

Paul Broman "When Science Outgrew God - The Decline of Natural Theology"

We are thrilled that a longtime member and former board member has agreed to give a talk on May 12! We were hanging out at Game Night last month and were discussing who we could get for the May speaker when Paul Broman spoke up and said he would be happy to give us a talk called **When Science Outgrew God - The Decline of Natural Theology.**"



Paul Broman

Paul says, "I plan to talk about the period of time when the science of geology began and created a real controversy about the age of the earth. Prior to that, "Natural Theology", or the idea that the universe reveals God's plan, was dominant even among Deists. I plan to focus on the impact of an anonymous 1844 book titled *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* which was a bombshell book that popularized a number of really controversial ideas that were floating around, like the idea that the earth is much older than the Bible might say, the earth and solar system condensed from space dust, and the idea organisms might have evolved (which was in the popular consciousness before *Origin of Species*). I plan to focus on how scientists of the day actively defended Christianity against these ideas (such as Herschel, Lyell) and how the ultimate result of this controversy led to the current world in which science and religion are totally separate."

"I am a total layman but an avid reader. I don't claim to have academic chops, but I think the topic is fascinating and my research is fair. I hope you

The May Potluck

Before the May 12th meeting we will have a Potluck Lunch, starting at 11:00. 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 dessert**
- H-P: Bring a side dish**
- Q-Z: Bring a main dish**

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.

AFS Calendar

May 11	GAME NIGHT!!	6 pm
May 12	Potluck Lunch	11 am
May 12	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm
Jun 8	GAME NIGHT!!	6 pm
Jun 9	Board of Directors	11 am
Jun 9	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm

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

like it!"

The Broman 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. The program will start at about 1 P.M. on Sunday, 12 May, via Zoom and in AFS Hall. We welcome those who are not freethinkers but who just want to know more about historical scientific controversy. Details on the Zoom meeting number are shown below.

AFS May Meeting

May 12, 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

Atlanta Freethought Society

GAME NIGHT

Please come hang out with us for Game Night on Saturday, May 11, starting at 6 pm! We've been having loads of fun playing games and catching up with friends old and new! We'd love to have you! Please bring snacks, beverages (beer and wine okay), and any games you'd enjoy sharing.



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.



- 12 May** Paul Broman “When Science Outgrew God - The Decline of Natural Theology”
- 9 Jun** Ben Radford “Investigating Miracles”
- 14 Jul** TBA
- 11 Aug** April Lakeman “Fortifying the Separation of Church and State in Georgia”

AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.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@yahoogroups.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 5, May 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

Tax Churches?

by Ed Buckner • Letters to a Free Country

For the sake of religious freedom/liberty of conscience, an idea I prize highly and not just for myself and those who share my irreligion, the question (questions, really) about taxing churches (and synagogues, mosques, temples, etc.) must be approached with care and clarity. I've written about this before, but let me start by setting out a few principles that I argue must be upheld:

1. Religious and irreligious organizations must be treated equally, without regard to anyone's opinion as to whether the organization promotes the truth. Even if a majority like or dislike the religion or philosophy promoted, that alone should not determine tax policy. This is not to suggest that there cannot be any limits to what ideas an organization can promote. For example, if a group promotes a clearly criminal activity—murder or robbery, say—I'm steadfastly against letting them enjoy special tax treatment.
2. People and organizations of people should pay for what they use.
3. Government's role(s) regarding religion should be steadfastly neutral. No government, federal, state, or local, should promote or oppose religious ideas and beliefs. (If an idea, good or bad, happens to be important to a religious group, that by itself should not mean governments should support or oppose it.)
4. The power to tax without limitation can be the power to destroy, but taxation properly regulated and limited is crucial to funding the common needs that government can best provide for a just society.

The questions related to taxing churches are not at all new. American founders like **James Madison**, Republican Presidents of 150 years ago, famous Americans, and many others have weighed in on these matters.

For example—

James Madison vetoed a bill where it was “proposed to exempt Houses of Worship from taxes.”

