

Freethought Today

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FFRF sues IRS to enforce ban on church electioneering

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has filed a historic challenge by suing the Internal Revenue Service over its failure to enforce electioneering restrictions against churches and religious organizations.

Calling the lack of enforcement a violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and of FFRF's equal protection rights, the state/church watchdog filed the lawsuit Nov. 14 in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Wisconsin.

A widely circulated Bloomberg News article quoted Russell Renwicks of the IRS Tax-Exempt and Government Entities division, saying the agency has suspended tax audits of churches. Although an IRS spokesman claimed Renwicks "misspoke," there appears to be no evidence of IRS inquiries or enforcement action in the past three years.

Other news sources, such as The Associated Press, claim the IRS hasn't been auditing churches since 2009.

FFRF is asking the federal court to enjoin the IRS commissioner from continuing "a policy of non-enforcement of the electioneering restrictions against churches and religious organizations."

Additionally, FFRF seeks to order the IRS "to authorize a high-ranking official within the IRS to approve and initiate enforcement of the restrictions of §501(c)(3) against churches and religious organizations, including the electioneering restrictions, as required by law."

As many as 1,500 clergy reportedly took part in a mass violation of the electioneering restrictions on Sunday, Oct. 7, notes the legal complaint, which also references "blatantly political" full-page ads by the Billy Graham Evangelical Association running on the three Sundays leading up to the Nov. 6 election.

"[I]n recent years, churches and religious organizations have been blatantly and deliberately flaunting the electioneering restrictions of §501(c)(3)," the complaint asserts.

FFRF has more than 19,000 members nationwide "who are opposed to government preferences and favoritism toward religion." FFRF is a tax-exempt organization that "must and does abide by the electioneering restrictions



An FFRF member sent this photo taken on Oct. 22 at the First Conservative Baptist Church in Jacksonville, Fla., as an example of church electioneering. There was also a Romney for president sign and one that said, "If you want to keep your job, pray the president loses his job."

of §501(c)3." FFRF is regularly contacted by its members and members of the public over specific and general violations of church electioneering restrictions, and FFRF staff attorneys regularly ask the IRS to investigate such violations.

This non-enforcement "constitutes preferential treatment to churches and religious organizations that is not provided to other tax-exempt organizations, including FFRF," the complaint notes. "Churches and religious organizations obtain a significant benefit as a result of being non-exempt from income taxation, while also being able to preferentially engage in electioneering, which is something secular tax-exempt organizations cannot do."

This preferential tax exemption involves more than \$100 billion annually in tax-free contributions to churches and religious organizations in the United States.

Website swamped

After news of the lawsuit became the No. 1 item on Reddit, an online social network, almost 70,000 people flooded FFRF's website to read about the case. Unfortunately, the spike took down the site intermittently.

Attorney Richard L. Bolton, the litigator, who is with Boardman Law Firm in Madison, Wis., and has been working with FFRF for more than a decade, reported receiving almost 100 adulatory emails from strangers around the world, thanking him for his role in the case. Bolton said this is unprecedented in his experience as an attorney.

Biologist Jerry Coyne of the University of Chicago, author of *Why Evolution Is True*, wrote in his November blog, "We now get revenge: the FFRF sues the IRS for failure to enforce tax laws on churches," adding that he con-

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Mississippi police department decalogue downed by FFRF

Among many recent FFRF victories banishing religion from government was the removal of a very large, very unconstitutional Ten Commandments monument from the police department in Brandon, Miss.

A local resident was taken aback by the bible display and contacted FFRF. To the rescue came Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott, who told Mayor Tim Coulter in a Sept. 24 letter that "any reasonable observer would view it as an endorsement of religion by the city of Brandon. This display is unmistakably stamped with the city government's

approval, as it is prominently placed directly inside of the city's most important government offices."

Elliott cited a Supreme Court ruling that called the Ten Commandments an "unmistakably religious statement dealing with religion's obligations and with morality subject to religious sanction."

Residents have informed FFRF that the display was removed sometime in October.

To read about other recent legal victories, see pages 6-7.



FFRF's letter got this illegal Ten Commandments display removed.

One nation *under* God — not!

This column originally was published on Huffington Post and appears here with the author's permission.



By Phil Zuckerman

At the Republican National Convention, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio was loud and clear: What makes us Americans is our shared belief in God. That's it, above all else. Forget adherence to the Constitution, forget a hatred of tyranny, forget a love for baseball. Forget watching reality TV while ingesting a double cheeseburger, large nachos and a 32-ounce orange soda.

No, what binds Americans together is, according to this Christian politician, theism.

As Rubio proclaimed: "We are special because we're united not by a common race or ethnicity. We're bound together by common values . . . that almighty God is the source of all we have." And furthermore: "Faith in our Creator is the most important American value of all."

Rubio's wrong. There are countless values that are far more important than having faith in an invisible, invertebrate, unknowable deity. Valuing education, for example. Valuing democracy. Valuing human rights. Valuing free speech. Valuing trees, mountains, valleys, lakes, rivers and the ozone layer. Valuing affordable health care. Valuing nutritious school lunches. Valuing one's spouse, one's friends, one's neighbors. It is far more important to value and love one another, and to act on that love, than to have faith in a god.

Rubio is also wrong about something else: Faith in God is not shared by all Americans. In fact, millions of hardworking, child-raising, military-joining, coal-mining and liberty-loving Americans live their lives without faith in God. Millions more live their lives without any interest in religion whatsoever. The statistics are surprisingly clear on this front.

In the 1990s, about 8% of Americans claimed "none" as their religion. Then, in 2007, the Pew Forum found that the percentage of nonreligious Americans had doubled to 16%. In 2010, Putnam and Campbell's national survey put the percentage at 17%. In 2011, the General Social Survey reported it at 18%. This year, the Pew Forum bumped it up to 19%. (Anyone see a pattern here?)

Then, according to the 2012 WIN-Gallup International "Global Index of Religion and Atheism," a whopping 30% of Americans describe themselves as nonreligious. So whether we're talking 16 or 19 or 30%, we're talking tens of millions of Americans who are more secular than not.

Of course, not all Americans who claim to be nonreligious are atheists or agnostics, but a very significant proportion are. In fact, according to the most recent American Religious Identification Survey, of those Americans who self-identify as nonreligious, about half are atheist or agnostic. Another 23% believe in a higher power but not a personal God. Only 21% are firm God-believers.

What's really un-American

Now, maybe there is a god. Maybe there isn't. Maybe there is a heaven. Maybe there isn't. Maybe the precious, red blood of Jesus saves us from our sins. Maybe it doesn't. But the answers to these questions, whatever they may be, are not what defines us as Americans, or as citizens, or as humans.

And to suggest that to be a good, decent American requires faith in a Creator, or to imply that Christian values are the only values, or to argue that our laws are given to us solely by God, or to constantly denigrate nonbelievers as somehow less-than-welcome partners in the American enterprise — well, that's all, quite frankly, very un-American.

After all, the brilliant founders of this nation made their vision quite clear, as they proclaimed in Article 11 of the Treaty of Tripoli of 1797: "The

government of the United States of Americas is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion." The treaty was passed unanimously by the U.S. Senate, only the third such unanimous vote in the Senate out of 339 votes that had taken place up to that time.

And, the writers of our Constitution left God out of the entire body of that foundational, brilliant and oh-so-secular document.

Marco Rubio should know all of

this. Perhaps he does. But heck, to Rubio, faith in his deity is clearly of greater value than historical accuracy or embracing all Americans regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof. He said so himself.

Phil Zuckerman, professor of sociology at Pitzer College in Claremont, Calif., is an FFRF member and a leading authority on how secular societies measure up favorably to theocratic ones.

FFRF welcomes 23 new Lifetime Members!

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to welcome 23 new Lifetime Members:

Dick Baker, Roger Banvard, Sheri Bender*, David Bockoff, Sheila Chambers, Dennis Drake, William Kable, Marc-Andre LaChance, Paul and Deb Lindsey, Andrew Miller, Yvonne Nantais, Carsten Smidt, Ph.D., Camille Stafford (whose husband, Roger, is already a Lifer), Kevin Stansell, Cindy and Eric Stern (gift from Donn Milton), Larry Tanner, Michael J. Timinski, Curtis A. Waddell, Dr. Wayne Wright and Hank Zumach.

Additionally, FFRF welcomes a Washington state member who prefers anonymity.

States represented are California, Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Florida, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Utah, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming. FFRF also welcomes a new Lifetime Member from the Canadian province of Ontario.

FFRF belatedly welcomes Sheri Bender, who was mistakenly not listed in October Lifers. Her husband Charles, already a Lifetime Member, was listed by mistake. Charles surprised Sheri with a Lifetime Membership at the 35th annual FFRF convention in Portland, Ore., which they attended.

Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000, ensure never another renewal notice, go into a safe rainy-day endowment and are deductible for income tax purposes to the kind donor,

as are all gifts and dues to FFRF.

Our warmest thanks to Anonymous, Hank, Wayne, Curtis, Michael, Larry, Cindy, Eric, Donn, Kevin, Camille, Carsten, Yvonne, Andrew, Paul, Deb, Andre, William, Dennis Sheila, David, Charles and Sheri, Roger and Dick!

Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

Arrange a bequest in your will or trust, or make the Freedom From Religion Foundation the beneficiary of an insurance policy, bank account, or IRA. It's easy to do.

For related information (or to request a bequest brochure), please phone Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608) 256-8900.

FFRF
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Madison WI 53701

Freedom Depends on Freethinkers

A Note to Members

Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and "Private Line." If it says any month in 2012, please renew! Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 sustaining; \$25-student) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in Jan/Feb and June/July. Send to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

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November 2012
The only freethought newspaper in the United States

FFRF awards two student activists

Wisconsin brothers get religious football logo removed

FFRF has awarded Mayan and Balen Essak each \$1,000 student activist awards. Freethought activism runs in the family (see sidebar).

By Mayan and
Balen Essak

For several years, our Wisconsin public high school's football team has partnered with a private, Catholic high school to create a competitive team. For years, the team's logo was a simple MS, combining our schools' first initials.

Last year, our graphic arts program assigned students a project to create a new logo, combining our high school's logo, a greyhound, with the private school's logo, a Catholic bishop's hat with a cross on it. The winning design would replace the old logo. After passing through the football coach, principal and many other school authorities, a design that cleverly combined the logos was chosen and printed on decals for helmets.

For most of the season, the cross-bearing helmets went unbeknownst to us until the school newspaper printed an article about them with a few weeks left in the season. Publication of the situation prompted an immediate response.

The day the paper came out, one of us, along with some other upset peers, brought it to the assistant principal's attention that we were unhappy with a religious symbol representing our football team and public school. We felt that it was unfair to force people to wear a cross on their heads if they wanted to play football. It was a clear issue of separating church and state.

We brought it to the attention of our parents as well, who, that night, emailed the school board and principal explaining that without swift action, we would be contacting the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

At the school board meeting that one of us attended, the board acknowl-

edged our request. They all had been unaware of the new logo and voted unanimously and with minimal discussion to remove the decals as quickly as possible.

Taking responsibility for the mistake, the principal apologized and had the decals removed before the next game. Unfortunately, many people were unhappy with the decision. One school board member received many emails and phone calls from disapproving citizens across the nation, but there were many local protesters, too.

We had to explain countless times to oblivious peers why having a cross on a public school's football helmet isn't acceptable. Many felt that since a private school was involved, they should be allowed to have their symbol represented on the team's logo.

They couldn't understand that when a private school partners with a public school, they need to follow the public school's rules. Students at the private school may have signed up to be represented by a cross, but anyone attending a public school can expect complete freedom from religion in all representations of their school and all school-sponsored activities.

Another common complaint was that since we weren't football players, and because we weren't actually wearing the cross, we weren't directly affected by the logo and shouldn't care or make such a big deal about it.

On the contrary, it did directly affect us. At every single football game our team had played so far this season, people saw our football team associated with Christianity. People seeing our school as a Christianity-endorsing institution doesn't just affect the football players. It affects anyone associated with our school district.

Just because we're not football players doesn't change the morality of the situation. In the theoretical but entirely possible situation that we wanted to play football, we should not be forced to wear a cross on our heads. The helmet logo was morally and legally wrong; whether or not we play football doesn't change that.



The Essak family, from left: Lena, Jennifer, Balen, Sam and Mayan.

Some other arguments were even more outlandish. This was one of the emails a school board member received: "Everyone wonders why America is in decline. The answer is simple, our country was founded with Christian values . . . and every time we disavow his image or the cross we are a little less blessed each day. . . . I don't know what your religious affiliation is, but if you are a Christian . . . think about putting God ahead of your job and political motivations. . . If they don't like it, tell them to go to another school . . . If you are a liberal, you won't understand me."

Obviously, America was not founded on Christian values but on moral principles, which contradict this point of view. Another email received in response to the decision stated, "This has nothing whatsoever to do with separation of church and state and you know it. What it shows is that today's society is determined to shield this generation from Christianity and remove all mention of God from our lives. Our great country was founded on the belief of personal and religious freedoms and you have now done your part to squash that freedom."

Actually, it did have to do with separation of church and state. Also, not forcing Christianity upon others seems more like freedom from religion than the freedom suggested in this email.



Student activist honorees Mayan and Balen Essak

To us, this issue seems absolutely self-evident. By separation of church and state, it is unacceptable to place any religious symbols on a public school's uniforms. How so many people are naïve about this idea is bewildering to us. Working to remove the cross from our school's helmets was a rewarding experience, but also an eye-opening one.

Sadly, far more people than we had ever imagined are completely oblivious to religious symbols in public settings and are too ignorant to other points of view to understand why the cross had to be removed. Hopefully, this has been a learning experience for all.

We just hope that if a situation like this arises, and we aren't there to fight for our freedom from religion, someone else will.



Jennifer and Sam Essak (at right), parents of Mayan and Balen, as state employees were among the victorious plaintiffs in FFRF's lawsuit declaring unconstitutional Wisconsin's Good Friday holiday in 1996. "We're thrilled to see two generations of commitment to the First Amendment in the Essak family," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. Also pictured by the Robert La Follette bust in the Wisconsin Capitol in 1996 were Good Friday plaintiffs (left) Dan Barker, Michael Hakeem, Richard Uttke and Annie Laurie and Anne Gaylor.

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

Truth

We shall die alone.
—PASCAL

An army of moments:
 jade against the skin
 heavenly Aïda
 a view of Toledo
 belly and thighs—
it is always
war to the last man,
every man
is the last man,
you
are the last man
remembering
 heat and pressure
 mass and energy
 wave length and frequency
 beauty and truth—
none of your captains
will remember,
non of your non-coms
will follow you there,
only the big-eyed recruits:
 sunrise in April
 purple clowns Beaujolais
 duckling in peaches
 rose leaves and rain—
at the final moment
they
will be with you, blindfolded
with you, standing there with
you, backs to the wall.

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Reprinted from *New and Selected Poems, 1956—1996*.



Philip Appleman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible* (2012), *Darwin's Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used *Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, and the *Norton Critical Edition of Malthus' Essay on Population*. His poetry and fiction have won many awards, including a fellowship in poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Center for Science Education. His work has appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *The Paris Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, and *The Yale Review*.
He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both "Afterlife" Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. They recorded an excerpt of "Noah," *New and Selected Poems*, which is available for sale from FFRF for \$23 ppd., *The Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, is \$22 ppd., *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie*, \$27 ppd., *Darwin's Ark*, \$23 ppd., and *Perfidious Proverbs*, \$20 ppd. (ffrf.org/shop/).

YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

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Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

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news, music & interviews



Overheard

Do the atheists in Wisconsin realize they're going to hell?
Bill O'Reilly's comment on FFRF's legal victory in getting a nativity scene removed from public property in Ellwood City, Pa.
"The O'Reilly Factor," 11-13-12

Under Orders should be in every rucksack for those moments when Soldiers need spiritual energy.
Endorsement by Gen. David Petraeus of a chaplain's anti-atheist book subtitled *A Spiritual Handbook for Military Personnel*
Huffington Post, 8-17-12

OkCupid is the only free service that assists nonbelievers with specific advice, statistics and tests. Last December, self-identified atheist users were sent "12 Days of Atheist Matches," and current members can take an "atheist test" to find those with similar levels of non-belief. The site's "Darwin Test" looks to match those with similar attitudes about evolution (sample question: Are most people a) good? b) evil?).
News story, "At OKcupid, being an atheist is a date-maker, not a deal-breaker"
Religion News Service, 11-13-12

Rabbis launch war on self-locking doors.
Headline on news story about an Orthodox "Yichud" prohibition meant to limit occasions of sin by men and women not married to each other
ynetnews.com, 11-13-12

I'm moving to Australia, because their president is a Christian and actually supports what he says.
Post-election Tweet by Kristen Neel, 18, a Georgia Republican, apparently unaware that Julia Gillard, Australia's prime minister (not president), is a female atheist who is politically progressive
Sydney Morning Herald, 11-8-12

One in 20 is a minimum. It might be one in 15, perhaps not as high as one in 10.
Des Cahill, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology professor, on the number of Catholic priests in Melbourne he estimates from court records are child sex offenders
The Age, 10-24-12

Australians know, from the revelations that they've read in recent weeks, that too many children have suffered child

abuse but have also seen other adults let them down. They've not only had their trust betrayed by the abuser, but other adults who could have acted to assist them have failed to do so.
Prime Minister Julia Gillard, ordering a federal inquiry into cover-ups of sexual abuse by persons associated with religious and state institutions, schools and community groups
Associated Press, 11-12-12

The Rev. Bill Effinger, pastor of Holy Name Parish from 1972 to 1992, took Adam under his wing in 1987 to help the boy consider a possible future in the priesthood. After two overnight trips, Adam stopped talking about wanting to be a priest.
News story, "Sheboygan [Wis.] family shares its story of priest abuse to help others come forward"
Wausau Daily Herald, 10-29-12

The ads that come up from the Republican campaigns sound like the letter.
State Sen. Tim Mathern, D-Fargo, on a letter by Bismarck Bishop David Kagan to be read in all North Dakota parishes that says abortion, euthanasia, embryonic stem cell research and same-sex marriage "are never acceptable"
Fargo Forum, 10-25-12

[C]ourts have held, and Texans believe, that cheerleaders are a special subset of students, and not just for the reasons dramatized in John Hughes movies and Taylor Swift songs. They're not people who happen to be standing on the football field, exercising their right to free speech. They're deputies of the school administration; they speak for the school, not themselves.
Op-ed, "Consider the cheerleaders," on the controversy caused by FFRF's complaint against stadium banners with bible verses
The Economist, 10-24-12

I thought, "Wow, there's not someone watching me all the time? That's a wonderful freedom!" So I shed that.
Rapper and foxhole atheist Greydon Square, on losing his religion as a student at Arizona State University
LA Weekly, 11-14-12

No matter what the title is, what the subject is, I'm using it as an excuse to tell stories.
Atheist entertainer Penn Jillette, on the release of his new book *Every Day Is an Atheist Holiday!*
Washington Examiner, 11-13-12

Religion and hospice: A cautionary experience

By Susan Fallon McCann

“Can you believe they believe this crap?” whispered my beloved, freethinking father. Unfortunately, my father’s “whisper” was in fact a deeply resonant voice that rippled through rows of the Methodist church we were attending with my mother, an immensely sweet and deeply religious woman. Worse still, we were in the second row, my mother’s favored position.

The minister had just read a particularly ridiculous bible verse that offended my hearing-impaired but whip-smart dad. The minister looked momentarily startled. My mother looked dismayed. I was both amused and proud of my father, who though in his late 80s, sported a clear, highly intelligent mind.

I happily plunked down the modest amount to become a Lifetime Member of FFRF before this year’s convention in Portland began, and felt privileged to shake the hand of Annie Laurie Gaylor as I did so. I also thought, “My father would be proud.”

Here’s why. In 2005, my dad died of lung cancer that metastasized to the spine, and suffered in needless pain due to the “protocol” of the religiously backed hospice we had unwittingly become involved with during the final six weeks of his life. His experience has become my passion.

Hospice is a caring and compassionate approach to death. But beware, freethinkers, not all hospices are created equal. We were automatically “linked” to this particular hospice at the advice of my father’s physician, a kind man and a family friend. Connected to the Missouri hospital where my father resided briefly, it seemed sensible to simply enroll with the recommended hospice when the end was near.

The problems began almost immediately. When the hospice case manager showed up at our home to enroll my father, she said, “Our chaplain will be happy to meet with you,” to which he responded, “No preachers.” The case manager persisted, “We ask only that he visit one time.” My dad’s response? “I don’t believe you heard me correctly — no preachers or no hospice.”

The woman was clearly taken aback, but duly marked the form “no spiritual support requested.”

Unfortunately, we found that the hospice workers assigned to my father’s case simply could not park their religion at the door. His pain was severe; he was 89 years old and quite pragmatically and emotionally ready to leave this particular veil of tears.

Nonetheless, when he asked, “I know you may not be able to answer this question, but based on my vital signs and the progression of my disease, can you give me a sense of how long I have?” the response was, “When the sweet Lord calls you home.”

My father was dismayed. I was furious. I met with the case manager outside our home and said, “If you do not observe my father’s wishes, we will find a different hospice.”

‘I’m not Dr. Kevorkian’

This hospice refused to give my father anything other than liquid morphine to control his pain, when a PCA (patient controlled analgesia) pump was clearly required. Their emphasis



In 1939, Vernon L. “Bill” Bowman (left) joined the Royal Canadian Air Force and for the next two years flew fighter missions with the RCAF and the British Royal Air Force. After America’s declaration of war, he transferred to the U.S. Army Air Force and was shot down Aug. 23, 1944, then spent nine months in Stalag Luft 1 prison camp in Barth, Germany.

He’s pictured late in life with his son, Vice Admiral Michael Bowman, USN, (center), and grandson, Cmdr. Geoffrey Bowman, USN. The photo when published originally was titled “Three Generations of Fly Boys.”

was on “keeping the patient conscious so that he can interact with loved ones.” I finally insisted that he be admitted to the hospital, where pain doctors immediately installed a pump.

But that’s not the end to this sad tale. In the last week of his life, when he had been transferred to a skilled nursing facility where PCA pumps were not allowed, my father asked to be placed in a deep state of unconsciousness, as much as permissible within the law. During overnight vigils, it was clear to me that the hospice organization, still in charge of his care, was not adequately controlling his pain.

