

Kenneth Copp - "Amish Atheist: My Journey from Fundamentalist Christianity to Free Thought" (via Zoom)

AFS will host Kenneth Copp, a furniture maker from Maine (and from a rich and interesting religious and cultural tradition) to provide our program on August 8th (Sunday) via Zoom. Copp is famous for his furniture and proud of his free thought.



Kenneth Copp

This feels as if we're hearing from a voice from long ago and far away. Kenneth Copp is one of us in time and only a thousand or so miles distant. But his story is of a man who is almost a time traveler—journeying from a self-consciously anti-modern religious culture to real freethinking. His journey is in some ways similar to that of AFS—adapting religious ways and buildings to other purposes. We're eager to hear from him.

Copp will give a concise and brief retelling of his journey and what opened his mind to reject faith in favor of reason and science, along with his growing awareness of civil rights violations perpetrated on excommunicated members of the Amish and Mennonite sect/cults.

He was initially raised as a Lutheran, but at the age of seven, his parents defected to the Assembly of God sect as well as the FGBMFI (Full Gospel Business Mens Fellowship International). This became a springboard for his later radicalization into the conservative Mennonite cults as a teenager. His much older brother was instrumental in his recruitment, himself having joined the cult years earlier. Copp later joined and married into the cult, having a family of 10 children.

His family later left the Mennonites for the Amish, giving up their cars, electricity, etc. Being some years later disillusioned by blatant hypocrisy, and having contact with a friendly atheist, Copp

began rethinking everything and eventually realized he didn't believe anymore. Needless to say, this was extremely difficult after having invested decades of his life into the cult and being extremely zealous over that time.

Calendar

Aug 8	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Sep 12	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Oct 10	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm

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

Besides being a thoughtful amateur philosopher, Copp is a furniture artist of the first order. He hand makes, one piece at a time, beautiful chairs, beds, coffins, and many other practical works of art in wood (see <http://locustgrovewoodworks.com/> for more, including the interesting role played by horses in his work.)

The Copp AFS program, free and open to the public, will be preceded by a few minutes of social distanced (seriously distanced!) socializing starting about 12:30 P.M. EDT, for those interested. The program will start at about 1 P.M. EDT (1700 UTC; 10 A.M. PDT) on Sunday, 8th August, via Zoom.

We welcome those who are not freethinkers but who just want to know more about the contemporary left from a prominent thinker and leader (and freethinker). All freethinkers are of course welcome—and we hope that they will decide to join as members in due course.

Please click on the link below to participate. Socializing starts at 12:30 pm.

**AFS August Meeting
August 8, 2021 1:00-2:30 PM (EDT)**

To join Zoom meeting go to this link:
us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911



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 due to global pandemic (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.



August 8: Kenneth Copp

September 12: Charles Shapiro

October 10: Jonathan Pearce

November 14: Alison Gill

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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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Atlanta Freethought News

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Pentecostal Preacher Became an Atheist

From *Freethought Today*, Vol. 38, No 6, August 2021

Name: Sam Whitehead

Where I live: Marietta, Ga.

Where and when I was born: A farmhouse in Grant, Ala., in 1950.

Family: My lovely wife Vicki, and Miles, a miniature schnauzer. No children, but I have two younger brothers and several nephews and nieces.

Education: Bachelor's and master's business degrees with emphasis on personnel management and finance from Georgia State University in Atlanta.



Sam Whitehead

Occupation: Retired from a 44-year career with one of the largest petroleum transportation companies in the world. Mostly worked in human resources management and public affairs.

How I got where I am today: Hard work and perseverance. I had to pay my own way through college and went from the mailroom to ever-increasing responsibilities during my career.

Where I'm headed: An enjoyable retirement with travel, playing music with my friends and spending time with friends and family.

