

Freethought Today

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FFRF ousts bibles at 2nd public university hotel

Building on its success removing bibles from University of Wisconsin hotel rooms in December in Madison, the Freedom From Religion Foundation scored another victory for secularism on an Iowa public college campus.

The Memorial Union at Iowa State University in Ames agreed to remove Gideon bibles from its hotel rooms on March 1.

FFRF received a complaint about the religious propaganda on state property. "If a state-run university has a policy of providing a Christian religious text to guests, that policy facilitates illegal endorsement of Christianity over other religions and over nonreligion," said Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott in a Jan. 29 letter to the university. "Permitting members of outside religious groups the privilege of placing their religious literature in public university guest rooms also constitutes state endorsement and advancement of religion."

Elliott added, "Individuals, not the state, must determine what religious texts are worth reading."

Union Director Richard Reynolds responded Feb. 13: "The concern you raised about the availability of bibles in the guest rooms of the Memorial Union has been taken under advisement and, effective March 1, 2014, the bibles will be removed from the hotel rooms."

"We're delighted to see reason and



Julia Sweeney, shown here with her daughter Mulan, is among the freethinkers profiled and photographed in Chris Johnson's new book *A Better Life: 100 Atheists Speak Out on Joy & Meaning in a World Without God*. The author/entertainer is a huge FFRF supporter and serves on its honorary board. In her profile, Julia says that she felt "lost" and "wobbly" when she first accepted atheism. "But after awhile, the understanding of my particularly small place in the natural order of life deepened, and my appreciation for this short stint — to be alive and aware — was activated. I was in thrall to this truth. This feeling has never left me." (See pages 12-13 for more photos and atheist insights.)

the Constitution prevailing. We can all sleep easier knowing secularism is being honored at our public universities," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

"Many nonbelievers greatly object to its primitive and dangerous instructions to beat children, kill homosexuals, atheists and infidels and that it sanctions the subjugation of women, who are scapegoated for bringing sin and death into the world," Gaylor added.

"Imagine the uproar if someone

found a Quran or atheistic literature such as Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion* in their state-supported hotel room. Government can't take sides on the religious debate."

FFRF's victory received widespread Iowa and national coverage. Elliott appeared on national Fox News coverage and Gaylor was invited to debate Sean Hannity on Fox. (View the video on YouTube with the search terms "Gaylor FFRF Hannity.")

John McCarroll, executive director of university relations, told WCCI

News 8 in Des Moines: "It's a public institution and we do have certainly responsibilities on the separation of church and state. We thought it was appropriate to put the bibles in the browsing library."

Gaylor noted that as long as there are a variety of books of varying views, and the library is not solely religious, that is a satisfactory resolution. FFRF, which has more than 20,000 members, represents nearly 150 in Iowa.

electioneering restrictions applying to tax-exempt organizations, puts all the cards on the table," said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

The church argues it has a "legal right to participate in political campaigns without forfeiting their tax-exempt status," and cites the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, as well as the free speech, free exercise and establishment clauses of the First Amendment. Incidentally, FFRF calls RFRA unconstitutional in its amicus brief, written by attorney Marci Hamilton, in the *Sebelius v. Hobby Lobby* case before

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Church intervenes in FFRF pulpit politicking suit

A court decision allowing an obscure Milwaukee-area church to intervene in FFRF's nationally significant lawsuit against the Internal Revenue Service over church politicking has placed the litigation "on the front line," said FFRF's litigation attorney, Richard L. Bolton.

"This will put everything in play, including the churches' argument that the politicking restriction violates the First Amendment — using the *Citizens United* argument," he added.

Although FFRF and the government defendants opposed the intervention, U.S. District Judge Lynn Adelman in Milwaukee ruled Feb. 3 that Fr. Pat-

rick Malone and the Holy Cross Anglican Church of Wauwatosa, Wis., could intervene. (The congregation left the Episcopal Church in 2008 in reaction to a series of decisions, most prominently the ordination of a gay bishop, and joined the more conservative Convocation of Anglicans of North America.)

"The intervention by the clergyman and church, which openly admit in their brief that they don't obey the



Rich Bolton

Photo: Brent Neastio

Continued on page 3

© A Better Life/Christopher Johnson

Meet an Activist Member

Name: Luther G. Weeks. (The “G” stands for Gaylord, long ago translated from the French “Gaillard.” Who knows if a descendant of some common ancestors dropped the “d.”)

Where I live: Glastonbury, Conn., in a condo on the banks of the Connecticut River. Although our state constitution claims “the good providence of God, in having permitted them to enjoy a free government,” at least three of the members of the Connecticut Hall of Fame are atheists: Mark Twain, Paul Newman and Katharine Hepburn, all greatly appreciated and admired here.

Where and when I was born: Bristol, Conn., 1946.

Family: Wife Denise, adult descendants Madeleine and Aaron.

Education: Mathematics B.S., Clarkson University, Potsdam, N.Y., when computers were huge and their memories were small. A senior course on automata and a seminar on brain theory set me on a path to career and lifelong interests, leading to an M.S. in computer science.

I’m also a master fellow of the Life Management Institute. (That’s life insurance management, no actual life management!) I read voraciously on issues in democracy, history and science, especially evolution, brain science and how we think.

Occupation: Retired computer scientist in business — building, buying and selling software for large companies and startups. Now I’m a full-time volunteer (unpaid) political activist/watchdog for election integrity.

Two or three times a year, I organize voters to observe and independently report on the results of Connecticut’s post-election audits. I organized volunteers in 2010 for a citizen recount

of 25,000 ballots in Bridgeport. Every spring, you can find me taking a rational approach to lobbying and testifying to the legislature, promoting better election laws and trashing risky schemes.

In my spare time, I have a large community garden plot and serve as president of my condo board, which keeps me sympathetic in relating to elected officials.

Military service: Drafted. After jungle infantry training, I served as a company clerk in Korea during the Vietnam War. There is no need to thank me for my service; it was all like the movie “MASH,” without the blood.

How I got where I am today: Continually improving by learning something new, jumping carefully, yet quickly, at opportunities and learning from many of my mistakes. I recently took a personality assessment and learned among other things that I am an “activator.” That fits pretty well. I am always looking at things differently, often amusingly.

Where I’m headed: Crematorium, hopefully then to produce some leaves of grass near family and familiar places.

Person in history I admire: Robert Ingersoll. I wish we could hear some of his lectures and speeches. Many are great, but all would be better in person than on paper. I’m currently reading volume 8 of the 12-volume “Works of Robert G. Ingersoll.”

A quotation I like: “Whatever comes, this too shall pass away.” — Ella Wheeler Wilcox

Whatever bugs us, whatever we love, whatever we oppose, whatever we cause, human life, and the Earth, are all temporary. That realization can be depressing or freeing, it is your choice.

Twelve ‘Lifers’ from 9 states join FFRF

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to welcome a dozen new Lifetime Members. They are:

Lawrence Beat, Scott Burdick, Joe S. Creager, Dean Hoffman, Kenneth Knighton (FFRF’s 20,000th member; see story page 3), Corey Leon, Joyce H. Lindley, Lois Martin, Jay Mumford, Glenn Reynolds, Nicholas Sargeantson and Andrew Seidel.

States represented are California, Connecticut, Florida, Michigan, North

Carolina, New York, Utah, Washington and Wisconsin.

Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000 designated as a membership or membership renewal, are deductible for income-tax purposes, ensure never another renewal notice and go into a rainy-day reserved account.

Thank you, Andrew, Nicholas, Glenn, Jay, Lois, Joyce, Corey, Ken, Dean, Joe, Scott and Lawrence!

A Note to Members

Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and “Private Line.” If it says March 2014 or earlier please renew! Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 gung-ho; \$25-student) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in Jan/Feb and June/July. Send membership or renewal to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701, ffrf.org/donate



Luther Weeks promotes FFRF at the annual Hope Out Loud festival sponsored by the Connecticut Coalition For Peace and Justice.

These are a few of my favorite things: Walking, reading, thinking, blogging and debating. Cats.

These are not: Rigid, irrational individuals. Robocalls. Most dogs.

My doubts about religion started: I was raised Methodist, yet none of it actually set in. My mother was not pleased when I made jokes about grape juice after my first communion. I chose “no preference” on military dog tags when inducted, so there would be no question, just in case.

In the early '90s, I started reading more and more books on atheism and decided to really determine if there was any basis for believing any religion, then confirmed myself as atheist. In 2002, I Googled “Freedom from Religion” and guess what link came up on top?

Before I die: I intend to keep living, learning and having fun.

Ways I promote freethought: I do not hesitate to tell people I am atheist. I endeavor to set an example for others, especially children, that it is fine

to be an “out” atheist. You never know who might be watching or listening, or when it will make a difference for someone.

When a devout friend learned that I was atheist, he said, “There is still time for you.” That is my attitude toward everyone I know that is not yet atheist, “There is still time for you.” When appropriate, I tell them that. I have it all be friendly and fun. Once, a neighbor said that the priest wanted to talk to me about conversion. I declined. I told her to tell him, given his age and likely pension, that it would be better if he stayed Catholic.

I occasionally attend local or national atheist meetings, it never fails to inspire, educate, and be an opportunity to meet new friends and discover that other friends are also atheist. I save my copies of Freethought Today and give them to atheist friends.

I wish you’d have asked me: My epitaph — “Please join me as one who has lived.”

Islamists blamed for 59 school deaths

Militants from the Islamist group Boko Haram shot or burned to death 59 pupils Feb. 25 in Buni Yadi boarding school near Damaturu, Nigeria. Boko Haram means “Western education is sinful” in the Hausa language.

“Some of the students’ bodies were burned to ashes,” Police Commissioner Sanusi Rufai told The Guardian. Bala Ajjiya, an official at the Special-

ist Hospital, said all those killed were boys. He said the school’s 24 buildings were all burned to the ground.

President Goodluck Jonathan called the attack “callous and senseless murder.” Boko Haram, which wants an Islamic state in northern Nigeria, has been blamed for more than 300 deaths in February and several thousand in recent months.

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

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Ken Knighton, who had been following FFRF's growth closely, made a special request last fall to be notified in time to become FFRF's 20,000th member. In February, he accomplished that goal when he joined as a Lifetime Member. Thank you, Ken!

FFRF appeals Montana mountain Jesus to 9th Circuit

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has asked the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals to overturn a federal district court decision approving a shrine to Jesus on public land near Whitefish, Mont.

"A permanent Catholic shrine on public land is prohibited by the Establishment Clause, every bit as much as a Catholic church would be," asserts FFRF's appeal brief, filed Jan. 28.

The 6-foot-tall shrine sits on a 7-foot pedestal on Big Mountain in the Flathead National Forest, which is owned by the U.S. Forest Service. Since 1953, the Forest Service has issued a permit at no cost allowing the Knights of Columbus, a conservative Catholic men's group, to place a "Shrine overlooking the Big Mountain ski run," whose purpose is "to erect a Statue of our Lord Jesus Christ."

In response to initial objections to the shrine, the Knights of Columbus claimed "that our Lord himself selected this site."

FFRF wrote the Forest Service in 2011 to object to permit renewal. When Chip Weber, forest supervisor, agreed, determining it was "an inappropriate use of public land," he faced blistering criticism and renewed the permit in January 2012.

FFRF is suing on behalf of its 100 Montana members, including three who have come into unwelcome contact with the shrine. William Cox, who has long been personally opposed to the shrine, has frequent and unwanted exposure to it when he skis on Big Mountain many times each winter. FFRF member Doug Bonham found the shrine "grossly out of place" when first encountering it, and his 15-year-old daughter, who often skis on the mountain, considers it "ridiculously out of place."

Likewise, FFRF member Pamela Morris, a third-generation Montanan, first encountered the shrine as a teenager in 1957 at age 15 as part of a ski team, when she found the statue "intrusive" and "startlingly out of place."



William Cox on Big Mountain

She has since avoided the area, choosing to backpack, fish and camp where nature has not been violated.

The record shows a decision by the Forest Service to emphasize the shrine's "historic" ties to development of the ski hill over its religious nature. The government argues that because the violation is longstanding, the shrine has become "historic." FFRF counters that if courts followed such logic, segregated public schools and bans on interracial marriage would still prevail.

"The Government's argument, reduced to its essence, otherwise would mean that religious iconography on public land is acceptable if supported by popular interest groups. The Establishment Clause, in other words, would be subject to majoritarian or popular demand. That, however, is not the lesson of our Constitution — nor a paradigm for historical success, as worldwide religious conflict attests. Religious icons on public land cannot be constitutionally salvaged by local celebrity status."

Richard L. Bolton, of Boardman and Clark, Madison, Wis., is litigation attorney, with Martin S. King and Reid Perkins of Worden Thane, Missoula, serving as local counsel.

Sign up to receive FFRF news releases and action alerts by request at info@ffrf.org. Read more about the case at ffrf.org/legal/challenges.

Church can intervene in FFRF's pulpit politicking suit

Continued from front page
the U.S. Supreme Court.

FFRF filed its suit in November 2012, taking the IRS to court over its failure to enforce electioneering restrictions that require 501(c) tax-exempt entities to refrain from endorsing political candidates.

FFRF recently prevailed in its federal challenge to an IRS policy that benefits clergy. The government has appealed that ruling on the parish exemption to the 7th Circuit.

FFRF has a third challenge of the IRS in federal court over the fact that churches are exempt from filing the same financial accountability reports, the Form 990, required of all other 501(c)(3) nonprofits.

Meet FFRF's 20,000th Member

Name: Ken Knighton.

Where I live: Bountiful, Utah.

Where and when I was born: Clovis, N.M., 1952, when my father was in the Air Force.

Family: I'm the oldest of eight children, all still living. No, we're not a polygamist group.

Education: Public schools through high school and various college courses in real estate and business.

Occupation: My wife Shirley and I own and operate K and J Auto Inc. in Bountiful. We've operated it for 28 years.

How I got where I am today: I've read many books and Internet articles on topics of religion — Hitchens, Dawkins, Harris, Russell, Dennett and

others. I've been a "faithful" listener to FFRF's broadcasts and other freethinking programs.

Where I'm headed: I will continue my research into early Mormon histories and fact-finding to share and hopefully open some minds.

Person in history I admire: Christopher Hitchens, for his style, persistence and penchant for the truth.

A quotation I like: "All thinking men are atheists." (Ernest Hemingway)

These are a few of my favorite things: Studying early Mormon history, debunking religious dogma, snowmobiling and quiet Sundays.

These are not: Religious bigotry and dishonest bureaucrats.

My doubts about religion started: By reading and rereading *The End of Faith* by Sam Harris.

Before I die: A good meal, please.

Ways I promote freethought: I thought becoming the 20,000th member was a cool way to show my support for FFRF's ongoing work in keeping religion out of our government, schools and public places.

I wish you'd have asked me: When I can co-host the radio show with Dan and Annie Laurie.

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.

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Freedom Depends on Freethinkers



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

The Foundation's e-mail address is info@ffrf.org. 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

He Answers Every Prayer

The Lottery

Having bought fifty tickets or so,
She prayed she'd collect all that dough.
She moved heaven to win it —
Alas, though, she didn't,
For sometimes the answer is No.

Boy Meets Girl

A handsome young Russian named Brett
Wanted Sonya to come be his pet,
So he prayed to the Lord,
But his plea was ignored,
Because sometimes the answer is Nyet.

Xmas

"Send a doctor," he started to pray,
But Santa flew in on his sleigh.
Well, Prancer and Dancer
May not cure your cancer,
But sometimes the answer is Neigh!

Forecast

The Hell's Angels were planning to Go,
Though the weatherman said it might blow,
So the Lord they invoked,
But their party got soaked,
Because sometimes the answer's Hell, no!

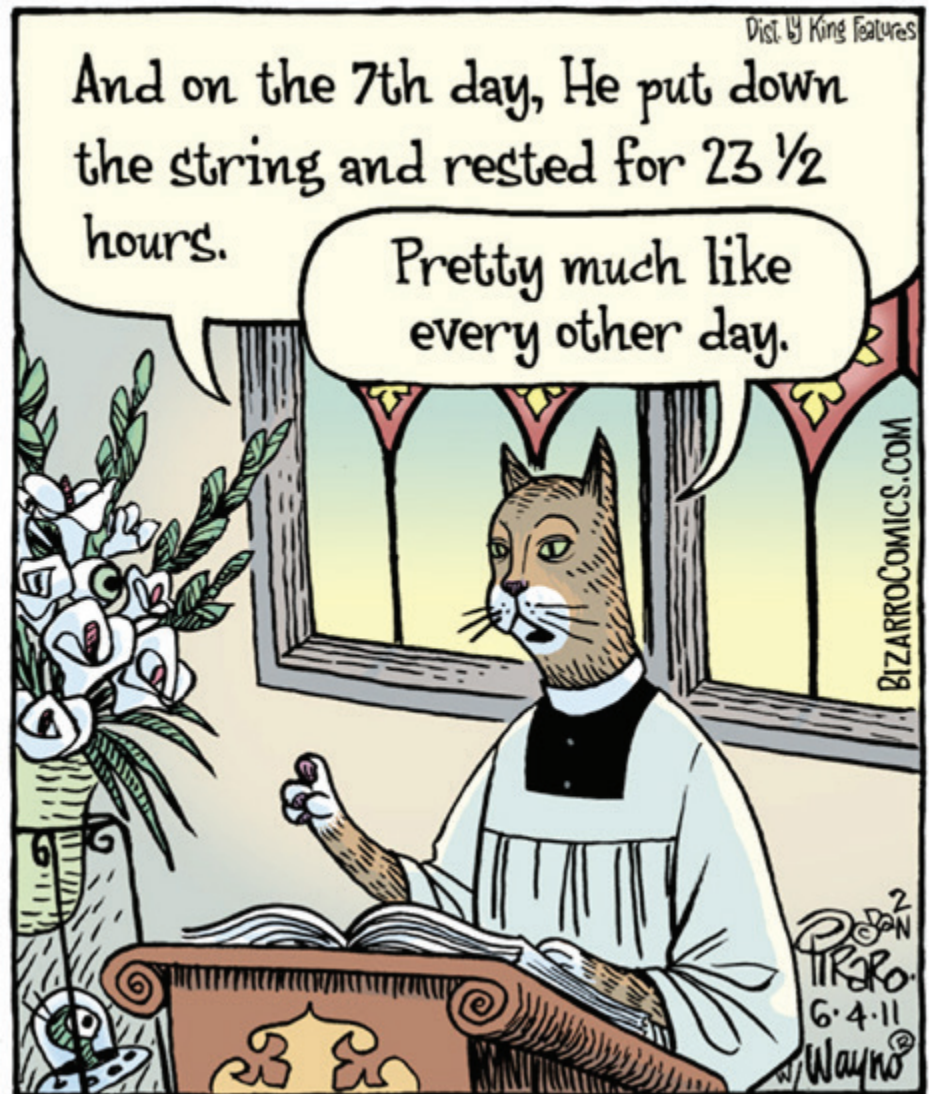
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Freethought Today is honored to publish this new poem.

