

Michael Buckner! Christian Nationalists to Founders: “Why Didn’t You Say So?” America’s Foundational Documents: Christian or Secular?

AFS is proud to have one of our own longtime leaders, **Michael Buckner**, to deliver a talk and lead us in discussion on Sunday, 10 March. (*Don’t forget to spring your clocks forward for 2024*

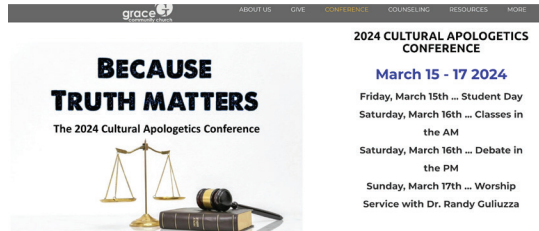


Michael Buckner

DST!) Michael has long been a leader of AFS and is a current board member. He’s been on panel presentations for us before, but this is his first time as the speaker. Buckner, an honor graduate in history from the University of Chicago and co-author of *In Freedom We Trust: An Atheist Guide to Religious Liberty* (Prometheus Books, 2012), has studied and written about this subject in depth.

He will talk to us about **America’s Foundational Documents: Christian or Secular?** That will also be the topic that he and Rev. Jay Lucas will be debating in Washington Court-house, OH, the next week. And Buckner’s opening statements (yes, two of them—all will be revealed) will be the basis for his talk to AFS.

Buckner, famed for a related essay on the internet a quarter century ago (<https://infidels.org/ki-osk/article/the-unchristian-roots-of-the-fourth-of-july/>), says he’ll be happy to have the AFS audience ask questions and make suggestions to help him



AFS Calendar

Mar 9	GAME NIGHT!!	6 pm
Mar 10	Potluck lunch	11:30 am
Mar 10	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm
Apr 13	GAME NIGHT!!	6 pm
Apr 14	Potluck lunch	11 am
Apr 14	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm

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

prepare for his debate.

Buckner and both his parents have been key leaders of the Atlanta Freethought Society since its founding nearly forty years ago.

We’re always pleased to provide great programs for our members and visitors, and we are glad we’ll be continuing 2024 with another good one.

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

interested. Buckner will be with us in person. The program will start at about 1 P.M. (EDT) on Sunday, 10 March, via Zoom and in AFS Hall. We welcome those who are not freethinkers but who just want to know more about freethought and about the Declaration and the US Constitution. All freethinkers are of course welcome—and we hope that they will decide to join as members in due course. Details (the same as last month) on the Zoom meeting number are shown below.

The March Potluck

Before the March 10th meeting we will have a Potluck Lunch, starting at 11:30. Join AFS members and guests for some good food and great socializing. Please bring food according to the first letter of your last name:

A-G: Bring a side dish
H-P: Bring a main dish
Q-Z: Bring a dessert

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.

AFS March Meeting
Mar 10, 2024 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.



10 Mar Michael Buckner
14 Apr Blake Smith
12 May TBA
9 Jun TBA
14 Jul 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@yahoo.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@yahoo.com. The AFS Facebook page is at facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought. For calendar 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.

Views, opinions, positions or strategies expressed by authors are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, positions or strategies of the Atlanta Freethought Society or any member thereof. The editors of *Atlanta Freethought News* reserve the right to edit or alter in any manner it sees fit any articles deemed to be obscene, offensive, defamatory, threatening, in violation of trademark, copyright or other laws, or is otherwise unacceptable; and also to correct grammar and to conserve space.

Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

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

2024 Board of Directors

Mark Banks
Michael Buckner
Beth Davis, Secretary,
George Craig
Laura Ross, President
Judy Thompson
Steve Yothment, Treasurer

Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 30, Number 3, March 2024 CE
Copyright © 2024 by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc. Signed articles are all copyright © 2024 by their respective authors.

Membership in AFS is \$50/year per person,
\$20 for low income.

Membership includes voting privileges and
AFNews by email/USPS (indicate preferences).

Sustaining Membership is \$100.

Life Membership is \$1000.

Subscriptions only are \$30 for 12 issues.

Please make checks or money orders payable to
Atlanta Freethought Society
(or Paypal to afs@atlantafreethought.org).

Visit our Meetup page at
meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society.

See AFS events and member views at:
facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought.

Send E-mail to
afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Wordpress specialist: Beth Davis
AFS Facebook page: Laura Ross, Ed Buckner,
Steve Yothment

Books in Student Libraries—Who Decides?

by Ed Buckner • Letters to a Free Country

Probably everyone—or nearly everyone at least—would agree that in public school libraries—elementary, middle, high school—there should be some restrictions. Few would think that books that feature graphic pornography, malicious racism, virulent anti-human rights and the like shouldn't be kept out.

