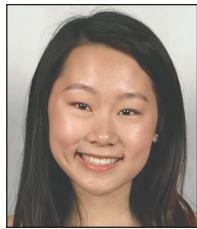


FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**She sells for FFRF
and doesn't
buy religion**

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**Students of color
essay contest
winners printed**

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**Jeff Sharlet joins
convention
speaker lineup**

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Vol. 36 No. 8

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Spreading freethought globally



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, right, and Manel Salido, president of Apalhu, the humanist group in Valencia, Spain, stand at the foot of the medieval town of Bocairent, much of it carved from the rocks. The two had just completed a 2-hour hike over the mountain from Ontinyent to get there. Barker spoke to Apalhu the night before on Aug. 30. "It was a hot day!," Barker said. "But up in that town, the narrow shady streets were very cool. Part of our hike followed some Roman chariot roads that had been carved into the mountain. We saw four eagles circling a nest high on a crag." For more photos from Dan's trip (and other FFRF staffers on the road), see pages 22-23.

FFRF educates Congress on 'founding myth'

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has given every member of Congress a copy of a timely new book dispelling the "founding myth" that the United States is a "Christian nation."

Each senator and representative has received a hardcover copy of *The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism is Un-American*, by Andrew L. Seidel, recently published by Sterling Press. Seidel, an attorney, serves as FFRF's director of strategic response. The preface is by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker and the foreword is by journalist and author Susan Jacoby.

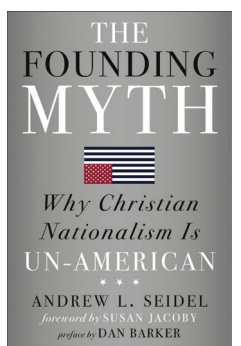
"The author recounts the legal issues in a lively, lucid fashion accessible to readers unfamiliar with the fine points of either the bible or the Constitution," Jacoby notes. "Above all, he makes the vital point that when faith is politically weaponized, religion itself 'is weakened and tainted.'"

In a cover letter to members of Congress, FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor write: "We are pleased to provide your congressional office with this groundbreaking resource — chronicling why Christian nationalism is an existential threat to our government of the people, by the people, for the people; and how you can help stop it."

The first half of the book examines the historic evolution of the constitutional principle of separation between religion and government. The second half trenchantly examines why the bible itself is full of "un-American" concepts and laws, such as original sin and the concept of hell.

The Founding Myth compares "the principles of Judeo-Christianity and the principles that founded the United States of America," Seidel writes in the introduction. "The two systems differ and conflict to such a degree that, to put it

See Congress on page 17



Billboards oppose 'In God We Trust'

The Freedom From Religion Foundation placed eye-catching billboards in South Dakota's largest cities to protest a new state law requiring "In God We Trust" in public schools. And it did catch the eyes of Gov. Kristi Noem and several state representatives.

One billboard initially went up on West 41st Street in Sioux Falls and the other at Baken Park in Rapid City. The Sioux Falls billboard message then moved to 41st Street. FFRF also placed the message on a billboard in Pierre, the state capital,

on Highways 14 and 83.

The billboard message features an irreverent cartoon showing the presidents immortalized on Mount Rushmore skeptically proclaiming "There goes the neighborhood" as the motto "In God We Trust" is carved into the mountainside. The cartoon was penned for FFRF by Steve Benson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoonist who formerly worked for the Arizona Republic.

On Sept. 13, the Rapid City Journal ran an op-

See Billboards on page 3

FFRF publishes book of Don Addis' irreverent cartoons

In an era that can definitely use a lot less religion and a lot more humor, the Freedom From Religion Foundation has the perfect offering: a new book, *Cartoons for the Irreverent*, celebrating the wit of editorial cartoonist Don Addis.

If you can make someone laugh about a controversial subject, aren't you halfway there to converting them to your point of view? This unique collection of cartoons by Don Addis will bring a smile while making you think.

Addis, who died at 74 in 2009, was the legendary daily editorial cartoonist of the St. Petersburg Times, who penned his

delicious and deceptively gentle jibes at religion and other foibles for 40 years, six days a week. This collection represents a bit more than 1 percent of his life's work, which Don once put at more than 11,150 cartoons. But FFRF considers them to be the *crème de la crème*.

"No one could puncture sanctimony like Don," recalls his friend and colleague Robyn Blumner, a former St. Petersburg Times columnist who is now CEO of Center for Inquiry.

The collection of more than 150 cartoons is largely made up of those penned exclusively for FFRF and its newspaper, Freethought Today. Addis, a long-

time FFRF member who was famous for giving away his original cartoons, first started sending FFRF his cartoons dealing with religion in the early 2000s.

When Don retired in 2004, he went into overdrive, penning cartoon after brilliant cartoon for Freethought Today. FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor relates in her warm introduction. After being published in FFRF's periodical, the funny, brilliant and irreverent cartoons sadly languished in a file drawer until Gaylor resuscitated them and turned them into this long-overdue book celebrating

See Cartoons page 4

Cartoons for the Irreverent Celebrating the Wit of Don Addis



Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation

She sells for FFRF and doesn't buy religion

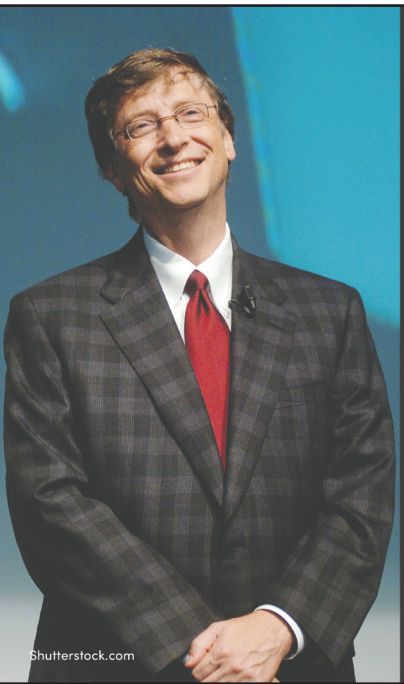
Name: Astoria L. Goldsby
Where and when I was born: Madison, Wis., in 1983.
Education: Associate's degree in liberal arts.
Family: My mom and three younger brothers. Currently living with my partner, a local glass blower. We have a dog, fish and rats.
How I came to work at FFRF: Through a Craigslist ad!
What I do here: I manage all things related to the products we sell.
What I like best about it: The people here are inspirational.
What gets old about it: It is impossible to plan ahead for the day.
I spend a lot of time thinking about: When will the world make sense? LOL.
I spend little if any time thinking about: My decision to leave the church.
My religious upbringing was: AME (African Methodist Episcopal).
My doubts about religion started: In history class around the third or fourth grade. I remember coming home after learning about how religion tied into slavery. I had also learned that my beloved actor John Travolta was a Scientologist. I had to clarify this fact with my mom, who told me that there are Scientology books that people follow as truth and a way to live their lives. That was a shocking moment. I remember my response being: "So, I can



Photo by Chris Line

Astoria L. Goldsby
write a book that convinces people I am a god or know of a god so that they give me all their money?!" and my mom said, "Yup, I have faith you could write a better book!" I wasn't able to leave the church until some time later and still haven't written my book yet!
Things I like: Animals, shopping, and wine with friends and family.
Things I smite: Explaining why something stupid like child detention centers shouldn't exist.
In my golden years: I hope to travel.

MEET A STAFFER



FREETHOUGHT OF THE DAY

"Just in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient. There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning."

Bill Gates
Interview, Time magazine (1996)

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Sign up for and view our daily calendar of famous freethinkers, bios and quotes at ffrf.org/day.

ffrf

FREETHOUGHT
TODAY

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

Freethought Today caption contest winner!

Congratulations to Stephen Van Eck of Pennsylvania for winning FFRF's caption contest from the September issue. For his winning essay, he wins an FFRF T-shirt.

The winning caption is: **You'd think God could do something about these damn pigeons!**

Top runners-up include: **Hmmm, who shall I discriminate against today?**— Wayne Kleeman of Arkansas.

Paper or plastic? Give me paper, I guess. — Larry Lubetsky of Maryland

If I would have known THIS is what everlasting life meant . . . — Paul Oles of Ohio

Thanks to all who participated. If you've taken any photos that you



think would be good for this contest, please email them to caption@ffrf.org.

FFRF welcomes 16 Lifers

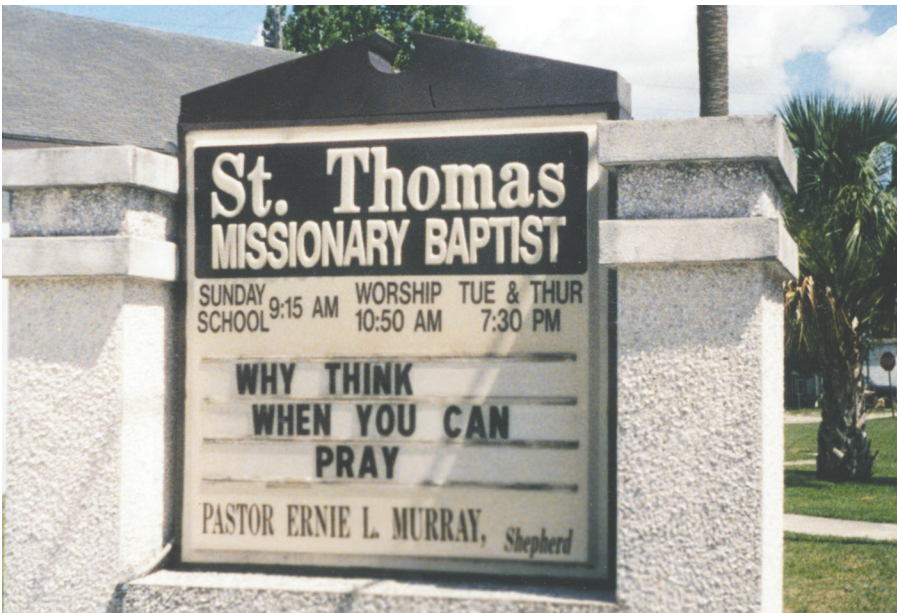
FFRF thanks and welcomes our 16 new Lifetime Members and one new Immortal.

The new \$1,000 individual Lifetime Members are: Betsy Bainbridge, Jill Dobis, Zenos Frudakis, Timothy Garb, John Halas, Rahul Malhotra, Gary Mize, Michael Murgolo, Nancy and Jim Rattmann, Craig S. Ross, Gayle Steinmeier, Paul Swanson, Shel M. Waggener, Neil Wassner and Benjamin E. Zuckerman.

States represented are California, Colorado, Idaho, Louisiana, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

Our new Immortal is Dave Kinsey. The Immortal category is a donation designation for those generous members who have contacted FFRF to report they have made provisions for FFRF in their estate planning.

Religion in a nutshell



FFRF Member Nancy McNeely of Florida sent us this photo of a marquee in Jacksonville. "I had to laugh," she writes.

LEAD US NOT INTO PENN STATION

provocative pieces by Anne Nicol Gaylor

Lead Us Not into Penn Station — Provocative Pieces

By Anne Gaylor

A must-have for any freethinker, this gracefully readable book contains Gaylor's classic writings.

—Published by FFRF. 80 pages / PB

Buy it from FFRF online ffrf.org/shop

Woe to the Women The Bible Tells Me So

The Bible Female Sexuality & the Law

Annie Laurie Gaylor

Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

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

—Published by FFRF. 264 pages / HB

Buy it from FFRF online ffrf.org/shop

'I'm as proud to be an atheist as I am to be an African American.'

- Therrin Wilson
University of Tennessee

Join us at www.ffrf.org

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION foundation

ABC refused to air FFRF JFK ad during debate

Two TV commercials produced by FFRF were rejected by ABC during the Democratic debate in Houston on Sept. 12.

FFRF first tried to purchase time from ABC to run its iconic TV spot featuring Ron Reagan endorsing FFRF and describing himself as “an unabashed atheist . . . not afraid of burning in hell.” Major networks have refused to run the 30-second spot since it was produced in 2014, including ABC, NBC, CBS and even Science Discovery. (MSNBC, Comedy Central and CNN have run the ad, and it aired for two weeks in September on “The Daily Show with Trevor Noah.”)

“Every year we ask the major networks to reconsider and run our commercial,” explains FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We were disappointed, but not surprised, when ABC once again refused to run the Reagan endorsement spot.”

But, Gaylor says, she was shocked that ABC next rejected a commercial largely featuring a video excerpt of a famous speech by John F. Kennedy. As a presidential candidate, JFK gave a talk to a gathering of Protestant ministers in Houston in 1960, intending to allay their fears that as a Catholic he would be beholden to the Vatican rather than



to the Constitution.

In his strong remarks in favor of secular government, JFK said: “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute.” FFRF’s commercial leads with footage from his speech, then states: “Let’s restore respect for America’s secular roots. Help the Freedom From Religion Foundation defend the wall of separation between state and church. Join us at ffrf.org. Freedom depends on freethinkers.”

The ad concludes with the strains of “Let freedom ring,” as FFRF’s emblematic image appears of a Lincoln penny with the words “In Reason We Trust” instead of “In God We Trust.”

FFRF produced this commercial, which first aired on “CBS This Morning” and the “Monday CBS Evening News” in 2012, in response to a remark by then-presidential candidate Rick Santorum, after he said JFK’s remark “makes me want to throw up.”

Ironically, FFRF had no trouble placing the JFK spot nationally on “ABC World News Tonight” on Sept. 24, 2016, to protest Pope Francis’ joint address to Congress.

Gaylor says the American public has no idea how much censorship nonbelievers encounter in seeking to disseminate their views. Print ads have been rejected by daily newspapers, includ-

ing recently by the Chicago Tribune and Sun-Times. FFRF’s billboards can’t “play in Peoria” and many other cities around the nation.

But Gaylor says that the blackout by national networks is the most egregious. FFRF contends it is essential for free-thinking voices to be heard in order for the United States to retain its secular republic.

Ad to be in October debate

As of press-time, FFRF has secured placement of its 30-second spot recorded by Ron Reagan to run during the October Democratic debates airing on CNN. It was still undecided whether the debate will air over a two-day period on Tuesday, Oct. 15 and Wednesday, Oct. 16. If the debates take place over two days, FFRF’s ad will air once on both days. If it’s a one-day debate, the ad will air twice. The ad will also air once during the pre-debate CNN show and once in post-debate coverage.

FFRF’s ad will also appear once per show on Wednesday, Oct. 16, during CNN’s “The Lead with Jake Tapper,” “The Situation Room” and Anderson Cooper. Ads airing during the debates are highly analyzed over social media, Gaylor noted. She is hopeful that CNN will not change its mind.

High school baptisms must cease, FFRF declares

After FFRF contacted a high school in Tennessee over an on-field baptism of students, several local and national media covered the issue.