Person in history I admire and why:

Bob Dylan. He is the musical artist I wish I had been. As a teen in the 1960s, I aspired to be a singer/songwriter like the members of the Beatles. My friends and I wrote songs and dreamt of fame and fortune. It was in the 1970s that I became a Dylan fanatic. His body of work is astounding and I have seen him numerous times in concert.

A quotation I like: "This above all: To thine own self be true." - William Shakespeare.

Things I like: Music, cars, motorcycles, dogs, "Gunsmoke."

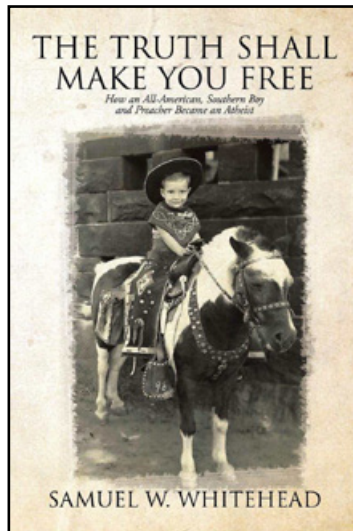
Things I smite: Religious privilege, people who expect the government to take care of them.

My doubts about religion started: a child, but really took off at age 22, when I set out to prove to myself that God was real.

Before I die: I hope to see another Bob Dylan concert and that he invites me to the stage for a duet on "Blowin' in the Wind."

Ways I promote freethought: I support my local Freethought Society and attend the meetings. I am also quick to point out, whenever the opportunity arises, that America is NOT a Christian nation. I also published a book (*The Truth Shall Make You Free: How an All-American, Southern Boy and Preacher Became an Atheist*) in 2020 about my 40-year quest of research and reflection to prove my faith was the one true religion and that God was real. I reluctantly came to the conclusion that there is no god and that no religion is true.

I wish you'd have asked me: What is one of my favorite songs? "Let it Be" by the Beatles. "When I find myself in times of trouble"



Guest commentary: The 'Great Agnostic' was among the least-known Americans

Galveston County (TX) Daily News, July 14, 2021

By Ed Buckner

Twice in the 1890s, a world-famous speaker came to Galveston giving lectures (and drawing huge crowds) at The Grand 1894 Opera House. He spoke in 1896 on agnosticism, then in 1898 on liberty.

He stayed at the Tremont Hotel and The Hotel Grand as they existed before the 1900 hurricane destroyed so much of the island.

This man was a major leader of the 19th-century Republican Party, close friend of several U.S. presidents (and lived on Lafayette Park, neighbor of the White House, for several years) and ally of Frederick Douglass. He knew Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses Grant, but the presidents he was closest to were Rutherford B. Hayes, Chester A. Arthur, and, especially, James A. Garfield (he saw Garfield just before and again just after Garfield was shot in July 1881; Garfield died weeks later).

He was offered — and turned down — the equivalent (in today's dollars) of \$1 million-plus expenses if he'd go to Australia for a speaking tour. He gave talks across America in major cities like Galveston, Chicago, San Francisco and in hundreds of smaller ones. A town near Texarkana was named after him (but later changed its name to the current Redwater, Texas). A mountain in Washington state is named after him.

Preachers all across the United States led prayers for him, including by thousands of Christians on Thanksgiving Day, 1895. The prayers were focused on this Illinois attorney general, giver of the then most famous nominating speech at a national political convention, and man reputed to be among the nation's most generous and kindly.

He steadfastly championed civil rights, voting rights for women and for citizens of the District of Columbia, and denounced slavery even before he led a regiment of Union soldiers at the Battle of Shiloh.

He memorized all of Shakespeare (one of his popular lecture subjects) and was an extremely successful attorney. His power to speak, in the days before radio, microphones, television and movies, made him the biggest entertainment draw in the land, reportedly being seen and heard in person by more people than any other American.

