

# FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**Darrow statue  
can help educate  
for years**

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**We resist and  
challenge because  
we must**

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**Salman Rushdie  
to speak at  
FFRF convention**

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## FFRF saves \$72K for county taxpayers in North Carolina

FFRF is pleased to have stopped an expensive and unconstitutional taxpayer grant to a North Carolina church.

The Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority had awarded \$72,500 to Haywood Street Congregation in Asheville, N.C., for, according to local media, “an innovative project, to artfully portray [the church’s] mission and ministry through a large-scale work of art in the medium of fresco.” This project, which was slated to be 28.5 feet wide and 11 feet tall, was meant

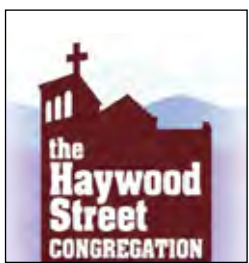
to decorate the church’s sanctuary with a Christian religious scene of the “eight beatitudes” of Jesus delivered during the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament.

It is unconstitutional for the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority to fund a religious mural, FFRF contended. “The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits the government from financially supporting churches,” FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne wrote to Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority President & CEO Stephanie Pace Brown last November. “Buncombe County may not award grants to churches in order to decorate their sanctuaries with religious imagery.”

Any reasonable observer would understand the city’s contribution of \$72,000-plus as an endorsement of this church and the religious message portrayed in the project, FFRF maintained. The U.S. Constitution prohibits such endorsement regardless of whether the project attracts tourists and possibly generates revenue for the county.

FFRF’s campaign has paid off. “Asheville’s Haywood Street Congregation has withdrawn its request for funding for a fresco project from the Buncombe County Tourism Development Authority, ending a several-months-long challenge of the grant’s constitutionality,” the Asheville Citizen-Times reported.

The congregation’s move was a *See Taxpayers on page 7*



during the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament.

The church’s pastor had told the media that the project would directly promote the church’s religious mission: “What it will do more than anything is theologize our deepest belief here, and that is that God blesses those who suffer the most.” He also explained that it would be “a timeless witness, both visually and spiritually, to the Gospel.”

### FFRF celebrates 40 years as national organization!



Freedom from Religion Foundation Co-Founder Anne Gaylor (pink jacket) leads an FFRF contingent in an abortion-rights rally in Washington, D.C., in 1992. For an extensive look at FFRF’s 40-plus-year history, see our eight-page pullout section inside.



## State senator pushes poster fight

Much to the chagrin of Arkansas state Sen. Jason Rapert, FFRF has harmonized an Arkansas high school’s choral area with the Constitution.

Last fall, it was brought to FFRF’s attention that Searcy High School’s choral director had placed several Christian-themed posters on the walls of the high school chorus room. Most contained bible verses.

FFRF Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellow Colin E. McNamara sent a letter to Searcy School District Superintendent Diane Barrett, warning the district that it violated the U.S. Constitution by allowing a display of

religious symbols or messages.

FFRF was then contacted by letter from Barrett that the Christian posters had been removed and that school staff had been informed on the unconstitutionality of religious displays.

But Rapert thought the school should have held its ground and taken FFRF to court, posting on Facebook that the district “should NOT have caved into the demands of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.”

Rapert was also unaware of the significant successes of FFRF lawsuits, stating, “Nothing fails like a Freedom From Religion lawsuit.”

## FFRF’s newest award honors Avijit Roy legacy

FFRF is proud to announce the creation of an annual award in the name of Avijit Roy, who was assassinated three years ago. Avijit, a Bangladeshi-American writer and atheist, died at the hands of militant Islamists on the streets of Dhaka.

Avijit Roy initiated a new movement in free and rational thinking in Bangladesh, South Asia and Bengali-speaking diaspora communities. He had a Ph.D. in biomedical engineering, but wrote prolifically on many varied subjects that include religion, atheism, cosmology and homosexuality.

He founded an online community called Muktomona (freethinkers) that promoted rational discourse among mainly Bengali-speaking users across the world. As an advocate



Bonya Ahmed, left, carries on the legacy of her husband, Avijit Roy, who was assassinated in a vicious streetside attack in 2015.

of freedom of expression, Avijit took an active role in protesting the arrests of atheist bloggers in Bangladesh.

His writings and activism earned the ire of fundamentalist Islamists and on Feb. 26, 2015, he was hacked

to death by militants at the Dhaka Ekushey Book Fair where his two new books were featured. His wife, Rafida Bonya Ahmed, known as Bonya, was also brutally attacked and critically wounded, but survived the assault.

FFRF will be working with Bonya in helping to raise funds and bestow the annual award or scholarship of \$5,000.

The Avijit Award will be given to a person who has been working toward the spread of rational and logical discourse, toward diminishing the influence of regressive fundamentalist religious thinking, toward building a society based on humane laws and without discrimination. The award will recognize creative and heroic

*See Roy Award on page 4*



# Pushing for freethought equality

**Name:** Joseph Richardson.  
**Where I live:** Winter Garden, Fla.  
**Where and when I was born:** I was born in Jacksonville, Fla., in 1963, but grew up in the Orlando area.  
**Family:** Married for 26 years with three sons (23, 21 and 18 years old). And four cats.  
**Education:** I graduated from Oak Ridge High School in Orlando, then started college at Renselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y. I finished my B.S. in computer science/physics at SUNY Albany in 1986. That was followed up with an M.S. in computer science from SUNY Albany in 1988. Started, but never finished, a Ph.D., also at SUNY Albany.  
**Occupation:** Software engineer working on a transaction processing system for college students.

**How I got where I am today:** A lot of the reason I'm where I am today is luck or being a white male in the United States. I'm not much of a planner. School, jobs, living situations, etc., often fell in my lap. Certainly I've worked for some things. But the older I get, the more I realize the advantages I've had that I did not earn.

**Where I'm headed:** I'd like to think I'm headed in a direction that, in some small way, reduces suffering, increases fairness, and makes the world a slightly better place. I'd be very hap-



Joseph Richardson

## MEET A MEMBER

py if it ends up being a direction that other people look at and say, "I'd like to go that way, too."

**Person in history I admire and why:** Richard Feynman. How can you not admire someone who wanted to decline a Nobel Prize?

**A quotation I like:** The one that motivates me is this: "Never be a spectator of unfairness or stupidity . . . the grave

will supply plenty of time for silence." — Christopher Hitchens.

**These are a few of my favorite things:** There are so many things I enjoy. Last year, I went on vacation with my wife and we spent two whole weeks hiking, bike riding, whitewater rafting, zip-lining and more. That was a very good time. But I also love movies, books, cats, science and wordplay.

**These are not:** Time zones (and don't get me started on Daylight Saving Time). Also, anytime someone uses an argument from ignorance to justify their position.

**My doubts about religion started:** I grew up in the Assemblies of God. I remember having doubts when I was very young. Later, I switched to the Episcopal Church and managed to rationalize or liberalize or ignore those doubts until I was 49 years old. Then the doctrine of hell became dramatically more important when I found out someone close to me was an atheist. In the process of trying to rationalize, liberalize or ignore hell, I started learning some additional things . . . things about the bible, theology, philosophy, evolution, morality, etc. Over the course of five VERY difficult and painful months, I shed one doctrine after another. One day, I realized that I did not believe in anything supernat-

ural anymore. And further, that I was no longer able to believe.

**Before I die:** I'd like to see an aurora borealis.

**Ways I promote freethought:** I serve on the board of the Central Florida Freethought Community. I write letters, speak before state and local meetings, maintain the CFFC website and social media sites, and help in many other ways. I also give talks in local churches explaining my views on freethought, atheism and the separation of state and church. And I give atheist/humanist invocations for local government meetings. I have been fighting with my city, Winter Garden, for almost four years now (starting within a week of *Greece v. Galloway* being handed down) to do an invocation at our City Commission meeting. I've spoken at more than two dozen meetings asking it to change its invocation policy, which allows it simply to pass over anyone it doesn't like. At the moment, that means me. An unplanned part of this fight was getting kicked out of one Winter Garden City Commission meeting for not standing for the Pledge of Allegiance. It generated a ton of local press and some national attention, as well. I suppose that counts as promoting freethought.

## Nonbelief Relief announces \$75,000 in spring grants

Nonbelief Relief, a leading freethought charity, has announced its early spring grants "to improve this, our only world."

Nonbelief Relief is a charitable organization created by the executive board of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Its purposes are to serve as a humanitarian agency for atheists, agnostics, freethinkers and their supporters. Nonbelief Relief seeks to remediate conditions of human suffering and injustice on a global scale, whether the result of natural disasters, human actions or adherence to religious dogma. Such relief is not limited to but includes assistance for individuals targeted for nonbelief, secular activism or blasphemy.

The organization is giving:

- \$20,000 to Doctors Without Borders, with the request it be used for the group's work in Syria and with Syrian refugees, given the crisis there.
- \$5,000 to Violence Policy Center, which is a 501(c)(3) educational group



to stop gun death and injury through research, education, advocacy and collaboration. Nonbelief Relief notes that the center is especially important, given the official embargo on gun violence research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

- \$5,000 to UltraViolet, in the wake of the #MeToo and #Timesup movements. UltraViolet works to mobilize millions of activists on a range of issues including reproductive rights, health care, violence, economic security and racial justice.

- \$25,000 to the volunteer Women's Medical Fund, in memoriam to FFRF's principal founder Anne Nicol Gaylor, also co-founder of the longest continuously operating abortion fund in the nation. All money goes to pay for

abortions for low-income or indigent women in Wisconsin, one of about 35 states that has cut off Medicaid assistance for abortion care. The fund helped more than 1,000 women last year, with an average of \$330.

- \$10,000 to the Afghan Women's Fund, endorsed by FFRF Honorary Director Katha Pollitt, which works to open schools for girls in Afghanistan and ensure the human rights of Afghan women. Its motto: "Education is the key."

- \$10,000 for Camp Quest to use as scholarships for children who would otherwise be unable to afford to attend one of the educational summer programs offered around the country catering to the nonreligious.

Additionally, this year Nonbelief Relief has already given stipends of \$5,000 each to three individuals: a feminist journalist forced to leave Bangladesh; a Pakistani man who was accused of blasphemy and tortured and is now (with his family) seeking asylum in the United Kingdom; and a Bangladeshi

who co-edited the first gay journal in that country, whose colleague was brutally murdered and who was targeted for assassination. He is seeking asylum in the United States. Articles about their plight will be appearing in FFRF's newspaper, Freethought Today, when they are at liberty to write about their situations. A fourth application for an endangered Pakistani is under consideration.

Nonbelief Relief Administrator Annie Laurie Gaylor notes that given the rising violence and persecution in Islamist nations worldwide, the demands for help from threatened nonbelievers from a variety of nations is also increasing. These stipends are given after vetting with a loose consortium of aid groups and individuals. Most individuals receive assistance from more than one organization.

To donate directly to Nonbelief Relief, go to [ffrf.org](http://ffrf.org) and select the "Donate" button and then click on "Nonbelief Relief, Inc." Your donation is deductible for income tax purposes.



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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

## OVERHEARD

I don't know why an entire political party wants to proudly carry the brand of being hateful.

**Georgia state Sen. Nan Orrock, a Democrat, following the passage of a bill that would allow adoption agencies to discriminate against same-sex couples. Republicans passed the bill with all Democrats voting no.**  
*NBC News, 2-2-18*

No, man. I know too much about it. I knew Romano Mussolini, the jazz piano player, the son of Benito Mussolini. We used to jam all night. And he'd tell me about where the Catholics were coming from. The Catholics have a religion based on fear, smoke and murder. And the biggest gimmick in the world is confession: "You tell me what

you did wrong and it'll be OK." Come on. And almost everywhere you go in the world, the biggest structures are the Catholic churches.

**Legendary music producer Quincy Jones, after being asked if he was religious.**  
*The Vulture.com, 2-7-18*

He [Pope Francis] has just turned back the clock to the darkest days of this crisis. Who knows how many victims now will decide to stay hidden, for fear they will not be believed?

**BishopAccountability.org co-founder Anne Barrett Doyle, calling a "stunning setback" remarks by the pope defending a Chilean bishop accused of child sexual abuse cover-up.**  
*New York Times, 1-20-18*



Nov. 2-4 in San Francisco

Rushdie, Sweeney added to FFRF convention lineup

FFRF is delighted to announce that acclaimed author Salman Rushdie has joined comedian Julia Sweeney and “Mythbuster” Adam Savage as some of the notable speakers who will be headlining FFRF’s 41st annual convention in San Francisco, which takes places Nov. 2-4 at the downtown Hyatt Regency.

Future issues of Freethought Today will update convention speakers as they are confirmed. See the back page for details about the convention.

Salman Rushdie



Salman Rushdie

Rushdie is one of the most celebrated authors of our time. He has written several classic novels, influenced a generation of writers, and received the Queen’s Knighthood for his “services to literature.” He is also one of the most thought-provoking proponents for free speech.

His novels include *The Satanic Verses*, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* and 2008’s *The Enchantress of Florence*. His masterwork of magic realism, *Midnight’s Children*, won the prestigious Booker Prize, and later, the Best of the Booker. He is also the author of bestselling memoir *Joseph Anton*. Rushdie’s *Luka and the Fire of Life* is a children’s novel and a companion to *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. His latest novels are *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*, which was a New York Times bestseller, and most recently *The Golden House*, a novel that “depicts Obama’s and Trump’s U.S.”

Julia Sweeney

Sweeney, one of FFRF’s honorary directors, will perform a new stand-up routine called “Julia Sweeney: Older and Wider” for the FFRF audience.

She is joining Second City in Chicago in May.

She is a “Saturday Night Live” alum who created and portrayed the androgynous character “Pat,” which spun off the feature film “It’s Pat.”



Julia Sweeney

She also created and performed several award-winning one-woman shows, including “God Said, Ha!”, “In the Family Way” and “Letting Go of God,” which was about her journey from Roman Catholic schoolgirl to atheist. She has also been in several movies, including “Pulp Fiction.” She has previously received FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

Adam Savage

Savage has spent his life gathering skills that allow him to take what’s in his brain and make it real. He’s built everything from ancient Buddhas and futuristic weapons to fine-art sculptures and dancing vegetables.

In 1993, Savage began concentrating his career on the special-effects industry, honing his skills through more than 100 television commercials and a dozen feature films, including “Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace” and “Episode II: Attack of the Clones,” “Galaxy Quest” and the “Matrix” sequels.

In 2002, Savage was chosen along with Jamie Hyneman to host “MythBusters,”



Adam Savage

which premiered on Discovery Channel in January 2003. Fourteen years, 1,015 myths, 2,950 experiments, eight Emmy nominations and 83 miles of duct tape later, the series ended in March 2016.

Today, Savage stars in and produces content for *Tested.com*, including behind-the-scenes dives into multiple blockbuster films (such as “Ghost in the Shell,” “Alien Covenant” and “Blade Runner”). He also produces and stars in his “Brain Candy” stage show with Vsauce’s Michael Stevens.

John de Lancie

De Lancie, an actor, director, producer, writer, singer, musician and voice artist, will be receiving FFRF’s first “Clarence” award — a statuette version of



John de Lancie

FFRF’s 7-foot statue on display in front of the site of the Scopes trial, in Dayton, Tenn. De Lancie spoke at that dedication and helped with the unveiling.

Well-known for portraying “Q” in the TV series “Star Trek: The Next Generation,” he has many film credits, including: “The Hand that Rocks the Cradle,” “The Fisher King,” “Fearless,” “Multiplicity,” “Women on Top” and “The Big Time.”

De Lancie has appeared in numerous television shows, including “The Librarians,” “Breaking Bad” and “The West Wing.”

He was a speaker at the Reason Rally in Washington, D.C., on June 4, 2016. He spoke in reference to his Star Trek character Q, “My name is John de Lancie, and I am a god. At least, I’ve played one on TV. And I’m here to tell you as a god that I was created by humans. The words I spoke were written by men and women, just like all the gods before me. My god creators wanted you to believe I was the omnipotent one.”

Sarah Haider

Haider is a co-founder of Ex-Muslims of North America (EXMNA), a group that advocates for the acceptance of religious dissent and works to create local

support communities for those who have left Islam.

Born in Pakistan and raised in Texas, she spent her early youth as a devout Muslim. In her late teens, she began to read the Quran critically and left religion soon after.



Sarah Haider

Nowadays, Haider directs EXMNA’s Life Beyond Faith mini-documentaries, a series of video portraits of ex-Muslim atheists and humanists. She is also heading EXMNA’s Normalizing Dissent tour, and travels the United States and Canada to cover a range of issues related to apostasy in Islam. She is currently a columnist for Free Inquiry magazine. In addition to atheism, Sarah is particularly passionate about civil liberties and women’s rights.

She will receive FFRF’s Freethought Heroine Award.

Bailey and Doug Harris



Doug and Bailey Harris

Bailey Harris, 12, a sixth-grade student at Salt Lake City’s Open Classroom, will be receiving the \$5,000 Beverly and Richard Hermesen Student Activist Award. When Bailey was 8, she was watching the episode of “Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey” in which host Neil deGrasse Tyson said, “The planets, the stars, the galaxies, we ourselves and all of life — the same star stuff.” Inspired, she immediately went up to her family’s computer and started writing what would eventually become the beautiful picture book, *My Name is Stardust*.

Bailey worked with her father, Doug Harris, over the next year to develop a story that they felt would teach children this concept, along with other areas of science such as evolution and astronomy, most effectively. After vari-

ous versions of the story, and feedback from numerous parents, scientists, and children, the story for *My Name is Stardust* was finalized. Doug Harris gets a co-credit on the book.

Doug is a successful entrepreneur, special-interest writer and science education advocate. He was a featured expert panel speaker at the 2017 BookCon in New York City on Science and Education. While releasing his book in 2017, he was interviewed by Helen Little for The Public Library Podcast on iHeartRadio about science, education and literature.

The second book in the series, *Stardust Explores the Solar System*, will be released in the fall. The public will receive early access to the book through a Kickstarter campaign that launched in January. It will then be featured at Book Expo and BookCon in New York City in June, followed by an international book release in October.

Leighann Lord

Lord, a veteran stand-up comedian, will perform a stand-up routine at the convention. Lord has been seen on Lifetime, VH-1, Comedy Central, HBO and “The View.” She is a contributor to the Huffington Post and the author of *Dict Jokes: Alternate Definitions for Words You’ve Probably Never Heard of But Will Definitely Never Forget* and *Real Women Do It Standing Up: Stories From the Career of a Very Funny Lady*.



Leighann Lord

Lord was the New York City face of the African-Americans for Humanism outreach campaign sponsored by the Center for Inquiry and its Millions Living Happily Without Religion Campaign. In 2012, the group ran a media campaign that included billboards depicting Lord and other contemporary activists and organizers alongside historically prominent African-American humanists Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes and Frederick Douglass.

Author Chris Johnson has featured her in *The Atheist Book: A Better Life*.

Debra Deanne Olson

Olson, along with Dr. Craig West Wilkinson, just authored a book about her atheist grandfather, *The Honorable Culbert Levy Olson: Governor of California 1939-1943*. A review of the book was syndicated in more than 300 newspapers in early March.



Debra Deanne Olson

She is a political, environmental and peace activist and held volunteer positions on both of Hillary Clinton’s presidential campaigns.

She was a national senior advisor and a fundraising consultant for the Kucinich for President campaign in 2003. She is founder of Peace Solutions.

Olson is committed to fostering a culture of peace and connecting like-minded individuals and organizations to create a sustainable and healthy society. She has been an active member of the Clinton Global Initiative since 2006 and served as a member of the Business Council of Women for Hillary Clinton during the 2008 presidential primary.



# HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

## PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

*“I should have received mine own with interest.”*  
– Matthew 25:27

The love of money is the root,  
the branch, the flower—so  
why don’t we ever write poems  
about money?  
Is it because we’re just  
too good for this world, counting  
our delicate heartbeats out at the edge  
of everyone else’s reality,  
our sensitive psyches never fed  
by the Fed, our Tao out of sync  
with the Dow, in the midst of rallies,  
all of us bearish on bulls?

Or is it because they’re already  
writing their own poems, those canny  
can-do capitalists, brokers and bankers all busily  
locking in yields,  
pumping new blood into partnerships,  
watching the markets peak and bottom out,  
sheltering windfalls, letting their profits run,  
cutting their losses,  
beefing up capital, funneling cash  
into balanced portfolios?

Down here in the daffodils,  
who’s counting? Could we ever  
achieve an emotional high  
at a boost in the prime rate?  
Or could we go broke again  
and convince our down-side lovers  
it was only negative cash flow?

No poems except  
in passion: the brokers keep asking,  
is her smile worth three points  
up front? Will the bougainvillea  
turn a profit this quarter?  
Are those gentle fingertips  
economically viable?  
And the sonnets keep whispering: Poets,  
remember,  
where your treasure is,  
there will your songs be also.



*From Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie*  
© 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. Phil’s books: [ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop).

# FFRF welcomes its 23 new Life, After-Life Members

FFRF is proud to announce and recognize its 19 newest Life Members, four After-Life Members and one Immortal.

The new After-Life Members are Kathryn Allen, Clifford A. Hall, Gordon Lamb and Carsten Smidt. After-Life Membership is a tongue-in-cheek-named donation category of \$5,000 for those who want their donation to “live on” after them.

FFRF’s 19 newest Life Members are Scott Alspach, Jim Ball, Brett Benson, Mario Bourgoïn, Nancy Breslow, Tim Cooney, Richard Corbeille, Stephen H. Deutsch, Jack Egger, S. Eurûs, Phillip Lloyd Howard, Martha Lentz (gift membership from Jonathan Noll), Jim Loddengaard, Gayle Reber, Tom Reber, Branislav Slan-tchev, Susan Wernet, Eric White and

T. Zdeblick.  
Individual Life Memberships are \$1,000, designated as membership or membership renewal, and are deductible for income-tax purposes, as are all donations.  
States represented are Alabama, California, Colorado, Georgia, Kentucky, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Vermont, Washington and Wisconsin.  
The latest Immortal is Jack Egger (who also became a Life Member this past month and has generously paid for FFRF to put up freethinking billboard messages in the Atlanta area. (See page 6). The Immortals category is a donation designation for those members who have contacted FFRF to report they have made provisions for FFRF in their estate planning.

## Roy Award

Continued from page 1



Photo by Chris Line

Bonya Ahmed, left, sits with FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker on the set of Freethought Matters, FFRF’s new television show.

people, who — in spite of facing numerous hurdles that may include a threat to their personal lives — have persisted in their work through writing, artistic projects, activism or other means of expression to promote science, logic and humane ideas.  
“We are honored to be part of this overdue memorial to Avijit Roy and to be working with his widow, Bonya, who is continuing in Avijit’s footsteps

to ensure Muktomona persists, and who has personally done so much to ensure the safety of other endangered Bangladeshis,” said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “As Medgar Evers presciently noted before his own assassination, ‘You can kill a man, but you can’t kill an idea.’ It’s vital that Avijit’s work continues so that rationalism and freedom of conscience prevail.”

## Bonya meets Charles



Rafida Bonya Ahmed is pictured with FFRF’s life-like silicone mannequin of Charles Darwin (created by sculptor Csam Wheatley), which “lives” in FFRF’s Joel B. Landon and Wanda Y. Beers Freethought Library. Bonya, as she is called, visited FFRF’s office recently to appear on FFRF’s new TV talk show, “Freethought Matters.” A Bangladeshi-American, Bonya was critically wounded, but survived a Feb. 26, 2015, machete attack by Islamist extremists on the streets of Dhaka, Bangladesh, that killed her husband, Avijit Roy, a well-known atheist and author. The brutal attack was part of a horrific series of Islamist executions of nonbelievers and gays in that country.  
FFRF’s Nonbelief Relief is working with Bonya on providing help to other endangered nonbelievers. Bonya will be featured on an April 20 TED Talk out of Exeter, U.K. In the fall, she will be a fellow at the London School of Economics. You can find her interview on “Freethought Matters,” after it airs on WISC-TV 3 in Madison, Wis., on FFRF’s YouTube Channel.



# IN THE NEWS

## City must pay \$700K in Ten Commandments case

The city of Bloomfield, N.M., hopes to use online fundraising money to pay the \$700,000 it owes from a lawsuit regarding the Ten Commandments monument that was formerly located outside of City Hall.

Because the courts ruled the monument violated the U.S. Constitution and represented a government endorsement of religion, the city must now pay the legal fees for the American Civil Liberties Union, which filed the complaint in 2012 on behalf of two Bloomfield residents.

The nonprofit law firm Alliance Defending Freedom provided Bloomfield with "free" legal representation throughout the litigation process.

City Manager Eric Strahl said Bloomfield had until June 30, 2021, to pay the \$700,000 that it owes for the ACLU's legal fees.

Strahl said if the city is unable to raise money through donations, it will have to pay the sum out of its general fund.

## Woman imprisoned under abortion ban freed

A Salvadoran woman who spent almost 11 years in prison under El Salvador's ban on abortion was freed after the country's Supreme Court commuted her sentence.

The case of the woman, Teodora del Carmen Vásquez, underscores the punishment faced by Salvadoran women convicted of homicide after losing a pregnancy. El Salvador forbids abortion under any circumstances, even to save the life of the woman.

Vásquez, 34, was at her job as a school cafeteria cook in 2007 when she began bleeding and suffered a stillbirth in the last month of her pregnancy. She was convicted of aggravated homicide and sentenced to 30 years in prison.

But the Supreme Court ruled that there was insufficient evidence to show that Vásquez had taken any action to end the pregnancy and that for "powerful reasons of justice" and "equity," she should be released.

## Pakistani rights activist Asma Jahangir dies

Asma Jahangir, 66, a leading Pakistani rights activist, fearless critic of the military's interference in politics and a staunch defender of the rule of law, died Feb. 11.

Jahangir was a human rights lawyer who had a reputation for speaking truth to power and defending the weak and the marginalized and women and minorities against injustice. She gained international acclaim for being the conscience of a country where liberal, secular voices have continuously been under threat.

She was the founding chairwoman of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

She often faced threats to her life, both from military dictators and militants. She championed the rights of religious minorities — especially those who were charged under the country's blasphemy laws.

## American United picks first woman to lead

Rachel Laser, a lawyer and longtime advocate on issues related to reproductive freedom, LGBT equality and racism, has been named the executive director

### God's getting mixed messages



**This sign outside the Knox Presbyterian Church in New Westminster, British Columbia, Canada, expresses the exact opposite sentiment of Utah Gov. Gary Herbert. Herbert asked faith leaders in his state to pray for more snow. His letter asked interfaith leaders to urge prayer for snow during the first week in March. The governor references the summer of 2012 when Utah was plagued with wildfires and he asked for prayers for rain, which "worked."**

**FFRF sent out a press release on March 8 under the headline, "Prayer is snow business of Utah gov."**

**"It's best to check the weather report before praying for snow, FFRF paraphrases Mark Twain as a retort to a silly request by the governor of Utah."**

of Americans United for Separation of Church and State. She is the first woman to lead the 71-year-old group.