A concerned area resident reported that on Aug. 7, Chad Diehl, a minister at Bethlehem Baptist Church and “character coach” for the Springfield High School football team, baptized two players on the school’s football field in front of the rest of the team and coaches. One of the coaches, Jake Buttram, tweeted a photo from the baptism with the message, “Great day for two young men being baptized in front of our team and our field. Better than winning any game or any trophy.” Head Coach Dustin Wilson retweeted a post from Diehl that included photos of the baptism and the message, “What a blessing it was to baptize these young men today in front of their football brothers.”

Covering the story nationally were Newsweek and USA Today, along with statewide media including the Nashville

Tennessean, Nashville News 5, Fox 17 in Nashville, the Times Free Press in Chattanooga and WKRN in Nashville.

It is illegal for coaches to organize or participate in religious activities with students, including baptisms, FFRF reminded the district in a letter to Superintendent Chris Causey. FFRF wrote to ensure that the district ceases promoting and endorsing religion to its students through prayers, religious rituals or a “character coach.”

The school sent out a statement, defending the baptisms.

“The activities that occurred on or about Aug. 7, were student-initiated, student-led, and occurred after the practice session had ended, and after school hours,” the statement reads. “All participation was voluntary with no requirement for attendance either stated or implied.”

But FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line said that was not the case.

“It is inappropriate for a public school district to proselytize students by praying with students, baptizing students, or employing an outside religious leader to organize these activities,” writes Line. “This is especially problematic in the context of athletics, given the coercive pressure players feel to conform to coaches’ expectations so as not to disappoint coaches or hurt their standing on the team.”

FFRF is requesting that the district investigate and take the appropriate steps to ensure there will be no further illegal religious events, including any official prayers and team baptisms, during school-sponsored activities. Diehl must no longer be allowed to act as the “character coach” for the team and should no longer be given access to students as part of school-sponsored activities.

“The involvement of a public school coach in baptisms is so over the top as to be ludicrous,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “You’d be hard-pressed to cite a display of sectarian religiosity more blatant than this.”



Billboard

Continued from page 1

ed titled, “Local billboard challenges ‘In God We Trust’ legislation,” written by Kent Bush, the newspaper’s editor. He spoke with Kristin Wileman, press secretary for Gov. Noem, who said, “The governor believes that it is important for students in our schools to remember the foundational principles our country was founded on. We should never be afraid to proclaim that we are one nation under God.”

Bush also quoted state Sen. Phil Jensen, who said, “I am amazed, but I’m not really surprised. . . . [FFRF] is just trying to stir things up and turn public opinion against us.”

FFRF Co-President said that’s exactly right — FFRF does want to change public opinion.

“There has been such concern expressed by our South Dakota members and from Americans across the country over this misguided and exclusionary law,” comments Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

South Dakota state Rep. Chris Johnson tried to make the silly claim that the national motto is for everyone.

“It is the opposite of exclusionary,” he said. “‘In God We Trust’ doesn’t say who God is.”

But Gaylor notes that the motto was adopted at the height of the Cold War. She calls it divisive, saying it fosters the

false perception that piety is somehow equated with patriotism. That perception has bred discriminatory attitudes toward nonbelievers, who are consequently at the bottom of the totem pole when it comes to social acceptance.

Yet many prominent U.S. Founders were Deists and promoters of the Enlightenment. Our nation’s original motto, E Pluribus Unum [out of many, come one], chosen by the distinguished committee of Jefferson, Adams and Franklin, fosters the concept of unity. “In God We Trust” is a completely inappropriate motto for our nation, given the fact that the U.S. Constitution is itself godless, and the document’s only references to religion are exclusionary, such as barring any religious test for public office.

“We hate to see a captive audience of public schoolchildren targeted by the Religious Right and the Christian Nationalists who are behind this legislation,” adds Gaylor. Project Blitz, a legislative assault to flood state legislatures with bills promoting hard-line Christian Nationalist views, is behind South Dakota’s new “In God We Trust” law and many other “model bills” intended to entangle religion and government. Project Blitz is the brainchild of the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation.

FFRF’s advertising is made possible thanks to kind donors to our advertising fund. Go to ffrf.org/donate, click on “Donate,” then, under the dropdown menu that says, “How would you like your donation to be used,” go to “Advertising/PR.”

**Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning**

Arrange a bequest in your will or trust, or make the **Freedom From Religion Foundation** the beneficiary of an insurance policy, bank account or IRA.

IT'S EASY TO DO!

For related information (or to receive a bequest brochure), please contact:

Annie Laurie Gaylor
at (608) 256-8900
info@ffrf.org

Freedom depends on freethinkers

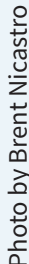
A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

(This excerpts two of the five.)

1
O Karma, Dharma, pudding & pie,
gimme a break before I die:
grant me wisdom, will, & wit,
purity, probity, pluck, & grit.
Trustworthy, helpful, friendly, kind,
gimme great abs and a steel-trap mind.
And forgive, Ye Gods, some humble advice—
these little blessings would suffice
to beget an earthly paradise:
make the bad people good
and the good people nice,
and before our world goes over the brink,
teach the believers how to think.

4
O Mammon, Thou who art daily dissed
by everyone, yet boast more true disciples
than all other gods together,
Thou whose eerie sheen
gleameth from Corporate Headquarters
and Vatican Treasury alike, Thou
whose glittering eye impales us
in the X-ray vision of plastic surgeons,
the golden leer of televangelists,
the star-spangled gloat of politicians—
O Mammon, come down to us in the form
of Treasuries, Annuities, & High-Grade Bonds,
yield unto us those Benedict Arnold Funds,
those Quicksand Convertible Securities, even the wet
Judas Kiss of Futures Contracts—for
unto the least of these Thy supplicants
art Thou welcome in all Thy many forms. But
when Thou comest to say we're finally in the gentry—
use the service entry.

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.

Books by him, available at shop.ffrf.org, include *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* and *Darwin's Ark: Poems by Philip Appleman*.



Continued from page 1

Don's life and genius.

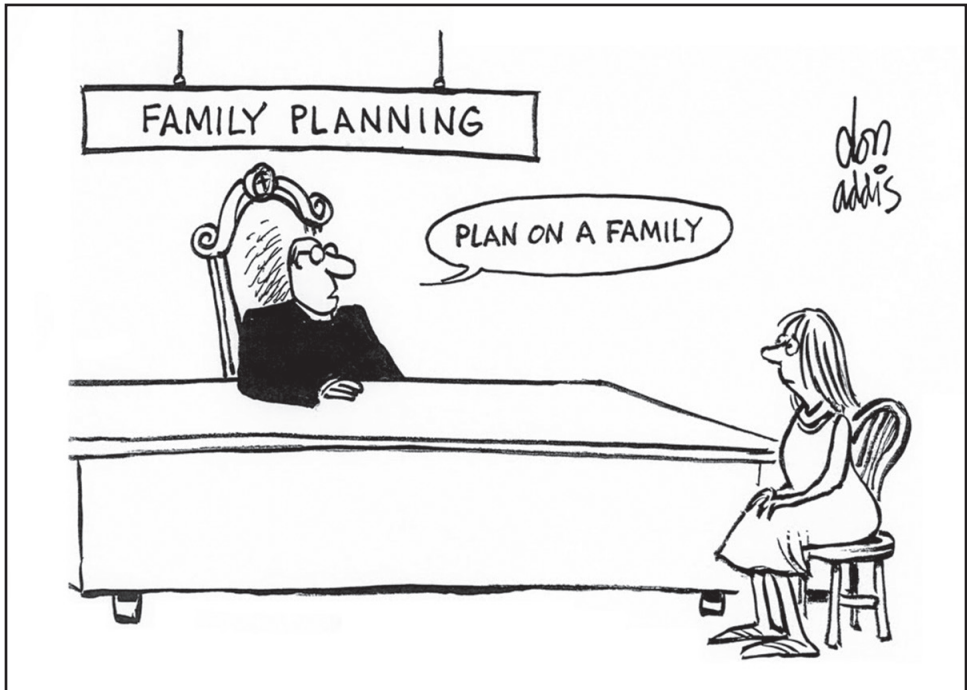
Don's views on religion, science (mis) education and the Christian Right remain as prescient and timely today as when he penned them 10 or 15 years ago. His cartoons are loosely organized into sections: those on freethought and atheism, science versus religion, feminism and gay rights, the dangers of church/state entanglements (Don's specialty), and cartoons lampooning religion and true believers.

Don's cartoon "signature" was the ubiquitous fly appearing in most of his drawings. The fly was an inside joke with his mother-in-law, even after she became his ex-mother-in-law. But Don was him-

self a “fly on the wall,” observing and skewering human failings, such as our tendencies to credulity, blind faith, piety and sheep-like conduct.

FFRF thanks its graphic artist Jake Swenson for design, the Center for Inquiry and the Tampa Bay Times for permission to reprint several of the cartoons Don drew for them, and FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott for his help. The book reprints a memorial column appearing in the St. Petersburg Times about Don by colleague Andrew Meacham.

The large paperback is the perfect gift for you or the freethinker on your list, and is now available from ffrf.org/shop (\$15 postpaid). Go to “FFRF books” in the dropdown menu under the “Books and Lit” link. All profits benefit FFRF.



Asking whether someone is black, Hispanic or Asian cleaves the electorate into two groups. Those who answer “yes” lean Democratic; the others are split roughly evenly between the parties. Among those who are not black, Hispanic or Asian (mostly white people), the second most important question is whether the person considers religion important. If they answer “yes,” they are probably Republican.

Sahil Chinoy, in the article “Let us predict whether you’re a Democrat or a Republican.”

The New York Times, 8-8-19

I have my beliefs, you have your beliefs, but don't use the machinery of government to impose them on others.

New Jersey Assemblyman John Burzichelli, sponsor of New Jersey's law that

allows patients to end their own lives under the care of a doctor, after opponents tried to have it reversed in court.

NJ.com, 8-28-19

And Guatemala, suffering one of the greatest droughts in their recorded history, caused not by God nor by mother nature, but by you and me and all of us and our emissions and our excesses and our inaction in the face of the facts, and the science and the truth.”

Presidential candidate Beto O'Rourke, speaking at a rally in Texas.

Fox News, 8-27-19

For at least a century, the courts have repeatedly upheld the states' compulsory vaccination laws. . . . The right to practice religion does not include liber-



in upholding a law passed in June that ended religious exemptions to vaccinations.

Gothamist.com, 8-26-19

ty to expose the community or the child to communicable disease or the latter to ill health or death. New York state Supreme Court Justice Denise Hartman, quoting the 1944 Supreme Court case *Prince v Massachusetts*,

passed in June that endorses the move from booster shots to vaccinations.

With their focus on repeal of the Johnson Amendment and the right to say “Merry Christmas,” some evangelical leaders are tidying up the kitchen while the house burns down around them.

Michael Gerson, on the “massive sell-

off of evangelicalism” among the young, in his column, “Why white evangelicals should panic.”

Washington Post, 8-29-19

What I have seen in the pro-life movement and elsewhere in evangelical culture is this ancient reliance upon the scapegoat mechanism, and the scapegoat is always the same — the female body. . . . The fact that white evangelicals still as a whole support Trump for a 2020 reelection with abortion as the flag over their crusade points to an important truth: Evangelicals are still obsessed with female bodies, controlling them and blaming them.

Andrea Lucado, in her article, “How the female body became the scapegoat for white evangelicals.”

Washington Post, 8-29-19

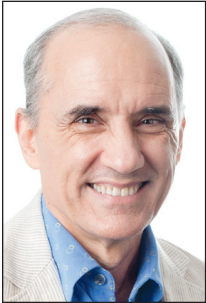
County seal a symbol of Christian supremacy

This op-ed first appeared in the Morning Call newspaper of Allentown, Pa., on Aug. 22.

By Dan Barker

The cross on the Lehigh County seal, in addition to its overt Christian message, signifies historical racism. The fate of my people in this region demonstrates that fact.

After the Freedom From Religion Foundation complained about the seal, the Lehigh County Board of Commissioners replied: "The cross, one of more than a dozen elements, was included to honor the original settlers of Lehigh County, who were Christian."



Dan Barker

But that is historically wrong. The original settlers of Lehigh County are the Delaware Indians (actually the Lenni Lenape, which means "original people" or "real people"), who were "living in greatest numbers on both banks of the Delaware River" in the 1500s and 1600s, according to the definitive "History of Lehigh County, Pennsylvania," by Roberts, Stodt, Krick and Dietrich.

Centuries earlier, the Lenape had traveled from the west and camped for a while on the Mississippi River before settling in what today is Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Manhattan.

We were the first tribe to sign treaties with the colonists and the U.S. government. We were also the first to have



a broken treaty. I say "we" because I am an enrolled and voting member of the Lenape tribe.

In the year 1900, there was a council of the Delaware tribal leaders in Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) to conduct a census of the tribe, which had dwindled to about 1,000 individuals. My grandfather was 5 years old at the time, and his father, John Curtis Barker, one of the "leading members" of the tribe, was on that historic council.

Why were we in Oklahoma, far away from our ancestral homeland around Lehigh? It is because we had followed our own trail of tears — a more northerly trail

involving six migrations — after being expelled from our land by the invading Europeans who arrived with a weapon in one hand and a bible in the other.

And "expelled" is the precise word. The first (alleged) treaty between the American Indians and the European colonists was the 1737 "Walking Purchase" between the Penn family and the Lenape, encompassing what's part of Lehigh County today. The Encyclopedia Britannica describes this transaction as a "land swindle." We were forced to vacate our land, which, after being purchased from Thomas Penn, became part of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The Christians who colonized this continent believed God had given it to them, blessing the removal of the original settlers. This attitude of "manifest destiny" comes right out of the bible. It commands, for example: "You must demolish completely all the places where the nations whom you are about to dispossess served their gods ... and thus blot out their name from their places." (Deuteronomy 12:2-3)

Talk about "blotting out" all remembrance. The Lehigh County seal contains no depiction of the original settlers. The dozen elements the commissioners boast about are exclusively images of the European usurpers, including the Latin cross, the preeminent symbol of Christianity. The only ghost of the original settlers on that seal is the word "Lehigh," a corruption of the Lenape word "Lechauweki," meaning "the place where there are forks in the river."

There certainly were forks in the tongue of Thomas Penn and other Christian settlers. "Drive out all the inhabitants" and "do not let them live in your land," the bible commands, and the invaders complied.

I am certain most current residents of Lehigh County are good people. But as a non-Christian who is a descendant of the original settlers, the county seal is to me an exclusive symbol of white colonialism and Christian supremacy.

Dan Barker is co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. The 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals recently allowed the Christian cross to remain on the seal, overturning a 2017 district court ruling declaring it to be unconstitutional.

The war on military religious freedom

By John Compere

There is a wicked and wanton war disrespecting, disparaging and denying the American constitutional right to religious freedom for the men and women serving our country.



John Compere

The U.S. Constitution prohibits our government or its representatives (which includes the military) from promoting or endorsing a religion. The Supreme Court has continuously confirmed this constitutional prohibition as the law of our land. U.S. Armed Forces regulations also prohibit the military from promoting or endorsing a religion.

