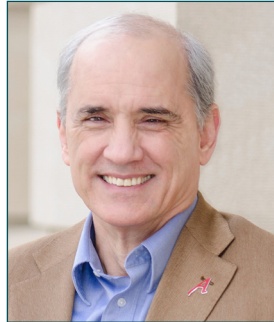


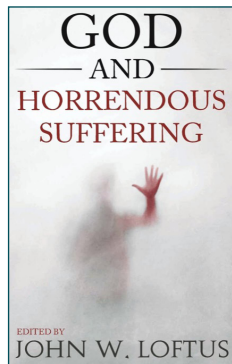
Dan Barker of Freedom From Religion Foundation: "Supernatural Evil"

AFS has the great honor to have a return speaker, Dan Barker of Freedom From Religion Foundation. Dan has been one of the best speakers—several times—we’ve ever had. We nearly always have great speakers, but only rarely can we boast of having an international star and leader of freethought like Dan Barker.



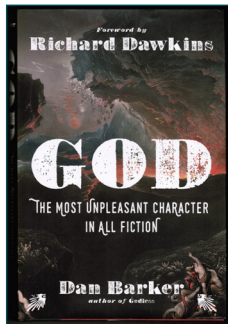
Dan Barker

FFRF is the largest and most effective freethought organization in the US and likely in the world, in no small part because of the leadership he and his co-president (and wife), Annie Laurie Gaylor, have provided over several decades. Barker is a prolific writer, frequent debater (across the US and in the United Kingdom). His books are easily among the best on freethought, atheism, and related topics anywhere. The talk and discussion on Sunday, 9 July that Barker will lead is on



"Supernatural Evil."

Barker said about the talk, "Why are Jesus and his father held in such high regard? If we actually read (rather than worship) the words and actions of the biblical deity, we see that they are not only untrue: they are immoral." In this talk, Dan Barker will discuss the ideas he considered and wrote about in a chapter in a book edited by John W. Loftus, *God and Horrendous Suffering*, Gcrr Press, 2021.



Dan Barker, a former Christian minister, is

Calendar

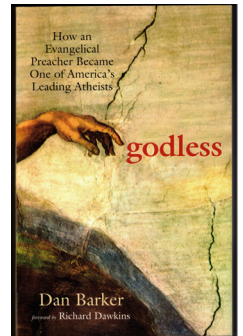
July 9	General Meeting Live/Online	11 pm
Aug 13	Potluck Picnic (Live only)	12 pm
Sep 10	General Meeting Live/Online	1 pm

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

co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and co-founder of The Clergy Project. His many books include *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists* (Ulysses Press, 2008) and *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction* (Sterling, 2016).

Having great programs like this one for our members and visitors always makes us proud, and we expect to continue doing that throughout 2023 and beyond.

The Barker program, free and open to the public, will be preceded by a few minutes of Zoom-and-in-person-based socializing starting about 12:30 P.M. Eastern Daylight Time in the US, for any interested. The program will start at about 1 P.M. (EDT) on Sunday, 9 July, via Zoom and at AFS Hall. We welcome those who are not freethinkers but who just want to know more about freethought and church & state. All freethinkers are of course welcome—and we hope that they will decide to join as members in due course. Details are below.



AFS July Meeting July 9, 2023 1:00-2:30 PM (EST)

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 July	Dan Barker of FFRF
13 Aug	Potluck Picnic at Atlanta Freethought!
10 Sep	Robyn Blumner of CFI
8 Oct	TBA
12 Nov	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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Atlanta Freethought News

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What in the Name of God?

By Ed Buckner • Letters to a Free Country • edbuckner.substack.com

For what it's worth, this installment of *Friday Freethought Perennials* even more directly tracks the language in our book *In Freedom We Trust*—in this case Chapter 18—than most have. Among other things that means that if you want to see documentation or further reading suggestions, the ten footnotes included in the chapter (but not here) may be of interest.

