

**Potluck Lunch at the Pavilion starting at noon!
(No Zoom Meeting on Sunday)**



Calendar

Aug 13	Potluck Picnic (Live only)	12 pm
Sep 10	General Meeting Live/Online	1 pm
Oct 8	General Meeting Live/Online	1 pm

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

The August Potluck

For August 13th meeting we will have a Potluck Lunch, starting at noon. 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 main dish

H-P: Bring a dessert

Q-Z: Bring a side dish

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.



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 Sep Robyn Blumner of CFI
8 Oct Keith Sharp of Groundwork Atlanta
12 Nov Kenan Holland: 'A Freethinker on Cooking' [tentative]
10 Dec 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.

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Atlanta Freethought News

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Righteousness without Religion?

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

A friend and subscriber, **Mike May**, asked me to talk about righteousness—he suggested my title, too. My thanks to him, though he may not agree with what I write here. If others have subjects they want me to hold forth on, just ask.

I've written about closely related things and I'll post a longer essay on Friday—a Freethought Perennial quite similar to a chapter in the book my son Michael and I wrote—that overlaps with this one.

But first we need to get a fix on what counts as “righteous” and what may just be phony righteous pretension—self-righteousness or moral arrogance or just plain pomposity.

Some examples:

A good friend and fellow veteran (“**Mr. Tenor Sax**”) noticed a nearby business had a tattered American flag flying at all hours and was unhappy about it. So he talked to a maintenance guy and then to the manager, **Derrick McFadden**, about this. McFadden immediately and graciously responded and got a new flag and got my friend to help him raise the flag properly. And his staff report that he was delighted at all this and proud of his role. So was my friend.

A former neighbor and good friend of ours, **KG**, teaches others about mental health, goes way out of her way to commend people working in difficult situations, meets the needs of her grown children even when it's hard, loves Oliver's book and has passed it on to others, and is the kind of friend you know will back you any time you need it.

A current neighbor, **LW**, inherited some property with her brother that included an underground gasoline tank their father had put in to make it easier to operate his equipment. Years ago her brother told her he thought they should have the tank dug up and the site treated properly for possible pollution. She readily agreed and they removed it, though they had not (yet) put the property up for sale and no one could even detect the tank then—and excavating it was expensive.

Retired FBI agent who has given presentations and written, with others, a book titled *Taking the Harder Right*. This man—**Oliver Halle**—wrote and taught about doing the right thing even when it's hard. He provided an anecdote in his book about how doubtful it is to do the right thing only because you're being observed. He urges people to return to their codes even if they stray. And he follows a strict ethical code himself.

Friends “**Rainbow**” and “**David**” are naturally kind and friendly but are also consciously gracious to others. They assume the best in others,

they are interested in how others are doing, they are happy to do favors for others, and they are honest, law-abiding, principled people. They're good teachers to their grandchildren and supportive of their children.

There is a family of televangelists and megachurch pastors led by widowed patriarch, “**Eli**.” Eli and his immature children, “**Jesse**,” “**Judy**,” and “**Kelvin**,” lead opulent, decadent lives funded by church donations. They curse and engage in obscene, depraved, and sacrilegious behavior in private, even as they mouth pieties in public and beg people for money for them to “do the Lord's work,” whether those people can afford it or not.

Now, which of the six people or groups of people are righteous—and which are not? And who among them is religious and who is not?

All are righteous—but yes, that requires some explaining. Some are religious, some are not at all, and some I don't know whether they are or not.

Mr. Tenor Sax and **Derrick McFadden**? Both righteous! Religious?—I'm not sure.



Derrick McFadden (Photo by **Mr. Tenor Sax**)

KG?—one of the most righteous people I've ever known, and I've known her for over half a century. And she's deeply religious.

LW and her brother? Righteous. She's the kind of person who obeys the rules AND who regularly goes around picking up trash that people who don't obey reasonable rules throw down. Her brother? I don't know—but he was sure righteous in that one instance. Either or both religious? I'm not sure.

Oliver Halle (and his fine book)?—righteous!

Rainbow and **David**? Righteous beyond a shadow of a doubt. Religious beyond any doubt, also.



The family of televangelists? A bit different. They are fictional and I know they're “righteous” because it's right there in the name of the television show on HBO. It's a hilarious (but definitely not for all tastes) over-the-top satire that almost certainly intentionally mocks the excesses some preachers and megachurches get up to. But whether from irritation with perverting what such individuals and organizations *should* do to serve God or from disdain for all such, I don't know.

