

# Freethought Today

Complimentary Copy  
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January/February 2013

## Churches exempt from filing fee, annual reporting *FFRF sues IRS over preferential treatment of churches*

Ending 2012 with a bang, the Freedom From Religion Foundation filed a federal lawsuit Dec. 27 to challenge the Internal Revenue Service's preferential treatment of churches in applying for and maintaining tax-exempt status.

The IRS exempts churches and certain other religious organizations from paying expensive application fees and filing the onerous annual Form 990 required of nonchurch nonprofits. *FFRF and Triangle FFRF v. the IRS* was filed in U.S. District Court, Western District of Wisconsin.

FFRF, a national state/church watchdog with more than 19,000 non-religious members, and its chapter, the Triangle Freethought Society in North Carolina, are challenging the preferential application and reporting exemptions to churches.

FFRF and its North Carolina chapter are 501(c)(3) nonprofits that paid fees of several hundred dollars in order to apply for tax-exempt status and must annually file the annual Form 990.

The IRS requires nonchurch tax-

exempt nonprofits to file "detailed, intrusive, and expensive annual reports to maintain tax-exempt status, but such reports are not required for churches and certain other affiliated religious organizations," the complaint notes.

"Why should churches be exempt from basic financial reporting requirements?" asks Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. "Equally important, why would churches not *wish* to be accountable?"

Gaylor adds, "Having tax-exempt status is a great privilege, and in exchange for that privilege, all other groups must file a detailed report annually to the IRS and the public on how we spend donations."

"The unfairness of this is so overwhelming," says FFRF President Emerita Anne Nicol Gaylor, who in FFRF's early years personally prepared the annual forms. "Churches are allowed to play by different rules."

Form 990 requires detailed reports on revenue and functional expenses, activities, governance, management, how groups fulfill their mission and what proportion is spent on programs, management and fundraising.



Photo: Andrew Seidel

**FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker show off the mountain of 990 Forms FFRF has filed, which churches are exempt from.**

The "preferential treatment of churches" directly benefits churches, while discriminating against other nonprofit organizations, including the plaintiffs, "solely on the basis of religious criteria," FFRF's complaint asserts. This "results in obligations imposed on secular nonprofits, including the plaintiffs, that are not imposed on churches."

FFRF asks the court to find the church exemptions a violation of the Establishment Clause of the Constitution's First Amendment and the equal protection rights of the Due Process Clause of the Fifth Amendment. FFRF seeks to enjoin the IRS from continuing to exempt churches and related organizations from the application and annual reporting required of all other 501(c)(3) nonprofits.

This is FFRF's third ongoing lawsuit against IRS practices involving preferential treatment of churches.

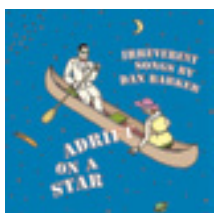
In January/February 2013, FFRF filed a high-profile lawsuit seeking to enforce the IRS' non-electioneering code against churches.

In late August, U.S. District Judge Barbara Crabb ruled that FFRF and three of its directors have standing to proceed in a challenge of the 1954 "parish exemption" act of Congress. That law, enacted to reward ministers for fighting what the law's author, U.S. Rep. Peter Mack, called "a godless and antireligious world movement," permits "ministers of the gospel" to deduct payment designated as a housing allowance from taxable income.

All three lawsuits were filed in U.S. District Court, Western District of Wisconsin, and were brought on behalf of FFRF by attorney Richard L. Bolton.

"We thank the Triangle Freethought Society for joining FFRF in this important challenge," adds FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

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## FFRF's 'Jackson Jesus' protest makes waves in Ohio



**Purportedly part of a public middle school's "Hall of Honor," Jesus appears to reign above all.**

The Freedom From Religion Foundation's formal request that a middle school in Jackson, Ohio, remove a prominent painting of Jesus from its entrance has created shockwaves locally.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote a letter of complaint Jan. 2 to the Jackson City Schools on behalf of a complainant protesting the painting's presence at Jackson Middle School. Since sending the letter, FFRF has been contacted by other families with children in the schools distressed over the violation.

"Courts have continually held that public schools may not display religious messages or iconography. It is illegal for Jackson Middle School to post religious images on the walls of

its schools. The district must remove the picture of Jesus at once," Markert wrote.

Her letter cited a 1994 decision by the 6th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, which ruled that an identical portrait of Jesus could not be displayed in a public school. Ohio is part of the 6th Circuit.

The Jackson School Board decided Jan. 8 to not remove the devotional image. Superintendent Phil Howard told more than 300 emotional backers of the painting who attended a board meeting that the picture would stay. He claimed it was lawful because it was a gift from a student group and "has historical significance."

Channel 10 News reported on the  
*Continued on back page*

## Meet a Staffer

**Name:** Scott B. Colson.

**Where and when I was born:** Neenah, Wis., 1984. I've spent most of my life in Appleton and Madison.

**Education:** University of Wisconsin-Madison, B.S. in philosophy.

**What I want to be when I grow up:** The Don, El Jefe, El Capo.

**I spend a lot of time thinking about:** Progressive politics, brewing beer, revolutionary economics, music.

**I spend no time thinking about:** I guess I haven't thought about it. No topic is off limits.

**My religious upbringing was:** Barely Catholic. My catechism teachers were parents of other students who had a hard time answering so many of my "gotcha" questions and double binds.

**My doubts about religion started:** Very early. I think it was during second grade that I told my parents I thought the whole thing was some weird power trip.

**How I came to work at FFRF:** An opening for website development and desktop publishing at an atheist foun-

dation — how could I pass that up?

**What I do here:** If it's jammed, I unjam it. If the lights on a machine start blinking, I unblink them. I produce the newspaper (not the content, except for this gem). I build Web pages, manage the artwork for campaigns and occasionally work on ads. I help with the radio show and podcast.

**What I like best about it here:** Tea time, all of the time; random acts of jazz and baking.

**What sucks about it:** There are not enough hours in the day to fight all that's crazy out there.

**Things I like:** Peanut butter, post-modernism, prog rock.

**Things I smite:** Piety, papacy, pelf-tocracy. [pelf (n.) money, esp. when gained in a dishonest or dishonorable way]

**Favorite quote about freethought:** "Atheism is not a drama, but the philosopher's serenity and philosophy's achievement." (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*)



Photo: Tom Stringfellow

## No stranger to speaking out

Scott Colson introducing 'Emperor Has No Clothes' recipient Cenk Uygur at the 2010 National Convention in Madison, Wis.

## FFRF intern brings write stuff



Journalism intern Sarah Eucalano (left) runs a marathon in Superior, Wis.

## Meet an Intern

**Name:** Sarah Eucalano.

**Where and when I was born:** Milwaukee, April 6, 1992.

**Family:** Mom, Patty; dad, Brian; and an older sister, Lara, 24.

**Education:** Pursuing a bachelor's in journalism and international studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

**My religious upbringing was:** Roman Catholic.

**How I came to work at FFRF as a journalism intern:** I belong to Atheists, Humanists & Agnostics at UW-Madison and answered an email FFRF sent about intern opportunities. I love being a part of AHA. The discussions that happen there and the awareness the organization raises are great. I sent FFRF an email hoping I'd be able to help them out with their mission and gain some writing experience.

**What I do here:** I write up legal victories and Freethought of the Day and do whatever else FFRF needs me to do.

**What I like best about it:** I love writing and working with the people at FFRF because they are all nice and intelligent. I also love all of the freethought stickers, comics, quotes and pictures that are all over the walls. Everyone at FFRF is a freethinker, and most people are tea drinkers, so I fit

right in.

**Something funny that's happened at work:** At the Winter Solstice party, Dan sang a song from *South Park* with a chorus that inserted the f-word between Merry and Christmas. Also, FFRF still uses a typewriter for some tasks. I had to use it once and got a kick out of it.

**My writing interests are:** I write for the city news beat for the UW Badger Herald, which I enjoy. I also write short stories and poetry in my free time.

**Three writers I admire:** Mark Twain, Margaret Atwood and Douglas Adams.

**These three words sum me up:** Pragmatic, honest and passionate.

**Things I like:** People who think for themselves and have integrity. I also enjoy running, reading and riding my bike.

**Things I smite:** Dane Cook's stand-up comedy. I also hate it when people use the phrase "you know how they are." I hate it when people think they can look down on or make assumptions about people who aren't white, white collar, suburban or formally educated.

**Fun fact:** I ran my first marathon this summer, the Paavo in Hurley, Wis. My time was 3:43, a good 15 minutes faster than Paul Ryan's actual time.

## 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 or January or February 2013 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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Don't miss a single issue! If you move, notify us directly and promptly. **The Post Office does not forward third-class mail.** FFRF cannot be responsible for replacing back issues if we have not been notified prior to your move. Back issues, while they last, may be ordered for \$2 each.

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January/February 2013

*The only freethought newspaper in the United States*

# FFRF releases its third music CD

## *Barker grounded in reality while 'Adrift on a Star'*

The Freedom From Religion Foundation released its third musical CD in January, "Adrift on a Star," featuring **Dan Barker** and friends. The title song is Barker's arrangement of a **Yip Harburg** poem.

The album's showpiece is "Poor Little Me," a collaboration between Barker, who wrote the lyrics, and **Charles Strouse**, the Broadway icon ("Annie," "Bye Bye Birdie"), who's also an atheist who received FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award in 2011.

"I had the pleasure of sitting next to Charles at the 2011 FFRF convention dinner," says Dan. "We chatted about music, the many Broadway and other composers who are nonreligious, and he said if I sent him some lyrics, he would put them to music. So I did and he did. It's truly a collaboration, because Charles threw away about half of my lyrics, and it's a much better song for it!"

What's left are subtly humorous lyrics and rich music blended into a winning song.

Dan, who had a musical ministry as an ordained minister before "seeing the light" and is still receiving royalties

for his Christian musicals for children, has now written scores of freethought songs in what he calls "reverse penance."

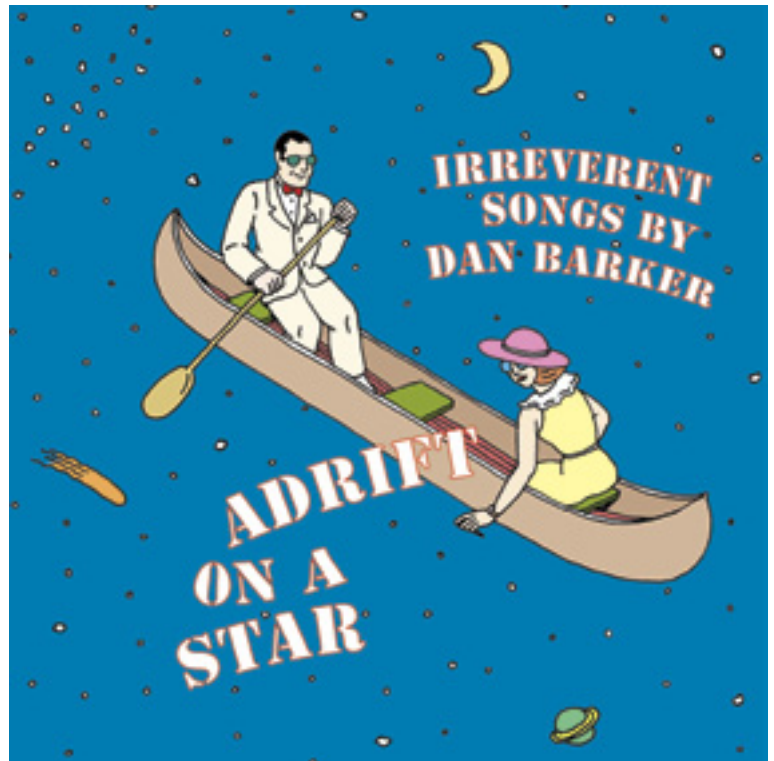
Other new songs in the album include "Get Off Your Knees (And Get to Work)," dedicated to "Gov. Rip Van-Perry Winkle, who has slept not 30 but 2,030 years," "Reason," inspired by the D.C. Reason Rally, and Dan's humorous "Unfaithful." Dismissing belief in a deity, the lyrics say: "I want you to know it isn't me — it's you."

**Susan Hofer**, a talented jazz vocalist in Madison, Wis., performs Dan's jazz ballad, a love song, "It's Only Natural," inspired by **Richard Dawkins'** book *Unweaving the Rainbow*, which makes a plea to integrate science and art. The song has been oft-requested since Dan wrote it in 2006.

He's also set to music several poems by Harburg from *Rhymes for the Irreverent*, a collection of verses reprinted by FFRF. Another musical icon, Harburg, a nonbeliever who openly scoffed at religion, wrote "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" and "It's Only a Paper Moon," among many, many enduring classics.

To showcase many of Harburg's witty rhymes about religion, Dan set them to music in "Somewhere Over the Paper Moon," performed as a duet with Hofer.

Dan also performs Harburg's song "One Sweet Morning," a lovely but rarely recorded peace anthem with a freethought perspective. The music is by **Earl Robinson** ("Joe Hill"). Dan set plaintive music to poet and lyricist **Philip Appleman's** cautionary "In a Dark Time," written in the mid-2000s.



Dan also recorded "Experiment," a little-known paean to science and critical thinking by **Cole Porter**, who was non-religious. By popular request of FFRF's staff, Dan recorded a G-rated version of "Merry F&#ing Christmas" from "South Park."

Cameo appearances include Australian freethought/feminist troubadour **Shelly Segal**, who graciously gave FFRF permission to include her haunting song "I Don't Believe in Fairies," and **Joe Taylor**, formerly a Christian rocker, who recorded his first freethought song, "Be Still My Child," for the album.

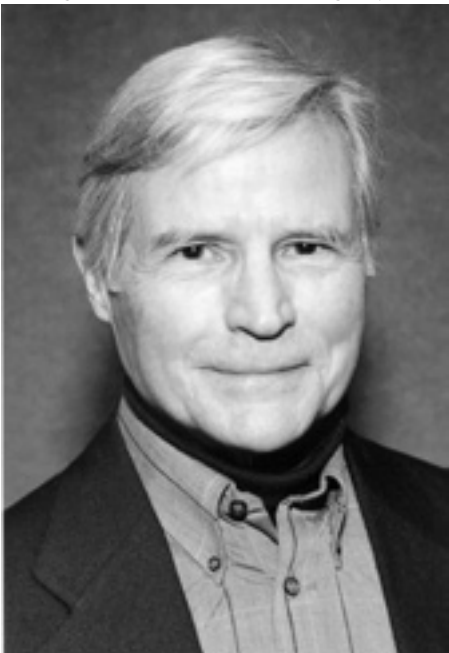
Also included is "It Ain't Necessarily So," sung by Hofer and arranged by Dan with a local band. Bonus tracks include a few extras.

FFRF **Rob Shepherd** plays the saxo-

phone on several songs, and FFRF member **Buzz Kemper**, announcer of Freethought Radio, engineered the album at Audio for the Arts in Madison.

FFRF members may order the CD "Adrift on a Star" for a discounted \$15 postpaid (\$20 postpaid for nonmembers). "Adrift on a Star" joins FFRF's two previous CDs, featuring Barker and friends. "Beware of Dogma" is also available for \$15 to members.

The 34-song "Friendly Neighborhood Atheist," with many contemporary and historic freethought songs, also featuring **Kristen Lems**, is available for \$20 to members via the mail or [ffrf.org/shop/music](http://ffrf.org/shop/music). (Note: The online shop calculates postage based on weight and location, so final online price may vary slightly from mail catalog price.)



Philip Appleman



Shelly Segal



Susan Hofer



"Poor Little Me" collaborators Dan Barker (lyrics) and Charles Strouse (music).



Joe Taylor

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*Freedom Depends  
on Freethinkers*

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**What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?**

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists.

The Foundation's e-mail address is [info@ffrf.org](mailto:info@ffrf.org). Please include your name and physical mailing address with all e-mail correspondence.

Foundation members wishing to receive online news releases, "action alerts" and "Freethought of the Day" should contact [info@ffrf.org](mailto:info@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.

# Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

## To the River

(Benares)

For one burning moment  
we were snarled together  
under the winding-sheet: you,  
the boy with blistering eyes,  
the brown water-carrier,  
the milky lady who walked like a *rani* and sniffed,  
and all of us.

The sun was boring through the sheet,  
through our eyelids. Strapped cold to the litter,  
we hunched on hired shoulders downhill  
toward the river, where,  
in the whitest white we ever wore,  
skinny legs fretting the husky logs,  
we would flame to a fine gray ash.  
To the equanimity of peacocks  
our passing made no tremor;  
under the nim and tamarind  
burnt eyes died in dusty faces,  
monkeys cried abstract abuse,  
temples turned their walls on us,  
camels wet the earth,  
and only children stared, that games and sun  
could come to this.

All of us  
suddenly  
shrieked through the sheet:  
My voice is the language of God!  
My skin is the color of heaven!  
My knowledge makes towers and temples!  
My pity, My passion, My deeds!  
No one heard.

And  
even now, as the litter twists along,  
one of us is still there,  
swaying to the smug chanting of the mourners,  
moving toward fire on the holy river,  
one of us.

© 1996 Philip Appleman

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

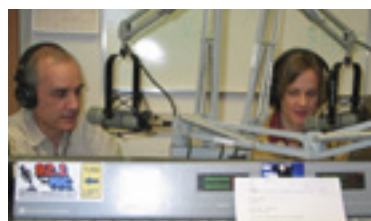
National Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Center for Science Education. His work has appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The New 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/](http://ffrf.org/shop/)).

### YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

#### TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

produced by the  
Freedom From Religion  
Foundation



Hosted by Dan Barker and  
Annie Laurie Gaylor

Broadcasts and streams Saturdays at 11 a.m. Central, Progressive Talk The Mic 92.1 FM, Madison, Wis., and over several other stations.

iTunes or podcasts archived at: [ffrf.org/news/radio](http://ffrf.org/news/radio)

Slightly irreverent views,  
news, music & interviews



## Overheard

I have prayed before not to have another child, but the condom worked better.

**Giselle Labadan, roadside vendor in Manila, on a new law opposed by the Catholic Church in the Philippines that provides public funding for contraception**

*Honolulu Star-Advertiser, 1-8-13*

While I was younger, my father drank a lot. There was abuse in the home. My brother committed suicide in 2001. So at some point you start to say, "Why does all this stuff happen to people?" And if I pray and nothing good happens, is that supposed to be I'm being tried? I find that almost kind of cruel in some ways. It's like burning ants with a magnifying glass. Eventually that gets just too hard to believe anymore.

**Rigoberto Perez, 30, raised as a Seventh-day Adventist, "More Young People Are Moving Away From Religion, But Why?"**

*NPR "Morning Edition," 1-15-13*

Between banning gay marriage and requiring school prayer, too many legislators are intent on turning Indiana into a religious state as repressive, intellectually stultifying and ultimately insulting of their own God as any on the planet. It's time for them to learn a new R: Reality.

**Columnist/reporter Phil Wieland, opposing a bill by the state Senate's Education Committee chairman to let public schools require daily recitation of the Lord's Prayer**

*Northwest Indiana Times, 1-11-13*

Wise atheists make no moral claims, seeing good and bad randomly spread among humanity regardless of faith. Humans do have a hardwired moral sense, every child born with an instinct for justice that makes us by nature social animals, not needing revelations from ancient texts. The idea that morality can only be frightened into us artificially, by divine edict, is degrading.

**Polly Toynbee, outgoing president of the British Humanist Association**

*The Guardian, 12-16-12*

I noticed something interesting. Those two guys disagreed on everything, except the fact that I was going to hell.

**Doug Krueger, an atheist and professor at NorthWest Arkansas Community College in Bentonville, on sharing an office with a Catholic and a Baptist when he was a Ph.D. student**

*Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, 1-10-13*

Commonly known to biographers but

often surprising to most Christians, King James I was a well-known bisexual. Though he did marry a woman, his many gay relationships were so well-known that amongst some of his friends and court, he was known as "Queen James." It is in his great debt and honor that we name the *Queen James Bible* so.

**Publisher's statement on new bible translation, "edited to prevent homophobic misinterpretation"**

*amazon.com, 11-27-12*

This report confirms that the code is 10 times the size of the bible with none of the good news.

**U.S. Rep. Dave Camp, R-Mich., chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, on a new study of the U.S. tax code**

*U.S. News & World Report, 1-10-13*

Man, this is weird for me too — to be in a room where I don't recognize a single person. And you call yourself a Christian nation. . . . I am totally cool with hookers. Fishermen and hookers. I got a whole fishnet motif going.

