

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**FFRF student
activist awards**

PAGE 14 – 15



**Why Millennial
women are
embracing atheism**

PAGE 16



**Meet Tom Cara,
president of FFRF
Metro Chicago**

PAGE 2

Vol. 34 No. 5

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

June / July 2017

Bible program suspended in West Virginia

**Mercer County Schools
took action in response
to FFRF's lawsuit**

A school district in West Virginia has suspended its “Bible in the Schools” classes next school year following FFRF’s lawsuit against its egregiously unconstitutional program.

FFRF, along with two parents of young children, brought the case earlier this year against Mercer County Schools. The lawsuit has received national attention, including a segment on “CBS This Morning” and coverage in the Washington Post.

Members of the Mercer County Board of Education approved the suspension at their regular meeting on May 23. The “Bible in the Schools” program, which is offered in 15 elementary schools and three middle schools, is financed by donations, but administered by the school system.

Mercer County Schools Superintendent Deborah Akers announced that she wants to include “community members and religious leaders” in reviewing the class and recommended suspending the classes until the review was completed.

FFRF is pleased at this first step in addressing long-standing violations of the constitutional rights of children and parents. Starting this fall, it appears that students will receive an appropriate education free from religious instruction within the Mercer County public schools system.

Contending that the bible classes are not legally defensible, FFRF will continue to pursue all legal remedies available against

See Bible in the schools on page 3

FFRF v. Trump



Photo by Associated Press

President Trump shows off the “religious freedom” executive order he signed on May 4 in the Rose Garden, surrounded by members of the faith community and Vice President Pence.

‘Religious liberty’ executive order faces legal challenge

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has legally challenged President Trump over his “religious liberty” executive order. The order and Trump’s repeated statements clearly communicate to churches that they can now endorse political candidates from the pulpit.

FFRF’s lawsuit was filed on May 4 in the U.S. District Court, Western District of Wisconsin. FFRF and co-plaintiffs FFRF Executive Directors Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor assert that Trump

**Why did FFRF sue Trump,
when others did not?**

See page 10

has used this order to usher in a new era of church politicking to the exclusion of secular organizations.

The Associated Press, The New York Times and The Hill, among others, published stories about FFRF’s lawsuit.

Trump signed the executive

order with great fanfare during a National Day of Prayer ceremony in the White House Rose Garden before a largely clerical audience. Trump said: “This executive order directs the IRS not to unfairly target churches and religious organizations for political speech. No one should be censoring sermons or targeting pastors. [Standing ovation.] . . . In America we do not fear people speaking freely from the pulpit, we embrace it.”

See Trump on page 10

Ethics violations by Texas AG Paxton?

FFRF is investigating possible ethics violations by Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton to advance the interests of First Liberty Institute, a religious rights advocacy organization.

Last year, Paxton recruited two First Liberty attorneys to work in the attorney general’s office. Jeff Mateer, formerly Liberty Institute general counsel, was hired as first assistant attorney general in March 2016, where he remains. Hiram Sasser, First Liberty’s deputy chief counsel, was hired as chief of staff in April 2016. Although Paxton announced Sasser would serve for at least 90 days, he served for just over a month before leaving, citing a family medical emergency. Sasser was back in action at his position with First

Liberty by early June 2016.

FFRF has filed a records request with the attorney general’s office, seeking records of conversations and correspondence with First Liberty.

“It’s clear that the attorney general has a close relationship with this religious advocacy organization,” notes FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “But what we’re concerned about is whether he’s abused his position as attorney general to further First Liberty’s religious agenda.”

FFRF’s records request comes on the same day that Paxton has moved to intervene in a lawsuit between FFRF and its plaintiffs, and defendant, Montgomery County Justice of the Peace Wayne

See Texas AG on page 3



Ken Paxton



FFRF runs ad in NY Times

On May 25, FFRF ran a full-page ad in The New York Times informing the readers that America “is not a nation of believers,” in reference to President Trump’s commencement speech at Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University.

“We are one nation under a godless Constitution,” the ad reads. “We the people’ are free to believe or disbelieve.”

The ad lampoons Trump’s signing of a May 4 executive order signaling that tax-exempt churches are now free to politick from the pulpit.

To see the ad, turn to page 11

‘Does everyone here really believe this stuff?’

Name: Tom Cara.
Where I live: Niles, Ill., a suburb of Chicago.
Where and when I was born: Oak Park, Ill., in 1958.
Family: I have been married for 36 years to a wonderful and extremely patient woman. We also have two grown children.
Education: I received a B.S. degree in sociology from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and then a master’s degree in marketing communications from Roosevelt University in Chicago. My early years in college were spent in confusion, not knowing what I really wanted to do after realizing my first chosen major in the natural sciences was not within my academic capabilities. I then settled on a degree in sociology with a concentration in criminal justice, with the intention of becoming a police officer. Upon returning home, I concluded that law enforcement was perhaps not my cup of tea. Enter another state of confusion in my life regarding a career path. My father, who had been in the advertising business, suggested I give that a try. Because I had always enjoyed working with numbers and statistics, I was attracted to the demographic analysis component of the media planning side of the business. This compelled me to enter the marketing communications program at Roosevelt University.

Occupation: I am retired from a 30-year career in the advertising profession. I worked as a media planner/buyer, responsible for performing quantitative and qualitative research in making recommendations to clients on where they should place their advertising. Upon receiving my master’s degree, I was offered a position in the media departments of the Chicago offices of advertising firms J. Walter Thompson and Foote, Cone & Belding, where I worked on such accounts as the Quaker Oats Company, Gerber Foods, Northern Telecom Communications, S.C. Johnson, and Godfather’s Pizza. And yes, I did get to meet then Godfather’s President Herman Cain, long before he became a presidential candidate (although, as Mr. Cain would say so eloquently, “I don’t have facts to back this up!”).
After many years of working in the large corporate environment, I decided I wanted something a little more



Tom Cara is the president of the FFRF Chicago Metropolitan Chapter.

slow-paced, so I began working at smaller advertising/marketing shops in the suburbs.
When our children were young, I made the decision to become a private contractor, which allowed me to work out of our home and take care of our kids. I was self-employed for 17 years and retired at the end of 2013, although I still have a client or two who like to pull me out of retirement on occasion to do work for them.

I met with FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor in the spring of 2012 to begin formation of the FFRF Metropolitan Chicago Chapter. I have served as president of this local chapter since its inception. Our group, with all its wonderful members, will be celebrating its fifth anniversary this year. Though I have enjoyed every minute of the challenge, even the operation of a small nonprofit can seem almost like a full-time job.

Person in history I admire and why: I’m not actually someone who likes to cast too much admiration on a single person. But if I were compelled to give a name, it would have to be Jonas Salk. The selfless gift he gave to humanity with his polio vaccine, and then sharing it with the world without any thought of personal gain, was the kind of humanistic act we need a lot more of in this world. His example of altruism is something all school children should be taught at the earliest age possible.

A quotation I like: “The pursuit of truth will set you free, even if you never catch up with it.” — Clarence Darrow. I can’t imagine this statement being more important than it is today.
Another quote I am fond of is by physicist Steven Weinberg: “With or without religion,

good people can behave well and bad people can do evil. But for good people to do evil — that takes religion.”
These are a few of my favorite things: The Rocky Mountains; dogs; taking early evening walks with my wife; bicycling; model railroading (I have replicas of two FFRF billboards on my layout!); classical music (but not opera!).

I also very much enjoy having intellectual, rational, yet non-confrontational discussions about religious faith with believers. I get such a lift out of asking the faithful direct questions about why they believe what they believe.

These are not: People of religious faith who just automatically presume that everyone else shares a belief in their god; rude drivers; politicians who put party before country and personal ideology before the Constitution.

My doubts about religion started: While I was technically raised a Christian (Lutheran to be exact), religion was never high on the priority list in my family. My mother forced me to go to confirmation class during my two years of junior high, but we never went to church, or prayed at meals (except on an occasional Thanksgiving), or even bothered to mention Jesus at all during Christmas or Easter.

But my religious skepticism began taking hold during high school while taking a language arts elective called “Rhetoric and Logic.” For the class, we had to read the play “Inherit the Wind,” which, of course, is based on the Scopes “Monkey” trial. This was my first exposure to any questioning of the bible. It was then I started to realize how nonsensical it was to believe in our creation as the work of a biblical god. Once my mother began to suspect my growing skepticism, we had one serious discussion on the subject. She asked me how I thought everything came to be if not for God. So,

I responded by asking her where God came from. She could not provide me with a satisfactory answer, and we never talked religion again.

For many years into my adulthood, I was what one would consider an “uneducated skeptic” who didn’t place much importance on my nonbelief. But interestingly, what truly drove me from religion was when our children were young and my wife began taking them to church and Sunday school. It was then I decided to finally give religion a try to see if I was missing something. It was my 10 years or so in the church that truly educated me as to the foolishness of these beliefs and rituals. As time went on, I would sit in the pew, looking around, asking myself, “Does everyone here really believe this stuff?” I also began to realize there was no substance behind what the minister was preaching — only words of comfort encouraging reliance on something that most likely doesn’t even exist.

And I also began to find it curious why all the less desirable passages in the bible were so conveniently ignored.

So, actually, it was my time spent in the church that compelled me to learn more about the origins of the major religions, which then led me to read Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris. And the rest, as they say, is history!

So, my journey from Christian identity to atheism was not as difficult as perhaps for most. It was not a painful breakup to leave Christ, since the guy was never a part of my life to begin with. I now proudly identify as an atheist to friends, family, acquaintances, co-workers, or whomever, should they choose to inject their religion into my face. There is nothing today that generates more guilt within me than staying silent and allowing people to think I share their irrational beliefs.

Before I die: My goal before I return to oblivion is to finish writing the book I’ve been working on for the past four years, which is a personal deliberation on the irrationalism of religion. The purpose of the book is to encourage critical thinking among those of moderately religious faith, and those who are “on the fence” between faith and atheism. I also have an idea running through my head for a second book, which would be a fictional story with an atheist theme and protagonist.

Ways I promote freethought: Starting the FFRF Metropolitan Chicago Chapter has provided me with the greatest outlet to promote freethought. I am very proud of the accomplishments of the chapter, with our annual public forum displays in both winter and spring countering religious imagery and promoting non-theism, and also, the “Out of the Closet” billboard campaign we generated with the help of FFRF. I receive a great deal of inspiration from the incredible members of our chapter, who are some of the most honest, generous, helpful and rational people I have ever met, and make me proud to be a freethinker!

ffrf

FREETHOUGHT
TODAY

Published by Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

P.O. Box 750
info@ffrf.org
P 608.256.8900

Madison WI 53701
FFRF.org
F 608.204.0422

EDITOR
EDITOR EMERITUS
EXECUTIVE PUBLISHER
GRAPHIC DESIGNER
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
CONTRIBUTORS

P.J. Slinger fttoday@ffrf.org
Bill Dunn
Annie Laurie Gaylor
Roger Daleiden
Amit Pal

Philip Appleman, Ashlynn Bradley, Dan Barker, Jack Doe,
Kyle Fitzpatrick, Molly Hanson, Chris Line, Seth Manning,
Peter Opitz, Lauryn Seering, Andrew Seidel, Jake Swenson

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

Freethought Today caption contest!



Freethought Today is debuting our new caption contest. To enter, please write a humorous or witty caption to go along with this photo. Email your response to caption@ffrf.org by July 7.

The winner, chosen by FFRF staff, will get an “Unabashed Atheist” T-shirt! We will announce the winner and top runners-up in the August issue. Have fun!

FFRF thanks 37 Lifers, 4 Immortals

FFRF is excited to announce and welcome its 37 newest Life Members and four new Immortals.

Erica Byrne, Stephen Beckham, Allen P. Wilkinson and Craig Fehrenbacher are now Immortals, a designation for those kind members who have contacted FFRF to report they have made provisions for FFRF in their estate planning.

Our 37 newest Life Members include two who wished to remain anonymous, plus: Andrea L. Andersen, Zuzana Bochar (a gift from fellow Life Member Ron Bochar), Robert W. Braam, Erica Byrne, Eric R. Carlson, Kenneth Edgar, Christopher Elliott, Rosemarie Foltz, Pamela M. Halverson, Peter Hanauer, Linda Hartig, Sheryl L. Holland, Paul and Hildi Hoopes, Lois Johnson, Karen Ruth Keatley, Charles B. Keeling, Susan Kennedy, Chris E. Kramer, William J. Kritzmire, Alan Lunemann, Stephan Marosvary, Frances Huggard Migliaccio, Fred Phillips, Erin Roethlisberger, Dolores A. Salomon, Janine Schenck, Scot Schneider, Matthew S. Schultz, Jesse Sheridan, Eileen Silverstein, Arthur Sine (a gift from his dad and fellow Life Member Philip Sine), Salvador F. Sola III, Clinton B. Walker and Elizabeth Wilson.

Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000, designated as membership or membership renewal, and are deductible for income-tax purposes.

The states represented are California, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, and Washington.

Texas AG

Continued from page 1

Mack, who is represented by First Liberty. The case challenges Mack’s practice of holding courtroom prayer on Establishment Clause grounds.

Paxton previously issued an opinion in the Mack case after Mack, represented by First Liberty, appeared before the State Commission on Judicial Conduct for a hearing on whether his courtroom prayers violated state judicial ethics rules. Paxton’s ruling closely mirrored the arguments and the wording used by First Liberty to defend Mack at his hearing in November 2015.

FFRF’s records request probes other connections between Paxton and First Liberty, including their joint endorsement of “Project 75,” an organization that aims to advance “traditional values” and bring “the biblical worldview to the forefront of American life and politics.” Paxton and First Liberty Senior Counsel Michael Berry jointly announced launching Project 75 at First Baptist Church of Denison last August.

Paxton also credits First Liberty’s executive director, Kelly Shackelford, with encouraging him to run for the state House seat he won in 2002. “While Paxton may credit First Liberty’s director with his career trajectory and may be close to the organization,” says FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, “that doesn’t mean he can use his government position to help First Liberty with its private court cases.”

Bible in the schools

Continued from page 1

the school system to ensure compliance with the First Amendment.

“The Supreme Court has spoken directly on this type of public school indoctrination and has ruled that public schools may not engage in it,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Religion in schools builds walls between children and leads to ostracism of minorities — as experienced by our plaintiff Elizabeth Deal, who had to remove her child from the school.”

Deal said she joined the suit because she believes in the separation of church and state.

“When something is wrong,” she told the Washington Post, “you have to stand up against it.”

FFRF’s legal complaint lists examples of the proselytizing curriculum. Lesson 2 promotes creationism by claiming humans and dinosaurs co-existed. Students are asked to “picture Adam being able

to crawl up on the back of a dinosaur! He and Eve could have their own personal water slide! Wouldn’t that be so wild!”

Lynne White, a former School Board member and mother of two sons who went to Mercer schools, told the Washington Post that the class was obviously an Establishment Clause violation.

“As a person of faith myself, I don’t see any problem with having an after-school bible program,” she said. “But to me this seems a pretty clear violation of the Constitution.”

FFRF and the parent plaintiffs are continuing with the case. The court will hear arguments from both sides on June 19.

FFRF v. Mercer County Board of Education (Case# 1:17-cv-00642) was filed in the U.S. District Court in the Southern District of West Virginia before Judge David A. Faber.

California school board appeals FFRF’s suit win

The Chino Valley Unified School Board has filed an appeal after losing a lawsuit to FFRF over board members’ practice of praying during meetings.

The board voted 3-2 to appeal FFRF’s win, claiming that a district court judge’s attempt to curtail prayer is a violation of their First Amendment rights. The appeal was filed April 26 in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeal.

“We are requesting reversal of the order in its entirety,” said Robert Tyler of Tyler & Bursch law firm, which is handling the case for the board members.

FFRF sued the School Board in November 2014, noting when board members invoke God’s name and pray, they violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. Last year, U.S. District Judge Jesus Bernal agreed, demanding board members desist from “reciting prayers, bible readings and proselytizing at board meetings.”

According to the original suit filed by FFRF, board member James Na “often injects religion into his comments” at the ends of meetings, and board member Andrew Cruz regularly closed meetings with a bible reading, in addition to the prayers used to open meeting.

After losing at the district court level, the school district was on the hook for nearly \$200,000 in legal fees. Chino Valley Unified serves nearly 30,000 students.

OVERHEARD

It’s an atrocity. If it was cattle being treated like this, no medical care, in distress, if you saw that from the street, we’d have a search warrant and we’d be kicking down doors.

Canyon County Sheriff Kieran Donahue, about Idaho’s religious exemptions for medical care of children. The Legislature refuses to repeal the exemption.
Los Angeles Times, 4-18-17

There’s just no evidence of it. And this is why religions are called “faiths” collectively. Because you believe something in the absence of evidence. That’s what it is! That’s why it’s called “faith”! Otherwise we would call all religions “evidence,” but we don’t, for exactly that reason.

Astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson, discussing his lack of belief in a god.
CBS Sunday Morning, 4-30-17

My attitude to religion is that religion is a most interesting and extraordinary human phenomenon. I’m fascinated by it, interested in it, and at some points critical of it. . . . Religion is private thing, and a fine thing and a good thing, as long as it remains private. As soon as it becomes public and political, it’s dangerous.

Philip Pullman, author of His Dark Materials trilogy.
NPR, 2-14-17

History teaches us this: Whenever the church is too close to government, the church loses its integrity.

The Rev. Don Anderson, executive minister of the Rhode Island State Council of Churches, backing the Johnson Amendment.
Associated Press, 5-5-17

I’ve come a long way in my beliefs. I started out life as a member of the One Holy Roman Catholic Apostolic Church, and I am coming to the end of it without organized religion or mystical thinking. I am an atheist, thank God, with no fear of hell and no hope of heaven.

Author Malachy McCourt, in his just-published memoir, Death Need Not Be Fatal.
Buffalo News, 5-18-17

Thank you very much for the invitation. I am sorry to have to decline it. As an avowed atheist, I could be considered a terrorist, according to a 2014 public declaration by the Saudi Interior Ministry.

I’m sure that there are plenty of closet atheists in Saudi Arabia, and they are probably doing just fine. But as a vocal advocate of atheism and rationalism, and as a humanist and a proponent of human rights (including the rights of women), I cannot accept an invitation from a country that sees me as the enemy.

Yann LeCun, Facebook’s director of Artificial Intelligence Research, after receiving an invitation to lecture in Saudi Arabia.
Facebook, 5-20-17



This visual aid, featuring a dinosaur living among humans and tigers, is used to help teach “Bible in the Schools” in classes in Mercer County public schools in West Virginia.

HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

BLACK-FOOTED FERRET ENDANGERED

The taste in our mouths
is the feeding of tigers:
we’re killing off eagles, too,
and whales.
How it all began: the way
our thumbs slowly came round
to grab for the throat, our toes
flattened for stalking, more than animal
cunning
swelling the skull — and then
the clever tools: the hand-ax,
the motor, more dangerous
than tigers.
It was only a matter of time
till the tools were a part of us
like glands, a million years of murder
creating this:
the pitiless face of the tiger
is our own face grinning
with gears.



© Philip Appleman.
From New and Selected Poems, 1956–1996

Philip Appleman is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. He is editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Darwin*. His published volumes of poetry include *New and Selected Poems: (1956-1996)*, *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 newest book is *The Labyrinth: God, Darwin and the Meaning of Life*. He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both “After-Life” Members of FFRF. Phil’s books: ffrf.org/shop.

Striking backdrop



The mountains and sky provide a beautiful setting for the “Vouchers” sign placed by the Colorado Springs Chapter of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. With Pikes Peak in the background, members of the Colorado Springs chapter and Atheist Community of Colorado Springs stand along Highway 24 as you approach Colorado Springs from the east. The chapter and FFRF also placed another sign, “The only wall we need is between church and state,” on the highway coming up from Pueblo near Pikes Peak Raceway.

Coffee distribution, poetry, horses, and Oxford commas

Name: Kristina Daleiden.
Where and when I was born: Wausau, Wis., way back during the Carter administration.
Education: B.A. in creative writing from Eckerd College in St. Petersburg, Fla., 2001. Post-baccalaureate certificate in paralegal studies from Madison College, 2009.
Family: Parents, sister, brothers, partner, and teenage son.
How I came to work at FFRF: My oldest brother (Roger Daleiden) got a job at FFRF last year as graphic designer. Naturally, sibling rivalry ensued. I had become a member of FFRF while in college and have been a supporter ever since. When an administrative support position became open, I jumped at the opportunity. I consider it an honor to be able to use my skills to further the cause of protecting the First Amendment. Also, I’m a bit of a groupie.
What I do here: I am the office assistant. I assist the administrative staff with all tasks, big and small. Ask me about our new shipping and receiving procedures or where most of the coffee is distributed. Hint: It’s the legal floor. Attorneys love coffee.



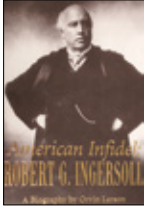
Kristina Daleiden

MEET A STAFFER

What I like best about it: The staff is great, and so are our members. I enjoy interacting with a wide variety of dedicated freethinkers who work tirelessly to advocate for our constitutional right to live in a secular society.
What gets old about it: Callers whose faith in their religion is so flimsy that the mere existence of people whose beliefs differ from theirs drives them into a spittle-flecked rage; and parking on the isthmus in Madison.
I spend a lot of time thinking about: Justice, history, middle-school homework completion rates (household specific), and politics. I also spend a lot of time thinking about how I can have a positive impact on those around me, and what to make for dinner.
I spend little if any time thinking about: How to enlighten intransigent people.
My religious upbringing was: My family had become nonpracticing Catholics by the time I came around.