I confronted the hospice doctor, who actually said to me, “This is not Oregon and I am not Dr. Kevorkian.” My reply? “Unless you follow my father’s written and signed wishes, my next call will be to an attorney.”

In her Oct. 3 letter (“Defend our monument”) on the Ten Commandments plaque at Valley High School, Helen Snyder writes that “Anyone who follows the good morals listed in the Ten Commandments is a good citizen. I wonder if our atheist friends have ever read them.” Her position is the exact opposite of the Founders’, who would find abhorrent any religious test for “good citizenship.” Religious freedom does not include the right to use the instruments of government to promulgate religion. This step-by-step intrusion of religion into official government activities, which include public schools, is paving the way for a Christian religious dictatorship in which atheists would be deemed “bad citizens.”

Amesh Adalja, Butler, Pa., letter to the editor on a case in which FFRF has filed a lawsuit

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, 10-27-12

I read a lot of books about science and the history of religion. One of my heroes is Christopher Hitchens, who was a game-changing anti-religious writer — showing it up for what it is. I don’t understand why someone can spout their God stuff, but atheists have always

That comment suddenly spurred action that allowed my dad to die pain-free.

After his death, I was on a mission. I contacted the state licensing board in charge of hospice organizations throughout Missouri. I sent a detailed list of the occurrences — ways in which this facility had violated the concepts of the national hospice organization. Their response was swift. They flew a team of auditors to St. Joseph from Jefferson City and carried out an unannounced audit.

They pulled files of three patients (in an attempt to protect the anonymity of the complainant, though I’m sure said complainant was obvious.) The result? The hospice organization was cited on multiple counts and given three months to clean up its act or be closed. (It is still in operation and apparently



Bill Bowman with his wife, Jeanie, and their daughter, Susan Fallon McCann.

in accord with national hospice concepts, which I am glad to know.)

One other vital point: I conferred with a doctor of mine who was on the board of Stanford Medical Center in California before taking action. He said to me, “Susan, it is vital that you pursue this case. The Religious Right are having an increasing impact on pain control of dying patients in this country.”

My mission now is to warn all who are considering hospice care themselves or on behalf of a loved one to carefully vet all hospice organizations in your area. You must ensure that their approach is medically sound, that they are sufficiently staffed, and, most important, that they are willing to conform to those of us who wish to die without God and also without pain.

My allegiance and respect are absolute for FFRF and its work to keep church and state separate. My decision to join as a Lifetime Member is a great privilege. I hope my experience can help inform and assist other members.

Susan Fallon McCann lives in Fountain Hills, Ariz., where she is a business management and communications professional.

Overheard

had to keep quiet. Just because you have an opinion, it doesn’t mean it has to be respected unless it is supported by evidence. We live in the most exciting time in the history of the sciences. Reading about that is far more exciting than reading about a burning bush or a guy who builds an Ark.

Ryan Walkinshaw, executive chairman of the U.K. Gloucester pro rugby team
Daily Mail, 10-29-12

Nude Woman Who Was Shot Described as Religious, Caring, Modest
Headline on a story about a Florida woman, 42, shot to death when she showed up uninvited and naked with a gun at a private party and confronted off-duty police officers
Tampa Bay Times, 10-31-12

A high-quality person who has passion for football and cares about faith, family and football.

Interim head coach Bruce Arians, on what type of player the Indianapolis Colts are looking for to join the NFL team
NBC Sports, 10-31-12

It’s not wrong to have strong faith

in whatever you believe in. I’m like George Carlin, I pray to the sun and Joe Pecs because the odds of getting my prayers answered are still 50/50 but I can see my Gods. But seeing and believing have historically been two different things, and that’s fine. Just don’t bring it into the workplace where discrimination can occur.

Writer Josh Hill, “Colts may be discriminating against atheists in hiring practices”

The FanSided Network, 11-2-12

Lack of visibility for atheists and prevalence of deference to religious authorities has contributed to a generally passive and docile attitude that is too often mistaken for humility and for a virtue. This false humility, and the false arrogance that atheists are often accused of, reveal a system of values that has little respect for empirical and scientific evidence and too much undeserved respect for religions that are ostentatious about a moral superiority that they sorely lack.

Contributing writer Hiram Crespo, “Revising views on atheism”

Northeastern Illinois University Independent, 10-31-12

FFRF legal victories — It pays to complain

Christmas cross won't return to Illinois water tower

The village of Alsip, Ill., will not display a Latin cross on the village water tower this holiday season after receiving demands from FFRF to end the practice.

The annual display of an illuminated cross each December on its distinctive water tower brought a complaint from FFRF last December. Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote that the display violated precedent by the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, which has jurisdiction over Illinois. FFRF sent the village a reminder Nov. 6 about the illegality of the cross.

Mayor Patrick Kitching posted a letter on the village's website during the week of Nov. 18:

"A tradition for almost 35 years here in the Village of Alsip is coming to an end. You will notice this year our holiday decoration on the West Water Tower (Holiday Cross) will not be erected nor [sic] lit. We have an organization out of Wisconsin, Freedom from Religion Foundation, who is threatening a lawsuit for having a holiday symbol that can be construed as a religious decoration. It is considered to be unconstitutional. Other municipalities have been brought to suit regarding this very same issue and have lost. We have chosen not to waste taxpayer dollars to fight a losing battle in court. The holiday cross will be replaced with a different holiday decoration in the future, however, I am not sure this process can be completed in time for Christmas of 2012."

Kitching added, "I am very saddened by this and had hoped we would not have to change tradition, however in these economic times, the Village cannot afford to waste any tax dollars on a lawsuit that simply cannot be won."

In years past, the illuminated cross could be seen by heavy traffic on Interstate 294. FFRF learned through a Freedom of Information Act request that the village Water Department installs and removes the cross each year.

The original installation of the cross, along with a decoration on another water tower, cost the village \$3,200 in 2003.

Proselytizing teacher also big bully

A high school biology teacher in Cheektowaga, N.Y., a Buffalo suburb, removed religious displays from her classroom and will no longer proselytize as a result of an FFRF complaint. A student alerted FFRF after the teacher invited a guest speaker who promoted Christianity and used biblical quotes from Isaiah and Judges. There were also four posters with bible quotes in the classroom. The complainant also noted a cross painted in a hallway.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent Superintendent Dennis Kane a letter June 7. Kane said in a June 22 reply that the cross in the hallway and religious posters had been removed. He said the district discussed the student's concerns with the teacher.

The student complainant reported that the teacher showed a copy of FFRF's June 7 letter to her class on June 12, the last day of school, disclaiming responsibility for her actions. The teacher also attacked the student anonymously, saying whoever had complained to FFRF lacked integrity and

character and was on the same level as a student who had cheated on the class's final exam.

Markert responded to the teacher's inappropriate handling of the situation with a June 14 letter to Kane. "Bullying is rampant in schools. Teachers should strive to conduct their classes in an inclusive manner so that students can participate fully without compromising their own personal beliefs."

Kane responded Sept. 11 that the teacher's conduct was addressed and she was directed to not discuss religion in her classroom.

FFRF closes book on bible handouts

FFRF stopped Gideons International from distributing bibles to fifth-graders at Central Elementary School in Magnolia, Ark. Before FFRF's involvement, men from Gideons were scheduled to give a presentation to students and then present them with bibles.

"Courts have held that the distribution of bibles to students at public schools is prohibited," wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott in an Oct. 31 letter to Superintendent John Moore. Elliott added that districts cannot allow any group to distribute religious material during the school day.

FFRF received word Nov. 5 that the Gideons were not allowed to be on campus.

FFRF letter ends religious song

First-graders at Ada Givens Elementary School in Merced, Calif., will no longer be instructed to sing "God Bless America" in the classroom.

A district parent told FFRF that her 6-year-old daughter was being taught to sing the religious song in class. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to Superintendent RoseMary Parga Duran on Oct. 17: "The first verse of 'God Bless America' ends with, 'As we raise our voices in solemn prayer.' A prayer conceived, hosted and advocated by a publicly-supported school does not pass constitutional muster."

The school district issued a positive response Oct. 25: "The principal spoke to the teacher about the complaint and about the district's policy regarding these matters. The teacher was very apologetic and stated she never intended to offend any of her students, or make them uncomfortable in her class. She immediately discontinued singing patriotic songs."

[Editor's note: "patriotic" songs?]

FFRF: Just say no to drug prayer

The Cherokee County School District (Canton, Ga.) has stopped including religious messages on anti-drug ribbons during "Red Ribbon Week." During a special drug prevention week, the district distributed ribbons to students that said "God answers prayers, drugs don't." The ribbons also depicted two hands praying.

After being alerted by a concerned parent, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote an Oct. 26 letter to Superinten-

dent Frank Petruzielo urging him to "remain sensitive to the diverse religious and nonreligious views of students and staff. While the anti-drug concept is laudable, the injection of religion into the public schools is unconstitutional. Government actors must be especially careful to remain neutral on matters of religion in the public school context."

A school district attorney replied Oct. 30: "[S]taff has been counseled to be more careful in the future in giving even an appearance of promoting religion."

Football bible banners won't happen again

FFRF received a local complaint after Stone High School cheerleaders held a banner with a bible quote at a football game in Wiggins, Miss.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt sent a letter Oct. 17 to Stone County School District Superintendent Gwen Miller. FFRF has contacted the district in the past about prayer at school-sponsored athletic events.

District attorney Sean Courtнал called FFRF on Oct. 22 to say the district took this violation very seriously and that it would not happen again. [Editor's note: Till the next time it happens, when FFRF will again contact the district about flouting the law.]

School counselors leave religion at door

FFRF helped Cesar Chavez Elementary School in Oklahoma City rethink its use of religion in school assemblies and counseling sessions.

A local complainant witnessed several incidents at an Oct. 4 assembly. A third-party counselor was invited to speak to students after a bullying incident. The speaker described "what heaven looks like" and "how we get to heaven." Even more egregiously, the speaker told students "the way they were acting was not going to get them into heaven."

Counselors were also being forced to distribute fliers to students. One listed worship times at a church and a Gamblers Anonymous meeting schedule.

Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote Nov. 5 to Superintendent Karl Springer, urging the district to "refrain from hosting overtly religious assemblies" and religious flier distribution.

General counsel for the district told Seidel in a Nov. 9 phone call that the superintendent agrees "that their current policy on religion in the public schools is 'clearly not enough for non-lawyers' and they are going 'to draft a new policy.' " She added that this will involve additional staff training.

'First priority': warn about religious clubs

Austin High School (Decatur, Ala.) teachers will no longer sponsor the First Priority Club, a Christian, noncurricular group that describes itself as a vision with a comprehensive plan of action to reach and disciple a generation with the message of Jesus Christ.



Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote Oct. 17 to Martin County Schools Superintendent Mark Blackburn about this illegal message outside Eden Elementary in Inez, Ky. A community member alerted FFRF to the sign. John Triplett, school attorney, replied Oct. 24 to say that the religious phrase was removed from the school's message board.

A photo caption in the local paper described the relationship between the school and churches: "Austin High School students, teachers and youth pastors join hands and pray at the closing of the First Priority club meeting Tuesday."

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote Oct. 19 to Superintendent Edwin Nichols: "A public school may not endorse or provide preferential treatment to a Christian club. While students may organize religious clubs, we are concerned that FPC is not 'student-initiated' or 'student-run.' Students might presume that this Christian club is sponsored by the school because of the apparent role of school faculty in organizing club activities."

Nichols responded in a Oct. 29 letter that he would "review with the teacher providing custodial oversight of this student noncurricular group and make sure that they understand their parameters as related to the legal ramifications cited in your letter."

Pep rally prayers stopped in Texas

Ballinger [Texas] Independent School District no longer selects a student prayer leader during pep rallies as a result of a Sept. 18 letter from Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt. FFRF received a complaint from a Ballinger alumnus.

Superintendent Will Brewer in a Sept. 26 response letter thanked FFRF for alerting him to the violation and said that the district does not endorse religion and is reviewing the pep rally program. "Ballinger ISD employees do not request that students engage in prayer, privately or publicly, nor do they encourage or otherwise lead students in prayer," Brewer said.

Football coach brags he breaks the law

After receiving an Oct. 25 letter from Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, Newton County Schools ordered a football coach in Covington, Ga., to stop leading students in prayer at practices and games.

Occasionally, FFRF receives taunting “complaints” from teachers, coaches and government officials intentionally violating the Establishment Clause. Rick Hurst, head football coach and athletic director at Eastside High School in Covington, wrote one such email to FFRF, defending another praying coach and happily thumbing his nose at the Constitution:

“I am a Christian first and a Head Football Coach in the state of Georgia . . . I have open prayer at my practices and before and after our games. If a player does not want to participate I would kindly excuse him.”

Unwilling to limit his bragging to constitutional violations, Hurst pointed out that we here at FFRF are probably going to hell:

“Here is the important question that I ask to ALL of you. What if your [sic] right about your idea of there not being a God? Well, that would be ok for all of us including myself. But, what if I am right about my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and you are wrong. I am still ok, but where does that leave you?”

The letter was signed, “Rick Hurst (A believer).”

Seidel sent a copy of the email to Superintendent Gary Matthews. FFRF received a copy of a Nov. 5 letter from Matthews to Hurst, chastising the coach: “Legal counsel for the Newton County School Board of Education has

reviewed this matter and confirmed that your actions may violate federal law, including but not limited to the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution. Therefore, you must cease and desist these actions immediately.”

Another school board drops meeting prayer

There was no prayer before the Eastern Lancaster County (Elanco) [Pa.] School Board meeting Nov. 12, according to LancasterOnline.

The board decided to halt the practice after getting an FFRF complaint letter in August. The Anti-Defamation League of Philadelphia also pressured Elanco to stop praying.

Superintendent Robert Hollister notified FFRF after the October board meeting that Elanco would no longer open meeting with a board member leading a prayer.

“After consultation with our solicitor, it was clear that the district would lose the lawsuit,” Hollister told LancasterOnline in an email. “So rather than throw money away and simultaneously add fuel, cash, to the coffers of those organizations, the board made the logical choice to withdraw the formal prayer.”

Four other Pennsylvania school districts also agreed this year to stop prayer at board meetings after getting letters from Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert. A fifth school board dropped prayer in 2011 after getting a warning letter.

FFRF thanks current interns JJ Rowling, Maddy Ziegler, Calli Miller, Sarah Eucalano, legal assistant Liz Cavell and publicist Katie Stenz.



FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt sent a letter of complaint Oct. 26 to Autauga County Schools Superintendent Spence Agee in Prattville, Ala., after being contacted by a concerned alumnus about religious, run-through banners held by Marbury High School cheerleaders at football games. This is Philippians 4:13 from the bible.

FFRF sues IRS to enforce church electioneering ban

Continued from front page
siders FFRF “the most effective secular organization in the U.S. That’s largely because instead of hosting endless ineffectual meetings with the same speakers, or navel-gazing about internal divisiveness, the FFRF actually does something: through scrupulous monitoring of the government and judiciously filing lawsuits, the FFRF fights an endless battle against the brushfires of religious enthusiasm that threaten to incinerate our Constitution.”

Thanks to Coyne’s blog, which pitched membership, Reddit’s notice and other news stories, many new supporters have found and joined FFRF.

In addition to reporting the Graham ministry’s electioneering to the IRS, FFRF has sent more than 27 letters of complaint to the IRS involving other such violations so far this year. Recent complaints include:

- Green Bay Bishop David Ricken, who wrote an article on diocesan letterhead inserted in all parish bulletins about voting and choosing the president and other offices. Ricken warned that if Catholics vote for a party or candidate who supports abortion rights or marriage equality, “you could be morally ‘complicit’ with these choices

which are intrinsically evil. This could put your own soul in jeopardy.”

- Peoria Bishop Daniel Jenky, who, in an April homily, sharply criticized President Barack Obama, saying Obama was “following a similar path” as Hitler and Stalin. Jenky said “every practicing Catholic must vote, and must vote their Catholic consciences.”

- Madison Bishop Robert Morlino, who wrote a Nov. 1 article, “Official guidelines for forming a Catholic conscience in the Diocese of Madison,” published in the Catholic Herald, spelling out “non-negotiable” political areas. “No Catholic may, in good conscience, vote for ‘pro-choice’ candidates [or] ... for candidates who promote ‘same-sex marriage.’”

- A church marquee saying “Vote for the Mormon, not the Muslim! The capitalist, not the communist!” in front of the Church in the Valley in Leakey, Texas.

The federal lawsuit is FFRF v. IRS, (12-cv-818). The case is before U.S. District Judge William M. Conley. Tax-deductible donations to FFRF’s Legal Fund are gratefully accepted. Read the complaint, hyperlinked in FFRF’s news release, by scrolling to Nov. 14, 2012: ffrf.org/news/news-releases/

State/Church Quotes

I’ll do all I can to help you. And you can quote me on that.

Rev. Billy Graham, 93, meeting with GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney, after which Graham’s website removed reference to Mormonism as a cult
ABC News, 10-11-12

[E]very American citizen who believes in God and his prophets should vote for Mitt Romney.

Rabbi Eliezer Melamed, Israeli Religious Zionism leader
ynetnews.com, 10-28-12

Freedom of religion only works if the government is neutral on the topic, and that includes the public schools.
Martin Stuetz, resident of Chilliwack, B.C., opposing Gideon bible distribution in schools
Chilliwack Times, 11-15-12



Many FFRF members snapped photos of electioneering by churches, including Bobbie Nord, who sent this one of Blessed Trinity Catholic Church in Jacksonville, Fla., urging a “Yes” vote to allow public financing of religion, which was voted down. Unfortunately, the IRS does not consider activity by churches to influence referenda to be political speech. That is why religious lobbies have been able to push through 32 state constitutional amendments against gay marriage in the past.

Teacher, students enlighten public about atheism



By Diane Cormican

As a 30-year veteran public school teacher, I often read horrific stories in Freethought Today about church/state violations in our schools. People at freethought meetings and conventions are always citing school proselytizing as a huge problem, and the public schools absorb the blame for everything that is wrong with our society.

In all my years teaching in three states and three different countries, I have seen little of this type of thing from the inside. In defense of the schools, and more importantly, the students, I want to share some good news about what I have experienced.

Part of the middle school enrichment program that I run involves an annual mock trial contest called Law Adventure, sponsored by the New Jersey Bar Foundation. Each year, students are given the choice of two topics

and are asked to create and submit a case brief. Winners are invited to perform their cases in front of a judge and jury in the spring.

In the 2012 contest, one of the topics was First Amendment rights violations. One of my seventh-grade teams was intent on making a case involving religious rights in the schools. I swear on *The God Delusion* that I did *not* influence them! Much discussion was held about different religions, current cases in the news and how the school community might respond. The students agreed to move forward.

The case, *Singh v. Fair Side School*, involved Melodie Singh, a high school honors choir soloist, and her very religious choir teacher. When the choir was invited to compete at a national event, the director chose an overtly religious spiritual for them to perform. Melodie, who was to sing the soloist parts, felt that the teacher knew she was an atheist and thus would opt to sit out for a song that contained words such as “I have surrendered my life to Christ.”

In an interesting twist, the students had the director, Jay Tempo, show favoritism for students who attended his church. The full case brief can be found at njsbf.org/educators-and-students/programs/7-8-lawadventure.html under “2012 Law Adventure Mock Trial Exercises.”

After we were notified that our case had won an honorable mention, we prepared to take it to the next level. This is where we turned it into a script, choosing parts and performing it for the school and community. Students, staff and parents were impressed with our case, the acting and the impressive award.

Many of them had no idea what an atheist was, but knew that Melodie had clearly been wronged. The student

jury decided she’d been discriminated against and found in Melodie’s favor. I do acknowledge that many church/state violations occur in schools, and I am appalled that my own union came to the defense of the teacher in the case of Matthew LaClair.

Matthew was a high school junior who was harassed in 2006 after secretly recording his history teacher, who was also a Baptist youth pastor, making over-the-top comments, including warning students that by rejecting God, “you belong in hell.” The compelling story is detailed in a documentary

titled “In God We Teach.”

I like to believe that these situations are less common, and I’m grateful that FFRF and other organizations are involved in this litigation. In my experience, most students, teachers and parents are careful and respectful when discussing religious topics and ideas.

Diane Cormican is a middle school enrichment teacher, FFRF member and president of the Lehigh Valley [Pa.] Humanists.

[Editor’s note: Diane’s other mock trial team placed first in the competition in a product liability case.]



Nine students were part of the mock trial team.

State/Church Bulletin

UW-Madison seculars get landmark funding

Atheists, Humanists and Agnostics (AHA), a secular group at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is on track to receive \$67,400 in student fees for staffing and programming next year. According to the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, it appears to be the first such university secular group nationally to get such substantial funding.

“Religious groups have been receiving this type of funding for years,” AHA President Chris Calvey told the Journal Sentinel. “It’s about time that secular students got the support we deserve.”

The university’s Student Services Finance Committee approved the request unanimously. Student fees generate about \$39 million annually, and about \$1.2 million goes to student organizations.

It appears to be the largest subsidy to any campus group of its kind in the country, said Jesse Galef, spokesman for the Columbus, Ohio-based Secular Student Alliance. “It’s pretty common for groups to have budgets of a few hundred dollars. This is something on a different magnitude entirely.”

In 2007, the student-run Badger Catholic sued the university for rejecting \$35,000 of a \$253,000 allocation

because it had been earmarked for worship activities. The university lost, paying \$500,000 in legal fees.

Badger Catholic is getting \$116,000 for the current academic year.

AHA’s email list has grown from about 100 to 1,500 over the last three years.

Activists win out over nativity displays

A federal judge on Nov. 19 denied a Christian group’s attempt to force Santa Monica, Calif., officials to reopen spaces in city parks for private displays, including Christian nativity scenes. U.S. District Court Judge Audrey Collins denied a motion for a preliminary injunction to a Religious Right group.

Activists stopped a violation of nearly six decades involving 14 area churches, which dominated Palisades Park by erecting nativity displays in December.

