



**A
Bishop
Refuted**

PAGE 3



**2018 college
student essay
contest winners**

PAGE 12-16



**Jocelyn
Williamson's
secular invocations**

PAGE 23

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Appeals court upholds cross victory

FFRF, AHA sued to have 34-foot-tall cross taken down in Florida park

A federal appeals court has ruled that a 34-foot-tall cross in a Florida park is unconstitutional and must come down.

The decision is a resounding victory for the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the American Humanist Association.

In a pivotal federal decision released Sept. 7, the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld a lower court judgment that ruled against the promotion of Christianity — and exclusively Christianity — by local government agencies.

However, the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, which is representing the city of Pensacola in the case, announced Sept. 18 it had filed a petition with the Supreme Court asking the court to hear the case.

In 2016, FFRF and AHA filed suit



A federal appeals court ruled that this 34-foot concrete cross in Bayview Park in Pensacola, Fla., must come down.

against the city of Pensacola, Fla., on behalf of residents of the city troubled by a large, freestanding cross on city park property. The massive cross, located in Bayview Park and maintained by city of-

ficials, represents a troubling elevation of Christian faith above other beliefs.

The three-judge panel begrudgingly affirmed a district court decision because of a previous case, *ACLU v. Rabun*

(from 1983), with virtually identical facts that had found a governmental cross unconstitutional. The panel cannot disregard that precedent without it being overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court, or without the full court of the 11th Circuit overruling itself.

In June of last year, Senior U.S. District Judge Roger Vinson ruled that “the Bayview Cross can no longer stand as a permanent fixture on city-owned property.” The white Latin cross owned, displayed and funded by the city of Pensacola towers over Bayview Park. The cross is also the site of numerous Easter Sunrise services, frequently co-hosted by Christian churches.

Vinson ordered the cross removed within a month. Lamentably, the city decided to waste more taxpayer funds by appealing the case to the 11th Circuit. The appeals court, in its wisdom, has affirmed the lower court’s ruling.

However, the appeals court decision

See *Victory on page 2*

FFRF slams Citizens United, Huckabee for smear letter

It includes numerous falsehoods, often repeated several times

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is taking Mike Huckabee and the Citizens United Foundation to task for scurrilously using its name as a fundraising gimmick.

FFRF has obtained a recent letter that Huckabee wrote for the Citizens United Foundation. The undated letter entirely devoted to attacking FFRF runs to 10 pages and includes a request for a minimum donation of \$22 and a petition that recipients are to sign and return to Citizens United. The letter states that it will be mailed to 2 million Americans. (For a fun point-by-point refutation, read the letter with FFRF’s annotations online at ffrf.org/attack.)

Huckabee is a former governor of Arkansas and Fox News host. He also lost twice in Republican presidential primaries. Citizens United is an organization that, in 2010, won a U.S. Supreme Court case which struck down a federal law prohibiting corporations and unions from making expenditures in connection with federal elections. In other words, the controversial outcome of the case equated corporations with people when it comes to political donations.

The letter from Huckabee and Citizens United is not simply dishonest, it contains patently false statements that damage, and are intended to damage, the reputation of FFRF. Worse yet, through this dishonest-



ty and fear-mongering, Huckabee and Citizens United are striving to build up a \$44 million theocratic war chest.

In one sense, FFRF is flattered, FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor write in a letter to Huckabee and Citizens United. Huckabee’s letter recognizes that FFRF and its legal team have “done more than just about any other group” to buttress the constitutional wall of separation between church and state. Huckabee also admits that he “is afraid” of FFRF.

However, Huckabee’s letter overflows with lies, disinformation and misstatements. The biggest lie appears on page two and is repeated 13 times in various iterations: “The Freedom From Religion Foundation has launched a Campaign for an Atheist America that has one goal — to erase any trace of America’s Christian heritage from the public square.”

FFRF has launched no such campaign. Nevertheless, the letter even indicates that Huckabee and the Citizens United Foundation are familiar with various stages of the nonexistent campaign: “Urgent action is needed to stop the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s newest and most

Supreme Court asked to reverse FFRF victory

Morris County, N.J., is asking the U.S. Supreme Court to overturn FFRF’s resounding victory this spring against taxpayer subsidy of churches.

The county, defended by the Catholic Becket Fund, wants the court to overrule the New Jersey Supreme Court’s decision against funding religious worship.

FFRF will be represented by renowned legal scholar Erwin Chemerinsky in opposing the Sept. 19 request. Chemerinsky is the dean of the University of California-Berkeley School of Law.

The New Jersey Supreme Court unanimously held in April that state taxpayers cannot be forced to pay to repair active houses of worship, several of which explicitly sought taxpayer funds in order to further their worship services.

This decision will save New Jersey taxpayers many millions of dollars and protects the religious liberty of all New Jersey residents.

Morris County churches are arguing that they are entitled to taxpayer funds, even though the New Jersey Constitution specifically forbids this religious use of taxpayer funds. One of these churches sought and received a grant to allow the church’s “continued use by our congregation for worship services.” Another received funds “to ensure continued safe public access to the church for worship.”

At the heart of the lawsuit, argued in New Jersey state court, is the New Jersey Constitution’s guarantee: “nor shall any person be obliged to

See *Huckabee on page 2*

See *Supreme on page 2*

Victory

Continued from page 1

is unprecedented not only because the judges indicated they did not want to rule in the Constitution’s favor, but also because two of the judges on the panel wrote separately to urge the court to rehear the case en banc.

FFRF welcomes the judgment, though, regardless of the undercurrents. “Reason and the Constitution have prevailed,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “The court has

affirmed that individuals of minority faiths or no faith at all are full citizens of this country and may not be excluded or proselytized by their government.”

The American Humanist Association concurs.

“It’s reassuring that the court recognized the illegality of an overtly Christian cross conspicuously displayed in Bayview Park,” says Roy Speckhardt, executive director of AHA. “As the city

of Pensacola complies with the court’s direction, it is our hope that this park becomes an inclusive space for all.”

The Becket law firm offered to appeal the ruling for the city for free and Pensacola Mayor Ashton Hayward accepted the offer.

“The city looks forward to being vindicated on appeal — as the majority of the court said it should be,” Hayward said in the release.

FFRF believes that the court will deny review or agree that the cross is unconstitutional and must be removed.

The plaintiffs in the case are Amanda Kondrat’yev; Andreiy Kondrat’yev; David Suhor and Andre Ryland. The case was brought by both FFRF and AHA, and handled by FFRF staff attorneys Rebecca Markert and Madeline Ziegler and AHA’s senior counsel Monica Miller and legal director David Niose.

Huckabee

Continued from page 1

frightening plan — the next phase of their Campaign for an Atheist America.”

This appears to be a deliberate lie meant to scare people into donating to Citizens United.

In another lie, the letter states: “In Ohio, the Freedom From Religion Foundation sued to prohibit the Star of David from being displayed at a new Holocaust Memorial.” FFRF never sued over this memorial on Capitol grounds. FFRF simply wrote

a letter suggesting that a secular memorial on Capitol grounds was more appropriate and inclusive than a sectarian memorial. Painting an artistic suggestion as an anti-Semitic lawsuit deliberately and dishonestly casts FFRF in a negative light.

Then there is this absurd and harmful paragraph: *To the Freedom From Religion Foundation, you and I are “narrow minded” because we still believe in “old fashioned” Religious Values. Since you and I don’t think that things like pornography*

and crosses in urine are “art,” they firmly believe that they must sue the Heartland into accepting these things.

“The clear implication here is that FFRF has sued to force people to accept pornography and crosses in urine as art, an indefensible claim devoid of any basis in reality,” Barker and Gaylor write.

The state/church watchdog has never brought a lawsuit about pornography or urine-soaked crosses, much less one that forced people to accept them

as art.

The Huckabee attack letter makes many statements that purport to be factual but are actually lies. Those statements injure FFRF’s reputation — and are intended to injure that reputation.

FFRF is formally requesting that Mike Huckabee and the Citizens United Foundation cease disseminating what it calls their smear letter or other lies about FFRF. The unvarnished truth is the least that their followers — and this country — deserve.

Supreme

Continued from page 1

pay tithes, taxes, or other rates for building or repairing any church or churches, place or places of worship, or for the maintenance of any minister or ministry, contrary to what he believes to be right.” Art. I, Para. 3.

Morris County is asking the Supreme Court to extend a 2017 case, *Trinity Lutheran v. Comer*, which held that Missouri could not exclude a church-owned playground from a secular funding program. The county made the same unpersuasive arguments before the New Jersey Supreme Court, which soundly rejected the county’s arguments. The state high court crucially noted that this case “does not involve the expenditure of taxpayer money for nonreligious uses, such as the playground resurfacing in Trinity Lutheran.”

FFRF, with the help of Chemerinsky, will file a response to the county’s petition, urging the court to reject the requested review.

“We’re confident that the U.S. Supreme Court will either deny review or will accept the case only to clarify that the New Jersey Supreme Court got the case exactly right,” FFRF Co-President Dan Barker said.



The Presbyterian Church in Morristown, N.J. got \$1.04 million in grants from Morris County. The New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that the county cannot pay for the upgrades to that church (and others). The county is now trying to get the U.S. Supreme Court to take the case.

Plaintiffs in the case are David Steketee, an FFRF member, and FFRF itself. In New Jersey state court, Steketee and FFRF were represented by outside counsel Paul Grosswald and FFRF attorneys Andrew Seidel

and Ryan Jayne, who will continue as co-counsel. Chemerinsky is one of the most cited legal scholars of all time and has argued several cases before the Supreme Court.

FFRF welcomes 14 new Life Members

FFRF is excited to announce our 14 newest Lifetime Members and two new After-Life Members.

FFRF’s newest Lifetime Members are Leslie Dimmick, Michael Donovan, Benjamin Peter Fields, Richard Lunde, Anthony Martin, Shane McDaniel, Brian McDonald, Douglas Pierson, Clifford Raynor, Elizabeth Rose, Maria Pilar Susterich, Robert Taylor, Sue Taylor and Donna Watt. States represented are Alabama, Arizona, California, Idaho, Illinois, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

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

Our two new After-Life Members are Shawn Flisakowski and William Weiss. An After-Life Membership is a \$5,000 donation for those who want their donation to “live on” after them.

ffrf

FREETHOUGHT
TODAY

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With apologies to Lin-Manuel Miranda . . .

A Bishop Refuted

When news broke of the Catholic Church’s most recent massive pedophilia scandal and cover-up, Bishop Robert Morlino of the Madison, Wis., diocese was quick to respond, like he was running out of time, with a letter blaming “a homosexual subculture” within the Church.



Bishop Morlino

When FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover read Morlino’s words, he called upon FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel to respond, invoking Hercules Mulligan’s call to Alexander Hamilton in the popular musical “Hamilton”:

“Oh my God, tear this dude apart!” Which Andrew did, with a scathing op-ed published in The Capital Times in Madison.

Sam and his wife recently had a baby, giving Sam some late-night bottle-feeding time, when it was quiet uptown. In the room where that happens, Sam worked nonstop nourishing his creative side (as well as his child). In the following verses, Sam takes his shot, recreating Andrew’s rebuttal of Bishop Morlino based on two songs from “Hamilton” — “Farmer Refuted” and “You’ll Be Back.” Who can say no to this?

— By Sam Grover —

(Bishop Morlino)

Hear ye, hear ye my name is Bishop Morlino
And I present free thoughts on the pedophilia scandals within the Catholic Church!
Heed not the public who scream “prosecution,”
There’re none with your interests at heart.

(Sam to Andrew)

Oh, my God, tear this dude apart.

(Morlino)

Quitting the Church is not a solution.
Don’t let them lead you astray.
This scandal is not about me . . .

(a Catholic)

Let him be

(Morlino)

They’re playing a dangerous game.
I pray that God shows you his mercy.
Shift blame, shift blame . . .

(Andrew, Morlino repeats)

Yo, he’d have the public deafened to the sound
of screams but some
Prosecution is needed, the Nones are gonna
Win this, it’s hard to listen to you preach
forgiveness.

Quitting the Church is the only way, honestly you
shouldn’t even talk
What’s this about being gay?
That’s not even true, the culprit is you — we must
talk about scandal

(M)

. . . is not about me

(A)

Ken Ham speaks more eloquently than thee

(M)

They’re playing a dangerous game



Sam Grover’s head was Photoshopped onto an image from the musical “Hamilton.”

(A)

But strangely, your dogma’s the same

(M)

I pray that God shows you his mercy

(A)

He’s nonexistent firstly . . .

(M)

Shift blame

(A)

Quit the Catholic Church!

(M)

Shift blame

(A)

Quit the Catholic Church!

(M)

Heed

(A)

If you repeat yourself again I’m gonna

(M/A)

Scream!

(A)

Honestly, look at me, please don’t read

(M)

With your interests

(A)

Don’t modulate the key then not debate with me
Why should a church survive and collect tithes
after committing such atrocities?

(a Catholic)

Andrew Seidel, please

(A)

Look, I’d rather be religionless than involved in
this mess, drop the niceties.

(Choir)

Silence! A message from the Church,
A message from the Church, a message from the
Church!

(The Church)

They say, you’re not buying our lies, that this all
can be blamed on the gays.
You cry, that protecting the priests isn’t worth the
fate of one more child.

Too bad. We thought that we made an
arrangement: your soul for your tithes, now
you’re making us mad. Remember, despite all
the scandals, we’re still your guide . . .

You’ll be back, soon you’ll see,
We still own you psychologically.
You’ll be back, time will tell,
You’ll recoil at the threat of hell.
Priests get moved, children fall,
You have kept the faith through it all,
And when push comes to shove,
We will scare you with eternal damnation to
remind you of our love!

Da da da da da . . .

You say you care for the victims and your heart
is torn
But you vote with your attendance every Sunday
morn’ . . .
And no, don’t blame the prophets,
Cuz you’re our source of profits
Our sweet and steady profits
From which the Church will profit
Forever and ever and ever and ever and ever . . .

You’ll be back to the pews
Though you know we haven’t changed our views.
There’s no time to take stock
We’re far too busy tending to our flock.
We will claim we’ve changed our ways,
Though we’ll blame the victims and the gays
As we work to keep priests safe
You can’t trust us based on history, so you’ll trust
us based on faith.

Da da da da da . . .

Pray with me!

(Choir)

Da da da da da . . .

HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

FLEAS

*I form the light, and create darkness:
I make peace, and create evil:
I the Lord do all these things.*
—Isaiah, 45:7

I think that I shall never see
a poem as ugly as a flea,
a flea whose hungry mouth is pressed
against a buttock or a breast,
a flea that spreads disease all day
and lifts its little claws to prey:
poems are made by you and me,
but only God can make a flea.

I think that no one ever made
a poem as powerful as AIDS,
or plagues that may in summer kill
half the bishops in Brazil
and share the good Lord’s Final Answer
with clots and cholera and cancer—
for God concocted pox to mock us,
staph and syph and streptococcus:
poems are made by bards or hacks,
but only God makes cardiacs.

I think that I shall never smell
a poem as pungent as a hell,
where grinning devils turn the screws
on saintly Sikhs and upright Jews,
giving them the holy scorcher,
timeless, transcendental torture:
poems can make you want to yell,
but only God can give you hell.

From *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look At The Bible*

© Philip Appleman.

Philip Appleman is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. He is editor of the Norton Critical Edition of *Darwin*. He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both “After-Life” Members of FFRF.



Caption contest winner!

Congratulations to Steve Haack for winning FFRF’s caption contest from the September issue.

The winning caption was a limerick (of which we received more than one):

**There once was a woman named Mary,
Whose impotent husband was wary,
So she claimed it was God,
Who had slipped her the rod,
It was really a shepherd named Larry.**

Top runners-up include: **#MeToo** —John Schaeffer and Lois Jean, sent separately.

All I did was go to confession! — Allen Misher



Thanks to all who participated. If you see any non-copyright-protected pictures or images (most likely that you take yourself) that you think would be good for a caption contest, please send them to caption@ffrf.org.



*No gods, no demons, no afterlife;
take responsibility for your actions.*
- Phyllis Ethington-Green
Out of the Closet Humanist

FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

Make your own nontheistic cyber billboard at ffrf.org/out, and you might win an “Out of the Closet Atheist” cap, like Phyllis (above) did.

OVERHEARD

Separation of church and state is among the most brilliant and crucial founding principles of this nation. . . . In fact, few things are more dangerous to both religious and secular rights than to pit the two against each other. **Newspaper editorial, “Breaching the wall between church and state,” calling out Josh Hawley, Missouri’s attorney general, the state’s Republican Senate nominee and a former constitutional law professor, for wanting to overturn the Johnson Amendment.** *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 8-28-18

“[Roncalli] should not be rewarded with state dollars if they choose to discriminate against employees simply based on who they love. The actions of Roncalli



Dan Forestal

High School have unfolded in a manner that is contrary to the ideals I learned during my time there. **Indiana state Rep. Dan Forestal, in a statement about the Catholic high school that suspended a counselor after learning of her same-sex marriage. Forestal wants to introduce legislation that would block public money supporting Indiana’s school voucher program from being used at schools that discriminate against employees because of sexual orientation and gender identity.** *WTHR-13 (Indianapolis)*, 8-15-18

I don’t even believe in God, but I’m going to thank her tonight. **Thandie Newton, who won an Emmy for her portrayal of sentient robot Maeve Millay on HBO’s “Westworld.”** *CBS*, 9-17-18

I have written the Holy Father and called on him to cancel the forthcoming synod on young people. Right now, the bishops would have absolutely no credibility in addressing this topic. **Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput, asking the pope to cancel a bishop’s conference focusing on youth in the wake of the Catholic child sex abuse crisis.** *USA Today*, 9-3-18

They felt it was inappropriate to have “In God We Trust” on the school. The teachers were really upset about it. . . . I just don’t think anyone’s offended when they see a state seal. **Palm Beach County School Board member Karen Brill, after the board decided to replace the “In God We**

Trust” signs with the state seal, which does include the phrase. A new Florida law requires all public schools to post the phrase “In God We Trust” in a “conspicuous place” on campus. *My Palm Beach Post*, 9-5-18

My mother is not watching. She says she doesn’t like watching white award shows because you guys don’t thank Jesus enough. That’s true. The only white people that thank Jesus are Republicans and ex-crackheads. **Michael Che, co-hosting the Emmys.** *CBS*, 9-17-18

My father, the songwriter and producer Richard Rudolph, came from a family that was agnostic Jewish, because my grandfather didn’t like being told what to do. I remember my mom not even saying “God bless you,” She’d say, “Guhbless you,” because she didn’t want us to say “God.” **Actress, comedian Maya Rudolph, talking about how her family was committedly nonreligious.** *New York Times Magazine*, 9-15-18

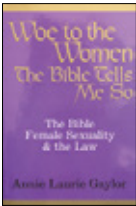


Emma Thompson

I was quite keen on Jesus and toyed with Christianity in my teens. I went to bible classes with the vicar who lived next door, and I remember saying: “My uncle is a homosexual, would he be allowed into heaven?” The vicar paused, and at that moment I knew I was done with religion. **Emma Thompson, actor, in an interview with Michael Segalov of The Guardian.** *The Guardian*, 8-25-18

I can’t even explain how I am feeling right now. The long battle has been won. Finally we have been recognized by this country. **Bismaya Kumar Raula, after India’s top court decriminalized gay sex.** *CNN*, 9-6-18

Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So



By Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

Published by FFRF

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FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists. FFRF has more than 32,000 members. FFRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and donations are tax deductible for income tax purposes.

FFRF’s email address is info@ffrf.org. Please include your name and physical mailing address with all email correspondence.

FFRF members wishing to receive online news releases, “action alerts” and “Freethought of the Day” should contact info@ffrf.org.

IN THE NEWS

Court approves ‘In God We Trust’ on money

A federal appeals court on Aug. 28 said printing “In God We Trust” on U.S. currency is constitutional, citing its longstanding use and saying it was not coercive.

The 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in St. Paul, Minn., rejected claims by 29 atheists, children of atheists and atheist groups that inscribing the national motto on bills and coins violated their First Amendment free speech and religious rights.

While other courts have allowed the motto’s use on currency, Circuit Judge Raymond Gruender said it also did not constitute an establishment of religion under a 2014 Supreme Court decision requiring a review of “historical practices.”

Michael Newdow, a lawyer for the plaintiffs and an FFRF member, in an email called it “utterly revolting” that “the history of governmental denigration of a suspect class should trump [the] principle” that neutrality be the “touchstone” for analyzing claims under the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause.

Judge nixes prayer policy for Pennsylvania House

A federal judge has halted the Pennsylvania House of Representatives’ policy banning people who don’t believe in God from giving the invocations made at the start of each day’s legislative floor session.

U.S. Middle District Judge Christopher Conner sided with the freethinkers, represented by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, who challenged the policy that has limited the opening prayers to those who believe in God or a divine power.

Conner said the restrictions on who may serve as guest chaplain violate the U.S. Constitution’s prohibition on making laws that establish a religion.

Muslim court canes women for relationship

Two Malaysian women accused of pursuing a sexual relationship were caned in an Islamic court.

The women, who were convicted of “sexual relations between women,” were each struck six times with a rattan cane in front of witnesses in the Shariah High Court in the state of Terengganu, officials said.

The women, aged 22 and 32, were caned by a female prison officer, Malaysian news outlets reported.

Voters more open to nonreligious candidates

Just 25 percent of Americans say it’s very or extremely important that a candidate has strong religious beliefs, according to a poll by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Only 19 percent consider it very or extremely important that a candidate shares their own beliefs, and nearly half say that’s not very important or not important at all.

But, still, a majority of Americans (57 percent) want the influence of religion on government policy to ex-



tend beyond traditional culture war issues and into policies addressing poverty. Americans are more likely to say religion should have at least some influence on poverty than on abortion (45 percent) or LGBT issues (34 percent).

At the highest levels of political office, it’s still rare for a politician to profess that he or she is an atheist; surveys indicate that roughly 10 percent of Americans are explicitly atheist. Only one member of Congress, Rep. Jared Huffman, identifies currently as a nonbeliever.

Foster care, adoption program ends in Buffalo

Catholic Charities of Buffalo will end its foster care and adoption program because state rules that bar discrimination based on sexual orientation conflict with church teachings.

The agency has a contract with the Erie County Department of Social Services that expires in March. The state Office of Children and Family Services licenses Catholic Charities and other providers of these services.

The state requires contracting organizations to allow same-sex couples to adopt or to raise foster children. That directive, however, goes against the church’s position that marriage is between a man and a woman, Catholic Charities said in a statement.