Though all of my siblings went through parochial school and the typical Catholic indoctrination, they advocated for me to be educated in public schools. The extent of our church-going during my childhood was the occasional Easter service.
My doubts about religion started: Early. I do not recall ever believing the God stories. I caught my parents playing the parts of Santa and the Easter Bunny when I was quite young, and I simply assumed that the invisible sky watcher story was also a hoax designed to elicit good behavior from those too innocent to know better. My opinion has not changed much in that regard.
Things I like: The outdoors, classic cars, historical fiction, craft beer, and most of my family.
Things I smite: Recreational snowmobiling, willful ignorance, voter suppression, and the lack of an Oxford comma.
In my golden years: I hope to spend my time writing poetry and riding horses on the beach.
What’s your favorite quote: “My country is the world, and my religion is to do good.” — Thomas Paine.

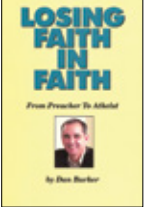
American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll



Prof. Larsen writes with affection and respect of this illustrious 19th century freethinker.
By Orvin Larsen

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist



How Dan “threw out the bathwater and discovered there is no baby there.”
By Dan Barker

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

Foundation members wishing to receive online news releases, “action alerts” and “Freethought of the Day” should contact info@ffrf.org. Please include your name, email and physical mailing address.

IN THE NEWS

FFRF, others support atheist legislator

Arizona GOP members say invocation didn't invoke higher power

A group of faith and humanist leaders rallied to support Arizona atheist lawmaker Athena Salman after she was rebuked by Republican leaders over an invocation they didn't think was religious enough.

"It doesn't take an atheist to see this is fundamentally wrong," Salman said, referring to Arizona House rules requiring prayers to invoke a "higher power."

On April 20, about 60 people protested that decision with their demonstration outside the State Capitol.

"I am deeply disappointed with the government's infantile treatment of the secular citizens of Arizona," Salman said. "There is a higher power — it's nature. The Arizona House of Representatives is the people's house. Opening prayers in the House should represent Arizonans of every faith's perspective. This includes the hundreds of thousands of Arizonans who, like myself, do not believe in a supernatural god, but do believe in the power of humanity to



Photo by Benjamin Steele of The State Press

Arizona Democratic state Rep. Athena Salman speaks to the gathered crowd about her treatment by Republicans after delivering a humanist invocation in Wesley Bolin Memorial Plaza in Phoenix on April 20.

do good in the world."

GOP state Rep. Mark Finchem objected to Salman's invocation and gave his own invocation in Jesus' name. House Majority Leader John Allen then reminded members House rules require that a prayer invoke a "higher power."

FFRF backed Salman and sent out a statement to its members:

"The Arizona House of Representatives leadership has compounded its First Amendment violation of scheduling official governmental prayers by inflicting yet another injury — this time to free speech. Not

only are legislators being told to pray, but now they are being told who to pray to ('a higher power').

"It should not be the business of the Arizona House of Representatives to pray on government time and dime, much less to dictate to whom other legislators should address invocations.

"Nonreligious individuals can invoke a higher power — the only 'higher power' any governmental official should invoke in an official capacity, the only 'high power' recognized by our secular Constitution. That higher power is 'We, the People.'"

Arizona state Sen. Juan Mendez has helped lead the charge for non-religious invocations since 2013. That's when the then-state representative provoked outrage among Christian GOP members by quoting Carl Sagan during an invocation.

Last year, following the Legislature's rule change spearheaded by Christian minister Steve Montenegro, then the House majority leader, ordered that another godless invocation by Mendez had to be followed immediately by a proper prayer from a reverend.

Record few believe bible is literal word of God

Fewer than one in four Americans (24 percent) now believes the bible is "the actual word of God, and is to be taken literally, word for word," similar to the 26 percent who view it as "a book of fables, legends, history and moral precepts recorded by man."

This is the first time in Gallup's four-decade trend that biblical literalism has not surpassed biblical skepticism. Meanwhile, about half of Americans — a proportion largely unchanged over the years — fall in the middle, saying the bible is the inspired word of God but that not all of it should be taken literally.

From the mid-1970s through 1984, close to 40 percent of Americans considered the bible the literal word of God, but this has been declining ever since, along with a shrinking percentage of self-identified Christians in the United States.

Still, while biblical literalism has waned, the vast majority of Americans — 71 percent — continue to view the bible as a holy document, believing it is at least God-inspired, if not God's own words.

Over the past three decades, Americans' view of the bible as the literal word of God has been declining, while their view that the bible is a collection of fables, myths and history recorded by man has been increasing. The shift is most pronounced among young adults, indicating the trend is likely to accelerate in the years ahead.

Higher loan defaults when God mentioned

A team of three economists has found that someone who mentions God in his or her application for a peer-to-peer loan was 2.2 times more likely to default. This was among

the highest indicators that a person would not pay back, according to Seth Stephens-Davidowitz, author of the book *Everybody Lies: Big Data, New Data, and What the Internet Can Tell Us About Who We Really Are*.

The economists used data from Prosper, a peer-to-peer lending site. In order to get a loan, potential borrowers write a brief description of why they need a loan and why they are likely to make good on it. The potential lenders then decide whether to provide them the money. Overall, about 13 percent of borrowers default on their loans.

"Generally, if someone tells you he will pay you back, he will not pay you back," Stephens-Davidowitz writes. "The more assertive the promise, the more likely he will break it. If someone writes 'I promise I will pay back, so help me God,' he is among the least likely to pay you back."

Humanism acknowledged by Defense Department

Humanism is now on the Department of Defense's updated list of recognized religions.

The designation means that humanists are now guaranteed the same rights, privileges and protections granted to others who are members of faith groups.

Previously, the U.S. military recognized just over 100 religions. The new list has grown to 221 to include Earth-based faiths, such as heathens and Asatru, and an additional eight Protestant groups, including the International Communion of the Charismatic Christian Church.

And there's another plus: The Department of Defense will now have more accurate counts of each recognized religious (or in this case, irreligious) group, which varies widely depending on who's counting.

Brain damage is linked to religious extremism

Scientists who studied Vietnam War veterans have found that certain kinds of brain injuries may increase religious fundamentalism.

Researchers at Northwestern University found that combat vets who suffered trauma in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex were less willing to accept new ideas and became more extreme in their religious beliefs.

The scientists studied 119 vets with penetrating traumatic brain injuries and 30 with no history of brain injury. Those who suffered injuries to the site reported higher levels of religious fundamentalism compared to those without the lesions.

"Human beliefs, and in this case religious beliefs, are one of the cognitive and social knowledge stores that distinguish us from other species and are an indication of how evolution and cognitive/social processes influenced the development of the human brain," said Jordan Grafman of Northwestern University, the study's author.

Previous research had suggested that the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which is located in the frontal lobe, was a "critical hub" for belief systems.

Adoption agencies could turn away LGBT couples

The Texas House of Representatives passed HB 3859, a bill that would allow state-funded adoption, foster care, and family planning agencies to impose their religious beliefs onto prospective parents, families, and vulnerable young people. If passed by the Senate and signed into law, HB 3859 would bar Texas from taking "adverse action" against any private agency that refuses to provide services to young people in their care, or to place young people with an otherwise qualified family, if doing so would conflict

with the agency's "sincerely held religious beliefs" — which the bill itself does not limit or define.

The bill's definition of "adverse action" is broad and all-encompassing.

This would have serious consequences for a range of vulnerable communities, including young people and families. The bill would shield agencies from liability even if they refused to provide services to same-sex couples, people of other faiths, unmarried people, single women, and divorced people.

Facebook censorship hits atheist pages

Atheist and ex-Muslim organizations are being targeted for Facebook censorship by organized religious conservatives through the use of Facebook's reporting mechanism.

The Ex-Muslims of North America and Atheist Republic faced unnecessary restrictions on their pages and posts by these pages were blocked from appearing in news feeds.

Atheist Republic's Facebook Page, with more than 1.6 million followers, was deleted, with no further explanation.

Nearly 40 secular and atheist organizations have signed a letter asking that Facebook improve its reporting system to protect vulnerable groups that rely on its services.

The organizations request that Facebook create a whitelist for Groups and Pages, which are determined as vulnerable to malicious attacks. They also ask that reports and flags aimed at these groups should not be handled by automated mechanisms, but reviewed and given due consideration by a trained Facebook employee.

Further, they request that Facebook should penalize individual accounts and groups that are found to have been repeatedly abusing its reporting system.

Freethought Matters!



Photo by Chris Line
FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor with Chris Johnson, author and filmmaker of the book and movie, “A Better Life: An Exploration of Joy & Meaning in a World Without God,” during a taping of FFRF’s new “Freethought Matters” TV show. More details about the show will follow in future issues.

Join FFRF
for Darrow
celebration

Time is running out to sign up for FFRF’s Clarence Darrow Dinner Party in Chattanooga on Thursday, July 13, celebrating the installation that day of a statue of the famed Scopes Trial litigator in Dayton, Tenn. The dinner party will be followed with the public dedication of the statue in Dayton on that Friday. Dayton is about 40 miles from Chattanooga.

Talented sculptor Zenos Frudakis will give a short visual presentation at the dinner party and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker will entertain at the piano. Special guests will be Nicole Jacobsen and Andrew Kersten. Jacobsen grew up in Dayton and her family members were the unnamed plaintiffs in FFRF’s federal lawsuit ending a legacy of the Scopes trial — weekly bible instruction in the public schools by bible students from William Jennings Bryan Bible College. Kersten, the dean of the College of Letters, Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Idaho, wrote the book *Clarence Darrow: American Iconoclast* in 2011.

That Friday also marks the first day of the 29th annual Scopes Trial Play and Festival. Tickets are available for the play, performed annually in the historic courthouse where the trial took place in Dayton. Purchase tickets directly from the Tennessee Valley Theater at 423/365-7529 or at scopesfestival.com. Space is limited!

Dinner party registration is \$45 per person, which covers the buffet, 20 percent service charge and 9.25 percent state tax. Registration will be cut off on Thursday, July 6, or when capacity is reached. Be sure to phone FFRF before mailing your registration, as we are close to reaching capacity. Register online at ffrf.org/Darrowdinner or by



This statue of Clarence Darrow by sculptor Zenos Frudakis will be officially unveiled Friday, July 14, outside the courthouse in Dayton, Tenn., where the famous “Scopes Monkey Trial” was held in 1925. It will stand across the front lawn from the already-installed statue of William Jennings Bryan.

phone at: 800/335-4021.

And don’t forget to reserve your room now at the Chattanooga Hotel, 1201 Broad St., Chattanooga, Tenn. The hotel is holding a courtesy block of rooms while they last on Thursday and Friday, July 13-14. Make your own arrangements, using the code “Clarence Darrow Party.” (FFRF’s event webpage, ffrf.org/Darrowdinner, will also link directly to the hotel registration while rooms last.) Other nearby hotels include the Marriott and Staybridge.

Maine Senate wrong
to deny invocation

FFRF is denouncing the Maine Senate’s censorship of a humanist invocation.

Thomas Waddell, head of FFRF Maine, worked with state Sen. Shenna Bellows to deliver the opening invocation before the Maine state Senate. This request was initially approved by the secretary of the Senate, with Waddell scheduled to give an invocation before the Senate on May 30. Waddell delivered a humanist invocation before the Maine House earlier this year. Waddell’s scheduled Senate invocation was suddenly cancelled, supposedly because of its content and length.

Waddell is being forced to meet requirements that others are not. Waddell reports that no other person selected to give the opening invocation must adhere to these unwritten requirements. The Maine Senate’s

stipulation that Waddell submit his remarks for review and approval violates the U.S. Constitution on a number of counts. First, disparate application of rules based on perception of Waddell’s views on religion is illegal. Second, when the government allows invocation speakers to deliver remarks, it cannot censor or approve invocations based on their viewpoint.

If the Senate insists on continuing to host prayers at public meetings, it must not discriminate against any person wishing to give an invocation, FFRF asserts.

Under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, it is discriminatory to handle similarly situated persons differently. Treating an atheist or nonbeliever who wishes to give an invocation differently from a religious citizen constitutes discrimination.

The little girl inside



Photo by Lenny Irving
Life Member Polly Rothstein, shown here as a young girl, gave FFRF a generous bequest of \$10,000 following her death on Nov. 13, 2016. (Her obituary ran in the January/February issue.) Near the end of her life, Polly said that the girl in this photo is how she felt inside. FFRF acknowledges Polly’s generous donation with gratitude.

Freedom of Expression
conference set for July

FFRF proud co-sponsor
of two-day event in
London on July 22-23

Freethinkers from around the world will come together in July in London for a week-end of discussions and debates on freedom of conscience and expression, which are under attack in many parts of the world.

The International Conference on Freedom of Conscience and Expression in the 21st Century will be held July 22-23 and is co-sponsored by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, among several other organizations.

FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker will among the more than 60 people scheduled to speak or perform during the conference. Discussions will include topics such as censorship and blasphemy laws, freedom of and from religion, apostasy, the limits of religion’s role in society, LGBT and women’s rights, atheism, secular values and more.

Iranian-born rights activist Maryam Namazie, who organized the prestigious conference, will also be speaking. Namazie will be receiving the Henry H. Zuma Freedom From Fundamentalist Religion Award at FFRF’s 40th annual conference in Madison the weekend of Sept. 15-17. (See back page



for FFRF convention information.)

Others include activist, blogger and writer Bonya Ahmed (who spoke at FFRF’s 2016 convention in Pittsburgh), scientist and author Richard Dawkins, philosopher A.C. Grayling, singer Shelly Segal. The conference will highlight the voices of people on the frontlines of resistance — many of them persecuted and exiled — as well as address challenges faced by activists and freethinkers, elaborate on the links between democratic politics and free expression and conscience, promote secular and rights-based alternatives, and establish priorities for collective action.

Speakers will come from dozens of countries around the world, including Algeria, Bangladesh, Canada, Egypt, France, India, Iran, Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan, Ireland, Lebanon, Malaysia, Morocco, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, Sudan, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, Tunisia, United Kingdom, Ukraine, and Yemen.

For more information or to sign up, go to secularconference.com



Barker schools Fox News’ Carlson

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker got into a lively debate with Fox News host Tucker Carlson on May 25.

Carlson had Barker on for about six minutes to discuss the Memphis, Tenn., school where a teacher-led bible club was shut down after FFRF complained.

Carlson was adamant that teachers have a right to run a bible club at school in their off-hours, but Barker corrected him on the constitutional issue. Of course, Carlson didn’t give in and held steadfast to his incorrect interpretation of the First Amendment.

“There’s a difference between free speech and government speech,” Barker said. “When those teachers are at school, they are the government. . . . Saying it’s voluntary does not make it legal.”

“You bullied them into it,” Carlson responded after Barker said, “The school did the right thing (by suspending the class).”

Several FFRF members who saw the clip on Fox News sent positive feedback.

“Great work, Dan! It takes guts to go on FOX and take a stand for the truth,” wrote Steve Siebold.

“Many thanks to Dan for his effective debate, however brief, with Tucker Carlson,” Willaim Sperber writes. “FFRF is a most necessary organization to help protect our constitutional rights.”

Of course, for every positive note Dan and FFRF received, there were three times as many who wrote with hateful or negative messages that deserve a place in Crankmail (strong language alert!).

“PULL YOUR EMPTY HEAD OUT OF YOUR LYING COMMIE ASS FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YOUR PATHETICALLY STUPID EXCUSE FOR A LIFE AND KILL YOURSELF YOU BRAIN DEAD SUBHUMAN ANTI-AMERICAN MARXIST PIECE OF SHIT! The First Amendment of America’s Consitution guarantees freedom OF religion, NOT freedom FROM it! If you didn’t like the club, don’t attend of send your kid! You disgusting VERMIN on the left have no fucking right to shut down things just because you don’t like them! CREATURES as STUPID as you should be fed feet first into wood chippers to be ground up into fertilizer!”

FFRF offers ‘atheist’ badge for Boy Scouts



Even as the Boy Scouts of America is acquitting itself well on LGBT equality, it still has a blind spot regarding another marginalized group: atheists and nonbelievers.

The Boy Scouts of America’s repeal of its ban against gays recently incurred the wrath of the Mormon church, which announced that it’s breaking off most ties to the Scouts. While FFRF applauds the Boy Scouts for lifting its anti-gay ban, it decries the fact that the group still formally discriminates against non-religious boys and their families, officially excluding atheists, agnostics and nonbelievers. Currently, the organization maintains “that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing his obligation to God.”

FFRF has come up with a creative way to address the Boy Scouts’ prejudicial attitude toward nonbelievers. At the urging of its member Richard Kirschman, it has produced a badge similar to the Boy Scouts’ merit badges, which are typically sewn on uniforms or sashes. The badge, featuring a red “A” based on a symbol of atheism and agnosticism popularized by distinguished scientist and atheist Richard Dawkins, is being issued in collaboration with the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science.

At Dawkins’ suggestion, the Scout or youth seeking a badge need only send FFRF a short essay addressing the Boy Scouts of America’s claim that nonbelievers can’t be good citizens. FFRF will not charge Scouts money for the badge.

The badge is intended to reward Boy Scouts who have persevered in an organization that basically has instituted a “Don’t ask, don’t tell” policy about atheist and agnostic participants, but has regularly expelled open nonbelievers.

“If any young person fulfills the requirement, we’d be delighted to reward them with this badge,” adds Gaylor. “Many nonreligious students who might otherwise wish to join the Boy Scouts Association, knowing of its bigoted policy, don’t try. This is their chance to be rewarded for critical thinking and to earn a keepsake at the same time. We hope someday very soon that Boy Scouts of America itself will change policy and adopt its own official merit badge rewarding critical thinking.”

The full requirement can be found at FFRF’s website: ffrf.org/freethought-badge. Or the badges can be purchased online at shop.ffrf.org

Trump budget a disaster for public education, says FFRF

President Trump’s proposed education budget would damage public schools and shortchange students in order to fund religious schools, FFRF charges.

The budget would cut \$10.6 billion from federal education initiatives and pour about \$400 million into charter schools and school vouchers, mainly profiting religious schools. The budget also creates a \$1 billion “school choice” grant program to allow students to take money to the public school of their choice. Once the program is running, it could easily be amended to send students to private (mostly religious) schools, as has happened in state programs.

FFRF co-president. “It’s apparent this budget seeks to punish public schools and their students, and use federal dollars to reward and encourage private, mostly religious schools. It’s even more alarming that money is being cut from public programs to go to the pet projects of Education Secretary DeVos.”

As a voucher proponent prior to being named education secretary, Betsy DeVos remarked that such initiatives should be used to “advance God’s Kingdom.” The proposed education budget is the foot in the door to a much larger voucher program.

“Public schools and universal, secular education are a cornerstone of America.” — Annie Laurie Gaylor

French upbraid



New French President Emmanuel Macron trolled President Trump, condemning Trump’s rogue decision to withdraw the United States from the Paris climate agreement with a call to “Make our planet great again.” Macron is quoted on FFRF’s marquee in downtown Madison, Wis. Read FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel’s blog post, “God’s Not Fixing Climate Change, He’s Making It Worse” on patheos.com/blogs/freethoughtnow.

The Born Again Skeptic’s Guide to the Bible



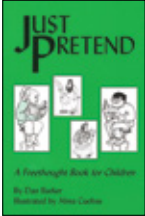
A Missouri grandmother debunks the bible as no one has debunked it since Thomas Paine.

By Ruth Hurmence Green

Buy it from FFRF online shop.ffrf.org

JUST PRETEND

A freethought book for children



A fun book allowing children of all ages to explore myths like Santa Claus and compare them with ideas like the existence of God.

By Dan Barker

Buy it from FFRF online shop.ffrf.org

FFRF VICTORIES

California mayors abandon prayer luncheon

After a warning from FFRF, two California mayors abandoned an official prayer luncheon with a disreputable speaker.

The annual East County Mayors’ Prayer Luncheon on May 4 was billed as a chance to meet “mayors from four different cities” and included testimony from past lunches that portrayed it as a chance to lobby and influence local government.

FFRF asserted that lending mayoral titles and possibly city resources to a prayer lunch sent an official message of endorsement of religion over nonreligion that excluded many constituents.

“It is a fundamental principle of Establishment Clause jurisprudence that the government cannot in any way pro-



mote, advance, or otherwise endorse religion,” FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote to the mayors of El Cajon, Santee, La Mesa and Lemon Grove.

FFRF also cautioned the mayors about the main speaker, David Barton, a divisive figure who has called AIDS God’s punishment for homosexuality. He regularly impugns religious minorities such as Muslims and nonbelievers, saying: “From a societal standpoint,

there should be more concern over elected officials who are secularists and will swear an oath on no religious book, than for Muslims who swear on the Quran. After all, secularism presents a greater threat to American traditions and values than does Islam.” Barton’s book, “The Jefferson Lies,” was so riddled with falsehoods that its publisher (which typically publishes bibles) pulled the book from shelves.

FFRF’s missive asking the four mayors’ offices to disassociate themselves from the prayer luncheon — combined with local public misgiving — made a big impact.

“Mayor Racquel Vasquez of Lemon Grove has sent regrets and will now not be attending the luncheon,

Councilmember Jennifer Mendoza informed East County Magazine today,” states a local publication in a story about FFRF’s communiqué to the mayors. “Mendoza has also cancelled her attendance at the lunch due to Barton’s participation. Mayor Mark Apostathis of La Mesa has also reportedly cancelled his appearance.”

FFRF is gratified that it helped change the minds of important government officials.

“These sort of official prayer events are inappropriate to begin with, and this one was made much more offensive due to Barton,” says FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. “We’re glad the mayors heeded our call — and the calls of their conscience.”

By Molly Hanson

School abstains from abstinence-only sex ed

FFRF sent out letters in early April to 15 Missouri public and charter school districts objecting to school-sponsored sex education being conducted by Thrive St. Louis. Thrive’s “Best Choice” sex education curriculum only promotes abstinence, offering little information other than shame and risks that await sexually active students.

Thrive requires that its employees “be committed Christian[s] who demonstrate a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.”

FFRF’s Elaine and Eric Stone Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne urged that these Missouri public school districts stop using dubious outside materials to teach sex ed to their students. One district has already listened. The Warren County R-III School District has indicated to FFRF that it will revamp its syllabus.

The curriculum “is not consistent with district policy and board-adopted curriculum standards,” Superintendent Jim Chandler responded. “Accordingly, the district will halt use of outside consultants with respect to sex education instruction to further review curriculum, effective immediately.”