**Matt Gubser, portraying Jesus in the "Holiday Heathens" comedy show at the Punch Line in San Francisco**

*Religion News Service, 12-13-12*

The bible has outsold *Fifty Shades of Grey* and Justin Bieber's autobiography to top the Norwegian bestseller charts this month for a second year in a row. The new Norwegian translation of the bible has held the top spot for 54 out of the last 56 weeks.

*Christian Today, 12-18-12*

I've explained to them that some people believe God is waiting for them, but I don't believe that. I believe when you die, it's over and you live on in the memory of people you love and who love you. I can't offer them the comfort of a better place. Despite all the evils and problems in the world, this is the heaven — we're living in the heaven and it's the one we work to make. It's not a paradise.

**Julie Drizin, Takoma Park, Md., quote in "Atheist parents comfort children about death without talk of God or heaven"**

*Washington Post, 12-22-12*

It's an opportunity to get out of the cold, have a cigar and learn some bible. **Larry Gilbert, member of a Missouri Synod Lutheran bible study group that meets at Cigar Cigars, Rocky River, Ohio**

*Cleveland Plain Dealer, 1-18-13*

# Over 150 legal victories for FFRF in 2012!

In 2012, the Freedom From Religion Foundation and its four staff attorneys impressively won more than 150 significant legal victories using education and persuasion, without having to go to court.

FFRF received more than 2,460 requests (whew!) last year for help from members, or members of the public, over entanglements between state and church. FFRF officially doubled its staff attorneys in 2012, going from two to four, to handle the caseload.

They or FFRF's co-presidents sent 1,005 formal letters objecting to state/church violations last year. It may take many follow-up letters to get results, and those follow-up letters are not included in the letter count.

The majority of FFRF legal letters involve religion in the public schools, followed by prayer at government meetings such as city council or county board meetings. Two-thirds of FFRF's victories involved ending violations in public schools, which FFRF prioritizes.

Prayer in schools is the largest subcategory within school complaints. FFRF also sent letters of complaint to more than 100 government bodies or departments over prayer. Most involve city or county board prayer, but there are also many complaints over city-hosted prayer breakfasts and prayer proclamations.

## Top 10 states for violations

(most FFRF complaint letters):

1. Florida
2. Texas
3. Tennessee
4. Georgia
5. North Carolina
6. California
7. Wisconsin
8. Ohio
9. Alabama
10. Pennsylvania

## Top ten issue areas:

1. Schools
2. Government Prayer
3. Miscellaneous
4. Holiday Displays
5. Religion in the Workplace
6. Election Law Complaints
7. Crosses
8. Prayer Breakfasts
9. Church Bulletins
10. National Day of Prayer

## 2012 legal victories

These include but are not limited to:

- The Federal Election Commission, in response to a complaint filed by FFRF in 2008, found that the Colorado group Informed Catholic Citizens violated election laws in issuing a robo-call by a priest who advocated for the election of John McCain.
- The Kiel Area School District Board of Education (Wis.) voted down a proposal to teach "alternative theories of the origins of man within the science curriculum" after FFRF pressured the board to follow case law prohibiting such instruction in public schools.
- An FFRF complaint prompted Henrico County (Va.) officials to drop the 25-year-old tradition of offering meeting prayers before Board of Supervisors meetings.



FFRF staff attorneys from left: Patrick Elliott, Liz Cavell, Rebecca Markert and Andrew Seidel. Photo by Andrew Seidel.

- The Kannapolis City Council (N.C.) ended prayers before meetings, replacing the prayers with a moment of silence.

- FFRF secured the right of students at Walton High School in Marietta, Ga., to start a "FACT" group (Free-thinkers for Cooperation Acceptance and Trust) after the school had denied their right to create the student group.

- After months of debate, the Ellwood City Borough Council (Pa.) voted to remove a long-standing nativity display in front of the borough's municipal building.

- Five Pennsylvania school boards (Big Spring, Octorara, Greencastle-Antrim, Eastern Lancaster, Grove City) dropped prayer before board meetings after letters from FFRF.

- FFRF stopped future religious assemblies by Dave Walton ([braggingforjesus.com/](http://braggingforjesus.com/)) at a Tennessee middle/high school.

- FFRF's letter of complaint resulted in removal of a cross from a Nebraska state park and outside a park ranger's home in George Wyth State Park on Iowa state property.

- FFRF's letter of complaint resulted in Washoe County Libraries in Nevada remaining open on Easter Sunday.

- FFRF stopped mayoral sponsorship and coordination of monthly prayer breakfasts in Augusta, Ga.

- The City of Tucson, Ariz., rescinded a grant to the Catholic Church of \$1.1 million to fix a building it had abandoned after FFRF's letter of complaint, records request, and action alert to FFRF members in Arizona.

- In another faith-based victory, the West Linn, Ore., City Council rescinded a \$1,300 grant to a local church and removed paid, government employees from the church's advisory board after a letter from FFRF.

- Thanks to FFRF, Catholic Social Services of Augusta, Ga., will no longer receive free lawn maintenance from the U.S. military.

- A family court in Jackson, Mo., has reprimanded a pastor for hijacking a secular class meant to teach divorced parents how to help their children and injecting it with his religious rant. The court is looking for other teachers and sites other than his church.

- Bret Harte Union High School (Calif.) will no longer release student

information to the local Catholic diocese.

- Peach County senior center employees will no longer pray with their charges or read the bible to them at meal times and special occasions.

- The Assessment Appeals Board in San Francisco implemented procedural changes to eliminate the use of a religious oath when swearing in parties at hearings.

- COLT bus system in Scranton, Pa., discontinued the practice of displaying "God Bless America" on their electronic tickers after FFRF wrote to them in February.

- FFRF halted (or stopped for the future) illegal Gideon bible distribution in public schools in Magnolia, Ark., Boydton, Va., Robertson County, Tenn., and Grant County, Ky., among other public school districts.

- The University of Tennessee-Chatanooga discontinued its long tradition of prayer before its football games after continued pressure.

- FFRF persuaded the Cobleskill-Richmondville Central School district (N.Y.) from using school facilities for religious worship.

- FFRF was able to address several complaints regarding the inappropriate use of government emails, putting a halt to religious messages at four different agencies.

- FFRF stopped numerous prayer violations and other religious indoctrination at schools around the country.

- FFRF had a total of 11 victories in 2012 ending church bulletin discounts, in which restaurants or places of public accommodation were illegally discounting meals or tickets for those bearing church bulletins. These are violations of the Civil Rights Act.

Many complaints from 2012 and earlier are still actively being pursued, with other victories pending.

Although not all complaints can be acted on, FFRF's attorneys try hard to respond to bonafide state/church queries. FFRF also hosts an extensive State/Church FAQ: [ffrf.org/faq/state-church](http://ffrf.org/faq/state-church)

Before contacting FFRF, you may wish to check out the FAQ. Complaints over state/church violations may be sent via the online complaint form:

[ffrf.org/legal/report](http://ffrf.org/legal/report)

## Ongoing litigation

These victories are in addition to FFRF's litigation. FFRF has filed well over 60 lawsuits since it began, winning many significant victories, and through December 2012 had nine ongoing lawsuits. In 2012, FFRF successfully settled two additional lawsuits: its challenge of a cross on a water tower and other city property in Whiteville, Tenn., and its challenge removing a Ten Commandments poster from a high school in Giles County, W. Va., brought with the ACLU of Virginia.

FFRF last year won an appeals court decision in Colorado state court in which a judge agreed with FFRF that the governor's Colorado Day of Prayer proclamations are inappropriate.

Last year, FFRF filed four new lawsuits: challenging Ten Commandments monuments in front of two schools in Pennsylvania (two separate federal lawsuits), challenging graduation prayer in a South Carolina high school, and its highly popular challenge of non-enforcement by the IRS of its ban on church electioneering.

FFRF works with a number of litigation attorneys, including some pro bono, with staff attorneys providing help.

Congratulations to FFRF's diligent and committed staff attorneys **Rebecca Markert**, **Patrick Elliott**, **Andrew Seidel**, outgoing attorney **Stephanie Schmitt** and new intake attorney **Liz Cavell**. Also deserving of much credit are FFRF's 2012 law clerks: **Ken Earl**, **Susan Lund**, **Dustin Clark**, **Maddy Ziegler**, **JJ Rolling**, **Ben Zich**, and undergraduate volunteer interns **Svein Hoexter**, **Brendan Moriarity** and **Calli Miller**.

Your membership and additional donations designated for the Legal Fund help pay for this substantial litigation and the work of staff attorneys. Special thanks to Board Member **Lester Goldstein**, who created an internship endowment with the help of other FFRF members setting aside a minimum of \$5,000 a year to help pay for internships.

*Many thanks to Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert for her very thorough legal report which provided the details for this article.*

## Meet a Friendly Member

### Making math and atheism friendly



**Name:** Hemant Mehta.

**Where I live:** Naperville, Ill.

**Where and when I was born:** Just outside of Chicago, 1983.

**Education:** University of Illinois-Chicago, 2004, double major in math/biology; DePaul University, 2010, master's in math education; national board-certified teacher, 2012.

**Occupation:** High school math teacher.

**How I got where I am today:** After leaving medical school in order to become a teacher, I had some free time and began working closely with the Secular Student Alliance and also started my website, *FriendlyAtheist.com*. Both of those experiences have helped me develop into an activist, and I hope to keep improving on that in a variety of ways!

**Where I'm headed:** Thankfully, not downward.

**Person in history I admire:** It's always inspiring to hear about those who challenge the status quo to make things better for various minority groups. I've been fortunate to meet a number of atheists who have done sort of consciousness-raising in our own movement.

**A quotation I like:** "If you want to get something done, ask a busy person."

**These are a few of my favorite things:** My students, great books, crossword puzzles, "The Daily Show," Twitter.

**These are not:** People whose sole purpose in life is to put other people down.

**My doubts about religion started:** When I started high school. It turned out my parents' religion (Jainism) couldn't withstand tougher scrutiny.

**Instead of "thank God" or "God bless you," I say:** Gesundheit.

**Why I'm a freethinker:** It's empowering when you know the truth about something the majority of the country is completely wrong about.

**Ways I promote freethought:** I blog at *FriendlyAtheist.com* to spread news and stories about atheism. I am a board member for the Foundation Beyond Belief and work to encourage other atheists to give money to secular charities.

I serve on the Advisory Board of the Secular Student Alliance because they focus on helping young atheists. To promote my ideas, I've written a few books, the most recent of which is called *The Young Atheist's Survival Guide*.



### FFRF 'Spotlight' airs thousands of times on public TV

The Freedom From Religion Foundation's inaugural feature production for use as educational filler on public television affiliates aired more than 1,430 times over three months in late 2012. This is the first such segment featuring discussion of freethought, atheism and focusing on the specific dangers of mixing state and church.

The four-minute "Spotlight on Freethought and the First Amendment" featured interviews with FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor. The longer version, over five minutes, included a bonus interview with "secularity" expert, sociologist and author Phil Zuckerman, professor at Pitzer University, Claremont, Calif. Local public TV affiliates were given the option to use either spot, or both, as fillers.

For the first time in the history of Spotlight Productions, more affiliates ran the longer version, "a compliment to Phil Zuckerman," says Gaylor. The longer version aired 731 times in 136 station airings. The short version aired

699 times with 142 station airings.

The two shows each reached more than 3.6 million public TV viewers, according to the Nielsen ratings. Markets airing one or both of the spots included high population airings such as New York City and Los Angeles, as well as a diversity of smaller markets nationwide. In the Salt Lake City area, for instance, served by five area public TV affiliates including in Provo, FFRF's spots ran 62 times last fall.

The broadcasts are audited by Nielsen only for the first 3 months after the show is released. But FFRF's two "Spotlights" may continue to air for years as filler.

View the videos at FFRF's YouTube Channel. The shorter "abridged" version is at [bit.ly/WmTCP2](http://bit.ly/WmTCP2).

The longer "TV" version with Zuckerman is at [bit.ly/P8TZfT](http://bit.ly/P8TZfT).

A "bonus track" version of nearly seven minutes, which includes additional footage with Dan Barker, is prominently featured at FFRF's website, [ffrf.org](http://ffrf.org) and at [bit.ly/V7kan5](http://bit.ly/V7kan5).

## FFRF welcomes 33 'Lifers,' 2 'After-Lifers'

The Freedom From Religion Foundation gratefully announces two new "After-Life" Members: Justin Hinckley and Susie J. York.

FFRF is also delighted to welcome 33 new Lifetime Members joining at year's end or to start the New Year on a freethinking note: Kenneth Averill, Georgia Bazemore, Ph.D. (gift from Daniel and Margaret Carper), Larry Brown, Dr. Kris Byron, David Civic, Robert Collins, Matthew C. Cooper, Geoffrey Dietz, Ken Gelinias, T. Augusta Gordon, William Gray, Mark Hall, Glenn Hardie, Jeffrey W. Herrmann, Kenneth and Benjamin Huey, Margi Jones, Dan and Kelle Lloyd, Trigg Louthen, James Moniz, R.C. Nemer, Joanne Omang, Gary Payne, Erik and Deb Raettig, Isaac Schlueter, A. Joanne Siegla, Jim Stolz, Harry Sutton, R. Kelly Wagner and Christopher Will. One new "Lifer" preferred not to be announced by name.

U.S. states and Canadian provinces represented are Arizona, British Columbia, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, New

Hampshire, New York, Nevada, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Washington, Washington, D.C. and Wisconsin.

Individual Lifetime Members are \$1,000 designated by the donor as a membership or renewal, go into a "rainy day" endowment and mean never another renewal notice for the kind donor! The slightly tongue-in-cheek \$5,000 "After-Life" category of membership (which can be chosen in addition to or in lieu of a Lifetime Membership) is for those who want their donation to "live after."

Warmest thanks to Susie, Justin, Christopher, R. Kelly, Harry, Jim, A. Joanne, Isaac, Deb and Erick, Gary, Joanne, R.C. James, Trigg, Kelle and Dan, Margi, Benjamin and Kenneth, Jeffrey, Glenn, Mark, William, T. Augusta, Ken, Geoffrey, Matthew, Robert, David, Kris, Larry, Margaret and Daniel, Kenneth and "anonymous"!

Dues and donations to FFRF are deductible for income tax purposes to the fullest extent of the law.

## Psalm 23:4 piques most online interest

According to a Jan. 3 story in *The Christian Post*, out of nearly 7 million visits last year to King James Bible Online, the most-viewed bible verse was Psalm 23:4 — "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

No. 2 was Philippians 4:13 — "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Coming in third was the New Testament's John 3:16 — "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The rest of the top 10:

4. Genesis 1:1 — "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."

5. 1 Corinthians 13:11 — "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things."

6. 2 Chronicles 7:14 — "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and

will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

7. Jeremiah 29:11 — "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

8. Ephesians 6:12 — "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

9. 2 Timothy 1:7 — "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

10. Genesis 1:2 — "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

*Editor's note:* The website *shipoffools.com*, which pokes fun at Christianity, asked readers in 2009 to submit their favorite "worst" bible verses in a project called Chapter & Worse.

No. 1: St. Paul's advice in 1 Timothy 2:12, in which he says: "But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence."

# Freethinking dad explains atheism to fourth-graders

By Ben Kauffeld

Imagine standing in front of your child's elementary school classroom and explaining to 30 kids why you don't believe in God, why you don't pray and why you don't think there's a heaven.

Thinking back on my own public schooling, in an environment where everyone was assumed to be a believer (typically a Christian believer) and with our almost universal hesitancy to discuss religion so as not to offend someone else, it's pretty hard to imagine doing this. It's what I did, though, as a guest speaker in my son's fourth-grade class in Accra, Ghana.

I've been working in Ghana for a couple of years. I'm stationed here with my family. Generally, one can say that Ghana is an overwhelmingly religious country (predominantly Christian, but with a Muslim minority).

Here, as in many parts of Africa, religious faith is entwined in nearly every aspect of life and society. People commonly greet you with "God bless you," and it's very common to see shops with names like "God's Grace Motor Repair" and "Blood of Christ Hair Salon." I'm not kidding — you can see a hundred signs like this every day.

As you can imagine, for an atheist and freethinker, it can sometimes be an awkward environment. Since my job requires me to work closely with government and private sector organization leaders in an often high-level capacity, I generally keep my opinions on faith and religiosity like cards held close to the chest.

So when I received a request to speak at my child's school about atheism, my first thoughts were cautionary about some kind of backlash. I decided though that I owed it to my son to stand up and speak boldly about my



**Ben Kauffeld in Ghana. The online CIA World Factbook breaks down that nation's religiosity like this: Christian 68.8% (Pentecostal/Charismatic 24.1%, Protestant 18.6%, Catholic 15.1%, other 11%), Muslim 15.9%, traditional 8.5%, none 6.1%, other 0.7% (2000 census).**

own "beliefs."

My son attends a private international school in Accra. It has about 1,000 students in K-12 who hail from more than 30 countries. Most of the parents are expatriate diplomats, business leaders and wealthier "elite" Ghanaians. The school does not have a religious orientation, and my wife and I have been very pleased with how the school focuses on the holistic development of the individual.

The fourth-grade class had been studying what they call a "unit of inquiry" about human culture and beliefs. They have examined traditions and customs of various cultures, often using specific examples from the diversity of the students' homes.

Most recently, the class started examining religion — looking at belief systems, "sacred" texts and places of worship. Almost unbelievably to me,

## One girl gasped in shock when I said that I don't pray.

the school organized a series of field trips that took the kids to a Catholic church, an Islamic mosque, a Mormon temple and a Hindu temple. They had tours and presentations by the leaders.

It made me wonder how much people back in the U.S. might flip out if a teacher suggested such a comparative learning experience for their children. Anyway, my son (who has been raised in the open, freethinking, if perhaps a bit anti-religious environment of our home) thoroughly enjoyed the visits. I took a bit of humor out of his reaction that the best part was seeing giant, painted statues of Ganesha, the elephant-headed Hindu god.

It seemed fantastic to me that my son's open-minded teacher was willing to give equal time to a nonreligious viewpoint. He was aware from my son's unhesitant reportage about our family's views, so the teacher invited me to be a guest speaker on atheism one afternoon.

### Which is atheists' god?

I was somewhat uncertain about what to say. This was the first time that I would speak publicly about my non-belief. Knowing how impressionable (and perhaps how easily offended) children this age are, I felt I needed to tread carefully so as not to make an unintended attack on any child's faith.

I did a bit of research, turning to the Internet for simple definitions and resources about explaining atheism to kids. I found some sites and videos about freethinking parenting, but I think this is an area that we as nonbelievers could develop further.

I spoke first in general terms about whether or not atheism is a religion. For some kids, that it's *not* was a hard concept to take on. Several asked up until the end of my presentation, "Now, which god do atheists believe in?"

Others were "with" the concept quickly though, and I had some expected suggestions from the kids when I asked, "What are some reasons why people choose not to believe in a god or a religion?"

One boy enthusiastically ventured that there are many gods out there and someone might not know which one is "right." A girl said that people may have never seen a god in front of them. I agreed with the kids about these ideas and also added a bit on philosophical arguments, though perhaps not surprisingly this aspect didn't take too much hold with a young crowd.

Then I turned to the things that atheists do "believe" in, with a caveat that there isn't a universal view. I talked a bit about science and its ability to empower people to understand the mysteries of the universe around them on their own, without some godly explanation.

I talked about humans having rational minds and the ability to know what is wrong and right and to treat people kindly and with respect — all without needing a religion to point the way.

The most rewarding part perhaps were the 20 or so enthusiastic questions that the kids raised, along with their expectant hands. They asked about my upbringing, if we go to church, if I pray to anyone, what I think about heaven and people who have died (whew, that's a touchy one with kids you don't know!) and also a bit about the history of atheism.

One girl gasped in shock when I said that I don't pray because I don't think there is anyone to pray to. Some of the kids were also wide-eyed when I said that only a short while ago in Europe and America, and to this day in some areas, people can be attacked or murdered for saying they don't believe in God or the prevailing religion.

When a child asked about my son's belief, I was more hesitant, feeling concerned that the welcoming openness of this dialogue might have later repercussions for him from students with less-open minds. I told his classmates that I wanted my son to have an open and exploring mind and to make decisions for himself about what he believes or chooses not to believe. I hope that religion-focused bullying is not something he has to contend with.

At the end, the class clapped and thanked me, and the teacher expressed how great it was to have this exposure to atheism. I'm sure the kids probably moved right on to recess and sports and (hopefully) some studies or homework, but I do hope they took away a bit more enlightened and accepting view of nonbelievers and atheism.