Laser takes over the organization at a time when Americans are strongly divided about the role of religion in public life.

## 'In God We Trust' to be in all Florida schools?

The Florida House on Feb. 21, one week after the school massacre in Parkland, passed a measure that would require all public schools to post the state motto, "In God We Trust," in a "conspicuous place."

Rep. Kim Daniels, a self-described exorcist who runs her own ministry, said Florida needed the legislation, given the goings-on in the state.

"[God] is not a Republican or a Democrat. He is not black or white," Daniels said. "He is the light, and our schools need light in them like never before."

The bill passed 97-10, followed by a standing ovation. The Senate has yet to take up a companion bill.

## Churches hit by disaster eligible for FEMA funds

On Feb. 9, Congress approved a measure making houses of worship eligible for public assistance money for the restoration of damaged buildings and other purposes from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) in the aftermath of disasters such as hurricanes and tornadoes. President Trump signed the legislation into law that day.

Federal law now gives permanence to a new FEMA interpretation issued in early January. At that time, the agency announced it would no longer exclude houses of worship from its aid, which provides for debris removal, emergency protection and the rebuilding of facilities for some private nonprofit organizations.

Three Texas churches challenged FEMA's policy in federal court after

Hurricane Harvey caused damage to their buildings in August, and two Florida synagogues brought suit after Hurricane Irma harmed their facilities in September.

## Court reverses ruling on city funds for church

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court on March 9 reversed a lower court's ruling that the city of Acton could fund restoration of Acton Congregational Church.

The court ordered a preliminary injunction against using public money to restore the church's stained-glass windows that feature religious imagery, and sent the case back to the lower court for further scrutiny of whether Acton could use a statewide historic preservation grant program to fund any improvements to houses of worship.

The case, *Caplan v. Town of Acton*, was brought by Americans United on behalf of 13 Massachusetts taxpayers and was spurred by concerns from AU's Massachusetts chapter. The case challenged the town's decision to use the Massachusetts Community Preservation Act, through which communities can provide government grants to private landowners for the restoration of historic buildings, to restore houses of worship.

Acton wanted to give \$100,000 worth of grant money to a church for restoration of stained-glass windows with religious imagery and a "Master Plan" to evaluate the restoration needs of the church itself and two other church-owned properties. The church has an active congregation and in its grant request, it conceded that it wanted taxpayer funding so that it could save its own money for religious programming.

## Abstinence advocate in charge of Title X funds

A senior Trump health official who has promoted abstinence will decide

which groups receive federal family planning funds. In the past, a group of officials made the decision.

The \$286 million Title X program funds family planning services, mostly for low-income women.

Now the final decision of who gets the funding will be in the hands of one person — Valerie Huber, the acting deputy assistant secretary for population affairs at HHS, a longtime advocate of abstinence.

Many women's health advocates fear that the Trump administration will move money away from groups that provide contraception and toward crisis pregnancy centers that oppose abortion or groups that promote abstinence-only education.

## Court: Law covers transgender workers

A federal law banning sex bias in the workplace prohibits discrimination against transgender workers, a U.S. appeals court said on March 7, ruling in favor of a funeral director who was fired after telling her boss she planned to transition to female from male.

The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said RG & GR Harris Funeral Homes in Detroit unlawfully discriminated against Aimee Stephens, formerly known as Anthony Stephens, based on her sex.

Several federal appeals courts have said that discriminating against transgender workers is a form of unlawful sex bias. But the 6th Circuit was the first to consider and reject a religious defense in such a case.

## Study: Atheists more likely to be left-handed

A study has found that left-handed people are more likely to be atheists because it is thought that belief is passed on genetically.

The study suggests that religious people have fewer genetic mutations and are therefore less likely to be left-handed.

The study, published in the journal *Evolutionary Psychological Science*, reports that in pre-industrial times, religiosity was passed on like other genetic attributes. But because of advances in science, people who would not previously have survived are making it to adulthood and reproducing, leading to a greater incidence of atheism.

## Physicist, atheist Stephen Hawking dies

Atheist Stephen Hawking, the brilliant British theoretical physicist who overcame a debilitating disease to publish popular books probing the mysteries of the universe, died on March 14.

Hawking was also a cosmologist, astronomer, mathematician and author of numerous books, including the landmark *A Brief History of Time*, which sold more than 10 million copies.

Hawking merged Einstein's theory of relativity with quantum theory to suggest that space and time would begin with the Big Bang and end in black holes. Hawking also discovered that black holes were not completely black but emit radiation and would likely eventually evaporate and disappear.

Hawking suffered from ALS, a neurodegenerative disease, which is usually fatal within a few years. He was diagnosed in 1963, when he was 21. The disease left him wheelchair-bound and paralyzed.



FFRF NEWS

FFRF condemns feds honoring of Graham

FFRF denounced various governmental efforts to venerate the late Billy Graham.

A federal order instructed that flags be lowered to half-staff on March 2, just after Graham was “lain in honor” in the U.S. Capitol rotunda.

And North Carolina is proceeding with a 2015 request to place a statue of Graham in the National Statuary Hall Collection at the U.S. Capitol.

While it would be fitting for evangelical Christian organizations to honor Graham, it is not appropriate for our federal and state governments to do so.

Despite supporters’ insistence that Graham is a universally beloved figure, he had a checkered history, including anti-Semitism, disdain for atheists and other alienating and divisive views. Furthermore, he was a religious figure who had no redeeming secular achievements (unlike personalities such as Martin Luther King Jr.).

The decision to lower flags to half-mast in honor of Billy Graham follows on the heels of Graham receiving a rare tribute of “lying in honor” in the



Photo by Shutterstock

Evangelist Billy Graham was honored by the U.S. government as flags were ordered to be at half-staff on March 2, just after he was “lain in honor” in the U.S. Capitol.

Capitol rotunda, which FFRF also condemned. Only 31 persons previously have lain in honor in the U.S. Capitol since it was completed in 1824, 11 of them presidents and all the others

known for their direct and incontrovertible service to the nation. In Rosa Parks’ case, for instance, it was for her iconic role in the civil rights movement. Graham, on the other hand,

worked to narrow civil rights.

Graham consistently found himself on the wrong side of history, opposing gay rights and marriage equality and retracting anti-Semitic statements only when it became necessary to do so.

The Billy Graham Evangelical Association once said that Vladimir Putin was “more right” on LGBTQ rights than then-President Obama. Graham, in his 90s, wrote a full-page ad appearing in several North Carolina newspapers “to urge my fellow North Carolinians to vote FOR the marriage amendment” in May 2012, which passed, banning gay marriage until later nullified. He belonged to a denomination that refused to ordain women. The “Billy Graham” rule directing a man to not be alone with a woman other than his wife continues to influence evangelicals, including Vice President Mike Pence, isolating career women in the process.

Billy Graham stood against much of what makes this country noble. He is not worthy of governmental praise or honors.

Atlanta billboard campaign continues secular message



FFRF’s billboard campaign propagating freethought and secularism is proceeding briskly in the Deep South.

A new billboard graphically representing the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment went up in early March on Spring Road near the intersection of Atlanta Road in the town of Smyrna in the metropolitan Atlanta area. The eye-catching panel proclaims “The Only Wall We Need Is Between Church & State” against the backdrop of two portions of a clearly divided brick wall.

FFRF put up the billboard for a month in round three of a new year-long campaign in the South’s most bustling metropolis. Two previous billboards in different locations there declared “In Science We Trust,” depicting an astronaut suspended in outer space to illustrate the slogan.

Georgia FFRF Member Jack Egger is underwriting the campaign, for which FFRF is truly appreciative.



Jack Egger

FFRF, Americans United demand equality for Humanist prisoners

FFRF and Americans United for Separation of Church and State, two of the most prominent secular organizations in the United States, filed an amicus brief in appellate court on Feb. 27 over discriminatory official treatment of a Humanist inmate in Nevada.

The Nevada Department of Corrections and Lovelock Correctional Center denied a Humanist prisoner, Benjamin Espinosa, the opportunities accorded to dozens of “faith groups”: the ability to organize and meet. Shockingly, when Espinosa sued to exercise his rights on an equal basis with theistic prisoners, a district court ruled that Espinosa had no constitutional right to meet with other Humanist inmates, because Humanism doesn’t require the belief in a god.

The district court’s dangerous decision misapplies the law in a way that could undermine the rights of nontheists if it is upheld. Humanism is entitled to constitutional protection as a religion, FFRF and Americans United assert. Rolling back the clock to a time when the term “religion” referred only to “one’s views of his relations to his Creator,” the district court’s view is an anachronistic interpretation that runs counter to more than half a century of well-established legal precedent.

Nontheists, such as atheists and adherents of Humanism, Ethical Culture and Unitarian Universalism, are protected by the Constitution to the same extent as theists. The Supreme Court definitively established that belief in a god or gods is not required for one to be protected by the Constitution’s prohibitions against religious discrimination. And the court has specifically identified Humanism, the belief system that Espinosa identifies as his own, as one of the many “religions in this country which do not teach what would generally be considered a belief in the existence of God.”

“In the prison context, atheism, agnosticism, Humanism, Ethical Culture,

and Unitarian Universalism must receive the same constitutional protections as theistic belief systems,” the brief contends. “In a case with facts remarkably similar to those of the one at bar, the 7th Circuit held that a state prison violated the Establishment Clause by denying an atheist inmate the right to form an atheist study group.”

If the district court’s decision is allowed to stand, it will not only cut against a considerable, long-standing body of case law, but will also run counter to the policies and practices now embraced by numerous government bodies, including state prison systems.

If the district court’s decision is upheld, the Nevada Department of Corrections and Lovelock Correctional Center will be able to continue to arbitrarily and unjustly deny Nevada’s nontheistic inmates an equal opportunity to pursue similar beneficial group study and self-help.

The appeals court should reverse this unjust order.

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# Appeal filed in West Virginia bible-teaching case

After FFRF’s lawsuit caused a West Virginia school district to suspend its bible classes, a parent plaintiff has filed an appeal to make the change permanent. The appeal, dated March 5, argues that the suspension of the bible classes this school year by Mercer County, W.Va., does not prevent the court from ruling on the case. The brief states, “Because the evidence fails to clearly show BITS [Bible in the Schools] is gone for good, the case is not moot, and it should be remanded to the district court where it can proceed.” Elizabeth Deal, a parent of a former Mercer County student, is part of the appeal before the 4th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The appellate brief, filed by Attorney Marc Schneider and FFRF Se-

nior Counsel Patrick Elliott, argues that Deal and her daughter may continue to pursue claims against the school district even though her daughter is now attending a neighboring school system. In November, Senior U.S. District Judge David Faber dismissed the case on jurisdictional grounds, finding that Deal did not have standing. The appeal demonstrates that persons who are directly affected by the bible classes may challenge them in court. “Deal has standing under the Establishment Clause whether she endures a challenged practice or acts to avoid it,” the brief asserts. Bible indoctrination classes were taught in Mercer County Schools for more than 75 years until the FFRF law-

suit. FFRF’s legal complaint lists examples of the proselytizing curriculum. Lesson 2 promotes creationism by claiming humans and dinosaurs co-existed. Students are asked to “picture Adam being able to crawl up on the back of a dinosaur! He and Eve could have their own personal water slide! Wouldn’t that be so wild!” Also in West Virginia, FFRF was involved in helping stop a bill requiring state schools to teach bible classes. The West Virginia Senate did not even give a vote to SB 252, a bill that would have required all schools in the state, including elementary schools, to teach bible courses. FFRF released an informational video condemning the bill in early February.

The bill sought to frustrate West Virginia teachers, who recently gained national media attention by demanding that the state Legislature take action to remedy West Virginia teachers’ uncompetitive wages. The bill’s sponsors shamefully sought to impose additional requirements on public schools, while pushing them into inevitable lawsuits, rather than giving teachers much-needed relief. Political maneuvering aside, this proposed law was fundamentally misguided. Government employees should not impart religious beliefs to children. Elementary school students are particularly young and impressionable and a public elementary school education should not include religious instruction of any sort.

## Pruitt’s leaked views confirm FFRF’s claims

Recordings have surfaced of EPA chief Scott Pruitt attacking evolution, advocating for a constitutional ban on gay marriage and abortion, and claiming that Christianity is under attack in America and being driven out of the “public square.” At FFRF, we’re not surprised. We know Pruitt. We dealt with him several times as Oklahoma’s attorney general. Prior to his confirmation, FFRF tried to warn the U.S. Senate that he is an incorrigible theocrat. Then, on March 2, Politico broke the story of the tapes. In the recordings, Pruitt can be heard saying things like, “There aren’t sufficient scientific facts to establish the theory of evolution.” He also argues that “the most grievous threat that we have today is this imperialistic judiciary, this judicial monarchy that has it wrong on what the First Amendment’s about and has an objective to create religious sterility in the public square, which is wholly inconsistent with the Founding Fathers’ view.” Pruitt is describing a secular government, which

is precisely what the Founders not only wanted, but what they actually designed in our godless Constitution. He has also recently used the bible to justify his environmental policy. In an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network, which has unprecedented access in this administration, Pruitt put forth his theocratic perspective. He explained: “The biblical worldview with respect to these issues is that we have a responsibility to manage and cultivate, harvest the natural resources that we’ve been blessed with to truly bless our fellow mankind.” The article refers to Pruitt as “the kind of guy you might meet in bible study,” and that he “believes God commands us to take care of the environment and that also means to use what He has provided.” On Jan. 13, 2017, FFRF sent a series of questions to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, holding hearings on Pruitt’s nomination. The first group of questions fell under a heading that sums up all the problems we’re seeing with Pruitt: “Conflicts be-



Photo by Shutterstock

The People’s Climate March in Washington, D.C. where many protested EPA chief Scott Pruitt’s disdain for the environment.

tween [Pruitt’s] personal religion and secular law.” FFRF laid out the many times Pruitt has chosen his religion over his oath of office. After the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruled that a Ten Commandments monument in front of the Oklahoma Capitol was unconstitutional, Pruitt, in his official capacity as the attorney general of Oklahoma, said, “Quite simply, the Oklahoma Supreme Court got it wrong,” argued that the court’s order was unconstitutional, and filed a new, frivolous le-

gal action in order to defy that order. We do not live in a theocracy, but that is what Pruitt would have us think. By his own admission, he is running the EPA in accordance with biblical principles. The justified furor that the Politico tapes have generated shows the importance of FFRF’s work. Pruitt has always been a theocrat and has abandoned the duties of his office to cling to an ancient and misguided book. He’s unfit for office — as proven by his reliance on a specious theocratic tome.

## Mike Pompeo unfit to be U.S. secretary of state

The anointing of Mike Pompeo as U.S. secretary of state will be a disaster for the world. FFRF has been on to Pompeo for a while. When he was chosen to lead the CIA, FFRF highlighted his darkly dangerous way of thinking based on evangelical Christian notions. “To worship our lord and celebrate our nation at the same place is not only our right, it is our duty,” the then-Kansas congressman began a speech to a Wichita congregation in 2015 that en-

capsulated his worldview. He bemoaned the supposed official campaign to “rip faith from our schools.” Pompeo also exposed his Christian fundamentalism in stating, “America had worshipped other gods and called it multiculturalism.” Pompeo concluded by describing politics as “a never-ending struggle . . . until the rapture.” FFRF expressed its deep discomfort with the soon-to-be CIA head. Pompeo set about proving FFRF right. Soon after assuming control, he

cancelled an event in which the parents of hate-crime victim Matthew Shepard were to talk to CIA employees about LGBTQ issues. This wasn’t surprising. “Pompeo, who attends weekly bible studies held in government buildings, referenced God and Christianity repeatedly in his first all-hands speech and in a recent trip report while traveling overseas,” Foreign Policy magazine reported. Agency employees felt pressured to go along with the religiosity, Michael Weinstein, founder of Military

Religious Freedom Foundation (which represents secular folks in the Pentagon and intelligence agencies), told the publication. “Our clients at CIA feel extremely isolated in a way they have not felt before.” Mike Pompeo was unfit to even run the country’s premier intelligence agency. But now he’ll be in charge of the U.S. diplomatic apparatus and be its face to the rest of the world. His extreme views make him utterly unfit for this tremendous responsibility.

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### Taxpayers

Continued from page 1

response to the second thoughts the county had about disbursing taxpayer funds in this manner. “The Buncombe Tourism Development Authority voted to table a \$72,500 grant it previously had awarded the church to install a fresco in the sanctuary of its property,” stated the Citizen-Times. The Citizen-Times editorial board gives out weekly grades for a variety of new items. It gave a “C” grade to the “Haywood Street Congregation, for extricating the Buncombe County

Tourism Development Authority from a mess of its own making. . . Under our system, government is supposed to be indifferent toward religion, neither promoting nor suppressing it. In initially approving public money for a fresco inside a church, the Tourism Development Authority had crossed the line into questionable territory, as critics had pointed out.” FFRF is pleased with the outcome. “Initially, taxpayers were being wrongly asked to hand out their money to a church,” says FFRF Co-President

Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Would there have been the same complacency if it was a mosque involved?” Gaylor notes that the county could fund any number of secular projects to boost tourism in ways that do not exclude nonreligious citizens. FFRF has more than 32,000 members and 20 chapters across the country. Its purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.



# FFRF VICTORIES

By Molly Hanson

## Bible verse on T-shirts banned from band



FFRF has remedied several state/church violations within a Missouri public school after receiving multiple complaints from area residents regarding school employees at Buffalo High School promoting religion.

It was reported that the band director of the school’s marching band included a bible verse on the official band T-shirts in the past. Last year, T-shirts for the Buffalo High School girls’ basketball team also included a bible verse. Furthermore, a parent reported that in recent years there have been prayers given over the loudspeaker before Buffalo High School football games.

FFRF wrote to the Dallas County R-1 School District on Jan. 9, informing Superintendent Timothy Ryan that it is a violation of the U.S. Constitution for schools to promote a religious message to students, or to sponsor religious messages at school athletic events.

On Jan. 19, Ryan responded, informing FFRF that the district would perform an investigation into the alleged violations to ensure they would not recur.

## Oklahoma football team doesn’t have a prayer

FFRF has remedied a constitutional violation taking place within an Oklahoma City school district.

It was reported to FFRF by a concerned area resident that Putnam City High School had been including religion in its football program. The Rev. Mike Keahbone was allegedly leading the team in prayers. Keahbone had explained that his goal, in coordination with his church, was to proselytize players, having stated, “If the Lord opens the door, we’ll share the Gospel with them.”

In a letter sent to City Schools Superintendent Fred Rhodes, FFRF informed the district that it can neither allow a non-school adult access to the children in its charge nor can it grant that access to a religious speaker seeking to proselytize students.

“Public school football teams cannot appoint or employ a chaplain, seek out a spiritual leader for the team or agree to have a volunteer team chaplain, because public schools may not advance or promote religion,” wrote FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Chris Line. “Similarly, it is illegal for a public school or school-appointed volunteer to organize, sponsor or lead prayers at public high school athletic events.”

FFRF emphasized that school endorsement of Christianity is particularly troubling given that almost half

of young Americans are non-Christian. FFRF requested that the district end the chaplaincy program and take action to stop coaches and other school representatives from organizing, leading or participating in prayers with student athletes.

A legal representative of Putnam City Schools recently informed FFRF that the district had investigated the incident and discovered that Keahbone had been allowed into the team’s locker room to interact with students and offer prayer. FFRF was assured that new procedures had been put into place and that the athletic staff has been instructed that the practice of allowing access to students and engaging in prayer before any game would cease immediately.

“Religion is divisive and has no place in a football team locker room,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We’re pleased that the school district has taken corrective action to honor their students’ rights of conscience and create a more inclusive team atmosphere.”

## With one stroke, FFRF removes N.C. painting

FFRF has gotten a brazenly religious work of art removed from a North Carolina courthouse.

A Cleveland County resident informed FFRF that a large painting had been installed in the main corridor of the Cleveland County Courthouse depicting a Latin cross and an ichthys, also known as the Jesus fish. The Elizabeth Baptist Church donated the piece.

The religious significance of the Latin cross is unambiguous and indisputable, FFRF reminded county officials, since an overwhelming majority of federal courts agree that the Latin cross universally represents the Christian religion — and only the Christian religion.

“The Supreme Court has long recognized that the First Amendment ‘mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion,’” FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote to Cleveland County last November. “Displaying paintings that promote Christianity fails to respect either constitutional mandate of neutrality. A majority of federal courts have held displays of Latin crosses on public property to be an unconstitutional endorsement of religion.”

Plus, this painting conveyed a message to the nearly 30 percent of Americans who are not Christian, including the 23 percent of Americans who are not religious, that they’re not “favored members of the political community,” to quote the U.S. Supreme Court. The cross’ exclusionary effect made non-Christian and nonbelieving residents of Cleveland County political outsiders, FFRF asserted.

FFRF requested the county to immediately take down the painting from the Cleveland County Courthouse. County officials have acceded to the request.

“The large painting in the main corridor of the Cleveland County Courthouse that depicts a Latin cross and fish has been removed from the location inside the courthouse,” the county recently replied.

FFRF is appreciative of the move. “It’s gratifying that once we en-

lightened Cleveland County officials, they took out such obviously Christian artwork from a judicial building that serves a secular purpose — and the needs of a religiously diverse population,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

## Emergency! Crosses come off rescue vehicles

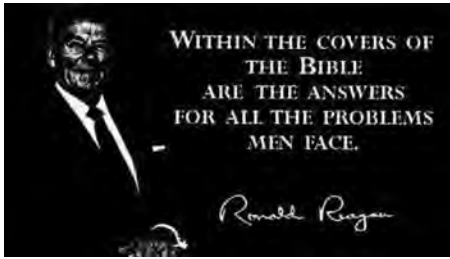


A concerned resident reported to FFRF that Palm Beach County in Florida had been displaying Latin crosses on its fire trucks and ambulances to commemorate fallen firefighters and EMTs. FFRF wrote to the county on Jan. 19 emphasizing that while it has no objection to memorializing emergency responders, it is unlawful for a county government to display patently religious symbols.

“Our objection is to the message of endorsement of religion over non-religion,” wrote FFRF Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow Chris Line. “These crosses send a message to minority religions and nonreligious emergency responders that their service is less valuable than that of their Christian co-workers.”

An attorney representing Palm Beach County responded on Feb. 6 informing FFRF that the fire rescue squad would be removing the cross stickers from their emergency vehicles.

## Club discontinued in Arkansas district



A concerned parent of a Bentonville Public Schools student informed FFRF that a woman, Esther Seim, was leading a Fellowship of Christian Athletes group for students of Osage Creek Elementary School and Creekside Middle School in Bentonville, Ark. FCA was reportedly organized and run entirely by Seim, who was advertising the group to fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders, whom she bribed to attend with food, games, prizes and “new friends.”

Seim vocalized her intentions for the group, saying it existed for “spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in our public school community.”

FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott wrote to the district on Oct. 25 warn-

ing against the public school’s unconstitutional appearance of endorsing religion over nonreligion by showing preferential treatment to an outside religious club.

An attorney for the district confirmed on Feb. 9 that the Fellowship of Christian Athletes had been discontinued.

## FFRF coaches schools on coach-led prayer

FFRF stopped constitutional violations that nearly took place in three high schools in a Florida school district. It was reported to FFRF that the Gainesville High School, Eastside High School and Buchholtz High School football teams were scheduled to attend a Fellowship of Christian Athletes football camp this summer.

The camp includes daily church services and its stated mission is to “present to coaches and athletes, and all whom they influence, the challenge and adventure of receiving Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, serving Him in their relationships and in the fellowship of the church.” Furthermore, the head football coach of Gainesville High School described the camp in part as a team building activity to “emphasize faith” and stated that “everyone can benefit from learning some Christian values and fellowship.” The coaching staff, and, occasionally, students were also leading the team in prayer before meals and coaches were leading the team in prayer before and after games.

FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel wrote to Alachua County Public Schools last year informing the district that the prayers and the camp were illegal. The district responded on Feb. 6, communicating to FFRF that the coaches of the teams have been instructed to refrain from any religious activity.

## FFRF stands up for New Jersey students

FFRF has protected students’ rights of conscience at a New Jersey high school. A student reported to FFRF that an East Brunswick High School teacher singled the student out to talk about why they were not standing for the Pledge of Allegiance, and threatened to report the student to the grade level administrator for not standing.

In a letter sent on Oct. 30, FFRF Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler informed the district that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that compelling a student to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance infringes upon students’ First Amendment rights.

A legal representative of the district responded on Feb. 12 assuring FFRF that all school staff members, including the specific staff member who had committed the violation, are not legally required to participate in the pledge.

## Texas school gets versed in Constitution

It was reported to FFRF that a teacher at a Texas elementary school was regularly quoting bible verses to his students. At Stafford Elementary’s fourth-grade graduation ceremony last June, the teacher allegedly took the microphone and announced that he regularly was telling his students that



“they can do all things through Christ.” FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover wrote to Stafford Municipal School District Superintendent Robert Bostic on Jan. 30, reminding the district that public school teachers may not endorse religion to students.

“The Supreme Court has continually struck down bible promotion and other forms of proselytization in public schools,” wrote Grover.

FFRF was informed on Feb. 12 by an attorney representing the school district that the violation was addressed with the teacher and that the school principal planned to address the issue with the entire school staff during an upcoming meeting.

Florida district removes unsightly plaques

Thanks to FFRF, religious messages have been removed from a Florida school. It was brought to FFRF’s attention that plaques had been posted in all school buildings in the Dixie County Schools District listing four district goals, the last of which is to “Serve with a good attitude, as to the Lord and not to men. Ephesians 6:7.”

FFRF wrote to the district on July 25 explaining that courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools.

“While the display of plaques containing bible verses in a public school would be constitutionally prohibited under any circumstance, the DCSD’s plaques are especially egregious because the displayed bible language is portrayed as official school policy,” wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel.

An attorney representing Dixie District Schools responded on Feb. 15, informing FFRF that the religious signage had been removed by the school.

Texas Good News Club gets bad news

A concerned family member of a student of Wichita Falls Independent School District in Irving, Texas, reported to FFRF that there was a prominent display advertising the Good News Club — a religious club — in Fain Elementary School. The advertisement indicated that the club has scheduled meetings within the school each Tuesday.