Georgia school won’t promote religious group

FFRF has taken on All Pro Dad, a religious organization, once again, this time at a Georgia elementary school.

A concerned parent of a student in the Barrow County School System contacted FFRF about the promotion of All Pro Dad events at Statham Elementary School through the school’s website. The website directed visitors to a page that included religious messages and to an online shop that included T-shirts reading, “Pray and Worship Together” and “All Pro Dad.”

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline

Ziegler, who sent a letter to the school district on March 31, noted that this religious promotion created an unnecessary wedge between students of the school. A response was received on April 25 from the superintendent informing FFRF that all mentions of the All Pro Dad program would be removed from the school calendar and that no school resources would be used to promote the program.

Texas school to address religious decorations

McKinney North High School in Texas has been given a secular makeover after FFRF was informed of religious symbols and messages decorating the walls of hallways and classrooms in the school. These messages included a football poster with a biblical quote, a varied collection of crosses, an advertisement for a Christian club, and a large assortment of Latin crosses next to white boards, over entrances to classrooms and behind teachers’ desks.

On April 12, FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover reminded the school district attorney, Charles Crawford, of a letter FFRF sent last year to the district outlining why Latin crosses and religious messages are impermissible displays by public school employees. Since the district’s employees clearly did not follow through with removing the displays, Grover requested additional assurance that the recurring issue would be, at last, resolved.

On May 1, Crawford responded to Grover’s letter informing FFRF that the district superintendent would address the displays.

Florida school ends religious baccalaureate

FFRF took action after being informed that a high school in Pierson, Fla., had scheduled a graduation ceremony at a church.

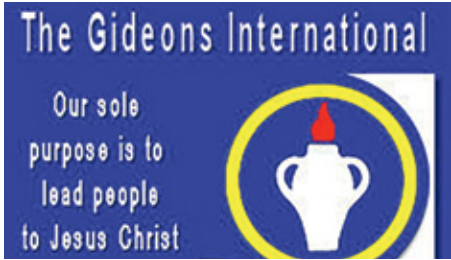
A member of the Volusia County School District informed FFRF that the

T. Dewitt Taylor Middle-High School official website encouraged graduating seniors to attend a baccalaureate at the Community Christian Assembly. The invitation was deceptively made to appear as if the religious event was a requirement for graduation.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter to School Board Attorney Michael Dyer on April 10 denouncing the inappropriate level of school involvement in the religious ceremony.

On May 1, FFRF was informed by a district representative that the school would not sponsor the baccalaureate and that no school employee would be involved in the organization, planning or coordination of the services. FFRF was also assured that the event would not be advertised as being encouraged.

Gideons banned from Michigan school district



FFRF has made sure that the Gideons won’t be permitted to distribute bibles in a Michigan school district.

A Union City Community Schools community member contacted FFRF to report that several adult members of Gideons International were allowed into Union City Middle School during the school day, where they distributed a bible and another book, “The Life Book,” to each student.

Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne wrote in April to Superintendent Pat Kreger.

“I have investigated this claim and found that, without knowledge of the district administration, religious literature was distributed to fifth-grade students,” Kreger recently responded. “Union City Community Schools does not support the distribution of religious material within our schools during the instructional day. Therefore, this practice will not happen again.”

South Dakota school keeps graduation secular

Thanks to FFRF, a South Dakota high school kept its May graduation ceremony free of religious influence.

FFRF was informed that Clark High School in Clark, S.D., scheduled prayers by a Catholic priest into its graduation

ceremony. The program had included both a Catholic invocation and a benediction as portions of the ceremony.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote to Clark School District Superintendent Luanne Warren on May 12, urging that the invocation and benediction be canceled and that all references to them be removed from the ceremony program. FFRF was informed on May 13, a day after the scheduled graduation date, that the ceremony was devoid of any religious undertones.

Religious hymns silenced at Connecticut school

Students at John B. Sliney Elementary School in Branford, Conn., will no longer be forced to sing religious songs after FFRF raised its voice in opposition.

It was brought to FFRF’s attention that the school’s music teacher, Ted Samodel, had been teaching spiritual songs to students. A concerned parent informed FFRF that her child was brought to the auditorium to listen to older students rehearsing for their music class. One of the songs being performed was “Angels Watching Over Me,” which contains pious lyrics.

FFRF Managing Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert sent a letter to Bradford Public Schools Superintendent Hamlet Hernandez on Feb. 9 requesting that Samodel be instructed to stop teaching young, impressionable students religious hymns.

Hernandez informed FFRF in a letter on May 3 that the district had addressed the issue with the music teacher and gave assurance that the situation would not occur again.

FFRF purges prayer from Georgia school ceremony

After being informed of a prayer scheduled to take place at the Schley County Middle School graduation in Ellaville, Ga., FFRF raised its voice against the constitutional violation.

FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote to Superintendent Adam Hathaway on May 16 reminding him of the school district’s obligation to remain neutral toward religion.

On May 18, FFRF received a response from a legal representative of the Schley County School District informing FFRF that no prayer would be scheduled to be part of the graduation ceremony, no prayer was referenced in the graduation program and seniors would not be required to remove their hats during the ceremony.

One Woman’s Fight

By Vashti Cromwell McCollum

The book cover for "One Woman's Fight" by Vashti Cromwell McCollum. It features a black and white portrait of a woman, likely the author, against a light background.

A compelling memoir on the historic legal battle to landmark Supreme Court victory ending religious instruction in public schools (McCollum v. Board of Education, 1948).

Buy it from FFRF online shop.ffrf.org

Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So

The book cover for "Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So" by Annie Laurie Gaylor. It has a purple background with white text and a small image of a woman.

A concise, easy-to-read book that will challenge your concept of the bible as “a good book.” Illustrated. 264 pages.

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

Buy it from FFRF online shop.ffrf.org

FFRF protects Texas student’s free speech

FFRF took swift action after a student at Lakeview Middle School in The Colony, Texas, contacted the state-church watch group about a teacher requiring that he stand and participate in the daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance and Texas Pledge.

The student, who identifies as an atheist, objected to taking an oath “under God,” wording present in the two pledges. The only way that the student would be allowed to opt out of the pledge would be by presenting a note from his parent or guardian allowing him to do so, which was not possible for the student.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to the Lewisville Independent School District Director of Legal Services Jeff Crownover on May 10 asking that the situation be investigated to ensure that teachers of the district were not violating the free speech rights of students. Crownover replied on May 12 that the student would be permitted to sit silently during the pledges of allegiance at school.

Bible distribution in Texas school to stop

An evangelical group will no longer be invading Liberty High School in Frisco, Texas, after FFRF got involved with the state-church violation.

A parent of a student in the school district informed FFRF that members of Gideons International were permitted to enter the school’s cafeteria during the lunch period to distribute bibles. FFRF was told that the Gideons were proselytizing rather aggressively, forcing bibles onto reluctant students.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Liberty Independent School District Superintendent Cody Abshier on April 24 to ensure that the shocking and illegal bible distribution would not take place in the future.

FFRF received a response on May 4 from Abshier, who wrote that the district had spoken with some staff about the troubling incident. Abshier assured FFRF that there would be training this summer to address the concern districtwide.

Religious poster taken down in Indiana class

A religious poster has been taken off display in Hillcrest High School, in Ammon, Ind. The framed poster of “A Wrestler’s Prayer” was hanging on one of the teacher’s classroom walls.

FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell sent a letter to Bonneville Joint School District No. 93 Superintendent Charles Shackett, informing the school district that it is a violation of the Constitution to display religious symbols or messages. Public schools may not advance, prefer or promote religion.

FFRF received a response from Shackett on May 8, explaining that the Hillcrest High School principal had met with the specified public school employee concerning his wrestling poster and had reviewed the complaint with him. The teacher immediately removed the poster from his classroom wall and placed it in his vehicle to take home.

Indianapolis police to stop promoting religion



FFRF has successfully stopped the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department from promoting religion through its government email server.

FFRF was contacted by a local resident after an email to city employees was sent by IMPD Police Chief Bryan Roach in March promoting an event. The email concluded with a scripture verse for “encouragement and guidance.” FFRF’s Legal Fellow Ryan Jayne contacted Roach requesting assurance that bible verses would not be included in future emails.

FFRF received notice on May 16 that future emails sent from Roach’s government email address would not include religious references.

Florida city’s prayer breakfast gets updated

Thanks to FFRF, the city of Winter Haven, Fla., ended its endorsement of religion through the annual Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast in May.

It was brought to FFRF’s attention that Mayor Steven Hunnicutt planned on hosting the annual Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast to recognize the National Day of Prayer on May 4. The conspicuous religious event was being promoted through the official Winter Haven Facebook page, Twitter account and in the city’s e-newsletter. Moreover, tickets for the event were being managed and sold through the city clerk’s office.

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter to the Winter Haven commissioners on April 28. On May 8, City Attorney Frederick Murphy responded, writing that the city had taken measures to ensure that its conduct regarding the prayer breakfast was in compliance with the First Amendment.

Georgia teacher to keep God out of classroom

An elementary school teacher in Stantonville, Ga., has been reminded of her constitutional obligation to keep her classroom secular.

A parent of an Echols County Elementary School student informed FFRF that a teacher at the school had a religious sign posted in her classroom which read, “Testing 101: When you are going through something hard and wonder where God is, remember the teacher is always quiet during a test. Trust in the Lord.”

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to an attorney representing the district, Brian Smith, on Dec. 23. Smith responded on May 15, informing FFRF that the district administration had spoken to the teacher regarding the violation and that the sign was removed. Smith also noted that the teacher had been counseled on her duty as a public school employee to remain neutral regarding religion.

Pennsylvania schools end state-church violations

After hearing of multiple shocking constitutional violations occurring within the Wilson School District in Pennsylvania, FFRF took action to warn the district of its duty to keep religion out of its public schools.

FFRF was made aware that Wilson Southern Middle School was regularly advertising religious events. A bible study was being hosted by two Wilson Southern Middle School teachers before school. Teachers handed out flyers promoting the bible study, which was advocated for in the morning announcements. A Christian “See You at The Pole” event was also featured in the school’s announcements. And sixth-graders were sent to Camp Swatara Church of the Brethren, a Christian camp.

FFRF Legal Fellow Madeline Ziegler wrote to Superintendent Curt Baker on March 2. On May 11, district administration responded that the issues FFRF raised had been investigated and that the district had taken the necessary steps to address the violations.

FFRF tells Texas school to keep evangelists out

The Pasadena Independent School District in Texas has been warned not to allow religious speakers access to a captive audience of public school students for indoctrination.

The school district had hosted an in-school assembly during the school day featuring a speaker from the evangelical church, Go Tell Ministries. The group was permitted to strongly promote its April 8 Christian event, the “Bay Area Go Tell Crusade.” The event was deceptively described to students as a “pizza night.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Superintendent DeeAnn Powell on April 21. On May 12, an at-

torney representing the school district responded to Grover’s letter informing FFRF that the district had been advised on its constitutional obligations related to religion and public schools. He noted that they anticipated no further violations.

Texas teacher gets constitutional lesson

A teacher at Texas’ Fannin Middle School will be promoting science rather than Christianity, thanks to FFRF’s action.

Eric Sheen, an eighth-grade science teacher at the school, had been promoting anti-science curriculum and Christian propaganda. A concerned parent had informed FFRF that Sheen had showed his class a video clip from Ben Stein’s pro-intelligent design film “No Intelligence Allowed,” and made repeated references to students about his personal Christian faith. Sheen regularly encouraged students to embrace religion themselves, citing his personal “life-changing” experience with letting God into his life.

FFRF Staff Attorney Sam Grover wrote to Amarillo Independent School District Superintendent Dana West on April 7, informing the district that teaching creationism or any of its offshoots, such as intelligent design, in a public school is unlawful.

In a response on May 3, FFRF was assured that the situation had been investigated and thoroughly addressed.

Washington yogurt shop ends church discounts



Revelations Yogurt in Edmonds, Wash. will no longer be dishing up its party room free to church groups after FFRF contacted the establishment over its religious discrimination.

FFRF Staff Attorney Elizabeth Cavell wrote to the Revelations Yogurt management on April 27, after a customer gave FFRF the scoop on the business’ tasteless deal promotions. The establishment charges \$25 for all other nonprofit organizations for use of the party room.

The store manager informed FFRF on May 5 that she had been unaware of the violation and had removed the discounts from the website and store poster in response to Cavell’s letter.

RECRUIT A MEMBER

sample copy for \$2 each

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

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

— Please send us only names of likely supporters —

Freedom depends upon freethinkers

Yip Harburg,
from his book:

Rhymes for the Irreverent

Lead Kindly Light

Where Bishop Patrick crossed the street
An “X” now marks the spot.
The light of God was with him,
But the traffic light was not.

Buy it from FFRF online - shop.ffrf.org

Why did FFRF sue Trump, when others didn't?

A statement by the Freedom From Religion Foundation

After FFRF announced our lawsuit against Trump's May 4 executive order, there have been some questions about why FFRF sued when other groups like the ACLU decided not to, issuing a statement to that effect. Obviously, we cannot speak for the ACLU, which we greatly respect and are partnering with on several lawsuits.

The ACLU decided that it was not suing . . . yet. If you read their statement, the possibility of a lawsuit is still open. The ACLU, like most groups, FFRF included, was particularly worried about the "License to Discriminate" language in Trump's sweeping "respect religious liberty" draft first leaked in February. But little of that language was retained in Trump's final order, making it harder to sue over it "on its face."

FFRF's primary focus is on another aspect of the May 4 order, namely its language rolling back the Johnson Amendment — which bars all 501(c) (3) nonprofits, including FFRF and churches, from engaging in partisan politicking — is crucial to keeping state and church separate, and keeping even darker money out of politics.

FFRF has already sued the IRS on a nearly identical issue and won. We agreed to end our challenge once the IRS showed it had resumed investigating reports over politicking by churches. We were the only civil rights group to take such a challenge, despite widespread reports at the time that the IRS was failing to enforce the law even-handedly. We



warned the IRS that we would refile our lawsuit if there was evidence of future lack of enforcement. We've spent recent time on Capitol Hill fighting bills to repeal the Johnson Amendment. We've distributed brochures, published a video explaining the importance of the protective rule, and written letters to those who publicly misunderstand the rule, such as Sen. Chuck Grassley.

We know the importance of the Johnson Amendment. We've been obeying and defending it for years. And as our lawsuit explains, Trump has made it clear that he and his administration view this order as undoing that law.

Not on our watch.

Legal experts are weighing in and noting, with interest, the import of our lawsuit.



Richard Schragger

an interesting legal blog taking its name from the clause of the Constitution which says that the president "shall take care that the laws be faithfully executed," a clause which FFRF's lawsuit argues that Trump violated, had an excellent write-up of our challenge. University of Virginia Law Professor

Richard Schragger writes, "There has been muted reaction to Trump's executive order. Many commentators on the right and the left have argued that it failed meaningfully to alter the status quo. Nevertheless, the FFRF complaint is worth reading, as it makes two important points that have been mostly unappreciated.

"Both sophisticated and casual observers of American politics take the alignment between the Republican Party and the Religious Right as a given," Schragger continues. "But why should the Establishment Clause not apply to this kind of political deal, when there is ample evidence that it is occurring, that it favors certain religious groups, and that its purpose is to advance and reinforce an existing religious-political alliance?"

"Though much-maligned by religious conservatives, the Supreme Court's Establishment Clause doctrine still requires that civil laws have a secular purpose, that the primary effect of those laws should be neither to advance nor inhibit religion, and that civil laws should not result in an 'excessive government entanglement' with religion."

Our favorite line in his article is the last one: "The FFRF complaint takes this legal doctrine seriously." Yes, we do.

And so we've sued the IRS once again to ensure Trump's pronouncements and his order do not lead to widespread violations of the Johnson Amendment.

Trump

Continued from page 1

Trump also told churches that, with his new order, they would not lose their tax exemption for violating the rule and could say whatever they wanted: "This financial threat against the faith community is over. . . . You're now in a position where you can say what you want to say."

Among its several abuses, Trump's order and statements signal to the Internal Revenue Service that it should not enforce the electioneering restrictions of the tax code against churches and religious organizations, while permitting these restrictions to be enforced against secular nonprofits. FFRF asserts the president has no constitutional authority to selectively veto a legitimate statute that Congress passed and a president signed into law more than 50 years ago.

This part of the law is known as the Johnson Amendment. Under the amendment, all organizations that are recognized as exempt from federal income tax under 501(c) (3) of the Tax Code are subject to the prohibition against political campaign intervention.

Church groups favored

FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, contends that Trump is violating its equal protection rights and favoring church groups over secular groups, in violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Trump has directed the IRS to do something for which it both lacks any enumerated or implied power: to selectively enforce a legitimate statute based solely on religion.

Even if the precise language of the executive order does not accomplish Trump's promise to "totally destroy the Johnson Amendment," the impression his administration is actively trying to foster among evangelical Christians is that the IRS will no longer enforce the Johnson Amendment against them.

FFRF sued the IRS in 2014 for its failure to enforce the electioneering restrictions and settled the suit after the IRS agreed to begin implementing these restrictions.

FFRF has public opinion on its side. According to an evangelical polling group, Lifeway Research, whose slogan is "Biblical Solutions for Life," nearly 80 percent of Americans say it's inappropriate for pastors to endorse a candidate in church, and 75 percent do not believe it is appropriate for churches to publicly endorse candidates.

As advertised by Trump, the executive order effectively provides preferential treatment to churches and will result in obligations on secular nonprofits, including the plaintiffs, that are not imposed on churches. This could amount to more than \$100 million annually in tax-free contributions for politicking pastors.

"Trump is communicating to churches that his administration will not enforce the Johnson Amendment," says Gaylor. "The IRS needs clear direction that it must enforce the law equally."

FFRF's legal complaint enumerates Trump's many public avowals to repeal the Johnson Amendment restrictions against churches. For instance, Trump promised a closed-door group of hundreds of Christian conservatives in June 2016 that

overturning the Johnson Amendment "will be my greatest contribution to Christianity, and other religions." At the National Prayer Breakfast in February, Trump vowed to "get rid of and totally destroy the Johnson Amendment."

Constitutional violation

FFRF is asking the court to declare that Trump has violated the Establishment Clause and the Due Process Clause of the U.S. Constitution, and acted in excess of presidential authority under Article II of the Constitution.

Gaylor notes that the pandering ceremony in the Rose Garden shows the ongoing harm of the National Day of Prayer, enacted by Congress at the behest of Rev. Billy Graham in 1952. FFRF won a resounding court ruling declaring the National Day of Prayer unconstitutional in 2010, in which the district judge noted: "The same law that prohibits the government from declaring a National Day of Prayer also prohibits it from declaring a National Day of Blasphemy." The challenge was stalled when a court of appeals ruled against FFRF's standing (or right to sue), not the merits, in 2011.

"As Judge Barbara Crabb noted in that ruling, the government has taken sides on a matter that must be left to individual conscience," Gaylor observes.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is a nonprofit membership organization that advocates for the separation of church and state and educates on matters relating to nontheism. It has more than 29,000 members, residing in every state of the United States, including more than 1,400 in Wisconsin, as well as members in the District of Columbia.

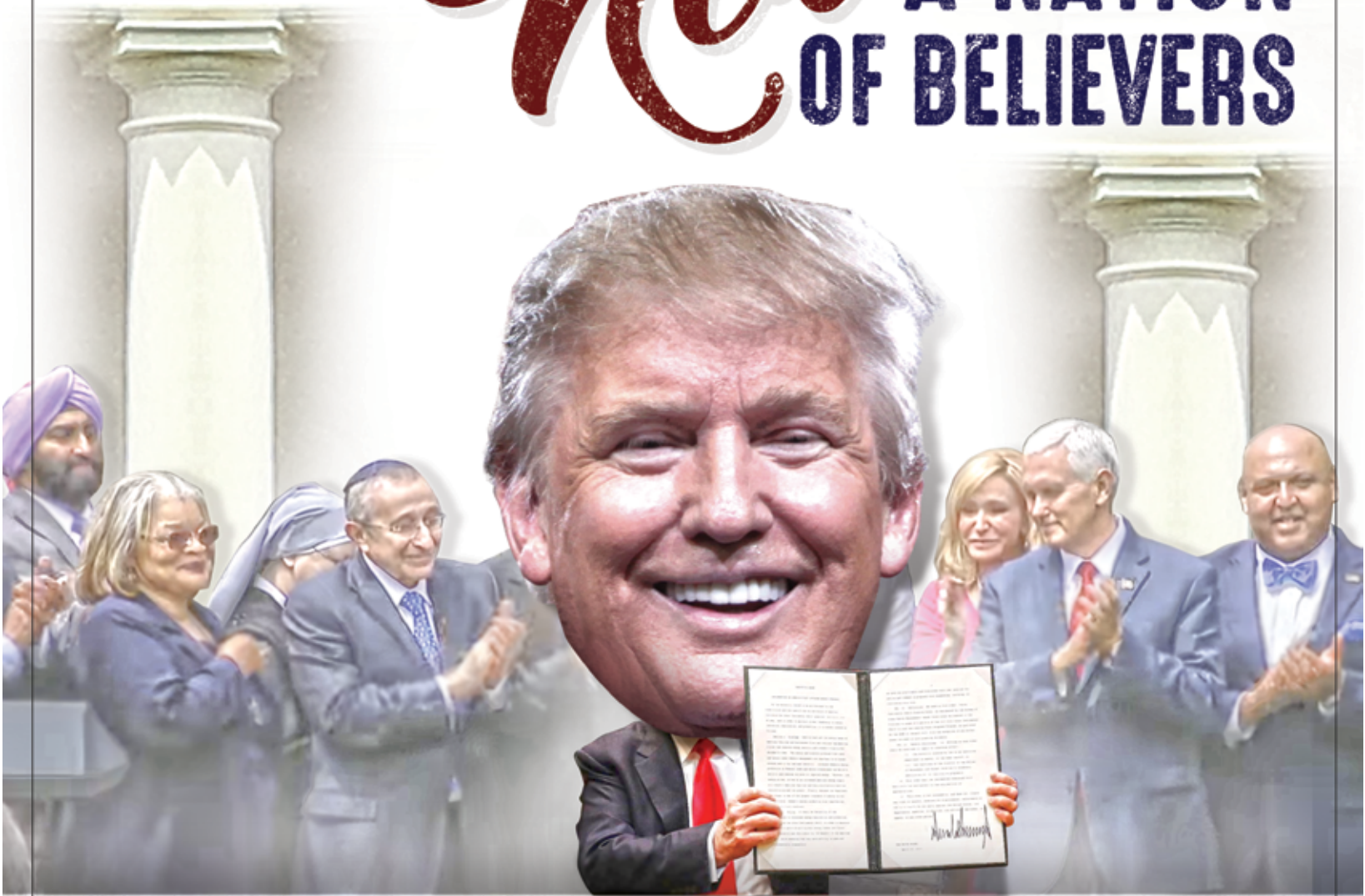
FFRF is being represented by attorney Richard L. Bolton and FFRF Staff Attorneys Andrew L. Seidel and Sam Grover.

