

## Alison Gill - "Georgia Legislative Advocacy Recap of 2021 & Preparing for 2022" (Or, "Is the General Assembly Really Nuts? And What Can We Do About It if They Are?")

On Sunday, November 14, at 1:00 pm via Zoom, AFS will have an excellent speaker for our Zoom meeting, in the person of Alison Gill, the Vice President of American Atheists for Legal and Policy.

Gill, a nationally recognized expert in civil rights law and state advocacy, directs American Atheists' legal and legislative advocacy strategy, supports state and local advocates, and represents American Atheists in Washington, DC.

For this talk, Gill noted, "While federal legislation makes the biggest headlines, state policy often plays a larger role in our lives. American Atheists works in states to oppose legislation that undermines the separation of religion and government and support positive legislation to achieve religious equality. We will look back at the events of this year, look ahead to what we can expect in Georgia and around the country in 2022, and discuss how atheists and nonreligious people can make their voices heard."



Alison Gill



Before joining American Atheists, Alison Gill worked as a consultant to foundations and non-profits focusing on advocacy strategy and systemic change. Gill earlier served as Senior Legislative Counsel at the Human Rights Campaign where she managed state-level advocacy on issues such as conversion therapy, bullying prevention, education discrimination, LGBTQ health and wellness, youth homelessness, and LGBTQ data collection. She also worked as Government Affairs Director with

## Calendar

Nov 14	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Dec 12	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Jan 9	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm

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

The Trevor Project and as State Policy Manager with GLSEN, the Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network.

The Gill program, free and open to the public, will be preceded by a few minutes of social distanced (with a vengeance) socializing starting about 12:30 P.M., for those interested. The program will start at about 1 P.M. (EST in US) on Sunday, 14 November, via Zoom. Please click on the link below to participate.

## AFS November Meeting Nov 14, 2021 1:00-2:30 PM (EST)

To join Zoom meeting go to this link:  
[us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911)

### Atheism

Definition: Disbelief or lack of belief in the existence of God or gods.

### Religion

Definition: The belief in and worship of a superhuman controlling power, especially a personal God or gods.

<http://www.cs.purdue.edu/atheism/>

### Atheism is NOT a religion

It has NO belief in a deity, no worship, no doctrine, no belief system. It is JUST the lack of belief in a deity/s.

Atheists can have any world view they wish, any belief system they wish, any ideas, any culture. They can even deny science if they wish.

They just lack belief in a deity. Period.

©pinkheretic

**For the latest in upcoming AFS events, join our Meetup group!**  
[meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society](https://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 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.



**November 14: Alison Gill**

**December 12: Kristina Lee**

**January 9: TBA**

**February 13: TBA**

**March 13: 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](mailto: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](mailto:AFSForum-subscribe@yahoo.com). The AFS Facebook page is at [facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought](https://facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought). For calendar information on AFS activities, please join the [Meetup group](#). The AFS website is [www.atlantafreethought.org](http://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](https://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.

---

Views, opinions, positions or strategies expressed by authors are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, positions or strategies of the Atlanta Freethought Society or any member thereof. The editors of *Atlanta Freethought News* reserve the right to edit or alter in any manner it sees fit any articles deemed to be obscene, offensive, defamatory, threatening, in violation of trademark, copyright or other laws, or is otherwise unacceptable; and also to correct grammar and to conserve space.

## Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

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](mailto:Laura@LauraRossDesign.com)  
or [luara.mom@gmail.com](mailto:luara.mom@gmail.com)

### 2021 Board of Directors

Mark Banks – 770-354-1546  
Diane Buckner, Treasurer – 404-257-6008  
Michael Buckner – 404-633-2486  
Dwight Lyman, Secretary – 404-825-0260  
Laura Ross, President – 404-825-0258  
Judy Thompson – 404-296-2020  
Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

### Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 27, Number 10, October 2021 CE  
Copyright © 2021 by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc. Signed articles are all copyright © 2021 by their respective authors.

Membership in AFS is \$50/year per person,  
\$20 for low income.

Membership includes voting privileges and  
AFNews by email/USPS (indicate preferences).

Sustaining Membership is \$100.

Life Membership is \$1000.

Subscriptions only are \$30 for 12 issues.

Please make checks or money orders payable to  
**Atlanta Freethought Society**  
(or Paypal to [afs@atlantafreethought.org](mailto:afs@atlantafreethought.org)).