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. Phil's books: ffrf.org/shop.



Overheard

To make things worse, the accuser claims Burrell used anointment oils during the act. After the incident, they then worked on [installing bathroom] tiles for a few hours before Burrell took him back to the home, saying, "What happens at the church stays at the church."

Teen's testimony at the trial of Pastor Bobby Burrell, whom he accused of masturbating in front of him in Lawton, Okla.

KWSO, 2-10-14

I am facing my imminent death. [Why are people in other states] able to die with dignity and I am not? This should be a basic human right.

Robert Mitton, 58, a Denver man with a terminal cardiac condition, favoring a proposal to authorize prescriptions for lethal doses if two doctors agree a patient will die within six months

New York Times, 2-8-14

At present the Religious Right has a tremendous amount of power, but they are getting older. Surveys show young Americans are rejecting institutional religion because they identify it with the Religious Right and values that they find off-putting, and frankly, immoral.

Dan Linford, Virginia Tech Freethinkers president and graduate student in the philosophy of religion

The Telegraph, 2-10-14

An ordained psychotherapist who has treated many pedophile priests in Britain wrote to me: "In all those cases of clerical abuse I dealt with, the sacrament of confession was used by the molester to discover vulnerability and groom candidates for abuse."

John Cornwell, author of *The Dark Box: A Secret History of Confession*

The Daily Mail, 2-8-14

Not all prisoners are religious, and I wanted them to know that to turn your life around and be a good and productive member of society does not re-

quire a belief in God.

Leslie Zukor, Seattle, founder of the Freethought Books Project, which distributes reading material to inmates across the U.S.

USA Today, 1-25-14

Just as gay marriage is not a threat to straight marriage, atheism is not a threat to religion.

Column by atheist journalist Cindy Hoedel, "Let 2014 be the year we start accepting atheists"

Kansas City Star, 1-18-14

Just as there are laws guaranteeing the division between church and state, there must be national guidelines to separate education and religion.

Op-ed by Veronica An, sophomore narrative studies major, "Prayer should be left out of public schools"

USC Daily Trojan, 1-27-14

I feel very sorry for teachers when the children who come here start guessing if what they're being taught is wrong.

Phil Jardine, a paleobiology graduate student touring the Creation Museum, Petersburg, Ky.

phys.org, 1-30-14

This is exactly what I was concerned about. Maybe the only thing that hasn't happened yet is any particular group saying, "We haven't been represented here and now we want to sue you." That's the only thing that hasn't gone wrong yet.

Mark Senmartin, Marathon [Fla.] City Council, refusing to stand for pre-meeting prayer and objecting to a pastor's "creationist" invocation

Florida Keys Keynote, 2-5-14

The new generation of Iraqis are tired of religious extremists and politicians, who are responsible for the ongoing sectarian divide in the country.

Nawaf Al-Kaabi, 23, Basra, on how violence is turning young Iraqis away from religion

Al Bawaba, 2-5-14



Declare and share your nonbelief in FFRF's online "Out of the Closet" campaign! ffrf.org/out

Vermont native lauds state's top spot on 'infidel index'

By Sam Grover

Is state pride considered a deadly sin? If so, I'm going to *burn* for it.

I became very proud of my home state of Vermont recently when I read the Gallup poll results on religiosity across the U.S. The results, published Feb. 3, paint a portrait of the U.S. that will not be surprising to most, but are fun to read nonetheless.

The grand prize for "least religious state" goes to Vermont, which boasts a whopping 56% nonreligious citizenry! Nearly 30% of those polled nationally identify as nonreligious. Gallup classifies Americans as "nonreligious" if they indicate in their poll response that "religion is not an important part of their daily lives and that they seldom or never attend religious services."

Respondents are classified as "very religious" if they say "religion is an important part of their daily lives and that they attend religious services every week or almost every week." "Moderately religious" (a third category) applies to those stating that "religion is important in their lives but that they do not attend services regularly, or that religion is not important but that they still attend services."



Photo: Lauryn Seering

Sam Grover attempts to bribe his way into the office Galentine's Day party Feb. 13 with baked goods.

Both coasts fared well in the Gallup poll. East Coast runners-up include New Hampshire (51% nonreligious), Maine (45%), Massachusetts (44%) and Connecticut (41%). On the West Coast, Oregon (43% nonreligious) edged out Washington (41%) and California (37%). Honorable mentions

from elsewhere in the U.S. include Nevada (39%), Colorado (39%), Hawaii (36%) and, perhaps surprisingly, Wyoming (39%).

At the other end of the spectrum are the usual suspects. Most religious states include Mississippi (61% very religious), Utah (60%), Alabama (57%), Louisiana (56%) and South Carolina (54%), though notably, 26% of respondents in Utah fall into the nonreligious camp.

How did FFRF's home state of Wisconsin fare? Our 36-year presence here has undeniably shaped state/church relations and freethought awareness — from our secular "nativity" displays in the statehouse to our recent victory removing bibles from the University of Wisconsin-Extension's guest rooms. Even so, Wisconsin still only ranks 21st on the list of least religious states. According to Gallup, 38% of Wisconsinites are very religious, 32% are moderately religious and 31% are nonreligious.

Due to growing up in Vermont with parents who did not attempt to indoctrinate me with any religious ideology, it took me a long time to realize how normalized religion is in other parts of the country. It wasn't until I had graduated from college (in Connecticut, eighth least religious) that I expe-

rienced life as an atheist in an aggressively religious state.

I spent a few months in Oklahoma (10th most religious, 49% very religious) and quickly realized that when it came to my nonbelief, I had a choice between being silent-but-accepted or being an outspoken outsider. This was not a difficult choice for me, given the temporary nature of my stay, but the reality that some atheists and agnostics face this choice every day helped solidify my desire to become a freethought advocate.

So now I live in Wisconsin, least religious state in the middle quintile of Gallup's results. While I may look back fondly at my statistically more secular life in Vermont, FFRF has provided me with an amazing opportunity: to advocate on behalf of fellow freethinkers, many of whom face far more daunting barriers to their freedom of conscience than I ever did.

For that opportunity, I would even move to Mississippi.

To see how your state compares to the nation, search for "least religious" at gallup.com.

Sam Grover first worked for FFRF in 2010 as a legal intern while attending Boston University School of Law. He returned to work as a constitutional consultant for FFRF in the fall of 2013.

FFRF'er in talks to settle prayer suit



Beaton

Attorneys representing the city of Eureka, Calif., and Eureka resident Carole Beaton (an FFRF Lifetime Member) are working on a settlement of Beaton's prayer lawsuit against the city.

At a case management conference Feb. 18 at the Humboldt County Courthouse, City Attorney Cyndy Day-Wilson told Judge Bruce Watson that she and Beaton's attorney Peter Mar-

tin are "currently negotiating a settlement," which is expected in about 60 days, the Times-Standard reported.

Martin filed the suit on behalf of Beaton in January 2013, asking the council to stop holding invocations before meetings and for Mayor Frank Jager to stop promoting the annual Mayor's Prayer Breakfast.

Watson ruled Dec. 24 that nonsecular invocations at council meetings are legal but said Beaton can still pursue her claim against Jager's prayer breakfast.

Neither party is discussing potential settlement details. "I want to say that the lawsuit was not against prayer and was not against religion," Beaton told a reporter. "It was against the mixing of church and state. A city or any other government entity should not be sponsoring a religious event."

The suit alleges use of city resources in promoting the breakfast. Jager downplayed the city clerk's involvement.

The next case management conference is set for April 30.



Photo: Jeff Yendis

Holly Huber and Mitch Kahle at the 2011 FFRF annual convention in Hartford, Conn., where Kahle received the Freethinker of the Year Award.

Megachurch will settle with FFRF plaintiffs

New Hope Church agreed to pay \$775,000 to settle a lawsuit filed by Hawaii FFRF members Holly Huber and Mitch Kahle. Three branches of the international megachurch apparently were getting sweetheart deals for years on rentals of school space from the state.

The suit was filed under the state's False Claims Act, which rewards whistle-blowers for exposing fraudulent billing.

The payments were disclosed in court filings by New Hope's parent organization, the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, Hawaii News Now reported in early February.

Most of the money will go to the state Department of Education, but as much as \$200,000 will go to the plain-

tiffs, who allege that New Hope short-changed the state \$4.6 million over six years.

Kahle noted that state rules setting rent amounts were undermined by Board of Education Chairman Donald Horner.

Honolulu Civil Beat reported Feb. 14 that Horner declined to comment except to say the board was not a party to the case. Horner is a licensed pastor with ties to New Hope, the paper reported.

The plaintiffs' attorneys plan to file an amended suit against One Love Ministries and Calvary Chapel Oahu, alleging that the two churches' underpayments total about \$1.1 million. An earlier claim was dismissed in January.

Parents dropped their kids off at the nursery, but instead of reading Bible stories and coloring pictures of Noah's Ark, children watched "Happy Feet" [a Disney penguin movie] and made Valentine's Day cards for a senior center. **News story on Sunday Assembly Nashville, "a godless congregation"**
The Tennessean, 2-10-14

There is a small obscure sect of heretics who believe the sauce preferred by the FSM is actually pesto, one specifically blended with Persian walnuts

from trees over 50 years old and only using the tips of organically grown basil. The meatball crowd have launched murderous attacks upon them, and they have replied by sending suicide squads into the meatballers' territory. It's all very, very nasty.

Comment by John M. on a story about Pastafarian posters at London University that parodied Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam," which the school ordered taken down
The Independent, 2-11-14

16 ways atheists can stand up for rationality

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By Jeffrey Tayler

I've often wondered how the term "New Atheism" gained such currency. It is a misnomer. There is nothing new about nonbelief. All of us, without exception, are born knowing nothing of God or gods, and acquire notions of religion solely through interaction with others — or, most often, indoctrination by others, an indoctrination usually commencing well before we can reason. Our primal state is, thus, one of nonbelief.

The New Atheists (most prominently Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris and the late Christopher Hitchens) have, in essence, done nothing more than try to bring us back to our senses, to return us to a pure and innate mental clarity. Yet their efforts have generated all manner of controversy. Far outnumbered, and facing a popular mindset according kneejerk respect to men (yes, mostly they are men) of faith — reverends, priests, pastors, rabbis, imams and so on — the New Atheists have by necessity explained their views with zeal, which has often irked the religious, who are accustomed to unconditional deference. Even some nonbelievers who, again thanks to custom, consider religion too touchy a subject to discuss openly have been riled.

We atheists, however, need to buck up, assert our rationality, and change the way we deal with the religious, with everyday affronts delivered (at times unknowingly) by believers, with the casual presumptions that historically have tended to favor the faithful and grant them unmerited respect. A lot is at stake. Religion is a serious matter, reaching far beyond the pale of individual conscience and sometimes translating into violence, sexism, sexual harassment and assault, and sundry legal attempts to restrict a woman's right to abortion or outlaw it altogether, to say nothing of terrorism and war. Now is the time to act. Polls show the zeitgeist in the United States is turning increasingly godless, that there are more atheists now than ever before (surely thanks in part to the efforts of the New Atheists). Most of Europe entered the post-faith era decades ago. Americans need to catch up.

I propose here a credo for atheists — concrete responses to faith-based affronts, to religious presumption, to what Hitchens called "clerical bullying." (I'll deal below with the three monotheistic, Abrahamic religions, but what I say applies to other confessions as well.) The faithful are entitled to their beliefs, of course, but have no inherent right to air them without expecting criticism. Religion should be subject to commonsense appraisal and rational review, as openly discussible as, say, politics, art and the weather. The First Amendment, we should recall, forbids Congress both from establishing laws designating a state religion and from abridging freedom of speech. There is no reason why we should shy away from speaking freely about religion, no reason why it should be thought impolite to debate it, especially when, as so often happens, reli-

gious folk bring it up on their own and try to impose it on others.

Herewith, some common religious pronouncements and how atheists can respond to them.

1. "Let's say grace!"

No, let's not. When you're seated at the family dinner table and a relative suggests clasping hands, lowering heads and thanking the Lord, say "No thanks. I'm an atheist. So I'll opt out." Nonbelievers have every right to object when being asked to take part in superstitious rituals; in fact, if children are present, they are morally obliged to do so. Courteously refusing to pray will set an example of rational behavior for the young, and contribute to furthering the atheist zeitgeist.

2. "Religion is a personal matter. It's not polite to bring it up."

No, religion is fundamentally collective, and since time immemorial has served societies in fostering union, but also in inciting xenophobia and violence (especially against "unchaste" women and "impure" minorities), often on a mass scale. Nonbelievers need to further advance the cause of rationality by discussing it openly; doing so, as uncomfortable as it may be at times, will help puncture the aura of sanctity surrounding faith and expose it for what it is.

3. "You're an atheist? I feel sorry for you."

No, please rejoice for me. I fear no hell, just as I expect no heaven. Nabokov summed up a nonbeliever's view of the cosmos, and our place in it, thus: "The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness." The 19th-century Scottish historian Thomas Carlyle put it slightly differently: "One life. A little gleam of Time between two Eternities."

Though I have many memories to cherish, I value the present, my time on earth, those around me now. I miss those who have departed, and recognize, painful as it is, that I will never be reunited with them. There is the here and now — no more. But certainly no less. Being an adult means, as Orwell put it, having the "power of facing unpleasant facts." True adulthood begins with doing just that, with renouncing comforting fables. There is something liberating in recognizing ourselves as mammals with some fourscore years (if we're lucky) to make the most of on this earth.

There is also something intrinsically courageous about being an atheist. Atheists confront death without mythology or sugarcoating. That takes courage.

4. "If you're an atheist, life has no purpose."

A purpose derived from a false premise — that a deity has ordained submission to his will — cannot merit respect. The pursuit of Enlightenment-era goals — solving our world's problems through rational discourse, rather than through religion and tradition — provides ample grounds for a purposive existence. It is not for nothing that the Enlightenment, when atheism truly began to take hold, was also known as the Age of Reason.

5. "If you abolish religion, nothing will stop people from killing, raping and looting."

No, killing, raping and looting have been common practices in religious societies, and often carried out with cleri-

I fear no hell, just as I expect no heaven.

cal sanction. The catalogue of notorious barbarities — wars and massacres, acts of terrorism, the Inquisition, the Crusades, the chopping off of thieves' hands, the slicing off of clitorises and labia majora, the use of gang rape as punishment, and manifold other savageries committed in the name of one faith or another — attests to religion's longstanding propensity to induce barbarity, or at the very least to give it free rein.

The Bible and the Quran have served to justify these atrocities and more, with women and gay people suffering disproportionately. There is a reason the Middle Ages in Europe were long referred to as the Dark Ages; the millennium of theocratic rule that ended only with the Renaissance (that is, with Europe's turn away from God toward humankind) was a violent time.

Morality arises out of our innate desire for safety, stability and order, without which no society can function; basic moral precepts (that murder and theft are wrong, for example) antedated religion. Those who abstain from crime solely because they fear divine wrath, and not because they recognize the difference between right and wrong, are not to be lauded, much less trusted. Just which practices are moral at a given time must be a matter of rational debate. The "master-slave" ethos — obligatory obeisance to a deity — pervading the revealed religions is inimical to such debate. We need to chart our moral course as equals, or there can be no justice.

6. "Nothing can equal the majesty of God and His creation."

No need to inject God into this. "Creation" is majestic enough on its own, as anyone who has gazed into the Grand Canyon or the night sky already knows. While paddling a pirogue down the Congo, at night I often marveled to the point of ecstasy at the brilliance of the stars, the salience of the planets against the Milky Way — just one of the many quasi-transcendental experiences I have had as an atheist globetrotter. The world is a thing of wonder that requires no faith, but only alert senses, to appreciate.

7. "It is irrational to believe that the world came about without a creator."