The reform started three years ago when FFRF member Damon Vix put up a sign quoting Thomas Jefferson on one side: “Religions are all alike — founded on fables and mythologies,” and on the other, “Happy solstice.”

By 2011, Vix had recruited a local coalition to apply for display places, and the coalition scored a coup, win-

ning 18 of 21 spaces. FFRF was proud to contribute its “Let reason prevail” solstice sign (which was mutilated but replaced).

Commandments monument at Oklahoma Capitol

A Ten Commandments monument was installed Nov. 15 on the north grounds of the state Capitol in Oklahoma City. It was paid for with \$20,000 of private funds, according to the Tulsa World. Made of red granite, it’s 6 feet tall and weighs 2,000 pounds.

“I think under the very best of circumstances, it is of questionable constitutionality,” said Ryan Kiesel, American Civil Liberties Union of Oklahoma executive director.

Sabbath is misspelled on the monument as Sabbeth, which will be corrected.

Hobby Lobby denied religious designation

Oklahoma U.S. District Judge Joe Heaton ruled Nov. 19 that the Hobby Lobby chain must offer its 13,000 employees contraceptive coverage without a co-pay, as mandated by Obamacare.

Hobby Lobby had sued in September, citing conservative evangelical

owner David Green’s personal religious objections.

Heaton ruled that “Hobby Lobby and Mardel [its partner company] are not religious organizations. Plaintiffs have not cited, and the court has not found, any case concluding that secular, for-profit corporations such as Hobby Lobby and Mardel have a constitutional right to the free exercise of religion.”

No rush to set up Florida student prayer

Not one Florida public school district to date has pursued plans to set up guidelines that allow student-led prayer. That’s despite passage of a law in March to let students offer “inspirational” messages, including prayer, at school events, even mandatory ones such as assemblies.

“We advised [school districts] against it,” said Wayne Blanton, executive director of the Florida Association of School Boards. “We told districts they’d be opening themselves up to litigation,” Blanton told the South Florida Sun-Sentinel.

“If any school districts did, it would essentially be volunteering their time and resources to be a test case,” said Howard Simon, executive director of the ACLU of Florida.



FFRF’s local complainant was driving by Benito Juarez Elementary in Anaheim, Calif., when he spotted this monstrosity parked right in front of the school.

FFRF contests release-time trailers

Like Big Tobacco, religions follow the “Get ‘em while they’re young” philosophy of marketing. In Anaheim, Calif., a Christian group is parking “chapels on wheels” outside of public schools to offer bible study.

According to the group’s website, it owns six of these eyesores and parks them at various schools in the district.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter of complaint Nov. 9 to the district superintendent. Citing three previous court cases, Seidel explained that it is unconstitutional for the trailers to be parked on or near school property.

According to the Supreme Court, the only permissible relationship between a public school and a release-time class is when the schools “do no more than release students whose parents so request.” Keeping forms in the school office (see photo) and parking the trailer in a school pickup/drop off lane violates that stricture.

Seidel also informed the Anaheim Police Department and the city of Anaheim Code Enforcement Division about the trailer chapels, citing several ordinances the trailers are likely violating.

School Commandments spur fanatics

Two Pennsylvania communities with Ten Commandments monuments in front of their public schools have seen rallies, signs and fundraisers to support keeping the illegal displays in place since FFRF filed suit in September.

The New Kensington-Arnold School District and the Connellsville Area School District are defendants in two lawsuits that FFRF brought on behalf of nonreligious families seeking the removal of the monuments. Local newspapers have regularly reported on community events initiated by clergy to support the monuments.

Rev. Ewing Marietta started a group called “Thou Shalt Not Move” in support of the Connellsville Junior High School monument. Marietta said the group has sold over 2,000 Commandments yard signs. He told the Daily Courier that proceeds will go toward

purchasing more monuments to be placed at churches.

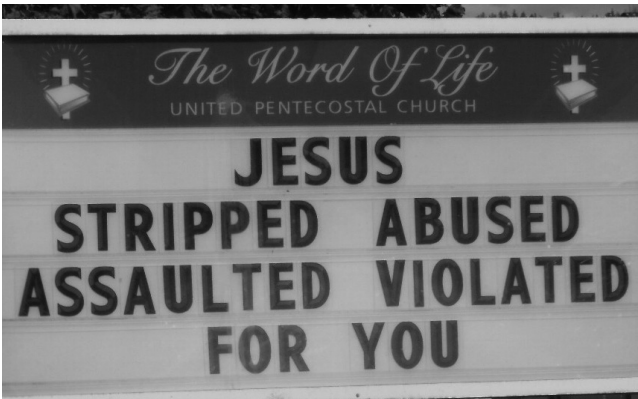
In October, Marietta participated in a rally and candlelight vigil at the school. The event was part of a “Values Bus” visit by the Family Research Council, a national Christian organization headed by Tony Perkins.

Before the event, vandals removed a wooden covering that the school district had placed over the Commandments in September. Dave Tantlinger, who helped remove the covering, said, “It’s the right of the people to have God in their society.”

Neither school district has expressed a desire to settle the lawsuits by moving the monuments. Both suits will proceed before judges in Pittsburgh in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania.

Troubling

“My atheist friend Kathy and I saw this along the road between Barriere and Kamloops, B.C.” writes Joyce Arthur from Vancouver. “We started laughing until we realized they were serious! Religion thrives on blood and gore and guilt.” [Editor’s note: We think it helps explain the content of a lot of the crank mail.]



Secular group makes a Montana difference



By Ian Cameron

Donated by the Eagles in the 1960s, a Ten Commandments monument sat alone in front of the Flathead County Courthouse in Kalispell, Mont., until 2004. Under threat of legal action, other temporary displays were added, and it was rebranded briefly as an “Evolution of Law” display.

Based on that and a 2005 Supreme Court ruling, the threat of a lawsuit was dropped. In 2005, after a private fundraising campaign by a county commissioner and the Eagles, permanent granite monuments replaced the temporary ones (including the Constitution, Bill of Rights, Declaration of Independence, Magna Carta and the Mayflower Compact).

For some reason (any guesses?), the name of the display was then changed to the “Cornerstones of Law.” During renovations in 2011, the entire display was relocated to, and remains in, a little noticed nook behind the courthouse. As seen in the photo, the Ten



The Ten Commandments appear to be the cornerstone of law in Kalispell, Mont.

Commandments monument is considerably larger and sits in the “cornerstone” position.

In early October, the local Eagles group, dissatisfied with the display’s current location, asked the city of Kalispell to ask Flathead County to transfer the monuments to the city for placement at Depot Park, a prominent city park.

At that time, one city councilor stated, “[The monument] isn’t something we want to hide under a bushel basket.” A county commissioner said, “At first blush, I think it is an excellent idea.” Even the city attorney chimed in, stating, he had no legal concern at all about moving the monuments to city property.

The Flathead Area Secular Humanist Association quickly responded with “assertive” letters of opposition to the county commissioners, city councilors

and major local newspapers, along with organizing an opposition email campaign.

On Oct. 22, the council met to discuss the request. Several people spoke in favor of the transfer. I was the sole public voice of dissent at the meeting, speaking on behalf of FASHA (and the law), emphasizing the city’s responsibility to follow the Constitution and to remain neutral when it comes to religion.

Two councilors, while supportive of the request by the Eagles, cited FASHA’s opposition letter and legal concerns in deciding against moving forward. Another councilor was strongly opposed, citing the potential for divisiveness in the community.

The mayor, while stating she “believes” in the Ten Commandments, thought the monument should be moved to private land. In the end,

the council decided to not pursue the transfer.

This was a huge success for us. Without our opposition, we would likely have had a religious monument in one of our city parks before year’s end (and an ensuing legal battle). The city council should be commended, especially given the predominantly conservative community we live in.

We feel fortunate for everyone involved that we were able to address this proactively and will closely monitor city and county meetings in the future to counter any future assaults on the First Amendment.

Montana FFRF member Ian Cameron is founder and administrator of Flathead Area Secular Humanist Association (flatheadsecular.com/).

State/Church Bulletin

Personhood initiative dead in Oklahoma

The U.S. Supreme Court on Oct. 29 declined to let a proposed Oklahoma “personhood” initiative that said life begins at conception be placed on the ballot.

Without comment, justices let stand a decision by the state Supreme Court that the proposed ballot question would put an unconstitutional ban on abortion, reported The Oklahoman.

‘Fatwa on your head’ bus ad nixed

The 6th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled Oct. 25 that the transit authority in Michigan’s four southeastern-most counties could bar a bus ad that read, “Fatwa on your head? Is your family or community threatening you? Leaving Islam? Got Questions? Get Answers! RefugefromIslam.com.”

The American Freedom Defense Initiative, through its executive director Pamela Geller, tried to place the ad in 2010 and was denied. A federal judge ruled in favor of AFDI in 2011.

The appeals court ruled that the side of the bus, in this case, wasn’t a public forum because the transit authority rejected all political ads.

Geller called the opinion “tortured

and twisted.”

Poll: Catholics disagree with hierarchy

In a poll released Oct. 25 by the American Civil Liberties Union and Catholics for Choice, 68% of Catholic respondents said universities shouldn’t be able to deny birth control insurance coverage.

About 77% of Catholics surveyed objected to pharmacies refusing to fill birth control prescriptions.

Substantial majorities also believe Catholics have no obligation to follow their bishop’s recommendation on how to vote and that Catholic politicians don’t have an obligation to follow official church directives.

Jewish colleges top religious Pell grants

Jewish colleges are among the leading religious institutions receiving federal Pell Grant funding, according to The Forward, a Jewish-American newspaper published in New York City.

Sixty-three of the 152 religious institutions that receive Pell grants are Jewish, U.S. Department of Education data reveals. The data shows. The Jewish schools collectively received 53% of

the \$84.5 million in Pell grant money that went to religious schools in 2010.

Of the top 10 Pell grant recipients, six were yeshivas, many of which focus primarily on Talmud study.

Judge tosses Muslim’s bacon lawsuit

In *Lopez v. Wendy’s International Inc.*, an Ohio federal district court ruled Oct. 23 in a case in which a Muslim

customer at a New York City Wendy’s restaurant sued. The plaintiff claimed he wasn’t adequately warned that the Asiago Chicken Ranch Club Sandwich contained bacon, which he claims the cashier didn’t mention as an ingredient when asked.

Religion Clause blog noted that the court dismissed the plaintiff’s Lanham Act claim on the ground that a one-time answer from a restaurant employee is likely not an “advertisement” and that there was no intent to deceive.



Freethinkers venture ‘out’ in Maine

The Downeast Humanists and Freethinkers had its first-ever booth Sept. 21-23 at the Common Ground Fair, an annual event sponsored by the Maine Organic Farmers and Gardener’s Association. It draws close to 60,000 visitors. “Our display featured an idea we borrowed from FFRF at the Reason Rally, a photo booth where visitors could snap their own pictures in an attractive frame with a label of their choosing,” writes Abbie McMillen. Choices included Freethinker, Atheist, Agnostic, Skeptic, Humanist, Realist, Pastafarian, “Evolutionist.” Atheist and Pastafarian were the most popular. FFRF noncontracts were also popular, Abbie noted. Pictured are (left) Torj Wray and Doug Bunker.

Broun, R-Ga., made some wacky remarks about evolution, said his candidate got a few more votes than he expected.

About 4,000 voters wrote in Charles Darwin for 10th District Congress. Broun, who had no Democratic opponent, called evolution “lies straight from the pit of hell” while speaking at a sportsmen’s banquet at a Hartwell church.

Roy Moore regains Alabama court seat

Roy Moore, the former Alabama Supreme Court chief justice who was removed in 2003 by a judicial panel for disobeying a federal court order, won a seat Nov. 6 on the state Supreme Court, garnering 52% of the vote against a Democratic opponent.

Moore refused to enforce a federal order requiring a Ten Commandments monument to be removed from the state judicial building.

He ran unsuccessfully for governor in 2006 and 2010 and most recently served as president of the Foundation of Moral Law, a conservative group. On his campaign website for the Supreme Court, Moore said he won’t try to bring the Ten Commandments back to the judicial building.

Pete Stark loses Calif. House seat

Rep. Fortney “Pete” Stark, D-Calif., Congress’ only “out” atheist, lost his

seat by 6% to challenger Eric Swalwell, a fellow Democrat. Californian has a new “top-two” primary system. Swalwell had 53 percent of the vote to Stark’s 47, with about 99 percent of the precincts reporting.

Stark, 81, had accused Swalwell of accepting “hundreds of thousands of dollars in bribes” from developers, a charge he later retracted and apologized for.

The House will instead have a new person with a secular philosophy — Arizona Democrat Kyrsten Sinema, 36, a former state senator and former Mormon who is bisexual. She won narrowly by about 2,000 votes.

“This is a step forward in that she was able to run openly as a nontheist, and it didn’t seem to be an issue,” Lauren Anderson Youngblood, communications manager for the Secular Coalition for America, told Religion News Service.

While some were trumpeting Sinema as a nontheist, campaign spokesman Justin Unga told RNS after the election that Sinema prefers a “secular approach. Kyrsten believes the terms nontheist, atheist or nonbeliever are not befitting of her life’s work or personal character.”

Local school control takes Georgia hit

Georgia voters by 58% to 42% approved a new state board to issue charters for private operators to run public charter schools. Control over charter

Continued on page 21

Election Roundup

Some favorable election results for nontheists

There were plenty of religious issues and candidates on the Nov. 6 general election ballot across the U.S.

The Catholic Church and other denominations that vigorously opposed same-sex marriage with millions of dollars in four states lost all four referendums.

In Washington state, voters approved by 6 percentage points a same-sex marriage law passed by the Legislature. Maine voters approved a similar law by the same margin. Maryland voters approved gay marriage by 52% to 48%.

Minnesota was the first state ever to defeat a constitutional ban on the issue. A measure to amend the Constitution to define marriage as a union of one man and one woman lost 52% to 48%.

Bishop Richard Malone of the Diocese of Portland said he was “deeply disappointed” how Mainers voted. He’d issued a statement earlier saying same-sex marriage supporters are “unfaithful to Catholic doctrine.”

Nine U.S. states and the District of Columbia have now legalized gay unions.

Relatedly, Iowa voters retained Supreme Court Justice David Wiggins despite efforts by conservative evangelicals to get him off the bench because of his 2009 vote affirming the legality of same-sex marriage.

Wiggins was the fourth justice to stand for retention since the unanimous ruling. Three justices were all ousted in 2010.

Jesus shrine defender loses in Montana

U.S. Rep. Denny Rehberg, R-Mont., lost the race for a U.S. Senate seat held by Democratic incumbent Jon Tester, 49% to 45%. Rehberg, a social conservative had some very ugly things to say about FFRF after it sued Feb. 7 in U.S. District Court, challenging the U.S. Forest Service’s decision to renew a special permit to maintain a Jesus shrine in the Flathead National Forest near Kalispell.

Rehberg publicly denounced FFRF and started a website, *vetsforjesus.com/*, which takes visitors to his congressional website and a pitch to retain the shrine. He also joined a legal brief to keep the statue on Big Mountain.

Religion takes electoral hit in Florida

Florida voters on Nov. 6 defeated Amendment 8, the “Religious Freedom Amendment” that would have repealed the state’s Blaine Amendment, a constitutional ban on tax money going to religious institutions. It was rejected by 56% to 44%.

Voters also defeated Amendment 6, which for the most part would have barred use of public funds to pay for abortions or for insurance coverage for abortions. The vote was 55% to 45%.

Darwin gets Georgia votes as write-in

Jim Leebens-Mack, a University of Georgia plant biologist who started a “Darwin for Congress” write-in campaign after incumbent Rep. Paul

Emperor Has No Clothes Award acceptance speech

Dawkins instructs crowd on Mormons, metaphors



Photo: Andy Ngo

I'm not knocking metaphors, but they have to obey two rules.

with respect to refraction. So once again, the photon lifesaver metaphor passes its test with flying colors. It does real work in helping you to get the right answer, and it's perfectly clear. It's obviously a metaphor.

I once attended a posh conference in Germany where Nobel Prize winners were invited to bring one young colleague. I went as the colleague of my Nobel Prize-winning boss, Niko Tinbergen. Jacques Monod, the distinguished French molecular biologist, was there. He said that when he was trying to solve a problem in chemistry, he would say, "What would I do if I were an electron?"

My late colleague W.D. Hamilton solved an enormous number of problems in evolutionary genetics by asking himself, "What would I do if I were a gene trying to maximize my survival through many generations?" If you use

the dog is only running for his dinner." You use that principle to explain all sorts of things in evolutionary ecology.

An extremely common error is to assume that what animals are doing is working for the good of the species, working for example to stop the species going extinct. This fallacy was identified by J.B.S. Haldane as "Pangloss's theorem," after the character in Voltaire [parodying Leibniz] who thought all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Molecular biologist Sydney Brenner satirized that theorem by suggesting that a molecule which arose in the Cambrian era, half a billion years ago, might have been of no use at the time, but it stuck around because it might come in handy in the Cretaceous.

Another example of bad metaphors I'm afraid Albert Einstein was guilty of — Einstein, when he wanted to say something like, "Could the universe have been different from what it is? Is there only one way for a universe to be?"

Unfortunately, Einstein chose to express that very important question with a God metaphor, "Did God have a choice?" He used another God metaphor when he was complaining about Heisenberg's indeterminacy principle,



Photo: Andy Ngo

Honoree Richard Dawkins accepting the Emperor Has No Clothes Award from FFRF Officer Jim Coors. The statuette honors public figures for "telling it like it is" about religion.

that metaphor, then you can get all sorts of answers right.

Once again, the intelligent gene metaphor passes the test. It does real work in helping us to get the right answer, and it's impossible for a reasonable person to think that we really mean that genes have intelligent motives.

Also I thought, one might have thought it was obvious that a selfish gene couldn't possibly mean literally selfish. But this lady, a philosopher called Mary Midgley, wrote a savage attack on [Dawkins' 1976 book] *The Selfish Gene*, in which she began, "Genes cannot be selfish or unselfish any more than atoms can be jealous, elephants abstract, or biscuits teleological."

Einstein's bad metaphor

John Krebs and I used a thing called the life-dinner principle in explaining certain aspects of evolutionary biology. It comes from Aesop's Fables. "The hare runs faster than the dog because the hare is running for his life, while

which he didn't like. He said, "But he does not play dice," meaning that God does not play dice [with the world].

The fact that Einstein used the God metaphor has been used over and over again by "faith heads" who wish to claim Einstein as one of their own. It's a very good thing, by the way, that Einstein, in one of the last letters he wrote near the end of his life, showed absolutely that he did not believe in any kind of personal God. That letter has now come up for sale. I tried to bid on it when it came up for sale last time. I was miserably outbid.

Misapplying metaphor

Religion arguably got its start from this very human habit of metaphorically personifying natural phenomena. People lacked a naturalistic explanation for thunder, so tribal peoples would resort to a supernatural explanation — thunder gods, like Thor with his hammer, and Zeus.

Yahweh himself seems to have be-

Continued on next page

Dawkins draws nearly 900 to convention

God Delusion author Richard Dawkins accepts an Emperor Has No Clothes Award on Oct. 12 at FFRF's 35th annual national convention in Portland, Ore.

This speech, excerpted for print, was given Oct. 12 by Richard Dawkins at FFRF's 35th annual convention in Portland, Ore. Dawkins, a distinguished evolutionary biologist and author, is arguably the world's most renowned living atheist. He received an Emperor Award in 2001 but was unable to accept it personally due to 9/11. The award is reserved for public figures who make known their dissent from religion.

Thank you very much indeed. [I am] delighted to have made a diversion to Portland to see this magnificent gathering and to see Annie Laurie and Dan Barker, who are some of my favorite people. We have been collaborating with them on the Clergy Project, among other things, and it's a very great pleasure to see this splendid audience,

I'm often asked, why do you pick easy targets, like Ted Haggard? Why don't you have an argument with a real theologian, the best that religion has to offer, a sophisticated religious thinker? But what's the difference between an evangelical wingnut like Ted Haggard and a sophisticated theological thinker like the archbishop of Canterbury or the pope?

In one sense, I believe the wingnuts are more honest. They know what they believe, and although it's false, at least they really believe it. The sophisticated theologians, I shall argue, are so drunk on metaphor, they don't really know what they believe, or they may be deliberately deceptive.

To quote Peter Medawar on Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the French priest and author of *The Phenomenon of Man*, "It may be that they can be excused of deceitfulness only because before deceiving others, they've gone to great pains to deceive themselves."

The case I want to make is that in the hands of a sophisticated theologian, the resort to metaphor may be a vehicle of deceit, a con trick, played on their innocent congregations.

C.S. Lewis made the point that our whole language is full of dead metaphors. The word "attend" is a meta-

phor. The word "reflect" is a metaphor.

You say she's very bright, or a very dim student. How dare you, he thundered. I can't grasp your nebulous — meaning cloud-like — meaning. Almost every word, every phrase in our language was once upon a time a metaphor.

I'm not knocking metaphors, but they have to obey two rules. They must do real explanatory work, and it must be clear that they *are* metaphors. One of the problems with the sophisticated theologians is that they are very unclear when they're talking about metaphors and when they're not.

Here's a good example of a very good metaphor — the distinction between skyhooks and cranes, which all of you will know from the work of Dan Dennett. It does useful explanatory work, and it can't possibly be mistaken for anything but a metaphor.

Here's another: When you're trying to explain the phenomenon of refraction, physicists have found that a good way to do it is to assume that the photons of the light are trying to minimize the time they take to get through the medium, whatever it is. The beautiful metaphor, which I've seen exposed by Peter Atkins, is if you are on the shore, you're a lifesaver. You see somebody drowning out to sea at a diagonal, what's the best course to follow in order to get to them as quickly as possible?

The straight beeline direction is not good, because you can run much faster than you can swim. So you want to increase the time you spend on the beach before you hit the water. Or in that case, you could minimize the time you spend on the beach and go right to opposite where the person is drowning, and then swim straight out to them. Or you could do the opposite, which is clearly not sensible.