FFRF wrote to the district informing it that it violated the U.S. Constitution if religious clubs were being granted special access to advertise to students and families.

“As you are aware, it is a well-settled constitutional principle that public schools may not advance, prefer, or promote religion,” wrote FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover.

An attorney representing the district responded on Feb. 19 assuring FFRF that the Good News Club would not be granted special access to advertising.

FFRF gets cancellation of graduation invocation

FFRF has ended unconstitutional invocations at a California high school.

A community member reported to FFRF that the Wasco Union High School graduation program had included an invocation in 2017. FFRF Associate Counsel Elizabeth Cavell wrote to Wasco Union High School District Superintendent Lori Albrecht on Jan. 19, warning the district that the Supreme Court has struck down prayers at school-sponsored events time and again — including public school graduations.

FFRF was informed on Feb. 13 that the district will not be including an invocation as part of its 2018 commencement program.

One more stop: Utah bus driver ends proselytizing



A concerned parent reported to FFRF that a bus driver for Helen M. Knight Elementary School, part of the Grand County School District on Moab, Utah, passed out proselytizing gifts to students on her bus. The gifts included candy and bookmarks with bible quotes on them. These presents came from “Scripture Candy,” a company that wraps candy in scriptures, which it advertises as “a great way to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line wrote to the district on Dec. 19 to ensure that its bus drivers do not proselytize students on their buses. Line underlined that public school bus drivers are agents of the school district and are subject to the same constitutional restrictions as other district staff and may not legally promote Christian or other religious messages to students.

On Feb. 16, FFRF received word that the district had investigated the issue and that action had been taken to rectify the violation.

FFRF tackles coach-led prayers in Alabama

FFRF has ensured that a coach at a school in Bayminatte, Ala., will no longer be leading his team in prayer.

FFRF was informed that this past September, a football player was injured during an Elberta High School football game. Following the injury, Coach Kenny Thomason called all of the players to the sideline, asked them to remove their helmets and demand-

ed that they “take a knee” while he led them in prayer. FFRF notified Baldwin County Public Schools on Sept. 12 that Thomason’s actions were inexcusable.

“Coaches may not use an injury as an opportunity to force students to participate in a religious exercise,” wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Chris Line to Superintendent Eddie Tyler. “It is illegal for public school athletic coaches to lead their teams in prayer.”

The district responded on Feb. 21 to inform FFRF that the coaching staff had been reminded of their constitutional obligation not to pray with players.

FFRF gets school to run away from prayer walk

After a concerned parent contacted FFRF about religious promotion at a school in Mendenhall, Miss., action was taken to remedy the violation.

It was reported that the principal of Mendenhall Jr. High School used a recorded message before the start of the school year to invite district families to join him at the school for a prayer walk and to ask that everyone pray for the upcoming school year. The school also advertised the prayer walk event on its homepage. FFRF wrote to Simpson County School District on Aug. 31 to ensure that it did not allow its employees to organize or participate in future religious events in their roles as district representatives.

“Prayer walks unconstitutionally entangle school personnel with an exclusively religious message,” wrote FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover to Superintendent Greg Paes.

Paes responded on Feb. 28, informing FFRF that no plans would be made for religious events going forward nor would such events be posted on the school website.

Bad Axe High School chops religious club

FFRF has reminded a Michigan school of its obligation not to promote or endorse religion after being alerted that a teacher at Bad Axe High School was hosting a Christian “breakfast club” in her classroom every Thursday morning.

A Facebook page for the club, which was managed by two teachers in the Bad Axe Public Schools district, described the weekly meetings as “Food for your bellies and food for the soul!” (The page was also used to promote other youth-oriented Christian events.) Students were enticed to attend the meetings with free food in exchange for exposure to Christian teachings. FFRF Robert E. Ingersoll Legal Fellow Colin McNamara wrote to the district on Nov. 28 asking that it immediately remove the group from Bad Axe High School.

An attorney representing the district responded on Feb. 28, writing that the superintendent had reminded participants of the club that the meetings must be student initiated and led.

Assembly not required: Prayers ended in school

FFRF has remedied unconstitutional Christian proselytization at a South Carolina high school.

In December, Fox Creek High School in Columbia, S.C., held an assembly for all boys in the school in response to vandalism incidents. A

school janitorial staff member — who is also a minister — spoke during the assembly and led all students in a long Christian prayer. The prayer was allegedly offered “in Jesus Christ’s name” and made specific reference to a bible passage relating to spreading god’s word. The U.S. Supreme Court has struck down school-sponsored prayer time and again.

FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott wrote to South Carolina Public School District on Dec. 27, reminding it of its constitutional obligation to refrain from advancing or endorsing religion. On March 5, an attorney for the district responded informing FFRF that the principal of the school had reviewed the legal issues related to prayer in public schools with school staff and made a commitment that unconstitutional prayer would not be permitted in the future.

See You at the Pole? Not if you work for school



FFRF has reminded a Louisiana school district of its legal obligation to refrain from promoting religion.

A concerned Ouachita Parish School System member contacted FFRF to report that East Ouachita Middle School in Monroe, La., hosted a “See You at the Pole” event — a Christian-oriented prayer rally organized each year around a bible verse — last fall.

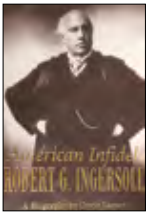
The event included adults playing live music, prayer by an adult and participation by school faculty — including the principal. Additionally, FFRF was informed that a pastor from an area church that has “adopted” East Ouachita Middle School was permitted to deliver a Christian prayer last August at a ribbon cutting ceremony for the school.

FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover wrote to Superintendent Don Coker on Oct. 26, asking that district staff cease scheduling and advertising religious events, or allowing outside adults to participate in religious events on campus with students. Grover also pointed out that no school-sponsored event can include clergy-led prayer.

The district responded on Feb. 7, notifying FFRF that the East Ouachita Middle School principal was reminded that school employees may not participate in student events such as “See You at the Pole.”

The school administrative staff has also been cautioned against promoting personal religious beliefs to students.

**American Infidel:**  
**Robert G. Ingersoll**



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

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# Convention speech

## Darrow statue can help educate for years

Here is an edited version of the speech Zenos Frudakis gave on Sept. 17 at FFRF's 40th annual convention in Madison, Wis. It has been broken up into two parts — a general overview of the idea behind the Clarence Darrow statue (this page) and the actual creation of it (page 11). Frudakis was introduced by FFRF Legal Intake Attorney Madeline Ziegler:

Zenos Frudakis is a renowned sculptor known for his public monuments, portrait statues, busts and figurative sculptures. He has created an extensive award-winning collection of more than 100 bronze sculptures in public and private collections. His work includes sculptures of historic figures such as Benjamin Franklin, Albert Einstein, Dwight D. Eisenhower and Winston Churchill. "Freedom," his best-known sculpture, has become an internet icon, inspiring many in their quest to break free from boundaries.

FFRF has been delighted to work with Zenos Frudakis on our statue of Clarence Darrow in front of the Rhea County Courthouse, home of the Scopes Trial in Dayton, Tenn.

Please welcome Zenos Frudakis.

By Zenos Frudakis

Sculpture has sometimes been called frozen music. It's something you do without words. One of the advantages of that, philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein said, is that words can bewitch you. There are words like "unicorn" or "God," and you think it's there because you have the word. But when you're working with sculpture and you don't have words, you're just looking directly at what's real. Painting and sculp-



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Sculptor Zenos Frudakis talks to the FFRF audience about how he created the Clarence Darrow statue that now sits outside the courthouse in Rhea County, Tenn.

ture both demand looking at the real world and not seeing it through language.

All of you, I'm sure, know about the Scopes trial. Outside the Rhea County Courthouse, there was a sculpture of William Jennings Bryan on the left and an empty space on the right. Bryan was 65 at the time of the trial. He was an old man, balding, overweight and had diabetes. He died just five days after the trial.

But in his sculpture, they decided to present him as a young, handsome man. It was kind of a lie right from the beginning. Instead of putting a Ten Commandments monument on the

courthouse lawn, which they would have had a hard time getting away with — I know that Annie Laurie and Dan wouldn't let them! — they put up a sculpture of him looking young.

But this was more subtle because it's supposedly history. But it's not really history. That sculpture is there to preach, to tell people that evolution isn't true, that creationism is true. It was a religious statement and I wanted to change that.

Tom Davis, who's a local historian, said, "Now that we have this sculpture of William Jennings Bryan, we're going to need one of Clarence Darrow." And that was something I'd been thinking about anyway.

Freethought activist Margaret Downey wanted me to meet Annie Laurie Gaylor. She said, "Come to Philadelphia where she's speaking at the Ethical Society. Tell her about your idea to do this Darrow sculpture. Maybe she can help." So I did, and Annie Laurie seemed interested because the Freedom From Religion Foundation had its own history in Dayton. Bryan College was sending missionaries to public school to teach religion, to sell their brand of Christianity and FFRF stopped them. They hated FFRF in town.

Annie Laurie told me she would like to be supportive and said that FFRF had this Robert Ingersoll sculpture project it was involved with in Peoria, Ill. I told her I'd help her with that. When I went into the foundry, I noticed insects all over the Ingersoll sculpture. They were, ironically, praying mantises, but they were living in the sculpture. After we got it to Philadelphia, we put the bronze statue outside and let the mantises all go off into the foliage.

I went to Dayton, and Tom Davis, the historian, was there almost every day. Students would come on field trips. This particular group was from a religious college and Tom would

talk to them about the history of the site and of the Bryan statue. Then I said, "Can I speak about Darrow?" because he didn't talk at all about Darrow. He allowed me.

The next day, when I was getting ready to leave, I saw another group of students stand in front of the Bryan sculpture. I jumped out of the car and ran across the courtyard and said, "Wait! Wait! You've only heard half the story. There's going to be another sculpture here of Clarence Darrow."

The group was a high school class from Atlanta, and the teacher said, "Tell us about him." As they left, I thought, I can't spend the rest of my life sitting in a car in a parking lot, jumping out, scaring kids, telling them about Darrow. But with a sculpture there, it can do the talking for us.

At this point, I thought the Freedom from Religion Foundation needed to get some publicity for this — they're paying for it, we're paying for it. I just said "Annie Laurie, let's just do it. We'll risk them stopping you from putting the sculpture up."

While I was sculpting, a woman started threatening me. She said she would meet me when the sculpture went up and she had a surprise for me and said she had a shotgun. And there were people praying that they didn't want the sculpture. We were constantly working with the town. There were many people in the town who didn't want it, but gradually they came around and were saying, "No, this is the right thing to do."

The night before the unveiling, there were some younger people there in the front who came and brought their sign, "Welcome Clarence Darrow," which was encouraging. And the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, newspapers from San Francisco to the East Coast wrote about it, so there was a lot of media coverage. People I know even saw it in Australia.

And then it was time for the unveiling. You may have heard about the drama of trying to get the cover off the statue — it took about five minutes. At this point I turned to the crowd and said, "It took me less time to make it than it's taking to unveil it."

On the relief it says, "Darrow asked William Jennings Bryan, 'Do you think the Earth was made in six days?' Bryan said, 'Not six days of 24 hours.' That was a checkmate moment, because the next thing Darrow said was: "Well, how about 600,000 years?" Then that allowed for evolution.

I thought — and the Freedom From Religion Foundation made it happen — if we could put the Darrow statue there, now it's not a sculpture that's preaching like the Bryan one, it's a sculpture that's part of a historical narrative. We redefined it and now people will go there and teachers will take their classrooms there and they're going to have to answer to him.

“I can’t spend the rest of my life sitting in a car in a parking lot, jumping out, scaring kids, telling them about Darrow. But with a sculpture there, it can do the talking for us.”  
— Zenos Frudakis



Zenos Frudakis shows off the full-sized Clarence Darrow statue and his initial scale model as it was being constructed.



# Sculptor casts Darrow ‘warts and all’

By Zenos Frudakis

You all know about Clarence Darrow. I love his quote, “I do not believe in God because I do not believe in Mother Goose.” He said a lot of great things. He looked like he slept in his clothes, and that’s because he did. He drank hard, he was a womanizer, but he was a great lawyer.

When I was thinking about creating the sculpture, I wanted him to look just like he was, unlike the sculpture of William Jennings Bryan, which was untrue — not just in the sculpture, but also in the argument it was making for creationism. I wanted to show Clarence Darrow the way he looked at 68 years old at the time of the trial, warts and all. You know, the baggy clothes, the pants up to here, which, I guess, was the style. Like a lot of older people, he still had the style from an earlier period. He is famous for his suspenders, which he used to snap when he was making a point.

And because I wanted to be realistic, I wanted to sculpt him the way he was, with long hair. But for this trial he cut his hair. I wanted to show this was that moment in time, again because I wanted to show that the other sculpture didn’t have that kind of credibility.

The clay I used was from about that period, the 1920s. Some of it was used to make the Lincoln Memorial. It’s a plastalina made from olive oil. And it’s passed down. When I die, it will get passed on to another sculptor. You use it over and over again. And the tools are all handmade. It’s not something you can go out and buy. In times past, sculptors made their own tools, they didn’t go to a store and buy sculpture tools like you would buy paint.

You start with a conceptual model. This you start small because you want to be able to make changes. And as you get larger, the armature has to be sturdier to hold up the larger



Dan Barker and Zenos Frudakis shake hands in front of the finished Clarence Darrow statue, installed on its pedestal in Rhea County, Tenn.

piece. You can’t make the changes as easily. You want to start with a small piece.

Margaret Downey said it looks like he’s pointing to heaven. That might not be good. But one of the photos had him pointing up, so that’s why I did that. I was going to have a base that represented the various periods of evolution, so he could stand on his argument and put Lucy the hominoid

between his shoes. But we didn’t have enough time and we started to run out of money.

Before I get the statue to the full size of 7 feet tall, I start with him nude. That’s the way it’s traditionally been done. So that way he wears the clothes, the clothes don’t wear him. When you have a figure and you have folds, they follow the arm. Otherwise, if you just sculpt the clothes first, you

could cut into the anatomy, cut into the biceps and so on. So that’s why I first created him naked.

You also don’t want to work on a head that’s seven feet up in the air. It gets uncomfortable. This took two years to do. It’s like taking a car and smashing it a little. It’s still all there, but it’s not the same. Right? I worked on the head separately.

One of the things I was told from the beginning is they didn’t want to see the name “Freedom From Religion Foundation” anywhere around the base. And they didn’t want me to overshadow the other piece. The other sculpture was 10 feet tall with the base. It has a 4-foot base and a 6-foot sculpture. You really shouldn’t do a 6-foot sculpture outside, because it looks smaller-than-life, so I almost always do 7 feet tall or more. So, I made a 7-foot sculpture on a 3-foot base. It made my sculpture a little larger than the other one. It’s subtle, but it’s still the same height. I technically stayed within the rules.

Next is the rubber mold. You pour rubber over the clay. It looks like an alien movie or something that’s been covered and then you put plaster over the rubber. There’s clay in there. Once you take the clay out it’ll flop around. But the plaster holds the rubber like a mother holds a child, so it’s called the mother mold.

Then you take out the clay and you pour wax into the rubber mold and you pull sections out. You put what’s called “sprues” on after they cast the wax. And that’s how you deliver the liquid bronze to the different parts of the sculpture. You have to have one on the end of the nose and otherwise the bronze won’t get there. The bronze is melted, and as it moves, it cools. If it cools and it doesn’t get to all the parts, then you only have a partial cast.

You dip the wax in a ceramic material and you can see the sprues. There’s wire in there because sometimes it’ll explode while they’re pouring. And I’ve been there. You have molten bronze kind of flying around. It’s still kind of flat looking. Bronze is not by itself that attractive. It’s all welded together and this is the patina process. You can see how it’s changing color. And what that does, the patina helps protect the bronze outdoors. It also gives it a quality almost of skin to be able to look into it. It gives it a depth, especially when you add the wax.

I made it green because I wanted it to look at least as old as the sculpture that was already there. Normally, I would make it kind of a brown, but I wanted it to look like it belonged with the Williams Jennings Bryan statue.

It’s like when you’re painting, you’re doing glazes, you’re going to make a painting lighter and then the glazing darkens it. I wanted to make a statement with the whole sculpture.

I made the pedestal look better than the Bryan one. He had a concrete pedestal. There are little ways to overwhelm, to compete with, to make it better.

But you can see the warm brick and the warm stone and then the rough stone at the bottom that matches the bottom of the courthouse. There’s kind of a visual rhyme. It looks like it belongs.



Zenos Frudakis works on sculpting the head of Clarence Darrow to be attached to the sculpted body later.



Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award

We resist and challenge because we must

Here is an edited version of the speech Maryam Namazie gave on Sept. 15 at FFRF’s 40th annual convention in Madison, Wis. She was introduced by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor:

Maryam Namazie is an Iranian-born writer and activist who lives in London. She has a very lengthy resume as a free-thinking feminist rabble rouser. The Islamic regime of Iran has called her “immoral and corrupt” and once did an exposé on her titled “Meet This Anti-Religion Woman.” She’s spokesperson for Fitnah — Movement for Women’s Liberation. She hosts a weekly TV program in Persian and English called “Bread and Roses.” Maryam and the Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain were featured in the 2016 film by Deeyah Khan called “Islam’s Nonbelievers.” She’s received the Julia B. Friedman Humanitarian award among many other recognitions. She’s done a lot of work on refugees. This past summer, Maryam organized the largest gathering of ex-Muslims in history, which Dan and I were proud to be at in London, and which FFRF helped to co-sponsor. She has led many protests and founded Iran Solidarity. And now she will be named the 2017 Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism award recipient. Hank is here to give her a plaque and her \$10,000 award prize. And we are very grateful to the benefactor, Hank Zumach.

By Maryam Namazie

Thank you very much. This is really a wonderful honor, especially coming from people like yourselves who are activists who have been changing the world — the Freedom from Religion Foundation, Dan Barker, Annie Laurie Gaylor, people who I admire greatly. I can’t tell you how grateful I am.

I do honestly feel that this award is not very well deserved, especially when I think of the innumerable people across the world who’ve said no to the Religious Right, particularly people who live in theocracies and are doing so at great risk, and the many unsung heroes who have died fighting against religion’s encroachments in the public space.

I think of people like those who are buried in mass graves in the Khavaran of Iran; it’s called the “Place of



Maryam Namazie holds up her Freedom From Fundamentalism Award presented to her by Henry Zumach, the benefactor of the award, which includes a \$10,000 prize.

the Damned” by the Iranian regime. Thousands upon thousands of people were executed in one bloody summer during the ’80s in Iran. Many of them were killed after five-minute trials. Some of them were asked only one question: Do you believe in God? And when they said “no,” they were taken out and shot. Their families were even made to pay for the bullets that were used.

I think of others slaughtered, generations slaughtered actually, by the Religious Right, by the Islamists in Algeria, for example, the innumerable killed by what the Algerians called the “green fascists.” Green is the color of Islam and the Islamists are our fascists. One of those killed was Katia Bangana. She was a 17-year-old student. The Islamists demanded that she wear a headscarf.

“When 16-year-olds are hanged in city squares for acts incompatible with chastity and gay men are being thrown off of buildings because of Sharia ‘justice’, then criticism of religion and religion’s role in power becomes a historical task and necessity.

— Maryam Namazie

She refused to do so and they assassinated her on the spot.

Of course, we know about the Bangladeshi bloggers, like the wonderful Avijit Roy, and I don’t know if you’ve heard of the Yemeni 17-year-old, Omar Mohammad Batawil. He identified as an atheist. He used to criticize Islam on Facebook and was threatened as a result. And one day he was abducted in front of his home — in front of his home! — and he was murdered. And just to show what a wonderful young man he was, there’s a quote of his on Facebook. He wrote, “They accused me of atheism! Oh, you people, I see God in the flowers and you see him in the graveyards. This is the difference between me and you.”

And, for me, when I think of these people, the fallen, it brings to mind that “Les Miserables” song, “Empty Chairs at Empty Tables.” It really does describe how I feel.

ized society and, of course, parents, who, even though they are believers, love me more than they love religion and religious dogma, which is how it should be.

But we know that’s not necessarily the case for a lot of young people across the world. And to be honest, the fact that I am alive weighs very heavily on me. I feel this great burden of responsibility, so much so that I sometimes feel that if I don’t speak, it would be very difficult to breathe. In many ways, like many others, I speak because I have no choice.

I know this is true for many people who are coming out as atheists under very difficult circumstances in the Middle East, in North Africa, in South Asia, thanks in large part to the internet and social media. I think what we’re seeing now, the tsunami of atheism, is a result of social media and the access it has given. And social media and the internet are doing to Islam what the printing press had done to Christianity.

Many of us feel that we are all going to die, aren’t we? But many of us prefer to do it standing. And we make no apologies. I have said it many times before: When you can be killed for leaving Islam, for criticizing Islam, then you need to do it publicly, loudly and proudly. You need to celebrate blasphemy and apostasy when it is illegal because these are important forms of resistance.

When 16-year-olds are hanged in city squares for acts incompatible with chastity and gay men are being thrown off of buildings because of Sharia “justice,” then criticism of religion, the Religious Right and religion’s role in power becomes a historical task and necessity. And this challenge takes place in many different ways.

For example, you may have heard of the unveiling movement in Iran where women — even though it is compulsory to be veiled, even though it is punishable by fines and up to two months in prison — are unveiling as a way of challenging the veiling laws. And men



Maryam Namazie speaks with some members of a PR firm who were doing video snippets from convention speakers and attendees.



are veiling in solidarity with women, saying, “Look how stupid it is to be veiled.”

I think it’s important to be able to criticize the veil. And particularly when you think of the veil, very often it’s promoted; it’s the propaganda that it’s empowering: “Oh, it feels so good to be not seen and not heard and to be invisible and walk around in a mobile prison; how lovely!” And that’s why as a challenge to that, we’ve had nude protests. Not an objectified nudity, not a nudity that’s commodified, but one that is in the hands of women as a form of political protest. It can be hugely empowering and an important challenge to the Islamist movement.

Another form of protest has been eat-ins during Ramadan. All we hear is “Happy Ramadan!” or how lovely Ramadan is, let’s all celebrate Ramadan. Ramadan is a bleak month for a lot of people because you’re forced to *not* eat, you’re forced to *not* drink. You can be arrested and beaten and flogged if you do. Of course, people have a right to fast, but a lot of us don’t want to fast and we should also have that right. So, we have eat-ins in front of embassies where it’s illegal, drinking wine and eating pork sausage rolls. I know some might find it distasteful, but it is a serious solidarity action.

We went in front of a number of embassies last year and this year. The only embassy that called the police was the Iranian Embassy. I wonder what they told the police? “There are people eating in front of our embassy!”

It may seem funny or silly, but these are important ways of resisting and challenging the Islamists and the religious right. It’s something that’s been done by young people in Morocco and Tunisia and Algeria and many of them have been beaten and arrested. It’s something that we think is important to do to show solidarity with those persecuted for eating during Ramadan.

I’m just trying to give you some examples of the various forms of resistance. Another was #Ex-MuslimBecause hashtag. We thought we’d start it to see why people have left Islam, to give an opportunity for people to speak because so many are in the closet, they’re frightened, they’re fearful. We didn’t expect more than a few hun-



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Maryam Namazie gestures to the crowd during her convention speech on Sept. 15, 2017.

dred responses, but it actually went viral in 24 hours. We had 120,000 tweets from 65 countries. It was very moving. A lot of people said they sat behind their computers and cried because it was the first time that they had come out. Even though it’s on the internet, even though it’s anonymous for many, and there’s still so much fear around it, it was empowering.

And here’s a few funny, sad, moving responses to the #Ex-MuslimBecause hashtag.

- “#Ex-MuslimBecause I’m a woman.”
- “#Ex-MuslimBecause bacon, Yum.”
- “#Ex-MuslimBecause no 72 virgins for me.”
- “#Ex-MuslimBecause my own mother told me I should be killed because I didn’t believe the same things she did.”
- “#Ex-MuslimBecause my dad said there’s no such thing as rape in marriage in Islam, and that I’m a liar when I asked him to tell the man he’d married me off to at 17 to stop raping me. My own dad.”

There are Muslims who also showed solidarity with us. But a lot of them hid their faces because of fear of the backlash.

Double standards

We joined Gay Pride Parade in London. Some of us were topless — we were body painted by the award-winning

body painter Victoria Guggenheim. We had flags of countries that execute LGBT and the aim of our involvement was to say that there are 15 countries or territories that execute LGBT. One of our activists had the Chechnya flag on his ass, which is exactly where it should be, particularly since Chechnya’s president had said that he wanted to eliminate gay people by the beginning of Ramadan.

Of course, the minute we got there, the police converged on us because people had been offended by our placards. They were particularly offended about the placard, “Allah is gay.” And we talked to the police about how there are countless signs saying, “Jesus is gay” and “Jesus has two dads” and making fun of the pope and on and on and on. But the minute you talk about Islam, you’ve got the police converging on you. They did try to take our placards and they did say it was illegal and this and that, but you’re not going to mess with us. We marched anyway and it was a wonderful march.

As expected, some “Muslim leaders” complained. They asked for an apology, which we are not giving. And they said that our placards were “Islamophobic.” First of all, they’re not “Muslim leaders.” It’s interesting how anyone who is regressive and reactionary suddenly becomes a “Muslim leader”

and we all have to listen to them. The East London Mosque was one of those that complained. They were incensed because one of our placards said, “East London Mosque incites the murder of LGBT,” and it does. And that’s what they’re calling “Islamophobic.” The way things are phrased just shows how much we live in a world where cultural relativism reigns supreme, and every homophobe and reactionary can say that they’re a Muslim leader and we all have to listen to them.

This East London Mosque is a center of homophobia. It’s invited preachers that have called for the death of apostates and blasphemers, and they want us to apologize? I don’t think so.

This is what Gay Pride in London wrote when they received the complaint against us. They said, “If anyone taking part in our parade makes someone feel ostracized, discriminated against or humiliated, then they’re undermining the principles on which we exist.” And they said they “won’t tolerate any discrimination of any kind.” And they “won’t tolerate Islamophobia.” That’s very interesting, because we had Muslims march with us and our placards were against racism. Most of the people marching were migrants and people from Muslim backgrounds and minority backgrounds. And we were very clear that our placards were against Islam, against Islamism, against Islamic homophobia, and against racism. The conflation of bigotry with criticism of religion and the Religious Right benefits reactionaries and disadvantages us and other dissenters. As of now, Pride is assessing whether they will allow us to march again next year. And we’ve told them that we don’t need their permission to march for LGBT rights. We will march nonetheless.

We held placards for people’s rights. People did that in the feminist movement, they did that in the civil rights movement against segregation. That’s basically what lots of people do when they’re fighting for people’s rights.