But students should, surely, be able to read material that widens their horizons, educates them enough to see that their own ideas are not the only ones, wakes them up to perspectives they haven't considered or don't like, and enlightens them about history that makes them uncomfortable. And what is available should include books that present different, even contradictory views. Education, not indoctrination, is the goal.

Should parents be able to exercise any veto power over what their children read? Even if one answers "Yes" (and not everyone would) there's still room for differences related to age and—probably—to subject matter.

Perhaps the questions of what books are made available to students should be settled and controlled by religious organizations?

Or maybe Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) should be excluded—or should be the only work on biology on the shelf?

Or settle book choices by political parties governed by religious principles. What could go wrong?

If political parties, operating through school boards or state legislatures, set the standards, that would mean effectively that majorities could decide—and this is supposed to be a democracy, as everyone knows. Problem solved.

But what if the majority oppose democracy and just vote to let the pastor of the biggest church in town choose. Or the majority is white and wants only books that describe white people as smarter to be in the library. Or the majority decides that a book that includes this—

There she lusted after her lovers, whose genitals were like those of donkeys and whose emission was like that of horses.

must be rejected even for high school students, no matter what the context is.

(And yes, that book is in most public school libraries—and should be, in my never humble opinion.)

Are there books in school libraries that describe white people unambiguously as superior? There are—and there should be—in the form of Mark Twain's finest novel, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), that includes one of most off-handedly racist passages (about a steamboat accident) to be found anywhere. According to a *Gale Review*,

Soon after it was published, the public library in Concord, Massachusetts, refused to carry *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* because of

its perceived crudeness. This ban turned into a publicity coup for Twain and his book. In a letter published in the *Hartford Courant*, the author responds gratefully, noting that "one book in a public library prevents the sale of a sure ten and a possible hundred of its mates." Twain also notes that the library's newsworthy action *will cause the purchasers of the book to read it, out of curiosity, instead of merely intending to do so ... and then they will discover, to my great advantage and their own indignant disappointment, that there is nothing objectionable in the book after all.*

Let's get serious—however much books in public school libraries should be restricted, everyone would surely agree that it is quite unreasonable to let parents restrict the reading of other people's children's. Or to let the Muslim imam decide for the Catholics or vice versa. Or to let political parties, even if they do represent the majority, decide on political or religious grounds.

So is there no answer?

There is, and it's parallel to letting biologists determine what should qualify as the right things to teach in biology class: professional librarians should decide.

A librarian can be counted on to know that, whatever Ezekiel 23:20 says

about horse and donkey genitals, the *Bible*, like the *Qur'an* or the *Tanakh* (or *Torah*), is culturally important enough to have available on the shelves of an American public school library, at least for high school students.

A librarian can be counted on to know that Twain's characters' racism was clearly in service of satirizing racism—and an exquisite example of the power of irony.

We don't need preachers and political parties choosing books for students. We need teachers and librarians, because we must support education.



Honor Nex Benedit by fighting to protect queer and trans kids

by Kendall Kalustyan • au.org

Nex was a straight-A student who enjoyed drawing, nature, and their cat, Zeus. Nex played Minecraft and listened to rock music with their friends. Nex deserved so much more from this world.

Nex Benedict, a transgender, 16-year-old teenager from Owosso High School in Oklahoma, died on Feb. 8, 2024, after enduring a violent assault in the school restroom the day before.

Nex traces their heritage to the Choctaw Nation, where they lived on the Cherokee Nation Reservation. Nex loved cooking, reading, and their favorite show was "The Walking Dead." Like many of us in the transgender community, Nex was on a journey of self-discovery that resulted in persistent bullying and harassment in school. Nex's grandmother, Sue Benedict, told the *Independent* that despite these hardships, "I was so proud of Nex. He was going someplace; he was so free."

Nex Benedict latest transgender person lost due to violence

Heartbroken doesn't begin to describe the grief felt throughout the LGBTQ+ community. And yet, this feeling is all too familiar for so many of us who have lost loved ones due to violence. According to the Human Rights Campaign's Fatal Violence Report, there were at least **32 deaths of transgender and gender non-conforming people in 2023**. There have been at least **two recorded deaths in 2024** and it's only February as of this writing.

Let me be clear – every single one of those lives was a life taken too soon and in vain. And yet there is something about Nex's death in particular that rubs salt in the wound. Many in the LGBTQ+ community relate Nex's death to that of Matthew Shepard in 1998, **a 21-year-old gay college student at the University of Wyoming who was attacked and left to die**. History repeats itself if we do nothing to change it.