The optimum solution is to go at a certain angle, which really does minimize the time you take to get to the drowning swimmer, and that is exactly what photons do. If you assume that a photon is working hard to minimize the time it takes to pass through the medium, then you get the right answer

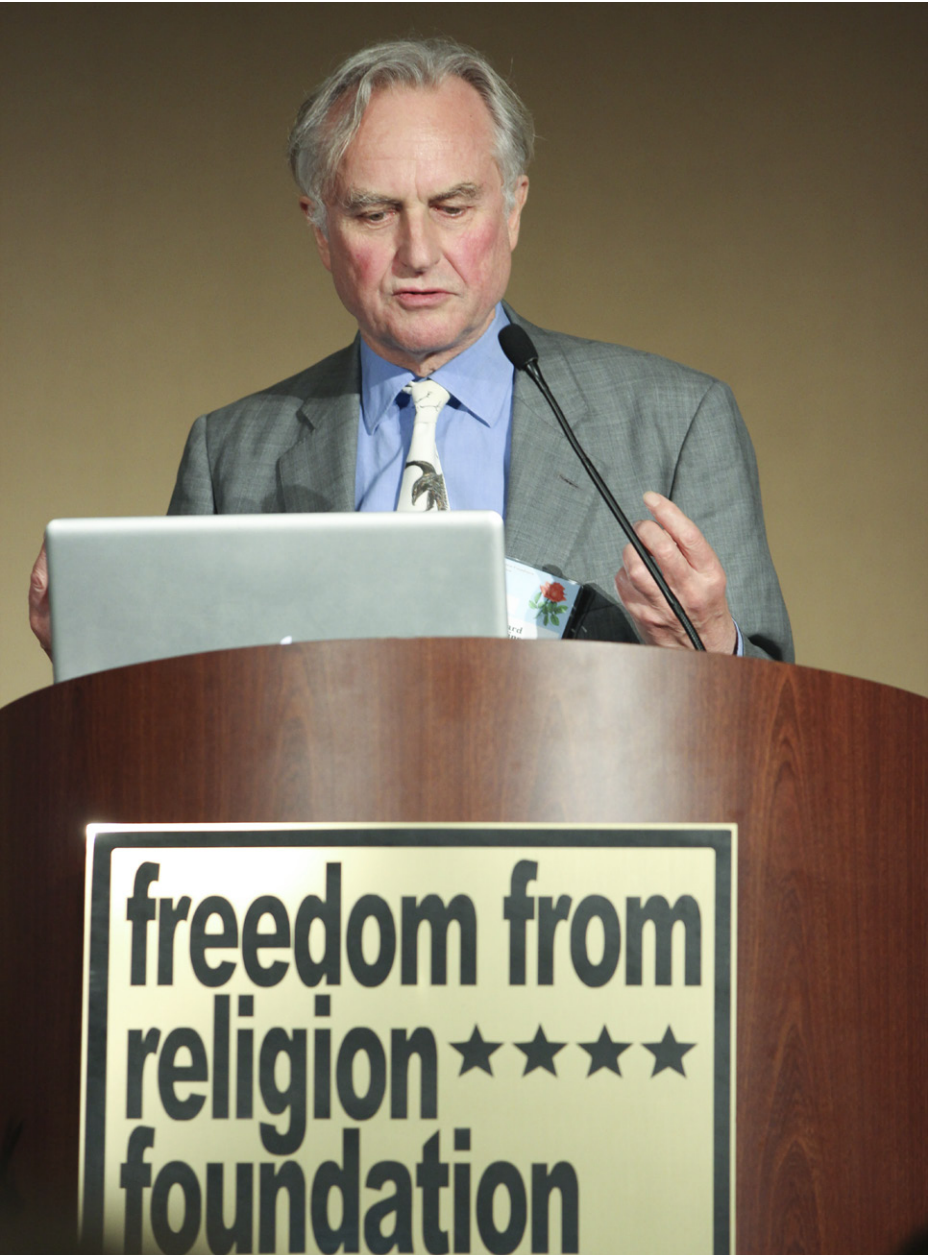


Photo: Andy Ngo

Continued from previous page
gun as a storm god, one of a polytheistic pantheon of Canaanite gods that included Baal, the thunder god.

Here’s a good example of the misapplication of metaphor. Pope Benedict said, “Christ stresses that the gift received in him far surpasses Adam’s sin and its consequent effects on humanity.” The pope knows perfectly well there never was an Adam. He’s an evolutionist. He’s come down in favor of it. But he can’t resist the temptation of metaphor. They are drunk on metaphor.

I was curious to know whether priests, pastors, were aware [that the biblical creation stories are myth, not history]. I asked two of them who have since become atheists. The first one said, “During my first few months of doubt, I actually met with, all in confidence, three former students, all preaching in similar congregations, and three seminary professors. All six of them admitted to not believing in the literal creation account of a literal Adam and Eve, and the resulting fall. And they questioned the historicity of Moses, etc. But they preach as if they do when they speak in local congregations. In other words, they share their scholarly beliefs with scholars, and preach down to the laity of rural congregations.”

The second pastor said, “I would completely agree that theologians are intoxicated by metaphor and that tendency trickles down to the local pulpit. I think in some cases, both in the academy and the pulpit, the intention is to feel comfortable in perpetuating a traditional narrative, but to do it in ways that serve both a metaphorical and literal understanding. In other words, we try to be all things to all people, but fail to say anything substantial.”

Biblical beauty, atrocity

The Song of Songs is a beautiful book of the bible. It’s recommended.

Read it in the King James version. “Thy two breasts are like two young roes that feed among the lilies. Thou art all fair, my love. There is no spot in thee. Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my spouse. Thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one chain of thy neck. How fair is they love, my sister, my spouse? How much better is thy love than wine and the smell of thine ointments than all spices, thy lips, oh my spouse, drop as the honeycomb. Honey and milk are under thy tongue, and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.”

Well that, as I said, is summed up in the King James bible at the top as “The Church’s Love Under Christ.” [laughter]

The horrific story of Abraham, almost murdering his son Isaac, is said to be a parable, symbolically telling the Hebrews to stop sacrificing humans and sacrifice sheep instead. You can’t help wondering why God didn’t simply *tell* Abraham instead of making him commit child abuse, which today would have him locked up.

Sophisticated theologians are drunk on metaphor, so in love with metaphor as to be seduced by atrocities like that; so in love with metaphor as to be persuaded that in order for God to forgive our sins, he had to reenact the metaphor of Abraham in the blood sacrifice of Jesus, without which it was impossible to forgive our sins. Somebody had to die.

Imagine you are God. You’re all-powerful. You’re all-loving. So it is really, really important to you that humans are left in no doubt about your existence and your loving nature, and exactly what they need to do in order to get to heaven and avoid eternity in the fires of hell. It’s really important to get that across. So what do you do?

If you’re Jehovah, apparently this is what you do. You talk in riddles. You tell stories which on the surface have a different message from the one you apparently want us to understand. You expect us to hear X, and instinctively understand that it needs to be interpreted in the light of Y, which you happen to have said in the course of a completely different story 500, 1,000 years earlier.

Instead of speaking directly into our heads, which God has presumed the capability of doing — simply, clearly and straightforwardly in terms which the particular individual being addressed will immediately understand and respond to positively — you steep your messages in symbols, in metaphors. In fact, you choose to convey the most important message in the history of creation in code, as if you aspired to be Umberto Eco or Dan Brown.

Anyone would think your top priority was to keep generation after generation after generation of theologians in meaningless employment, rather than communicate an urgent life-or-death message to the creatures you love more than any other.

Religion and public office

Now I want to switch to a completely different topic, which I think is important, because we’re just in the throes of a very important election. I want to say something which may be a bit more unpopular. We’ll see. Should we respect the privacy of a politician’s religion, or is it up for discussion, like his economic policy or his foreign policy?

Should politicians be allowed to hide behind the convention that privacy is to be respected where faith is concerned and refuse to discuss it? We shouldn’t even ask them about it, or should we question them about it?

Britain and America are rather different in the way their politicians treat

Almost every politician in America has to do God.

religion. Tony Blair, under the forceful direction of a rather sinister figure, Alistair Campbell, who was his spin doctor, very forcefully said we don’t do God. Blair’s best friend, George W. Bush, did God in a big way, even to the extent of listening to God’s advice to invade Iraq.

I’m conscious of not being American, but because the election is hanging over the whole world, I’m going to take the liberty of making a point about American election manners. I expect I may find myself at odds with some people here.

Almost every politician in America has to do God, or at least thinks he has to do God, on the pain of almost certainly losing the election if he doesn’t. The next point, which ought to be uncontroversial, is that the separation of church and state is quite rightly deeply woven into the DNA of America, unlike in Britain, where we have an established church and we have 27 bishops as ex-officio members of Parliament.

The American Constitution states, “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” John Kennedy famously laid the principle on the line: “I believe in a president whose religious views are his own private affair, neither imposed by him upon the nation, or imposed by the nation upon him as a condition to holding office.”

But while it’s of course right that no religious test should be imposed before a candidate is allowed to stand for election, that’s very different from saying that voters are expected to ignore a candidate’s religious beliefs when they’re deciding whether to vote for him.

Discriminating against anybody’s eligibility to stand for election goes right against the spirit of the American Constitution. Amazingly, however, in several states, atheists are barred by state law. [Dawkins names states with specific prohibitions: North Carolina, Arkansas, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Texas, Tennessee and South Carolina.]

I’m using Romney only as an example for the thesis that I want to advance, which is I think unpopular with some Americans, because they wrongly think it goes against the Constitution, against the “no religious test” laws. Whereas no religious test should be imposed when deciding whether a candidate’s eligible, voters are entitled to take account of what a candidate is capable of believing, even if he doesn’t let his beliefs interfere with his policies, as Kennedy vowed.

By the same token, I think journalists should be free to ask candidates about their beliefs. Their private beliefs should be fair game in debates between candidates. I wish that presidential debates were more gloves off when it comes to the religious beliefs of candidates.

Why does Mr. Obama limit himself to criticizing Mr. Romney’s taxation policy, medical policy, foreign policy and so on? Why does he ignore the elephant in the room, which is that his opponent is capable of holding beliefs which, in England, we call barking mad, and here, you might call batshit crazy.



Photo: Andrew Seidel

Dawkins gamely autographed hundreds of copies of *The God Delusion* at the FFRF convention.

Everything about the Book of Mormon reeks of fake.

Joseph Smith, charlatan

Mitt Romney believes that the Book of Mormon is a sacred book, translated by a 19th century American called Joseph Smith, whom Romney reveres as a prophet and the founder of his faith. Mormons believe that Smith was guided by an angel, Moroni, to dig up some golden plates on which were written characters of an ancient language which he called reformed Egyptian, unknown to archaeologists, by the way.

He bought a seer stone in a hat, buried his face in the hat and looked at the seer stone. One by one, characters of reformed Egyptian would appear in the stone, together with the English translation. Smith would say the English word, which would be written down by a scribe sitting behind a curtain so he couldn't see what was going on.

The scribe repeated the word, and when Smith approved it, the stone would display a new word in its place, and so on until all 531 pages of the book had been written down — in English. Mark Twain remarked that if you remove all occurrences of "it came to pass," the Book of Mormon would be reduced to a pamphlet.

Before any of this happened, Joseph Smith had built up a track record in the area as a psychic diviner of buried treasure. He claimed to be able to see underground, looking for treasure by looking through his hat. Everything about the Book of Mormon reeks of fake.

Joseph Smith was an obvious charlatan. That's not an interesting fact in itself. There have been numerous charlatans down the ages. The point is that Mitt Romney, candidate for the job of most powerful man in the world, with his finger on the nuclear button, is a gullible fool who believes Joseph Smith.

It seems to me entirely right that journalists should question him on his Mormon beliefs. They should not feel it's a taboo they have to tiptoe around. The only reason President Obama should refrain from doing so, if he should, would be a purely tactical reason. It might put voters off because they wrongly, in my view, think that to do so would be to go against the spirit of the First Amendment.

There he is, looking through his hat. I've been Tweeting about this lately. The commonest retort that I'm getting is, well, Obama's Christianity, isn't that just as ridiculous?

Obama not a Christian?

I think there's an excellent chance that Mr. Obama is not a Christian at all. I strongly suspect he may be an atheist.

I say that mainly because he's obviously intelligent and educated. But in any case, the fact that he professes Christianity means absolutely nothing. He's an elected American politician. And if you are an elected American politician, that has to mean that you pretend to be religious. There's no other way about it. So that doesn't really mean anything.

One could say the same of Romney. But I think the evidence shows actually Romney does believe it. He was a



Mormon bishop. There are records of his excommunicating people. He excommunicated a woman because she left the Mormon Church. You'd think since she'd left already, there was no need to excommunicate.

And it's really much more recently that he, I think really rather obnoxiously, posthumously baptized his atheist father-in-law. If he were professing religion for reasons purely of political expediency, instead of saying he's a Mormon, couldn't he say he sort of believes in spirituality or something vague like that?

I think it's pretty clear Romney is a definitely strong-believing Mormon, whereas I don't think it's clear that Obama is a Christian. But even if he is, Christianity, even fundamentalist Christianity, I think is substantially less, I mean it may be ridiculous, but it's not as ridiculous.

Christian scriptures are genuinely ancient. The translations from Hebrew and Greek that Christians use are in a language contemporary with the translators. The Book of Mormon is not ancient. The language of its alleged translation is ludicrously anachronistic. It contains absurdities, scientifically demonstrable absurdities, about the origin of Native Americans, about people of African descent. It's an absurd piece of work. A man who seriously believes it, it seems to me, cannot be trusted to have the sort of acumen, the sort of critical mind that you need in a leader of a great country.

DNA evidence conclusively refutes the claim that Native Americans are a remnant of the house of Israel. The idea that Jesus visited America is archaeologically preposterous. The idea that Adam and Eve did, too, is even worse. It's at least arguable that Jesus existed.

The traditional Mormon belief in the inferiority of black people, only lately renounced for reasons of political expediency, is as scientifically in-

accurate as it is obnoxious. The great prophet Brigham Young even prescribed the death penalty for interracial marriage.

Reductio ad absurdum

Are any Christian beliefs as daft as Mormonism? I think the answer is probably no, but I do think that the bread and wine question should be put to any Roman Catholic seeking high office. Do you really believe in transubstantiation? Do you literally believe that the wafer becomes the body of Christ and the wine becomes the blood of Christ?

I think that question should have been put to Kennedy. I suspect that if he were honest, he would have said no, to which the reasonable response would then be, then why do you remain Catholic?

For many Americans, the sticking point is whether the candidate keeps his religion separate from his politics. This was the Kennedy defense, and it has a lot going for it. But I actually want to go further.

I'm not an American voter, but if I were, I would want to know that my president has the critical intelligence needed to be a president. Anybody who can't see that Joseph Smith was a charlatan and a liar doesn't have critical intelligence.

I wanted to get to the bottom of what I see as a reluctance among some Americans to question a candidate's private religious beliefs, a reluctance to intrude upon this private matter of religious belief. Shouldn't it be a private matter that we leave to him and don't question? So I invented a hypothetical example.

My extreme reductio ad absurdum was a hypothetical doctor. He was an excellent eye surgeon, brilliant at removing cataracts, repairing detached retinas, all the other things that an eye surgeon should be good at. You couldn't fault him, except for one peculiar fact. He doesn't believe in the sex theory of reproduction.

I published this hypothetical example in two places, richarddawkins.net/, which I recommend to you, and boing-boing.net/, which I also recommend to you. I expected that the commenters would at least agree with me in this extreme case. They'd agree with me that this doctor should be struck off, or at least they wouldn't consult him, even if they had an eye problem.

Not a bit of it! I would say most of them, were outraged at my suggestion. So long as he does his job as a doctor, well how dare you criticize his believe in the stork theory!

I offered another example, which was a professor of geography who believes the Earth is flat, but who gives perfectly good lectures based on the assumption of a round Earth. But nevertheless, he privately believes the Earth is flat. I think he should be fired, but many people don't.

Maybe people here wish to argue the case that if religious beliefs or disbeliefs, about the stork theory or whatever, are private, we have no business intruding upon them. I'm offering my alternative view, which is that we don't only want to know what the candidate's policies are, we want to know whether he has the kind of mind that you can trust to take reliable decisions under difficult circumstances.

Thank you very much.

The mission of the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science (richarddawkins.net/) is to support scientific education, critical thinking and evidence-based understanding of the natural world in the quest to overcome religious fundamentalism, superstition, intolerance and suffering.

[Thanks to Cal Hutson for the excellent transcription.]





Caption contest

Go ahead — have fun! The winner gets \$25 credit to spend in FFRF’s gift shop (ffrf.org/shop/) and a “clean,” pre-In God We Trust \$1 bill. Email captions to bdunn@ffrf.org or mail to Caption Contest, Box 750, Madison, WI 53701. Photo: J.E. Hill

FFRF’er makes Guinness Records



Sam I am

California member Linda Riggle Davis is celebrating the entry of Oklahoma Sam in the 2013 *Guinness World Records* (on page 61) as “Tallest Living Donkey.” Sam, 4, is 15.3 hands, almost twice the height of the average donkey. Linda’s other critter companions are a macaw, duck, goose and four cats.



Linda says she and Oklahoma Sam have been atheists their whole lives. You can join FFRF’s “cyberboard” campaign at ffrf.org/out/ and make your own virtual billboard for free.

Member reminds school of Constitution



“Memorial” crosses were planted outside the lunchroom at Cedar Key School. Cedar Key is an island on the Gulf Coast 50 miles southwest of Gainesville, Fla.

Florida member Ben Wilson writes to say it paid to complain about a constitutional violation at his children’s K-12 school in Levy County:

I’m so happy this morning. Yesterday afternoon I noticed that the school had a plethora of miniature white crosses at the entrance to the lunchroom. Surrounding the crosses was police tape, which I immediately assumed was a statement about abortion.

I took my children to school this morning and stayed until the principal showed up. I asked him about the

crosses. He said he didn’t know what they were for but said he would check. I explained that it would be a violation regardless of the motive(s). He was dismissive and walked off.

Ten minutes later, he called me and stated that the crosses were not an abortion statement but were meant to symbolize the deaths from cancer in our county. He then said, “So that would be OK, Mr. Wilson, right?”

I explained to him that as I previously stated, having the crosses on school grounds was not legal, regardless of their intended message. I explained that latin crosses symbolize Christianity.

They are “only there to represent the deaths,” he said. I answered, “But you are symbolizing the deaths with Christian symbols. Were all those who died Christian?”

“Mr. Wilson, I’ll remove them if they offend you. Is that what you want?” I said, “Yes, not just because it offends me but to protect children and to uphold the Constitution.”

Minutes later, I drove by and the crosses and tape had been removed.

What little tactical skills I have to counter these abuses have come from what I’ve learned from FFRF, its newspaper, its updates and Action Alerts. Thank you all for doing what you do.

[Update, a week later]: Today I called the principal about another violation with the science teacher. This is the third time I’ve complained about his incessant pandering to Jesus.

Fundamental(ist) flaws exposed

- Who said it, a Christian social conservative or an Islamic fundamentalist (via slate.com/)?*
1. “Bring up your daughters with manners, otherwise they’re going to be divorced in the first week of their marriage.”
 - 2.”A child who disrespects his parents must be permanently removed from society in a way that gives an example to all other children of the importance of respect for parents. The death penalty for rebellious children is not something to be taken lightly.”
 - 3.”Woman possesses the weapon of seduction and temptation.”
 4. “Women are simply not endowed by nature with the same measures of single-minded ambition.”
 5. “[A girl] can read a useful book, prepare her homework, join a charity, and spend her time doing things that are useful to her in this world and the world to come, instead of thinking about satisfying her urges.”
 6. “The strength of a woman lies in her ability to seduce man.”
 7. “Women cannot handle power. It is not within them to handle power. ... The real and true power comes from God and God is the one that gave man the power and the authority over the wife.”
 8. “It’s like having a flower, or a rose. You water it and keep it at home for yourself, to look at it and smell it. It is not supposed to be taken out of the house to be smelled.”
 9. “Radical feminists succeeded in undermining the traditional family.”

[Answers elsewhere on this page.]

Answers

1. **Abu Hamza**, imam awaiting trial in the U.S. on charges of supporting al-Qaida.
2. **Charlie Fuqua**, Republican candidate [defeated Nov. 6] for Arkansas House of Representatives, in his self-published book *God’s Law: The Only Political Solution*.
3. **Tajeddin Hilali**, Australian Sunni Muslim leader.
4. **Pat Buchanan**, political commentator.
5. **Yusuf al-Qaradhawi**, Egyptian theologian, on the risks of female masturbation in a lecture for Qatar TV.
6. **Dr. Ahmad al-Tayyeb**, president of Al-Azhar University and former mufti of Egypt.
7. **Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson**, popular Christian pastor, in his Sunday service webcast “How Liberal Women are Building a Shameless Society.”
8. **Syed Ghaisuddin**, Taliban minister of education, when asked why women needed to be confined at home.
9. **Rick Santorum**, former Pennsylvania senator and candidate for president.