The secular military mission is to defend our nation against enemies (not

promote or endorse a religion). The secular sworn service oath is to bear true faith and allegiance to the Constitution (not to a deity or a religion). The military is nonreligious by law, regulation, custom and necessity (neither anti-religion nor pro-religion).

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution provides our historic trinity of religious liberties — (1) freedom from religion, (2) freedom of any religion or no religion, and (3) freedom for religious speech. It prohibits our government from lawfully "respecting" a religion. These freedoms cannot deny or disparage others retained by the people (Ninth Amendment).

Like our diverse nation, the military is composed of individuals with many religious and nonreligious beliefs. There is no belief uniformity. There are 10,000 distinct world religions and American Christianities alone comprise more than 2,000 vastly different versions. The Department of Defense recognizes religious diversity with its official list currently including 221 different belief groups for the military. Its 2010 survey showed that more than one-third of its members are not Christians.

Like all Americans, military members desire and deserve the right to determine, enjoy and practice their own religious or nonreligious beliefs. They do not want the religious beliefs of others, especially superiors, imposed on them in the military workplace while they are performing military duties. Military chapels provide places for religious worship and military chaplains provide religious instruction. Any military member refusing to obey the Constitution, military regulations and sworn service oath may choose a civilian career.

Self-righteous Christians demand their right to religious freedom but do not respect the same right for others. They presumptuously proselytize their uninvited and unwanted religious beliefs on others, especially subordinates, in the military workplace, interfering with military mission and duty. Their disruptive distractions adversely affect military morale and efficiency. Prompt and proper prevention occurs when military leaders demonstrate intelligence, integrity and insistence on compliance with the law, regulations and the service oath.

Over 61,000 military men and women (95 percent of whom are Christian) have complained and requested their right to religious freedom, to which all Americans are entitled under our Constitution, be respected and protected. They are fortunate the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, a nonprofit constitutional rights organization dedicated to ensuring military members have the right to religious freedom, exists to respond to their requests for representation. Its motto is "Fighting for our service members' rights, so they can fight for ours." (www.militaryreligiousfreedom.org)

As a result of its advocacy, the Military Religious Freedom Foundation has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize seven times.

Also, as a result of this advocacy, it regularly receives hate mail (from those claiming to be Christians) acrimoniously attacking the representation of their fellow Americans. These radicalized religionists contemptuously contend only those who share their particular religious beliefs are entitled to religious freedom. Their bigotry is exceeded only by their hypocrisy.

FFRF Member John Compere of Texas is a retired brigadier general in the U.S. Army and member of Disabled American Veterans.

Yip Harburg,
from his book: **Rhymes for the Irreverent**



History Lesson
This we learn from Watergate
That almost any creep'll
Be glad to help the government
Overthrow the people.

Illustrated by Seymour Chwast, published by FFRF

Buy it from FFRF online — ffrf.org/shop



The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible
By Ruth Hurmence Green
A Missouri grandmother debunks the bible as no one has debunked it since Thomas Paine.

—Published by FFRF. 440 pages / PB

Buy it from FFRF online
ffrf.org/shop

IN THE NEWS

Court: Pa. House can bar nontheists from prayers

The 3rd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled Aug. 23 that it's constitutional for the Pennsylvania House of Representatives to ban guest chaplains who don't believe in God or a higher power from delivering opening invocations at its meetings, reversing a district court decision last year. A group of freethinkers, represented by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, sued members of the Pennsylvania House in 2016 over its theists-only policy for guest chaplains, arguing that it violates the Constitution's Establishment Clause.

Judge Thomas L. Ambro, who wrote the 2-1 majority opinion, claimed that because prayer presupposes a higher power, "only theistic invocations can achieve all the purposes of legislative prayer."

Americans United called the ruling discriminatory and "disturbing."

The majority opinion shows a preference for people who believe in God while "sending a message of exclusion and even scorn to nontheists," said Rob Boston, a senior adviser for the group.

Pence says 'The bible stays' at VA hospital

Vice President Mike Pence told his supporters "the bible stays," when discussing the New Hampshire veterans hospital display that is now part of a federal lawsuit.

The display at the Manchester VA Medical Center features a bible carried by a prisoner of war during World War II. The bible became the subject of a federal lawsuit filed in May by U.S. Air Force veteran James Chamberlain. He claimed its presence violates the Constitution's Establishment Clause. The Military Religious Freedom Foundation, which seeks to prevent the United States Armed Forces from showing favoritism toward any religion, also denounced the display.

Young Americans driving shift in religion, patriotism

Religion, patriotism and having children are seen as less important than they were 21 years ago, a shift driven largely by the changing views of younger Americans.

A new Wall Street Journal/NBC News poll showed significant differences from the poll in 1998.

'Judy's Outrageous Interviews'



Above: FFRF's Greater Sacramento Chapter held an event on Aug. 24 titled, "Judy's Outrageous Interviews," hosted by chapter President Judy Saint, left. Chapter Vice President Barri Babow writes that author Erin Louis, right, met Judy at FFRF's annual convention last year in San Francisco. Erin, who was the author of two previous books, was thinking of writing another book when she met Judy. Judy helped her with this book, edited it and took the photo for the book cover. This event was the official book launch of Louis' *Expose Yourself: How to Take Risks, Question Everything, and Find Yourself*, held at Sacramento's Reason Center. (You can buy the book here: amazon.com/dp/B07W1B4R3Q) Judy interviewed Erin, the audience asked questions, Erin read some passages from the book, and finished off the event with a book signing.



Erin and book cover designer Joe Mendez presented Judy a gift of thanks for her help with the book. It's Judy Saint made up as "Saint Judy — Patron Saint of Atheists."

In the earlier poll, Americans listed hard work, patriotism, religion and having children as their top priorities. Forty-eight percent of Americans cite religion as very important, a 14-point decrease from 21 years ago. Younger Americans again drove the decreasing value. Sixty-seven percent of Americans over the age of 55 cite religion or belief in God as very important, compared to 30 percent of Americans age 18 to 38, based on the poll.

Sixty-one percent of Americans in the new survey list patriotism as very important to them, a 9-point drop from 1998.

45% of students: No to 'In God We Trust' on money

Nearly half of U.S. college students think the motto "In God We Trust" should be removed from U.S. currency.

Of the 1,001 students who took the survey, 53 percent said it should remain and 45 percent said it should be removed.

Two-thirds of Democrat respondents are in favor of removing the motto, while only 6 percent of Republican respondents said it should go.

The poll was conducted for The College Fix by College Pulse, an online survey and analytics company.

Ruling upheld over Mormon sect

The 9th Circuit Court of Appeals on Aug. 26 found that Colorado City, Ariz., and Hildale, Utah, had conspired with sect members to advance the objectives of Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, a radical offshoot of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Federal authorities alleged the towns were operated as an arm of the sect, took orders from church leaders about whom to appoint to government jobs and that town employees assisted sect leader Warren Jeffs, who is now serving a life sentence in Texas for sexually assaulting girls he considered brides, when he was a fugitive.

City tries crowdfunding for ACLU legal bills

Bloomfield, N.M., owes \$700,000 to the ACLU after running out of appeals trying to defend an illegal stand-alone Ten Commandments monument outside a municipal building.

The city budget in 2019 called for paying \$233,000 to the ACLU. The city chose three annual payments over a one-time in-full payment.

But now, the city asked its residents to help cover the remaining cost (\$467,000). Brad Ellsworth, the city's finance director, set up a GoFundMe campaign to cover it. As of mid-September, the campaign had raised less than \$2,000 of the \$467,000 goal (or less than 4/10ths of 1 percent of their goal).

Appeals court: Kentucky owes for Davis fiasco

The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled recently that the state of Kentucky is responsible for paying nearly \$225,000 in court costs and attorneys' fees after former Rowan County Clerk Kim Davis broke the law when she refused to sign marriage licenses for same-sex couples.

In 2017, she lost her appeal, saddling the Kentucky taxpayers with about \$225,000 in legal fees. Gov. Matt Bevin said earlier this year that Davis, not the taxpayers, had to pay the fee.

A district judge ruled in 2017 that the couples suing for marriage licenses clearly prevailed and that the state of Kentucky must pay their fees and costs. The 6th Circuit agreed.

Nonreligious weddings rise in Northern Ireland

The demand for humanist wedding ceremonies has risen dramatically since they were legally recognized in Northern Ireland a year ago.

About 180 couples are expected to have a humanist wedding in 2019, up from 60 in 2018 and an average of about 10-15 a year before that.

Northern Ireland and Scotland are the only parts of the United Kingdom where humanist ceremonies are legally recognized. Before 2018, couples could have a humanist wedding, but had to have a separate ceremony at a register office in order to be legally married.

City may hold lottery for holiday displays

After a few years of wrangling, the Bethel, Conn., Board of Selectmen voted to permit any group to put up its holiday display outside the municipal building after applying for a permit.

But if there are more applications than spaces available, the city would hold a lottery, which would include all applicants.

Only Bethel residents or organizations are permitted to apply and the area reserved for the display must not exceed one-third of the total square footage of the square.

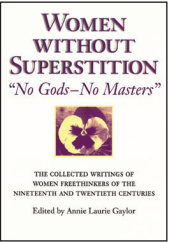
NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER CONTEST 2020

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 individual who gives the best secular invocation will be invited to open FFRF's annual convention in 2020, receiving an expenses-paid trip to San Antonio, Nov. 13-15, 2020, along with a plaque and an honorarium of \$500. Deadline: August 1, 2020.

MORE INFO AT:

ffrf.org/nothing-fails-like-prayer



Women Without Superstition
"No Gods—No Masters"
Edited: Annie Laurie Gaylor
Collected writings of 50 women freethinkers of the 19th & 20th centuries (51 photographs).

—Published by FFRF. 696 pages / HB

Buy it from FFRF online
ffrf.org/shop

FFRF VICTORIES

By Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey

Alabama

A local church will no longer be allowed to pray with Alabama public school students during the school day, following an open records request from FFRF.

A concerned local resident reported that members of the Westside Baptist Church in Tuscumbia had been permitted to enter R.E. Thompson Intermediate School just prior to the start of the school day in order to “pray over” the school. FFRF probed the situation, requesting public records to discern whether the church was renting the school during this time, or whether district policies allow outside adults to enter district buildings prior to the start of the school day.

Tuscumbia City Schools Superintendent Darryl Aikerson responded, informing FFRF that members of a local church have provided breakfast for the elementary school and pray for the school and its students, but that this would not recur.

“Suffice it to say, we have notified the church that this will not be permitted in the future and, if they would like to continue prayers for the school and its students, it would have to be done at the church (or elsewhere, but not at the school.)”

Arkansas

A religious decoration has been removed from a Springdale Public Schools cafeteria, thanks to a complaint from FFRF.

A member of the Springdale community reported that a decorative Latin cross is displayed in the lunchroom at Linda Childers Knapp Elementary School, and apparently displayed in full view of students.

FFRF Legal Fellow Colin McNamara wrote to Superintendent Jim Rollins, requesting that the district direct its schools to cease displaying religious iconography in recognition of the district’s constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion.

The district sent a response letter to FFRF with assurances that the cross has been removed.

Kentucky

A flyer for a religious event has been removed from the Tyner (Ky.) Elementary School website and official Facebook page after FFRF alerted district leader-

Fresno district nixes chaplaincy program

The Fresno Unified School District has replaced an official school chaplaincy program with a secular alternative after a complaint from FFRF.

FFRF first contacted the district in June, after it was reported that the Fresno Unified School District had been operating a chaplaincy program in partnership with the Fresno Police Department and the Fresno Police Chaplaincy. According to records obtained, Fresno Unified School District was paying \$65,000 a year to the Fresno Police Chaplaincy in order to bring chaplains into district elementary schools. These chaplains were tasked with “building character” in younger students and serving as “mentors.” An advertisement for

the program boasted that it reached 2,100 first-grade students each week. The program was scheduled to run through 2022.

One of these chaplains described her experience with the program on the chaplaincy’s website: “My prayer is that God will continue to use me as a beacon of His light to the kids at Susan B. Anthony. God is able to take our ashes and turn them into something beautiful. I’m humbled and honored to be a chaplain to these children.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Robert Nelson in June urging the district to stop allowing chaplains access to its students.

The district and the Fresno Police Department have since partnered to establish the secular Resilience in Student Education (“RISE”) Mentorship Program, which will replace the School Chaplaincy Program.

“The RISE Mentorship Program will provide age-appropriate curriculum around resiliency, coping with bullying and impulse control,” Nelson writes to FFRF. “The lessons taught by the RISE Mentorship Program are completely secular and reflect approved curriculum aligned with the state’s and district’s course framework.”

FFRF applauds the district’s action in creating an inclusive program for its students of all faiths and none at all.

ship of its unconstitutionality.

A community member reported that the school was advertising a release-time program sponsored by the Elgin Foundation and Annville Baptist Church. The flyer instructed students to go to their parents to get permission to attend a bible program at a nearby church. The flyer listed Tyner Elementary School’s principal, Melanie Philpot, as a contact person for the program. The flyer also advised students that they can learn more by visiting the website of the Elgin Foundation.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line urged the district to remove itself from all involvement with the Elgin Foundation’s bible study release-time program and Tyner Elementary School to cease promoting and endorsing the program to students.

The Jackson County Public School’s Board Attorney Larry Bryson sent a response letter, informing FFRF that the superintendent was unaware of the advertisement and it has been taken down.

Michigan

A Michigan public school district has ceased all involvement with an annual religious event after FFRF pointed out the constitutional issues with such a religious endorsement.

The Mesick High School Marching Band reportedly performed the national anthem at the 18th annual “Blessing of the Jeeps” event on May 4. The “Blessing of the Jeeps” is a Christian prayer event where Jeep enthusiasts come together “to ask for a blessing from God on the off-road season of that year.” The event apparently changes from year to year, but generally includes a sermon from a Chris-

tian minister and a group prayer. The marching band’s director Craig Jones arranged for the band to perform at the event, requested that parents volunteer to chaperone and then directed the band during its performance which took place under a large Latin cross. Jones has apparently had the band perform at the “Blessing of the Jeeps” since at least 2013.

FFRF Legal Fellow Colin McNamara wrote to Superintendent Scott Akom, asking that the district cease any involvement with the annual “Blessing of the Jeeps,” or any other religious events.

A law firm representing the district sent a response letter informing FFRF that the Board of Education discussed the issue in a closed session.

“From this point forward, the district will cease all involvement with the annual ‘Blessing of the Jeeps’ event,” the letter reads. “The district’s band will no longer perform the national anthem at the event or handle parking for the event.”

Missouri

Several religious displays in a Missouri school district will be removed due to a letter of complaint from FFRF.

A concerned Willard Public Schools parent reported multiple constitutional violations occurring in the district. The complainant reports that Willard Central Elementary School displayed multiple posters with religious messages, including a poster instructing students to “Trust in God,” an image of hands clasped in prayer, and a poster that directly quoted the bible and instructed students to be an example of believers through their faith. Additionally, the complainant reported that a librarian at Willard Intermediate School signs her official school emails with a bible verse, “But He said to me, my grace is sufficient for you: 2 Cor 12:9.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the district’s attorney, informing it that in recognition of the district’s constitutional obligation not to promote or endorse religion, it must remove these religious displays from the elementary school and instruct district employees to refrain from including bible verses in their email signatures.