I hope also that my son is encouraged by my own boldness to openly talk about these ideas among others, and that he is strengthened in finding his own understanding and path through nonbelief or belief, as he may choose in the days and years ahead.

*FFRF member Ben Kauffeld is a Foreign Service officer with more than 20 years of experience in international development and humanitarian assistance projects.*

## They Said What?

You worry about the goings-on in Wisconsin, and we will pray for you and that God will give you some sense.

**Commissioner Tucker Dorsey, Baldwin County, Ala., responding to FFRF's letter about prayers at commission meetings**

*AL.com 12-14-12*

Laws, the only redoubt of secularism, will not suffice. Let us all return to our places of worship and pray for help. Above all, let us pray for our children.

**Texas Gov. Rick Perry, statement on President Obama's executive actions**

*governor.tx.us, 1-16-13*

A student came up to me at a graduation and said not only did he get a scholarship to college but that the course changed his life. Principals talk about how students carrying their bibles down the hall have improved hall behavior to a point that teachers as hall monitors are no longer necessary.

**Phil Murphy, public school board member in Ozark, Ala., contending that a bible as literature course would reduce school shootings**

*Dothan Eagle, 1-8-12*

It's not the separation of church and state — which, by the way, is NOT in any of our federal papers — that wor-

ries these people. It's the life-changing power of Christianity and the light of truth it shines on the sins of the world, exposing the lies being propagated by the media, the politicians and the universities of this nation.

**Column by country singer Charlie Daniels, "There Ain't No 'X' in Christmas"**

*CNS News, 12-19-12*

There's one thing we know that works, and it's prayer.

**John Lee, Muncie, Ind., part of a Christian group which was let in to pray in every Muncie Community Schools**

*Belfast Telegraph, 1-13-13*

## Overheard

On their bare backs, the women had painted "In Gay We Trust" and "Shut Up."

**News story about four women who went topless in St. Peter's Square during an appearance by Pope Benedict, who "appeared not to have been disturbed"**

*Belfast Telegraph, 1-13-13*

An atheist is no more necessarily moral or better than a Christian or Muslim. The difference is an atheist isn't tied to an ignorant, dated and immoral

**building during winter break**

*Star Press, 1-3-13*

How often do we see girls and mature women going around scantily dressed and in provocative clothes? They provoke the worst instincts, which end in violence or sexual abuse. They should search their consciences and ask: Did we bring this on ourselves?

**Fr. Piero Corsi, pastor of the Catholic parish of San Terenzo, Italy, part of a Christmas message posted on the door of the church**

*TheJournal.ie, 12-27-12*

religious text and therefore doesn't need to make excuses for such. An atheist doesn't claim that anyone who doesn't believe like they do will be punished forever. An atheist doesn't abandon reason for convenience or fear of death. An atheist doesn't dismiss science for childish myths. An atheist takes the universe as it is without magic.

**James Kirk Wall, Wheaton, Ill., "Why be an atheist?"**

*ChicagoNow, 1-7-13*

## Judge rules FFRF's commandments case may proceed

U.S. District Judge Terrence McVerry ruled Jan. 22 that FFRF's challenge to a Ten Commandments monument in front of a Pennsylvania high school will go forward. McVerry rejected a motion to dismiss by the New Kensington-Arnold School District and issued an order that directs the district to file an answer to the plaintiffs' complaint.

FFRF and two families filed suit in September 2012 against the school dis-

trict over the prominent placement of a Ten Commandments monument at Valley High School. The district sought to dismiss the case by claiming that it had been "foreclosed" by the Supreme Court's *Van Orden v. Perry* decision in 2005, which allowed a similar monument on the Texas Capitol grounds to stand.

FFRF's brief argued that there are significant factual and legal distinc-

tions between the cases, most notably, that the Supreme Court has ruled against Ten Commandments displays in the school context.

McVerry's opinion stated that the First Amendment claim "has sufficient merit under our current jurisprudence." He noted that at this preliminary stage, "there is no meaningful evidence to support the School District's attack on the merits of Plaintiffs' case

and thus the 'foreclosure' argument is unavailing at this time."

The court issued an order in December that allowed three of the plaintiffs to proceed using pseudonyms, finding that there was a substantial public interest in protecting them from retribution from upset members of the community. The court will hold a scheduling conference in February.

## Honorable mentions: High school essay contest

*The students all received \$250 awards. Special thanks to John Moe and Dean and Dorea Schramm for underwriting.*

### Mission for humanity



By Cheyenne Tessier

My knees were sore. I got down and prayed for wind, joining hands with dirty-faced working men and the long-skirted women. And the wind came.

It was a miracle, I convinced myself, a missionary in a hell-stricken place, the daughter of two devout Christians. Yes, I was blessed.

We were told not to give our food to the starving children because it would start a riot, so we gave them bibles, telling them this is the right way. Do not live with the devils of your ancestors, children. We played and danced.

Then we sat on the air-conditioned bus and ate sandwiches and drank soda, but the children could not drink their bibles. Soon the girls would turn to prostitution to feed themselves, but God was with them, so we gave them bibles as if we offered salvation to a system that was, in the first place, polluted by missionaries.

We didn't give them work, only scripture. We didn't heal their water supply, only offered a prayer for their souls. And then we came home, our work done. I hung my Haitian flag above my bed. Many nights I stared at that flag, praising myself as a hero. But doubt is the greatest of infections, and soon I was overcome with questions.

I attended church less and less. I could not think about the evil I had done by starving a community for some faraway god, who didn't laugh or learn or die of malnourishment.

If there were no heaven and no hell and no God, I wonder if we would share our food and water and shelter instead of our "wisdom." I wonder if all the love, focused away from the skies and onto humanity, would be enough to eliminate hunger and educate every child to care for our Earth instead of our unreachable skies.

My proudest moment as a freethinker was inviting my former congregation to a benefit I held, in the name of humanity, after the 2010 Haiti earthquake. I proved that it does not take a zealot or a missionary to change the world, but as Margaret Mead said, "It takes a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens."

That night, I gave back to Haiti the sandwiches I had stolen from it.

When I am asked, "Are you doing it with a church?" I quietly reply, "No. I am on a mission, but I am not a missionary."

*Cheyenne Tessier, 18, Hudson, N.H., is enrolled at The George Washington University in Washington, D.C., to study international affairs and Arabic.*

### Light bulb in the pews



By Zach Gowan

I was raised by my mom, who never exposed me to a particularly religious environment. As a result, I never really found myself subscribing to any religion. I never thought about the fact

that I wasn't religious. Put simply, I just wasn't. However, around seventh and eighth grade, certain events occurred that brought my attention to religion and its effects in society.

My dad came back into my life in middle school. He and I were never able to form a relationship before this time. He had gotten himself in order and met a woman whom he soon married. As a result, I would go down to their house and visit every other weekend.

My dad had gotten back into going to church by this point. His wife and her children were religious as well, so all of them went to church. They would bring me along. I didn't really have a choice. They just made me go. If I ever voiced the fact that I didn't want to go, I would risk hearing a lecture about how I'd go to Hell if I didn't participate in their religion. This continued throughout middle school.

My previously religiously apathetic self was dissipating. Now that I was regularly being exposed to religion, I was starting to form opinions of it. And honestly, I didn't like it. I completely disagreed with all the things I would hear in the sermons. I couldn't stand the hate that the preachers would spout about nonbelievers, homosexuals, and so on. On the whole, I just couldn't understand why people would buy into this stuff.

Eventually, in eighth grade, a particular sermon at church caused my logical faculties to finally kick in (they would improve and enhance over the following years, but this was when reason truly started to play a role in my opinion of religion). It was a sermon about homosexuality and how it's supposedly a sin. The preacher used an analogy to demonstrate the point. It

went a little something like this: You can't take an electrical plug and plug it into another one. It has to be plugged into a socket. Similarly, a socket can't receive another socket. It has to receive a plug. Therefore, homosexuality is wrong. Obviously, the plug represents the male reproductive organ, and the socket represents the female reproductive organ. The "logic" here was that if putting a plug into a plug or a socket into a socket is wrong, then the same principle must apply to humans. I instantly saw how fallacious and absurd this was. To use this analogy, you have to assume that the only thing that matters in a relationship is sex, which is an odd assumption for a typically anti-sex group of people to make.

But the absurdity of the argument isn't what bothered me. The primitive and old-fashioned conclusion (that homosexuals are bad) isn't what bothered me. It was the fact that everyone in the room blindly bought into the blatantly illogical argument. No one gave it a second thought. They just accepted it because the preacher said it.

This moment was a critical one for me. I would consider myself to have been a budding freethinker at the time, as I was forming my own opinion of religion and its teachings through reason, even if I was just starting out. Looking back on that day, I'm proud of my refusal to accept the preacher's words at face value. I think religion has its place in society, but I do not like its potential to brainwash people. Fortunately, I was able to escape that brainwashing and from that point on, I can think for myself.

*Zach Gowan, 17, was born in Philadelphia and is attending the University of South Carolina in Spartanburg to major in English.*

## Madison committee rejects funding of religious 'pregnancy center'

A city committee in Madison, Wis., voted Jan. 17 against helping finance housing owned by CareNet Pregnancy Center of Dane County, an evangelical anti-abortion group that ministers to pregnant women.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote to the Madison Community Development Block Grant Committee on



Patrick Elliott

Jan. 17, to oppose the government financing, which would extend \$550,000 in low-interest loans to CareNet for a new 36-unit apartment building.

Elliott wrote, "We are very concerned that these funding grants will ultimately be used to subsidize an evangelical Christian and anti-abortion ministry and will not further the purposes of the designated funds."

The letter noted that CareNet's application did not disclose the group's purpose, which is "to share the love and truth of Jesus Christ in both word

and deed."

FFRF's letter highlighted CareNet's religious programming and argued that any secular objectives could not be separated from evangelical Christian programming.

The committee voted 5-2 against funding the project. City staff had initially recommended committee approval.

Even if the financing had been approved, it was unclear how CareNet would abide by nondiscrimination provisions required for city contracts.



## FFRF Legal Victories

### Michigan letter results in prompt solution

After an early childhood program assistant sent home an inappropriate religious gift with students, the Monroe County (Mich.) Intermediate School District is ensuring that school policy will be followed by the assistant and other staff in the future.

The faculty member works with children as young as 4, some of whom are disabled, and distributed a gift of Play-Doh to children, along with a letter containing religious references and urging people to pray.

The letter was titled "CHRISTmas is Jesus's Birthday" and opened, "So for the Jesus gift you could be like this play dough, and let Jesus mold & shape Your Life so Jesus Can use you for His Glory!" The letter encouraged parents to find a church that teaches about Jesus.

FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote Jan. 7 to Superintendent Randy Monday about the illegality of proselytizing to children in public school. She noted it was irrelevant that the assistant included the disclaimer "this is my belief & my gift & is not promoted by the school in any way."

Assistant Superintendent Elizabeth Taylor replied the next day to say that the employee was told about the inappropriateness of her actions and her violation of school policy that states teachers or supervisors must approve items sent home with students.

Parents were also notified that the staff member had violated school policy.

### Gideons groups out after FFRF complaints

Gideons International representatives will no longer be allowed in Grant County Schools, Williamstown, Ky., to distribute bibles as a result of a complaint from FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert. A concerned parent contacted FFRF after her child was taken out of class to receive a bible.

Markert pointed out that by allowing Gideons to distribute bibles, the district was "impermissibly endorsing religion by placing its 'stamp of approval' on the religious messages contained in the bible."

Superintendent Ron Livingood responded Nov. 30 and said that he had met with district principals and instructed them not to permit Gideons in schools or on school property.

Markert sent a similar letter Nov. 19 to Robertson County Director of Schools Daniel Whitlow in Springfield, Tenn., responding to a distressed parent whose child was ostracized for not taking a Gideon bible.

Whitlow responded Jan. 8 that all administrators had been notified that bible distribution was against district policies.

### Georgia university ends staff prayer

North Georgia College & State University, Dahlonega, Ga., will no longer be including prayers at university-sponsored events after receiving an FFRF letter of complaint last October. The school is one of six senior military colleges in the U.S.

A concerned student alerted FFRF that at an event that was mandatory for some students, faculty members led attendees in several Christian prayers. Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote to President Bonita Jacobs: "Including prayer at events at which attendance is mandatory is coercive, embarrassing, and beyond the scope of our public university system."

Julia Anderson, state senior assistant attorney general, responded Dec. 13 that Jacobs would "remind [all faculty and staff] that prayers shall not be included in university-sponsored events."

### FFRF stills Wisconsin student bell-ringers

FFRF was able to intervene before students at the Medford (Wis.) Area Middle School were sent to ring bells to raise money for the Salvation Army.

The Salvation Army's stated mission is "to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination." It has 11 Christian "articles of faith" and is blatantly discriminatory to gay people.

After a concerned parent contacted FFRF, Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent District Administrator Pat Sullivan a letter Dec. 13 pointing out that "while it is laudable for a public school to encourage young students to become active and involved in their community," the Salvation Army is "an overtly Christian organization."

Elliott asked Sullivan to inform staff "that they may not continue with their plans to solicit funds for the Salvation Army during the school day."

Sullivan responded Dec. 17 that the school was no longer planning to send students to ring bells.

### FFRF tackles coaches' prayers in Ohio

Coaches at Spencerville High School in Ohio will no longer pray with their students after Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert's Nov. 6 letter to Superintendent Joel Hatfield, informing him that "a public school coach's participation in a team's prayer circle is illegal and inappropriate."

Hatfield responded Dec. 17: "As superintendent, I have informed our coaches that they are to no longer lead their athletes in prayer."

### School changes policy after FFRF complaint

The Cobleskill-Richmondville Central School District in New York banned groups from using school facilities for religious worship after FFRF urged it to adopt a revised policy.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor sent a Dec. 3 letter informing the school board that prohibiting the use of school buildings for worship was "in line with current law [as applied in the 2nd Circuit] and is the best policy option."

Gaylor detailed how start-up churches often take advantage of low rental fees to "get a foot in the door" while collecting church donations on public property, which amounts to "what many of us consider taxpayer subsidy of congregations."

A church that had been using school



facilities retained the American Center for Law & Justice, a Religious Right legal group founded by Pat Robertson, to object to the proposed changes. Despite that opposition, the board amended its policies Dec. 17, adding "Gatherings for the purpose of holding religious worship services" to its list of prohibited uses of school facilities.

### FFRF letter gets Iowa park cross removed

A house inside George Wyth State Park near Waterloo, Iowa, will no longer include a display of a lighted Latin cross.

A local complainant reported to FFRF that a large cross was affixed to the garage of a park ranger's home owned by the state in the park. The cross was highly visible at night from the highway and within the park.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert wrote Dec. 14 to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources: "While it is appropriate for the park ranger to display personal religious items inside his home, it crosses the line when he chooses to display Christian symbols on the exterior of his home," Markert said.

Markert received a phone call Dec. 19 from the DNR that the ranger had been directed to remove the cross.

### School replaces hymns with secular songs

Main Street K-3 School in Shelbyville, Ill., removed two Christian hymns from its holiday concert after receiving an FFRF letter. A concerned parent contacted FFRF after learning her child's concert included "Mary Had a Baby" and "Go, Tell it on the Mountain."

In a Dec. 17 letter to Superintendent Denise Bence, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor said it's "wholly inappropriate for public schools to perform songs of Christian worship in a public school setting."

Bence responded Dec. 21 that the songs would be taken out of the program and replaced with secular holiday music.

### FFRF stops church's free school 'lunch'

Alma (Mich.) Public Schools will now require a church using its facilities to pay a rental fee and remove religious items left scattered around a district school.

The district let Alma Vineyard

Church hold Sunday services and frequent events at Republic Alternative High School. The church was allowed to use the kitchen, gym, stage and extra rooms. It also had free use of building supplies and custodial services and was allowed to store religious items, including an 8-foot wooden cross that was left on display in the cafeteria.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a letter Oct. 19 to Superintendent Sonia Lark, pointing out that the religious symbols left in the school demonstrated "district preference for religion over nonreligion, and Christianity over other religions."

The school district responded Oct. 23 that the cross and other religious items were removed or covered. The district further informed FFRF on Jan. 3 that the church would now have to pay for custodial services and rental of space.

### 3 boards ditch prayer after FFRF letters

Three governmental bodies, two in California and one in Georgia, have halted meeting prayers after receiving letters from FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.

Seidel wrote the Plumas County Board of Supervisors, Quincy, Calif., in August and sent several follow-ups before receiving a reply from the county's counsel Jan. 16 that the board voted Jan. 15 to stop the practice. "[T]he invocation will be removed from the agenda, and the county will not solicit invocation speakers."

The city of Santa Clara, Calif., which previously had sectarian Christian prayers and excluded a Hindu officiant, has abandoned its prayers for a "values statement" after getting a November letter from Seidel.

The language is pious but doesn't overtly address a supernatural being: "As we gather, we humbly seek blessings upon this meeting. May we act with strength, courage and the will to perform our obligations and duties to our people with justice to all. Let us seek wisdom so that we may act in the best interests of our people, our neighbors and our country. All this we ask so we may serve our community with love and grace, putting their needs before all."

The city of Forest Park, Ga., received an FFRF letter in September and several follow-ups before City Manager John Parker responded curtly Jan. 10:

"The city of Forest Park no longer participates in prayer during meetings of the City Council."

## The greatest story ever sold

# Debunking the Christian nation myth

By Andrew Seidel

Andrew Seidel, FFRF staff attorney, gave this speech accompanied by PowerPoint (edited here for print) in October at FFRF's 35th annual convention on Oct. 13, 2012 in Portland, Ore.

I'd like to thank Dan and Annie Laurie for asking me to speak here today. It's quite an honor to share the stage with such illustrious speakers. I'd also like to take a moment to thank all the FFRF members out there. Your generosity and support make my job possible, and I absolutely love my job.

Today I want to discuss two things: One, the idea that we're founded as a Christian nation. When you hear that argument, you may debunk it using, say, the Treaty of Tripoli, which most of you are probably familiar with, which says we're not founded in any sense on the Christian religion. Or maybe you cite the First Amendment or the fact that religious oaths are constitutionally prohibited or that the Constitution is entirely godless.

When you use those facts to refute their first argument, your opponent will fall back on the second argument, which is that we're founded on Judeo-Christian principles. Typically, you'll hear three arguments as to why we are founded as a Christian nation: "In God We Trust" or "One nation under God" (these silly little phrases always seem to come up), the Declaration of Independence made us a Christian nation, and the claim that the founders were all Christian.

You obviously know that "In God We Trust" and "One nation under God" are not from the founding era. The former first appeared on one coin in 1863 and was required on currency only in 1956 and the latter was added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954.

The timing of these late additions is telling. Lincoln had declared martial law in 1863, the year the battle of Gettysburg was fought. Habeas corpus was suspended in 1861 for the first time in U.S. history. Brothers were killing brothers, and the country was literally tearing itself apart. It's at this "propitious" time that Christian nationalists — a phrase I'm going to use to describe anybody who claims that we're a Christian nation — push their religion on us all.

When Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase ordered James Pollock, U.S. Mint director, to make the change on one coin, he wrote: "We claim to be a Christian Nation. . . . The time for this or the introduction of a similar motto is propitious. 'Tis an hour of National peril and danger, an hour when man's strength is weakness, when our strength and our nation's salvation must be in the God of Battles."

The same thing happened in the 1950s during the height of McCarthyism and the "Red scare," marked by witch hunts for nonbelievers and communists, blacklists, loyalty oaths and arrests. Chief Justice Earl Warren at the time said that if the Bill of Rights were put to a vote it would lose.



Photo: Andy Ngo

That religion is divisive is probably not a controversial claim to make here.

chose to erect the wall of separation between church and state. You've all probably heard the quip that if we're a Christian nation, you might as well call us a white nation. That's a very effective argument to make. The idea that they were all Christian and therefore founded us as a Christian nation is absolute nonsense.

When I set out to debunk the Christian nationalist fallback argument, it took me a while to discover what a Judeo-Christian principle is. It turns out the best answer comes from Harry Truman, president during McCarthy's rise to fame. Known for being a plain speaker, he occasionally used vulgarity.

Arguably, the most vulgar thing he ever said was, "The fundamental basis for all government is in the bible. It started with Moses on the mountain." He then mentions the New Testament and the Ten Commandments.

Let's compare the Judeo-Christian principles in the bible and the Ten Commandments to our nation's founding principles.