Scotland no longer a faith-based country

The Humanist Society of Scotland undertook a survey to better understand the current spiritual and religious beliefs among the Scots. The results show the degree of change that has taken place in the country over the past few years. With over 1,000 participants, 59 percent of the individuals identified themselves as nonreligious. By gender, 62 percent of the women and 55 percent of the men stated they were nonreligious. Other results show that 51 percent of the individuals said they don’t believe life exists after death, 60 percent say that angels don’t exist, 65 percent believe evil spirits don’t exist, and 67 percent don’t believe in divine miracles.

Atheist ‘churches’ can improve your well-being

According to a recent study published in the journal *Secularism and Nonreligion*, atheist “churches” can improve one’s well-being. Researchers showed that congregational-style meetings improve your well-being the same way it does if you go to church. The findings suggest that religious beliefs aren’t as important as previously thought when it comes to well-being.

The most important aspect of the services in terms of community building and friendship formation was socializing before and after services.

Results were published in the journal *Secularism and Nonreligion*.

“Secular congregations may be a good alternative for non-religious people who want the health benefits religious communities traditionally offer,” said Dr. Michael Price.

Batman is an atheist, DC Comics confirms

Batman apparently doesn’t believe in God. That revelation comes at the conclusion of *Batman #53*.

Batman’s religious confessions begin with Bruce Wayne, who is Batman’s alter ego, talking about his own theological background, raised as a Christian by his father. Though Wayne never quite believed in Christianity as a small child, he accepted it. That’s until his parents were murdered and he lost his faith.

Christian-only town votes to allow non-Christians

After being hit with a lawsuit for not allowing non-Christians to live in their town, members of the Bay View Association (which is associated with the United Methodist Church) in Michigan recently voted to allow non-Christians to purchase homes in their neighborhood.

The lawsuit filed last year by the Bay View Chautauqua Inclusiveness Group said the housing association was guilty of violating the First Amendment, the federal Fair Hous-

ing Act, Michigan’s Constitution and civil rights laws.

They argued that Bay View isn’t affiliated in any meaningful way with the UMC. They operate independently from it and they’re owned by a for-profit company. They also pay taxes, which proves it’s not church property. And it maintains “state-delegated police power.”

Judge: Christian flag barred from city flagpole

A federal judge on Aug. 29 rejected a Boston resident’s demand that the city be forced to fly a flag with a prominent cross over an event he says he wants to hold on City Hall Plaza next month.

U.S. District Court Judge Denise Casper rejected Hal Shurtleff’s request.

In his request for an injunction, Shurtleff argued Boston was violating his First Amendment rights to get his Christian flag on one of the three flagpoles on City Hall Plaza. Casper noted that the city has told Shurtleff he could hold his event there and unfurl any flag he wanted, just not from a city flagpole.

Devout parents arrested after son dies during fast

A Reedsburg, Wis., father and mother were arrested after their 15-year-old son died during a 40-day fast, according to the Reedsburg Police Department.

Kehinde Omosebi, 49, walked to the police department to report the death of his son on Sept. 2. When officers went to the family’s home, they had to force their way in through doors that had padlocks on the inside and found the boy “extremely emaciated and deceased,” Becker said.

An 11-year-old child was also found extremely emaciated but alive along with the mother, 48-year-old Titilayo Omosebi, who was also emaciated.

The father described himself as a “religious minister affiliated with Cornerstone Reformation Ministries.” The family started their fast on July 19.

No food was found in the home, and the mother and 11-year-old child were brought to a hospital for medical treatment, but Titilayo Omosebi refused, citing religious restrictions.

Fired for not going to bible study, worker sues

A 34-year-old man has filed an \$800,000 lawsuit against a Albany, N.Y., construction company, claiming the owner fired him after he refused to attend weekly bible study.

Ryan Coleman’s lawsuit states that he discovered only after he was hired as a painter for Dahled Up Construction that the job entailed more than just fixing up homes. According to Coleman and his lawsuit, owner Joel Dahl told him all employees were required to partake in regular bible study sessions led by a Christian pastor during the work day, while on the clock.

Coleman told Dahl that the requirement was illegal, but Dahl wouldn’t budge, according to the lawsuit. In order to keep his job, Coleman obliged for nearly six months but ultimately told Dahl he couldn’t go, the suit says.



Clergy abuse roundup

Eight more states launch investigations

FFRF, survivors want a federal investigation into Catholic Church

Law enforcement officials in at least eight states are considering how to investigate potential abuse cases in the Catholic Church after a report from a Pennsylvania grand jury found more than 1,000 victims and hundreds of predatory priests over the course of more than six decades. FFRF and survivors of clergy abuse are also urging the Justice Department to initiate a federal nationwide investigation.

“The Church’s claim of divine authority gives it coercive power over its congregants that allows it to get away with widespread crimes,” FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor write to Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein. “Under Catholic Canon law, adherents are required to give a ‘religious submission of the intellect and will’ to their church. For millennia, the Church has used that power to suppress questions, doubts, and dissent. This leads to frequent unprosecuted crimes against child victims who are forced to remain silent by their parents under pressure from, and fear of, the Church.”

Survivors of sexual abuse by priests say the investigation by the grand jury should represent just the beginning of the process. The grand jury report was released in August.

“Pennsylvania and the attorney general there had the courage to take on a very powerful institution,” said Tim Lennon, president of the board of directors for the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP). “Any time there’s been an investigation, we find similar kinds of systematic coverup, systematic moving around priests to hide.”

Survivors also urged the pope and the U.S. Department of Justice to take steps to prevent more abuses and hold abusers accountable.

“They have plenty of evidence,” said Peter Isely, spokesman for the group Ending Clergy Abuse. “Let’s launch this investigation. Let’s do it now.”

Besides FFRF, SNAP and the Center for Constitutional Rights have also sent a joint letter to Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein demanding an “investigation and prosecution of high-level officials in the Catholic Church” for sexual crimes and cover-ups.

“It is long past time for the US Department of Justice to initiate a full-scale, nationwide investigation into the systemic rape and sexual violence, and cover-ups in the Catholic Church, and, where appropriate, bring criminal and/or civil proceedings against the hierarchy that enabled the violations,” the groups said in the letter.

As for the states’ investigations, each one will take a

different approach because of the range of laws concerning the convening of grand juries and who has subpoena power. Attorneys general are gathering historical records from parishes and dioceses to conduct these investigations. The massive stores of private documents relating to sex abuse, compensation of victims, and transfers of offending priests were instrumental in the formation and impact of the Pennsylvania report.

Here are the states that have announced investigative initiatives so far:

Illinois: At least seven priests with connections to Illinois were named in the Pennsylvania report, which prompted Attorney General Lisa Madigan to ask to meet with state church officials regarding the report and sex abuse more widely. The Archdiocese of Chicago has agreed to meet Madigan.

Illinois Supreme Court Justice Anne Burke has also called for a new investigation, which the Catholic Church is doing, but she wants the probe to be done by the government, not be left to the Catholics.

“Only the civil authorities — who are solely disinterested, not convened by the church itself — can get to the bottom of how prevalent is this problem,” she said.

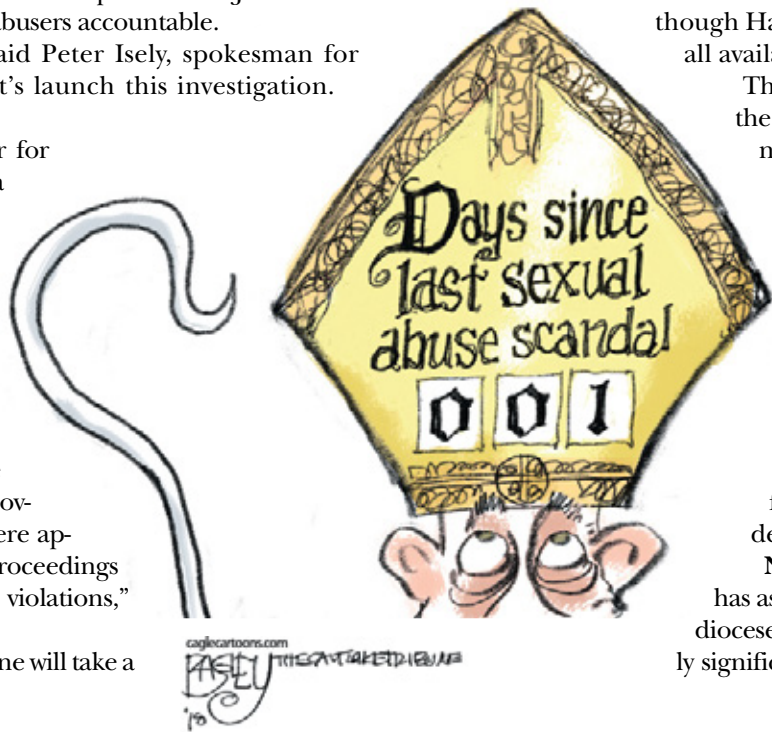
Kentucky: Deputy Attorney General J. Michael Brown announced that he will seek permission from the state legislature to open a statewide grand jury investigation.

Missouri: Attorney General Josh Hawley is working with the cooperation of the Archdiocese of St. Louis, which requested the probe, to investigate clerical records spanning decades. Missouri’s four other archdioceses are not yet under investigation, although Hawley has already asked them to hand over all available records.

The cooperation of various dioceses is vital to the investigation because in Missouri, the attorney general does not have the power to subpoena documents beyond those voluntarily provided by the church, or to convene a grand jury.

Hawley, who is running for Senate, has appointed a veteran sex crimes prosecutor to head up the investigation. He said the probe “is fast moving,” but he cautioned that the Pennsylvania report took almost two years to investigate and write. Hawley said his office would eventually issue a public report detailing its findings.

Nebraska: Attorney General Doug Peterson has asked (but not subpoenaed) the state’s three dioceses for their records. Likely to be particularly significant is the conservative Diocese of Lincoln,



the only diocese in the United States not to subscribe to the 2002 Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People, which is a zero-tolerance policy of reporting clerical sex abuse to legal authorities. The diocese is currently investigating six priests for alleged abuse.

New Jersey: Attorney General Gurbir Grewal announced the creation of a task force, as well as a hotline for abuse survivors to report their experiences directly with the state. The task force will be empowered to subpoena records from the state's six dioceses.

The state will be watched closely because the majority of the allegations against ex-Washington, D.C., Archbishop Theodore McCarrick, who is accused of decades of sex abuse against both young seminarians and minors, took place there.

New Mexico: Attorney General Hector Balderas demanded that archdioceses turn over all documentation concerning child sex abuse to his office. Balderas, who has subpoena power but has not yet invoked it, wrote in a public letter that he hopes the church will take the initiative to make "a full, massive disclosure."

New York: Attorney General Barbara Underwood has subpoenaed each of the state's eight dioceses for records pertaining to child sex abuse. Her office has also set up a hotline for victims or witnesses of clerical child sex abuse to report incidents directly. The attorney general's office does not have the authority to unanimously call a grand jury.

Wyoming: Cheyenne police have announced that they are investigating sexual abuse allegations against retired Wyoming bishop Joseph Hart, who has been accused of sexually abusing minors in Wyoming as well as in Kansas City, where he previously served as a priest. The Kansas City allegations first surfaced in the late 1980s and early '90s. At that time, the Kansas City-St. Joseph Diocese did not find the allegations credible, but it did pay for counseling for one of the victims. More broadly, state police officials have asked clerical sex abuse victims to come forward.



and Kristin Hancock, a member of the Diocese of Pittsburgh. Both have children in Catholic schools. O'Connor represents the first class named in the lawsuit — victims of clergy sexual abuse — and Hancock, on behalf of her kindergartner son, represents the second class — children currently enrolled in Catholic schools and other programs.

They charge in their lawsuit that the eight dioceses in Pennsylvania are still engaged in an attempt to cover up sexual abuse. As evidence, they say that at least 20 names in the grand jury report remain redacted because the church has fought to preserve the anonymity of some people accused in the report. And the grand jury report remains incomplete, they argue, because the church failed to document numerous reports of abuse over the years and because church leaders discouraged victims from reporting their sexual abuse at all.

Abuse victims top 3,600 in Germany, study finds

More than 3,600 children in Germany, most age 13 or younger, were sexually abused by Catholic clergy members over the past seven decades, a wide-ranging report has found. The report had not been made public, but the New York Times obtained a copy.

The study, which was commissioned by the Roman Catholic Church bishops' conference in Germany, found that at least 1,670 church workers had been involved in the abuse of 3,677 children. That is 4.4 percent of the clergy.

The study, conducted by researchers from three universities over more than four years, was an ambitious effort to understand the scale of the abuse — and how it could have been systematically covered up for so many decades.

"We are aware of the extent of the sexual abuse that is supported by the results of the study," said Bishop Stephan Ackermann of Trier. "It is depressing and shameful."

They chronicle abuse cases from 1946 to 2014. Every sixth case of abuse involved rape, researchers found, and most of the victims were boys.

Christian Pfeiffer, a criminologist, said the report, damning as it is, is likely to underestimate the full extent of the scandal.

"The report does not give the full picture, and is not fully independent," he said. "The degree of the cover up is stunning and beyond anything I had expected."

Half of Dutch cardinals, bishops linked to abuse

A report linking half of the cardinals and bishops who served in the Netherlands between 1945 and 2010 to abuse cases has drawn the country's Catholic Church into the church's global sex abuse and cover-up scandal.

The leader of a group of Dutch victims of abuse by Catholic clergy called Sept. 17 for the church to make public all it knows about such cases if it wants to win back trust.

A report by Dutch newspaper NRC linked 20 of 39 bishops and cardinals to abuse. The paper reported that four bishops commit-

ted abuse and a further 16 senior clergymen transferred priests who had been accused of abuse to new locations.

The report was based on a 2011 Dutch Catholic Church report about abuse, victims' testimony to a commission of inquiry and the newspaper's own research.

Pope meets with U.S. bishops over abuse

Top American bishops met in the Vatican with Pope Francis on Sept. 13 to discuss the sexual-abuse crisis that the leader of the U.S. Catholic Church said has "lacerated" the church.

Cardinal Daniel DiNardo of Galveston-Houston, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, was

himself accused of covering up the actions of an abusive priest in his archdiocese — prompting questions about DiNardo's fitness to lead reform efforts.

"It's too early to say, but just looking at the case, it looks very bad. It seems like a violation — is he the guy who should be leading at this point?" David Gibson, the director of the Center on Religion and Culture at Fordham, a Catholic university, said of DiNardo.

Amid the crisis facing the church's leaders, the bishops who met with Francis said very little about what they discussed.

Hotline swamped with new abuse allegations

Since the Pennsylvania grand jury report's publication, people have made more than 1,130 calls to the phone line handling clerical sex abuse tips, which is managed by state Attorney General Josh Shapiro's office. The attorney general's office had to recruit additional staff from other departments to keep up.

Record settlement reached with 4 victims

The New York Diocese of Brooklyn and a co-defendant have reached a \$27.5 million settlement with four men who were sexually abused as boys by a lay church education director, reports NBC News.

Each of the men, who have remained anonymous, will receive \$6.875 million from the diocese and an affiliated after-school program under terms of the settlement.

It is the largest settlement involving abuse of minors by Roman Catholic Church figures. The men, who are now ages 19 to 21, said in court documents that they were repeatedly raped from 2003 to 2009 by Angelo Serrano, 67, a former director of religious education at St. Lucy's-St. Patrick's Church in Brooklyn.



Victims of abuse file class action lawsuit

Pennsylvania Catholics are suing all eight dioceses in the state, claiming that Catholic leaders there systematically covered up ongoing sexual abuse by priests.

The bombshell grand jury report released in August brought to light the widespread abuse and cover-up within the Catholic Church in the state.

A victim of abuse and the parent of a Catholic school student are inviting others to join them in the class-action lawsuit that they filed Sept. 17 in Allegheny County, Pa.

"This lawsuit is brought because defendants cannot be trusted to act on their own," they wrote in their request to get others involved. "Indeed, through decades of choosing to defend their predatory clergy members over the children of Pennsylvania, defendants have enabled untold abuse and suffering by children, family members, and others, and have also created a clear and present danger that must be abated to protect the public from future and ongoing harm which is continuing every day it is not abated."

Bringing the lawsuit are Ryan O'Connor, who says he was abused by a priest from age 10 to 12,



FFRF NEWS

Proclamation honors FFRF, ACLU chapters

FFRF and its Florida chapter, the Central Florida Freethought Community, the ACLU of Florida and its Central Florida chapter were honored by proclamation at the Kissimmee City Commission meeting on Sept. 4. This was in response to complaints from the organizations that prompted the city to revise its prayer proclamation last month.

In August, the city declared “40 days of celebration of life, love and family” and announced a “call to prayer” event scheduled for Aug. 21. The proclamation, the ceremony at the commission meeting and the photos released for the event had the appearance of city sponsorship and endorsement.

After the organizations and others complained, the city said it was not their intention that the “city officials’ actions and comments were interpreted as promoting a religious message and advancing religion over nonreligion.” The city also distanced itself from the prayer event in a city-owned park, stating that it wasn’t a sponsor



and had not used city resources to promote a specific religion.

The proclamation acknowledging the important contributions of the organizations reads in part:

“WHEREAS, the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida (ACLU) and its Central Chapter work to defend and preserve the individual

rights and liberties guaranteed to all people in this country by the Constitution and laws of the United States; and

WHEREAS the City of Kissimmee honors the important work that the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the Central Florida Freethought Community do in defending the constitutional principles of separation between state and church; and

WHEREAS, the City of Kissimmee applauds the work of all three of these organizations in defending the Constitution’s promise of freedom and liberty for everyone in our country.

NOW, do hereby THEREFORE, we the City Commission for the city of Kissimmee proclaim September 4, 2018, as the day the city of Kissimmee honors the First Amendment to the United States Constitution in the city of Kissimmee, state of Florida, and our noble nation for the good of all.”

The groups also conducted a presentation for the Kissimmee City Commission on the importance of the First Amendment’s Establishment

Clause and the separation between state and church. Central Florida Freethought Community Director David Williamson invoked the words of both Presidents Reagan and Kennedy to stress the need for government to remain resolutely secular.

“We are thrilled to have an opportunity to work with our parent organization the Freedom From Religion Foundation, as well as the ACLU of Florida and Central Florida, to highlight concerns that Kissimmee residents expressed,” says Williamson. “If the citizens are to have freedom OF religion, their government must be free FROM religion.”

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is elated at the official recognition being accorded to its local chapter and the Establishment Clause.

“We are delighted that the city of Kissimmee is providing some equal time and recognition for secular groups and the importance of separation between government and religion,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

Senator submits letter signed by FFRF in Kavanaugh hearing

She also called him out on his stances on state-church separation

On Sept. 5, Sen. Mazie Hirono, D-Hawaii, submitted into the record of Brett Kavanaugh’s Supreme Court confirmation hearing a letter organized by the Secular Coalition of America and signed by FFRF urging senators to reject his nomination.

FFRF proudly signed onto this letter, which pointed out that Kavanaugh’s nomination is a threat to the constitutional order of the United States and to the religious liberty of all Americans. “Judge Kavanaugh’s record and writings demonstrate support for the entanglement of religion and government, and he has continuously argued in favor of religious coercion above the constitutional guarantees of religious freedom and individual liberty,” the letter states.



Mazie Hirono

To safeguard the constitutional separation between church and state, which FFRF views as the crown jewel of the Bill of Rights, the Senate must reject Kavanaugh’s nomination. (This edition of Freethought Today went out before the vote was taken.)

The letter focused on state-church issues, but also the single most important issue any new Supreme Court justice is likely to decide, the Religious Right’s attempt to redefine and weaponize religious freedom: “Religious freedom means the right to choose a religion, or none at all, without interference by the government, and simultaneously prevents religious authorities

from interfering with our system of government and law. Religious practices, if used to excuse oneself from the law, would ‘make the professed doctrines of religious belief the law of the land, and in effect, to permit every citizen to become a law unto himself.’ Historically, the Supreme Court, like the Founders before them, has believed such a system to be unworkable.”

Hirono alerted the American people to a staggering contradiction between two of his opinions as a federal judge.

Hirono hammered Kavanaugh for his anti-woman hypocrisy in two cases, *Garza* and *Priests for Life*, that he ruled on two years apart.

In *Garza* in 2017, Kavanaugh declared that forcing a teenager to carry a pregnancy to term was not an “undue burden” on her rights. In *Priests for Life* in 2015, he argued that filling out a two-page, five-blank form was a “substantial burden” on religion.

The stances that Kavanaugh took in these two cases are irreconcilable or, as Hirono twice said, his position “defies logic.” Kavanaugh is perfectly willing to protect unconstitutional religious privilege and violate the rights of women.

Kavanaugh’s only response was very lame: “precedent.” There’s just one problem with that response: He was writing in dissent in both cases. In other words, even his colleagues thought that he was not applying precedent correctly. Hirono made a nice follow-up statement about using precedent when and how it suits your needs — in these cases to rule against women’s reproductive rights. As FFRF has warned in the past, judicial nominees who claim to blindly apply precedent as “textual originalists” are usually hiding outright judicial activism. Sen. Hirono exposed this brilliantly — and not a moment too soon.

Congratulations, Hal and Doreen!



More than 130 friends and colleagues celebrated the freethinking and humanist contributions of Dr. Harold and Doreen Saferstein (couple in center of photo) in Scottsdale, Ariz., on Sept. 15. The Safersteins are Lifetime Members of FFRF many times over, and generous supporters of many other secular, humanist, local and national organizations. FFRF was a major co-sponsor helping to underwrite the Safersteins’ arrival in style, the cake (pictured), a plaque and other thank-yous. The tribute dinner was coordinated by the Humanist Society of Greater Phoenix and various local nontheistic groups. Pictured with them at left (laughing heartily) is Stephen Uhl, another major freethought and FFRF benefactor.

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, who could not be there, composed the following tribute for the Safersteins (Hal is a well-known light versifier himself):

“A couple with big-hearted latitude
And utterly unselfish genes
Deserves our exuberant gratitude:
The generous Safersteins.”

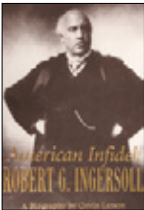
The Born Again Skeptic’s Guide to the Bible



By Ruth Hurmence Green
A Missouri grandmother debunks the bible as no one has debunked it since Thomas Paine.
Published by FFRF

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll



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

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org



I blasphemed in Ireland, which is against the law

This article, written by FFRF’s Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel, was first published on IrishCentral.com.

