional or legal) claim.

Rob Boston addressed this 30 years ago in his fine book, *Why the Religious Right is Wrong: About Separation of Church & State* (1993). And even then, as Boston pointed out, Religious Right activists were over-claiming the words of the Brewer decision.

Many, many ardent Christians, seemingly especially preachers and leaders hungry for power and donations, have cited Brewer’s claim as proof that our origins and beliefs are Christian, if not that Christianity is the established religion or that it once was. A recent example along these lines came from a 15 February (2022) “**Patriot’s Daily Devotional**” by Richard G. Lee of Atlanta—

Supreme continued on Page 4

Supreme continued from Page 3

If people like Richard Lee are only saying that they think the US *should* in some sense be Christian or that it's just demographically true, no one can really deny such people the right to hold such an opinion, however much one may disagree. But Lee, at least, seemed to be arguing for more than that, for he prominently quoted a Bible verse: "They were unfaithful to the God of their fathers" – I Chronicles 5:25. That suggests that a betrayal has happened, that Americans now are being "unfaithful" not just to Lee's religious preferences, but to the intent of the founding fathers. If that is what he is claiming, that is not factual—has been discredited for at least three decades—hence my writing about it in my **Friday Freethought Perennials** subset.

To return to Justice Brewer's 1892 statement, he was at some pains to make clear then that he and the Court were not declaring the US government, in form or law, to be Christian. He seemed only to assert a received wisdom notion along the lines of "Well, everyone knows America is Christian, so of course the Congress could not have meant to include an English clergyman in this immigration law." He emphatically did not connect his assertion to language in the Constitution or in federal law or to any other clear and formal authority. That kind of reasoning, as the late conservative Justice **Antonin Scalia** noted, was unjustified. Scalia, referring to the holding in the Holy Trinity decision as the "prototypical case" in which a judge follows what the judge sees as the intent of the legislature rather than the text of the statute, wrote that this was in opposition to his judicial philosophy of textualism. Brewer essentially declared that his sense of things mattered more than the law or the Constitution—possibly the clearest justification one could claim for judicial activism, so much despised by the Right.

Now imagine that the six Catholic Justices (**Sotomayor, Roberts, Thomas, Alito, Kavanaugh, and Barrett**) on the current Court, backed by the Catholic President (**Biden**) declared in a Court decision, "We realize it is not in the Constitution or in our laws, but it is nevertheless clear that all Americans

should acknowledge that the one true leader of God's Church on Earth is **Pope Francis** in Rome; all Protestant pastors should surely acknowledge the authority of the Pope." Would Richard G. Lee or anyone else accept this? Do you see how such a thing could actually happen if we allowed the Court—or any government entity—to make religious decisions for US citizens?

It is more than clear from many, many documents that the received wisdom Justice Brewer claimed in 1892 was mistaken. Some of the framers were Christian, some deists or adherents of other religions or philosophies, but they agreed to and helped get passed in 1787-1789 the governing document for the US: a Constitution completely devoid of Christian or anti-Christian doctrine, and they did so quite deliberately.

Let me close with a statement from the Court in 1943 in *West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*, written by Justice **Robert H. Jackson** and already alluded to in late February by **Oliver Halle**. This is a statement that I honestly think every freedom-loving American should agree with:

If there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein.

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A New Poll Reveals What Americans Really Think About Christian Nationalism. The Answers May Surprise You.

by Rachel Laser • AU.org • Wall of Separation

On Feb. 8, Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI), a nonprofit, nonpartisan research group at the intersection of religion, culture and public policy, joined with the Brookings Institution to release a major new national survey that offers a wealth of data about Christian Nationalism. I attended an in-person briefing in Washington, D.C., to learn more about the survey.

The findings were interesting and relevant to our work at AU, so I thought I would highlight a few in this column.

The room was packed, and more than 1,500 people were attending online. Clearly, the topic of Christian Nationalism is engendering the level of interest it should these days.

What The Survey Found

The survey's major finding was that nearly two-thirds of white evangelical Protestants qualify as either Christian Nationalism adherents (29%) or sympathizers (35%), and more than half of Republicans qualify as adherents (21%) or sympathizers (33%). Take that in! And compare it to the one in 10 Americans as a whole who adhere to the tenets of Christian Nationalism and 19% who are sympathetic. While the general population numbers are still too high, they pale in comparison to these two groups.

It's remarkable, and remarkably scary, that, as my friend and PRRI founder Robby Jones put it, "A vocal and engaged minority has hijacked one of our major religious traditions and one of our political parties, determined to hold the country hostage to a mythical past it is ready to leave behind."