### The commandments

First, which commandments? There are four different sets of Ten Commandments in the bible. The first set is given to Moses on the mountain. He comes down the mountain and finds his followers worshipping a golden calf. They are breaking one of the commandments, *a commandment they don't know about yet*. His response is to smash the commandments on the ground in anger and slaughter 3,000 of his friends, brothers and neighbors. Mark that term for later — friends, brothers and neighbors.

God orders Moses to make a new set and promises to sweep all of the current residents off the land in favor of the Israelites. So the second set is sealed with the promise of genocide, and in that set, God lays claim to all the firstborn of Israel. The third set is substantially similar to the first, and the fourth set is just a list of people who are cursed.

Any given bible cannot agree on which 10 are *the* 10. Actually, different religious traditions do not agree on how the commandments should be numbered or translated either. Such discrepancies may seem like small differences, but when you couple unshakable certainty with a claim to hold the ultimate truth, everything, no matter how small, matters. There is no such thing as a small religious difference.

Which set? I'm going to use the first set, the one that people are most familiar with because of Charlton Heston. We'll use the Protestant version.

**First Commandment:** "I am the Lord your God, you shall have no other gods before me." This obviously conflicts

The second thing to note about these changes is their effect. That religion is divisive is probably not a controversial claim to make here. The founders were well aware of this. James Madison in the "Federalist Papers, Number Ten" wrote that the zeal of different opinions concerning religion has divided humankind into parties and enflamed mutual animosity. This is one of the reasons the founders wanted to keep religion out of government. The original motto was "E pluribus unum" (from many, one). The Christian nationalists erased that unifying theme and put their divisive, religious theme in its place.

The same thing happened with the pledge. It's even more striking because they actually divided the indivisible and then injected religion.

### Natural law

When discussing the Declaration of Independence, the Religious Right typically focuses on four phrases from it: "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God," "their Creator," "the Supreme Judge of the world" and "Divine Providence." Notice that not a single one of these is Christian. There's no mention of Jesus or Yahweh or the God of Abraham.

There are two competing views on natural law. The first is that laws or rights are given to us by a divine being. The second is that we have rights because we're human.

We know which one of these Thomas Jefferson was talking about because he wrote about natural law in several other places. A great quote from his opinion of the French treaties: "Questions of the natural right are triable by their conformity with the moral sense and reason of man. Those who write treatises on natural law can only declare what their own moral sense and reason dictate."

Human rights — natural law — are discoverable by reason. This is most certainly not a divine idea of natural law. Jefferson also said in 1774 that "a free people claim their rights" — they are "not a gift of the chief magistrate." I think that would also include they are not a gift from God. People have to assert those rights.

Moreover, the Declaration of Independence has two principles that Judeo-Christianity is directly opposed to: When you have a tyrannical government, it's a "duty" and a "right" to throw off that government; and it explicitly states that governments are instituted by the people, not by the magistrate, not by the king. The bible directly contradicts these two ideas.

The Book of Romans in the New Testament says, "There is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God." The Old Testament Book of Daniel says basically the same thing: "The Most High has sovereignty over the reign of mortals and gives it to who He will."

These principles behind Judeo-Christianity are fundamentally in conflict with the principles that the Declaration of Independence lays out.

### Founders' faith

George Washington died in 1799. The next year, Mason Weems, a parson, wrote a book about him, a book in which we get the myths about the cherry tree and about Washington praying in the snow at Valley Forge. There's no evidence to suggest either happened, and the prayer story didn't actually come out in Weems' book until something like the 34th edition.

These claims are reminiscent of Mormons posthumously baptizing people — claiming that the founders were all Christian and therefore we're a Christian nation. It's also incredibly rude. These men and women sacrificed an awful lot — lives, blood, treasure — and it just ignores that and attributes to God this monumental achievement.

More importantly, what the founders thought personally about God or Jesus is irrelevant to the nation itself. Religion does not claim ownership over other ideas generated by a mind. For instance, there's no such thing as Jewish blue jeans. We just call them blue jeans, even though they were invented by Levi Strauss. Same thing with vaccines. They're not Jewish vaccines, they're just vaccines. Algebra is just algebra, not Muslim math.

Whatever the founders chose to do in their private lives, publicly they



with the First Amendment's guarantee of free exercise of religion, but it also conflicts with Article VI of the Constitution. The Constitution specifically says that it, not God, is the supreme law of the land.

This commandment conflicts with the constitutional Supremacy Clause and the First Amendment. So it did not have an influence because it conflicts.

**Second Commandment:** "You shall not make for yourself an idol." But read the unabridged commandment, which continues, "for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God punishing the children for the iniquity of the parents until the third or fourth generation." This conflicts with the First Amendment again. You can make as many idols as you want, but the Constitution also directly prohibits punishing children for their parents' crimes. Article III: "No attainder of treason shall work a corruption of blood." That means if you are guilty of treason, only you will receive punishment, not your children, and certainly not your grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

This also conflicts with our principle of justice that only the guilty are punished.

**Third Commandment:** "Thou shall not take the name of thy Lord thy God in vain." I claim that this is void for vagueness. Under the 14th Amendment, laws have to be simple enough for people to understand them, so that they know what action is being prohibited.

I've asked this of a number of people and get different answers. The best I've heard is that it prevents people from swearing an oath and then violating that oath. It fails to give adequate guidance. Quite obviously, this also runs afoul of freedom of speech.

**Fourth Commandment:** "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy." Again, read the whole commandment: "You shall do no work neither shall your male or female slave. In six days the Lord made the heaven and earth and sea and all that is in them."

First of all, we're supposed to be celebrating because a God who is all-powerful took six days to make the earth and on the seventh day he had to rest? I call this celebrating lazy omnipotence.

Most importantly, this commandment sanctions slavery. We do have to concede the bible has had a severe influence on the history of slavery. Every original justification for continuing the practice came from the bible. We can concede that to the Christian nationalists. They are welcome to this shameful influence.

**Fifth Commandment:** "Honor thy father and mother." I don't really like this commandment, not because I don't want to honor my mother and father, but I think it should be simply to honor people. This really didn't have

an effect or influence on our nation's principles, unless somebody can correct me later.

## Six through nine

I'm going to group these next few together and come back to adultery at the end: "You shall not kill; don't steal; and don't bear false witness against your neighbor."

These commandments are not Judeo-Christian at all. They are universal principles that apply to absolutely everyone. All successful societies have discovered them.

Secondly, the Judeo-Christian interpretation is actually less moral because it is not universally applied, but applied only to one's "neighbor."

In the original Hebrew translations, there are no punctuation marks, no paragraph breaks, no line breaks. These commandments could be read so that "against your neighbor" applies to all the preceding commandments starting with "you shall not murder."

So it could mean, you shall not murder your neighbor, you shall not steal from your neighbor, you shall not lie to your neighbor. I submit to you that that's actually the better reading.

Who is your "neighbor?" In Leviticus, "any of your people" is how they define neighbor. "Stand against the blood of your neighbor," "your people," "the sons of your own people," "your countrymen." It's only the people who believe in the same God as you, your co-religionists. That's what neighbor means in the Old Testament.

Immediately after getting these commandments, the Israelites commit genocide after genocide. But none of the slain are Israelites. So they are not actually breaking the "don't kill" commandment if it only applies to Israelites.

"You shall not commit adultery." The Seventh Commandment actually did have an influence. I don't think there can be any doubt that Christianity has an incredibly powerful history

influencing legislation concerning sex in the U.S. It's also a shameful history.

In *Loving v. Virginia*, the Supreme Court in 1967 overturned miscegenation laws banning interracial marriage. One law was justified like this: "Almighty God created the races white, black, yellow, Malay, and red and placed them on separate continents."

Condemnation of homosexuality is firmly rooted in Judeo-Christian "moral" standards. Finally, a Supreme Court ruling in 2003 in *Lawrence v. Texas* overturned sodomy laws in 14 states. Again, Christianity had a very shameful influence.

**Tenth Commandment:** "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house." Again, read the commandment fully: "or fields, nor his male or female slaves, nor his ox or ass, or anything that belongs to him."

Women are chattel. Slavery is condoned. This is thought crime. Big Brother is watching. Christopher Hitchens was very fond of pointing this out. This completely conflicts with the First Amendment.

To sum up the Ten Commandments and their influence on our nation's founding: they either have no influence, being in conflict with our founding principles or have a shameful influence.

## Hell cruel, unusual

Obedience is a theme that runs through the whole bible. In the annihilation of Sodom and Gomorrah, when Lot and his wife are fleeing, Lot's wife disobeys the angelic command to not turn around and look. She disobeys and is turned into a pillar of salt.

And obviously, Isaac and Abraham, the sacrifice, the murder of a child, is often held up as the ideal for obeying God. This is fundamentally opposed to our nature and founding principles.

Edmund Burke wrote: "In this character of the Americans, a love of freedom is the predominating feature which marks and distinguishes

the whole." In *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine wrote about the importance of "securing freedom and property to all men, and above all things, the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience."

People are required to believe this nonsense by their bible, but they are allowed to believe nonsense because our nation cherishes freedom and has enshrined it, not obedience, in our founding documents.

The Golden Rule? Here's a list [PowerPoint slide] of Golden Rules that predate the Judeo-Christian tradition. Jesus is down there at No. 14. Hillel is down there at No. 12. We have found equivalence of the Golden Rule as far back as 2000 B.C.E. in Egypt. It's arrogant for Christian nationalist Judeo-Christians to claim as their own a rule that is universally known and not even original to their tradition.

Hell is definitely a Judeo-Christian principle. More properly, it's a Christian principle because Jesus invented hell. In the Old Testament is a place called sheol, which was a place for the dead to go but not a place of eternal torment.

On the other hand, the bible describes hell as where "The worm dyeth not and the fire is not quenched." It's described as a burning wind, fiery oven, unquenchable fire, furnace of fire, eternal fire and eternal punishment. You should get the sense that hell is hot and it's eternal.

The Eighth Amendment prohibits cruel and unusual punishment. Need I say more?

The Supreme Court has actually said that being locked in a jail cell with a five-pack-a-day smoker is cruel and unusual, so I think that hell most certainly qualifies.

Finally, the Judeo-Christian principle: Vicarious redemption, that Jesus died for your sins. This is a total and complete abrogation of personal responsibility. Our entire system of justice is founded on the idea that people are responsible for their own actions.

But abrogation of personal responsibility is the central tenet of Christianity. This conflicts with the central tenet of our system of justice and government. You can imagine how this would go: The defendant gets on the stand and admits to raping children but says, "It's OK, your honor, I've accepted Jesus as my savior and he forgave my sins, so you don't need to punish me."

I'd like to leave you with this quote from James Madison. It's my favorite quote and is on my wall at FFRF. It's how I motivate myself every day:

"It's proper to take alarm at the first experiment on our liberties. We hold this prudent jealousy to be the first duty of all citizens, and one of the noblest characteristics of the late revolution. The free men of America did not wait till usurped power had strengthened itself by exercise, and entangled the question in precedent."

I hope that I've given you some mental ammunition to counter the pernicious notion that we are a Christian nation or founded on Judeo-Christian principles. We must prevent that myth from growing and becoming entangled in precedent.

Thank you.

Andrew Seidel graduated magna cum laude from Tulane University Law School and has completed a master of laws at Denver University's Sturm College of Law. He practiced law in Colorado before joining FFRF as a constitutional consultant in 2011. He became a member of the Wisconsin Bar in May 2012, and serves as one of four staff attorneys.



Delaware artist Jessi Taylor's painting makes the point that "the 'God Fearing Freedom Loving American' is a mythical creature. This super-eagle symbolizes the unity of church and state incarnate. He seems quite confident about it, but he can't even fly!" Her website is [jessipencer.com/](http://jessipencer.com/).

Illustration: Jessi Taylor

# Think: What would make you into a believer?

**This is what an atheist looks like.**

Dr. Peter Boghossian, philosophy instructor, Portland

Freedom From Religion Foundation

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**Atheism is not an immutable, timeless truth. Atheism is a conclusion.**



to answer this question may help you to hold your beliefs less tenaciously.

In philosophy, there's a term "doxastic closure." It's an esoteric term even among seasoned philosophers. Many philosophers use this in a specialized, technical way.

I use the term in ways that accord with how it's percolated into public discourse. Doxastic derives from the ancient Greek "doxa." It basically means belief, but another meaning is how things look or appear to *me*.

If someone is doxastically closed, that means that their beliefs are immune to revision. Doxastic pathologies are ubiquitous in the realm of faith and religion.

My current research involves looking at mini-dialectical interventions with people to help separate faith from its host — to help people to lose their faith and to become more rational.

The second reason being able to answer this question is important is because it helps us to model the behavior that we want the faithful to emulate. If we want the faithful to be less doggedly certain, less closed-minded, less dogmatic, then this is the behavior that we need to model. If we want the faithful to be trustful of reason and willing to revise their beliefs, then we need to show them by example.

There's an entire line of literature on change and modeling behavior. Sometimes it's referred to as pro-social

modeling. It shows that modeling is a key component in eliciting behavior change. One of my favorite questions to ask believers is a variation of Matt McCormick's Defeasibility Test: What would it take for you to lose your faith?

This is a reasonable question, and when I ask it, I expect a clear answer. It's also a diagnostic tool that enables me to quickly ascertain the degree to which one is doxastically closed.

But beyond this, when I'm asked what it would take for me to have faith or to believe in God, I respond that these are reasonable questions. I always give a direct, blunt and honest answer. In order for us to answer this question, we must first make sure that we've asked it of ourselves. We must take a dose of our own medicine. I would never hold a person of faith to a different epistemic standard than I would hold myself. Neither should you.

I want to be clear that there are obviously no guarantees. Just because one can state what it would take to believe or disbelieve a particular proposition doesn't mean they've suddenly experienced some doxastic openness and are willing to revise their beliefs.

Sometimes we engage someone who's argued poorly for their position, but because of dialectical training, we can immediately think of a counterargument to offer for the same conclusion or a better argument, a much stronger argument. We should provide people with arguments for their conclusions that are even better than the ones they've offered.

When I'm having a discussion about faith, I don't want to have a conversation with a straw man. I want to have a conversation with a real person who's giving me powerful arguments that have emerged from their experiences. If they can't provide that, then I'll provide it for them.

One of the strengths of philosophical training is that it enables you to do this. It's also one of the strengths that comes from leading an examined life. This is the thing that we should try to model. This is another component of street epistemology.

## Matter of attitude

Having a closed belief system is a complex problem. One part of it is that our brains trick us into thinking that we're open-minded. Michael Shermer has some wonderful work on this in *The Believing Brain*. Our brains trick us into thinking that we're willing to revise our beliefs, that we're willing to reconsider when we're not.

Confirmation bias is part of this. We have a natural predisposition to go with our own ideas, to go with the way things appear to us, but we get stuck

*Peter Boghossian was introduced by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker at FFRF's 35th annual convention on October 13, 2012, in Portland, Ore.*

After our convention was fully booked, we realized that you have a nationally known freethought celebrity right here. Peter Boghossian happens to be not only an FFRF member, but he's on the new billboard that you saw last night, "This is what an atheist looks like."

Peter is an instructor of philosophy at Portland State University. They want to corrupt the morals of the young people, right? ["Socratic" laughter]. He has a teaching pedigree spanning more than 20 years and 30,000 students.

His fundamental objective is to teach people how to think, how to think through what often seems to be intractable problems. His publications can be found in *Dialogos*, the *Philosopher's Magazine*, *Skeptical Inquirer*, *Inside Higher Ed*, *Essays in Philosophy*, *Federal Probation Journal* and a host of other popular and academic journals. Peter is working on a book that's coming out soon, which will be called *A Manual for Creating Atheists*.

Here is Dr. Peter Boghossian.

By Peter Boghossian, Ph.D.

**T**hank you. It's a true pleasure to be here, and I'm incredibly grateful for the work of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and for you here today. Earlier speakers talked about an audience full of their best friends. I feel that I'm among my people and among people that I like and respect.

Thank you also for the work that you do in your communities to make them more thoughtful and rational. I have over two-and-a-half decades of experience teaching in prisons and crowded public universities and in the streets. I call it street epistemology.

One lesson I've learned is walking the talk. That's what I'm going to talk about today.

## Street epistemology

What would it take for you to believe? Well, to believe in what? What would it take for you to believe in a particular religion? What would it take for you to be a believing Christian? Or what would it take for you to believe that the communion wafer that

Catholics use transmutes into human flesh and becomes the physical body of Christ?

Or that women should be put in cloth bags and occasionally beaten? What would it take for you to believe that through faith, Jesus Christ can heal people of any and all ailments? Or that the Easter bunny is a real entity that hides colored eggs? Or that you go to a happy place after you die?

Why is it important to answer the question, "What would it take for you to believe?" There are two reasons. First, it's important so that we don't become what we're fighting — doggedly certain, closed-minded, epistemologically arrogant, dogmatic and religious. Being genuinely open to revise or to change your beliefs is an attitudinal disposition.

The American Philosophical Association's Delphi Report on critical thinking noted, "Willingness to revise a belief is a core attitudinal component of an ideal critical thinker." Being trustful of reason is another critical component."

Being able to state explicitly what it would take for you to believe or disbelieve in a particular proposition creates spaces, cognitive spaces, openness in your beliefs. Even thinking about a way



Photo: Andrew Seidel

in appearances. We confirm our own biases.

An example of this would be the bones of Christ. Whenever I ask someone of faith, a Christian, "What would it take for you to lose your faith?," often I'm struck when they say, "The bones of Christ."

I used to believe that when people said that to me, they weren't being sincere. I no longer believe that. I think that's a result of a different sort of epistemological pathology. Look, let's say that I had a bag, and I brought a bag in here, and instead of this conference, this is the Apologists' Conference.

I plop the bag on the table and I say, "These are the bones of Christ. I went to Jerusalem, had a great time, went on an archaeological dig." Those bones would be examined with far more scrutiny than what the faithful use to believe their current set of beliefs about Jesus and the resurrection. They would do *everything* to falsify that claim.

This shows that the problem of why people hold preposterous beliefs is not a matter of a skill set. It's not because they lack critical thinking skills or because they don't know their beliefs are absurd. It's a matter of attitude.

The faithful don't have the appropriate attitudinal dispositions, like a trustfulness of reason and willingness to revise their beliefs. This is also why we need to help them to break through these delusions by modeling the behavior in ourselves.

You may be thinking that I've placed an undue burden upon you. There are just too many issues, too many ideas to consider what it would take to change one's beliefs on all of these issues. I don't think it's an undue burden. This is what it means to live a thoughtful and examined life.

It's the ability to reason through problems, to evaluate evidence, to generate counterexamples, to clearly state why we believe or don't believe, to revise your beliefs, to use the results to inform our decisions to make better lives and form better communities.

### What is atheism?

I'm not arguing that this is something that has to be immediate. If someone asks you what would it take for you to believe, if you don't know, just say you don't know, that you'll think about it and get back to them.

An indispensable goal is to be free from bad reasoning, faulty epistemologies and from the attitudes that lead to religion. What's *not* important is to be an atheist. It is important to be a person who trusts reason, who formulates reason on the basis of reliable evidence and who's genuinely willing to reconsider.

