

Freethought Today

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October 2013

Schempp salutes McCollum at FFRF convention

Ellery Schempp (left), celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court's ruling in his favor in *Abington v. Schempp*, which removed bible recitations and the Lord's Prayer from public schools, shakes hands with Jim McCollum, another Supreme Court victor. This year also marks the 65th anniversary of the landmark Supreme Court decision *McCollum v. Board of Education*, which protects children from religious indoctrination in public schools.

Look for full coverage of FFRF's 36th annual national convention in the November issue.

Videos will go online soon at ffrf.org/outreach/convention.



Photo: Brent Nicastro

FFRF files SCOTUS amicus against government prayer

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, a national state/church watchdog representing nearly 20,000 non-religious members, has asked the U.S. Supreme Court to declare city council prayers unconstitutional.

FFRF's friend of the court brief was filed Sept. 23. The court is holding oral arguments in November over a closely watched case out of Greece, N.Y.

The town began scheduling prayers to open meetings in 1999. Only a

handful of non-Christian officiants have been invited to give prayers, and two-thirds of the prayers have been sectarian Christian (referring to Jesus).

A challenge of the practice was brought by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, representing two local residents — a nonreligious woman, Linda Stephens, who is an FFRF member, and Susan Galloway, who is Jewish. They won a unanimous appeals court ruling by a three-judge panel of the 2nd Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in May 2012, declaring the practice unconstitutional.

The town, with help of a well-heeled theocratic legal group, Alliance Defending Freedom, appealed the ruling to the Supreme Court. The fact that the court decided to take the appeal of a decision halting sectarian prayers is seen as potentially ominous. Justice Anthony Kennedy, as usual, is viewed as the swing vote.

FFRF notes in its strong supporting brief that FFRF was originally formed in 1976 explicitly to stop prayers at the local government level. Government prayer is the second-most common complaint FFRF receives. FFRF has written to hundreds of legislative entities, in nearly every state, to protest government prayers on behalf of its members who feel excluded as citizens.

In its brief, FFRF asks the court to overturn its misguided 1983 decision, *Marsh v. Chambers*, which "blessed" nonsectarian prayer. FFRF noted that *Marsh* relied on flawed historical



Linda Stephens

analysis, excusing Nebraska statehouse prayers as "traditional" because the practice was longstanding, and calling prayers "a tolerable acknowledgment" of widely held beliefs.

FFRF labeled *Marsh* an "outlier." The decision, by relying on "tradition" rather than principle, does not comport with other court decisions interpreting the meaning of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, such as a string of solid decisions against imposition of prayer and indoctrination in public schools.

FFRF urged the court to place legal principles over history. Some of the Supreme Court's most-ill-advised decisions, such as the *Dred Scott* ruling, have used "tradition" to justify violations of

constitutional rights: "Sometimes, a long history is simply a longstanding injustice — as this Court's treatment of anti-miscegenation and discrimination against gay citizens demonstrates," the brief states.

Marsh's recitation of history is unsound," FFRF writes. "It missed significant facts and distorted others. It relied on congressional chaplaincies but overlooked the divisiveness that office engendered. It relied on the first Congress's approval of chaplaincies to discern the framers' intent but ignored the framers' legal opinions against government prayer.

"*Marsh* relied on colonial prayers that were given years before the Constitution and First Amendment were adopted but minimized the fact that the framers did not pray during the Constitutional Convention when composing our godless Constitution."

FFRF further told the court, "*Marsh* wrongly subjugates fundamental rights to majority rule. Majority will does not trump rights. This country's rapidly shifting religious demographics should force this Court to revisit *Marsh's* 'tolerable acknowledgment' argument."

The brief cites statistics showing that a fifth of today's population is not religious, making government prayer highly exclusionary.

FFRF also worked into the Supreme Court record a correction of a factual assumption by Justice Stephen Breyer

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Meet a Eccentric Staffer



Name: Lauryn Seering.

Where and when I was born: Wausau, Wis., July 28, 1989.

Education: B.S. in professional communications and emerging media, double minors in journalism and international studies, University of Wisconsin-Stout in Menomonie; study abroad at Nagasaki University of Foreign Studies, Nagasaki, Japan (長崎外国語大学 — Nagasaki Gaikokugo Daigaku).

What I do at FFRF: I'm the publicist and assistant editor. I manage our online social media presence and work with news outlets by writing and distributing press releases.

What I like best about FFRF: The staffers I work alongside. They are intelligent and well-read people with a great sense of humor. I adore managing our Facebook and participating in office shenanigans. Most of all, I'm really taking advantage of the upstairs library.

What I like least about it: Reading the crank mail can be a little disheartening. I feel like FFRF's mission is so terribly important and often misunderstood and misrepresented by the media.

I spend a lot of time thinking about: How crazy it is that humans have advanced so much and so little. On the one hand, through science, we have begun to understand the world around us. We have accurate maps of our entire beautiful world and have the capability of actually protecting this planet that gave us life.

On the other hand, there is so much blatant ignorance and superstition. I also spend a lot of time thinking about astronomy, astrophysics, space flight

missions, the Hubble telescope and how awesome the invention of writing is.

These three words sum me up: Artistic, cheerful and opinionated.

My religious upbringing was: Catholic.

My doubts about religion started: I grew up with Japanese culture, starting with "Sailor Moon" and Hayao Miyazaki films. I knew much more about Shintoism and Buddhism before I was truly exposed to Christianity. I realized I identified as atheist after I read a George Smith book, *Atheism: The Case Against God*. Then everything clicked.

Things I like: Watercolors, Prismacolor markers, turtles, coffee, reading old books, studying vocabulary words, watching really cliché Korean dramas and writing anime- and manga-related fan fiction [stories written by fans of the original work, not by the original creator].

Things I smite: Organized intolerant ignorance. Homophobia. Nuclear weapons. And I don't 'smite' but still find a majority of television programs distasteful.

Favorite authors: Carl Sagan, Haruki Murakami, Jane Austen, Oscar Wilde, Chris Hitchens, Sylvia Plath, Douglas Adams, Shungiku Nakamura and Stieg Larsson.

What is the answer to life, the universe and everything? Enjoy and appreciate every last moment as they are right now, because anyone who tells you differently is a lying, conniving jerk. Oh, and of course, 42. [Familiarity with *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* is the key to fully appreciating this last Q&A.]



Why not obey the law?

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott ably represented FFRF at the South Carolina School Boards Association conference on school law Aug. 24 in Charleston. Elliott was a featured presenter and spoke to the legal need for school boards to abide by First Amendment precedent.



The name's the same

William van Druten, principal founder of Lake Superior Freethinkers, a chapter of FFRF in Duluth, Minn., and his daughter recently visited Druten, a city in the eastern Netherlands.

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October 2013

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

In Memoriam

Roger Cleveland, 1945–2013

Founder, Alabama Freethought Association



The Cleveland family was recognized by FFRF with their very own Emperor Has No Clothes Award for their uncommon activism, generosity and outspoken freethought advocacy in the heart of the bible belt. From left are Melody and Alice Cleveland and Patricia and Roger Cleveland. Melody and Alice were Roger's sisters and Pat was his wife.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is sorry to report the death this summer of Roger Cleveland, 67, co-founder of the Alabama Freethought Association. Roger, with his wife, Patricia Cleveland, founded FFRF's Alabama chapter in 1989.

He was born July 23, 1945, in Anniston, Ala., the son of Gilbert Ryan and Levis Brown Cleveland. He had one brother and three sisters, including Melody and Alice Cleveland, both active with the chapter.

He had lived in Talladega since 1954 and received his education in Alabama public schools. He married the former Patricia Creel, and they have a son, a daughter and several grandchildren.

Roger was featured in *Outstanding Talladegans of the Centuries, 1834-2000*. He successfully filed suit against the state of Alabama to remove crosses from state parks and to open up a building used as a chapel on Mt. Cheaha to nonreligious groups. He joined the original suit against state Supreme

Court Chief Justice Roy Moore and his Ten Commandments monument.

AFA also blew the whistle on former Gov. Guy Hunt's use of a state airplane for preaching engagements.

Roger devoted decades of his life to defending and protecting citizens' First Amendment rights. It was Roger who had a dream about a "Freethought Advance — Not Retreat!" in rural Alabama after he and family members purchased land around a lake abutting the Talledega National Forest.

"Without Roger, Lake Hypatia Freethought Hall and Advance would not exist," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Dan and I remember when Roger gave us a tour of the unimproved grounds in the early 1990s, outlining his ideas, and then how we watched them be achieved."

Roger and the Cleveland family generously deeded personal land to FFRF, which raised funds to build Lake Hypatia Freethought Hall and Auditorium. Many freethought markers, including FFRF's historic monument to Atheists in Foxholes, are on the campgrounds.

Roger was the initial tireless volunteer caretaker, spending hours and hours mowing and grooming the grounds for the annual July 4 festival at Lake Hypatia, attended by hundreds of freethinkers. His hands-on volunteerism and carpentry helped to keep costs down in building the hall and auditorium, as well as the lakeside pavilion where meals are served and diners cooled by ingenious fans using lake



Roger cruising down Lake Hypatia.

water.

He died after a protracted illness June 23.

FFRF sends heartfelt condolences to Pat, who co-directs AFA and has taken over caretaking of the grounds for many years, and to his sisters Alice and Melody.

Twilight Destiny

To top the mountain was his goal
That twilight eve in June.

But, lo! The comet caught him up
And headed toward the moon.

This journey was not in his plans,
No bag — no map — no fare.

Yet, he complied and fled this world
Without a thought or care.

Ahead, the blackness ate the sky;
The stars did turn and toss.

With skiey speed, he crossed the
line;
He felt no sense of loss.

The comet lightly sat him down;
He knew not when nor where.

But, he was in a better world ...
For things that were not there.

There was no hate or bigotry;
All myths had been laid down.

No need for vengeance or for wars;
The peace of truth he found!

He ventured up well-trodden paths
To his twilight destiny.

Yes, he was in a long-sought world
Where every thought was free.

— Alice Faye Cleveland



Roger Cleveland with grandson Wesley, in front of Fearn Park (named for FFRF benefactor Blanche Fearn), Lake Hypatia, Ala.

Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

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

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

FFRF
P.O. Box 750
Madison WI 53701

*Freedom Depends
on Freethinkers*



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • ffrf.org

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. 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.

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

Sensual Music

what is past, or passing, or to come
— W.B. Yeats

You know that from day one you start
to lose a little of your heart;
your mother, with a world to save,
has given birth beside a grave,
and time, relentless surgeon's knife,
year by year trims off your life.
But moments teach you not to be
deceived by immortality:
it's far too little, far too much.
What you have is what you touch;
passion feeds on bread and bells,
a chime of sounds, bouquet of smells,
someone's arm around your waist,
the best desire you'll ever taste;
and every glance is one step of
the pilgrimage that leads to love—
silver voices, golden bough:
the immortality of now.

© Philip Appleman 1996

New and Selected Poems, 1956—1996



Philip Appleman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible* (2012), *Darwin's Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used *Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, and the *Norton Critical Edition of Malthus' Essay on Population*.

His poetry and fiction have won many awards, including a fellowship in poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Center for Science Education. His work has appeared in *Harper's Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *The Paris Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, and *The Yale Review*.

He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both "Afterlife" Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. They recorded an excerpt of "Noah," *New and Selected Poems*, which is available for sale from FFRF for \$23 ppd., *The Norton Critical Edition, Darwin*, is \$22 ppd., *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie*, \$27 ppd., *Darwin's Ark*, \$23 ppd., and *Perfidious Proverbs*, \$20 ppd. (ffrf.org/shop/).

YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

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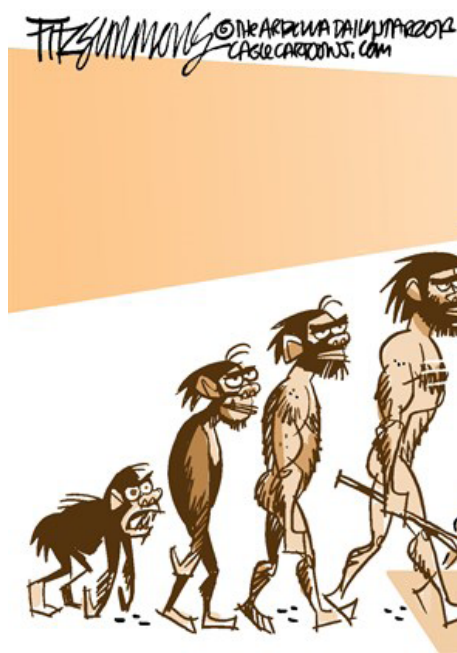


Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

Slightly irreverent views,
news, music & interviews



Overheard

These tax breaks don't favor one religion over another, and that's a plus. But [FFRF's parsonage exemption lawsuit] shows that the subsidies inevitably draw the government into making judgments about spiritual practices, about what counts as religion and what does not. That is not the government's role. A better plan would be to subsidize nonprofits based on their work, not on any spiritual litmus test.

Editorial: "A broken wall between church and state"

Newark [N.J.] *Star-Ledger*, 8-28-13

Churches may have a First Amendment right to endorse candidates, but there is no constitutional right to a tax exemption. Congress is free to condition such exemptions, which can be worth millions of dollars, on an agreement by churches and charities to refrain from partisan political activity. And it's the IRS' responsibility to enforce compliance.

Editorial board comment on 501(c)(3) status for churches engaged in politicking from the pulpit

Los Angeles *Times*, 9-8-13

Barker's opening move was a good one. Not only did he instantly reduce God from an all-powerful entity to a punchline, but he cleverly narrowed the debate from the universal concept of gods (lowercase G) to the God (uppercase G) of the Bible. And the Bible is a buffet for any skeptic hoping to feast on paradoxes and inconsistencies.

Mark Hohmeister, newspaper editor and Presbyterian elder who moderated a debate between FFRF Co-President Dan Barker and Bryan O'Neal of the Moody Bible Institute

Tallahassee *Democrat*, 9-17-13

We're not doing anything for those people. After several months I was embarrassed to have Operation Blessing on the airplane's tail.

Robert Hinkle, chief pilot for Rev. Pat Robertson's Operation Blessing in Zaire in 1994, quoted in the new documentary film "Mission Congo," which details how donations meant for starving refugees were allegedly diverted to Robertson's diamond mining company

The Guardian, 9-8-13

There were files of confidential material relating to child sexual abuse kept in the fireproof strong room of the Chancery office during my tenure as archdiocesan secretary.

Affidavit by Fr. Brian Lucas, general secretary of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, who admitted he

didn't report allegedly abusive priests to the police

The Australian, 8-29-13

Florida has executed a man diagnosed as schizophrenic after the Supreme Court denied a last-minute bid to stay his execution. Lawyers for John Ferguson say his death violated the Eighth Amendment, which requires a person to understand the reason for his execution and the impact the death penalty will have. They said Ferguson believed he would rise again after his execution to fight alongside Jesus Christ and save the country from a communist plot. Ferguson was sentenced to death in 1978 for his role in two sets of killings. He died by lethal injection at 6 p.m. Eastern time on Monday. His final words were, "I just want everyone to know, I am the Prince of God and I will rise again."

Miami Herald, 8-15-13

There's no war on anybody. It's a law that allows people to have justice against people who molested them. How simple can you get?

California state Sen. Jim Beall, D-San Jose, answering Catholic critics of a bill that gives sexual abuse victims a 1-year window to sue, regardless of when the molestation happened

KXTV Sacramento, 9-3-13

It's to let other people of nonreligious beliefs know that there are other people in the community like them.

Luis Fayad, on four "You are not alone" billboards sponsored by the Agnostic and Atheist Student Group of Texas A&M, the Brazos Valley Atheist Vuvuzela Marching Band, the Bryan-College Station Atheists and Freethinkers and the Secular Humanist Network of Texas A&M

The Eagle, 9-11-13

You ask me if the God of the Christians forgives those who don't believe and who don't seek the faith. I start by saying, and this is the fundamental thing, that God's mercy has no limits if you go to him with a sincere and contrite heart. The issue for those who do not believe in God is to obey their conscience.

Pope Francis, responding to a question from Eugenio Scalfari, founder of La Repubblica newspaper

The Independent, 9-11-13



Brian Bolton Graduate/Mature Student Essay Contest

FFRF awards student essayists \$7,850

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has announced the nine winners of its annual essay competition for graduate students or students over 25 in this year's essay competition. Students were asked to write "Why the USA is not a 'Christian Nation'" in 850 to 1,000 words. There were six winners in the top five, with a tie for fifth place. There were also three honorable mentions. Scholarships totaled \$7,850.

FFRF Lifetime Member Brian Bolton, a retired psychologist, humanist minister and university professor

emeritus at the University of Arkansas, very generously endows the graduate essay competition. First place (\$3,000):

Chris Calvey, 27, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Second place (\$2,000): **Nicole White**, 22, Louisiana State University.

Third place (\$1,000): **Anna Kelly**, 27, West Virginia University.

Fourth place (\$500): **Max Lewis**, 28, Brandeis University, Harvard Divinity School.

Fifth place (\$300): **Kristen Webster**,

30, University of Virginia, College of William & Mary, University of Washington-Tacoma.

Fifth place (\$300): **Kristina Beverlin**, 26, University of Kansas.

Honorable mention (\$250): **Daniel Urban**, 33, University of South Alabama, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

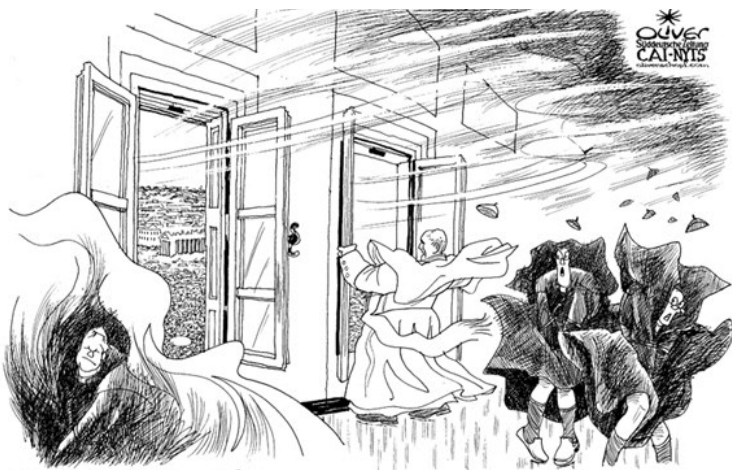
Honorable mention (\$250): **Jessica Abernathy**, 30, San Francisco State University.

Honorable mention (\$250): **Roksana Stalinski**, 25, University of Ottawa.

This year, FFRF awarded \$33,000 in student scholarships, including \$14,100 in the William J. Shultz High School Essay Contest, \$11,050 in the Michael Hakeem College Essay Contest and \$7,850 in the Brian Bolton Graduate/Mature Student Essay Contest.

FFRF would also like to thank Dorea and Dean Schramm for providing honorable mentions with a \$50 bonus.

Overheard



Fresh air in the Vatican

A few of those friends are atheists and tend to post things on their Facebook pages about atheism in the U.S. These posts revealed to me quite how badly



atheists are treated in the U.S., as well as how many untruths, misrepresentations and straight-out lies about atheism and atheists were being circulated. I found this both disturbing and upsetting, and quite frankly, it made me angry. I knew I wanted to help and change these ridiculous notions, but it was my husband who said to me: "Want to make a difference? You're a filmmaker! Make a documentary about the subject." And so I did.

Sylvia Broeckx, 35, a native of Belgium living in England and director of "Hug an Atheist," which debuted Sept. 14 at the San Francisco Atheist Film Festival sfatheistfilmfestival.org, 8-12-13

A few months after retiring, former Rep. Barney Frank (D-Mass.) announced his nonbeliever status, a declaration he made more than 25 years after coming out as the first openly gay member of Congress. That Frank felt more comfortable going public with his sexuality in 1987 than he did with his secular beliefs at any point during his House career says a lot about the stigma surrounding atheism in electoral politics.

Article, "Here Are All the Atheists in Congress," which lists a total of zero Huffington Post, 9-19-13

[Atheists are] out there, they're thinking it, they're just afraid to say it. But that's changing. It'll be the new gay marriage.



Atheist entertainer Bill Maher, interview

The Wrap News Inc., 9-23-13

Tests indicated 86% of the holy water, commonly used in baptism ceremonies and to wet congregants' lips, was infected with common bacteria found in fecal matter such as E. coli, enterococci and Campylobacter, which can lead to diarrhea, cramping, abdominal pain and fever.

News story on testing of 39 "holy water" sources in Austria

ABC's "Good Morning America", 9-14-13

Even without paying the ministers, using ministers as a formal part of the police department — as an outreach ministry — I think violates the Establishment Clause. The government cannot take actions that appear to endorse religion. Using ministers in this way does exactly that.

Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of the School of Law at the University of California-Irvine, on Operation Good Shepherd, a publicly funded program started by the Montgomery, Ala., Police Department to put Christian pastors on crime scenes to pray with victims and witnesses

The Atlantic, 9-27-13

Hi there blackcollar! How are you? My name is Kay and I want to meet with you [smiley face]. I like seeing people and talking with them. If I like a guy I have nothing against having sex with him (well, I must confess that I like you very much). You can see my photos and read more about me at [URL].

Email to blackcollar@ffrf.org with the subject line "Im very sexy"

8-12-13

'In God We Trust' case appealed

The Religious Right, which never gives up in its quest to unite church and state, has met its equal in tenacity with state/church watchdog Michael Newdow.

A federal judge slapped down his and FFRF's latest challenge of "In God We Trust" on U.S. currency in September. Mike will be appealing on behalf of FFRF, his mother, Roslyn Newdow, a numismatist (coin collector) and 17 other plaintiffs, including a teacher, parents and their minor children.

"In God We Trust" was a Johnny-come-lately motto first adopted in 1956 (and required by Congress to appear on all currency in 1955 — showing up on paper currency in 1957). FFRF brought a case in Colorado court, ably argued by attorney Robert R. Tiernan, which was thrown out in the 1990s.

