

Cecil Bothwell: “The Billy Graham Free-way: Never Pay For Anything If You Can Help It” (via Zoom)

Cecil Bothwell is a biographer, editor, fiction author, organic gardener, painter, musician and former two term Asheville, North Carolina, City Council member. He was founding editor of the Warren Wilson College environmental journal *Heartstone*, managing editor of Asheville’s *Mountain Xpress*, and a member of the Association of Alternative Newsmedia national editorial board. His 13 books include the only critical political biography of Billy Graham, *The Prince of War*, three essay and four short story collections, a novel, a gardening book, a dive into ethics, an account of his investigation of a crooked sheriff he helped put in prison, and his latest, *Waist Not, Want Knot: Further Confabulations* (2020). All of his fictional protagonists are non-theists.



Cecil Bothwell

Cecil nabbed his fifteen minutes in 2009 when some civic-minded folks tried to prevent an atheist from being sworn into office given that the North Carolina constitution proscribes election of “any person who shall deny the being of Almighty God.” Since then Cecil has addressed atheist, humanist and Unitarian Universalist groups in 24 cities in a dozen states on issues of morality, politics and the environment. He lives in a net-zero solar home in Asheville with four cats and four cacti. He drives an electric Leaf and his other car is a raft. “According to the Bible, floods happen.”



Cecil Bothwell and Senator Al Franken

Steve Yothment again has set up a free Zoom session for Sunday, September 13 from 1:00-2:30 p.m. Log in at 12:30 to socialize and everyone is welcome to hang out and chat afterwards. Below is the meeting invitation as generated by Zoom. Log in with a computer, tablet, or smart phone.

AFS September Meeting September 13, 2020 1:00-2:30 PM (EST)

To join Zoom meeting go to link below:
us02web.zoom.us/j/86843137944

Meeting ID: 868 4313 7944

Calendar

- Sep 13 General Meeting on Zoom 1 pm
- Oct 11 General Meeting on Zoom 1 pm

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

God when He sacrifices Himself to Himself to save mankind from Himself



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 unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 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.



September 13: Cecil Bothwell

October 11: Dr. Kimberly Hamlin on her book, *Free Thinker* (on Helen Hamilton Gardener, formerly Alice Chenowith).

November 8: John W. Loftis

December 13: TBA

January 10: TBA

AFS Email List

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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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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

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American Atheists Urges Supreme Court Not to Impose Blasphemy Law, Warns of Deluge of Atheist Lawsuits

atheists.org

On August 20, the civil rights organization American Atheists, in an **amicus brief** for the upcoming Supreme Court case, *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, urged the Justices to refrain from restricting free speech and conjuring a de facto blasphemy law into existence from the bench.

Catholic Social Services (CSS) claims the city of Philadelphia must provide it with a taxpayer-funded contract to place children in foster care despite its refusal to comply with the city's nondiscrimination requirements, in part, because two Philadelphia officials made innocuous statements about the Archdiocese and the Pope.

"The Supreme Court has repeatedly ruled that political officials, both on and off the job, must be allowed to speak freely about matters of public concern, including religion, and that the First Amendment protects their right to do so," said **Geoffrey Blackwell**, Litigation Counsel at American

Atheists, referencing a half-dozen cases dating from the 1960s to today. "If the **Roberts Court** were to overturn decades of jurisprudence because of these harmless comments, it would create a doctrine akin to a blasphemy law. Free speech would be stifled, and officials would be encouraged to fawn over religion, since to do otherwise would endanger any government action."

Free speech arguments aside, there is no evidence of religious hostility by the two officials. **Commissioner Figueroa**, herself a Catholic, urged CSS to follow "the teaching of **Pope Francis**" and said that "times [and] attitudes have changed." The Third Circuit concluded that these statements were a reasonable attempt by an official "to speak [CSS's] language and mak[e] arguments they may find compelling from within their own faith's perspective." In addition, the trial court could not even find factual support that **Mayor Kenney** "had any influence" on the Department of Human Services' decision not to renew CSS's contract.

"Catholic Social Services is trying to warp the Supreme Court's decision in *Masterpiece Cakeshop* and convert Kenney's and Figueroa's benign comments into religious hostility," explained Blackwell. "Statements by government officials, on their own, do not restrict the free exercise of religion."