The district’s legal representation sent a letter of response to FFRF:

“In the present case, the district is willing to direct district employees to refrain from the use of scriptural passages on official district stationary. Furthermore, the display of wall hangings without context, using scriptural references will be removed.”

North Carolina

A Christian organization will no longer be given access to students in a North Carolina district during the school day following intervention from FFRF.

A Pitt County Schools parent reported that adults from WyldLife, a branch of Young Life, an organization whose goal is to “personally impact area teenagers and to point them to a relationship with a God,” was regularly recruiting students during the lunch hour at Hope Middle School. The school reportedly gave permission to adults from WyldLife to talk to students at lunchtime every Monday. One of these representatives apparently collected contact information from middle school students and attempted to contact the complainant’s child after school hours. The adults from WyldLife seemingly seek to recruit for their religious events.

FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott wrote to the district urging it to immediately stop allowing adults from WyldLife access to young, impressionable students during the school day.

The school has since ended the lunch visits. A response letter from the district’s legal representation says, “Any outside group wishing to interact with Hope Middle School students will now be required to complete a facilities use form and come before or after the instructional day or on weekends.”

Texas

A Texas district will add disclaimers of district endorsement to advertising of religious events following a complaint from FFRF.

It was reported to FFRF that, in May, Lubbock-Cooper High School advertised a baccalaureate service in its weekly newsletter. The advertisement quoted Psalm 16:8 and asked readers to “join [the school] as we worship together, thanking God for what these students have experienced and asking His blessing on that which lies ahead.” The advertisement did not include any disclaimer of district endorsement or otherwise indicate any private group responsible for the ad.

The district’s attorney responded to the letter informing FFRF that the sponsors of the baccalaureate service have the right to advertise their service in the weekly newsletter because the district allows all organizations to advertise their activities, but that a disclaimer will be added noting that the district does not sponsor the event.

A note to FFRF Members

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Please renew now!

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Freedom depends upon freethinkers

FFRF NEWS

Sports Illustrated article features FFRF

FFRF figured significantly in an in-depth article in Sports Illustrated regarding the football program at Clemson University, a public university.



Patrick Elliott

FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott was interviewed extensively by Tim Rohan for the article titled “Faith, Football and the Fer-vent Religious Culture at Dabo Swinney’s Clemson,” which appeared in the Sept. 9 issue. Swinney is Clem-son’s head coach.

“Swinney has built Clemson into one of the premier college football pro-grams in the country, while keeping reli-gion front and center,” Rohan writes in SI. “Swinney has hired a team of Chris-tian coaches and support staffers; he’s used faith as a selling point for recruits; and he’s created an environment where players openly discuss and bond togeth-er over their Christianity.”

The article begins with an anecdote from 2012, when Clemson’s star receiv-er DeAndre Hopkins was baptized on the field.

“One assistant coach was so moved by the scene, he snapped a photo of Hop-kins in the tub and tweeted it out,” Rohan writes. “After that, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), a nonprofit organization that promotes the separa-tion of church and state, received at least

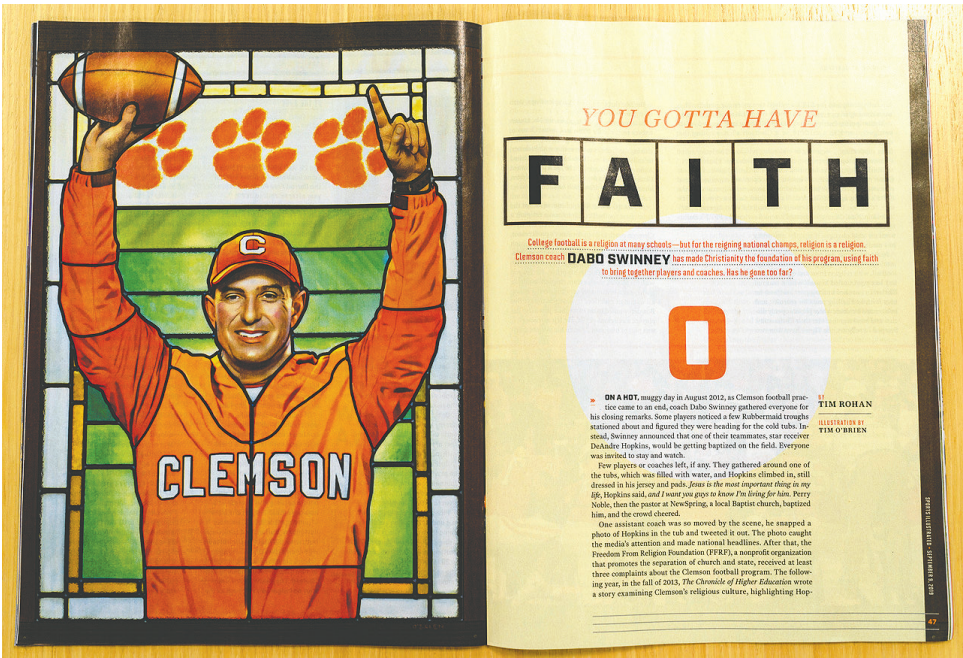


Photo by Chris Line

The Sept. 9 issue of Sports Illustrated features an in-depth look at the Clemson football program and its ties to Christianity.

three complaints about the Clemson football program. The following year, in the fall of 2013, The Chronicle of Higher Education wrote a story examining Clem-son’s religious culture, highlighting Hop-kins’s baptism again, and the FFRF re-ceived two more complaints. They were coming from alumni and people in the Clemson community.

“At that point, Patrick Elliott, an FFRF attorney, opened an investigation and, in April 2014, sent Clemson a let-

ter noting that the First Amendment prohibited the school, as a public in-stitution, from supporting, promoting or endorsing religion. The letter asked Clemson to stop its team prayers, bible studies and organized church trips.”

Later in the article, Rohan writes: “Af-ter receiving upward of five complaints about the Clemson football program, the Freedom From Religion Founda-tion opened an investigation around early 2014. Elliott, the FFRF attorney,

obtained a trove of internal e-mails be-tween Swinney and his religious advisors, and sent Clemson a letter of complaint in April 2014. The FFRF accused Clem-son of creating a culture that pushed Christianity on its players and violated the First Amendment.”

Rohan then writes about a 2003 case involving the Virginia Military Institute, in which the Fourth Circuit Court of Ap-peals ruled that VMI had coerced its ca-dets into participating in a dinner prayer.

“The court noted how VMI cadets often had to ‘submit to mandatory and ritualized activities,’ because ‘obedience and conformity remain central tenets of the school’s educational philosophy.’ Elliott sees a lot of similarities between VMI and the Clemson football program. Like military officers, coaches also hold immense power over their charges. ‘They control several aspects of the players’ lives,’ Elliott says. ‘Their play-ing time, their ability to have a scholar-ship, potentially their future career.’ If a coach were to endorse a religious activi-ty then, Elliott says, the player might feel pressured into participating.”

Clemson and others led FFRF to in-vestigate college athletic programs that emphasized Christianity and religion. In 2015, FFRF came out with its “Pray to Play” expose (ffrf.us/PraytoPlay) on how “Chris-tian coaches and chaplains are converting football fields into mission fields.” The Clemson program was featured promi-nently in the report.

DNC resolution on nonbelievers a historic step

For the first time in U.S. history, a ma-jor political party has warmly welcomed freethinkers.

The Democratic National Committee (DNC) has adopted a resolution that recognizes the contributions of nonbe-lievers to society and to the Democratic Party. The almost unanimous move rec-ognizes the value of courting the largest and fastest-growing “religious” demo-graphic in the nation.

At approximately one-fourth of the U.S. population, nonreligious Ameri-cans represent a sizeable voting bloc. The resolution indicates that political organizations have finally realized its im-portance. It also demonstrates the sig-nificance of the fact that “the religiously unaffiliated demographic represents the largest religious group within the Demo-cratic Party, growing from 19 percent in 2007 to one in three today,” as the reso-lution states.

The resolution concludes by recognizing:

1. The value, ethical soundness, and importance of the religiously unaffiliat-ed demographic, a group of Americans

who contribute in innumerable ways to the arts, sciences, medicine, business, law, the military, their communities, the success of the Party and prosperity of the nation; and

2. That religiously unaffiliated Ameri-cans are a group that, as much as any other, advocates for rational public poli-cy based on sound science and universal humanistic values and should be repre-sented, included, and heard by the Party.

FFRF, which is a nonpartisan group and does not advocate for or against any political party or candidate, is delighted at the respect accorded to freethinkers.

“This is long overdue, but is still a political landmark,” says FFRF Co-Presi-dent Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Freethinkers pack a powerful political punch, and it’s high time that political parties made note of this.”

The Secular Coalition of America puts the move in a bigger context.

“America was founded as a secular government charged with representing and protecting the freedoms of people of all faiths and none — I am proud to see the Democratic Party take that to

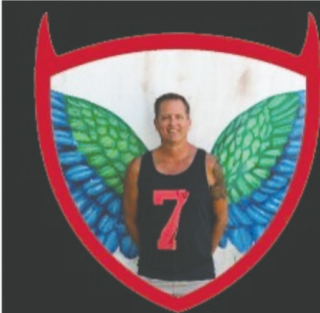
heart by bringing secular Americans into the fold,” says Sarah Levin, director of governmental affairs for the Secular Coalition for America. “At the end of the day, it is critical that all political par-ties embrace and work with the secular community to ensure that policy is driv-en by science and evidence, not sectari-an beliefs.”

The DNC’s resolution marks an ex-tension of current political trends, such as the formation two years ago of the Congressional Freethought Caucus. All of this is a sign that, finally, nonreligious Americans are not being politically ignored.

The Freethought Equality Fund PAC, which works to increase the number of

open humanists and atheists in public office at all levels of government, has released a report demonstrating that, among Democratic voters, atheism is no longer the political taboo it used to be. “Hopefully, the DNC’s recognition of nonreligious voters will lead to more representation in elected offices, so that America’s lawmaking bodies more accurately reflect the growing number of nonbelievers in our great country,” says Ron Millar, coordinator of the Free-thought Equality Fund PAC.

FFRF is optimistic that the DNC reso-lution is a sign of bigger and better things to come for freethinkers, and would like to see every party at every level of gov-ernment adopt similar resolutions.



NOT AFRAID OF
BURNING IN HELL

Kurt Raihn
UNABASHED ATHEIST

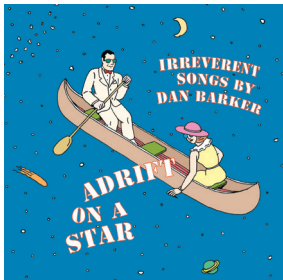
FFRF.ORG

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

Make your own nontheistic cyber billboard at ffrf.org/unabashed and you might win an “Unabashed Atheist” tee, like Kurt (above) did.

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Music CD



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Charles Strouse, Cole Porter,
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‘Freethought Matters’ is back on the air

The nation’s premier freethinking television show returned to the airwaves on Sept. 1.

FFRF’s “Freethought Matters” TV program, a half-hour talk show, airs Sunday mornings in 11 cities and Sunday evening in FFRF’s hometown of Madison, Wis.

U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman, founder of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, was the first guest of the new season.



Robyn Blumner

Other guests who have appeared recently (or will appear) include Center for a President and CEO Robyn Blumner, legal scholar Geoffrey Stone, U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin and philosopher and scientist Daniel Dennett. If you missed any shows,

you can watch them on YouTube on FFRF’s channel.

“Our aim is to provide fun, intelligent alternative programming for those who want to look beyond the Sunday morning religious fare,” says FFRF co-founder Annie Laurie Gaylor. Gaylor and her husband, Dan Barker, a former evangelical minister and well-known atheist author, are FFRF co-presidents and typically co-host the program.

The intent is to introduce communities to leading freethought authors, thinkers and activists. Today, the non-religious is the largest “denomination,” surpassing Roman Catholics, at roughly one-fourth of the adult population. A third of Millennials are “Nones” and a fifth of Gen Z explicitly identifies as atheist or agnostic.

“The purpose of the show is to offer lively discussions that provide a perspective most often missing on television,” adds Barker.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is the nation’s largest association of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), with more than 30,000 members nationwide. FFRF also works as a watchdog guarding the constitutional separation between religion and government.

The show is produced by FFRF’s videographer Bruce Johnson, a veteran of many years in public television. Crew includes staff members Kristina Daleiden and Lauryn Seering, plus various floor managers, with sound production provided by Audio for the Arts.

Please tune in to “Freethought Matters” . . . because freethought matters.



U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman appeared on the season-opening episode of “Freethought Matters” on Sept. 1. Watch on FFRF’s YouTube channel.

We asked and you responded!

On FFRF’s national television show “Freethought Matters” that aired Sept. 1, U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman pointed out that requiring witnesses to recite “so help me God” during oaths unnecessarily entangles government with religion.

The Religious Right jumped on this interview to mobilize its base and vilify Huffman. The Washington Examiner and Fox News used FFRF’s interview with Huffman as an opportunity to attack him for his support of secular government.

So FFRF asked you — our members — to take a few moments to thank Huffman for standing up for our community and for all Americans who support the separation of church and state.

Well, you responded in force, with more than 500 letters received by Huffman’s office from FFRF members. Thank you!

Here is a small sample of those letters.

“Thank you so much for bringing an intelligent, rational view of religion to your office. We need more people like you. This type of thing should not be a matter of bravery, but in our society and culture, it is a brave thing to do.

“As an atheist, I have wondered many times how I would respond if asked to repeat “so help me God” in a courtroom. I should not be put in that position by my government, and I should not be subjected to anger if I do not want to pledge allegiance to God. I love my country. We can leave the invisible beings out of it.”

Ken

“I admire your reasoned and unemotional approach to a much-needed separation of church and state, especially so in Congress. Thank you also for co-founding the Congressional Freethought Caucus and for being so effective at a time when it is needed most.

I have been yearning to hear a member of Congress say what you do the way that you do. Maybe there is some hope!”

Robert

“I understand the challenges that one experiences in our current society in taking a stand for secularism. When I first read about the Freethought Caucus, I felt a glimmer of hope that maybe, just maybe, our country will start to turn away from the rampant Christian Nationalism that threatens the very foundations of our government.”

Linda

“Thank you for speaking out about the threat of Christian nationalism to our nation. I’m relieved to know that there are some members of Congress who understand that we need to base policy on facts and science, not the beliefs of a single religious group. I’m truly frightened that our secretary of state believes in the rapture, and is in a position to steer our foreign policy based on that belief. I hope that your courage in speaking out publicly and organizing the Freethought Caucus encourages other members of Congress to stand up to the Religious Right.”

Sally

Huffman’s ‘ballistic’ comment about Liz Cheney causes a stir

U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman’s appearance on FFRF’s “Freethought Matters” TV show on Sept. 1 caused a bit of a media fuss. He said that U.S. Rep. Liz Cheney had gone “ballistic” on Fox News in reference to a decision by the House to drop the “under God” portion of the witness oaths.