“ Trump is communicating to churches that his administration will not enforce the Johnson Amendment. The IRS needs clear direction that it must enforce the law equally. — Annie Laurie Gaylor

This ad ran in the New York Times on May 25, 2017.

ADVERTISEMENT

MR. PRESIDENT,
WE ARE *Not* A NATION
OF BELIEVERS



FFRF is suing Trump over his executive order signaling that tax-exempt churches are now free to politick from the pulpit.

**WE ARE ONE NATION UNDER A GODLESS CONSTITUTION.
"WE THE PEOPLE" ARE FREE TO BELIEVE OR DISBELIEVE.**

In his pandering commencement address to graduates at Jerry Falwell's Liberty University, President Trump proclaimed, "America is a nation of true believers."

Such exclusionary remarks denigrate the quarter of the U.S. population today that is nonreligious — "true *nonbelievers*." The United States is not a theocracy and there is no religious test for citizenship. It's never been more crucial for those of us who dissent from religion to stand up for the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

**JOIN THE FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION —
DEFENDING FREETHOUGHT & THE WALL OF SEPARATION FOR 40 YEARS**

Or call for information and a free copy of *Freethought Today*, FFRF's newspaper.

Give dollars and cents to counteract Pence! Give in his name to FFRF's Legal Fund, and we'll let him know your gift, deductible for income-tax purposes, will fight theocracy.

FFRF.ORG/RESIST 1.800.335.4021

FFRF · NY Times May Ad · PO Box 750 · Madison, WI 53701 · 800.335.4021 · FFRF.org

☐ I would like to become a member (includes 10 issues of *Freethought Today* newspaper).

☐ I would like to donate to FFRF's Legal Fund in Mike Pence's name. \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____ Phone/Email _____

Make payable to "FFRF." Dues and donations are deductible for income-tax purposes.

Membership Dues

<input type="checkbox"/> Individual.....	\$40
<input type="checkbox"/> Household.....	\$50
<input type="checkbox"/> Gung Ho.....	\$100
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining.....	\$250
<input type="checkbox"/> Sponsoring.....	\$500
<input type="checkbox"/> Life Member...	\$1,000
<input type="checkbox"/> "After Life"...	\$5,000
<input type="checkbox"/> Student.....	\$25

This week Trump unveiled an education budget that spells disaster for our secular public schools, diverting tax money toward vouchers benefiting religious schools. Download FFRF's free brochure, "The Case Against Vouchers": **ffrf.org/caseagainstvouchers**

FFRF, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit founded in 1978, represents more than 29,000 freethinkers (atheists, agnostics) and works as a state/church watchdog.

FFRF.ORG

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

Time to update Rockwell’s Four Freedoms

Freedom from religion now included in list for digital age

This article originally appeared in the April/May issue of Mensa Bulletin and is reprinted here, edited for length, with permission.

By Karl Albrecht

The beloved American artist Norman Rockwell, when asked to explain his distinctive approach to painting, said simply, “I paint the world the way I want it to be.”

Rockwell spent much of his early career in the small town of Arlington, Vt., where he absorbed the essence of American life, experience and values, far removed from the frenetic urban environments that seemed to attract so many other artists and intellectuals.

Rockwell painted his first cover for The Saturday Evening Post at 22, and he produced another 321 covers over the next 47 years.

Many of us feel a sense of nostalgia, and even loss, at the passing of Rockwell’s America.

And for many others, the relentless march of all things digital seems to be a mixed blessing. Techno-venture capitalist Peter Thiel recently lamented, “We wanted flying cars, and we got 140 characters.” Paradoxically, we seem to be more connected and less intimate than ever before.

Rockwell’s series of four paintings called the “Four Freedoms” probably ranks as his most memorable affirmation of what Americans believe — or, at least, want to believe. Taking his lead from President Franklin D. Roosevelt, who, in his 1941 State of the Union address, cited “freedom of speech,” “freedom of worship,” “freedom from want” and “freedom from fear” as primal needs of a society going through the compound agony of economic depression and looming world war, Rockwell portrayed them as images of simple, ordinary Americans in ordinary circumstances.

We can wonder: Fifty years from now, will these and other Rockwell icons still be part of the American cultural memory, or will they have faded from our collective consciousness?

The digital environment that we’ve created is now creating us. It seems to me that we now need to claim and celebrate several additional “freedoms.” Now, I believe, it’s time for a “New Four Freedoms,” all of which involve “freedom from”:

- Freedom from Media
 - Freedom from Commerce
 - Freedom from Politics
 - Freedom from Religion
- Admittedly, these four new candidates lack the sentimental appeal of Rockwell’s (and Roosevelt’s) original four. But they might enable us to enjoy the original four for a while longer, at least. The big difference is that the New Four must come from within — they are not bestowed upon us as civil liberties by “society.” They are mental,



The Four Freedoms is a series of four 1943 oil paintings by Norman Rockwell. The paintings — Freedom from Want, Freedom from Fear, Freedom of Speech and Freedom of Worship — are in the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Mass.

emotional, and spiritual freedoms, which we can acquire and retain only by conscious choice.

Freedom from Media

Freedom from media means exercising the right to choose when to tune in to the all-pervasive electronic culture and when to switch it off. Media addiction, or at least media habituation, is probably much more widespread than many techno-advocates realize. As with many other forms of addiction, its victims typically prefer denial to introspection.

Are we becoming a society of people who fear both intimacy and solitude, and who can’t find joy in silence? The collective consciousness of our culture has become an ocean of commercially constructed images and sounds, which soaks into our senses almost every waking hour. What we call “the news” has become an endless parade of talking hairdos that cue shocking, amusing and entertaining film clips. Beat poet and philosopher Allen Ginsberg warned, “We’re in science fiction now, man. Whoever controls the images — the media — controls the culture.”

I became a “media vegetarian” more than 15 years ago, when I threw the TV out of my house, eliminated all incoming broadcast signals and began to accumulate a video library of quality educational programs, documentaries and classic films. I’m not tethered to a smartphone every waking minute. I don’t have a Twitter account or a Facebook page. I even “fast” from time to time, deliberately limiting my input of all screen media, to free my brain’s processing capacity for creative activity.

Freedom from Commerce

Freedom from commerce means exempting yourself from the never-end-

ing onslaught of selling messages, 24/7, everywhere you go.

We’ve evolved into a society in which we as citizens are automatically deemed obligated to produce and consume at the maximum possible rate — it’s our duty as good citizens and our birthright as people of privilege.

The Christmas buying season, our annual guilt spasm, has become a threadbare cultural habit with very little social or spiritual meaning attached to it anymore.

We needn’t feel guilty about reducing our levels of consumption and discretionary spending; the economy will adjust, as it always has. We can savor the joys and benefits of the enterprise economy without becoming addicted to the compulsion to consume.

Freedom from Politics

Freedom from politics means letting go of emotional attachment to any brand-name political party, ideology, tribe or hero figure. Again, many people have deluded themselves into thinking they’re independent, self-made thinkers, even though they’ve voluntarily enslaved themselves to one of the competing political brands. Slogans like “I don’t vote for a party, I vote for the person” help them rationalize their steadfast allegiance to the beliefs and opinions preached by their chosen tribe.

The quintessential irony of American political discourse seems to be the fusion of willful ignorance with absolute conviction. Another acerbic writer, Germany’s Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, said, “There is nothing quite so frightening as ignorance in action.”

Psychologist Abraham Maslow spoke of the need for the modern human to develop and assert “resistance to enculturation” — the capacity to see through the prevailing cultural propaganda and

form one’s independent worldview. Ernest Hemingway preferred a somewhat more blunt characterization. He declared that a writer needs a “built-in, shockproof bullshit detector.” I and others have softened the language a bit, expressing it as the skill of “crap detecting.”

Freedom from Religion

Freedom from religion might involve a bigger challenge for some Americans than for others. The following discussion might even engender apprehension, anger or hostility in some readers, depending on where they are currently in their spiritual explorations.

The American society remains, firmly, a pre-scientific society, and the popular culture an anti-intellectual one. Americans love to buy and use the most exotic products of advanced technology and engineering, but few of them seem to understand — or accept — the most elementary principles of scientific thinking.

Apparently, science class is not having much impact. As with all of the Earth’s other cultures, more Americans are willing to embrace supernatural explanations for reality — religious creation stories, mythical god figures, and angels, devils, and miracles — than scientific, evidence-based propositions.

Surveys repeatedly indicate that nearly 30 percent of Americans completely reject the scientific concept of species evolution — ranking them 29th worldwide in scientific orientation, just ahead of the people in Turkey. Probably more than half of the others cannot accurately explain its core proposition. Forty-six percent of them identify as believers in one of the major brand-name religions. Twenty-eight percent say they believe in angels. A similar number claim to have seen UFOs. When members of Congress and presidential candidates declare that the Earth is 6,000 years old, or that the concept of global climate change is a hoax perpetrated by the Chinese government, clearly we still have a long way to go.

Nonetheless, I surmise that about half or more of Americans may be getting close to the emotional tipping point at which they can let go of the last traces of the religious stories and superstitions that were implanted in their brains as impressionable children. As they reflect on the grandness of the universe, and come to peace with the idea that their own existence is a cosmic crapshoot, they can evolve to a new kind of faith. That is the faith of not knowing — a neo-scientific orientation that finds comfort in the sheer fact of existence.

When they realize that praying to an old white guy with a beard, who looks like Charlton Heston and lives up in the sky, brings no more existential comfort than simply marveling at the fact that the universe allows them to exist, they may leave behind the magical-supernatural worldview and embrace the promise of scientific investigation.

Belief in the essential premise of science — that knowledge and understanding are forever evolving — is actually a deeper and more profound “faith” than worshiping the old white guy with the beard.

Karl Albrecht is a management consultant, lecturer and author of more than 20 books on professional achievement, organizational performance, and business strategy.

Blasphemy! The dangers of speaking out

To those who don't believe in a higher power, the notion of blasphemy seems frivolous and ridiculous. But for tens of millions of people around the world, blasphemy is a crime with potentially harsh punishments, including death. Anti-blasphemy laws exist in 32 countries, and 87 nations have hate speech laws that include defamation of religion and public expression of hate against a religious group.

Charges dropped over Stephen Fry's comments

Police in Ireland have dropped charges against British comedian Stephen Fry for blasphemy. In 2015, Fry appeared on an Irish television program called "The Meaning of Life," where he made comments that disparaged God, and a viewer of the program lodged a formal complaint.

Asked what he would say if he was confronted by God after his death, Fry replied: "I would say, 'Bone cancer in children? What's that about? How dare you create a world in which there is such misery that is not our fault?' It's not right. It's utterly, utterly evil. Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid God who creates a world which is so full of injustice and pain? Because the God who created this universe, if it was created by God, is quite clearly a maniac, utter maniac. Totally selfish. We have to spend our life on our knees thanking him? What kind of God would do that?"

The Republic of Ireland has a blasphemy law that comes with the punishment of a potentially massive fine (up to roughly \$38,000), but Ireland has never prosecuted anyone under that new law.

Christians convicted for blasphemy against Islam

Indonesia and Pakistan have taken legal actions against two Christians, including the governor of Jakarta, for the crime of blasphemy. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, the governor, was given a two-year jail sentence after being found guilty of committing blasphemy. And in Pakistan, the blasphemy law was leveled against Zafar Bhatti.

In Jakarta, the trial of the governor was seen as a test of religious tolerance in Indonesia. The harsher-than-expected ruling is seen as a blow to religious tolerance in Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim-majority nation.

The presiding judge told the court that Purnama was "convincingly guilty of committing blasphemy."

The case originated in a September 2016 speech in which the governor encouraged voters not to be dissuaded from voting for him in the February 2017 election because the Quran tells Muslims not to align with Christians or Jews.

NBC News reported that an incorrectly subtitled video of his comments later went viral, helping to spark huge demonstrations that ultimately resulted in him being bought to trial.

Purnama's lead in the polls shrank, and he lost the race to a Muslim challenger.

In Pakistan, the 2012 case ended in a sentence of life imprisonment for Bhatti. A court in Rawalpindi sen-



tenced the man May 3 for having sent text messages from his cellphone that allegedly insulted Islam. Bhatti denied the charges and explained that the phone card had not been activated by him. Bhatti is planning to appeal the decision.

Saudi Arabia sentences man to death for apostasy

A man has been sentenced to death on charges of apostasy in Saudi Arabia after losing two appeals. Ahmad Al Shamri, in his 20s, in 2014 allegedly uploaded videos to social media in which he renounced Islam and the Prophet Mohammad.

In February 2015, he was sentenced to death after being arrested on charges of atheism and blasphemy, held in prison and convicted by a local court.

A Supreme Court ruled against him after he reportedly lost an appeals court case.

FFRF has appealed to the U.S. State Department to help save Al Shamri's life. A series of royal decrees under the then-King Abdullah in 2014 redefined atheists as terrorists, according to Human Rights Watch.

One citizen was last year sentenced to 10 years in prison and 2,000 lashes for expressing atheistic sentiment in hundreds of social media posts.

Millions of Pakistanis receive warning texts



Millions of Pakistanis received text messages from the government warning them against sharing "blasphemous" content online.

It comes amid a surge in mob violence linked to accusations of insulting Islam, including three attacks within the past month. Rights activists say the texts would only encourage more vigilante attacks.

"Uploading & sharing of blasphemous content on Internet is a punishable offense under the law. Such content should be reported on info.pta.gov.pk for legal action"

ous content on Internet is a punishable offense under the law. Such content should be reported on info@pta.gov.pk for legal action," read the text sent by the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to all mobile phone subscribers.

A similar note was posted on the agency's website in Urdu. A PTA spokesman said the agency was acting on a court order.

Blasphemy is a hugely sensitive issue in conservative Muslim Pakistan, with unproven allegations leading to dozens of attacks since 1990.

L.A. Times editorial: Affront to free speech

The L.A. Times ran an editorial condemning blasphemy laws. Here are some excerpts:

"British writer and actor Stephen Fry is breathing easier after officials in Ireland announced that they wouldn't charge him for violating that nation's blasphemy law for saying in a 2015 television interview that God, if he existed, was 'quite clearly a maniac.'

"But the police had investigated Fry under the law, which, far from being a relic, was enacted in 2009. The law makes it illegal to utter or publish any material 'grossly abusive or insulting in relation to matters held sacred by any religion' in which the intent and result is 'outrage among a substantial number of the adherents of that religion.'

"That language echoes a resolution passed by the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2010 calling on nations to 'combat defamation of all religions.'

"Fortunately, more recent pronouncements by the U.N. have shown a greater appreciation for the importance of freedom of speech even while condemning behavior that is intolerant of religion. Yet many nations still have blasphemy laws on the books.

"These laws should be repealed, even if they were enacted not for the traditional reason — to show reverence to a deity — but for the supposedly more progressive purpose of sparing the sensitivities of believers, including members of minority faiths.

"Redefining blasphemy laws as laws against 'hate speech' don't make them any more acceptable or any less susceptible to abuse and selective enforcement."

BLASPHEMY

Blasphemy: a law to protect an all-powerful, supernatural deity from getting its feelings hurt.
Ricky Gervais



Ricky Gervais

Where there is no belief, there is no blasphemy.
Salman Rushdie

On the whole, "blasphemy" has been a force for good in human history. It is part of the process by which millions of people have come to reject theocracy and think for themselves.
Katha Pollitt



Katha Pollitt

Blasphemy is the crime of not taking someone's beliefs as seriously as they do.
Jasper Sole, author

Sin, blasphemy, heresy — all these are primitive ideas created by primitive creatures, unworthy of the title "human."
Abhijit Naskar, author

Blasphemy has always seemed to require taking things very seriously.
Donna J. Haraway, professor at UC-Santa Cruz



Donna J. Haraway

I suppose I should say that I treasure blasphemy, as a faith of the highest order.
Rick Moody, author

Blasphemy is a victimless crime.
Anonymous

The whole story of human history is: The blasphemy of today is the commonplace of tomorrow.
Ralph Nader

I'm afraid I don't believe there is such a thing as blasphemy, just outrage from those insecure in their own faith.
Stephen Fry



Stephen Fry

This crime called blasphemy was invented by priests for the purpose of defending doctrines not able to take care of themselves.
Robert Green Ingersoll

One man's blasphemy doesn't override other people's free-speech rights, their freedom to publish, freedom of thought.
Dan Savage

The pettiness of a mind can be measured by the pettiness of its adoration or its blasphemy.
André Gide

Cliff Richards Memorial Student Activist Award

Superintendent steps over state-church line

FFRF gave Ashlynn a \$1,000 Cliff Richards Memorial Student Activist Award.

Over the last few years, FFRF has sent several complaints to Willard, Mo., School District Superintendent Kent Medlin regarding his Establishment Clause violations. The most recent case involves his speech to the 2017 Willard High School graduates, in which he abused his position of authority to promote his religion.

By Ashlynn Bradley

Graduation is a huge deal to all of the students, as well as to the teachers, family members and community members who have helped us get this far.

However, during the graduation



Ashlynn Bradley

ceremony, our school’s superintendent didn’t use his time to give a speech that encouraged the students, but instead spent the time worshipping his savior. Throughout his speech, Superinten-

dent Medlin referenced Jesus Christ, God, and the New Testament, as well as informing us that all of our successes could be attributed to the Lord.

He even invited any student who had yet to find the Lord to stop by his office so he could share God’s love and gospel. He then invited the students and audience to stand up and pray, if they wanted. That left only a handful of us sitting down, which completely ostracized us. The prayer lasted roughly three minutes, which was three minutes too long.

Not only did he show blatant disregard for the law and the Constitution, he also ignored many of his students’ pleas to refrain from a prayer for that exact reason. So a few fellow students and I took action. We went to our lo-

cal newspaper and reported the story, as well as filed complaints with civil liberties groups to help us take action against his unconstitutional actions.

My name is Ashlynn Bradley and I recently graduated from Willard High School in southwest Missouri. I was secretary and head of public relations for Student Government Association, a member of Foreign Language Club, Diversity Club, Paws, Family, Career and Community Leaders of America, Future Business Leaders of America, National Honor Society, as well as president of Science Club. I even founded the Cryptozoology Club! I was also active in my school’s art program and I played soccer, participated in track and field, and was on our school’s dance team. I will be attending Colorado State University and am planning to go into the pre-med program.

Richard & Beverly Hermesen Student Activist Award

A spectacular challenge to Christmas program

Bullying, harassment, threats force plaintiff to remain anonymous

The high school student in FFRF’s ongoing federal lawsuit, **FFRF v. Concord Community Schools**, is the recipient of a \$5,000 student scholarship generously endowed by FFRF members Richard and Beverly Hermesen. “Jack” and his family are the original plaintiffs in this federal lawsuit in Indiana.

By Jack Doe

For 45 years, Concord Community High School in Elkhart, Ind., has been holding a show called “Concord’s Christmas Spectacular.” Families from all over the community attend, nearly always selling out all performances.

The show’s first half consists of classic Christmas songs performed by the students who participate in the dance team, band, choir and orchestra. Following an intermission, the second half is a 20-minute segment dedicated to the retelling of the birth of Jesus Christ. It includes a full reading by a school staff member directly from the bible, while selected students are displayed, dressed as all the characters in the nativity scene. This is an infringement on the First Amendment and my rights as a student in a public high school.

I didn’t know what to do. I felt awkward and out of place being made to perform in the second half of the show. As I started to reach out with my concerns, I began to see I wasn’t alone. Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Sikh, Jewish and atheist students had been pressured to participate in this dedicated showcase, even though they didn’t believe in it.

Performances mandatory

Because the performances were mandatory, we had no choice but to go along with the school’s program (or we would have our grades significantly reduced). This had to change. Someone had to stand up against this injustice, and not just for their own rights, but for the rights of their peers, as well. Little did I know, this would cause persecution and hatred throughout the community.

On Sept. 15, 2015, I finally became



This Facebook post is one suitable-for-print example of the harassment that Jack Doe faces because of the lawsuit against Concord Community Schools.

aware of just how entrenched Christianity was in my school system. After the school received the initial letter from Freedom From Religion Foundation stating that what Concord had been doing was completely unconstitutional and asking that it make changes, the superintendent of Concord Community Schools, John Trout, addressed the community at a school board meeting.

Trout stated the nativity portion of the Christmas Spectacular would not be changing. He received cheers from the packed room filled with parents, citizens and ministers.

Concord High School is supposed to be a secular public high school, but it was evident that there was a major Christian problem inside our walls. Throughout my years of attendance, Concord High School had a biology instructor who was teaching the students that the Earth was only 6,000 years old. This “educator” taught that humans and dinosaurs not only existed concurrently, but also survived a global flood together aboard a boat built by a 600-year-old man.

Now, to top it off, you have a superintendent who thinks the birth of a god-man not only has basis in reality, but is also an important part of everyone’s Christmas celebration.

