

Robyn Blumner of Center for Inquiry Informs AFS: “What does fighting homeopathy, conspiracy theories, and misinformation have to do with protecting church-state separation and saving atheist lives overseas? Well, I’ll tell you.”

AFS has the great honor to have a nationally prominent speaker, **Robyn Blumner** of the **Center for Inquiry** (international headquarters in Amherst, NY) talk with us. Her topic:

“What does fighting homeopathy, conspiracy theories, and misinformation have to do with protecting church-state separation and saving atheist lives overseas? Well, I’ll tell you.”



Robyn Blumner

Robyn Blumner has established herself as an effective international leader, leading multiple organizations with interlocking purposes. We are most fortunate to have her talk with us on Sunday, 10 September at 1 pm EDT. CFI is the umbrella organization for the **Council for Secular Humanism**, the **Committee for Skeptical Inquiry**, and other groups. Their reach and positive influence is quite literally world-wide.

Blumner said about the talk, “Since its founding by **Carl Sagan**, **Isaac Asimov**, and **Paul Kurtz**, among other luminaries, the Center for Inquiry



has been fighting for the causes of reason, science, and secularism and against pseudoscience and nonsense beliefs. The work (sadly) is more

important than ever. I will be giving an overview of the organization and how so many seemingly disparate programs and projects are ultimately all part of a cohesive whole to promote Enlightenment values.”

Robyn Blumner is a lawyer, opinion writer, constitutional law expert, and the current president & CEO of the Center for Inquiry and executive director of the **Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science**. She is a graduate of **Cornell University**, and **New York University School of**

Calendar

Sep 10	Board Meeting at the Hall	11 am
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.

Law. Previously Robyn was executive director of the **American Civil Liberties Union of Florida** and prior to that, the **ACLU of Utah**. She spent 16 years as a syndicated newspaper columnist and editorial writer at the **Tampa Bay Times** where along with three colleagues she was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in editorial writing.

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 Blumner 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, 10 September, via Zoom and at Atlanta Freethought Hall.

We welcome those who are not freethinkers but who just want to know more about freethought, secular humanism, skepticism, and church & state. All freethinkers are of course welcome—and we hope that they will decide to join as members in due course. Details (the same as last month) on the Zoom meeting number, etc., can be found below:

AFS September Meeting Sept 10, 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.



10 Sep	Robyn Blumner of CFI
8 Oct	Keith Sharp (tentative)
12 Nov	Kenan Holland on Freethinking and Cooking
10 Dec	TBA
14 Jan	TBA
11 Feb	TBA

AFS Email List

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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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The Whole Truth and Nothing But the Truth: On Lying With History

By Ed Buckner • [Letters to a Free Country](#) • [edbuckner.substack.com](#)

When anyone writes about history, especially to make some point, selection of facts is crucial. Of course selection always occurs and must—there are uncountable numbers of facts associated with any event, most of them lost to recorded history and perhaps irrelevant. (What was the name of the third warrior killed in the first battle of the Peloponnesian War in 431 BCE? Could knowing who he was change our understanding?)

These historical facts or quotes are, I promise, accurate:

1. Former President **John Adams** wrote, in a letter to **Thomas Jefferson** on 19 April 1817, that “*This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it!!!*”
2. Near the end of the second administration of President George Washington, in November 1796, the US agreed to a treaty that stated clearly that “the government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.”
3. “The women’s rights movement in America was largely birthed out of the ranks of the movement to end slavery. In 1848, at the Seneca Falls Convention in New York, activists including **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** and **Susan B. Anthony** began a seventy-year struggle to secure the right to vote for women. Nearly all of the major leaders of the suffrage movement came from Christian backgrounds.”
4. **Benjamin Franklin** proposed at the 1787 American Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia that sessions of the convention open each day with a prayer by a local clergyman.
5. **Winston Churchill** once declared that “Democracy is the worst form of government.”

I’ve written already about a couple of these and others may be familiar to you. Let’s consider them in turn:

1. **Adams to Thomas Jefferson** (19 April 1817). The quotation is accurate. But the full context conveys pretty much the opposite of the one given above:

Twenty times in the course of my late reading have I been on the point of breaking out, “*This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it!!!*” But in this exclamation I would have been as fanatical as Bryant or Cleverly. Without religion this world would be something not fit to be mentioned in polite company, I mean Hell.