By Andrew Seidel

I’m guilty. I admit it. I broke the law. I did so knowingly and deliberately. But in my defense, the law is terrible.

In Ireland, one of the loveliest countries I’ve had the good fortune to visit, blasphemy is illegal. It says so in the Irish Constitution:

“The publication or utterance of blasphemous, seditious, or indecent matter is an offence which shall be punishable in accordance with law.” - Art. 40.6.1.



Andrew Seidel

Well, on a recent trip to that beautiful country, I uttered what might be considered the ultimate blasphemy, writing: “There is no god.”

Actually, I put it on a postcard to my co-workers at FFRF. In full, the postcard read, “Greetings from Ireland! Blasphemy is illegal here, but there’s still no god. Cheers.”

Prosecutors and believers might disagree about whether this even rises to blasphemous levels, but we’ll get to that serious problem momentarily.

Thankfully, the blasphemy provision will be subjected to a referendum on Oct. 26 (on the same day as the presidential election) and we can only hope that it will receive the same treatment as the abortion ban, which was recently overturned by Irish citizens by a 2-to-1 margin.

Thoreau’s masterful essay on civil disobedience says that unjust laws exist, and then it asks: “Shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once?”

When it comes to laws that seek to curtail speech, confine thought, and protect supposedly omnipotent beings, surely the latter is the correct course.

The abiding sin of blasphemy laws is that, by limiting criticism of religion and God, they seek to limit thought. As George Orwell explained, “the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought.”

At their tainted core, they are that most loathsome and dangerous of all laws, thoughtcrime. By narrowing the range of thought, Big Brother would eventually “make thoughtcrime literal-

ly impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it.”

Of course, quoting an English author, even one so great as Orwell, may not be the way to persuade an Irish reader, so you should know that some of Ireland’s greatest poets and authors have had trouble with blasphemy. Oscar Wilde, James Joyce, Augusta Gregory, Bernard Shaw, W.B. Yeats and Jonathan Swift were all thought blasphemous by some authorities. Frank O’Connor was accused of blasphemy for his 1946 translation of the poem, “The Midnight Court,” as were Brendan Kennelly and Brinsley MacNamara (John Weldon).

Lately and perhaps most famously, the Gardaí (the state police of Ireland) investigated Stephen Fry for saying, correctly, that any god who allows children to suffer through bone cancer is “capricious, mean-minded, [and] stupid.”

Both Fry and I offered up thoughtful opinions, but were we blasphemous? Some might say we were both guilty of being illegally irreverent. Others might think Fry’s pointed barbs are more offensive than my postcard. Or vice versa.

This illustrates why blasphemy, by its very nature, is a poorly defined crime. That is why treason as a crime is defined in the American Constitution. Treason, or any other crime, if poorly defined, “furnishes an opportunity to unprincipled courtiers, and to demagogues equally unprincipled, to harass the independent citizen, and the faithful subject, by treasons, and by prosecutions for treasons, constructive, capricious, and oppressive,” explained James Wilson, one of America’s Founding Fathers, in a 1791 law lecture.

For Irish citizens, this danger is exacerbated by the 2009 blasphemy law, which ludicrously defines the crime in relation to an unspecified number of touchy citizens. Blasphemous statements are those “causing outrage among a substantial number of the adherents of that religion.”

This is a recipe for mob rule and oppression. It encourages people to give in to reactionary outrage rather than reason and debate and it incentivizes religious leaders to whip up fury instead of tolerance and understanding.

It’s not easy for a country to overcome its past. But the rule is outdated, tyrannical — and a ticking bomb suitable for nothing but exploitation.

That law and the sentiments the blasphemy ban embody do not reflect my experience in Ireland. I found a beautiful country full of lovely conversationalists. It seemed to this traveler that this restriction is unworthy of Ireland and the Irish people and it’s time it is repealed.

FFRF runs ‘quit the church’ ad in New York Times

FFRF ran a full-page ad in The New York Times the final week of August urging people to leave the church, in response to the newest revelations over sexual crimes against children in the Catholic Church.

The ad, headlined “It’s time to consider quitting the Catholic Church,” quotes the Pennsylvania grand jury report into sex abuse of minors by Catholic officials.

Reads the ad: “Six dioceses, three hundred predatory priests, a staggering 1,000-plus victims. No bishops indicted. The pope’s response? All words, no action — except, insultingly, to call on the faithful to ‘pray and fast.’

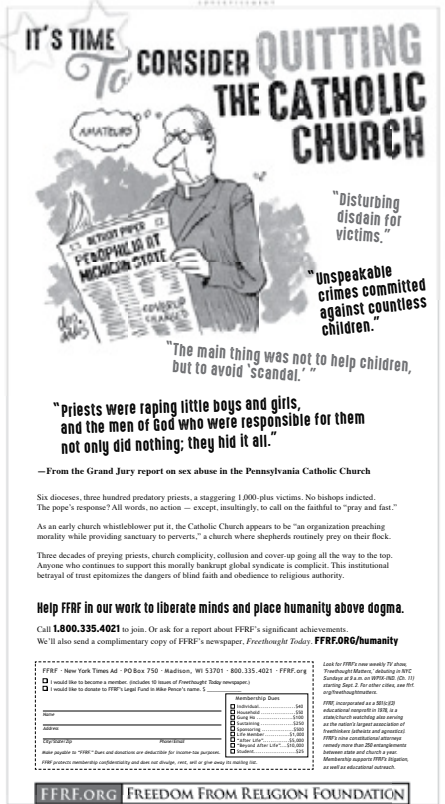
“As an early church whistleblower put it, the Catholic Church appears to be an ‘organization preaching morality while providing sanctuary to perverts,’ a church where shepherds routinely prey on their flock.

“Three decades of preying priests, church complicity, collusion and cover-up going all the way to the top. Anyone who continues to support this morally bankrupt global syndicate is complicit. This institutional betrayal of trust epitomizes the dangers of blind faith and obedience to religious authority.

“Help FFRF in our work to liberate minds and place humanity above dogma.”

FFRF famously first ran ads suggesting that Catholics quit the Catholic Church in 2012, at the time U.S. bishops were targeting women’s reproductive rights by working against Obamacare’s contraceptive mandate.

In Oregon, FFRF and its Portland



chapter placed a full-page advertisement in the Sept. 16 Sunday edition of the Portland Oregonian, celebrating “Our godless Constitution” and Constitution Day.

Sept. 17 was the 231st anniversary of the adoption of the U.S. Constitution.

The ad, featuring six U.S. Founders, proclaims, “In Reason We Trust.”

Cheryl Kolbe, director of FFRF Portland Area, notes that on July 4, Hobby Lobby ran a full-page ad in the Oregonian. “Misleading sources and distortions were used to attempt to falsely imply that we are a Christian nation,” Kolbe says. “Our Portland chapter, with FFRF, is very pleased to record set straight.”

Defenders of the Constitution



Several FFRF staff members attended the Religious News Association conference in Columbus, Ohio, recently. From left, Communications Director Amit Pal, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, Associate Counsel Liz Cavell and Director of Strategic Planning Andrew Seidel participated in the event. Pal gave a brief speech on FFRF, and Gaylor, Cavell and Seidel were panelists on a discussion of church/state separation in the Trump era.

Watch ‘Freethought Matters’ on Sundays

FFRF’s new weekly TV show, “Freethought Matters,” began airing in September in eight major cities, plus Madison, Wis., covering more than 22 percent of the United States TV market. The show will air for 26 weeks, including in four of the top 10 markets.

The intent of the half-hour talk show is to introduce communities to leading freethought authors, thinkers and activists in a non-threatening and positive way.

In addition to airing in Madison, Wis., at 11 p.m. Sundays on WISC-TV 3 (the CBS affiliate), “Freethought Matters” will air in:

- Chicago, WPWR-CW (Ch. 50), Sundays at 9 a.m.
- Los Angeles, KCOP-MY (Ch. 13), Sundays at 8:30 a.m.
- New York City, WPIX-IND (Ch. 11), Sundays at 8:30 a.m.
- Phoenix, KASW-CW (Ch. 61), Sundays at 8:30 a.m.
- Portland, KRCW-CW (Ch. 32), Sundays at 9 a.m.
- Sacramento, KQCA-MY (Ch. 58), Sundays at 8:30 a.m.
- Seattle, KONG-IND (Ch. 16), Sundays at 8 a.m.
- Washington, DC, WDCW-CW (Ch. 50, digital 15), Sundays at 8 a.m.

FFRF VICTORIES

Ohio city removes decalog plaque from park

A Ten Commandments plaque has been removed from Murphy Park in Steubenville, Ohio, after FFRF sent a letter to the city asking for the religious display to move to private property.

FFRF contacted City Manager Jim Mavromatis on Aug. 10 after receiving a complaint from a concerned Steubenville resident who objected to the Ten Commandments display and its placement on government property. The complainant has subsequently reported that the plaque has been moved across the street to church property.

The appearance of this religious message in a public space, FFRF pointed out, violated the Constitution’s Establishment Clause by displaying government preference for religion.

“Given the content of the display, and the fact that the Ten Commandments originally appeared as a lone display, a reasonable observer would view it as an



Here are before and after shots of Murphy Park in Steubenville, Ohio, where a Ten Commandments plaque sat until FFRF got involved.

endorsement of religion by the city,” writes FFRF’s Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott.

Additionally, it is unnecessarily divisive to place religious monuments in

community spaces, making non-Christian and non-religious citizens feel like outsiders in their own community.

“The First Commandment alone makes it obvious why the Ten Com-

mandments should not be posted on government property,” Elliott continues. “The government has no business telling citizens which god they must have, how many gods they must have, or that they must have any god at all.”

Mavromatis announced at an Aug. 14 City Council meeting that the plaque would be moved, thanks to FFRF’s letter.

“Mavromatis reported the city will have to remove a Ten Commandments plaque from Murphy Field as a result of a warning letter from the Freedom From Religion Foundation of Madison, Wis.,” according to a Herald-Star story.

“We commend the city for taking swift action to correct this violation,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Removing the bible plaque ensures that Murphy Park can be a welcoming space to all citizens.”

By Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey

Banners taken down in West Virginia

FFRF has caused Jackson County Commissioners to rewrite their policy on allowing religious banners to be hung on county courthouse property.

In June, FFRF’s complainant reported that a gazebo on the Jackson County Courthouse lawn displayed two banners: one containing a bible verse, and another featuring crosses and announcing a National Day of Prayer in May.

“No legitimate secular purpose was served by the banners’ message,” FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott wrote in his letter to the commissioners.

FFRF received a response from the county’s attorney that those banners had been removed, and that the county has adopted a new policy prohibiting the placement of any banners or signs on the gazebo to avoid any future entanglements.

Religious ads dropped from car hangers

FFRF succeeded in removing religious promotion from the back of mandatory car tags at an elementary school in Tennessee.

Dupont Elementary School in Chattanooga had partnered with Rock Bridge Community Church by displaying an advertisement on the back of the car hangers parents are required to hang from their rearview mirror to be allowed to pick up their children from school. The advertisement displayed the name of the church and a Latin cross, invited parents to book a “VIP visit,” and lists the worship times for the church.

FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote that the presence of the advertisement “communicates a message of school endorsement of religion and is marked by excessive entanglement between the school district and church.”

The school’s legal representation assured FFRF that it was unaware the tag had a religious message on the back. The school has since distributed new tags free from religious promotion.

Ohio school handbook no longer has prayer

An Ohio school district has removed religious promotion from its Parent Transportation Handbook after FFRF reminded it of the constitutional obligation to remain neutral regarding religion. A concerned parent reported that the handbook contained “A Bus Driver’s Prayer,” an overtly religious appeal to the “Lord.”

“Publishing a prayer in an official publication impermissibly entangles the district with a religious point of view, violating the principle that state and church must remain separate,” wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line in his Aug. 30 letter to the district.

Upon receiving FFRF’s letter, the superintendent ensured the prayer would be removed immediately and reported that new copies of the handbook were redistributed in the beginning of September.

FFRF stops 3 violations in Tennessee schools

The Cumberland County School District in Tennessee has remedied several state/church violations after receiving a letter from FFRF.

FFRF wrote to the district’s legal representation warning them of three constitutional violations.

First, FFRF’s complainant reported that Homestead Elementary School (HES) rents its facilities to a church group called “Plant, Grow, Harvest” on Sundays, but allows the group to advertise at the school during times when they are not renting the school facilities.

Secondly, HES reportedly regularly promoted religious events on its official Facebook page.

Lastly, Stone Memorial High School reportedly posted and shared religious messages on what appears to be an official Twitter account for its boys’ basketball team. Additionally, the school reportedly allowed a pastor to act as a “character coach” for SMHS basketball players.

In a video posted on Upper Cumberland Fellowship of Christian Athlete’s Facebook page, SMHS basketball coach Neil Capps explained that he

was approached by FCA about starting a “character coach program.” He wrote that he allowed a pastor named Robert McTurnal to act as a character coach for his team. He acknowledges that the team refers to him as “Coach Robert,” and states that Pastor McTurnal is “a part of our staff now.” Capps admits that McTurnal does a “weekly devotional.”

In the video, McTurnal stated, “I got involved here because I found out that I couldn’t get into this school on my own. So, I found out through the umbrella of FCA, I had an opportunity to come in and serve the basketball team as their character coach.

“Since then it’s been amazing just getting to know the boys, getting to minister them, you know, outside of a church. Meeting them right where they are has been a fantastic opportunity.”

“CCDS cannot allow a non-school adult access to the children in its charge, and it certainly cannot grant that access to a minister seeking to grow his religious ministry by targeting students,” wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line in the letter.

The legal firm representing the district wrote back to FFRF on Sept. 13, ensuring that all three issues have been investigated and that the religious signs have been removed and that the church no longer rents the

building, that posting about religious club events will no longer appear to be endorsed by the school, and that both the basketball coach and the “character coach” have been informed that they cannot promote religion to their players.

Religious books removed from university hotel

FFRF convinced Dixie State University in St. George, Utah, to remove religious texts from the DSU College Inn hotel guest rooms.

A concerned hotel guest reported that on one stay at the College Inn, she found two copies of the Book of Mormon in her room. On another stay, in a different room, she found a copy of the bible.

“Regardless of whether the religious texts were donated by a private party, the placement of ‘holy books’ in guest rooms demonstrates government endorsement of religion,” wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line in his letter to DSU President Richard Biff Williams.

FFRF heard from DSU’s general counsel, stating “any religious texts that may have been left in any of the guest rooms have been removed. Further, we have established a procedure of removing any such texts going forward.”

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Biblical verses on bulletin boards nixed

FFRF brought two bulletin boards containing religious verses to the attention of a Tennessee school district which have been subsequently taken down.

Midtown Elementary School in Kingston, Tenn., had displayed two bible verses in one of its hallways. One display said “A cord of three strands is not easily broken. Ecc. 4:12.” The other said, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might. Ecc. 9:10.”

The superintendent quickly responded to FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line’s letter that the bulletin boards would be swiftly removed.

Cross covered at Iowa VA hospital

A religious display was removed from outside the Out Patient Mental Health Clinic building at the Central Iowa VA Hospital in Des Moines, Iowa, following a letter from FFRF.

FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert wrote to the director of the VA Central Iowa Health Care System after a concerned complainant reported a religious memorial that included a soldier kneeling before a Latin cross.

“FFRF has no objection to veterans’ memorials. Our objection is to the mes-

sage of endorsement of religion over nonreligion,” Markert wrote in her July 16 letter. “Additionally, this memorial sends a message that the government mainly cares about the deaths of Christian soldiers, not other non-Christian and nonreligious soldiers.”

FFRF received a response from Director Gail Graham stating that the display was carved by a Central Iowa Veteran and the family of the deceased veteran has modified the display to cover the cross.

FFRF stops religious messages on flyers

The U.S. Probation Office in San Bernardino, Calif., will cease the distribution of job posting flyers with religious messaging, thanks to FFRF.

After a probationer reported last September that the flyers he received from his probation officer contained religious verses in them, FFRF Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellow Colin McNamara sent a letter first to the head of the U.S. Probation Office in the Central District of California, then eventually directly to the Chief Judge Virginia Phillips, asking for the religious messaging to be removed.

On Aug. 14, Phillips assured FFRF that “all officers will discontinue sending the list until further research is

done about the group that compiles it,” and that “if the office resumes sending out these job listings, all religious quotes, attachments and references will be deleted.”

Posters taken down at Arkansas school

Religious posters have come off the walls of a middle school classroom in Jonesboro, Ark., after FFRF sent a letter reminding the district of its constitutional obligation to refrain from endorsing a religion.

A concerned parent reported that a Westside Middle School teacher had decorated classroom walls with multiple bible verses, including “Proverbs 3:5 — Trust in the Lord with all your heart” prominently displayed directly alongside a poster listing “classroom rules.”

On Aug. 23, FFRF Legal Fellow Colin McNamara sent a letter to Superintendent Scott Gauntt, asking that the district investigate these violations and respond in writing with steps the district will take to ensure this violation does not recur.

The legal firm representing Westside Consolidated School District replied on Sept. 7, ensuring that the posters had been removed from the classroom.

Prayer breakfast ad falsely tied to city

FFRF helped end a constitutional violation in Fort Myers, Fla.

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote to the city of Fort Meyers after a complainant reported that the city sponsored and promoted a “Community Prayer Breakfast” on the National Day of Prayer.

FFRF received a response from City Attorney Grant Williams Alley, who reviewed the document, which called the Day of Prayer a city-hosted event. Alley said the publication was incorrect. He further confirmed that the city did not pay for the event and the event organizers paid for the use of all city services and facilities. Alley assured FFRF the city would attempt to correct this advertisement, which is not created by the city, should it happen again in the future.

“Please understand the city of Fort Myers does not want to alienate any people, irrespective of what religion they are or, as you write, the 24 percent of Americans who are nonreligious,” the city’s letter read. “There exists a fundamental separation between church and state in American jurisprudence and the city strives to follow the fluid law as the courts interpret them and your opinions are helpful in this critical endeavor.”

CRANKMAIL

Here’s our October installment of some of the wonderful (read: nasty) mail we get from some non-members. Presented to you as received, unedited. (Note: Harsh language below!)

Harassment!: Why does your organization choose to harass people of religion? If the people of WV want to say the Lords Prayer why not ? Is someone from Wisconsin there to offend? Not likely its just a left wing bunch of nuts harassing religous people! You have your freedoms and so do the religious people leve them alone. I will pray for you and your membership. — David Montgomery

Prayer for all: Y’all are some horrible people trying to shut down prayer at a council meeting in Parkersburg West Virginia. Its not your or anybody’s place to tell people that they can’t pray. Didn’t you know its not okay to try and shut that down. Those people aren’t hurting you. You people are horrible people for this. And you look stupid. — Stephanie Starkey

IN GOD WE TRUST: I’m from Alabama and I for one am GLAD that ‘In God We Trust’ is now being allowed in schools and in public places. God is the foundation for EVERYTHING and YOU and your organization will not stop it. God’s WILL will be done regardless of what anybody does. I can’t speak for the rest of the states, but here in Alabama, we are gonna teach our children about God, creation, Jesus, IN OUR SCHOOLS. — Andy England

Leave us alone!: You can start by enjoying your freedom and leaving the rest of us alone! Fuck you cocksuckers if you don’t like a cross,... leave those who do alone or you’re gonna have a shitload of problems and they won’t be legal,... I’ve been listening to the guys who are about to take you fuckers out and I hope they do! — George Statton

Sickos: You are the main reason this country has gone to hell. By your actions this country now has no morals, no respect, no conscous and no ethics. By your actions this country is a cesspool of crime. You are the ones who should keep out of things that you have no business sticking you nose into. It is individuals like you who have ruined this country by your actions. It just makes me sick to know what kind of damage you have done in this country. — Connie McCollum

Learn to pray: GROW UP IF HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL PLAYERS WANT TO PRAY GREAT THOSE WHO DO NOT THEN THEY DO NOT AHVE TO WAIT TIL YOU STAND BEFORE GOD AND FIND OUT THAT HELL IS WHERE YOU ALL ARE GOING — Pat Noy

Fuck off: if we want to pray with the coach the stfu its our right and people like you need to leave us the fuck alone. DONT FUCKING WORRY ABOUT IT FUCK YOOOR SELF — Bradley Musthane

Get out!: Leave my country! I call it mine because I served it, lost brothers, defending our rights. We didn’t serve so you atheists could try to divide our country. Religion is an individual

right! Your terrorist organization decided on your own to infringe my right to practice my choice of religion! Your entire organization will be judged one day, I look forward to hearing the repentance of your soiled members attempts to justify your anti-human organizations hate toward everyone that doesn’t follow your twisted, hate filled messages. Leave the USA! — Rodney James

FFRF: How about leaving people alone .. if you dont want to believe in god fine.. but how does other people praying hurt you. If you dint want to hear, leave. You are no better than Hitler , if it isnt your way then you shall ban freedoms. Man high school has a right to pray for a good game for theirselves and their team. I dont mind people believing in what they want. Aheck my boyfriend is atheist and I love him more than life. ya know why because he loves and lets everyone worship ehoever the heck they want and doesnt let it effect him. That is a truly great person rather than religious nazi’s liee the lot of you. — Jessica Jefferson

WTF?: Who the fuck is FFRF and why does your teaser mischaracterize this exchange? I find nothing alarming either, nothing the judge did or said the whole week even began to approach alarm or controversy or bias or surprise. What the fuck were you watching FFRF? I smell liberal stink ass mother fucker, tainted bs as in Feinstein, Booker, Kamala, and Durbin to name one pack of lying dogs. You, you’re up in the peanut gallery lying, with the other nuts and liberal bomb throwers. Did you post the wrong video, did you headline it incorrectly, or are you simply a lying pos liberal hack lemming? Retitle it loser, was it you that turwned over the high school confidential to Feinstein, whether you did or didn’t you’re no better than the trash contained in the letter. It does not pay to be a sack of shit liar, wherever life takes you, everyone will know what an under the balls infected sore you are. — Billy Bromberg

Disgusting!: I am very disappointed and disgusted by your discrimination against Christians. Just read a post stating that you all contacted a high school complaining about a banner that some cheerleaders made with scripture on it. So proud of these girls for standing up for the truth! By the way, Abraham Lincoln, the very President to initiate the abolition to slavery, expressed his beliefs about God in many speeches to the public. Therefore, this contradicts your crazy philosophy that most moral reform has come from “freethinkers” who are “free” from religion. The most moral reform has come from Christians who put God where he should be, FIRST! Just look at the Protestant reformation for example. These men where not “freethinkers” but we’re instead some of the most intelligent men who followed the Word of God. Also the word “freethinkers” doesn’t truly exist because there is nothing new under the sun. May the Lord have mercy upon your soul! God is very powerful and almighty and He, in the end, will prevail. — Brittnee Shepherd

Oh, the joys . . .