It does anger me to think that these “progressives” look at us in the same way that the Islamists look at us. While criticism of Christianity or the Christian right is seen to be “progressive,” similar criticisms of Islam and Islamism are considered “Islamophobic” and bigotry against Muslims. There is a racism behind the double standards that finds “Jesus is Gay” to be permissible at London Pride but finds “Allah is Gay” to be offensive.

They see dissent through the eyes of our fascists and they vilify this dissent. The reality is that it’s not all about demographics, it’s about people’s politics and their choices. You’ve got professors at universities saying ex-Muslims are “native informants,” “coconuts” and “Uncle Toms” and linked in with the Christian Right. But the Islamists are our Religious Right, and more closely linked in aims and actions to the Christian Right than they like to let on.

Always blamed

It reminds me of the fact that whatever happens, we’re always to blame. The Islamists are never to blame. There’s always an excuse for why they have to kill people and decapitate people. Poor things, you know they feel desperate. They’re upset about U.S. imperialism. They faced racism. A lot of ex-Muslims have faced racism, faced imperialism, faced injustice and poverty. We don’t tend to decapitate people, though, do we?

It does remind me sometimes of

See Namazie on page 14



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Maryam Namazie shows a photo of Katia Bangana, a 17-year-old student who refused to wear a headscarf and was assassinated on the spot.



# Namazie

Continued from page 13

a woman who’s been raped. It’s the length of her skirt that must have been the problem, not the rapist. And very often you see that sort of blaming the victim by Islamists and Islam itself and their many apologists.

There’s been many times where I’ve received death threats and I’ve been told, “Well, what do you expect? You know you shouldn’t have been talking about these things.” Well, I’m sorry but I expect NOT to be killed for talking about religion and criticizing it.

We see this victim blaming with the attack on Charlie Hebdo as well. If only they hadn’t drawn that cartoon. “They shouldn’t have been killed, but. . .” There’s always some “buts,” as if offense is more important and more offensive than murder. And, of course, we know racism exists. It kills. But I don’t think ex-Muslims need a lesson in racism. We live it all the time. Particularly, many of our family members remain Muslims, and racists can’t really tell us apart anyway. They can’t even tell the difference between Muslims and Sikhs. We all look the same to them. Obviously, also, criticism of Islam and Islamism is not the same as bigotry against people. It’s been conflated so we have to keep explaining that criticizing Islam is not racism, criticizing Islamism is not racism.

We must not excuse fundamentalism because of racism. And we mustn’t excuse racism because of fundamentalism. I think it’s important to fight on several fronts. We fight for LGBT rights, we fight for women’s rights, we fight for the right to be free from religion. We are complex people and we fight on very many fronts so we can also fight against religion, including Islam. We can fight against the Religious Right, which includes Islamists and the Christian right. Look what the Hindu Right is doing in India. It is killing people for eating beef, for goodness sakes.

The Buddhist Right, we know what it is doing to the Rohingya Muslims there. The Jewish Right, what it is doing in the Palestinian territories. We have to fight them. But, at the same time, adamantly defend the separation of religion from the state, citizenship rights irrespective of people’s beliefs, and human rights, irrespective of our migration status, where we come from, what our backgrounds are and so on.

The charges of Islamophobia are de facto blasphemy and apostasy laws. In countries under Sharia, they kill us, they imprison us, they call us apostates and blasphemers and send us to the gallows. Here in the West where such laws don’t exist, they cry “Islamophobia” with the support of many people who are supposed to be on our side. It’s a way of silencing dissent and criticism. But we have to criticize Islam because our lives depend on it.

I want to end now with a few words from Mohammed Alkhadra. [You can read his story in the January/February issue of Freethought Today.] He spoke in July at the free-thinkers conference that Annie Laurie and Dan were at, the largest gathering of ex-Muslims in history, and he just blew us away. He is a star. He’s someone we should all know. He has started the Jordanian Atheists in a country where you cannot legally be an atheist. You can be killed by mobs for being an atheist and he’s publicly shown his face there. I want to end with his words:

“I’d like to first thank Maryam Namazie, the bravest woman I know, for hosting this. I’m Mohammed Alkhadra. One day, four years ago, I was becoming more and more Salafi. And I was believing in the Caliphate and having that Caliphate again be the greatest Arab nation or the Muslim nation. And then this man Richard Dawkins . . . I found a YouTube video of him and I began to learn and learn more.

“I think what we’re seeing now, the tsunami of atheism, is a result of social media and the access it’s given.”  
— Maryam Namazie



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Maryam Namazie signs a book for George Iddon of Washington.

And then I woke up. To be able to wake someone up, that’s what stands for being ‘out, loud and proud.’ Because if he wasn’t, I wouldn’t be here. And I’m sure that this is the same situation for a lot of people here. To be ‘out, loud and proud’ is to give a chance to people who are in the closet to come out.

“You give a chance to people to think, ‘How do I know what I know? How do I know that the Earth is round? How do I know about the theory of evolution?’ There’s someone that says, ‘OK, it’s creationism.’ But I need to find out. This debate and this reasoning with people, you can’t have that while you’re hiding. And I know that a lot of people here are open, but to be open in the Middle East is something else.

“In August 2016, Nahed Hattar, a journalist and an atheist, published a cartoon about the god of ISIS. It showed that this is what jihadists look for in heaven. The whole country was calling for the government to get him. And it did. And after it got him, while he was going up the stairs at the courthouse, he was shot to death on the 25th of September last year.

“This is the con, this is the major con for being out. Death is what we are fearing. Maryam said in the opening of this conference that the tsunami is

coming. Yes, that tsunami is coming, but it’s coming from us, from the ones who are on the front line. But here you guys are losing.

“Yesterday, at night, I had a small paper that says, ‘Awesome Without Allah.’ And we left here and we went to have dinner. An ex-Muslim with me at the conference grabbed me and took away that sign. And I asked her why. She said that because there are Muslims next to us, we might get in trouble. This is in London. This is in the 21st century. This is in the free world. Where are your priorities? While we die there, you all are thinking about Islamophobia. Being out is being able to speak and to be who you are. So if we think about which is better, the cons or the pros, I will definitely pick the pros. Why? Because you can never live with yourself. You can’t live with yourself if you just choose to be quiet. And this is what you are doing. You’re being quiet while we’re not. Look what we are having to give and what you are giving. You’re giving your freedom and we’re giving our life. Don’t give up the things that you have. You have freedom of speech. Use it. You have the freedom to offend.”

Yes, you have the freedom to offend. Use it. Thank you. Thank you so much.

## You can donate to FFRF through CFC, AmazonSmile

There are a few ways you can donate to FFRF, including directly through our website, through the CFC or AmazonSmile.

If you are a federal employee, you may make donations to FFRF through the CFC (Combined Federal Campaign) through the end of the year. Check with the U.S. Office of Personnel Management for more details. If you wish to help FFRF through this campaign, the CFC code to designate your contribution to FFRF is 32519.

It is recommended that all CFC donors check the box to include their name and mailing address (in addition to e-mail) with the donation. Donors will receive an acknowledgment from FFRF when we receive pledge notification (throughout the year).

From the CFC website: “The CFC is the official workplace giving campaign of the federal government. The mission of the CFC is to promote and support philanthropy through a program that is employee focused, cost-efficient and effective in providing federal employees the opportunity to improve the quality of life for all. The CFC is the world’s largest and most successful an-

nual workplace charity campaign.”

Another way to donate automatically is through AmazonSmile. It’s a simple way for you to support FFRF (or other charitable organizations) every time you shop, at no cost to you. When you shop at [smile.amazon.com](https://smile.amazon.com), you’ll find the exact same prices, selection and shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to your favorite charitable organization. Visit our AmazonSmile donation designation page and select the Freedom From Religion Foundation to donate 0.5 percent of eligible purchases to FFRF.

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### Just add magic water

**Lesson 5 THE GIFT OF GOD'S LIFE AND LOVE**

God loves everything He made.  
But He loves some things more than others.  
He gives them more gifts.

Draw a circle around the one God loves the most.

Plants

Animals

Baby—not baptized

Baptized Baby

• Fill in the missing letters :  
When I was baptized, I received the gift of G \_ \_ \_ \_  
I became a child of G \_ \_ \_

An FFRF Member sent us this page from the book *Christ's Life In Us*, an Irish schoolbook from the 1970s, shows that God clearly favors baptized children over the non-baptized.



## Jerry Coyne visits Freethought Hall



Evolutionary biologist and author Jerry Coyne, left, chats with FFRF Co-President Dan Barker in FFRF’s Charlie Brooks Auditorium at Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis., on March 14. Jerry is an honorary director of FFRF and an Emperor Has No Clothes award recipient.



Left: Coyne signs a copy of his book — *Why Evolution Is True* — for an FFRF member following the discussion. Coyne’s two books may be ordered from [shop.ffrf.org](http://shop.ffrf.org). Right: FFRF Staff Attorney Ryan Jayne holds his daughter Leona before the event begins.



During the 90-minute session, Coyne and Barker discussed several topics, including atheism, evolution, and free will. Coyne also did an “Ask an Atheist” segment on Facebook Live! and will appear on an upcoming “Freethought Matters” TV program.

Photos by Chris Line

## THEY SAID WHAT?

This is a nation that was not founded on agnostic views. This was a nation founded with a deep belief in God. . . . You can’t separate church from state.



**Rep. Steve Scalise at National Prayer Breakfast.**

Steve Scalise *ABC News, 2-8-18*

When you take prayer out of schools, you replace it with metal detectors. **South Carolina state Rep. Bill Chumley, on a bill that would allow public school teachers to pray with students.**

*Friendly Atheist, 2-13-18*

We can’t very well blame God for not coming to our aid if we fail to use the tools (prayer and the Second Amendment) he has graciously given to us. **Bryan Fischer, senior columnist for Cowger Nation, in the wake of the deadly shooting in a Florida school on Feb. 14.**

*CowgerNation.com, 2-16-18*

When we say, “thoughts and prayers,” it’s frowned upon. And I take real offense at that because thoughts and prayers are really the only thing that’s gonna stop the evil.



**Florida state Sen. Kelli Stargel, in a speech before voting against an assault weapons ban.**

*Friendly Atheist, 3-4-18*

Abortion is murder. . . I’m a Roman Catholic and a conservative Republican. They’re welcome to their point of view — but I take abortion seriously. It’s murder.

**Idaho state Sen. Dan Foreman, talking about a group of University of Idaho students who traveled 300 miles to speak to him about birth control legislation. Foreman abruptly canceled the meeting.**

*ABC News, 2-20-18*

And if there’s ever a time to return prayer to the classroom, now’s the time. That’s something I would be a big advocate for.

**Republican candidate Steve Lonegan, who is running to represent New Jersey’s 5th congressional district, following the mass shooting at the Parkland, Fla., school.**

*Huffington Post, 2-16-18*

The biblical worldview with respect to these issues is that we have a responsibility to manage and cultivate, harvest the natural resources that we’ve been blessed with to truly bless our fellow mankind.

**EPA head Scott Pruitt, in an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network, on his justification to use the Earth’s resources, such as oil and coal.**

*The Hill, 2-22-18*

If you ever had a doubt that God exists, guess what? November the 8th, all the proof you need. Why? Because [Clinton] had it all, she had the media, she spent \$1.4 billion on a seat, on a position, she thought was owed to her because of her gender and her last name, but she lost!



Photo: Gage Skidmore

**Former White House adviser Sebastian Gorka, speaking at the Conservative Political Action Conference.**

*Right Wing Watch, 2-24-18*

I know in my heart of hearts this will be the generation that restores life in America. If all of us do all we can, we can once again, in our time, restore the sanctity of life to the center of American law.



Mike Pence

**Vice President Mike Pence, predicting that legal abortion would end in the U.S. “in our time,” during a speech to Susan B. Anthony List & Life Institute, an anti-abortion organization.**

*The Hill, 2-28-18*

I think of those kids who went back to school today after that horrific shooting, and they need something more. They need a belief in God and Jesus Christ. I think that would help.



Jason Chaffetz

**Former U.S. Rep. Jason Chaffetz, speaking about the Parkland High School students who returned to school two weeks after the mass shooting.**

*The Hill, 3-1-18*

## Freethought on the high seas



About 80 members of FFRF or its chapter, the Central Florida Freethought Community, participated in the annual Freethought Cruise, hosted by the enterprising chapter and its directors David and Jocelyn Williamson. FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor were guest presenters and extend their warm thanks for wonderful hospitality. Side note: A woman (not associated with the group) went overboard the last night of the four-day cruise to the Bahamas, but fortunately was rescued in a maneuver that took the Norwegian Epic about an hour.

**A note to FFRF Members**  
Don't miss a single issue of Freethought Today & Private Line!  
If the expiration date of your FFRF membership on your address label says May or earlier . . .  
**Please Renew Now!**

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# Why is the bible so badly written?

By Valerie Tarico

Millions of evangelicals and other Christian fundamentalists believe that the bible was dictated by God to men, who acted essentially as human channelers. Each phrase is considered so perfect that it merits careful linguistic analysis to determine God’s precise meaning.

If that were the case, one would have to conclude that God is a terrible writer. Although some passages in the bible are lyrical and gripping, many would get kicked back by any competent editor or writing professor — kicked back with a lot of red ink.



Valerie Tarico

*Mixed messages, repetition, bad fact-checking, awkward constructions, inconsistent voice, weak character development, boring tangents, contradictions, passages where nobody can tell what the heck the writer meant to convey. . . .*

This doesn’t sound like a book that was dictated by a deity.

A well-written book should be clear and concise, with all factual statements accurate and characters neither two-dimensional nor plagued with multiple personality disorder — unless they actually are. A book written by a god should be some of the best writing ever produced. It should beat Shakespeare on character development, Stephen Hawking on scientific accuracy, Pablo Neruda on poetry, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn on ethical coherence, and Maya Angelou on sheer lucid beauty — just to name a few.

No question, the bible contains beautiful and timeless bits. But why, overall, does it so fail to meet this mark? One obvious answer, of course, is that neither the bible — nor any derivative work like the Quran or Book of Mormon — was actually dictated by the Christian God or other celestial messengers. We humans may yearn for advice that is “god-breathed,” but in reality, our sacred texts were written by fallible human beings who, try as they might, fell short of perfection in the ways that we all do.

But why is the bible such a mixed bag? Falling short of perfection is one thing, but the bible has been the subject of literally thousands of follow-on books by people who were genuinely trying to figure out what it means. Despite best efforts, their conclusions don’t converge, which is one reason Christianity has fragmented into more over 40,000 denominations and non-denominations.

Here are just a few of the reasons for this tangled web of disagreements and the terrible quality of some biblical writing (with notable exceptions) by modern literary standards.

## Too many cooks

Far from being a single unified whole, the bible is actually a collection of texts or text fragments from many authors. We don’t know the number of writers precisely, and — despite the ancient traditions that assigned authorship to famous people such as Moses, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John — we don’t know who most of them were. We do know that the men who inscribed the biblical texts had widely different language skills, cultural and technological surroundings, worldviews and supernatural beliefs — along with varying objectives.



Photo by Shutterstock

Scholars estimate that the earliest of the bible’s writers lived and wrote about 800 years before the Christian era, and the most recent lived and wrote almost a century after any historical Jesus would have lived. To make matters more complicated, some of them borrowed fragments of even earlier stories and songs that had been handed down via oral tradition from Sumerian cultures and religions. For example, flood myths that predate the Noah story can be found across Mesopotamia.

Bible writers adapted earlier stories and laws to their own cultural and religious context, but they couldn’t always reconcile differences among handed-down texts, and often may not have known that alternative versions existed. Later, variants got bundled together. This is why the bible contains two different creation myths, three sets of Ten Commandments and four contradictory versions of the Easter story.

## Forgery and counterforgery

Best-selling bible scholar Bart Ehrman has written two books about forgery in the New Testament, texts written under the names of famous men to make the writings more credible. This includes the book of 2 Timothy, the one which claims that “all scripture is God-breathed.” Pseudonymous writing was so common among early Christians that nearly half of the books of the New Testament make false authorship claims or were assigned famous names after the fact. When texts claiming to be written by one person were actually written by several, each seeking to elevate his own point of view, we shouldn’t be surprised if the writing styles clash or that they espouse contradictory attitudes.

## Lost in translation

The books of the bible were originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, though not in the modern versions of these languages. When Roman Catholic Christianity ascended, church leaders embraced the Hebrew bible and translated it into then-modern Latin, calling it the Old Testament. They also translated texts from early Jesus-worshippers and voted on which to include in their canon of scripture. These became the New Testament. Ironically, some New Testament writers themselves had already quoted bad translations of Old Testament scriptures. These multilayered imperfect translations inspired key doctrines of the Christian faith, the most famous being the “virgin birth.”

Plus, an enormous amount of information is simply lost in translation. One challenge is that the meanings of a story, or even a single word, depend on what

preceded it in the culture at large or a specific conversation, or both.

## Inside baseball

A lot changes in 2000 years. As we read the bible through modern eyes, it helps to remember that we’re getting a glimpse, however imperfectly translated, of the urgent concerns of our Iron Age ancestors. Back then, writing anything was tremendously labor intensive, so we know that information that may seem irrelevant now (because it is) was of acute importance to the men who first carved those words into clay, or inked them on animal skins or papyrus.

*Long lists of begats in the Gospels; greetings to this person and that in the Pauline epistles; instructions on how to sacrifice a dove in Leviticus or purify a virgin war captive in Numbers; ‘chosen people’ genealogies; prohibitions against eating creatures that don’t exist; pages of threats against enemies of Israel; coded rants against the Roman Empire. . .*

As a modern person reading the bible, one can’t help but think about how the pages might have been better filled. Could none of this have been pared away? Couldn’t the writers have made room instead for a few short sentences that might have changed history: *Wash your hands after you poop. Don’t have sex with someone who doesn’t want to. Witchcraft isn’t real. Slavery is forbidden.*

Answer: No, they couldn’t have fit these in, even without the begats. Of course, there was physical space on papyrus and parchment. But the minds of the writers were fully occupied with other concerns. In their world, who begat who mattered(!) while challenging prevailing Iron Age views of illness or women and children or slaves was simply inconceivable.

## It’s not about you

The Gospel According to Matthew (not actually authored by Matthew) was written for an audience of Jews. The author was a recruiter for the ancient equivalent of Jews for Jesus. That is why,

in the Matthew account, the Last Supper is timed as a Passover meal. By contrast, the Gospel According to John was written to persuade pagan Roman prospects, so the author timed the events differently. This is just one of many explicit contradictions between the four Gospel accounts of Jesus’s death and resurrection.

The contradictions in the Gospel stories — and many other parts of the bible, are not there because the writers were confused. Quite the opposite. Each writer knew his own goals and audience, and adapted hand-me-down stories or texts to fit, sometimes changing the meaning in the process. The folks who are confused are those who treat the book as if *they* were the audience, as if each verse was a timeless and perfect message sent to them by God. Their yearning for a set of clean answers to life’s messy questions has created a mess.

## The pig collection

My friend Sandra had a collection of decorative pigs that started out small. As family and friends learned about it, though, the collection grew to the point that it began taking over the house. Birthdays, Christmas, vacations, thrift stores . . . when people saw a pig, they thought of Sandra. Some of the pigs were delightful — lovely and well-crafted — some not so much. Finally, the move to a new house opened an opportunity to do some culling.

The texts of the bible are a bit of a pig collection. Like Sandra’s pigs, they reflect a wide variety of styles, quality, raw material, and artistic vision. From creation stories to Easter stories to the book of Revelation, old collectibles got handed down and inspired new, and folks who gathered this type of material bundled them together into a single collection.

A good culling might do a lot to improve things. Imagine a version of the bible containing only that which has enduring beauty or usefulness. Unfortunately, the collection in the bible has been bound together for so long that Christian authorities don’t trust themselves to unbind it. Maybe, deep down, bible-believing evangelicals and other fundamentalists suspect that if they started culling, there wouldn’t be a whole lot left. So, they keep it all, in the process binding themselves and our society to the worldview and very human imperfections of our Iron Age ancestors.

And that’s what makes the “Good Book” so very bad.

*FFRF Member Valerie Tarico is a psychologist and writer in Seattle. She is the author of **Trusting Doubt: A Former Evangelical Looks at Old Beliefs in a New Light** and **Deas and Other Imaginings**, and the founder of [WisdomCommons.org](http://WisdomCommons.org).*



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • [FFRF.org](http://FFRF.org)

### What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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



# Secular support in AA aids atheist Marine

## The ‘higher power’ reference doesn’t have to mean God

*This article first appeared in the October issue of Grapevine, the monthly magazine of Alcoholics Anonymous.*

By Eric C.

Not only are there lots of atheists with decades of sobriety in Alcoholics Anonymous, there have always been atheists in foxholes.

A graduate of a Christian high school, I enlisted in the Marine Corps at age 19. I had already discovered that the more I studied the scriptures and the more earnestly I prayed, the more I doubted the existence of any kind of God. I’ve rediscovered this many more times through the years.

Five years into what would become a 25-year career in the Marines, I was diagnosed by a physician as an “acute, chronic alcoholic.” A Vietnam veteran with an impeccable service record, I was hospitalized briefly and introduced to Alcoholics Anonymous.

I was happy when I was told at my first meeting that AA is “spiritual, not religious,” and “not allied with any sect or denomination.” But my spirits fell when the meeting began with a prayer, followed by a ritual recitation that invoked the name of God no fewer than six times (“How It Works”). The meeting closed with the saying of the Lord’s Prayer.

It was instantly clear to me that AA was a religious cult in denial about being religious. So I didn’t come back to any meetings for years.

In the meantime, on several occasions I almost died from my alcoholism. My disease progressed through an additional five years in the Marines. The commandant of the Marine Corps then ordered me to the National Naval Medical Center at Bethesda, Md., for treatment of alcoholism. At least two good things happened to me the second time I was hospitalized.

First, a long-sober Marine master gunnery sergeant, who was a counselor at the treatment facility, helped square away for me the “higher power” question. He pointed out that all Marines have the same higher power — the commandant of the Marine Corps.

In addition, the master gunny noted that he and I had both been in harm’s way earlier in our careers.

We talked about a phenomenon with which we were both quite familiar, something known as “esprit de corps.” “Esprit” is the French word for “spirit.” And “corps” refers to a body of troops, in this case, our corps of Marines.

We knew from hard experience that when the situation is grave, Marines



help each other survive by working together. In fact, another favorite term among Marines — “gung ho” — is an ancient Chinese battle cry that means “working together.”

The master gunny and I had both been in situations where we and those around us were scared out of our minds. But we knew that when Marines support each other selflessly, we can and do overcome our fear. In doing so, we gain an ability to beat seemingly insurmountable and life-threatening odds.

We knew that the bond Marines feel with each other, especially in combat, is best described as spiritual.

This is clearly not a supernatural power, but a deeply human power that has been proven throughout history to play a decisive role in turning potential defeat into victory on the battlefield.

### Esprit de corps

“Esprit de corps is the same kind of spiritual power that AA has,” the master gunny explained. “People in AA call this power whatever they want.”

The second good thing that happened to me in treatment was that I found my first sponsor. I noticed him at an AA meeting they drove us to in a hospital van one evening. He was the one guy in the room at the end of the meeting whose lips weren’t moving when everybody else was holding hands and reciting the Lord’s Prayer.

My first sponsor, an atheist with 10 years of sobriety at the time, explained to me that even though much of the AA program borrows from religion, AA works just fine anyway, as long as you don’t drink, go to lots of meetings and take as many of AA’s suggestions as you can stomach.

Working the Twelve Steps to the best of my ability wouldn’t kill me, my sponsor said. Even as an atheist, he explained, I could work the Steps exactly the same way everybody else works them — imperfectly and according to my own understanding.

Before my first year in sobriety ended, my career as a Marine rocketed into a new dimension. The commandant ordered me back to college, where I completed my bachelor’s degree. Shortly after my second anniversary in sobriety, people were saluting me and

addressing me as “sir.”

My attainment of officer rank led to a number of new and exciting assignments all over the world. Each time I moved, I found a new AA sponsor locally and tried to attend 90 meetings in 90 days. I also began sponsoring other men and got involved in AA service work.

During the Persian Gulf War, I was able to attend a few AA meetings at the Marine headquarters in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia. However, I spent most of my time out in the desert on the front lines.

### Atheist in fighting holes

For the record, Marines don’t have “foxholes.” We call them “fighting holes.” While under fire during Operation Desert Storm, I observed an important difference between the atheists I knew and others who might be inclined to spend time on their knees praying for divine protection. I found that the atheists could be counted on to do things that are actually useful, like digging better fighting holes.

Some years later, I found myself in Somalia in the midst of a civil war characterized by sectarian violence, famine and human suffering on a biblical scale. Even though we could find no sign of a “loving God” anywhere in Somalia, I and a few other military personnel decided to start holding AA meetings in downtown Mogadishu.

Our little group opted to meet outdoors in the shade of a tree because of the heat. That turned out to be a mistake. Our first meeting was broken up by sniper fire. Although the sniper was clearly a lousy shot, we decided to change locations.

We chose to move our meeting indoors behind concrete walls and simply ignore the heat. It was our group’s little joke that we closed our meetings “in the usual manner” by all shouting, “Incoming!”

### Sober for 33 years

About a year after returning to the United States, I married a woman I’d met in AA who is also an atheist. We had two children before I retired from the Marines. Today, our kids are grown and doing well.

As of this writing, I have 33 years of sobriety in AA and my wife has 26 years.

But some in AA still “feel sorry” for atheists, just as our co-founder Dr. Bob said he felt about unbelievers in the Big Book. Some, too, remain convinced that those who say they won’t believe are “belligerent” and have a “savage” mind, as co-founder Bill W. asserted in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

My original atheist AA sponsor, with whom I remain in touch, has 43 years of sobriety in AA and is still clearly a thorn in the side of some of the bleeding deacons in his home group.

In recent years, I’ve played a role in organizing a couple of secular “We Agnostics” meetings of AA in my community. I’ve also tried to be more vocal at other AA meetings about my lack of belief in any kind of God.

If AA is to survive and thrive in a world where increasing numbers of people, especially young people, are leaving religious beliefs behind them, as I did, my hope is that we will open the doors of our fellowship a little wider.

Eric C. is an FFRF member who lives in Michigan.

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## FREETHOUGHT BOOKS

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

### Status Quon’t: A Woman’s Perspective on How Christianity Was Never About God

By Katilyn Pulcher  
\$17.89 (paperback); \$9.99 (Kindle)  
2017 (Self-published)

The author describes her theory that Christianity was created by humans solely to control the behavior of other people, particularly women and homosexuals. She believes that religious leaders recognized fear as the number one source of human motivation and the fear of an immortal, all-powerful God as more paralyzing than fear of themselves, and thus claimed to have intimate knowledge of God’s wishes in order to influence others. The book encourages readers to reject the status quo and replace it with a status quon’t, which is described as an ever-evolving state of critical thought and personalized belief systems.