The current suit was filed in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York on Feb. 1. The complaint alleged that the religious verbiage is proselytizing, discriminatory and an establishment of monotheism in violation of the Establishment Clause.

Newdow quoted representatives who voted for the addition as seeking to use the money to proselytize around the world. Rep. Herman Eberharter

of Pennsylvania said "[T]he American dollar travels all over the world, into every country of the world, and frequently gets behind the Iron Curtain, and if it carries this message in that way I think it would be very good. I think that is one of the most compelling reasons why we should put it on our currency."

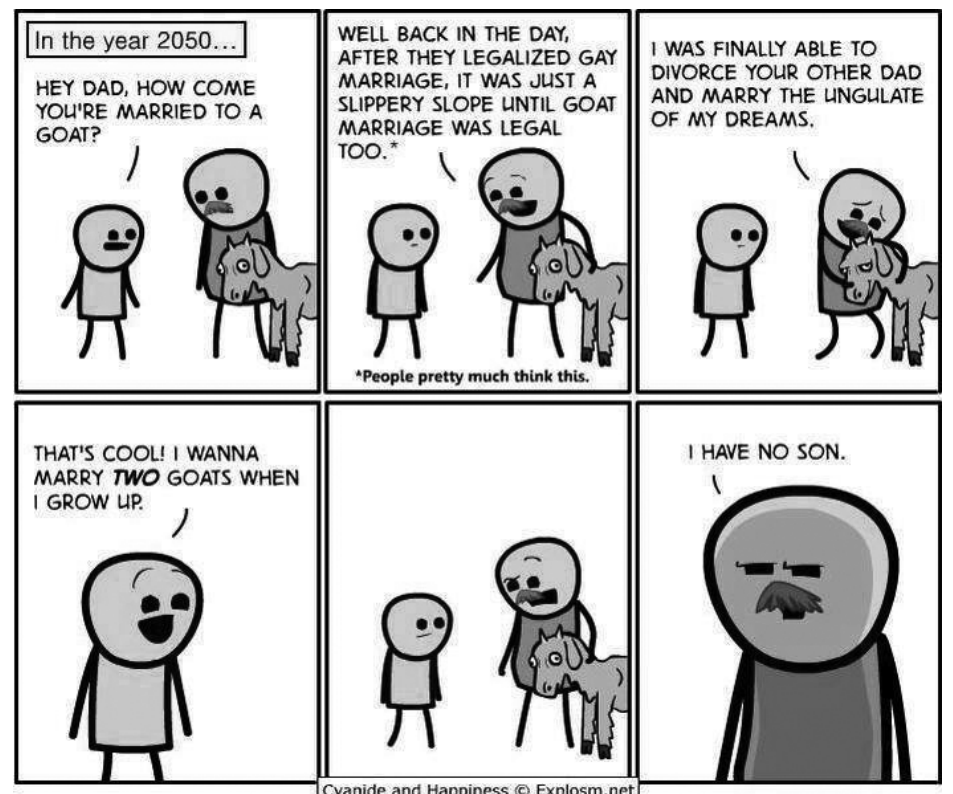
Newdow noted that "In God We Trust" necessarily excludes atheists and others who don't believe in one god or a god. The plaintiffs are "forced to proselytize, by an Act of Congress, for a deity they don't believe in whenever they handle money."

The 19-page ruling by U.S. District Judge Harold Baer Jr. said that the placement of the phrase doesn't constitute a "substantial burden" on atheists.

"We feel sure if it read 'In Allah We Trust,' the judge might have found this a tad irksome for Christian believers," noted FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

"We're grateful for the indefatigable, pro bono work of Mike Newdow to restore secularism to our government mottoes and the pledge," added Co-President Dan Barker.

See you in the appeals court!



Cyanide and Happiness © Explosm.net

FFRF attorneys confront lawbreakers

'In God We Trust' plates exclusionary

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott testified on Sept. 24 against Wisconsin Assembly Bill 244, which creates a religiously exclusionary license plate saying "In God We Trust." Money would go to a state veterans fund.

Elliott noted Wisconsin already offers a "Wisconsin Salutes Veterans" plate, which honors all and excludes no one, and already helps fund a program for vets.

According to 2012 Department of Defense data, 23% of military personnel identified as nonreligious. A survey of FFRF's membership correspondingly shows 24% of members are veterans.

Elliott cited the Supreme Court, which has ruled: "[S]ponsorship of a religious message is impermissible because it sends the ancillary message to members of the audience who are non-adherents 'that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community and accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.'"

The history of "In God We Trust" has no secular purpose, Elliott noted. It was first adopted in 1956 during the Cold War as a reaction to "godless" communism. "E Pluribus Unum" meaning "out of many, one," was the entirely secular motto selected by a distinguished committee of U.S. founders: Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and Benjamin Franklin.

Elliott noted the favoritism of the bill. Private groups may already use the normal process that is available for special group plates. Such special approval was a primary reason that an "I Believe" religious plate in South Carolina was ruled unconstitutional. The court said in that case:

"Any religious message approved through South Carolina's legislative process would likely violate the Establishment Clause because the speech involved is predominantly government speech and the legislative approval of it evidences approval of the referenced religion."

The Wisconsin Legislature is also considering a bill to promote an anti-abortion plate, "Choose Life," with proceeds going to a nebulous group offering "abortion counseling," organized under the auspices of Religious Right spokesperson Juliane Appling, who works with a Focus on the Family offshoot.

School skirts law with midfield prayer

An illustration of how tenacious theocratic school officials can be is found in FFRF's ongoing complaint over illegal prayer at South Pittsburg [Tenn.] High School at football games. Prayer was blared over the public address system, according to a local complainant who contacted FFRF, in direct violation of a Supreme Court ruling.

Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney, first wrote Mark Griffith, director of Marion County Schools in Jasper, about the unconstitutional practice in April 2012. Getting no response, Markert sent follow-up letters on May 31 and July 16.

Finally, Marshall Raines Jr., an attorney representing the school district,

replied. Raines demanded that FFRF provide the name of the complainant "to determine whether your organization has standing to raise this issue and to properly investigate the assertions contained in your letter."

FFRF asserted by return letter that there was no need to identify the complainant. "Marion County Schools can confirm the practice of prayer before football games without knowing who told us," Markert wrote. "FFRF would not be pursuing this issue at all if it had not been brought to our attention by someone who attended a game and was offended by its religious content. The family would prefer that their identities be held in confidence so that there is no negative interaction between the complainant and administrators at the school."

Raines responded that state and federal laws bar the school district from retaliating, thus continuing to refuse to address the gist of the complaint.

Three days after receiving Raines' nonresponse, FFRF was alerted to a WTVC News Channel 9 story that Director of Schools Griffith had "made the decision to allow 10 minutes before each game for student-led prayer," replacing the loudspeaker prayer with an onfield prayer.

Griffith was quoted as saying, "We're going to call it 'Meet me at the 50.' That way both sides, the home and the opposing side, can come together and conduct prayer." FFRF received reports that the 50-yard line prayer occurred at the most recent home game.

Markert wrote the district Sept. 4 that such a "remedy" doesn't alleviate the constitutional violation. In *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe* (2000), Markert noted, "The court reasoned that because the football game was still a school-sponsored event, the fact that a student was leading the prayer did not cure the constitutional violation."

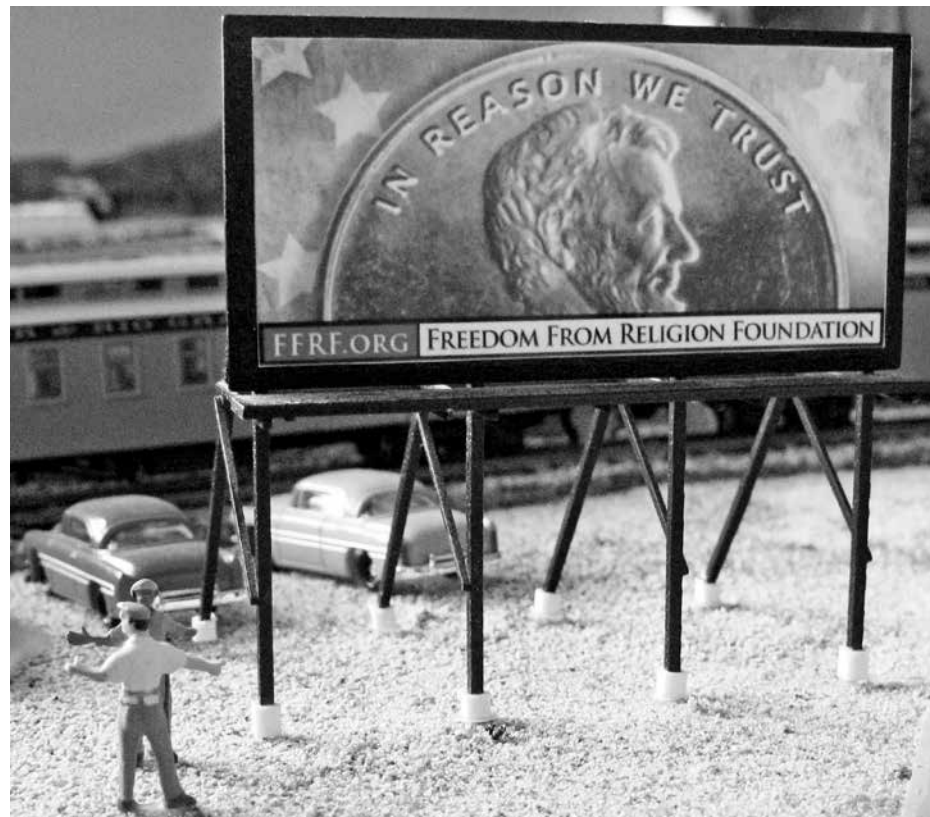
FFRF Co-President Dan Barker said it's naïve to believe that because a law prohibits retaliation, it won't occur. "There's an old saying that says 'Three can keep a secret, if two of them are dead.' Time and time again in cases like this, we've seen complainants harassed and threatened, sometimes physically, because they stood up for the law, and courts usually allow anonymity in such cases."

FFRF places 'Constitution Day' ads

FFRF celebrated Constitution Day on Sept. 17 to mark the 226th anniversary of the adoption of the U.S. Constitution in 1787 with a full-page color ad celebrating "our Godless Constitution" in the Lancaster, Ohio, Eagle Gazette and "our secular Constitution" in the Herald-Times, Bloomington, Ind.

FFRF has nearly 20,000 members, including more than 500 in Indiana and more than 300 in Ohio. Cost of the ads was underwritten by a generous Lancaster member and by Indiana members Paul Newman, Charlie Sitzes and donor Jim Vaughan.

The ads quote U.S. founders and framers on their strong views against religion in government and their often critical views on religion in general. The ads feature Thomas Paine and Benjamin Franklin and the first four presidents: George Washington, John



Tom Cara of FFRF's metro Chicago chapter, who's an avid model railroader, recently added another billboard to his rail layout. "My ideal little world is completely free from religion, including a government motto in complete opposition to the unconstitutional one we have here in the U.S."

Adams, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison.

"This ad would also be timely on Bill of Rights Day on Dec. 15, the anniversary of ratification of the Bill of Rights in 1791. FFRF would be delighted to work with members to run this ad in their area on any occasion," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

View the prototypical ad at ffrf.org/news-releases (scroll to Sept. 17, Sept. 13 or July 1, 2013).

No trust in God, or in Hobby Lobby

Hobby Lobby's latest July 4 ad features a variety of historic quotes arranged around a large font saying "In God We Trust." The quotes try to cre-

ate the impression that the U.S. is a Christian nation and "trusts in God." But just like Hobby Lobby's God, the quotes aren't very trustworthy and are often wildly inaccurate.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel researched the quotes cited by Hobby Lobby. He and summer legal intern Charles Roslof, an information technology major before going to Harvard Law School, launched an interactive Web page with a breakdown of the ad. Users can see a side-by-side comparison of Hobby Lobby's quote and the original quote, read notes on history and context of the quote and view original source documents.

An example of disinformation and outright distortion: In 1844, the Supreme Court upheld a provision

Continued on page 9

It Pays To Complain

Moms in Prayer outed

A California FFRF supporter, who must remain anonymous because she has two children in this public charter school, recounts her experiences with the school, which was originally started by families who went to the same church, but nevertheless is a public school: My kids' high school strongly encourages parental volunteering, so I went to the list to see what was available. They had "Moms in Prayer — Praying for Staff and Students" as a category! So I asked if sitting on my butt and thinking special thoughts would satisfy my need for 25 hours of volunteering (valued at \$10 an hour cash or in-kind donation otherwise) because, if so, I've really been doing it wrong!

Go take a look [momsinprayer.org]. It's a predatory group of evangelical Christians which aims to get more Christ in our schools. The principal, with whom I got into a bit of a brouhaha, said the group had helped a lot with things like staff luncheons, but there were already check boxes to vol-

unteer to help with luncheons.

And while the Moms in Prayer site has a full page of "Benefits for Churches," it has no page about "Benefits for Schools" or a place where anyone can log requests from the school for assistance. Here are some of its priorities, posted online:

- To pray that our children will receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, then stand boldly in their faith.

- To pray that teachers, administrative staff and students would come to faith in Jesus Christ.

- To pray that our schools will be directed by biblical values and high moral standards.

The principal eventually agreed that the group should be removed from the list of volunteer options. I've noticed a strong Christian undertone at our public school, which hosts a Christian club after class. The area overall is surprisingly religious, with lots of Mormons.

Cheers, and thanks for all that FFRF does!

FFRF Legal Victories

FFRF halts mandated Christian probation

FFRF recently stopped the practice of forcing convicted offenders to attend Miracle Lake Christian Training Center in Etowah, Tenn., and similar Tennessee institutions as a condition of probation. Forced attendance for probation did not offer non-

religious, non-spiritual treatment options.

FFRF received a complaint from an offender in Tennessee and sent letters to the state Board of Probation and Parole on Feb. 22 and the Department of Corrections on May 9 and July 12.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott explained that the core components of the Christian program are religious: repentance, faith, mind renewal, life in the church and "life beyond."

Elliott wrote that the state must offer nonreligious options, and explained why religious programs can

be detrimental: "Our organization receives a substantial number of complaints about religious drug treatment programs. Our complaints often express concern that they are being subjected to religion and pressure to conform to the religious practices of such support groups rather than receiving neutral, scientific assistance. Many describe experiencing ostracism after abstaining from participation in such overtly religious acts."

DOC Commissioner Derrick Schofield responded Aug. 22, stating, "I can assure you that the state of Tennessee and its agencies of government are committed to the lawful separation of church and state and of the constitutionally guaranteed freedom to practice religion as each citizen sees fit. That right includes the freedom to refrain from the practice of any religion or to be forced to attend any religious programming against their will."

Schofield added that the agency acknowledges its responsibility to offer nonreligious treatment alternatives.

Snarky superintendent nevertheless complies

FFRF action has removed a Ten Commandments poster from the Blytheville High School library in Blytheville, Ark. FFRF received a complaint from a resident reporting that the Ten Commandments poster was featured prominently near the checkout station.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter May 28 to Superintendent Richard Atwill explaining that the U.S. Supreme Court has repeatedly "made clear that such displays in public schools are unconstitutional."

Although Superintendent Atwill responded, "You will have to investigate this matter yourself or have your mole investigate," it's been confirmed that the commandments poster was removed.

Prayer stopped in Tenn. school

FFRF stopped a prayer group co-sponsored by a Baptist church that included school officials and students walking and praying in the hallways of Hardy Elementary School in Chattanooga, Tenn. This is the latest in a long string of violations FFRF has complained about in the Hamilton County School District.

Love Fellowship Baptist Church hosted an after-school prayer group which would walk through the halls once a month. Teachers and school administrators reportedly participated and led students, who were recruited via take-home fliers, in the religious ritual.

A Times-Free Press article quoted Principal Anetta Ferguson and Assistant Principal Rick Hall about their involvement in the prayer group. Principal Ferguson stated, "I want the children to have a great day every day regardless of what goes on outside."

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a letter on Aug. 29 to the school district's lawyer: "Although the walks are evidently organized by a private church, prominent participation of the administration in these events and the administration's promotion of these events in a newspaper article and through fliers indicates school co-sponsorship and endorsement of this event. As you know, it is unlawful for school-sponsored events to include prayer."

On Sept. 23, the district responded that the prayer group wouldn't happen again. Training on how to avoid unconstitutional actions was also promised.

FFRF letter removes cross seal

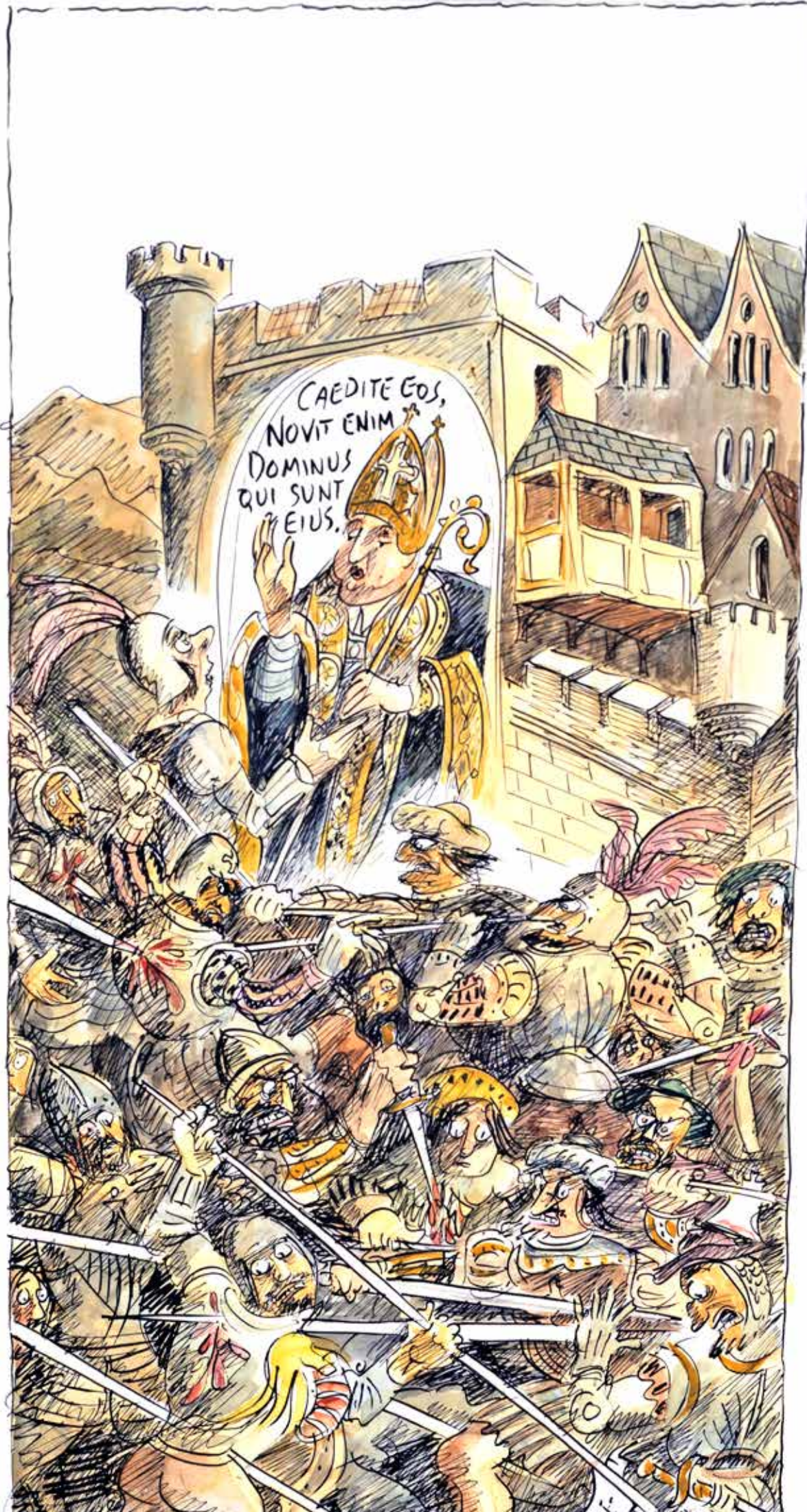
An FFRF complaint stopped the public display of an official city seal depicting a cross in Wauwatosa, Wis. After FFRF was contacted by a local complainant, Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter June 18 to Mayor Kathleen Ehley.

The city of Wauwatosa formerly had a cross on its seal, which was modified in 1992. The current seal states "In God We Trust," but older versions of the seal with the cross are no longer legally allowed to be displayed. The complaint informed Ehley that the old seal was still on display at the Department of Public Works building.

Elliott wrote, "The Latin cross on the seal is surely a sectarian display. As such, we hold that it endorses Christianity in violation of the First Amendment. There is no constitutionally defensible reason to display the cross-bearing version of the Wauwatosa seal."

On Aug. 30, Ehley's assistant responded that the seal had been removed.

Memorable Moments in Monotheism.



The Cathars, in opposition to Rome, rejected forgiveness of sins after baptism, refused the Eucharist, and saw women as capable of being spiritual leaders. Such heresies led Pope Innocent III to act. On July 22, 1209, an army led by his legate Arnaud-Amaury, laid siege to the town of Beziers. Catholics in the city were allowed to leave, but many stayed. When the army commander asked Arnaud-Amaury how his men were to tell Cathars from Catholics, his reply: "Kill them all, the Lord will recognize his own."

— Edward Sorel

Meet a Technical Atheist

Name: Mike Cermak Jr.

Where I live: Rural Pennsylvania, not far from Gettysburg.

Where and when I was born: Pittsburgh, March 30, 1981.

Family: Heather, my wonderful wife of eight years, and Cameron, our energetic 2-year-old son.

Education: Pennsylvania State University, B.S. in information sciences and technologies for system development; PSU associate's in science in information sciences and technologies for computer networking. I also have various certifications from Microsoft and the IT trade association CompTIA.