Life Member Tom Johnson sent us several photos from throughout his amazing life and FFRF shared them with our members.



“Here’s doddering me, shaved and all gussied up to go with my daughter Carole to the store for ice cream and other necessities. I forgot to look for pickled herring!,” he writes. “I call that walking stick ‘Leroy’ and the other one in the house is ‘Zeke,’ both named after long-gone old friends. Oh, the joys of these happy, carefree golden retirement years, at 95. My charming cardiologist told me yesterday my pacemaker is good for another seven years. Think I’ll make it?”



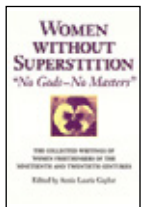
Tom was born in 1923 and raised, with his sister Rosemary, in the small village of Center City, Minn.

He graduated high school in 1940 and then, as a member of the Marine Corps, “was hauled four times across the country and as far west as Guam” during World War II.



“As an aviation ordnanceman, I went on a practice dive-bombing mission in North Carolina and found I wasn’t cut out to be a rear gunner,” Tom writes. “I got very airsick and never went again.”

Women Without Superstition: “No Gods — No Masters”

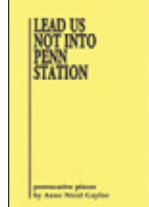


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FFRF awards \$12,750

2018 college students essay contest winners

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the 18 winners of the 2018 Michael Hakeem Memorial College Essay Contest.

College students were asked to write a personal persuasive essay on the topic of “Why I’m an unabashed nontheist, not afraid of burning in hell.”

Winners are listed below and include the award amount and the college or university they will be attending. FFRF has paid out a total of \$12,750 in award money for this contest this year. FFRF thanks Dean and Dorea Schramm of Florida for providing a \$100 bonus to students who are members of a secular student club or the Secular Student Alliance. The total reflects those bonuses.

First place
Matthew McFadden, UCLA (\$3,000)

Second place (tie)
Alex Kellogg, University of North Carolina (\$2,000)

Second place (tie)
Mike Meo, Portland State University



(\$2,000)

Third place
Emily Mickel, Cornell University (\$1,000)

Fourth place
Rachel Bellflowers, Appalachian State University (\$750)

Fifth place
Samuel Hagen, Harvard University (\$600)

Sixth place
Niamh Falter, Savannah College of Art and Design (\$500)

Seventh place (tie)
Emma Rosen, LIU Global (\$400)

Seventh place (tie)
Truth Muller, College of the Atlantic (\$400)

Honorable mentions (\$200 each)
Edon Ademaj, Texas Wesleyan University
Samantha Jones, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Ashley Levy, Oglethorpe University

Parker Maris, University of Calgary
Blake T. Miller, IUPUI
William Napp, Grand Valley State University
Julianna Schoenwald, Grand Rapids Community College
Lydia Taylor, University of Denver
Cameron Zahner, Harvard University

FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979. This contest is named for the late Michael Hakeem, a sociology professor who was an FFRF board chair and active atheist known by generations of University of Wisconsin-Madison students for fine-tuning their reasoning skills.

FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994, and graduate students since 2010 and since 2017 a contest geared directly specifically to students of color.

The graduate student essay winners will be announced in the November issue.

FIRST PLACE

Sacred tyranny, holy violence: Religious hell on Earth

FFRF awarded Matthew \$3,000.

By Matthew McFadden

All persons are children of God, benevolently formed in his heavenly image, the objects of his unconditional and everlasting love, tenderly envisaged within his divine plan. Gratifying though it may appear, beware this ostensible narrative of solicitude. When contrasted with St. John’s pronouncement in John 3:36 (KJV), “He that believeth on the son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him,” a starkly more pernicious account is revealed.

Created with supposedly boundless love, the subjects of God are commanded to reciprocate this affection upon threat of perpetual anguish. “Adore me or incur eternal misery!” is the mandate of the lord. Omnipotent and all-knowing, he nonetheless conceives of multitudes of beings foreseen to be destined for his



Matthew McFadden

incontrovertible vengeance. These persons, given no say in the matter, are designed, thrust into being, judged and callously condemned by the very engineer of their existence, enrolled in a form of ethereal Russian roulette in which the finger of heaven pulls the trigger. Forged as a mere plaything of his enjoyment,

this creation seems more a product of jaded narcissism than love. Far from the charitable and caring deity naively portrayed by his children, this father is a jealous, egotistical, greedy, possessive, insecure sadist who abhorrently revels in the compulsory worship of his creation. This father is a celestial dictator, starving for tribute, quick to punish anything but blind credulity.

Not solely reprehensible in essence, this belief readily becomes a moral pretext for the imposition of brutality. Warfare, torture, terrorism and forced conversions, each categorically borne out in religious history, carry no ethical misgivings when juxtaposed to the presumed alternative of unceasing hellfire. Inaugurating hell on Earth is a small price to pay for an eternity of paradise.

Is it not some God whose word may be interpreted as justification for the dismemberment of limbs, torching of heretics or suicidal mass murder? This God must either be purposefully arcane, and thus delight in the bloodshed

his species unnecessarily doles on his behalf, or be profoundly and paradoxically incompetent, capable of crafting the cosmos in all its complexity, but unable to effectively communicate with a species of advanced apes. In either case, I am uninterested in making this God’s acquaintance, let alone squandering an eternity with him.

I maintain an utter lack of defensible ground by which any fellow mortal may admonish me against supernatural punishment. Even were this mythical jabberwocky to ultimately exist, I would not wish to everlastingly abide with the indifferent architect of human suffering. I do not wish to obsequiously venerate this megalomaniacal tyrant into perpetuity. I do not wish for God. I am unafraid of burning in hell. I am an unabashed anti-theist.

Matthew, 19, from Dana Point, Calif., attends the University of California-Los Angeles. He plans to minor in neuroscience and eventually wants to pursue medical education and employment in psychiatry.

SECOND PLACE (tie)

Confessions of an ex-evangelical agnostic

FFRF awarded Alex \$2,000.

By Alex Kellogg

Religion has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I distinctly recall, at the age of 6, coming down to the church stage, awash in fog machine smoke and gently playing electric guitar music, to accept Jesus Christ as my personal lord and savior. It would not be the last time I said that prayer in my young adult life, though in the future it would not be childlike faith that motivated my prayers, but rather something much more pernicious: the fear of eternal damnation. Over the course of my childhood, I attended Christian weekend retreats, Wednesday youth groups, and even won what amounted to my Christian school’s “Best Christian of the

Year” award two years in a row.

None of this was enough, however, to expel the gnawing doubts that I was really, truly “saved,” that Jesus had actually forgiven my sins and that I was actually going to heaven when I died. This doubt slowly grew from a fear into a mental illness during which, for three-and-a-half long years, I was obsessed with how to make absolutely sure that I was not going to hell. My father, a Christian fundamentalist, insisted that this was merely a test from God, and that sleep, rest, exercise and morning bible study would cure it. In his view, mental illness was the result of sin or divine intervention, not chemical imbalances in the brain, and an attempt to cure mental illness with medication was an affront to God’s plan.

In the years since leaving home, I have become an unabashed agnostic,



Alex Kellogg

although the antics of self-proclaimed Christians such as my father make taking up the label of atheist tempting indeed.

As I have traveled and been exposed to new ideas, I have come across theories that attempt to explain the phenomena of religion. One theory, the one most convincing to me, suggests that religion is an evolutionary adaptation that allows humans to act as a cohesive group, efficiently allocates resources among members, gives divine moral justification for the group’s actions, and provides an end goal that rewards adhering to the group’s understanding of morality in the afterlife, even if it means sacrificing one’s own individual will and desires in the present. By sharing the same epistemological universe and by having a divine goal to advance toward, religion could have served as an incredibly effective mechanism by which to pass the adherents’ genes on to the next generation.

However, a more interesting, if less

charitable, theory states that religion serves merely as a mask for power, providing the strong with the moral justification to do as they please to the weak. This seems most evident to me in the Christian doctrine of hell: What better way to scare someone into obedience than by telling them that they will burn for eternity if they do not submit to your rules? Intellectual reasons aside, this can be a profoundly psychologically trau-

matizing thing to tell a child, the effects of which I am personally well acquainted. On a society-wide scale, the divine threat may have the desired effect of keeping people in line, but at the cost of free inquiry, innovation and individual ambition. What minds have we lost to the fear of going to hell that, had they been empowered to make up their own mind, would have chosen to pursue science,

philosophy or art instead of submitting to the powerful agent that keeps their mind in fetters, be it a parent, partner or church? It is for this reason that I strongly disagree with the rationale behind Pascal's wager, as we have potentially everything to lose in this life by believing we will be revived in the next. And if he happens to be correct, should I face God after my demise, I will, as Twitter implores, face

him/she/it/they and walk backwards into hell. Alex, 22, from Chapel Hill, N.C., attends the University of North Carolina. He spent the summer in Colombia learning about indigenous farming practices, spirituality and resistance to foreign mining companies. Alex is fascinated by ecological processes and the ways in which human culture interacts with them, particularly regarding agriculture and religion.

SECOND PLACE (tie)

Hell and God are useless ideas

FFRF awarded Mike \$2,000.

By Mike Meo

There is but one useful way of understanding and interpreting the universe, and that way is the scientific method. The slow and steady amassing of truth can only be done by the insistence that evidence must support a claim, and that conclusions rest solely on fact. Every human being is already familiar with the process of making logical deductions based on evidence. The mouse that retreats from an electric shock and over time learns not to make contact with the live wire is engaging in a logical way of thinking. Yet, in some ways, the humble pain-averse mouse understands its universe better than the theist afraid of the unsubstantiated. The wire in question either has an electric current running through it or it doesn't. A claim made without any test is empty and without meaning. The existence of a life after death, potentially full of an eternity of torture, is, at its core, a claim without evidence.

It is as useful in revealing the truth of the universe as any other unsubstantiated claim. To view it as anything else is either dishonest or delusional. To believe it fact, to use it to determine the course of life decisions — building an entire ethic with this claim at its core and dedicating a religion on its veracity — is dangerous. When one lives life forever afraid of hell, suddenly the whole point of life is made crystal clear — hell must be avoided at all costs. What are a few decades on Earth when compared to an eternity of torture? Living by the rules set by the faith is then the greatest task achievable. But if hell doesn't exist, wouldn't a life centered on its avoidance be rather empty and devoid of meaning? Would it not be a life wasted? And since belief in hell has the power to define the purpose of a life, wouldn't it be extremely important to make sure that it's actually real? A fear of hell takes that which stands unproven without any supporting evidence as fact and then leads one to throw away precious time alive on a whim. Just as a phobia can debilitate someone irrationally afraid of some-

thing harmless, so too can the irrational fear of hell transform one's life in a futile attempt to avoid the nonexistent. Faith — and the intentional ignoring of reason — is a mainstay of religion. Society is unfortunately resigned to this fact. In no other realm is this type of thinking acceptable. Imagine a world where public policy was put into place simply on faith, or bridges were designed by prayer or new medicine was administered on the authority of scripture. Religion is totally unconcerned with honestly examining reality. I'm an unabashed atheist not afraid of going to hell because I care about living as I see fit instead of according to someone else's rules. The truth is important to me, and in order to be convinced of something, I'd like to find reasons that support it. Not only do I want to enjoy a pursuit of personal excellence, but I want others to have that opportunity, as well. And when others are shackled by their fear or by their belief, I seek to convince them to think critically about all ideas presented to them. As an unabashed atheist not afraid of going to hell, I'm positive that eventu-



Mike Meo

ally the superstition and mysticism that has steadily held back progress will fade away, and the steady introduction of secular values will continue to grow in influence around the world. Just as concepts in science are subjected to intense skepticism and constant critique, so too should religious ideas be scrutinized. When these concepts are placed above scrutiny, then improvements can never be made and we are condemned to live in the past. Mike, 19, is from Portland, Ore., and attends Portland State University. He is an economics major and plans to become a lawyer. His hobbies include running, singing and acting.

THIRD PLACE

Theism in the life of an atheist

FFRF awarded Emily \$1,000.

By Emily Mickel

I grew up in a vaguely Christian household; my mom is a lapsed Catholic, my dad is a nontheist and my brother is an apatheist, so none of us agree on religion. When I was a kid, my great-aunt used to send little girls' bibles and "VeggieTales" movies, but both always seemed more like fairy tales or fictional stories than the truth they're claimed to be. I didn't ever think of the stories of the bible as real, such as that of Moses parting the Red Sea for the Israelites to escape the Egyptians. It sounded just as fantastical as "The Frog-King" or "Cinderella," so I didn't make a distinction between those and

the bible as bedtime stories. As I got older, I met some people whose beliefs made no sense to me. For example, my childhood friend believed the Earth began 5,000 years ago and that carbon dating was wrong. Mentioning my dad's lack of faith horrified her to the point that, even though she was only 8 or 9 years old at the time, she tried to convert him. I quickly learned not to bring up my lack of religion in my community, where Christianity is so prevalent that the main road gets backed up every Sunday morning, requiring police to direct traffic. In high school, I drove my dad's car to school and I worried that one of my classmates would be offended by the Flying Spaghetti Monster sticker on it and key the car.

(Luckily, no one seemed to catch the reference.) I even have to be careful around my relatives. I watch what I say around them because they would easily be offended by an irreverent joke. For example, my dad once made a joke about the phrase "Jesus take the wheel," saying that Jesus was going to get arrested and go to jail because he doesn't have a license. They would've been horrified that he was taking God's name in vain. This disconnect creates awkward moments between my relatives and me, since they can be overzealous in their desire to "save" me. During our last visit, they wanted to take my brother and me to a Christian bookstore, and we didn't have the heart to tell them we'd rather do anything else. I am an unabashed atheist because organized religion just makes no sense to me and seems to contradict scientific evidence. The bible says that the entire human race was started by two people. Why would anyone ever believe this over evolution, when there is proof that we have a common ancestor with other primates? If we had existed since the beginning of creation, then we would have coexisted with the dinosaurs, who we've found to have lived and then died out millions of years before humans ever existed. Some may say it seems like too much of a coincidence that all the conditions necessary to form life on our planet occurred, but as we've



Emily Mickel

continued to explore our universe, we've found that our planet isn't as unique as we thought. Though many phenomena are currently inexplicable, it doesn't mean that their causes are supernatural. Besides my confidence that it doesn't exist, I'm also unafraid of burning in hell because it's such an objectionable concept. Who is to decide who deserves to go there? Depending on who you ask, a murderer who repents right before being electrocuted on the electric chair might not, while an otherwise morally good and "sin-free" nonbeliever could end up in hell. As an atheist, I don't worry about some omnipotent presence watching everything I do, and I don't do the right thing to avoid going to hell. I am a good person because I want to be. Emily, 20, is from Middleburg, Fla., and attends Cornell University. She plans to get a degree in mechanical engineering and hopes to work in aviation. She enjoys running and biking and has volunteered at an animal shelter.

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NEW!

FOURTH PLACE

Perspectives from a Bible Belt atheist

FFRF awarded Rachel \$750.

By Rachel Bellflowers

In my 19 years of life, I have not heard a single claim convincing enough to entice me into becoming a member of the one of the hordes of religious fanatics. With its acceptance of rape, genocide, misogyny, murder and slavery, its ever-conflicting divisional sects, and its hypocrisy and questionable “truths,” religion proves itself less than unappealing. However, in the eyes of many, if I do not believe the tales of a book that offers more conjecture than citation, more mysticism than matter, I am a lost soul in need of guidance, ignorant of the miracle of God’s creation. To the contrary, I do not believe that deviating from the traditional path means that I have lost my way; rather, I have discovered freedom from an oppressive religious system.

The bible paints Satan as the prime malevolence, all due to his defiance of God and subsequent attempt to steal his throne. However, the more probable reason for Satan’s appearance in the bi-

ble is to silence any temptation to question God’s word. Through this adversary figure, God instills eternal fear and guilt in his subjects. In truth, the “worst” the devil ever did was enlighten humankind by enticing Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit of knowledge. Is it not better to side with Satan, who rejected the tyranny of God, than to accept passage to what will be like a life-long prison sentence in heaven?

God possesses the power to create unthinking, all-obeying creatures, but he would rather grant humanity free will so that they can be punished if they do not obey his will. Why is God so vain that he must punish those who do not willingly believe in him? Those who do not believe in Jesus are undesirable, yet, according to some sects, merely asking for forgiveness for your wrongs is enough to earn your key to heaven. Expressing penance (whether false or genuine), even in the case of an inherently evil individual, would cast him or her in a better light than a moral, honest nonbeliever. A system deeming a recurrent child molester to be more deserving of forgiveness than

a nontheist is one that is principally defunct itself.

Living in the Bible Belt has forced me to live a life of nondisclosure. My family’s lack of faith is a family secret revealed only to those we trust; being ostracized by the religious mothers of my friends taught me that. In the Pew Research Center’s 2014 Religious Landscape Study, they ranked North Carolina as the tenth-most religious state, with 73 percent of the population believing in God with “absolute certainty.” These statistics reflect the reality that I have lived. I have sworn on a bible to gain a nonreligious leadership position. I have accepted the religious beliefs of others while knowing that they would not respect mine in return, holding my tongue, lest I be decried a sinner. In the South, it is an acceptable practice to force religion upon people at every turn, and I have discovered that there is little else one can do in this current situation but find like-minded, nonjudgmental individuals.

As a freethinker, I would rather consider ideas from multiple philosophies to form my own point of view, rather



Rachel Bellflowers

than having one body of thought prescribed. The only proof that God exists is “faith,” yet I would not accept the existence of any invisible thing unless there were proof. Consequently, I do not yearn to find guidance or strength in religion. If we are only good enough in the eyes of the lord if we abandon our own desires to submit to his commandments, I would prefer “burning in hell” than becoming a part of what is more akin to an abusive relationship than to one of love.

Rachel, 19, is from Bessemer City, N.C., and attends Appalachian State University. She plans to get a degree in psychology with a business concentration. After graduating, she hopes to get a master’s degree in industrial-organizational psychology.

FIFTH PLACE

Can we learn anything from theists?

FFRF awarded Samuel \$600.

By Samuel Hagen

As an unabashed atheist on campus, I am frequently pained when I find myself placed in a seminar with zealously believing classmates. The undergraduate seminar room is, after all, a sacred place that values reason above all; the best ideas win validation by the professor, while poorly constructed arguments fall flat, or worse, are subject to ridicule. In such an environment, it seems unlikely that one could learn anything from theists — especially, as one often encounters in this great nation, evangelical Christians — because the perpetuation of dogma has little to do with reasoned argumentation, let alone our grander project of learning.

In a recent course in the university religion department titled “Theism and Moral Reasoning,” I found myself on the first day of class seated across from a young man proudly sporting a T-shirt featuring a bible quote: “I can do all things through Christ.” Continuing my glance around the room, I spotted another student with an unavoidably large laptop sticker, proudly projecting in bold, italicized



Samuel Hagen

papyrus: “I am pro-life.”

Well, this will be a fun semester, I thought. While my believing counterparts in the course will remain entrenched in the divine ditch, my reason will win out these discussions every time! After all, I figured that these theists didn’t have much to say about moral reasoning, aside from the usual inevitability of my route as a nonbeliever to hell.

One of the major themes of the course was the idea of divine moral arbitration, that is, the moral judgment of right and wrong (e.g., God condemning people to hell), as opposed to the belief

in some human potential to arrive at moral principles through reason. The concept of divine moral judgment is, as it turns out, logically unsound. Plato knew this. In his *Euthyphro*, he aptly points out that it remains unclear whether certain actions are morally commendable merely because God desires them, or if God promotes certain actions because they are moral. The first case is problematic, as it implies that morality — the pursuit of goodness — is merely arbitrary dogma; the second case would mean that God’s judgment remains subservient to some ultimate, higher morality, and thus makes God irrelevant to moral reasoning. By either formulation, morality could not logically have anything to do with God, and the concept of hell becomes obsolete.

Relieved that reason would let me eschew eternal damnation, I began to wonder if I might learn anything from my theistic classmates. As the semester progressed, and our weekly discussions inevitably devolved to the same questions of belief, I began to realize that the issue with their theistic reasoning was merely a question of moral ownership. Whereas evangelicals would have us believe that God is the ultimate owner of moral value, I believe that I have full ownership over

my own morality. Sure, they may be able to “do all things through Christ,” but personally, I can do all things through myself. I will never burn in some New Testament inferno, but I might suffer — hellishly, perhaps — if I fail to follow my own ethical code. Through our class discussion, I began to see theism as a sort of lazy ethic: Rather than reasonably consider the moral stakes of one’s actions, theists would rather enter a transactional relationship with God. Do x, go to heaven; fail to do x, go to hell.

I’ve come to realize that theists and atheists both pursue a certain divine goodness. It’s just that I would label this “reason,” whereas theists would say “God.” My task, then, as I leave the seminar room and look beyond my college campus, is to reclaim the supreme divinity of reason. The only hell that reason can conceive of is a land devoid of reason — and the longer we allow theism to flourish, the sooner we might be headed for such a hell after all.

Samuel, 22, is from Gainesville, Fla., and attended Harvard University, having graduated in May. He majored in theater and art history and minored in Russian literature. Samuel is now working for an entertainment company in California.

SIXTH PLACE

I Won’t Go to Heaven (a poem)

FFRF awarded Niamh \$500.

By Niamh Falter

I won’t go to heaven, that much is true
If there are pearly gates, then I’m not passing through
I’m devoted to sin, I have to admit it
I’ve tried and I’ve tried, but I just can’t quit it.

According to Leviticus 19:11
I sinned my first time at the age of 7
While waiting in line at the grocery store
I suppose it is time to make my confession.

I spied an open pack of gum
Mum turned her back and I took one

I chewed it happily until
It dawned on me what I had done.

I’d foiled it then, my post-death plan
And never told a clergyman
Just sat in silence and decided
Sinning is where I was guided.

Then when I was just a teen
Exodus 21:17
When my dad came in my room
And told me that I’d have to clean.

It was my room, that much I knew
No matter the dirt that you couldn’t see through
Disgusting, the must and the dust, it was mine!