So what makes them all righteous? (Leaving aside the Gemstones, that is).

All have moral codes they follow. All have standards of right and wrong that are important to them and that transcend doing something that benefits only themselves or some narrowly defined group. All are decent. Some of them attribute their following those codes to a supernatural source, some don't, some may not even think about the source(s). Some—probably all—include self-respect as part of what drives them to do what is right.

On **July 28th's article** I'll add some to this, including how the questions of righteousness have been abused in attacking the irreligious.

In the meantime, remember, “We can all do better,” as **Jim Jefferies** says.

Christian Nationalists' attempt to remove this library's LGBTQ+ books backfired

by Rhys Long • AU.org • Wall of Separation

The saga of Christian Nationalists targeting libraries' LGBTQ+ books continues. This time, there's a happy ending.

The Rancho Peñasquitos branch of the San Diego Public Library was recently **thrust into the spotlight** due to its LGBTQ+ Pride display. Two neighborhood residents checked out nearly every book in the Pride display and held the books hostage, telling the library that the books would not be returned until the library agreed to permanently remove the "inappropriate content" from the shelves.

Donations flooded in

After a **local newspaper** reported on the protest, the library started to receive boxes containing donated copies of the books checked out by the two protestors. The library also received over \$15,000 in donations, which the city has agreed to match in order to provide more LGBTQ+ programming and material, including expansion of the library system's Drag Queen Story Hour.

The protestors who checked out the books in the display copied a template from the group CatholicVote's "Hide the Pride" campaign, which instructs supporters to check out or move books with LGBTQ+ themes and characters. Their goal is to limit access to LGBTQ+ material for everyone, and, as their name suggests, force LGBTQ+ people out of public spaces. They are

yet another organization citing religion as justification for demonizing the LGBTQ+ community.

Libraries are a haven of information for everyone

Libraries are a haven of information for everyone. They are one of the few repositories of knowledge that are accessible to all and they ought to remain as much. Efforts to restrict public access to LGBTQ+ material are shameful and should not be tolerated. Luckily for the citizens of San Diego, the community decided not to tolerate such bigotry. And the protestors, after seeing the results of their actions, returned the kidnapped books to the library.

Christian Nationalists launch daily attacks on our society, and **libraries** are only one target of

these extremists' attempts to force everyone to live by their beliefs. But this example from San Diego has proven that a vigilant community can push back against hatred to protect the public's access to information and to respect the rights of the LGBTQ+ community.



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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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This summer, I learned how crucial church-state separation is to the fight for reproductive freedom

by Tatiana Wolkowitz • [AU.org](https://www.au.org) • Wall of Separation

In the past year, attacks by far-right lawmakers and judges on reproductive freedom and LGBTQ+ rights have continued to chip away at the separation of church and state that is meant to promote freedom of religion, choice and identity.

The **overturning of *Roe v. Wade*** and subsequent abortion bans that were passed or took effect in states like Missouri, the unprecedented amount of legislation attacking LGBTQ+ people and especially trans people, along with the recent Supreme Court ruling in **303 Creative** prove that now, more than ever, our ability to live as ourselves as we believe as we choose hinges on the success of the church-state separation movement.

The nexus between reproductive freedom and church-state separation

Before starting my summer internship with Americans United, my education and advocacy background was mostly rooted in reproductive justice. In the past several weeks, my shift in understanding church-state separation as not only related, but crucial, to reproductive freedom has been tremendous. My personal understanding of the church-state separation movement's shared values with the reproductive justice movement expanded and ultimately enhanced my advocacy for both. I began to realize that there is a long history of overlap and partnership between these two movements that I am so passionate about, and I believe a strong understanding of both makes our advocacy stronger.



The reproductive justice movement evolved from the women's rights and pro-choice movements that dominated mainstream conversations surrounding reproductive policy and advocacy. Reproductive justice pioneers such as **Loretta Ross** recognized that the experiences of women of color were too often omitted from these political and legislative spaces. Coined by

Black women in 1994, "**reproductive justice**" describes the "human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities." The reproductive justice movement is radically intersectional and recognizes that collective liberation is the only pathway to individual freedom.

Since its founding over 75 years ago, **AU has been involved in advocacy for reproductive freedom**. This work can be traced back to the 1950s and '60s when birth control was illegal in several states and health care providers could be prosecuted for providing married couples with information about contraceptive options. AU partnered with women's rights groups to combat these laws, particularly in regions of the country where conservative Catholic lawmakers were imposing their beliefs on others. Over the subsequent decades, AU's advocacy for reproductive rights only grew with its involvement in the **Webster v. Reproductive Health Services** Supreme Court case. AU challenged Missouri's 1989 anti-abortion legislation by filing a friend-of-the-court brief arguing that the law's language was so rooted in religion that it should be invalidated.