Presenting the statement out of context completely misrepresents what Adams wrote and any reasonable analyst wouldn’t do that. Any who knowingly did would be dishonest. Any who did so out of ignorance of the full facts would be irresponsible at best,

2. Quotation from **Washington**, or rather from Washington’s administration during his second term. The quotation is accurate and one I analyzed at considerable length back on 10 February. It would be somewhat misleading, as some have done, to attribute the quote to Washington himself. Washington biographer **Paul Boller** wrote that there is no record of Washington writing or saying those words (about the US government not being founded on Christian ideas), but that Washington “likely would have agreed with it.” And the treaty was created by his administration. But saying it was his personal doing is inaccurate. I wouldn’t call doing that dishonest—but careless.
3. **Elizabeth Cady Stanton** was indeed one of the two or three most important leaders of the very long—closer to 80 years than 70—struggle to win the right to vote for American women (finally achieved when the Nineteenth Amendment went into effect just over 103 years ago, on 26 August 1920). And she and most of the others did indeed “come from

Christian backgrounds.” That quotation is from an Atlanta area preacher, **Richard G. Lee**, who consistently claims that America is and should be a Christian nation. Given that context, I’d say that Lee was quite dishonest with his statement even though it was narrowly true. He has to have known, if he has studied these matters at all, how very misleading his claim was. The organizers of the woman’s suffrage movement, especially Stanton, were strongly

opposed by the Christian church leaders of their day, who brandished scripture quotes at length to fight hard to keep women as second-class, voteless, citizens. And the mainstream Christian leaders of the day denounced the women leaders vigorously. In response, Stanton produced in 1895 a compilation of commentaries and essays by women, including by

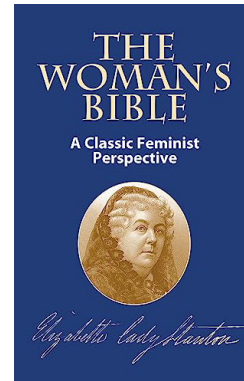
Stanton, that quite sharply critiqued standard Christianity and orthodox Christian leaders. She called it *The Woman’s Bible*.

Stanton came from a Christian background, but she was certainly not seen as a promoter of the Bible or the Christian church.

4. **Benjamin Franklin** asked for prayer at the constitutional convention. He did that, as **Newt Gingrich** wrote (and as I discussed back on 6 March), but Franklin himself noted ruefully that “The Convention, except three or four persons, thought Prayers unnecessary.” To report Franklin’s motion but not the result of it is quite dishonest, especially if reported by a man with a doctorate *in history* from a reputable university—**Newt Gingrich** earned his history Ph.D. from Tulane University.
5. **Winston Churchill** on democracy. Churchill did say that but made clear that he was just repeating what someone had said and Churchill immediately added, “except for all the others.” This is nearly always quoted in full and the fact that Churchill was citing a predecessor, as he noted, doesn’t seem that important. So, in my view, not meaningfully dishonest. For more, see richardlangworth.com/worst-form-of-government

In conclusion, it’s worth noting that omitting facts—not telling “*the whole truth*”—is inevitable and sometimes unimportant.

But in other cases it is certainly lying by omission.



D.C. incident provides troubling reminder of anti-abortion religious extremism

by Rob Boston • AU.org • Wall of Separation

There are people in this country who are determined to shut down access to reproductive freedom, heedless of what Americans want. They do this because they are religious extremists who want to impose their beliefs on everyone else – and they long ago decided that lies, terror tactics and violence are acceptable tools to achieve their ends.

In Washington, D.C., a band of religious extremists **has been found guilty** of blocking access to a health clinic in a disturbing incident that occurred in October 2020. The group's ringleader, **Lauren Handy**, an extremist who was once caught with **fetal remains in her apartment**, made an appointment at the Washington Surgi-Clinic under a false name. Two of her confederates hid nearby, and when a staff member opened the door to let Handy in, her partners rushed inside and used bicycle locks, ropes and chains to physically block the entrance to the clinic.