Why “God” Doesn’t Belong in America’s Motto or in any Official Pledges of Allegiance

Ronald Reagan, as President, made much of the importance of “In God We Trust” on US currency and “Under God” in the pledge. According to Richard J. Ellis, Reagan “deplored the efforts to remove religion from public life,” specifically connecting this to lawsuits about the pledge and motto. Ellis quoted Reagan as saying in 1984 on the day he accepted the Republican nomination for re-election:

“politics and morality are inseparable. And as morality’s foundation is religion, religion and politics are necessarily related. We need religion as a guide. We need it because we are imperfect, and our government needs the church, because only those humble enough to admit they’re sinners can bring to democracy the tolerance it requires in order to survive. . . . Without God, there is no virtue, because there’s no prompting of the conscience. . . . Without God, there is a coarsening of the society. And without God, democracy will not and cannot long endure. If we ever forget that we are a nation under God, we will be a nation gone under.”

Reagan’s narrow understanding of tolerance and his stated conclusion that morality depends on religion are not new ideas. And neither his declarations on either matter or his heavy piety necessarily tell us a great deal beyond what audience (in this specific case to a prayer breakfast in Texas—but likely to a broader spectrum of voters) he was pandering to. The longstanding but wrongheaded connection between morality and religion is discussed in other parts of our book and in other essays of Letters. . . . I also analyzed

the meaning and importance of tolerance and toleration in a Letter called “Give Me Liberty or Give Me Tolerance?” on 13 February.

But the pledge and motto deserve special attention in any case for American secularism.

Many anti-secularists declare that the motto, ubiquitous on all American coins and currency, on legislative and courtroom walls, and in federal legislation, as well as elsewhere constitutes necessary and sufficient evidence that this is a Christian nation, that the United States is not and should not be secular. Those same critics frequently cite the pledge for the same reasons.

In God We Trust

Most American atheists and many other secularists are offended by the

religious motto printed on our money, but, whatever else it tells us, it says nothing about the intentions of the Founding Fathers, whose choice of a motto was “E Pluribus Unum” (“Out of the Many, One”). That thoroughly unchristian motto:

“was chosen by a committee appointed on July 4, 1776, by the Continental Congress ‘to prepare a device for a Seal of the United States of America.’ Committee member Benjamin Franklin proposed the motto ‘Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God,’ but the phrase *e pluribus unum* was chosen by the committee and officially adopted on June 20, 1782. The phrase—which was well known, having appeared for many years on the cover of the *Gentleman’s Magazine*—is from ‘Moretum,’ attributed to Virgil.”

It is interesting that our allegedly oh-so-pious-and-Christian Founding Fathers had an opportunity to choose a national motto with the word “God” in it and rejected it in favor of a secular one. (And this was in the days before the secular U.S. Constitution was adopted.)

IN
FREEDOM
WE
TRUST

AN ATHEIST GUIDE TO
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY



EDWARD M. BUCKNER
MICHAEL E. BUCKNER

The religious (IGWT) motto was not printed on all US money until required under the McCarthy-inspired law enacting the IGWT motto as law in the 1950s. The courts have essentially held, by the way, that the motto is constitutional because it is not Christian or even really religious (just “ceremonial deism”). As Justice William Brennan summed it up in a 1984 dissenting opinion,

“I would suggest that such practices as the designation of ‘In God We Trust’ as our national motto, or the references to God contained in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag can best be understood, in Dean Rostow’s apt phrase, as a form of ‘ceremonial deism,’ protected from

What in the Name Continued Page 5

Christian Nationalists support religion-based discrimination. Most other Americans don't.

by Rhys Long • AU.org • Wall of Separation

Religion-based discrimination

A **new study** reports that a majority of adults believe that health care, employment and other services should not be denied to LGBTQ+ people on the basis of a provider or employer's religious beliefs. This is a fundamental part of living in a free, diverse, tolerant society: You respect other people, even if you disagree with them. You especially respect people's civil rights.

Of those polled, 84% said medical professionals should not be able to deny care to an LGBTQ+ person based on religious beliefs, 74% opposed the denial of employment and 71% opposed letting businesses refuse service. Most people understand that we are guaranteed basic rights, and we should not be denied those rights on the grounds of someone else's beliefs. This would be religion-based discrimination.

Belief vs. action

Allowing health care providers to refuse service sets an especially dangerous precedent. Putting people in harm's way is not covered by the First Amendment's guarantee of free exercise of religion, and housing or employment discrimination is also not covered in many contexts. That's because there's a difference between belief and action; you may believe marriage equality is wrong, but that does not give you the right to take action to deny a same-sex couple their legal rights. Religious beliefs should not extend into the sphere of someone else's rights, and it's a monumental constitutional issue when they do.