No, it is irrational to infer an invisible omnipotent being from what we see around us. The burden of proof lies on the one making supernatural claims, as the New Atheists have tirelessly pointed out. But here again the New Atheists are really doing nothing novel. Almost 200 years ago, the British poet Shelley, in his essay "The Necessity of Atheism," noted that "God is an hypothesis, and, as such, stands in need of proof: the onus probandi rests on the theist."

This was clear to him even before we had mapped the human genome, discovered the Higgs boson, or even invented the telegraph.

8. "I will pray for you to see the light."

Not necessary, but do as you like. Abraham Lincoln noted that, "What is to be, will be, and no prayers of ours can arrest the decree."

9. "If you're wrong about God, you go to hell. It's safer to believe."

Pascal's wager survives even among people who have never heard the name of the 17th-century French philosopher and mathematician. Leaving aside whether blatant self-interest would please a god demanding to be loved unconditionally, which god will save us from hell? The god of Catholicism? Judaism? Islam? Doctrines of all three Abrahamic faiths prohibit entry into paradise for adherents of rival confessions.

10. "Religion is of great comfort to me, especially in times of loss. Too bad it isn't for you."

George Bernard Shaw noted that, "The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one. The happiness of credulity is a cheap and dangerous quality." A few shots of vodka will do for me, and are more to the point.

11. "As you age and face death, you will come to need religion."

Perhaps in dotage anything is possible, but this turn of events is unlikely. Aging and the prospect of dying by no means enhance the attractiveness of fictitious comforts to come in paradise, or the veracity of malicious myths about hellfire and damnation. Fear and feeble-mindedness cannot be credibly pressed into service to support fantastic claims about the cosmos and our ultimate destiny.

Whether one would even consider turning to religion in advanced years has much to do with upbringing, which makes all the more important standing up to the presumptions of the religious in front of children. One would regard the Biblical events — a spontaneously igniting bush, a sea's parting, human parthenogenesis, a resurrected prophet and so on — that supposedly heralded God's intervention in our affairs as the stuff of fairy tales were it not for the credibility we unwittingly lend them by keeping quiet out of mistaken notions of propriety.

12. "You have no right to criticize my religious beliefs."

Wrong. Such a declaration aims to suppress free speech and dialogue about a matter influential in almost every aspect of our societies. No one has a right to make unsubstantiated assertions, or vouch for the truthfulness of unsubstantiated assertions on the basis of "sacred" texts, without expecting objections from thinking folk.

13. "Jesus was merciful."

If he existed — and there is still, after centuries of searching, no proof that he did — he was at times a heartless prophet of doom for the sinners he supposedly loved, commanding those who failed to give comfort to the poor to "depart . . . ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

14. "You can't prove there's no God."

Correct, at least epistemologically speaking. Reasonable atheists, "New" and old, would not argue with this. Richard Dawkins, for example, has told audiences that he is nominally an agnostic, since proving that something does not exist is impossible. He claims to be an atheist "only" in the sense that he is an "a-leprechaunist, an a-fairiest, and an a-pink-unicornist." The evidence for God, fairies and leprechauns, he remarked, "is equally poor."

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FFRF compiles state/church victories

Wash. school benches praying 'All Pro Dad'

FFRF stopped White Bluffs Elementary School in Richland, Wash., from promoting religion. Meetings in the school sponsored by All Pro Dad, a private group focusing on religious programming, were advertised in fliers sent home with students.

The fliers failed to indicate the event was not school-sponsored. The meetings were also noted in the calendar along with official school events.

"The circumstances surrounding 'All Pro Dad' events would lead a reasonable observer to view it as school-sponsored," wrote Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel in his Jan. 14 letter to Superintendent Rich Schulte. "Because of the religious aspects of the programming, Richland School District must take measures to address parental concerns regarding school involvement in this event."

The district responded in late January, calling the promotion a clerical error and saying it would be removed from the school calendar. Staff will also be informed on the policy barring distribution of religious materials and announcements.

Teachers' religious symbols removed

FFRF was informed that a teacher at Southside Elementary School in Pulaski, Tenn., prominently displayed several religious images in her classroom. Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter Dec. 17 to Giles County Schools Superintendent Timothy Webb:

"When a teacher puts up crosses and images of Jesus, they have unconstitutionally entangled the school itself with a religious message, specifically a Christian message. To avoid continuing to violate the Establishment Clause, we ask the teacher to remove the crosses and images of Jesus from her classroom."

Webb responded two days later with a copy of the memo he sent to principals and supervisors: "The situation mentioned in the complaint has been addressed. Please remind your staff of the federal requirements in matters such as this."

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FFRF action got this out of a Texas classroom.

A teacher in Rusk, Texas, will no longer be displaying religious iconography after FFRF was contacted by a concerned parent of a Rusk High School student. A classroom poster read, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God the salvation of everyone who believes. Romans 1:16." At the bottom it said, "This poster is illegal in 51 countries."

Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote the district Dec. 13 to note the constitutional violation while adding that a public school teacher has no free speech or free exercise right to proselytize.

Superintendent Scott David replied Jan. 9: "All campus principals and department directors will be reminded of our constitutional duties as public school employees with regard to the separation of state and church."

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A local complainant alerted FFRF that a classroom in Bernard Campbell Middle School in Lee's Summit, Mo., displayed a religious poster prominently on the wall facing students. The poster read, "Blessed are the people who know the joyful Sound! They walk, O Lord, in the light of your countenance. Psalm 89:15."

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter Feb. 20 to Superintendent David McGehee about the egregious, obvious

violation. "When a school teacher places religious posters in the classroom, she unconstitutionally entangles the school with a religious message. It is also a usurpation of parental authority — parents have the right to direct the religious, or nonreligious, upbringing of their children."

McGehee called FFRF the next day to say he agreed that the poster shouldn't be allowed in the classroom and that it had been permanently removed.

School Good News Club gets bad reviews

After Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel's Jan. 24 letter of complaint, FFRF was informed that an elementary school secretary in Sanford, Fla., will no longer be involved with Good News Club permission slips.

Child Evangelism Fellowship of Central Florida had distributed registration forms to Geneva Elementary students to promote the club. The form told students to return forms to the secretary.

Seidel said, "Despite the appropriate disclaimer, students might presume that Good News Club is sponsored by the school because of the apparent role of school personnel in facilitating the club's activities by collecting registration forms. While the Child Evangelism Fellowship of Central Florida is entitled to host meetings, there are limitations on adult involvement."

The Seminole County School Board's attorney responded Jan. 28 that the district agreed that the club, not public school employees, was responsible for collecting forms,

Charter school's church graduations end

The Academy for Academic Excellence in Apple Valley, Calif., will no longer hold its graduation ceremony in a church. According to the complainant, AAE, a K-12 public charter school operated by the Lewis Center for Educational Research, held graduation in churches where crosses, bible verses and other religious symbols were displayed.

AAE reportedly held a baccalaureate at a second church, advertising it on AAE's calendar and listing the school's vice principal as "coordinator." Many school officials, including the principal, attended.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a November letter to Superintendent Thomas Hoegerman: "Religious faith and worship are an intensely personal choice. The government cannot make attendance at a secular school's graduation ceremony contingent on entering the holy ground of a particular religion." He also lodged objections to mandatory baccalaureate attendance.

Gordon Soholt, chief academic officer, responded Nov. 20: "It is anticipated that both ceremonies will be held in the new gymnasium in the future, thus removing any potential First Amendment issues. The previously named 'baccalaureate' has been renamed to reflect its intent, which is issuance of senior awards and scholarships."

No more forced pledge for Florida student

A student at Southwest Middle School in Orlando, Fla., will no longer be coerced into reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

After refusing to stand for the pledge, the student was taken aside by a teacher and was told by the school's attendance dean to stand and recite it or face reprimand.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote a letter Nov. 20 to object: "Faced with the choice of either reciting the pledge or being punished by the school, this student has relented, but now only recites the pledge out of fear of being punished. Students should not be singled out, rebuked, told they must stand, or otherwise penalized for following their freedom of conscience. It is illegal to reprimand a student for choosing not to stand during the recitation of the pledge."

The student sent an email response on Jan. 25, "I am so thankful for your help. Thanks to you, I'm now able to sit during the pledge without punishment!"

FFRF has a lawsuit against the Orange County School District regarding literature discrimination.

16 ways atheists can stand up for rationality

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15. "My religion is true for me."

A soppy, solipsistic and juvenile declaration and cop-out bordering on the delusional and contradicting Christianity and Islam, neither of which recognize the other, and both of which espouse universalist pretensions. You will not find a scientist who will say, "quantum physics is true for me." No one would have trusted Jonas Salk if he had promoted the efficacy of his polio vaccine as "true for him."

16. "Don't take everything in the Bible literally."

Not taking the Bible (or other texts

based on "revealed truths") literally leaves it up to the reader to cherry-pick elements for belief. There exists no guide for such cherry-picking, and zero religious sanction for it.

I'm not counseling incivility — but arm yourself with the courage of your rationalist convictions and go forth. We will all be better off for it.

Jeffrey Tayler is a contributing editor at *The Atlantic*. His seventh book, "Topless Jihadis — Inside Femen, the World's Most Provocative Activist Group," is out now as an Atlantic ebook. Follow @JeffreyTayler1 on Twitter.



Secular sweat equity

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel presented "Sweat the small stuff: Why we have to challenge every violation of the First Amendment" to the newly formed Secular Legal Society of Drake University Law School, Des Moines, Iowa, on Feb. 19. The club is directed by Josh Glasgow, former FFRF legal intern.

Creates FFRF student activist award endowment

Memorializing Clifford Donald Richards, 1943–2014



By Annie Laurie Gaylor

I received a heartbreaking letter Dec. 20 from Cliff Richards, a member of FFRF from Washington state, informing me that he was naming FFRF as a beneficiary on his Fidelity account, adding that FFRF could expect to receive \$100,000. He very wonderfully asked to designate these funds for student activist scholarships.

The news was *so* welcome, as FFRF has a handful of recurring student scholarships but no major long-term fund. My excitement turned to dismay as I read Cliff's next paragraph:

"Because of the advanced nature of my cancer, I'm told that my life extension will, at best, be approximately three months. I am going to be using Washington state's Death With Dignity program that allows me to end my life if I have less than six months to live."

I quickly replied by mail, expressing FFRF's gratitude for Cliff's outstanding generosity in endowing student activist awards, noting how much the bequest would mean to many thousands of deserving students and youth activists. "This is an act of greatness," I told him.

Cliff phoned after receiving my letter, and we talked once or twice again, the last time on Dec. 29, when he told me his story. He had just retired last summer and was in the middle of relocating to the South when his cancer — Stage 4 colon cancer metastasizing to his spine — was discovered.

He was grateful he discovered it while still living in Washington, one of only five states with death with dignity laws or court rulings. Having sold his home, Cliff was ending his last days in a hotel room in the Sequim area.

His doctors warned him that the cancer could eventually lead to blockage, deadly rupture, blood poisoning and painful death. The cancer that had spread to his spine could also weaken the bone and snap his spine, leading to instant paralysis. Cliff was determined, by making use of death with dignity provisions, to avoid one or both fates.

When the subject changed to his life story, which he authorized me to publish after his death, Cliff's voice brightened. He was born July 20, 1943, in Milwaukee, grew up there and attended a Catholic grade school, high school and college, graduating with a degree in medical technology from

Marquette University in 1966.

"I lost my religion when I reached the age of reason," he told me. He began questioning the "one true religion" mantra of the Catholic Church. "How can a just god say a Native American living in the woods who never heard of Jesus could go to hell because he was not baptized?"

Cliff told me, "This whole religion thing got me when I would see yet another religion was trying to impose its edicts on the rest of us." He said he "absolutely enjoyed reading Freethought Today, especially about the students and student essays. It was a breath of fresh air to see kids going out and taking on the system. We need a whole lot more of them."

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After graduation, Cliff had moved to Minneapolis and got a position as chief lab manager. By age 23, he realized he had gotten as far as he could go with his degree. Hennepin County, he noted, had made Time magazine as one of the best-run county hospitals and he wondered why.

Then he realized, "Its esprit de corps was phenomenal. Administrators would come into the lab and talk to lower echelon employees, chat about family, etc." He was inspired to go into administration.

He graduated with a master's in hospital administration at the University of Ottawa in 1974 and worked in Minnesota and Georgia, where at the latter he had to desegregate the blood banks. He wound up at a 100-bed hospital in California.

He belatedly fulfilled a childhood dream to fly and earned a private pilot's license. He started a chartered airline service in 1989. The enterprising Cliff was hired by US Airways and flew for them for 11 years until being furloughed. He was then hired by a small Nevada hospital to do lab work, commuting from Washington in his own plane until retiring in June 2013.

Although engaged four times, Cliff told me he had never married. He had arranged for a longtime friend to stay with him at the end. He predicted he might last to mid-February.

On Valentine's Day, our office received a copy of Cliff's death certificate. He had died Jan. 27 at the age of 70 and was cremated Jan. 29, the birth date of Thomas Paine.

Cliff Richards had seized control of his own life and death.

He split his generous legacy between FFRF and the University of South Dakota Foundation, indicating he hoped his bequest to them would benefit Native American women students. We're so grateful to him for his generosity to freethinking students.

FFRF is proud and very thankful to be able to administer a variety of ongoing or one-time student activist awards created by other FFRF members. These include the annual \$5,000 award newly endowed by Richard and Beverly Hermsen and the annual \$1,000 Thomas Jefferson Youth Activist Award by Len and Karen Eisenberg.

Extend death with dignity nationwide

More than once, a reporter has asked me what's the best and worst thing about my job at the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Without much hesitation I usually answer: winning and losing lawsuits!

But the hardest thing has actually been the death of FFRF members, the early co-founders and activists whom my mother, Dan and I have worked with over the years. They all contributed so much to the freethought movement.

Mourning the death of someone you love is hard enough, without the knowledge that the person you love suffered terribly and unnecessarily in dying. FFRF had barely lifted off the ground as a national group when Ruth Hurmence Green died at age 64 in 1981.

Ruth's book, *The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible*, was the first book FFRF published and is still a brisk seller. She served as board secretary, was a wonderful idea generator and was my mother's and my dear friend.

Ruth, too, fought cancer, first of the breast, then skin and throat, enduring 37 radiation treatments. Her cancer was in remission when we met her. When excruciatingly painful throat cancer returned, Ruth bravely hid the pain from friends and family, carefully stockpiling pain pills, until July 7, 1981, when she took her own life after sending her husband out on an errand.

Her final letter to my mother, mailed the morning she took her life, read: "Freedom From must grow and prosper . . . freedom depends upon freethinkers."

It was painful to contemplate a Freedom From Religion Foundation without Ruth Green. Worse was contemplating how she must have suffered by forgoing pain medication in order to save enough pills. The inhumanity of our society toward the dying forced Ruth to be furtive, squirrel away pills and die alone with no chance for family and friends to say goodbye.

She and so many others with terminal illnesses should have been afforded the same right and dignity as Cliff Richards, who had the peace of mind provided by Washington's death with dignity law. It's so obvious that civil rights should not be dependent on the state you happen to live in.

So little progress has been made on this front. In 1990, Freethought Today published an important piece by Jan Hitchborn, the daughter of

one of our members. Jan wrote about the death of her father, Read Schuster, a member of FFRF and the Hemlock Society.

Read had developed amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease. In Read's case, the disease started in his throat, so that he gradually lost the power to speak. Then he choked and coughed as he ate. Then he could scarcely swallow his Ensure.

Although he could still get up, dress himself and even drive, and although his mind stayed sharp and alert, he faced death by starvation, choking or asphyxiation. In September 1990, less than a year after his diagnosis, when he could no longer lift his leg from gas pedal to brake, he mustered all his inner strength, got himself into the garden shed, closed the door and shot himself in the head.

The area was classed as a crime scene, and although his family was grateful he was at peace, they were left with the horror of the cleaning up.

"He should have been able to die whole, in his bed, with us to hold his hands telling him again how much he meant to us, how much he had touched our lives. He should have been able to take an injection to peacefully slip off to sleep," wrote Jan.

Only Washington, Oregon and Vermont have passed referendums or laws authorizing prescriptions for lethal doses by two doctors who agree the patient will die within six months. Courts in Montana and New Mexico have recently approved such aid. Even these few states granting death with dignity rights do not permit injections for the terminal patient, such as Read, who are too sick to swallow the necessary pills.

Among Read Schuster's goodbye letters were those to doctors and the police department, lecturing the authorities "about a society which boxes terminally ill people into a corner." "My dad was able to close his life. But he should have been able to do it with an injection. There should have been a Dr. Kevorkian for him," Jan wrote.

Jan's moving article can be read in its entirety at ffrf.org/news/timely-topics (scroll to "There ought to be a law").

Jan's piece was accompanied by a short plea by Anne Nicol Gaylor, FFRF president emerita. "Prolonging dying is a religious idea," she wrote. "Those who wish to die painlessly, at an appointed time, should have that right." — Annie Laurie Gaylor

More than \$23,000 in scholarship prizes announced

FFRF kicks off three 2014 student essay contests

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is announcing its 2014 high school, college and graduate/mature student essay scholarship competitions, which offer more than \$23,000 in cash prizes.

FFRF has offered a college essay competition since 1979, added a separate contest for college-bound high school seniors in 1994 and one for "graduate/older students ages 25-30" in 2010.

The awards are \$3,000 first place, \$2,000 second place, \$1,000 third place, \$750 fourth place, \$500 fifth place and \$400 for sixth place. Several \$200 "honorable mentions" may be awarded at judges' discretion.