Atheism is a natural consequence of

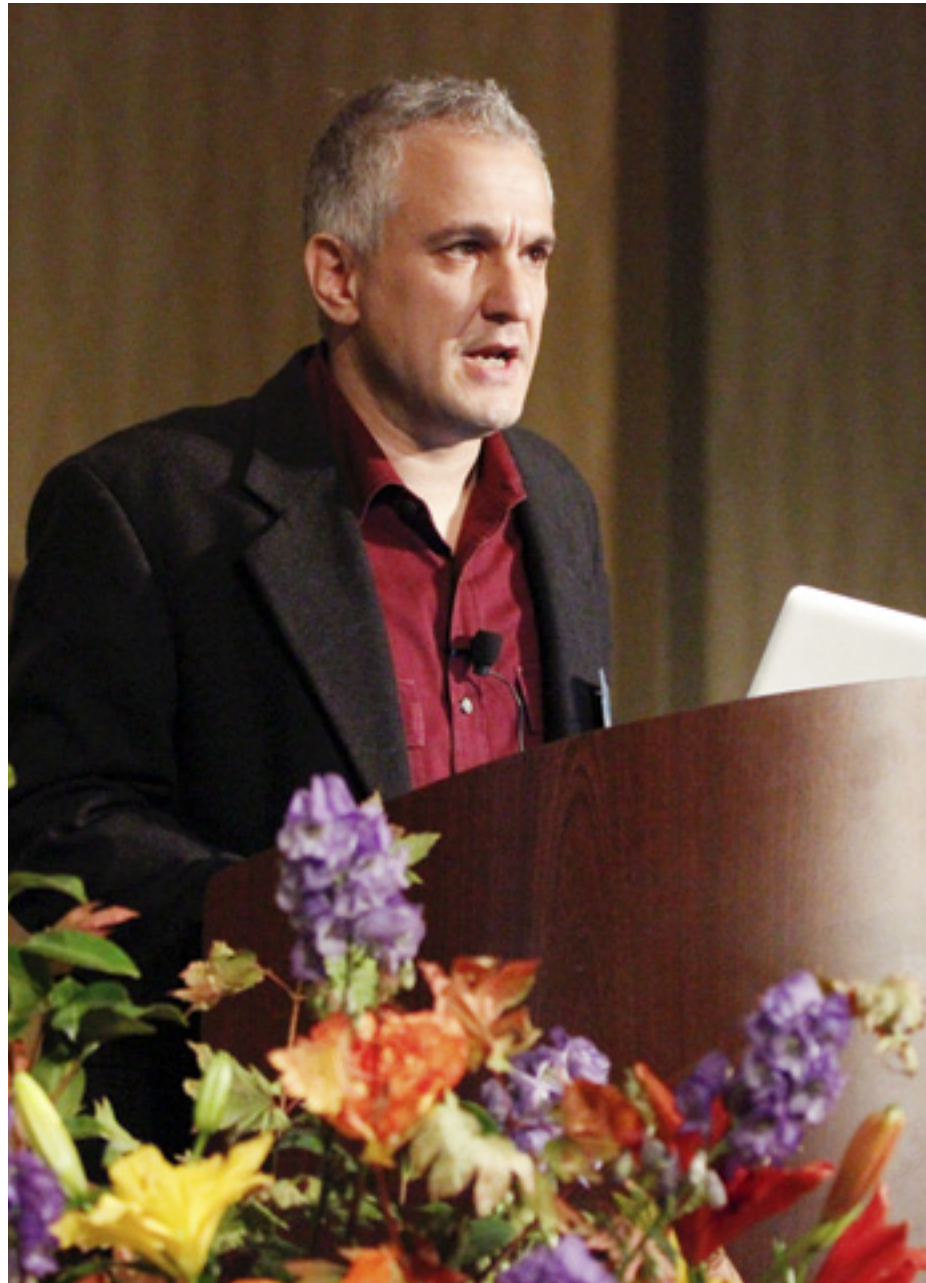


Photo: Andy Ngo

## We don't believe in God because there's a complete lack of evidence.

Or maybe if I could be shown that I was harboring a mistaken view about reality in regard to women. Maybe, for example, if they were malevolent entities, some kind of extraterrestrials bent on destroying humanity. This is the sort of evidence that one would need to warrant belief in these claims.

Regardless of the specific belief that's being examined, in all of the cases, what's important is to sincerely think about answering the question. This is a way that we can nudge ourselves to think more clearly and more rationally. Just stating that we're willing to revise our beliefs if shown sufficient evidence, or if given sufficient reason, is not enough. We must be able to state exactly what it would take for us to believe or to disbelieve a given proposition. We need to model the change that we want to see in the faithful. There's a lot of work to be done to help people to lose their faith and to embrace reason. This is one step in that direction. It's possible for virtually everyone to lead a life free of delusion.

To facilitate this, think back to one of the definitions of belief from the Greek. We need to move from appearance and opinion to knowledge. We also need to model the attitudes that are necessary to provide people with hope.

But the hope we offer is a tough hope. It's not born of platitudes. It won't make you feel better right away. But it takes away a false view of reality and offers a genuine hope, a hope that's based on reason and rationality and the tools of science.

It's a hope your own efforts of thoughtfulness and an examined life will help contribute to that — a hope offered through walking the talk. Thank you.

*FFRF member Peter Boghossian is an instructor of philosophy at Portland State University. His main focus is bringing the tools of professional philosophers to people in a wide variety of contexts. Email: [pgb@pdx.edu](mailto:pgb@pdx.edu); Twitter: [@peterboghossian](https://twitter.com/peterboghossian)*

possessing these skills and attitudes. Yet one could be an atheist and not possess these skills and dispositions. That is, one could be a doxastically closed atheist. This should not be an intellectual or attitudinal aspiration.

Atheism is not an immutable, timeless truth. Atheism is a conclusion. It's a conclusion one comes to based on an honest and thoughtful examination of reasons and evidence.

In the next [PowerPoint] slide I've compiled a comprehensive, historical and contemporary list of all of the evidence and all of the reasons that one should consider when examining whether or not there's a god or gods. [Blank slide, laughter and applause.] There is no evidence. Nada. Zip. Nothing.

This is why I don't believe in God. It's not for ideological reasons. Dan mentioned his debate with Dinesh D'Souza recently. We don't not believe in God, as D'Souza claims, because we're angry. I'm not angry. Dan, are you angry?

Dan: "Not with you." [Laughter.]

We don't believe in God because there's a complete lack of evidence. But this shouldn't deter us from providing answers as to what it would take to believe in God, to believe in leprechauns, or to believe in any other proposition.

So let's revisit the questions, the issues that we've looked at this morning. I will honestly say what it would take for me to believe in these things. Physicist Lawrence Krauss has an interesting debate with William Lane Craig, where Krauss said, "If God wanted you to believe in its existence, you'd walk outside, you'd look up at the sky and there it would be. And the stars would realign themselves and say something like, 'I am God. Believe in me.'"

If that happened to me, I would doubt my sanity. I would think that somehow I was the victim of a delusion, or one of my students spiked my coffee

with LSD. The philosopher David Hume has an interesting comment on miracles. He says that there's stronger reason to doubt the testifier than to trust the testimony.

I'm not sure I would trust this perception. It may be that no perception, or no feeling state, would lead me to conclude that God exists. Instead, I would need argument or reason.

### What would it take?

But let's suspend that for a moment and go with the example. What would it take for me personally to believe in God? Well, the stars spelling things out to people in different languages would be interesting. "I am God, believe in me" in Arabic.

I also want predictions. I'd want, I don't know, something about the future, someone to solve Goldbach's [mathematical] conjecture, I'd want something that I could latch my hands on to. This is the way I would approach the problem. These are the tools that I would bring to bear on how to think through the problem.

The communion wafer transforms into the body of Christ. I'm going to combine this with the next one of faith healing. We can turn the tools of science on these questions very easily.

There's a famous line, "Why doesn't God heal amputees?" The tools of science are quite easy in these cases. What is more difficult is when we enter the moral realm. What would it take for me to believe that we should put half of our population in cloth bags and beat them? Well, this is an astonishingly difficult question.

If I could be shown that my core value of gender and racial egalitarianism was a cultural artifact, and that somehow forcing women into bags and beating them was actually in their own interest, and somehow contributed to the well-being of society, that would really be something.



Photo: Andrew Seidel



Photo: Andy Ngo

# Honorable mentions: Graduate/mature student essay contest

## Humanity, individuals over religion

FFRF awarded Antwon a \$250 scholarship, thanks to an essay competition endorsed by Professor Brian Bolton.



By Antwon Kennedy

The need for separation between religion and government is as important today as it has been since the introduction of the Establishment Clause in 1789. History shows that combining the two entities can have dangerous consequences. The Pilgrims, for example, when King James came into power, almost lost their lives after voicing their concerns about the Church of England and had to flee to avoid persecution.

Today, religious interests still want to influence public opinion and politics. A preacher recently spoke out in favor of physically abusive corrective actions toward children, backed by biblical teachings. Religious organizations are opposing contraceptive coverage in their employees' insurance plans. These actions endanger our youth and strip individuals of their right to choice in family planning by placing the decision-making process in the hands of religious groups.

CNN reported: "Sean Harris, the pastor of Berean Baptist Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina, told his congregants in his sermon on April 28, 'Dads, the second you see your son dropping the limp wrist, you walk over there and crack that wrist.' He continued, 'Man up, give them a good punch, OK. You're not going to act like that. You were made by God to be a male and you're going to be a male' "

The pastor later claimed he was misunderstood, saying he wasn't advocating abuse of homosexual children. What is certain is that combining church and state would give the government power to support and uphold the pastor's words because the bible states in Proverbs 22:15, "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him," and in Proverbs 23:13, "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you strike him with a rod, he will not die."

Both passages confirm the acceptance of child abuse. Even more so, the greatest argument for the bible's standpoint on child abuse is that God sent his son to Earth so that people could abuse him and hang him on a cross.

Mixing religion with politics is a recipe for the reversal of human choice and liberty. If politicians give in to the demands of a set religion, we face being confined to the constraints of the religious doctrine at hand.

An example of this process of constraint: religious organizations fighting to not have to include contraceptive coverage in insurance plans for their employees. These organizations are forgetting about the right of the individual to make her own choices. They are confining their employees to limited choices in the types of health services available to them.

If politicians continue to show favoritism to religious groups, citizens risk losing the rights that generations have fought for and the freedoms that make America the great country that it is. Laws must be uniform for all.

In this election year, we need to let politicians know that just because a religious doctrine says it is acceptable to beat children, we will not stand for child abuse. We need to let politicians know that we do not need to make concessions for religious organizations that want to modify laws so that they can limit the health care options of those caught under their vise.

If we concede on one issue, the stage will be set for more concessions until we are a nation under the laws of a particular religious doctrine. Our citizens, in fear for their lives, will begin to flee just as the Pilgrims did centuries ago from England.

We do not need to repeat a past that did not work. That is why in this election year, we need separation between religion and government.

Antwon Kennedy, 32, Marietta, Ga., is a junior working toward a bachelor of business administration degree in finance at Kennesaw State University.

## Theocracies are deadly to freedom

FFRF awarded Anastassia a \$250 scholarship.



By Anastassia Smorodinskaya

During the recent presidential election, it became clear that we as a nation are moving further and further away from our constitutional right to the separation of church and state. Most disheartening is that with so many examples of failing theological governments throughout the world, American politicians and citizens alike turn a blind eye to the fact that God and government are indeed a very dangerous mix.

Mideast nations serve as prime examples. The elections in Egypt were

supposed to be a celebration of new-found democracy, yet citizens who don't adhere to fundamentalist Islam live in fear of losing their rights to religion. Decades of civil unrest and bloodshed in Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Iran and Pakistan should steer the U.S. away from letting power fall into the hands of theocrats.

I am even starting to see an unhealthy partnership of church and state in my native Russia, a nation which less than 100 years ago denounced all religion in favor of atheism. The nation has started using the Russian Orthodox Church to justify blatant violations of human rights and freedom of speech, as made evident by the imprisonment of the female punk band Pussy Riot. Putin's government is making an example of Pussy Riot for anyone else who dares speak out against Putin, but is doing so under the guise of defending religion.

In turn, the church has shocked the international community by siding with Putin's dictatorial regime instead of practicing the Christian notion of forgiveness. This scenario shows how mixing religion and politics can lead to loss of civilian freedom and to the corruption of religious institutions themselves.

In America, the lines are blurring, as made evident by nearly every hot-button issue debated by rival political parties. The most obvious example is legalization of same-sex marriage, an issue that should be treated as a question of human rights, but instead has been argued by politicians on the basis of populist religious morality, showing blatant disregard for the Establishment Clause.

Women's rights to birth control and family planning have also come under scrutiny from conservative Christians who, tragically, are gaining leverage in the Republican Party.

When I see religion making its way into political debates, scenes from the dystopian novel "The Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood spring to mind. It depicts the U.S. after it has been taken over by an extreme fundamentalist Christian group that strips women of their rights and forces them into roles of pious servitude.

It is ironic that while many Americans fear losing their freedom to Islamist groups like al-Qaida, they are blind to the fact that Christianity is slowly seeping into the pores of government, with equal potential to do serious damage to constitutional rights.

It would behoove all Americans to keep in mind that we must vote for the candidate who best protects our constitutional liberties and not for one whose decisions will be based on the moral compass of a particular religion. Rev. Otis Moss III said it best in a sermon he delivered to his Baptist congregation in Chicago:

"To claim that the president of the United States must hold your theological position is absurd. He is president of the United States, not president of the Baptist Convention, not president or bishop of the sanctified church. He is called to protect those who are Jew and gentile, male and female, young and old, gay and straight."

That powerful statement perfectly sums up the way Americans need to look at government. Sadly, the fact that Moss felt compelled to make the plea shows that too many are still inclined

to vote in the name of God.

Anastassia Smorodinskaya, 25, was born in Moscow, Russia. She moved to the U.S. at age 6 and grew up in the quiet college town of Middlebury, Vt. She graduated from Eckerd College in 2008 as a communications major and theater minor. She's enrolled in Columbia University's master's program for broadcast journalism.

## Wanted: Separation of state, church

FFRF awarded Justin a \$250 scholarship.



Justin Vacula was the sole protester at the June 8 Catholic rally at Courthouse Square in Scranton, Pa.

By Justin Vacula

Our recent Establishment Clause issues in Pennsylvania — legislation declaring 2012 "The Year of the Bible," sectarian governmental prayer, coercion of citizens who dare to remain seated for governmental prayer, and intentions to fund religious schools with taxpayer monies — should convince Pennsylvanians that they need separation of religion and government.

Lawmakers seemed to neglect Section 3 of the state Constitution, which states, "All men have a natural and in-defeasible right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences," and "no human authority can, in any case whatever, control or interfere with the rights of conscience, and no preference shall ever be given by law to any religious establishments or modes of worship."

The "noncontroversial" resolution declaring "The Year of the Bible" said there was a "national need to study and apply [its] teachings," and claimed that "renewing our knowledge of and faith in God through holy scripture can strengthen us as a nation and a people."

"The dictates of conscience" in the Constitution were trampled on because the resolution took sides on theological issues and recommended religious actions.

Another obvious example of religion and government being a dangerous mix is the constant stream of unconstitutional sectarian governmental prayer during House of Representatives sessions. Many contain specific references to Christianity, with Jesus

## I was made to feel like a political outsider.

Christ dying on a cross to save people from sin, Jesus Christ as “Lord and savior,” “God in heaven” and “the maker of heaven and earth.”

Unconstitutional prayers also exist in a background of coercion directed at citizens who dare to remain seated during prayer. Individuals, before entering the guest chambers, view a prominent sign which encourages people to stand for prayer. Then the House speaker asks people to stand.

On one occasion, I remained silently seated while taking notes on a tablet. An armed security officer approached me and repeatedly asked me to stand to “show respect.” Two requests — from the House speaker and a sign — were not enough.

Another insidious foray by lawmakers concerned a school voucher program in which public funds, instead of funding public schools which must educate children regardless of their religious upbringing or belief, would fund private schools. Many are religious and exist primarily to indoctrinate impressionable minds, compel students to participate in school-led prayer and teach “young Earth creationist” doctrine instead of sound science.

When I peacefully protested a rally, holding a sign calling for separation of church and state, at which pious politicians assembled to urge lawmakers to vote for the school voucher program, I was told that I should go back to my “community of privilege” and send my children “to whichever school I wanted to whether they be atheist schools or not.”

That was said to me from the podium by state Sen. Anthony Williams, who angrily added, “By the way, this is my rally, not yours,” and “These are our dollars, not just yours. These are our children, not yours. These are our school systems, not yours, and by the way, this has nothing to do with separation of church and state.”

At the voucher rally and with the coercion I faced for staying seated for governmental prayer, I was made to feel like a political outsider. A climate of divisiveness — pitting citizens against lawmakers acting in pious unconstitutional manners — was created in which I, as a citizen of Pennsylvania, while peacefully objecting to that which I saw as unconstitutional, was poorly treated.

If lawmakers had remained neutral on matters of religion while acting in their official capacities to serve all citizens, there would have been no divisiveness.

The above situations create a compelling case for freethinkers, and even religious Pennsylvanians, to be concerned with matters of separation of church and state. Establishment Clause violations are especially grievous in election years because pandering politicians are seeking votes while lawmakers who otherwise would object to the violations may not because they fear losing support from their constituents.

*Justin Vacula, Exeter, Pa., 23, is a graduate student at Marywood University studying mental health counseling. He has a bachelor's in philosophy and psychology from King's College, is active in the NEPA Freethought Society and blogs at [examiner.com/user-justin-vacula](http://examiner.com/user-justin-vacula).*

*com/user-justin-vacula.*

*Justin was also a plaintiff in FFRF's lawsuit challenging "The Year of the Bible" in Pennsylvania. He recently spent a lot of time getting FFRF's Winter Solstice banner included in the Wilkes-Barre Public Square holiday display. The banner was vandalized and later reinstalled.*

## Government for the people, not the god

*FFRF awarded Ashley a \$250 scholarship.*



By Ashley Miller

**R**eligion, in the hands of the power hungry, is a dangerous thing, and you'll find few groups more power hungry or more religious than U.S. politicians. That only one member of Congress admits to being a nonbeliever speaks volumes about the usefulness of professed religious devotion for those seeking office.

Politicians fall all over themselves to prove their support of religion. In the past decade, Congress has unanimously reaffirmed “In God We Trust” as the national motto three times. Countless bills are presented with hopes of winning the religious base. Even if sponsors don't think they will pass, they want credit for proposing them.

Sincere or cynical, politicians know that pandering to the religious gets them votes and, just as importantly, gets them money. The relationship between religious money and the state has always been problematic, but never more so than it is today. And fighting against that relationship is never more important than in an election year.

Every year, the churches of America get \$71 billion in tax breaks thanks to very generous exemptions. The American taxpayer has to cover the lost revenue, forcing the population to subsidize organized religion. Churches pay no property taxes, write off housing expenses for their clergy, do not pay sales tax on anything they sell, and do not pay taxes on the money they earn. US churches own \$400 billion in untaxed land and the Church of Scientology alone earns over \$500 million untaxed dollars annually. Donations to these churches are written off individuals' taxes, even if those churches spend little money on charitable works — churches, unlike other charitable organizations, don't have to publicly disclose what they use the money for; they are automatically exempt.

So, what do the religious use the money for? Rather than focusing on charity, they have used their untaxed income to wage war on our secular Constitution, to try to force the Christian version of Sharia law onto the American people.

Churches use this money to support their campaigns against gay marriage. Groups like Focus on the Family are funded almost entirely by the Catholic



## No clue

Texan Tracie Harris' “Atheist Eye” cartoons are featured on the Atheist Community of Austin website: [atheist-community.org/atheisteve/](http://atheist-community.org/atheisteve/)

and Mormon churches. Proposition 8, the amendment to the California Constitution that overturned the right to gay marriage, raised over \$40 million, \$20 million of which came from Mormons. At the urging of their church, Mormons provided over half the funds that helped Proposition 8 pass. When the California government was alerted to this, not only did the LDS church not lose its tax-exempt status, they were fined only \$5,000, practically an invitation to do it again.

Churches use this money to promote their choices for judicial nominations. Justices in South Carolina have given reading assignments from the bible as punishment for crimes as serious as vehicular homicide. Of the nine justices on the Supreme Court, six are Roman Catholics and three are Jewish, in a country that is 24% Catholic and 2% Jewish. These judges ensure the bench is biased in favor of religion and that bias encourages decisions like Citizens United, which allows the religious to spend unlimited funds on pushing their political agenda.

Churches use this money to push religion into the public classrooms of America, to make sure after-school programs have access to children, to remove evolution and Thomas Jefferson from schoolbooks, and to force non-religious students to listen to and participate in prayers on secular campuses. Religious exemptions don't just hurt the education of young people; they can also lead to disease and death. In many states, religious schools are exempt from government oversight, which has led to deaths of children through poor care and negligence.

Churches use this money to promote their hatred for women. In 2011, there were 1,100 bills about reproductive rights introduced at the state level. There were bills that force women to accept a transvaginal exam to get an abortion; that have nearly gotten rid of abortion clinics altogether in states like Mississippi; that allow doctors in Arizona to lie to women if they think it will prevent them from having an abortion; that charge women with manslaughter for having miscarriages; that allow doctors and pharmacists to refuse to give

birth control to women. All of this in a country where being pregnant is more dangerous and more expensive than in many other industrialized nations. Even bills to make the life-saving, cancer-preventing HPV vaccine mandatory have been vetoed out of fear that it would encourage girls to have sex; in South Carolina, the governor vetoed a bill that would allow schools to simply tell parents the vaccine exists. These bills are so cavalierly anti-woman; women are dying in this country because of religious interference.