During the scuffle, a staff member broke her ankle. One woman, who had an appointment at the clinic, had to climb through a reception window to reach the medical staff. Another woman, who was having issues with pain, passed out.

Anti-abortion extremists face trial

It took three hours for police using saws to break through the chains and locks and clear the clinic. Handy and several confederates were arrested and charged with violating a **federal law** designed to

protect clinics from violent protests. In court, they were represented by the Thomas More Society, a Christian Nationalist legal outfit.

Attorneys with the group attempted to employ a free-speech defense, but U.S. District Judge **Colleen Kollar-Kotelly** didn't want to hear it. The group's actions were obviously not a protected form of free speech, Kollar-Kotelly declared.

Nevertheless, in court, attorney **Martin Cannon** of the Thomas More Society argued that Handy's actions were somehow justified, reported WUSA-TV.

"In Lauren's mind, any person she can prevent from going into that clinic is a person whose baby will not be born alive and left to die," Cannon told the jury.

Extremist views are no defense

Yes, the woman is a religious extremist. We knew that. It's not a defense. A person can believe any manner of extreme things; that doesn't give them the right to take away the legal rights of others or assault health care workers.

Handy and her confederates were found guilty by a jury and may face up to 11 years in prison. The More Society is vowing to appeal.

Anti-abortion groups sometimes assert that they merely want this issue to be decided at the state level. That is not what they want. They want a complete ban on abortion, for any reason, in all 50 states – and they want to send anyone who violates the ban to prison. (Some argue that since, in their view abortion is the taking of a human life, **the death penalty should be applied.**)

Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* last year, the American people have **made it clear that they favor keeping abortion legal**. The incident in D.C. is a troubling reminder that, no matter where public opinion lands, religious extremists who believe they have a God-given right to force the rest of us to live under their narrow religious beliefs will remain a plague on our land.

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A tribute to the freedom of the human mind': At Chautauqua, rebuking a rising tide of Christian Nationalism

by Andrew L. Seidel • AU.org • Wall of Separation

The lakefront breeze cooled a crowd of more than 1,200 in the Hall of Philosophy, under soaring Doric columns in a structure reminiscent of the ancient Parthenon.

"It will forever be one of the honors of my career to have been invited to join y'all during this weeklong celebration of religious freedom and free expression – at

the same place and one-year, almost to the day, after the attempted assassination of **Salman Rushdie**," I told the crowd at the Chautauqua Institution Aug. 16. "Gathering together, in community, in this place, to celebrate in the shadow of that authoritarian religious violence is a tribute to the freedom of the human mind."

Last year, Rushdie was **nearly assassinated** by a knife-wielding attacker as he was about to discuss "the United States as an asylum for writers and other artists in exile and as a home for freedom of creative expression." Chautauqua invited me to speak about my new book, *American Crusade: How the Supreme Court is Weaponizing Religious Freedom*, and the threat our country faces from a rising tide of Christian Nationalism, during this weeklong series of events that acknowledged the trauma of that assault and defied the attacker. (Several years ago, I was fortunate enough to have dinner with Rushdie and discuss the visceral repugnance we feel at book burning and book banning. He signed my first edition, first printing of *The Satanic Verses*. As a bibliophile, it's one of my prized possessions.)

Senseless hate and rage

Early on the morning of my speech, I stood at the very spot where Rushdie was almost killed and contemplated the senseless hate and the rage that motivates such attacks.

"That vicious attack was an assault on the host of freedoms that Americans hold most dear: freedom of thought, freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and church-state separation," I told the audience

later. "Our nation, from the beginning, was not a Christian nation, but one opposed to theocracy because it was committed to the freedom of thought. Criticism of religion is a basic human right. It's the beginning of freedom. We cannot begin to live freely until we can think freely. And freedom of thought begins with questioning, critiquing, and criticizing the answers we



are told from birth to accept without question."