Visit our Meetup page at  
[meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society](https://meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society).

See AFS events and member views at:  
[facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought](https://facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought).

Send E-mail to  
[afs@atlantafreethought.org](mailto:afs@atlantafreethought.org).

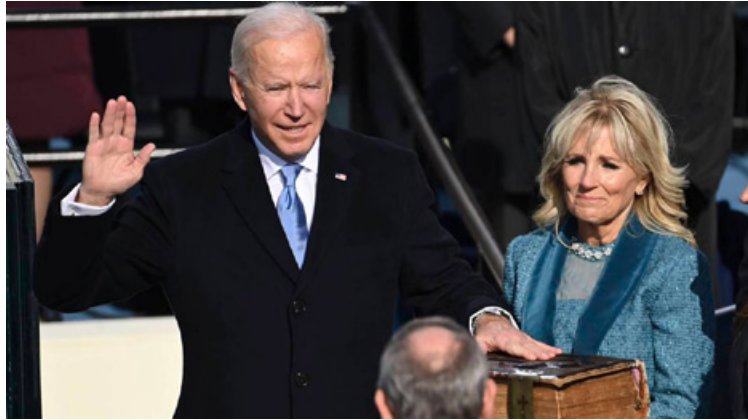
AFS Wordpress specialist: Dwight Lyman  
AFS Facebook page: Laura Ross, Ed Buckner,  
Steve Yothment

# Just Biden Our Time? What Should an Atheist Think of (or Do About) a Devout Catholic President?

By Ed Buckner

American Atheist Magazine - Second Quarter 2021

On January 20, 2021, newly sworn-in President Joe Biden seemed to ignore entirely the millions of his fellow Americans who lack religion as he spoke to the nation. Exactly a dozen years earlier, then newly sworn-in President Barack Obama said, “For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims,



Jews and Hindus, and non-believers.” Many of us took strong satisfaction at what was apparently the first time any important American national leader had prominently and explicitly included, however generically, all the atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, rationalists, etc., in America as part of the citizenry.

American Atheists issued an immediate congratulatory news release in 2009, noting that “every American politician, every elected leader should routinely acknowledge [atheist Americans] as the good, patriotic, taxpaying, and contributing citizens we have always been.” We added, “His mother would have been proud, and so are we. Congratulations and best wishes on your presidency, Mr. Obama. And thanks for including us all, right from the start.” (In his autobiography, *Dreams from My Father*, Obama had said of his mother that in Indonesia “she was a lonely witness for secular humanism, a soldier for New Deal, Peace Corps, position-paper liberalism.”) News outlets worldwide, from Oklahoma to Slovenia, picked up our congratulations, many including the comment about the President’s late mother.

But...

Obama’s inaugural address also referenced “God” five times, and he closed with the tired, irritating (to many of us, anyway) words: “Thank you. God bless you. And God bless the United States of America.”

And Obama continued to pay occasional dutiful homage to religiosity thereafter.

Later that year, in the Politico article “Atheists Keep Faith with Obama,” reporter Daniel Libit claimed that “George W. Bush offered similar acknowledgements of nonbelievers during his presidency”—but gave no examples. Libit’s essay quoted me on Obama: “The fact that our best shot of making things better still goes around saying God stuff all the time in some ways maybe makes it worse.” Interestingly, he quoted Sam Harris, too: “The one important thing to recognize, is [Obama] is so much better than the last guy in the Oval Office, and everyone is feeling so much relief for the change he has brought that they are inclined not to gripe too much about all the delusional stuff he may be paying lip service to or holding over from the previous administration.”

Many secular community members responded to President Joe Biden’s more recent inaugural address with worry, even though Biden may be “so much better than the last guy.” American Atheists, in the previous issue of the magazine, concluded that, despite Biden’s religious talk, the “early Biden administration actions on religion are promising.”

But we need good balance in both the actions and words of this administration on atheists (I’ll just write “atheists” hereafter, but in this piece I mean atheists, agnostics, secular humanists, freethinkers, and other irreligionists, and in some senses religious Americans committed to secularism). Joe Biden gives every appearance of being a longstanding, consistent, devout Catholic; Kamala Harris

also seems pretty religious, if more ostentatiously ecumenical—a practicing Baptist, married to a Jewish man, and whose family background has considerable Hindu influence.