Legal action taken

After Trout’s statement was made, we took legal action. The case must have scared him, because shortly after the press announced that the lawsuit had been filed, he changed his story and gave testimony that Concord High School had already planned on making changes to the nativity portion of the Spectacular even before FFRF got involved.

After the lawsuit was filed, time seemingly stepped back a few centuries in our community. Nonbelievers in our community were actively sought out, threatened and ridiculed. Students began blaming different people from week to week. Students would share gossip with their parents, and their par-

ents would share these names on social media.

As an anonymous plaintiff, this was one of the hardest things to bear. Day after day, social media was littered with the names of many of my fellow students, calling them out as the “Doe family.” My heart wrenched as those students were bullied and harassed.

It also reminded me, though, why anonymity was so important. The Christians in the Concord community were on a witch hunt. A visit to any social media story about Concord’s nativity will show examples of name-calling, harassment and threats. These commenters would name parents and children they believed to be behind the lawsuit.

Hatred on social media

Suddenly, a Facebook page surfaced called “Save Concord’s Christmas Spec’s Nativity Scene,” and this quickly became a place for hateful Christians to gather, with the page administrators encouraging it. It worried me what they would feel justified in doing to an innocent community member in the name of their God. Threats filled the page. People were saying they should “fight fire with fire” and burn the Does’ house down. One parent even posted that they were going to have their kid find Jack Doe at school and show him what happens when he opens his mouth.

When the judge told Concord that they couldn’t have a live nativity during the 2015 Christmas Spectacular, Concord took the judge’s words literally. They secretly replaced the “live” nativity scene with one made of mannequins, instead of students, so they didn’t technically have a “live” nativity scene. I simply can’t describe the feeling of sadness and disappointment I felt as the curtain raised and the auditorium erupted with applause and cheers for Jesus by name.

Hundreds of pro-nativity shirts were sold and worn by the community. Yard signs were placed throughout the community supporting the injustice, and vehicle decals supporting the nativity were distributed, as well.

The upside to this was that it was ultimately their undoing, as the judge stated that all these things influenced his final decision. On March 7 of this year, U.S. District Court Judge Jon DeGuilio ruled the scene featuring live student actors as Mary, Joseph and other biblical figures had indeed been an unconstitutional endorsement of Christian beliefs.

My legal challenge against my own high school that began in 2015 had finally come to a close. However, the school ended up being allowed to include a static nativity scene featuring mannequins to represent the biblical figures. The school also added one Jewish song, with no lyrics, that was played by the orchestra to represent Hanukkah and one song from the choir, in a different language, to represent Kwanzaa in the second half of the show.

The judge ruled this adjusted performance didn’t violate the Constitution. Since the ruling, we have decided to appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals to hopefully rid Concord of the nativity scene and any other religious endorsement. A ruling in our favor by the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals would set a precedent for other religious practices in any public school and place all schools around the country on notice.

A note to FFRF Members

Don't miss a single issue of Freethought Today & Private Line!

If the expiration date of your FFRF membership on your address label says July or earlier . . .

Please Renew Now!

FFRF Memberships:

\$40 single; \$50 household; \$100 gung-ho; \$250 sustaining

Memberships are tax deductible!

Freethought Today is published 10 times a year.



P.O. Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701

ffrf.org/donate

Allen P. Wilkinson Student Activist Award

Taking down a college graduation prayer

Seth received \$1,000, partially funded by the Allen P. Wilkinson Student Activist Award.

By Seth Manning

The constitutional ideal of church and state separation may seem vital to those who describe their personal belief as atheistic or agnostic.



Seth Manning

As a Christian who believes in the U.S. Constitution, I can't help but to fight for it, as well. I think much of this comes from my experience as an LGBT individual in the South. Northeast State Community College in Blountville, Tenn., was founded in 1966, and a graduation prayer has been recited for as long as records show. Given the demographic nature of northeast Tennessee, this shouldn't be surprising. Christians make up a clear majority, but, as time goes on, an influx of a younger generation with less focus on religion has materialized. This increasing diversity of opinions finally led to a showdown in the Volunteer State over the prayer.

The debate was not new to the



Seth Manning speaks in support of expanding tuition-free post-secondary education to four-year institutions in Tennessee in November 2016.

school before I enrolled. In fact, it had been an issue that both faculty and students had raised for nearly the last decade. Initial attempts to remove it were ignored by a president who was vocal in her religion. After the threat of legal action, prayer was removed from the program two years ago.

Many thought the debate was over and a moment of silence would hold. However, as graduation was wrapping up last year, the president of the college used the closing remarks to lead a Christian prayer. Students, including myself, did not forget that. I was named Student Government Association president that year and brought up the issue. The administration, though, was intent on stopping that and quickly made a move to block our group. But we would not be silenced.

I quickly gathered 10 other student leaders and sent a letter to the administration and our local media demanding that the separation of church and state be respected. Within a day, knowing that the law was clear, the administration folded and, for the first time in 50 years, allowed a moment of silence to fully replace prayer.

With just a few days before graduation, the issue seemed decided. Within a day though, a petition was started labeling the signees of the letter as a "hate group" and demanding prayer be reinserted. That petition would garner 500 signatures in just two days. Those 11 of us who signed the letter to the administration and media were subjected to vicious attacks on our sexuality, race and religion, labeling us as "anti-God," which is ironic since

half the signees were Christian.

When graduation day arrived, another attempt was made by the opposition to disrupt the day. The moment of silence was to be inclusive to all. However, the opposition quickly spread a plan to interrupt the moment of silence by shouting a mix of prayer, yelps, claps and general noise pollution.

During the moment of silence, a faint rumble of noise could be heard — apparently a few were praying aloud — but halfway through, with little support, the opposition gave up. The rest of the ceremony went unimpeded and, for the first time in 50 years, the separation of church and state was upheld.

The fight isn't over, though. With near certainty, there will be a major push next year to turn back the clock, but the law is on the side of inclusion and equality. The Constitution will still be there, as will fighters like the 11 signees who beat a half century of religious intolerance.

My name is Seth Manning. I was born in upstate New York though I have lived in East Tennessee most my life. I have just graduated from Northeast State Community College and will be continuing my education as an honors scholar at East Tennessee State University, studying political science and emergency relief. I would like to serve in the U.S. Air Force. Eventually, my goal is to shape policy as either a legislator or employee in a federal department. Away from school, I enjoy the outdoors, sports, music and activism.

Paul J. Gaylor Memorial Student Activist Scholarship

Jesus Lunch teaches wrong kind of division

Peter Opitz received a \$1,000 scholarship from FFRF endowed by Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor in memory of her father, Paul J. Gaylor, who was FFRF's most hardworking volunteer for its first 25 years. He died at 84 in 2011.

By Peter Opitz

Expressing your opinion isn't always easy, especially if it's controversial. You're questioned, degraded, debated and judged for what you believe and for what you think is right.

I found this out the hard way in the spring of 2016, when public dissent began rumbling over the so-called Jesus Lunches at Middleton (Wis.) High School. These lunches are organized by parents' groups and are held at the park adjacent to the high school, where they hand out bibles and religious trinkets, and proselytize to students in exchange for a free lunch.

Many atheist, Jewish and Muslim students were forced to sit by themselves at lunch while their Christian friends attended a lunch where evangelical values were preached.

A lot of students felt marginalized in what is supposed to be a safe place for everyone, a place in which students of all religions (and no religion) are respected and not pressured. Eventually, I'd had enough.

It was pretty obvious that the main cause of this marginalization was one thing — the Jesus Lunch. Even after pressuring our school administration, the hate speech and exclusion continued and the school became more and more unsafe for students who weren't Christians.

At this point, the school decided to go public with its disapproval of Jesus Lunch and created a legal briefing that justified its right to enforce school rules on the nearby park property. And then everything erupted. News media rushed in, parents sent hundreds of emails to administration, and the tense emotions in the school could be felt from miles away.



Peter Opitz

It was at that point when I decided to make my stand — to advocate for inclusivity and safety in our school. I started with a petition and video. It called upon the Jesus Lunch organizers to move their activities away from the school in an attempt to decrease the division, harassment and distraction that the event had caused. The petition spread quickly and soon had hundreds of signatures, prompting organizers of Jesus Lunch to create their own counterpetition.

Phone calls and emails poured in and I found myself in the busiest time of my life, trying to balance school and an unexpected new role of community activist. I worked with my peers to organize a protest that attracted hundreds of students and community members at the next Jesus Lunch.

Nearly half of our 2,000-person high school flooded the park that day for and against Jesus Lunch, all caught on video for the evening news. I gave a speech urging my peers to stand up for students who felt marginalized because of Jesus Lunch. I watched my friends get hit with food, thrown by Jesus Lunch

attendees into the crowd of protesters. I witnessed an unprecedented amount of yelling, screaming and shoving. But, most importantly, I saw friendships ripped apart over religion.

FFRF sent letters to the City Council, an eight-page legal memo was drafted by community members that outlined four constitutionally acceptable actions for the city, constituents spoke at meetings with concerns about Jesus Lunch, but nothing worked. Not the petition. Not the protests. Not the legal brief. Not the attention from national media and organizations. We had failed to keep the school a welcoming and respectful place for all people, regardless of religious belief.

It's a year later now, and as I look back on what I did, how hard I tried, I find pride in it. Not in the division that it caused in our school, but in the effort that students made to stand up for each other. To see people from all perspectives — Christian, Jewish, atheist, Muslim, etc. — come together to support each other was one of the most powerful moments I have ever seen.

In the meantime, the Jesus Lunches will continue giving free food and an evangelical message to students every Tuesday, but we will persist. We will continue to stand up for each other and provide a loving, respectful community for innocent students trying to get an education free of religious division.

My name is Peter Opitz and I just concluded my junior year at Middleton High School in Wisconsin. I enjoy the outdoors — hiking, biking, swimming, and working outside. I am dedicated to social justice, and am a member of Student Voice Union and Student Equity Coalition. I am also a student representative on the school district's Partnership for Student Support and Success committee. I am a leader in Model United Nations, the local chapter of National Honor Society, and a member of the Human Rights Week organizing committee. When not involved with those activities, I do stage crew work for theatre productions and am a drum major for the Middleton High School Band.

Why Millennial women are embracing atheism

This article first appeared on Popsugar.com on May 5, and is reprinted with permission.

By Kyle Fitzpatrick

Danielle Schacter never thought she would become an un-Christian. “I slowly became more and more disgusted by the way I saw people treating others,” says the 32-year-old, who was raised Baptist. “I didn’t want to be associated with a religion that preached so much hate.”

Schacter, like so many Millennials, has chosen a secular life, and she’s not alone: According to the Pew Research Center, only four in 10 Millennials say that religion is very important to them, compared with six in 10 Baby Boomers.

The numbers of religiously unaffiliated support this, too: 23 percent of the population identifies with no religion. This number is up from 2007, when it was only 16 percent. Of Millennials,



Kyle Fitzpatrick

35 percent are religiously unaffiliated — and they’re driving the overall growth of that group in America.

This is a big deal. To be religiously unaffiliated means you not only avoid identifying as a Christian or Jew or Muslim, but that you eschew organized faith altogether. From there, “nonreligious” can be broken down into four categories: secularism (the belief in separation of church and state and that all beliefs are equal), agnosticism (the belief that it’s impossible to know if there is a god), humanism (the idea that human reason drives us, not higher powers), and atheism (the lack of belief in a god). This last group, the atheists, has become increasingly vocal in recent years. They are fighting to keep religion separated from laws that affect them and to shift society away from religious trappings.

What’s fascinating is that while Millennials are moving away from religion, they are moving toward spirituality. This demographic considers itself just as spiritual as older demographics, even as they represent an exodus out of organized religion and into the throes of secularism. When you consider the issues facing young people today, the reasons for the exodus are easy to understand. In rejecting religion, Millennials are asserting their progressive attitudes and passion for social justice. They’re committed to the idea that they don’t need religion to know the difference between right and wrong.

Perhaps no one represents this cultural shift better than Millennial atheist women. While they may sit at the most extreme side of the nonreligious spectrum, atheist women are fueled by the same concerns plaguing Millennials in general: a quest for independence and a rejection of the status quo.

Atheism and feminism

Lauryn Seering, 27, has never been religious, but she found atheism in high school in reaction to mainstream fundamentalist Christian ideas that condemn her lesbian mother. “Millennial women want autonomy over their own bodies,” said Seering, communications coordinator for the Freedom



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF staff members Lauryn Seering, left, and Molly Hanson were interviewed for this article by author Kyle Fitzpatrick.

From Religion Foundation, which is dedicated to protecting the separation of church and state.

“They recognize that all the arguments against this autonomy — contraception, birth control, marriage — are religiously fueled,” Seering continued. “Women aren’t being pressured by society anymore to get married at a young age, have children right away, and tend house while their husbands work.”

Schacter identifies as agnostic. She’s based in Kansas City, Mo., where she founded a digital marketing agency called Boxer & Mutt. To her, growing secularism is a sign of independent women. “It’s becoming more socially acceptable for women to think for themselves and really question why things are the way they are rather than blindly accepting them,” she says.

Kayley Whalen, 31, is a queer transgender Latinx woman who identifies as “a humanist and an existentialist and an atheist.” These different identities certainly influence how she approaches the world.

“We have ethical values without the need for the supernatural,” Whalen says. “We believe in social justice, that we can live a life with meaning, purpose, and dedication to social justice without the need for supernatural guidance.”

Unsurprisingly, Whalen’s beliefs are tied up in her activist work: She’s the digital strategy and social media manager for the National LGBT Task Force and is on the board of directors for both the Secular Student Alliance and the Trans United Fund.

As Whalen epitomizes, many young women who do not believe in God share a point of view that goes beyond just being atheist or just being a woman. The two are intertwined identities oppressed similarly in the United States.

Lee Blackwolf, who runs the popular Facebook page Black Atheists, constantly copes with this intersection.

“It’s important to me because, as a black bisexual woman, there’s not many of us who are atheist,” explains Blackwolf, a 29-year-old stay-at-home mother in Twinsburg, Ohio. “We’re not welcomed in most spaces that are atheists. We already have a lot of hurdles to jump through in life so it takes

a lot of strength. I lost an entire family because of it. I actually have the luxury to say that I’m better off without them. It’s not the same for most.”

Blackwolf’s concerns hint at societal assumptions about atheist women, which every woman we spoke with touched on: Being a woman who isn’t religious breaks from the social norms that frame femininity. Emily Greene, an artist and activist working in promotional marketing in Augusta summed it up best.

“You’re probably seen as less feminine,” the 32-year-old said. “You’re definitely judged, looked at more harshly. It’s an assumption that it’s a negative thing.”

Ironically, being atheist can mirror being religious, as it plays a role in many aspects of young life. “That was very im-

portant to me in choosing a partner,” says Katherine, a 32-year-old HR manager in California. “I have gotten into some debate with friends before where they’re like, ‘If you’re an

atheist, why do you care if the other person is of faith?’ I’m like, ‘You — as, say, a Christian person — would not want to marry a non-Christian person.’”

Turned off by Christianity

Phil Zuckerman, professor of sociology and secular studies at Pitzer College, believes that young people are turning away from religion as a result of how closed-minded and conservative many congregations can be, particularly when they are responsible for enabling xenophobic and queer-phobic mindsets. For instance, many churches reject the idea of same-sex marriage, while 71 percent of Millennials support it (in comparison with only 46 percent of Baby Boomers).

“A lot of young people are being turned off of by that brand of Christianity,” he explains. “They’re just seeing religion as an institution and saying, ‘Ah, screw it.’ Even though that brand of Christianity is not the majority — most Christians are decent, kind people who aren’t anti-gay and aren’t racist and aren’t anti-Islamic. But they don’t make the headlines. They’re not dominating the news.”

The internet is also serving as a conduit for less religion. As technology occupies more of our time, says Zuckerman, it chips away at “religion’s ability to maintain a monopoly on truth . . . It’s really corroding reli-

gion’s ability to dominate our culture and dominate people’s lives.”

While there have always been religious skeptics — the farthest back is believed to be the Charvaka movement in 7th century B.C. in ancient India — the present shift away from religion is notable because the numbers of religiously unaffiliated and atheists are way up. Although the movement is still predominately male and white, more women are stepping forward as religion reveals itself to be optional in their lives — and sometimes to stand in the way of their independence.

Zuckerman believes this has to do with traditional organized religions’ male-centrism: teaching women that they’re second class, must remain virginal, and must stay out of leadership positions. Pair this with the amount of women in the workplace rivaling men, and the group doesn’t need to turn to a church for social or financial support that churches typically offer.

Molly Hanson grew up in a Catholic household but has always been skeptical of the “invisible man in the sky” who tells people what to do. The 23-year-old Hanson, like many atheists, finds that questioning faith and religion makes people wonder if something is wrong with her womanness.

“People think, if a woman doesn’t bow down to this god and lord, she must have an issue with that god or lord,” says Hanson, an editorial assistant at FFRF. “She must have been damaged. There’s a reason why she decided to leave that god. She might have been morally corrupted by another man or might have — I don’t know — been wronged.”

This issue isn’t confined to religious communities. One woman — a 30-year-old Indian-American writer in New York who declined to give her name — finds this flaw in atheist leaders, too.

“The movement itself is really alienating toward women,” she says. “Leaders like Richard Dawkins are pretty sexist and condescending and talk down to women. Women have been left out in those major discussions of atheism.”

Whalen agrees: “It’s really difficult that one person like a Richard Dawkins or a Bill Maher can be seen as the face of atheism. The difference between a woman who is an atheist, and a male, cis-gender atheist is that a woman doesn’t have the choice to be a single issue. She can’t say, ‘Oh, religious discrimination is the most important thing — and being a woman comes second.’”

For women who are atheists, discrimination is complicated further by the many ways their identities intersect. Gender as it relates to religious affiliation is complex, and it’s even more complicated as it relates to black female atheists, as Blackwolf can attest.

“A lot of black atheist men are often heard saying, ‘Black women sure do love them some church!’” she says. “When we start having a discussion, there are implications about where my place in the community should be, and that’s behind the man.”

A hope for equality

In speaking with young atheist and secular women, some through lines appear, among them a hope for equality that could be stymied by religion’s grasp on society. There is a desire to normalize differing points of view, from LGBTQ people to atheists.

Katherine sees public events like

See Women on next page 17

FFRF dissects Trump’s Liberty U speech

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is appalled at President Trump’s extreme pandering to evangelicals and his degrading treatment of nonbelieving Americans at his commencement speech at Liberty University on May 13.

Trump repeated tired tropes meant to show this is indeed a Christian nation at the evangelical stronghold founded by Jerry Falwell and now run by his son Jerry Falwell Jr., an early Trump endorser. During his third visit to the campus, Trump managed to pander to evangelicals, denigrate nonbelievers as un-American, and fail history class in the span of a few sentences:

“America has always been the land of dreams because America is a nation of true believers. When the pilgrims landed at Plymouth, they prayed. When the founders wrote the Declaration of Independence, they invoked our creator four times, because in America we don’t worship government, we worship God. That is why our elected officials put their hands on the bible and say, ‘So help me God,’ as they take the oath of office. It is why our currency proudly declares, ‘In God we trust,’ and it’s why we proudly proclaim that we are ‘one nation under God’ every time we say the pledge of allegiance.

“Liberty University is a place where they really have true champions and you have a simple creed that you live by: to be, really, champions for Christ. Whether you’re called to be a missionary overseas, to shepherd a church or to be a leader in your community, you are living witness of the gospel message of faith, hope and love. And I must tell you, I am so proud as your president to have helped you along over the past short period of time. I said I was going to do it, and, Jerry, I did it. And a lot of people are very happy with what’s taken place, especially last week, we did some very important signings. “

Let’s parse Trump’s disinformation point by point:

“America is a nation of true believers.”

“True believers” is, of course, a euphemism for Christians. (Given the setting, it’s not a stretch to conclude Trump is employing “true believers” as code for evangelical Christians, 81 percent of whom voted for him.)

Calling America “a nation of true believers” is as patently false as it is exclusionary to us nonbelievers. Overall, nearly a quarter of adult Americans



identify as nonreligious — making the “Nones” the fastest-growing identification in America. Another 7 percent are non-Christians (and one assumes would not qualify as “true believers,” practicing a minority religion). Over a third of Millennials are nonreligious.

That’s an unforgiveable number of Americans for our president to ignore, dismiss, deny and shut out.

“When the pilgrims landed at Plymouth, they prayed.”

Fewer than half of the 102 Mayflower passengers in 1620 were “Pilgrims” seeking religious freedom. The first colony of English-speaking Europeans was Jamestown, settled in 1609 for trade, not religious freedom. The secular United States of America was formed more than a century and a half later, and the founders adopted a godless Constitution. If tradition requires us to return to the views of a few early settlers, why not adopt the polytheistic and natural beliefs of the Native Americans, the true founders of the continent at least 12,000 years earlier?

“When the founders wrote the Declaration of Independence, they invoked our creator four times.”

The references to “Nature’s God,” “Creator,” and “Divine Providence” in the Declaration do not endorse Christianity. Thomas Jefferson, its author, was a Deist, opposed to orthodox Christianity and the supernatural and a target of his day’s Religious Right. The declaration’s purpose was to “dissolve the political bands,” not to set up a religious nation. Its authority was based on the idea that “governments are instituted

among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,” which is contrary to the biblical concept of rule by divine authority. It deals with laws, taxation, representation, war, immigration and so on, never discussing religion at all.

“In America, we don’t worship government, we worship God.”

This is the most odious of Trump’s pandering statements. “We” Americans include many citizens who eschew any worship. But what is so dismaying is Trump’s implication that America is — or ought to be — a theocracy. We don’t want or expect Trump to “worship” the U.S. Constitution, but he ought to realize it sets up an entirely secular government.

“That is why our elected officials put their hands on the bible and say, ‘So help me God,’ as they take the oath of office.”