And, before you blame this entirely on the religious right, the Democrats are guilty as well. President Obama prevented Plan B from becoming over-the-counter, despite the recommendations of the medical community, primarily because he wanted to avoid the Christian backlash. Democrats are just as afraid of the repercussions of upsetting the godly, and just as interested in getting their money.

Before you despair, there is good news. The non-religious population is growing and becoming more vocal and actively fighting the destruction of separation of church and state. There are things we can do to fight back. We can support organizations like the Secular Student Alliance, Secular Coalition for America, Freedom From Religion Foundation, and the many other secular institutions in our country. We can vote for the candidates that don't pander to the religious, if they can be found. And, if they cannot be found, we can follow the lead of people like Pete Stark and Cecil Bothwell, and run for office ourselves. Our Constitution clearly states that God and government do not go together, and we must fight for a government that is truly representative of “we the people,” all of us, not just those under the command of a fictitious and very wealthy deity.

*Ashley Miller, 28, grew up in Litchfield, S.C., and attends the University of South Carolina as a second-year Ph.D. candidate. She holds a master's in radio, film and television production from Florida State University and B.A. in film studies from Emory University.*

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# Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

## Arrested / Charged

**Jaison Kollannur**, Kochi, **IND**: Kollannur, a Catholic priest and former secretary of the Kerala Catholic Youth Movement, surrendered to authorities to face charges of smuggling unskilled laborers into the U.S.

Kollannur and 3 other former KCYM officers are under investigation after a complaint was lodged by the U.S. Consulate in Chennai about an alleged attempt to smuggle Indians into Houston.

"The accused, including the priest, faked certificates to support that 42 persons were experts working in the education sector," said Amose Mammen, assistant commissioner of the Kochi Crime Records Bureau.

Police said Kollannur allegedly offered jobs to Catholic youths in exchange for 155,000 rupees (\$3,000) each. The Kerala Catholic Bishops Council has dismissed him. *Source: The Hindu, Eurasia Review; 1-19-13*

**Stanley Wilkinson**, 61, Rochester, **MN**: Felony intentional discharge of a firearm that endangered safety. Wilkinson, a Seventh-Day Adventist Church pastor, fired 2 shots from a pistol, hitting his 16-year-old granddaughter in the neck after mistaking her for an intruder. The girl was living with her grandparents and didn't tell them she was leaving the house. *Source: AP, 1-18-13*

**Kevin Wallin**, 61, Bridgeport, **CT**: Conspiring to distribute 500 grams or more of a substance containing methamphetamine and 6 counts of possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine. Msgr. Wallin is former pastor of St. Augustine Catholic Church, where he was stripped of his priestly duties in May after allegations of cross-dressing and having sex in the rectory were investigated. He then bought an adult specialty store called Land of Oz that sells sex toys and X-rated DVDs.

Wallin and four others are charged with selling meth to undercover federal agents. Wallin was selling as much as \$9,000 worth a week, authorities said. *Source: N.Y. Daily News, CT Post; 1-17-13*

**William Hughes**, 71, Spartanburg, **SC**: Criminal sexual conduct with a minor and contributing to the delinquency of a minor. Hughes, a pastoral staff volunteer the past 7 years at Restoration Church, is accused of molesting a 15-year-old girl.

A sheriff's report said the girl alleged that Hughes persuaded her to go home with him after church and drank some alcohol there. She told deputies the next thing she remembered was waking up and putting her pants on.

Pastor Tony Cribb said Hughes' duties included helping with hospital visits, running errands and making bank deposits. *Source: WYFF, 1-15-13*

**Terry Greer**, 54, Gardendale, **AL**: Murder and attempted murder. Greer, senior pastor at Gardendale-Mt. Vernon United Methodist Church, is charged with murdering his wife, Lisa, 52, an elementary school teacher, and shooting at his daughter, Suzanna, 18, who grabbed the gun and ran to a neighbor's house, authorities said.

Greer then stabbed himself in the chest and neck with a kitchen knife but is expected to recover. Police Chief Mike Walker would not speculate on a motive. *Source: Times Daily, 1-14-13*

**Charles A. Denton**, 59, Palmyra, **TN**: 2 counts of rape. Denton, associate pastor and guitarist at Bethel Baptist Church and a retired police sergeant, is accused of raping a 34-year-old mentally disabled woman. *Source: The Tennessean, 1-11-13*

**Thomas Bouklas**, 64, Holbrook, **NY**: Possessing a sexual performance of a child. Bouklas is a retired teacher and former soccer coach at St. John the Baptist Diocesan High School in West Islip.

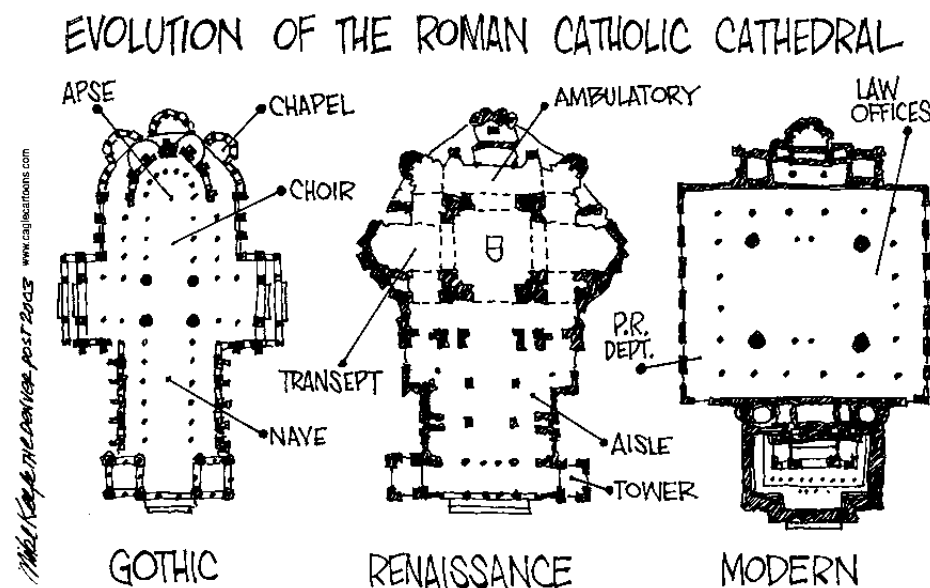
Bouklas' attorney, Arshad Majid, claimed his client had only one suspect image on his computer. "We believe this is a mistake and a misunderstanding." *Source: Newsday, 1-11-13*

**Wendel Palmer**, 44, Ft. Washington, **MD**: 1st-degree child sexual abuse. Court papers allege the abuse occurred while Palmer was youth choir director at Bethel Temple Church of Christ Apostolic Inc. He's also a 22-year D.C. police officer.

Palmer allegedly would tell his victim to stay with him in the pastor's office while the other choir members went to a store.

The assaults started when the girl was 11 and allegedly continued for 2 years. She told investigators there were "too many incidents to count." *Source: Washington Post, 1-9-13*

**Vincent Mercer**, 66, Kilkenny, **IRE**: 39 counts of sexual assault. Mercer, a Dominican Order priest not serving in active ministry, is charged with molesting a juvenile between the



ages of 11 and 17 from 1986-94 in Cork and County Limerick. *Source: Irish Times, 1-10-13*

**Aryeh Goodman**, 30, East Brunswick, **NJ**: 12 counts of indecent assault of a person less than 13 years of age. Goodman, the son of a rabbi, is accused of molesting a boy when he was 12 in 2001 at Camp Manachem in Pike County, PA, where Goodman was a counselor.

Goodman is director of Chabbad of East Brunswick, which focuses on educating children. *Source: NJ.com, 1-8-13*

**M.M. Sharma**, 55, East Delhi, **IND**: Rape. Sharma, a Hindu priest, summoned the alleged victim, in her early 30s and married to another priest, to his home on the pretext of preparing sweets to offer in temple on New Year's Day. He allegedly threatened the woman afterward "with dire consequences" if she told anyone. *Source: Mumbai DNA, 1-7-13*

**Bruno M. Tucci**, 70, Salisbury, **MD**: 4th-degree sex offense and child abuse by custodian. Tucci, a priest with the Allentown [PA] Catholic Diocese, was removed from active ministry in 2002 and defrocked in 2007 after abuse allegations.

He's now charged with molesting a boy in Ocean City, MD, in August 1981. *Source: Morning Call, 1-2-13*

**Joel K. Hodges**, 31, Fultondale, **AL**: Electronic solicitation of a child and traveling to meet a child for an unlawful sex act. Hodges is contemporary worship leader at Gardendale-Mt. Vernon United Methodist Church. *Source: N. Jefferson News, 1-2-13*

**Meilech Schnitzler**, 37, Brooklyn, **NY**: Felony and misdemeanor assault, menacing, criminal mischief and criminal possession of a weapon. Schnitzler, a fishmonger and Hasidic Jew, is accused of throwing bleach in Rabbi Nuchem Rosenberg's face the day after Rabbi Nechemya Weberman was convicted of 59 counts of child sexual abuse. [See conviction story on next page.]

Rosenberg is an outspoken advocate in the ultra-Orthodox community for sexual abuse victims, including criticism of District Attorney Charles Hynes for failure to prosecute.

Hynes said charges against Schnitzler are "a clear message that anyone who would seek to intimidate someone opposed to the uncovering of sexual abuse in the Orthodox community will face serious criminal charges, and if convicted, I will ask for the maximum jail time." *Source: N.Y. Times, 1-12-13*

**James MacCaline**, 75, Cary, **NC**: Misdemeanor larceny. MacCaline, known as Jimmy Mac, an usher for 20 years at St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church, is charged with stealing an undetermined amount of money from collection baskets.

After getting a tip, police set up 10 hidden cameras during Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Sunday Masses and added \$20 bills to the collections after copying serial numbers.

"It was while the collection was going on right inside the church, as the basket was being passed and the money was palmed into his hand and then into his pocket," said police Capt. Dave Wulff. *Source: WRAL, 1-2-13*

**Timothy Murray**, 62, Novi, **MI**: Downloading child pornography. Murray, former pastor at St. Edith Catholic Church in Livonia, allegedly admitted to federal agents his preference is 13-year-old boys.

The videos on his computer "contained images of minor boys between the ages of approximately 6 to 16 years olds displaying their genitals in a (suggestive) manner and/or engaging in sexual contact with other minor boys and/or adults," the complaint said.

He was removed from public ministry in 2004 on allegations of sexual abuse of a minor 3 decades earlier. *Source: Detroit News, 12-20-12*

**Luis F. Henao**, 40, Springfield, **VA**: Sexual battery. Henao, a Colombia native and pastor

of St. Bernadette Catholic Parish, is accused of sexually touching a 29-year-old man who came to him for counseling. *Source: Washington Post, 12-19-12*

**Jason Laws**, 44, Albion, **IL**: Theft of over \$100,000 from a place of worship and 2 counts of forgery. Laws, administrative pastor at the House of Prayer, is accused of embezzling more than \$300,000 from his former church. *Source: Courier & Press, 12-18-12*

**Gregory D. Forehand**, 40, Chesapeake, **VA**: Indecent liberties with a child. Forehand, youth pastor at Real Life Christian Church, was indicted by a grand jury for allegedly molesting 3 teens between 1999 and 2006.

A police detective told reporters that children would often stay at Forehand's home during church events. *Source: WAVY, 12-17-12*

**Robert C. Hester**, 27, Allentown, **PA**: 9 counts of writing insufficient funds checks. Hester wrote the checks on the accounts of Pneuma Life Center and Maranatha House of Refuge and Recovery, two churches he operated in Allentown. Checks totaled \$11,700. *Source: Morning Call, 12-17-12*

**Charles Saviers**, 78, Eufala, **OK**: Possession of child pornography. Saviers is listed as pastor at several McIntosh County churches. *Source: KJRH, 12-14-12*

**Clarence T. Taylor**, 26, Columbia, **PA**: Solicitation to commit sexual abuse of children, unlawful contact with a minor and criminal use of a communications facility. Taylor, associate pastor at Church of God in Christ, is accused of trying to set up sex with a boy, 15. *Source: Fox 43, 12-14-12*

**Steve Harding**, 60, New Palestine, **IN**: Child molestation and sexual misconduct with a minor. Harding, youth pastor at United Methodist Church, is accused of engaging in sexual activity twice with a 13-year-old girl whose parents considered him a family friend.

Harding has also been a wrestling coach and school board member. *Source: Indianapolis Star, 12-14-12*

**Isrom Perry-Johnson**, 33, New Albany, **IN**: 3 counts of 2nd-degree sodomy. Perry-Johnson, pastor at Prince of Peace Missionary Baptist Church, is charged with molesting a male age 14 or under, who alleged the incidents took place in 2010. *Source: Courier-Journal, 12-21-12*

**Filimone H. Mone**, 59, West Valley City, **UT**: Failure to report abuse of a child. Mone, pastor of Tongan United Methodist Church, is accused of failing to promptly report allegations of abuse of minors in the congregation by an older boy several years ago.

The complaint said the alleged perpetrator, then about age 14, lined children up so each could take a turn performing oral sex on him. *Source: Salt Lake Tribune, 12-12-12*

**Dennis W. Myers**, 52, Blue Springs, **MO**: Receiving a video of child pornography over the Internet and possessing child pornography. Myers, worked as a youth pastor at Christ United Methodist Church in Independence before working in the same position at a church in Arkansas.

He was charged in 2011 with statutory sodomy, attempted enticement of a child, 1st-degree child molestation and 2 counts of sexual misconduct involving a child and has yet to go to trial on those charges.

Court documents allege Myers got 2 girls intoxicated and offered them \$100 to have sex with each other before taking nude photographs of them. *Source: The Examiner, 12-12-12*

**Aron Andonie**, 47, Kenhorst, **PA**: Harassment, lewd communication and stalking. Andonie, pastor of Spring Valley Church of God, a Romanian congregation, is accused in alleged incidents involving female victims.

Court documents said he called a woman at work shortly after she was hired, told her she

'[Rabbi Weberman] took this young girl with a fiery spirit and he broke her.'

—Assistant D.A. Linda Weinman

was "a hot girl" and she should wear short skirts and heels to work. Calls became more sexual in nature. He never identified himself.

Police said they identified Andonie through his cellphone number. He told police he called about 25 women, mostly women he knew from his work at the church. *Source: Reading Eagle, 12-12-12*

**Willie Demps**, 69, Pensacola, **FL**: 3 counts of child abuse. Demps, a pastor and administrator at S.L. Jones Christian Academy, was charged after a student told a grandparent that Demps paddled and punched her and after police observed physical evidence. *Source: North-Escambia.com, 12-12-12*

**Otis B. Jetter**, 70, Indianapolis: 3 counts of child molesting. Jetter, pastor at Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church, is alleged to have engaged in multiple sex acts with a boy starting when he was 12. The alleged victim is now 29.

The man said he came forward because he saw Jetter driving a boy to church several times. *Source: WISH, 12-10-12*

## Pleaded / Convicted

**Larry M. Bollinger**, 67, Stanley, **NC**: Pleaded guilty to illicit sexual conduct, for which he was indicted last May. Bollinger was pastor at Christ's Evangelical Lutheran Church when he and his wife left in 2004 for Haiti to work with the Lazarus Project, a mostly Lutheran ministry that runs a vocational school and medical clinic.

According to an indictment, the alleged misconduct took place in 2009. Four victims were identified, but Bollinger was charged for misconduct with 2 girls, ages 11 and 12. *Source: WCNC, 10-18-13*

**Neil Doherty**, 69, Miami, **FL**: Pleaded no contest to lewd or lascivious molestation, lewd acts in the presence of a child and sexual battery on a victim younger than 12. Doherty, a retired Catholic priest, has a long list of accusers in alleged incidents going back to the 1970s.

Several civil cases involving him have been settled out of court. The first case that went to a jury ended with a \$100 million award to the victim. *Source: Miami Herald, 1-13-13*

**Archie L. Evans**, Conway, **SC**: Pleaded guilty to mail fraud and structuring financial transactions to evade reporting requirements. Evans, pastor of Tilly Swamp Baptist Church, ran a Ponzi scheme in which church members and others lost \$2.5 million, according to court documents.

Evans also operated nonprofit companies called Pale Productions and Pale Ministries. The former published his book *Nature's Pairs: The Demise of Homosexuality*. *Source: Myrtle Beach Online, 1-9-13*

**Wilbert Brassfield**, 48, Charlottesville, **VA**: Guilty by jury of 3 counts of embezzlement. Brassfield was accused of taking more than \$10,000 from the accounts of Courts of Praise Christian Fellowship, where he was pastor. He was also a police officer.

If a plea agreement is followed at sentencing, he'll be fined \$7,500 but serve no jail time. *Source: newsplex.com, 12-21-12*

**Joseph Ostrowski**, 28, Wilkes-Barre, **PA**: Pleaded guilty to child pornography, interstate extortion and cyber stalking. Ostrowski was head football coach at Holy Redeemer High School, a Catholic Diocese of Scranton school.

He was arrested after posing as a female on Facebook to trick male teens into emailing nude photos, according to an arrest affidavit. He then used the images to extort victims into sending more photos, a ploy called "sextortion."

A complaint said Ostrowski engaged in such conduct from 2006-12. Some alleged victims were adults. A plea agreement calls for a 25-year prison sentence and lifetime parole. *Source: Times-Leader, 12-19-12*

**Caleb D. Hesse**, 52, Yucca Valley, **CA**: Pleaded guilty to 5 counts of lewd and lascivious acts with a child. He admitted to molesting 5 boys under age 14 between 1988 and 2012.

Hesse was a 1st-grade teacher and a youth group volunteer at Evangelical Free Church. All of the alleged abuse occurred during church youth group outings. *Source: Hi-Desert Star, 12-19-12*

**Charles Agbu**, 58, Carson, **CA**: Pleaded guilty to money laundering and conspiracy to commit health care fraud. Agbu, pastor at Pilgrim Congregational Church, paid patient re-





## State/Church Bulletin

### Indiana rep pushes school Lord's Prayer

Indiana state Sen. Dennis Kruse, R-Auburn, filed a bill which would let public schools have students recite the Lord's Prayer daily. The bill received first reading Jan. 9.

SB 251 states that "the governing body of a school corporation or the equivalent authority of a charter school may require the recitation of the Lord's Prayer at the beginning of each school day. The prayer may be recited by a teacher, a student, or the class of students."

It further states, "If the governing body or equivalent authority requires the recitation of the Lord's Prayer under subsection (a), the governing body or equivalent authority shall determine the version of the Lord's Prayer that will be recited in the school corporation or charter school."

The bill lets students or "the student's parent" choose to not participate.

The South Bend Tribune in a Jan. 11 editorial called the bill a bad idea and urged Gov. Mike Pence to veto it if the Legislature passes it, predicting that "long years of legal challenges would certainly drain the state treasury and end in defeat" if it became law.

### Domino's founder: Birth control 'immoral'

Tom Monaghan, devout Catholic and founder of Domino's Pizza, is suing the federal government over mandatory contraception coverage in the new health care law. Monaghan called contraception a "gravely immoral" practice, according to the suit, in which he and Domino's Farms, Ann Arbor, Mich., are plaintiffs.

According to a Dec. 15 post on Domino's Facebook page, Monaghan sold the company in 1998: "His views are not our views, nor are his actions in any way related to our actions."

A Wikipedia entry says Bain Capital bought Domino's in 1998, netting Monaghan about \$1 billion, before it went public in 2004.

### Egyptian atheist gets three-year sentence

A Cairo court sentenced atheist Alber Saber, 27, to three years in prison Dec. 12 for blasphemy and contempt for religion. Alber was accused of posting clips online of the short film "Innocence of Muslims," which sparked violent and deadly protests throughout the Middle East.

"This is an outrageous verdict and sentence for a person whose only 'crime' was to post his opinions online," Hassiba Hadj Sahraoui of Amnesty International told The Associated Press.

Saber, while awaiting trial, was attacked by other prisoners while guards allegedly looked the other way. He's appealing the sentence. "Egypt is a religious state," he said. "If you disobey the norms, you get judged and sentenced."

### Montana high court rules against Hutterites

The Montana Supreme Court ruled Dec. 31 that forcing the Big Sky Colony

of Hutterites to pay workers' compensation insurance for jobs outside the colony is not an unconstitutional intrusion into religion.

The 4-3 decision upholds a 2009 law. The Associated Press reported that Montana has about 50 Hutterite colonies with about 100 members each. Many have expanded into nonfarm ventures, including construction, and are able to bid lower than private firms because of their communal living arrangements.