Bringing freethought to Rotary Club



Name: Jessica Walker.
Where I live: Tyrone, Ga., about 20 miles south of Atlanta.
Where and when I was born: Connecticut in 1967 but grew up in New Jersey.
Family: Husband, Robin; son, Jack, 11; and daughter, Maisie, 8.
Education: B.S. in accounting from Centenary College, New Jersey, and an MBA from the University of Phoenix.
Occupation: Director of project management for Caliber Services, a software consulting firm. I started my career as an accountant and moved to consulting on enterprise resource planning in the early 1990s. I took time off from the corporate world to stay home with my young children and supported my husband’s new business venture in 2003 by taking care of the back-office and accounting duties.
Now that the children are in school, I’ve come back into the work-for-pay world and have taken over more responsibility in the family business and moved from bookkeeper duties to project management.
How I got where I am today: I’ve always wanted to know the reasons behind things and found that evidence and data were much more satisfying than fairy tales. This quality drove my passion for books, learning, and not being afraid to make someone a little uncomfortable by asking them a tough question about their position on a given subject.
I have a deep interest in knowing that people are being treated fairly in life and came to understand early on that a secular worldview is the one that is the most inclusive and fairest to the most people.
Where I’m headed: I’m married to a wonderful man and we have two amazing children. We don’t try to influence our children on matters of conscience. We simply ask what their thoughts are on a particular subject, where the evidence is leading them, and suggest when more research may be warranted. In addition to raising two little skeptics, I’m finding great joy in athletics lately, especially the character-building experience that is dragon boating.
Person in history I admire: Maria Montessori. She “followed the child” to create an education system that modern research (see Dr. Steve Hughes) is now proving most accurately mirrors a child’s brain development. She cared deeply about respect for the child as an individual, the child’s place in the greater commu-

nity and how to peacefully interact with others.
Montessori, one of the first female physicians in Italy, was a devout Catholic, a fact that I tend to think is an accident of geography and the time when she was born. Her discoveries about child development, sensitive periods and emphasizing learning with concrete materials through our senses rather than jumping directly to abstract concepts are strong evidence of her scientific mindset. The many children I have known (including my own) who are educated within the Montessori Method tend to be independent critical thinkers, self-assured, mature for their ages, early readers, self-motivated, respectful of others and creative, joyful people.
A quotation I like: “It is best to read the weather forecast before praying for rain.” (Mark Twain, 1835-1910)
These are a few of my favorite things: My family and friends, playing tennis and the piano (not simultaneously), dragon boat racing, Rotary Club service projects, the Fayette Freethought Society, traveling to other countries, reading anything I can get my hands on, NPR and physical fitness.
These are not: People who equate religion with morality (I tend to think it’s more of an inverse relationship), hypocrisy, bad line calls in tennis, intercessory prayer, insistence on respect for religion and/or faith, commercial television, smelly cheese.
My doubts about religion started: I don’t come from a religious family, although both my grandmothers were Catholic. We didn’t attend services and celebrated holidays in a cultural rather than a religious manner. For most of my life, I was rather apathetic about religion, then moved five years ago to Georgia, where my freedom from religion is assaulted on a daily basis.
I’ve become more and more motivated to actively work against this unwanted intrusion in my life. Living in the bible belt, I now understand more than ever how much religion and a faith-based mindset is a dangerous force for paternalism, ignorance, arrogance and misogyny.
Why I’m a freethinker: I’m a freethinker because I think there is so much self-righteous “certainty” in the public marketplace of ideas that I see eventually getting shot down after new evidence on a subject comes to light. Being a freethinker shows a level of humility with regard to the future and a respect for humanity’s ability to continually make new discoveries about our natural world.
Ways I promote freethought: I joined groups like FFRF, the Fayette Freethought Society and the Atlanta Freethought Society to find like-minded people. My children and I have talks about superstition, famous scientists, evolution, relationships, ethics, the FFRF quote of the day, the future of our planet, etc., on our morning drives to school.
I leave my back issues of Freethought Today in local coffee shops. As a peaceful protest, I refuse to stand up with all the other people during opening prayers at Rotary Club meetings. Yes, I’m the only one sitting, and yes, it’s been noticed and commented on. [See sidebar story.]

Jessica’s excellent letter

Jessica Walker writes: Being a member of FFRF and being exposed to your writings and arguments helped me in crafting the following email to my Rotary Club. I am answering a question from a fellow member as to why I do not stand up during the club’s prayer/pledge.
Thank you very much to each of you for your leadership and bravery in the face of desperate odds.

Hi Patti,
Thank you for your polite curiosity. This is something that I thought about long and hard. I even strongly considered not joining and on many occasions considered leaving the PTC Club [Peachtree City] because of its current prayer and pledge practice.
The short answer to your question about my nonparticipation in prayer and pledge is because I’m a Rotarian, a member of a supposedly (if we are to believe the statements on the Rotary International website) nonsectarian and nonpolitical organization that seeks to be inclusive of all peoples in the world. I sincerely think that the Rotarian ideals of “Service Above Self” and the Four-Way Test are superior to the sectarianism and nationalism that any club indulges in when it comes to improving human relations and uplifting others less fortunate than ourselves.
I find it very sad that we very rarely recite the Four-Way Test or our excellent motto “Service Above Self” at our meetings. For that, I would gladly and proudly stand up from my seat. The prayer/pledge only serves as a distraction from Rotary’s excellent ideals. The motto and the Four-Way Test are strong enough, powerful enough, and meaningful enough to stand on their own merits.
My quiet refusal to participate in the prayer/pledge illustrates my choice to adhere to these higher values of Rotary. I sit, rather than stand up, go with the flow and be coerced against my conscience into tacit acceptance of divisive, unnecessary and ultimately ineffective appeals to the supernatural along with nationalism coupled with the festering vestiges of McCarthyism that we see embodied in the post-1954 version of the pledge. We are better than this. We just need the courage to buck powerful forces and choose the higher road.
As Rotarians, we have the obligation to be inclusive of all people, and the only peaceful and respectful way that I have seen this to have ever been achieved in history is to keep things as secular and nonterritorial as possible, just like we are shown on Rotary International’s own website. Until we, as members of the PTC Rotary, can be brave enough to say “No more” to our current sectarian and nationalistic practices and choose to run our meetings in the most inclusive and Rotary-focused way possible, there will always be a member, a visiting member, a guest, or a potential member at our meetings who feels like an outsider — unwelcome, creeped out, unwilling to join us.
Take a moment to think of all the folks we had to lunch a couple of weeks ago on International Day. How many different religions (or no religions) were in that room? How many different countries were folks citizens of? I was intensely embarrassed for the club when the Christian prayers and pledges to a single nation were once again trotted out and forced on all these different people.
How many of those decision-makers from the various PTC international companies do you think would want to join a club that behaves in such an exclusionary, arrogant, self-righteous manner? I wonder how many of those international presidents and CEOs would now be asking to become members of our club if they had been presented solely with the Rotary motto and the Four-Way Test instead? Those are ideals that *everyone* can get behind and accept into their lives without violating their freedom of conscience.
I have chosen to remain a member of the club because I truly think that the Rotary ideals are worth striving for. I truly think it is also worth my incurring a bit of curiosity and/or hostility from the other members, like yourself, because I want to help people see that the Rotary ideals are more important, inclusive and useful to humanity than prayers and pledges could ever be.
If any of my ideas have resonated with you, I invite you join me in my peaceful protest of this embarrassing, coercive and exclusionary part of our meetings.
Warmest regards,
Jessica S. Walker
Director PMO Office, Caliber Services, LLC

Recruit a Member

Sample Copies for \$2

Send \$2 with the name and address of each person you wish to receive a sample copy of Freethought Today to:
FFRF, P.O. Box 750, Madison WI 53701
Freedom depends upon freethinkers
(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)

Fighting faith-based schemes in West Linn, Ore.

By Andrew Seidel

In October’s Freethought Today, we told you about FFRF’s legal victory in West Linn, Ore. After our letter, the mayor rescinded a \$1,300 grant to the Willamette Christian Church.



The case involved more than the grant and is an excellent illustration of how a local complainant, whom I’ll call Jane for the purposes of this article, can have a huge impact.

The mayor, who has been very cooperative and proactive, and the City Council thought the grant was financing a community teen center, but the church had different and more deceptive plans.

The church would open the center to all comers from 4-6 p.m., but the rest of the time it was only open to church members. From the application materials: “The primary use of the Premises is for church related services,” and, “Our top priority is to serve our church’s youth by providing a great space for weekend services.”

The goal was to build a new church annex, not a community center.

A little more digging revealed the less-than-savory and decidedly non-communal purpose behind the general public hours: converting children to evangelical Christianity. “We love middle schoolers here at WCC! Our goal is to see students grow deeper in their faith as they make it their own.”

The church has a website dedicated to students, a high school pastor, middle school pastor and youth intern, in addition to organizing “Willamette Kids — where kids of all ages learn about Jesus.”

The WCC website had a telling video conversation (since removed) between Pastor Jon Furman and high school Pastor Chris Nye, discussing the real purpose of the teen center, aka “The Summit.”

The grant was not the only problem. I have been working with the city officials to cure four other issues.

- The West Linn police and parks departments had unusually close relationships with the church. Members of both departments served on the board of The Summit and hosted dances together. WCC freely used the titles of both departments on promotional materials and touted the participation of city officials.

The city attorney has halted these highly inappropriate relationships.

- The church was granted a fee waiver for grant and permit applications. Another, truly secular community center (i.e., open at all times to all comers) was also granted a fee waiver. The precedent was used to give WCC a similar waiver.

But The Summit is a church annex, not a secular community center. We are still working with the city on this issue. Because the fee was waived, city employees did not track their time, so we don’t know how much the city spent on handling the application materials.

WCC put down a deposit of nearly \$1,000. Our goal is to have the city rescind the waiver and keep the church’s deposit.

- Mike Jones, the council member responsible for pushing the grant and permits through (in record time, according to another council member), is a church member. Officially, Jones did not join the church until after the grant and permit process was completed. But FFRF has called for an investigation into any possible ethical violations.

- The church annex rents space in a shopping center next to a large Safeway grocery store. In its application, WCC assured the city that there would be no impact on parking at the shopping center. After the permit approval, the church newsletter told congregants, “Parents may drop off their students [at the teen center], then park in the Safeway lot and walk across to the main campus.”

A small violation, but a great example of the two-faced nature of churches and their sense of entitlement. The city is raising this matter with the shopping center.

Duping a retailer

WCC duped more than just the city. The trendy retail store Anthropologie, a national chain specializing in women’s clothing, accessories and home décor, donated some unique merchandise to The Summit. Jane, our local complainant, put a stop to that with a simple email to Anthropologie headquarters, including background on the rescinded grant and this:

“I have always associated Anthropologie with being progressive, and by allowing your products/displays to be used at a local evangelical church’s teen center it makes me realize that we don’t share the same values, like I thought we had, and it makes me not

With brave locals on the ground, FFRF accomplishes more.

want to financially support your store any longer.”

Anthropologie replied the next day, “Thank you so much for bringing this to our attention. We did not have any knowledge of this, nor did the Portland area District Managers. To qualify to be a recipient of any of our donations — monetary, merchandise, or displays — organizations should not be religiously or politically affiliated. Very rare exceptions are made for multi-denominational organizations. I sent the District Visual Manager your email yesterday and she looked into it. The store team had been misinformed about the organization. No further display donations will be made to this group.”

Problem solved! There was no legal hook to hang the complaint on, but Jane succeeded anyway. She didn’t sit idly by while FFRF acted; she engaged the local government with FFRF and an independent retailer on her own.

The way to effect change is to have local people pounding the pavement, pressuring the politicians and generally rocking the boat.

Cute kids and compliments

Just this year, FFRF attorneys have fielded over 2,000 unique complaints. There are four of us, with some help from interns. Allusions to Sisyphus or a leaking dam and too few fingers and toes are appropriate. Jane understands

this and provided encouragement — a photo of her cute child cheering “Hooray Andrew!” She also sent kind words to Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor:

“Initially, when I was troubled by these issues, I reached out [to another organization] and, to be honest, did not receive much support. My experience in contacting FFRF and Andrew was significantly different. From my first phone call, I found Andrew to be incredibly responsive and genuinely committed to helping me. Plus, he has a wonderfully warm and supportive personality, which has been a true pleasure to work with on these issues.

“[Andrew] inspired me to become a member and financially support FFRF. As we all know, every staff member is an ambassador and fundraiser at a nonprofit even if it’s not technically in their job description.”

FFRF’s legal Sisyphi love reading emails like that. Receiving praise and photos of our complainants’ cute kids cheering us on helps recharge our batteries. The part I love most about my job is that I get to help people — people who would not have anyone to turn to were it not for FFRF — in a way I never could in private practice.

In private practice, cases take years to reach a resolution that is often unsatisfactory. Other nonprofits do great legal work but have a more diffuse, abstract impact (FFRF does this work too, but it’s not our bread and butter). But an FFRF legal victory changes a complainant’s life and even a whole community in very real ways.

Thank you for supporting that work. And take a lesson from Jane — with brave locals on the ground, FFRF accomplishes more.

Sharing the Crank Mail

Below, a small but representative sampling of disturbing emails recently received by FFRF from “loving” Christians, usually in response to news coverage of FFRF’s state/church work. Grammar and spelling are uncorrected. Warning: Language and suggestions are commonly X-rated.

The Lord: please keep your liberal ideas in wisconsin. Texas is a Christian state and we do not appreciate your interfering in our schools expression of love and faith in our Creator. Just remember JESUS IS LORD!! — *Steve Rousseau*

Texas cheerleader: Stay out of Texas. We dont need your non beleiving ways here. Dont stand behind the Courts or threatening lawsuits. Come here and meet us face to face. — *Richard Zelenuk, Arlington*

Football Banners: Suck it up and hang it out your atheist ass. — *Arthur Windell, Caldwell*

YOU ARE DUMB GAY IDIOTS SENT TO RUIN AMERICA: There are people who understand the truly American anti-gay dream. We want to live in a world with “In God We Trust” on the currency. Think of all of the people who died to preserve Christianity from terrorists. — *Tiger Gibbons*

Marbury, AL High School: You need to stay out of our business. This is Ala-

bama, and we do as we please. — *John Hazel*

Tennessee: You need to leave Tennessee alone. Keep your views if you like... Just don’t bother us. I realize that people have rights... We have moving trucks here if people don’t like it here.

religion: YOU PEOPLE ARE FULL OF SHIT. IF SOMEONE DOESN’T LIKE THE SIGNS THEY CAN DO 1 OF 2 THINGS: IGNORE THE SIGN OR 2 MAKE A BIG DEAL ABOUT AND SOMEONE IS GOING TO WHOOP YOUR SORRY ASSES. — *Daniel Berney*

RELIGION: yOU AND YOUR TEACHINGS ARE WHAT IS WRONG WITH THIS COUNTRY NOW. TEACHING CHILDREN THERE IS NO GOD LEADS THEM TO BELIEVE THEY CAN DO WHAT EVER THEY PLEASE AND THEIR IS NO RESPECT FOR ANYTHING. WHEN THE TIME COMES,AND IT WILL IT WILL BE TO LATE TO ADMIT HOW VERY WRONG AND EVIL YOU WERE AND ARE! PLEASE DO NOT CONTACT ME AS THERE IS NOTHING I WANT OR NEDD TO HEAR FROM THE LIKES OF YOU. — *Nancy Grant*

Tennessee: hope you needle ducks enjoy hell stay out of Tennessee stop by Caryville and see me idiots you speak

with a forked tongue. — *Dave Johnson*

how much I dont like freedom from religion: This country, built and fought for by my forfathers has turned into a scary place to live because people like you are to worried about treating people fairly, who dont deserve to be treated fairly — *Jeremy Miller, Woodstock*

Suggestion: All you exist for is to undermine the moral fabric of this nation as it was historically founded. Since you all are so unhappy with that why not move? Suggestions: Try: Iran, N.Korea, Russia, China, Cuba, spread your poison there you will be more than welcome since you share the same ideology. I picked the other selection below for the CPUSA! — *Doc H.*

Texas Cheerleaders: With the recent injunction that was granted to the Cheerleaders it looks like God is tell you to “ shove your organization right up your ass “ don’t you agree! — *Mike Hunt*

Bible verses at Alabama football games: Those of us down here take our religion seriously and if we choose to carry signs with Bible verses at football games, well it’s really none of your business. Perhaps you should read your Bible more often. — *Pam Cory*

FFRF news

Supreme Court turns down Spartanburg cert: A loss for reason

The U.S. Supreme Court on Nov. 13 denied a petition for a writ of certiorari by the Freedom From Religion Foundation and its co-plaintiffs, asking the court to rule against academic credit for release-time instruction in Spartanburg (S.C.) public schools.

The petition, filed by attorney George Daly of North Carolina, opposed this “delegation of governmental power to a religious school” as “an excessive entanglement of church and state” prohibited under court precedent.

The U.S. Supreme Court approved release-time instruction in the 1952 case, *Zorack v. Clauson*, allowing religious instructors to offer off-campus religious instruction once a week during the school day to willing public school students, provided there is no

school district involvement.

“When the Supreme Court, I think misguidedly, approved release-time instruction, I feel sure the court never envisioned such students receiving academic credit for indoctrination,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

“Accepting and passing on a grade for devotional religious instruction involves substantial school involvement. It grants an unfair advantage to students belonging to the community’s dominant religion, who can put on such instruction, and places nonreligious students at an academic disadvantage as well. What next? Students demanding extra credit because they’ve attended Sunday school?”

The facts involved a program at Spartanburg High School put on by an

unaccredited bible school in a church next door to the high school. At the semester’s end, the bible school sent grades to the accredited Oakbrook Preparatory School. Without review, Oakbrook approved the grades and passed them on to the high school. The high school accepted the grades for academic credit without question, allowing up to two credits. There was no involvement by an accrediting agency over the course work.

“Respondent has granted to a religious institution the governmental power to decide whether a course of religious instruction qualifies for public school academic credit, without any assurance that the religious institution will decide the matter on secular grounds only. The district testified that if Oakbrook grants academic credit for

a course entitled Laboratory for Intercessory Prayer, it would accept the credit. Bar Mitzvah training and Mass qualify for academic credit, if Oakbrook says so,” wrote Daly in the petition.

He called it a delegation of governmental power to a religious group forbidden under *Larkin v. Grendel’s Den* (1982).

The lawsuit was filed in federal court in 2009. The petition was filed on Oct. 2. (To read the legal petition, visit ffrf.org/news/ and scroll to Nov. 13, 2012.)

FFRF thanks its local plaintiffs, Robert and Melissa Moss, FFRF member Ellen Tillett and George Daly, acting pro bono as attorney. Thanks also to Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott for his work on the case.

Catholic Church’s heavy hand weighs down Philippines

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor recently blogged about the longstanding opposition of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines to a bill which would provide contraception and require sex education.

The New York Times (Nov. 10), reporting on new interest in the bill, quoted Jose Palma, Catholic Conference president, insisting that “a positive birthrate and a population composed of mostly young people ... fuel the economy.”

The story quoted Dr. Esmeraldo Ilem: “Family planning in the Philip-

pines is not about population control. It is a health intervention. We are focusing on women who are too young, too old, too poor or too sick to have babies, but their situation does not allow them to stop.”

The birthrate in the Catholic Philippines is 24.98 out of 1,000 (compared to 13.7 in the United States).

“The Catholic Church has much to answer for,” Gaylor wrote. Read the entire blog at ffrf.org/news/blog/ (scroll to Nov. 13, 2012).

Don’t want to wait for the next issue of Freethought Today for updates on FFRF news and actions? Members



Above, a photo of Filipinos living in festering slums in Manila, snapped last spring by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker while on a tour of the Philippine capital as part of an atheist conference. Many families live in the huge dump.

may sign up to have news releases, action alerts, blogs or Freethought of the Day (a daily biographical calendar of quotes) delivered to your inbox.

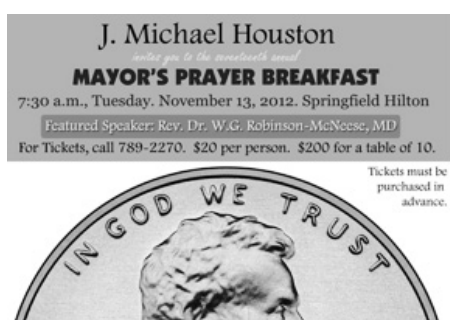
Simply select these options at your new Membership Profile. (Click on “login” at the upper right-hand corner of ffrf.org/ to begin. If we have your

email on file, we emailed you instructions on registering and your Membership ID number in November.)

Still need your Membership ID number or help? Email info@ffrf.org. Instructions are also available by clicking “login” at ffrf.org/.

FFRF contests prayer breakfast involvement

FFRF sent a letter of complaint Nov. 13 in advance of a Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast to Mayor J. Michael Houston in Springfield, Ill., over illegal city involvement. FFRF, a national nonprofit with over 19,000



members, has 675 members in Illinois. “Our complainant informs us that this religious event is promoted on the official website for the city of Springfield,” wrote Rebecca Markert, senior staff attorney. The Web page lists the main telephone number for the Springfield Department of Community Relations, a city office, as the contact number for the event.

“[I]t is grossly illegal and inappropriate for the city to be hosting, organizing, supporting or otherwise promoting a patently religious event, such as a prayer breakfast,” Markert added. “This practice, which has been recurring for the last 17 years, certainly has

the effect of government endorsement of religion.”

FFRF cited legal precedent barring direct government involvement in such events. “The Department of Community Relations is inappropriately handling ticket sales for this religious event. It is of no consequence that the breakfast will take place on private property.”

It also appears that Houston, a retired banker, helped to sponsor and attended the event in his official mayoral capacity.

“We ask that you take immediate steps to remedy the serious violations of the Establishment Clause that the city’s involvement in the prayer breakfast presents,” wrote Markert. She sent a separate letter containing an open records request on the city’s involvement.

Ask Obama to drop religious oath

FFRF sent a Nov. 8 letter to President Barack Obama asking him to reject the way this country politicizes religion. The Constitution, which prescribes the presidential oath (or affirmation) of office in Art. 2, Sect. 1, does not contain the “so help me God” language or require use of a bible.

As FFRF has always done before presidential inaugurations, it once again asked Obama to honor the Constitution on Jan. 21 by using the oath as given and omitting the religious verbiage.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote the letter, noting that the November election “highlights the country’s rapidly shifting demographics.” The electorate’s religious affiliation is changing more quickly than any other metric: “When you were elected in 2008, 15% of Americans identified as nonreligious. Now that number is 20%. More strikingly, one in three Americans under 30 now identify as

nonreligious. More and more they are tired of leaders injecting religion into politics,” Seidel noted.

“In its altered, religious form, the oath is a symbol of the disregard this country has shown for its Constitution in the name of God. Our once silent minority will no longer remain silent as politicians trample the document we hold sacred—the Constitution. Honor the oath as you recite it on January 21 and lead us into the new era you promised four years ago,” Seidel concluded.