Occupation: I'm a computer nerd and serial entrepreneur. I own a large tech website, a local computer consulting company, an office building and, most recently, a car wash!

How I got where I am today: I didn't grow up in a particularly religious family but certainly in a religious geographic area. While attending high school, I decided that matters of god and religion were important enough to warrant a decision. Amazon.com was relatively new back then, and I purchased a dozen or so books that represented both sides of the argument.

My selection included several books on Christian apologetics as well as, I'm very lucky to say, Dan Barker's *Losing Faith in Faith*. Dan's book was exactly what I needed to confirm my preexisting suspicions and marks a clear turning point in my life.

Person in history I admire: I admire a lot of people, but one recent choice is Elon Musk, best known as the CEO of Tesla Motors, which builds some of the world's best electric vehicles, and the founder of SpaceX, which builds some of the most advanced space launch vehicles. He was also a founder of PayPal and recently announced an idea for an alternative mode of transportation that he calls the Hyperloop.



Cameron Cermak is happy to be at the airport with his dad, Mike.

While many may look at Elon and see a remarkably successful inventor and businessman, I think it's more admirable that he's done so while aiming to truly change the world. I think that he genuinely finds causes he believes strongly about, whether it's decreasing our use of fossil fuels or helping humanity reach the stars. Most projects that he chooses to take on are considered to be impossible. He's been incredibly effective at succeeding at the impossible.

A quotation I like: "You do something all day long, don't you? Everyone does. If you get up at seven o'clock and go to bed at eleven, you have put in sixteen good hours, and it is certain

with most men, that they have been doing something all the time. They have been either walking, or reading, or writing, or thinking. The only trouble is that they do it about a great many things and I do it about one. If they took the time in question and applied it in one direction, to one object, they would succeed. Success is sure to follow such application." (Thomas Edison)

These are a few of my favorite things: Computers — actually, technology of any kind. (I'm known as "Tech-Guy.") I also enjoy flying. I'm a private pilot and currently fly a Cessna 172. I think my wife may secretly say a prayer when she flies with me.

Ways I promote freethought: I feel

honored to be a member of the FFRF Executive Board of Directors. I also participate in several local freethought groups. While I don't consider myself an outspoken atheist, I hope to help make a difference in church/state separation.

Just as I don't like to have others push their beliefs on me, I try not to push mine on others. But if the topic comes up, I'm very willing to discuss my personal feelings. I like to think of myself as your "friendly neighborhood atheist."

Atheists have been so villainized that many people don't realize that they already know one. I was once told, "but you're too nice to be an atheist!"

In the News

Judge restores boy's name to Messiah

A Tennessee judge has overruled child support magistrate Lu Ann Ballew's order in August to rename a child named Messiah. At a paternity hearing, Ballew was asked to decide Messiah Deshawn Martin's surname. She ended up changing the 8-month-old boy's first name as well, saying that Messiah was a title reserved for Jesus Christ.

Chancellor Telford E. Forgety Jr. ruled Sept. 18 that Ballew violated the violated the Establishment Clause. Messiah's mother, Jaleesa Martin, said she's glad the court fight is over. FFRF's complaint against the judge is still pending.

God discussion turns very deadly

Douglas Yim, 33, Oakland, Calif., was found guilty by a jury Sept. 3 of killing Dzuy Dunh Phan, 25, during an argument over the existence of God. Yim was also convicted of assault with a firearm and mayhem for wounding another man during the argument, the San Francisco Chronicle reported.

His attorney, Mario Andrews, said the men were using alcohol and drugs.

"[My client] is a religious man. He was trying to see if he could get Mr. Phan to become more religious."

According to testimony, Phan asked Yim where God was whenever Yim lost a video game and when Yim's father died several years earlier.

Yim then got an AR-15 assault rifle from his bedroom and shot Phan six times.

'Tornado' atheist has helping hands

Rebecca Vitsmun, the Oklahoma mom who became famous after telling CNN's Wolf Blitzer in the wake of a tornado that she's an atheist, will be moving with her family to the Seattle suburbs with the help of more than \$125,000 raised by #AtheistsUnite. Religion Dispatches reported Sept. 5 that Vitsmun's brainchild, the Rainbow Lion project, will be incorporated into the Humanist First Responders program.

Inspired by her son's loss of his Rainbow Lion after the tornadoes, the program helps reunite children with their lost comfort item or toy after a disaster.

Through Oklahoma Freethought, Vitsmun started working with Foundation Beyond Belief to launch the

Humanist Service Corps in 2014. It will coordinate efforts of secular first-response disaster teams domestically and overseas.

Vitsmun said she paid little attention to claims by Rush Limbaugh and Glenn Beck that she was a liberal plant when Blitzer interviewed her. "I wasn't out. My family didn't even know I was an atheist."

Poll: Irish students losing religion

A survey conducted in late July and early August by the Irish Student Marketing Network showed that 83.5% of college students polled think abortion should be legal in Ireland and 77% think the Catholic Church has too

much power.

About 60% of respondents identified as Catholic, with 20% identifying as atheist. When asked "Do you attend communal religious ceremonies and functions?" the highest response was "no" at 61%. Those who answered "yes" mainly attend one to three times a year. Only 32% of those receiving communion believe it's the body and blood of Christ.

Students ranked "looking good" as fifth most important. "Religious beliefs" was sixth. "Family and friends" was first.

Just over 37% said they believed in God, with 41% saying they were unsure. About 66% said they don't think religion necessarily makes the world a better place.

FFRF files amicus in Greece case

Continued from front page
cited in the *Van Orden* case. Breyer was the swing vote in a decision that ruled a Ten Commandments monument at the Texas Capitol was constitutional.

Breyer had ruled in a similar case that the decalogue could not be posted inside a courthouse. He partly based his change of heart in *Van Orden* on the supposed fact that no one had ever complained about the monument in Texas. Documentation of complaints by FFRF and others was submitted in

the brief.

The brief was submitted on behalf of FFRF by Richard L. Bolton, counsel of record and by FFRF Staff Attorneys Andrew L. Seidel, Patrick C. Elliott, Rebecca S. Markert and Elizabeth Cavell.

Read the entire brief at:

ffrf.org/news/news-releases

(Scroll to the Sept. 26 news release. A PDF of the brief is linked at end.)

New Building Fund Donors through September

Thank you, Brian Bolton!

Below are new donations to FFRF's Building Expansion Fund received from Aug. 27 to Sept. 30, 2013. It is not cumulative (except for the total).

Previous donations were listed in earlier Freethought Today issues. No donor will be identified by name without express permission. (Please check the box on the donation coupon mailed to you or online at: ffrf.org/ffrf-building-fund-contribution-page to grant permission.) Thanks to everyone making the expansion possible.

All donations will be listed in a keepsake book. The larger donations were given naming rights and will be listed in the lobby in an impressive full-length Wall of Honor. Names of donors giving \$5,000 or more (cumulatively) for the project will be on lobby plaques.



FFRF President Emerita Anne Nicol Gaylor, 86, breaking ground in FFRF's building expansion.

FFRF welcomes 29 Lifetime Members, one 'After-Lifer'

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to welcome its newest "After-Lifer" — Abbie McMillen, who turned in her After-Life Membership at FFRF's national convention in late September.

FFRF also gratefully announces 29 new Lifetime Members, including one who prefers not to be publicly named.

Richard Halasz and Jana Dubke became "Lifers" at FFRF's convention and were married at the conference in a heartwarming, impromptu ceremony conducted by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. (More coverage on that next issue.) FFRF wishes them a happy life together. Several other members likewise kindly became "Lifers" at the conference.

Welcome to Louis Altman, Eleanor Altman, Barbara Baldock, Phillip Butler, Charles Bingham, Linden Bland, Antonia Clark (gift from Thomas Creswell), Richard Halasz and Jana Dubke, Elizabeth Lunte-Hanson, Bruce Harvey, Ronald Herman, Jeanette Hinckley, Marjorie Holden, Beatrice Ann Kabler, Richard Keene, Marc Loy, Gary Moessner, Phil Padol, John Peha, Kathy Pettycrew, Doug Rader, Alan Remington, Wilton Sanders, Margaret Sayre, Tom Scruggs, Charles Warr and David Whittaker.

There are still options available: Naming right for 3rd Floor Wing. Your name or message could appear on a paving stone in the Rose Zerwick Memorial Courtyard and Garden (\$1,000 or \$2,000) and your name (or a name in memoriam) on handcast tiles in the entry vestibule (\$2,500).

\$100,000+

Brian Bolton, \$125,000, TX
[The Executive Wing will be named Brian Bolton Executive Wing]

\$1,000-\$5,000

Anonymous, \$5,000, FL
Brian Zeiler, \$2,500, GA
Fred Dietz Sr, \$2,500, IL
Joseph Harris Sr, \$2,500, MI
Phil Monroe, \$2,500, MO
Anonymous, \$2,000, CA
Anonymous, \$1,000, AK
Anonymous, \$1,000, CT
Anonymous, \$1,000, MN
Anonymous, \$1,000, PA
Fred Shortz, \$1,000, CT
Stefan Shoup, \$1,000, WI
Steven & Pam Solomon, \$1,000, MO

\$100-\$500

Arthur Lerner, \$500, NJ
Robyn Bagley, \$412, MA
Drew Fondrk, \$200, WI
Maurice Solomon, \$200, NY
Roy Frazel, \$150, MA
Alfred and Cathy Bond Anderson, \$100, WA
Anonymous, \$100, AZ
Anonymous, \$100, CA
Anonymous, \$100, NM
Anonymous, \$100, PA
Bill Dunn, WI
Anonymous, \$100, WI
Fred and Barbara Kusko, \$100, NY
Greg Baskin, \$100, MN
Harvey and Bettye Gossard, \$100, PA
J. Roderick Greig, \$100, AR
Stan Altan, \$100, NJ

\$5-\$99

Anonymous, \$75, AZ
James Fangohr, \$50, MO
Joy Meininger, \$50, CA
Matt Mitro, \$50, WI
Rob Kessler, \$50, TX
Stefanie Moritz and Vince Jenkins, \$50, WI
Anonymous, \$30, CA
Anonymous, \$25, MI
Anonymous, \$25, NY
Joseph Colette, \$25, MA
Sandra Kral, \$25, SD
Anonymous, \$20, Puerto Rico
Anonymous, \$10, CO
John Bligh, \$10, NY
John Fostvedt, \$5, WI
Subtotal \$152,162
Total: \$1,093,891



Brian Bolton

Thanks to our members who had to cancel their convention plans and turned the convention fee into a Building Fund donation!

If you gave a gift designated to the Building Fund which does not appear to be reflected in this or previous monthly issues, please contact FFRF so that we may check our records and publish your generous gift. Contact Bookkeeper Katie Daniel at 608-256-8900 9-5 CDT weekdays or email to katie@ffrf.org.



FFRF's hardworking summer interns Sarah Eucalano (journalism, University of Wisconsin-Madison) and Chuck Roslof (Harvard law student) help break ground.

FFRF Legal Complaints

Continued from page 6
in freethinker Stephen Girard's last will and testament that left \$2 million (about \$43 million today, who says nonbelievers aren't generous?) to start a school for educating orphans, so long as "no ecclesiastic, missionary and minister" held any position in the school. Hobby Lobby mischaracterizes the court's decision as encouraging the use of the bible in public schools.

See the page at ffrf.org/hlr/Hobby-Lobby.html.

FFRF to New York: 'So long, Sukkahs!'

FFRF once again contacted New York City's Department of Sanitation Bureau of Legal Affairs to address the illegal construction of structures called sukkahs that are annually placed on Brooklyn public sidewalks for the Jewish holiday Sukkot.

The sukkahs often block sidewalks and disregard city safety codes. Most have been built without permits, but

are often taken down before enforcement action can be taken.

Observant Jews eat in the outdoor booths during Sukkot (Sept. 19-25 this year). Sukkahs are meant to represent the temporary dwellings claimed to have been used by Israelites while "wandering the desert."

On Sept. 6, Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter to the sanitation department, following up his 2012 complaint. The Bureau of Legal Affairs had responded to the first complaint by agreeing that no permits had been allowed and that "it appears that the structures impeded the flow of pedestrian traffic and would therefore constitute a sidewalk obstruction."

Elliott stated in his follow-up letter: "The department has not done enough to address this problem."

FFRF contends that nonenforcement of current policies gives the appearance of government endorsement of religion and religious favoritism.

If you live in New York City and see sukkahs obstructing sidewalks, call 3-1-1.



Come out of the closet, freethinkers: ffrf.org/out

State/Church Bulletin

Cranston West put in new (secular) murals and had an invite-only unveiling and I wasn't invited </3 <http://t.co/Z7Ski8LIW>

September 22, 2013 1:39pm via Falconry Reply Retweet Favorite



@jessicaahlquist
Jessica Ahlquist

Ahlquist not invited to mural unveilings

Cranston High School West in Cranston, R.I., has two new inspirational reminders to students to replace the prayer banner that addressed "Our Heavenly Father" and sparked a 2011 federal lawsuit because it was in the auditorium in a public school.

To celebrate its 50-year reunion, the Class of 1963 gave the school a 5-by-10-foot mural, which was unveiled Sept. 21 at an invitation-only event, the Providence Journal reported. A similar-sized display contains the "School Creed," also couched in nonreligious terms. Cost of the replacements was about \$2,000.

"Foster an atmosphere of good will and respect," the first line says. "Affirm our efforts to conduct ourselves with honor," reads the next. "Learn from our achievements and mistakes," says the third. Four more first words (Choose, Overcome, Nurture, Strive) complete "FALCONS," the school mascot.

"The community is healed," said Janice Bertino, Class of '63. "There is no more controversy." [FFRF wonders if Ms. Bertino was wearing rose-colored glasses.]

The Rhode Island affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union sued successfully on behalf of Jessica Ahlquist, a 16-year-old atheist student at Cranston West, to get the prayer banner removed. FFRF later awarded \$13,000 to Jessica for her activism. She was not invited to the unveiling event.



"Faith, hope and charity" are intertwined on the city seal of DeLand, Fla.

Rabbi wants cross off city's seal

Rabbi Merrill Shapiro, president of the Flagler County, Fla., chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, wants the Christian cross off the city of DeLand's official seal, Fox News Orlando reported.

The cross makes non-Christians feel "like second-class citizens," Shapiro said. "This is an intrusion of religion into the world of government."

DeLand City Attorney Darren Elkind said in a Sept. 9 letter to Americans United that the seal doesn't promote Christianity. He said the seal can be traced back to the city's incorporation, when its founders chose symbols

of "faith, hope and charity" for its seal.

"Nothing in the history of the city's seal suggests that it was adopted to promote any particular religion or even religion in general," Elkind claimed.

Suit filed to stop chapel graduations

The American Humanist Association filed suit Sept. 4 in U. S. District Court on behalf of John and Jane Doe and their minor child Jill Doe to stop Mountain View Elementary School in Taylors, S.C., from holding graduation in the chapel of North Greenville University, a Christian school. The suit also seeks an end to inclusion of school-sponsored prayers at future events.

The graduation was held May 30 at the university, which has a logo with the words "Christ Makes the Difference."

The suit alleges that prayers recited by graduates were solicited and approved by school administrators and were explicitly Christian, said a press release from AHA, which warned school officials in June that a suit would be filed unless corrective action was taken, a step the school district refused to take.

Kansas board sanctions student prayer

The board of Unified School District No. 480 in Liberal, Kan., voted unanimously to sanction student-led prayer at activities in the district. The board "spontaneously" added the prayer item to the agenda near the end of its Sept. 23 meeting, reported the High Plains Daily Leader.

Board member Nick Hatcher said he's "struggled with" the lack of prayer at school activities. "We do live in a democratic society, and I personally feel like our community would support that decision, regardless of the rest of the world."

The district stopped having prayer several years ago at events like football games. The new policy will let students use school public-address systems for prayer.

Superintendent Paul Larkin urged caution: "We can have student-led prayer, but if we turn away certain groups — if you have someone who wants to serve up a prayer or a thought that isn't the mainstream thinking — you're going to have a problem. The thing to do is take it to [board attorney] Mr. Yoxall and get some advice."

Board member Tammy Sutherland-Abbott said she saw no need to wait for legal advice. "We can make a board decision, as long as it's student-led, to support prayer. I'll make that motion. I'm gonna do it."

The motion passed 7-0. FFRF has formally complained.

Hate group head gets La. appointment

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal in late September appointed Tony Perkins,



Doug Keeler/Taft Midway Driller

Brian McIlroy of East Los Angeles stands on a street corner Aug. 19 in Taft, Calif., on the first day of school after summer vacation. McIlroy, a former Taft resident, told the Midway Driller newspaper he was protesting religion in public schools and that he supported a new law signed by Gov. Jerry Brown that lets transgendered children choose the bathroom or locker room they feel most comfortable using. Becky Sharp (left), upset by McIlroy's sign when she brought her daughter to school, came back with one that said "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there also." (Matthew 18:20)

president of the evangelical Family Research Council, to the state Commission on Law Enforcement. The appointment, confirmed by the state Senate, lets Perkins weigh in on grant awards, officer training standards and regulation of law enforcement statewide.

FRC has been certified as a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center for its homophobic stance on gay rights issues.

Perkins served in the state House from 1996 to 2004. Before that he was a TV news reporter and reserve police officer. He was suspended in 1992 from the reserve for failing to report an illegal conspiracy by anti-abortion extremists to his superiors.

Churches appeal ban on cross display

A coalition of churches in Evansville, Ind., that wanted to install a display of Christian crosses along four blocks of the city's downtown riverfront is appealing a federal judge's July 31 order permanently blocking the display, the Evansville Courier-Press reported Aug. 29.

The churches filed a notice of appeal with the 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in Chicago. In June, West Side Christian Church was given permission by the city's Board of Public Works to install 31 6-foot-tall crosses to be decorated by vacation bible school pupils for display from Aug. 4-18.

Two Evansville residents, represented by the ACLU of Indiana, challenged the display. FFRF sent the city an open records request for its policies but dropped the request after the judge barred the display.

Catholic school grant unconstitutional

A \$1.5 million grant that the 2013 Hawaii Legislature agreed to set aside for a Catholic school is unconstitutional, said a Sept. 3 memo from Deputy Attorney General Randall Nishiyama to Senate President Donna Mercado

Kim.

The grant for Kalihi's Damien Memorial School violates a provision in Hawaii's Constitution prohibiting the state from contributing public money to private schools, Nishiyama said.

Civil Beat reported that the Catholic school's subsidy is one of about three dozen nongovernmental capital improvement projects worth roughly \$32 million that the Legislature agreed to allocate. Damien was the only school to receive such a grant.

Mitch Kahle of Hawaii Citizens for the Separation of State and Church said the grant was stopped due to "the hard work of many people, including FFRF. We put public scrutiny on this unconstitutional grant and it's gone."

Indian atheist wins higher pay fight

Sanjay Salve, an atheist and secondary school teacher in Nashik, India, has won a long battle with the school, which had refused to remit to Salve scheduled pay raises since 2008 because he refused to take part in religious prayers.

The school informed the division bench of Mumbai High Court that Salve, 41, is eligible for the higher pay scale and will be allowed to stand without folding his hands during prayers, The Hindu reported Sept. 20.

Salve teaches English and has been employed by the school since 1996. The controversy started in 2007 in the playground, Salve said: "As students began their prayers and pledge, I remained standing as I was, my hands behind my back. Everyone else was praying with folded hands. My action was spontaneous and not intended as a revolt. I just stood there, wondering why I should pray to the god of a religion which I do not follow."

He told the "furious" headmaster that "I am an atheist and cannot participate in prayers to any god, that such compulsion violates the Constitution."

Brian L. Bolton Award: First-place graduate/mature student essay

What a godless Constitution looks like



By Chris Calvey

Chris received \$3,000 for his essay.

The “Christian Nation” debate is rife with bad arguments, faulty reasoning and historical revisionism. Christian nationalists frequently point toward the phrases “In God We Trust” and “under God” as evidence of our nation’s religious heritage, failing to recognize that these divisive slogans were not adopted until the 1950s. (Tragically, these additions tainted the original secular and inclusive nature of our currency, pledge and national motto.)

Proponents also posit that the U.S. is a Christian nation because the “founding fathers” were all Christian. Even if this were true, the religion of hypothetically Christian founders would no more make the U.S. a Christian nation than their race or sex would make the U.S. a “white nation” or a “male nation.” (Many founders were freethink-

No doubt, they spread the Christian nation myth because they wish to make it so!

ing deists, who would be considered unelectable infidels by modern-day standards for political religiosity.)

Christians conceding the above points will inevitably retreat to their last line of defense: the concept that our laws are based on the Ten Commandments or somehow built on a foundation of nebulous “Judeo-Christian values.”

First, traditional American ideals such as liberty and equality are far more traceable to the Enlightenment than to Christianity. As for the Ten Commandments, no one can seriously defend the notion that its proscriptions are uniquely Christian.

Every society in the history of human civilization has recognized that unfettered lying, killing and stealing are generally a bad idea. (Not to mention that the first four commandments are religious edicts with absolutely no relevance to our legal system.)

The private religious beliefs of the founders, like mottoes and commandments, are irrelevant to the question of whether our country was designed to be a “Christian Nation.” What is relevant, and what truly defines our government, is the Constitution. More than any other historical document, the Constitution best reflects the vision the founders had for the United States.

If they had intended to promote religion or establish a Christian nation, they certainly could have. What would we expect to see in the Constitution if

this were the case? For this thought experiment, it is instructive to examine examples of deeply religious nations like Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Within the constitutions of each of these countries, Islam is immediately declared to be the official state religion. This is not merely mentioned in passing; rather, the commitment to Islam is enumerated in great detail, such as in Pakistan’s Constitution: “All existing laws shall be brought in conformity with the Injunctions of Islam as laid down in the Holy Quran and Sunnah.”