The divorce between Church and State ought to be absolute.

It ought to be so absolute that no Church property anywhere, in any state or in the nation, should be exempt from equal taxation; for if you exempt the property of any church organization, to that extent you impose a tax upon the whole community. — **James A. Garfield**, Republican (20th U.S. President in 1881); as a Congressman in 1874.

I would call your attention to the importance of correcting an evil that, if permitted to continue, will probably lead to great trouble in our land before the close of the Nineteenth century. It is the acquisition of vast amounts of untaxed church property.... In a growing country, where real estate enhances so rapidly with time as in the United States, there is scarcely a limit to the wealth that may be acquired by corporations, religious or otherwise, if allowed to retain real estate without taxation. The contemplation of so vast a property as here alluded to, without taxation, may lead to sequestration with-

out constitutional authority, and through blood. I would suggest the taxation of all property equally, whether church or corporation. — **Ulysses S. Grant**, Republican, 18th U.S. President [1869-1877], Message to Congress from the President, December 7, 1875.

Mark Twain noted that when “no church property is taxed ... the infidel and the atheist and the man without religion are taxed to make up the deficit in the public income thus caused.”

So, what about **Ed Buckner**? If I may speak for him, I'd say,

1. Exempt religious organizations from income taxes but only under the same circumstances as any other non-profit groups: require accounting, to assure that the organization is actually non-profit. (That is not the law now: churches, mosques, temples, etc., need only declare that they are that, and no accounting at all is required. Some responsible churches do account to their members for their money—but not all and no law requires it.)
2. Require all organizations that receive police and fire services and make use of roads and streets to pay the local real estate taxes needed to finance those services. This is a matter of state and local law and varies greatly—most but not all jurisdictions exempt churches from such taxes. They shouldn't—when some get special treatment, everyone else has to pay more.
3. All organizations, religious or not, non-profit or not, should have to withhold income taxes on employees, pay into social security, etc. For the most part, all are in fact now required to do this. The IRS Code grants various special privileges—like exempting the value of housing provided by a church from income taxes—to clergy—and should not.

The basic idea, in my opinion, is that Catholics, atheists, humanists, Baptists, and Muslims should not be asked to supplement the expenses of each other in unequal measure. No special privileges or special tax treatment based on religion.

Treat all organizations the same regarding taxes—anything else favors or restricts based on matters that are not any of any government's business.



FFRF sues Memphis schools on behalf of The Satanic Temple

FFRF.org

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has filed a federal lawsuit on behalf of The Satanic Temple against the Shelby County Board of Education in Memphis, Tenn., over serious violations of the First Amendment.

Since November 2023, when The Satanic Temple sought to begin an afterschool club at Chimneyrock Elementary School, the school district has attempted to thwart it at every turn. Rather than allowing it to rent school facilities on the same terms as other nonprofit organizations (such as the Christian Good News Club), the Shelby County Board of Education, which operates the district, has chosen to defy the First Amendment. The district has charged The Satanic Temple discriminatory rental and security fees, refused to adequately communicate, and generally treated members of the educational group as second-class citizens.

Memphis-Shelby County Schools “cannot pick and choose how much it charges an organization renting its facilities based on how much it does or does not favor the organization’s viewpoint, the content of its speech, or its religious beliefs,” asserts FFRF’s lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee. The district’s “unconstitutional behavior has chilled The Satanic Temple’s speech and substantially burdened its ability to exercise its religiously motivated practice of offering inclusive, welcoming religious clubs at public schools.”

Further, the school district’s rental security fee policy vests unbridled discretion in an administrator to arbitrarily assess fees against disfavored

groups, squarely in violation of the First Amendment, the suit contends. In *Forsyth County, Ga., v. Nationalist Movement*, the U.S. Supreme Court held that a policy that similarly vested a government administrator with unbridled discretion to arbitrarily assess security fees against disfavored groups violated the First Amendment.