Niamh Falter

And I muttered some choice words I thought were benign.

But little I knew, according to The Book
Those words that I said, the choices I took
They qualified me to be put to the death
(It was a small detail that I overlooked.)

And then, again, I gossiped about
My neighbor’s new haircut (just belted it out!)

And In high school, my friend told me that he was gay
Didn’t stop to consider
I said “That’s OK.”

Before we got married, it might not be clever,
But my husband and I
Broke commandments together.

And I’m guilty of sloth,
When I have my off days
I sit on the couch in a do-nothing haze.

I’ve lied, I’ve been jealous, eaten more than my share.
But it just doesn’t matter, I just shouldn’t care.

What use is a world of wonder and light
If you have to make sure you get everything right?
And it’s not at all easy, rules aren’t always good
They don’t love thy neighbor as much as they should.

They pick and they choose
Which rules you should follow
And some of their guidelines
Are quite hard to swallow.

Because I was born as a woman, it seems,
(as told by Timothy 2:11-14)
I “should learn in quietness and full submission”
And do what I’m told, and take what I’m given.

But no. I am happy that Joe married Jack. And
creation by God is fiction not fact.
In schools we should pledge our allegiance to good
Not just living our life in ways God thinks we
should.

People are people no matter the way
They choose how to love or choose how to pray
I’m a sinner, offender, an infidel
So you can have heaven, I’m going to hell.

Niamh, 24, is from Summerville, S.C., (although born in Nottingham, England) and attends Savannah College of Art and Design. She plans to major in photography after years of running her own photography business.

SEVENTH PLACE (tie)

My nonreligious beliefs are worth burning for

FFRF awarded Truth \$400.

By Truth Muller

Thanks to my parents allowing me to grow up as a freethinker and choose my own spiritual path, I am unabashedly nonreligious and have been that way since I was very young. I am spiritual, but I do not believe in God, heaven, or hell. One of my first arguments I ever had against religion was “If there is a god, then why is there so much unhappiness in our world?” If God exists, he’s pretty awful to his creations because he lets them suffer and die needlessly. Some might counter that those people were sinners, but I say this is ridiculous. There are plenty of people who believe in a god who have died from natural disasters, wars and starvation, just the same. My grandmother has been a “good Catholic” for her entire life, but now Alzheimer’s disease is slowly erasing her mind and killing her. What kind of reward for good faith is that? Another person might still counter that those disasters were somehow caused by the devil, another entity I don’t believe in. If God is all-powerful, why



Truth Muller

couldn’t he stop the devil from doing all those terrible things? In my opinion, someone truly all-powerful would snuff out the devil like a birthday candle. While I was in my local library, I remember overhearing a so-called “language tutor” use the bible to teach a Spanish woman English. The student asked her tutor what an atheist was. My blood boiled when I heard the answer. “Well, atheists are bad people who do not believe in God. They will go to hell.” The student was confused, and asked why

they were bad, but the tutor had no answers beyond that. I left, furious. I do not understand how choosing not to believe in something makes me a bad person, or should condemn me to perdition after I die. I don’t identify as an atheist. The Webster’s dictionary definition of atheism — “The belief that there is no god, or denial that God or gods exist” — is worded in such a way as to indicate that there is a god, and I’m simply too blind to see it. So now I’m a bad person, and an idiot, too? Religion isn’t exactly winning me over. In a world where the planet is rapidly spinning out of control on a climatological and social scale, I see no evidence of a benevolent higher being. Some can say that those who’ve died in earthquakes and genocides, riots and school shootings, floods and bombings have gone to “a better place,” to the afterlife. I ask, where is the right-now life God supposedly gave them to live? Squandered. If everything that happens on this planet has a divine purpose, then give me God’s reason for my aunt, mother of two, dying of brain cancer at 45 after losing her ability to speak and

walk. At the wake, the priest said she went to God willingly. Then why were the last words I ever heard her say “I don’t want to die?” I don’t believe there is an afterlife. Science has no proof to offer me. This I do know: All my friends and I — the gays, the nonbelievers, the questioners, the unwed lovers, the contraceptive users, and the scientists — don’t deserve to burn because we think the status quo is wrong. Religion has become a way of explaining away the unexplainable, denying the undeniable, excusing the inexcusable, and regulating things that are untidy or unpleasant. And I think those values, not me, can go to hell. If I’m wrong, if this belief I have is not good enough for God, then he can go ahead and send me to hell. Just bury me with a stick and a bag of marshmallows, because it’d be nice to have something to do while I burn for what is right. Truth, 18, is from Rock Hill, N.Y., and attends the College of the Atlantic. He operates an environmental organization, Buddies for Bats, and is a professional public speaker and environmental writer.

SEVENTH PLACE (tie)

As long as you’re not there

FFRF awarded Emma \$400.

By Emma Rosen

I cannot possibly recall all the times I’ve been told I’m going to hell. This silly notion meant to be an insult has been flung at me mainly because I’m Jewish (though I’m a secular Jew) and whenever I’ve exhibited behaviors that religious people deem damning. It’s almost funny how little an effect this has had on me. These people, holding their righteous anger close to their hearts and waving it around like they’re wielding a piece of their God’s power, like to let me know I will be burning eternally. It has about the same meaning to me as someone telling me I’m going to Atlantis, or Middle Earth, or Hogwarts. And the cure for this straight-to-hell diagnosis? Let Jesus into your heart! Arbitrary rules abound when it comes to who’s going to heaven and who’s going to hell. The concept falls apart when you consider the fact that by evangelical standards, a serial killer could end up playing a harp in heaven as long as he repents and becomes a

stringent God-lover. Furthermore, the concept of hell itself seems to contradict what missionaries on the street tell you. God loves you, they say. Jesus loves you. If God and Jesus are so loving, why do they condemn a significant portion of the population to be tortured in a fiery pit? Now, the Old Testament God, the God of the Jews, seems like the kind of deity who would remand you to the flames. This guy was vengeful, violent, and could seemingly care less about the majority of human life. Humans are doing things that displease God? Send a flood, wipe them all out. Moses was frustrated after leading the Israelites out of Egypt only to be lost in the desert? Too bad Moses, you don’t get to go to the promised land anymore because you doubted your God for a second. That God wouldn’t think twice about his “children” burning in hell. Yet, it’s the New Testament fans who take to the concept of hell. Religion itself is like a bunch of fables and parables being used as justification for anything and everything. People choose what they want to follow and believe: God’s an a la carte buffet. If you’re gay,

they think you will burn in hell because the bible says so. But the bible also commands you to keep the Sabbath. And yet, people work on the Sabbath all the time. But they’re not going to hell because they didn’t grab that commandment for their a la carte self-righteous feast. A man tried to save my soul once. He said, “You should be one of those Jews for Jesus, because if you don’t, you’re going to hell.” My response? “As long as you’re not there.” I’m an unabashed atheist secular Jew, unafraid of burning in hell, because hell doesn’t exist. If there was a God who sends his more unruly people to hell, why the hell would you want to follow that guy? If there was a hell, and a God who sent me there, I think I’d enjoy it. Hell would be filled with interesting people, my friends and family, and probably all of my heroes throughout history. We’ll just avoid the murderers in the corner. I do not reject religion out of disdain or anger. I reject religion because following a doctrine blindly leads to horrible occurrences. This has been proven again and again. I do not ex-



Emma Rosen

pect all the people in my community to fully understand where I’m coming from, as religion is personal and sacred to family members and some friends. Sometimes not believing in God is a lonely burden. The religious might see me as a heathen for this. Maybe they’ll even tell me to my face that I’m going to hell. Well, as long as you’re not there. Emma, 24, is from Cincinnati and attends LIU Global. She has worked as a preschool teacher, an Americorps VISTA at a nonprofit for the homeless, an English teacher in Israel, an English teacher for recent immigrants, a newspaper editor, a nanny, a high school youth adviser and a tutor.

FFRF student essay honorable mentions

FFRF selected nine essays from the college competition that were worthy of honorable mention status. Each of the following students received \$200 (plus an additional \$100 for those who are members of a secular student club).

To read each of the honorable mention essays in full, go to freethoughttoday.com.

Here are edited excerpts from each (in no particular order).

By Samantha Jones

I have always lived by the phrase, “I believe what I can see.” A holistically perfect being in the sky that will send me to a mythical realm of fire and suffering for having sex or refusing to believe that a jaded historical figure is my personal savior isn’t something that can be proven, or to be frank, even adequately justified. I don’t believe that putting blind optimism and faith into a figure in hopes of arriving at a promised land is a valuable use of my time.



Samantha Jones

While I understand that many churches are now taking progressive stances as our society becomes liberalized, this itself is undermining their integrity: If there really is this undeniable figure that is constructed in this undeniable text, why do we get to change the meaning as we see fit?

Samantha, 19, is from Rochester, Minn., and attends the University of Wisconsin-Madison. She is an editor for the student newspaper the Daily Cardinal. She hopes to attend law school after graduation or begin writing as an environmental journalist.

By Cameron Zahner

Entering high school, I was already a proud atheist who was ready to take on an onslaught of opposing opinions for the next four years. At the time, I simply rejected the notion of a god. The idea of an all-powerful and all-knowing being was absurd to me.

I operated under the assumption that religious groups were harmless communities that occasionally took on service projects. I quickly realized how wrong I was and how religious concepts, such as hell, had an immense negative impact on society and promoted uninformed and dangerous thinking.



Cameron Zahner

Intellectually, religion puts mental handcuffs on its adherents. Just imagine a world in which all people accepted the fallacy that the Earth was created only a few thousand years ago by a divine, all-knowing entity. What a miserable place it would be, devoid of science and discovery.

Cameron, 20, is from Melrose, Mass., and attends Harvard University. He is majoring in economics and interns for InnerCity Weightlifting, a nonprofit that aims to end gun violence in Boston.

By Edon Ademaj

In my experience, in discussing the concept of hell with theologians, I found each dismissive that this cruel dimension could be made possible by an all-loving, compassionate and merciful god. Somehow, they come to interpret this horrible place as a manifestation of our individual hells.

Hell and religious systems exist as a form of government over the soul, and they are devised in such a way to rule with fear, as well as with compassion. This ambivalent quality is just vague and encompassing enough to work for all who call themselves believers.

Edon, 20, is from Fort Worth, Texas, and attends Texas Wesleyan University. He is unsure of his future plans, but may pursue teaching English in Reykjavik, or writing or editing for the New Yorker, or working as a freelancer in graphic design.



Edon Ademaj

By Lydia Taylor

I was always shocked at how some of the most intelligent people I knew depended so heavily on the crutch of religion. Couldn’t they see how misleading religion is now and always has been? Besides all of the logical fallacies and embellishments found in religious texts of all types, the scientific proof of essential processes such as evolution, and the hypocritical nature of many religious icons (such as the abundance of sexual harassment at the hands of trusted community priests), people I had once truly respected and admired lost some of their prestige in my eyes as they continued to bow again and again to religion.

Lydia, 19, is from Millstadt, Ill., and attends the University of Denver. She volunteers at a day shelter for women, children and the transgender community. She hopes to get a master’s degree in international studies and serve in the Peace Corps.



Lydia Taylor

By Ashley Levy

I am an unabashed atheist and not afraid of burning in hell because if I do not speak out, who will? History has taught that inaction leads to disaster. If no one ever chooses to speak out against tyranny, then it will be allowed to continue. I am privileged to be able to speak out and not fear for my physical safety. There are people who are still beheaded for being atheist in some countries.

The idea that one should be God-fearing is dangerous and teaches people to be cowardly and unquestioning. Everything must be questioned. Religion teaches the



Ashley Levy

opposite. I refuse to be relegated to dark corners for who I love.

Ashley, 20, is from Brookhaven, Ga., and attends Oglethorpe University. She is studying economics and politics. After graduation, she plans to get an advanced degree in economics.

By Blake Miller

To accept the concept of hell, you must employ a very particular style of selective reading and ignore the entirety of the Old Testament (as hell, per se, does not exist within those pages, which were penned after a few thousand years of oral storytelling as the only means of their record-keeping). Putting critical thinking aside concerning the validity of hell, the morality of such a place is even more alarming. An all-powerful deity who creates the cosmos on a whim — and claims to love its creations — puts its creations on a world it made full of pain, disease, death and evil. Then, while giving no indication or proof of existence of itself, it dictates that if you don’t believe it caused all of existence, you get thrown into a firepit to be tortured for all eternity. Any reasonable human (who has not been indoctrinated since childhood never to question any biblical teaching) would be incredibly skeptical of such a place and horrified at the implications of what qualifies as love to those who believe the claimant.



Blake Miller

I am unafraid of hell for the same reason that I am unafraid of Tolkien’s Nazgûl: They are both constructs of human imagination. How could a book composed of multiple separate texts, written in different time periods, in different geographical locations, for completely different reasons be considered a trustworthy coherent single source (especially considering those texts don’t even agree with one another)?

Blake, 22, is from Avon, Ind., and attends IUPUI. He worked as an editor in the film industry for a few years before taking a few semesters at Ivy Tech, then transferring to IUPUI. He also works at the Avon Washington Township Public Library.

By William Napp

Why does hell exist at all? It’s conceivable that those who rejected God could simply cease to exist, rather than be tormented. And if we must remain conscious for all eternity, why are there only two places to go in the afterlife, rather than many? Moreover, in what sense is an eternal punishment proportionate, since no finite crime merits infinite punishment? This is potentially hell’s most absurd feature: the terms and conditions for entry. Failing to sincerely believe the right set of propositions is how a sinner finds himself in the hands of an angry god. Even if I could choose my beliefs at will, coercion is still coercion. If we reject God’s generous offer to wor-



William Napp

ship him for eternity, we’re warned that we will burn alive. We’re unable to make a “free choice” in any meaningful sense if we’re under threat of torture.

William, 23, is from Kentwood, Mich., and attends Grand Valley State University. He enjoys music, especially playing the guitar and drums, and reading.

By Parker Maris

As of this writing, I am completing an internship in Uganda, where religiosity is 99.8 percent. Nearly all girls in Uganda are told only to practice abstinence, while boys are given no sexual education at all. Absolutely nothing. Zero. How could this be possible in a country where roughly 25 percent of girls become pregnant before their 19th birthday and 1.4 million people are suffering from HIV/AIDS?

It was common for both students and teachers alike to discuss “playing sex,” as if sex were a game. Despite the clear lack of information, I still had multiple teachers approach me after the sessions with the opinion that the talk I gave was unnecessary, as the girls had already been taught “religious values.” It was clear that conserving religious dogma had become more important than protecting children’s health.

Parker, 23, is from Calgary, Alberta, recently graduated from the University of Calgary and is now at law school at the University of British Columbia.



Parker Maris

By Julianna Schoenwald

Though many arguments can be leveled against belief in God on the grounds of naturalism and moral philosophy, my fundamental reason for disbelief is fairly simple: There is not a modicum of convincing data to suggest that I should. I am under no illusion that I have any obligation to provide a reason not to believe in something for which I have no evidence.

My desire is to orient my worldview around evidence and constantly update my beliefs as new information becomes available to me. However, this inclination is not shared by much of the believing community. Instead, the religious approach accepts credulity as a virtue, which they call faith.

Believers opt to forfeit their intellectual freedom for the peace of mind brought about by a packaged set of metaphysical and moral dogmas, and, as a result, they become ideal hosts for ideological possession.

Julianna, 22, is from Grand Rapids, Mich., and attends Grand Rapids Community College. She plans to pursue a career in chemistry, using her eventual degree to engineer sustainability solutions and research biochemical processes.



Julianna Schoenwald

There’s no stopping the Secular Age

FREETHOUGHT BOOKS

By James A. Haught

Last year, the American Family Survey by Brigham Young University found that churchless people have become the nation’s largest segment. Asked “What is your present religion, if any?” Five percent replied “atheist,” 6 percent said “agnostic” and 23 percent chose “nothing in particular.”

This religionless total of 34 percent outstripped Protestants (33 percent), Catholics (21 percent), Jews (2 percent), Muslims (2 percent), Mormons (1 percent) and all smaller groups.

The AFS findings were the highest yet in the snowballing trend of Americans who say their religion is “none.” Previous polls put the growing unchurched tally at about one-fourth.

Whatever the correct ratio, it’s clear that religion is collapsing in the United States as it did in other Western democracies. We live in the long-foreseen Secular Age when gods, devils, heavens, hells, miracles, messiahs, prophecies and other church dogmas fade into myth. Church membership and attendance are dropping relentlessly.

The trend began in Europe after World War II. Decade after decade, churchgoing dropped until only a fringe of old people worshipped. Pope Benedict lamented: “Europe has developed a culture that, in a manner unknown before now to humanity, excludes God from the public conscience.” Columnist George Will called the Vatican “109 acres of faith in a European sea of unbelief.” Today, what’s left of European religion consists mostly of fervent Pentecostalism among tropical immigrants and Islam that is alien to much of society.

Ironically, Europe spent centuries killing people over religion — in Crusades, Inquisitions, witch hunts, Reformation wars, pogroms against Jews, massacres of Anabaptists, etc. Then finally it decided that faith is inconsequential.

The secular tsunami spread to Canada, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and other advanced societies. At first, America seemed immune, but the trend blossomed in the 1990s and has increased steadily. At first, only about 8 percent of American adults told pollsters their faith is “none,” but the ratio rose with remarkable swiftness.

Southern Baptists lost 1 million



James A. Haught

members in the past decade. So many Catholics have quit that one-tenth of American adults now are ex-Catholics. As for tall-steeple mainline Protestants, they have shrunk drastically since the 1960s. United Methodists dropped from 14 million to below 7 million. Presbyterians fell from 4.2 million to 1.5 million. Episcopalians faded from 3.6 million to 1.8 million. The Disciples of Christ sank from 1.9 million to 600,000. Meanwhile, America’s population doubled.

Although this country is called a “Christian nation,” church statistician David Olson says only 17 percent of Americans now attend worship on a typical Sunday — and he expects a drop to 10 percent by 2050. Thus, nine-tenths of people won’t be in pews. Churchgoing will become a fringe activity.

Western civilization evolves through epochs: the Renaissance, the Age of Kings, the Enlightenment, the Colonial Era, the Industrial Revolution, the spread of democracy, etc. Now the Secular Age is blooming.

The relentless retreat of supernatural religion is transforming America’s culture, although most people hardly notice. The metamorphosis has deep social and political implications.

Those who abandon faith mostly are young, and they tend to hold liberal social values. They generally support gay marriage, the public safety net, legal marijuana, women’s right to choose abortion, acceptance of minorities and immigrants, etc. They shun politics and hardly vote — but they hold the potential to change America’s moral climate.

White evangelicals are the core of the Republican Party. They tipped the 1980 presidential election to Ronald Reagan, the 2000 election to George W. Bush and the 2016 election to Donald Trump. Strangely, those fundamentalists contradict the values of Jesus. He taught followers to help the poor, heal the sick, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, comfort the afflicted — basically the agenda of the liberal Democratic safety net. Yet white evangelicals back the GOP, which tries to slash the safety net. In effect, they

oppose Christ. However, white evangelicals keep shrinking, along with other faith groups. I hope their power to sway elections disappears. A 2017 report by the Public Religion Research Institute said: “Today, only 43 percent of Americans identify as white and Christian. In 1976, roughly eight in 10 Americans identified as white and identified with a Christian denomination.”

That’s a stunning drop in four decades. Of course, part of the decline stemmed from the “browning of America” — the flood of Hispanics, Asians, blacks, Pacific Islanders and others who constantly whittle the white majority.

Pew Research projects that Islam eventually will become the largest religion globally. As for America, it expects churchless ranks to grow to 62 million by 2020, and 101 million by 2050.

Scholars offer various explanations for the Western secular surge. Mostly, they say that religion thrives in low-income, undeveloped lands where people need supernatural comfort — but that need vanishes when life becomes affluent and secure.

Personally, I think education and intelligence are involved. Several studies have found that doubters are smarter than believers. Researchers say America’s average IQ rises by three points per decade, while tests are recalibrated to keep the median at 100. Many intelligent people can’t swallow magical claims of religion. Americans are becoming smarter, and they’re leaving supernaturalism behind.

Of course, American churches will linger interminably as congregations age. But they’re increasingly sidelined. Around the world, religion remains powerful in Islamic lands, and Christianity is booming in less-developed tropical places — where faith mostly involves charismatic Pentecostal worship. In fact, the latter is so strong that one-fourth of all the world’s Christians now “speak in tongues.”

Culture change isn’t clearly visible while it’s happening, but I think the Secular Age is rolling in Western democracies. Every American city remains graced by lovely church spires pointing heavenward. However, the supernaturalism behind them is fading.

A half-century ago, in *The Age of Reason Begins*, philosopher-historian Will Durant wrote that if Christianity dies in Western civilization, it will be “the basic event of modern times.” That basic event seems to be in progress.

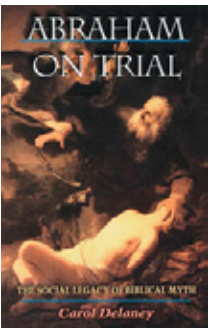
James A. Haught is the editor emeritus of West Virginia’s largest newspaper, *The Charleston Gazette-Mail*.

The relentless retreat of supernatural religion is transforming America’s culture.

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

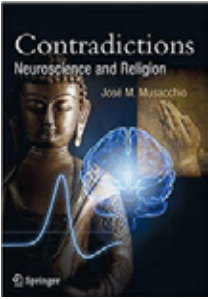
Abraham on Trial: The Social Legacy of Biblical Myth
By Carol Delaney
\$35 (hardcover), \$31.57 (paperback) Princeton University Press

Through his desire to obey God at all costs, even if it meant sacrificing his son, Abraham became the definitive model of faith for the major world religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The book explores how the sacrifice rather than the protection of children became the focus of faith, to the point where the abuse and betrayal of children has today become widespread and sometimes institutionalized. Delaney’s analysis offers a new perspective on what unites and divides the peoples of the sibling religions and, implicitly, a way to overcome the increasing violence among them.



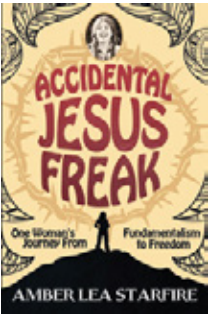
Contradictions: Neuroscience and Religion
By Jose M. Musacchio
\$15 paperback, \$19 Kindle
Springer Praxis Books

The incompatibility between popular religious beliefs and the scientific view of human nature is exposed. The book begins with a survey of the evolution of religions and their continuing, often irrational, influences in modern society. Then, based on his long experience in neuroscience, the author takes issue with Descartes about the duality of body and soul. He presents case studies of patients with brain diseases and from these deduces that the soul, far from being separate and supernatural, is no more or less than our way of experiencing our brains. Convincing clinical findings and powerful arguments about the universality of truth make this book a bold contribution to the debate about belief and religion.