### Mom, We’re Black!

By Peter A. Bobley  
\$17.50 (paperback); \$5.99 (Kindle)  
Wall Street Rose Publishing 2017

We are all black Africans with the identical genetic code. We’re not French per se or Catholic per se. We’re human per se. Each of the 31 two-page spreads (text on left, cartoon on right) portrays an important element in history. Topics covered include the fictional and supernatural aspects of religion, how human IQs rose, the creation of language, the need for laws and money, admitting ignorance and the role of science, the subjugation of women, climate change and more.



### Star Thistle

By Jim Gronvold  
\$14.99 (paperback); \$9.99 (Kindle)  
2017 (Self-published)

From tasting “wild sea/on a soft breeze” to expressing his conviction that “hallowed Nature/...needs no temple,” the concise lyrical poems in *Star Thistle* reflect the author’s view that “Life itself/is paradise.” Author Barbara Swift says, “The poems offer readers a look into the larger questions of the here and now, and what makes for a meaningful life.” Author Terri Glass says, “Slightly reminiscent of Emily Dickinson or Robert Frost, Jim Gronvold’s musings of life and death are deeply philosophical.”



Your weekly antidote to the Religious Right

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The “Out of the Closet” campaign allows you to proclaim your freethinking. Create your own message and add your own photo to make a unique virtual billboard. Go to [ffrf.org/out](http://ffrf.org/out).

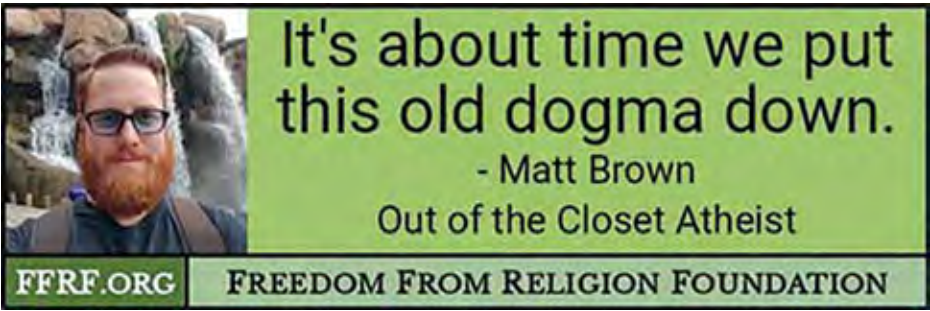
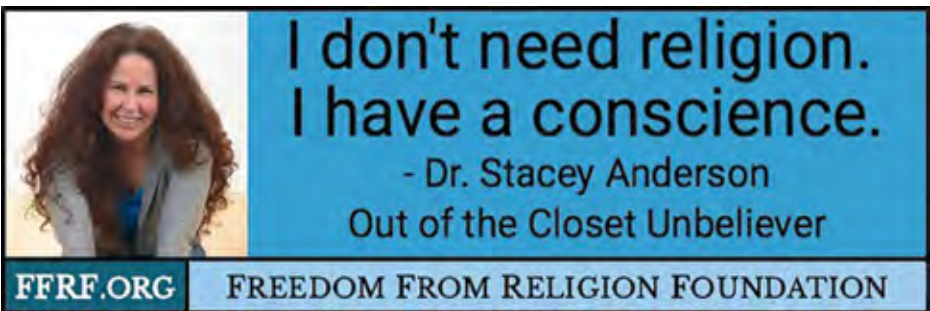
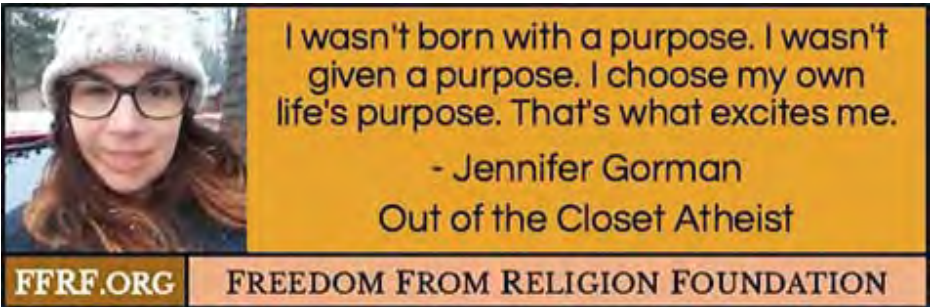
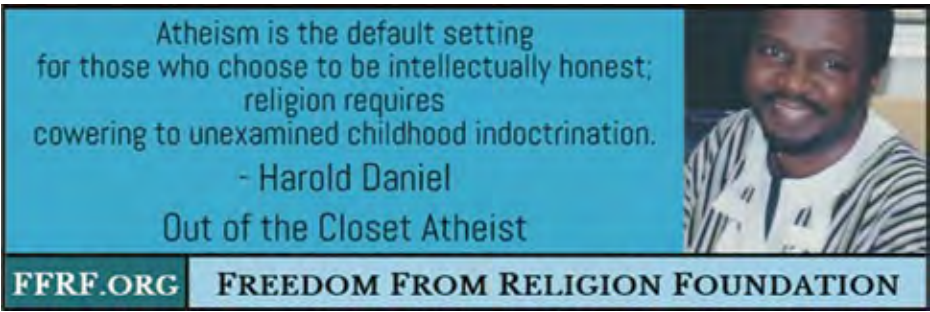
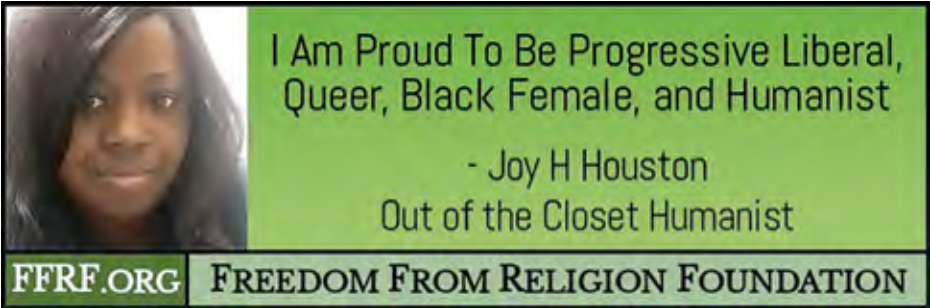
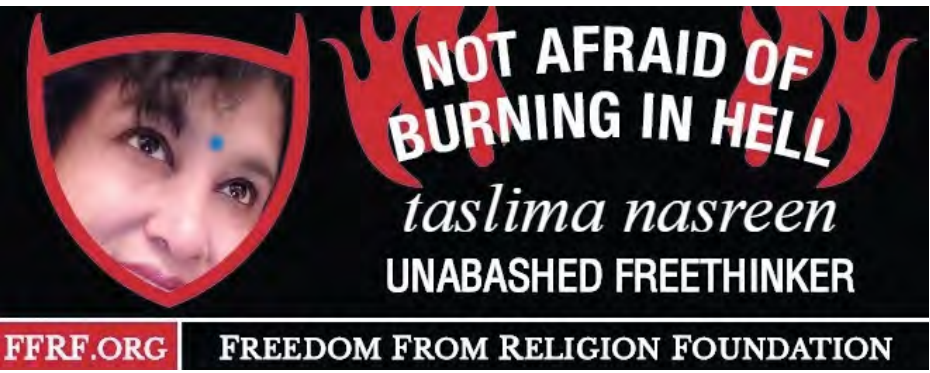
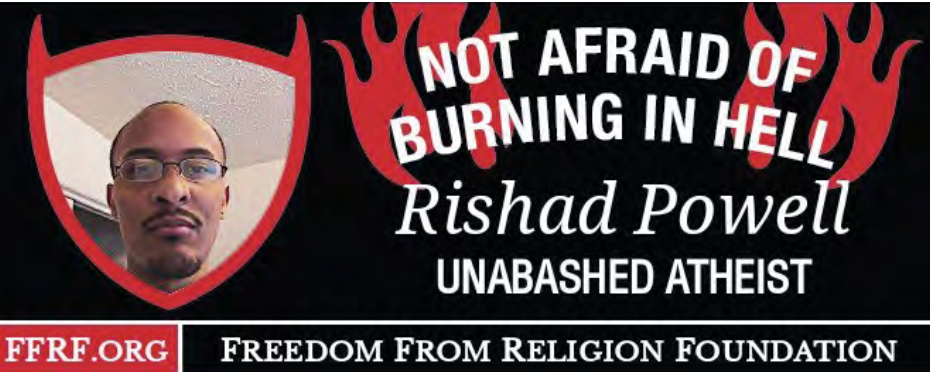
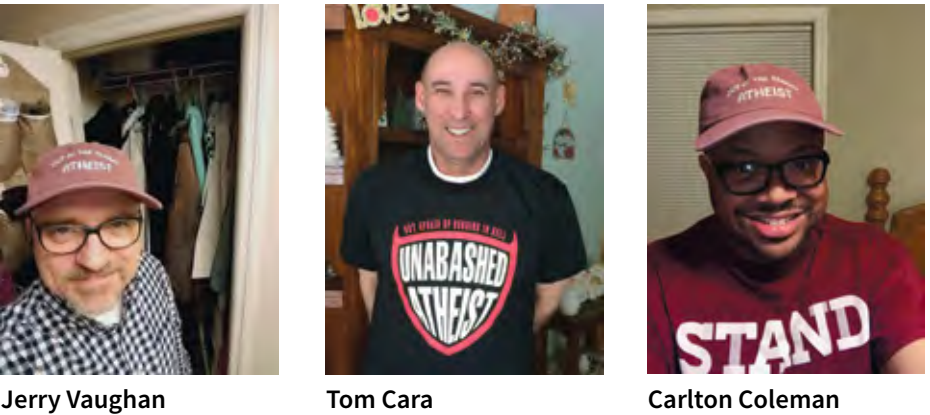
The “Not Afraid of Burning in Hell” campaign is inspired by Ron Reagan’s irreverent 30-second TV commercial, in which he quips that he is “an unabashed atheist, not afraid of burning in hell.” Go to [ffrf.org/unabashed](http://ffrf.org/unabashed).

It’s fun, it’s easy and takes less than a minute to complete! Once your cyberboard is approved by FFRF, you may post and tweet it. Our app lets you use it as your Facebook or Twitter image or even as your Facebook and Twitter banners.

Both campaigns offer weekly prizes based on staff picks. If your billboard is chosen as a staff “pick of the week,” FFRF will feature your billboard on Facebook and Twitter, and will mail your prize — FFRF’s popular “Out of the Closet Atheist” cap or “Unabashed Atheist - Not Afraid of Burning in Hell” T-shirt!

Tom Cara, president of the Chicago chapter of FFRF, was a recent staff pick for his billboard. He is shown wearing his “Unabashed Atheist” T-shirt prize. And Jerry Vaughan is wearing his new “Out of the Closet Atheist” cap. (It’s not lost on us that’s he’s standing just “out of the closet”!) And Carleton Coleman shows off his new cap.

Here are several of our recent staff picks. You could be next!





# LETTERBOX

## Billy Graham was a bigot and charlatan

We decided to become Lifetime Members today, the same day funeral services are being held for Billy Graham. You cannot forget him spewing anti-Semitic and anti-LGBTQ remarks. He spent a lifetime getting extremely wealthy by exploiting the credulousness of Americans.

Tom and Gayle Reber  
Kentucky

## Company doesn't reveal Christian agenda

I recently bought a plastic-sealed 2018 calendar and put it on my wall. Then I noticed a cardboard stiffener inside with a message by the co-founder of Dayspring cards. I went to its website and found it's got a Christian agenda. So, with no disclaimer visible on the package, it was there to ambush people. It should have said the purchase was helping to further Christian endeavor/practices. It made me so angry that I contacted the company.

Linda Riess  
New York

## Religion wrong-headed on reproduction issues

We have to address the outcome of religious attitudes on human reproduction. This goal of unfettered reproduction is heading us toward massive human overpopulation. All of this, at the very least, is encouraged, especially by the Catholic Church, which prohibits contraception and even advises the least-educated that contraception is dangerous. What can the goal possibly be? Do they think ahead? What would life be like in an overpopulated world? I would find it horrific. This is what religion and ignorance would bring down upon us.

F. Frederickson  
Oklahoma

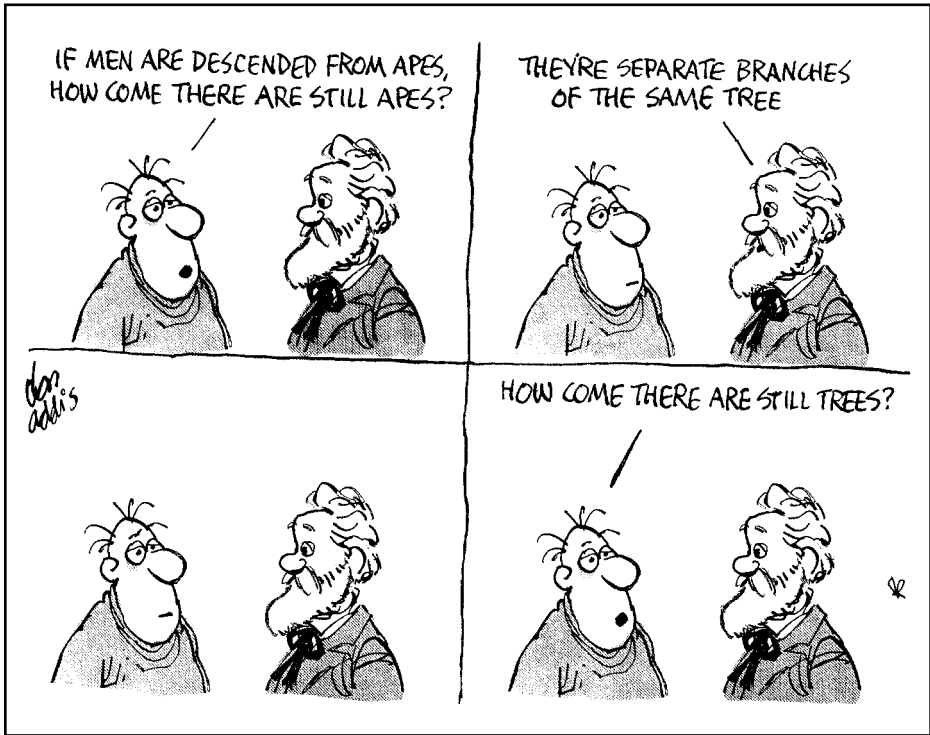
## Religious magazine shouldn't be at library

I recently checked the free magazine rack at my local library and found a copy of Philadelphia Trumpet. Scanning through this periodical, I saw articles like, "How the wrangling over the Holy City hastens bible prophecy," "The deadly climate change deception" and other scatological screeds. Of course, everything was backed up by some sort of "fact of prophecy."

The big problem is that the magazine had a library address on the back, and when I checked the periodical section, sure enough, there were other issues with a handwritten label.

The magazine is published by the Philadelphia Church of God. I was shocked that our library would subscribe to something like this, so I brought up the issue with our librarian. Luckily, she is an intelligent, gracious woman. She told me she had contacted the magazine and was informed that it was a free religious publication sent out to numerous libraries.

The staff (volunteers) don't know which ones are legit or not and simply put them on a shelf. Luckily, the librarian feels the same as us about religion (she told me one of her favorite authors is Philip Pullman).



She removed those magazines and will have a talk with the staff. The issue on the rack was out of place and I was, jokingly, told that Satan put the copy there and sent me to find it! During these critical times, we all must be vigilant.

Sweat the seemingly small stuff.  
Jack M. Pedigo  
Washington

## FFRF should try to win the war, not battles

My fundamental question is: Should we keep winning and losing individual battles, or should we focus on winning the war waged by cults against our democratic republic, seeking to reduce our freedoms, trying to force us to abide with their ancient faiths, dangerous beliefs and destructive political, economic, social and life-threatening tenets?

The public-at-large does not understand that we (and such other caring entities) are not our country's enemy and that our primary purpose is to assure government officials stop violating

the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

In order to do so effectively, our mission and goal should be that we the people force Congress to establish clear law and rule against the domestic interference and abusive dictatorial nature of cults (at times far worse than foreign enemies) in order to protect all citizens from the vast harm cults are dedicated to cause us.

Every government official shall abide with these laws or be charged with constitutional violations, from local mayors to the commander in chief.

And that Congress shall no longer permit the states or local government officials the right to violate our Constitution at will without legal recourse and penalties.

Harold Chanin  
Florida

## Anne Mardick will long be remembered

I have enclosed a donation to honor the memory of our dear friend Anne

Mardick, who died on Feb. 15.

Anne served as president of our local chapters of FFRF and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State until her fragile health sadly precluded her participation.

Anne was a dedicated and passionate humanist who, despite years of living with severe pain, made her home available to many visiting humanist dignitaries.

Anne's generosity was remarkable in so many ways, including her participation in the renovation of our Humanist Community Center in Mesa, Ariz. The greater Phoenix humanist community will long remember the numerous contributions of Anne Mardick.

Hal and Doreen Saferstein  
Arizona

(See page 23 for Anne's obituary.)

## Graham was charismatic snake oil salesman

Billy Graham's outsized influence with numerous presidents was a national scandal. Graham was nothing more than a charismatic snake oil salesman who preached to the people of the world that they were all "miserable sinners" destined for eternal hellfire unless they accepted his backwoods, bible-thumping fire-and-brimstone evangelical theology.

That was his so-called "good news." Graham's anti-Semitism was well documented, and he also was homophobic, advocating the discredited "conversion therapy" for gays.

The fact that this theocratic bigot lay in state in the Capitol rotunda, surrounded by a fawning bevy of leading political figures, including President Trump, was nothing short of disgraceful and represented a serious violation of the separation of church and state that the nation was founded on.

Dennis Middlebrooks  
New York

## 'I love receiving Freethought Today'

I love receiving Freethought Today. It's very informative, creative and hopeful.

I'm a new member and I think it would be fun to have FFRF return-address labels like the ones my friends use for endangered animals.

Cathleen Imp  
Oregon

## A sacrificial weekend

*Gordon Lamb sent us this short discussion between God and Jesus regarding the crucifixion:*

"Listen, son, here's the con. We tell the suckers that I'm willing to sacrifice my son for forgiveness of their 'sins,' and they'll absolutely eat it up. Think of the pure theater of it — dragged through the streets, flogged, a crown of thorns. . ."

"What?! Flogged!? A crown of thorns!? Since when does Jerusalem have a Folsom Street Fair?" Jesus stared at His Dad unbelievably.

"Just listen, wouldja?" JeHoffa glared at his mouthy kid, thinking that maybe knocking up that Jewish girl might not have been the best idea. He went on to detail the high points: three years of cruising the back roads with his 12 fishing buddies, bringing wine to the weddings, treating his mother like crap while she thinks that he's a god, only cleaning his house twice in three years, and the whole time cops hatin' while he rollin'. A sort of Our Savior of the Rednecks gig. And appropriate for someone born in a barn.

Jesus looked on with a rather jad-

ed, cynical eye while he listened.

"Just picture it — hanging from that cross, eyes turned heavenward, the soldiers throwing craps for your Crocs, thong and bathrobe. And when you complain that you're thirsty, offering you some vinegar."

"Sounds like most of the wines in the Hinnom Valley," Jesus interrupted. "I mean, Me-sus Christ! I wouldn't use that to treat toenail fungus!"

"My point," Almighty God sniffed, "is you'll be spending the rest of eternity up here in the Cloud Nine Sports Bar and Bordello. Not one of those yokels will hook up to the fact that when I said that 'I've so loved the world that I gave my only begotten son,' I only meant for 48 hours or so — less time than your mother spent in labor, after all."

"And she still bitches about that," Jesus grinned. "Especially after I teased Joseph about paternity suits."

"Well, Joseph will have a little fun at your expense," snorted The Almighty. "Joseph the Carpenter is the cross supplier to the Roman garrison."

Gordon Lamb  
Kentucky

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For related information (or to request a bequest brochure), please contact Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608) 256-8900, info@ffrf.org

Freedom depends on freethinkers



# BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

## Arrested / Charged

**Steven Winn**, 33, Crandall, TX: 3 counts of sexual assault of a child. Winn, a youth pastor at Open Door Baptist Church, is accused of assaults on an alleged victim who is 15.

Open Door senior pastor **Matt Jarrell** hanged himself in jail in 2011 after his arrest on a rape charge in West Virginia. *Source: Dallas News, 2-27-18*

**Philip “Flip” Benham**, 69, Concord, NC: Communicating threats. Benham, an ordained Free Methodist minister who leads Operation Save America, is accused of threatening a woman at A Preferred Woman’s Health Clinic in Charlotte during a protest against legal abortion.

The clinic volunteer told a reporter Benham approached her “menacingly” and “repeatedly” and said “You are dead.” Benham responded that there was no such threat, that he actually told her she was “dead in her sins.”

Defending Alabama Senate candidate Roy Moore last year against charges that he dated and assaulted girls in their teens, Benham said, “There is something about a purity of a young woman, there is something that is good, that’s true, that’s straight, and he looked for that.” *Source: WSOC, 2-26-18*

**An unidentified imam** in Temara, Morocco, is accused of sexual assaults on 6 children at a mosque where he had started an elementary school. After parents of a child reported an alleged assault, 5 other families made similar accusations.

Parents of an alleged victim reportedly witnessed the imam molesting their 8-year-old son after they were alerted by a watch group that he was alone with the boy at the school. *Source: Morocco World News, 2-21-18*

**David Rowan**, 62, Milton, FL: Sexual battery by an authority figure, 3 counts of rape and 2 counts of unlawful sexual contact. Rowan, pastor at Liberty Baptist Church, is accused of assaults on 14- and 15-year-old sisters at a hotel in Murfreesboro, TN, when he was guest speaker at a religious convention in 2014.

The girls and their mother knew him before his visit to Tennessee, a police report said: “The victims looked up to Pastor Rowan and counted on him for spiritual guidance.” *Source: Murfreesboro News, 2-20-18*

**Anthony Morris**, 49, **Zelda Morris**, 46, and **Kamali Morris**, 19, Toledo, OH: Aggravated robbery with a deadly weapon. Anthony Morris is pastor at St. Paul’s AME Zion Church, and Zelda and Kamali are his wife and daughter. They are charged in an incident with Nickema Turner, 39, who was teaching Sunday school when the Morrises allegedly attacked Turner, pointed a gun at her and took items from her purse. According to the police report, Zelda stated to Turner’s daughter, “You wanna know why this happened? It happened because your mom slept with my husband.” *Source: ABC 13, 2-19-18*

**Aryeh Goodman**, 35, East Brunswick, NJ: Engaging in prostitution with a child and endangering the welfare of a child. Goodman, a rabbi who operates a religious learning center (chabad) from his home and may be affiliated with another at a separate location, is accused of having sex Feb. 1 with a 17-year-old girl at a hotel.

Two others are charged with trafficking for allegedly selling the girl’s services to about 30 men in January and February. Goodman was sentenced in 2015 to 11 to 23 months in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of indecent assault involving a boy in 2001 at Camp Menachem in Pennsylvania, where he was a counselor. *Source: Courier News, 2-19-18*

**Maurice Frazier**, 51, Indianapolis: Coercion and enticement, sexual exploitation of a child, possession of child pornography, offense by a registered sex offender and 6 counts of receipt of child pornography. Frazier, associate minister at Nazarene Missionary Baptist Church, is accused of multiple assaults on a 14-year-old girl he met through the church.

He’s also accused of persuading the girl to send nude photos of herself and threatening to retaliate if she reported him to police, according to the U.S. Attorney’s Office. Frazier is married with 4 children. *Source: Indianapolis Star, 2-15-18*

**Otho Schilling**, 58, Mount Hermon, LA: Theft of government funds, amounting to over \$200,000. Schilling, pastor of a unidentified church in Bush between 2005-16, is accused of concealing his earnings and employment from the Social Security Administration while receiving Retirement, Survivors and Disability Insurance of \$1,728 a month.

He had the church pay personal expenses such as health care and insurance premiums, car payments and a personal land note in lieu of being paid a salary, the indictment said. *Source: Times-Picayune, 2-15-18*

**Brian S. Dicken**, 37, Winchester, VA: 2 counts of taking indecent liberties with a child. Dicken, former associate pastor of Church of Christ at Mountain View, is accused of assaults on a girl younger than 18 in late 2014 and early 2015.

He’s listed as lead minister on the website for

Broad Creek Christian Church, New Bern, NC, including a photo with his wife and 6 children. *Source: Winchester Star, 2-15-18*

**Anthony Oelrich**, 51, St. Cloud, MN: 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct. Oelrich, pastor at Christ Church Newman Center Catholic Student Community, was arrested after an investigation of alleged sexual misconduct involving an adult woman.

In 2014, parishioners got a written notice that Oelrich was taking “voluntary leave for ‘depression, anxiety, and stress’” to receive treatment at St. Luke Institute, which provides mental health services for priests, deacons and members of religious communities. *Source: St. Cloud Times, 2-13-18*

**Gerardo Martinez**, 52, New Port Richey, FL: 2 counts of sexual battery/custodial authority solicits victim. Martinez, pastor of Miracle Christian Church, is accused of having sex with a 17-year-old girl on multiple occasions from April to October 2017 after telling her she had multiple personalities and that one of them was possessed by a demon.

They allegedly had sex in a back room at the church, at her home and in the parking lot of a Publix grocery store. *Source: WFLA, 2-12-18*

**Douglas Rivera**, 40, Baldwin Park, CA: Child molestation, indecent exposure and burglary. Rivera, pastor of God’s Gypsy Christian Church in Glendale, is accused of masturbating in his pickup parked outside a motel room occupied by 2 girls from China ages 10 and 13.

He masturbated and stared at the girls for about half an hour before knocking on the door, forcing his way inside and sexually assaulting one of the girls, alleged Covina police Lt. Trevor Gaumer. Surveillance video led to his arrest. *Source: Valley Tribune, 2-12-18*

**An unidentified woman** in her 50s was arrested in Israel and awaits extradition to Australia on 74 counts of sexual abuse of girls at an ultra-Orthodox school she headed in Melbourne. She allegedly molested 3 sisters separately at Adass Israel School from 2001-08 to “get them ready” for marriage. She fled to Israel in 2014.

