

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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August 21, 2017

***Sent via U.S. Mail and Email***  
[governor@ky.gov](mailto:governor@ky.gov)

The Honorable Matt Bevin  
Governor  
700 Capitol Avenue Suite 100  
Frankfort, KY 40601

Re: Prayer patrol proposal

Dear Governor Bevin:

We are writing to you on again behalf of the largest freethought association in North America. FFRF has more than 29,000 members, including members in Kentucky and a Kentucky chapter. FFRF works to uphold the constitutional principle of the separation of between state and church, and educates the public on matters relating to nontheism.

We wrote to you on June 9 regarding your factually deficient proposal to fight crime with “prayer walks.” In that letter, we explained not only that prayer will not lower crime, but that increased religiosity in society is actually linked to increased levels of all manner of societal ills, including: violent crime and homicide, poverty, obesity, teen pregnancy, and infant mortality.<sup>1</sup>

Despite these indisputable findings, you suggested that the violence in Charlottesville is the result of our government not indoctrinating public school children in the bible. In an August 15 radio interview, you said:

“When you go back a couple of hundred years, in most instances the only textbooks that were in our public schools were the Bible. And it’s interesting, the more we’ve removed any sense of spiritual obligation or moral higher authority or absolute right and wrong, the more we’ve removed things that are biblically taught from society, the more we’ve seen the kind of mayhem that we were just discussing.”

As an initial matter, we reiterate that it is a fundamental principle of Establishment Clause jurisprudence that our government cannot in any way promote, advance, or otherwise endorse religion. The Supreme Court has said, “The touchstone for our analysis is the principle that the ‘First Amendment mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.’” *McCreary County v. ACLU*, 545 U.S. 844, 860 (2005), (quoting *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97, 104 (1968); *Everson v. Board of Ed. of Ewing*, 330 U.S. 1, 15-16 (1947); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38, 53 (1985)).

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<sup>1</sup> In a synthesis of the latest social scientific research concerning some of these issues see Zuckerman, Phil. 2009. ‘Atheism, Secularity, and Well-Being: How the Findings of Social Science Counter Negative Stereotypes and Assumptions.’ *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 3 Issue 6, 949-971.

In your interview you complained about “the sanitization of history,” which you mentioned in the context of removing Confederate monuments. You and the host seemed to agree that the problems in America stem from removal of the bible from public schools in the 1960s or 1970s. But the bible was removed in many states much earlier, if it was there at all.

Your remarks appear to reference the 1963 Supreme Court case, *Sch. Dist. of Abington Twp. v. Schempp*, which banned school-sponsored devotional bible reading in public schools. 374 U.S. 203 (1963). *Schempp* was certainly not the first case to remove bible preaching or recitation from the public schools. Many state courts booted out the bible prior to 1963. See, e.g., *Weiss v. District Board*, 44 N.W. 967, 981 (1890) (Wisconsin); *Herold v. Parish Board of School Directors*, 136 La. 1034, 1049-1050, 68 So. 116, 121, L.R.A.1915D, 941 (1915) (Louisiana); *State v. Scheve*, 65 Neb. 853, 91 N.W. 846 (1902) *aff'd*, 65 Neb. 853, 93 N.W. 169 (1903) (Nebraska); *Tudor v. Board of Education*, 14 N.J. 31, 48-52, 100 A.2d 857, 867-868, 45 A.L.R.2d 729 (1953) (New Jersey); *Brown v. Orange County Board of Public Instruction*, 128 So.2d 181, 185 (Fla. App., 1960) (Florida).

As one state supreme court justice memorably wrote: “There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state, as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed. Let it once enter our common schools, they would be destroyed.” *Weiss*, 44 N.W. at 981.

For more than 65 years, the United States Supreme Court, consistent with this nation’s history of secular schools, has ruled against religious indoctrination through schools. *McCullum v. Board of Education*, 333 U.S. 203 (1948). Public students are a captive audience, and our public schools exist to educate, not to proselytize.

Additionally, the Kentucky State Constitution (Section 5) guarantees: “No preference shall ever be given by law to any religious sect, society or denomination; nor to any particular creed, mode of worship or system of ecclesiastical polity; nor shall any person be compelled to attend any place or worship, to contribute to the erection or maintenance of any such place, . . .”

You suggested in the interview that, before the 1963 *Schempp* decision, the bible was the only textbook used in public schools. If so, why did the *The School Review*, a journal dedicated to secondary education (1893–1979), debate “the adoption of the Bible as a textbook in public schools,” in 1909?<sup>2</sup> Nor was religion in public schools a settled and accepted norm. According to one scholar, between 1800 and 1920 there were at least 18 public school prayer and bible reading cases and 15 cases involving public aid to sectarian schools.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, religion is and has always been divisive, especially when mixed with our pluralistic school system.