What if, for example, an atheist refused service to a straight couple? Or a Muslim refused to provide medical care to a Christian? Or a Buddhist refused to employ an evangelical? I'm sure, in all these circumstances, Christian

Nationalists would take issue. That's because they don't actually believe in the absolute freedom of religion which they profess. What they really want is freedom to make everyone abide by their views; you shouldn't be allowed to discriminate against Christians, but Christians should be allowed to discriminate against you. These attacks are disingenuous, bad faith efforts to instill Christian Nationalism as a protected and exalted belief system.

A world without church-state separation

The matter of businesses discriminating against folks should be settled, but anti-LGBTQ+ extremists continue to refuse service to members of this community. Think of what the world will look like if we allow religious extremists, or any other group, to violate folks' civil rights on the basis of belief. We would soon descend into anarchy and hate. We best remember that this is really what's at stake with cases like **303 Creative LLC v. Elenis**. We are duking it out in the courts to decide whether religion gives someone the right to discriminate in secular settings – let's all hope the answer is a resounding no. [Editor's note: ,,sigh,,]

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

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What in the Name Continued From Page 3

Establishment Clause scrutiny chiefly because they have lost through rote repetition any significant religious content.”

A later federal court ruling, reaffirmed this idea. I do not agree that the motto or the “Under God” phrase added to the pledge are constitutional, largely because I understand them to be religious. Some Christians, including ardent advocates of the United States as a Christian nation like **John W. Whitehead**, agree with me that the motto and “under God” should be seen as deeply religious:

“... the Pledge of Allegiance ... still contains the phrase ‘Under God’ only because a federal court said that the phrase has lost any religious significance through rote repetition and now amounts to ‘ceremonial deism’” (emphasis is Whitehead’s). But if the motto or pledge language is interpreted as Christian, the courts would then necessarily interpret it as constitutionally impermissible.”

The “IGWT” motto has, to be sure, apparently achieved *political* security even if it should not. Fearful politicians still blithely support it, I suspect most often as an easier path—easier because more people who care very much about it want to keep it than because it makes sense—than any to change it. State legislatures frequently pass laws or resolutions regarding “IGWT,” almost certainly for mostly political reasons. For example, the Georgia General Assembly has invested time and energy in arguing over whether “In God We Trust” stickers for Georgia automobile license plates should be available for free or at a charge of \$1.00 each.

When the U.S. House passed a nonbinding resolution reaffirming the motto, 396 to 9, in November 2011, President **Obama** correctly called that “political posturing.” But neither Obama nor any other prominent political leader from either party called then for eliminating the motto.

“E Pluribus Unum” has appeared on most U.S. coins, beginning in the late 1790s. The motto “In God We Trust” did not appear on any U.S. coin until 1864, when “Its presence on the new coin was due largely to the increased religious sentiment during the Civil War Crisis,” according to **R. S. Yeoman**.

Pledge of Allegiance and “Under God”

Not only **Ronald Reagan** but scores of leaders, political and religious, have, probably with widely varying degrees of sincerity, concluded that the Pledge of Allegiance, the short but inspiring declaration apparently agreed to by every patriotic American, is strong evidence of our non-secular status. After all, we seem to proudly include the words “Under God” as a core part of our freedom and of our united indivisibility. If that’s not a reference to Christianity, what could it possibly refer to?

Expressing fealty to any god, however vaguely, should not, we insist, be a condition of citizenship. Love of country is not, nor should it be, measured by a citizen’s religious belief or lack thereof. Many atheists, freethinkers, secular humanists, and agnostics have laid down their lives for this country. Many other Americans object to false piety as a part of nationalism.