Additionally, any winning student who is a member of a secular high school or college club or signs up (for free) to become part of the Secular Student Alliance before entering the competition will automatically get an additional \$50 grant from FFRF members Dean and Dorea Schramm. The Schramms wish to support the SSA and reward student activism and participation in secular campus activities.

Thousands of scholarship programs reward students for blind faith and orthodoxy, but few reward them for using reason. FFRF members: Please publicize FFRF's important outreach to the next generation to your local high schools, colleges and universities. See handy ads in the back wrap or visit ffrf.org/outreach/student-essay-contests/.

William J. Schulz High School Senior Essay Competition

"A Moment When I Spoke Up for Freethought/Secularism"

Topic prompt: Write from a personal perspective about your activism or include memorable challenges you've faced as a nonbelieving teenager, in your family, your high school or community. Explain how and why you've spoken up for freethought and/or secular government in the classroom, at school events, in government or your personal life. Include at least some intellectual analysis of what led you to reject religion and/or why you care about keeping religion out of public schools/ government.

Eligibility: North American high school senior who graduates in spring 2014, going to college in fall 2014.

Word length: 500 to 700.

Deadline: Postmarked no later than June 1, 2014. Winners announced in August.

Submission rules: Essays must be both mailed and emailed no later than June 1 to highschoolessay@ffrf.org with the subject heading "Essay [and Your Full Name]," e.g., Essay Voltaire. Follow other requirements listed at end of this article.

This competition is endowed by William J. Schultz, a member of FFRF who died at 57, was a farm boy who became a chemical engineer and built paper-producing mills around the world. He cared deeply about FFRF's work.

Michael Hakeem Memorial College Essay Competition

"My Atheist/Unbeliever 'Coming Out' Story"

Topic prompt:

Use a personal (first-person) approach about how and why you came out as a nonbeliever (freethinker, atheist, agnostic, skeptic). Include some intellectual analysis of why you reject religion. If you grew up without religion, you may wish to describe your experiences being open as an atheist or nonbeliever with religious classmates or society. If raised with religion, tell us how and why you thought your way out of religion. You may wish to include experiences with activism.

Word length: 700 to 900.

Eligibility: Currently enrolled undergraduate college student through age 24, including but not limited to college seniors graduating in the spring or summer 2014, attending a North American college or university.

Deadline: Postmarked no later than June 15, 2014. Winners announced in September.

Submission rules: Essays must be both mailed and emailed no later than June 15 to collegeessay@ffrf.org with the subject heading "Essay [and Your Full Name]," e.g., Essay Elizabeth Stanton. Follow other requirements listed at the end of article.

The late Michael Hakeem, a sociology professor, was an FFRF officer and active atheist known by generations of University of Wisconsin-Madison students for fine-tuning their reasoning abilities.



Brian Bolton Graduate/ "Older" Student Essay Competition

Why "Religious Liberty" Does Not Mean the Right to Impose Your Religion on Others

Topic prompt:

Write a persuasive analysis of the newest danger to the Establishment Clause: The radical redefinition of "religious freedom" to include the right to impose one's religious beliefs on others. Research and include at least some examples, such as religious litigants opposing Obamacare's contraceptive mandate or states passing laws to allow businesses to decline services to same-sex couples based on religious objections.

Other issues might include exemptions in state statutes permitting religion-based medical neglect of children. You may wish to analyze what's right or wrong with the Supreme Court's ruling this summer in *Sebelius v. Hobby Lobby* (in which a corporation claims its "religious beliefs" are violated by permitting employees to exercise their own freedom of conscience).



Eligibility: Currently enrolled graduate student up to age 30, or undergrads ages 25-30, attending a North American college or university, including but not limited to someone graduating or earning a degree in the spring or summer 2014.

Word length: 750 to 1,000.

Deadline: Postmarked no later than July 15, 2014. Winners announced in September.

Submission rules: Essays must be both mailed and emailed no later than July 15 to gradessay@ffrf.org with the subject heading "Essay [and Your Full Name]," e.g., Essay Robert Ingersoll. Follow other requirements listed below.

The competition is generously endowed by Brian Bolton, an FFRF Lifetime Member who is a retired psychologist, humanist minister and university professor emeritus at the University of Arkansas.

Rules applying to all categories

Essay must be submitted both by mail and email by postmark deadline. No faxes accepted. Essay must be typed, double-spaced, standard margins and stapled. Include word count. Place your name and essay title on each page. Entrants must choose their own title and include a one-paragraph biography on separate page at end of essay.

Bio should include name, age and birth date, hometown, university or college, year in school, major or in-

tended major, degree being earned. High school students should include high school's name, city, state and date of graduation as well as intended college. Do not include a résumé.

If you wish to be eligible for an additional \$50 bonus, indicate the name of the secular school or college club you belong to or indicate when you joined Secular Student Alliance (offering free student membership at secularstudents.org/studentmember). Provide both summer and fall 2014 addresses (campus and home), phone numbers and email addresses for notification. Winners may be asked to send verification of student enrollment.

Students will be disqualified if they do not follow instructions. FFRF monitors for plagiarism. *Do not write under or over word minimums and maximums.*

By entering, students agree to permit winning essays to be printed in full or in part in Freethought Today, FFRF's newspaper, and posted online at FFRF's website. Winners agree to promptly provide a photograph suitable for reproduction with their essay and will not receive their prize until they do so.

Winners will receive a school-year subscription to Freethought Today. All eligible entrants will be offered a subscription to Freethought Today or a freethought book or product.

Send essays by required deadline to: FFRF

_____ (fill in) Essay Contest
PO Box 750
Madison WI, 53701



FFRF convention speech by First Amendment champion McCollum

My mother, the Sarge



Jim McCollum, FFRF Life Member and previous "Champion of the First Amendment" recipient, spoke at FFRF's 36th national convention Sept. 28, 2013, in Madison, Wis. McCollum talked about his role in the landmark *McCollum v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision (1948) in its 65th anniversary year. The suit was filed in July 1945 by his mother, Vashti McCollum, on behalf of Jim in Champaign, Ill.

By Jim McCollum

My brothers and I had the good fortune to be raised in a nurturing, stable family setting, with the added bonus of not being burdened by God and the trappings that accompany it!

My father was a principled, quiet atheist, a scientist, who grew up with 10 siblings on a farm in south Arkansas. His parents and grandfather Daniel placed a premium on education and saw to it that all 11 children, all of whom were born by 1920, including five girls, got a full college education.

My mother was raised in a liberal family that encouraged her and her sister to seek the truth freely. Her father, raised a Presbyterian, was well-read — especially books by freethought authors such as Spinoza, Thomas Paine, Clemens and Robert Green Ingersoll — and became what I would call a bible-pounding atheist. Mom described herself as an agnostic humanist.

So what about this plucky lady, my

Her moral credentials were impeccable and unimpeachable, and she didn't need a supreme being looking over her shoulder to 'keep her in line.'

mother "The Sarge," who stuck to her guns with what became a landmark case all the way to the Supreme Court, losing all the way up, but winning when it counted?

If all that can be said of my mother, Vashti Cromwell McCollum, was the important contribution she made to U.S. constitutional law in the late '40s, she would still be a shining light in the 20th century. For the 8-1 decision she won set the precedent that applied the strictures of the prohibition of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution to the several states by virtue of the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment.

Albeit that decision, written by Justice Hugo L. Black, is currently under intense attack by the radical Christian right, it still stands as a beacon in the annals of U.S. constitutional law to this day, for all cases involving purely sectarian practices in public schools and use of taxpayer money, by states and their municipalities, to fund religious activities, projects, monuments and displays, descend from *McCollum v. Board of Education*.

In her later years, Mom became an avid world traveler and an accomplished amateur photographer, winning salons at the Champaign County Camera Club on a regular basis. She was in great demand to present her informative and entertaining slide shows to all kinds of audiences, including at the Inman, the assisted care facility in



Vashti McCollum with a banner headline in 1948.

Champaign, where she spent her last years.

Her travels took her to all seven of the world's continents. She traveled on whatever conveyance was available — ferries, like the ones we read about in Third World countries that turn over and sink, trains and buses filled with peasants and their variety of livestock and worldly belongings, and puddle-jumping airlines, sometimes barely clearing the mountaintops. She was even trapped in the Amazon jungle for a period, while pursuing an adventure on an historic railroad that, unbeknownst to her, had been discontinued shortly before she arrived.

She traveled to places that no longer exist and to others, now too unsafe for tourists. Upon hearing stories of some of her exploits and travails, my father was heard to exclaim, "The woman is fearless!"

It was sometimes difficult to keep up with her, as she was always coming up with another trip to one exotic place or another, many of which were on the spur of the moment. Indeed, I can remember on several occasions where my first wife and I would wake up to a knock on the door early in the morning to find her on a surprise visit or just passing through on another of her excursions.

Mom was clearly her mother's daughter and knew how to divine the bargains and travel on the cheap. I still remember spending a tortuous night at London's Heathrow Airport, with her, just to save a £40 hotel bill. That two-week excursion to Scotland cost the two of us less than \$4,000 (including roundtrip airfare). Most of her travels were on a shoestring.

Most important of all, she was the best mother one could have. She and my father, John Paschal McCollum, her husband of over 50 years, managed to raise three boys and put them through college, (a lawyer, a historian and a successful businessman), two with advanced degrees and all having made positive contributions to society. A finer tribute cannot be given to anyone!

'Fair to a fault'

Why did I entitle this talk "My Mother, the Sarge?" Well, she was the disciplinarian in the family — fair to a fault, but there was no mistaking when she was displeased with something we said or did. While I can remember an occasional acquaintance with a flyswatter, generally all she needed to do was to give us the evil eye and that was that. More importantly, she was a consummate feminist and not one to back away from what she held dear — hence the "Sarge" moniker.

Albeit she made heavy weather at being a mother, she was an extremely effective one, never missing the opportunity to guide her sons carefully along the straight and narrow. In the last hours of her time with us, she was still correcting my English if I had the temerity to utter the phrase, "it's me" instead of "it is I" or similar egregious grammatical transgressions.

She also admonished me to lose weight and get rid the rubber tire around my middle. Maybe feeble, but she still had her edge!

Her moral credentials were impeccable and unimpeachable, and she didn't need a supreme being looking over her shoulder to "keep her in line."



Dan Barker presents Jim McCollum a medallion commemorating the 65th anniversary of the *McCollum* decision.

Convention photography by Brent Nicastro

My mother, the Sarge



Vashti and Jim McCollum in court.

She and my father made sure that my brothers and I were on the same page.

After the family became embroiled in her famous lawsuit, she would often admonish us to do nothing that would bring discredit to ourselves or the family, as "our detractors are watching." However, we didn't really need that admonishment, because our parents were the epitome of good role models.

I often chuckle to myself, remembering her choice comment, "I hope it's not trivial," when a prominent demagogue would be outed for some moral or ethical transgression.

Her memorial marker, in a southern Arkansas Missionary Baptist cemetery, proudly proclaims, beneath her name, the citation of the decision of her landmark case: 333 US 203 (1948).

Upon my retirement from the practice of law and move to Arkansas and her retirement from her world travels, we saw to it that one of us would call the other at least once a week, usually on Saturday morning. Her last travels, with the exception of a final one to help her older sister Helen celebrate her 95th birthday, were to visit us in Arkansas to see her "daffy down lilies," which each February and March pave our front yard in a sea of yellow. In January she would ask us if the jonquils were blooming yet and then find a way to get here to see them, usually by catching a bus by herself to Bloomington and then the Texas Eagle Amtrak to Texarkana, where we would pick her up.

She was avidly independent in life, and even in her declining years, to the extent she could manage, she remained such. On her return trips to Champaign, she would insist we leave her at the Amtrak station in Texarkana in the early evening, where she would wait by herself several hours for the train. In spite of our reluctance, she was adamant about it.

The indelible mark she left behind, both on her three sons and grandchildren, as well on American jurisprudence, lives on!

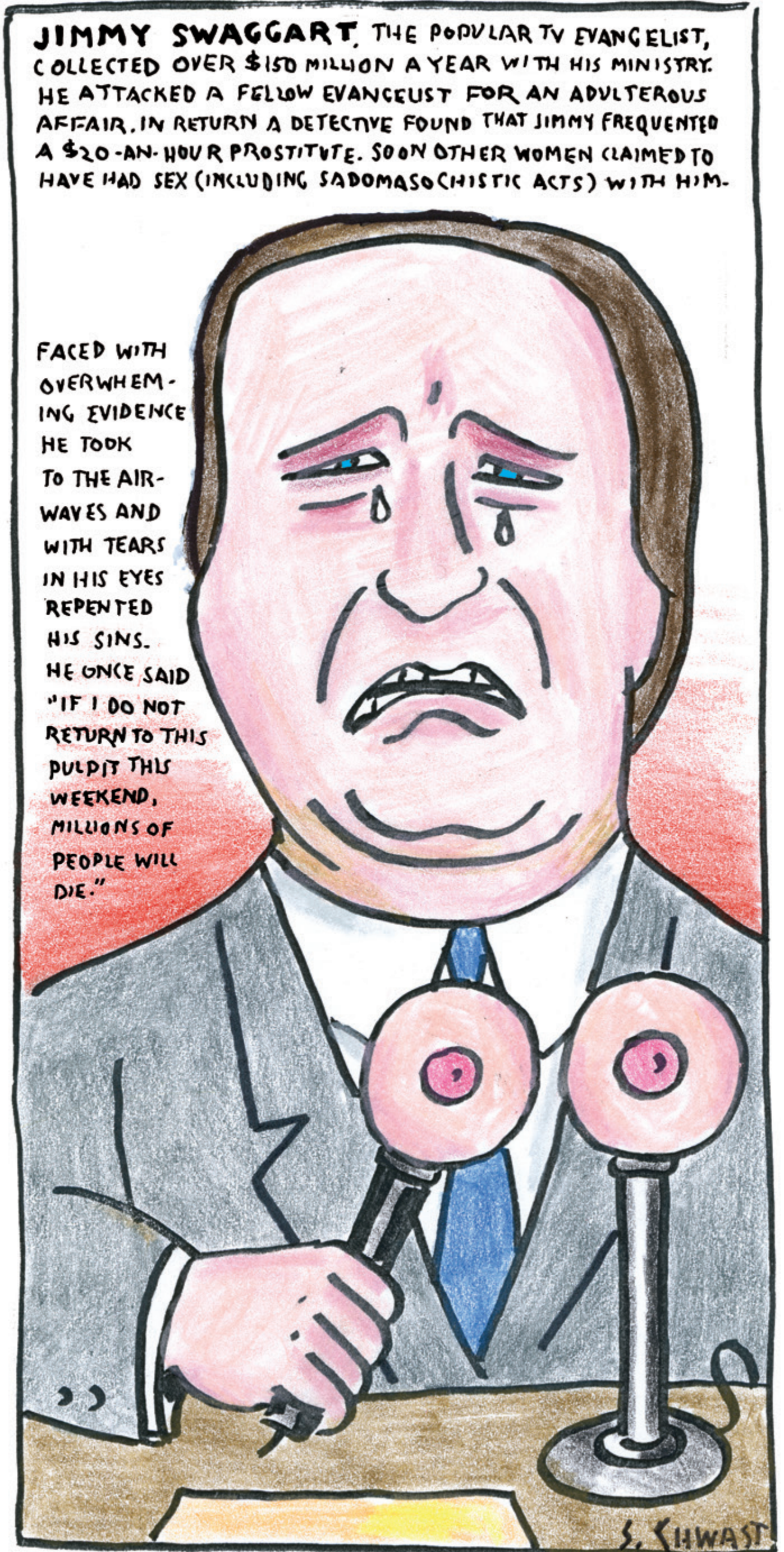
Jim McCollum received his B.S. in geology and his J.D. in law from the University of Illinois. He served two years' active duty as an officer in the U.S. Army and another six in the Army Reserve. He retired as an attorney after 34 years of practice and lives with his wife Betty in Arkansas, where he, appropriately, teaches constitutional law.

*Vashti McCollum died in 2006 at age 93. Her story, **One Woman's Fight**, is available at: ffrf.org/shop/books*

Memorable Moments in Monotheism.

JIMMY SWAGGART, THE POPULAR TV EVANGELIST, COLLECTED OVER \$150 MILLION A YEAR WITH HIS MINISTRY. HE ATTACKED A FELLOW EVANGELIST FOR AN ADULTEROUS AFFAIR. IN RETURN A DETECTIVE FOUND THAT JIMMY FREQUENTED A \$20-AN-HOUR PROSTITUTE. SOON OTHER WOMEN CLAIMED TO HAVE HAD SEX (INCLUDING SADOMASOCHISTIC ACTS) WITH HIM.

FACED WITH OVERWHEMING EVIDENCE HE TOOK TO THE AIRWAVES AND WITH TEARS IN HIS EYES REPENTED HIS SINS. HE ONCE SAID "IF I DO NOT RETURN TO THIS PULPIT THIS WEEKEND, MILLIONS OF PEOPLE WILL DIE."



'100 Atheists' shines light on nonbelief

Chris Johnson's informative and entertaining book, *A Better Life: 100 Atheists Speak Out on Joy & Meaning in a World Without God*, "highlights the various ways that those who are not religious find joy, meaning and purpose in life."

Its 254 pages are filled with photos and recollections of atheists (including

FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker) — some famous, some little known, others unknown. Johnson, a New York-based photographer and filmmaker, spent two years traveling the world, speaking with and photographing nonbelievers from all walks of life.