### Silence substituted for 'offensive' prayer

Boyle County's Fiscal Court in Danville, Ky., has voted to stop starting its meetings with prayers. Instead of a prayer on Jan. 22, there was a moment of silence.

Harold McKinney, judge executive, said he received a complaint from a person who found the prayer offensive. "After I looked at it, thought about it, the way to do this is to say we're not going to impose Protestant prayer on those who may not believe in that way," McKinney told WTVQ in Lexington.

The board was also concerned about legal costs if they kept praying.

### Louisiana board deals blow to creationism

The Orleans Parish School Board in New Orleans voted unanimously Dec. 18 in favor of two policy amendments proposed by outgoing president Thomas Robichaux.

One amendment added "zero tolerance" to the parish's "bullying, intimidation, harassment and hazing" policy. The other addressed concerns about mention of creationism, intelligent design and "revisionist history" in textbooks.

The textbook selection update said: "No history textbook shall be approved which has been adjusted in accordance with the State of Texas revisionist guidelines nor shall any science textbook be approved which presents creationism or intelligent design as science or scientific theories."

It also applies to teachers: "No teacher of any discipline of science shall teach any aspect of religious faith as science or in a science class. No teacher of any discipline of science shall teach creationism or intelligent design in classes designated as science classes."

### Wash. pastor prays against gay marriage

Washington state's opening legislative session in Olympia got off to a rocky start Jan. 14, reported the Seattle Times.

In his invocation, Rev. Jon Sanné prayed for the strengthening of marriage "as You ordained it for our good and Your glory."

"Completely inappropriate," said Sen. Kevin Ranker, D-Orcas Island. "Regrettable," said Seattle Sen. Ed Murray, the Democratic leader. They said all pastors are told in advance to keep prayers nondenominational and nonpolitical.

Sanné, pastor of Calvary Chapel, hosted a rally at the church against marriage equality in September with

featured Rick Santorum. The church donated \$5,000 to the campaign against legalization.

### Teacher has bible but no job now

You've got to love how this story starts: "Just moments before the Phillipsburg [N.J.] Board of Education voted Jan. 14 to terminate a substitute teacher who showed a student a bible, a sudden downpour of rain could be heard hitting the roof of the middle school meeting area." The WFMZ-TV reporter further mused, "Was there some sort of message to be gleaned from this meteorological event?"

The board had just unanimously approved, with abstentions from three new members, Superintendent George Chando's recommendation to terminate substitute teacher Walter Tutka three months after he was removed from teaching. Last fall he is alleged to have told a middle school student, who was last in line to leave class, that "the last will be first, and the first will be last" and showed him the passage in his personal bible.

The board wouldn't disclose the reason for removing Tutka from the substitute list for the rest of the year.

### Neighbors target skeptics in senior living

Some seniors living at La Costa Glen retirement community in Carlsbad, Calif., told KERO News they're being

targeted by residents for their nonreligion, the station reported Dec. 26.

"They said, 'She is a sinner. She's going to hell and she's going to burn forever,'" said Brigit Smith-Clarke, 84, who started a group called Atheists Anonymous.

It started with 16 members two years ago and has grown to nearly 100 seniors. Smith-Clarke said people are calling her things such as "anti-Christ" and "Jew-lover." She said she was raised Christian but "is tired of pretending."

"I think it's a big place and people do all sorts of things," said activities coordinator Michelle Chaffee. "It's not typical of what we see here normally."

Chaffee says it's the A-word that is the problem. "That has turned a lot of people off."

### U.S. House proclaims Darwin Day

U.S. Rep. Rush Holt, D-N.J., introduced H.Res. 41 declaring Feb. 12 as Darwin Day in recognition of "the importance of science in the betterment of humanity."

Holt, who has a doctorate in physics, introduced the resolution to honor Charles Darwin's 204th birthday:

"Whereas Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by the mechanism of natural selection, together with the monumental amount of scientific evidence he compiled to support it, provides humanity with a logical and intellectually compelling explanation for the diversity of life on Earth. . ."

## Marquee Madness



### Obviously!

Deb and Paul Lindsey comment on this scene in Marathon, Fla., "Full of nuts? Really? No kidding!"



### Mixed message

Ellen Lewis took this photo in Minnesota in summer 2011. "The message might just cause any reasonable, thinking Christian (is there such person?) to reconsider and question their faith. For this atheist, it reaffirms my nonbelief with an exclamation point."



## In Memoriam

### Michael Deanhardt, 1936–2012



Michael Christopher Deanhardt, 76, Anderson, S.C., died Dec. 19, 2012, at the Rainey Hospice House.

He was born Oct. 7, 1936 in Anderson to Melvin and Ellen (Wilson) Deanhardt and worked as a self-employed mason.

Deanhardt, a longtime FFRF member and man of good humor, was for

years called “the most prayed for man in Anderson” due to his ongoing campaign to get local government boards to stop praying at their meetings. He was also a committed activist on behalf of civil rights, abortion rights, labor rights and separation of state and church.

The Anderson Independent Mail in a profile mentioned “the faded bumper sticker on his pickup read: ‘When the rapture comes, can I have your truck?’”

In a 2008 column in that paper, Deanhardt wrote: “We are not willing to cede the moral high ground to the fundamentalists of the religious and political right who are using the language of faith, religion and politics to advance a narrow-minded, mean-spirited agenda, which is built on what we consider to be immoral values of intolerance, exclusion, division, discrimination and repression.”

He is survived by his wife of 55 years, Anita Story Deanhardt, five children, nine grandchildren, five great-grandchildren, two brothers and two sisters.

FFRF offers its sincerest condolences to Michael’s family.

### James Schiller, 1937–2012

James Joseph Schiller, Denver, died Dec. 6, 2012. He was born in in 1937 in St. Louis, Mo.

He attended New York University, where he met his wife, Susan. They lived in New York while he attended the New School for Social Research, where he obtained his master’s degree. He earned a post-master’s at Johns Hopkins University.

His first teaching position was in Atlanta. James and Susan lived in Baltimore for 23 years and then in the Denver area for 22 years. Their daughter, Julia, and grandson, Nicolas, live in New Zealand, which was a favorite vacation destination for James and Susan for many years.

James was a member of the Hu-

manists of Colorado and the Freedom From Religion Foundation. “FFRF was very important to James and remains very important to Susan,” notes Tim Bailey, Humanists of Colorado president and FFRF member.

A humanist celebration of life memorial is being planned for March and will be announced. Condolences can be mailed to Humanists of Colorado, Box 461112, Glendale, CO 80246, or emailed to [humanistsofcolorado@mind-spring.com](mailto:humanistsofcolorado@mind-spring.com).

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to FFRF, Box 750, Madison, WI 53701.

FFRF’s sincerest condolences go out to the Schiller family.

### Ann E. Zindler, 1935–2012

Ann Elizabeth Zindler, 77, Columbus, Ohio, died of metastatic breast cancer at her home after a heroic battle of more than four years’ duration.

Ann Hunt was born Feb. 25, 1935, in Ann Arbor, Mich. She studied art and biology at Eastern Michigan University. She managed a women’s dormitory at the University of Michigan before moving in 1967 after her marriage in 1964 to New York, where she worked as a glasswright known for her acid-etched stained glass creations.

She served as joint director of the Central Ohio Chapter of American Atheists after moving to Columbus in

1983. Ann became the principal artist and art and layout editor for American Atheist Press. She devoted her life to the advancement of reason and with her husband, Frank, labored to guard the wall of separation between state and church. She was a member of Planned Parenthood and NARAL, Zero Population Growth, the Audubon Society and American Atheists.

Survivors include her husband of 48 years, Frank, an FFRF member; a daughter, Catherine; and three grandchildren; all of Columbus.

FFRF offers its sincerest condolences to the Zindler family.

# Make it Great, not Good, Friday!

**Nobody died for our “sins”  
Jesus Christ is a myth**

P.S. your god says, “Thou shalt not steal.”

**FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION**

By Gary McIntyre

It’s encouraging to see our secular movement growing and gaining strength. We are meeting, networking, organizing, participating and proliferating.

As our numbers increase, so does membership in the growing number of secular organizations. We are receiving national and international media attention, with the important message of reality-based alternatives to lives and minds dimmed and shackled by the influences of religion and its myths and superstitions.

Each day, friends, neighbors and fellow citizens who share our worldview are standing up, speaking out and accepting their role in what may be the most important and consequential social change in the history of humankind. It is the evolution and transition from a world of mythological beliefs and practices toward lives, societies and nations founded upon science, facts and reason.

Many of us seem to lack the perceived freedom, social support or opportunity to make our freethought known to others. Yet, freethinkers today are much like those minority groups which have gone before us to proudly proclaim their identity, become recognized and ultimately accepted as equals in the political process and to claim their rightful place in society.

Nothing is more important to our future success than for nontheists to “come out” to their families and friends, their coworkers and communities. One has to wonder, for each one of us who is openly nontheist, how many of our family members and friends secretly share our rejection of religion and dogma?

On March 29, the day known as Good Friday to Christians, public attention, popular discussion, social practices and media coverage worldwide will focus on the Christian myth — Jesus dying on the cross, then rising from the dead to save humankind from sin. Most of us don’t get this at all, but what an opportune time for nontheists and secularists to plan, organize and publicize a nationwide, or even worldwide, effort to encourage those of like mind to “come out” en masse.



We can create a back story now to next year’s Good Friday, one which encourages public discussion, facilitates conversations and provides nontheists with the opportunity and moment to openly join us in this most important of social change movements.

Good Friday? No, it will be a Great Friday! We can own this. Great Friday can become our annual, purposeful, secular response and alternative to yet another religious holiday.

We have the message. We have the resources. We have this opportunity.

*Gary McIntyre, a Kentucky resident most of his life, was “saved” while growing up Baptist. He started to question religion in college and remembers giving a Speech 101 presentation on “something you feel strongly about.” It was titled “Why I Am Not a Christian” and drew mostly negatives reactions.*

*He considered himself an agnostic much of his adult life but now says atheist and humanist more accurately describes his worldview. Gary joined FFRF in the mid-1980s after seeing Dan Barker on a television morning show.*

## ‘Do good on Good Friday’

In the spirit of 19th century freethinker Robert Green Ingersoll, who wrote, “Hands that help are better far than lips that pray,” FFRF annually challenges freethinkers to set an example for religionists by ‘doing good on Good Friday.’

The annual challenge was inaugurated in the early 1990s by Pat Cleveland, a founder of the Alabama Freethought Society, FFRF’s longest-running existing chapter.

“It’s not that freethinkers aren’t good every day,” says active volunteer Pat. “But this will be a way to make it a

truly good day, if all freethinkers in the country would be visibly helping.”

FFRF overturned a statute making Good Friday a state holiday in Wisconsin. But in all too many regions, there are still government-fostered holidays for Good Friday. FFRF encourages you to take advantage to donate blood, donate a free afternoon to the needy or other worthy causes.

You may want to advertise your “good deeds” on FFRF’s online members-only forum or on our Facebook page.

## Letterbox

### 3 troublesome themes permeate crank mail

In reading the November crank mail, three principal themes seemed to permeate almost all the letters. First, no argument is made and no evidence given to support religious belief; in fact, no letter even addressed the question of how truth is to be determined.

Second, the main thrust of letters is that “this is the way we’ve always done things around here,” with no mention of reason or moral value. This is the same line that was offered in defense of segregation (recall “our Southern way of life”), and is descended from the defense of slavery.

Third, many contain either implicit or explicit threats of physical violence against anyone who might venture into this supposedly religious territory. This reinforces the age-old relationship between religion and power: those who win the battles or wars proclaim that a deity assisted them, which, by twisted logic, is sufficient to establish the reality of their deity.

**David Bushler**  
New York

•••

The latest issue was another winner, but aren’t they all? I love the crank mail which you so boldly reprint showing these incredibly ignorant people for what they clearly are. If they represent religion, I’ve made an excellent choice.

**Don Blair**  
Florida

### Calif. retirees donate 2012 surplus to FFRF

We are a group of elderly people (average age 75) who believe that religion is, on balance, not good for children and other human beings. We live in Rossmoor, Calif., a retirement community of 9,000 people. Our group has 98 active members, and our email list has 186 names of other “interested” people.

At the end of each year we donate whatever is left in our treasury, after expenses, to an atheist cause. Some of our members already belong to FFRF. At our last meeting, we voted to contribute \$300 (check enclosed) to FFRF to recognize what you are doing to free American minds from the fog of religion.

Please accept our congratulations on your good work. We hope next year’s contribution will be larger.

**Richard Golden**  
California

### Life Member proud to lend a hand

Enclosed please find the fourth and final payment for my Life Membership. I am so happy and proud to be able to complete this membership and help with your very important work.

**A. Joanne Siegl**  
Ohio

### ‘Outsiders’ force locals to obey the law

I am so disappointed by stories about unenlightened and unrepentant local officials who complain about those “outsiders” (FFRF) who “force” the community to end some local violation. Of course, it’s the First Amendment (not FFRF) which “forces” the

result, and it is the First Amendment which the local opposition denigrates when it dismisses the result as some sort of bizarre misapplication of justice.

After a church-state violation is remedied, these communities have an opportunity (and in this country of laws, a civic duty) to turn the resolution of a contentious dispute into a learning moment for the citizens who must live by these laws. They would do well to try to heal the rift caused by the conflict and to remind the citizenry of the very American values embodied in our First Amendment.

Instead, to their enduring shame, these strident individuals, immune to the notion that they might not speak for God, and oblivious to how un-American their intolerance is, follow their loss by doubling down on their spiteful and vitriolic demonization of outsiders.

To FFRF members in such communities, I say: Please don’t let the petulant provincialism of uneducable bullies resonate throughout the region as a final declaration of local intolerance and xenophobia. Let your voice, not theirs, be the last one heard on the opinion pages.

And if a school is involved, urge them to invite credentialed speakers to a school assembly after the dispute is over so that the spirit and function of the First Amendment might be better understood and respected by thinking people.

**Fred Shortz, Life Member**  
Connecticut

### God either heartless or imaginary figure

I am happy to learn that FFRF’s building expansion can go forward. Two years ago I gave \$500 for the expansion. Here is another \$500. I’d give more if I could. The work you do to keep religion out of government is so important.

I have been an atheist most of my life. Even if there were a God, what good is “He or She” to just ignore all this awful stuff going on like the school shootings? Surely, He’d do something if He were real. Need no Ph.D to see that.

**Charles Saxton**  
Arkansas

### Wondering about future of our species

’Tis the season for Reason’s Greetings again, and for another modest donation to your most worthy cause, that of intelligence and sanity. Someday, I hope to be able to offer you more, such as \$666, ho ho ho.

It’s hard to believe the tiresome religious bigotry and ignorance reported in each issue of Freethought Today and to tell if we’re making much headway from year to year. Is there any future for a species that, despite having a complex brain, feels the need to invent an imaginary being and then lives in fear of being punished and eventually sacrificed by its own delusional invention?

**Judy Loewen**  
Alberta, Canada

### Shaking the piggy bank for worthy causes

The solstice card and Lifetime



### Pulpit politickin’

**Amy Frakes spotted this church marquee in Cynthiana, Ky.**

Member pin you sent really caught me by surprise. I do appreciate that badge of honesty and will wear it proudly.

Now that you have quite a project at hand, I shook the piggy bank energetically and, lo and behold, a few dollars fell out. Best wishes to all of you in your commendable pursuits.

**Tom Johnson**  
Colorado

### Religions are waging war on nonbelievers

Religious leaders complain of “the war on religion” whenever they can’t bully others into giving them what they want, even at the cost to everyone else’s civil and human rights. Let’s not forget that religions started the “war” in the first place.

All’s fair in religious wars, and the ends justify the means, to advance the kingdom of God. Whenever blind faith trumps reason and evidence, there are consequences. The costs can be so high that we must not allow them to be unchallenged.

The addiction to and respect for religions is disrupting education, critical thinking, rational discourse, our legal system and human rights. Its intransigence is blocking progress.

**Carl Scheiman, Lifetime Member**  
Maine

### Thank you for the best issue ever

I have been getting Freethought Today for several years but find this last issue the best ever. As a member of a minority (an atheist in the South), I often feel overwhelmed and downtrodden, but getting your publication always renews my spirit, vigor and conviction.

I was particularly inspired by the article written by student activist Shawna Scott and continue to marvel at the strength of Jessica Ahlquist, whom I had the pleasure of meeting at your convention in Hartford, Conn.

I got a kick out of Dan Barker’s article about Christians “stealing” Christmas. It’s so amusing that Christians are so convinced they’ve got it right, the little thieves! The crank mail always tickles me. By the last one, I’m usually in tears of laughter from the idiocy of the brainwashed bigots who are so convinced they have all the answers. What fun!

You’re always a welcome shot in the arm!

**Jack M. Reed**  
North Carolina

### Maybe Mormons, Muslims should merge?

In his acceptance speech for the Emperor Has No Clothes award [Nov12], Richard Dawkins said it made no sense

for Mormon Bishop Mitt Romney to excommunicate a woman after she already left the Mormon Church.

She could not just leave the church; she had to be punished. By excommunicating her even after she left means all of her Mormon family and friends can have nothing more to do with her. It is like putting her in isolation.

Baptizing his long-dead atheist father-in-law is weird. Mormons are taught they are to have as many children as they can because they are to take over the world. Do you think they will pass the Catholics one day?

They are not allowed to drink alcohol or coffee. Maybe they can hook up with the Muslims who are taught alcohol and dogs are unclean. And so it goes, on and on.

**Irene Stephenson, Life Member**  
California

### Zealots marred internship at Okla. water board

I was very interested to read in the October Freethought Today about prayers that were stopped at the Oklahoma Water Resources Board, where I worked for two years in the late 1990s. It was almost more like working for a church than for a scientific agency!

It was very common when we were traveling for my boss to grab my hands before a meal and say grace. People there referred to each other as “brothers in Christ,” and there was no escape from the relentless torrent of religious piety that surrounded me. Since I was an intern hoping for a permanent job, I wasn’t in a position to say anything (the job was never forthcoming; I discovered they did not give permanent jobs to people with two X chromosomes, but that’s a whole other story).

I learned a lot during that internship. I was very much an accommodationist when I arrived there, but not by the time I left. I wish I had known about you when I was trapped in my boss’s office listening to a long, gory, graphic description of “The Left Behind” series. Watching this mild-mannered, kind man working himself into a froth of delight over the tortures that awaited many of his neighbors and friends was a real awakening for me.

Listening to another friend, a man with a master’s degree in zoology, describe the reality of demonic possession horrified me. But the worst moment came when I heard a man I considered a friend inform me that, yes, if God told him to kill me, he would have to kill me, because killing was moral and good when God ordered it. At the time, my life was in his hands as I riding in a truck he was driving.

I am glad that you have managed to put a stop to the illegal prayers at the

OWRB. I just wish I thought it would bring more comfort to those individuals who have taken my place as the ones hiding under their desks (figuratively) to avoid sparking a religious incident that could become unstable and dangerous.

**Robin Buckallew**  
Nebraska

## Realizing 'no good comes from blind faith'

This last year has been an awakening for my husband and me. Through much reading, struggling and arguing at times among ourselves, we finally realized what we knew all along: Religion is for people who do not wish to think. Although this was a relief at first, the reality began to set in, as so many others have vocalized.

As time passed, more education and awareness began to open our eyes and the picture became uglier to the point of being grotesque. It is now difficult to not make the connection between religion and the difficulties we see everywhere. What once seemed harmless now has become foul and is polluting everything it touches.

One of our arguments: I would say, "No, it matters what people believe, and it's not fine with me when they believe lies." That seemed narrow-minded to him (and sometimes even to me), but I am certain now that no

good comes from blind faith.

It took us several months to make the decision to donate to your funds. We were not sure that some of the battles being fought were necessary. But it has become apparent that a line must be drawn in the sand for the welfare of the whole human race. If the vast majority of people's belief systems teach them to live in a fantasy world, real world problems can't be addressed, which in turn breeds ignorance, intolerance, hate and apathy.

If the very best that we can do is keep them from usurping our freedoms, we must fight hard and meet them with resistance at every battle line.

**Darla Horn**  
New York

P.S. My husband insisted on sending \$104 because that's \$2 for every week in the year. I think this is left over from his church tithing days. By the way, our only other donations are to the Red Cross, SPCA and Get the Money Out ([getmoneyout.com/](http://getmoneyout.com/)), a secular group dedicated to getting money out of politics.