This tragedy is only the most recent manifestation of the harms of policies crafted by Christian Nationalists. **Ten states, including Oklahoma, have passed bathroom bans, prohibiting transgender students from using the bathroom consistent with their gender identity.** Make no mistake, Nex's death is a direct consequence of this legislative vitriol.

Fight to protect queer and trans kids

Nex's death places this country at an inflection point with the transgender community. We can choose to allow another year to unfold where marginalized children are the **punching bags** of political discourse (and we know it will be worse than ever since it's an election year), or we can declare that enough is enough and we refuse to lose another life.

Now more than ever, I want transgender and LGBTQ+ youth to know that you are loved, your light is so much brighter than their hate, and they can't take that away from us. We have to keep fighting because queer and trans kids deserve to grow up in a world safe from violence. And because I believe in a tomorrow Nex can be proud of.

Nex continued on pg 5

Become a Member!

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

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$50 per year.

Sustaining memberships: One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.

Life memberships: Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A \$1000 life membership lasts a lifetime.

Paper newsletter: We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.)

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

Membership Dues	# of mems	Total
Individual	\$50	_____ \$_____
Low Income	\$20	_____ \$_____
Sustaining Member	\$100	_____ \$_____
Life Member	\$1000	_____ \$_____
Subscription only	\$30	_____ \$_____
Extra donation (Thank you!)		_____ \$_____
	Total:	_____ \$_____

Name _____
 Address: _____
 Phone: H _____ W _____
 Email: _____

- Receive PDF of newsletter by email
- Receive paper newsletter by post

Save time, postage, and keep your hands clean by making a payment via **Paypal** to:
afs@atlantafreethought.org

Good news: Most Americans continue to oppose Christian nationalism

ffrf.org

The Freedom From Religion Foundation welcomes the recent findings that approximately two-thirds of Americans do not support Christian nationalism. It's truly good news that 57 percent of Americans "completely disagree" that U.S. laws should be based on Christian values, two-thirds completely disagree that being Christian is an important part of being truly American, 70 percent completely disagree that the U.S. government should declare America a Christian nation, 60 percent that we would not have a country anymore if the "U.S. moves away from our Christian foundations" and three-quarters that "God has called Christians to exercise dominion over all areas of American society."

The Public Religion Research Institute surveyed 22,000 adults throughout last year as part of its American Values Atlas and was able for the first time to research attitudes on Christian nationalism in all 50 states. The research finds that roughly three in 10 Americans qualify as adherents (10 percent) or sympathizers (20 percent) of Christian nationalism while 30 percent reject it and 37 percent are skeptical. These percentages are consistent with responses since PRRI started asking these questions in late 2022.

Notably, if not surprisingly, the group with the most bragging rights for agreeing least with Christian nationalism is the religiously unaffiliated: 61 percent reject it and 31 percent are skeptical. Jewish Americans are second-least supportive, followed by religious non-Christians.

Also not surprisingly, majorities of white evangelical Protestants and other Protestants of color fall into the Christian nationalist camp, with a near-majority of Hispanic Protestants close behind. However, it's heartening that majorities of Mormons, Black Protestants, other Christians, white mainline Protestants, white Catholics and white Hispanics reject or are skeptical of Christian nationalism.

Among other significant findings:

- **"Residents of red states are significantly more likely than those in blue states to hold Christian nationalist beliefs."** In red states, the number of Christian nationalist leaners is nearly four in 10. In five states, more than 45 percent of residents are Christian nationalist adherents or sympathizers: North Dakota, Mississippi, Alabama, West Virginia and Louisiana.
- **"At the national level, Christian nationalism is strongly linked to Republican Party affiliation and holding favorable views of Trump."** Republicans at 55 percent are twice as likely as independents and three times as likely as Democrats to hold such views.
- **"Christian nationalism is strongly linked to evangelical/born-again identity and frequent church attendance."** Majorities of white evangelical Protestants and Hispanic Protestants hold Christian nationalist beliefs. Christian nationalists are more likely to believe in modern-day prophecy, spiritual healing and the prosperity gospel. Of those who attend religious services weekly or more, 52 percent are Christian nationalist adherents or sympathizers, compared with 38 percent who attend a few times a year and 18 percent who seldom or never attend.
- **"Christian nationalists are more likely than other Americans to see political struggles through the apocalyptic lens of revolution and to support political violence."** Some of the disturbing findings are that a majority of Christian nationalist adherents and sympathizers agree that "there is a storm coming soon that will sweep away the elites in power and restore the rightful leaders." They are about twice as likely as other Americans to believe political violence may be justified.
- **"While there is little variation in support for Christian nationalist beliefs by race or ethnicity alone, Christian nationalist beliefs are refracted through racial and ethnic identity, which produces divergent political outcomes among white, Hispanic and Black Americans."** For example, among white Americans and Hispanic Americans — but not Black Americans — holding Christian nationalist beliefs is strongly correlated with Republican Party identity and support for Trump, according to PRRI.