He funded the project through

Kickstarter and ended up with a handsome, 12-by-9 hardcover suitable for coffee tables. Released on Jan. 1, it sells for \$49.99 exclusively at theatheistbook.com/. Enter the discount code "FFRF" to get 10% off your order.

You can also listen to a Jan. 18 Freethought Radio interview with Johnson at ffrf.org/news/radio/shows/.



Chris Johnson

All photos © A Better Life/Christopher Johnson



Science communicator, TV co-host and producer

Cara Santa Maria, Los Angeles, grew up Mormon in Plano, Texas. "When I was in academia focusing on psychology and neuroscience, I often peered inward and felt awe and wonder at our inner worlds. But science is everywhere. It's in everything. Science is the way we think about the world." (In 2011, *InTouch Weekly* carried news of her split with entertainer Bill Maher after a two-year relationship.)



Lawyer, founder of Black Atheists of America

Although Ayanna Watson, New York City, struggled with religion's "obvious inconsistencies" while growing up, "It was not until my first philosophy course in college that I began to question why I believed in the supernatural. By the end of the course, I was no longer a theist. It felt like a huge burden had been lifted off my shoulders."



Dianne Arellano, Sikivu Hutchinson

Dianne, a photo documentarian and youth advocacy educator, and Sikivu, an author and educator, are both "out" atheists living in Los Angeles. "As feminists of color, our joy and purpose come from activism, namely teaching, serving and shaping the next generation of humanist intellectuals from schools that have been written off as expendable, 'ghetto,' dangerous and low-achieving."



Freedom From Religion Foundation co-president, musician

Dan Barker, Madison, Wis., says that as a young evangelical preacher, his message often focused on the alleged, innate evilness of human nature and the need for redemption. "As an atheist, I don't buy into that paradigm anymore. Instead of original sin, I think about original good."



Freedom From Religion Foundation co-president, 'scratch' baking whiz

Annie Laurie Gaylor, Madison, Wis., has been a jack-of-all-trades and guiding force for FFRF since its start. An ardent feminist and state/church separationist, she's written and edited several freethought books. Last but not least, she brings inspired, home-baked sweet treats to the office (her bundt cake is in the book). Life is what you make it, she says. "There wasn't a deity that put me on Earth and said, you're going to enjoy baking, or you need to start a group to get God out of government. Working for the First Amendment gives you profound meaning. I can't really think of anything more important."



Anna Bella Chapman, Matthew Chapman

The Chapmans, father and daughter, live in New York City. Matthew is Charles Darwin's great-great-grandson. Writer-actress Anna, baptized at age 11, says she got a chance to "sample both sides of the coin" growing up with a Brazilian Catholic mother and staunchly rational English father. "Atheism was a decision that was mine to make, and that meant something to me as well." Matthew, a film director and writer, says, "All an atheist loses by not believing in gods is a shortcut to an illusion. Every real pleasure remains, heightened by knowing life is finite."



Psychiatrist, author

Janet Asimov, New York City, lost her religion in high school. She holds a photo of Isaac Asimov, her husband from 1973 until his death in 1992. "I think one reason believers have hidden depression is that in the effort to ensure that they and their loved ones live forever, they don't really live in the present. They worry about past sins and future punishments or rewards. They even louse up the environment because only heaven matters."



Commercial airline pilot

"Raised religious" Nicholas Robertson, New York City, was hired by a regional airline as a first officer to fly 50-passenger jets near the end of his flight education program at Auburn University. "I am proud to call myself an atheist and ecstatic with my decision to free myself from the poison and corruption in religion. The people in my life and life's experiences are what bring me happiness."



Professional rock climber

Alex Honnold, Sacramento, Calif., sits atop El Capitan in Yosemite National Park. "I find my purpose in pushing and exploring, constantly setting new goals and working toward them. I travel and climb full-time, always looking for the next big challenge or adventure. I find the whole process incredibly fulfilling, especially how it brings me into contact with the most beautiful parts of the natural world."



Writer, museum educator, educational consultant

Nica Lalli, Brooklyn, N.Y., says she's a complicated person with many roles and interests. She doesn't like being defined "by what I am not. Atheist, nonbeliever, even my preferred moniker 'nothing,' address what I am not. They fail to get at what I am." Her 2007 book is titled *Nothing: Something to Believe In*.

The truth about funerals: Follow the money

By Barbara G. Walker

When you think about it, there is nothing really logical or necessary about people gathering together after a death, to talk about the deceased, witness the mourning, or even peer at the unnaturally preserved body. Our usual rationalization for this behavior is that the bereaved find it a “comfort.”

This may be, but if so, it is a culturally learned response not grounded in nature. The original reasons for funerary custom were quite different. We must ask, what did the most primitive humans do about their dead, perhaps a million years ago?

From the beginning, people have believed everything that happens is caused by invisible spirits with human-like intellect and purpose. Many people still believe this, despite all evidence to the contrary. They still pray to a god to produce benefits or avert disasters; they entreat, flatter, cajole and thank their deity accordingly. In the view of such people, nothing in the universe occurs at random. The spirit or the god always has a reason, even for the tiniest happening.

A corollary to this primitive worldview is that in death, the animating spirit of a human being deserts the body and becomes one of these invisible entities, even acquiring some extrahuman power to make things happen. At this point the dead are made into ghosts, wandering souls that, like gods, can communicate with the living, listen to entreaties, or affect events for good or ill, according to their personal inclinations.

Here it becomes necessary for formal appeasement of the ghosts of those who might harbor resentments, or of those who were especially powerful when alive. Ceremonies of homage, praise, and propitiation of the dead become common. The ghost must be made to feel kindly toward the living so as not to punish them for real or imagined slights.

Funerary ceremonies vary, but the basic idea of pleasing and eulogizing the dead is universal. Sacrifices may be offered. Adulatory speeches may be given. Exaggerated mourning behaviors are staged to convince the ghost that he/she is sorely missed.

Professional mourners or “keeners” are still employed in some areas, just as they were in ancient Egypt. This oddly illogical custom seems to assume that the dead person forgets all about any professional mourning seen during his/her lifetime and comes to believe in the sincerity of all the paid-for wailing, hair-pulling, garment-rending and otherwise carrying on.

Another requirement may be that the ghost should be flattered by maximum attendance at the solemnities. Huge funerary processions can be staged by rich and powerful families to flaunt vast numbers of mourners — certainly not all of whom find “comfort” in such ceremonies but rather feel coerced into attending.

One is reminded of the lavish funerals of Mafia dons, rejoicing in hundreds of attendees, most of whom actually hated the deceased, including the clergy who are paid to give the routine guarantee of his “sure and certain”



admission to paradise. Inevitably, this guarantee is given no matter how many or how heinous the crimes committed by the deceased; God’s forgiveness is almost always for sale to those who can pay.

Propitiation of especially revered ancestors can become a recurrent event, celebrated on each anniversary, like a saint’s day. In some cultures, the ancestor thus morphs over time into a god or goddess, able to hear and answer the prayers of his/her descendants. The origin of our Halloween or All Hallows (All Saints’ Eve) was just such an anniversary, annually honoring the spirits of all ancestral ghosts at once, at the time of the harvest.

In Europe, the priestesses who officiated at such pagan funerary solemnities were later denounced by the new rival religion of the church as witches, and the ancestral ghosts they invoked were called demons. Then Halloween took on the trappings of make-believe “evil” that we now know.

The church soon discovered that ceremonies for the dead were highly lucrative. The clergy came to insist that only official clerical sanctions would guarantee the soul’s entrance into heaven. Payment then became a duty of the survivors. Medieval Catholicism even increased revenues by the direct sale of “indulgences,” meaning special rituals guaranteed to shorten the deceased’s term in purgatory.

So it has ever been: Money opens all gates, even pearly ones.

The four elements

For thousands of years previous to the intrusion of the church, however, people had developed many ideas about the spirits of the dead, and had incorporated these ideas into many different funerary customs. Methods of disposing of the body gave rise to the very notion of the four elements — fire, air, water and earth — embraced by Greek and Roman thinkers and all their European descendants up to the 18th century when discovery of the real elements began.

The classic four represented the only possible ways to dispose of a corpse, short of cannibalism: cremation by fire, dispersal into the air, burial at sea or in other water and entombment in the womb of Mother Earth, anticipating a future rebirth.

Cremation was thought to send the soul skyward along with the flames, perhaps to become a permanent spark among the stars, which were often perceived as angelic beings or immortal souls. Sun worshipers especially favored the use of fire, which was em-

ployed also to send sacrifices to various divinities of heavenly light.

So it has ever been: Money opens all gates, even pearly ones.

ployed also to send sacrifices to various divinities of heavenly light.

The Old Testament says sacrifices to Yahweh were often burned on the altar to send their essence skyward. Souls arising from the flames gave rise to the myth of the phoenix, always arising reborn from the ashes of sacrifice.

Air dispersal was favored especially by the Persians, who left their dead in the topless “Towers of Silence” to be consumed by vultures and other birds. Some Native American tribes had the same idea, placing their dead on platforms in trees. The ancient Egyptian Goddess of the dead, Nekhbet, was depicted as a vulture. Romans also believed that souls could enter the bodies of birds, which accounted for their taking of ancestral spirits’ omens from bird behavior.

Other people believed that any flying creature could contain the soul of a deceased person. The Greek word for soul, psyche, also means butterfly. The name of the (biblically vilified) Philistine god of the dead, Beelzebub, means “Lord of the Flies” because it was thought that flies could carry souls. Some of the virgin mothers in Irish mythology conceived their children by swallowing a fly.

Air was often considered the substance of spirit, since “breath” was the very thing that a dead body lacked. Hindus believed that a father gave a soul to a newborn child by breathing into its face. Ancient Israelites had the same idea; in Genesis, God gives Adam a soul made of “breath” or air, because being male, God couldn’t make life out of the vital essence of blood, as the earlier goddesses did.

Water burial was also quite popular, as we know from the famous Viking funeral and several Oriental customs of relegating the dead to rivers. The Vikings regarded the sea as the Great Mother of their race, and their word for death meant “a return to the womb.” The name of a burial ship was ludr, which applied equally to a boat, a coffin and a cradle.

In Egypt, the dead were said to enter the sun boat of Ra and sink with him into the western ocean. Greek philosophers said water was the Arche, the primary element, the womb of all life. In this they were not too far wrong, since we now know that life can exist only on a planet that has liquid water, and liquid water is the greatest proportion of the very substance of our bodies.

The sea was a common symbol of the goddess who gave birth to all things. The fact that blood still tastes like sea water was not lost on the ancients, who also identified four “humors” of the body with the elements.

Perhaps the most common method of burial in our culture was entombment in the earth. Romans often consigned the dead to Terra Mater. They wrote on tombstones, “Mater genuit, Mater recepit” (the Mother bore me, the Mother took me back).

Noting the apparent resurrection of dead plants from their seeds, the an-

cientists likened this to rebirth from the magical earth element, which was also symbolic of living flesh. Savior gods, such as Osiris, Dionysus and Attis, were sacrificed at the spring equinox and represented the rebirth of the crops each year.

Some people described flesh as “clay.” The original Hindu “Adam” was named Arya, “man of clay,” the ancestor of all Aryan tribes. The biblical God made Adam out of clay, recalling the ancient conception charm of Babylonian and Sumerian women: Construct a baby image out of clay and anoint it with menstrual blood to bring it to life. Adam’s creator, of course, used air instead of blood.

Resurrection myths

Medieval Christians also believed that burial in an earthly tomb was one way to achieve resurrection. The church taught that the body would be restored intact, no matter how much decay it had undergone. Saints’ bodies were alleged to be fresh and undamaged even after centuries, which proved their holiness, but somehow the empirical evidence for this claim always seemed to be lacking.

Ancient Egyptians similarly believed in resurrection of the flesh, so they did their best to preserve the flesh by mummification, which we now call embalming. The techniques may be different, but the purpose is the same: preserve the body as long as possible to ensure sufficient material for resurrection. Alas, neither technique really achieves the purpose; neither mummies nor embalmed corpses present a very reassuring spectacle after a long period in the earth.

Then of course, there were those malevolent spirits supposedly resurrected without their souls, such as zombies and vampires, thirsting for the blood of life that they lacked. The idea was a very old one. In Greek myth, Odysseus summoned spirits of the dead out of Hades by offering them a trench filled with sacrificial blood, which magnetically attracted the blood-hungry shades who could give oracles.

Christian authorities were quite willing to support belief in vampires, another form of the demons that they postulated to give common people the perpetual feeling of menace from the forces of darkness. Fathers of the church wrote treatises on all the various revenants and evil spirits that were supposed to threaten the living.

The common fear of a ghost with a bad attitude represents the same primitive fear of the dead that instituted funerary customs in the first place. Even deceased loved ones could be regarded as threatening, for no one knew what changes their personalities might have undergone in the afterworld.

Corpses were obviously not the same as living bodies, so the personality might radically change also. Guilt feelings about possible quarrels or abuses, endured by the deceased during life, might surface and make the ghost even more of a threat. Those who had been one’s enemies were naturally to be feared when they became invisible spirits.

Why then sorrow?

The phenomenon of death is one

In memoriam

Michael Maduras Jr., 1931–2013

Michael Maduras Jr., 82, Walker Valley, N.Y., died unexpectedly Dec. 4, 2013, at home in the Hudson Valley. He was born Nov. 20, 1931.

Survivors include a daughter, Micki Ann (Mark) Hammond; a son, Marlin Michael (Randy) Maduras; 5 grandchildren, Ariel Hammond, Evan Zane Earl Hammond, Michael Mason Maduras, Asha Bleau Keegan and Jordin Allee Esserman; and several great-grandchildren.

“Our renaissance man is gone,” said the family’s obituary in the Middletown Times Herald-Record. “Appropriately, he was outdoors looking over the gardens, natural sculptures and hand-

wrought archways he had lovingly created at his home. Mike was a complex man, who continually strove to understand the world and his place in it. His quest for internal peace is complete.”

Michael was a member of FFRF, attended the 2011 national convention in Hartford, Conn., and listed FFRF, Planned Parenthood and several environmental groups as valued causes.

“He was not a religious man; one of his core beliefs urged us to beware of dogma,” the obituary noted.

A humanistic celebration of life was held in January at his home. “He left a request that we have a party in his memory. And so we shall.”



George Brazill, 1920 – 2013

George Brazill died Dec. 18, 2013, at age 93. He and his wife, Janet, were longtime FFRF members. In the late 1970s, they heard Anne Gaylor on late-night radio and immediately joined FFRF. George had retired from the military, having fought in World War II. During the 1958-59 International Geophysical Year, he spent a year in the Arctic, where he handled the military logistics for a scientific expedition to T-3, a floating ice island at the North Pole. He then worked for Civil Service until he suffered a heart attack in 1975 and retired again, finding his hobby of building models of sailing ships from scratch. He helped Janet with her activism for women’s rights after she retired in 1985. They escorted patients regularly at abortion clinics and engaged in lively exchanges in letters to the editor and opinion columns on state/church and women’s issues.

Eleanor Mae van der Voort, 1935–2013

Eleanor Mae “Andi” van der Voort, 78, Kailua, Hawaii, died Oct. 15, 2013, at Honolulu Kaiser Hospital. She was born Aug. 11, 1935, in Alberta, Canada, and married Johan “Hans” Van der Voort in 1958.

Andi’s many accomplishments included being a loving wife and mother, registered nurse, real estate broker, professional clown, chief medical officer on the USS Independence, president of the Hawaii Hemlock Society,

humanist minister and president of the Humanist Society in Hawaii for over 10 years. She joined FFRF in 1997 and became a Lifetime Member in 2000.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Johan. Survivors include four sons, John, Jim, Eric and Carl; seven grandchildren and a great-granddaughter.

The truth about funerals

that has concerned and puzzled human beings from the beginning of our species. People have obviously spent a great deal of time and effort trying to figure it out and avert it, and failing that, to deal with it in ways that could give them an illusion of understanding. We now understand it pretty well, but religious attitudes toward death are still contradictory and illogical.

The general feeling, when someone dies, is regret or sorrow, even if the person is a stranger. It seems to be an occasion calling for sympathy. Yet our religions often insist that death is a ticket to a much happier place, a land of eternal bliss. Why then sorrow?

Why is it that suicide is very uncommon, even among people who believe in a postmortem paradise? The clergyman can say, “He has gone to a better place,” but does the grieving widow really know that in her heart? All she knows for sure is that he is gone, never to return.

Grieving relatives may indeed be comforted by funeral ceremonies, or they may simply regard them as costly intrusions on their grief, having to listen to trite expressions of sympathy from casual acquaintances or even strangers who really don’t share any deep feeling.

The custom has been perpetuated by those who profit by it, just as the priests and mummy-makers of ancient Egypt profited by their craft. It might even be said that there is something not quite savory about profiting from other people’s sadness; yet funeral ceremonies have come to be considered “only decent,” or essential to maintaining social approbation, or even to securing immortality. Whether this latter effect is ever actually achieved, or ever has been, is of course something that we will never know.

For many centuries now, people of the Western world have been convinced by their religious authorities that the deceased can be assured of a comfortable afterlife only if the proper clerically sanctioned words are spoken over the corpse. Therefore, it would be a crime to omit them.