Those of us who’re more or less patriotic Americans want Biden-Harris to succeed in general—but we’d also like atheists to be treated with respect and as first-class citizens. We’re not all Democrats; some of us are conservative or libertarian and prefer less government; others range from liberal to socialist and expect the government to be bold in solving societal problems. Being an atheist has no obvious connection to where we fall on political-ideological spectrums. This is about religiosity and the need for separation of government and religion.

My friend and former colleague Tom Flynn, editor of *Free Inquiry* magazine, recently wrote in a letter to members: “Biden subjected us to one of the most faith-based inaugural addresses in history.” Flynn detailed the number of references to “soul,” “God,” and the like in that inaugural address and—probably the most outrageous thing—that Biden interrupted his own address for a moment of silent prayer. Flynn noted that all of this could reasonably be interpreted as meaning that “our brand-new president told more than a third of Americans that they don’t belong...” Not everyone will agree with Flynn about this, but I certainly do. We can probably take satisfaction and encouragement from Biden’s Secretary of State appointment, Anthony Blinken. Blinken, surely without objection from Biden, was sworn in with his hand resting not on the usual, traditional Bible or other allegedly sacred book, but on the U.S. Constitution. This sends a clear signal to all the nations of the world and to all the citizens of the U.S. that, as the famous 1796–7 Treaty of

**Biden continued on page 4**

**Page 3**



## Biden continued from page 3

Tripoli declared, “the government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion.”

It is important to note that my own problem with Joe Biden is neither with his religious beliefs nor with the depth of his commitment to those beliefs. Every American, from the president to the guy who cleans the grease trap at the local hamburger joint, must have real religious freedom, true liberty of conscience. As an American who is also a devout Catholic, Biden is entitled to believe that abortion is murder—but not to act on that belief in his capacity as an elected official. On that matter, Biden seems to have been consistent with his secular role, whatever his religious beliefs. But abortion rights are not the only things at risk when Catholics are in charge of healthcare institutions, and we do not yet know if Biden will come down in a wise and thoroughly secular way on all such things.

The distinction between religious ideas and governing principles confuses many Americans, to be sure. If there is universal acceptance of what is right, no arguments are needed. But if, as happens with most things decided by legislatures or governing leaders, not all religious beliefs are in agreement, then other political or constitutional grounds must be brought to bear. And executives in a secular government must apply the proper ones, not personal beliefs.

The crucially important legal, constitutional, more narrowly First Amendment aspects of this can best be addressed by competent and inspired attorneys like American Atheists’ own **Alison Gill** and **Geoffrey T. Blackwell**. My interest here is in wondering about the political question of just how much pious political theater may still be necessary for success in governing this nation.

One thing I think we should avoid is getting too optimistic just because the Religious Right attacks this administration. It was inappropriate as ever that the president of all of us participated in the National Day of Prayer this

year and endorsed it with his appearance there. The fact that the Religious Right made a mostly phony kerfuffle—attacking Biden for not using the word “God” in his National Day of Prayer statement— was more posturing by the Religious Right than evidence of wise secularism by Biden. Most recent U.S. presidents have at least paid lip service to default godliness-is-goodness nonsense, ending nearly all political addresses with “God bless the USA” or similar phrasing. As a personal belief, this is unremarkable, but when it is spoken in a context that suggests it represents the views of all Americans, it is unacceptable. In most Western nations, this pandering would be seen by the public as embarrassing and weak. Even within the U.S., most Americans probably don’t see it as religiously serious.

I’d guess, if pressed, that **Donald Trump** is actually an atheist. And I’m reasonably confident that Joe Biden is actually deeply religious. But is an honest theist who understands secularism better than a dishonest atheist who cares nothing for American liberty of conscience? Or are we at risk of merely being satisfied with what Sam Harris called being “so much better than the last guy?” History will judge.