The U.S. Congress added “Under God” to the pledge—amazingly enough, actually *dividing* the phrase “One nation indivisible”—to insert it in 1954. The Ninth Circuit U.S. Court ruled in 2002:

“In the context of the Pledge, the statement that the United States is a nation “under God” is an endorsement of religion. It is a profession of a religious belief, namely, a belief in monotheism. The recitation that ours is a nation “under God” is not a mere acknowledgment that many Americans believe in a deity. Nor is it merely descriptive of the undeniable historical significance of religion in the founding of the Republic. Rather, the phrase “one nation under God” in the context of the Pledge is normative. To recite the Pledge is not to describe the United States; instead, it

is to swear allegiance to the values for which the flag stands: unity, indivisibility, liberty, justice, and—since 1954—monotheism. The text of the official Pledge, codified in federal law, impermissibly takes a position with respect to the purely religious question of the existence and identity of God. A profession that we are a nation “under God” is identical, for Establishment Clause purposes, to a profession that we are a nation “under Jesus,” a nation “under Vishnu,” a nation “under Zeus,” or a nation “under no god,” because none of these professions can be neutral with respect to religion. [T]he government must pursue a course of complete neutrality toward religion (Wallace, 472 US at 60, 105 S.Ct. 2479). Furthermore, the school district’s practice of teacher-led recitation of the Pledge aims to inculcate in students a respect for the ideals set forth in the Pledge, and thus amounts to state endorsement of these ideals. Although students cannot be forced to participate in recitation of the Pledge, the school district is nonetheless conveying a message of state endorsement of a religious belief when it requires public school teachers to recite, and lead the recitation of, the current form of the Pledge.”

While that ruling has since been overturned on technical grounds, it accurately describes why the phrase “Under God” should never have been added by the U.S. Congress to any official pledge of allegiance to this nation.

What **Jefferson** said in a letter to his friend **Benjamin Rush** in 1803 is still true today:

“It behooves every man who values liberty of conscience for himself, to resist invasions of it in the case of others; or their case may, by change of circumstances, become his own.”

Whoever is in the majority today, could, by next year or next century, find themselves in the minority. Minority rights therefore should matter and be preciously guarded by those now in the majority. Only by opposing a convergence between church and state, only by insisting on a religiously neutral pledge of allegiance and government, can we succeed in defending freedom of conscience for us all. For political leaders to pretend to have the power to act or speak “In the Name of God” is deeply un-American, unpatriotic at its core, and hypocritical quite directly in the sense conveyed in red-letter words in the Bible (Matthew 6:5)—

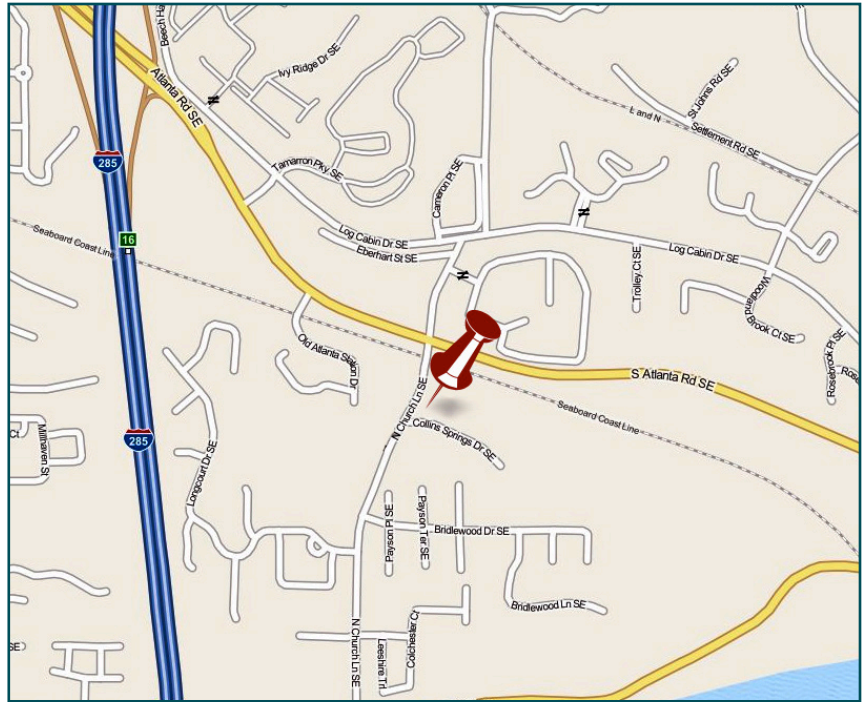
“... do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full.”

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**AF Hall
4775 N. Church Lane SE
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**Dan Barker
7/9/23 1:00 pm EST
(via Zoom+AF Hall)**



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