Send your own message requesting a secular swearing-in:

President Obama
whitehouse.gov/contact/submit-questions-and-comments
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500
White House Comment Line:
(202) 456-1111

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

James Scahill, 65, East Longmeadow, **MA**: Operating under the influence of alcohol. Scahill, pastor of St. Michael's Catholic Church, was charged after being involved in a minor 3-vehicle accident. Scahill made the news in 2010 when he said Pope Benedict should resign for not being truthful about sex abuse by clergy and for not taking stronger action. *Source: AP, 11-19-12*

Matt Capranelli, 41, Highlands Ranch, **CO**: 8 felony sexual abuse counts, including sex assault on a child by a person in a position of trust. Capranelli, youth pastor at Mountain View Community Church, is charged with molesting a female youth group attendee in 2004-07. *Source: KKTV, 11-16-12*

Stephen Foote, 70, Bremen, **ME**: Trafficking in prison contraband. Foote, pastor at St. Mark's Episcopal Church, is accused of smuggling 10 suboxone strips valued at \$500 into a regional jail to an inmate who was a former parishioner. Suboxone is a synthetic opiate. *Source: Morning Sentinel, 11-14-12*

Clinton A. Feemster, Gastonia, **NC**: Soliciting for a crime against nature. Feemster is accused of approaching an undercover male police officer at the overlook at Charlotte-Douglas International Airport to have sex. He was found not guilty in 2011 of a similar charge, after which he resigned as pastor at Mt. Zion Baptist Church and as director of the Pitman Center for Congregational Enrichment at Gardner-Webb University. *Source: Gaston Gazette, 11-14-12*

David E. Rapson, 59, Sunbury, **AUS**: Rape, gross indecency, 5 counts of indecent assault and 4 counts of indecently assaulting a child under 16. Rapson, a former Catholic priest, is accused of abusing boys at Rupertswood, a Salesian Brothers school where he taught and was vice principal. Offenses are alleged from 1973-90. A witness who was a student in 1976 testified: "We were all standing in a line with white singlets and our underpants. We were told not to laugh, and if we did it would prove that we liked males." Rapson walked up and grabbed my penis, the witness said. "He then fondled my testicles and had a feel for about a minute. I had to look straight ahead and I wasn't allowed to move. Rapson then moved on to the next boy." He's also accused of lacing sodas with liquor and assaulting boys while they were asleep. *Source: Morning Herald, 11-14-12*

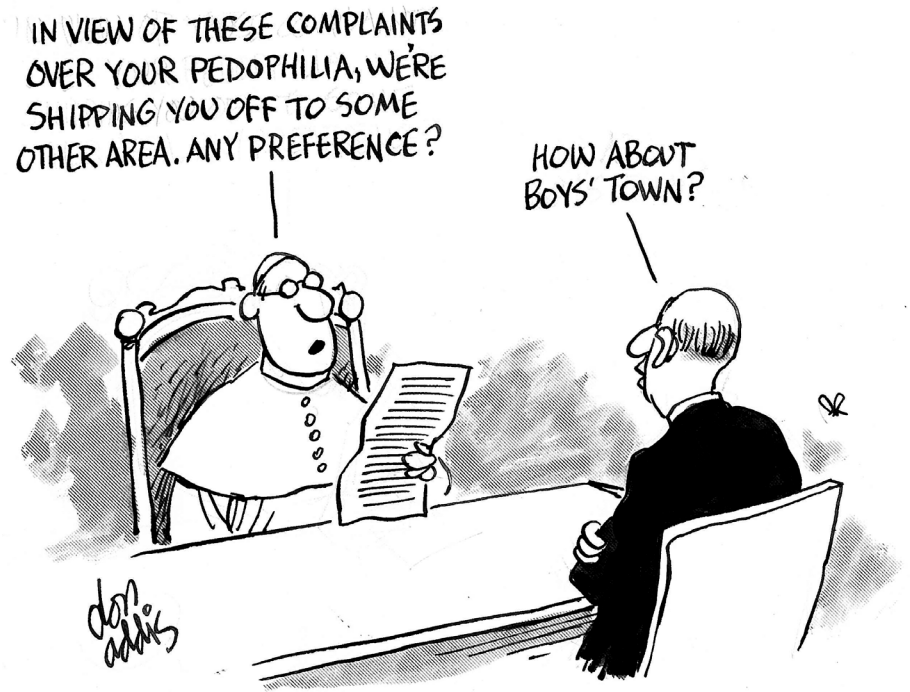
Peter Ball, 80, Langport, **UK**; **Vickery House**, 67, Haywards Heath, **UK**: Suspicion of sex abuse. Ball, former Church of England bishop of Lewes and Gloucester, is suspected of molesting 8 boys and men in the late 1980s and early 1990s. House, a retired Church of England priest, was arrested on suspicion of sexual offenses involving 2 teen boys in 1981-83. *Source: BBC, 11-13-12*

Sohan Lal, 35, Jaipur, **IND**: Outraging modesty. Lal, a Hindu priest, was arrested after the mother of a 6-year-old girl told police he had used vulgar gestures and touched the girl inappropriately inside the temple. *Source: Times of India, 11-13-12*

Thomas H. Bryne, 80, Dianella, **AUS**: Grievous bodily harm. Bryne, a Catholic priest living in a retirement home near Perth, is accused of biting off the ear of another priest, Thomas Smith, 81, during an argument over a parking spot. An attempt was made to surgically reattach the ear. *Source: Australia News Network, 11-11-12*

Amie Lou Neely, 38, Port St. Lucie, **FL**: Felony sexual assault. Neely, a teacher at Community Christian Academy in Stuart, was discovered by her husband, who tracked her with a GPS device, having intercourse with a 16-year-old foreign exchange student in the back of a vehicle. The boy lived with the couple. "Community Christian Academy is aware of a legal situation involving a teacher and we are cooperating with law enforcement officials who are dealing with this as an ongoing investigation," said Norma Hammond, administrative director. *Source: Stuart News, 11-11-12*

Ryan J. Muehlhauser, 55, Cambridge, **MN**: 8 counts of 4th-degree criminal sexual conduct. Muehlhauser, senior pastor at Lakeside Christian Church, is accused of sexual contact with 2 males (ages not given) he was counseling at the Outpost Ministry, which, according to its website, helps "men and women making the decision to break away from gay life." One alleged victim told investigators Muehlhauser "blessed" him by cupping his genitals outside his clothing and alleged the pastor asked him to masturbate in front of him for "spiritual strength."



At an encounter with the other alleged victim, Muehlhauser fondled him before they joined the pastor's wife for a dinner outing. The criminal complaint said "consent by the complainant is not a defense" because Muehlhauser is a clergy member. *Source: Star-Tribune/KARE 11, 11-6-12*

Mary Anne Rapp, 67, Lewiston, **NY**: Grand larceny. Rapp, a Catholic nun, is charged with stealing \$128,000 from 2 parishes where she worked in 2006-11. She was fired in 2011 by the Diocese of Buffalo. *Source: AP, 11-5-12*

Glenn Masters III, 58, San Antonio, **TX**: Indecent exposure. Masters, pastor of Los Angeles Heights Presbyterian Church, is accused of exposing himself to an undercover police officer in a secluded area of a park. Court records showed he was arrested for indecent exposure during a similar sting at the same park in 1994. *Source: Express-News, 11-5-12*

John Douglas White, 55, Broomfield Twpsh., **MI**: 1st-degree murder. White, pastor at Christ Community Fellowship, is accused of beating his fiancée's daughter with a rubber mallet and strangling her with a zip tie. According to the complaint, White told police he watched necrophilia pornography before killing 24-year-old Rebekah Gay. He said he undressed Gay's body and touched her but couldn't get an erection. White told police that Gay's 3-year old son was home at the time and that he dressed him in his Halloween costume and sent him off with his father. White later led police to where he dumped the body. White was convicted in 1981 of assault with intent to commit murder for stabbing a 17-year old girl 14 times. He spent 2 years in prison. He was convicted of involuntary manslaughter in 1995 and spent 12 years in prison after killing 26-year old Vicky Sue Wall. He was released in 2007. *Source: Grand Rapids Examiner, 11-2-12*

Robert Warren, 43, Yuma, **AZ**: 2 counts of furnishing harmful material to a minor. Warren, a youth pastor at Valley Baptist Church, was arrested after the sheriff got a call from a mother claiming her 14-year-old daughter had received sex toys from Warren. The affidavit said Warren admitted to deputies he bought the items and took them to the girl's residence. *Source: Yuma Sun, 11-2-12*

Kenneth Seen, 52, Spencer, **W.VA**: 2 counts of battery, assault and child abuse creating the risk of injury. Authorities believe Seen, a physician and pastor at Christian Society of Roane County, stuck his tongue in an elderly patient's mouth. The man, who later died, then bit off a "significant" portion of Seen's tongue. Sgt. F.L. Hammack said State Police believe Seen's action was sexual in nature. Other charges stem from an alleged October incident at Seen's church, where he's accused of attacking a 14-year-old boy. Seen's children, Adam K. Seen, 25, and Jacob T. Seen, 23, were sentenced in June to prison for possession of child pornography. *Source: Daily Mail, 11-1-12*

Arnold Mathis, 41, Lake Wales, **FL**: 2 counts of producing and attempting to produce child pornography. Mathis, associate pastor at Higher Praise Ministry, allegedly persuaded and tried to persuade 2 minor teens into engaging in sexual conduct. He also still faces 5 counts of sexual battery from a December 2011 arrest involving an alleged male teen victim in Winter Haven. *Source: WTSP, 11-1-12*

Caesar A. Belchez, 52, Bonneauville, **PA**:

3rd-degree theft by unlawful taking, theft by failure to make required disposition of funds received and access device fraud. Belchez, former pastor at St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Parish, is accused of stealing \$384,000 from the church. The money was allegedly taken from 2006-11 but wasn't noticed until he transferred to another parish. *Source: Hanover Evening Sun, 10-31-12*

Tim Amey, 47, Daphne, **AL**: 10 counts of forgery and identity theft. Amey, pastor of Greater Pine Grove Missionary Baptist Church and assistant principal at Daphne High School, is accused of applying for 5 student loans by listing a friend from church as his co-signer without his permission, allegedly using the friend's Social Security number and other personal information. Amey was pursuing a master's degree at Alabama State. George Jenkins, 60, the alleged victim, is out \$45,000 and is facing bankruptcy. Police said there may be other victims. *Source: local15tv.com, 10-26-12*

Robert B. Haywood, 77, Warsaw, **IN**: Sexual misconduct with a minor and sexual battery. Haywood, pastor at Harvest Time Ministries, allegedly preyed sexually on a 14-year-old girl with significant mental and physical handicaps. *Source: Ft. Wayne Journal Gazette, 10-25-12*

David A. Young, 46, Rio Grande, **OH**: 20 counts of unlawful sexual conduct with a minor. Young, pastor at Simpson United Methodist Church, pleaded not guilty to contact with 15-year-old "Jane Doe" in 2011-12. The girl was in a class Young taught through the church. *Source: Gallipolis Daily Tribune, 10-23-12*

Simé Nimac, 34, Split, **CRO**: Abuse of office. Nimac, a Franciscan priest, was arrested in Zagreb after disappearing from his parish with a large amount of cash he allegedly got from selling church property without permission of the diocese. Croatian media speculate he used the money to live lavishly, including buying a yacht named "Lucky Me" and entertaining a married woman who allegedly was involved in the land transaction. The woman, **Jasmina Bilonic**, 41, a banker, denied after being arrested they were romantically involved. *Source: The Telegraph, 10-22-12*

Francis A. Benham, 74, Lincoln, **IL**: Practicing clinical psychology without a license. Benham, a former Catholic priest and convicted sex offender, was using the title "Dr." and falsely advertising as a psychotherapist, a state regulatory agency alleges. He served time in Maryland and was released there in 2006 for sex crimes against children while he was a priest in the 1970s. *Source: Lincoln Courier, 10-22-12*

A former Catholic priest, 59, who can't be named for legal reasons, is charged with 25 child sex offenses in Armidale, **NSW**. Charges include indecent assault and sexual intercourse without consent and are related to alleged assaults of 3 girls in the 1970s and 1980s. *Source: Australian Broadcasting News, 10-19-12*

Jesse D. Ruhl, Chico, **CA**: Pledaded no contest to engaging in lewd conduct in a public place. Ruhl, music minister at Pleasant Valley Baptist Church, where his father is senior pastor, was accused of sexually touching a 16-year-old female congregant. A charge of misdemeanor or child molestation was dropped. Ruhl reportedly told police he touched the

‘No one is going to be hurt again.’
— 14-year-old girl, fighting back tears after Luis Morales’ guilty verdict.

girl's breasts and buttocks between 5 and 10 times, with some skin contact. The relationship ended when Ruhl's wife discovered text messages. *Source: Enterprise-Record, 11-16-12*

Curtis C. Wehmeyer, 48, Minneapolis: Pledaded guilty to 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct, 2 counts of 5th-degree criminal sexual conduct and 17 counts of possessing child pornography. According to court documents, Wehmeyer molested 2 brothers in 2010 when they were 12 and 14 after giving them alcohol and marijuana and showing them pornography. At the time he was pastor at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church. *Source: Star Tribune, 11-9-12*

Luis Morales, 58, and **Rebeca Rivera**, 27, Ormond Beach, **FL**: Guilty by jury of 3 counts of transporting minors over state lines for the purpose of sexual activity. One girl was brought from Connecticut, allegedly to make religious music for Morales' En Fuego for Jesus ministry. Another girl, now 14, traveled from Arizona. Morales molested both while they were traveling with him. "No one is going to be hurt again," the 14-year-old said, fighting back tears after the verdict. *Source: News-Journal, 11-5-12*

Eric C. Reid, 63, Kaitaia, **NZ**: Pledaded guilty to 25 counts of making intimate visual recordings and 24 counts of possessing intimate visual recordings. Reid resigned as Kaitaia Family Church pastor after a teen girl and adult woman alleged he recorded them secretly. Reid's church is part of the Apostolic evangelical movement. *Source: New Zealand Herald, 10-31-12*

Anthony M. Adinolfi, 55, Kingsport, **TN**: Entered Alford or "best interest" pleas of guilty to 2 counts of solicitation of aggravated statutory rape. Adinolfi allegedly solicited through text messages conduct from a 16-year-old girl that, if completed, would constitute statutory rape. The offenses allegedly occurred in 2010 when he was pastor of an unidentified Kingsport church. *Source: Times News, 10-30-12*

Sentenced

Cedrick McMillan, 27, Eight Mile, **AL**: 10 years in prison, 9 years suspended, and 5 years' probation. McMillan, pastor of New Birth Community Church and co-founder of Prichard Preparatory Academy, had a sexual relationship with a female family member unconnected to his church work. Circuit Judge Michael Youngpeter said it wasn't a case of a clergyman abusing his position to prey on children. "I see a very big distinction." The prosecution asked for a 20-year sentence. The victim testified McMillan touched her and had oral sex with her when she was 14 in 2007. The defense claimed sex was consensual. Defense attorney Jeff Deen said McMillan had broken up with the girl's mother and then had a fling with the daughter. *Source: al.com, 11-15-12*

Curtis Franklin, 47, Mahwah, **NJ**: 8 years in prison for having sex with an underage member of Mahwah Full Gospel Church, where he was pastor. He started a sexual relationship with the victim when she was 15. It lasted until she was 19. Franklin, who is married with 2 children, is 22 years older than the victim, who contacted authorities in 2009. *Source: AP, 11-15-12*

David and Bridget Montgomery, Humble, **TX**: 41 months in prison and \$550,000 each in restitution. The founders of Restoration Temple Church of God in Christ were convicted of conspiring to impair and impede the IRS in tax collections in 2003-06 and of making false statements by underreporting \$2.1 million in income. U.S. District Judge Lynn Hughes revoked bond because she believed David Montgomery intimidated witnesses. *Source: CBS Houston, 11-13-12*

Raymond Brady, 77, Oldcastle, **IRE**: 2 years in prison on each of 11 counts of sexual assault, sentences to be served concurrently. Brady, a retired Catholic priest, acted "like a predator," said Judge Michael O'Shea. Brady admitted molesting 10 boys as young as age 11, some of them brothers. Most were altar boys. *Source: Irish Central, 11-12-12*

George Benbow, 59, Plainfield, **NJ**: 11 years in prison for 2 counts of sexual assault

and 4 counts of child endangerment. Benbow, founder of Christian Fellowship Gospel Church, was accused by girls as young as age 9 of sexual contact at the church. *Source: AP, 11-11-12*

Jan-Mikkel Jasper, 36, Mineral City, **OH**: 5 years in prison for sexual battery. Jasper was pastor of Alpine Bible Church, where the assault against a minor female occurred.

At sentencing, Judge Elizabeth Leigh Thomakos quoted a bible verse about leading a child astray. *Source: Times-Reporter, 11-8-12*

Earl Wayne Gann, 56, Corona, **CA**: 1 year in prison and register as a sex offender for life. Gann, girls junior varsity soccer coach at Ontario Christian High School, pleaded guilty to 1 count of lewd and lascivious acts for sexually touching a 14-year-old during a massage at school.

According to a probation report, Gann allegedly told her, "It's been a long time since I've touched a woman like that and it felt good. We should keep our relationship secret."

Another alleged victim, a 35-year-old woman, has come forward to accuse Gann of using his hand to penetrate her and exposing himself when she was 12, the report said. He sent her a letter of apology after being confronted by her parents but no charges were filed. *Source: Inland Valley Daily Bulletin, 11-3-12*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

A third California man is suing the **Stockton Catholic Diocese**, alleging he was molested as a 10-year-old altar boy by **Fr. Michael Kelly**. A suit filed in September claims Kelly molested a 12-year-old altar boy in the early 2000s.

He's been removed from the ministry and has gone to his native Ireland, citing health problems. *Source: Modesto Bee, 11-9-12*

Six men are suing the **Canadian government**, the **Catholic Diocese of Thunder Bay** and **Les Oblats de Marie Immaculee du Manitoba**, alleging sexual abuse in the 1960s by a priest who died in 1986. They allege they felt powerless to speak out because of the priest's position of power in their small tribal community. *Source: CBD, 11-6-12*

Plaintiff "T" is suing **Christ Chapel Assemblies of God** and its former pastor, **Jonathan Gray** in federal court in Alexandria, **VA**. The 5th-grade teacher alleges Gray used his position to force her into having sex with him and that the church fired her for reporting him.

T claims Gray's advances started soon after he began counseling her for marital problems. *Source: Courthouse News Service, 10-31-12*

Plaintiff "N.P." is suing **Grace Academy International** and **Gerald T. Ealey**, its former principal and pastor, in Miami-Dade County **[FL]** Court. Grace Academy, Opa Locka, is a Pentecostal school with about 140 students.

The woman, a teacher, alleges Ealey demanded sex, paid her to have 2 abortions and then fired her when she tried to end the relationship. *Source: Courthouse News Service, 10-30-12*

A "John Doe" plaintiff is suing **Antioch Baptist Church and Academy**, Warren, **MI**, for not vetting **Pastor Christopher Settlement**, 29, convicted in 2011 of criminal sexual conduct and accosting a child for immoral purposes. Church and school officials should have stopped obvious "grooming" of the teen male victim who was being raised by a single mother, the suit alleges.

It also alleges the church knew that Settlement, married with an infant daughter, had pedophilic tendencies.

"The rape of a minor child occurred dozens of times," while the staff turned a blind eye to crimes against a child under their care, the suit alleges. *Source: Daily Tribune, 10-23-12*

Three female plaintiffs claim in a suit filed in state court in Montgomery County, **MD**, that **Sovereign Grace Ministries** covered up multiple allegations of sexual abuse against children in the 1980s and 1990s. The 30-year-old ministry, which has more than 80 congregations, failed to report accusations to police and discouraged members from cooperating with law enforcement, the suit alleges.

The suit criticizes the church's "Home Group" day care structure as fostering a poorly supervised environment that enabled abuse to occur.

One plaintiff, a high school student in Virginia, alleges she was sexually assaulted when she was 3 and that the mother of the boy who abused her told church officials. *Source: AP, 10-7-12*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

Clifford Esquibel, Albuquerque, **NM**, settled his suit for an undisclosed amount against the **Archdiocese of Santa Fe** and the **Servants of the Paraclete**, a Catholic ministry group formed to help sexually abusive clergy and those with alcohol and emotional problems. Esquibel alleged **Fr. John Weisenborn** molested him as a 7th-grade altar boy at St. Francis Xavier Parish in Albuquerque starting in 1966 or 1967.

Weisenborn was sent to a Servants of Paraclete facility in Jemez Springs called Via Coeli in 1964 after being accused 3 times in Washington D.C. for having sex with boys.

But the abuse began anew after Weisenborn

resumed pastoral duties at Albuquerque parishes in 1966, the suit contended. Esquibel alleged he was "plied with alcohol" and molested several times at a motel. Via Coeli closed in 1995 as a treatment center. *Source: AP, 11-17-12*

The **Catholic Diocese of Green Bay, WI** has been ordered to pay \$500,000 to a Nevada man molested in 1984 by now-defrocked **Fr. John Patrick Feeney**. A Las Vegas jury made the award to "John Doe 119," who had sought \$5.2 million in damages.

A Wisconsin jury in May ordered the diocese to pay \$700,000 to brothers Troy and Todd Merryfield, who were abused by Feeney in the 1970s. But the judge threw out that verdict after learning a juror failed to disclose she suspected Feeney of inappropriate contact with her brother. That case is scheduled for retrial.

Feeney was sentenced on 2004 to 15 years in prison but was released in 2011. He was defrocked in 2005. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 11-2-12*

A Louisiana lawsuit that accused **Fr. Etienne LeBlanc**, a former Houma priest, of molesting a child and the **Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux** of protecting him has been settled. Jared Ribardi filed suit in 2007, accusing LeBlanc of forcing him into sex starting when he was 9 and continuing until he was 14 in the early 1990s.

"It was a decent settlement," said Roger Stetter, plaintiff's attorney. "It wasn't billions, but it was a good settlement." *Source: Daily Comet, 10-23-12*

Finances

Pastor **Terry D.** and **Sylvia Jones** of the **Dove World Outreach Center** in Gainesville, **FL**, face federal liens totaling \$101,000 for unpaid income taxes in 2009-11. Records don't show the source of income the couple apparently failed to pay taxes on.

Dove World in 2011 had a listed market value of \$1.6 million, taxable value of \$120,700 and paid about \$2,900 in taxes. *Source: Ocala Star-Banner, 9-28-12*

Legal Developments

Robert Poandl, 70, a Catholic priest accused of taking a 10-year-old boy to West Virginia for sex in 1991, was ordered jailed in Hamilton, **OH**. Poandl has been living with his religious order, Cincinnati-based Glenmary Home Missioners, since being removed in February from priestly duties in Georgia. Specific charges have not been formally filed. *Source: AP, 11-15-12*

Xiu "Joseph" Jiang, 29, **St. Louis**: A court refused to dismiss 1st-degree child endangerment charges against Jiang, a Catholic priest accused of molesting a 16-year-old girl several times in early 2012. He's also charged with felony witness tampering.