Accidental Jesus Freak: One Woman’s Journey from Fundamentalism to Freedom
By Amber Lea Starfire
\$16.99 paperback, \$2.99 Kindle
MoonSkye Publishing

Amber Starfire chronicles her journey as Linda Carr into the evangelical church culture, where she gives up everything for her husband and their music ministry. But in the process, she loses her most valuable assets: her identity and sense of self-worth. It is only when Linda returns to live with her birth family and faces her complicated relationship with her mother that she finds new purpose and the courage to begin to extricating herself from the limiting beliefs of her past. *Accidental Jesus Freak* is a powerful reminder for anyone who seeks to live a life authentic to who they truly are.



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LETTERBOX

Donation to FFRF moved up after health issues

For more than a year now I have been dealing with some health issues. Although not terminal, I've decided to make some changes in my life.

I decided some time ago to include FFRF in my will. However, I'm going to issue that amount now, but I prefer the donation be private until after my death.

I wish FFRF continued success in your noble and courageous endeavors. (I look forward to each issue of Freethought Today!)

Name withheld
Pennsylvania

True fact: Nothing fails like prayer

Nothing fails like prayer.

I prayed every day for a year that everyone in the world would become atheists.

Mary Jo Stirling
California

Christian donates to FFRF in place of tithe

Please accept my donation. I insist it be entirely applied to your legal fund.

I donate and write to you with a heavy heart. I consider myself a devout Christian. I attend church and tithe regularly. I have foregone my usual tithe in order to donate to your cause.

I have thought and struggled with this decision for months. Though I am no theologian, I do read my bible. I see my donation to FFRF as consistent with its teachings.

Christians are called to ally themselves and fellowship with people of goodwill to do good things, regardless of their current place on the path with God. That includes those of little or no faith who act with integrity. Christians are called to be mindful of weightier societal issues of justice, mercy and faithfulness in their tithing. Romans calls me to accept those whose faith is weak without passing judgment. We are all on our own individual journeys through life and faith.

I have periodically read your Crank-mail. Frankly, I'm appalled at the level of foulness coming from purported believers. By chastising FFRF, often vehemently, Christians are violating a covenant.

Admittedly, I am only mildly concerned with my religion influencing government policies. However, I am concerned with false faiths influencing it. The opposite side of that same coin is government influencing religion. The bible is teeming with stories of other beliefs, governments and leaders persecuting Christians for their faith. As a patriotic American, I try to uphold and defend the freedom to worship as I choose. We must remain ever vigilant to retain that freedom.

I believe that the goodwill efforts of FFRF are consistent with my faith. I do not have to believe in everything you do in order to support some of the things you do.

Please continue your good works defending my right to worship my God, as my conscience and integrity requires, and protecting me from any and all religious practices being forced upon me.

Name withheld
Oregon

Send us photos of repurposed churches



Photo by Heather Bellow of the Berkshire Eagle

This former United Methodist Church in Great Barrington, Mass., is currently being restructured and may house a retail cannabis shop.

Member Stephen Carlsen of New York sent us a letter after seeing the photo in the August issue of the repurposed church (now a post office) in Ireland. He wanted to point out another one in Massachusetts. (See photo.)

So, in that spirit, FFRF would like you to send us photos of any churches that you know of that have been repurposed for something useful. Include yourself in the photo, if possible! Please tell us where it is, what kind of church it was and what it is now and any other details that may be worth mentioning. We will print them in Freethought Today as space allows. Send the information and photo to editor@ffrf.org.

Essayists, be ready for others to deride you

Dear fellow students of life, I read your winning essays as high school students in the August issue. The theme, in a word, was the hereafter. As an old atheist, I want to warn you: Others may shun or deride you because you will not pretend to believe in an afterlife.

We know that the hereafter was born of and evolved through fear and ignorance. Life is a banquet, and yet many among us continue to be malnourished on narrow-minded dogma diets.

The strongest emphasis of religion is not on the existence of God, not on God's will, and, from the looks of things, not on living a moral and ethical life.

Religions focus on only one question: Where and how will I spend eternity? It makes the only lives we can know trivial. After I die, the universe will go on for billions of years, but I will no longer exist to experience it.

There's an old saying, "Marry in haste, repent in leisure." Applied to Christians in the "hereafter," it might be, "Sin spontaneously, say you're sorry eventually, be forgiven completely, live eternally in leisure."

Carl Scheiman
Maine

Student essay writers are impressive, eloquent

I am a Lifetime Member of FFRF and a second-generation atheist. My father was raised as a Christian Scientist, and decided at age 18 that it was all a bunch of crap. I am my father's son. I have a scientific education (CalTech), and have a continuing interest in cosmology and biological evolution. I am an orthopedic surgeon.

of us closet atheists. I will have to say, it is difficult for many of us. In my job as a physician, I try to avoid any discussions of religion, as it may detract from my efficacy as a surgeon and my neutrality in such issues. I therefore remain mostly in the closet regarding religious issues. It is pretty bizarre really that we are now more in the closet than gay people or transgender people. So unacceptable, right?

Jim Loddengaard
California

Sessions' citing of biblical verse appalling

How shameful that Attorney General Jeff Sessions counsels Americans that Romans 13 is part of our government's laws!

Where in the Constitution is Romans 13 cited? And where in that instrument of law does St. Paul's signature appear as one of our Founding Fathers?

Worse yet, which law school graduated Jeff Sessions anyway?

David Quintero
California

Sometimes, it pays to directly complain

In this age of daily outrage and sadness, I would like to share a small victory.

I recently moved to a conservative area and have chosen letter writing as one of my methods of protest.

The head of a nationwide respected nature center here uses the word "blessed" in his newsletter's opening. I wrote about feeling excluded and about the fact that language matters.

He quickly responded with a letter in which he apologized for offending me and thanked me for reminding him that words do matter.

I could not have asked for a better outcome.

Raye Bransdorfer-Polasek
Michigan

FFRF's existence is necessary in these times


I am originally from New Lexington, Ohio. I can tell you I graduated high school in the '90s and prayer was always around when I was there. When I played sports, I always stood at the back, hovering over, not kneeling or bowing. I never believed in prayer and thought it was a waste of time. Back then, I didn't know there was an organization like this to look to for guidance or information. So, I just wanted to say thank you for existing.

Kevin Goodfellow
Ohio

Yip Harburg,
from his book:

Rhymes for the Irreverent

Illustrated by Seymore Cwast



Three Bolts, No Strikes

When lightning struck the steeple
Of the Church of San Jose,
It barely missed the brothel
That was just across the way.

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation

Buy it from FFRF online - shop.ffrf.org

‘Blessed’ note was not left as sign of approval

I hate to disappoint Howard Bostock (from his letter in the September issue), but the “Have a blessed day,” note left under his windshield wiper was not from an approving passerby. It was left there by a disapproving rah-rah Christian.
Kathleen Yaeglo
Michigan

P.S. Church and state mix very well in your cartoons!

Volunteer has to ride in ‘In God We Trust’ car

I live in the middle of the Bible Belt, where it’s not easy being an atheist. I was a good friend of Dr. John Henderson, author of three books about atheism and a member of FFRF until his death a few years ago. I am proud of that fact that he acknowledged me in his last book, which I helped edit. Currently, I am a volunteer with the Haywood County Sheriff’s Citizen Patrol and drive a patrol car. Unfortunately, the vehicle has “In God We Trust” painted on it, which bothers me. But I haven’t said anything about it as my patrol partner is a minister We agreed to not discuss religion.

I enjoy Freethought Today very much. Keep up the good work!
Michael Goode
North Carolina

ABC News’ David Muir got the message, maybe?

I may be reporting this prematurely, but I got tired of hearing ABC News anchor David Muir, an otherwise intel-

Great work, Sacramento chapter!



FFRF’s Greater Sacramento Chapter has been doing great things recently (with the assistance of FFRF’s Nonbelief Relief). In the photo, chapter Secretary Janet Thew, center, and chapter President Judy Saint, right, stand with a school coordinator after donating goods. The secular school is designed specifically for homeless and transient young children, often living in cars with their parents, who might be in and out of classrooms too often to benefit from regular public education. The Sacramento chapter also donated to Wind, a secular organization that provides temporary shelter, laundry, showers, counseling and job placement for youth who have been aged out of the foster care program, keeping them off the streets.

ligent and well-spoken human being, constantly using the word “prayers” and references to God in his evening news report. So I sent an email to the station, directed to his show, pointing out that these references in a news report are inappropriate and are not something that I would expect from a reputable reporter. I also pointed out the statistics on the dying state of religion in this country and the rate of atheism among Millennials.

Oddly enough, since I sent that email, there has not been one word about God or prayer from Muir. I held my breath the other night when he talked about Olivia Newton-John’s battle with cancer, but all he said afterwards was that “we are all pulling for you.” Is it possible someone was listening? Wouldn’t that be nice?
Judy Ellis
Florida

Alliance between wealth and religion makes sense


This is in response to a piece in Freethought Today about how the United States is the most religious wealthy nation. Many people wonder how the Religious Right can ally itself with plutocrats who seek to keep wealth in the hands of the few and away from the rest of us, as well as make our public education system dysfunctional. Isn’t Jesus supposed to be on the side of the poor and forgotten? Aren’t Christians supposed to fight for the oppressed against the strong? The answer can be found in the statistics that show that the more uneducated and poor you are, the more likely you are to be religious. Giving people a good education and decent income results in their rejection of religion. To the hard-core Christian this is horrible. Saving one’s soul is the most important thing, and if it means pushing people into poverty and ignorance to do so, so be it. To them, of course, being a Christian blesses you with spiritual wealth and a divine knowledge no school can give. This belief has lead to a society that places dogma over decency and an acceptance of one’s place in society without question. It even has created the most hideous of all dogmas, the prosperity gospel, where the rich are seen as God’s chosen ones. The more one looks at it, the more obvious the alliance between wealth and religion makes sense.
Peter Hall
Oregon

THEY SAID WHAT?

If they did [intend for separation of state and church], then why did they put ‘one nation under God’ in the Pledge of Allegiance?
Rev. Jerry Carter, Republican candidate for the N.C. House, claiming erroneously that the Founding Fathers both wrote the pledge and included “under God” in it, even though that phrase wasn’t added until the 1950s.
Greensboro News & Record, 7-23-18

God spared my child and she is coming home alive and not in a body bag.
Mandi Keller, mother of 15-year-old Gillian, who was on the amphibious “duck boat” in Branson, Mo., that was consumed by water during a storm, which killed 17 people, whom God apparently did not spare.
Friendly Atheist, 7-2-18

This isn’t intended to slight other religions; it’s about tradition. Government is based on Christian principles, and we abide by those Prayer is important to me. It puts me in a good frame of mind. I ask for the ability to think and to work with people and to do the best for my constituents.



Brown County (Wis.) Board Supervisor Patrick Evans, a Catholic, in pushing for a referendum stating: “Should the Brown County Board of Supervisors continue to open their monthly board meeting with a Christian-style (prayer) invocation?”
Green Bay Press Gazette, 7-30-18

have the freedom to follow any belief system you choose.
The (very confused) new prime minister of Australia, Scott Morrison, a Pentecostal who has denounced what he sees as the lack of respect for Christian beliefs and an opponent of same-sex marriage, who has described Christianity as one of his main motivations for public service.
New York Times 8/29/18

One of the things I’m most proud of is getting rid of the Johnson Amendment. That was a disaster for you.
President Trump, speaking in a closed-door meeting with evangelical leaders, wrongly asserting that his executive order that purported to ease enforcement of the Johnson Amendment was “getting rid” of it.
NBC News, 8-28-18

the American Legion’s Philip B. Onderdonk Jr. Religious Liberty Award to President Trump.
Legion.org, 8-30-18

Any time I’m criticized for my belief in Jesus Christ, I just breath a prayer of praise. . . . This is a nation of faith. We’ll continue to stand for the things that we believe in.
Vice President Mike Pence in an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network.
USA Today, 8-31-18

There is no reason for us to be ashamed of our national motto; it is a vital part of our culture. We are one nation under God, and that reality should be reflected in public life, including in the buildings where our children are being educated.



Brandon Reed, **Kentucky state Rep. Brandon Reed**, about a state bill that would require schools to display “In God We Trust” in a “prominent location.”
Friendly Atheist, 9-10-18

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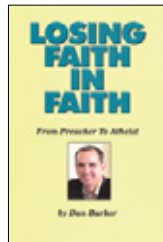
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Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist



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

Buy it from FFRF online
shop.ffrf.org

Australia is not a secular country. It is a free country. This is a nation where you

By the time he had left high school, he [Mike Pence] had decided that he was going to be president of the United States. . . . He thought God was calling him to, now, be vice president and function as a president-in-waiting.
Michael D’Antonio, who wrote The Truth About Trump, in an interview on CNN.
The Hill, 8-28-18

This year’s award recipient wasn’t that difficult. We have never had a year when somebody so surpassed anybody else in the advances they made for religious freedom.
Kelly Shackelford, president and CEO of First Liberty Institute, in awarding

Plenty of space on the Ark for dinosaurs — no problem.
Joseph Kezele, a biology teacher at Arizona Christian University, who is being asked to help review Arizona’s standards on how to teach evolution in science class.
AZCentral.com, 9-13-18

BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Timothy Urban, 52, Van Alstyne, TX: Sexual assault, bigamy and sexual performance of a child. Urban is part-time youth director at First United Methodist Church. Alleged incidents date back to 2015. According to his now-deleted biography on the church website, he's married with 2 children and has coached youth soccer teams. *Source: KTEN, 8-25-18*

Suphachai Suthiyano, 64, Kanchanaburi, Thailand: Assault resulting in death. Suthiyano, a Buddhist monk, is accused of battering a 9-year-old temple novice with a stick and slamming his head into a pillar after he disrupted a ceremony. The boy died after falling into a coma. *Source: AFP, 8-24-18*

Kevin Lonergan, 30, Allentown, PA: Felony corruption of minors and misdemeanor indecent assault. Lonergan, assistant pastor at the Cathedral of St. Catharine of Siena, is accused of sexually touching a 17-year-old girl he met at another parish and sending her nude photos on Snapchat.

The girl alleged to investigators in June that Lonergan embraced her Feb. 1 at St. Francis Parish and that she could feel he had an erection before he grabbed her buttocks. She said she told a priest at Central Catholic High School, who alerted the bishop's office. *Source: Morning Call, 8-21-18*

Ricardo Strachan, 40, Lauderhill, FL: Performing a lewd or lascivious act on a victim between the ages of 12 and 16. Strachan, who led Prophetic Worshipers International Church, is accused of molesting a 13-year-old girl about 60 times in 2016. Police said he scared her into keeping the abuse a secret by having her steal clothes and other items from her family for him to use in voodoo rituals.

Avo A. Roker, 32, Strachan's friend and the girl's stepfather, is charged with sexual battery. A website from 2015 listed him as senior pastor of Believer Community Church in Nassau, Bahamas. The church now appears to have new leadership. *Source: WPLG, 8-19-18*

Bryan Engfer, 57, Ft. Atkinson, WI: Suspicion of theft from a business setting of more than \$2,500 when he was pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church, where he no longer works after an audit in July found financial irregularities. In 2013 he was a nominee for bishop of the South-Central Synod of Wisconsin for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America but lost by a vote of 200-177. *Source: WKOW, 8-16-18*

A senior member of Israel's Chief Rabbinate and **4 others** were arrested on suspicion of bribery, fraudulence and breach of trust. The rabbinate certifies products as kosher. **Eight others** were detained but not arrested. Police announced that hundreds of thousands of shekels were found in suspects' homes. A shekel is worth about 28 cents. *Source: Haaretz, 8-13-18*

Darryl Farrier, 38, Franklin, NJ: Child endangerment and possession of child pornography. Farrier, youth pastor at Freedom Church, allegedly met with a 15-year-old girl after using social media to meet her and have explicit chats with other underage girls. An affidavit alleged he possessed over 100 images depicting sexual exploitation and abuse of minors. *Source: nj.com, 8-13-18*

Siraj Wahhaj, 40, and **4 other adults** who lived in a compound near Taos, NM, are charged with child abuse after Wahhaj's 3-year-old son was found dead and 11 emaciated children were also discovered there. Wahhaj was wanted on a Georgia warrant for abducting his son, who suffered from hypoxic ischemic encephalopathy, in November.

The boy's body was washed, wrapped in sheets and buried at the compound, prosecutor John Lovelace said. It was believed he would return as Jesus in 4 months to reveal which of society's institutions were corrupt and needed to be done away with, a witness said. After a 2017 trip to Saudi Arabia, Wahhaj and the others performed rituals to "cast demonic spirits" out of his son's body, another witness alleged.

Wahhaj's father, an imam in Brooklyn, NY, testified as a character witness for Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, the "blind sheikh" convicted in 1995 of plotting terror attacks in the U.S. *Source: CBS, 8-13-18*

Paolo Glaentzer, 70, Bagni di Lucca, Italy: Sexual molestation of a child. Glaentzer, a Catholic parish priest, is accused of molesting a girl who is 10 or 11 after allegedly being seen naked with her in July in a car parked at a market about 10 p.m.

In an interview with the newspaper Corriere Fiorentino, he said the encounter was "an exchange of affection" that got out of control, adding that the victim seemed "much more mature than she was," adding, "I thought she was at least 15." Italy's age of consent is 16 when a person holds power over another such as a priest or teacher. *Source: Newsweek, 8-10-18*

Seth Welch and his wife, **Tatiana Fusari**, both 27, Cedar Springs, MI: Felony murder and 1st-degree child abuse for the August death of their daughter Mary Anne, 10 months, from malnutrition and dehydration. Fusari admitted "they failed to reach out for medical help with their daughter for fear of having her children removed by Child Protective Services, lack of faith and trust in the medical services and religious reasons," an affidavit said.

They have 2 other children, ages 4 and 2, and Fusari is pregnant. On Facebook, Welch called doctors "priesthoods of the medical cult" and wrote "The righteous shall live by faith. It's God who is sovereign over disease and those sorts of things and, of course, ultimately deaths."

The children weren't vaccinated, which Welch opposed: "If evolution believes in survival of the fittest, why are we vaccinating everybody? Shouldn't we just let the weak die off and let the strong survive?" *Source: WOOD, 8-8-18*



Robert R. Browning, 59, Jacksonville, FL: Lewd battery on a person between the ages of 12 and 16, transmission of material harmful to minors and lewd and lascivious molestation. The complaint alleges the girl performed oral sex on him as he touched her sexually inside Cedar Creek Baptist Church, which operates a school where Browning taught bible studies.

Investigators also found an image of male genitalia allegedly depicting Browning that was sent from a phone number associated with him. *Source: Times-Union, 8-8-18*

Orlando Martinez-Chavez, 47, Jersey City, NJ: Sexual assault, criminal sexual contact and endangering the welfare of a child when he was pastor at Iglesia Pentecostal Lirio de los Valles. Martinez-Chavez was removed in June after he was accused of sending graphic images to a 32-year-old female congregant.

An alleged victim, now 15, told police Martinez-Chavez touched her genitals inside her pants in November 2012. Another girl from the church alleges she was 16 when the pastor fondled her breast 5 years ago. He's also accused of threatening to tell authorities about family members' undocumented status. *Source: Jersey Journal, 8-8-18*

Timothy L. Reddin, 67, Fayetteville, AR: Attempted coercion and enticement of a minor. Reddin, part-time pastor at Turner Street Baptist Church, is charged with messaging an undercover agent in July to have oral sex with someone he thought was a 14-year-old boy.

Reddin also taught classes at Ecclesia College, a Christian school, and was chaplain for the Singing Men of Arkansas choir. He was sentenced to 27 months in prison in 2000 after pleading guilty to possessing child pornography. *Source: AP, 8-7-18*

David Myers, 52, Akron, OH: Felony importuning. Myers, a former teacher at Cuyahoga Valley Christian Academy, is charged with starting an online chat in July with a person he thought was a 15-year-old boy but was actually an undercover officer. Four days later he showed up to have sex with the boy. Myers

taught at the school from 1995 to 2012 before returning in 2014 as a part-time volunteer for the boys soccer team and theater program. *Source: cleveland.com, 8-3-18*

Scott E. Moore, 52, Beaverton, OR: 7 counts of aggravated theft. Moore, director of operations at Village Baptist Church until last March, is accused of stealing at least \$70,000 starting in 2015. *Source: The Oregonian, 8-3-18*

Santo J. Alvarado, 30, Baton Rouge, LA: Indecent behavior with a juvenile and sexual battery. Alvarado, music minister at an unidentified church, is accused of assaults on a teen girl from the church between Feb. 1, 2015, and Feb. 25. He faces similar charges in S. Carolina. *Source: WBRZ, 8-3-18*

Aryeh Cohen, 44, St. Louis Park, MN: Soliciting a child or someone believed to be a child through electronic communication to engage in sexual conduct. Cohen, rabbi and director of youth outreach at Minneapolis Community Kollel, allegedly responded in February to an ad placed by an undercover agent posing as a 16-year-old boy on the social networking app Grindr.