Churches are notoriously prone to criminalize, whenever possible, almost anything that might reduce their in-

The custom has been perpetuated by those who profit by it.

come. The idea that any afterlife at all may be nothing but a cultural illusion is an idea abhorrent to the church. Yet it may be, after all, the simple truth.

Jesse Bering in his book, “The Belief Instinct,” has this to say:

“It’s only through intellectual labor, and after countless millennia of thinking intuitively otherwise, that today we can arrive at the most obvious of all possible syllogisms: the mind is what the brain does; the brain stops working at death; therefore, the subjective feeling that the mind survives death is a psychological illusion operating in the brains of the living. Can the answer to the question of what happens to us after death, such a profound mystery, really be that simple?”

For most of us, when we look at the deaths of other species, it is that simple. The idea that our species is unique, possessing some essential inner quality found in no other mammal, is a vain-glorious myth that has led us to exploit and unfairly abuse many other living creatures. Perhaps what we really need are funeral services marking the final abandonment of the myth. The rest of the world would thank us if it could.

Let us indeed have rituals that please and comfort us. But let us understand that the ritual exists *for its own sake*, and not for a magical purpose, to make something happen that would not otherwise happen.

Let us not allow money-making institutions to convince us differently. Humans have been enslaved by this kind of superstition for too many centuries already.

Barbara G. Walker is the author of Man Made God (available at ffrf.org/shop), The Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets and The Skeptical Feminist. Go to ffrf.org/outreach/secular-funerals to read FFRF’s “Secular Memorials and Funerals Without God.”

More states fight marriage discrimination

Oregon officials notified a federal court Feb. 20 that the state will no longer defend a ban on same-sex marriage. Similar switches in Nevada and Virginia were announced recently.

Pennsylvania is still officially defending its ban, but some officials see it as unconstitutional.

The Oregon filing came in one of two consolidated cases challenging the 2004 voter-approved ban that passed by 57% to 43%.

Scotusblog.com reported 17 states and Washington, D.C., now allow same-sex marriage. Federal judges have struck down bans in Oklahoma, Utah and Virginia, but those rulings are on hold pending appeals.

A lawsuit, *Wolf v. Walker*, was filed Feb. 3 in U.S. District Court in Madison by lawyers for the American Civil Liberties Union of Wisconsin and the law firm Mayer Brown on behalf of four same-sex couples from Milwaukee, Eau Claire and Madison.

“These families simply want the se-

curity and recognition that only marriage provides,” said Larry Dupuis, ACLU of Wisconsin legal director.

The suit also seeks a permanent injunction to block a state law that makes it a criminal offense for a Wisconsin resident to leave the state to obtain a marriage that would be prohibited in Wisconsin. Maximum punishment is nine months in jail and a \$10,000 fine.

Also in Wisconsin, Democrats have introduced a bill to repeal the state’s constitutional gay marriage ban. Republican Assembly Speaker Robin Vos told WISN that he doesn’t expect it to even get a hearing.

“Unfortunately, I think at the end of the session, people are doing this much more based on a political answer than trying to find anything else,” Vos said.

Wisconsin Family Action, a socially conservative evangelical group, is vigorously lobbying against the bill as an assault on “religious freedom.”

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.

In the News

Faith-healing parents get prison terms

Herbert Schaible, 45, and Catherine Schaible, 44, a faith-healing husband and wife from Philadelphia, were sentenced Feb. 19 to 3½ to seven years in prison for the 2013 death of their son, the second child they have lost to pneumonia. Brandon Schaible, 8 months, died of of treatable pneumonia but was never taken to a doctor.

Instead, the couple, who pleaded no contest to 3rd-degree murder, and other members of First Century Gospel Church, prayed for God to heal him.

In doing so, they defied a court order to get medical care for their children after their son Kent, 2, died of bacterial pneumonia in 2009. They were convicted of involuntary manslaughter and sentenced to 10 years' probation.

"April of 2013 wasn't Brandon's time to die," said Judge Benjamin Lerner said. "You've killed two of your children. . . . Not God. Not your church. Not religious devotion. You."

Their pastor, Nelson Clark, blamed Kent's death on a "spiritual lack" in the parents' lives, reported The Associated Press. The eldest of their seven surviving children is 18.

Ulster council reverses bible play ban

The Newtownabbey Borough Council in Northern Ireland reversed a controversial decision made Jan. 22 to ban the comedy play "The Bible: The Complete Word Of God (Abridged)" by the Reduced Shakespeare Company as blasphemous. The board backed off on the ban five days later.

Mayor Fraser Agnew supported the ban "because they are poking fun at the bible, they are poking fun at Christ."

The ban was the "worse type of censorship," said Councillor Gerry O'Reilly. "This is clearly an example of certain councillors forcing their religious views onto everyone else in the constituency. What the councillors are basically saying is that they can dictate what type of dramas people can view."

Given the worldwide publicity the ban garnered, several dates on the U.K. tour are sold out, the Belfast Telegraph reported Jan. 29.

'Messiah' judge loses Tennessee job

Child Support Magistrate Lu Ann Ballew of Newport, Tenn., has been fired in the wake of her court order last August to change a toddler's name over the parents' objection. Ballew threw out the child's birth name of Messiah and ordered his first name to be Martin, which is his mother's surname. Another judge overruled Ballew's order as unconstitutional.

"The word 'messiah' is a title, and it's a title that has only been earned by one person, and that one person is Jesus Christ," Ballew told a TV reporter in August.

O. Duane Slone, Fourth Judicial Circuit presiding judge, terminated Ballew's appointment Jan. 31 without giving a reason, Reuters reported. Ballew was cited earlier by the state Board of Judicial Conduct for inappropriate religious bias. A hearing is set March 3 on that.

FFRF filed a formal complaint with the board Aug. 14.

Orlando church goal: Overcharge city?

A Florida judge ruled Jan. 31 that the Orlando City Council can use eminent domain to acquire the property of Faith Deliverance Temple if negotiations with the church fail. The church is the last parcel needed to build an \$84 million Major League Soccer stadium, the Orlando Sentinel reported.

City officials tried to negotiate the purchase without going to court and offered \$1.5 million, more than twice the appraised value. When the family that owns the church countered by asking for \$35 million, the council voted to file eminent domain.

U.N. clergy abuse report stings Vatican

In a Feb. 5 report, the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child accused the Vatican of "systematically" adopting policies and a "code of silence" that let clergy molest tens of thousands of children over decades.

The Associated Press reported that the panel also severely criticized the Holy See for its attitudes on homosexuality, contraception and abortion. It recommended changes in canon law to ensure children's rights and access to health care. The Vatican promptly objected.

Austen Ivereigh, coordinator of Catholic Voices, said the report was a "shocking display of ignorance and high-handedness."

'Science guy' meets 'pie in the sky'

About 900 audience members watched Bill the "Science Guy" Nye debate Creation Museum founder Ken Ham on Feb. 4 at the museum in Petersburg, Ky.

Misty Brewer of Tulsa, Okla., told USA Today she has "traveled my journey to atheism" and drove 12 hours to bring her son to the event. "I think the believers will stay believers," Brewer said. "No one's going to walk out of here saying, 'I changed my mind.'"

"The bible says God created man. It doesn't say evolved," said Diana Yokum, Akron, Ohio. "I really believe those who believe in evolution will have their eyes opened tonight."

"Your assertion that there is some difference between the natural laws that I observe today and the natural laws of 4,000 years ago is extraordinary and unsettling," Nye told Ham, noting kangaroos don't live in the Middle East, where Noah's Ark supposedly ran aground.

Ham focused on "observational science" [how do you know if you weren't there?]. "The battle is really about authority. It's about who is the authority, man or God," said Ham, who wants to build a \$60 million Noah's Ark theme park in Grant County, Ky.

Religious freedom bill falters in Virginia

A Virginia House subcommittee in Richmond tabled a student religious



freedom bill Feb. 5 that had passed the Senate 20-18, the Lynchburg News & Advance reported. No subcommittee member favored advancing the bill to the full House.

The bill "[c]odifies the right of students to (i) voluntarily pray or engage in religious activities or religious expression before, during, and after the school day in the same manner and to the same extent that students may engage in nonreligious activities or expression; (ii) organize prayer groups, religious clubs, 'see you at the pole' gatherings, or other religious gatherings before, during, and after school to the same extent that students are permitted to organize other activities and groups; and (iii) wear clothing, accessories, or jewelry that display religious messages or religious symbols in the same manner and to the same extent that other types of clothing, accessories, and jewelry are permitted."

The bill would have required every school division to let students express religious views at any school event in which students are allowed to publicly speak, said the Roanoke Times.

Sen. John Edwards, D-Roanoke, said the bill would create "a patchwork quilt" of local policies. "If this bill is passed, it almost guarantees litigation. Do we really need to spend time and money and effort litigating different school districts' policies that are established under this bill?"

Missouri bill allows evolution opt out

Missouri Rep. Rick Brattin, R-Harrisonville, has introduced a General Assembly bill to make schools notify parents about the "basic content" of any instruction students are getting about evolution. It would also let students opt out, with parental consent, of "any part" of that instruction.

Brattin told KCTV that public schools teach Darwinian theory as fact and that students who question it are ridiculed.

"I definitely think parents should be notified if evolution is taught because I believe in creation," said Tina Decavale of Drexel.

Brandon Eastwood, of Harrisonville, went further. "Evolution is not taught in the bible so it shouldn't be taught in the class. Even if I had to spend some time in jail, I wouldn't subject my kids to that nonsense."

The Daily Beast online publication said Oklahoma, South Dakota and Virginia have similar bills circulating, from "teaching the controversy" to including so-called "intelligent design" theory in biology courses.

On "The Daily Show," host Jon Stewart referred to the Missouri bill and called state legislatures "the meth labs of democracy" for even considering such legislation.

Gay discrimination bill dies in Senate

The Kansas House approved a bill 72-49 on Feb. 5 that would let individuals, groups and businesses discriminate against same-sex marriage or civil union couples by refusing to provide services. Anti-discrimination lawsuits also would be barred.

The bill, introduced by Rep. Charles Macheers, R-Shawnee, responds to the possibility that a federal court ruling could invalidate the state constitution's ban on same-sex marriages, the Wichita Eagle reported. Government agencies would still be required to provide services, but individual clerks could refuse to participate based on their religious beliefs.

Then on Feb. 18, Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Jeff King, R-Independence, said the bill won't advance in the Senate. "We're not working House Bill 2453," King told The Associated Press. He said he will still have hearings on whether Kansas needs to enact other "religious liberty" protections.

[Fr. Benjamin Kneib] had called me the day of the rosary and said he wouldn't be able to give us communion because of our same-sex relationship.

Carol Parker, Chillicothe, Mo., on a Catholic priest's phone call the day before her mother's funeral
The Raw Story, 2-7-14

State/Church Bulletin

Milwaukee mayor vetoes 'Higher Call' funding

Milwaukee Mayor Tom Barrett vetoed a resolution Feb. 12 approved 8-5 by the Common Council to give up to \$5,000 to the Retail Christian Network for a breakfast at the International Council of Shopping Centers convention in May in Las Vegas.

Barrett said he didn't see a public purpose in spending tax money to finance RCN's year-round ministry to support Higher Call, its parent organization based in Franklin, Tenn.

RCN stated in its application that it needed breakfast sponsors "to underwrite our year-round ministry budget." In an email to the Journal Sentinel, Higher Call founder David Atchison said his group seeks to encourage professionals who "live out authentic faith as Christ followers in their workplace."

It will take 10 votes to override the veto.

FFRF mulls Arizona school prayer action

Despite the potential of legal action by FFRF, the Gilbert, Ariz., school board voted 3-2 on Jan. 28 to reinstate prayer before meetings. A conservative blog, Gilbert Watch, urged the public to support prayer in a post that started, "He died for you. Are you too busy to say a few words on His behalf?"

FFRF Staff Attorney wrote the board Jan. 23 warning it not to follow "in the reckless footsteps of Mesa Public Schools." FFRF's course of action in both districts depends somewhat on how much local complainants want to become involved.

'Choose Life' plates ruled illegal in N.C.

A three-judge panel of the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on Feb. 11 unanimously upheld a 2012 ruling by U.S. District Judge James Fox in Raleigh that North Carolina's issuance of "Choose Life" license plates is unconstitutional. The appeals panel said because the state doesn't offer plates supporting abortion rights, the anti-abortion message is "blatant viewpoint discrimination squarely at odds with the First Amendment."

Legislators authorized the "Choose Life" plate in 2011, with part of the proceeds going to support so-called crisis pregnancy centers. Lawmakers defeated various amendments, include ones to authorize plates stating "Trust Women. Respect Choice" or "Respect Choice."

L.A. County sued for seal with cross

The American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California and a group of Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders filed a federal lawsuit Feb. 5 against Los Angeles County over the decision to restore a cross to the county's seal. The county Board of Supervisors voted 3-2 in January to add a cross to the San Gabriel Mission depiction on the seal, the Los Angeles Times said.

The seal adopted in 1957 showed a cross floating over the Hollywood

Bowl. A 2004 redesign included the mission without a cross after a threatened ACLU suit.

Supervisors Michael Antonovich and Don Knabe, the main proponents of the new cross, claimed it was an issue of historical accuracy, not religion.

Panel: Florida judge pushed religion

Sanctions for Leon County, Fla., Judge Judith Hawkins were recommended Jan. 27 by a Judicial Qualifications Commission hearing panel, reported the Tampa Bay Times. Hawkins was charged in December 2012 with running a religious business from her courthouse chambers.

The newspaper said Hawkins' business offered religious books, seminars, conferences and international mission trips.

Panel recommendations to the state Supreme Court include a public reprimand for Hawkins, a three-month suspension without pay and a \$17,000 fine.

Parents allege Buddhist son harassed

Scott and Sharon Lane, the parents of a Buddhist student, and the American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana are suing the Sabine Parish School System.

The suit was filed Jan. 22 in U.S. District Court on behalf of their son. In a post on the ACLU's website, the Lanes alleged: "Like any parents, we were deeply concerned when our son C.C. began getting sick to his stomach on the way to school each morning. At first, we thought he had fallen ill. But we soon found out a far more disturbing truth — that our son, a Buddhist of Thai descent, was afraid to go to school because his teacher was chastising him in front of his peers for his Buddhist faith."

"As we dug deeper, we discovered that our son's sixth-grade curriculum at Negreet High included extreme religious indoctrination. The school itself was covered in religious icons. Christian prayer was incorporated into nearly every school event. And our son's teacher routinely preached her biblical beliefs to students and tested the children on their piety with exam questions such as this one: 'ISN'T IT AMAZING WHAT THE _____ HAS MADE!!!'"

"When our son failed to answer religious questions like this correctly (the answer was 'LORD,' his teacher mocked him for his beliefs. And when we brought our concerns to the school superintendent, expecting compassion for our son's treatment, we found none. She informed us that we live in the 'Bible belt' and suggested that we transfer our son to another district school 25 miles away where, she claimed, there were 'more Asians.'"

Little Rock AFB drops FamilyLife video

Commanders at Little Rock Air Force Base in Arkansas banned a marriage enhancement video course produced by the Christian group FamilyLife because it focused solely on heterosexual marriage.

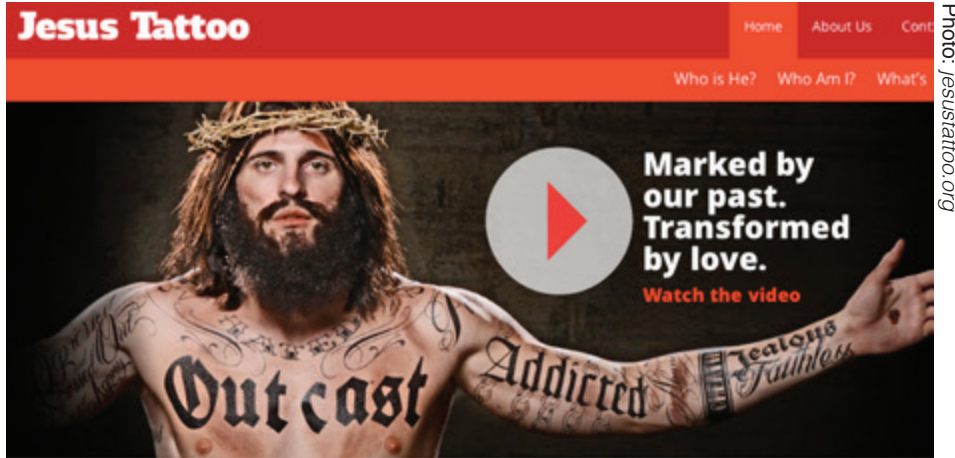


Photo: JesusTattoo.org

'Teavangelicals' want Jesus on jumbotron

Alliance Defending Freedom, an evangelical law firm, announced a federal lawsuit Jan. 28 challenging a Texas school's refusal to display an ad from JesusTattoo.org on the jumbotron during high school football games last fall. The complaint in *Little Pencil v. Lubbock Independent School District* claims unconstitutional viewpoint discrimination.

The district explained to ADF that policy prohibits "religious advertisement with the use of government property based on the Establishment Clause." However, the complaint alleges, the district routinely permits faith-based ads from groups such as Full Armor Ministries, Lubbock Christian University, Sunset Church of Christ's Just Kids Preschool and Bethany Baptist Church.

The video series, "The Art of Marriage," was set for Feb. 7 as part of the base's annual Wingman Day, Stars and Stripes reported Jan. 21. The Wingman program is mandatory.

Mikey Weinstein, president of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, said about 25 service members, almost all Christians, complained to MRFF about the series.