FFRF wrote Trump as president-elect, as we write all presidents-elect, urging him not to place his hand on a bible or recite “So help me God,” thereby following the dictates of the Constitution he would take an oath to uphold. The framers of the Constitution believed the wording of the oath of office for the president was so important that they included it in the Constitution itself. Article II, Section I makes no reference to a bible or holy book. It’s tampering with the oath to add the words “So help me God,” which are not part of the dictated oath. The framers conscientiously provided for the option of affirming,

cognizant that for many unorthodox, the word “oath” would be distasteful.

“It is why our currency proudly declares, ‘In God we trust.’ ”

Likewise, Congress mandated at the height of the Cold War that “In God We Trust” appear on all currency only in 1955, and it was absent from paper currency prior to 1957. (It appeared on some coins earlier, as did other sundry phrases, such as “Mind Your Business.”) “In God We Trust” was belatedly adopted as our national motto in 1956.

The original motto, “E Pluribus Unum,” celebrating diversity, not theocracy, was chosen by a distinguished committee of Franklin, Adams and Jefferson, and was entirely secular.

“It’s why we proudly proclaim that we are ‘one nation under God’ every time we say the Pledge of Allegiance.”

The words “under God,” did not appear in the Pledge of Allegiance until 1954, when Congress, under the spell of McCarthyism, inserted them. Piety should not be considered synonymous with patriotism. Citizens should not be subjected to a religious test.

“And I must tell you I am so proud as your president to have helped you along over the past short period of time. . . . I said I was going to do it, and, Jerry, I did it. . . . We did some very important signings.”

Trump is bragging about his recent executive order on “religious freedom,” in part greenlighting church politicking, which was designed to reward those evangelical votes. Trump made this clear repeatedly during the campaign, as FFRF laid out in our lawsuit over the order.

As FFRF’s lawsuit over the executive order made clear, Trump is purposefully working to give evangelical Christianity unrestrained power to use its tax-exempt coffers, programs and property to buy votes and undermine elections — and, ultimately, our secular republic.

That is why the work of the Freedom From Religion Foundation is more important than ever.

Women

Continued from page 16

the inauguration of President Trump as a perfect example.

“I was really struck by so much praying happening,” she says. “I’d like to see us move kind of away from that and use logic and science and that holistic definition of freedom.”

The nonreligious believe that, once the church is taken out of the state, equality can be achieved. Hanson believes these roadblocks arise as the result of unequal representation.

“Women understand what it’s like to be oppressed by laws that are rooted in religious ideas that oppress women and their sexuality,” she explains. “To get more women in government positions is going to be a challenge, especially right now.”

When women hold elected office, it inspires more women to run — and more women in government has a powerful

trickle-down effect on women as a whole.

But what if these women leaders were atheists? Would they still succeed?

Surveys have shown that atheism is one of the traits in a leader that Americans are most biased against.

“I cannot imagine a president who identifies as an atheist,” says the Indian-American writer in New York. “I’m a woman and a person of color: a female person of color who is an atheist could never be the president of the United States. It feels like another barrier.”

Others, like Whalen, see these many layers as vital to change: “I want a woman politician to run and say that she’s an atheist and that she’s for reproductive justice, that she’s for transgender rights, and win. I want a transgender woman to be able to do that.”

Ultimately, for atheist women (and

atheists in general) to succeed at changing society, they need to continue on the path they are on and not settle for being silenced. Zuckerman draws parallels to the LGBT community.

“Coming out does have an effect,” he says. “More and more people feeling comfortable saying ‘I’m not that religious’ has an effect.”

Greene sums it up nicely: “We want to get up, go to work, and enjoy our friends and families and our lifestyles just the same way as the person who gets up on Sunday and goes to church. We have our own ways of self-care. A lot of people find religion and that’s how they take care of themselves — and that’s great. We just do things a different way and that’s OK.”

Kyle Fitzpatrick, of Los Angeles, is a freelance writer who loves dogs and Champagne.

MOVING?
Don’t miss your copy of
Freethought Today

**Notify Us of
Your Address Change
Promptly!**

EMAIL info@ffrf.org

**The Post Office does not
forward third-class mail.**
*FFRF cannot be responsible for replacing
back issues if we have not been
notified prior to your move.*

LETTERBOX

Is council invocation a conflict of interest?

I recently attended a city council meeting for the first time since I moved to Michigan. The invocation that opened the meeting ended with “in Jesus’ name.” Is that kosher under *Greece v. Galloway*? If so, might it be possible to attack this kind of proselytizing invocation with a conflict-of-interest challenge? A city official who tried to open a council meeting with a commercial for his own used-car lot would obviously be in violation of conflict-of-interest laws. Why shouldn’t the same apply to an invocation that is basically a commercial for a personal belief system?

Lee Helms
Michigan

Preach politics under these circumstances

Personally, I would agree to churches preaching politics if no tax exemptions were given for churches, church property, church income, religious donations, perks for clergy, and no confessional privacy for sex predators; and all religious contributions more than \$100 be made public.

Bill Danenhower
California

Final Exit Network will help at end of life

It was a pleasure to meet FFRF Member Darwin Soder through his bio in the January issue. In many ways, we share parallel philosophies, especially being members of the Final Exit Network.

I, too, am prepared to employ a fast, painless process to “move on” at the time of my choosing. Because I witnessed my mother and father being held prisoner in the grips of dementia and Alzheimer’s, I have already purchased my tank of nitrogen and made my drawstring hood. My wife is aware of my plan and respects my wishes, though she will not be directly involved.

At 75, I am an active, happy man and proud of the fact that I, like Darwin, have chosen not to add any more passengers to our fragile, overpopulated planet.

Instructions in my will include a very generous donation to FFRF in hopes that you will continue to earn the four-star status from Charity Navigator and Charity Watch.

Warren Dunn
California

Pentagram has been demonized for too long

In response to a letter submitted in the April issue showing “dismay” for a pentagram being set up in a city park next to FFRF’s, I would ask the writer to consider how much he actually understands freethought.

A pentagram is a symbol that recognizes the four elements of earth, air, fire and water with the fifth point, importantly, in the descendent, i.e., down toward our earthly existence. It embraces humanity’s place in a material universe as evolved hominids living on a rocky planet, equal in status to the other forms of life.

This earthly symbol has been demonized for far too long by Christians and spiritualists. They have labeled it “the



Daughter’s cartoon earns high marks, praise

We would like to share with you our daughter Gianna’s eighth-grade English assignment. The project was to create political cartoon based on a controversial issue.

The cartoon depicts the Texas Capitol grounds with its Ten Commandments monument. To our surprise, she not only received a perfect score, but a positive comment from the teacher.

Frank and Valerie Bruno, Texas

Devil’s star” and associate it with the so-called “lower” elements and vilify it for not recognizing our “higher” spiritual nature. The letter writer seems to have framed his argument from this flawed and highly prejudiced view.

There is nothing diabolical about the pentagram; it is life affirming!

As a freethinker, I cast my net widely and I feel that the right to display a pentagram supersedes any Christian discomfort. People who wear or display the pentagram are not precluded from being moral, upright, honest and fair citizens simply because they have a unique worldview that is wholeheartedly not Christian. I encourage FFRF to be at the forefront of promoting the true understanding of a symbol like the pentagram.

And had the writer been at FFRF’s 2016 national convention in Pittsburgh, he could have experienced David Suhor’s jovial invocation to Satan.

Mark Taylor
Ontario, Canada

Ex-wife gets zinger in on her Christian sister

My ex-wife of 46-plus years, Sug, and I do share a similar belief; she leans toward the practical side of Buddhism and I am an educated Christian atheist. My study of the bible convinces me that the Christian God does not exist. Sug and I recently recommitted to each other.

Sug and I were at a family holiday party and her younger sister was proselytizing her. When Sug could finally get a word in, she smiled and said: “When

we were at Asbury College (a Christian school), we were into your brand of Christianity, including attending weekend ‘witness teams’ for proselytizing. We shared your faith system. And then we grew up!” Wow!

Larry E. Farr
Indiana

Belief in Constitution is highest priority

I’m not an atheist. I’m not an agnostic. But I am thankful for what you do.

Molly Olsen
Minnesota

Still in closet over fear of social reaction

I read with great interest the May issue’s article about the number of atheists in America. In particular, I identified with the group that finds the word “atheist” too negative, tending to drive us into the closet. Growing up as an Irish-Catholic, I was inculcated with the attitude that atheists were scum and usually included in a list of undesirables, e.g., communists, criminals and atheists. To this day, at 77 years old, I behave under cover. Many of my friends and associates would be stunned to learn of my “lost faith.” I have even entertained the idea of my coming out by issuing an article titled, “Confessions of a Nonbeliever.” However, my fear of social reaction prevents me from doing so.

I also believe the term “atheist” suffers from being constructed by what is not believed. What is needed is a label

that incorporates what is believed. I, for one, believe in a higher authority, namely science. I would love to see a new term to embrace the positive. I don’t know what would be appropriate, but maybe something like “scientific spiritualist”? Maybe readers of Freethought Today have better suggestions? Who knows, the right one just might open the closet door for me.

David Connell
Maryland

Botanist has great use for Freethought Today

I’m a member of FFRF and I enjoy reading Freethought Today. I have a comment about the paper that may be unique.

I am a botanist. Botanists regularly “press” plants. We take a plant or a piece of the plant put it in a section of newspaper and then put it in a plant press to dry. When the specimen is dried, it can be mounted onto archival paper and placed in an herbarium. We often collect duplicates of a particular species and these are distributed as “exchange,” and in return we get plants from other places that we can study.

Well it turns out that your newspaper is the perfect size to use for pressing plants. I save all of mine and use them when I am going collecting or put them in the “newspaper bin” in the herbarium. Then they are used for collections that may be distributed around the country and world and others get to read pages of it. When exchange material comes in from other places, we often read the papers just for fun. So these pages may be read in many herbaria. If you ever have extras at the end of the year and need a home for them you can send them to me! Thanks!

Vicki Funk
Virginia

I am woman, hear me roar!

A letter by Al Schritt in the March issue led me to finally let you know what Annie Laurie Gaylor’s book, *Woe to the Women*, meant to me.

I ordered a second copy of *Woe to the Women* because I wanted to share it with my family, but I didn’t trust I would get it back in one piece. I wrote the following inside the first page of the book:

“I’m not asking you to roar, but I do ask — if you call yourself an independent, informed and enlightened woman — to at least read this book. You may not agree with all the commentary, but you can’t deny what the bible says. I don’t think women even realize where the stereotypes and injustice comes from. The double standard. The unfairness.”

I can’t say how successful my deconversion attempt was, or how many were strong enough to read the whole book. Some still “just pretend,” as Dan Barker put it, that all is well and we aren’t meant to understand the “will of God.” I have made it clear that I do not believe that saying “God works in mysterious ways” is an answer for the horrors of the word of God.

I appreciate all that FFRF does. I was so fond of [FFRF principal founder] Anne Gaylor. She was amazing! And, like many others, I am so proud of FFRF. You make the world a better place.

Shirley McClellan
North Carolina

Asking one question can save a lot of time

I have been married and divorced three times, and all three of the women were (and are) Christians. I've come to the conclusion that Christians and freethinkers shouldn't be married to each other. I will never marry a Christian again!

While talking recently with some Jehovah's Witnesses, they asked me, "How old do you think the Earth is?" Very few fundamentalist Christians would say 4.5 billion years. So now that is the first question I will ask any new potential friends, male or female. I figure I don't have enough years left to waste with people who believe in ghosts, spirits or Reaganomics, but I have plenty of time for a sensible realist.

Kyle Villarreal
Wisconsin

Can we do away with Good Friday observance?

I am extremely happy and impressed by your ongoing attempts to free the United States of all religious oppression. My enclosed check is to help fund the success of our worthy goals and to become a Lifetime Member.

May I add to the many worthwhile goals the possibility of doing away with all government recognition of Good Friday? Why does the stock market close?

Thanks you so much for your efforts in the advancement of reason, common sense and reality as the exposure of the ridiculous waste of time that is religion.

Joe Leslie
California

Virgin Mary appearances realistic to the gullible

One thing that has always puzzled me about religion is how gullible people are, willing to accept any absurdity just because someone says so.

A friend of my late mother went to a supposed shrine in the former Yugoslavia where, it was said, the Virgin Mary appeared. But not to everyone, just to one or two seers. (One might think that if she was so inclined, the Virgin Mary could appear to 40,000 people at Yankee Stadium. But no.)

At this shrine (Our Lady of Medjugorje), one of these seers would say something like, "The Virgin Mary is here." And hundreds of people, staring into space, would believe it. After a while, someone would say, "The Virgin Mary has gone," and everyone would sigh and go home. This little performance has been making truckloads of money for the church.

David M. Shea
Maryland

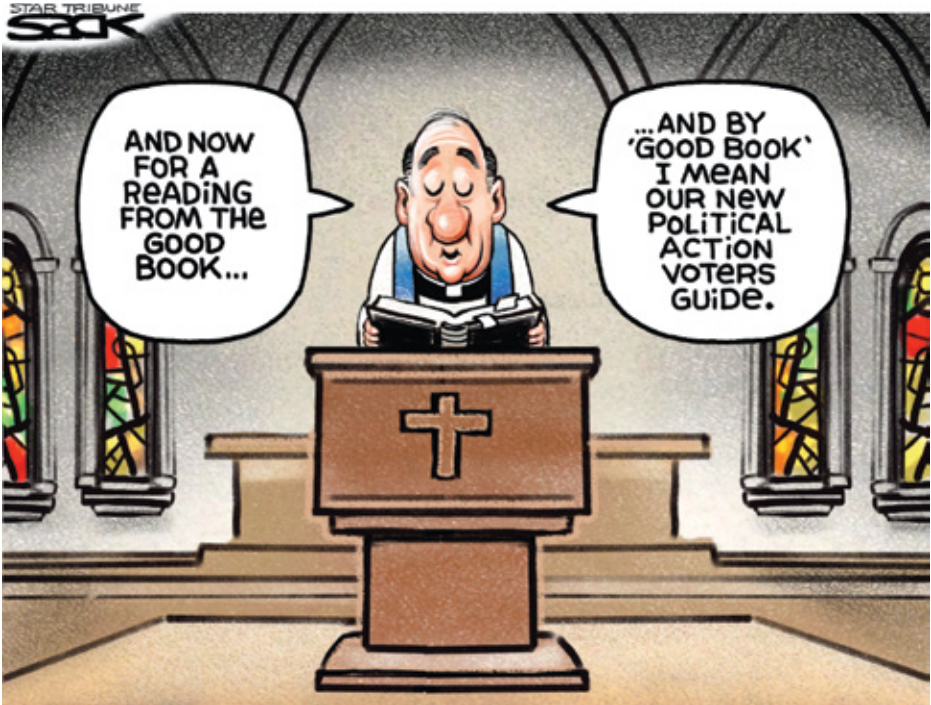
Exodus commandments should be displayed

I'm sure FFRF consumes a lot of time and money to force Christians to remove displays of the Ten Commandments from public property. I think it would be wiser to insist they display the whole commandments as they are written in Exodus, Chapter 20.

Commandment 4 says "No one shall work on the Sabbath, including male and female servants." (Exodus 20:8)

Commandment 10 says, "No one shall covet their neighbor's property . . . including their male and female servants." (Exodus 20:17)

If you read Exodus chapters 20 and



21, you'll notice that modern interpreters of the bible try to obscure the issue by switching the words "slaves" and "servants."

Public displays of the Ten Commandments are not only unconstitutional, they're dishonest.

Art Davis
Indiana

Crankmail reveals problems with religion

After having perused Freethought Today, enjoying the hilarious, unedited Crankmail from hateful religious folks, I found common threads: 1. Logical thinking makes them extremely angry because they are terrified of being suckers! 2. They are confused about the difference between religious freedom and the separation of church and state. 3. They tend to be undereducated in the English language and especially American history. 4. They really believe that religion holds the patent on morality.

The problem with these mental patterns is that they can be attributed to trusting what they are being told by their parents, the clergy and their friends as being true without individual investigation. Most Christians don't even know what the Council of Nicea was and that the bible has more changes than there are words in the New Testament. In other words, these folks are just repeating what they've heard.

My only hope is that religious folks can be enlightened in the future and that we can all be free of religious hindrance and persecution. I am not holding my breath.

Don T. Heitkotter
California

FFRF must have subgroup of non-atheist members

I think there is a subgroup of FFRF members that gets little attention within your organization. My husband and I have been members of FFRF (and even sponsored a brick in the garden), as well as lifetime members in American Atheists. To most, this would make one believe that we are atheists. To the contrary. We despise organized religion, religious nutjobs, and overly conservative determination to control our lives. We live our lives with the belief, well, perhaps hope, that there is a god (or gods) somewhere. The work that FFRF does, along with other organizations that we sponsor, is vital to us. We do not want the wall of church and state to be more thinly veiled than it already is and we hope that this will get thicker with time. I suspect that you may have

more members than just us within this subgroup. Keep up the great work!

John and Jose Bernadyn
Illinois

Wearing your atheism potentially dangerous

Carl Scheiman's terrific article "Adventures with my atheist cap" in the January/February issue prompted this letter. I certainly applaud his candor and philosophy, but I also worry about him.

Sadly, in Trump's America, we have seen a rise in assaults and despicable hate crimes.

As much as I support the right to wear his hat, the depressing reality is that in this current political environment, increasing numbers of people who would take exception to seeing his hat have become emboldened. We all see the Crankmail section in each issue, containing a constant flow of condemnation, rage and hatred directed at us all.

Thankfully, Mr. Scheiman hasn't had any incidents. My intent is not to discourage, but just to inject reality to what is represented in the frightening statistics. Sometimes discretion is the better part of valor.

Best to Mr. Scheiman and our wonderful organization.

James Walsh
New York

Despite ark story error, myth still falls apart

I'm writing about Andrew Seidel's article in the May issue regarding The Ark Encounter.

There was an erroneous idea in the article regarding the impossibility of the flood. It is stated that if the entire planet was covered, the seas would have risen 30,000 feet, and it would be impossible to breathe, plus they'd be experiencing -40 degree temperatures. That would be true if the ark was floating in the air at that altitude, but it's not. It's on water. Consequently, the air above the ark is the same as it was at the former sea level, so we would expect the air pressure and temperature to remain pretty much as they were.

Not to despair, though, as there are numerous other reasons why the flood myth is exactly that, a myth.

For starters, consider that it rained for 40 days and nights, and in that time the oceans had to rise 30,000 feet. That's a rainfall rate of roughly 30 feet per hour! Most folks would describe rainfall rates of three or four inches per hour as a downpour, and we're looking at 100 times that

rate, uninterrupted, for nearly six weeks. Rain falling that hard would likely strip all vegetation and soil from the ground. It would turn the oceans into a muddy, churning mess of brackish water, killing everything that lives in the sea and leaving it uninhabitable. There is also the real question as to whether of not the ark itself could withstand that sort of continued barrage.

But there are the two even more fundamental questions: First, where did this water come from? If every glacier melted, there would be nowhere near enough added liquid water to cover mountains of even modest height. Second, when the flood was over, where did all of this water go? It certainly can't evaporate. Even if it was possible to hold that much water in the atmosphere, the resulting atmospheric pressure at sea level would crush any land animal.

Then, of course, there are the questions of required genetics; how the animals arrived at the ark and subsequently returned to their native lands; and what the animals would eat once they got back onto the devastated, mud-caked surface. Some have suggested that they could eat the remains of animals that had drowned, but assuming any were obtainable at the surface, these carcasses would be many months old and likely infested with pathogens.

It's clearly fantasy, but it makes for a good lesson in critical thinking.

Jim Fiore
Professor in the Department of Physical Science, Engineering and Applied Technology
Mohawk Valley Community College
New York

Religion was designed to control the people

Religion is nothing more than a self-preservation strategy hatched by human-kind as a desperate attempt to suppress and control inner evil through fear of an imagined higher power or an authoritative leader. Ironically, this organized religion engendered for self-control became, in itself, the pure and unruly evil we tried to prevent, as it turned out to be nothing more than a projection of wickedness.

Fear was and still is used by the clergies and politicians to ensure that people would obey the rules that were allegedly bestowed by God upon humanity to avoid burning in hell. In reality, these rules were actually written by people to control the masses and to perpetuate the power of the religions leaders and their cohorts. As a result, telling the truth and challenging the establishment will only lead to ridicule, crucifixion, and death.

Sadly, religion was initially designed to control and tame the human animal, and eventually evolved into an organized bureaucracy with a beguiling political mechanism that manipulates and advances the leaders' political agendas.

Millions of people have been slaughtered in the name of God, by self-righteous, self-serving hypocrites only interested in advancing themselves at the expense of others.

Religion was and still is the biggest illusion that humans have created to satisfy their unquenchable narcissistic needs.

Richard Skaff
California

BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Kosaka Kumiko, 42, Lujan de Cuyo, Argentina: Child sexual and physical abuse. Kumiko, a Catholic nun working at the Antonio Provolo Institute for children with impaired hearing, is accused helping priests rape students and of physically abusing some herself. A native of Japan, she has Argentine citizenship.

A former student alleges Kumiko had her wear a diaper to contain bleeding after she was raped by priest Horacio Corbacho. Kumiko told the court during an 8-hour hearing that she's innocent. She wore her nun's habit and a bulletproof vest. At least 24 students have accused Corbacho, fellow priest Nicola Corradi and 3 other men from the facility of assaults. *Source: Daily Mail, 5-6-17*

Willie B. Wilkerson, 58, Dorchester, MA: Trafficking and possession with intent to distribute Class B and Class C drugs. Wilkerson, pastor of Quincy Street Missional Church, is accused of trafficking crack cocaine, fentanyl, oxycodone and suboxone. Police said they also found \$20,000 worth of stolen items from an excavating company on the property. *Source: Boston Herald, 5-4-17*

Richard Fritz, Centreville, MI: Embezzlement over \$100,000. Fritz resigned in October as pastor of 2 Catholic parishes during a probe of missing church funds. It's alleged he took \$213,000 from 2010-16. He was ordained in 1975. He allegedly spent hundreds of dollars a day on Michigan Lottery tickets. *Source: mlive.com, 5-3-17*

Robert E. Gamel, 67, Los Banos, CA: Possession of child pornography with a prior conviction. Gamel, former lead priest at St. Joseph Catholic Church, pleaded no contest in March 2016 to a similar charge and was sentenced to serve 11 months in jail. *Source: Fresno Bee, 5-3-17*

Robert C. Trueblood, 56, Fairmont, MN: Possessing pornographic material involving a minor on a work computer. Trueblood, pastor at St. James Evangelical Lutheran Church in Northrop, was arrested after an internet provider told authorities a user named "PervyPastor" had uploaded child porn in March. He's also superintendent of the church's school.