To determine levels of support for Christian Nationalism, the poll used responses to five questions; participants were asked whether they completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree, or completely disagree with the following:

- The U.S. government should declare America a Christian nation.
- U.S. laws should be based on Christian values.
- If the U.S. moves away from our Christian foundations, we will not have a country anymore.
- Being Christian is an important part of being truly American.
- God has called Christians to exercise dominion over all areas of American society.

Christian Nationalism: Racist And Sexist

Christian Nationalism is a worldview that clearly believes in Christian supremacy. But the research also illuminated the connection between Christian Nationalism and both racism and sexism. For example, a majority of Christian Nationalism adherents disagree that white supremacy is a major problem in the United States today, and seven out of 10 reject the idea that past discrimination contributes to present-day hurdles for Black Americans. And nearly seven in 10 Christian Nationalism adherents agree that "[i]n a truly Christian family, the husband is the head of the household and his wife submits to his leadership."

Some findings did stand out as hopeful. 73% of Americans want our country to be religiously diverse. It's always nice to remember that AU has majority support for our vision for America. Another important finding is that most Christians are not Christian Nationalists. Evangelical Christians are five times more likely to be Christian Nationalists than other Christians.

When it was time for questions, I asked panel members how they thought we could best bring Americans on board to support the obvious bulwark against Christian Nationalism: church-state separation.

Robby answered by explaining that a real challenge is people's lack of understanding of the term. He pointed out that a super majority of Christian Nationalists (63% of adherents and 66% of sympathizers) in their poll claim to support church-state separation. Jones explained: "They don't think they are violating this old civic idea of separation of church and state, even while they say all the laws in the U.S. should be based on Christian beliefs in the Bible."

How AU Will Fight Back

Religious extremists' effort to twist the meaning of church-state separation is just one of the many reasons why America needs a national recommitment to that principle. We must make clear that church-state separation not only doesn't permit you to use your religious beliefs to harm others, it prohibits it. And we have to put forward our own positive vision, too. I'm excited to see what comes out of our expanded youth essay and video contest, where the prompt this year is: "What would happen if we secured separation of church and state in the United States and all people were able to live as themselves and believe as they choose?"

Together, we will seize this moment of challenge and opportunity to make church-state separation – the antidote to Christian Nationalism – a priority for this country.

Wall of Separation Editor's note: This blog post by AU President and CEO Rachel Laser originally appeared in the [March 2023](#) issue of AU's Church & State magazine.

AFN Editor's note: If you want to see the poll referenced by Rachel Laser, it can be found [here](#).

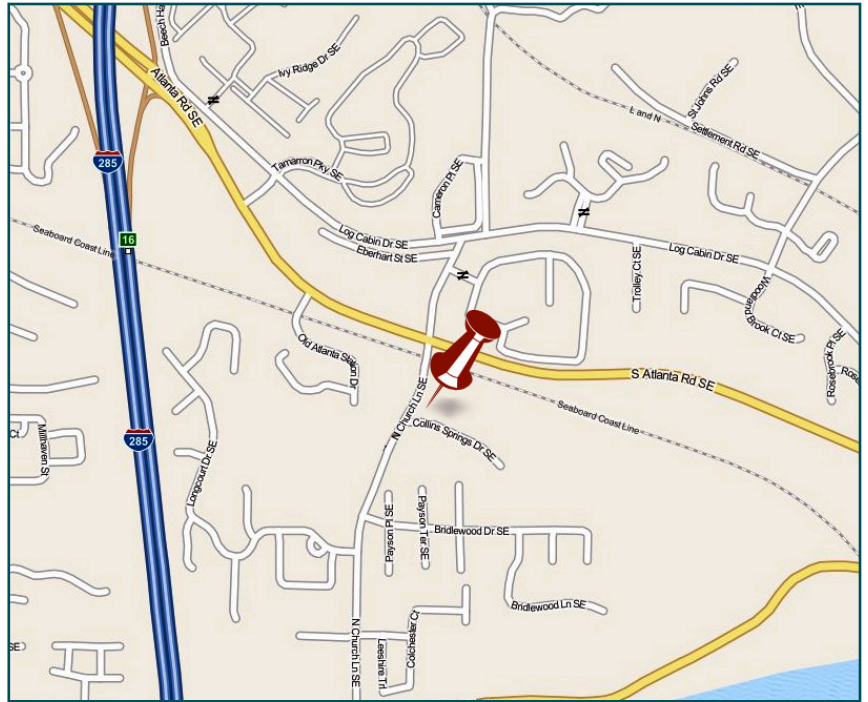


*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**AF Hall
4775 N. Church Lane SE
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**Antonio Daza
3/12/23 1:00 pm EST
(via Zoom)**



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