Several conservative news outlets praised Cheney and lambasted Huffman.

“Unfortunately, it’s been kind of a sporadic standard,” said Huffman, who is a co-founder of the Congressional Freethought Caucus. “Some committees have dropped the oath, others have not. I sit on the Natural

Resources Committee and in our original proposed rules for the committee, we proposed that we drop the oath or we allow witnesses to simply say it voluntarily if they chose to, which to me makes perfect sense. And wouldn’t you know it, Liz Cheney just went ballistic. She smelled blood in the water, went on Fox News and started ranting about how Democrats were dropping God from the Congress.

“And at our next meeting, the Republicans, one by one, made these pronouncements about how we shouldn’t be against God . . . and, unfortunately, my Democratic colleagues backed down.”

A Cheney spokesperson on CBN News then responded to Huffman’s statement, saying, “Liz Cheney will always defend God. Period. If that bothers Rep. Huffman, we’ll be praying for him.”



Liz Cheney

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Houston	KUBE-IND (Ch. 57)	9:00 a.m.
Los Angeles	KCOP-MY (Ch. 13)	8:30 a.m.
Madison, Wis.	WISC-TV (Ch. 3)	11:00 p.m.
Minneapolis	KSTC-IND (Ch. 45)	9:30 a.m.
New York City	WPIX-IND (Ch. 11)	8:30 a.m.
Phoenix	KASW-CW (Ch. 61)	8:30 a.m.
	(Ch. 61 or 6 or 1006 for HD)	
Portland, Ore.	KRCW-CW (Ch. 32)	9:00 a.m.
	(703 on Comcast for HD or Ch. 3)	
Sacramento	KQCA-MY (Ch. 58)	8:30 a.m.
Seattle	KONG-IND (Ch. 16)	8:00 a.m.
	(Ch. 16 or Ch. 106 on Comcast)	
Washington, D.C.	WDCW-CW (Ch. 50)	8:00 a.m.

What Is a Freethinker?

freethinker *n.*

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

American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll
By Orvin Larson

Prof. Larson writes with affection and respect of this illustrious 19th century freethinker.

—Published by FFRF. 316 pages / PB

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ffrf.org/shop

FFRF awards \$20,850

2019 Students of Color Essay Contest winners

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the 30 winners of the 2019 David Hudak Memorial Students of Color Essay Competition for College Students.

FFRF has paid out a record total of \$20,850 in award money for this contest this year. FFRF thanks Dean and Dorea Schramm of Florida for providing a \$100 bonus to students who are members of a secular student club or the Secular Student Alliance. The total reflects those bonuses.

College students of color were asked to write a personal persuasive essay about “How being nonreligious has enhanced your life and how the secular community can better engage people of color.”

FFRF also thanks “Director of First Impressions” Lisa Treu for managing the details of this and the four other student essay contests and, of course, our “faithful faithless” volunteer and staff readers, including Don Ardell, Linda Aten, Dan Barker, Bill Dunn, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Judi Jacobs, Dan Kettner, Katya Maes, Gloria Marquadt, Dave Petrashek, Lauryn Seering and PJ Slinger.

FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994, grad students since 2010 and one geared explicitly for students of color (this one) since 2016. A fifth contest for law school students debuts this year.

This contest is named for the late David Hudak, an FFRF member who left a bequest to generously fund a student essay contest.



Winners, their ages, the colleges or universities they are attending and the award amounts are listed below.

First place
Nicole Li, 18, Yale University, \$3,500

Second place
Kea Ravi, 19, Ohio State, \$3,000

Third place
Donovan Henderson, 18, Georgia Institute of Technology, \$2,500

Fourth place
Mika Kat, 20, Nova Southeastern University, \$2,000

Fifth place
Yeh Seo Jung, 18, Swarthmore

College, \$1,500

Sixth place
Colleen Avila, 17, Washington University, \$1,000

Seventh place
George Olea-Romo, 18, UC-San Diego, \$750

Eighth place (tie)
Adonis Logan, 19, Centre College, \$500
Anagha Sreevals, 18, George Mason University, \$500

Ninth place (tie)
Leyma Hernandez, 18, Arizona State

University, \$400
Elisa Nicolini, 20, Virginia Polytechnic and State University, \$400

Tenth place (tie)
Javohn Dyer, 18, Michigan State University, \$300
Kimberly Perez, 21, Duke University, \$300

Honorable mentions (\$200 each)
Camryn Beaco, 19, DePaul University
Raimundo Farmer, 19, Claremont McKenna College
Evan Flemming, 19, Fisk University
Jessie Garcia, 18, Rutgers University
Kenneth Gonzalez Santibanez, 19, Princeton University
Tea Floyd, 18, Columbia College
Jamiah Hawkins, 18, University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Kathy Ho, 18, University of Tulsa
Asha Johnson, 18, Howard University
Nolan Mangal, 18, Baylor University
Kaylin Moss, 19, Marist College
Sarah Niles, 18, UC-Santa Cruz
Pari Parajuli, 18, UC-Berkeley
Jas Perry, 21, CUNY Hunter College
Isabelle Rosales, 21, Arizona State University
Anoushka Shandilya, 17, UC-San Diego
Raven Yamamoto, 19, Loyola Marymount University

David Hudak Memorial Award — Students of Color Essay Contest winner

Empathy, compassion and redemption

FFRF awarded Nicole \$3,500.

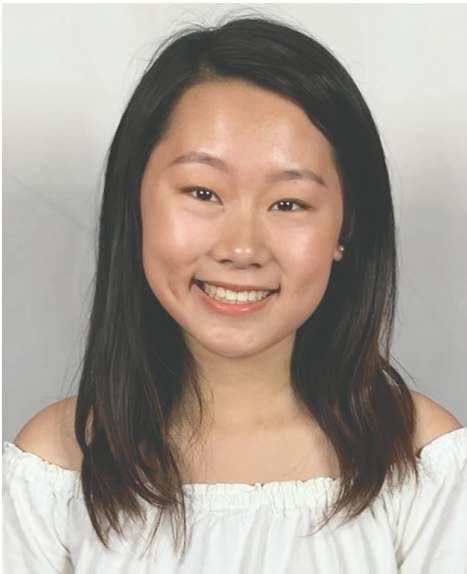
By Nicole Li

It took me 15 years to realize that I was being systemically and nonconsensually indoctrinated. A decade of Sunday school had failed to instill a flicker of faith in me, and I began to question the legitimacy and pragmatism of “miracle” stories and weekly bible drills. I was sent to youth group as if it was day care, and was expected to blindly accept the lectured dogma.

Faith will redeem you, they said. Jesus loves you, they said. Assimilation felt like an obligation, and, at 12 years old, I finally surrendered myself on Baptism Sunday. All at once, religion was everything I knew and all that I didn’t know.

Three years later, I stopped going to church. The institutionalized hypocrisy appalled me (love thy neighbors . . . but only if they’re heterosexual) and the supremacist evangelism was evidently toxic. Religion was supposed to be used for love, not damage. Yet in the name of God, the churchgoers allowed their faith to become politically weaponized — an exploitative tool to condemn, marginalize and pity nonbelievers. Homosexuals were lost and sinful, they said.

Women seeking abortions were wickedly destroying God’s creations, they said. And up until that point, I believed them. Until that day, my worldview was a manufactured byproduct of family tradition and Christian ideology. My youthful curiosity was stifled and molded by an intangible,



Nicole Li

abstract force that I never understood. My conscience awoke.

Freedom from religion is just as much a sacred right as freedom of religion. Although my departure from the church was met with glaring eyes and guilt-tripping comments, I have since found significant solace in my work as a social activist. Whether I’m canvassing for reproductive rights or registering voters at the annual PrideFest, I now devote myself to reversing and compensating for the foolish bigotry that I had formerly accepted. I do not believe that Jesus condoned inequality, but it is clear that some of his misguided followers are fueling a prejudiced campaign of sexism and homophobia, a dangerous movement of division and

intolerance. So, when protesters waved their bibles outside Planned Parenthood, shouting at the patients not to murder and instead to repent, I held the poor women’s trembling hands as they stepped out of their cars, escorting them to safety inside the clinic. When radical “Christians” used Romans 13 to justify the separation of immigrant families, I was proud to fight for human dignity and speak out against the unspeakable atrocities. It turns out that these efforts fulfilled, invigorated and empowered me more than any outdated scripture ever did.

In these valuable interactions, I came to know many strong leaders within the local secular community, yet oftentimes people of color were still vastly underrepresented. I believe that, in order to truly and productively engage diverse voices, we must guarantee them a seat at the table in all community-related discussions. Social change must be spearheaded by those most hurt by evangelism, which predominantly encompass LGBTQ+ communities and people of color. I observed that the most effective leaders

were the ones who committed to spotlighting these often-marginalized voices, and I have made a promise to myself that I will be one of them.

Paradoxically, my experience growing up among white evangelicals and my conversion to atheism have catapulted me on an exhilarating journey of self-discovery, individualism and unapologetic existence. Today, I am thrilled to live in confident satisfaction knowing that all of my beliefs are self-rationalized and all of my achievements are mine, not God’s, to celebrate. For 15 years, I was lost, but it wasn’t “Amazing Grace” that I needed in order to find myself — it was just open-minded empathy, unconditional compassion and genuine redemption.

Nicole, 18, is from Memphis, and attends Yale University, where she plans to study politics and economics. She is passionate about civic engagement and has worked with March For Our Lives and Planned Parenthood to organize rallies against gun violence, canvass for pro-choice politicians, and direct a campaign to increase youth voter turnout. Nicole is also a nationally recognized poet.

Your weekly antidote to the Religious Right

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SECOND PLACE

Nonviolence, acceptance and freedom

FFRF awarded Kea \$3,000.

By Kea Ravi

Throughout my life, I was often one of the only (now ex-) Hindus in the room. I felt a drive to defend Hinduism against false claims, to give it the same level of legitimacy as Christianity. During British colonization, my great-great-grandparents defied colonial and supremacist attitudes by retaining their Hindu faith and not converting to Christianity. Rejecting the religion of my ancestors seemed like a betrayal of my culture, the anti-colonial efforts of my forebears.

I realize now that I was thinking in an “us versus them” mentality — a mentality encouraged by my religious upbringing.

While my parents always taught me to be accepting of other faiths, a religious person cannot ever truly accept another’s eschatological views while harboring their own. Ultimately, I am right and you are wrong, a judgment not passed by facts but by beliefs. By pitting Hinduism against Christianity, I did not see the tragedies Hinduism has caused in its own right: its treatment of Dalits and perceptions of women.



Kea Ravi

Socially conservative viewpoints exist in every religion, and, in another world, we could have just as easily seen ideas of Desi supremacy rather than white supremacy.

After examining my beliefs, I saw a contradiction. Hinduism, the religion that espouses ahimsa or nonviolence, was also violent, both physically and mentally. By forcing everyone to believe in an idea with-

out any evidence, it executes mental violence in the form of cognitive dissonance and makes its followers pursue physical violence through the subjugation of women and people of lower castes.

Being nonreligious helps me achieve a greater, more nuanced understanding of the world around me. The absence of zealotry lets me engage with new philosophical ideas and grapple with old ones using an unclouded mind.

In fact, I became more interested in religion as a nonbeliever. I studied Buddhism as a researcher and read the bible for the first time. As an atheist, I did not try to disprove the claims inside religious texts. It is up to each individual to decide what works best for them.

Instead, I fully accepted and appreciated what the sutras and proverbs were for: a way of finding direction in life. Studying religion as a nonbeliever helped me form my own philosophy for my life without the outside pressure of faith. I did not have to reprimand myself for forgetting the words to a sloka. I could put that effort into helping others in more concrete ways than “thoughts and prayers.”

This journey would have been much

easier if I did not feel the need to defend a faith I did not believe in. The secular community in the United States tends to be both white and relatively wealthy. As atheists, we agree that it is not reasonable to believe in a higher power which cannot be proven to exist. What often ends up happening in these spaces is a competition to see which religion is the worst. This is a pointless conflict. Demonizing one religion over another misses the point that all religions advocate unequal treatment between the believers and nonbelievers.

As a person of color, much of my community in the United States is based around religious groups and spaces. If the secular community emphasized its commitment to racial justice, more people will engage with us. The hardest part about leaving a religion is leaving a support system. If we build up our own systems, more people will achieve the liberation of thinking for themselves.

Kea, 19, is from Westerville, Ohio, and attends Ohio State University, where she is studying computer science. She hopes to attend law school after graduation. Kea enjoys reading, crocheting and rock climbing, and has worked as a florist.

THIRD PLACE

The divine white elephant

FFRF awarded Donovan \$2,500.

By Donovan Henderson

Religion. To many in the black community, this word invokes a divine feeling of hope and faith. To others, this word is simply a mask for the structured spiritual miseducation of our people.

Studies show eight out of 10 people of color identify as one of the many branches of Christianity. This staggering statistic shows that nearly all of the individuals of the colored community continue to be misguided by the trickery of our oppressors. We all know of the racial and social catastrophe that was slavery, but have you ever asked yourself who would we worship if we hadn’t been captured and traded?

Travel back in time to the start of slavery and you will notice the seeds of Christianity had not yet infected the lives of our ancestors as they worshipped their original African deities. However, while in the bondage of their tyrannical “masters,” our ancestors were taught and forced to adopt Christianity as their one true religion. Quite unfortunately, we as a people have not learned any better in the centuries since.

Enslaved people and colored people as a whole were never given anything to empower themselves, as this would ultimately lead to the demise of slavery. Introducing Christianity to colored people has done more harm than it will ever do good.

First, let’s address the divine white elephant in the room: Jesus. Christianity teaches our people — via our beloved religion — to love and praise and worship a savior who does not even look like us. This religion has subconsciously taught us to believe that white is right.

We can praise and worship Jesus every Sunday of our lives, yet we should accept that we are not like him and we will never be like him because we are imperfect sinners and he (White Jesus) is an all-holy and perfect being. This has contributed to a community-wide feeling of inferiority to our Caucasian counterparts. However, that’s OK, because Christianity also tells us that if we repent our sins and believe that Jesus is the one true savior, we just might make into heaven, where everything is perfect. All you have to do to get there is remain complacent during a lifetime of suffering and pain. What’s one lifetime to a possible eternal

life, right?

Furthermore, Christianity leads us to believe that everything that’s unfavorable is either the work of the devil or not in “God’s plan.” This enters us into a cycle of excuses that discourages us from ever taking responsibility for a situation. This is why I refuse to become indoctrinated into this fallacious reality that is Christianity. I refuse to play my oppressors’ game. I refuse to forego taking responsibility for my actions in favor of believing that it was the fault of the red man with a pitchfork beneath me. Instead, I empower myself. Without the fallacies of Christianity guiding me into oblivion, I can truly make my life my own. I no longer am trapped in the slave mentality that grips the minds and souls of so many in the colored community.