Other users calling themselves "TrueRev," "Kyle," "Pastor" and "Robert" also accessed the site from the same IP address. Trueblood gave an undercover agent his email username "erastes." Erastes in ancient Greece referred to an adult male sexually interested in an adolescent boy called an eromenos. An affidavit said he sent the agent a nude photo, purportedly of himself, from the chin down and later sent others of young males. *Source: Fairmont Sentinel, 5-2-17*

Dale A. Julio, 57, Destin, FL: 2 counts of sexual battery. Julio, a civilian employee at Eglin Air Force Base, was assistant pastor at Rocky Bayou Baptist Church in Niceville from 1998-2009. He's no longer associated with the church.

The mother of a 6-year-old alleged that she found her daughter wearing only her underwear in her bedroom, along with Julio's phone and a bottle of sexual lubricant. He then tried to bribe the mother not to report the incident, offering to help pay her mortgage, an affidavit said. *Source: Destin Log, 5-2-17*

Andrew Timpuza, 60, Nkutu, Malawi: Indecent assault. Timpuza, a Catholic priest based at Mtendere Parish, was arrested on the Malawi College of Forestry campus while with a 17-year-old girl.

"He was attempting to have sex with the girl but was disturbed by the forest guards who found him while romancing the minor," said police spokesman Edward Kabango. *Source: Malawi 24, 4-29-17*

Walter Chuquimia, 59, Wimauma, FL: 3 counts of sexual battery. Chuquimia, a pastor at Beth-El Farmworker Ministry, is accused of molesting a now 17-year-old girl on multiple occasions since 2011 and most recently on April 24. He's worked since 2013 at Beth-El, which conducts missions and hunger relief programs and offers worship services. *Source: WFTS, 4-27-17*

Benjamin Tweedt, 32, N. Liberty, IA: 3rd-degree sexual abuse, 4 counts of lascivious acts with a minor and 3 counts of indecent contact with a child. Tweedt, a junior high ministries volunteer at Parkview Church and teacher at Heritage Christian School, is accused of molesting at least 4 children ages 11-13 between 2006-13.

According to an affidavit, Tweedt told "Victim No. 4" in 2006 to go to the bathroom and measure his penis while Tweedt did the same. *Source: Press-Citizen, 4-27-17*

Tate J. Pigg, 22, Amarillo, TX: Sexual assault of a child and purchasing or furnishing alcohol to a minor. Sexual assault of a child in Texas involves alleged activity with a person under 17 but older than 14. Pigg, former youth minister at Pinnacle Community Church, is accused of a March 13 incident with a girl.

Pinnacle lead pastor Kurt Oheim said Pigg hasn't been affiliated with the church since late in 2016. *Source: Globe-News, 4-26-17*



Ifor Whittaker, aka Colin Pritchard, 72, London: 7 sexual assault counts against a male between the ages of 12-16 in 1987-93 while he was Anglican vicar of Sedlescombe. *Source: BBC, 4-26-17*

Augusto Cortez, 53, Hamptons Bay, NY: 1st-degree criminal sexual act and sexual abuse and endangering the welfare of a child. Cortez, a Catholic priest now removed from ministry, fled to Guatemala after being indicted in 2014.

Court documents allege he assaulted a girl who was born in 2007 several times between 2009-14. He pleaded guilty in 2009 to forcibly touching a 12-year-old girl in Brooklyn and was on probation for that conviction when the girl in the Hampton Bays parish was assaulted, officials said. *Source: Newsday, 4-24-17*

Gibson Kauta, 58, Njolo, Malawi, and Martin Shawa, 32, Jajezi, Malawi: 2 counts each of theft. Kauta is an elder at the Church of Central African Presbyterian, the country's largest Protestant denomination. Shawa is a church security guard. They are charged with stealing 25 mattresses, electric cables and a microphone. *Source: Malawi News Agency, 4-24-17*

Jumana Nagarwala, 44, Northville, MI: Female genital mutilation, transportation and conspiracy to engage in criminal sexual activity and making a false statement to a federal officer. **Fakhruddin Attar, 53,** and **Farida Attar, 50,** husband and wife, Livonia, MI: Conspiracy to commit and aiding and abetting female genital mutilation. They all belong to an Indian-Muslim community called Dawoodi Bohra.

The Attars own the clinic where Nagarwala mutilated the clitorises of 2 girls from Minnesota, both age 7. A key reason for the procedure is to curb female sexuality. It's believed to be the first prosecution under the federal statute barring it. *Source: Detroit Free Press, 4-22-17*

David Clarke, 66, Northampton, England: 2 counts of fraud by false representation. Clarke, a priest from Oregon serving parishes in the UK while studying at Cambridge University, is accused of defrauding St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church of over \$15,000 in 2010-14.

Most of the money came from ongoing church payments to Clarke for a vehicle he had leased and later returned without telling parish officials. *Source: Daily Gazette, 4-18-17*

Lemuel Elechicon, 51, Shorewood, IL: Felony grooming. Elechicon, a Trinity Christian School science teacher, is accused of sending sexually suggestive text messages starting last January to a 13-year-old girl. The girl's parents notified police. He told her he "was so in love with her" and in another wrote about watching "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" with her and other students: "I enjoyed rubbing your thighs. I told you those soccer thighs are so firm. I hope you liked it."

Elechicon, a native Filipino, also worked with youth groups at Ridgewood Baptist in Joliet. "By faith, Christ saved me from my sins when I was in high school," his educator webpage said. It also noted his skepticism about evolution theory and said he teaches and views creation science through "Biblical glasses." *Source: Joliet Patch, 4-16-17*

Warren Anderson, 55, St. Vincent, MN: 10 counts of possessing child pornography. Anderson was principal at Sterling Education, which has 35 campuses and is operated by Plymouth Brethren Christian Church, and was a volunteer organizer with the Republican Party of Minnesota from 1996-2008.

He admitted downloading some "questionable things" on Freenet, according to the criminal complaint, and allegedly told investigators that "oth-

erwise I am a goodie goodie." Nearly 3,000 image and video files, mostly of prepubescent girls, were seized in a search. *Source: Grand Forks Herald, 4-13-17*

An unidentified Israeli, 37, was arrested on suspicion of sexually assaulting several boys at a Jerusalem yeshiva where he supervised a dormitory. Four alleged victims, ages 17, 12 and 10, are involved and others may be, investigators said, calling it "a web of severe sexual abuse and sexual misdemeanors committed by the suspect who exploited his position and closeness to innocent children" in a statement. *Source: Jerusalem Post, 4-11-17*

Cordell Jenkins, 46, and Anthony Haynes, 37, Toledo, OH: Knowingly recruiting, enticing, harboring and transporting person(s) younger than 18 years old to engage in commercial sex acts. Jenkins, founding pastor of Abundant Life Ministries, and Haynes, pastor at Greater Life Christian Center, may be indicted on more charges.

A girl alleged to investigators that Haynes sexually exploited her for 3 years, starting when she was 14, and that Jenkins had sex with her at his home, a motel and a church, including paid encounters involving another minor girl. Court documents allege Haynes introduced juveniles to several adult males, who "provided Juvenile #1 with money in exchange for sexual activity."

Star Academy of Toledo, a K-8 public charter school, shares building space with Abundant Life. *Source: Toledo Blade, 4-7-17*

Michael Claiborne, 49, Jacksonville, NC: Failure to comply with a court order. Claiborne, prophet at New Rivers Ministries, allegedly owes more than \$8,000 in child support. He also has a pending court date for contributing to the delinquency of a minor. *Source: Daily News, 4-6-17*

Elizabeth A. Johnson, 37, Tulsa, OK: Embezzlement. Johnson, financial administrator at Bethany Community School, is charged with theft of \$118,000 in 2014-16 from the school, which serves pre-K through age 10 students and is operated by Bethany Christian Church, a Disciples of Christ congregation. She was fired last September. *Source: Tulsa World, 4-6-17*

William A. Dombrow, 77, Philadelphia: 4 counts of wire fraud. Msgr. Dombrow, rector at Villa St. Joseph, a retirement home for Catholic priests, is accused of embezzling more than \$500,000 from the facility. The missing money was discovered after a bank flagged suspicious payments at Harrah's Casino in Chester. *Source: philly.com, 4-5-17*

Loren Copp, 48, St. Louis: 2 counts of using interstate facilities to persuade a minor to engage in sexual activity and 3 counts of transmitting information about a minor with the intent to encourage sexual activity. Charges were added to earlier ones of production, attempted production and possession of child pornography.

A complaint said Copp, founder of a combination church, martial arts school and pizza place, was identified in images showing incidents of oral and vaginal sex, the earliest when a girl was 12. He ran the school under a nonprofit called Ma-ji Ryu Christian Karate Association and received public funding for student meals. Payments totaled \$14,121 for the 2014-15 school year. *Source: Riverfront Times, 4-3-17*

Velvel Butman, 49, Brooklyn, NY: Contempt of court for failure to pay child support since 2013. Butman has also failed to comply with the order of a Chabad Lubavitch rabbinic court to give his wife a Jewish divorce called a get.

"He strongly believes that a rabbi's not supposed to get divorced. Yet he's no longer technically a rabbi because he's been defrocked," said a rabbi

who requested anonymity.

Six of his children live with his estranged wife Rachel. The court said he owes \$78,400 in child support. *Source: NY Post, 4-2-17*

Chanc A. Baylor, 23, Akron, OH: Disseminating material harmful to juveniles. Baylor, a teacher's aide at K-8 Emmanuel Christian Academy, is charged with sending nude photos of himself though social media to 5 juvenile girls in 2016. *Source: Beacon Journal, 3-30-17*

Charlie M. Hamrick, 54, Pensacola, FL: 3 counts of providing obscene material to minors, multiple counts of lewd and lascivious behavior on a victim under age 16 and 36 counts of capital sexual assault on a victim under 12. Assaults on several boys are alleged from at least 1997-2017. For part of that time, Hamrick was a high school football coach and directed a group for boys called the Royal Rangers at Harvest Christian Center.

One alleged victim told investigators he was molested between 1997-2000, starting when he was 8 and had met Hamrick through his position as Sunday school teacher at Pine Forest United Methodist Church. It's alleged Hamrick's wife was present in their home during some of the contact but was unaware of what was going on. *Source: northescambia.com, 3-29-17*

Michelle Gates, 28, Ensley, FL: Cruelty to a child. Gates, a teacher at In His Arms Christian Academy, allegedly grabbed a misbehaving student by the nose, causing bruising. Video surveillance showed her walking over to the boy and appearing to grab his face. *Source: WEAR, 3-18-17*

Pleaded / Convicted

Juan Gregorio Rocha Romero, El Cortezal, Nicaragua: Guilty by jury of murder and illegal detention. Rocha, pastor of a local evangelical Christian group, and **4 followers** had carried out an exorcism on a 25-year mother of 2 after she attacked people with a machete, prosecutors said.

Witnesses said Vilma Trujillo García was tied up for 6 days in February without food or water, then was thrown naked on a burning pile of wood after their prayers failed. She died 5 days later of severe burns.

"God told her he was going to remove that evil spirit from her and asked us to start a fire, as that's where the spirit was going to be expelled," Rocha earlier told a reporter. *Source: AFP, 5-2-17*

John S. Mattingly, 71, Charlotte Hall, MD: Pleaded guilty to bank fraud for a scheme that moved about \$76,000 in church funds to his retirement account in 2006-10 when he was pastor of St. Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Leonardtown. *Source: AP, 5-2-17*

Juan Gomez, 53, Wimauma, FL: Guilty by jury of sexual battery on a minor and unlawful sexual activity with a minor. Gomez, pastor at Iglesia de Dios when arrested, is accused of assaulting a 17-year-old boy on a 2015 hunting trip. Another boy testified Gomez molested him in 1990 at a church camp and during a 1994 Tennessee college visit. *Source: Bradenton Herald, 4-27-17*

Cherie White, 45, and Keith White, 52, Kingstons, PA: Pleaded guilty to theft and access device fraud. She was an administrative assistant and he was board president at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church while allegedly raiding church coffers of \$175,000.

"They were living the big life on the congregation's nickel," said pastor Paul Metzloff. Prosecutors said the thefts started in 2010 when Cherie White obtained an unauthorized debit card linked to a church account. *Source: Citizens' Voice, 4-27-17*

Avraham Yosef, 67, Holon, Israel: Convicted of 2 counts of breach of trust by the Tel Aviv Magistrate Court. Judge Tzachi Uziel ruled that Yosef, chief rabbi of Holon, had a severe conflict of interest in the approval of kosher meat by the Beit Yosef rabbinical court, which is under the control of his family. *Source: Arutz Sheva, 4-23-17*

Samuel Hiller, 59, Far Rockaway, NY: Pleaded guilty to 1st-degree larceny for embezzling \$5 million in 2005-12 from a taxpayer-funded preschool founded by Hiller, a rabbi. The money was intended to serve Orthodox Jewish special-needs students ages 3 to 5. *Source: NY Post, 4-21-17*

Melissa A. Rogers, 49, Quincy, MI: Pleaded guilty to attempted larceny for stealing \$37,000 over 6 years from Girard United Methodist Church, where she was secretary. The original embezzlement charge will be dismissed if Rogers makes restitution. *Source: WTVB, 4-12-17*

Douglas McAllister, 48, Eaglesham, Scotland: Pleaded guilty to the theft of about \$52,000 from Mandors Fabric Store, where he was finance director. The theft was traced in part to McAllister, a married deacon and organist at an unidentified church, when the co-owner found sexually explicit emails and video of him having sex with his mistress, a former employee at Mandors. The video was discovered in a box in the office marked "To Do." *Source: Herald Scotland, 4-8-17*

Benoni "Jon" Enciso, 49, Boyne City, MI: Pleaded guilty to possession of sexually abusive

material and 2 counts each of surveillance of an unclothed person and eavesdropping using a device. Enciso, director of family life at Stutsmanville Chapel, is accused of recording an 18-year-old woman and her 15-year-old sister in the shower at his home. The family was visiting from out of town. He was their former pastor. *Source: WPBN, 4-7-17*

Douglas G. Kleinsmith, 55, Sartell, MN: Pleaded guilty to 2 counts of criminal sexual conduct on the day his trial was to start. Kleinsmith was part of a Latin Mass group that met at St. John Cantius Catholic Church. He also trained altar boys, including his 15-year-old victim, the complaint said.

He was convicted in Idaho in 1991 of sexually abusing a child younger than 16. *Source: St. Cloud Times, 4-4-17*

Richard Keenan, 65, Hubbard, OH: Pleaded guilty to 8 counts each of rape and gross sexual imposition and 4 counts of attempted rape for assaults on a girl from 2013-16, starting when she was 4. He served as Hubbard mayor in 2010-11, and after being sworn in told a reporter he brought more than political experience to the job: “I’m a Christian. Dedicating my life to Jesus has changed my life. Don’t preach it, but live it.”

He initially claimed the girl was a “willing participant” and had walked in on him in the bathroom and asked “if she could touch his pee-pee,” court documents said, followed by him performing oral sex and having her kiss his genitals. He has 3 daughters and 3 grandchildren. *Source: Christian Post, 3-29-17*

Sentenced

Torace Weaver, 38, Dayton, OH: 18 years to life in prison after being found guilty by jury of murder and 7 related charges in the 2015 death of his 2-year-old foster son. Stanley Thomas III died at King of Glory Worship Center, where Weaver was pastor. His wife, **Shureka Weaver**, 40, was found guilty of child endangerment and obstructing official business and received a 3-year sentence.

“The 20 separate blunt force injuries to Stanley’s head, face and neck, in conjunction with the disfiguring burns to his arm and buttock, and the fatal injury to the back of his skull represent a depraved disregard for the life of a child,” said prosecutor Kelly Madzey. *Source: Daily News, 5-5-17*

Jacob M. Malone, 35, Chadds Ford, PA: 3 to 6 years in prison after pleading guilty to institutional sexual assault, corruption of minors and endangering the welfare of children. Malone, pastor of Calvary Fellowship, met the victim, now 20, at age 12 in 2009 when he was her youth pastor in Arizona. She moved in with Malone and his wife in 2014 to help look after their 3 children. In March 2016 she gave birth to Malone’s daughter. *Source: philly.com, 4-28-17*

Clovis Vilchez-Parra, 36, Palatine, IL: 4 years in prison after pleading guilty to distributing child pornography. Vilchez-Parra, a native Peruvian who was a Catholic priest at Misión San Juan Diego in Arlington Heights when arrested in 2015, used computer file-sharing software to download and distribute images of children younger than 13. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 4-27-17*

Kenneth Adkins, 57, Brunswick, GA: 35 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of enticing a child and 7 counts of child molestation. Adkins, a controversial anti-gay pastor at Greater New Dimensions Church, was accused of inducing an underage couple to have sex in front of him in 2009 and then participating himself.

The male told the jury that Adkins watched them have sex so many times that he lost track. Adkins’ tweet last year about a shooting rampage at Pulse nightclub said, “I don’t see none of them as victims. I see them as getting what they deserve!!” *Source: WJXT, 4-25-17*

James Love, 46, Woodside, NY: 7 years in prison for 2015-16 assaults on a girl from the day care operated by his wife. The girl, now 7, testified against Love, pastor at New Mount Zion Baptist Church in Harlem. Queens District Attorney Richard Brown said Love touched the girl’s genitals through her underwear, tried to kiss her and forced her to touch his genitals. *Source: NY Post, 4-24-17*

Christopher A. Hogge, 48, Franklin, VA: 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to 19 counts of possessing and distributing child pornography. Hogge, pastor of Battery Park Baptist Church and director of social services for the city of Franklin, also admitted using a city printer to print more than 200 images of male child porn and keeping them in his desk at work. *Source: WTKR, 4-19-17*

Robert Jaynes Jr., 46, Indianapolis: 11½ years in prison for conspiracy to distribute and possession with intent to distribute controlled substances and their analogues and conspiracy to introduce and receive misbranded drugs. Jaynes was pastor of Irvington Bible Baptist Church when arrested in 2014 for making and dealing synthetic cannabinoid products called K2, spice incense or potpourri.

Workers, including at least 1 church member, were paid \$100 to \$200 in cash to fill as many as 10,000 bags a day with the drugs. Jaynes and a co-defendant sold about \$2.6 million in drugs through their company, West Strong Wholesale Inc. *Source: Post-Dispatch 4-14-17*



Keith R. Vallejo, 43, Provo, UT: 5 years to life in prison after being found guilty by a jury of 1st-degree object rape and 10 counts of 2nd-degree forcible sexual abuse. Vallejo, a bishop with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, will be parole-eligible in about 8 years.

Vallejo was accused of assaulting on his sister-in-law Julia Kirby, now 23, in 2013 when she stayed at his home while attending Brigham Young University. The Vallejos have 8 children. Another victim told police he also assaulted her while she was sleeping on his couch in 2014 when she was 17.

“The court has no doubt that Mr. Vallejo is an extraordinary, good man. But great men sometimes do bad things,” said Judge Thomas Low.

“For him to say that in a courtroom in front of the victim who was abused and raped by this man, that he is a great person, to me was unacceptable and unprofessional,” Kirby told a reporter.

Vallejo maintained he’s innocent and said at sentencing that the justice system “is geared to bullying you into confessing. The whole thing is geared to push you into pleading.” *Source: Salt Lake Tribune, 4-13-17*

Michael Higginbottom, 74, Newcastle, England: 17 years in prison for raping a teen boy in the 1970s at St. Joseph’s College, a Catholic seminary in Upholland, where Higginbottom taught and served as a priest. He still denies the allegations.

“My sexual abuse happened so often I became numb to what was happening,” testified the victim, now in his 50s, telling the court he stole a watch to get expelled so the abuse would end. “I used to pray to die. There are worse things than death — living with an evil man and being left alone at Upholland.” *Source: Liverpool Echo, 4-12-17*

Andrew L. Jackson, 31, White Hall, AR: 80 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of 2 counts of rape. He’ll have to serve 70% of the sentence (56 years) before he’s eligible for parole. Jackson, youth pastor in 2014 at Victory Tabernacle of Hot Springs United Pentecostal Church, was originally charged with 13 counts of rape, with 10 involving a 16-year-old and 3 counts involving her sister, age 13 at the time.

The younger girl told investigators she often spent the night at the Jackson home, sleeping with Jackson and his wife on a sectional sofa. She said they first had sex while his wife was asleep on another section.

Her sister alleged they had sex “at least 10 times” and that Jackson said if she told anyone he would burn down her family’s house with everyone inside. *Source: Arkansas Online, 4-11-17*

Lonny Remmers, 59, Corona, CA: A year and a day in prison, 3 years’ probation and \$95,000 restitution for conspiracy to commit wire fraud. Remmers, pastor of Heart of Worship Commu-

nity Church, and 2 others were charged with soliciting \$2 million from an Ohio developer as seed money for an investment fund. Instead they used the money for their own purposes. *Source: Press-Enterprise, 4-5-17*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

The **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** and the **Boy Scouts of America** are being sued by 5 plaintiffs in Idaho who allege they were molested as boys by scoutmaster **James Schmidt** and other volunteers. Plaintiff Riley Gilroy alleges Schmidt started molesting him and others in 1982 even though both organizations knew he had a history of sexual abuse documented in the Scouts’ “ineligible volunteer file.”

“I felt like they not only betrayed me, but the whole neighborhood. All of the other kids that were involved that were in my small circle were all betrayed by everybody around us that knew about this,” said Gilroy. *Source: KTVB, 5-2-17*

Eleven Catholic priests who served the Catholic Archdiocese of Agaña, Guam, have now been accused of preying sexually on children, with the number of plaintiffs reaching 58 with the filing of a suit by “H.J.C.,” now 53, who alleges he was molested by 2 priests at Santa Barbara Catholic Church in Dededo when he was 11 to 17 years old.