The Satanic Temple does not worship or believe in the existence of Satan, FFRF’s legal complaint notes, instead regarding the literary figure as a representation of rejecting tyranny, championing the human mind and spirit, and seeking justice and egalitarianism for all. And The Satanic Temple promulgates the Seven Tenets, which promote rational and compassionate action. For example, the first tenet states: “One should strive to act with compassion and empathy toward all creatures in accordance with reason.”

The district’s discriminatory behavior gained a national spotlight last December when the district held a press conference in which school board members, administrators, and other officials expressed hostility toward The Satanic Temple and validated community members’ hostility toward the After School Satan Club’s then upcoming first meeting at Chimneyrock Elementary. A local news source later described the



Memphis continued page 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:	_____ \$_____

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

Name _____

Address: _____

Phone: H _____ W _____

Email: _____

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

Memphis from page 4

press conference: “Interim Superintendent **Toni Williams**, board chair and Rev. **Althea Greene**, and board member **Mauricio Calvo** passionately denounced [The Satanic Temple] while flanked by pastors of local churches.”

Shortly after the press conference, the Freedom From Religion Foundation, a national state/church watchdog with 40,000 nonreligious members, sent the first of three complaint letters to Superintendent **Williams** in response to the deeply concerning and discriminatory remarks. FFRF’s letter urged the district to continue to abide by the First Amendment and allow The Satanic Temple to rent facilities in accordance with the district’s own written policies. And the letter further explained that if the district bowed to the community’s attempt at a heckler’s veto, it would violate the Constitution by discriminating against The Satanic Temple on the basis of its viewpoint. The school district has not yet responded.

Instead, it notified The Satanic Temple in early January via a late-afternoon phone call that it had assessed a “special security fee” of \$2,045.60 against The Satanic Temple for “additional security.” The district also charged The Satanic Temple another fee of \$250 for “field lights.” **The Good News Club**, which describes itself as a bible-centered organization of born-again believers whose purpose is to evangelize boys and girls with the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ,” meets every week at Chimneyrock Elementary, and has not been assessed any “special security fee” or a fee for “field lights.” FFRF and The Satanic Temple requests to the district for a fee waiver were ignored, and so The Satanic Temple reluctantly paid the \$2,295.60.

On Jan. 10, Memphis-Shelby County Schools finally allowed The Satanic Temple to hold the first meeting after-school at Chimneyrock Elementary. When club leaders arrived at Chimneyrock Elementary, they discovered that various district administrators, school board members and members of the clergy were already at the entrance of the building. On Jan. 12, The Satanic Temple submitted four rental requests for monthly meetings — with dilatory and unhelpful responses from the district.

The district has since Jan. 10 continued attempts to thwart The Satanic Temple and deter its club for students from meeting at Chimneyrock. The district has abruptly changed the meeting time, unceremoniously canceled rental applications, refused to communicate with the Temple regarding rental rates, and continued to treat the Temple unfavorably. It’s clear that such illegal tactics are fueled by hostility toward The Satanic Temple’s speech, viewpoint and religion by school board

members, administrators and other officials.

The Satanic Temple seeks an order for prompt approval of its reservation requests by Memphis-Shelby County Schools. It also seeks to reserve Memphis-Shelby County Schools facilities without the district attempting to charge discriminatory rental fees. Accordingly, The Satanic Temple requests a declaratory judgment from the district court that the Shelby County Board of Education’s behavior violates the Free Speech Clause and the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and permanent injunctive relief, with nominal damages, enjoining the school district from continuing to discriminate against The Satanic Temple and the After School Satan Club.