"We wanted to make sure it was inclusive of all relationships, to include same-sex relationships," said 2nd Lt. Amanda Porter. A chaplain will instead teach a "faith-based" but nondenominational seminar covering heterosexual and same-sex relationships, she said.

Porter added that in response to complaints about the lack of nonreligious programs offered as part of Wingman Day's spiritual component, commanders had reclassified several programs, including one on nature appreciation.

Mandatory prayer bill filed in Alabama

Alabama public school teachers would have to read a daily prayer under a bill introduced by state Rep. Steve Hurst, R-Munford.

The House Education Policy Committee passed the bill by voice vote Feb. 24 over the objection of some members who said the "ayes" didn't outnumber the "nays."

"It's what I heard as chairman," said Rep. Mary Sue McClurkin, R-Indian Springs.

Hurst's bill requires the first 15 minutes of the first class period every day be set aside "for study of the formal procedures followed by U.S. Congress," which must include "a reading verbatim of one of the opening prayers" given at the opening of the U.S. Senate or House of Representatives.

Such a law would help students learn about history and civics, Hurst told the Anniston Star. "They could read the prayer from the day war was declared in World War II. They could read the prayer [from] the day after Sept. 11."

Court denies Notre Dame injunction appeal

The 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in Chicago upheld 2-1 on Feb.

21 a federal judge's ruling denying the University of Notre Dame's request for a preliminary injunction to prevent it from having to comply with the birth control coverage mandate in the Affordable Care Act.

The Associated Press reported the court noted that the Catholic college in South Bend, Ind., had already notified the administrators of its employee and student plans that the school would not pay for contraception, as required under the compromise with the federal government. The insurance companies must still provide coverage as the suit moves forward.

Afghan atheist first to get U.K. asylum

An unidentified Afghan man, 23, is believed to be the first atheist to be granted asylum in the U.K. by the Home Office due to his views on religion, The Guardian reported Jan. 13.

The man fled the conflict in Afghanistan and arrived in the U.K. in 2007. He had permission to stay until 2013. Living in England, he gradually turned to atheism. His lawyers argued he could face a death sentence under sharia law if forced to return home.

The decision stemmed from 2010 court precedent that held it would be unreasonable to return two gay men to Cameroon and Iran on the grounds that they could be discreet about or hide their sexuality.

Solicitor Sheona York said, "We are absolutely delighted for our client. We believe that this is the first time that a person has been granted asylum in this country on the basis of their atheism."

Silence not golden yet in Port Hope

Port Hope, Ontario, councillors voted Feb. 12 to table a committee motion earlier approved to stop saying the Lord's Prayer to start meetings.

Linda Thompson told the Northumberland News she wants to keep the prayer but realizes the council could still be forced to stop reciting it. Port Hope could substitute a moment of silence, she said.

Letterbox

Motel bible sticker was pleasant surprise

One of the first things I do when checking into a motel is to look for “the book” and put a warning sticker in it. On a trip to Houston last fall, I checked into a motel near Hobby Airport (so glad I didn’t have to fly into George Bush Intercontinental) and to my surprise and delight, found that someone had beat me to it!

I’ve never experienced that before but hope to see it again soon!

Mark Welty, Life Member
Iowa

Order FFRF’s two bible warning labels at: ffrf.org/shop

Barker’s debate prowess very impressive

I attended Dan Barker’s debate with a Christian believer at Boise State University. Dan’s instant recall (no notes) and knowledge of biblical contradictions, philosophy and science and his debating skills are superb. He won the debate handily.

His musical and lyrical abilities are also outstanding. I especially like the closing line to believers at the end of his song “Beware of Dogma”: “Clean up after your dogma!”

Personally, I am cleaning up my use of words that have superstitious, religious connotations. I will substitute confidence for belief, reality for truth, thank her heart for bless her heart, pardon you for bless you, thank goodness for thank god, character for soul, happiness for heaven, misery for hell, attitude or backbone for spirit and inspirational experience for spiritual experience. Let me finish with a secular humanist meditation: Nothing fails like prayer!

I’ve been an FFRF member since 1982. May the high court of reason be present in the minds of people and prevail over myth and superstition. Amen — sorry about that — may it be so!

Ron Marquart
Idaho

Crank mail comments laughable, revelatory

Even though we may find the crank mail laughable at first glance, given more thought, one realizes it is also the perfect example of what religion (belief, faith) does to the mind and how religion has set the tone for so many of the world’s ills throughout history.

The work yet to be done by freethinkers is considerable, but we’re getting there!

Carolyn Lawing
South Carolina

Delighted by attorney Elliott’s work, story

As always, I was delighted with the latest Freethought Today and am so pleased to see that I am not the only “convert” to freethinking after reading the bible cover to cover in a class. I suspect our membership would mushroom tremendously if more churchgoers would take on that eye-opening assignment. But that’s asking a lot. . .

I want to express real pleasure in the article showcasing Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott. Seeing his name so of-

ten in print piqued my interest in him as a person, so I was glad to see the “personal” article. I had the pleasure of meeting Patrick at the Hartford conference a few years back and was very favorably impressed.

Thanks, Patrick, for all you do for us. (Oh, and Macy the puppy is really cute.) Look forward to seeing you all in North Carolina in May.

Jack Red
North Carolina

Alaska couple laments state of separation

We’re enclosing our check for the building fund. We read each paper hungrily and were sorry not to make it for the convention, but this year we should be able to be in Los Angeles. We are especially pleased you are fighting tax exemption for ministers’ housing. A judge in Anchorage ruled that 16 residences for teachers at a Baptist school also were tax deductible.

Now the state is planning to give money to parents for private and religious schools. We live in a terrible state when it comes to state/church separation.

Thanks for continuing the good work against stupidity and bigotry.

Julie and Jim Ede
Alaska

New ‘Lifers’ helping FFRF to grow

I’m getting older and just a little forgetful. The idea that I might forget to renew and miss your newspapers scares the hell out of me. Could you please sign me up for a lifetime?

Dean Hoffman
Wisconsin

Editor’s note: Well, if you insist, Dean. Kidding! Thank you very much.

•••

I’m proud to be a member for several years and would like to offer more financial support [as a Lifetime Member] for your vital work.

Keep fighting for common human decency in the face of an unending onslaught of Iron Age misogyny and bigotry.

Jay Mumford
California

Editor’s note: Thank you, Jay! (You made me look up when the Iron Age was, roughly 1200 to 550 B.C.E.)

HBO series features atheist detective

A new series called “True Detective” starring an atheist character debuted Jan. 12 on HBO. Detectives Rustin Cohle (Matthew McConaughey) and Martin Hart (Woody Harrelson) are Louisiana state trooper looking for a serial killer.

Both are rugged, flawed characters, but Cohle (the atheist) is clearly smarter than his peers. His critique of gullible worshipers is right on target, and it’s good to see it treated sympathetically in a major production from HBO.

Unfortunately, Cohle has a troubled past, and his atheist philosophy hasn’t freed him from a cynical, nihilistic view of life.

Chris Allen
Florida



Photo: Kemp McElwee

Long may you love

Longtime FFRF member Jim Haught and Nancy Lince were married Dec. 29, 2013, at their home in Charleston, W.V. At 82, Jim still works full-time as an editor at the Charleston Gazette. Nancy is a retired Kanawha County Schools teacher. “I think my private skeptic writing has slowed,” comments Jim, “because I’ve exhausted every topic I can think of.”

Clergy crime blotter rates close read

Thank you for all that you are doing to defend the separation of state and church. It is shameful to see how some communities have infected their council meetings, schools and government properties with a version of someone’s religion, trying to override The First Amendment.

I look forward to Freethought Today arriving in my mailbox. One column I read very closely is the black collar crime blotter. I was raised Assemblies of God and look at their representation in every issue. Thanks for doing this from a very fulfilled atheist.

Dan Fester
Illinois

Time for new tack challenging creationists

Bishop Samuel Wilberforce and T.H. Huxley debated creationism vs. evolution at Oxford in 1860. Now, 154 years later, it’s still being debated, and the debates are still between “Creationism vs. Evolution.”

I’ve listened to and read about these debates since childhood, 70 years ago, and the content and context was Christianity. We are giving credence to extremist Christians who posture that Judeo-Christianity possesses the one and only true creation.

We should not partake in any debate that is exclusive to Christian creationism vs. evolution. We should refuse all debates unless it includes the creation stories of all other major religions. Native Americans may have had as many as 200 creation myths, and it is discriminatory to not include those stories. Whenever I try to discuss creations with the door-knockers, other lay Christians or clergy, they get frustrated and anxious when I begin demanding that we give every creation story equal time and status.

Courts also should be interested in the concept of racism and discrimination (not legally but as a social argument). Lawyers representing Christian groups are arguing for either their cre-

ation myth or “intelligent design and aren’t extending their arguments to beliefs of other faiths.

Our state and national lawmakers should also be charged with discrimination and racism if legislation excludes religious groups.

Scott A. Hunter
Arizona

To be frank, Frank is very sharp-eyed

The September 2013 issue included a college essay by Rebecca Tippens with the headline “On why I choose science.” If I’m not mistaken, there’s a misprint in the sixth paragraph: “Statements like this are innately scientific and they simply cannot hold their own against any sort of empirical scrutiny.”

Shouldn’t that sentence read, “Statements like this are innately unscientific . . .?”

While I read every issue through, I’m always several behind. Otherwise I would have written sooner!

Frank Dowding
Minnesota

Editor’s note: You are right, Frank. We apologize for that typo.

Buffalo bishop pushing parochial tax credits

The Catholic Diocese of Buffalo, N.Y., just announced it’s closing 10 primary schools due to declining enrollments. The TV coverage has been wide-ranging. Catholic families are putting their 12-year-olds on TV crying, wondering how they will survive going to an adjacent school that is not closing.

Bishop Richard Malone is pushing state lawmakers to pass a bill that would give tax credits to people donating to private scholarships, namely private religious schools.

Two western New York legislators are pushing for the Education Investment Tax Credit to mollify their constituents. They are Sen. Mark Grisanti and Assemblyman Sean Ryan.

If the local Catholic bishop is push-



Religious nuts?

“Enjoy,” says James Kavanagh, Georgia. Behind the marquee near Alpharetta is Holbrook Campground, a camp meeting site since 1838. It has 72 cabins for committed Christian campers.

ing for it, it cannot be good for taxpayers or atheists.

George Saunders
New York

Workers, not employers, pay for insurance

The Hobby Lobby lawsuit regarding the federal contraceptive man-

date, which is pending in the Supreme Court, concerns whether businesses must pay contraceptive coverage within health care premiums. Hobby Lobby argues that corporations have a conscience and owners can run their businesses in accordance with their convictions.

Health benefits started during World War II when wages were frozen as a way to hire and retain employees. Wages are paid in arrears. One does not receive pay on their first day at

work. They are paid at the end of a pay period whether it be a week, two weeks or monthly.

I believe employers are *not* paying their own dollars for health care coverage. The employees have earned the money that pays the premium as a benefit of their labor. Although the employer writes the check, it is from an account reserved for employee benefits for the pay period. Therefore, it is the employees who are paying for contraception coverage. They are the ones to exercise their conscience as to whether they use that particular insurance health benefit.

Democracy is defined as rule of the majority. Surveys show that a very high percentage of women, including religious women, use birth control at some point. This practice is no doubt with the happy knowledge of spouses or companions.

Conscience is subjective. Should I receive an exemption from whatever government policy with which I disagree? Should you? To do so would create unfair chaos. Tax laws are a perfect example.

The majority has spoken with the institution of the health care law by officials elected by the people.

Donna Clark
Kansas

FFRF ad inspires in Ms. magazine

Thank you for the appeal to feminists on the back cover of Ms. Magazine. It's a collection of inspiring images, and I hope it will be fruitful for FFRF!

Sue Gibson
Missouri

Religion is 'world's biggest industry'

I am writing in an effort to convince you to drop the tepid phrase “Church and State” for the more correct “Religion and Government.” “Church” can be construed to imply any little, innocent-looking church on a corner. “State” suggests only one of the 50 states and is a small part of a much larger problem.

All levels of government are guilty of attacks on our Constitution. My own congressman wrote to me personally, telling me I don't have the right to be a “religious nonbeliever.”*

It's not exaggerating to call religion “the world's biggest industry,” so let's begin to refer to it as such. Perhaps it might make some people see religion for what it really is: big business.

The Religious Right and its minions are experts at using the strongest emphasis to perpetuate their agenda. It's time for nonbelievers to do likewise.

Jack McKinney
Georgia

Praise for FFRF member who beat odds

Kudos to Bob Lee [“Meet a Member” Jan/Feb14], who, despite tremendous obstacles (e.g., the traumatic death of a parent at a very early age, fundamentalist education and surviving parent) emerged not only as an outstanding freethinker but also as a genuinely clear thinker who “miraculously” managed to educate himself despite all the odds against him.

We are so glad he never quit!

Joan Reisman-Brill
New York

Sharing the Crank Mail

Crosses and curses and prayers, oh my! A sampling of recent emails FFRF has gotten, printed as received.

Ground hogs: Total ignorance. For all your efforts you'll still get to meet God. He awaits you. You aren't free to think as you please when you're interfering with other's rights. When you take a Bible out of one place, and the majority wants that Bible, who's being violated? Your ignorance and your smelly drawers precede you. What have you achieved in life? Not much of anything really. It takes substance. — *Derek Clouse, Ph.D., Savannah, Ga.*

free country: you may not be a believer .and that's your choice .but you don't have the right to tell the coach in nc that he cant pray to jesus .if other people don't want to pray that's there choice. bunch of communistic devils .don't have the right to take away true god given rights .but what you promote and gloat is sinful and immoral leftwing devilish evil ways .that is wrong so .so just remember this is supposed to be a free country but people like you are trying to destroy it, — *fred brendle, north carolina*

Get real: I read the action of the University of Wisconsin removing Gideon bibles from their guest rooms. God is pained by your act. Retribution will be his. I wrote a friend of mine “I accomplish more by wiping my ass one time after taking a crap than you have done in your entire life! — *Clairmont Brekken, Stoughton, Wis.*

Football Coach: As a native of Mooresville, NC and a 1984 graduate of Mooresville Senior High School I am completely offended and pissed off that an organization composed of atheists based in Wisconsin has any say about what a good God Fearing Christian coach in Mooresville, NC is doing! I bet your organization would support putting Christian believers in concentration camps and torturing them... maybe you are a descendant of Hitler! It's people like you that are turning our country that was founded on Christian principals into such a torn and violent place. — *Lori Broome*

Bibles removed from lodging: I'm a born again Christian and I find your organization offensive to the Christian country that I (we) live in! Why not Muslims boodist any other religions?? The bible tells us one day every knee shall bow and every tounge shall confess that JESUS CHRIST is LORD and yes this does mean you also weather you want to or not you will bow before him so you better start soul searching! — *Mike Wallace, Richwood, Ohio*

North Carolina Coach: I'm getting sick and tired of these attacks on religious people to the point that my cousin lives in N. Carolina and we may move there this summer and my son who enters high school next year loves football and I may be a problem for you people. And by the way if we do move I have some very good lawyers since I am an entertainer and I can afford them. So leave these kids alone. — *Frank Puff, Rochester, N.Y.*

NC coach: I read with horror your treatment of the North Carolina coach that prays with his team. I will follow the path the good Lord has laid out for me. When you begin to walk it; you will allow us the freedom the founders so beautifully outlined. — *Marc Schaller, Ohio*

A word of encorageme: We're all sinners in need of a Savior. Let His death be the payment or pay for it yourself forever in the place the Bible calls hell. — *Jeff Worthington, North Carolina*

waronJesus.com: Thanks to people like you our kids live in a toilet. But hopefully America will grab it's Christian roots and make a comeback. — *Mike Bambino, Grand Junction, Colo.*

Libtards: Libtards, get a better cause. — *Eric Armstrong, Ames, Iowa*

Your Beliefs: Why do you have special rights over anybody else? Nobody said you had to read that Bible in the drawer at your hotel room, just ignore it! I sure wish I could be there

that day when you and other athiests are kneeling before the Lord and he asks “So, I don't exist?” — *Steve Bartlett, Westminster, Colo.*

Christ the King: Jesus spoke to me on November 24, 2013, the Feast Day of Christ the King. He said, “I am Christ the King.” He hugged my heart 3 times and conveyed a message. He wanted everyone to know: He loves you. — *E.J. Jorgensen, Wisconsin*

Searcy ark: Searcy Ar does not belong to you and for you to tell us to remove a cross that is hurting no one is rude and heartless, it is hurting no one and whom ever the coward is in searcy that is having you to do there dirty work needs to either look away or confront the chief them selfs and stop asking someone from another state to do there work for them they have a mouth and if they cant use it then they need to get over it or Move. I have lived in searcy since i was 16 i am now 47. — *Debbie cullum*

From Marilyn Solamito: Stop! What you are doing going after crosses on public land and complaining in schools about the separation of church and state. Get this straight! The US is based on the bible and you are not going to destroy that in our country. I am watching your organization and I will start the public against you. Remember my name because bring it on! — *Marilyn Solamito*

GODWINS: YHWH whom you do not believe in is going to kick ass very very soon and one day when you wake up to the fact that your dead in trespasses and SIN, well, enjoy the fire that burns forever knowing that you can never escape the thought of refusing to acknowledging Him. Sorry, I never KNEW YOU, HE WILL SAY TO YOU. OUCH, THAT'S GOTTA HURT! — *callhimyahshua@yahoo.com*