The rage and hate that underlies these attacks is all related, I explained: "The assassination attempt differs from the current political assaults on public education, public schools, teachers, public libraries and books only in its violence. If we wish for America to be an asylum for free expression, we need to defeat the rising

Christian nationalism that threatens our public institutions."

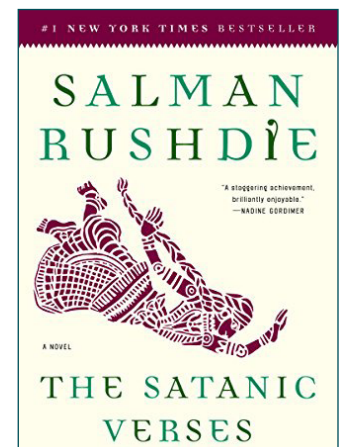
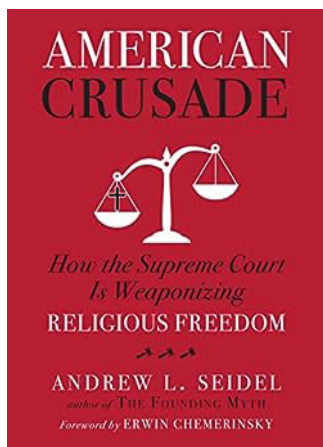
A dominant group feels threatened

When the dominant group or caste in society feels threatened or left behind by circumstances, it reacts – or overreacts – by seeking a way to retain that status. As I told the crowd, "This is why we're seeing them turn to Christian Nationalism. To violent insurrection. That's why they're seeking this weaponized religious freedom. The erosion of the deference which they demand and which they wrongly believe they are due. They are raging against the dying of their privilege. And that rage can easily turn to violence. That is what happened on Jan. 6 – and it could easily happen again."

At Americans United, we fight for "freedom without favor and equality without exception." You've heard us say it a thousand times – but take a moment to ponder the

words. The phrase is a clarion call and the very antithesis of Christian Nationalism, authoritarianism, and religious extremism.

It's one reason I consider it an honor to be in this fight at this organization at this time.

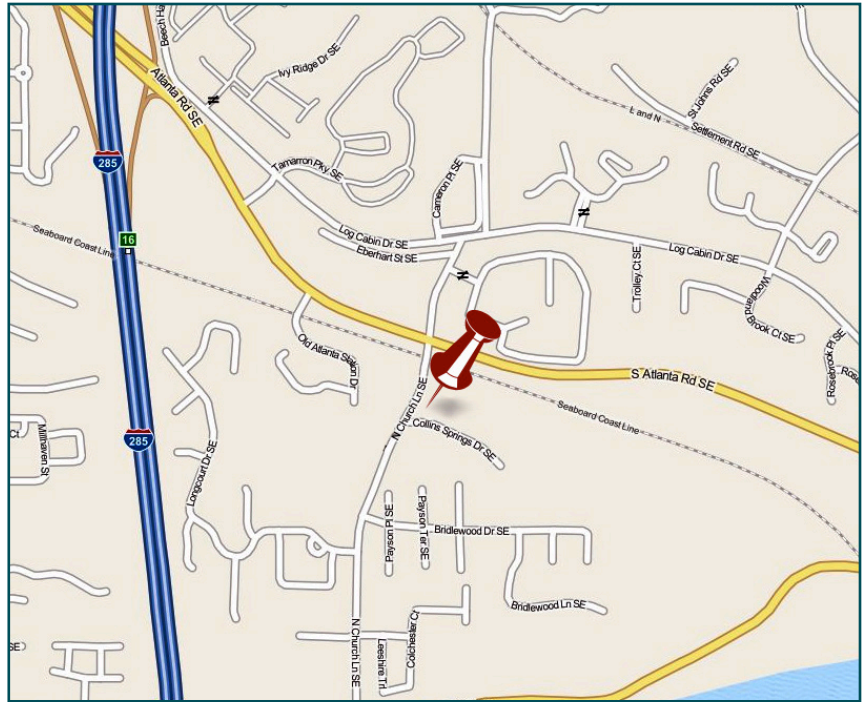


*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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

**Robyn Blumner
9/10/23 1:00 pm EST
(via Zoom+AF Hall)**



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