Cohen later sent the agent a photo of his genitalia and was arrested in an apartment complex where they were to meet, an affidavit said. *Source: Pioneer Press, 8-2-18*

Dustin R. Herrera, Medford, OR: 13 counts of lewd acts on a child under 14 years old and sentence-enhancing allegations of targeting multiple victims in a sex crime. Herrera is accused of molesting 8 children from 2000-04 while youth pastor at Yucaipa Christian Church in Calimesa, CA. *Source: Press-Enterprise, 7-31-18*

Fernando Hernandez, 50, Brownwood, TX: Indecency with a child and continuous sexual abuse of a young child or children. Hernandez, founding pastor of It's A Challenge Church, is accused of assaults on 2 underage girls in 2010 and 2016. The mother of a 7-year-old alleged she didn't come forward until now because when others she knew had, "nothing was done." *Source: KTXS, 7-31-18*

Charles N. Pelkey, 49, Avon, MN: 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct. Pelkey, Avon Community Church pastor, is accused of engaging in a sexual relationship with a woman who had gone to him for marriage counseling in November 2017, which is illegal in Minnesota. Consent is not a defense. Another parishioner reported the alleged relationship to police. *Source: KMSF, 7-30-18*

Malo "Victor" Monteiro, 45, Colton, CA: Intent to commit rape, mayhem or sodomy, lewd and lascivious acts on a child and sexual penetration by force. Monteiro, youth pastor at Faith Baptist Church, is accused of multiple assaults on several juveniles between 1999 and 2017. *Source: Press-Enterprise, 7-29-18*

James C. Jones, 38, Cross Plains, TN: Sexual contact with a minor by an authority figure. Jones, youth pastor at an unidentified church, was charged with assaulting a girl following an investigation that started in September 2017. *Source: WSMV, 7-27-18*

Wilfredo A. Flores, 24, Oklahoma City: Rape. Flores, youth pastor at Iglesia Pentecostal Unida Hispana, is accused of assaulting a 13-year-old in her home in September 2017 after he brought her Chinese food and a flash drive she needed to finish a church project. The girl's mother allegedly found Flores hiding in a closet with a blanket over him. *Source: KFOR, 7-25-18*

Pamela J. Alberts, 54, Whitney, TX: Theft. Alberts, treasurer for Ministerial Alliance Whitney, is suspected of stealing as much as \$85,000 from the nonprofit since 2017. *Source:*

KXXV, 7-25-18

Dhanajay Bhawe, 51, Mangeshi, India: Outraging the modesty of a woman. Bhawe, a Hindu priest at Shri Mangesh Temple, is accused of trying to kiss and hug a young Mumbai woman who attends medical school in the U.S. She was visiting the temple in June when the alleged incident occurred. *Source: NDTV, 7-23-18*

Pleaded / Convicted

Thomas Chantry, 47, Hales Corner, WI: Guilty by jury of 2 counts of aggravated assault causing physical injury. A mistrial was declared on 4 counts of child molestation after the jury couldn't reach a verdict. When arrested in 2016, Chantry was pastor at Christ Reformed Baptist Church but the charges stemmed from Prescott, AZ, where he was pastor at Miller Valley Baptist Church from 1995-2001.

Five alleged victims testified his "discipline" left bruises and marks and in one case turned into molestation. One man said that when he was 10 or 11 he would try to rub his buttocks to soothe himself after a spanking. "I wasn't allowed to do it because he gave me the pain," the man testified. "He said it was OK for him to do it since he delivered the punishment." Then Chantry would rub his bottom for several minutes and eventually start fondling the boy's genitals. *Source: Verde News, 8-21-18*

Reginald Flynn, Flint, MI: Pleaded no contest to misdemeanor assault and battery for spanking a 6-year-old student with a spatula in February at Foss Avenue Baptist Church, where he is pastor. The boy was a student at Eagles Nest Academy charter school, which Flynn founded and where the boy was allegedly having behavioral issues. He was also accused of grabbing the boy's face and neck.

Flynn's attorney claimed Flynn agreed to the plea deal because of potential litigation and because he didn't want the child to have to testify. *Source: mlive.com, 8-6-18*

John T. Sweeney, 74, Lower Burrell, PA: Pleaded guilty to indecent assault in a plea bargain that dropped a charge of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse. Sweeney, a retired Catholic priest who served 7 different parishes from 1970-2008, admitted molesting a 10-year-old boy who attended St. Margaret Mary School in 1991-92.

According to the grand jury presentment, Sweeney forced the boy to perform oral sex on him in his parish office after he was sent there for being disruptive on a bus. *Source: pennlive.com, 7-31-18*

Jerry R. Newton, 54, Slidell, LA: Pleaded guilty to theft of \$95,316 in Social Security disability benefits. Newton, pastor of Bogalusa Baptist Church since May 2007, didn't disclose to the government that he had a paid position with the church and owned 2 businesses when he applied for benefits. *Source: Times-Picayune, 7-26-18*

Sentenced

Donald C. Biggs, 40, Medford, OR: 15 years 8 months in prison after pleading guilty to transporting with intent to engage in criminal sexual activity. Biggs, youth pastor at Mountain Christian Fellowship, admitted taking a 14-year-old girl to California in 2013 to record her in a bathroom during a church trip. Several other victims of secret recording later came forward.

At sentencing, 45-year-old Kevin Smith jumped the railing and started punching Biggs in the face. He's the father of 2 of the victims. A GoFundMe page set up to cover Smith's legal costs raised \$15,000 toward a \$5,000 goal in 6 days. *Source: Mail Tribune, 8-24-18*

Christopher R. Gattis, 59, Chester, VA: 158 years in prison with all but 33 years suspended after pleading guilty to 3 counts of 1st-degree murder and felony use of a firearm in the Nov. 23 killings of his wife, Jeanett Gattis, 58, his stepdaughter, Candice Kunze, 30, and her boyfriend, Andrew Buthorn, 36. Gattis was youth ministry director for Grace Lutheran Church in Chester. Parole was abolished for felonies in Virginia in 1995.

Long-term family discord escalated over several days and reached a boiling point on Thanksgiving night, the prosecution said. Part of it was captured on a home surveillance camera. About 11:15, Gattis used a pistol to shoot all the victims, who were playing a board game in the kitchen. *Source: Times-Dispatch, 8-15-18*

John P. Aitchison, 67, Canberra, Australia: 9 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of 5 counts of rape and 8 counts of indecency involving a 13-year-old girl in the late 1980s. The woman testified that Aitchison first assaulted her after violin practice at the Anglican church where he was pastor.

She testified he told her during a rape to look into the corner and pray she would see her pet dog that had died, while he muttered "please God forgive me." Two men also testified Aitchison molested them as youths. *Source:*

Canberra Times, 8-13-18

Ignacio Villafan, 52, Tulare, CA: 5 years’ probation after pleading no contest to grand theft of personal property worth more than \$200,000. Villafan, pastor of St. Rita’s Catholic Church from 2005-12, is believed to have stolen about \$300,000.

District Attorney Tim Ward called the sentence too lenient: “To think that a person could steal such a large sum and not face incarceration undermines the justice that we in the District Attorney’s Office seek every day,” Ward said.

Bishop Armando Ochoa of the Diocese of Fresno asked the court to take a “restorative justice” approach because the diocese is short of priests and Villafan could eventually return to ministry but have no access to funds. Restitution will be decided at a later hearing. *Source: Fresno Bee*, 8-10-18

Wiraphon Sukphon, 39, Si Sa Ket, Thailand: 20 years in prison and \$877,000 restitution for fraud, money laundering and violating the Computer Crimes Act. Sukphon, a Buddhist monk who headed Wat Pakhantitham Monastery from 2009-13, solicited donations for “the world’s largest Buddha statue” in jade and gold and for other projects but spent much of it to live lavishly, the court ruled.

He was extradited from California last year and faces charges for allegedly raping a girl under 15 over whom he had unofficial custody in 2000-01. *Source: The Nation*, 8-9-18

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Joseph Everly, pastor of The Quest, a Christian church in Novato, CA, for the past 15 years until resigning recently, is being sued by Kimberly Labozzetta, 34, a church employee who claims Everly manipulated her into a sexual relationship that led to an abortion. The church is a co-defendant.

When she got pregnant in February and told Everly her husband had had a vasectomy, he allegedly promised her they would get married after he left his wife and they could have children later. After the abortion, he ended the relationship and told the congregation about the affair, the suit alleges. *Source: Independent Journal*, 8-20-18

Five employees at Bergen Catholic High School, Oradell, NJ, are defendants in a suit filed by Anthony Asatryan, now 18, who alleges sexual abuse, harassment and assault. He asserts his wrestling coach **David Bell** pursued him romantically starting when he was 15 and that assistant coach **Dominick Spataro** showed him and another wrestler pornographic photos on his phone.

Other defendants are **Brother Brian Walsh** (then-president of the school), **Principal Timothy McElhinney** and **Jack McGovern**, athletic director. The county prosecutor’s office has declined to bring criminal charges.

Asatryan let USA Today examine 94 text messages from Bell, sent from February 2016 to early 2018. The last one arrived just before he was kicked off the wrestling team. He’s since transferred to another school. *Source: North Jersey Record*, 8-16-18

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Christian Brothers** Catholic religious order settled a suit for \$727,000 with an Australian man who said he’d have been happy with a simple apology for his sexual abuse. Paul Bradshaw, 74, Perth has terminal cancer. His alleged attackers — Brothers **Lawrence Murphy**, **Bruno Doyle** and **Christopher Angus** — are all dead. Bradshaw reported his abuse twice as a child and was instead called a liar and was sent to get psychiatric treatment. Bradshaw’s lawyer, Michael Magazanik, said his firm is handling 60 claims against the Christian Brothers. Bradshaw is the first to claim damages for historical sex abuse under recent laws in Western Australia that removed the time limit for such cases. *Source: ABC*, 8-16-18

Finances

The **Catholic Archdiocese of New York** has paid about \$4 million from its compensation program to 24 sexual abuse victims represented by attorney Michael Reck. Payments range from \$25,000 to \$500,000, Reck said. The latest payment went to an alleged victim in the 1980s of **John T. Meehan**, 81, a priest who was a guidance counselor at Cardinal Hayes High School in the Bronx and was named a monsignor in 2006. *Source: NY Post*, 8-18-18

A Montana federal bankruptcy judge approved a \$20 million settlement between the **Diocese of Great Falls-Billings** and 86 survivors of sexual abuse by Catholic clergy.

Catholic Mutual Insurance will pay \$8 million, the diocese will pay \$5 million, \$4 million will come from individual parishes, \$2 million will be paid by the Catholic Foundation of Eastern Montana and \$1 million by St. Labre Indian School.

Most claims are from 1950-80. The names of **27 priests** will be posted on the diocese’s

website within 30 days and remain online for at least 10 years. *Source: KBZK*, 8-15-18

Legal Developments

Joseph H. Hart, 86, Cheyenne, WY, bishop emeritus of the Catholic Diocese of Cheyenne, is being reinvestigated on sexual abuse allegations involving an underage male. A 2002 investigation by the Natrona County District Attorney’s Office found “no evidence” of abuse but the Cheyenne Police Department has new information and has asked any other potential victims to come forward.

Bishop Steven Biegler announced in July that the diocese had learned of “credible and substantiated” allegations that Hart had abused 2 boys. The diocese reported the alleged abuse to police in March, Biegler said in a statement. *Source: Tribune Eagle*, 8-23-18

Emiliano Arias, the prosecutor in charge of investigating the sexual abuse scandal in the **Chilean Catholic Church** said several bishops could face charges in the wake of scheduled interviews with Richardo Ezzati, cardinal archbishop of Santiago. Arias’ office is investigating **38 abuse accusations** against 73 bishops, clerics and church lay workers involving 104 victims.

The office of **Santiago Silva**, bishop to the armed services, has been raided in a search for evidence. Silva is also president of the Chilean bishops’ conference.

Arias said officials seized documents related to complaints made over 20 years to Silva and his military predecessor, **Bishop Juan Barros**. Seven more court-authorized raids of senior church officials’ office have been carried out. *Source: Channel News/Reuters*, 8-18-18

Devin Caruthers, Raymore, MO, violated bond conditions with an appearance at Second Missionary Baptist Church when children were present, prosecutors said in a motion to revoke bail. Caruthers, church youth pastor, is charged with 2 counts of sodomy, attempted child molestation and domestic assault. He’s barred from contact with his alleged victims or any child under 17 except for his own.

It’s alleged that during 2 sleepovers at his home, he touched a boy’s genitals and told him he loved him. He’s also accused of sexually touching 2 girls. *Source: WDAF*, 8-7-18

Denis Nolan, 64, a defrocked Irish priest convicted last year of 6 counts of rape and sexual assault of a 10-year-old boy he’d hired to do yard work in 2005-06, had his appeal denied. It was based mainly on the trial court’s decision not to give the jury a corroboration warning due to inconsistencies in the victim’s testimony and complaint. The appeals court said the inconsistencies were minor and not out of the ordinary. *Source: Irish Times*, 7-31-18

Allegations

Carlo Maria Vigano, archbishop emeritus and Vatican ambassador to the U.S., said in a statement that **Pope Francis** should resign for his handling of sexual abuse allegations against **Theodore McCarrick**, a cardinal who resigned in July as archbishop of Washington due to claims he molested an altar boy in 1971-72 and later targeted adult seminarians.

Francis “must be the first to set a good example to cardinals and bishops who covered up McCarrick’s abuses and resign along with all of them,” Vigano said. “He knew from at least June 23, 2013, that McCarrick was a serial predator. . . . [A]lthough he knew that he was a corrupt man, he covered him to the bitter end.”

Speaking to the press in Ireland, the pope responded: “I will not say a single word on this.” *Source: CNN*, 8-26-18

Edmundo Paredes, pastor for 27 years at St. Cecilia Catholic Church in Oak Cliff, TX, before fleeing the U.S. after being removed in June 2017 for suspected financial irregularities, is now under investigation for molesting 3 teen boys in the parish between 10 and 20 years ago.

During the financial probe, in which \$60,00 to \$80,000 is involved, church officials received allegations of criminal sexual acts, which have been found to be credible, said Diocese of Dallas Bishop Edward Burns. The church is hiring private investigators to find Paredes, suspected of being in the Philippines. *Source: Morning News*, 8-19-18

James Mulcahy, 74, is accused in a victim’s compensation claim filed with the Diocese of Rochester, NY, of repeatedly molesting a boy in 1978 when he was 13 and Mulcahy was religious education coordinator at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Mt. Morris. The alleged abuse wasn’t reported to authorities until 1994 after the statute of limitations expired. Mulcahy now lives in Ukraine and works for Metropolitan Community Churches, where a reporter contacted him and was told the allegations lack substance.

Mulcahy’s file in the Livingston County Sher-

iff’s Office has an allegation of sexual abuse involving a 14-year-old boy for whom Mulcahy was a foster parent. Reporters found more abuse claims targeting boys as far back as 1978. Through it all, at various times, Mulcahy was a hospital chaplain, religion teacher, diocesan personnel department employee and pastor at Metropolitan Opens Arms Church in Rochester, where he retired in 2014. *Source: WHAM*, 8-15-18

William C. Graham and **Roland Antus** were found to be credibly accused of sexual abuse after the Diocese of Duluth, MN, investigated claims. Graham was accused of child abuse in the 1970s at St. Benedict’s Catholic Church in Duluth.

Antus was credibly accused of committing the same crime in the 1980s at St. James Catholic Church in Duluth. Graham is on administrative leave and Antus retired in 2008.

Graham sued his accuser in 2016 for making false claims. The suit is unresolved. The list of credibly accused priests in the diocese has 37 names. *Source: News Tribune*, 8-5-18

Gerald P. Sheehan, a New York Catholic priest who died in 2006, has been accused of molestation by a woman in her 40s who says she was between 7 and 14 years old and a member of Nativity of Our Lord Church in Orchard Park when she was assaulted about 200 times at her home, at the church rectory and at various cottages. Sheehan was listed as “On leave” in S. Buffalo in 1976, the time of the alleged abuse. *Source: WKBW*, 8-3-18

Leonard Kalin, a Nebraska Catholic priest who died in 2008, has been accused of sexual misconduct by **Peter Mitchell**, a priest who was laicized in 2017 for violating his vow of celibacy on multiple occasions. Kalin was vocations director for the Diocese of Lincoln and pastor of the University of Nebraska Newman Center from 1970 until the late 1990s.

Mitchell alleged Kalin regularly asked seminarians to help him shower because he was old and needed help and would then make sexual advances. He also invited them on trips to Las Vegas and would require them to meet with him late at night at the Newman Center.

Mitchell admitted his own violations of celibacy with women. “I am painfully aware, however, that the people to whom my seminary formation was entrusted modeled addictive behavior to me and an entire generation of young men who are now priests.” *Source: Catholic News Agency*, 8-3-18

Removed / Resigned

Frank Gomez, Bridgeport, CT, resigned as pastor at St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church rather than undergo “treatment and assessment” at a facility in Canada amid accusations that he texted children and gave them gifts without their parents’ knowledge.

The Diocese of Bridgeport told parishioners that Gomez, a native of Mexico ordained in 2009, texted children without their parents’ knowledge, offered them gifts and had physical contact that was not sexual but made people uncomfortable. “Serious boundary violations” but nothing “illegal or immoral,” said Bishop Frank Caggiano. *Source: CT Post*, 8-25-18

Javier Heredia, pastor of S. Carolina Catholic parishes in Lancaster and Great Falls, was placed on administrative leave after his arrest for inappropriate touching of a girl at a public wave pool, said a diocesan press release. Arrest details weren’t available. *Source: The State*, 8-24-18

Michael W. Matusak, Uniontown, PA, was removed by the Diocese of Greensburg as pastor of 5 Catholic parishes due to a credible allegation of child sexual abuse dating back almost 20 years. The accusation is new and isn’t part of the state grand jury report on child abuse in Pennsylvania. *Source: WTAE*, 8-22-18

Steven M. Fink, Baltimore, rabbi at Temple Oheb Shalom, was suspended by the Central Conference of American Rabbis for multiple violations of its Ethics Code.

The synagogue sent a letter last May to congregants that said it had suspended Fink with pay due to an allegation of sexual impropriety with a teen minor that occurred “a number of years ago.”

In January 2007, then-Cantor Lisa Levine left the temple abruptly and declined to say why. She again declined in May. *Source: Baltimore Sun*, 8-20-18

Henryk Pawelec, Pompano Beach, FL, resigned as pastor at St. Coleman Catholic Church, the Archdiocese of Miami announced in a letter to parishioners. Archbishop Thomas Wenski alleged Pawelec stole over \$236,000 for “his personal benefit” and said the archdiocese has reported the incident to the State Attorney’s Office. *Source: Miami Herald*, 8-19-18

Edward Jones was removed as pastor at Florida Catholic parishes in Crawfordville and Lanark due to a credible allegation of inappro-

priate contact with a minor female in 2004 when he served at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Tallahassee. State Attorney Jack Campbell said his office is investigating. *Source: Tallahassee Democrat*, 8-16-18

Xuecheng (born Fu Ruilin), 51, resigned as head of the Buddhist Association of China and abbot of Longquan Monastery in Beijing. A 95-page report written by former monastery monks alleged he “sent suggestive messages to two female monks at Longquan Temple and made unwanted sexual advances toward at least four others,” reported the S. China Morning Post. “Other chapters outlined how he had overseen the illegal construction of several buildings at the monastery and embezzled funds.”

Xuecheng denied all allegations on Weibo, China’s equivalent of Twitter, where he has over a million followers. *Source: NPR*, 8-15-18

Jeff Jakes, senior pastor at Orangewood Church and Christian School in Maitland, FL, resigned after an independent investigation criticized the church’s handling of sexual harassment of a young female intern in 1998.

“Much has been said about events that happened 20 years ago and though I strongly disagree with many of the accusations made against me and the conclusions, my heart breaks for those who have been hurt at Orangewood and I pray for healing,” Jakes wrote in a resignation letter.

GRACE, a Christian group that investigates misconduct claims within religious institutions, said it spoke to 76 witnesses and surveyed more than 600 church members. Orangewood is Presbyterian-affiliated. *Source: Orlando Sentinel*, 8-13-18

Patrick Barvick, pastor at St. Mary’s Catholic Church in Davey, NE, was removed by the Diocese of Lincoln. Bishop James Conley said he told Barvick earlier that “he was not to be alone with females. His behavior concerns me and the Diocesan Review Board,” adding, “I have asked him to temporarily step aside from his parish while I evaluate this situation.”

Steve Thomlison resigned as pastor at St. Stephen in Exeter and St. Wenceslaus in Milligan after Conley met with him to “discuss a past incident in the military that was a concern” when he was a National Guard chaplain.

Conley also removed **Charles Townsend** as pastor of St. Peter’s Parish in S. Lincoln due to an “emotionally inappropriate, nonsexual relationship” with a 19-year-old man. Conley said the relationship involved alcohol and that Townsend was sent to the Shalom Center in Houston for treatment. *Source: Fremont Tribune*, 8-13-18

Steve Timm, Clearwater, MN, resigned as pastor of Rejoice Lutheran Church in July. Timm told a reporter: “Earlier this year, I was involved in a consensual affair with a woman at Rejoice.” He called the relationship “mutual and consensual” and said it was “not in the context of counseling.”

State law bars clergy members from having a sexual relationship with anyone they are counseling, regardless of consent. The behavior was also disclosed to the state National Guard, where he’s a member of the 47th Chaplain Detachment.

Timm, who is married with children, worked with the Guard’s Yellow Ribbon program that trains clergy on how to gain the trust of troops returning from deployment. *Source: St. Cloud Times*, 8-11-18

Heather Larson, S. Barrington, IL, lead pastor at Willow Creek Community Church, and the **board of elders** resigned after acknowledging the church mishandled allegations that megachurch founder **Bill Hybels** engaged in improper behavior with women, including his executive assistant, for decades. Hybels resigned in April and alleged victims are still coming forward.

Willow Creek has a \$77 million budget and 350 employees spread among its 8 campuses. *Source: Chicago Tribune*, 8-10-18

Mark F. Plaushin, Philadelphia, a priest in residence at Our Mother of Consolation Catholic Parish, was removed from ministry after an allegation surfaced he molested a minor in 1985 before he was ordained. Plaushin, who is in his early 60s, was ordained as an Oblates of St. Francis de Sales priest in 1989. *Source: Philly Voice*, 8-10-18

Brett Moser, lead pastor at River City Church in Fargo, ND, was placed on leave after he and his wife, **Shannon Moser**, met with the board after she was arrested for having sex with a 16-year-old student. She teaches middle school science.

His photo and biography have been removed from the church’s website but there’s no public allegation of his involvement.

The student alleged he met the teacher in Rendezvous Park in June and that they had sex in the car along a gravel road. Another student, now 15, told police in July that Shannon Moser had shared explicit photos and videos on Snapchat starting when he was 14. Some of the videos showed the Mosers having sex, court documents stated. *Source: News Tribune*, 7-24-18

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

‘I alone can fix it’

Evangelicals were perfect host for Trump

By Chris Todd

God gave us President Donald Trump. Or, more accurately, the idea of God gave us Donald Trump. The key to his election was his lopsided share of the white, evangelical vote — 81 percent. Trump drew their votes without living any of the virtues



Chris Todd

evangelical Christians aspire to. In fact, it was quite the opposite; he is an adulterer and a serial liar, he defaults on his debts, gives little or nothing to charity and openly boasts of sexual assault. He has also stated that he has never asked God for forgiveness — an act that is at the core of evangelical belief. All of this is well known and well documented. Why, then, did evangelicals vote for him?