Lo! Evolution is wrong and there is more evidence proving that there is a god than not. My god left me his signs everywhere. Why is there such order? Boom? No. Intelligent design. Watch lee stroble “case for christ. — *Derek Fredin*

Help: Hi, do you really believe that you evolved from an ape? Do really believe this awesome universe and all living creatures came

from the big bang? I'm here to tell you that Hell is a place you don't want to be. — *Chad Heistand*

Leave searcy alone: This is a christain based college town. If you took a vote 90% in our town would say let the cross stay. Sorry your living in sin but, stop picking on stupid pitty stuff. All business are coming together and putting crosses all cross town so you lose. — *Angel Mosley, Arkansas*

work: You people need to get a job! — *Kate Trost, Carrollton, Ill.*

Sorry: My son was a student at Four Oaks Elementary school and was told he could not pray at the lunch table to ask for God to bless his food. If people choose not to believe in God and want to go to hell when they die then that is there discision but they are not going to drag my family with them. We home school now. — *Matthew Wiggs, Clayton, N.C.*

freedom of religion: HATE TO SAY THIS I THINK YOU ALL NUTS FREEDOM OF WHAT WE ALL PRAY TO THE FAT GUY BUDDA OR A CROSS OE WICKEN AND WHAT EVER OUT THERE PEOPLE PRAY TOO. — *dee calise*

mind your own Business and we'll do the same: I think you guys should mind your own bussiness or attack something like pornography. just maybe that little cross in their yard or that cross at some office building is their last hope and you know what people would stop to they have no hope homicidal or suicidal tendencies do the next you see that small cross in a yard stop and think i might be stomping on domeones last little bit of hope. — *Brandon Partin, luka, Illinois*

FYI: I respect my dog more then people like you. — *Julian Davis*

clergy: The clergy of today,[pope's, minister's, reverend's, doctor's of divinity, pastor's, rabbi's, etc.] comes from the clergy of 2000 year's ago, [pharisse's, sadducee's, scribe's, and nazirite's]. They honor HIM with their lip's, but their heart's are far from HIM , because their heart's are in their paycheck's. — *Steven Gossum, Calvert City, Kentucky*



Biblical battle

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie stood up for state/church separation Feb. 10 on Fox News in an interview with host Sean Hannity, who expressed outrage that FFRF successfully got Gideon bibles removed from state-owned property at Wisconsin and Iowa colleges. "You would be offended if you found *The God Delusion* and atheistic materials in a hotel that was supported by the government, a public university hotel," Gaylor told Hannity. "Don't tell me you wouldn't be shocked." View clip on FFRF's channel: youtube.com/FFRForg



'Drop and give 20 prayers'

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott with Wayne Johnson, emeritus professor of philosophy, in a lecture hall Feb. 10 at the University of Wisconsin-Parkside in Somers. Elliott spoke during a "Perspectives on Religious Issues" series, which Johnson has been helping coordinate since 1998. Elliott spoke on constitutional violations in the military during a talk titled "Drop and give 20 prayers." (The whiteboard lists upcoming topics, including "Pope Francis and the Future of the Catholic Church" and "Physician Assisted Suicide: The Oregon Story.")

Ariz. gov vetoes bill singling out gays

In a room packed with media Feb. 26, Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer vetoed Senate Bill 1062 in the wake of national outcries, including some from Republicans and business interests, over a bill that would allow discrimination against gays for religious reasons.

The Legislature gave final approval Feb. 20 to a bill that lets businesses and individuals refuse to provide goods and services to gays. Similar "religious protection" legislation has been introduced in Ohio, Mississippi, Idaho, South Dakota, Tennessee and Oklahoma, but Arizona's plan is the only one that has passed, The Associated Press reported. Similar efforts are stalled in Idaho, Ohio and Kansas.

The law "could divide Arizona in ways we cannot even imagine and no one would ever want," Brewer told a room packed with media.

Tony Perkins, head of the Family Research Council, a Religious Right group, said that "by vetoing this bill, Governor Brewer is saying she supports government discrimination against people's religious freedoms."

Brewer denied such claims. "As gov-

ernor, I have protected religious freedoms when there is a specific and present concern that exists in our state. Senate Bill 1062 does not address a specific and present concern related to religious liberty in Arizona. I have not heard of one example in Arizona where a business owner's religious liberty has been violated."

Before the 33-27 vote in the House, Democrats called the bill "state-sanctioned discrimination." Democratic House Minority Leader Chad Campbell said the law would be "horrible for our economy." Opponents predicted the law would also bring boycotts of the 2015 Super Bowl in Glendale.

Republican Rep. Steve Montenegro defended the bill, commenting, "Please, I will accept you because you are a child of God, I love you because you are a child of God. But please don't ask me to go against my religious beliefs."

According to the Arizona Republic, enough lawmakers oppose the bill now that it's certain there will be no veto override.

Rattler bite fatal for Pentecostal pastor

The ninth time was not the charm for Jamie Coots, pastor of Full Gospel Tabernacle in Jesus' Name in Middlesboro, Ky., who died at home Feb. 15 from a rattlesnake bite that night at church.

Coots refused to be taken to the hospital or get treatment at home. His son Cody said he'd been bitten eight times before. "We're going to go home, he's going to lay on the couch, he's going to hurt, he's going to pray for a while and he's going to get better. That's what happened every other time, except

this time was just so quick and it was crazy, it was really crazy," Cody Coots told WBIR-TV.

Coots was profiled on the National Geographic show "Snake Salvation."

Cody Winn, Full Gospel co-pastor, and Andrew Hamblin, another "Snake Salvation" participant, saw the rattler bite Coots on the hand. "Andrew said he looked at him and said 'sweet Jesus' and it was over," Winn said. "He didn't die right then, but he just went out and never woke back up." Church members took him home.

Uganda anti-gay bill signed into law

On Feb. 25, a day after Uganda passed even harsher anti-gay laws, the Red Pepper tabloid newspaper printed a list of 200 people it called the country's "top homos," according to CNN.

President Yoweri Museveni signed the bill, telling CNN, "They're disgusting. What sort of people are they?"

Homosexuality is illegal in 38 African nations, CNN reported.

NPR reported statements that the bill was composed with the help of

American evangelicals with close ties to its Ugandan sponsors. "There are these factions of the evangelical community in the U.S. that believe they've more or less lost the fight against 'the homosexual agenda,'" said Malika Zouhali Worrall, co-director of the documentary "Call Me Kuchu." (Kuchu is a word for "queer" in Uganda.) "Therefore, they're trying to preempt it in other countries."

A miracle. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Frank Lucas, R-Okla., reacting to passage of a farm bill which would cut about \$800 million a year from the food stamp program

Associated Press, 1-30-14

A miracle. Justin Carper, Patterson Springs, N.C., on the minor injury his daughter suffered when her 3-year-old brother shot her though the shoulder with a 9-mm handgun he found on Carper's dresser

Gaston Gazette, 2-6-14

[L]iberals are really trying to make it difficult for Christians and conservatives to have a voice in public education.

David Bradley, Texas Board of Educa-

tion, on the board's vote to lessen the influence of volunteers with minimal expertise to review public school textbooks

Associated Press, 1-31-14

Bill, I want to tell you, there is a book that tells where atoms come from, and it starts out, "In the beginning . . ." Creationist Ken Ham, debating Bill "the Science Guy" Nye

Associated Press, 2-5-14

Thank you. Please, everyone have a seat. Giving all praise and honor to God, who brought us here this morning.

President Barack Obama, after being introduced at the National Prayer Breakfast at the Washington Hilton

whitehouse.gov, 1-6-14

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION foundation

"The Bible and the Church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the way of woman's emancipation."
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EMMA GOLDMAN

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Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the nation's largest association of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics) working since 1978 to keep religious dogma out of our civil laws. Phone for a free copy of our newspaper, *Freethought Today*, and the brochure "Why Women Need Freedom From Religion."

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I would like to join. (Dues & donations are tax-deductible. Membership includes 10 issues of *Freethought Today* newspaper.)
 I'd like a copy of "Woe To The Women: The Bible Tells Me So," \$15 I'd like a copy of "Women Without Superstition," \$25.
 ANNUAL DUES: Individual: \$40 Household: \$50 Sustaining: \$100 Life Member: \$1,000 "After Life": \$5,000

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Make check payable to "FFRF" (U.S. \$\$ only). Or join online at ffrf.org/donate.
 FFRF protects membership confidentiality and does not divulge, rent, sell, or give away its mailing list.

Reduced version of FFRF ad in Ms. Magazine, Spring 2014.

Freethought on the Road



Spokane, Wash.

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker joined FFRF's chapter, the Inland Northwest Freethought Society, at its Feb. 9 meeting, where he and a history/religious studies professor from Gonzaga University did a point/counterpoint. At left is Tech. Sgt. James Davis, an FFRF and INFS member who's been very active for over a decade in fighting unfair religious practices in the Air Force. During each of his four oaths of enlistment, he has stated "So help me gods" (plural) to make a point, but humorously.



Freethought Hall being 'born again,' thanks to donors



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker and FFRF's newest staff attorney, Sam Grover, look over newly installed floors in Freethought Hall's 9,000 square feet additions.

This listing reports donations received from Jan. 24, 2014, to Feb. 23, 2014 for FFRF's building fund to enlarge office space in downtown Madison, Wis. The listing is not cumulative except for the total.

Donations received before Feb. 23 were listed in previous issues. Freethought Today will list subsequent donations in future issues. To protect privacy, contributors will not be named unless they grant express permission.

Names of the 18 largest donors will appear on a wall of honor. Names of other donors who contribute \$5,000 or more will appear on a lobby plaque. To make a tax-deductible donation or put your name or message on a vestibule tile or paving stone, go to:

ffrf.org/donate/donate-to-ffrf-building-fund

Thanks to *all* donors for making FFRF's much-needed expansion a real-

ity!

- Glenn Reynolds, CA, \$5,000
- Anonymous, AZ, \$1,000
- Anonymous, TN, \$1,000
- Anonymous, AK, \$500
- Jay Huemmer, WI, \$100
- William and Margie Neff, OH, \$50
- Stefanie Moritz and Vince Jenkins, WI, \$50

Subtotal \$7,700
New Cumulative Total: \$1,731,629.56

Bill and Billie Jean Smith, CO, previously listed as Anonymous, have since granted their permission to acknowledge their generous \$1,000 contribution by name.

'And on the eighth day he rested'

The Humanist Fellowship of San Diego presented Dan Barker with this specially engraved bottle of wine at a reception in his honor Feb. 11. The bottle (with matching glasses for the 50-plus guests) was presented by Michael McCarron, an HFSD board member who owns Etching Expressions. It depicts Dan on a surfboard in front of the university where Dan debated the next evening.

Dan's February whirlwind tour (seven events in seven days) included a talk about "Losing Faith in Faith" at the Boise, Idaho, Unitarian Fellowship on Feb. 6; a "Does God Exist?" debate at Boise State University the next night before 200 people; a talk about "How Darwinism Helps Us Be Moral" for the "Darwin on the Palouse" events in Moscow, Idaho, on Feb. 8 (sponsored by the Palouse Coalition of Reason and Freethought Moscow, a Secular Student Alliance group); a debate about "Christianity: the only truth," with Gonzaga [Catholic] University professor Eric Cunningham at a luncheon event sponsored by FFRF's Spokane chapter; a talk about "Morality without God" for the Philosophy Club (a Secular Student Alliance group) at North Idaho College in Couer d'Alene on Feb. 10; the San Diego reception at a private residence; and last, Dan's debate with a Catholic apologist before an overflow crowd of 300 at the University of San Diego, a Catholic college.



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker (background left, shaking hands) debated apologist Trent Horn of Catholic Answers at the University of San Diego on Feb. 12. The topic was "God: Supreme Being or Imaginary Friend?"

Register now! Raleigh Regional Convention

Freedom From Religion in the Bible Belt – May 2-3



Stuart Watson



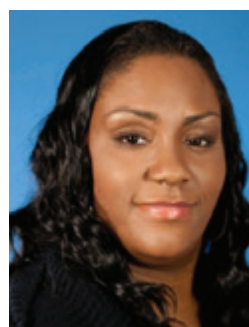
Michael Nugent of Atheist Ireland will be in Raleigh to speak, but Boris likely will be purring at home in Dublin with Nugent's five other felines. Photo: Chris Johnson



Candace R.M. Gorham



Matt Killingsworth



Mandisa Thomas



Todd Stiefel



Max Nielson



Bart Ehrman

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and the Triangle Freethought Society, its Raleigh-area chapter, will “win hearts and minds for reason and secularism” on the weekend of May 2-3 at the Sheraton Raleigh Hotel, 421 South Salisbury St., in downtown Raleigh, N.C.

The conference is for the convenience of Southern and East Coast FFRF'ers but all are welcome. Plan now to avoid disappointment. The convention will provide both edification and

entertainment. Phone the Raleigh Sheraton at 1-800-325-3535 by April 4 and identify yourself as a member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation to ensure the convention room rate of \$129 single/double, \$139 triple, \$149 quad and \$169 club, plus tax.

Entertainment includes **The Village Atheists**, a local comedy troupe; **Dan Barker**; FFRF co-president, aka “The Singing Atheist,” who’ll entertain at the piano; a complimentary cake reception; and two group meals, including Saturday’s Non-Prayer Breakfast and a drawing for “clean,” pre-“In God We Trust” currency. Filmmaker **Scott Burdick’s** 25-minute documentary “Sophia Goes to the Good News Club” will air, featuring local student **Sophia Winkler**, who will receive a student activist

award at the event.

Speakers include **Stuart Watson**, investigative reporter at WCNC-TV (NBC) Charlotte, who will speak on his megachurch abuse exposés; **Bart Ehrman**, well-known professor at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and author of *Did Jesus Exist?* and *Forged*; **Mandisa Thomas**, founder and president of Atlanta-based Black Nonbelievers Inc.; **Todd Stiefel**, a Raleigh local and head of the Stiefel Freethought Foundation, which has sparked much activism; writer **Michael Nugent**, founder and chair of Atheist Ireland; and **Max Nielson**, intrepid secular student activist and lead plaintiff in FFRF’s lawsuit against graduation and school board prayer in South Carolina.

A panel of former clergy, emceed

by FFRF’s Barker (who’s also on the Clergy Project board), will include **Candace R.M. Gorham**, a local chapter member who left the ministry and is author of *The Ebony Exodus Project: Why Some Black Women Are Walking Out on Religion — and Others Should Too*; **Matt Killingsworth**, a former Pentecostal minister with a B.A. in theology, and **Randy Bender**, a former Evangelical Lutheran Church of America pastor.

The conference will be emceed by Barker and **Annie Laurie Gaylor** of FFRF and will draw on chapter activists, who will run a “Meet and Greet” social where participants can meet speakers and activists.

Formal proceedings start at 7 p.m. Friday, May 2 (dinner on your own) with registration opening up earlier. Two optional group meals will begin and end Saturday (with Saturday lunch on your own). The event will conclude Saturday night after the banquet dinner and final programs.

Meals. A classic breakfast with scrambled eggs, bacon, hash browns, juice, coffee, tea and pastry rolls is \$20 (inclusive of 23% service and 7.75% sales tax). **Vegetarian option** will substitute a tomato for meat. A **vegan option** is available. All options are gluten-free, skipping the bread basket.

Dinner of \$40 inclusive includes choices of **Chicken Saltimbocca**, a chicken breast stuffed with sliced prosciutto, sage and fresh mozzarella served with penne with garlic cream sauce and sautéed asparagus; or **Grilled Salmon** or **Farm-Fresh vegetable plate**. The vegetable plate and salmon are gluten-free. All entrees include garden salad, warm rolls with butter, chef’s choice dessert, sweet iced tea and Starbucks coffee.

Registration costs. \$50 for FFRF member, \$55 for non-FFRF spouse/companion accompanying member, \$90 for nonmember (includes \$40 to become FFRF member) and \$5 for students. Registration at the door is planned but early registration and meal orders must be received at FFRF’s office **no later than Friday, April 25**.

FFRF’s national convention takes place in late October on the opposite coast, in Los Angeles.

Check for updates or register online: ffrf.org/raleighcon2014

Return with payment to: FFRF, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701

Freedom From Religion Foundation's Raleigh Mini-Convention May 2-3, 2014 Raleigh, North Carolina

Make checks payable to “FFRF”



Number registering	
_____ FFRF member registration(s) @ \$50 per person	\$ _____
_____ Non-member spouse or companion accompanying member @ \$55.....	\$ _____
_____ Non-member registration(s) @ \$90.....	\$ _____
(Includes \$40 annual FFRF Membership)	
_____ Student registration(s) @ \$5	\$ _____
_____ Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast @ \$20* per person	\$ _____
_____ Classic _____ Classic Vegetarian _____ Vegan	
All gluten-free minus bread basket	
_____ Saturday Night Dinner @ \$40* per person	\$ _____
_____ Chicken _____ Salmon _____ Vegetarian/Vegan	
_____ Salmon and Veg./Vegan gluten-free	Total: \$ _____
* Meal prices include 23% gratuity & 7.75% sales tax	

Name(s) _____ Please include names of all registrants for nametags

Address _____

City/State/ZIP _____ Please include phone/email (in case we have a question about your registration)

Mark Your Calendar
FFRF National Convention
Los Angeles Biltmore
Oct. 24 – 26, 2014