*Ed Buckner served as American Atheists’ President from 2008-2010, and a board member for several years in between. He co-wrote, with his son Michael, In Freedom We Trust: An Atheist Guide to Religious Liberty, published by Prometheus Books in 2012.*

# Become a Member!

**(Or renew your membership with this form or online at [www.AtlantaFreethought.org](http://www.AtlantaFreethought.org)!)**

**Individual memberships:** One person can become a member for \$50 per year.

**Sustaining memberships:** One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.

**Life memberships:** Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A \$1000 life membership lasts a lifetime.

**Paper newsletter:** We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.)

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

Membership Dues	# of mems	Total
Individual	\$50	_____ \$_____
Low Income	\$20	_____ \$_____
Sustaining Member	\$100	_____ \$_____
Life Member	\$1000	_____ \$_____
Subscription only	\$30	_____ \$_____
Extra donation (Thank you!)		_____ \$_____
	<b>Total:</b>	_____ \$_____

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: H \_\_\_\_\_ W \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email: \_\_\_\_\_

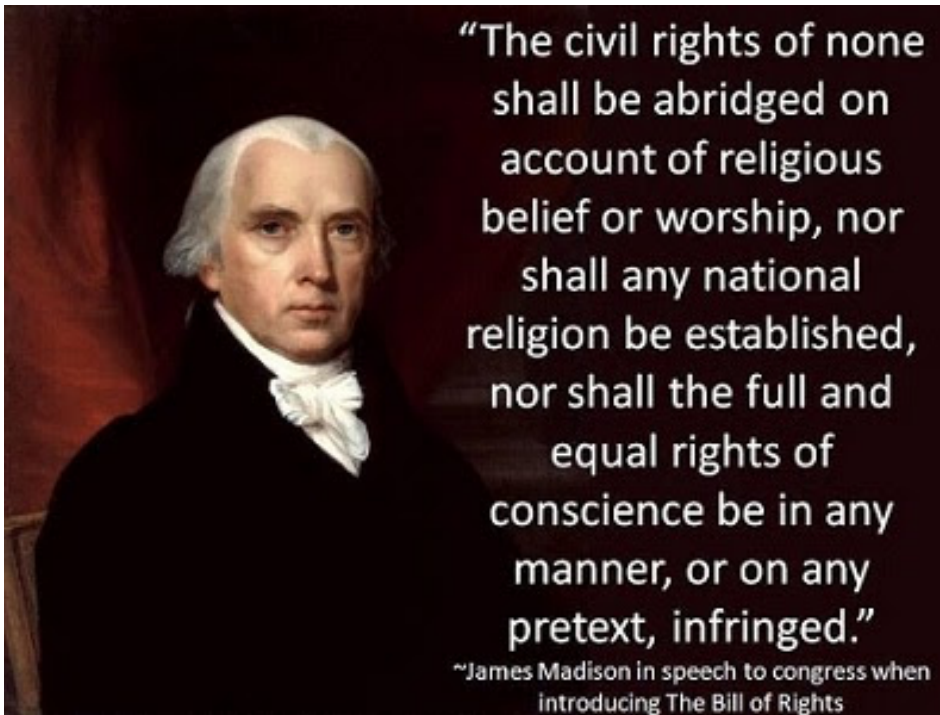
- Receive PDF of newsletter by email
- Receive paper newsletter by post

Save time, postage, and keep your hands clean by making a payment via **Paypal** to:  
**[afs@atlantafreethought.org](mailto:afs@atlantafreethought.org)**

# Most Americans Appreciate Religious Diversity. White Evangelicals Don't.

au.org

By Rob Boston - Wall of Separation Blog



James Madison, a primary author of the Constitution and its guarantee of religious freedom, **once spoke approvingly** of the “multiplicity of sects, which pervades America, and which is the best and only security for religious liberty in any society.”

Madison added, “For where there is such a variety of sects, there cannot be a majority of any one sect to oppress and persecute the rest.”

Madison’s support for religious pluralism was somewhat utilitarian: If we have lots of different religions, he reasoned, no one group could become too powerful and oppress others.

That’s a good reason to support religious/philosophical diversity, but there are others. For one, the right to believe in the faith of your choice or reject religion entirely is a fundamental human right. In countries like America where religion and state are separate and the government does not espouse an official theology, this kind of pluralism just naturally arises. In other words, pluralism is a sign that our country has got religious freedom right. We should celebrate that.

Here’s another reason: Many Americans would argue that the diversity of religious and non-religious thought is the mark of a mature society; it’s a sign that the state is confident that people can make the choice about which religion, if any, to affiliate with on their own, without interference from the government.

This may seem like a no-brainer, but not everyone agrees. **A new survey** by Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) finds that a disturbingly high number of white evangelical Protestants don’t appreciate America’s religious diversity. They’d rather that everyone believed as they do.