What we observe in the U.S. Constitution is exactly the opposite. It contains precisely zero references to Jesus, God, Christianity, the bible or any faith at all. Religion is indeed mentioned, but only in an exclusionary context. The Establishment Clause states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Atheists in Iran, Pakistan or Afghanistan can’t run for the presidency due to constitutionally mandated restrictions that the office be held by Muslims. If the U.S. founders had sought to create a Christian nation, they could have required similar religious qualifications for public office. Instead, Article 6 of our Constitution declares that “no religious test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.”

Newly elected presidents in these Islamic countries are also required to recite oaths saturated with religious language, including swearing to “believe in the Unity and Oneness of Almighty Allah, the Books of Allah, the Holy Quran” (Pakistan), “obey and protect the Holy religion of Islam” (Afghanistan), and “guard the official religion of the country” (Iran).

The presidential oath of office mandated by the U.S. Constitution, in contrast, is entirely secular. (The ad-

dition of “So help me God” by many affirmants is disappointing, but rest assured it does not appear in the Constitution.)

We are fortunate that the founders were deeply distrustful of the mutually corrupting influences that religion and governments have on one another. Inspired by Jefferson’s visionary conception of “building a wall of separation between Church & State,” the founders endeavored to create a government that is forever neutral on the subject of religion.

By restricting the government’s ability to pass laws either advancing or inhibiting religion, every citizen’s private religious convictions (or lack thereof) are protected equally. Fundamentalist Christian intrusions into the government in areas like reproductive rights, science policy and marriage equality dangerously erode Jefferson’s wall and are reminiscent of the actions of their religious counterparts in Islamic countries.

No doubt, they spread the Christian nation myth because they wish to make it so!

If Christianity was so important to the founders, wouldn’t they have mentioned it at least once? We are forced to conclude, as eloquently stated in 1797 by the (unanimously ratified) Treaty of Tripoli: “The United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.”

Chris Calvey, 27, grew up in Schaumburg, Ill., has degrees in materials science engineering and molecular and cellular biology from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He’s now a fourth-year graduate student researching microbial biofuels while pursuing a Ph.D. in cellular and molecular biology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Chris is an activist and vice-president of the Atheist, Humanist & Agnostics (AHA), a secular club at UW-Madison.

Second-place graduate/mature student essay

Some founders were Christian; nation is not

By Nicole White

Nicole received \$2,000 for her essay.

With America’s beginnings founded on the desire for religious freedom, it is a disconcerting irony that the majority of Americans today believe the U.S. Constitution establishes America as a Christian nation. Yet the Treaty of Tripoli, signed by President John Adams in 1797, says otherwise: “[T]he Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.”

Nonetheless, the myth is understandable: “In God We Trust” is emblazoned on coins and currency; children recite “one nation, under God” every day before class; and pandering politicians reinforce the misconception for political ends.

An example of the latter involves

Sen. John McCain, who asserted that America is “a nation founded on Christian principles” in an interview during his run for presidency. When a presidential candidate makes such claims, it is not hard to understand why so many Americans are confused.

Some argue that because most of America’s founders were Christian, the government must have been founded on Christian ideals. But on the contrary, these men subscribed to a diverse mixture of belief systems and philosophies that influenced the language set forth in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution.

Gregg Frazer maintains that many founders followed “theistic rationalism, a nondenominational belief system that borrowed from Christianity and from deism,” which enabled the founders to “describe the projects of the Revolution and the Founding in terms that did not offend popular religion.”

Both documents contain ideas from

The god they are referring to is human-made.

several Enlightenment philosophers, including John Locke’s “consent of the governed,” Thomas Hobbes’ contract theory of government and Charles Montesquieu’s theory of balanced forces.

The founders were educated, thoughtful men, many of whom believed religion was integral to a successful society. But they were careful to protect religious freedom, including freedom from religion: “[T]he insertion was rejected by the great majority, in proof that they meant to comprehend, within the mantle of its protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and Muslim, the Hindu and Infidel of every denomination.” (Thomas Jefferson on the failed vote



to insert “Jesus Christ” into the Constitution’s preamble.)

Lawmakers today continue to push the Christian agenda with legislation
Continued on next page

Continued from page 6 that stunts progress toward equality and separation of religion from public education. It's also shameful that closed-mindedness, coupled with religiously motivated laws such as the Defense of Marriage Act and Proposition 8, have prevented gay couples from enjoying the same benefits afforded to straight couples for so many years.

The dangerous attitude that made such discrimination possible is encapsulated by Texas Gov. Rick Perry's not-so-eloquent presidential campaign ad in which he complained that "There's something wrong in this country when gays can serve openly in the military" while "kids can't openly celebrate Christmas." Perry then promised to end the "war on religion," claiming that "faith made America strong."

There are also laws that impose on Americans the "creationism" narra-

tive that God created humankind in its present form. Despite there being "no controversy in the scientific community about whether evolution has occurred," a 2012 Gallup poll shows that 46% of Americans believe in creationism.

Creationism is allowed to be discussed alongside evolution in several states' public schools. The Louisiana Science Education Act, for example, lets teachers use "supplemental textbooks" in order to "help students understand . . . and review scientific theories" such as "evolution and the origins of life."

While the law states it "shall not be construed to promote any religious doctrine," critics scoffed as Louisiana teachers began incorporating creationist texts into their lectures, with one school district adding a "critical thinking and creationism" section to its sci-

ence courses.

As a freethinking group, many of the founders would be disappointed that their religious views have been misconstrued to enable the discrimination of a sexual identity and the restriction of scientific inquiry in schools. With over 70% of Americans today identifying as Christian, the founders' beliefs are often misrepresented on the technicality that they were Christian, while the wildly changing religious landscape over nearly three centuries is overlooked.

Sidney Meade captures it best: "Societies create their concepts of the attributes and character of the god they worship in the likeness of the pressing practical problems of their time." In the Declaration of Independence, the founders proclaimed that every citizen is "endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among

these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

This "Creator" is not the Christian god: That god is incompatible with the founders' views on religious freedom and consent of the governed. Rather, the god they are referring to is human-made.

This god embodies the qualities suitable for their new republic, a republic that can stand up to the "tyranny of the majority," for "what is right is not always popular and what is popular is not always right."

Nicole White, 22, Lee's Summit, Mo., has a B.S. in economics (mathematics minor with specific interest in statistics and probability) from Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. She's pursuing an M.S. in business analytics at the University of Texas-Austin, with a goal of becoming a statistical programmer for a major Web-based company.

Third-place graduate/mature student essay

America's toxic 'Christian nation' claim



By Anna Kelly

Anna received \$1,000 for her essay.

Like any debate that begins without clearly defined terms, the discussion of whether the U.S. is a Christian nation is erratic and nonsensical, a mess of unconnected arguments and sloppy rhetoric, because the term "Christian nation" has no standard definition.

If the term were separated from its context as a descriptor for America, it would indicate an independent, politically organized state that identifies itself as practicing the Christian religion. This is indeed the sense of the semantically equivalent "Muslim nation,"

which is applied to countries whose governments officially operate under Islam. But since the U.S. does not officially operate under a religion, the term "Christian nation" does not carry this meaning.

When users of the term "Christian nation" offer an explanation for its use, they tend to rely on two main points: that Christianity is the majority religion in the United States, and that the United States is founded on Christian principles. These points both become shaky under examination; the first is weak, and the second, false.

First, if the term "Christian nation" refers to Christianity as the religion of the majority of American citizens, then the meaning is not logical, but merely metaphorical. It uses a label of a part (the Christian majority) as a label for a whole (the entire population).

This type of generalization is a stylistic device often used in poetry and advertisements. In academic text, its careless use is called a logical fallacy. Since the term "Christian nation," when taken to refer to the majority religion in the United States, is true only in this figurative, rhetorical way, it should not be used in serious discussion about national issues. It also, of course, disenfranchises the growing minority of non-Christian Americans.

If America is founded on Christian principles, what are those principles and what makes them Christian? The basis of the Christian religion is that an afterlife in heaven, as opposed to hell, can be obtained only through belief in Jesus. In keeping with this doctrine,

Christianity favors conversion, not religious freedom.

Christians throughout history have gone to extensive and sometimes violent lengths to compel non-Christians to become Christian, whether through foreign missionary work, evangelistic preaching or campaigns such as the Crusades, the Spanish Inquisition and the Salem witch trials.

Doctrinally, Christianity does not favor individual religious freedom; it favors trying to convert everyone to Christianity. The only way the principle of religious freedom could be considered Christian is by taking the term "Christian" to mean "of Christendom," meaning Western civilization. But this is a stretch, and Americans rarely use the term "Christian" in this sense.

The only references to religion in the Constitution and Bill of Rights are exclusionary — it must be kept separate from government. (The Declaration of Independence does refer to God, but its purpose was to justify separation from Britain.) Because the founders lived in a world much more dominated by Christianity than today's, they had to go out of their way to create a Constitution that kept Christianity firmly out of the government.

The Christian nation term is ambiguous, inaccurate and misleading. Why then does it persist? Largely because

Christians toss it around to boost themselves and rhetorically emphasize their statements before Christian audiences. In such contexts, "Christian nation" tries to equate Christianity with good morals and traditional ideas. Christianity does embrace many traditional ideas, but Christians do not have a monopoly on moral goodness. But they think they do.

The term thus fosters an attitude of moral superiority, which in turn encourages moral laziness, for which Americans have indeed earned a reputation. The stereotype of the arrogant American traveler has been reduced to a catchphrase, "ugly American." Of course "Christian nation" is not solely responsible for individual citizens' arrogance, but neither can it help, considering the moral superiority it engenders.

This side effect of the term, when considered along with the bickering it tends to ignite, shows "Christian nation" to be not merely false and imprecise but also harmful. "Christian nation" is therefore a toxic, inaccurate, and sloppily debated nickname for America. It is long past time for this moniker's retirement.

Anna Kelly, 27, Charleston, W.V., moved to a remote part of Wisconsin after graduating from high school to attend a small missions-oriented bible college, graduating five years later. Eventually, she rejected Christianity for atheism and moved back to Charleston to work full-time in her father's insurance agency, take online courses from West Virginia University in multidisciplinary studies and write in her free time.

Fourth-place graduate/mature student essay

The myth of a Christian nation

By Max Lewis

Max received \$500 for his essay.

Is America a Christian nation? The answer depends upon what is meant by "Christian nation." One prominent in-

terpretation, which is promulgated by religious and political conservatives, is that America was founded on Christian teachings, but has subsequently turned its back on this tradition. But is this claim true?

An examination of America's founding documents — the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution — shows that neither is based on Chris-

tian teachings.

The Declaration of Independence is sometimes thought to be clear evidence that America was founded as a Christian nation. This is because its authors make four references to a being that some think is the Christian god.

First, they claim that "the Laws of Nature and Nature's God" entitle Americans to "separate and equal sta-



tion.” Second, they assert that all humans have “unalienable Rights” that are “endowed by their Creator.” Third, they appeal to the “Supreme Judge of the world” to determine the “rectitude of [their] intentions.” Finally, they affirm their reliance on the “protection of Divine Providence.”

However, all these references are to the god of deism, a stripped-down form of theism inspired by the teachings of the Enlightenment. Deism’s god is a supremely intelligent being who is responsible for creating and governing the world, but who does not directly intervene in human affairs. This fact explains why god is referred to as “Nature’s God (emphasis added),” as the “Creator” of humankind, and as a source of “Divine Providence.”

Finally, the appeal to the “Supreme Judge of the world” is a reference to a god that judges people not on their religious belief, but on their actions. This is the god that Thomas Jefferson believed in.

In addition to being influenced by deism, most of the drafters of the declaration rejected core teachings of Christianity (e.g., the Holy Trinity, the divinity of Jesus Christ and the divine inspiration of the bible). This fact explains why the declaration contains no reference to just “God,” the bible,

Christianity or Jesus.

When the Constitution does mention religion, it is only to specify limitations on its ability to influence America. In particular, it requires that there be no religious test for public office and that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

Thus, as Susan Jacoby writes, the Constitution is a secularist document both because of “what it says and what it does not say.” Jacoby also importantly notes that the Constitution’s rejection of religious tests for public office was unique for its time, both in America and worldwide.

In fact, the Constitution’s silence concerning Christianity has repeatedly inspired religious groups to propose amending it. In both 1864 and 1946, evangelical Christian groups tried but failed to get references to God and Jesus Christ inserted in the Constitution.

The purpose of the Constitution is explicitly stated in its preamble: “to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty.” Nowhere does it mention Christianity or God.

Additionally, some of the governing

The Constitution’s rejection of religious tests for public office was unique for its time,

principles found in these documents conflict with Christian teachings:

- The Constitution (Article VI) lists itself, along with treaties and federal statutes, as the “supreme Law of the Land.” This claim contradicts the Christian teaching that either God or God’s word is the ultimate authority.

- The Declaration of Independence asserts that the government derives its power not from God, but from “the consent of the governed.”

- The 13th Amendment of the Constitution bans slavery, but the bible does not (Exodus 21:2-7, 21:20-21; Leviticus 26:44-46; Luke 12:47-48; Colossians 3:22). The biblical acceptance of slavery contradicts the declaration’s assertion that all humans have the unalienable right to liberty.

- The First Amendment holds that Congress cannot enact laws prohibiting religious exercise or freedom of

speech, which conflicts with the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17). Freedom of religious practice contradicts the commandments to only worship the God of the bible, to not make or to worship idols, and to not work on the Sabbath.

Freedom of speech contradicts the commandment to not take the Lord’s name in vain. Neither document contains principles of governance that mention the other commandments, i.e., they are silent about honoring parents, murder, adultery, stealing, lying and coveting.

Given our analysis, it should be clear that the principles that the founding fathers chose to govern America are not based on Christian teachings. Perhaps America could be considered a Christian nation under a different interpretation of “Christian nation,” but that is a question for another occasion.

Max Lewis, 28, Boston, graduated summa cum laude from Brandeis University in 2009 with a B.A. in religious studies. In 2013, he earned a master of theological studies from Harvard Divinity School. He’s pursuing an M.A. in philosophy at Brandeis and is interested in normative and applied ethics.

Fifth-place (tie) graduate/mature student essay

‘Zombies’ and religious fanatics

By Kristen Weber

Kristen received \$300 for her essay.

As I watched the recent zombie apocalypse movie “World War Z,” an uneasy feeling crept over me. The highly contagious zombie infection turns people into single-minded predators who are unable to think and reason.

Zombies are dangerous and terrifying because of their mindlessness. It is futile to try to reason with them because they are feral creatures, entirely focused on infecting other people. What disturbed me most was not the violence of the movie, but rather the anxious realization that a zombie epidemic can be viewed as a subtle satirical commentary on religious fanaticism, which is as dangerous as a zombie plague.

Both destroy people’s higher cognitive powers and ability to question authority. Both demand blind obedience, often turning followers into senseless automatons. Once “zombified,” they don’t care much about anything except converting others and increasing their growing hordes.

Watching the characters in the movie become ever more desperate in their efforts to avoid the zombie infection, I too was wondering, how can we avoid real-life epidemics of religious fanaticism?

The U.S. has a secular government, one that is legally bound to protect the “wall of separation between church and state.” More Americans than ever report that they have no religious affiliation and the percentage of U.S. Chris-

Religion uses fear and shame to create blinders.

tians, while still a majority, diminishes steadily.

Yet even as our culture and government teem with signs of religious diversity, there exists a widespread belief that the U.S. is a Christian nation. Concurrent with this idea is the belief that the U.S. government should support Christianity to the exclusion of other religions. These beliefs work in tandem to produce ignorant prejudice in mild cases, and violent fanaticism in the extreme.

Culturally, legally and historically, the U.S. is not a Christian nation. The founders deliberately left religion out of the Constitution, and the 1797 Treaty of Tripoli further reinforced America’s secularism with the statement, “The Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion.”

Religious leaders often equate Christianity with patriotism and secularism with heathenism. The very word “secular” has taken on malignant connotations with some religious leaders. Pat Robertson said, “The truth is, the secular world isn’t too enamored with Jesus.” Jerry Falwell said that the 9/11 attacks were brought on by “all of them who have tried to secularize America.”

Religion conflates secularism and “godlessness” when, in reality, secularism benignly connotes a neutral separation from religion. By denigrating secularism, religious leaders teach their followers to view the separation

of government and church as an ungodly abomination.

Spreading like a zombie virus through the biosphere, these misguided beliefs propagate the idea that our country should be (even) more Christian and that our government should only uphold Christianity. Medieval, Old World governments did this, and the results were sectarian violence, torture for those with questionable religious beliefs and rampant abuses of power by clerics and kings.

We are still vulnerable to the religious brainwashing that spews Christian supremacy from the pulpit and creates the illusion that Christianity is all about loving-kindness and forgiveness. Raised in a highly Christian household, I experienced firsthand the subtle ways in which religion breeds fear, sheep-minded acceptance and a sense of righteous superiority.

When I began to question my own religious beliefs, I felt like a traitor to God and my family, as if I were taking an axe to the root of my community and very existence (since God Himself ordained my birth). But in reality, what I discovered was that I had been betrayed by a millennia-old methodology that numbed my intellect and sabotaged my reason. No one ever told me that I could say no to religion, so for years I was blind to other possibilities.

Religion uses fear and shame to create blinders. The belief that the U.S. is or should be a Christian nation promotes dangerous radicalism and supremacist ideology. This deplorable indoctrination starts at a young age as Sunday school teachers inundate children with the cheery images of Christ’s flagellation and crucifixion.

Viruses work most effectively on



those who are ill of body, whereas religion packs a punch on those who are weak of logic. Churches target the young, the brokenhearted and the dying because those vulnerable people are most susceptible to the emotional pull of religion’s outlandish premises and promises.

There have been thousands of gods and religions over the millennia, and the vast majority of them are long forgotten. Richard Dawkins says, “We are all atheists about most of the gods that humanity has ever believed in. Some of us just go one god further.”

Fanatics refuse to take that last step. One of my favorite bumper stickers reads, “God, please save me from your followers.” When the zombies try to tear down the barricade that separates church and government, our antidotes must be rational thinking and commitment to the true meaning of secularism.

Armed with these, we can protect ourselves from the infection.

Kristen Webster, 30, was born in Lynchburg, Va., and lives in Seattle. She earned a B.A. in English at the University of Virginia and an M.Ed. in community counseling from the College of William & Mary. She’s now pursuing a B.S. in computer science and systems at the University of Washington-Tacoma. Her long-term goal is to integrate the disciplines of literature, psychology and computers in new ways.

Fifth-place (tie) graduate/mature student essay

The Christian 'nation' of Kansas



By Kristina Beverlin

Kristina received \$300 for her essay.

Growing up in very small-town Kansas, I was constantly bombarded with the idea that Christianity was the one "true" religion, that it was the most fundamentally important aspect of a person's life and that it was superior to all other forms of decree, even trumping everyday social norms and government laws.

Though Kansas is obviously a part of the United States, it can often feel as if it were not and is instead its own isolated, Christianity-based state. After all, many Kansans have already been living as if our nation centered on reli-

gious principles. After witnessing what has taken place in my state, I know that a nation based on Christianity or any other religion would not be a good thing.

While my father is nonreligious, my mother is a Christian and, therefore, my younger brother and I were regular churchgoers. I have been told many times that I could never be a good person without "God" in my life, that my dreams would never come true without "Him," and that while other religions can provide good moral guidance, only Christians are truly "safe."

Many in my state (including my neighbors and relatives) have worked tirelessly to base our laws on biblical ideas. My high school was nearly devoid of science classes (in fact, my freshman science class consisted of watching movies like "Twister," "Dante's Peak" and "Volcano," which was deemed acceptable by our pious principal).

Sex education did not fare much better, in spite of the fact that my graduating class had an almost 10% pregnancy rate. As for gay students, the only teacher who agreed to sponsor an LGBT school group was quickly fired.

Nearly all of my classmates were married by their early 20s (if not as teens), as they were told by their churches that their life's purpose did not lie in their own aspirations but in fulfilling traditional family duties and producing offspring as quickly as possible. I even know several book-smart, highly motivated young people who were convinced by religious leaders to skip college out of fear that it would cause

Many in my state have worked tirelessly to base our laws on biblical ideas.

them to lose their religious ideals.

Sam Brownback, our current governor, has devoted a lot of time in office to what he calls a "pro-life" agenda, though it has a greater resemblance to an "anti-woman" agenda. Many Kansas legislators have made nationwide news for making jokes about rape. They also routinely refer to calamities or tragic events as being a part of "God's plan."

These same politicians issue public outcries when the word "God" is left out of the Pledge of Allegiance, yet don't blink an eye when racial, sexually oriented or female-related injustices occur.

None of this is surprising, of course. The bible consistently endorses slavery and discrimination. Rape is considered a minor offense at best, especially if the rapist marries his victim afterward. Other than as seductresses or sorcerers, women are mostly ignored by or left out of the bible. Women who questioned such ideas were either stoned to death, or hanged or burned alive. Even as a modern woman, I feel that my ultimate fate and my quality of life is entirely dependent on the nation in

which I live remaining 100% secular.

One of the most astonishing arguments that I have heard religious fundamentalists make is that our founding fathers wanted the U.S. to be a Christian nation. This never fails to shock me, as the word "God" or "Christianity" does not appear in the Constitution at all. The Bill of Rights ensures "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." It wasn't until the 1950s when President Eisenhower wanted to combat domestic communism that the phrase "under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance. Two years later, "In God We Trust" was added to our currency.

In spite of the boisterous fundamentalism that surrounds me, I remain hopeful about a more intellectually based future. According to the latest Pew research, the "nonreligious" now make up nearly one-fifth of all Americans. While I am sure that Kansas will remain a mostly "Christian state" for quite some time, I will continue to put my faith in my own education, will work to encourage those around me to look at the world with an open mind and not allow it to be clouded by words that were written more than two millennia ago.

Kristina Beverlin, 26, Hillsdale, Kansas, earned a degree at the University of Kansas with a triple major in linguistics, environmental studies and economics with a minor in film and media studies. She's enrolled in KU's economics master's program.