"The Great Agnostic" continued on page 4

Biden Nominees for Religious Affairs Roles American Atheists

On July 30, the Biden Administration announced the nomination of **Rashad Hussain and Deborah Lipstadt, and appointments of Khzir Khan and Sharon Kleinbaum** to serve in key religious affairs roles within the U.S. State Department and at the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

In response, **Nick Fish**, president of American Atheists, released the following statement:

We welcome President Biden's selection of these nominees to such important roles advancing religious freedom and equality. Our organization looks forward to learning more about their records as they move through the confirmation process in the Senate.

While I am hopeful these nominees share our commitment to religious pluralism and equality, the Biden Administration has once again missed an opportunity to appoint the first nonreligious person to serve on USCIRF. At a time when atheists, humanists, apostates, and nonreligious people around the world face discrimination, threats of violence, imprisonment, and even death, appointing the first atheist to USCIRF is long overdue.

We urge congressional leadership to take this important next step and finally nominate a secular humanist as a USCIRF Commissioner at the earliest opportunity.

Rashad Hussain has been nominated to serve as Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom and **Deborah Lipstadt** has been nominated to serve as Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism with the Rank of Ambassador. Their nominations must be confirmed by the Senate. The appointments of **Khzir Khan** and **Sharon Kleinbaum** to serve on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom are not subject to Senate confirmation.

“The Great Agnostic” continued from page 4

Walt Whitman declared that, “I see in Bob the noblest specimen — American-flavored — pure out of the soil, spreading, giving, demanding light.” And **Mark Twain** wrote, “I doubt if America has ever seen anything quite equal to it; I am well satisfied I shall not live to see its equal again. How pale those speeches are in print, but how radiant, how full of color, how blinding they were in the delivery! **Bob Ingersoll's** music will sing through my memory always as the divinest that ever enchanted my ears.”



He was born Aug. 11, 1833, (you can visit his birthplace in Dresden, New York, on the Finger Lakes) and died in 1899.

In his day, he was widely known as “The Great Agnostic.” Today, he would more likely be called “The Great Secular Humanist.”

I invite you all to think “Happy Birthday” on Aug. 11 for **Robert Green Ingersoll** — now that you've heard of him.

Ed Buckner is a native of League City who now lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

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After 65 Years Of ‘In God We Trust,’ The Problems With The National Motto Have Never Been Clearer

Wall of Separation Blog - Ethan Magistro

Sixty-five years ago July 30th, President Dwight Eisenhower signed into law a resolution that enshrined “In God We Trust” as our nation’s official motto.

“In God We Trust” is the nation’s first official motto — the de facto motto “E Pluribus Unum” (out of many, one) was never legally codified. That same day, July 30, 1956, the 84th Congress also passed a measure to require all American currency to include “In God We Trust,” which is why your Abe Lincolns and Alexander Hamiltons have the phrase on their backsides.

The phrase first appeared on U.S. coins to respond to increased religiosity during the Civil War, being stamped on a two-cent coin issued in 1864. After appearing on most coins until 1873, the motto disappeared but would sometimes reappear. It wasn’t until the Eisenhower administration that it was permanently enshrined on American currency.

There are various reasons offered for the introduction of “In God We Trust” in the 1950s. The most oft-cited reason – and the one mentioned by U.S. Rep. Charles Bennet (D-Fla.) on the House floor – was to distinguish the United States from the Soviet Union, which enforced state atheism. Bennet proclaimed, “In these days when imperialistic and materialistic communism seeks to attack and destroy freedom, we should continually look for ways to strengthen the foundations of our freedom.” He continued by arguing that “while the sentiment of trust in God is universal and timeless, these particular four words ‘In God We Trust’ are indigenous to our country.”

Yet the Cold War narrative hides more than it

reveals. In his book *One Nation Under God*, Kevin M. Kruse, a professor of history at Princeton University, points toward Eisenhower’s revolutionizing of religion in American society as a catalyst for the motto change. Eisenhower is the only president to have been baptized during his time in office. He was close friends with Billy Graham, instituted opening prayer before cabinet meetings and cemented the idea that America is, should be, and always was, a religious nation.