Trial was set for March 7. *Source: KSDK, 11-14-12*

Samuel Ciccolini, 70, Akron, **OH**, started a 6-month sentence at a minimum-security federal facility in Morgantown, W.VA, for tax fraud. "Father Sam" has been prohibited from saying Mass or hearing confessions. He admitted embezzling more than \$1 million from the fundraising arm of the rehab center he operated, but the money was repaid and he wasn't charged for that.

He was sentenced in September for filing false tax returns and making more than 100 bank deposits under \$10,000 to avoid reporting rules. *Source: Beacon Journal, 11-3-12*

The **Wisconsin** Court of Appeals ruled that **James R. Blume**, 66, who molested 2 teen boys as a Catholic priest in Elm Grove in the late 1970s and early 1980s, has to finish his 20-year prison term. Blume appealed his 2010 sentence on the grounds his health is failing and the sentence was unduly harsh.

The court noted that Blume's health was known at sentencing and wasn't a new issue. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 11-1-12*

Steven Yang Suan Piau, a Baptist pastor in Singapore, was fined \$4,000 for violating the Customs Act by trying to cross into Malaysia without the mandatory amount of fuel in his car. The law requires a vehicle to have at

'The rape of a minor child occurred dozens of times.' — lawsuit against a Michigan Baptist church

least three-quarters of a tank. *Source: Channel NewsAsia, 10-30-12*

U.S. District Judge Rudolph Randa upheld a bankruptcy court ruling dismissing a victim's claim against the **Archdiocese of Milwaukee** but allowed 2 other claims to go forward.

The archdiocese argued that enough victims of clergy sexual abuse had enough information on the church's handling of cases to have filed fraud claims years ago, and that the statute of limitations had expired.

Still pending in the bankruptcy proceeding are 574 sex abuse claims. In the case dismissed by the federal judge, the victim has already received a \$100,000 settlement. About 90 persons have signed settlement agreements.

The state Supreme Court has ruled that the archdiocese's insurer was not liable for sexual abuse claims because they involved fraud allegations.

But newly discovered policies with Lloyd's of London and Stonewall Insurance could cover claims by as many as half of the creditors, victims' attorneys said. *Source: Journal Sentinel, 10-30-12*

Allegations

George Akinleye, 47, a **Nigerian** Pentecostal pastor, was accosted by a crowd in Lagos after being accused by an 8-year-old girl of raping her twice.

"While he was being paraded naked round the neighborhood, his penis swung as passers-by wonder on what manner of crime the man of God had committed to deserve such a Calvary treatment," a newspaper reported.

A hospital doctor and a nurse confirmed the girl had been penetrated vaginally. Police rescued Akinleye from the vigilantes and later released him.

"He suffers from diabetic ulcer, a reason the police could not detain him at the station," the doctor said. *Source: Osun Defender, 11-12-12*

Lamaa, a 5-year old Saudi girl, died in a **Riyadh** hospital after she was allegedly tortured by her father, **Faihan al Gamera**, described as a former drug addict who turned his life around with religion and regularly preaches on satellite TV.

"He used all sorts of torture and abuse against Lamaa," alleged her mother, now divorced from al Gamera. The medical report and the mother said Lamaa was tortured with whips and electric shocks and burned with an iron. Police have detained al Gamera. *Source: Al Arabiya/Al OKath, 11-11-12*

Detective Chief Inspector Peter Fox, a New South Wales investigator, has alleged the **Australian Catholic Church** covers up crimes. He wants a Royal Commission into child sex abuse within the church.

"I can testify from my own experience that the church covers up, silences victims, hinders police investigations, alerts offenders, destroys evidence and moves priests to protect the good name of the church. None of that stops at the Victorian border."

Fox said he has "definite information" of alleged cover-ups by a number of bishops. "It potentially goes even higher than that."

About 70% of the Brothers from the St. John of God order are suspected child abusers, said Michelle Mulvihill, who dealt with more than 120 of the order's victims during compensation negotiations. She claims Cardinal George Pell was aware of a loan by the church to the order, which was used to pay off victims.

Fairfax Media has obtained documents showing that in the 1960s and 1970s, dozens of boys were molested at Kendall Grange, the

order's school for mentally and physically impaired boys. *Source: Yahoo! News, Morning Herald, 11-9-12, 11-12-12*

The **Archdiocese of Kansas City** is asking the Vatican to look into a case involving multiple allegations against **Rev. John Wisner**, accused by 3 men of molesting them. Wisner was removed from active ministry in May after a 45-year-old man alleged Wisner had inappropriately touched him in 1982 on a youth outing.

Wisner is also a medical doctor and had been an associate professor at the University of Kansas School of Medicine. *Source: Kansas City Star, 11-2-12*

Removed / Resigned

Havili Mone, West Valley City, **UT**, was fired as pastor of Tongan United Methodist Church after waiting several months to report alleged sexual abuse by a 16-year-old of as many as 10 boys, ages 6 to 10, at the church. Mone was put on leave in September.

"For many of these kids the church is a second home, so they would sleep over and [the 16-year-old boy] would wake them up and take them into other rooms in the building," said Ivoni Malohifoou-Nash, National Tongan American Society program director. *Source: Fox 13, 11-15-12*

Thomas H. Maguire, Norwell, **MA**, pastor at St. Helen's Catholic Church, voluntarily left the church after an allegation of recent inappropriate behavior with children surfaced, the Archdiocese of Boston announced.

"Norwell police and the district attorney's office are aware of the allegation, and we're looking into it at this time," Police Chief Ted Ross said.

Maguire, pastor at St. Helen's since 2001, has been an outspoken critic of the Archdiocese of Boston for its handling of the sex abuse scandal. During a sermon in 2002, he called on former Cardinal Bernard Law to resign. *Source: Patriot Ledger, 10-29-12*

Stanislaw Strycharz, former pastor of St. Leo Catholic Church in Bonita Springs, **FL**, has been removed from the priesthood. Diocese of Venice Bishop Frank Dewane issued a letter to parishioners explaining the outcome of the canonical trial.

"By collegial decision, the judges discerned a pattern which demonstrated that Strycharz, violated his fiduciary responsibilities to the Parish, his priestly promise to celibacy, and his promise of obedience to his Ordinary," Dewane wrote.

The bishop placed the priest on leave in 2010 because Strycharz had previously fathered a child and was allegedly responsible for more than \$1 million missing from church coffers, most of which went to paying off his personal credit cards. *Source: News-Press, 10-24-12*

The conservative **Society of St. Pius X** expelled British **Bishop Richard Williamson**, who in 2009 sparked a crisis in Jewish-Catholic relations for denying the Holocaust. The Society announced Williamson had been "excluded" from its ranks because of his refusal to "show due respect and obedience to his lawful superiors."

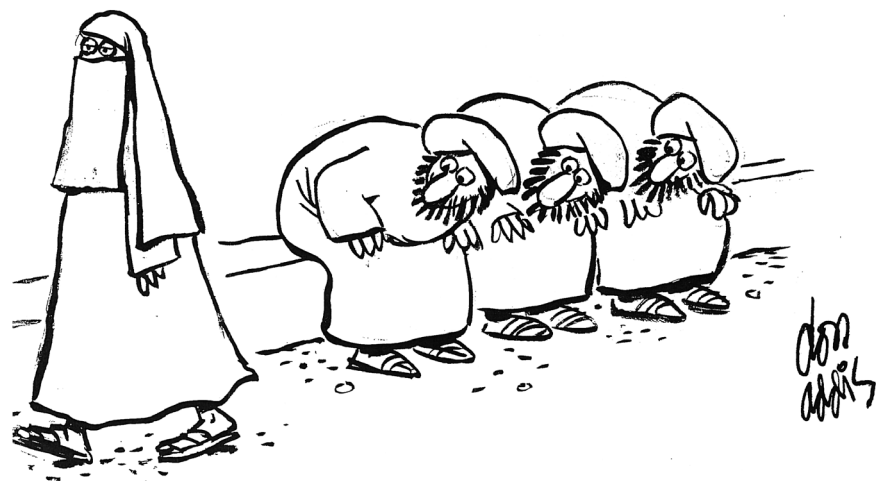
The Simon Wiesenthal Center said until the Society reforms itself, Williamson's ouster will be "no more than cosmetic surgery that attempts to cover up the ugly reality of anti-Semitism and hate that is imbedded in the theology of the SSPX." *Source: Religion News Service, 10-24-12*

The Archdiocese of **Miami** placed **Fr. Roldando Garcia**, pastor of St. Agatha Catholic Church, on administrative leave due to new sexual abuse allegations.

Tony Simmons said at a press conference he was a 16-year-old runaway when he met Garcia in 1994. A lawsuit alleges Garcia initially gave him assistance and counseling, but began sexually abusing Simmons after they went to a movie.

Two other lawsuits have been filed recently against Garcia. *Source: NBC-6 Miami, 10-23-12*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org



What Is a Freethinker?



free-think-er n.

A person who forms opinions about religion

on the basis of reason, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.

Letterbox

Weighing in on football banners

Every time the Christianists assert some religious encroachment into government is legal, it seems a reasonable response would be “If you change Jesus to Muhammad and God to Allah, are you still OK with it?”

Consider the pathetic recent cheerleader case in Kountze, Texas. Would the Christianists argue it was “freedom of speech” for the cheerleaders’ banner to read “I can do all things through Allah and his prophet Muhammad, which strengthens me?”

I might add the freedom of speech argument implies it would be fine for the cheerleaders to advocate reenslaving African-Americans, or abortion rights. Hey, it’s their freedom of speech, right?

We need a term for substituting Islamic terminology into Christian slogans. Using this technique, it immediately becomes “obvious” to Christians that such Muslim slogans would be inappropriate. It doesn’t require any sophisticated Establishment Clause arguments.

Thank you for your great work!

Rob Kalman
California

What could be more absurd than to think of an omnipotent god who, as the No. 1 fan of a particular high school football team in Texas, sees to it that they defeat their opponents?

Just imagine, a deity who could easily eradicate the scourge of cancer and end world hunger with the wave of a magic wand, but instead prefers to help his favorite football team to win!

David Quintero
California

Convention speakers were excellent

This year’s convention was my first time ever attending a freethought event. Although I initially came to see Richard Dawkins, it was indeed the other speakers — Annie Laurie and Dan, Andrew Seidel, Peter Boghossian, Katherine Stewart and the Clergy Project panel — who were the highlights of the event.

Many thanks to everyone who made this convention happen.

Frank Mercer
Washington

Thanks for the great program you put together for your Portland convention. It was enlightening to find such a growing, vibrant group of people who sympathize with my frustrations with issues of church and state balance in the U.S.

I enjoyed all the speakers and I’m grateful to my mother, Penny Ann Fox, for inviting me to join in.

Ginger Driscoll
Massachusetts

Hispanic atheist women appreciate help

I want to thank you for giving me an opportunity to put Hispanic atheist women on the map. We are in a difficult position. Perceptions and stereotypes can only be changed when you show that we are part of society like everyone else.

Thank you again for featuring me on Freethought Radio.

Lorena Rios,
Virginia
Hispanic American Freethinkers

Lifetime Members express their thanks

I just renewed my membership as a Lifetime Member. I usually sign up for a \$100 membership but now am hoping to live more than 10 years. I enjoyed myself so much at the convention in Hartford and this year in Portland. I can’t say enough about how proud I am to be part of your outstanding organization.

Thanks for all you do.

Larry Tanner
Connecticut

I hope FFRF can consider this \$1,000 to become a Lifetime Member as a form of compensation for Dan Barker’s debate appearance in La Crosse on behalf of the La Crosse Area Freethought Society.

Hank Zumach
Wisconsin

Imagine my pleasant surprise when I opened my Los Angeles Times last July 4 to find your full-page advertisement advising Catholics to “leave the church.” Enclosed please find a check in the amount of \$1,000 to cover what will hopefully be the first of my many Lifetime Memberships in FFRF.

Thank you for your good work.

David B. Bockoff, M.D.
California

Questioning tax break for church donations

After discovering that Mitt Romney makes huge, tax-deductible donations to his Mormon church, I decided to contribute to your efforts to limit the influence of these churches.

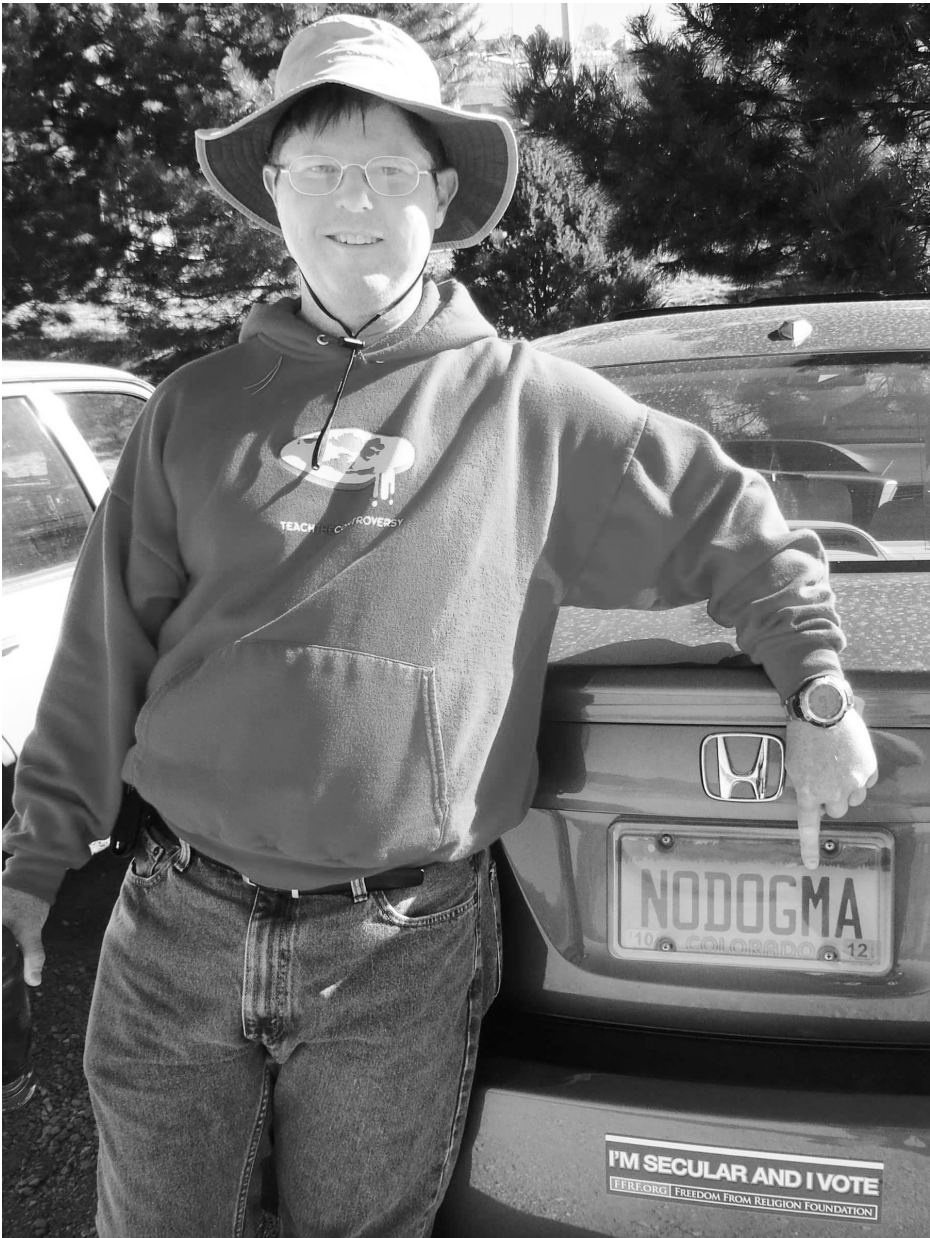
I will be in a 22% effective tax bracket this year compared to Romney’s 14%. At some point, the tax-deductible nature of church contributions needs to be eliminated to the extent that it is not charitably related (probably most?). Good luck.

Wayne Varner
Minnesota

Married priests too busy making babies?

In response to Jerry Weinberg’s October letter on Catholic priests not marrying, a justification which may not be on his list is the current anti-birth control, anti-abortion stance of the church. Married priests with unlimited families would be an unacceptable drain on church finances for food, clothing, housing, health care and education.

Robin Bernstein
Illinois



Freethought hike

Gene Osegovic, FFRF Colorado Springs chapter member, leaves no doubt about his allegiances. Gene’s sporting a “flat Earth” hoodie that reads “teach the controversy.”

Crank mail has value to Carolina member

Please don’t ever stop sharing the crank mail. It serves to insulate and forewarn me as to the types of slings and arrows that may come my way. I hope that when I hear crank mail delivered to my face, I will look the person in the eye and come back with one of those pithy replies we dream about.

Without knowing the depths some sink to and seeing in print how they argue, I might be too surprised to say anything. It might be worthwhile to ask FFRF members what they say to statements like those contained in your crank mail.

Thanks for producing the only newspaper/magazine I read cover to cover.

Pete Prunkl
North Carolina

Ohio poll worker has election insights

I’m writing about concerns regarding polling locations in churches. I understand those concerns, but I feel the readers need to hear what an atheist who has worked at the polls in Ohio since 2004, mostly in churches, has to say.

The Ohio secretary of state is the chief election officer for the state and sets directives that all 88 counties have to follow. The individual county boards of elections are the ones which pick polling locations.

The picture on page 5 [Oct12] showed a sign over the door of St. Joseph Catholic Church in Richmond, Ill., that said VOTE PRO-LIFE. If that was in my county and that was the door where the voters would have to go through to vote, the church would be informed that they would have to

either remove it or cover it up.

In Fairfield County, we have many villages of various sizes. Since our polling locations must comply with the federal Americans With Disabilities Act, many times the only building that can comply is a church building, especially if you can’t use a school building.

The only way to solve this problem would be to do what Washington, Oregon and Colorado do — have mail-in ballots.

Stan Bradley
Ohio

FFRF stopping prayer made her day

What a joy to get my Sunday news and see that the Elanco School Board is no longer praying at meetings! This area has very poor church/state boundaries.

This week I need to talk to the principal in our Warwick School District about the religious content in my son’s music class. Our district also has a “religious release” program during the school day. Unbelievable!

Thanks for your great work and making my day today.

Renita Leong
Pennsylvania

Keep those great student essays coming

The essays by high school and college students are *awesome*. Thinking back over 65 years to my own experience in “departing the flock,” I am most impressed at how articulate these young men and women are.

My compliments also on your major victory in saving the taxpayers more than \$1 million in Tucson, Ariz.

Bill Walker
Pennsylvania

• • •

The articulate and rational essays from all of the contests are inspiring and give me hope for the future. If I had a tail, it would be wagging.

Torsten Pihl
Oregon

Floridians liked info on ballot questions

Thanks for the notice [on the pro-religion ballot amendment] in Florida. Christians have been trying to delete the state constitutional ban on public funds going to religious institutions for as long as I can remember.

I have lived in Florida for 44 of my 77 years and have four nontheist children. After hearing all the “God bless you and God bless America” at the national political conventions, I decided that I am a man without a country and had to force myself to vote. What are we coming to?

Edward J. McDougall Sr.
Florida

• • •

Thanks for your letter concerning Amendment 8 in the election in Florida. It was very informative, clear and to the point. I passed it on to a number of friends who, like myself, all voted “No” on this attempt to use our state tax money to help religious groups. It was defeated!

William Shumaker
Florida

Washington billboard was slightly shocking



We were riding in the heart of Washington’s right-wing, fundamentalist territories, just south of Okanogan, when to my disbelief I saw a large billboard espousing separation of church and state.

Congratulations and support to the brave people who sponsored this and congratulations and support to the Freedom From Religion Foundation, who fight so hard to keep us from becoming a theocracy.

John Snow
Washington

Large families, religion on downhill course

The study on the decline of U.S. Protestants points to an important phenomenon — that the influx of Hispanic and Asian immigrant Catholics marks the only increase in U.S. religion.

They’re also the only people to have multiple children before they realize the exigencies of U.S. life. Their progeny will change that.

Large families and religion make no sense within the political, social, economic and moral realities of life. Americans are too aware of the sexual predation and corruption of religious hierarchies to continue to fall for religion.

Dr. Harriet Fraad
New York

Base U.S. law on reality, not religion

I’ve been reading some of your re-

cent letters/treatises which eventually toss off, more or less as an aside, the descriptive noun “wingnuts,” referring to many theists. In the process of minimizing this craziness, the most powerful perspective that we share (the psychological one) may be forgotten.

