

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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January 31, 2019

The Honorable Mike DeWine
Governor of Ohio
Office of the Governor
Riffe Center, 30th Floor
77 South High Street
Columbus, OH 43215-6117

Re: Swearing on Nine Bibles at a Religious Ceremony

Dear Governor DeWine:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation to object on behalf of our nearly 800 Ohio members to your decision to begin your time as governor with a religiously divisive swearing-in ceremony. FFRF is a national educational nonprofit with more than 31,000 members, including more than 700 in Ohio. FFRF's purposes are to uphold the constitutional separation between church and state, and to educate the public on matters related to nontheism.

On January 14, you chose to be officially sworn in at a religious ceremony held in your home, with Christian hymns, prayers, and an overemphasis on religion that included swearing in on not one, not two, but nine Christian bibles. This unfortunately conveys a fealty not to the United States, but rather to your own religious beliefs. Instead of swearing in on nine bibles, it would have been far more appropriate to swear in on the United States Constitution, a godless and entirely secular document, whose only references to religion are exclusionary.

The bible contains violent, sexist, homophobic and racist models of behavior that FFRF members find personally repugnant and that historically have been used to justify or excuse the most infamous conduct, including the execution of tens of thousands, if not millions of women as "witches," because of one bible version, the justification of four centuries of barbaric, race-based slavery in the New World, and religious genocide around the world.

The United States was first among nations to separate religion from government. Our founders did not claim a pipeline to a divinity, investing sovereignty not in a deity but in "We, the People." This wisdom has largely protected the United States from the religious slaughter and persecution rife around the world and historically whenever the government and religion are aligned:

"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." *State ex rel. Weiss v. Dist. Bd. of Sch. Dist. No. 8 of City of Edgerton*, 76 Wis. 177, 44 N.W. 967, 981 (1890).

Today 24 percent of Americans¹ are nonreligious, making the nonreligious the fastest-growing religious demographic by religious identification. Your decision to symbolically enmesh religion with your purely civil and secular authority as governor sends a clear and inappropriate message to nonreligious and non-Christian Ohioans that we are not first-class citizens, and to Christians that they are favored citizens. We urge you in the future to honor our secular form of government and keep divisive and unnecessary religion out of state-sponsored events.

Very truly,

Annie Laurie Gaylor Dan Barker

¹ Robert P. Jones & Daniel Cox, *America's Changing Religious Identity*, PUBLIC RELIGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE (Sept. 6, 2017), available at www.prrri.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PRRI-Religion-Report.pdf.