"If the Supreme Court does side with Catholic Social Services, statements by government officials involving religious perspectives—including atheism—will be used against them to strike down their actions," said **Alison Gill**, Vice

President for Legal and Policy. "The court system better be ready for a deluge of litigation by atheists challenging government actions where officials have made hostile statements about atheists."

As American Atheists' brief demonstrates, government officials frequently attack atheists for their beliefs. From Former Attorney General **Jeff Sessions**, who **said** he was "not sure" whether "a secular person has just as good a claim to understanding the truth as a person who is religious," to his successor **William Barr**, who **blamed** "**militant secularists**" for countless societal ills, it is known that federal officials consider atheists

a threat and inferior to religious Americans. In addition, state lawmakers around the country **have introduced bills** that express hostility to secular humanism.

Earlier this year, American Atheists **released a survey** of nearly 34,000 nonreligious Americans, which found that anti-atheist hostility comes in two forms: stigmatization and discrimination. Just over a quarter of participants reported being explicitly told, sometimes,

frequently, or almost always, that they are not a "good person" because of their atheism. In addition, more than half of participants had negative experiences with family members, nearly one third in education, and more than one in five in the workplace due to their nonreligious identity.

"For more than two centuries, atheists and non-religious people in America have been subjected to repeated, systemic, and genuine hostility from government officials and the public at large," said **Nick Fish**, president of American Atheists. "Yet Catholic Social Services says it faced hostility because officials exercised their freedom of speech to discuss religious topics in a nondiscriminatory manner. This is a slap in the face to actual victims of discrimination, including atheists."



Pressuring Workers To Be 'Spiritual' Isn't The Answer To The Office Blues

By Rob Boston / Wall of Separation Blog

au.org

The *New York Times* on August 30 ran a [lengthy piece](#) about a new trend in corporate America: hiring “divinity consultants” for the workplace.

What do these people do? As *The Times* put it, divinity consultants – who are also known as ritual consultants, sacred designers and soul-centered advertisers – have this goal: “Their business is borrowing from religious tradition to bring spiritual richness to corporate America.”

If you think this could be a real problem, you're right. To put it simply, it's no business of secular employers to meddle in the spiritual or non-spiritual lives of their workers. Under federal law, it's illegal to intentionally discriminate against an employee because of their religious or non-religious beliefs. In addition, employers are required to make certain accommodations to meet employees' religious beliefs or practices. An entire body of case law exists to flesh out how these rules are applied, but it's safe to say that if your boss is pressuring you to take part in a religious practice or even be “spiritual” when you don't want to, there will be trouble.

The Times story touches on these issues, noting, “Another challenge is that many workers are already devout on their own terms, on their own

time, and are not at all hungry for soul-based activities between 9 and 5.”

But it isn't just devout workers who might object. I can certainly understand why a Christian of any stripe might oppose rituals that mimic the style of faith but that have been decoupled from it, but it's easy to see why a non-believer would also have concerns. The slippery, “New Age” feel of these “rituals” makes them not for everyone. Pressuring employees to take part in such activities is only going to spark litigation.

Office workers are certainly facing some serious issues right now. Most workplaces are closed, and working from home can present unique stresses, including a sense of social isolation. The best way for employers to deal with that is not to assume that everyone is yearning for a shot of spirituality. Rather, they should support their workers with the coping mechanisms of the workers' choice. Ensuring that company health care plans cover whatever sort of counseling an employee finds best suits his or her needs would also be a good step.

P.S. If you feel your religious freedom rights are being violated at your job, [report it to AU](#). We may be able to help.



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Giving Tax Aid To Religious Schools Forces You To Support Discrimination

By Rob Boston / Wall of Separation Blog

[au.org](http://www.wallofseparation.org)

Over the past few decades, the U.S. Supreme Court has been giving its approval to various forms of taxpayer aid to private religious schools.

Americans United opposes these rulings because they violate the fundamental principle of church-state separation: They compel taxpayers to support religious education. Americans United believes religious activities should be funded with voluntary contributions from supporters, not tax dollars. Public money should fund public schools, which educate 90% of America's schoolchildren.



Devin Bryant - Photo by Devin Bryant

There are plenty of other reasons why vouchers, tuition tax credits and other forms of tax aid to religious schools are problematic from a public policy

perspective, and [you can read about some of them here](#). But one of the most compelling reasons is that these schools often engage in blatant forms of discrimination, something no taxpayer should ever be made to support.