Although slavery ended more than 150 years ago, its lingering embrace has plagued the black community religiously, mentally and spiritually for far too long. If we want to see an improvement in our societal standing, then we must make a collective and positive change. For religion to empower my people, it must start at the top. We as a community need to see



Donovan Henderson

our savior as someone whose image is not unlike our own. Religion must remove its emphasis on the afterlife and prompt the members of the community to better themselves while they are alive. I believe these are the changes needed to truly engage the colored community through religion. But not me. For I am free.

Donovan, 18, is from Hampton, Ga., and attends the Georgia Institute of Technology, where he plans to major in aerospace engineering. For years, he has been training and teaching martial arts. “I plan to use my education to empower myself and those around me, establish a career in entrepreneurship, and become a first-generation millionaire,” Donovan writes.

FOURTH PLACE

The meaning of freedom

FFRF awarded Mika \$2,000.

By Mika Kat

Free is an adjective, defined as “not or no longer confined or imprisoned.” But freedom is defined for me as the ability to live my life within the mandated rules, as being grateful for the different roles dictated by holy text, to worship without question, and stand in awe at the sheer perfection of what it meant to be a young woman in Islam. Freedom was to find joy in the caged world of Islam, while staying with-

in the lines, never questioning the faith, and trusting in divine law because surely the god in question knew more than us mere mortals.

As I grew older, I discovered an alternative version of being free — one that meant I was allowed to be curious, to ask questions, to speak, to act and to live as an individual. Being free means I am no longer bound by esoteric rules that were seldom explained or justified.

“Being free means I am no longer bound by esoteric rules that were seldom explained or justified.”

—Mika Kat

It means I make my own rules, I alone am responsible for my actions and decisions, and that I can create the life I choose to live.

The two alternate versions of freedom seemed mutually exclusive. The cognitive dissonance and mental gymnastics I used to justify my waning faith were exhausting. The more I looked into Islam, the more I realized that the inequalities present

in the religion were incompatible with my emerging beliefs as a feminist. My cultural background had always taught me to tread softly, to never overstep the boundaries enshrined by the religious texts. Being an immigrant and woman of color were labels I already bore on my shoulders. Adding atheism could have meant ostracization within my community and my homeland. My whole identity was shaken.

Thankfully, liberation from the shackles of religion proved worthy. I

Freedom

Continued from page 13

could indulge in the little freedoms enjoyed by my peers that I had been robbed of. I loved the way the sun kissed my skin as I stepped out, no longer bound by the dress code of sexist text. My life was finally my own.

Islam prides itself on being a totalitarian religion, with rules for every aspect of one's life, enforced through the tools of guilt and shame. The relief of no longer feeling the shame of using my own ratio-

nal mind, and the peace that came with opening up my thoughts to support my own actions, far surpassed the delusional comfort of religion.

Leaving religion and embracing atheism meant losing the piece of my identity that harbored my insecurities, shame, fears and regrets. It was time to carve my own identity, and step into the unknown world.

Although we are like-minded peers, I have always felt that I stand out in the secular community. While we share similar beliefs, my appearance and background are dramatically different.

Atheism is often a generational move-

ment, but I believe I am part of the first major wave of ex-Muslims and have a new trail to blaze.

This contrasts with most secular-minded people in the West, who have a tradition of secularism and an identity that they can adopt. Being an ex-Muslim woman, however, involves navigating a new world and carving a new identity for myself. There are few role models or leaders to follow and look up to, and among the greater secular community, there exists this level of pity for those who have taken my path, there persists an idea that we "need saving" from Islam and its oppres-

sion. But change must come from within one's own community. I have altered the ways that Muslims around me think, and a larger understanding of the issues that we uniquely face would greatly benefit the ways in which we can be better supported. Being an atheist has given me the courage and strength to tackle what this vast universe has to offer. I am no longer imprisoned, and no longer confined.

Mika, 20, is from Miramar, Fla., and attends Nova Southeastern University, where she is majoring in biology. She enjoys photography, reading, writing and traveling. Mika plans to attend medical school after graduation.

FIFTH PLACE

The mathematics of religion

FFRF awarded Yeh Seo \$1,500.

By Yeh Seo Jung

The line is always clear in religion, always delineated between harsh contrasts. Eternal punishment and eternal life, black and white, heaven and hell, right and wrong. Church taught me these dichotomies with a gentle hand and a bible. Absolutes were familiar and easy to understand when I was young, and I counted morals and actions like mathematic calculations at school. A lie got you closer to hell, while helping someone brought you a step closer to heaven. Justifying actions was simple as one, two, three.

It made sense. Sins like stealing and lying were inherently bad actions. Everything abided by the golden rule — treat others the way you want to be treated. That recursive proof echoed across my parents' Christianity and my grandparents' Buddhism, as well. After my grandfather died, I asked my Sabbath school teacher if he would be waiting in heaven for me, even though he was Buddhist. The teacher shifted his eyes before re-

“Nothing was as rigid or absolute as I originally thought.”
—Yeh Seo Jung

luctantly saying no. He wasn't Christian and would have no access to salvation. That didn't add up. If the church posited that good actions led to heaven, then my grandfather should be there, safe and sound. That discrepancy caused the equations of good and evil to shift in my mind, and the edge between black and white began to blur.

Then, my church community splintered around the 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* case. I watched as my Sabbath leaders, pastor and even my parents condemned homosexuality as an unforgivable sin. I stared helplessly at my community and searched through my calculations once more. If this was truly a logical equation, then I would be classified as an error because I identify as bisexual. The divine postulate of absolutes called me blasphemous and a sacrilege. I felt lost in the line between contrasts, and this great and sudden change isolated and terrified me. Religion was meant to be a palliative, but instead, it turned into something that alienated me away from my community. Moreover, that loss also meant a loss for me in terms of my Kore-

an community, which was almost entirely centered over church.

Yet, in that space, I found something better. Nothing was as rigid or absolute as I originally thought. There were shades of gray — rather than just black and white — to every issue, and I could come up with my own theorems instead of relying on pre-established ones. I left the set parameters I used to know and embraced uncertainty by accepting myself. I connected with other LGBT members at my school and in online communities, and I followed other passions involving sciences, whether it be in the intricacies of genetics or engineering pursuits aimed toward the skies and stars.

Despite the errors scattered throughout the mathematics of my religious experience, I still miss the community I once knew. Perhaps, in the future, I will be able to connect with them in a space that does not need divinity to form a bridge between us. We can coexist in a secular space and bond over our shared culture and heritage, whether that be communal kimchi making or celebratory yutnori games for the new year.

But, for now, I know that in their world, religion and cultural identity are so closely intertwined, and I, as an outlier, don't fit in between that space. They



Yeh Seo Jung

may never accept who I am, but they reshaped me into a person able to see all sides without the bias of religion, while constantly creating new equations to express what I discover. And in the end, I would rather have that liberation instead of being tied forever to static parameters in the field of religion.

Yeh Seo, 18, is from Camas, Wash., and attends Swarthmore College, where she is studying biology and history. She was born on Guam and immigrated to the continental United States after a typhoon ravaged Guam. In high school, she won national medals in Science Olympiad and Knowledge Bowl and also founded a sustainable farm initiative at her school. Yeh Seo hopes to become a doctor specializing in diagnostic radiology or endocrinology.

SIXTH PLACE

Change and tradition

FFRF awarded Colleen \$1,000.

By Colleen Avila

My father will take every opportunity to educate a person on the fact that potatoes are not from Ireland. They're from Peru, I've heard him say countless times. They were stolen from indigenous land and transplanted in Europe, a perfect example of disremembering of history, in which the people like my father's grandmother, born from the land, are given no chance to be heard. This is why my father doesn't call himself Hispanic. Not because he's not proud, but because he is proud — he is proud to be a brown man with Quechua blood, to be a father of first-generation American children who will extend on the opportunity he has given us past discrimination and hate. He speaks Spanish,

“Why should it make sense to use the religions forced on us by white settlers to help us cope with the problems the white settlers created for us?”
—Colleen Avila

but he is not Spanish. He calls himself Latino, Peruvian. He does not want to be associated with the white, Spanish conquerors who committed atrocities against our native peoples.

I have taken these lessons from my father and I have used them to guide my intellectual life. Thus, I am not just a nonbeliever because I simply do not believe. I am a nonbeliever because I do not agree with the systems of organized religion, which have historically been used to justify theft from and violence against indigenous peoples.

The history of Western religions like Catholicism are inextricable from the history of imperialism and conquest. Being free from religion has enhanced my life by liberating me from those ties to oppression, allowing me to be especially critical of the Western norms and constructs that I see around me (many of which are derived from religious mo-

res). So many unreasonable and even abhorrent things are enabled by the idea that we must adhere to the standards that have been laid out before us. This intellectual stubbornness fails to acknowledge two things: One, that perhaps the traditions of the past were not perfect in the first place; and two, that an evolving society necessitates evolving standards. By being nonreligious, I believe I am not only distancing myself from the doctrines that influence imperialist, antiquated thought, but I am distancing myself from the past itself, in



Colleen Avila



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What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists. FFRF has more than 30,000 members. FFRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and donations are tax deductible for income tax purposes.

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

order to learn from it and to look forward toward a society that is more just, open-minded and empathetic.

Yet despite its connections to colonialism, there is often great reliance on religion in communities of color. Particularly in black and Latinx communities, Christian and Catholic beliefs persist, deeply entrenched in our culture by time and need. But why should it

make sense to use the religions forced on us by white settlers to help us cope with the problems the white settlers created for us?

There is a plethora of empathetic, change-oriented young people in our communities, who have seen their parents' hardship and who crave a better life for themselves and their families. Our engagement in the secular com-

munity may be through learning our own forgotten history, and rejecting the religious tradition that has contributed to chronic social, political and economic strife among us. Just as we honor our culture and our families, we must learn to honor our resilience. We must think critically about our own history so that we can begin to pass the torch onto an educated youth, who are freethinking

and poised to uproot the beliefs of our elders. We can hold respect for past ideas, but we don't have to perpetuate them if change is needed.

Colleen, 17, is from Monrovia, Md., and attends Washington University, where she plans to study visual arts and neuroscience. She enjoys drawing and painting, and her art has received local and regional awards.

SEVENTH PLACE

Divine skepticism

FFRF awarded George \$750.

By George Olea-Romo

I was born into a Catholic family. I was baptized early on and went through confirmation by age 3 (in Mexico). I remember feeling proud of my religious status. I took pride in being a “Católico Apostólico Romano,” thinking that the title was somehow supposed to impress others. I felt privileged at the thought that I had a reserved seat in heaven. At a much younger age, I was content with my religious beliefs. However, my interest in the divine led to questions, and eventually, I began questioning the divine.

I once thought that everyone believed something for good reason, so logically for me, I thought there must have been some kind of solid indication that the Catholic God exists. At around age 13, I asked my mother for this proof. I was dissatisfied with her answer: “Dios se manifiesta en los campos, las flores,” which means, “God manifests in the fields, the flowers.” I was expecting something less vague. I was hoping for

“ I had to come to terms with my reality, since choosing ‘God’ would go against what I saw as being logical. I became an atheist as a result. —George Olea-Romo

more than simply elaborating on God's natural abilities. After all, how does this indicate the Catholic god specifically? I expressed my dissatisfaction, implying that her response didn't constitute as proof. My father got a little defensive and brought up the miraculous Virgen de Guadalupe painting, whose eyes supposedly reflected images of villagers. I felt reassured for some time in my faith until I decided to see these depictions for myself. All I saw were random, purposeless spots, no people.

Disappointed again with my parents' responses, I figured that they must be wrong about the evidence. They probably don't know what the real proof is. I checked online and found a page claiming that it had five ways to prove God exists. I would have been satisfied with a single valid point. I found no indication of a divine being from what I read and was disappointed with the website's use of mental gymnastics and condescension of other views. Further investigation led to similar results. At this point I had to come to terms with my reality, since choosing “God” would go against what I saw as being logical. I be-

came an atheist as a result.

The transition seemed malicious to me, at first. I felt like a traitor toward my Mexican culture that held the miraculous story of Juan Diego in high regard. I felt like I betrayed my parents by leaving Catholicism, especially since they expressed their discontent with my decision. However, these thoughts were eventually dismissed. I thought: Abandoning these stories do not disconnect me from my heritage, so why should I be tied to them despite their lack of credibility? My self-deprecating thoughts were expelled when I considered the soundness of my reasoning and took pride in my skepticism.

I believe many others, including people of color, should become part of the secularist community. However, one must



George Olea-Romo

remember that many people are deeply impacted by religion in their life and it's something sacred to them, so one must tread lightly when making them consider secularist views. In order to engage other communities, we must communicate the message of skepticism, where one could objectively evaluate the validity of claims. We can spread the message of the burden of proof, not believing something until being given a defensible argument or reason. Skepticism doesn't have to end at just questioning religion. It can be used to observe and criticize the actions of the government. Should a religious monument be built with taxpayer money? Should children be obliged to learn creationism in school? Should consenting adults be denied marriage due to their uncommon sexuality? Bestowing other communities with the word of skepticism gives people a chance to think with individuality and free from bias.

George, 18, is from Victorville, Calif., and attends the University of California-San Diego, where he plans to major in chemistry. He has been playing the flute since sixth grade and has been part of his high school's full orchestra, chamber orchestra and college band. George received the National Hispanic Recognition Program award, given to the top 2.5 percent of Hispanics who took the PSAT. He would like to be a forensic toxicologist.

EIGHTH PLACE (tie)

The catalyst

FFRF awarded Adonis \$500.

By Adonis Logan

I grew up in Jamaica, an island with the highest number of churches per capita in the world. Like most children in a black Caribbean household, I went wherever my parents brought me, adopted their beliefs and never questioned much. Church every Sunday was obligatory. I will admit, I never saw anything wrong with my family's devotion to church because that was the Jamaican cultural norm. My own liberation is synonymous to committing social suicide in the black community. Despite these obstacles, like never truly being free to discuss my beliefs, I continued to pursue my liberation and journey toward becoming a nonbeliever.

I am a nonbeliever because I seek to move from a mindset of faith and belief into a freethinking realm of reason and rationality. My journey becoming a nonbeliever had two major influences. The first came when I immigrated to the United States at the age of 10. The experience of switching countries was the catalyst my

“ My own liberation is synonymous to committing social suicide in the black community. —Adonis Logan

family needed to begin questioning religious norms. Within months of moving, my family became busy and generally uninterested in the practices of the church. After witnessing our faith deteriorate rapidly, I realized that without the weekly “religious re-ups” of going to church, practicing faith is synonymous with taking drugs. Both give you a temporary high that allows you to relinquish your problems, but in the end, neither gives you the comfort or answers you seek. Coming to this conclusion was monumental mainly because it led to seeking out my second major influence.