The sisters allege they were targeted because they came from a dysfunctional home. *Source: Haaretz, 2-12-18*

**Richard Cecil**, 47, N. Fort Myers, FL: Soliciting prostitution. Cecil, the former pastor of The Father’s House who now runs a ministry with his wife from their home, is accused of offering to pay \$200 to an undercover officer for sex at a hotel.

“Richard’s extensive Hebraic insight, humorous,

ness and indecent exposure. Gregory, pastor at Waterfront Christian Community Church, was allegedly found by police in the back seat of a vehicle with another man naked and tied up in the front seat.

A citizen called police after allegedly seeing the naked man exit the vehicle and expressed concern because it was parked in view of his daughter’s bedroom window.

“I was counseling a young man with a drug problem,” Gregory told a reporter. “It did turn strange, but it wasn’t my doing, OK? . . . And I was adamant that I’m not participating in that way. And so that’s when the police pulled up, and they assume things, but I’m standing by my story.” *Source: KDKA, 2-10-18*

**David Cooper**, 43, Eloise, FL: Sexual battery and lewd exhibition on a victim under 12. Cooper, pastor of Mountain Movers Ministries, is accused of exposing himself 4 times last year to a 7-year-old girl.

According to the complaint, the girl told her mother that Cooper put his “pee pee” in her “no-no” several times and that Cooper told the girl that a woman she knew let him do it to her when she was little.

An affidavit alleged the woman, now 32, told investigators Cooper molested her for about 2 years, starting when she was 10. Cooper apologized to her several times in a phone conversation deputies listened to, Sheriff Grady Judd said. *Source: Lakeland Ledger, 2-9-18*

**David P. Carson**, 63, Tampa, FL: Sexual assault. Carson, pastor at In My Father’s House Church and a math teacher at Hillsborough Community College, is charged with assaulting a 14-year-old girl. Another adult allegedly witnessed part of the attack. *Source: WFTS, 2-8-18*

**Caleb Gaston**, 21, Wichita, KS: Aggravated indecent liberties with a child. Gaston, who worked at Kid Zones at both the Downtown and East YMCAs, is accused of assaulting a 4-year-old girl in January. Kid Zone employees watch children while parents are exercising or taking classes. Areas are surveilled by video.

Gaston’s employment at Plymouth Learning Center, a church preschool, was “terminated on 10/9/17 due to one complaint of inappropriate touching,” said a statement from Plymouth Congregational Church. *Source: Wichita Eagle, 2-6-18*

**Barbara L. Fouts**, 56, Dennison, OH: 2 counts of grand theft. Fouts, treasurer of Pleasant Valley United Methodist Church, is accused of stealing from the church from 2012-16. “The accountant found that there were \$63,299.60 in disbursements that could

*Statesman, 2-5-18*

**Kenneth L. Fairbanks**, 61, Greensboro, NC: 4 counts of committing a lewd and lascivious act on a child under 16. Fairbanks, pastor at Faithworks Ministry, is accused of assaults on 4 church members from 1997 to 2016. *Source: WGHP, 2-1-18*

**Garry Evans**, 72, and **Gay Evans**, 70, Rushville, IN: Criminal trespass. Gay Evans is also charged with resisting law enforcement. The couple are accused of refusing to leave a residence where they wanted to speak with their son’s girlfriend. A family member ended up chasing them off with a baseball bat.

Garry Evans, pastor of Rushville Baptist Temple, was arrested in October 2017 on multiple counts of child molestation and sexual battery involving girls ages 3, 5 and 7. He tried unsuccessfully to kill himself after another alleged victim came forward. It’s unclear if the sexual charges are tied to the trespassing. *Source: Greensburg Daily News, 2-1-18*

**John A. Sarro**, 76, Elkton, MD: Unlawful sexual intercourse and unlawful sexual contact. Sarro was pastor at St. Helena Catholic Parish in Bellefonte, DE, in 1991-94, when the crimes involving a girl under 16 are alleged.

He was removed from public ministry in 1997 by the Diocese of Wilmington after allegations of sexual abuse in the 1980s in New Guinea, where he was serving as a Marist missionary. He’s been living in a monitored residence since 2002, according to the diocese. *Source: News Journal, 1-31-18*

**Dorothy Nicolo**, 70, Tallahassee, FL: Grand theft, fraud to obtain over \$50,000, illegal use of credit cards and passing a forged instrument. Nicolo, volunteer treasurer for 24 years at Aenon Baptist Church, is accused of stealing \$119,000 from the church between 2012-17. *Source: Tallahassee Democrat, 1-25-18*

**Matthew F. Pinder**, 43, Palm Harbor, FL: Sexual battery with custodial authority. Pinder taught at Calvary Christian High School in 2009 when the incidents with a 16-year-old student are alleged. Before that he taught at Indian Rocks Christian School.

Authorities suspect there are other victims. Pinder allegedly admitted to detectives he assaulted the student at least twice. *Source: Tampa Bay Times, 1-25-18*

**Harry Maxwell**, 66, Shermans Dale, PA: Unlawful delivery of a controlled substance, criminal use of a communication facility and drug possession.

Maxwell, youth pastor at an unidentified church, is charged with selling the painkiller Oxycodone. *Source: pennlive.com, 1-26-18*

**Ralph G. Stair**, 84, Canadys, SC: 3 counts of criminal sexual conduct, assault with the intent to commit criminal sexual conduct, kidnapping, assault, burglary and criminal sexual conduct with a minor. Stair, founder of Overcomer Ministry, came under investigation after video surfaced from church services from last July to October. One clip shows him calling a 12-year-old girl to the front and putting his hand between her breasts. “Growing up,” he said, adding while she returned to her seat, “I’m gonna touch those things till nobody else can touch ‘em.”

Charges involve at least 35 alleged acts involving another girl in 1998-99. Stair pleaded guilty in 2002 to assault and battery for sexual touching of 2 underage girls from the church. *Source: CBS Charleston, 1-18-18*

## Pleaded / Convicted

**Tadhg O’Dalaigh**, 74, Dublin: Guilty by jury of indecent assault on a 12-year-old boy at Christmas time in 1980 at an Irish boarding school where O’Dalaigh taught as a Sacred Heart Missionaries Catholic priest.

The complainant, now in his 40s, testified O’Dalaigh came in the sick bay to check his temperature: “He put his hand down and touched my testicles and penis. He did that. I just lay there. I didn’t know what to do. It was probably a minute, a minute and a half. That is a long time when he is at me. He stopped. He left.”

O’Dalaigh has earlier assault convictions in 1999 and 2014. *Source: Irish Examiner, 2-22-18*

**Ifor Whittaker**, 73, London: Guilty by jury of 7 counts of gross indecency and conspiracy for assaults on a boy between 1987-93, starting when the boy was 10 and Whittaker was an Anglican priest.

**Roy Cotton**, a priest who died in 2006 and was never charged, facilitated the abuse with Whittaker, according to the prosecution. *Source: BBC, 2-22-18*

**Charles A. Barnett**, 72, an Australian Catholic priest sentenced to 6½ years in 2010 for molesting 4 teen boys between 1977-94, pleaded guilty to indecent assault and persistent sexual exploitation of 2 more victims. One boy testified Barnett sneaked into his room through a window to molest him. *Source: ABC Online, 2-19-18*

**Donald C. Biggs**, 39, Medford, OR: Pleased guilty to transporting with intent to engage in criminal sexual activity. Biggs, youth pastor at Mountain Church, was accused of secretly recording girls in the nude at his home and on church trips between 2012-14.

It’s alleged he encouraged “messy” activities requiring students to change clothes or shower. At church camps he allegedly used “punishments” such as covering a camper in syrup and flour. *Source:*



Wayne Trotta sent this photo of the marquee from Red Mount United Methodist Church in East Berlin, Pa. “It’s either a quote from a Trump University textbook, or from someone with a serious case of Double Entendre Deficit Disorder,” writes Trotta.



Mail Tribune, 2-16-18

**Harry L. Thomas**, 74, Medford Township, NJ: Pleaded guilty to aggravated sexual assault, endangering the welfare of a child and 3 counts of sexual assault. Thomas, pastor of Come Alive Church, admitted molesting 5 girls between the ages of 7 and 10 from 1999 to 2015.

Thomas founded Creation Festivals, which now bills itself as the largest U.S. Christian music festival, and Come Alive International, a missionary organization. *Source: Courier Post, 2-16-18*

**An unidentified Catholic priest**, 58, was arrested in Mexico City on charges of aggravated sexual abuse of a minor for allegedly assaulting a 12-year-old girl after her mother left her at church to study catechism. The girl fled and her mother contacted police. *Source: AP, 2-16-18*

**Thomas Thanninilkumthadathil**, 44, Kallara, India: Rape, theft, criminal intimidation and voluntarily causing hurt. Thanninilkumthadathil, a Syro-Malabar Catholic priest, is accused of raping and robbing a 42-year-old Bangladeshi woman from England after they met on Facebook.

The woman told police that he raped her repeatedly during her weeklong February visit and stole her gold jewelry, mobile phone and about \$1,800. *Source: The News Minute, 2-16-18*

**Matthew Tague**, 44, San Marcos, CA: Pleaded guilty to lewd acts on a child under 14. Tague, pastor at North Coast Calvary Chapel, allegedly admitted to investigators that he repeatedly molested a girl in 2016-17 when she was 12 and 13. He turned himself in after his wife caught him molesting a relative, an affidavit said. *Source: Union-Tribune, 2-15-18*

**John Bishop**, 54, Vancouver, WA: Pleaded guilty to unlawful importation of a controlled substance. Bishop, pastor at Living Hope Church, was arrested at the Mexican border in San Ysidro, CA, in possession of 282 pounds of marijuana. *Source: AP, 2-9-18*

**Lethebo Rabalago**, the South African “Doom Pastor,” was found guilty of 5 counts of assault and of contravening the Agricultural Stock Remedies Act by a court in Limpopo province.

Rabalago, prophet of Mt. Zion General Assembly, sprayed the insecticide Doom on multiple congregants in 2016, claiming it could cure various ailments, including cancer and HIV. *Source: BBC, 2-9-18*

James D. Arbaugh, 40, Stuarts Draft, VA: Pleaded guilty to traveling in foreign commerce to engage in illicit sexual conduct with a minor. Arbaugh admitted “engaging in illicit sexual conduct” with at least 21 boys as young as 5 in Haiti as a Mennonite missionary between 2008-17. *Source: Times-Dispatch, 2-6-18*

**Dennis Engelbrecht**, 58, Nevada, MO: Pleaded guilty to illegally collecting \$91,000 in Social Security disability benefits from 2011-15. Engelbrecht, pastor of Pentecostal Assembly of God, was paid a weekly salary of \$650 but failed to report his employment status, prosecutors said. *Source: Kansas City Star, 1-29-18*

Sentenced

**Jordan Baird**, 26, Warrenton, VA: 8 months in jail, 5 years’ probation and \$12,000 restitution to the victim’s family after a jury found him guilty of 5 counts of indecent liberties with a minor by a custodian. He pleaded no contest to electronic solicitation of a minor. Baird used his position as son of the leader of the Life Church and as a Christian pop singer to manipulate girls and women into having inappropriate relationships with him, prosecutors charged.

The judge barred testimony from 3 other alleged victims as prejudicial to Baird. According to testimony, the church ordered an investigation, which was conducted by Steve Dawson, a close friend of Baird and former co-pastor.

Prosecutor David Gross suggested Dawson left out key details of his probe when he was interviewed by police and refused to share his notes with law enforcement. *Source: Prince William Times, 2-21-18*

**Steve Brack**, Brookville, IN: 9 months’ home detention, 400 hours’ community service and \$5,217 restitution after pleading guilty to felony theft. Brack was accused of stealing from Whitcomb United Methodist Church, where he was a trustee, and from the Brookville Kiwanis Club.

A State Police detective testified that the restitution was likely only a fraction of what Brack stole because the statute of limitations barred charges for older suspected thefts. A church member said profits from the church’s county fair food tent went up 50% after Brack was not allowed to handle money. Thousands of dollars are also missing from the 1999 sale of the church parsonage. *Source: Democrat-American, 2-21-18*

**Alfredo P. Arias**, 51, Aurora, IL: 205 days in jail, with credit for time served, and deportation to Colombia after pleading guilty to battery. Arias lost his religious worker visa after he was charged with fondling 2 girls under age 6 as pastor at Sacred Heart Catholic Church. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 2-12-18*

**Robert Gamel**, 67, Merced, CA: 4 years in prison after pleading no contest to possessing child pornography. During a probation check, Gamel, former lead priest at St. Joseph Catholic Church in Los Banos, was found to be in possession of the same nude images of a female teenage parishioner he was convicted for in 2016.

Gamel told investigators the photos he kept in a



briefcase in a closet weren’t new and he wasn’t sure how to destroy them. “This isn’t rocket science,” Judge Jeanne Schechter said. “You just destroy it.” *Source: Sun-Star, 2-8-18*

**Thirty-one Pakistani Muslims** were sentenced for the April 2017 murder in Mardan of Mashal Khan, 23, a university student whom they accused of posting blasphemous material online. **Imran Sultan Muhammad** was sentenced to death, 5 others received life imprisonment and 25 others received 4-year sentences. Khan was stripped, beaten and shot before being thrown from his 2nd-floor dormitory.

Video footage shows a mob beating and stomping Khan’s lifeless body. A court determined the blasphemy charge was baseless. *Source: AFP, 2-8-18*

**Benjamin Nelson**, 27, Waco, TX: 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to online solicitation of a minor and 2 counts each of aggravated sexual assault of a child and indecency with a child. Nelson, pastor at Peoria Baptist Church and a seminary student at Baylor University, was accused of posing as a teen to meet and eventually seduce a 13-year-old girl. *Source: Tribune-Herald, 2-6-18*

**Benjamin L. Petty**, 36, Spencer, OK: 15 years’ probation, wear an ankle monitor for 2 years and sex offender registration after pleading guilty to rape, forcible sodomy and rape by instrumentation. Petty, a cook at a Texas church camp, was charged with raping a 13-year-old girl in 2016 after tying her up.

Prosecutor David Pyle said major factors in deciding not to seek prison time were that Petty is “legally blind” and that the family signed off on the plea agreement. The family has filed a civil suit. Defendants are the **First Baptist Church of Terrell**, the **Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma** and the **Country Estates Baptist Church**. *Source: newsok.com, 1-30-18*

**Joni Stinson**, 42, Ottumwa, IA: 10 years in prison suspended, 5 years’ probation and \$160,000 restitution after pleading guilty to theft as bookkeeper at Ottumwa Christian School since 2010. She has paid back \$50,000 so far. *Source: Ottumwa Courier, 1-26-18*

**Stephen J. Howard**, 58, Fontana, CA: 308 years to life in prison for 32 convictions of lewd act upon a child, oral copulation of a person under 16 and sodomy of a person under 18. Before his 2014 arrest, Howard was lead pastor at Muscoy United Methodist Church.

Prosecutors said the 4 male victims’ current ages range from 14 to 36. *Source: Fontana Herald, 1-25-18*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

**Cameron McDonald**, Lexington, KY, pastor of Southern Acres Christian Church, is accused in a suit filed by church member James Keogh of embezzlement, unlawful conversion of funds and unjust enrichment for allegedly using \$100,000 of a \$170,000 donation to pay the mortgage on his home. Keogh claims the 2016 donation was meant to pay off the church’s \$144,000 mortgage.

The complaint alleges McDonald fired the church’s office manager to stop her from providing financial information to law enforcement. *Source: Herald-Leader, 2-20-18*

**Louis Brouillard**, former Catholic priest, is accused by Guam plaintiff “ABL” of raping him at least 8 times in the parish rectory in 1971 when he was 14. Brouillard allegedly walked around naked before telling him it was “natural and normal” to have sex, the complaint says.

The church on Guam now faces 157 lawsuits

seeking at least \$1.03 billion in damages because of alleged abuse by priests and others associated with the church. *Source: Pacific Daily News, 2-19-18*

**Joseph White**, 81, founder of the Church of the Living God International, is accused in a suit filed by 5 male church members of sexual abuse and harassment over a period of more than 20 years. The Pentecostal church is headquartered in Columbus, OH, and has 102 locations worldwide. White, long dogged by abuse allegations, started it in 1994 after being forced out of the Church of the Living God.

Formal accusations were made last June to the church’s board of directors (2 members are White’s sisters) but results of its investigation haven’t been disclosed. *Source: Columbus Dispatch, 2-6-18*

**John Wright**, former pastor of Mid-City Church of the Nazarene in San Diego is accused in a suit of sexual harassment and rape by plaintiff Amy McClanahan, 23. The church is a co-defendant for alleged negligent hiring/supervision. McClanahan met Wright in 2014 when he was her professor at Point Loma Nazarene University. She told him that a family member had molested her and he offered to counsel her, the complaint says, and they eventually started having sex. Wright’s wife was co-pastor.

The Wrights have countersued, alleging the relationship was consensual and that McClanahan had “agreed at all times that she would keep the relationship secret from all other persons” and that she exposed the affair only after John Wright broke it off

in October 2017. *Source: San Diego Reader, 2-1-18*

**The Catholic Archdiocese** of Santa Fe, NM, is being sued by 4 more men alleging sexual abuse as children by priests **Sabine Griego** and the late **Wilfred Bombardier**. Griego was removed from the priesthood in 2005. At least 74 similar suits have been filed in recent years.

An Albuquerque man, now in his 50s, alleges Bombardier repeatedly molested him at Blessed Sacrament Parish and told him “participating in this special altar boy training was his ‘ticket to heaven.’” *Source: Albuquerque Journal, 1-28-18*

**Robert and Cindy Litzinger**, former senior pastors at the Church for Life in Santa Maria, CA, are defendants along with the church in a suit filed by parishioner “Jane Doe,” who alleges sexual battery, assault and harassment from 2014-16. Doe a mother of 2 in her 30s, asserts that she has discovered over a dozen women who had similar experiences. Cindy Litzinger assisted, facilitated and encouraged Robert’s conduct, the complaint said.

Doe alleges that in church premarriage classes, Robert told women how to masturbate and have an orgasm to be “prepared and willing to do whatever their husbands wanted” and shared photos of him and his wife in bed.

Robert Litzinger allegedly groped Doe’s breasts and genitals during a prayer group meeting at his home, which Doe complained about to Cindy, who allegedly called that an “innocent mistake.” *Source: Santa Maria Times, 1-18-18*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

**First Baptist Church** of Columbia, SC, agreed to apologize and pay \$300,000 to settle a case involving a child who was allegedly molested by **Andrew McCraw**, volunteer youth mentor. “Joel Doe” and his parents alleged McCraw started molesting him about 6 years ago when he was 11.

“We are sorry that this young man was wronged and that our policies and procedures as well as our enforcement of those policies and pro-

cedures were insufficient to protect him,” said a statement read to parishioners at Feb. 4 services. A separate suit against McCraw is pending. *Source: Baptist Press, 2-6-18*

Finances

**The Catholic Diocese** of Rockville Centre, MD, awarded \$500,000 to Thomas McGarvey for alleged long-term sexual abuse in the 1980s by priest **Robert L. Brown** through a compensation fund set up by the diocese.

“Whatever settlement they gave me is not going to wipe out the pain that I went through,” said McGarvey, who was 16 when he went to Brown for counseling. Brown died in the mid-1990s. *Source: Newsday, 2-13-18*

**Walter Diggles**, 61, pastor at Lighthouse Church in Jasper, TX, and his wife **Rosie Diggles** have filed for Chapter 13 bankruptcy. They were convicted last year of wire fraud and money laundering for diverting \$1.3 million in hurricane relief money but haven’t been sentenced.

From 2007-12 while executive director at the Deep East Texas Council of Governments, Walter Diggles funneled money to a nonprofit he ran and then to church accounts for his family’s personal use, court documents said. *Source: Beaumont Enterprise, 1-12-18*

Legal Developments

**Fernando Sayasaya**, a Catholic priest accused of molesting 2 North Dakota boys, was extradited from the Philippines. He’s charged with 2 counts of gross sexual imposition for alleged abuse of underage siblings from 1995-98 while assigned to 2 parishes in the Fargo area.

A Philippines court ordered his extradition in 2010 but he appealed and wasn’t arrested until late 2017. *Source: AP, 2-15-18*

**A Brooklyn, NY, yeshiva** agreed to pay the city \$22,500 for continuing to hold religious services in a building the city deemed unsafe. **Abraham Low**, a rabbi and director of Yeshiva Kollel Tifereth Elizer, answered a criminal summons from the Department of Buildings and accepted the fine.

After a fire in August 2015, inspectors found the building had no certificate of occupancy and sprinkler system and was illegally occupied as a house of worship. Several orders to vacate the property were ignored. *Source: NYPost, 2-11-18*

Allegations

**Church of England** spending for sexual abuse issues has increased fivefold since 2014 and the church faces over 3,300 allegations of abuse by clergy and volunteers.

The vast majority relate to “children, young people and vulnerable adults within church communities,” Peter Hancock, bishop of Bath and Wells and the church lead bishop on safeguarding, told the general synod in London. A “deep sense of shame” pervades, he said. *Source: The Guardian, 2-10-18*

**Catholic priest Eduardo Perez**, a native Colombian who served parishes in Stockton and Modesto, CA, is being investigated by the Stockton Diocesan Review Board for alleged abuse of a 15-year-old girl who was a member of St. Stanislaus Parish in 1999. Modesto police have also been notified.

Perez later served St. Mary’s Parish in Stockton, where his replacement Dean McFalls resigned in 2013, telling parishioners he was about to become the father of a baby son and could no longer serve as a priest. *Source: Stockton Record, 2-9-18*

**Ronnie Gorton**, 39, Munford, TN, pastor of The Awakening Church, has been accused by a juvenile male of sexual assault, molestation and rape, most recently on Jan. 31. “Interviews are being conducted, evidence is being gathered,” said Billy Daugherty, Tipton County Sheriff’s Office chief deputy. “Currently these are just allegations. No warrants have been filed.”

Gorton’s friend told a reporter the pastor had a handgun and was talking about suicide, which law enforcement was notified about. *Source: Covington Leader, 2-2-18*

Removed / Resigned

**Carlos Pineda Gomez**, parochial vicar of Corpus Christi Catholic Parish in Council Bluffs, IA, was suspended due to an allegation of a “serious violation of boundary issues related to unwelcome advances toward an adult,” the Diocese of Des Moines announced. He was ordained in December 2016. Law enforcement has been notified. *Source: Daily Nonpareil, 2-20-18*

**Sean Kerins**, 27, West Middlesex, PA, was removed as a teacher at Kennedy Catholic High School and as pastor of Church of the Good Shepherd due to a series of inappropriate text messages to a student. Kerins was ordained last June and taught a sophomore course in morality and a senior course in Christian social living.

Diocese of Erie Bishop Lawrence Persico also announced the resignation of **David Poulson**, 64, pastor of St. Anthony of Padua Parish in Cambridge Springs, due to “credible allegations against Father Poulson regarding the sexual abuse of minors.” *Source: Sharon Herald, 2-13-18*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org



## ON THE ROAD



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker debated University of Leeds thermodynamics professor Andrew McIntosh on the topic of “Does God Exist?” before an overflow crowd of more than 240 students and FFRF members in the Gheens Science Hall and Rauch Planetarium at the University of Louisville on Feb. 26. Pictured are McIntosh, Baptist Campus Ministries organizer John Adams, Dan, and moderator Clint Elliott.



Dan Barker, front row center, spoke about FFRF and his new book *Free Will Explained* to an enthusiastic group of FFRF Kentucky members and “Reasonable Living” members on Feb. 25 at Sullivan University in Louisville, Ky.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF attorneys Elizabeth Cavell and Andrew Seidel taught a continuing legal education program at the Dane County (Wis.) Legal Association of Women luncheon in January. They discussed *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* — a recently argued case before the U.S. Supreme Court — and how the case threatens to redefine religious liberty and undermine civil rights laws across the country.



FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor was invited to speak Feb. 28 to an adult education class at Lakeview Lutheran Church in Madison, Wis. FFRF Co-President Dan Barker provided beautiful piano music, opening Annie Laurie’s talk with the traditional freethought anthem “Die Gedanken Sind Frei” and ending it with his jazz ballad and ode to romance and science, “It’s Only Natural.” This was Annie Laurie’s first talk before a Lutheran (ELCA) congregation, and she found the 60 or so in attendance to be supportive of separation between church and state. Annie Laurie and Dan are pictured with the very open-minded Pastor Dean Kirst.

### Freethought Today caption contest!

This month’s caption contest photo was taken by FFRF Member Emily Dunbar at a grocery store in Philadelphia. To enter, please write a humorous or witty caption to go along with this picture. Email your response to [caption@ffrf.org](mailto:caption@ffrf.org) by April 25.

The winner, chosen by FFRF staff, will receive an FFRF T-shirt! We will announce the winner and top runners-up in the May issue.



In early February, FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert, left, and Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel, right, lobbied members of Congress, including Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, center. They lobbied on important secular issues, including protecting the Johnson Amendment, ensuring that FEMA funds are not used to build churches, and sponsoring a Darwin Day resolution. As the unabashed heathens entered the office of one Texas representative, the Rolling Stones song “Sympathy for the Devil” fittingly began to play: “Please allow me to introduce myself . . .” This trip was part of FFRF’s “Educate Congress” initiative and has helped produce several important victories, including defeating one of Trump’s worst judicial nominees and defeating a measure that would have undone the Johnson Amendment.



# CRANKMAIL

Here we go with another installment of letters we have received from nonmembers, reprinted as received.