FFRF Senior Litigation Counsel **Patrick Elliott** and FFRF **Anne Nicol Gaylor** Legal Fellow **Sammi Lawrence** prepared the complaint. This case is being handled in conjunction with FFRF’s local counsel, Attorney **Scott Kramer** and Attorney **Matt Kezhaya**. [You can read the entire legal complaint here.](#)

SCOTUS should affirm that federal law EMTALA protects pregnant patients who need emergency abortion care

[au.org](#)

Americans United for Separation of Church and State President and CEO **Rachel Laser** issued the following statement in advance of oral arguments tomorrow before the U.S. Supreme Court in *Moyle v. U.S.* and *Idaho v. U.S.*, which involve Emergency Medical Treatment and Labor Act (EMTALA) requirements that hospitals provide stabilizing abortion care to pregnant patients seeking treatment during medical emergencies:

“No one in America should be denied emergency medical care because of someone else’s beliefs. Our Constitution’s promise of church-state separation means that all of us must be free to make our own decisions about our own bodies based on our own beliefs.

“Abortion is a fundamental right that is essential to our health, equality and freedom. But religious extremists in Idaho and across the nation are violating the separation of church and state by banning abortion and enshrining one narrow religious viewpoint into our law. We knew that the end of *Roe* signaled the beginning of a new wave of attacks on abortion rights and reproductive health care. That’s why we need a national recommitment to the separation of church and state. It’s the shield that protects freedom without favor and equality without exception for all of us.”

AU joined more than 100 reproductive rights, civil rights, religious and other social justice organizations in an amicus brief urging the Supreme Court to affirm that EMTALA guarantees everyone the right to emergency medical treatment nationwide, including pregnant people who may require abortion care to stabilize emergency medical conditions. Idaho’s abortion ban directly conflicts with this nearly 40-year-old federal law, endangering the health and lives of pregnant people, especially Black, Indigenous and other people of color, LGBTQ+ people, people working to make ends meet and others who already face excessive barriers to health care.

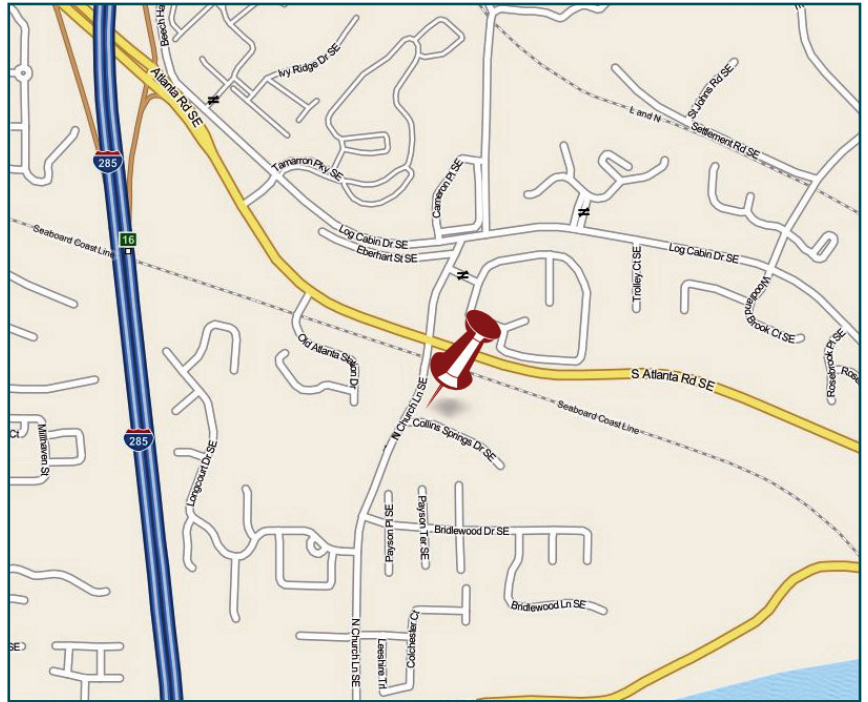
The brief was spearheaded by the National Women’s Law Center. Other organizations joining the brief include American Federation of Teachers, Human Rights Campaign Foundation, NAACP Legal Defense & Educational Fund, National Education Association, National LGBTQ Task Force, People For the American Way Foundation, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Reproductive Freedom for All (formerly NARAL Pro-Choice America) and many others.

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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

**Paul Broman
May 12 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