Kruse goes on to argue that corporations in America were the head engineers of this religious revival, but the historical picture he paints of Eisenhower and the religious extremists before him is damning for the Cold War argument about the adoption of “In God We Trust.” That legacy makes it much more difficult to believe that adoption of the motto had a secular rationale, as advocates sometimes claim.

While the jurisprudence around the issue, which largely argues that the phrase has become so ceremonial that it has lost any religious favor, is often invoked by motto defenders, it is ultimately unconvincing. The phrase is religious, and, above all, reflects Christian principles. “In God” evokes a traditional, singular god, a belief that excludes some religions. The “We” groups all Americans, religious or not, into a crowd of singular believers; should you not believe, you feel less American. And with “Trust,” it asks of Americans to have faith in a divine providence many don’t trust.

The language of the motto, combined with a history that pushed church-state separation to its limits, makes “In God We Trust” anything but the secular ceremonial phrase many people believe it to be. Perhaps it’s time we let the phrase go. Ultimately, people of all religions and none should feel like they are a part of the United States without having to profess a trust in God. Those who do trust in God should be able to express that belief freely, so long as they do not abuse the law to impose their religious beliefs on others.

As for a replacement motto, there are a lot of possibilities. *E Pluribus Unum* is always a great one to fall back on, but the state motto of Oregon, “She Flies with Her Own Wings,” has a nice ring to it, too. I’m personally a fan of “Cultivate Peace and Harmony with All” or “Moderation, Perseverance, and Firmness,” two phrases from George Washington’s farewell address. Any of these are more inclusive, and truer to American ideals, than “In God We Trust.”

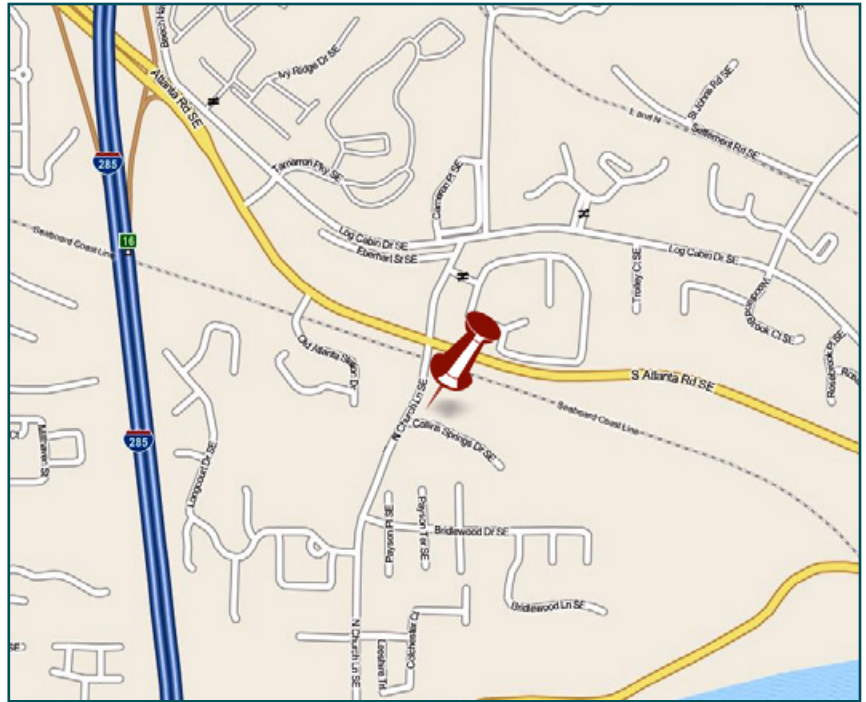


*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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**Kenneth Copp
8/8/21 1:00 pm EDT
(via Zoom)**



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