### **The bible is a violent, racist book that has inspired violent, racist organizations.**

Ironically, the bible that you want to unconstitutionally interject in public schools encourages violence and racism. Inculcating more American children in the ways of the bible would not have

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<sup>2</sup> Isaac Thomas, “The Bible as a Textbook in the Public High Schools,” *The School Review*, Vol. 17, No. 10 (Dec., 1909), pp. 705-712. At <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1077397> concluding, “adopting the book as a textbook . . . the high schools are shut out from.”

<sup>3</sup> H. Frank Way, “Death of the Christian Nation: The Judiciary and Church-State Relations,” *Journal of Church and State*, vol. 29, issue 3 (1987), 509-529 at 509-11. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcs/29.3.509>

prevented Charlottesville. Perhaps the bloody Civil War our nation fought might have been prevented had not the bible been invoked to sanctify slavery. Clergy, many Christian denominations and slaveholders could and did turn to their God and their bible for justification of slaveholding. Clear rules countenancing or dictating slavery appear in the Mosaic law. Among them, Exodus 21. In Genesis 9, the biblical deity first ordained slavery, condemning of Ham to be “a servant of servants.” A righteous priest who murdered a mixed-race couple was rewarded by the God of the bible for his “zealous” hate crime. Numbers 25. The Jesus of the New Testament left the laws of slavery intact. In 1 Timothy, Paul tells slaves to honor their owners. In the Epistle of Paul to Philemon, Paul sends a slave back to the servitude he had fled. In several New Testament passages, such as Ephesians 6:5, servants are told to be obedient “with fear and trembling.” The parables of Jesus are filled with references to slaves and masters, none of which denigrates slavery in any way. Jesus displayed his compassion by insisting that some slaves should not be beaten as hard as others. Luke 12:47. The bible prohibits intermarriage between the races or sects. *See, e.g.*, Deut. 7:1–6; Nehemiah 13:23–30.

In terms of violence, no white supremacist thugs could one-up the god of the bible, who regularly commits and orders genocides (just a few examples: Genesis 6:6–8, Deut. 20:16–17, Deut. 2:32–34, 1 Samuel 15:2–3, Joshua 10:28–40).

Telling believers that they are favored by an omnipotent being—that they are part of the chosen few—and others are enemies who should be slaughtered can lead to elitism in its more sinister strains, including racism. The bible is rife with such harmful supremacist teachings: “The Lord your God has chosen **you out of all the peoples on earth** to be his people, his treasured possession.” Deut. 7:6

It should be no surprise that this hate-filled book has spawned hateful ideologies and groups to perpetuate those ideologies. The Ku Klux Klan is and has always been, a Christian group. Klansmen began burning crosses “to spread the light of Jesus into the countryside.”<sup>4</sup> Hitler was a Roman Catholic and his soldiers wore a religious slogan on their buckle belts (*Gott mit uns* [God with us]).

In an interview published the same day you gave your radio interview, Iliá Calderón, a black Hispanic journalist, interviewed a North Carolina KKK chapter on its home turf. These moral monsters told Calderón they were going to chase her and other blacks (except he used the n-word) out of the country. Then he amended his statement: “We’re going to burn you out. . . . We killed six million Jews the last time. Eleven million is nothing.” Calderón asked a pointed question:<sup>5</sup>

**Calderón: “Are you a hate group? How do you define yourselves?”**

**KKK: “We define ourselves as a Christian group.”**

Children don’t need more of the bible to understand tolerance. They need less.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/klansville-faq/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.univision.com/univision-news/united-states/im-not-a-racist-the-answer-a-kkk-leader-gave-to-ilia-calderon-video>. *See also* [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/08/21/kkk-leader-threatens-to-burn-latina-journalist-the-first-black-person-on-his-property/?utm\\_term=.f1d2f2588bb8](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2017/08/21/kkk-leader-threatens-to-burn-latina-journalist-the-first-black-person-on-his-property/?utm_term=.f1d2f2588bb8)

Finally, it's worth understanding not only that religion and the bible are violent, but also that they lead to violence when forced into the public schools. American Christians rioted over which bible to teach in public schools. In the 1840s, riots far worse than Charlottesville broke out in Philadelphia as Protestants and Catholics fought over which version of the bible ought to be taught in public schools. Catholics argued that the state had no power to tell children to read the King James Version of the bible and the Protestant majority was incensed. All told, some 20 people were killed, another five dozen injured, hundreds fled their home, and churches and property were burned down.<sup>6</sup>

If you want less violence, less religion is a good place to start. Your inflammatory comments were short on facts, history, and reality, much less a reverence for the First Amendment and its Establishment Clause. Please do not misuse your public office to promote your personal religion. You should be employing your public office instead to reinforce, not denigrate, treasured constitutional principles. Religion divides our one nation, indivisible; it does not unite it.

Very truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dan Barker Annie Laurie Gaylor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor

DB/ALG:als

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<sup>6</sup> Russell Frank Weigley, *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*, 357 (W. W. Norton & Company, 1982).