Thanks to my newly developed freethinking mindset, I wanted to understand why others didn't reject religion, as well. During high school, I informally interviewed religious leaders in my community, attended an Anti-Defamation League conference and different religious ceremonies. In my quest to understand others, I became aware of an even greater issue. Most, if not all religious people that I talked to firmly believed that their beliefs were the “best.” They were highly critical of all other beliefs except their own. I asked each of them, “Do you think your



Adonis Logan

faith. I find that I am drastically less likely to discriminate against someone. Considering the current political climate and the bombardment of bad news across most media outlets, now is the most opportune time for the secular community to engage with people of color. People are more likely to explore thinking for themselves when society seems unstable. For me, getting involved with the secular community is an opportunity to determine truth and morality through reason and evidence, instead of accepting dogma. Most individuals don't even realize thinking for themselves is an opportunity they are missing out on. I urge the secular community to interact with people that wonder about existential questions. I find these people are the most receptive to hearing other ideas.

Adonis, 19, is from Boston and attends Centre College, where he is majoring in environmental studies. He was named the Boys and Girls Club Youth of the Year in Boston and was awarded the Princeton Prize in race relations for the state of Massachusetts. Adonis writes: “My proudest accomplishment after completing my first year of college was receiving the Robert Dale Holmes Freshman of the Year award, which is given to a ‘member of the first-year class who, by the improvement of his or her work, diligence, and character, reveals most clearly the value of college training and the spirit of the college.’”

EIGHTH PLACE (tie)

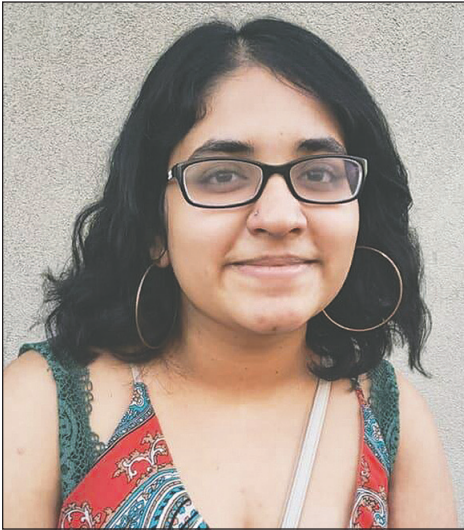
Breaking the chains of religious identity

FFRF awarded Anagha \$500.
By Anagha Sreevals

Some of my earliest memories include praying with my parents at the temple. Even before I could talk, I was partaking in daily prayer and other rituals within Hinduism. My bedtime stories consisted of verses from the Vedas, a body of religious texts which date back to the origins of Hinduism. Although I didn't really understand what religion was, I was very interested in it as a child. I saw Hinduism as something connecting me with my parents more than a devotion to religious beings. I felt happiest when my parents commended me for reciting hymns from memory.

However, as I grew older, I started to resent parts of Hinduism that restricted my freedom of choice. As Hinduism is interwoven with Indian culture and customs, religious heritage proved to be crucial to one's identity, especially ethnic identity. It was hard to separate religion with my culture — being Indian and being Hindu were basically the same thing. Being devout consisted of a duty to fulfill a predetermined role in society. Indian culture enforced a variety of gender roles and customs, especially when it came to arranged marriage.

My parents planned to marry me off



Anagha Sreevals

when I was around 20 to a man I didn't know. Before I had even started middle school, I realized that my life was set out for me already. If my parents wanted me to become a doctor, that's what I would be. I would then go to college, get married immediately after, and have kids. If my husband was lenient enough, I could get a job. Although the situation isn't so dire for everyone in India, just knowing my future was already planned was more than disheartening. I understood that religion could be a significant part of one's life, but I didn't want it to define mine.

After learning that Hinduism and Indian culture was controlling all aspects of

my life, I grew to dislike both. I didn't want my parents to choose everything for me, as my uncles and aunts had for my cousins. Through the years, I learned more about the world through my own eyes, instead of a religious and cultural lens. Cultural and religious experiences can be important in cultivating a more diverse understanding of the world, but in my case, I just wanted to learn about things my way.

After being exposed to different beliefs, I eventually took a liking to agnosticism. I'm not all-knowing, so I can't certainly say whether there is a god or spiritual being, but whether there is or not, I didn't want it to define my life or my choices. Soon after, I started studying everything I could, from economics to technology to sociology.

Eventually, I began college and chose my own career path. After finding agnosticism, I not only felt liberated from the chains of religion and my culture, I also felt empowered to live for myself — to think for myself.

In order to engage other students of color, secular groups need to be more present in communities. As I was growing up, I had no access to information about

other religions or secularism until I had a computer. I had no one but my religious parents to ask these questions. However, they not only lacked the knowledge to teach me, but they also didn't want me to stray from Hinduism. There has been much controversy that mainstream atheist or secular organizations that partake in the diversity "bandwagon" tend to exhibit tokenism. In these situations, these organizations are only showing a superficial interest in minorities, without ever regarding real minority issues.

To more successfully engage students of color, secular organizations need to provide more easily accessible informational and financial resources. Secularism freed me, and with some help from the secular community, it can free others, too.

Anagha, 18, is from South Chesterfield, Va., and attends George Mason University, where she is studying global affairs/international development, with a minor in immigration studies. She has a specific interest in refugees and immigration in the Middle East. She volunteers with refugees, teaching English and providing help with employment.

“Secularism freed me, and with some help from the secular community, it can free others, too.”
—Anagha Sreevals

NINTH PLACE (tie)

Against all oppression

FFRF awarded Leyma \$400.
By Leyma Hernandez

There was only one kind of kiss that was not prohibited, only one union that was not frowned upon: between man and woman. That was how it was meant to be, how God intended it. A lingering stare at a pretty girl was seen as adulterous when I was an emerging teenager. Something as innocent as a kiss or the holding of a hand, sinful. The message of the church was echoed every day through my grandmother, ever the devout Catholic. I heard, all the way from Mexico, her piercing disappointment at my disobedience toward the Church, my shunning of hundreds of years of Mexican tradition. I resented the ever-present institution that preached about love and forgiveness, yet only accepted one kind of love.

To step outside the norms was to be shunned by your family, to break the traditions would be disrespectful, and to love the woman I love was to spit in the face of my grandmother. Religion forced me and my grandmother apart. It broke bonds and created restrictions, chains that I was to wear throughout my lifetime if I was to be accepted by my family. But these standards would not be what I would live by.

Freedom from religion meant freedom in all its essence for me. Freedom not to be subject to men's whims. Freedom to love. Freedom to progress into a better future. I began to reject the Catholicism in which I had been raised, with such teachings as, "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent" (1 Timothy 2:12). Or when they began to say that my love was not valid. Or when I heard Sunday school instructors speak in hushed tones about "the gays" and their "sexual deviancy," which I thought was a bit funny coming from an institution that



Leyma Hernandez

covered up thousands of cases of sexual assault against children. My split from the oppressive church was my salvation. Not God. My decision to take my life into my own hands and live my truth was the best decision I ever made, for it provided me with enough courage to take on the world.

My struggle to overcome the rejection of my family for not loving the God they wanted me to is shared by many, yes, but aside from my hardships are the hardships

millions of other people suffer from. The secular community can begin to engage us by seeing the truths and hardships people of color face every day. From blatant racist comments by the president, when he tells immigrants to "go back to your country," to our black brothers and sisters being inexcusably murdered every day by oppressive police. This community should become a blanket of freedom for all people, and not just selective causes. It stands for love, progress, freedom and human rights, and under that umbrella falls many of the everyday struggles of people. If the secular community is able to reject a most powerful institution in our modern-day society, it can most definitely stand against all oppression.

Leyma, 18, is from Phoenix and attends Arizona State University. She hopes to become a civil rights lawyer and work for the ACLU. Leyma is a film enthusiast and writes screenplays that reflect the struggles of all kinds of communities.

NINTH PLACE (tie)

The detrimental religious paradigm

FFRF awarded Elisa \$400.
By Elisa Nicolini

Contrary to what religious organizations would have you believe, there is much to gain and little to lose by leaving religion. Many freethinkers, especially in the case of people of color from developing countries (such as myself), are raised in organized religion and are indoctrinated into a mindset that promotes the hatred of the reified "other," including homosexuals, atheists and individuals be-

longing to other religions. This mindset is extremely pervasive in the fundamentalist Catholicism that is practiced by my Mexican family.

Fundamentalism is most pervasive among the less educated, such as the community that my family comes from. My mother, for example, only had a middle school education and was pulled out of school to be married off, despite her proficiency in mathematics. The same community also is heavily entrenched in patriarchal norms. The traditionalist and conservative paradigm that my family has

been indoctrinated into is the exact opposite of the mindset that I have developed. I am the first person in my immediate family to attend college, am a successful athlete and always speak my mind. I am finishing my undergraduate degree at Virginia Tech a year early with a double major and am going to attend law school in order to pursue my dream career in international and human rights law. None of the accomplishments that I have achieved or goals that I am working toward would be possible if I was still fettered by the religious paradigm I was born into.



Elisa Nicolini

Whenever I attended church with my parents as a child, I heard the priests spew hateful misogyny and homophobia and wondered why there were so many people in the audience nodding along to the sheer evil hatred that was being expressed in each week’s sermon. I wondered how there could possibly be a god who wanted his followers to be so hateful. I decided that if that God indeed existed, I would never be able to worship it and maintain my intellectual and moral honesty. Furthermore, as I follow current events, it becomes more and more evident that any god that would allow the sheer evil that exists in humankind to

continue is not worth worshipping. When I rejected religion, I finally felt that I was free to be myself and express my opinions. During my education, I have extensively studied topics such as women’s rights, abortion, the male domination of politics, and the oppression of minority groups. All of the topics I have studied have something crucial in common: They are all examples of progression of culture that is being hampered by religious norms. These issues are especially evident in communities of color and in developing countries. An example of oppression of minority groups that has recently made headlines would be

Brunei’s attempt to implement a policy of stoning LGBTQ individuals to death. This serves as an example of a religious majority showing a flagrant disrespect and disdain for those who do not follow their religious paradigm. Being nonreligious has enhanced my life in that I am able to pursue an education and career and do not have to subscribe to an organization that supports the hatred of certain individuals (and in some cases, violence against them). The secular community grows each year as more individuals receive the education required to think critically about the means and ends that religious organizations engage in and

whether religion is morally correct. However, the secular community could better engage people of color simply by becoming more visible. For example, volunteering in low-income neighborhoods without the ulterior motive of conversion that religious organizations have when they “do good” in the community would make freethinkers more visible and dispel the myth that freethinkers are evil devil worshippers who eat babies. Elisa, 20, is from Herndon, Va., and attends Virginia Tech, where she is double majoring in international relations and Spanish. She plans to attend law school. Elisa currently interns at a law firm.

TENTH PLACE (tie)

Blood, shunning and isolation

FFRF awarded Javohn \$300.

By Javohn Dyer

Life as a Jehovah’s Witness (JW) was unique; lead by the Governing Body, a group of eight men who reside in Bethel, N.Y., JW’s version of Mecca. It’s where they create literature that enables child abuse, supports science denial, shunning and the refusal of blood transfusions, the latter causing thousands of deaths, a fact the organization has hidden through lies and gaslighting.

Many members silently disagree with the Governing Body, but to maintain the status quo, JW leadership expects members to self-segregate from “the world” (everything external to JW communities) and shun dissenting members. Allowing them to remain unchallenged and unchanged negatively affects millions, particularly developing youth. Indoctrination occurs in cycles. JW’s actively anticipate the rapture will come and bring paradise. In order to survive, members must follow JW doctrine, which reinforces cognitive dissonance and incentivizes members to police



Javohn Dyer

one another. Parents intentionally underprepare their children, anticipating they’ll never leave, creating naive young adults. Many fall victim to toxic relationships, substance abuse or commit suicide upon leaving. Those who return are shunned by friends and family until they publicly dedicate their lives to the doctrine. As part of their retribution, they are used as examples to show youth how dangerous the world is, completing the cycle.

I have witnessed and been a victim to this doctrine my entire life. I couldn’t join the Boy Scouts, as reciting the Pledge of Allegiance was seen as worship. I was never allowed to form close friendships because of Corinthians 1:15 (“Bad associations spoil useful habits”), which justified my segregation from others. Every aspect of my life was inspected for satanic influences, and my questions and doubts taken as spiritual weakness. For years, I would remain silent until I began to question my identity as a teen.

Being a black, socially awkward, book-loving JW meant that I was scrutinized for reading “worldly” material and bullied by my black peers for trying to be “white.”

Unlike many black Americans, I never got the chance to develop mutual interests with other black youth. My access to media and pop culture was limited to the internet, causing me to develop a broad range of obscure interests, which, coupled with my lack of social exposure, made me unrelatable. To many I was “white,” which is inaccurate — my skin is blacker than most black Americans and my community was multi-ethnic. My skin color had forced me into a group, while my experiences prevented my peers from understanding me. Being detached from my religion and blackness, I had to think independently.

I began denying religion and stereotypes associated with my race. Deeper introspection led me to identify as an atheist, which turned out to be life changing. Sundays were no longer wasted in church and I became unattached to unjustifiable beliefs. Becoming an atheist gave me freedom and meaning, made me smarter and intellectually stronger. Putting my trust in evidence and utilizing skepticism has proven more fruitful in learning than faith ever had. My thoughts and emotions can never again be criminalized by religion. My future’s mine to control.

“My thoughts and emotions can never again be criminalized by religion. My future’s mine to control.”

—Javohn Dyer

Sadly, positive exposure to skeptics and atheism is lacking in the black community, since casual racism and bigotry are big inhibitors to the dissemination of skeptical ideas. To better engage with the black community, skeptics must increase the visibility of black skeptics, as familiar faces make skeptical ideas more appealing.

Additionally, skeptical organizations need to support black skeptics who sound phenotypically black, since black skeptics with white “passing” may make negative impressions to black viewers. Finally, skeptics must show themselves in discussions about police brutality and poverty within the black community. Displaying concern for black issues will make skeptical communities all the more welcoming to the faces of the black diaspora.

Javohn, 18, is from Lansing, Mich., and attends Michigan State University. He enjoys boxing and spends much of his spare time preparing for upcoming fights, including a shot at boxing in the 2020 Summer Olympics. He also enjoys political discussions and studying African history, philosophy and religion. He plans to create a group called “Rispetto” for ex-fundamentalist college students.

TENTH PLACE (tie)

Knowledge is power

FFRF awarded Kimberly \$300.

By Kimberly Perez

As an immigrant and a first-generation college student, attaining higher education has been an uphill battle. But as I approach graduation, I realize religion was the most influential barrier to my college experience. My parents have been Jehovah’s Witnesses for as long as I can remember. I was raised in the faith. The difference between an ordinary person and a Witness is that Witness lives are micromanaged by a religious hierarchy, eight men known as the Governing Body. My religion restricted me from things most consider inoffensive and/or joyous (e.g., celebrating birthdays). Although I was never thrilled by these limitations, I complied because I thought it was God’s will.

However, there was one rule that even my parents couldn’t support. Jehovah’s Witnesses vehemently discourage higher education. One Governing Body member said, “The better the university, the greater the danger. The most intelligent

and eloquent professors will be trying to reshape the thinking of your child.” But my parents just couldn’t deny me higher education, an opportunity they didn’t have, and worked so hard to give me. Once I enrolled, my father was stripped of his “privileges.” He was no longer seen as a Christian man suitable for congregational responsibility due to his parenting choices. I discovered that the organization is afraid of young people objectively evaluating their beliefs in a freethinking environment.