Less bible, more tolerance, please

By Raysa Everett

I was raised in Brazil in a Christian family and was taught to trust the bible, "the word of God," most of my life. I went to church, participated in girls' bible study groups and even went on mission trips to "share the Gospel."



"Trust in the Lord. He has a purpose for everything in life. His word is perfect." I heard that all the time growing up, and I really believed it. Anytime I was struggling or things got difficult, I was able to tell myself that God knew what he was doing.

Then I began the "horrible" practice of questioning everything. Initially I was scared — questioning such an integral part of one's identity is scary and disorienting. But afterward I felt liberated.

Many people think of nonbelievers as sad, lonely people. On the contrary, we feel free knowing we can think logically and don't need to judge people because they are different. We certainly don't claim to be better than anyone else. We just base our decisions on reason and evidence, not holy books.

We try to live our only life to the full-

est. After all, we just get one chance, so why waste it by following restrictions based on unsubstantiated opinions?

Contrary to what I was led to believe for most of my life, the bible is not perfect and is filled with both minor and major contradictions. I used to find excuses for every contradiction, such as "it was different in the past," "that was for a specific group at the time," or "God has a plan and knows better" (a Christian's last resort for rationalizing the irrational and illogical).

The bible contains some beautiful stories that teach truths, just like many fables, parables and myths teach truths. However, we can also find a lot of stories that teach bad lessons or condone bad things.

Unfortunately, the bible has frequently been used to justify some of the hate we have seen and still see in our society. In the Civil War, many men of faith used it to defend their "right" to have slaves: "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling" (Ephesians 6:5), or "tell slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect" (Titus 2:9). How difficult could it have been for God to simply say, "Slavery is wrong?"

Many Christians today rely solely on the bible to justify their opposition to marriage equality (all other "evidence" for this prejudice has long since been

discredited). José Martí, a poet, said, "He who has rights does not have the right to violate those of others in order to maintain his own."

The bible should not be used as an excuse or justification for anyone's prejudice against other groups, including homosexuals, nor as the basis for any argument against giving human beings their basic rights or for denying equal rights. Can we really justify discrimination and prejudice by relying on what amounts to nothing more than literary interpretations of a contradictory and, at times, ethically questionable book?

Leviticus 20:13 says, "If a man has sexual relations with a man as one does with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They are to be put to death." But Leviticus 19:19 says, "Keep my decrees. Do not mate different kinds of animals. Do not plant your field with two kinds of seed. Do not wear clothing woven of two kinds of materials."

How many of those who preach Leviticus 20:13 also practice or preach Leviticus 19:19? Jesus said in Matthew 5:17-20 that he came to fulfill the law, not abolish it, and that not the smallest letter would disappear from it. Why is one sin regarded as an abomination and others as forgettable? Because one sin is supported by prejudice while the others are not.

In a civilized, free society, we cannot force people to agree with us or do what we think is best for them, especially if it does not harm anyone (evidence proves homosexuality to be harmless). We have to respect every human being independently of gender, race, religion (or lack thereof), or sexual orientation, not judge or discriminate against them.

Marriage is defined as "the state of being united to a person by love, recognized by law." Even if you believe that people should not be allowed to marry someone of the same sex, you do not have the right to prevent them from having the same right to be united to the person they love.

The many, many rights granted to myself and my husband simply because we are two committed, consenting, heterosexual adults should not be denied to two committed, consenting adults merely because they are of a different sexual orientation.

This is the definition of discrimination, and I hope that reason and logic will prevail rather than outdated prejudices.

Raysa Everett is a member of the La Crosse [Wis.] Area Freethought Society. Her husband, Joshua, is a former ordained evangelical pastor who left the ministry and is a member of the Clergy Project, a confidential online community for active and former clergy who do not hold supernatural beliefs.

Honorable mentions: High school essay contest

A walrus on Pluto!?



By Nathan Hume Stevens

It's strange to see some of my peers, who are academically brilliant, accept the rules of a supernatural and capricious being even as they begin their careers in physics and mathematics. They spout arguments based on their nature-defying savior, and I can only shake my head.

The core problem with each dialogue or (more likely) debate that I enter comes from the logical fallacy known as burden of proof. The theists I speak to will make claims about their god and will ask me to disprove them. I tell them in return that it is their responsibility to prove their claim.

I will usually turn the example on its head by claiming there is a walrus located in the center of Pluto; because the other cannot technically disprove it, I then claim I am right. Most theists ignore the analogy.

I was fortunate to be raised by parents who taught me about all religions. I studied Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. I considered myself a Buddhist for a time after I found that a teacher I idolized was a student of Siddhartha Gautama's lessons. I was told by a Christian friend that I was only being a copycat and didn't truly believe.

The irony of his statement didn't hit me until I became an atheist, and I realized he was in an even worse situation — instead of choosing a religion (or nonreligion) a religion had been forced on him since birth. I've come across some who no longer believe in the dogma of their parents' religion but hide their true beliefs in the face of disapproving peers, family members and other adults.

This is the biggest problem facing young freethinkers, feeling uncomfortable expressing their ideas due to the convictions of others. Fundamentalists preach hellfire while parents and peers compound these visions of hell. I've been told many times by people I consider friends that I was going to burn.

I can't imagine how hard it must be for those who have parents with a firm faith that non-Christian beliefs will lead to eternal damnation. We deists, atheists, humanists and others have no need to be militant, but something we must do is help those who bury their ideas to "come out."

Nathan Stevens, 18, Friendswood, Texas, is attending Clark Honors College at the University of Oregon, majoring in journalism and minoring in political science. In high school he was a College Board AP Scholar and co-founded the Humanist Club.

Leaving the 'Truth' for the truth

By Aaron McLaughlin

The atheist community includes many brave activists. Stories of young activists standing up for their lack of religious belief are especially inspiring, but my story isn't like that.

My story is important in its normalcy and needs to be told so that the culture of casual oppression and suppression can change. It needs to be told so that young atheists can realize that coming out isn't as bad as it seems.

I didn't have to face down an angry mob of strangers — I had to talk to my friends and family. In some respects, that can seem even more frightening.

In high school, I found myself mentally maturing and abandoning beliefs I'd been raised with. I left behind a sense of superiority, a subliminal sexism, an outright homophobia and a black-and-white view of morality. Finally, in April 2012, I realized that I had left God behind, too.

After I came to terms with this realization, I became afraid of how my parents might react. They and the rest of my family are Jehovah's Witnesses. The culture is hard to describe to an outsider.

Internally, the religion is referred to as the "Truth," and everything outside of it is the "World." Those words illustrate the polarized world in which the faithful live. They are fighting, not a battle, but a disease. They socially isolate themselves from people of other faiths and shun their own members who sin or rebel.

Those two phenomena combined to form a powerful incentive for me to stay in the closet: My only close friends were inside the religion and would abandon me if I ever expressed my doubts. This shunning, known as "disfellowshipping," kept me in the closet for almost a year.

The world of the closet is a dark and lonely one. Yet, my world was brightened by what I found online: information and community.

I surrendered my voice to preserve peace. When I finally stood up, I found my fears were no more substantial than the supernatural claims I had once believed in. In my own journey, I found that community and courage were the keystones to surviving the difficult path that many young atheists must take.

My father, believing that I couldn't be emotionally fulfilled with my lack of belief, repeatedly asked me whether I was happy that I came out as an atheist. I answered him proudly then as I answer him now: "Yes!"

Aaron McLaughlin, 18, grew up in Eveleth, Minn., then moved with his family to Sioux City, Iowa, and Georgia. After graduating second academically in his high school class, he's majoring in business at the University of Iowa, where he plans to join the Secular Student Alliance.

Freedom not to choose a god



By Ayla Yener

Growing up on the seam between my father's Muslim family and my mother's Jewish relatives, I've fought to form my own beliefs and opinions. While my parents have never tried to shove their religion down my throat, so to speak, faith still surrounds us.

A collection of smaller daily struggles, rather than one monumental event, have shaped me as a freethinker. I started this journey young. Second grade found me in a heated argument with another student over evolution ("Joe, you don't have *any* evidence that God made us out of mud, but there are loads of proof that evolution is real!")

In fifth grade, I found myself omitting God from the Pledge of Allegiance. In seventh-grade life science, when the theory of evolution was taught as hypothetical, my teacher and I came to the conclusion, after a long discussion, that by denying the substantial evidence verifying evolution (gravity is also "just a theory," do you deny its existence?), the state was actually giving religion a presence in school.

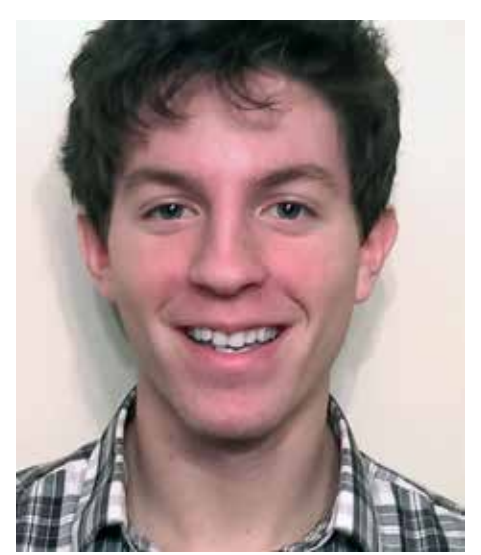
When, in my 13th year, a clump of friends had bat mitzvahs, I sat in a synagogue for the first time in my memory. Many of my friends denounced the hours of practice and theology forced on them by their parents, and I had no desire to attach myself to Judaism, but watching my friends hold service after party after party after party (way too many parties), I couldn't help but feel like they were part of some kind of club I was excluded from, despite having Jewish heritage.

At the end of my senior year, I was sitting in a mandatory "nonreligious" baccalaureate service. But even here, not only was God mentioned, but was mostly modified to "your God," implying that everyone present had one they believed in.

Freedom of and freedom from religion are not the same thing, but in a way they should be. Being free to have any religion or belief system you choose should also include the freedom to choose no religion, and to feel comfortable doing so.

Ayla Yener, 17, graduated from Emma Willard School in Troy, N.Y., and lives in Canaan, N.Y. She is enrolled at McGill University in Montreal and is interested in studying linguistics (when she's not engaged in martial arts, dance or playing the flute).

A heretic experiences yeshiva



By Meshulam Ort

Five years ago, inside the relentlessly enforced rules of the Haredi Judaism community and under its controlled environment, I began questioning my most ardent beliefs.

By age 14, I did not believe in my God or my religion. It was also at this age when I took a flight to a boarding school in Dallas to attend my first year in yeshiva, the Haredi equivalent of high school.

I was immediately given the chance to learn about beliefs that were not taught to younger students. The teachers preached that homosexuals should be stoned, African-Americans were created to be slaves and that life was nothing but an unimportant hallway to the real world just around the corner.

These archaic philosophies were far from the only disturbing aspect of yeshiva. The first thing I noticed when I arrived was the suffering of the other students. Faced with immense pressure to study the cult's laws and obey its most demanding commandments, many had nervous breakdowns or gave up and became depressed.

A student who slacked off in his studies (girls are barred from yeshiva) was immediately pushed to the bottom of the social ladder and made to feel utterly worthless. Sickened and saddened by what I saw, I resolved to do something.

My public rants combined with poorly kept secrets allowed word to quickly spread. Before I knew it, I was known as the atheist in a school filled with people who had, until then, thought that atheists were not real. This unintended and seemingly negative turn of events had far-reaching implications.

Students who had no idea that atheists existed suddenly learned that a regular kid, their good friend, was an atheist. It suddenly became an option. For the first time, the idea of leaving the cult was turned over in their minds.

I plan on continuing my fight to help free the kids who never got a chance to choose the life they will live.

Meshulam Ort, Lakewood N.J., graduated as valedictorian from Texas Torah Institute in Dallas and is a National Merit Scholarship finalist. He will be attending Rutgers University.

All students received \$250 for their essays.

Fifth-place (tie) college essay contest

Gauze of God removed, sight renewed

By Daniel Mark Davis

Daniel received \$350 for his essay. [This essay was mistakenly omitted from the winners published in the September issue, and the photo was wrongly placed with another essay.]

Pyeongyang, North Korea, 2009. A thousand people sit quietly in a dull white compound, facing the front of the room as a doctor addresses them and explains what's about to take place. Each listener sits tensely in complete darkness with their eyes behind makeshift bandages, hastily wrapped around their heads to keep out the light.

In the preceding days, a Nepalese doctor by the name of Sanduk Ruit had been granted a 10-day stay by the government to perform cataract removal surgery. Working day and night, Dr. Ruit successfully carried out his goal of 1,000 surgeries on medically deprived individuals, each of whom now waits in darkness for him to remove the thin plastic covers and gauze wraps from their faces.

One by one, the wraps are removed and cries and cheers of joy begin to echo through the room. But the cries are not directed to Dr. Ruit or his staff but to a small display in the front of the room: three photos of Korean leaders, with the deified Kim Jong-il in the center.

On the stairs leading up to this

shrine, the patients fling themselves in religious devotion, tears falling from their repaired eyes. Through syncope, sobs, they pledge fealty to their dear leader with grand declarations to the crowd — people promise to work harder in the salt mines, some even promise to die, but all profess service to their leader.

While watching this unfold via documentary film, I glanced at my father, an evangelical pastor of many years, as he slowly shook his head and in disbelief muttered expressions against this churchlike procession such as “how deceived they are,” “how blind, how lost.” It was at this moment, while an “awakening” took place in Korea and my father sullenly intoned with conviction that these people needed Jesus, not Kim Jong-il, that I was struck by the most conflicting realization I’ve had in years.

I was stunned at how, in this militantly anti-religious country, with armed guards posted at each doorway, possibly one of the most devout expressions of belief I had ever seen was taking place. More sincere than in any of the churches I had grown up in, these people were chanting subservience and speaking with more dedication than any Christian I had ever seen.

By this standard, watching from America in my Christian house, my family would swear that these people were in fact the deceived ones. I could only imagine how many Christians would call themselves deceived, for most of them had never believed with

God isn't up there pulling all the strings; events are simply unfolding.

such conviction. Watching this unfold led me to believe that it is in fact quite possible to simulate religious experiences. This brought to mind the possibility that my own experiences, the ones which I had sworn were God reaching into my life, could be from within my own head.

I thought to myself, “How could my father call them the deceived ones? At least they can see their god, or watch him on television. In this country, we worship a being which doesn't even physically exist.” The more I watched, the more I began to feel it is the Christians who act strangely, not the North Koreans.

I started becoming slowly disenchanted with many of the religious practices I had grown up with. First, the authority of church began to crumble. The more I listened to Christians' experiences of God supernaturally intervening in their lives, the more everything began to look slightly fabricated. If the people in North Korea were capable of experiencing the stupefying powers of religion, and certainly without any intervention by the Christian God, then surely individuals in America could be capable of the same experi-



ences, whether a legitimate God was behind the experiences or not.

The experiences my Christian friends were having were the same ones my nonbelieving friends were having, but my Christian friends were predisposed to attribute everything to God. Thus, the authority of God began to crumble as well.

I realized there was no divine reason why so-and-so had died or had been physically disabled. God isn't up there pulling all the strings; events are simply unfolding.

People die, lose jobs, get cancer and so on. There doesn't need to be a spiritual reason for it. Understanding this, I have immense difficulty with the concept of God and have since dismissed it.

Daniel Davis, 19, grew up in McKinleyville, Calif., and is a cellular/molecular biology undergraduate at College of the Redwoods in Eureka. He's also enrolled in paramedic school and will be receiving a medic's license in the coming year.

In the News

Russian Pastafarians hassled by bigots

Moscow police broke up a march of Pastafarians in August with help from anti-gay Russian Orthodox religious activists. RIA Novosti reported that eight persons were detained for “attempting to hold an unsanctioned rally.”

Followers of the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster held a “pasta procession” to honor the birthday of Robert De Niro, who played a character named Noodle in the 1984 movie “Once Upon A Time in America.”

The march was also disrupted by members of Bozhaya Volya (God's Will), who sprayed ketchup on marchers. The Orthodox group has protested against homosexuality, punk rockers Pussy Riot and the Darwin natural history museum.

“We were detained for simply walking,” one Pastafarian wrote on a social networking website. “In particular, I was taken in for a sieve on my head.”

Measles outbreak at Texas church

A measles outbreak was traced to Eagle Mountain International Church in Newark, Texas, where the leader of the megachurch had warned followers to avoid vaccinations, claiming they increase the risk of autism.

Church leader Terri Pearsons is the daughter of televangelist Kenneth Co-

peland, a multimillionaire. The unvaccinated congregation was exposed to a member who came in contact with measles overseas and interacted with church members, including children at the church's day care center. Nine children and six adults were infected with measles.

“This is a classic example of how measles is being reintroduced,” William Schaffner, a professor and infectious disease expert at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville told USA Today. “This is a sadly misinformed religious leader.”

Pearsons changed her mind after the outbreak and told all congregants to get vaccinated.

Survey results worry religious Jews

A new survey by the Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project shows that two-thirds of American Jews do not belong to a synagogue and one-fourth don't believe in God. “It's a very grim portrait of the health of the American Jewish population in terms of their Jewish identification,” Jack Wertheimer, professor of American Jewish history at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York told the New York Times.

Of millennials (born after 1980), 32% say they have no religion. “It's very stark,” said Alan Cooperman, deputy director of the Pew religion proj-

ect. “Older Jews are Jews by religion. Younger Jews are Jews of no religion.”

The intermarriage rate was 58% for all respondents and 71% for non-Orthodox Jews. Only 17% married outside the faith in 1970.

Reform Judaism is the largest American movement (35%), followed by Conservative (18%), Orthodox (10%) and groups such as Reconstructionist and Jewish Renewal at 6%. About 30% don't identify with a denomination.

Jane Eisner, editor in chief of the Jewish Daily Forward, called the results devastating. “I thought there would be more American Jews who cared about religion.”

Jihadists murder 40 in Nigerian dorm

Boko Haram extremists murdered 40 students with gunfire and explosives Sept. 29 in a dormitory at the College of Agriculture in Gujba, Nigeria, as the students slept, Agence France-Presse reported.

The Islamist group's formal name is the Congregation and People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad. It also took “credit” for killing 41 students in July in Mamudo. Boko Haram loosely translated means “Western education is sinful.”

Nigerian President Goodluck Jonathan voiced exasperation in a broadcast interview: “Why did they kill them? You can ask and ask.”

Corrections



We are sorry that Andrew Spalding's photo was mistakenly omitted from his 4th place college essay “1 Corinthians 13:11” in September.

The October Freethought Calendar in the September issue incorrectly said MacFarlane as having been born in 1806. He was born in 1973.

In the same issue, The September “Great Moments in Monotheism” wrongly said Galileo was put under house arrest in 1616 for supporting the Copernican theory. That happened in 1633.

An August story wrongly said 0.02% of prison inmates call themselves atheists. The percentage is actually 0.07. (Data from 1998 put the percentage at 0.20.) The item was mistakenly attributed to Andrew Seidel.

Sharing the Crank Mail

A small sampling, printed as received, of FFRF's crank mail. Member F. Elaine Hampton, who finds the mail "more disturbing than funny," suggests "the arrogance of ignorance" as a subtitle. Works for us!