AU challenges Missouri's anti-abortion laws

More recently, AU **filed a lawsuit** challenging Missouri's unconstitutional abortion bans in partnership with the National Women's Law Center on behalf of **plaintiffs** who represent 14 **clergy from seven different**

denominations. The plaintiffs include an Episcopal bishop, an orthodox Jewish maharat, a United Methodist pastor (who is also a state legislator), as well as Reform Jewish rabbis and United Church of Christ and Unitarian Universalist ministers. Efforts by church-state separation and reproductive freedom organizations alike lift up the voices of faith leaders and allow both movements to reach and mobilize crucial communities in the fight for collective freedom.

As an advocate for reproductive justice who didn't always make the connection to church-state separation, it's powerful to see the roles that a wide range of organizations play to advance shared values of equality and freedom for all and contribute to stronger, more diverse movements. Organizations such as the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice and Catholics for Choice work with faith leaders to promote reproductive freedom in religious communities and mobilize faith communities to advocate for change. Other organizations like the Tennessee-based SisterReach advocate through a reproductive justice lens by building the power of Black voters, providing direct services to the community and educating and advocating at the intersections of faith, religion and social justice. By rooting its social justice strategy in the intersectional, grassroots approach central to the reproductive justice movement, organizations like SisterReach empower communities to fight for their liberties by centering the voices of the most marginalized and fostering community-focused impact.

Building partnerships for victory

Our country's current reality is one of religiously motivated Supreme Court decisions and bans on reproductive health services, making it clearer than ever that inter-movement partnership only enhances the fights for church-state separation and reproductive justice. By fostering networks of committed religious, non-religious, racial justice, education, LGBTQ+ and other organizations committed to using their strengths and resources to promote a shared vision for religious and reproductive freedom, our movements become one step closer to realizing shared goals.

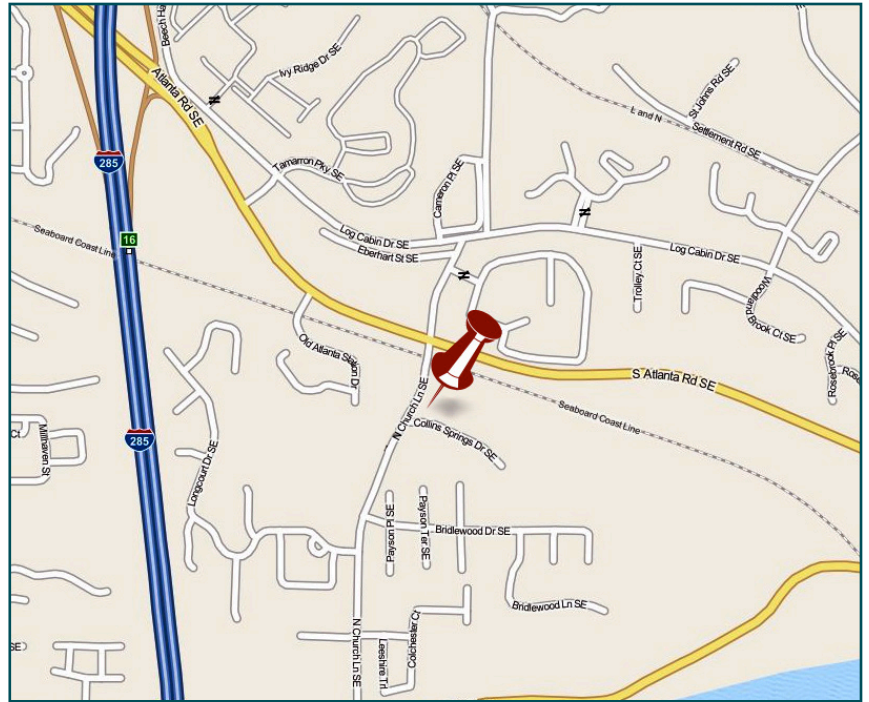
Just as my understanding and involvement with the church-state separation movement has enhanced my reproductive justice advocacy, learning about the reproductive justice movement can only serve to strengthen our collective fight for religious freedom. By continuing to work hand-in-hand, we come closer to inter-movement success and achieving the change we want to see.

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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

**Potluck Lunch!
8/13/23 1:00 pm EST
(AF Hall only)**



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