PRRI asked people to evaluate two statements and place themselves on a scale between them. The first statement was, “I would prefer the U.S. to be made up of people belonging to a wide variety of religions” and the other statement was, “I would prefer the U.S. to be a nation primarily made up of people who follow the Christian faith.”

Among all Americans, 38% placed themselves close to the statement that supports religious diversity, and 38% put themselves in the middle. 24% said they identify with the statement favoring a country where most people are Christian.

But among white evangelicals, the figures were much different. 57% of them said they’d rather live in a country where most are Christian. Only 13% expressed support for pluralism, and 30% were in the middle.

No other religious group rejected pluralism so decisively. As PRRI noted, “[W]hite evangelical Protestants are the only religious group in which a majority (57%) express a preference for a mostly Christian country.”

White evangelicals may feel this way because they simply don’t appreciate other faith and non-faith perspectives and what they bring to our nation. Or, like Madison, they may acknowledge pluralism as a barrier to efforts by one religious group to impose its theology on others and bend the law to its liking. (But unlike Madison, they don’t see that as a good thing.)

Either way, it’s disturbing to realize that so many of our fellow Americans, despite their claims to be patriots who love our country, don’t appreciate the diversity that springs from a policy of complete religious freedom for all.



**"YOU DON'T WANT ATHEISM SHOVED DOWN YOUR THROAT? OK.**

We will stop knocking on doors spreading our "Truth", and having tax-exempt organizations dedicated to atheism that have influential political action committees. We will also stop printing "In Atheism We Trust" on all US currency and saying, "One Nation, Under Atheism" in the pledge of allegiance. **We will also stop insisting that everyone who disagrees with us will be sentenced to eternal damnation...**

**Wait..."**

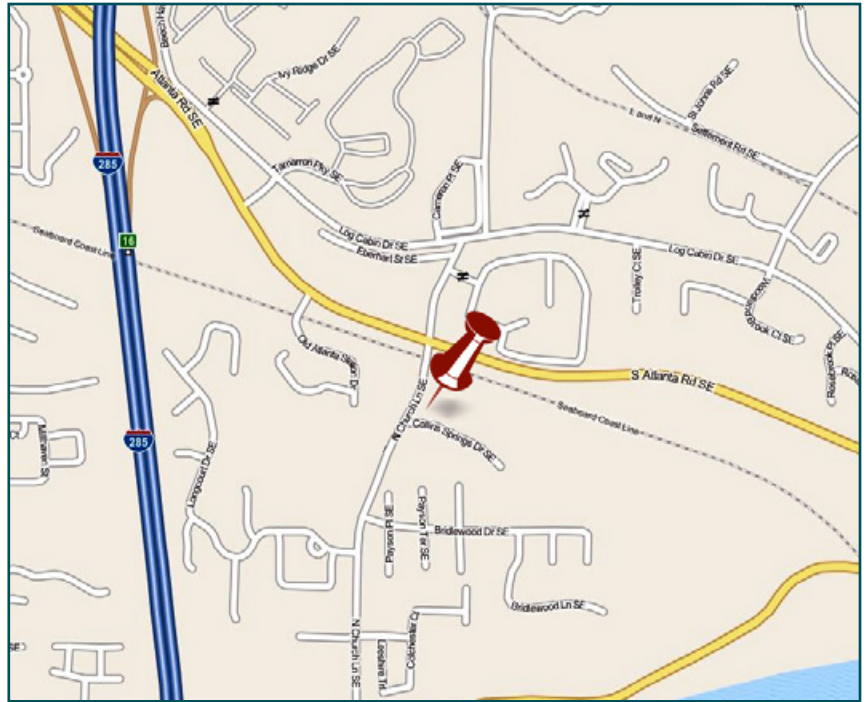
- David G. McAfee

*Dare To Think  
For Yourself!*



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

**Alison Gill  
11/14/21 1:00 pm EST  
(via Zoom)**



Atlanta Freethought News is produced by the Atlanta Freethought Society, Inc., a 501(c)(3) non-profit, member-run, educational organization created to advance freethought and protect freethinkers. Any freethought, atheist, secular humanist, agnostic, or rationalist group is granted permission to reproduce anything from our newsletter not expressly labeled otherwise (acknowledgement of AFS and author appreciated). Articles published represent the official opinion of AFS only when that is clearly stated; all other opinion is that of the individual author.

Atlanta Freethought News  
Atlanta Freethought Society  
4775 N Church Lane SE  
Atlanta GA 30339