The research is a follow-up from the major national survey PRRI released a year ago. As FFRF observed last year when that study came out, this is generally reassuring news for secularism. PRRI gauges Christian nationalist leanings based on adherence to the following statements:

- The U.S. government should declare America a Christian nation.
- U.S. laws should be based on Christian values.
- If the United States 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.

"This survey generally speaks well of the American people's commitment to pluralistic values," maintains FFRF Co-President **Annie Laurie Gaylor**. "But let's remember the caveat by **Katherine Stewart** in the new documentary, 'God and Country,' who points out that in a country where 40 to 50 percent of the people don't vote, you don't need a majority to dominate an election cycle." That's why it's so important that nonbelievers and other "Nones" get out the vote. The "Nones," at 28 percent of the population, could cancel out the vote of Christian nationalists.

Nex continued from pg 4

Take Action: Sign AU's petition

Editor's note: **You can take action** in the pursuit of justice for Nex and all LGBTQ+ people being persecuted in Oklahoma by signing our petition to urge the Oklahoma Legislature to remove Oklahoma Superintendent of Public Instruction Ryan Walters from office and take appropriate measures to ensure the protection of LGBTQ+ students and staff in Oklahoma schools. The link is: <https://www.au.org/get-involved/actions/petition-oust-superintendent-ryan-walters/>

Resources for LGBTQ+ people in crisis

If you or anyone you know is in crisis, the following LGBTQ+ resources are available:

(988) +3 National LGBTQ+ Suicide Hotline

The Trevor Project at (866) 488-7386

Rainbow Youth Project at (317) 643-4888

Trans Lifeline's Hotline at (877) 565-8860, which does not contact emergency services without a caller's consent.

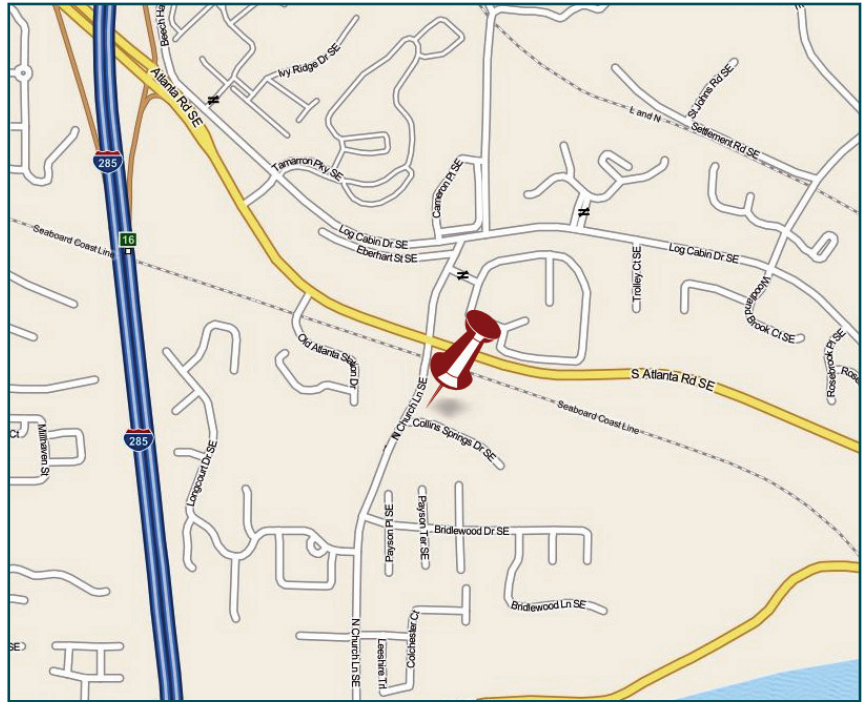
Kendall Kalustyan is a recent member of AU's Youth Organizing Fellowship program, and is currently the Policy Coordinator at the Human Rights Campaign.

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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

**Michael Buckner
3/10/24 1:00 pm EST
(At Hall and on Zoom)**



Atlanta Freethought News is produced by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit, member-run, educational organization created to advance freethought and protect freethinkers. Any freethought, atheist, secular humanist, agnostic, or rationalist group is granted permission to reproduce anything from our newsletter not expressly labeled otherwise (acknowledgement of AFS and author appreciated). Articles published represent the official opinion of AFS only when that is clearly stated; all other opinion is that of the individual author.

Atlanta Freethought News
Atlanta Freethought Society
4775 N Church Lane SE
Atlanta GA 30339