## Refreshing in D.C.: Nation *not* under God

I'm a Lifetime Member of FFRF as is my husband. Although I was born and raised as an atheist, I listened to the prayer service at the National Cathedral in Washington, hoping to find a

humanist on the roster of speakers but also hoping to hear President Obama speak. There was none and he did not.

But when Rev. Adam Hamilton, a United Methodist pastor from Kansas, said, ". . . one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all," I was amazed. He was not reciting the pledge, but he was clearly making a point.

This was only one day after Myrlie Evers-Williams, in her layman's invocation at the inauguration itself, said, "We now stand beneath the shadow of the nation's Capitol, whose golden dome reflects the unity and democracy of one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

So that's two Christian heroes in the space of two days, each willing to risk the wrath of the righteous.

**Sigrid R-P Smith**  
Connecticut

## Clergy abuse documentary exposes corruption

The documentary "Mea Maxima Culpa" is an extraordinary film that exposes the moral bankruptcy of the Catholic Church in covering up sex abuse of children by clergy over the centuries. Subtitled "Silence in the House of God," it focuses on the horrific abuse of deaf children in Wisconsin by Fr. Lawrence Murphy, who was

protected by the church hierarchy despite the fact he molested an estimated 200 boys over 20 years.

Murphy was never defrocked and was buried in his priestly vestments after showing no remorse. Incredibly, he justified his crimes as "curing" his victims of homosexual tendencies.

Cardinal Josef Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) is revealed as long complicit in the cover-up. His fury at reporters questioning him about his protection of a sex abuser and morphine addict cardinal is telling. His predecessor, John Paul II, and the Vatican as a whole, come across as no better. William Donohue of the Catholic League is exposed as a liar and apologist.

In a shocking scene, one of Murphy's victims tells how a nun tricked him into signing a settlement document in which he stated he had sinned against the Milwaukee Archdiocese for bringing the allegations to light.

Most of the people in the film are Catholics, including clergy repulsed by the cover-up but stonewalled when they tried to stop the abuse.

Parts of the film are hard to take, but it's worth the discomfort. It should be shown at every freethought convention.

**Dennis Middlebrooks**  
New York

## Sharing the Crank Mail

### Jesus said to 'kiss his ass'

*Below, a representative sampling of recent emails from "loving Christians," usually in response to news coverage of FFRF's state/church work. Grammar and spelling are uncorrected. Warning: Some language and suggestions are X-rated.*

**Jackson Middle School:** LEAVE THE SCHOOL ALONE OR YOU CAN JUST PLAIN LEAVE THE COUNTRY!! GOD BLESS AMERICA you are not American. — *Laura Chastain, Riviera Beach, Fla.*

**Jesus:** Jesus said to kiss his ass!!! And burn in hell!!! — *C.R., Hickory, N.C.*

**Your the reason:** Your group is one of the reason United States Of America is in the moral decay that is is!!! You take the foundation that we were founded on out of my Country! Take your leftist lawsuits and go hug your bulshivik president! — *"Michigan"*

**Communists:** Yes, you all are a pawn of the Communists and the Socialist Obama administration. — *Guy Melton, Okla.*

**Really?:** You people are all a bunch of a\$\$holes, and are exactly what is wrong with this country. Hope you all end up in hell, like the rest of the heathens. — *Mike Dufala, Easley, S.C.*

**A Disgusting Bunch of Bastards:** Maybe the time has come for the country to have Freedom from you "Freedom From Religion" bunch of warped bastards. — *David Marcontell, Midlothian, Texas*

**Happy Solstice:** MERRY CHRISTMAS AND GOD BLESS....YOU WORTHLESS MOTHER-FUCKERS!!!!

**From Seattle:** Merry Christmas pinheads.

**Merry CHRISTmas:** Your group is useless. — *Erik Czarnik*

**rights:** you crackpots make me sick the U S constitution says freedom OF religion not from religion. I find you crackpots very offensive so GORW UP — *Rick Marsh, Kan.*

**worthless:** your group is as unAmerican as you can get and bent on the destruction of America. Do you remember One Nation Under God, if you don't like it GET OUT.

**Chambersburg Glee Club:** If this is such

a bad place THEN GET THE FUCK OUT ASSHOLES and leave high school kids out of it! GET A LIFE AND LEAVE THE REST OF US ALONE!!! TAKE YOUR UNHAPPINESS SOMEWHERE ELSE AND STOP TRYING TO WRECK EVERYTHING THAT IS GOOD AND WHOLESOME IN THIS GREAT COUNTRY! — *Geoff Ackley, Hartland, Wis.*

**read this:** do everyone a favor and just kill yourselves. Would be no great loss to anyone. you are a bunch of self-centered narrow-minded assholes that force your beliefs on everyone else. who gives a fuck what you think — *Joe Public, Texas*

**Who cares:** u people have got to be the biggest bunch of fucking losers that I have ever encountered. There are no negative effects of a society that has a moral religious base. Go to a gov't funded housing project and you will see lazy immoral bums that today's society thinks it is fair to takeuchi money to support these lazy bums. It would be my guess that you and your kind support an incompetent idiot lik — *James Eck*

**fuck off:** you fucking people need to mind your own fucking back yard not any one elces i have photos of you people defacing others property and im sending them to world news — *"Shit Head"*

**Information:** You do realize you work for Satan right? You think you are a free thinker, but he has you right where he wants you. Repent, before it's too late. — *Brian Jones*

**Nativity Scene Athens, Tx:** Why don't you keep your Yankee bullshit outta TEXAS. Nobody here gives a damn about what you think. — *Ryan Ragsdale*

**hell:** hope you have fun in hell my granny is the devil and she is gonna make you pay for not minding your own damn business if you don't like it don't go around it what the hell if I want to go to the capitol and see the ten commandments you are violating my civil rights because I cant and will sue your ass in court so its a never ending battle hurry up and die so the us native americans can have our land back and our rights. — *Steven Flowers*

**freedom from religion:** You now have yourselves to blame for what happened in Connecticut....you want more freedom from religion, or freedom from God I should say? You are to blame. — *David Hess*

May your Christmas be blessed  
with God's special gifts  
of peace, joy, and love.

Merry Christmas!  
Jesus might love you!  
But you can still piss off

## Mixed message

"Glory to the newborn King" was the message on the front of this card from Farwell, Mich.

**Stay out of our schools business:** YOU AITHEST LIBERALS ARE THE REASON WHY THE SHOOTING AT BOTH SANDY HOOK ELEMENTARY AND COLUMBINE HAPPENED AND IF YOU KEEP IT UP WITY WANTING TO TAKE CHRIST OUT OF SCHOOLS AND EVERYTHING ELSE YOU ALL ARE GOING TO BE CONDEMNED TO AN ETERNITY IN HELL WITH THE DIEVL YE GENERATION OF VIPERS! — *Colin Stanley*

**Jackson county ohio:** Stay out of jackson county with your anti Christian views. We don't respect you. And I don't know one person in this county that has any use for you or your opinions. God bless you and have a nice day. — *Carl Detty, Oak Hill, Ohio*

**Jackson Ohio:** Keep your nose out of our schools leave up the picture of Jesus. If we had more pictures of him in schools maybe we would have less shootings in schools. How dare you but in.

**Jackson, Ohio:** I am going to start off by saying this organization needs to stay out of Southern Ohio, especially schools. So mind your own damn business, which should be at the very least in Wisconsin not all the way down here in Southern Ohio. — *Eric Castle, Ohio*

**Staying out of Ohio:** TO WHOM IT CONCERNS, YOU ARE A WISCONSIN BASED, NOT FOR PROFIT(BUT GETTING MY TAX DOLLARS)BUSINESS. IF YOU DO NOT APPROVE OF A PICTURE OF MY SAVIOR, I HAVE AN IDEA,KEEP YOUR ASSES IN WISCONSIN AND DON'T WORRY ABOUT WHAT WE ARE DOING IN OHIO! — *Bobby McKenzie, Ohio*



## Just like Obama?

"Jesus is the reason for the season!" exclaims Jeanette Jones from parts unknown.

**Religion:** If a picture of Jesus bothers your group so much, then don't go where it is. I think that is what is wrong with our younger generations today, some idiots, like your group don't have anything better to do than remove GOD from the classrooms. — *Anna Brown, South Shore, Ky.*

**Hypocrits:** Not having a picture of Christ is an illegal endorsement of atheism. I want separation of your church from my state. Such Hypocrits — *Spencer Mason, Salt Lake City, Utah*

Despite being called “spoilsports” by a local resident, members of FFRF’s Metropolitan Chicago Chapter say that posting the banner in North School Park in Arlington Heights went without a hitch. Front, from left, are Bob Elmore, Bob Hunter, Liz Calato, Kathi Wise, Dan Hamilton, (back) Fred Dix, Steve Foulkes, Brian McCaskill, Tom Cara, Rich Pope and Chris Calato.



Thanks to Board member Darrell Barker, FFRF’s Winter Solstice banner was erected for a second year to counter a large nativity display outside the Washington Capitol in Olympia. Barker applied for and received a permit to keep the display up until the end of the year.



Religion “hardens hearts and enslaves minds” declared FFRF on its banner challenging a nativity scene on government property near City Hall in Prineville, Ore. Local supporter Sarah Fierbaugh erected the banner on behalf of FFRF and its Oregon members.

# FFRF’s December battle of the banner



Three volunteers helped post FFRF’s solstice sign on Boston Common in Boston on Dec. 17. Zachary Bos (left), Gabriel McDonald and Ellery Schempp, Lifetime Member and Supreme Court victor, did the honors. Unfortunately, the banner was stolen a few days later. “Mary Dyer was hanged on Boston Common in 1660 for daring to preach tenets of the Quaker religion, and some residents perpetuate that tradition of intolerance by carrying off our Boston Common banner,” said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.



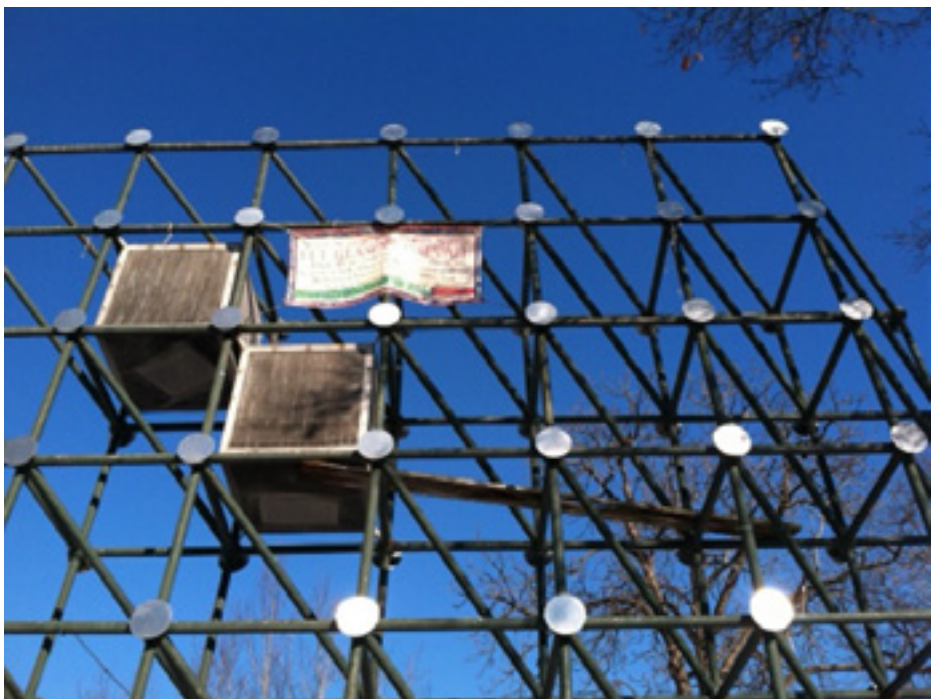
FFRF received a permit from the city of Manassas, Va., for its “Let Reason Prevail” banner to counter a nativity scene. It was placed by a local supporter on Dec. 19 in Nelson Park next to a crèche. A report was filed with police Dec. 29 after the banner was stolen. Zip ties attached to the posts were all that were left.

**Victory!**

The city council in Cheboygan, Mich., moved a nativity display from public property instead of giving FFRF equal time during the winter holiday season. Rather than let FFRF’s “Let Reason Prevail” banner stand in a public park with the Kiwanis Club’s nativity scene, the council voted Dec. 18 to ban all displays in Washington Park — except for secular displays by the Chamber of Commerce and the Opera House. City Attorney Stephen Lindsay warned the council about denying FFRF’s request if it permitted the nativity and facing potential litigation which “the city cannot win.”



From left: Sean Cunningham, Shelly Colanduno, Matt Newcomb and Jason Shainline. “Keep Saturn in Saturnalia” is the 19-foot message the Freedom From Religion Foundation would have liked to share with Pitman, N.J., residents this holiday season, but the group was stonewalled by borough officials. The state/church watchdog was unable to obtain a permit, even though the Knights of Columbus was allowed to reinstall its “Keep Christ in Christmas” display on public property without a permit.



Justin Vacula, a graduate student, FFRF member and student essay honorable mention awardee, coordinated the placement of a solstice sign in Public Square in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Shortly after a city worker placed FFRF’s banner, an identified man brazenly and in front of TV cameras cut the cords. Vacula immediately filed a police report. After he and FFRF repeatedly protested police and city inaction, Vacula was told by an officer that the vandal would be charged with disorderly conduct and criminal mischief. A police report verified the charges. The photo at right shows how FFRF’s banner was left dangling for 3 weeks before the city reattached it.



FFRF placed its solstice banner in City Park in Streator, Ill. Last holiday season, FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott protested the crèche being on public property. Locals took issue with the nativity itself and the blatantly Christian sign next to the display that read, “Unto you is born the Savior Jesus Christ the Lord.”



A thief or thieves in Warren, Mich., stole this solstice banner several days after it was placed on public property. It was vandalized the day after it was put up, when one of the steel fence posts it was attached to was removed. FFRF members Gary Fromm (left), Howard Flake, Douglas Marshall and Bruce Kopetz installed the banner before its theft. FFRF warmly thanks Douglas Marshall for all his hard work.

# FFRF protests 'Jackson Jesus' in public school

*Continued from front page*

"tense" and heated meeting, with parents booing those who opposed the painting's presence, and cheering and applauding the board's decision.

"It is still violating the United States Constitution and must be removed immediately," said a parent, who was loudly booed.

Since FFRF wrote its letter, the ACLU of Ohio has joined the fight. ACLU litigation coordinator Drew Dennis said: "The fact that this portrait has been hanging for many years does not change the fact that it promotes one set of religious beliefs at the expense of all others. Public school displays that advance one particular religious tradition are neither welcoming, nor inclusive for those who may have other beliefs."

The "Jackson Jesus" painting is the focal point, segregated by itself, of a so-called "Hall of Honor" at the school. It reportedly was given to the school in 1947.

"I'm certainly not going to run down there and take the picture down because some group from Madison, Wis., who knows nothing about the culture of our community or why the picture is even there, wants me to take it down," Howard told WKKJ.

A Christian-right group based in Texas known as the Liberty Institute announced Jan. 11 that it had been "retained" by Jackson City Schools as legal counsel. A Facebook group was started to support the school board's position, garnering more than 11,000 "likes" by Jan. 7.

Joe Hensler, who started the Facebook page, dubbed himself president of Citizens of Jackson County for Jesus.

"And it's good to see that there are still people in our community that are willing to stand up and speak out for Christ," he told a reporter.

The devotional painting in question, formally titled "Head of Christ," was painted by Warner Sallman in 1941. According to the Sallman official website, the painting has been reproduced more than 500 million times. The Gospel Trumpet County, later Warner Press, became the principal distributor of the painting and other Sallman images.

Sallman also painted popular images titled "Christ at Heart's Door," "Christ in Gethsemane" and "The Lord is My Shepherd." He enrolled in bible school and was encouraged to paint by a dean who said, "Sometime I hope you give us your conception of Christ. And I hope it's a manly one. Most of our pictures today are too effeminate."

Sallman said about his work, "I give God the glory for whatever has been accomplished by my efforts to bring joy and happiness to people throughout the world."

Dan Barker, FFRF co-president and a former evangelical minister, is familiar with the painting, having encountered it himself in countless Christian churches. "It boggles the mind that in 2013, a public school superintendent and school board would not understand that a devotional painting of Jesus, called 'The Head of Christ,' — identical to millions hanging in churches and Sunday school classrooms around the country — may not be part of a 'Hall of Honor' or be posted at the entrance of a middle school."

(Further developments in what will be an ongoing story will be reported in the March Freethought Today.)



FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel had his "nonbaptism by fire" Jan. 18 on "The O'Reilly Factor," speaking in opposition to religion's inclusion in the presidential inauguration. Although you would never know it from Andrew's expert appearance, this was his first-ever TV interview.

## Factoring in the Constitution

# So help me Zeus! — O'Reilly v. FFRF

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel, carrying on a long FFRF tradition of protesting the use of the bible and an oath to God at presidential swearings-in, sent an appeal to President Barack Obama immediately after he was reelected, asking him to "go by the book" (the Constitution, not the bible).

FFRF has asked every president since its founding, starting with Jimmy Carter, to eschew the bible and "So help you God" at presidential inaugurations. The U.S. Constitution, in Article II, Section 1, Clause 8, specifies:

"Before he enters on the execution of his office he shall take the following oath or affirmation: 'I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.'"

Missing from those instructions is any reference to the bible or God. In response to Andrew's letter, Fox TV invited him to debate archconservative pundit Bill O'Reilly. Andrew clearly won, but you be the judge by viewing it at [bit.ly/VkzMcI](http://bit.ly/VkzMcI).

Andrew said (amid numerous interruptions by the host) in response to O'Reilly's claim that the "overwhelming majority" of Americans want the bible in the inauguration: "That's actually not accurate. The Freedom From Religion Foundation's membership has exploded over the past five years. We have 19,000 members now; 19% of this country now consider themselves nonreligious; 35% of this country under the age of 30 consider themselves nonreligious. The demographics are shifting."

He also pointed out that the will of the majority is irrelevant and the bible is barbaric: "The Bill of Rights exists to protect the minority from the tyranny of the majority. We are a nation of laws and neither our laws nor our morality are founded upon the bible. Religion gets its morality from us, not the other way around. . . . The bible exhibits a Bronze Age morality that treats women as chattel, human beings as property and punishes innocent children for the crimes of their parents to the third and fourth generations, and that's just the first set of Ten Commandments!"

The subject of Martin Luther King Jr. came up briefly, since Obama swore on one of his bibles, giving Andrew an opening to quote from King's famous letter from the Birmingham jail criticizing the "pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities" of many white churches.

Read Andrew's letter (Nov. 9, 2012) and FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor's statement about the Inaugural (Jan. 20, 2013) at [ffrf.org/news-releases/](http://ffrf.org/news-releases/).



## Caption contest winners are!

In no particular order: "Shop Hunters Farm & Hardware for everyday Savings." (Linda Allewalt, Kentucky); "It turned out that Jesus wasn't much of a carpenter, either." (Eric Thomas, North Carolina); "Local residents had little interest in maintaining religious symbols after they were removed from public property." (Becca Challman, Delaware). They each win a \$25 credit in FFRF's gift shop ([ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop)) and a "clean," pre-In God We Trust \$1 bill. FFRF thanks all who entered and especially photographer J.E. Hill, Washington (also a prize winner), for the contest idea and great photo. (Winners will all be getting a note in the mail about prize details.)

## Overheard

God is great.  
**Shouted by militant Islamists arriving at an Algerian gas field where workers were taken hostage and forced to wear explosives, with the death toll exceeding 60, including militants**  
*New York Times, 1-19-13*

The Second Amendment Comes From God.  
**Protest sign at a rally of 600 gun owners at the Texas Capitol in Austin**  
*Associated Press, 1-20-13*

It's one of the darker sides of the Arab uprisings. Their peaceful nature may have damaged al-Qaida and its allies ideologically, but logistically, in terms of the new porousness of borders, the

expansion of ungoverned areas, the proliferation of weapons, the disorganization of police and security services in all these countries — it's been a real boon to jihadists.

**Robert Malley, Middle East and North Africa director at the International Crisis Group**  
*New York Times, 1-20-13*

We pray that you will bless us with your continued presence, because without it, hatred and arrogance will infect our hearts.

**One of many remarks offending free-thinkers made by Rev. Louis Leon during his benediction at President Barack Obama's ceremonial swearing-in**  
*CNN, 1-21-13*