Witefish Mnt Resort "Jesus" Statue: I am not a "religious" person, but you people need to stay the f**K out of Montana and not concern yourselves with what we choose to do out here. If you are so "offended" by this statue, then look the other f**KING way! — *Dennis Morgan, Dayton, MT*

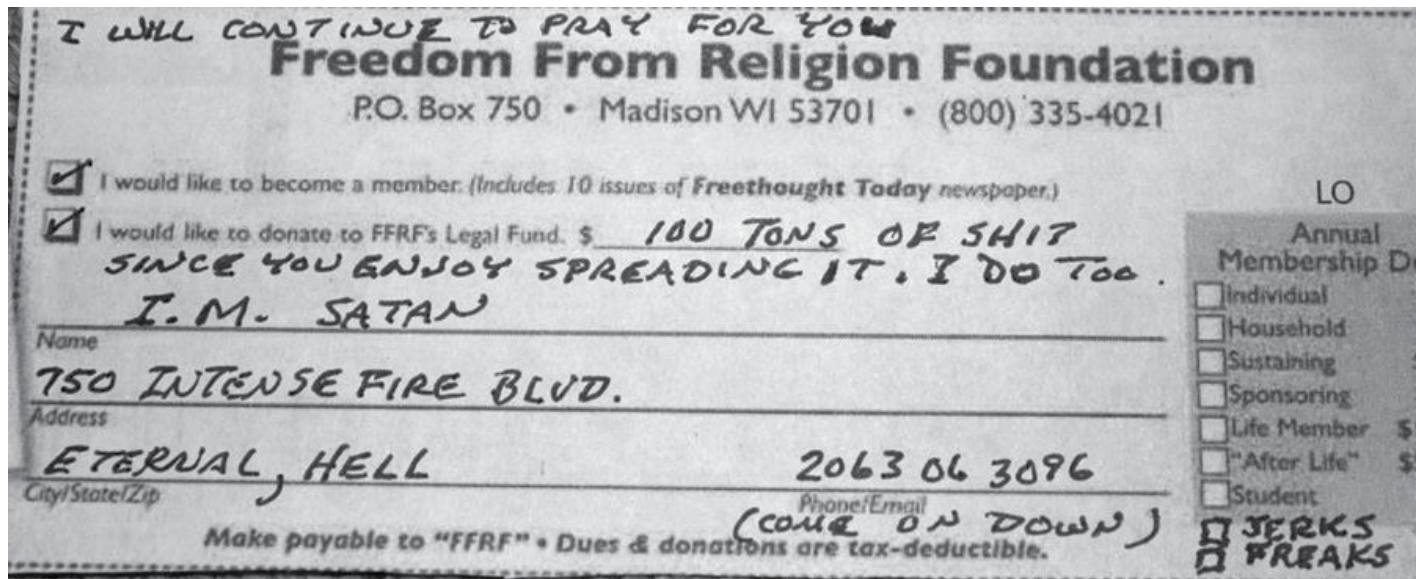
Darwin and Atheism: Darwin was not honorable..he tortured animals and killed them. And people who have the propensity to do those things because you say it's just how they evolved..well that is stupid and irresponsible. — *Duncan*

You people are dyed in the wool idiots: id-i-ot 2. A person of profound mental retardation having a mental age below three years and generally being unable to learn connected speech or guard against common dangers. The fact that you believe the devil's lies is proof of your idiocy. I know from experience that hell exists. One morning in June 1950 I was laying in bed wide awake and I left my body and went to hell. I didn't get in the fire but I got close enough to feel the heat and hear the screams of the people there. Then I came back and got in my body. The devil will tell you that I was sick or it was just my imagination but he will be lying as usual. — *MRED*

My Opinion: Why try and make everything so "politically correct" when the State and Church are barely unanimous. You people are giving extremism a segway into this nation and don't even realize it. — *Annabelle Giletti*

prayer: Yall need to keep ur noses out of our community here in Marion county tn It's non of ur concern what we do here keep ur asses in Wisconsin there will be prayer at our sporting events I'll make sure of it a former united states military member I faught for this right so shut up — *miles davis, south pittsburg, tenn.*

come kill me: I love my god and i have my choice to be religous. want to stop me your only choice is to kill me because i will never stop believing. what are you going to do imprison me



shoot me ticket me. go fuck yourself — *Jesus Christ, Heaven, Alberta*

We will win: You will never succeed! If I have to I will personally come out to your headquarters and make sure of that! — *James Baughman, Child Crisis Therapist/Evening Triage Therapist, Tulsa, Okla.*

A Friendly Rant: Who the fuck are you to tell someone they can't have a cross on a war memorial? Have you liberal cocksuckers ever served your country? doubt it. It's tree hugging faggots like you people that should be removed from our country. You have zero respect for the soldiers who died so you would have the freedom to run around and act like assholes. If you ass clowns dont like this country as founded, then by all means, get the FUCK OUT.....oh, and have a nice day. — *Marc Hightower, Greenbrier, Ark.*

Amazing Grace: People like you are ruining America. "Let immorality reign" should be your slogan. I know many of you lay awake at night wondering if there is a God and if you will have to answer to him one day. — *Mark Kjenstad*

Jesus picture in school: You have no need to tell the parents of Jackson County Ohio how to raise their children. I am in contact with other parents and we are trying to get it put on the ballot to be able to vote on having the picture put back. — *Mary K. Bates-Wilson*

Your religious harassment: I heard about you harassing the La Marque City Council of Texas. My response is my pledge to boycott all

Wisconsin businesses, starting with Milwaukee Tools, Wisconsin dairy products, Packers football and so on. Want a world without religion? That will be a world of revenge and retribution. Welcome to your new world, assholes. — *Steven Truthslinger*

Keep your cheese head opinions to yourselves: You don't live in Texas don't worry about our business. We Live by the Constitution of the United States founded buy Christians and by the Texas constitution again founded by you guessed it Christians. your playing in the wrong playground. Period. go play with your al-Qaida friends. — *Randel Gilmore*

Your Bigotry: You seem to not be smart enough to know anyone who has any beliefs, even your beliefs in nothing but self and science, when acting on those beliefs has created a religion. Even if it's a lame religion like yours trusting in noone but yourselves. So in short, Fuck Off, Democrat puppets and panderers, I can appreciate you not believing in God, as I am sure you can appreciate me believing you aint worth the salt in my piss. — *gary stephens, new hampshire*

Idiots!!! You people are arrogant idiots that need to mind your own business cause nobody around here has a problem with prayer for a better school year. So y'all just stay up there and eat your crappy cheese. — *Joseph Hinkle, Cullman, Ala.*

The South: We are Bible Thumping, Gun Toting, Freedom Loving Patriots. Without a belief in God, what is there to keep society in check?

Laws? No, only the fear of eternal damnation compels people to be good. May God Bless your hollow souls. — *Freedom Lover, Alabama*

who do you think you are? i am already crippled,or i would try to meet any sob who comes to alabama to protest the right to have a christian celebration,the bible says there is a time for war,i personally would not lose any sleep if you were all shot on sight.PS,better thank the lord that i can't travel. — *deerhunter, alabama*

what are you afraid of? why do you meddle in other states than wisconsin? what about christianity scares you so much if you dont believe? God is over all, so meddle all you want, you will be wondering what happened & why is it so hot? — *ann wittnebel, westlinn, oregon*

You are a flagrant violation of the word of God: You want god out of the schools? Then God will remove you from the book of life! — *Grady Brown*

marion county football games: The problem with this country now is lowlifes like you people trying to get prayer out of schools and create a bunch of immoral degenerates.I suppose you support a homosexuals to. — *bill everdon, jasper, tenn.*

you have no clue: if my kids wantr to pary on school land before a football game they will and if i want to pary with a bull horn in the middle of the football field i will as my tax money paid for it and no bunch of godless hell bound fools will stop me. — *dale king, jasper, tennessee*

They Said What?

If these people really don't like it, they don't have to live here.

Dana Perino, Fox News host and White House press secretary under President George W. Bush, saying she's "tired of" atheists objecting to "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance
Fox News, 9-6-13

That's classy. Well, I'm tired of you. You guys are, like, constantly, "Believe in my sky God! Believe in him! Believe in him!" Well, I don't believe in him. So, why don't you leave the country?



Cenk Uygur, show host (and 2010 Emperor Has No Clothes Award recipient), responding to Dana Perino
"The Young Turks, 9-9-13

For many in the world the ideal family is made up of the parents and two children (preferably boy and a girl). And unfortunately many Catholics are buying into this mindset. Until we reclaim our true Catholic heritage and become willing to disengage ourselves from the contraception culture, we will continue to have a shortage of priests.
Andrea Ertel, Sunman, Ind., letter to the editor
Dearborn County Register, 8-29-13

Christ Can Cure – Good News for Gays. Title of a Gospel tract distributed by British Pastor Alan Clifford at Nor-

wich Pride, an event he called an 'unashamed carnival of perverted carnality'
Christian News Network, 8-31-13

We are continuing to work to bring our racial demographic pendulum back to mid-line. So we would like to ask that only white people be on the front doors [greeting congregants].

Email to volunteers from Makeda Pennycooke, the African-American pastor at Freedom House Church, Charlotte, N.C.
Fox News, 9-3-13

The transformation of charity into legal entitlement has produced donors without love and recipients without gratitude. . . . It's not my place or my purpose to criticize these developments, only to observe that they do not suggest the expanding role of government is good for Christianity.



Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, a Catholic, speaking at Lanier Theological Library in Houston
Houston Chronicle, 9-8-13

We cannot stick our head in the sand while our nation's children are held hostage in government indoctrination camps. *We dare not leave our most precious resource — our children — to the humanists.* Secularization has deeply infected many school systems nation-

wide, spurred on by anti-Christian groups like the ACLU, People for the American Way, Freedom from Religion Foundation, and other radical groups that systematically coerce administrators into kicking God out the door.

Anita Staver, Liberty Counsel president, calling public schools "some of the most dangerous places in America"
The Liberator, August 2013

Go and feed the strippers. "Message from God" that Erin Stevens, wife of a Tennessee pastor, said she heard during a 21-day fast in 2012
New York Daily News, 9-18-13

College may be necessary for the provider of a family depending on the vocation God is calling them to or for those who are called to the Priesthood, both of which are intended for men.
Raylan Alleman, Citadel Catholic Media, "6 Reasons (+2) to NOT Send Your Daughter to College"
fixthefamily.com, 9-8-13

I think there are senators who are going to find Jesus and do the right thing.
U.S. Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, supporting a House bill to defund the Affordable Care Act
"The Lead With Jake Tapper," 9-20-13

Doing right for right's sake is atheistic. Christians should do what's right for God's sake, because the Bible teaches us to do everything for the glory of

God. . . . May God protect us from the atheistic notion of doing right for right's sake.

Blog titled "Don't Do God's Will Like an Atheist" by Calvinist theologian John Piper, answering if he thinks altruistic acts are possible or desirable
Christian Post, 9-24-13

The state's job is simply to say to students, "How life arises continues to be a scientific mystery and there are competing ideas about it."

John Calvert, attorney for a group suing the Kansas Board of Education for implementing Next Generation Science Standards by an 8-2 margin, despite the state's history of anti-evolution sentiment
Huffington Post, 9-27-13



Mens sana . . .

Maryland member Ted Nunn, traveling in New York City, left some thought-provoking reading material at the hotel fitness center.

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

William Paulish, 56, Blakely, PA: Involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with a person under 16, indecent assault of a person under 16, indecent exposure, corruption of minors and unlawful contact. Paulish, assistant pastor at Prince of Peace Catholic Parish, is accused of having oral sex with and masturbating a 15-year-old boy he met through Casual Encounters on Craigslist.

Paulish allegedly first told Dunmore police he met the boy by chance and tried to counsel him while walking around the Penn State campus to mull over a sermon Paulish was going to give. (When police arrived, they discovered the teen naked from the waist down.)

Several search warrants were served, including one to retrieve bodily fluids from Paulish's Toyota. Records show he's been reassigned 15 times by the Diocese of Scranton in 25 years as a priest. *Source: Citizens Voice, 9-20-13*

Jorge J. Castro, 53, Norwalk, CA: 6 counts of rape, oral copulation and penetration by a foreign object. The alleged abuse took place from 2004-12 while Castro worked at Las Buenas Nuevas church. Castro, an immigrant from Argentina, also was an associate pastor at a church in Riverside County.

More than 20 women, mostly Spanish-speaking and between the ages 18-39, are the alleged victims. Sheriff's officials said Castro, who claimed to have "healing hands," allegedly threatened to expose the women's undocumented status unless they had sex. *Source: San Gabriel Valley Tribune, 9-19-13*

Ioan Pop, 54, Toronto: Sexual assault. Pop, pastor at All Saints Romanian Orthodox Church, allegedly assaulted a woman at the church. Police said a couple entering the church interrupted the alleged assault. Police believe there may be other victims. *Source: cp24.com, 9-13-13*

Terry Jones, 61, Gainesville, FL: Felony unlawful conveyance of fuel and unlawful open carry of a firearm. Jones, an evangelical pastor, was arrested in Mulberry while driving a pickup truck towing a large barbecue grill filled with kerosene-soaked Qurans. Jones said he planned to burn 2,998 of the Muslim holy books to avenge victims of the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks.

Jones' associate pastor, **Marvin Sapp, Jr.**, 44, was charged with unlawful conveyance of fuel and no valid registration for the trailer. *Source: AP, 9-11-13*

Romulo Jimenez, 67, Houston: Continuous sexual abuse of a child. The alleged incidents occurred at Centro Christiano Vida Nueva when Jimenez was a pastor.

The alleged victim, then age 8 and now 9 years old, told police Jimenez took her into his church office, laid her on the desk, lowered her pants and underwear and kissed her, according to a complaint.

A witness told investigators she saw Jimenez coming out of his bathroom late at night. Inside the bathroom, the complaint states, the witness saw the girl with her pants and underwear down. Jimenez allegedly told her he was helping the girl go to the bathroom. *Source: Houston Chronicle, 9-11-13*

Samson Bamgbose, 25, Isabo, Nigeria: Negligence. Bamgbose, pastor of Celestial Church of Christ, is charged with being complicit in the death of Toheeb Odusanya, 13, who drowned in a river during a "spiritual bath."

The boy was allegedly taken to the ceremony without the knowledge of his parents. *Source: allAfrica.com, 9-9-13*

David I. Olusi, 41, Messina, Sicily: Theft and money laundering. Olusi, a native Kenyan who has been a pastor at San Nicola di Bari Catholic Church since May 2012, is accused of stealing gold valued at €40,000 from church statues, selling it and sending the money to Kenya. He's also suspected of taking collection money.

Fr. Salvatore Danzi, senior priest, allegedly caught Olusi on video stealing the gold. He was arrested at a Rome airport. *Source: The Local, 9-9-10*

Jason A. Roberson, 35, Boulder CO: Sexual assault on a child by a person in a position of trust and invasion of privacy. Roberson, a youth pastor at Vinelife Church, allegedly manipulated a 15-year-old girl into having an inappropriate relationship that lasted 7 years. The woman, now 23, reported that Roberson had shown her a picture of his penis, touched her breasts and watched her undress on multiple occasions between 2005 and 2007.

The woman told police she was interested in pursuing a church career and began exchanging text messages with Roberson. "[The victim] had never had a boyfriend and knew little about intimate relationships," Detective Brannon Winn wrote in the affidavit. "[She] told me that now,



looking back, she realizes that Jason was able to take her reality and twist it for his own personal use."

Roberson touched her in a sexual way at least 11 times before her 18th birthday, the girl told police. *Source: Daily Camera, 9-5-13*

Bernard Hartman, 73, Dayton, OH: 14 sexual assault counts related to alleged molestation of 2 boys and 2 girls while working as an Order of Mary Catholic brother at several schools in Australia from 1976-82. Alleged victims were ages 6 to 16.

Hartman moved back to the U.S. in 1984. He voluntarily surrendered to authorities and was arraigned in a Melbourne courtroom. The first allegations were in 2003, with more made in 2012. *Source: 7News, 9-4-13*

Rickey A. Reed, 56, Smyrna, TN: Aggravated burglary and misdemeanor theft under \$500. Reed, former pastor at First Free Methodist Church, is accused of breaking into the home of a congregation member, Jewel Proper, 70, who told police she found him holding her prescription Lortab.

Reed was caught in similar circumstances on video at the home of another church member July 4, 2011, and was sentenced to 4 years' probation. *Source: The Tennessean, 9-4-13*

Asaram Bapu, 72, Ahmedabad, India: Sexual assault. Bapu, a Hindu guru with millions of followers, allegedly assaulted a 16-year-old girl in Jodhpur while her mother waited outside after prayers.

He came under fire earlier this year for saying the victim of a fatal Delhi gang rape would have been set free if only she had begged for mercy from her attackers. *Source: BBC News, 9-2-13*

Olamide Sobowale, 46, Abeokuta, Nigeria: Rape. Sobowale, pastor of Glory Church of Christ, is accused of raping a 30-year-old woman at the church.

Prosecutor Paul Etusi told the court the pastor told the alleged victim he'd had a vision about her: "He asked the woman to come to the church to take a spiritual bath for her deliverance, but while the complainant was taking her bath, the accused barged into the bathroom, grabbed the woman and raped her." *Source: Osun Defender, 9-2-13*

John A. Pinkston, 76, Dallas, GA: Child molestation and sexual battery. Pinkston, founder and pastor of Congregation of God Seventh Day Church, allegedly touched a 6-year-old girl inside her clothing at the church in midsummer. *Source: Journal-Constitution, 8-29-13*

Jorge R. Lopez, Indianapolis: Corrupt business influence, 4 counts of forgery and 5 counts of theft. Lopez, pastor of Iglesia De Cristo Nuevo, allegedly accepted \$13,000 in cash from friends and family members who intended to pay bonds for 3 persons being held by U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement in Chicago.

"In every case, he did not bond them out and took their money," said Deputy Prosecutor Daniel Harrison. *Source: Christian Post, 8-29-13*

John O'Reilly, Santiago, Chile: Sexual abuse of minors. O'Reilly, former chaplain and spiritual director of Colegio Cumbres, a Catholic school, is accused of molesting 2 girls, ages 6 and 10, who were in his care in 2007. O'Reilly, a member of the Legion of Christ, suffers from an "immature and infantile sexuality and narcissistic conduct," according to a report presented in court. *Source: Irish Independent, 8-28-13*

Bobby G. Burrell, 28, Lawton, OK: Child sexual abuse. Burrell, pastor of One More

Soul Outreach Ministry, is accused of exposing himself to a 16-year-old boy last year after taking him from a group home where Burrell also worked.

Police said "six possible juvenile victims (ages 14-17) were interviewed."

The boy alleged Burrell took him to the church office, locked the door and asked him to watch a pornographic video on his cellphone. Burrell masturbated while he watched the video and urged the boy to join him, the report said. *Source: The Oklahoman, 8-27-13*

Francis P. Cullen, 85, Arona, Tenerife: Cullen, an Irish Catholic priest, was arrested on U.K. warrants alleging child sexual abuse in Derbyshire between 1955-91. Three alleged victims are involved, all boys, ages 7, 8 and 12 when they were first molested. *Source: Daily Mail, 8-25-13*

Zachary Anderle, 21, Chattanooga, TN: Sexual assault, simple battery and 2 counts of 3rd-degree cruelty to children. Anderle, a camp counselor for Vineyard Community Church, where his father is pastor, is accused of climbing on a 13-year-old camper and putting his penis on the boy's crotch while other boys watched. Anderle also slapped the child's face, the report said.

Bud Winderweedle, a church committee member, thinks "this was a case of horseplay gone wrong, which we deeply regret."

Allen Trapp, Anderle's lawyer, said, "This boy was using a lot of unsavory, sexually charged language. Zach told him to stop repeatedly. When he wouldn't, Zach told him, 'If you do not stop, I will come down there and sleep with you naked,'" Trapp said. "And he actually jumped on him, and all the other boys laughed and thought it was funny."

The boy's mother, who refused to speak to the church investigative committee, didn't. *Source: Times Free Press, 8-22-13*

Pleaded / Convicted

Harris Himes, Hamilton, MT: Guilty by jury of failure to register a security, failure to register as a security salesperson and fraudulent practices. Himes, pastor at Big Sky Christian Center, was accused of bilking a congregant out of \$150,000 in 2008, money that was meant to be invested in a Mexico-based building materials company.

The man told the jury when he went to Mexico to visit the plant, he found only an empty farm shed.

Himes, who represented himself at trial, is a very vocal public opponent of abortion, family planning and gay rights. *Source: Missoulian, 9-21-13*

Arthur Coyle, 62, Lowell, MA: Admitted to sufficient facts to warrant a finding of guilty to sexual conduct for a fee. The judge continued the case for 6 months, during which time Coyle, a Catholic Monsignor, is on probation.

He was charged after having been spotted by police frequenting known prostitution spots at least a dozen times the past 10 months. He allegedly paid a woman \$40 for oral sex. *Source: Lowell Sun, 9-21-13*

Robert Poandl, 72, Fairfield, OH: Guilty by jury of transporting a minor in interstate commerce with the intent of engaging him in sex. Poandl, a Catholic priest now assigned to the Glenmary Home Missioners, was accused of taking a 10-year-old boy in 1991 to Spencer, W.Va., and raping him while visiting a church there, prosecutors said.

The accuser, now 32, didn't tell police he'd

Cyprys told boys to kiss him on the buttocks during a game of 'Simon Says.'

been molested until 2009. Prosecutors told jurors Poandl had told the boy's parents he needed someone to ride with him to keep him awake and navigate. *Source: Columbus Dispatch, 9-20-13*

David S. Cyprys, 45, St. Kilda, Australia: Guilty by jury of raping a boy 5 times in 1990-91. He pleaded guilty to 12 more sexual abuse charges involving 8 other boys, as young as age 7. He knew the boys from the Yeshivah Centre, where he was a karate teacher and leader of the Orthodox yeshiva's youth group.

Cyprys told boys ages 7 and 8 to kiss him on the buttocks during a game of "Simon Says," prosecutor Andrew Grant said. *Source: The Standard, 9-17-13*

Larry and Carri Williams, Sedro-Woolley, WA: Guilty of 1st-degree manslaughter and 1st-degree assault of a child. Carri Williams was also convicted of homicide by abuse. The husband and wife were accused of causing their adopted Ethiopian daughter's death and abusing their adopted Ethiopian son Immanuel.

The couple were followers of Christian author Michael Pearl, who cites the biblical maxim "spare the rod and spoil the child." Police said Hana, the daughter, was often whipped, forced to sleep in a barn and to shower outside with a hose.

Immanuel testified they were also deprived of food and had to sleep in closets and listen to recordings of the bible and Christian music.

Hana's corpse was exhumed so that experts could try to definitively determine her age. She weighed 76 pounds in 2008 when adopted and 78 pounds 3 years later when she died. *Source: Skagit Valley Herald, 9-9-13*

Sentenced

Joseph G. Pennington, 33, Hartford City, IN: 15 years in prison with 7 years suspended after pleading guilty to sexual misconduct with a minor. Pennington, director of youth ministries at Hartford City Wesleyan Church, "took my first kiss [and] my virginity," alleged his 15-year-old victim in a letter read by her mother at sentencing.

The girl wrote that Pennington began "brainwashing me when I was 14," and said she believed they were planning a life together and discussed what to name their children. *Source: Indianapolis Star, 9-16-13*

Shawn Ratigan, 47, Kansas City: 50 years in prison on 5 counts [involving 5 victims] of producing child pornography. A technician working on the Catholic priest's laptop computer discovered hundreds of images of young girls.

"Prison is hell," Ratigan complained to the judge at sentencing. "I know I deserve 15 years, but 50 years? Come on, I don't think so."

Bishop Robert Finn, Ratigan's superior, was convicted last year of failure to report suspected child abuse and sentenced to 2 years' probation.

"We witnessed our outgoing, vibrant little girl become depressed, withdrawn, anxious," a victim's mother said. "She's too scared now to trust anyone of authority." *Source: AP, 9-12-13*

Gregory D. Forehand, 41, Chesapeake, VA: 15 years in prison with 10 years suspended after conviction of 5 counts of custodial indecent liberties with a child. Forehand, pastor at Real Life Christian Church, was charged with molesting 3 teens between 1999 and 2006. *Source: WAVY, 9-10-13*

Edmund Higgins, 39, Richmond, UK: 8 months in prison suspended after admitting to having 174 pornographic images of children on his computer. Higgins, pastor at St. Elizabeth Catholic Church, was also accused by the prosecution of having discussions about child abuse online. *Source: The Tablet, 9-4-13*

Phil Jacobs, 63, who served as a Catholic priest in British Columbia and Ohio, was sentenced in Canada to 2 months of house arrest followed by 2 years' probation, 50 hours of community service and restricted contact with youth for sexually touching a person between the ages of 14 and 18.