All but 2 plaintiffs are men. Guam is about 85% Catholic. *Source: Pacific Daily News, 4-17-17*

The **Catholic Archbishopric of Santiago** and the **Order of St. Clare** are being sued by a former nun in Chile who alleges she was forced out of the convent after she was raped and impregnated by a repairman in 2012. She joined the order in 2002 when she was 20.

After leaving, she gave the child up for adoption. Her rapist was sentenced to 5 years in prison in 2015. *Source: BBC, 4-5-17*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

St. John’s Abbey, Collegeville, MN, and the **Order of St. Benedict** settled a suit for undisclosed terms in which Catholic priest **Richard Eckroth** was accused of assaulting 2 boys at a cabin in the early 1970s when the boys were 8 and 10.

Eckroth was transferred to an island in the Bahamas in 1977 in the wake of numerous other allegations but was never criminally charged. He died at the abbey in 2015 at age 88. *Source: St. Cloud Times, 4-28-17*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago** will pay \$4.45 million to settle suits filed by 3 three men who allege they were molested more than a decade ago by former priest and convicted sex offender **Daniel McCormack** during an after-school program called SAFE at Our Lady of the Westside Catholic School.

He pleaded guilty in 2007 to fondling 5 boys ages 8 to 12 at another parish and was later defrocked.

Insurance no longer covers any claims involving McCormack, and the abuse scandal is affecting the long-term financial stability of the archdiocese. A luxury condominium and apartment developer recently announced plans to buy a huge Near North Side parking lot from the archdiocese for \$115 million. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 4-25-17*

Two Massachusetts Catholic entities settled sexual abuse suits with 8 victims for \$880,000, said plaintiffs’ attorney Mitchell Garabedian. Settling were the **Congregation of the Sacred Hearts** religious order and the **Diocese of Fall River**.

Among the victims in the 1970s and 1980s of deceased priest **James Nickel**, who died in 2008, was Chris Piersall, son of former professional baseball player Jimmy Piersall.

“The whole battle with the church over the last three years has been almost as bad as the abuse itself,” Chris Piersall said. “It’s good to get it over, the settlement wasn’t nearly what it should have been and some of these people should go to jail.” *Source: NECN, 4-10-17*

Legal Developments

Rowland Foster, 72, Lebanon, PA, faces a new charge of failing to report suspected child abuse in the November 2016 pneumonia death of Ella Foster, his 2-year-old granddaughter, after a judge dismissed the original charge for insufficient evidence. Foster, as pastor of Faith Tabernacle Congregation, is a mandatory reporter under the law. The church relies on faith healing.

After Foster’s preliminary hearing at which Judge Andrea Book dismissed the charge, cries of “Praise God!” were heard in the courtroom and supporters softly sang hymns. Book has recused herself from the case.

Forensic pathologist Neil Hoffman had testified that a single dose of antibiotics could have saved Ella’s life. State trooper Brian Cipko told the court he saw “a big red flag” at the scene. “You don’t see anybody crying, nobody’s frantic, nobody called the police or 911 to begin with. In my career as a police officer, I’ve never heard of a child dying and nobody calling the police or an ambulance to help.” *Source: Lebanon Daily News, 5-1-17*

Geronimo S. Aguilar, 47, sentenced to 40 years in Texas in 2015 for sexual assaults on 2 underage sisters whose family he was living with in the 1990s, had his appeal denied by a state appellate court. Aguilar, youth pastor at New Beginnings International Church in Ft. Worth and later the founding pastor of Richmond Outreach Center in Virginia, claimed the trial court wrongly allowed testimony from several women, including a 16-year-old, that they’d had affairs with him in Virginia while he was married. *Source: WTVR, 4-7-17*

Eliezer Berland, 80, an Israeli rabbi and founder of Shuvu Banim Yeshiva who was convicted in 2016 of sexually abusing several female followers, was released from prison after serving only part of his 18-month sentence. Berland fled to Africa after allegations surfaced in 2012. A parole board agreed to let him serve the rest of his sentence in a Jerusalem hospice due to health problems. *Source: Arutz Sheva, 4-5-17*

Allegations

A complaint of sexual abuse of a minor involving **Lawrence E. Gregovich**, a Catholic priest who died at age 71 in February, has been made to the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau, the Missouri diocese announced.

Similar allegations about underage boys and Gregovich, ordained in 1972, were made public by the diocese in 2002 but he was never charged criminally. *Source: Joplin Globe, 5-1-17*

An **unidentified female teacher** at Chicago Christian High School, Palos Heights, IL, has been suspended during a probe of alleged “delivery of sexual content” on a phone to as many as 6 male students on April 1.

Deputy Police Chief David Delaney said that no one police have interviewed wants to press charges. “If no one wants to say that a crime was committed, there is not much we can do,” he said, suggesting that any alleged contact may have involved students who were 18. “The investigation remains open. They can change their minds at any time,” he said. *Source: The Regional News, 4-20-17*

Removed / Resigned

Jonas Romea, Belen, NM, was removed as associate pastor at Our Lady of Belen Catholic Church because of alleged inappropriate conduct with an 18-year-old high school student. Police acting on a tip about Romea’s behavior contacted the Archdiocese of Santa Fe.

According to police report, Romea had kissed the girl on the cheek and forehead after services, told her he liked her Facebook photos and “wanted to see more pictures of her in shorts.”

Police Chief Scott Conner said the behavior from what is known at this point doesn’t appear to warrant criminal charges. *Source: News-Bulletin 5-3-17*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

IN MEMORIAM

FFRF ‘close to Joe’s heart’

FFRF Life Member L.R. Koukal sent FFRF this note and an obituary for Joseph Stone, who was killed during a humanitarian trip to Ukraine.

“I frequently read the obituaries and came upon one that makes a post-mortem request to donate to FFRF. I don’t know the man, but it gave me pleasure to read that maybe all us atheists are truly making headway in the battle against the bastion of ignorance. This guy beat me to being the first obit request like this. I am 96 and I know shortly all of this will be gone.”

The end of Stone’s obituary states that, “in lieu of flowers, the family asks that you make a donation to the Freedom From Religion Foundation” because it was “close to Joe’s heart.”

Joseph Stone, 36, was killed on April 23 when an explosion, possibly from a land mine or roadside bomb, hit an ar-

mored vehicle. He was working for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in the Luhansk region of eastern Ukraine.

Tucson.com reported that the “OSCE monitoring mission is made up of unarmed civilians from various countries who observe and report on activity in Ukraine and help foster dialogue among the parties fighting each other. Stone was the first OSCE worker to die as part of the monitoring mission. His death sparked calls from a wide range of governments and agencies for an investigation into the explosion.”

Joe grew up in Tucson and got his paramedic certification there. He traveled the world to help people where they needed it the most, including such places as Afghanistan, Liberia, Iraq and the North Sea, before going



Joseph Stone

to Ukraine.

“He was funny. He was smart. He was a good father. He was nothing less than a humanitarian. He went to the worst parts of the world where the people needed him the most. And he went above and beyond. Always. Always,” Matt Stone, Joe’s younger brother, told TucsonNewsNow.

FFRF thanks Joe and his family for their kind thoughts and appeal for donations.

Douglas Brassil leaves FFRF generous bequest

FFRF Member Douglas J. Brassil, 77, of Toledo, Ohio, died March 24, 2017, of acute lymphoma.

Doug retired from Libbey-Owens-Ford in Toledo and was a lifetime resident of Maumee and Toledo. He enjoyed attending local sports events, especially when nieces and nephews were playing. He had been a member of FFRF since 2004.

Doug left a bequest of \$7,500 to FFRF from a life insurance policy.

“We’re sorry to lose Doug, a longtime supporter, and touched and grateful he provided for FFRF’s future,” FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor said.

CRANKMAIL

Here is your June/July installment of some of the correspondence FFRF receives on the negative end of the spectrum. These come to you as received, unedited.

Leave school kids alone: I am so sick of you and your group going after school kids who have beliefs. You just can't stand the fact that maybe they possess enlightenment that you cannot understand. Leave school children alone. The ones who believe in God are not the ones shooting up the school, causing problems in school or trying to treat others like their are stupid, if they don't believe. Like you do. — *Brenda Aikey*

Who you are: Please explain to me who you think you are, from what I gather you are people of fear.Bitching and complaining about The Ten Commandments and bible verses on Police cars is not something for your kind to fear or anyone else to fear. Displays of these things do not promote a religion. You are promoting hate, and violence towards those who believe in something. Your organization needs to rethink its stand and back off. If you dont like something dont look at it but dont be afraid of words.... What are you people thinking???????????????? — *Mel Meadows*

Why: Who are you to go and bully people and tell them what they can and cannot put on their police vehicles and things!?! Leave us Christians alone. We will stand up for what is right and living for Jesus Christ is right and always will be right. What we do down here in the state of Virginia is none of your concern!! You stay in your state with your false gods and we'll stay here in Virginia with our ONE TRUE GOD!! Too bad the question about how people learn about FFRF doesn't have because y'all are idiots because I sure would have checked that one!! – *Karen King*

Satan: Don't they the right to do stuff just like you and your "kind"???? Don't you see how foolish you are???? — *JP Poche*

I'm Catholic: Bite me. — *John Borra*

idiots: If someone does something that you disapprove, it is not a violation of rights. The only ones that violate a persons righys are you because of your hatred of religious. Why don't you grow up and go away — *Edward J. Biel*

Papal audience: Find something to believe in and live for that is a positive.instead of bewailing and spending time over Some one you believe doesn't exist!!! Ever hear of paschals wager? Please check it out! — *Donna Donovan*

Sick of liars: You people are such huge liars that you are sick. What small minded and dishonest bigots you are. AND..... you are ANTI-American and ANTI-constitutional. You are just atheistic ISIS. You want people forced to believe what you think. — *Philip Creider*

Vatican visit: Guess you folks don't have a clear understanding of the Constitution in regard to religion. — *Catherine Galligan*

Crossing the line: Remember, what goes around comes around and Karma dictates that it will soon be your turn in the barrel. If you don't fear bad Karma then you are dumber than a rock. — *Frank Penshco*

Get over yourselves: God and the Pop are more important and so far above you it's beyond belief. — *Paul Kahler*

God bless cops: Next time you fuckers need a cop,I hope he doesn't show..Your all a piece of Shit.God Bless America and cops...Go fuck yourself — *Robert Michalowski*

John: You guys say that you are athiests but then give support to satanic groups becouse of there actions against christianity. You guys are hypocrites. They are alsoa religious group becouse they praise christians Num 1 enemy, lucifer. your propagabda is so sad. the things you write are so subjective. there si no autonomy and you are mostly against christians then other religions. What about hinduism, the jewish religion, budisim etc. — *John Pavic*

Why?: If you don't believe in God (which we know that is not true because the Bible makes explicitly clear that every person believes in God, Romans 1) but since you like to pretend you don't believe. Why would you be committed to stopping religion. If its not true then why bother. The very fact that you fight against religion is evidence of your belief. You know the God of the Holy Bible is real. Please repent of your sin and turn to Jesus Christ. — *Daniel Varney*

It's real: HELL exists and is filled with atheists!!!! — *Debbie Canova*

ISIS Decapitation: My prayer to the Lord Jesus Christ is for Him to get His to commission ISIS to go to Madison Wisconsin and behead leaders of the FFRF and their patsy attorneys. — *Sal Bechler*

You: You people had better mind you own business. Atheism is not a religion. The Presidents order is for religious groups who are tax exempt. If your looking for trouble it will find you. — *Dan Time*

First Amendment: It is amazing how many people do not understand the 1st Amendment, or reinterpret it, for their own purposes. Such is the case with your organization and followers. The 1st Amendment's language is very clear and simple to understand and comply with. Our Founding Fathers used those particular words so that even the poorly uneducated could fully understand the meaning of the 1st freedoms. It is really a shame you all don't get it!!!! I will never trust men to rule over my conscious!! — *Joe Broyles*

Jesus is Lord!: I don't understand why your group hates our living creator and Lord, Jesus Christ. Why are you so hellbent on destroying our nation's Christian heritage? I think the American people spoke this last November when Donald J Trump was elected president. They are tired of folks like destroying America and persecuting Christians. With God's help and that of our new real President, God is coming back to America to reverse the damage of the militant secularists and homosexuals. I pray that you release Satin and come to God's grace and mercy. — *James Carlson*

YOU ARE IN ERROR: There are no contradictions within the Holy Bible. You err because you do not know the Scripture. — *David McDaniel*

THEY SAID WHAT?

Father, we’ve trampled on your holy institution of holy matrimony and tried to rewrite what it is and we’ve called it an alternate lifestyle . . . Father, oh father, please forgive us. Lord, we have gone to killing the most innocent amongst us . . . We’re killing our descendants and we’re calling it a choice. Oh, God in heaven, forgive us, please.

Texas state Rep. Randy Weber, speaking at the sixth annual “Washington – A Man of Prayer” event. *Huffington Post, 4-28-17*

Of course, contraception doesn’t work. Its efficacy is very low, especially when you consider over years, which you know a lot of contraception health advocates want, to start women in their adolescent years when they’re extremely fertile, incidentally. And continue for 10, 20, 30 years, over that span of time the prospect that contraception would always prevent the conception of a child is preposterous.



Teresa Manning

Anti-abortion activist Teresa Manning, talking to NPR in 2003, and who was appointed by President Trump to serve as deputy assistant secretary for population affairs at the Department of Health and Human Services, which subsidizes contraception, Pap smears and other preventive health care services for 4 million low-income Americans. *Huffington Post, 5-1-17*

If you put a lawn mower out in your yard and in a hundred years come back, it’s rusted and falling apart. You can’t put parts out there and a hundred years later it’s gonna come back together.

Creationist Mark Green, President Trump’s failed pick to be secretary of the Army, using a tremendously flawed anecdote on why he believes evolution is wrong. *CNN, 5-1-17*

The reality is, across the wider world, the Christian faith is under siege. Throughout the world, no people of faith today face greater hostility or hatred than followers of Christ.

Vice President Mike Pence, speaking at the World Summit in Defense of Persecuted Christians in Washington, D.C. *Washington Post, 5-12-17*

I want the school boards of America in the hands of evangelical Christians within the next four to six years. And it can happen and that will have a huge impact because so many school districts now are controlled by wicked, evil people, and the gays and lesbians, and I keep bringing their name up, but they are at the forefront of this attack against Christianity in America.

Evangelist Franklin Graham, speaking with Fox News religion reporter Todd Starnes. *Fox News, 5-12-17*

[Religion] gives us a compass as to how we should behave. [Without religion,] we can begin to trash one another and justify our own actions. If a culture doesn’t have a set of objective realities and a way in which to judge our own behavior or to guide our own behavior, I think we get lost, and we’re seeing that today.

Ohio Gov. John Kasich, in an interview with Brian Lehrer on WNYC Radio. *WNYC, 4-27-17*

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, info@ffrf.org

Freedom depends on freethinkers.



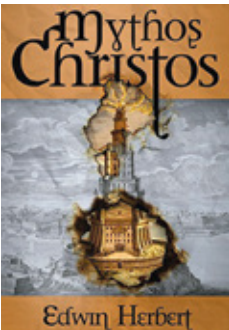
FREETHOUGHT BOOKS

The following books are by FFRF members on the topics of religion or freethinking. FFRF does not do traditional book reviews.

Mythos Christos

By Edwin Herbert
\$14.22 (paperback); \$7.99 (Kindle) 2016

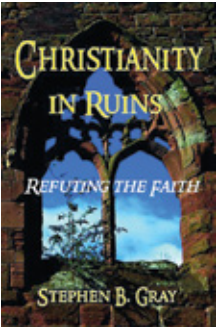
A Vatican team invites the young scholar Lex Thomasson to Egypt to help solve a sequence of puzzles left by fifth century philosopher Hypatia in her attempt to preserve the truth about the hidden origins of Christianity, information the Catholic Church did not want exposed. Lex finds himself on an archeological treasure hunt, but as he unlocks the secrets along the path, mortal peril follows.



Christianity in Ruins: Refuting the Faith

By Stephen B. Gray
\$39 (paperback) 2016

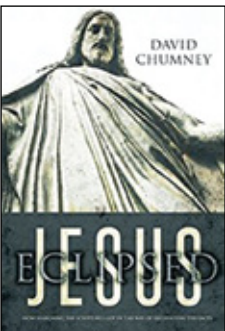
This book is intended to be the most thorough and well-organized refutation of the Christian religion. A few of the book's main claims are that God is not a useful explanation of anything, Jehovah was pictured as a psychopath, Jesus never existed, Christianity has little of value to say about morality, and literal views of the bible are irrational. It's backed with years of research and exemplary scholarly standards. The intention is to show that Christianity deserves no respect as a theory or moral guide.



Jesus Eclipsed: How Searching the Scriptures Got in the Way of Recounting the Facts

By David Chumney
\$14.99 (paperback) | \$9.99 (Kindle) 2017

Chumney offers readers a chance to engage in critical study of what biblical texts can reveal about the Jesus of history. A small handful of writings, alongside the gospels, provide the only sources of credible information about Jesus. But-tressed by reputable academic sources and offering readers avenues for further study, this book will appeal to freethinkers seeking a careful, evidence-based look at the historical Jesus and his true place in the annals of the past.



School's 'Bible Release Time' ends

Life Member Mitch Kahle was able to stop a Michigan elementary school from promoting an annual "Bible Release Time."

Kahle, representing the Michigan Association of Civil Rights Activists, sent letters to Principal Bob Cassiday at Daisy Brook Elementary School in Fremont, Mich., informing him of the constitutional violation.

The school's flier for the program, distributed to students, included this sentence: "Bible Release Time is a program permitted by Michigan law, whereby children are released from school classes during school hours to attend religious instruction at a nearby location."

Kahle's letter informs Cassiday that, "This statement is false and misleading, as state law does not 'permit' or otherwise authorize 'Bible Release Time Class.'"

IT PAYS TO COMPLAIN

His letter continues, "This 'Bible Release Time' flier is blatantly unconstitutional and illegal. The 'Bible Release Time' program at Daisy Brook is designed to promote and support one particular religion, pastor, and church, and this is an unconstitutional establishment of religion."

Cassiday responded by letting Kahle know that the school would be "canceling the final Release Time program for the school year. Additionally, we will abide by the Constitution moving forward."

But Kahle was thrown off by the wording "for the school year."

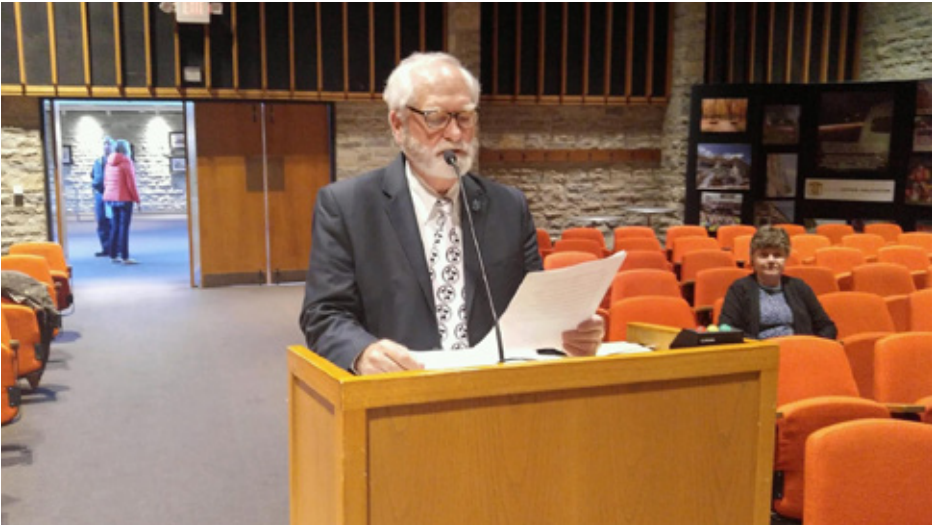
"Your use of the phrase 'this school year' is misleading because public schools are always prohibited from

establishing any program or activity that involves or promotes religion," he responded.

Kahle then reminds the principal that this event is not the first time the school has been caught violating the Constitution.

"Your June 9, 2015, memo to Daisy Brook Staff included the following: 'As a member of the Daisy Brook Elementary staff, and of Fremont Public Schools, you and I will immediately and forever cease and desist from this or any other activity which promotes or advances Christianity or religion generally.'"

"And yet here we are again, just two years later, addressing another complaint about the very same constitutional violations. You either misunderstand the law or have intentionally chosen to ignore it."



SECULAR INVOCATIONS

of wisdom."

Sweeney now says he hopes to get the council to stop having any invocations before meetings.

Most invocations in this room begin with a request to bow your heads.

Ed Sweeney
Upper Arlington,
Ohio, City Council
May 8, 2017

FFRF Member Ed Sweeney gave the following secular invocation that he said was met with kind words from citizens, city staff and council members, including Council President and Mayor Deborah Johnson. Sweeney said he would like to give credit to state Rep. Juan Mendez, who gave a similar invocation on May 13, 2013, before a session of the Arizona House of Representatives.

"When I finished, the mayor said, 'Awesome,'" Sweeney wrote.

Johnson also wrote a note to Sweeney, which said: "Thank you very much for taking the time to come to our City Council meeting. City Council and staff appreciate you delivering the invocation on May 8, 2017. We value your message and words

NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER CONTEST

Our goal is to see secular citizens flood government meetings with secular invocations that demonstrate why government prayers are unnecessary, ineffective, embarrassing, exclusionary, divisive or just plain silly.

The person who gives the best secular invocation will be invited to open FFRF's annual convention, receiving an all-expenses-paid trip to Madison, Wis., on the weekend of Sept. 15-17, 2017, along with a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

MORE INFO AT:
ffrf.org/outreach/nothing-fails-like-prayer



Signature _____