**Sad:** terminate your existence, because you obviously haven't a molecule of decency. what's even sadder is you chose this path? — *Michael C. Risinger*

**Wasting time:** I have only one thing to say to you people: Get the fuck over yourselves. There are real problems in the world that require solving. Stop wasting your time. Good gosh. — *David Wetmore*

**I feel sorry for you:** I am praying for all of you as your path is not going to end happy. When you leave this earth, you will be sadly disappointed that you have been wrong all along. Why would you want that for yourself? Why would you want that for your friends? Family? Kids? Don't you deserve better? Why would you be so determined to go against God? Do you realize that HE is the creator of all things? I really truly feel sorry for you. — *Kurt Sholly*

**Information:** You're stupid! — *Jason Walker*

**Freedom:** Why does the basic freedom and liberty of not wanting to pay for the consequences of a woman's free choice and free will to behave and act like a slut and a tramp have to be "religious"? If a woman wants to let a man defile her for her own pleasure out of wedlock, she can at least pay for contraception out of her own pocket. Just further proof that these "freedom from religion" and atheist groups are simply anti-Christian socialist groups who are ironically doing the work of internationalist Talmudic Jewry. There are plenty of sterile men and many who have had vasectomies that you sluts can pick from if you want to act like a \$10 whore, don't ask the rest of America to pay for your birth control pills unless you want to pay the rest of us for our greens fees — *Jack Brandt*

**Atheists:** When are you going to sue tow truck companies? Notice the towing piece in back is shaped like a cross. That can be your next project. How can atheists be offended by what they don't believe in? If you were true atheists, you wouldn't care. Why not just leave people alone, and live and let live? You would love living in North Korea where it is an atheist government. Christians have the life expectancy of dead men. — *Patrick McCarthy*

**Interpretation:** You need to "read" the Constitution, not interpret it. It IS a document that was drafted by the Founding Fathers, in very plain English, so ALL the common people could understand everything contained therein. There is no "separation of church & state" in this document, whatsoever. It states "Congress shall make NO law

respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof". Unless you are suffering from a cranial/rectal impaction, this should be very easy to understand. — *Jeff Backus*

**u'r purpose:** You are Bastards bound for hell! Stop what you are doing. — *Ray Judkins*

**Religion in school:** I just seen on the Cleveland Ohio news that u are complaining about a local high school near me that says a little prayer before there basketball games the school I am talking about West Branch My question is what are u doing to the schools that are teaching that Muslim garbage in schools across our country? Are there two different standards here or what ? To me Islam is not a religion and those type of people don't deserve to be among us Americans they have there own part of the world and we have ours I will be waiting for your response thank you — *Eric Neff*

**Shit hole arse wipes:** By disbanding...I pray daily that all you reprobates wind up in hell where you belong...you are despicable...amen... — *Allan Jones*

**Pray:** You should be ashamed of yourself stopping people who want to pray from praying if you don't want to pray that your choice to but the stop somebody else who wants to pray is just mean hearted don't you have anything better to do then to bother kid our great country that everybody wants to come to was built on God why are you trying to destroy it — *Gary Wagner*

**Wrong:** Hello. This is Steve Johnson. You have misinterpreted the idea of Separation of Church and State. I say shame on you for that. The thing is this, the Freedom From Religion Foundation is an Anti-American organization. It should be ashamed of itself. I mean it, the Freedom From Religion Foundation consists of a bunch of pathetic, good for nothing dweebs who obviously don't really give a care about the U.S. Constitution at all. As such, the Freedom From Religion Foundation needs to get the heck out of the United States of America and never, ever come back. The Freedom From Religion Foundation has absolutely no right whatsoever to be in the U.S of A. — *Steve Johnson*

**Go away!:** I saw your representative Dan on Ingram Angle. He is rude, disgraceful, arrogant and lacks the ability to present a cogent argument. I want nothing to do with your organization. — *Revonda Colbert*

**Nazis:** Just wanted to let you know that you are anti fredumb if you boycott thinking of any type. God bless you and have a great day .....nazi thinkers. You are what make people depressed. — *Jason Brusie*

## Holy Smoke

There is no heaven or afterlife~that is a fairy tale for people who are afraid of the dark.  
"We would know the mind of god" if there were a god, which there isn't.  
I am an atheist.  
Stephen Hawking 1942~2018



# Activist Anne Mardick dies

## IN MEMORIAM

Atheist activist and FFRF Life Member Anne Mardick died on Feb. 15.

She had been a member of FFRF since 2008 and was a founding member of FFRF's Valley of the Sun chapter in Arizona. She also founded and was president of the Greater Phoenix Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.



Anne Mardick

Mardick helped coordinate the billboard campaigns in Phoenix and Tucson in 2011. The billboards featured families, couples, a blind student with the statement: "Faith without reason is true blindness," a Spanish-speaking par-

ticipant and a plain-spoken bus driver. Mardick was a board member of both the Secular Coalition for Arizona and the American Civil Liberties Union of Arizona.

Besides being an FFRF Life Member, she was also a lifetime member of the Humanist Society of Greater Phoenix, the American Humanist Association and the National Center for Science Education. She was a Humanist minister and was the Humanist representative on the Arizona Interfaith Movement board of directors.

A retired telecommunications professional with nearly three decades of technical and leadership experience, Anne spent most of her career in new product development. She held director-level positions at both US West. (now CenturyLink) and Sprint. She earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and a master's degree in telecommunications.

## SECULAR INVOCATION

# Tom Waddell Maine Senate Feb. 15, 2018

Tom Waddell, president of FFRF's Maine chapter, has now opened sessions of both the Maine House and the Maine Senate by reading a secular invocation, both believed to be firsts.



Tom Waddell

On Feb. 7, 2017, Waddell spoke before the Maine House and was then honored by FFRF with its "Nothing Fails Like Prayer" award, given out at FFRF's annual convention.

This year, Waddell took it to the Senate, where he delivered the invocation on Feb. 15.

"Waddell made no reference to God or Jesus in his brief remarks, as many of the invocations that open sessions of the Maine Legislature do," wrote Charles Eichacker of CentralMaine.com.

Waddell was invited to give the invocation by state Sen. Shenna Bellows, who said in an interview that she has tried to bring an array of people with religious and nonreligious views into the statehouse.

"The invocation before the Senate is supposed to be open to all people of all faiths, including no faith," said Bellows, the former executive director of

the American Civil Liberties Union of Maine. "I think that religious liberty is a founding principle in our country."

Here are Waddell's remarks: Good morning, I am Tom Waddell, president of the Maine Chapter of the Freedom from Religion Foundation. We support everyone's religious freedom by advocating for the separation of church and state.

As you fulfill the Senate's solemn responsibility of making decisions that will affect everyone who lives in Maine, I urge you to rely on — and trust in — the collective character, honesty and integrity of your colleagues for guidance, today and every day.

The wisdom of our Founding Fathers has much to offer, as well, and I would like to close with words from two American presidents:

Thomas Jefferson reminds us that: "The purpose of government is to enable the people of a nation (or state) to live in safety and happiness. Government exists for the interests of the governed, not for the governors."

John Quincy Adams inspires us with: "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

Thank you all for the sacrifices each of you have made to be a member of the Maine Senate. We, the people of Maine, appreciate and rely on your collective wisdom and the personal commitment you have made to Maine's future.

Thank you.

## NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER CONTEST

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

The person who gives the best secular invocation will be invited to open FFRF's annual convention in 2018, receiving an all-expenses-paid trip to San Francisco Nov. 2-4, along with a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

### MORE INFO AT:

[ffrf.org/outreach/nothing-fails-like-prayer](http://ffrf.org/outreach/nothing-fails-like-prayer)



# Join FFRF in San Francisco from Nov. 2-4

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation in San Francisco for its 41st annual convention from Nov. 2-4 at the beautiful downtown Hyatt Regency. *(For information on guest speakers, see page 3.)*

The conference hotel features dramatic architecture, panoramic views and a waterfront setting, directly across from the iconic Ferry Building. If you’ve got some free time during the convention, you can explore the vibrant Embarcadero district, or head a bit further to explore famous attractions like Chinatown and Fisherman’s Wharf, or ride the ferry to Alcatraz.

The Hyatt features the world’s largest hotel lobby at 17 stories tall with 42,000 cubic feet of space. Each room features floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking cityscapes or the San Francisco Bay and comes with complimentary Wi-Fi.

## Hotel reservations

Reserve rooms now to avoid disappointment! Rooms (at \$230 plus tax) are being held for Friday and Saturday nights, and a slightly more limited number for Thursday. Phone directly to make your reservations: 1-888-421-1442 and use the code “Freedom From Religion Foundation.” Or go online at [ffrf.org/convention2018](http://ffrf.org/convention2018) for full convention information or reserve hotel rooms directly at [bit.ly/FFRF2018](http://bit.ly/FFRF2018).

## Registration

FFRF registration, always a deal, is only \$60 per member, \$65 per companion, \$110 non-member, and free for students and children. Take advantage of FFRF’s meal and registration package

(see order form below, including Saturday Nonprayer Breakfast plus the Saturday Banquet Dinner) to save \$20 (and get a chance to socialize with other members). Friday night dinner and Saturday lunch are on your own. The menus for the two Saturday meals (with veggie, vegan and gluten-free options) are:

Breakfast — Chef’s bakery selection, scrambled eggs, Hobb’s bacon, breakfast potatoes, juice and coffee.

Dinner — Potage Parmentier (potato leek soup), crispy shallots, chive crème fraîche, Champagne

brown butter chicken, tarragon mushroom fond, Cipollini onion and Comte risotto, steamed broccolini, French pear tart, frangipane, vanilla cream.

## General schedule

Arrange your travel schedule for the convention’s expanded hours and to take in a little sightseeing as well. The official starting time is 1 p.m. Friday, Nov. 2, continuing through Saturday night. FFRF’s membership and state representative meetings take place Sunday morning with a noon adjournment.

The convention will include irreverent music, complimentary appetizers on Friday afternoon and a complimentary Friday night dessert reception, plus the popular drawing for “clean” (pre-“In God We Trust”) currency on Saturday night.

Return the handy registration form on this page or sign up at: [ffrf.org/convention2018](http://ffrf.org/convention2018).

• • •

For information on FFRF’s convention speakers, see page 3.



The Hyatt Regency in downtown San Francisco.



The Regency Club Lounge at the Hyatt offers guests spectacular 360-degree panoramic views of San Francisco and the bay.

## FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION NATIONAL CONVENTION SAN FRANCISCO | NOVEMBER 2-4, 2018 2018 CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: [ffrf.org/convention2018](http://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<br><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<br><i>(Non-member accompanying member)</i> | ___\$65  | \$___ |
| Non-member<br><i>Or join for \$40 and save \$5</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:

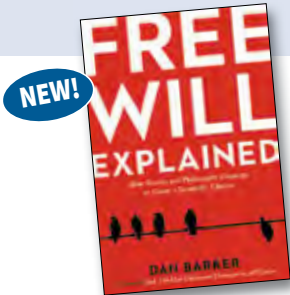


The Hyatt in San Francisco features a beautiful 17-story high atrium lobby.

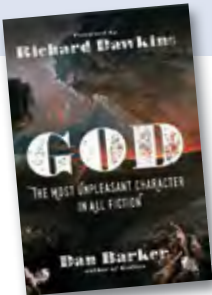
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# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

## Celebrates

# PLUS



# Years of Activism

Our warmest gratitude to you — our members — for your support, activism and participation.  
FFRF would not be here without you.



Founding meeting as national group in April 1978. Includes founders Anne Gaylor, Margaret and C.J. Richards, Jo and Charline Kotula.



Second lawsuit: Anne & Attorney Karen Julian.






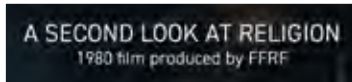


Anne Gaylor on 'Phil Donahue Show' in 1978.



All photos on this page by Paul J. Gaylor

Ruth Green.

| 1976                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 1977                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 1978                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | 1979                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 1980                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>'Pray on your own time.' FFRF starts a regional group to combat governmental prayer (Dane County, Wis.).</p> <p>First FFRF lawsuit: Feds order USPS nationwide to stop issuing religious-themed cancellations.</p> <p>Annie Laurie Gaylor stops 122-year commencement prayer abuse at University of Wisconsin-Madison.</p>  | <p>'Angels off public payroll.' FFRF ends school funding of nativity pageant at Wisconsin Capitol.</p>  <p>John Sontarck, FFRF's original third founding member, dies.</p> | <p><b>FFRF goes national!</b></p>  <p>Convention speakers: Supreme Court victors Vashti McCollum, Roy Torcaso.</p>  <p>FFRF pickets Catholic Church.</p> | <p>First paid employee (part-time): Sheila Thompson.</p>  <p>First student essay contest established.</p> <p>FFRF removes cross from Terry Andrae (Wis.) State Park.</p> <p>Anne and Annie Laurie Gaylor appear on NBC's 'Tom Snyder Show.'</p> | <p>FFRF publishes first bible warning label.</p> <p>FFRF publishes first book: <i>The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible</i>, by Ruth Hurmence Green.</p> <p>'Phooey on Falwell' FFRF picket.</p> <p>First FFRF T-shirt!</p> <p>First FFRF film: 'A Second Look at Religion.'</p>  <p>FFRF rents first office.</p> |



# The inside story of FFRF’s founding

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

This April marks the 40th anniversary of the national founding of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. FFRF actually began as a regional group two years prior. My mother, Anne Nicol Gaylor, then a well-known feminist activist, and I, a college student, were dismayed to learn that local govern-



mental bodies were opening with Christian prayers and decided we’d better do something about it. Thinking it would seem rather weak to go before the Madison City Council and

the Dane County (Wis.) Board merely as a mother-daughter team, we decided we’d identify ourselves as part of a group. We’d been bandying about the concept that freedom of religion necessarily encompasses the right to be free from religion. Anne coined what is now an oft-repeated phrase: There can be no true religious liberty without the freedom to dissent.

That’s the short story of how the Freedom From Religion Foundation was born. An elderly Milwaukee gentleman, John Sontarck, learned of our new venture and agreed to lend his name and moral support, becoming the third member of our nascent group (although, sadly, he died within the year).

A reporter at The Capital Times covered our appeal to a county committee on June 21, 1976. Ed Bark reported:

‘The Dane County Board’s Judiciary Committee didn’t exactly tell Anne Gaylor to go to the devil when she requested the board cease opening its meetings with a prayer Monday night. But several committee members informed her the proposed ban stands a snowball’s chance in hell of being approved . . .

‘Gaylor told the slightly bemused committee that: ‘It is not the business of governmental bodies to pray. When board members pray publicly, you inflict pressure, compulsion and embarrassment on those of your members and those of your audience who do not accept or share these private religious views.’

After reminding committee members that the Constitution is a ‘godless’ document designed to eliminate entanglements of church and state, Anne suggested they open instead with a reading from the Constitution ‘with special attention to the First Amendment.’ My suggestion that the board ‘pray on your own time’ became the news story’s banner headline. We ended our remarks by thanking the committee for not opening with a prayer. One of the committee members responded: ‘Amen.’

We went on to address the Madison City Council over its equally inappropriate prayer. Despite Bark’s prophecy, and although it took about a year, the city council dropped prayer altogether. The county board dropped explicit prayers, adopting rotating opening remarks by local alderpersons.

That fall, I ended the 122-year abuse of commencement prayers at UW-Madison. With knocking knees, I nervously went before the senior class officers. To my pleasant surprise, the students beamed as I pointed out the inappro-

priateness of a state university inflicting prayers on a diversity of students of every and no religion. They agreed with me, and the chancellor, rumored to be an agnostic, agreed with them. Within a month, the prayers were halted at the midterm commencements and from that point on.

As the timeline starting at the bottom of each page shows, within the first two years, we had a number of major successes, including winning FFRF’s first lawsuit within about a month of its filing. Satisfying victories brought resulting headlines and individuals seeking to join our new group. A past mistress of the soundbite before the term was known, Anne and her actions generated many wire and TV stories. By the spring of 1978, Anne was asked by onlookers across the country to take FFRF national.

FFRF was formally incorporated on April 5, 1978: ‘To promote the constitutional principle of separation of state and church and to educate the public in matters related to nontheism.’

The founding meeting of 15 individuals took place in Indiana on April 8, 1978. My father, Paul J. ‘Jody’ Gaylor, was one of the 15 founders. (An unfailingly devoted cheerleader of my mother, he became FFRF’s hardest-working volunteer.)

The rest is history, as they say. Some, but by no means all, historic highlights are recorded in the timeline on each page of this special section, along with a summa-

ry of legal accomplishments (see pages 6-7).

The ease of ending some of those major violations, I confess, gave us in those heady years of the 1970s an unrealistic perspective about how quickly activism could make a difference. We sincerely thought we’d just have to remind the nation of its secular roots and the pendulum would swing back. Perhaps one must not only be a committed reformer but also an optimist to found a controversial cause group!

And here we are today, grown from the original three of us to more than 32,000 members nationwide. I like to say that, as a freethinker in the United States, it may be the worst of times to be in court but the best of times generally, with ‘Nones’ now comprising 24 percent of the adult population and 36 percent of Millennials. About a fifth of Generation Z identify explicitly as atheists or agnostics.

FFRF has grown from an all-volunteer group to 25 full-time staff, including seven staff attorneys and two legal fellows. We produce our own newspaper and our own media, and create our radio and new “Freethought Matters” TV show, and Facebook Live! broadcast in the Stephen Uhl Friendly Atheist Studio.

Our legal work has always set FFRF apart, even before we had the budget to hire our first staff attorney in 2008. We’ve taken well over 70 completed lawsuits with about a dozen ongoing, winning two-thirds of them. We sponsor four student essay competitions and several student activist awards. Since 2006, we’ve never missed a week broadcasting Freethought Radio. And since 2007, we’ve placed thousands of messages on billboards throughout the nation and



Paul J. Gaylor



Carol Callahan, TV crew.



Anne Gaylor on CNN’s ‘Crossfire’ in 1983.



Dan Barker joins FFRF in 1984, appears on Oprah Winfrey Show.



Ishmael Jaffree, first Freethinker of Year.

1981

Anne Gaylor joins paid staff.  
July 7, Ruth Green dies.  
Writes: ‘Freedom depends upon freethinkers.’

FFRF’s second book: *Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So*, by Annie Laurie Gaylor.

1982

*Gaylor v. Reagan* lawsuit filed against ‘Year of the Bible.’ Judge James Doyle rips Congress over Year of Bible, won’t join it.

FFRF publishes third book: *Lead Us Not Into Penn Station*, by Anne Gaylor.

1983

Intro issue, Freethought Today, debuts in September.

Anne choked by anti-abortion woman after TV show in Philadelphia.

Four-city TV tour over Year of Bible.

Anne Gaylor on CNN’s ‘Crossfire.’

FFRF puts up first bus ads: ‘The bible: A grim fairy tale.’

1984

FFRF sues and wins over UW-Madison religious recruiting.

Launches ‘Christians Anonymous’ hotline.

Newspaper headline: ‘Anne Gaylor, Lightning Rod.’

Oprah Winfrey features FFRF on TV show with guests Anne, Annie Laurie, Dan Barker & Rita Bell.

FFRF solstice signs on city buses.

1985

Dan Barker’s first of 130 debates for FFRF takes place in Nashville.

Wisconsin state Senate (briefly) drops paid prayers after FFRF requests equal time.

FFRF moves to more spacious office.

FFRF sues over La Crosse Ten Commandments, Part I.

First ex-clergy panel at FFRF’s Minneapolis convention.

Isaac Asimov speaks at N.J. Chapter event.

Timeline photos this page by Paul J. Gaylor unless otherwise noted.



taken full-page ads in major newspapers. Despite censorship, we've placed our ad by Ron ('unabashed atheist . . . not afraid of burning in hell') Reagan on national and regional TV markets. We're proud of our honorary board, including our Honorary President Steven Pinker. (See their well wishes on the back page.)

We've grown from a dining-room-table operation to working out of a small rented office to acquiring a historic two-story building, Freethought Hall, in downtown Madison. Membership and staff growth compelled a major building expansion, completed in fall 2015, during which we added five stories plus a library — thanks to an incredible outpouring of support and some simply extraordinarily generous benefactors, including among many others,



Ken Proulx

Dan Barker, Ken Proulx, Charlie Brooks, Steve and Diane Uhl, Brian Bolton, Harold Erickson, Joel Landon and Wanda Beers, Richard and Beverly Hermesen, Rose Zerwick and Leonard Speisman.

Anne, FFRF's principal founder, died at 88 in June 2015, four years after my father, having lived long enough to tour the nearly completed expansion and to be feted in the Charlie Brooks Auditorium at its first event. She shared my pride that so many dedicated individuals have joined FFRF as members, and that so many professionals lend their talents as part of FFRF's committed staff.

I never imagined back in 1976 that I would spend my life working for free-thought and the First Amendment, although I can imagine nothing more important. Nor would I have imagined that writing a book about bible sexism for FFRF at my mother's request would be how I would meet my spouse-to-be

and partner at FFRF, Dan Barker, who had formerly preached from that nasty bible! We met for the first time on Oprah Winfrey's 'AM Chicago' in 1984. Dan had contacted me after reading my book, briefly explaining he had just left the ministry and was seeking information on FFRF. Busy working two jobs, I was impressed by his story but, infamously, never wrote him back. My mother did, asking Dan to address the upcoming national convention about his 'losing faith in faith' story. It was natural she'd suggest that Dan join us as a guest when Oprah put together a show about people losing their religion. When Dan joined the staff in 1987, he promptly set up FFRF's first computer database, then became FFRF's public relations director and 'ambassador of freethought,' and since then a major free-thought author, debater, speaker and co-founder of The Clergy Project.

From the beginning, it was our aspiration to do ourselves out of a cause and a job. Unfortunately, given the increasing threats to secularism and evidence-based social policy in the United States and worldwide, we appear to have job security. Our movement must work even harder to ensure that the candles of the Enlightenment are not snuffed out.



There is a back story about how FFRF really came to be founded: my family's freethought tradition. I'm a third-generation freethinker on my mother's side of the family. My mother explained that her quiet farmer-businessman father (who died long before I was born) was 'embarrassed' by religion. As she grew up, she felt that was the appropriate reaction. Anne didn't remember her mother,

To be free from religion is an advantage for individuals; it is a necessity for government.

who died when she was two. But my twin brother Ian recently uncovered a fascinating tidbit about our maternal ancestor, George Soule (or Soule), who came over on the Mayflower as a tutor, not a Pilgrim. Records show that on March 1, 1658, Goodwife Soule, George's wife, their son John and about 10 others were fined 10 shillings each for 'frequent absence from the public worship of God.' There appears to be no 'God gene' on my maternal side.

It was also lacking in my father, despite his growing up in a Christian Church Disciples of Christ family. He always said religion 'never took.' He despised the hypocrisy of the deacons and other holier-than-thou types in Depression-era segregated Missouri, who would mouth platitudes on Sundays — and ugly racism the rest of the week. The final straw was his humiliating full-body immersion baptism in front of the congregation when he was 12.

My parents wisely let their four children grow up free from religion. They 'devoutly' believed that children should be allowed to make up their minds once they were old enough to understand disturbing abstractions such as 'original sin.' They abhorred the idea of subjecting young children to neurosis-inducing concepts such as hell and eternal damnation. I like to say (in no apology to Robert Browning) that I was a secular Pippa: God wasn't in his heaven; all was right with my world.

But my mother realized in so many ways how much was wrong with the world, particularly for women. What opened our eyes to the vital need to keep religion out of our laws and policies was her activism on behalf of reproductive rights. In 1967, as a small-town

newspaper editor, Anne wrote the first editorial in the state calling for legalizing abortion. After that, her phone never stopped ringing. She was propelled into the abortion rights movement, beginning an abortion referral service and serving on the national board of NARAL.

As a junior high student, I happily trailed around the state of Wisconsin with my mother as she passionately worked to free women — tabling, speaking, lobbying and doing countless media interviews. When hearings were eventually held on abortion and contraception, we witnessed the rotunda of the Wisconsin state Capitol filled with nuns, priests and bused-in parochial school children. Their testimony invariably began, 'The bible says . . .' or 'God says . . .' We saw clearly that the only organized opposition to reproductive rights was religious. Abortion law reform came swiftly, but we'd learned a lesson we'd never forget: We must not allow religious doctrine or dogma to hold sway over our civil laws.

As Anne wrote in, 'Free From Religion' (from *Lead Us Not Into Penn Station*): 'In working for women's rights, I fought in a battle that would never end, because the root cause of the denial of those rights was religion and its control over government. Unless religion is kept in its place, all personal rights will be in jeopardy.'

'To be free from religion is an advantage for individuals; it is a necessity for government.'



To every friend, colleague, Board Member, State Representative, staffer, FFRF member (some of you, such as Dick Hewetson, dear members from the inception), and FFRF's many generous, generous donors among you, I thank you . . . for making FFRF's work, accomplishments and future achievements possible. Forward!



St. Louis convention, 1987. Participants don FFRF Freethinker sweatshirts.








State/Church: Keep Them Separate rally in Wisconsin Capitol, 1988. Founding member Joe Kotula is at left.



FFRF moves into Freethought Hall, thanks to many donors — the most generous being Blanche Fearn.

Kathleen Parr McKenna

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
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| <div>1986</div> <div>FFRF sues to halt Illinois State Chapel suggested by Pat Robertson.</div> <div>Wisconsin attorney general rules against pre-game prayer.</div> <div></div> <div>FFRF's first TV commercial, starring Sheila (Thompson) Jensen.</div> | <div>1987</div> <div></div> <div>Butterfly McQueen becomes 22nd FFRF Lifetime Member.</div> <div>FFRF's second TV commercial featuring Dan Barker airs in Honolulu, Madison, Wis., and Jefferson City, Mo. Censored elsewhere.</div> <div>Dan's 'Stay Away Pope Polka' airs in all U.S. cities pope visits.</div> <div>Media includes 'Sally Jessy Raphael,' Boston People Are Talking, Detroit's 'Kelly &amp; Co.'</div> | <div>1988</div> <div>Second FFRF film, 'Champions of the First Amendment,' debuts.</div> <div>FFRF publishes <i>Just Pretend: A Freethought Book for Children</i> by Dan Barker.</div> <div></div> <div>FFRF publishes <i>Betrayal of Trust: Clergy Abuse of Children</i> by Annie Laurie Gaylor.</div> | <div>1989</div> <div>Media: 'Good Morning America,' '700 Club,' 'Donahue.'</div> <div>Anne Gaylor wins <i>Gaylor v. Hanaway</i> lawsuit.</div> <div>Bible-free hotel room request gets international coverage.</div> <div>Butterfly McQueen at FFRF's convention in Atlanta.</div> <div></div> <div>FFRF sues over Ten Commandments at Colorado state Capitol.</div> | <div>1990</div> <div>FFRF complaint closes infamous Baptist home for children.</div> <div>Alabama FFRF chapter protests Cheaha State Park Chapel.</div> <div>FFRF moves into Freethought Hall, a two-story building in Madison, Wis., thanks to kind donors. (See painting, above.)</div> <div>Jack Kevorkian speaks at annual convention.</div> <div></div> |
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All photos this page by Paul J. Gaylor unless otherwise noted.