The sexual contact took place with a male victim at the priest's home when he worked as a tutor at St. Joseph the Worker School in Saanich in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

Jacobs testified at his trial that he took teen boys on overnight trips when he worked in Ohio, intending to introduce them to masturbation. Diocese of Columbus officials said that about 10

‘Those are checks the church council doesn’t believe were spent for church purposes.’

— Assistant D.A. David Feiss

credible reports of abuse by Jacobs were turned over to police. *Source: Columbus Dispatch, 9-4-13*

Joseph Gutnick, 61, **Singapore**, a senior Chabad-Lubavitch rabbi and mining magnate, was ordered to repay \$1 million plus interest after an Australian judge found him guilty of engaging in “misleading and deceptive conduct” in a business deal. Gutnick’s wealth is estimated at \$285 million, according to Business Review Weekly.

Victoria Supreme Court Justice Ross Robson ruled that Gutnick knew shares in a gold mining company were probably “close to worthless” when he sold them to Roy Raphael Tashi. “I find that it was predatory behavior in which Mr. Gutnick was primarily motivated by enriching himself at Mr. Tashi’s expense.” *Source: jwire.com, 9-4-13*

William F. Vatterott, 37, **St. Louis**: 3 years in prison after pleading guilty to possession of child pornography. Vatterott, pastor at St. Cecilia Catholic Church, was charged with having images of an unidentified nude boy on his computer. *Source: AP, 9-2-13*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Kim Schmit and Lori Stoltz went public with lawsuits they filed against the **Catholic Diocese of New Ulm, MN**, alleging that David Roney sexually abused them when he was a priest. Roney died in 2003.

St. Paul lawyer Jeff Anderson said he’s documented 20 cases of Roney molesting girls and boys, about 15 at St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Willmar, where Schmit and Stolz attended.

The suits ask the diocese to release a list of priests suspected of abusing children. *Source: West Central Tribune, 9-16-13*

Bill Beardmore, an altar boy at St. John’s Catholic Parish in the 1960s in Caledonia, **MN**, spoke publicly about his alleged abuse by **Diocese of Winona** priest **Thomas Adamson** in 1963-64. He is suing the diocese.

Beardmore, 61, who lives in Iowa, alleges Adamson repeatedly cornered him in private areas of the church and subjected him to oral and anal sex. His allegations in 2002 were dismissed by the diocese for lack of corroboration.

“I feel like I have been through the wringer,” Beardmore said. “The diocese made me feel like the bad person in all this. There needs to be accountability.”

Adamson, thought to be living in Rochester, has never faced criminal charges but has been named in several other lawsuits, many settled out of court. *Source: Lee Newspapers, 9-4-13*

In a suit filed in Cook County **[IL]** Circuit Court, an unidentified 21-year-old man alleges that he was fondled twice in 2003-04 by Catholic priest **Daniel McCormack**, who was removed from the priesthood and sentenced to 5 years in prison in 2007.

The Archdiocese of Chicago has since agreed to pay out millions to settle claims against McCormack, 44. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 9-4-13*

A \$900,000 suit filed by 3 men alleges they were molested as boys by **Chilean Catholic priest Fernando Karadima** in the 1980s. They charge the church with initially ignoring their complaints about Karadima, whom the Vatican later found guilty of sexual abuse of minors and sentenced to a life of prayer. *Source: Global Post, 9-3-13*

Monica L. Jaramillo, 35, a former member of the Los Lunas **[NM]** **Congregation of Jehovah’s Witnesses**, is suing the church, claiming she was molested by church elder **Michael Brunner** at his home in 1988 when she was 8.

Also named as defendants are the **Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York** and Brunner, who has not been criminally charged.

The complaint alleges that church elders knew of Brunner’s history of previous alleged sexual misconduct with congregation members, including the alleged rape of the plaintiff’s mother in Indiana when she was 8. *Source: News-Bulletin, Zalkin Law Firm, 8-28-13*

“John Doe M, A and B” now in their mid-20s are suing the **Archdiocese of Miami**, **Monsignor Edward Pace High School** and **Immaculate Conception Catholic School**, alleging they were molested repeatedly by Marist brother **Ken Ward**, Pace dean of students.

Ward, 56, is a defendant as is **Fr. Gustavo Miyares**, school principal, who’s accused by a plaintiff of sexual assault in the 1990s.

The suit alleges Ward often brought the boys into his office, “locking the door, snapping the

blinds closed, and forcing them to take their clothes off and participate in sexual conduct, while Ward masturbated both himself and the young boys.”

Ward has left the Marists and works as a registered nurse at a psychiatric hospital. Miyares, 66, resigned from the Miami archdiocese in 2006 after a former altar boy accused him of abuse in the early 1980s. The former altar boy and at least 2 more alleged victims have filed claims. *Source: Miami Herald, 8-27-13*

The parents of a girl allegedly molested in 2007 by a church camp counselor in San Jose, **CA**, are suing the **Church on the Hill**. After firing Keith Woodhouse, 28, church officials allegedly gave him a positive recommendation to work at a child care site, despite allegations he had touched young girls inappropriately several times, the suit claims.

Woodhouse was charged in 2011 with 30 counts of lewd and lascivious acts on a child under 14 stemming from employment at Trace Child Development Center.

The suit details allegations Woodhouse was fired 3 times by the church starting in 2004 for alleged misconduct with children. He was rehired to work at the summer camp, resulting in a 2007 swimming pool incident in which he was reportedly seen holding the plaintiff on his lap and kissing her on the shoulders and neck. A lifeguard alleges he saw Woodhouse leave the pool with an erection, the suit said. *Source: Mercury News, 8-23-13*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

Another 26 claims of clergy sexual abuse against **Archdiocese of Dubuque, IA**, priests have been settled for cases from the late 1940s through the 1970s. The archdiocese paid \$5.2 million to plaintiffs, 22 men and 4 women. The Waterloo firm of Dutton, Braun, Staack & Hellman has settled 83 abuse claims against the archdiocese since 2006.

“This is, we suspect, fewer than half of all such victims,” said Steve Theisen, director of the Iowa chapter of Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests.

Eight of the 10 priests named as abusers are dead. *Source: Telegraph Herald, 8-29-13*

A court has ordered **Fr. Giorgio Carlia** and a Catholic parish in Bolzano, **Italy**, to pay €700,000 to an alleged sexual abuse victim and her parents. The girl alleged she was molested from the ages of 9 to 14.

Carli was acquitted in 2003, but on appeal was sentenced to 90 months in prison. The sentence was reversed by a higher court due to the statute of limitations. *Source: The Local, 8-29-13*

Finances

The Catholic **Diocese of Gallup, NM**, plans to petition for Chapter 11 bankruptcy due to clergy sex abuse legal claims, said a statement by Bishop James Wall read to parishes during Mass over the Labor Day weekend. The diocese includes 6 counties in New Mexico, 3 in Arizona and 7 American Indian reservations.

The diocese will become the 9th U.S. Catholic diocese or archdiocese to seek bankruptcy protection since the abuse scandal erupted in 2002. Two Catholic religious orders have also done so.

The others are Milwaukee; San Diego; Davenport, Iowa; Fairbanks, Alaska; Portland, Ore.; Spokane, Wash.; Tucson, Ariz.; and Wilmington, Del.

Gallup, with 53 parishes, is the poorest U.S. diocese, said spokesman Fr. Tim Farrell.

Phoenix attorney Robert Pastor commented, “Chapter 11 bankruptcy was designed to help companies restructure debt. Bankruptcy was never intended to be a tool to help Catholic bishops hide other perpetrators or the knowledge it had about pedophile priests working in the diocese.” *Source: Post-Dispatch, 9-3-13*

Legal Developments

An **unidentified Catholic priest**, wanted for alleged child abuse in his native **Germany**, will be put on trial in November on similar charges in **South Africa**. The priest, said to be in his 50s, was arrested on a German warrant.

The “acts of indecency” are alleged to have occurred in 2008 with 4 boys, aged 9 and 10, at a German-language Catholic youth camp near Johannesburg. *Source: news24.com, 9-21-13*

The Supreme Court of Buenos Aires **[ARG]** Province upheld a 15-year prison sentence for **Julio Cesar Grassi**, a Catholic priest renowned for his “Happy Children” charity, which operates several children’s homes. Grassi was convicted of aggravated sexual abuse and corruption involving a teen in 1996 and has been under house arrest pending outcome of the appeal. *Source: AP, 9-20-13*

Yosef Kolko, 39, Lakewood, **NJ**, filed a motion to withdraw his guilty pleas to aggravated sexual assault, attempted aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault and child endangerment while he was a counselor at a camp run by the Yeshiva Bais Hatorah School. The alleged victim was 11 in 2008.

Kolko contends he was pressured by his Orthodox Jewish community to plead guilty to the accusations. The boy’s father, a prominent rabbi in the community, was fired and eventually moved his family to Michigan to escape ha-

rasment from others, much of it endorsed and allegedly orchestrated by Rabbi Yisroel Belsky of Yeshiva Torah Vodaas in Brooklyn. *Source: failedmessiah.com, 9-7-13*

A hearing officer in **Tennessee** recommended that **Michael R. Salazar**, 40, be denied parole for 6 years after Salazar tried to blame his victims at his hearing. He pleaded guilty in 2010 to 20 counts of sexual battery by an authority figure and statutory rape. The 5 victims were minors from the Lord’s Disciples Church in Maryville where he was youth pastor.

The recommendation goes to the state Board of Parole for a final decision. *Source: AP, 9-5-13*

John A. Salazar’s jury trial on a charge of indecency with a child was postponed after Salazar, a Tulia, **TX**, Catholic priest, filed for a change of venue. Salazar, 57, claims he can’t get a fair trial in Tulia due to publicity. The alleged abuse involved a 12-year-old boy and began in 1997.

The Amarillo Diocese hired Salazar in 1991 directly from a New Mexico treatment program that treated pedophile priests. Salazar pleaded guilty in 1987 in Los Angeles to oral copulation and lewd or lascivious acts with a child for molesting 2 altar boys, ages 13 and 14. He served 3 years of a 6-year prison term. *Source: Globe-News, 8-29-13*

Allegations

Mark Huberty, pastor since 2007 at Church of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Maplewood, **MN**, told parishioners at Sunday Mass he’s taking a leave of absence due to “a serious concern. An accusation was recently made against me by a woman who alleges inappropriate touching, which I deny,” Huberty said.

Huberty said he’s cooperating with police and the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis. In a statement, the archdiocese said Huberty is not being removed as pastor but will not be living at the parish during the probe. *Source: MPR, 9-22-13*

The Vatican is reviewing allegations that **Diocese of Limburg Bishop Franz-Peter Tebartz-van Elst**, spent lavishly on a new residence, staged ornate services and communicated badly.

The inquiry is officially called a “fraternal visit” by Cardinal Giovanni Lajolo, the former Vatican nuncio in Berlin. Cost of the residence for Tebartz-van Elst, 53, dubbed the “luxury bishop” by some newspapers, has at least doubled from the initial projection of €5 million. The residence turned the spotlight on other controversies, such as a Hamburg prosecutor’s inquiry into whether the bishop lied under oath in denying a report he flew first class to India to visit poverty projects. *Source: Reuters, 9-9-13*

The Milwaukee County **[WI]** District Attorney’s Office is investigating expenditures by **Fr. James Dokos** from a trust fund intended to be used for charity. Dokos, former pastor of Annunciation Greek Orthodox Church in Wauwatosa, was sole trustee and wrote hundreds of dollars worth of checks to a racquet club, over \$1,000 worth to a florist and \$57,000 worth to a Bank of America account.

“Those are checks the church council doesn’t believe were spent for church purposes,” said Assistant D.A. David Feiss. Dokos now pastors a church in Glenview, **IL**. *Source: WTMJ, 9-4-13*

Police are investigating allegations of sexual abuse by **Catholic priests** at St. Peter’s Seminary in Mirfield, **UK**, in the 1960s and 1970s.

Plaintiffs are preparing civil cases against the **Order of Verona Fathers**. One man posted online, “I was at Mirfield in the early ‘60s. My whole time there was a nonstop series of mental, emotional, physical and, on two occasions, sexual abuse by the priests, coupled with total neglect of all the boys, who were left to their own devices to cope with the problems produced by the abuse.”

The order ran St. Peter’s from 1960-84. *Source: Mirfield Reporter, 9-3-13*

Community groups in Constanza, **Dominican Republic**, held a press conference to denounce alleged sexual abuse by parish priest **Juan Manuel de Jesús Mota**, aka Padre Johnny, against whom charges haven’t yet been filed.

The priest is accused of molesting several young girls, including members of the choir. *Source: Dominican Today, 8-29-13*

Removed / Resigned

The Vatican has removed **Gabino Miranda**, 53, as auxiliary bishop of the **Peruvian Diocese** of Ayacucho due to allegations he molested children.

“It is what the pope said — zero tolerance,” said Luis Bambaren, former president of Peru’s bishops’ conference. *Source: Reuters, 9-20-13*

Robert “Bud” DeGrand, 61, is on leave from serving Catholic parishes in Sigel, Neoga, Green Creek and Lillyville, **IL**, said a statement from the Springfield Diocese.

The alleged misconduct occurred while DeGrand was pastor at Our Saviour Parish in Jacksonville in 1980, the year he was ordained. *Source: State Journal-Register, 9-19-13*

The Archdiocese of **Detroit** has restricted **Louis Grandpre**, 79, from public ministry because of a “substantive” sexual abuse allegation in the early years of his priesthood, a statement

‘The diocese made me feel like the bad person in all this. There needs to be accountability.’

— Bill Beardmore, former altar boy

said. He was ordained in 1961 and retired as an active priest in 2003. *Source: Press & Guide, 9-18-13*

Michael Sternfield, 67, rabbi at **Chicago Sinai**, acceded to demands he resign from the Reform synagogue in the wake of revelations he was charged with identity deception and trespassing in 2011 at an Indiana casino, which he initially denied.

A rabbi for 44 years, Sternfield confessed in 1993 to an affair with a younger rabbi while at a San Diego synagogue and his wife filed for divorce. He then took a job in 1994 at a synagogue in Durban, SA. He said feelings of isolation and shame led to a gambling addiction. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 9-16-13*

Chris Wilkinson, pastor of Morningside Community Church as well as mayor and police chief in Hamlin, **WV**, has been asked to resign by the congregation for letting the Sheriff’s Department use a church bus to take 9 officers to a methedrine drug bust so they wouldn’t be noticed.

“Rumor had it that people living at the mouth of the holler were calling them people living up in the holler, telling them that the police were coming,” Wilkinson said.

He said State Police also used the bus about 3 months ago and arrested 9 people. “I just assumed since they didn’t care that time, that they wouldn’t care for me doing it again,” said Wilkinson. *Source: WOWK, 9-8-13*

Polish Archbishop Jozef Wesolowski was dismissed as Vatican ambassador to the **Dominican Republic** after allegations of sexual abuse of minors were made against him.

“He did not leave his post voluntarily,” said Federico Lombardi, Vatican press spokesman.

A local TV station aired a report showing Wesolowski in an area of Santo Domingo known for male prostitution. *Source: Polskie Radio, 9-5-13*

The Vatican has laicized 2 **New Jersey** priests. **Richard Mielwocki** was accused of molesting minors at Our Lady of Sorrows Church in South Orange in 1994. He left the priesthood to become a social worker. He pleaded guilty in 2007 to abusing 2 teens.

Horacio D. Medina was removed from ministry in 2004 after being charged with having oral sex with an 8-year-old boy in the sacristy of Blessed Sacrament Church in Elizabeth. *Source: northjersey.com, 9-3-12*

The Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee, **FL**, removed **Msgr. Michael Cherup** as pastor of St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Ft. Walton Beach after deeming a 1993 sexual abuse allegation involving a 15-year-old as credible.

Cherup also taught then at St. Mary Catholic School. *Source: Daily News, 9-2-13*

Geronimo Moreira, 32, Gaviao, **Brazil**, stunned parishioners at Mass by announcing he is leaving the priesthood to marry a 23-year-old who is pregnant with his child. He said he met her in 2007 when he was at seminary.

Vatican permission is needed for them to have a Catholic wedding. *Source: Zee News, 8-29-13*

Other

Bishop Thomas Paprocki, Diocese of Springfield, **IL**, returned **Fr. Thomas Donovan** to the ministry after a period of treatment and counseling.

Donovan had called 9-1-1 in November 2012 after he couldn’t unlock the handcuffs he was wearing.

Paprocki granted Donovan a leave of absence, saying he “suffered from nonsexual self bondage.” He’s been assigned as chaplain to the Sisters of St. Francis of the Martyr St. George in Alton, where his therapeutic and ministerial progress will be regularly monitored, Paprocki said. *Source: KMOX, 9-13-13*

John D. White, a **Michigan** pastor imprisoned for killing his 24-year-old neighbor to fulfill a necrophilia fantasy, committed suicide by hanging himself in his cell. He was sentenced in April for bludgeoning Rebekah Gay at her home while her 3-year-old son slept in the next room.

A friend of the family who was once engaged to Gay’s mother, White later returned to Gay’s home and dressed the boy in his Halloween costume.

White’s neighbor, Michelle Anderson Earl, called him “a true coward. He took the life of a daughter, mother, sister and friend to many. Now he will serve his true punishment, the one he deserves. Rot in hell, John White.” *Source: Morning Sun, 8-28-13*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

Letterbox

Member's quote a 'Tower' of inspiration

I just read the September "Meet a Member" about [former Baptist pastor] Michael Tower. To "people in history I admire," he answered, "Is it strange that I can't think of some one person to single out in this way? I guess I think of the multitudes throughout history who stood for reason and fact in the face of unyielding emotionalism, especially those whom we will never know by name who lived simple, quiet lives of extraordinary decency with a determination that strengthens us yet."

I was awed at how beautiful that statement was. I reread it. Then I reread it again. Then I cried.

Thank you, Mr. Tower, for putting into words exactly what I've thought and have been personally striving for since I was about 10. (I'm 67 now.)

Cathy Groves
Massachusetts

Pair of huge hearts behind small donation

Enclosed is a check for \$10. This is to help with the building expansion. I am 82 years old and on Social Security as our only income. My wife (75 years old) is in a wheelchair and cannot walk, so this is the best we can do.

Thanks for all the great work you are doing. I am still hoping to meet other atheists here in Escondido. I have yet to meet one. I have no car and it is hard to get around. Thanks again for all you do!

Louis R. Williams
California

'Lionhearted' essayists captivate member

Today I received my second edition of Freethought Today. As with my first copy, I was captivated by the essays by all those young, brave, smart and loving student activists who wrote about their personal histories coming to grips with their experiences around freethought and atheism. What intrepid and heroic voices for reason, compassion and humankind's well-being.

I came to atheism late in life, in my 60s, but the seeds were always there in the back of my mind as long as I can remember. Even now, within the context of a deeply religious family, I tread lightly. But I have never felt more authentic, more honest and more secure in my own understanding of self and the world about me.

That's why I congratulate these lionhearted young champions of freethought. They are surely making the world a place of more light and peace and compassion.

J.H. Stoltz
Kentucky

Christian science quiz doesn't defy belief

I chuckled (but really wanted to cry) reading the fourth-grade science quiz from Blue Ridge Christian Academy [Aug13]. It's obvious the students are taught that the Earth is but a few thousand years old.

Even if all the scientific evidence to the contrary is thrown out, how do people who believe such nonsense account for cave drawings? They are known to be as much as 6,000 years old or more, the same age as the Earth in the minds

of the staff at the Blue Ridge Adademy?

Most of the cave art around the world was an effort by the makers to portray their lives and the animals with which they came in contact. Nowhere is a dinosaur drawn. Doubtless, something as terrifying as a Tyrannosaurus Rex or any other dangerous dinosaur would have been trumpeted on those walls if man and dinosaurs had lived contemporaneously.

This is only common sense.

Martin Green
California

There's no defense for religious bigots

I just read the article [Sept13] about tax evasion and blatant political activity by religious organizations. I worked for 501(c)(3) organizations for my entire career. We were very aware of the prohibitions against political advocacy by which we had to abide to keep our tax-exempt status. As religious organizations have become more desperate and aggressive in their efforts to blend their superstitions into government, I fully support FFRF's legal actions to require them to abide by the same rules as all other not-for-profit organizations.

I also noted your mention of the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) which, among others, is recommending allowing even more overt political advocacy by tax-exempt religious groups. The Southern Poverty Law Center, which tracks hate groups, recently reported that ADF has provided lawyers to defeat a challenge to the constitutionality of Section 53 of Belize's criminal code which prescribes a 10-year sentence for "carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any person or animal."

This is creepy, perverted Christian-speak for imprisoning men and women for engaging in private acts between consenting adults of the same sex. (I wonder why these good, straight, God-fearing Christians are so obsessed with gay sex and totally unrelated bestiality?)

I am proud to be a member of FFRF and applaud your efforts to protect us all from the hatred and ignorance of religious bigots.

Robert C. Van Fleet
California

Catholics practice hiring discrimination

After listening to Freethought Radio on secular hospital takeovers in Washington state, I thought of another important aspect of this problem. I've been a top-tier clinical laboratory scientist manager, chief scientist or director for 34 years.

When I applied to work at Mercy Hospital in Sacramento and St. Mary's in Reno, they required me to sign a statement swearing that I would support their holy mission, and that I would not do or say anything to deny the God delusion. I would not do so.

If more hospitals become this biased in employment on the basis of religion, it could have the effect of driving real scientists out of their chosen profession. When I asked a representative of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission about this, they basically said tough luck and that I would have to sue them and probably be litigated into the poorhouse.