If you need a reminder of how bad this can be, [consider the case of Devin Bryant](#), who was prepared to begin his senior year at Covenant Christian Academy in Colleyville, Texas, last month.

Devin is a straight-A student who has attended the school since kindergarten. He's so well-liked that teachers have written notes to his mother thanking her for raising such a great kid. He has won school awards for his art and played on sports teams.

So what's the problem? Devin is gay. Seniors at the school have a tradition of decorating their parking spots, and over the summer, Devin unveiled his design, which included the words, "Super Hot, Fun, Attractive, Fast-driving, Insane, Very Smart, Outgoing, Party Freak, Young, Gay (as in happy don't worry lol), Pretty, Reckless, Humble, Pyromaniac, Fun, Gay (as in homosexual this time, sorry) Person Parking Only."

Devin told *Dallas Voice* that the design "derived humor from how brash it was."

School officials felt differently. They informed Devin's mother that he was not welcome to return. Devin promised to be less vocal about his sexuality, but it made no difference. He was expelled. He enrolled in a public school where he's taking a full slate of advanced placement classes and considering options for college.

Texas doesn't have a voucher plan – although some legislators have pushed them over the years. If the state did have vouchers, there would likely be nothing to prevent Covenant Christian Academy from discriminating against

students like Devin even as it raked in taxpayer support.

But Covenant did receive another form of public support recently. [The school got a "loan" between \\$1 million-\\$2 million](#) under the federal Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), a key feature of the coronavirus relief package passed by Congress. (Under the terms of the program, the loans will be forgiven as long as a few conditions are met, so they are really grants.)

Covenant is not alone. [Research by Americans United](#) found that private religious and secular schools received funding totaling between \$2.67 billion and \$6.47 billion under PPP.

How many of these schools discriminate against kids like Devin Bryant? It's hard to say for sure, but AU's report lists plenty of examples of private schools that got money under PPP even as they state up front that they will deny admission to or expel students who are LGBTQ, whose parents are of the same sex, who are the "wrong" religion or who have disabilities.

Discriminatory policies like these are bad enough. Compelling taxpayers to buttress them by awarding these schools a windfall in taxpayer



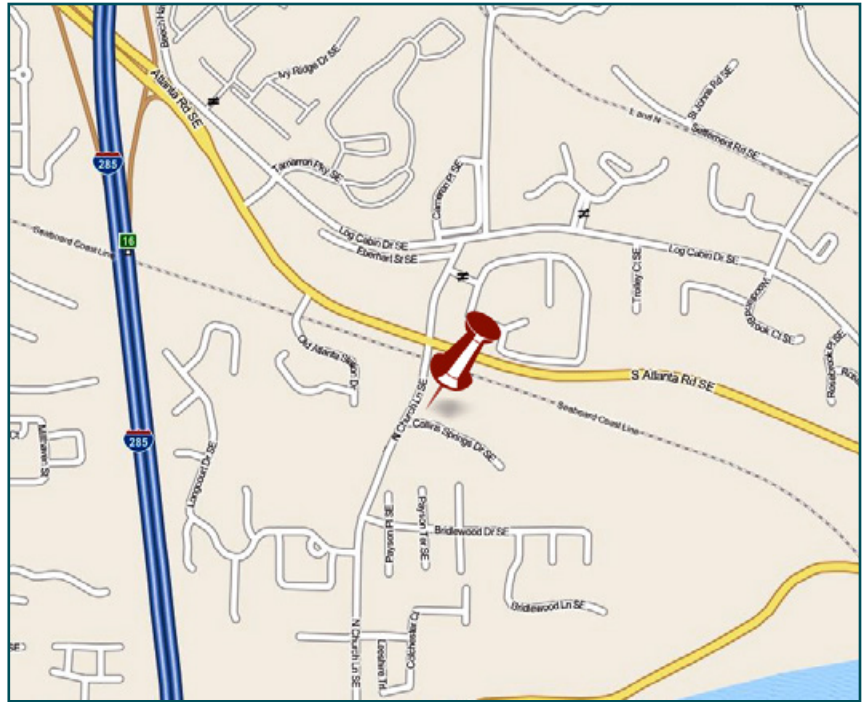
aid is a disgrace. That's why Americans United works to oppose private school voucher programs and other forms of public aid to private, mostly religious schools. [You can help by urging your Senators to reject](#) the latest attempt to create a federally funded voucher program.

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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

**Cecil Bothwell
(via Zoom)**



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