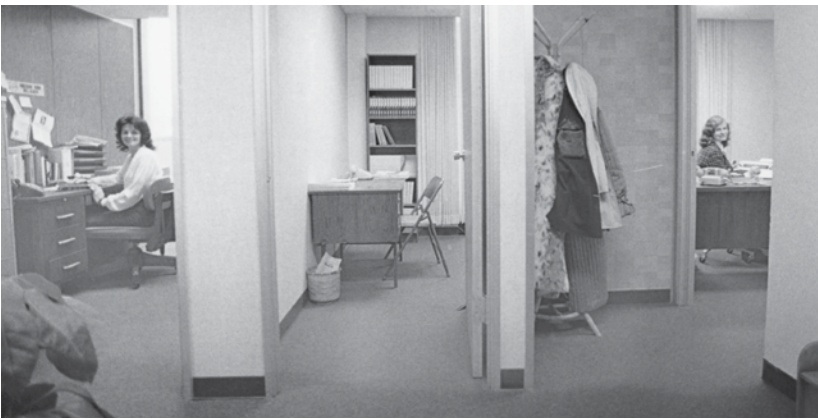


# Then and now



Paul J. Gaylor

FFRF's start as a volunteer, dining-room-table group. In this photo circa 1977, principal founder Anne Gaylor (top left) types while volunteers collate FFRF's newsletter.



Paul J. Gaylor

First FFRF office in 1980. In 1979, Sheila Jensen (left) was the first hired part-time help. Anne Gaylor became a paid staffer in 1981 after five years of volunteerism.



Freethought Today

FFRF paid cash in 1990, thanks to generous donors, including Blanche Fearn, for its office building in downtown Madison, Wis. Anne's frugal philosophy: A nonprofit should never go in debt, and FFRF never has.



Andrew L. Seidel

The groundbreaking in August 2013 for FFRF's five-story addition to accommodate FFRF's growth to more than 20,000 members and 16 staff that year. A decrepit building next door to Freethought Hall was razed for the addition, completed in 2015, thanks to very generous donors.



Phase 1, Lake Hypatia, Freethought Hall, Alabama, 1992.



FFRF abortion rights contingent, Washington D.C., 1992.



Chris Line

Freethought Hall today, fronted by FFRF's 25 full-time staff.



Brent Nicastro

Victorious plaintiffs in Wisconsin challenge of Good Friday holiday, 1996.



First-ever atheist sign in the Wisconsin state Capitol, 1996.

1991

FFRF sues over Waunakee, Wis., crèche.  
FFRF mentioned in Tom Robbins' novel, *Skinny Legs and All*.  
'Portrait of an Atheist' about Catherine Fahringer in San Antonio Express-News.  
Probable cause found, FFRF's ethics complaint over Alabama Gov. H. Guy Hunt.

1992

FFRF asks Wisconsin Sen. Herb Kohl for 'equal time' invocation. No go.  
FFRF publishes Dan Barker's *Losing Faith in Faith*.  
July 4: Lake Hypatia Freethought Hall Grand Opening.  
FFRF proclaims Oct. 12 'Freethought Day.'  
Catherine Fahringer flies FFRF banners over San Antonio.

1993

FFRF asks Sen. Russ Feingold to permit Barker invocation. No go.  
FFRF wins suit: Denver mayor enjoined from proclaiming day of prayer.  
'Religion is the problem' banner flies during pope's visit in Colorado.  
FFRF reissues *One Woman's Fight* by Vashti McCollum.

1994

FFRF stops federal money for Our Lady of the Rockies.  
  
FFRF challenges 'In God We Trust' motto.  
FFRF holds 'Good without God' event for schoolkids.

1995

FFRF's Alabama chapter sues Roy Moore (Pictured: Roger and Pat Cleveland.)  
  
Butterfly McQueen dies Dec. 22.

1996

Supreme Court refuses FFRF appeal over 'In God We Trust' suit.  
FFRF lawsuit overturns Good Friday holiday.  
First-ever atheist sign goes up in Wisconsin state Capitol.  
FFRF publishes first anthology of women freethinkers, edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor.



# Speaking of atheism . . .

By Dan Barker

When I gave my very first talk at the FFRF convention in Milwaukee in 1984 — the same year I came out of the ministry — I mentioned to Annie Laurie Gaylor that maybe this would help me earn some reverse-penance after 19 years of preaching the false hope of the gospel. Well, 34 years later, I think I can say, ‘Mission accomplished!’

During that time, I have had the great honor of speaking for FFRF in at least a thousand events in almost all 50 states and more than a dozen foreign countries. About half of those were on college campuses. Many were at UU Fellowships, Ethical Culture Societies, regional humanist, rationalist, atheist, skeptic, freethought groups, and even in a few churches. I was invited to tell my preacher-to-atheist story, but also to explain why I now work for a group that keeps state and church separate. I cannot count how many freethought concerts at the piano I’ve performed. (Unitarians are the best audience!) I



Dan Barker

especially enjoyed getting to know the struggling but vibrant freethought/humanist groups in countries like Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras and Cameroon. I think I now hold a world record: To date, I have done 130 public moderated debates with theists, mostly on the topic ‘Does God Exist?’ but also on morality, the resurrection of Jesus, the bible, the afterlife, and state/church separation. My opponents have been mainly conservative and evangelical Christians — such as Norman Geisler, Richard Swinburne, and the now-disgraced Dinesh D’Souza — but I have also debated liberal theologians, theistic philosophers, rabbis, Muslim apologists and even a Hindu Vedic astrologer.

My favorite debate was for the Oxford Union in 2012, where we wore tuxedos with bow ties and toasted the queen before Peter Millican, Michael Shermer and I went against Peter Hitchens (brother of Christopher), mathematician John Lennox and an Anglican priest on the proposition, ‘This house believes in God.’ Richard Dawkins was in the audience. After the debate, the moderator asked the people to ‘vote with your feet.’ Those in favor of the proposition exited through one door, and those agreeing with the opposition exited through another. The results: 143 for the proposition and 168 for the opposition. According to Oxford University, the atheists won! There is no God.

I can’t estimate the number of TV and radio interviews Anne Gaylor, Annie Laurie and I have done for FFRF. My first appearance on the national “Phil Donahue Show” in 1988 garnered more than 2,000 letters and phone calls in a pre-email era, giving our membership a huge boost. My appearance on the national “Oprah Winfrey Show” was followed by invitations to the “Sally Jessy Raphael Show,” “The Daily Show” (twice), Morton Downey Jr., Maury Povich, “Good Morning America” (twice), many Fox News shows (such as ‘Fox and Friends,’ Sean Hannity, Bill O’Reilly, Tucker Carlson, Laura Ingraham), and “Religion and News Weekly” on PBS. I even enjoyed being thrown off the Eric Bolling show on Fox Business Network one



Paul J. Gaylor

My first talk before an FFRF convention in 1984, as a ‘baby atheist.’



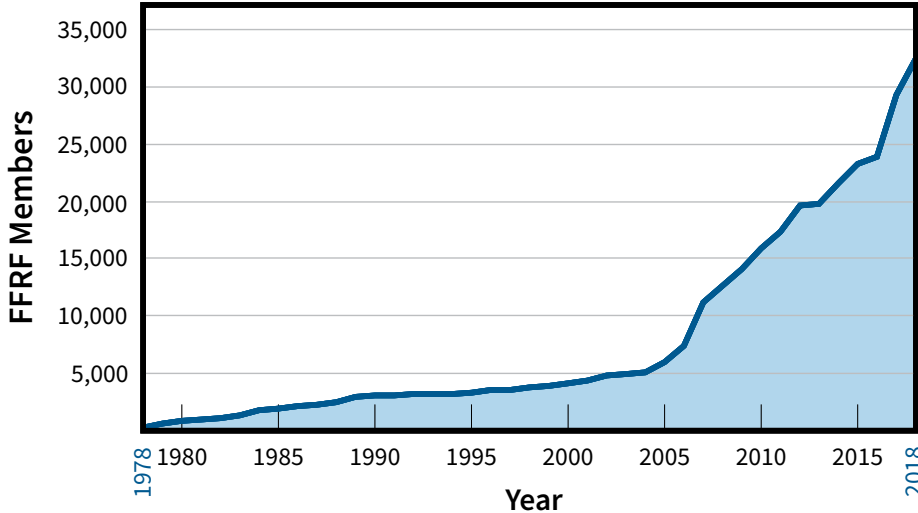
Brent Nicastro

For many years, I teamed up with the Arizona Republic cartoonist Steve Benson, a prominent ex-Mormon, to put on our dog-and-pony show, Tunes ‘N’ Toons.

December. But I think my favorite appearances were on national television in Guatemala and Honduras, where I truly got to do some reverse-missionary penance, in Spanish, for those years I preached in Latin America. One thing I was surprised to learn is that I truly enjoy speaking before a ‘hostile’ audience, starting with that first appearance on Oprah Winfrey’s ‘AM Chicago’ in 1984, where I first met Anne and Annie Laurie. It is much more fun (and important) than preaching! Once a preacher, always a preacher, I guess. A local Baptist minister stood up in the audience at one of my debates and yelled ‘Blasphemy!’ I thanked him for the compliment. During First Amendment

Week at the University of Iowa, someone went backstage and turned off my microphone while I was talking about free speech. Annie Laurie and I once drove to a private college in Minnesota where we had been invited by students to talk about FFRF, only to find that the administration had locked the doors and cancelled the event. The Westboro Baptist Church once protested outside one of my debates, which I considered a real honor. It is satisfying to see the growth and success of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. We are now in a strong position to continue spreading the ‘good news’ of freethought and secularism. Dan Barker is FFRF co-president.


FFRF Membership Growth 1978 – 2018



1997

FFRF wins second Wisconsin Good Friday suit.

FFRF sues over papal shrine in Cherry Creek Park, Colorado.




Lake Hypatia sign

1998

FFRF files suit challenging Wisconsin subsidy to Catholic schools.


Partial victory by FFRF over Marshfield (Wis.) Jesus shrine.



Doug Jager by Atheists in Foxholes monument, Lake Hypatia. This monument and others were created by veteran Bill Teague.

1999

FFRF’s World Famous Atheist Cookbook debuts.




First Atheists in Foxholes Award was dedicated on July 4 at Lake Hypatia. Grand opening of new auditorium.

Nobel Laureate Steven Weinberg, pictured with Anne Gaylor (adjacent right), receives the first Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

2000

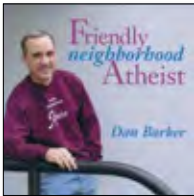
FFRF prevails in Marshfield, Wis., shrine case; shrine may not stay on public land.

FFRF lawsuit with minister stops public funding to assist clergy to develop marriage standards.



2001

‘Friendly Neighborhood Atheist’ music CD released by FFRF.




FFRF wins before appeals court, stopping direct internet subsidy to parochial schools.

FFRF gets city of Milwaukee to remove first Eagles Ten Commandments monument placed on public property (see photo at right).

2002

FFRF wins first court victory in nation against faith-based funding (Faith Works of Milwaukee).

‘Scopes II’ FFRF victory halts illegal bible instruction in Rhea County, Tenn.



Dan Barker



# 40+ years of court victories!

When education alone is not successful, and the circumstances are either egregious or the facts particularly promising, we go to court. FFRF has filed and completed well over 70 lawsuits, with a dozen ongoing and more in the planning stages, winning about two-thirds to date. FFRF couldn't do it without its all-important local plaintiffs, who deserve an ovation!

Here is a recap of FFRF's successful litigation over the years:

**1977**  
**Anne Gaylor v. United States Post Office**  
Federal lawsuit forces USPS to suspend nationwide religious cancellations for St. Vincent de Paul. Attorney: Karla Dobinski.

**1984**  
**FFRF, Jon Foust, Anne and Annie Laurie Gaylor v. University of Wisconsin**  
FFRF got the university to stop asking for and giving student contact info to area churches and campus ministries. Attorney: Richard Jacobson.

**1993**  
**FFRF, Colorado Chapter of FFRF, Robert Fenn and Lee Whitfield v. City and County of Denver**  
Successfully enjoined the Denver mayor's office from co-sponsoring a Day of Prayer against Violence on Dec. 5, 1993. Attorney: Robert R. Tiernan.

**1996**  
**Alabama Freethought Society, Roger Cleveland v. Alabama State Parks**  
State park system agreed to take down crosses, remove 'chapel' title from buildings and state maps, and give groups 'first come-first service' rights. Attorney: ACLU; Pamela Sumners.

**1996**  
**Alabama Freethought Society, Gloria Hersheiser, Al Faulkenberry v. Judge Roy Moore**  
The chapter and members in Gadsden sued Moore as county judge for inflicting prayers on juries and erecting a Ten Commandments plaque in his courtroom. Won, thrown out on technicality in 1998 after interference of governor. Attorney: ACLU; Joel Sogol.

**1997**  
**FFRF, Anne & Annie Laurie Gaylor, Dan Barker, Samuel M. and Jennifer Essak, Richard Uttke and Michael Hakeem v. Tommy Thompson & John E. Litscher**  
FFRF overturned Wisconsin's Good Friday holiday mandating worship between 11 a.m.-3 p.m. on Good Friday and closing government offices at noon. Attorney: Jeffrey Kassel.

**1997**  
**FFRF, Alan and Mary Porath, Floyd Olson, Esther Mattson v. Ozaukee County**  
FFRF mopped up its Good Friday victory to force county offices to stay open. Attorney: Jeffrey Kassel.

**1998**  
**Julie Wells and Jeff Baysinger v. Lochhead**  
Challenge of shrine commemorating mass by Pope John Paul II during his 1993 appearance at Cherry Creek State Park removes religious phrases, image of boy



FFRF's current legal team includes (front row, from left) constitutional attorneys Andrew Seidel, Elizabeth Cavell, Patrick Elliott, Legal Director Rebecca Markert, (back row, from left) Legal Assistant Whitney Steffen and constitutional attorneys Colin McNamara, Madeline Ziegler, Ryan Jayne, Sam Grover and Chris Line.

praying and pope blessing someone. Attorney: Robert R. Tiernan.

**2000**  
**FFRF and Clarence Reinders v. City of Marshfield, Wis.**  
Challenge of statue of Jesus with words 'Christ Guide Us on Our Way' in public park resulted in city selling land with shrine to Knights of Columbus, which had gifted shrine. Appeals court ruled sale did not remedy violation of shrine in public park, ordering erection of wall or fence with visible disclaimer. Attorneys: varied.



Clarence Reinders

**FFRF, Anne and Annie Laurie Gaylor, Dan Barker and Rev. Charles Wolfe v. Joe Leean and Susan Dreyfus**  
Nationally watched law to create and fund state coordinator to 'assist' clergy to develop 'community-wide standards of marriage,' ruled unconstitutional. Attorney: James Friedman.

**2001**  
**FFRF, Anne and Annie Laurie Gaylor, Dan Barker v. Mark D. Bugher, et al.**  
Appeals court upheld lower court ruling in favor of FFRF that direct cash grants to religious schools to reimburse them for internet linkage access is unconstitutional. Attorney: James Friedman.

**2002**  
**FFRF, Anne and Annie Laurie Gaylor, Dan Barker v. Scott McCallum, et al.**  
FFRF wins first fully adjudicated federal lawsuit challenging direct funding of a faith-based agency, Faith Works, a Milwaukee group

dedicated to bringing 'homeless addicts to Christ.' Attorney: Richard L. Bolton.

**2004**  
**John Doe, Mary Roe & FFRF v. Sue Porter, Rhea Co. Board of Education**  
The Sixth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled 51 years of bible instruction in Rhea Co. (Dayton, Tenn.) schools unconstitutional in 'Scopes II,' a practice started after the Scopes Trial. Attorney: Alvin Harris.

**FFRF, Edith Paxman, Ron Calvert, James Soular v. Montana Office of Rural Health**  
FFRF successfully challenges funding and merger of two Montana state offices with the 'Montana Faith-Health Cooperative.' Attorney: Richard L. Bolton.

**2005**  
**Sue Mercier, Hank Zumach, FFRF & 20 others v. City of La Crosse, Wis.**  
Some of the La Crosse plaintiffs, including principal plaintiff Sue Mercier (second from right, standing) and Hank Zumach (fourth from right, standing), who recruited many plaintiffs.

In Round II of FFRF's challenge of Ten Commandments marker in a public park in La Crosse, Wis., 22 individuals of no and various religious persuasions became plaintiffs. Following the suit, the city sold a small parcel of the park containing the marker to the Eagles, which had gifted the decalog originally. The city and Eagles were represented by Pat Robertson's legal group. A resounding ruling by District Judge Barbara B. Crabb ruled against this sweetheart sale as a remedy. The appeals court approved the sale, but demanded more fences and disclaimers. Attorney: James Friedman.

**2006**  
**FFRF, Anne and Annie Laurie Gaylor, Dan Barker v. Jim Towey, Director of White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives**  
Lawsuit forced HHS to discontinue funding MentorKids or other faith-based mentoring groups. Mentorkids USA was an offshoot of Watergate felon Chuck Colson's Prison Fellowship Ministries. Attorney: Richard L. Bolton.

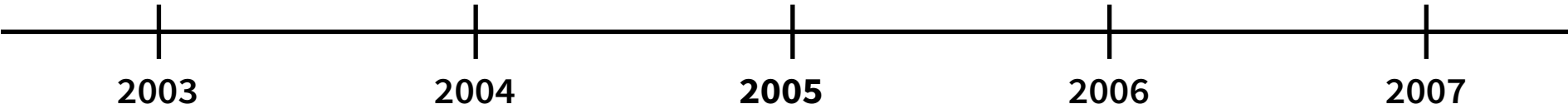
**2006**  
**FFRF, 7 Minnesota members v. University of Minnesota**  
Minnesota agreed to drop plans to sponsor a 'faith health leadership course' and to remove itself from a 'faith health consortium' intended to be a national model. Attorney: Richard L. Bolton.

**FFRF, Anne and Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker v. Gonzales**  
The Federal Bureau of Prisons, following FFRF's suit, dropped plans to set up 'single-faith' residential re-entry programs at one or more piloted institutions. Attorney: Richard L. Bolton.

**2007**  
**FFRF, Craig Gosling, John Kiel, Sean O'Brian and Diana O'Brian v. Indiana Family and Social Services**  
Suit ends first chaplaincy for state workers in nation, hiring pastor to bring 'faith into the workplace' for state employees in Indiana's Family and Social Services Administration. State abolished chaplaincy and fired chaplain, ending suit. Attorney: James Friedman and co-counsel.

**FFRF, Doe, Doe Child, Roe, Roe Children, Zoe v. Cherry Creek School District**  
Challenged program, '40 Developmental Assets,' linked to the Lutheran Brotherhood, including Asset 19 urging child to spend 'one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.' District agreed to add 'secular (nonreligious)' to the asset. Attorney: Robert R. Tiernan.

**2009**  
**FFRF, Gail and Wayne Vann, Taku Ronsman, Wendy Coriell, et. al, v. City of Green Bay, Wis.**  
Suit dismissed after city agreed not to



FFRF sues Montana over merger with faith health co-op. First of 10 victorious court cases against the faith-based initiative handled by outside counsel Rich Bolton.



Brent Nicastro

FFRF prevails in second challenge of La Crosse Ten Commandments. (Final win, 2005.)



FFRF wins lawsuit against faith-based funding in Montana health co-op case.

FFRF wins first court victory halting funding in progress under faith-based initiative, Mentorkids USA (Ariz.).

Barker represents atheism at World Religions Conference.

Media include 'The O'Reilly Factor', CNN, national CBS.

Dr. Oliver Sacks receives 2005 Emperor Has No Clothes Award.



Brent Nicastro

FFRF's winning challenge of Faith-based Office at White House, Cabinets appealed to Supreme Court.

Julia Sweeney performs 'Letting Go of God' at annual convention.



Brent Nicastro

FFRF publishes Rhymes for the Irreverent by Yip Harburg with Yip Harburg Foundation, illustrated by Seymour Cwast.



Freethought Radio, which debuted in 2006, goes national, on 30 stations over Air America.

Media includes national AP, USA Today, 'CBS Evening News,' C-Span, CNN, 'ABC World News,' Chronicle of Philanthropy.

Plurality opinion in Hein v. FFRF denies FFRF right to sue over Cabinet faith-based offices.

FFRF places first billboards after 3 decades of censorship.



Jeff Dean

See timeline, 2007.







# 40th Anniversary Testimonials

## from some of FFRF’s Honorary Board of Directors



One might think that the legal defenders of the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses of the U.S. Constitution would be grim warriors or killjoy legal sharks. Nothing could be further from the Freedom of Religion Foundation! With humor, humanity — and an unshaking commitment to freedom of and from religion — the Foundation has strengthened our Constitution and kept America at the forefront of Enlightenment values.

**STEVEN PINKER**  
**FFRF Honorary President**  
**Harvard’s Johnstone Family Professor of Psychology.** Author of *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason* and *The Blank Slate*.



Congratulations to FFRF for 40 years of indefatigable work propping up the constitutional wall between church and state — a wall that many constantly seek to dismantle. Of all the secular organizations in America, I think FFRF is the best, because they don’t just talk, but also walk the legal walk. In view of all they’ve done, I’m tremendously proud to be a supporter and a member of their honorary board.

**JERRY COYNE**  
**Honorary FFRF Director**  
**Professor, Department of Ecology and Evolution, University of Chicago.** Author of *Why Evolution Is True* and *Faith vs. Fact: Why Science and Religion Are Incompatible*.



The Freedom from Religion Foundation restores my faith in the goodness of Americans. Congratulations, FFRF, on your 40th anniversary.

**RICHARD DAWKINS**  
**Honorary FFRF Director**  
**Evolutionary Biologist.** Author of *The God Delusion*.



Congratulations, FFRF, on 40 years of providing escape routes for people trapped in their religions! Your legal activities have protected us all from the theocratic urges of many congregations and church leaders. But even more important, FFRF has helped doubters step into the daylight of a secular life. Above all, you have done this without lies and trickery, without exaggeration or insinuation: You have exposed the facts and let them speak for themselves. Well done, and keep it up!

**DANIEL C. DENNETT**  
**Honorary FFRF Director**  
**Austin B. Fletcher Professor of Philosophy, Tufts University.** Author of *Breaking the Spell*, *Freedom Evolves* and *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*.



America’s Founding Figures were thinkers thoroughly influenced by the European Enlightenment. If all Americans were as imbued with the spirit of the Enlightenment as our Founders were, we would have no need for an organization so tirelessly and effectively trying to keep the country true to the original vision. So, congratulations to FFRF on your 40th anniversary. I wish we didn’t need you so desperately, but, alas, we do.

**REBECCA NEWBERGER GOLDSTEIN**  
**Honorary FFRF Director**  
**MacArthur Fellow; 2015 National Humanities Medal Honoree.** Author of *Thirty-Six Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction*.



Now hear this: The Pew Research Center reports a growing share of U.S. adults who say belief in God is NOT necessary to have good values or be moral: In 2011, about 48 percent agreed, but in 2017, 56 percent agreed. The trend in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to adopt a more secular basis for moral values. Hurrah, FFRF.

**ERNIE HARBURG**  
**Honorary FFRF Director**  
**Scientist, Director of The Yip Harburg Foundation.**



I am particularly proud to be associated with the work of the Freedom from Religion Foundation because of its emphasis on programs designed to reach, and use the talents of, freethinking young people. FFRF has been exemplary in lending support to secular young people who often feel very alone in many parts of this nation.

**SUSAN JACOBY**  
**Honorary FFRF Director**  
**Author of *The Age of Unreason in a Culture of Lies*, *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* and *The Great Agnostic: Robert Ingersoll*.**



If you have had it up to here with faith-based initiatives, creationism and clerical prying into our private lives, FFRF is the organization for you. This scrappy group brings lawsuits against church-state entanglements and puts up witty billboards and bus signs promoting, well, freedom from religion.

**KATHA POLLITT**  
**Honorary FFRF Director**  
**Columnist, Subject to Debate, The Nation, essayist, poet.** Author most recently of *Pro: Reclaiming Abortion Rights*.



For 40 intrepid years, FFRF has been the principled voice and activist vanguard for those of us who care passionately about preserving the separation of church and state that is so fundamental to our democracy. Let me put it plainly: If Jefferson, Madison, Monroe and Paine were alive today, they would be proud to be supporters of FFRF. And so would Elizabeth Cady Stanton!

**ROBIN MORGAN**  
**Honorary FFRF Director**  
**Editor, Ms. (1989-1994), Co-Founder, Women’s Media Center.** Author of *Sisterhood is Powerful* and *Fighting Words*.



One would have hoped 40 years on that the FFRF would be a quaint anachronism by now, long past its utility, like a ‘Let’s keep flat-earth science out of the classroom’ society. Instead, its goals have never been more relevant. Thank you, FFRF, and keep up the good, brave fight.

**ROBERT SAPOLSKY**  
**Honorary FFRF Director**  
**Professor of biology, neurology and neurological sciences, Standard University.** Author of *Behave: The Biology of Humans at Our Best and Worst*.





How can we continue our pursuit of happiness when organized religion is always standing in the way? For 40 years the FFRF has been trying to get it to stand aside, and I’m very grateful.

**EDWARD SOREL**  
**Honorary FFRF Director**  
**Artist, illustrator and author.** Regular contributor to: The Atlantic, The New Yorker and The Nation.




2013

FFRF has 14 full-time employees, including five attorneys.  
Steven Pinker, one of ‘100 most influential people in world’ (TIME), becomes FFRF’s first honorary president.  
Groundbreaking for expanded Freethought Hall.  
FFRF and Sacramento chapter place 55 ‘Out of the Closet’ billboards!




2014

Media: Sean Hannity, Fox TV, ‘CBS This Morning’.  
Ron Reagan records TV ad for FFRF that runs on Comedy Central, censored by NBC, ABC, CBS, Discovery.  
150 state/church victories.  
FFRF files amicus with Marci Hamilton against Hobby Lobby anti-contraception case.





2015

Andrew Seidel  
Anne Nicol Gaylor, principal founder, dies June 2015.  
400 attend grand opening of expanded Freethought Hall.  
Media include CNN, ‘CBS This Morning’.  
FFRF starts fourth essay contest, for students of color.  
FFRF Board creates Nonbelief Relief charity.  
Attorneys send 1,186 formal complaint letters, have 241 victories.





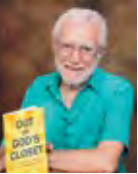
2016

FFRF refurbishes statue to Great Agnostic Robert Ingersoll in Peoria park, with help from Zenos Frudakis.  
Attorneys write 1,050 complaint letters, earn 230 victories.  
FFRF’s PR campaign: ‘I’m an atheist and I vote.’  
FFRF wins inaugural Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award.



2017

FFRF has 24 staffers.  
FFRF starts Educate Congress campaign (thanks to Stephen Uhl)  
Stephen and Diane Uhl  
FFRF Commissions, creates Clarence Darrow statue by Zenos Frudakis, for lawn of ‘Monkey Trial’ courthouse in Rhea Co., Tenn., to balance the historical record.



2018

FFRF reaches 32,000 members, 25 staffers.  
‘Freethought Matters’ TV show debuts.  
Freethought Today also goes mobile friendly, online.  
Co-creates Avijit Roy Memorial Award.