I applied for another job at a Catho-

lic hospital where they used even more insidious techniques to avoid hiring nonbelievers without crossing any legal lines. At Mercy San Juan in Sacramento, my daylong interview included a lunch meeting off campus with hospital managers and administration who made no bones about their religiosity. They used this unmonitored forum to ask me questions about where I go to church and similar probing questions. I was definitely the most qualified person for the job, but since I told them I was not religious, I never heard from them again.

If it weren't for groups like FFRF, I think I'd go crazy. You give me hope.

Daniel T. Harvey, CLS M.T.
California

Orthodox Jews tough nuts to crack

Regarding "New York 'Sukkahs' need to stop obstructing pedestrians" [FFRF news release], I live in New York City and know what you're talking about. It will be much hard to stop the practice in heavily Orthodox neighborhoods, where the citizens vote in blocs and will kick out any politician who doesn't support their traditions.

These people are even crying persecution about a law to inform parents (just inform, not even outlaw!) of the dangers of ritual circumcision that involves oral suction of the wound, which can result in infection leading to permanent disability or death for the infants.

So I'm delighted to see FFRF taking a stand on this. But no one running for office right now, and even in the future, will be willing to take action on this if they rely on Hasidic or Orthodox votes.

Joan Reisman-Brill
New York

Student essayists appreciate scholarships

As a winner of the student essay contest, I am naturally extremely grateful for the generous scholarship that is easing the cost of my education. But I was particularly surprised when my first issue of Freethought Today arrived.

FFRF has not simply given winners a one-time gift. The subscription will keep us informed and updated on the latest news of the freethought community.

Anna Cain
Colorado

•••

Thank you very much for awarding me an FFRF scholarship. I feel extremely honored. I feel I have worked hard throughout my high school career to maintain a high GPA and balance work, volunteer activities and sports. I will continue to study and learn as much as possible during the 2013-14 academic year at Oregon State University and make the most of this opportunity.

Attending Oregon State University seemed like such a faraway dream to me just a few short months ago. Now, because of the generosity of scholarships like the one you have given me, I will be able to attend a world renowned university and achieve my goals.

Taysie MollyRose Savage
Oregon

Never too old to sign up as 'Lifer'

Please renew my membership to Lifetime. Although my life remaining



Minnesota member Robert Allen writes: "The Lord, again, working in mysterious ways, like saving three crosses from the destruction of a tornado. Never mind the the church building itself was NOT saved — but then, maybe there was some kind of Divine punishment at work — on the church building, but not the 3 crosses. — Faithlessly yours, Bob

is short (I'm 80), it is worth the fee to help you in your continuing fight for "freedom from religion." Keep up the good work!

Margaret Sayre
Maryland

FFRF parsonage suit garners praise

I want to express my appreciation for FFRF's deft and intelligent handling of the parsonage exemption lawsuit. How wonderful to see the positive comments on Facebook and other media sources.

I've let you know when I disagreed with your approach in the past. It seems the right thing to do to let you know when I'm so pleased to be a Lifetime Member of FFRF because of your excellent approach and handling of a situation.

I will be sure to send in a donation to the legal fund next month.

Stephanie Ragusky
Director, Beltway Atheists
NARAL Pro-Choice Va. Foundation
board member

May the force be with freethought

I admire all of you very much. I donate to other organizations that support uprooting religion from the secular sphere, but FFRF is outstanding for its courage and action, particularly among young people. May the force (whatever it is) be with you.

Marjorie Holder
New York

Haters must hate abiding by the law

Congratulations to me! I received my first "hate call" for having FFRF notify our school board that they can't pray at graduations. Now we're getting

somewhere.

I got to see firsthand how religious bigots act when they can't get their way. It was very humorous and enlightening. Keep up the great work!

Nick Bakker
Pennsylvania

Editor's note: Mr. Bakker refers to a situation that was resolved successfully after FFRF filed a formal complaint with the board.

Service juridique: Bonne chance!

You impress me. I am enclosing a check for the legal department. Bonne chance!

Maggie Adams
Washington

Constitution ad leads to new membership

I loved the full-page ad "Celebrate our Secular Constitution" featuring Paine, Franklin, Washington, Adams, Jefferson and Madison, from which I took the membership form. I'm proud to become a member of FFRF.

Ron Gordon
Indiana

For essayists: 'You are my sunshine'

Kudos for another fine issue in September. I so look forward to these issues where I gleefully discover that I am not alone as a recent convert to this fresh "religion."

I was so impressed with the awards given to the "gutsy students" of Siler City, N.C. Those young men showed tremendous fortitude in the face of adversity. I admire their tenacity, particularly considering they're in the very

Scared senseless

rural Southern bible belt.

I thought the essay written by Andrew Spalding ["1 Corinthians 13:11"] was particularly poignant, but maybe I'm just a prejudiced Seminole! Justin Moss took my breath away with "Loss of sister brought on loss of religion." He hit the nail on the head with every sentence he wrote and should have gotten first place.

How I wish I had been so open-minded when I was their age and had looked beyond the religious "box" I was placed in at an early age. I wish I had ventured out so much earlier than I did, instead of waiting until my senior years, so that I too could have tackled the world logically and intelligently. Keep up the good work. You are my sunshine.

Jack M. Red
North Carolina

'Obstinacy, thy name is religion'

There is a proposal by some lawmakers to restore (with taxpayer dollars) houses of worship damaged by Hurricane Sandy. The fact that nature (commonly known as God by believers) did not spare such structures should send a message: that their God cannot make distinction between a topless bar and a church.

Will they now believe that their God is an equal opportunity destroyer or will they conveniently put the blame on nature whenever such devastation occurs? Some have even recommended that all houses of worship should be built bigger and taller to be more visible from heaven. Obstinacy, thy name is religion.

G.M. Chandu
New York

Marquee Madness



Berean Baptist describes itself online as "A Church With a Heart for People" (but apparently not an eye for spelling). Anne and Brian Wales, photographers and FFRF members, happened by the church in Beloit, Wis.



A "come to Jesus" moment in Blacksburg, Va., that member Dana Spencer isn't eager to bask in.

Do souls wear socks, have — talks?

FFRF should be challenging the superstitious belief that there is some kind of living, thinking, immortal creature called a soul living in a hollow space inside of us. Is it a solid, liquid or gaseous creature? Does it wear socks or have a pulse? Do X-rays show the cavity that it lives in? Does a plumber's soul still remember how to do plumbing?

Much of religious superstition depends on the idea that your soul will go to the "hereafter," wherever that is. How far away is that? Does it go through space in some kind of vehicle (a soulmobile)? If the person used a cane, wore glasses and wore dentures, will the soul also have those things, or does dying restore youth and health?

Is the soul real, or not?
I suggest that FFRF will have to address this very basic issue to succeed in stopping the pushy spread of religious superstition.

Robert H. Anderson
California

Hannukah Harry helps spur dialogue

I very much appreciate all the tireless effort you expend on First Amendment issues and keeping this country headed in the direction our founders intended that it evolve.

Regarding Mr. Scheiman's request [Aug13 Letterbox] for a new moniker for "unbelievers," I use the term "non-

theist" simply because it's not heard much. The ensuing conversation usually runs like this:

"Nontheist? What is that?"
"It means that I don't believe in the existence of a higher power or divine being."

"You mean like God?"
"Yes, 'like' God or like that other all-knowing individual who allegedly comes around in December."

"Santa?"
(Smiling) "No, Hanukkah Harry. Yes, Santa!"

"So you're an atheist?"
"What do you think that word means?"

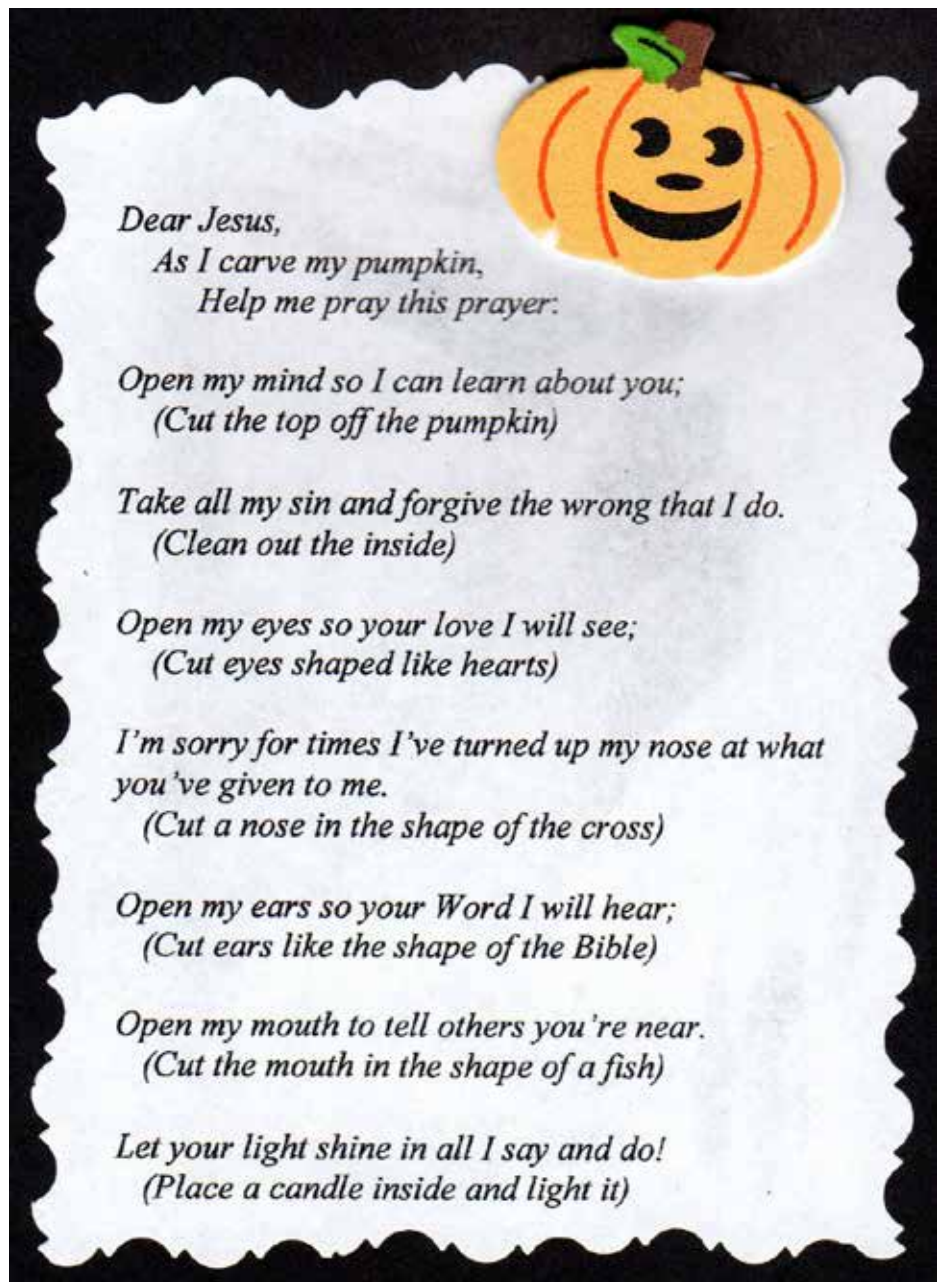
And all of a sudden we're in dialogue, talking about definitions (where Huxley began when he coined the term "agnostic") and relating as fellow human beings upon the planet. We may not come to see eye to eye, but I at least tend (most of the time) to earn their respect for my nonbelief.

Thank you for your fine publication. I'm proud to be a supporting member.
Bob De Dea
Washington

Organized religions

The adroit ability of the Priest classes to exploit gullibility and fleece the masses.

"A. Rich Hokes"
California



John deVille in North Carolina forwarded this inspiration that came to school staff in an email last Halloween from a church that "adopted" a public school. He terms it "low-brow theology which would embarrass a competent 8-year-old."

A hospice nurse's remembrance

'I saw no one grasping for a god or forgiveness'



By Pam O'Brien

I just finished reading "Hearing Jack's courageous deathbed confession" [Aug13] and felt sad that he had to hang on to his secret for so long. I want to share with you a few of the stories I have from my work as an in-home hospice nurse.

After 30 years of nursing in different areas of healthcare, I found hospice. It was all about the patient's and his/her family's wants and needs. I was there to offer as much comfort as I could. Requests were reasonable (no trips to Disney or a cruise) but included lots of "Do I still have to?"

Most people wanted to cut out all the doctor visits, tests and pills, pills, pills. My answer was usually "Whatever you'd like." I only had one chance to get it right for them, but it turned out it wasn't as difficult as I thought it was going to be.

When a patient was admitted, a registered nurse and a social worker were assigned to assess the patient's and family's needs. Full-time chaplains were employed, and I was to see that all my patients knew one was available 24/7. Out of respect for my patients, I always inquired about their "spiritual needs." It was rare that they wanted to see the chaplain. Occasionally, someone would want weekly visits.

On one visit, I found the patient's wife in dire need of the chaplain. She "knew" her husband was dying of cancer because of her. She hadn't gone to church or given them money or prayed on a regular basis, so God gave her husband cancer.

I was grateful our chaplain was able to come right over for her as she was suffering terribly. The Catholic Church had done that to her. The chaplain was able to bring her into a safe place. Her husband died a few hours later in peace, from the cancer, not God. His wife felt forgiven so she could allow him to go. The patient himself had declined the offer of a minister, priest or chaplain for himself when first interviewed, and continued till his death.

Our chaplain was a good man. He wanted to help, calm, soothe, and bring feelings of peace and forgiveness. He was able to ease the fears of retribution that accompanied so many minds of the religious, whether it was the patient or their family. He was what I believe in, and that is the goodness

'Can it, honey, no chaplains. I'm an atheist.'

in humankind. I'm sure it will prevail; it's unfortunate that religion gets in the way.

During one initial interview with an elderly woman who was dying, I offered the visit of our chaplain or her minister and she declined. I had recently been told by my agency that I was to offer a chaplain visit each time I saw my patients from now on. I thought it was because our rabbis and chaplains weren't getting enough calls. We were in the bible belt and everyone needed a spiritual visit, I was told.

After a couple of offers, the woman said to me, "Can it, honey, no chaplains. I'm an atheist." My response was that was fine and that I also happened to be an atheist. Her eyes widened and she blurted out, "Oh, thank god!" We both roared with laughter and bonded permanently.

Another response from a man was calm and respectful: "I'm an atheist and dying, I promised myself I wouldn't listen to any more of that." Once again I shared my status, and his attitude and affect changed toward me. We became friends and he had his death his way.

I visited a lovely woman with limited time due to cancer while she was still quite active, driving, living life to the fullest. She said she would love to meet with the rabbi although she had been an atheist for many years, but she would always be a Jew. Again, I shared my status, and she told me about her beautiful only child, a daughter, who had met a man and became a Christian for him.

My patient was so disappointed and hurt by her daughter's choice, but she could accept it. The most trying thing at this point was that they were trying to convert her. Our rabbi, a converted Catholic woman, helped her through the task of ending the proselytizing by her precious daughter and new husband.

The patient, the rabbi and I had some wonderful visits over the next several months, bonded in the friendship of women. The beloved daughter was at her mother's bedside when she died. She had accepted her mother as she was.

Over my six years as a hospice nurse, I can say I found people who stated they had no religious beliefs, listed themselves as "nones" or declined spiritual or religious visits were peaceful and accepting. I saw no one grasping for a god or forgiveness or salvation. I saw no one fearing hell or retribution, looking toward the light or gazing upward to a heaven.

They seemed content with what was coming. "I guess I'll find out pretty soon" was something I heard more than once. The physical act of dying, the last hours, were similar but individual, and the only miracle I witnessed was the effect of morphine. Calm, easy breathing till it stopped.

FFRF member Pam O'Brien, a retired R.N. from Georgia, writes: "I'm very thankful for all the work FFRF does. I'm so glad



Pam O'Brien at the other end of the caregiver's continuum while doing obstetrical nursing in 1990.

to see so many more people are able to reason for themselves than I thought. I feel validated after so many years of feeling the need to hide my atheism. My first clue was when no one could give a good enough explanation of Noah's ark, and after that not much else

was credible. Mother would drop me off at the church on Sundays, but that didn't last long when I discovered skipping church and going over to the drugstore for a cherry Coke and cigarettes."

Orthodox Jews tough nuts to crack

Regarding "New York 'Sukkahs' need to stop obstructing pedestrians" [FFRF news release], I live in New York City and know what you're talking about. It will be much hard to stop the practice in heavily Orthodox neighborhoods, where the citizens vote in blocs and will kick out any politician who doesn't support their traditions.

These people are even crying persecution about a law to inform parents (just inform, not even outlaw!) of the dangers of ritual circumcision that

involves oral suction of the wound, which can result in infection leading to permanent disability or death for the infants.

So I'm delighted to see FFRF taking a stand on this, but no one running for office right now, and even in the future, will be willing to take action on this if they rely on Hasidic or Orthodox votes.

Joan Reisman-Brill
New York

Recruit a Member: Sample Copies for \$2

Send \$2 with the name and address of each person you wish to receive a sample copy of Freethought Today to:

FFRF, P.O. Box 750, Madison WI 53701

Freedom depends upon freethinkers

(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)

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.

FFRF makes a scene



Avast, me heathens

For Pastafarians, Talk Like a Pirate Day each Sept. 19 is like Christmas for Christians. Donning (or holding) pasta strainers at FFRF were (front, left) Dan Barker, Bill Dunn, Katie Daniel, (back) Andrew Seidel, Scott Colson, Lauryn Seering and Lisa Strand.



Covington, Kentucky

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel (back, third from right) poses with members of the Tri-State Freethinkers on July 14 in Covington, Ky., after his presentation titled "Sweat the small stuff: Why we must challenge every violation of the Establishment Clause." Next to Andrew is Jim Helton, organizer of Tri-State Freethinkers. Jim's wife, Chrissy, is helping hold the banner along with their children Jim and Kelly, just back from Camp Quest. Other attendees included the Arnold family (far left), who recently started a Secular Student Alliance group at their local high school, FFRF members Greg, Carolyn and Sean Stuart and Dan Dusa and his wife, all in the back row.

Stone a heathen (with water balloons)



Andrew "Jesus" Seidel strikes a sacrificial pose right before being struck near the kisser.

Freethinkers staff fair booth



Jim Hudlow photo

Jim Downard and Julia Sweeney hold Gary King's original artwork ("The River" and "Validation") at the Inland Northwest Freethought Society booth at the Spokane County Fair.

The Inland Northwest FreeThought Society, a Washington FFRF affiliate, hosted booths at three fairs over 16 days last summer to spread the secular message: the Garland Street Fair, July 20; the North Idaho (Kootenai County) Fair, Aug. 21-25; and the Spokane County Fair on Sept. 6-15.

Entertainer Julia Sweeney, a Spokane native, joined INFS members on the last day of the Spokane fair and helped staff the booth. Colorado Springs artist and FFRF member Gary King kindly lent his original artwork to be displayed and donated to a Spokane-area women's shelter. Sweeney and King, also a Spokane native, both attended the now-defunct Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic School.

The primary purposes of staffing local fair booths (almost 200 total vol-

unteer hours in these three events) has been to show the community that there is a secular presence and let like-minded people join the fun, as well as stand up for our message of separation of church and state, said Jim Hudlow, secretary-treasurer.

The booths featured an "Ask an Atheist" placard, affording those of a theist persuasion a chance for some friendly sparring. However, INFS believes that civil and respectful exchanges help dispel misconceptions about atheists and can go far in bridging what seems, at times, chasms between believers and nonbelievers, Hudlow said.

Among the hundreds of visitors was Steven Wells, author of *Drunk with Blood: God's Killings in the Bible* and *The Skeptics Annotated Bible*.



FFRF teamed with the Atheists, Humanists and Agnostics at the University of Wisconsin-Madison to raise money Sept. 25 for the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. The event took the bible literally by "stoning sinners." From left are Adam Benton, Andrew Seidel, Sam Erickson, Lauryn Seering, Amanda Supak and Chris Calvey.



Julie Iddon between FFRF convention entertainers Julia Sweeney (left) and Jill Sobule.

Hurray: Julie's going to be OK

FFRF convention-goers present at the banquet dinner Saturday, Sept. 28, at the 36th annual national convention in Madison, Wis., will be very relieved to hear good news about Julie Iddon, a Lifetime Member from Washington State. Paramedics wheeled Julie away about 8 p.m. after her husband George, also a Lifetime Member, realized she appeared to be suffering a stroke.

Many FFRF members have since contacted our office to inquire about Julie. We're pleased to pass on the good news that her condition started reversing itself within about 15 min-

utes after she arrived at the emergency room. She stayed two nights at Meriter Hospital, where she was started on intensive blood thinners and other medication to treat very high blood pressure. George said everyone at the hospital provided excellent care.

They took a red-eye flight home after driving to Milwaukee and phoned the FFRF office immediately on arrival. Both said they enjoyed the convention immensely before the medical emergency and plan to attend next year's convention in Los Angeles.

FFRF staff sends its thanks and best wishes to this amazing couple.

It's a girl!



Audrey Frances Markert was born on Sept. 18, 2013, at 5:57 p.m. She weighed 9 pounds, 4 ounces and was 20.25 inches long. FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert and her husband Michael are the proud parents. "Aside from her dark hair and chubbier cheeks, she looks a lot like Dexter did as a newborn," notes Rebecca. Dexter, who turned 2 on Oct. 12, loved playing with the celebratory balloon from FFRF staff. Audrey made a special appearance at the FFRF convention to rousing applause on Friday night.



Not all things

New Jersey member Martin Ridder captured this gem in Stewartville.



Mark Your Calendar!

Announcing . . .

Raleigh, N.C. FFRF Mini-Convention

Weekend of May 2-3, 2014

(after National Day of Reason, er, Prayer)

Sheraton Raleigh Hotel
421 South Salisbury Street
Raleigh, North Carolina



37th Annual National Convention

Weekend of October 24-25, 2014

Millennium Biltmore Hotel - Los Angeles
506 South Grand Avenue
Los Angeles, California