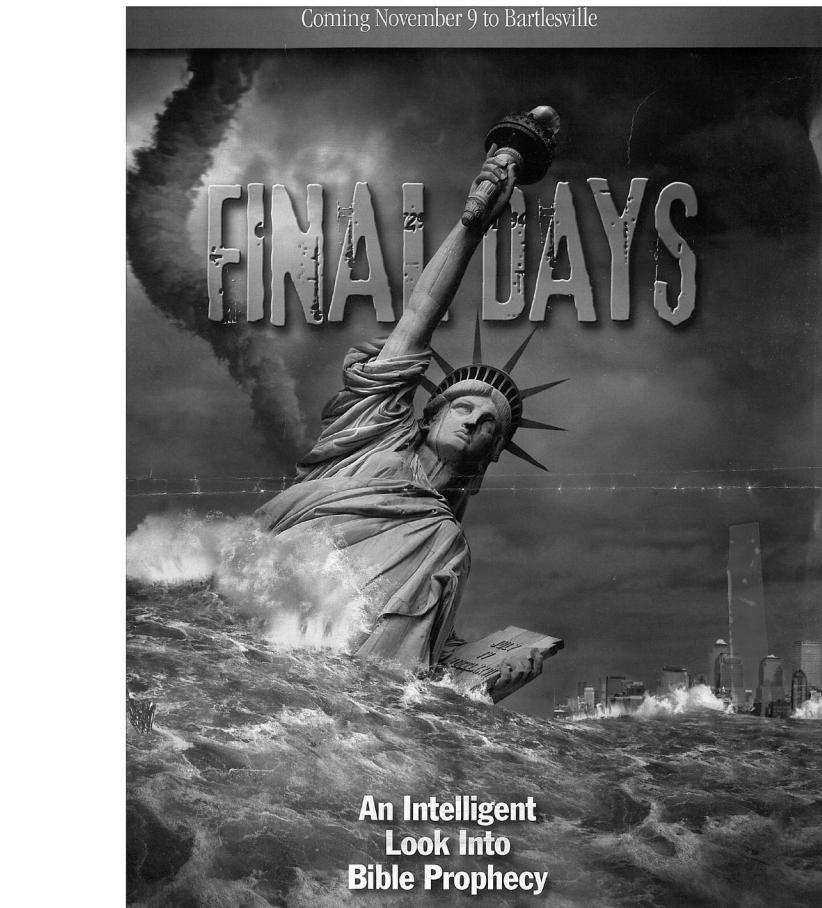
I have no wish to try to persuade anyone to my atheistic point of view. Indeed, in my business, when deism and theism provide comfort to a client who is troubled by fear of death or feelings of hopelessness or guilt or loneliness, for me to argue against that belief is usually counterproductive.

Unfortunately, mystical reference books have evolved (the bible, torah and quran) which support shared theistic delusions. John Shelby Spong is helping to put some biblical history, such as it is, into rational perspective for many Christians.

I’ve found that it’s possible to coexist with a theist, or to ignore, tolerate or even be amused by this frightened way of thinking, but I’m being made increasingly uncomfortable and angry when I must abide by laws that affect my personal decisions about creationism, sex, marriage, prayer, reproduction and eligibility for public office, now a tacit requirement for a lawmaker (witness the recent “debates”).

True, dedicated belief in the supernatural is a false belief, a delusion. Frequently, although not always, the believer is psychotic because he/she is delusional. A defense mechanism has been proposed, called “compartmentalization,” which is supposed to be the ability to store an unrealistic belief in our personality away from and apart from the rest of our psychological functioning.

We then access the discordant belief to deal with some part of living for which we have no other answer, e.g., death and heaven. As a result, we appear “sane.” Many of us, alternatively,



“This scaremongering literature came the day before Election Day,” writes **Carole Kowaleski, Oklahoma**. “My *educated* boss is sure President Obama is the Antichrist and has detailed proof from current events!”

don’t really believe in the supernatural (we lie) and remain sane, or we believe in ghosts and are psychotic.

Over time, legislation has been proposed based on some holy book. Homosexuality, dominionism and other forms of theocracy are such issues. We should note that the experts in these matters should not be politicians but psychologists.

A completely logical course of action now should be, then, for lawmakers to summarily reject all of this kind of proposed legislation, treating it as delusional and irrational (although all irrational thinking is not delusional.)

Proposals should first be dealt with by exclusion. The proposed extension of any “holy” document will be rejected by our representatives and returned to the author. The ultimate criterion for serious consideration of any bill would be basis in reality.

As a result, we would not have to revisit Scopes (1925) or persecute homosexuals or reject divorcees or kill infidels or object to public prayer, would we?

Leslie R. (Bud) Taylor, Ph.D.
Alabama

Election Roundup

Continued from page 10

currently rests mostly with local school boards, though operators who are denied can appeal to the state Board of Education, reported The Associated Press.

State Superintendent John Barge said the new commission will lessen local control and siphon public money away from existing schools. A state charter commission was created in 2008, but the Georgia Supreme Court ruled it unconstitutionally took control away from local boards. The amendment effectively overrides that decision.

Exit polls offer snapshot of voters

A new Pew survey showed that 5% of respondents identifying themselves as regular churchgoers were “urged to vote in a particular way” on Nov. 6. For white Catholic churchgoers, the number jumped to 13%, and “none say they were urged to vote for Democratic candidates.” Pew Forum analysis also showed President Barack Obama got 70% and 69%, respectively, of religiously unaffiliated voters and Jewish voters. About 79% of white evangelical Protestants and 78% of Mormons voted for Mitt Romney (George W. Bush got 8% in 2004).

Among white mainline Protestants in the exit poll, 54% voted for Romney and 44% supported Obama. White

Catholics backed Romney by 59%, up 7% from votes for John McCain in 2008.

Three-quarters of Hispanic Catholics voted for Obama. Half of Catholics as a whole voted for Obama, 48% for Romney.

About 59% of voters who said they attend church at least once a week voted for Romney, 39% for Obama. Among those who never attend church, 62% backed Obama.

Jews accounted for 2% of the 2012 electorate. Muslims and members of other non-Christian faiths together accounted for 7% of the electorate. The religiously unaffiliated made up 12%.

First Hindu elected to new Congress

Tulsi Gabbard, a Hindu from Honolulu, will serve in the 113th Congress representing Hawaii’s 2nd District in the U.S. House. Gabbard, a Democrat and the first Hindu elected to Congress, will take the oath of office on the Bhagavad Gita.

Gabbard, 31, was born in American Samoa to a Catholic father and a Hindu mother. She’s a member of the Vaishnava sect that believes in the Supreme Lord Vishnu and his 10 primary



Tulsi Gabbard

incarnations.

Gabbard follows the Vaishnava branch that believes in the Supreme Lord Vishnu, and his 10 primary incarnations.

U.S. Democratic Rep. Mazie Hirono, 65, defeated former Hawaii Gov. Linda Lingle for a U.S. Senate seat and will become the first Buddhist and Asian-American woman in the Senate. She was born in Fukushima, Japan.

According to CQ Roll Call, 11 members of the new Congress (about 2%) didn’t specify a religious affiliation, up from six members in the 112th Congress.

In 2006, Hirono and Rep. Hank Johnson, D-Ga., were the first Buddhists to be elected to the House. Rep. Colleen Hanabusa, D-Hawaii, became the Buddhist in 2010. Johnson and Hanabusa both won reelection.

The first Muslim to serve in the House or the Senate, Rep. Keith Ellison, D-Minn., was elected in 2006. Rep. Andre Carson, D-Ind., became the second Muslim in 2008. Ellison and Carson were reelected.

According to the Pew Forum, Catholics saw the biggest gains in the new Congress. Catholics gained five seats for a total of 161, about 30% of the 530 seats. Jews saw the biggest decline, from 39 to 32 seats (6%). Mormons continue to hold 15 seats.

Members with Protestant affiliation make up about 56% of Congress, down 1% from 2010.

FFRF covers Portland with cheery atheist/secular messages

The Freedom From Religion Foundation erected 15 billboard messages in Portland, Ore., in mid-October featuring Portland members to coincide with the 35th national FFRF convention there Oct. 12-14. Helping to celebrate the occasion were about 15 Portland-area FFRF members or families who volunteered to appear on a set of myth-dispelling billboards.

FFRF launched its largest “This is what an atheist looks like” campaign to date in Portland, also debuting a new slogan, “I’m SECULAR and I VOTE.” FFRF leased three 14x48-foot bulletins and 12 EcoPosters (10-foot by 23-inch signs), which appeared in a variety of locations.

“We were pleasantly surprised but sorry we had more volunteers than we could manage to use in the campaign. We wish we hadn’t had to turn anyone away,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “The definitive American Religious Identification Survey shows that 24% of Oregonians identify as nonreligious, so FFRF’ers have plenty of good company. FFRF sends special thanks to Life Member Steve Eltinge, for taking the professional photographs, and to all participants for making the campaign possible.”

Michelle and Justin Atterbury were pictured on a magenta billboard saying, “This is what an atheist family looks like,” with their toddler, Sylvan, and baby, Scarlett. Also on a bulletin with this message were Roy Firestone, an engineer, and Karen Firestone, a Portland homemaker. Another couple, Heather Gonsior, drafter, and Shawn Swagerty, information systems director, appeared on a similar billboard.

Appealing brothers Brent Mangum, a chemist and OSU tutor, and Tyler,

a physiologist, were pictured back-to-back on a blue “This is what atheists look like” billboard.

Other “This is what an atheist looks like” participants were Anita Brown, whose exotic cat, Wheely, also makes an appearance; Sonja Maglothin, an income auditor; Mark Hecate, a member of FFRF who is IT director at New Avenues for Youth; and Scott Mullin, a filmmaker in Portland.

Featured on a bright-blue billboard was Peter Boghossian, a well-known philosophy instructor at Portland State University, who has an upcoming book and spoke at the FFRF conference. Renee Barnett, who is a teaching assistant in Boghossian’s class on atheism, also appeared on a billboard.

With the election so close to FFRF’s conference, which attracted nearly 900 people from 43 states, two Canadian provinces and six nations, FFRF unveiled a timely billboard slogan, “I’m SECULAR and I VOTE.” The red, white and blue billboards featured the smiling faces of retired Portland teacher Lenora Warren; retired engineer Duane Damiano, a Life Member; retired politician and novelist Caroline Miller; and retirees Paul Buchman and Marsha Abelman.

Secular vote swayed election?

FFRF issued a preconvention press release about the billboards asking, “With up to 19% of the U.S. population now identifying as nonreligious, when are politicians and candidates going to wake up to the changing demographics and start courting us?”

Exit polls bore out FFRF’s conten-

I’m SECULAR AND I VOTE.

Lenora Warren, retired teacher, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

frrf.org



I’m SECULAR AND I VOTE.

Caroline Miller, novelist, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

frrf.org



tion that the secular vote can sway the election. Exit polls found that 70% of seculars went for Obama. About 62% of those who never attend church voted for Obama. Obama also won the vote for those who attend only monthly or less. Of those who attend church weekly or more, 59% went for Romney. According to Pew, Catholics made up a quarter of voters, Protestants 53%, Jews 2%, Muslims and other non-Christian faiths 7% and religiously unaffiliated 12% of the electorate. The Catholic bishops’ campaign against Obamacare’s contraceptive mandate dented Catholic support for Obama, which went from 54% in 2008

to 50% in 2012 (48% voted for Romney this year). White Catholic support for Obama dropped from 47% in 2008 to 40% in 2012. It was the Hispanic Catholics who buoyed the Obama vote at 75%, higher even than the secular vote. Fully 57% of the white Protestant vote went to Romney; 79% of white born-again evangelicals voted for Romney, while 95% of black Protestants went for Obama. To read Annie Laurie Gaylor’s blog, “The Nones have it,” and learn more about the secular vote, go to frrf.org/news/blog/ and scroll to Nov. 12, 2012.

I’m SECULAR AND I VOTE.

Duane A. Damiano, Retired Engineer, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

frrf.org



I’m SECULAR AND I VOTE.

Robert Paul Buchman, atheist, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

frrf.org



I’m SECULAR AND I VOTE.

Marsha Abelman, atheist, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

frrf.org



Billboard fights bigotry in Missouri



FFRF placed a colorful 14x48-foot “Ban Marriage Between Church and State” billboard in Smithville, Mo. It countered a nearby billboard saying “1 Man, 1 Woman, Forever” in downtown Smithville sponsored by Catholic Radio. FFRF’s slogan, affirming the constitutional principle of state-church separation, went up on Highway 169 a mile north of Highway 92 in Clay County. FFRF launched the slogan (adapted from one of its popular bumper stickers) at the request of Matt Gaines (above), an FFRF member and rural Smithville resident. He finds the Catholic-sponsored sign offensive to gay couples, and even to anyone who’s been divorced. “To denigrate other people’s relationships or the decisions they have

had to make with their outdated religious dogmas is simply shameful,” Gaines said. FFRF’s press release about the billboard noted, “The only organized opposition to marriage equality comes from the Religious Right. Mormon, Roman Catholic and fundamentalist Protestant churches and organizations have spent hundreds of millions to amend state constitutions to ban gay marriage in the name of Christianity. This religious battle underscores why dogma must be kept out of our secular laws.” FFRF thanks Gaines for helping to find a good site for the billboard and for donating toward the cost. FFRF places billboards where local members request them and help make it possible.

Portland’s many faces of freethought



Rose City vandalism

Someone with wicked intentions toward atheists vandalized an FFRF billboard in Portland, Ore., by adding horns to one of our freethinkers. Mark Hecate, who is IT director for New Avenues for Youth, a nonprofit that works to “empower homeless youth to exit street life,” said he’s not surprised about the vandalism because the billboard is on a dimly lit street near Hwy 99E at Ross Island Bridge.

“This unfortunate situation reveals how nonbelievers are still stigmatized, even in a community like Portland, where statistics show that a quarter of the population identifies as nonreligious. Even in Portland, it takes courage to come out of the secular closet, because who knows how people will react?” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Another Portland resident contacted FFRF to say that the vandalism of these “nice billboards” made him want to “turn to folks around me and say, ‘Hey, I’m with that guy!’ ”

This is what atheists look like.

Roy Firestone, engineer, & Karen Firestone, homemaker, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

ffrf.org



This is what an atheist family looks like.

The Mangum brothers, Brent & Tyler, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

ffrf.org



This is what an atheist family looks like.

Michelle & Justin Atterbury with Sylvan & Scarlett, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

ffrf.org




This is what atheists looks like.

Heather Gonsior and Shawn Swagerty, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

ffrf.org




This is what an atheist looks like.

Scott Mullin, filmmaker, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

ffrf.org




This is what an atheist looks like.

Dr. Peter Boghossian, philosophy instructor, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

ffrf.org



This is what an atheist looks like.

Sonja Maglothin, income auditor, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

ffrf.org




This is what an atheist looks like.

Anita Brown (& Wheely), Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

ffrf.org



This is what an atheist looks like.

Renee Barnett, teaching assistant, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

ffrf.org



Bravo for atheism at Oxford Union

‘This house does not believe in God’

By Dan Barker
Co-President
Freedom From Religion Foundation

I’ve done more than 100 debates as an atheist, but really looked forward to my first visit to Oxford, England, to debate the proposition, “This House Believes in God.” Members of the Oxford Society invited me, Michael Shermer and Peter Millican (philosophy, Hertford College) for a formal debate Nov. 8.

We teamed up against theists John Lennox (well-known Oxford professor of mathematics and philosophy), Peter Hitchens (journalist, author and former atheist) and Anglican priest Joana Collicut (co-author of *The Dawkins Delusion*).

It was a formal black-tie evening, so I brought my nice tuxedo that I use for playing jazz gigs and country clubs. I’m sure I was the only person in the room with piano keyboard suspenders.

The Oxford Union is “the world’s most prestigious debating society, with an unparalleled reputation for bringing international guests and speakers to Oxford.” Founded in 1823, it welcomes and encourages controversy. “The Oxford Union believes first and foremost in freedom of speech: nothing more, nothing less.”

Many of the protocols of modern-day British Parliament stem from Oxford Union customs. Eleven British prime ministers, starting with W.E. Gladstone, have been officers or members. Dozens of other members have gone on to become nationally and internationally prominent figures.

Famous speakers at the Union include many presidents and prime ministers, actors, sports figures, authors, journalists, the Dalai Lama, Malcolm X, Salman Rushdie, Mother Teresa, Philip Pullman, Stephen Hawking and Albert Einstein.

The formality was enhanced by the fact that Richard Dawkins was in the audience. After a delicious supper and preliminaries, the main event began. We spoke with no microphones in the formal Debate Chamber, with hardwood floor and busts of famous people around the red walls.

We stood on respective sides of a practical table on the floor (no lofty pulpits), with most of the audience at the same level, and many in the balconies above us. We were each allotted 15 minutes.

John Lennox, our most formidable and articulate opponent, went first, speaking for the proposition. John has a likable relaxed personality, a warm avuncular style with an Irish twinkle in his eyes.

Atheism is illogical, Lennox asserted, because “nothing comes from nothing.” There is no contradiction between science and faith. An immaterial God is free to show himself to us in a material way using revelation, and the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus is clear evidence for the existence

tence and power of such a being.

According to Lennox, the constants (forces or parameters) of the cosmos are so exquisitely balanced that if one of them were off by the tiniest fraction, we would not be living in a universe hospitable to life. Besides, without a belief in the Christian God, there is no hope.

My turn

I spoke next, for the opposition. It was my job to introduce the main ideas in opposition to theistic belief, putting as much as possible on the table for our opponents to rebut and setting the stage for Michael and Peter to drive the points home using their considerable areas of expertise.

I prepared a 10-minute opening, anticipating that I might appreciate the extra five-minute elbow room to insert specific rebuttals or allow interruptions from the floor. I turned to Lennox and said, “If nothing comes from nothing, God cannot exist.” A god, if such a being exists, is not nothing. To exclude the desired conclusion from the premise is to beg the question.

Smuggling God into the reasoning that is supposed to prove his existence also results in an incoherency, a “married bachelor,” a something that comes from the nothing from which something cannot come. If “God” is defined as an omniscient being with free will, then he cannot exist.

If you know the future, you cannot have free will. Foreknowledge of your own decisions rules out any ability to change your mind. You are a robot, not a personal being.

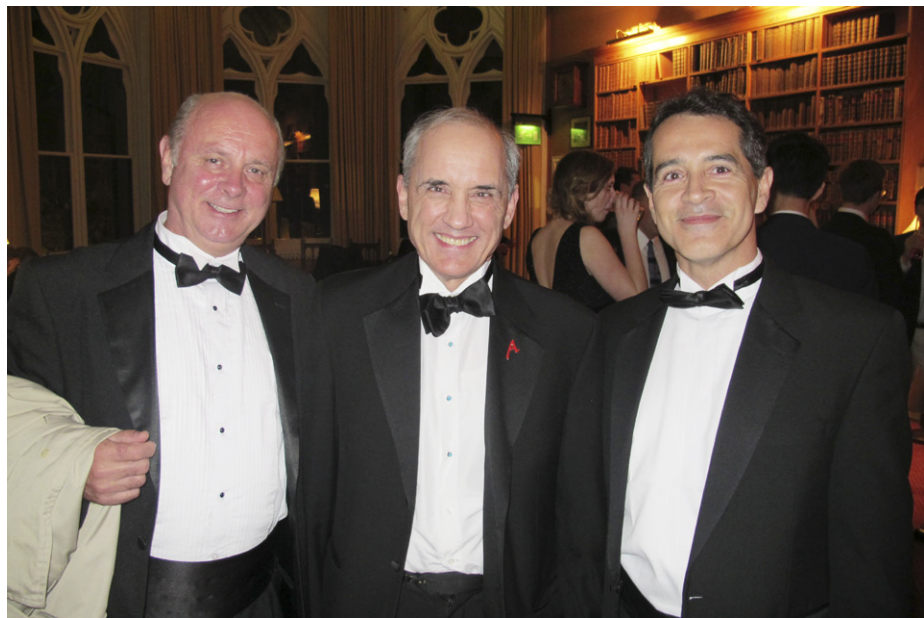
In response to interruptions, I briefly sketched the cumulative case that belief in a god suffers from serious deficiencies: lack of coherent definition, lack of evidence, lack of good argument (many theistic arguments are merely “god-of-the-gaps” explanations), lack of moral and theological agreement among believers, lack of good response to the problem of evil, and the lack of reliability of so-called holy books.

I turned to Lennox to counter that the resurrection of Jesus is the worst example anyone could offer as evidence for a god, and explained why. I ended with the fact that there is no need for a god: Tens of millions of good people have lives of purpose, morality, love, meaning, happiness, beauty and hope without such a belief.

As I returned to my seat next to Michael Shermer, he said “Bravo! You nailed it!” and we did high fives.

Then it was Joanna Collicut’s turn to argue for the proposition. I listened carefully, ready to take notes, but her monotone remarks were so vague, so Sunday morning sermonish, I really don’t remember what she said.

Michael Shermer virtually leaped to the table to take up for the opposition. He made the case that god beliefs are neurological, psychological, sociological, anthropological and historical. He challenged the audacity of pretending



FFRF members Steve Aldred (left) and Daniel Saiz (right) joined FFRF Co-President Dan Barker for a post-debate reception.

that out of the thousands of gods and religions, you just happen to possess the correct one.

“I simply believe in one less god than you do,” he said, eliciting much laughter and applause. He talked about pattern recognition and agency detection, Type 1 versus Type 2 errors (thinking the noise in the grass is the wind rather than a predator), showing that god belief is a Type 1 error (false positive) that was useful to our prescientific ancestors for survival reasons.

Very different Peters

Then came Peter Hitchens, the believing Anglican brother of Christopher Hitchens. (If anyone doubts the fact of evolutionary variation, just look at those two brothers.) Hitchens was combative and unfriendly, pitching ad hominem assaults. “I decided that I would abandon any pretense at being Mr. Nice Guy,” he wrote the next day. “Why would anyone want the universe to be a pointless chaos, where our actions could be judged only by their immediate observable effects, a universe utterly without the hope of justice, where death was the end and the deaths of those we loved extinguished them irrevocably? Well, the question, once asked, rather answers itself, doesn’t it?”

Hitchens apparently does believe all questions answer themselves because he brusquely declined interruptions from the audience.

Peter Millican, on our side, was last. He was brilliant and deftly handled the theistic arguments raised by Lennox, responding with philosophical rebuttals to the “fine tuning” argument, and the problem of evil. If there actually were an afterlife, how would future “justice” make our current suffering any less harmful?

When he sat down, I said, “Strike three! They’re out.” And I was right. At the end of the event, President John Lee announced to the audience that they were to “vote with your feet.” Our side won.

So although the exact proposition was indeed about belief and not knowledge, I think it is fair to say that it has been decided, by an Oxford vote no less, that there is no god.

Lively atheists in Mexico City



At Zócalo, Mexico City’s central plaza, are (left) professor Jerry Coyne, author of *Why Evolution Is True*, Gerardo Romero Quijada, founder and activist with Mexican Atheists; and FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. (Their spread-out arms are in honor of Dan Barker, who does this trademark pose wherever he travels.) They were sightseeing after the conclusion of the second colloquium on Mexican atheism Nov. 2-3. Gaylor spoke at the conference, as did Coyne, Michael Shermer and several Mexican scientists and freethinking activists. The Governor’s Palace in the background features a major Diego Rivera mural which is strongly anticlerical and explicitly celebrates Mexico’s formal separation between state and church.