The answer is that, long before they are capable of reason, evangelicals and other fundamentalists are conditioned from childhood to believe. Voters brought up to believe incredible stories — including Jonah emerging from the same end of the whale he entered, that God sent bears to eat 42 children and

that a lightning strike transformed Saul into Paul in a flash — were well-prepared in the magical thinking necessary to believe that Trump, despite his glaring immorality, could suddenly transform into a wise president. “I alone can fix it,” was essentially a religious statement, made to an audience groomed to believe in biblical miracles. With those words, Trump attached himself to a perfectly conditioned host, the believer, just as naturally as a lamprey attaches itself to a lake trout.

It is too late to avoid some consequences of our current situation, but we must do what we can to avoid the election of unbalanced leaders in the future. To that end, our best hope is to discourage magical thinking in our children — the belief in miracles, and the expectation that prayer can alter anything outside their own minds. At best, such thinking is relatively harmless — for instance, the irrational notion that we can influence the course of a football game by shouting at our TVs. At worst, it is disastrous; “If I blow up the World Trade Center, I will be immediately transported to sexual paradise.” Trump’s claim that he is the only man who can save our country is no less irrational than the suicide bomber’s belief in a heavenly, virgins-only brothel —

Long before they are capable of reason, evangelicals and other fundamentalists are conditioned from childhood to believe.

and it may well prove more damaging.

For many Trump voters, the foundation of magical thinking began with childhood religious indoctrination — and indoctrination it surely is. Five-year-olds do not choose to commit to a set of religious beliefs any more than they choose what language to speak. Children in Riyadh grow up to be Muslim believers; children in Atlanta grow up to be Christian believers. And once children have accepted religious magic, it is only a small step to convince them, later in life, that political magic is also possible — that a life-long narcissist could transform into a president who would put the public good above his own.

In a perfect world, children would not be exposed to religion until their minds are mature enough to decide among competing ideas, but that is not realistic. What we can do is resist

religious incursion into traditionally secular areas. Public education, for instance, is currently under attack by the Religious Right, which much prefers charter and private schools where children are immersed in whatever set of myths motivate the schools’ founders. It is crucial that we keep public schools alive and well-funded.

We must also become vocal public situations. Many of us have felt reluctant to openly criticize statements or actions based on religious belief — we’ve been conditioned to think it rude and intolerant. But to the contrary, it is our responsibility to help others, especially children, see that satisfying, productive lives are much more likely without religion.

The happiest four countries in the world are Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. It is not a coincidence that those four are also among the least religious and the most literate. “I alone can fix it” does not sell in such environments. We can only hope that America belatedly joins Scandinavia and Europe in rejecting religion, and in resisting those who use religion to exercise political control. In the meantime, we must continue to speak out against magical interpretations of our world.

FFRF Member Chris Todd lives in Minnesota.

Prayer: The ultimate cop-out

By Herb Gartner

Every time there is a catastrophe, you hear the families, friends, sheriffs and priests say they are praying for the victims. I want to yell out, “Idiots!”

Insensitive? No. Just the opposite.

How can anyone forget about the Holocaust, where 6 million people, some of whom prayed daily, were murdered? We’ve all seen pictures of the starving, emaciated, desperate people standing at fences in concentration camps with tormented, hollow eyes. Did God miss that? Can you imagine an all-powerful, loving, merciful god ignoring that pain and their prayers?



Herb Gartner

A young woman with cancer who was featured on the news said she knew God would cure her. Well, the doctors might, but God won’t!

It is these religious people who seem unaffected by the pain and suffering of others. They focus on their own reality, not that of the millions who prayed while suffering through wars, famines, disease, slavery and more. Their needs and egos are blind to history and the facts. And their blindness does harm.

The more religion is promoted as a solution to anything, the more power

it’s given to start wars, thwart scientific and medical research, and make communities feel so alienated that they radicalize into violence.

Prayer is a cop-out that trains the brain to be weak and dependent on something that does not exist. It’s futile. People look to prayer for solutions while often opposing human and technological efforts that can actually solve problems.

Starts in the home

We were taught to believe in an all-powerful, loving, merciful God the same time we’re taught to believe in Santa Claus, Easter Bunny and Tooth Fairy . . . by our parents. Religion starts in the home and is perpetuated by peer pressure and by religious opportunists, priests, rabbis, propagandists and unscrupulous profiteers who feed off people’s fears, anxieties and naiveté.

Popes continually pray for peace in the Middle East and the world. How’s that working out? If God won’t answer the pope’s prayers, why would he answer yours?

How far will people go to apologize for God?

God is not deaf, dumb and blind . . . just nonexistent.

Point out the inefficacy of prayer to believers and minds go blank; brains turn to mush. People don’t like being questioned about their belief in God. They become angry, frustrated and hostile because they are impotent to give a good answer, including the “free will” argument.

Ah, yes, that old standby, free will. A concept taught by priests so their flocks can hold fast to their beliefs, keep going to church and keep paying the priests’ salaries.

How far will people go to apologize



Photo by Lovelove/Shutterstock

for God? If a boy is setting fire to the cat and stabbing his sister with a knife, does his mother just sit there allowing the child to express his free will? Of course not. She yanks the knife away and douses the cat. Otherwise, what kind of mother would she be? Well, she’d be the kind of mother that God seemingly is now, ignoring pain and suffering and doing nothing.

The god they pray to has ignored wars, famine and diseases for millennia. Their god allows the worst, most evil of people to torture the best, most innocent people. He allows women to be abducted into slavery and children to be raped by priests. He just sits back and does nothing.

Free will? Last year, over \$500 billion in property damage was caused by hurricanes alone. Millions of lives were affected, and families, homes and towns destroyed by natural disasters, all seemingly under God’s control and not free will.

The prayerful demean the lives of

millions who suffered unspeakably horrible fates by suggesting their loved one is more worthy of saving than all those innocent men, women and children who came before them. And they pray to their God, who never did a damn thing to help those suffering, and now expect a response to those prayers.

Frankly, and unapologetically, this call to prayer annoys the hell out of me. Their god, by definition, could prevent any tragedy, but doesn’t, but apparently would for them. That is an intolerable degree of perceived self-worth, egomania, arrogance, delusion, ignorance or some combination.

Despite the pain and suffering endured by millions for eons, religious believers pray. They say, “You can’t question God.” Sorry. You can and must, unless you want to choose fear, naiveté and blissful ignorance over courage, intellect and sanity. And if you choose prayer, then at least stop imposing your ridiculous beliefs and superstitions on everyone else. Keep them to yourself.

FFRF Member Herb Gartner owns an advertising agency and lives in Jacksonville, Fla.

What Is a Freethinker?

freethinker *n.*

A person who forms opinions about religion on the basis of reason, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.

SECULAR INVOCATIONS

Jocelyn Williamson Ocoee, Fla. City Commission May 15, 2018

Good evening Mayor Johnson, council members, staff and citizens.

As we convene this evening to focus on the needs of city of Ocoee, let us remember that when we share with others that which is most important to us, listening begins.

When we acknowledge the concerns of others, when we say those concerns matter, compassion begins.

When we stand united against hatred, violence, and injustice, courage begins.

When we experience the full presence of each other, because of our shared humanity, in spite of our disagreements, this is where understanding begins.

May we be open to others' ideas and beliefs, respectful of our differences, not threatened by them.

May we grow in understanding of our own motives. May we replace fear with knowledge, helping us to be patient and charitable in our dialogue.

While we often focus on our differences, this evening let us also seek to understand the ideals and values we share.

Today and tomorrow, let us value one another more than we did yesterday.

Deland, Fla. City Commission May 21, 2018

Good evening Mayor Apgar, commissioners, city staff and citizens.

We come together at the beginning of another week, to listen and address the needs of the people of the city of Deland.

Tonight, as you honor the Public Works Depart-



Jocelyn Williamson

ment, let us remember that vital role it plays in connecting and protecting the community. It is through its concerted effort that we maintain the high quality of life in Deland.

May we openly listen and develop new ways of relating to neighbors and to the strangers we may soon call our friend.

Let us to find a sense of humility where we have privilege, and strength where we find and face oppression.

In our struggles, may we learn compassion; and in our power, may we learn temperance.

As a community, may we be a safe harbor in a world that is often harsh toward difference.

This evening, may we lean forward, keeping in mind the welfare of all the city citizens, embracing reason and free inquiry, working harmoniously together to transform our city through love and to accomplish good works with compassion and consideration for all.

Thank you.

“In our struggles, may we learn compassion; and in our power, may we learn temperance.”
— Jocelyn Williamson

Osceola County, Fla. Commissioners Council July 9, 2018

Thank you, commissioners, city staff and citizens of Osceola County. Let us take this moment, before we begin, to pause and reflect on why we have come together.

We assemble today to work together for good of the county.

We gather with confidence in the practice of democracy and with hearts and minds open to the wisdom in every voice among us.

Thomas Jefferson once called town meetings “the wisest invention ever devised by the wit of man for the perfect exercise of self-government and for its preservation.”

We recognize that vigorous debate is essential to democracy, and part of our revolutionary tradition.

So, as we gather this afternoon, let there be a free and unhampered exchange of ideas, questions and opinions.

Let us be mindful of the standards of tolerance, reason and civility recognizing the diversity with which we thrive and giving the most respect to those of differing views.

May we employ our best judgment keeping ourselves impartial and neutral as we consider the merits and pitfalls of each matter before us.

And may we always act in accordance with that which is best for our community and our fellow citizens.

Thank you.

FFRF Member Jocelyn Williamson, a lifelong atheist, co-founded and is a director of the central Florida Freethought Community, which is working to build a secular community and to keep religion out of government in central Florida. She also founded the Science League for Kids.

She has been named the winner of FFRF's 2018 "Nothing Fails Like Prayer" contest and will give one of her invocations at FFRF's convention in San Francisco in November.

Why Nones don't identify with a religion

Atheists are more likely than Nones to say that religion is simply 'irrelevant' to them

It's becoming common knowledge that the percentage of Americans who are religiously unaffiliated is growing — and fast. But what maybe isn't so clear is why.

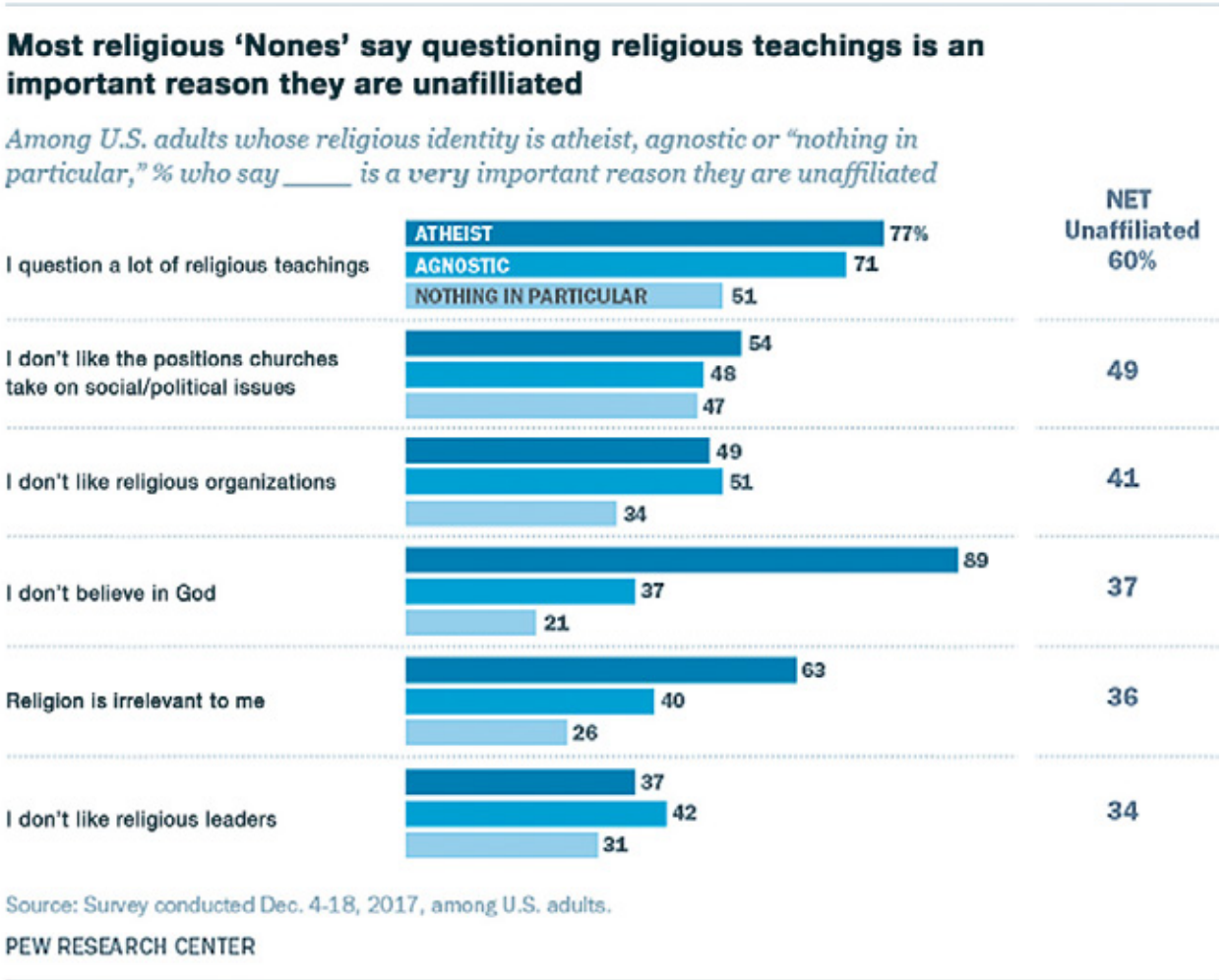
The Pew Research Center last year sampled more than 1,300 of the religiously unaffiliated, also known as “Nones,” as to why they don't identify with a religion.

The most common response was that they question a lot of religious teachings. About 60 percent of American Nones — adults who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” — say the questioning of religious teachings is a very important reason for their lack of affiliation.

The positions taken by churches on social and political issues, which nearly half (49 percent) of respondents cited, was the second-most common answer. (The combined totals add up to more than 100 percent because each question was asked separately from the others.) Others responded that they dislike religious organizations (41 percent), don't believe in God (37 percent), consider religion irrelevant to them (36 percent) or dislike religious leaders (34 percent).

According to the Pew survey, those who identify as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular” gave different reasons for their lack of affiliation.

Almost 90 percent of self-described atheists say their lack of belief in God is a very important reason for their religious identity, compared with 37 percent of agnostics and 21 percent of those in the “nothing in particular” category. Atheists also



are more likely than other Nones to say religion is simply “irrelevant” to them (63 percent of atheists, 40 percent of agnostics and 26 percent of adults with no particular religion).

Another survey question asked the Nones which of the six potential statements is the single most important reason they are unaffiliated.

Questioning religious teachings was again among the top responses, with a quarter saying it is the most important reason. Slightly less than a quarter of respondents cited lack of belief in God, and 16 percent said the most important reason is that they dislike the positions churches take on social and political issues.

FFRF’s 41st annual convention draws near

Join us Nov. 2-4 at Hyatt Regency in downtown San Francisco

There’s still time to register for FFRF’s 41st annual convention at San Francisco’s downtown Hyatt Regency, headlined by **Salman Rushdie**, **Cecile Richards** and **Adam Savage**. FFRF’s registration *ends on Friday, Oct. 12*. Unfortunately, there will not be space for walk-ins or registration at the door.

Added to the list of speakers are: **Larry Decker**, executive director of the Secular Coalition for America;

2018 Freethinker of the Year **David Steketee**, FFRF member and feisty litigant in FFRF’s major New Jersey Supreme Court win against taxpayer support of churches; California attorney **David Kalyonides**, who’ll talk about FFRF’s appeals court victory against school board prayer at Chino Hills, Calif., **Mohammed Al Khadra**, founder of Council of Ex-Muslims of Jordan, and Bay Area poet and atheist **Victor Harris**. This year’s Nothing Fails Like Prayer award will go to **Jocelyn Williamson**, a Florida member and chapter activist (see her three secular invocations, Page 23).

Convention registration is only

\$60 per member, \$65 per companion, \$110 for non-members, and students and children get in free. FFRF’s hotel block is sold out, but you may call 1-888-421-1442 and use the code “Freedom From Religion Foundation” to see what’s available. Or you can reserve rooms online at *bit.ly/FFRF2018*. Or try various online hotel booking sources.

Convention registration begins by noon on Friday, Nov. 2, with formal program promptly at 1 p.m., continuing through Saturday evening. FFRF’s membership and state representatives’ meetings take place Sunday morning. (See schedule below.)

The convention includes irreverent music, complimentary appetizers on Friday afternoon and a complimentary Friday night dessert reception. Saturday morning’s annual “Non-Prayer Breakfast” includes the popular “Moment of Bedlam.” And on Saturday evening, before **Leighann Lord** and **Adam Savage**, FFRF hosts its popular drawing for “clean” (pre-“In God We Trust”) currency.

For more information on the convention, or to sign up online, go to *ffrf.org/convention2018*. Or phone 1-800-335-4021 during office hours (Central Time).

FFRF Convention schedule

Schedule is subject to minor changes	
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 2	continues through Saturday
11:00 AM Registration opens <i>Continues through convention</i>	9:30 AM Welcome Lisa Strand, Director of Operations “Nothing Fails Like Prayer” Song “Nothing Fails Like Prayer” Winner Jocelyn Williamson Poetry Reading for Secularists Victor Harris
11:15 AM – 1:00 PM Movie “Losing Our Religion” 86-minute film. Exclusive preview! Includes interviews with former clergy, including Dan Barker	10:00 AM Report from Secular Coalition for America Larry Decker, executive director
Friday Afternoon Program	10:20 AM FFRF’s Appeals Court Victory David Kalyonides, primary litigator FFRF v. Chino Valley School Dist., Calif.
1:00 PM Welcome Emperor Has No Clothes Award U.S. Representative Huffman	10:40 2018 Freethinker of the Year David Steketee FFRF & Steketee v. Morris County, N.J
1:30 PM Richard Hermsen Student Activist Award Bailey Harris, author of <i>Stardust: The Book of Truth</i>	11:00 AM FFRF Legal Report “On a Roll” FFRF Attorneys Patrick Elliott, Rebecca Markert, Andrew Seidel
2:00 PM The Hon. Culbert Olson, Governor – Atheist Debra Deanne Olson Craig Wilkinson, M.D. , co-authors	12:00 – 2:00 PM Lunch Sightseeing on your own
2:30 PM Free Will: Make Up Your Mind Dan Barker & Freethought Concert	2:00 Freethought Heroine Sarah Haider
3:00 PM Break Book Signings for Olson, Harris & Barker Coffee, tea, light refreshments Open until 5:00 PM	2:30 PM “What We Think, How We Think” Mohammed Al Khadra, founder, Ex-Muslims of Jordan
3:30 PM Emperor Has No Clothes Award Salman Rushdie Book signing follows	2:45 PM Avajit Roy Courage Award Introduced by Rafida Bonya Ahmed Recipient: Roopbaan Magazine, accepted by co-founder
5:00 – 7:00 PM Dinner on your own	3:15 PM Henry Zumach Freedom From Religion Fundamentalism Award Ensaf Haidar
Friday Evening Program	3:45 PM Break
6:00 PM Registration re-opens Sales tables re-open	4:00 PM Forward Award A Conversation with Cecile Richards Book signing follows
7:00 PM Evening Welcome Dan Barker & Annie Laurie Gaylor Year in Review Presentation Music	Saturday Evening Program
7:30 PM Premiere “Clarence Darrow Award” Actor John de Lancie	6:00 PM Banquet Dinner with cash bar
8:00 PM “Julia Sweeney: Older & Wider” stand up comedy	8:00 PM Clean Money Drawing
9:30 PM Dessert Reception	8:30 PM “Real Women Do It Standing Up” Leighann Lord Stand up comedy
10:00 PM Late night film replay “Losing Our Religion” Night owl showing. 86-minute film. Exclusive preview! Includes interviews with former clergy, including Dan Barker	9:00 PM Emperor Has No Clothes Award Adam Savage
SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 3	SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 4
Saturday Morning Program	8:30 AM Pastries, coffee, tea available for members (while they last)
8:00 AM Non-prayer Breakfast For ticket holders	9:00 AM Annual Membership Meeting Open to all current FFRF members
8:30 AM Concert: Voices of Reason	11:15 AM Annual State Representatives Meeting
9:00 AM Registration re-opens	Adjourn by Noon

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

NATIONAL CONVENTION

SAN FRANCISCO | NOVEMBER 2–4, 2018

2018 CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: ffrf.org/convention2018

DISCOUNTED REGISTRATION & MEALS PACKAGE

Get a \$20 discount when you bundle two meals and registration. Includes Saturday breakfast and dinner.

	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___\$190	\$___
Spouse or Companion <i>(Non-member accompanying member)</i>	___\$195	\$___
Non-member	___\$240	\$___
Child / Student with ID (Meals Only)	___\$130	\$___

Please indicate number of meals

Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast

___# Regular ___# Vegetarian ___# Vegan ___# Gluten Free

Saturday Banquet Dinner

___# Regular ___# Vegetarian ___# Vegan ___# Gluten Free

REGISTRATION – NO PACKAGE

Member	___\$60	\$___
Spouse or Companion <i>(Non-member accompanying member)</i>	___\$65	\$___
Non-member <i>Or join for \$40 and save \$10</i>	___\$110	\$___
Child / Student with ID	___Free	\$___

SELECT MEALS À LA CARTE

Please indicate number of meals

Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast

___# Regular ___# Vegetarian ___# Vegan ___# Gluten Free

Saturday Banquet Dinner

___# Regular ___# Vegetarian ___# Vegan ___# Gluten Free

► Total \$_____

☐ I am enclosing a donation to sponsor student convention travel costs. \$_____

(Make checks payable to FFRF) Return with payment to:
FFRF, Attn: Convention | P.O. Box 750 | Madison, WI 53701

Names of all registrants (attach extra sheet as necessary)

Address

City State / ZIP

Phone* Email*

Credit Card Number Expiration Date / Security Code

Signature ***Contact information for in-house use only.**

☐ Please tell us about any concerns over accessibility or accommodations in order to fully participate in this convention:

FFRF Convention Early Registration closes on Oct. 12, 2018.