College gradually gave me the tools to critique my faith. It started with being surrounded by diversity, followed by learning about evolution, world power structures, human rights theory, ethics and postcolonial theory. Then, as the gears in my autonomous mind were finally turning, I was sexually assaulted during my junior year. Only survivors can tell you what this trauma does to your faith in God. It was time to see if I truly “believed.” I tried tirelessly to acquire strength through bible study, but my faith simply didn’t hold up against my new knowledge and perspectives.

At this point, I had to commit the worst offense: turn to “apostate literature,” information that contradicts Witness teachings. I learned that many people lose their ability to think rationally when they’re depressed, lonely or otherwise vulnerable. They are the individuals most likely to become Witnesses, because religion provides a strong sense of purpose and community during vulnerability. I realized that this was my parents’ situation. Having just immigrated to the United States, they had no friends or stability. As a person of color, I know that many struggles come with my skin tone. The secular community can better engage us by, first, recognizing that religions are manipulating us by appealing to such emotional hardships.

Thus, I finally found information that backed the uneasiness I felt surrounding my faith, information that helped me get through my assault aftermath. Higher education gave me the courage to trust my intuition and formulate my own arguments. Today, I continue to explore ideas on how I should live my life, without religion’s constraint. Knowledge is



Kimberly Perez

power and being free from religion has empowered me for a lifetime.

Kimberly, 21, is from Allentown, Pa., and attends Duke University, where she is majoring in international comparative studies. She is a first-generation college student who immigrated from the Dominican Republic. She is currently doing research on maternal health, and wants to work in the public health field upon graduation in May.

FFRF student essay honorable mentions

FFRF selected 17 essays deemed worthy of honorable mention status. Each of the following students received \$200 from FFRF.

Here are blurbs from each of the honorable mentions. To read each of these essays in full, go to freethoughttoday.com.

By Jamiah Hawkins

Sadly, the black religious community is not a haven for LGBT youth. At first, I tried, like so many others, to justify my lifestyle to myself, but I knew I would never grow to be a worthy Christian. The relentless bullying I faced, and a lack of a support system, led me to seek counsel from other areas.

Jamiah, 18, is from Laurinburg, N.C., and attends the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, with plans to major in digital marketing.

By Asha Johnson

Far too often, religion can be black and white, right and wrong, good and bad. Yet, life has more dimension, complexity and nuance than can be explained by simplistic dichotomies. Rather than living for the future and worrying about “sins” of the past, I live immersed in the present.

Asha, 18, is from Oakland, Calif., and attends Howard University, where she plans to major in mechanical engineering and play for its volleyball team.

By Evan Flemming

The origins of our existence cannot be summed up by the utterance “because God made it so.” To make such a claim is belittling to the scientific evidence that provides an actual account of our existence. Right now, the health and well-being of girls and women in America is being placed behind the personal beliefs of people who will never be affected by the laws they create.

Evan, 19, is from Atlanta and attends Fisk University as a biology major on a pre-med track.

By Isabelle Rosales

To this day, I personally believe that the institution of religion is the antithesis to everything I fight for. Adopting a humanist philosophy has allowed me to value community, compassion, and empathy more than I have ever been able to through religion.

Isabelle, 21, is from Chandler, Ariz., and attends Arizona State University, majoring in journalism and Latinx studies.

By Jas Perry

Freedom from a singular religious practice allows me to learn about all beliefs; it fosters receptivity. I become more open-minded and supportive by learning where religion is culturally rooted in history, community and solidarity. I engage to a fuller extent by considering the breadth of values and priorities of the people of the world — not solely my own.

Jas, 21, is from New York City and attends CUNY Hunter College, where she plans to earn an English degree.

By Pari Parajuli

Being free of religion has pushed me to constantly question the world around me — its moral standards, its ethical dilemmas, its social structures. It compels me to form my own moral standards and reassess them as I learn more about who I want to become.

Pari, 18, is from Chantilly, Va., and attends the University of California-Berkeley, where she is studying computer science.

By Raven Yamamoto

I was thrown out of my church for being a part of the LGBTQ community and in retrospect, this turned out to be a blessing in disguise. The cancerous idea put forth by religion that a person can be judged by a fixed set of standards never appealed to me. By losing religion, I am able to meet people where they are in life rather than trying to pull them up to some level that I have subjectively labeled as good.

Raven, 19, is from Kahului, Hawaii, and attends Loyola Marymount University, where she is a journalism major and political science minor.

By Nolan Mangal

The most effective and necessary method for the secular community to engage people of color is to acknowledge their existence. Then and only then will we truly feel we have received our equal and rightful place in the community.

Nolan, 18, is from San Antonio and attends Baylor University, where he is studying computer science.

By Tea Floyd

Success is linked to God within the black community, and as long as this link exists, many blacks will be stuck in a bad situation. It’s hard to grow up black and not be a Christian. God is seen as the first to be consulted for all of our nonracial

problems (mental health, job, college, etc.). The first person to be consulted should be yourself.

Tea, 18, is from Chicago and attends Columbia College in Chicago, majoring in art history.

By Anoushka Shandilya

I see people through humanist eyes and treat everyone with the same kindness and compassion than I would expect someone to treat me with.

Once the veil of religion is pulled back, you realize that no one is up there keeping a tally count of your sins waiting to punish you once you die.

Anoushka, 17, is from Artesia, Calif., and attends the University of California-San Diego, where she will seek a degree in engineering.

By Kaylin Moss

Senior year of high school, I stopped identifying as Christian. Wearing a permanent mask in front of my family was exhausting. Finally, I was free from intellectual conformity.

Taking off my disingenuous mask of religion has allowed me to rediscover my intellectual identity. The impact on my academic and leadership skills has been astronomical, due to my newfound inquisitiveness and courage.

Kaylin, 19, is from Mount Pleasant, S.C., and attends Marist College, majoring in computer science.

By Sarah Niles

One of the biggest issues I had with the Catholic doctrine was the idea that all people who aren’t followers of the Catholic Church are going to hell. In the Catholic Church, you were considered a sinner if you even thought about “sinful” things. I don’t regret leaving the church and going on my own individual path in life — it’s one of the best decisions I’ve made.

Sarah, 17, is from Azusa, Calif., and attends the University of California-Santa Cruz, where she plans to major in developmental psychology.

By Camryn Beaco

I believe that the secular community can better engage people of color by demonstrating that the religious and secularist communities can, and do, have similar goals: the betterment of humanity. No matter what views we hold, we are all human beings who are entitled to the same respect and love.

Camryn, 19, is from Aurora, Ill., and attends DePaul University, with a double major in English and economics.

By Kenneth Gonzalez Santibanez

If you cannot take full ownership over your failures in life, you cannot take any ownership over the successes. In fact, accepting responsibility for one’s failures is often the necessary step in achieving success. Your actions have consequences.

Kenneth, 18, attends Princeton University with plans to major in history.

By Kathy Ho

Freedom from religion has granted me this all-powerful and all-knowing truth that thinking for yourself, free from the bounds of religion and social bias, leads to self-discovery, independence and an overwhelming sense of control over my own life.

Kathy, 18, is from Van Buren, Ariz., and attends the University of Tulsa, with plans to major in biochemistry.

By Jessie Garcia

I came to conclude sometime during my freshman year of high school that I was wasting my conscience on something that I just could not believe.

I consider encouragement the most effective form of engaging people of color into the secular community. It’s probable that a good majority of doubting individuals of color who have been brought up a certain religion/faith are scared of admitting or even just talking about their thoughts.

Jessie, 18, is from New Brunswick, N.J., and attends Rutgers University, where she would like to pursue a degree in social work, early childhood education, philosophy or psychology.

By Raimundo Farmer

Strong religious belief can be detrimental to those struggling with mental health. The issues we face are biological and while on the one hand, religion can be therapeutic, it is not medication. Prayer cannot prevent the chemical reactions in our brains from occurring.

Freeing myself from the limiting perspectives of religion has helped me to begin my journey as I deal with my mental illness.

Raimundo, 19, is from Compton, Calif., and attends Claremont McKenna College, where he is majoring in psychology and philosophy.



Jamia Hawkins



Asha Johnson



Evan Flemming



Isabelle Rosales



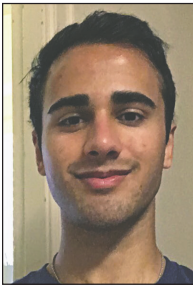
Jas Perry



Pari Parajuli



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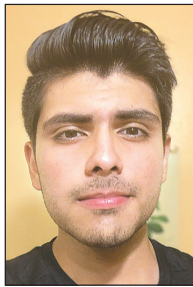
Kaylin Moss



Sarah Niles



Camryn Beaco



Kenneth Gonzalez Santibanez



Kathy Ho



Jessie Garcia



Raimundo Farmer

IN MEMORIAM

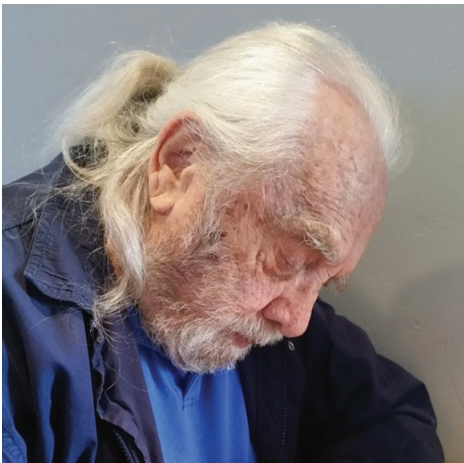
Robert Bader dies at 95

Robert Bader died June 27 at the age of 95. He was born Dec. 16, 1923.

His daughter Stephanie said he didn't want an obituary published in the local newspaper, but thought "he would be fine with being remembered in one of his favorite magazines [Freethought Today]."

Here is what Stephanie had to say about her dad:

"Father, husband and decent, principled human being, Bob was a self-proclaimed "devout atheist" and secular humanist. A sharp mind with a wonderful sense of humor, he was respected for his values and his intellect, and fondly remembered by all he touched. He learned hard lessons about humanity early in life, driving a landing craft onto Normandy Beach, and went on become a man of conscience and kindness.



Robert Bader fills out a ballot in a recent election.

"He was preceded in death by his wife Helen and his daughter Amanda. He is survived by his daughter Stephanie, daughter-in-law Cathy Hemler, and son-in-law Philippe Steinmann. We will all miss seeing him cruising by in his convertible, with his ponytail and his beard streaming in the wind."

Mike Briggs was lawyer, musician

FFRF Lifetime Member Michael J. Briggs, of Madison, Wis., died Aug. 26 at the age of 84.

Mike was born in Norfolk, England, on Sept. 1, 1934. Mike attended the University of Exeter, where he met his future wife Norma, who was from London. They wed on June 30, 1956.

In 1958, Mike and Norma immigrated to the United States. He went to graduate school at University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Their three daughters were born in Durham. In 1962, the family moved to Lagos, Nigeria, where Mike worked on a Ford Foundation grant to help set up a national library. In 1966, the family moved to Madison, and shortly after arriving there, Mike and Norma had a son and fostered a son. Mike worked as an African studies bibliographer, and Norma became involved in the feminist movement.

Mike graduated from the University of Wisconsin Law School in 1975. He worked as a parole and probation administrative law judge, and also served three terms as an alder on the Madison City Council. Norma also went to law school and grad-

uated in 1984. When Mike retired, he joined Norma in her private practice.

In 1999, they moved to Oregon, Wis., where Norma designed the house and transformed their 10 acres of land into an amazing garden. They were avid Scottish country dancers for decades. Norma died in April 2015, and Mike moved to a retirement community in Madison. He continued to practice law pro bono, and focused on assisting his neighbors with estate planning. Mike also remained active in progressive politics.

Mike had a lifelong love of music, which he shared with many. As a boy, he played church organ, piano and sang in choir, and he later took up the guitar, banjo, concertina and accordion. Mike was a versatile musician, composing originals and arranging standards. He played and sang rousing labor and anti-war songs, and was a member of English and Scottish country dance bands. In his later years, Mike was a peripatetic accordion player, who nicknamed himself "Grandpa Squeezebox."

Mike was also gifted at language, with a command of many tongues and a love for the dialect of his native Norfolk. He had a wonderful sense of humor, boundless compassion and intellect, and regaled many with his quick, wry wit. Shortly before his passing, he shared this joke: "What is perfect pitch? That's when you throw an accordion and it lands in a dumpster full of banjos."



Mike Briggs

FFRF'S

Ask an Atheist

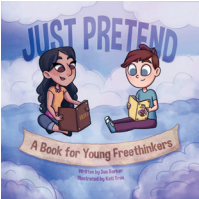
On Facebook Live

Wednesdays at Noon (Central)*

Send in your comments & questions via Facebook or AskAnAtheist@ffrf.org

*Except the last Wednesday of the month

Just Pretend: A Book For Young Freethinkers



By Dan Barker
Illustrated by Kati Treu

Revised and adorably illustrated classic. This fun book explores myths and religion from a freethought point of view, and promotes critical thinking.

Color Edition! Published by FFRF

Buy it from FFRF online
ffrf.org/shop

Judith Grunberg was well-known in N.Y. art scene

FFRF Lifetime Member Judith Grunberg died on Aug. 30 in Albany, N.Y., at age 86.

Born and raised in Manhattan, N.Y., she attended the Dalton school and was an amateur flutist and choral singer, and loved the Broadway theatre. She studied art at Bennington College (class of 1955), and, after college, drawing and painting in Rome. She married Paul Grunberg in 1960, and they moved to Chatham, N.Y., in 1965, where they raised four sons. She created an extensive garden of vegetables and flowers for her family and became involved in the local art scene, becoming the first artistic director of the Columbia County Council on the Arts in 1965, a role she held for two decades.

In 1996, Grunberg and her husband acquired the Blue Plate restaurant in Chatham, and she had owned and operated it since then. Among her many contributions, she was a prolific designer of logos for local businesses and nonprofits, including The Chatham Bookstore, Handcrafters Art Supplies, Columbia County Council on the Arts, Options clothing store in Albany, Chatham Real Food Market, and Rewraps clothing store. In 1999, Grunberg founded PS21



Judith Grunberg

(Performance Spaces for the 21st Century), a nonprofit in Chatham that recently completed the realization of her three-decade-long dream — the construction of a 300-seat open air pavilion and 99-seat black box theatre on the grounds of an apple orchard with sweeping views. She founded the Rewraps clothing store on Main Street to benefit PS21, and served as the president of PS21 until her death.

Grunberg had a number of shows of her work, including "Close But Not Art" (sculpture and found objects, receiving 3rd place in Metroland's Top Ten Shows of the Year 1998), and retrospective "Judy Grunberg: Past and Present," at Time & Space Limited in Hudson; "Across the Table" (line drawings) at Ralph's Cafe, Necessary Lines gallery and other venues; and most recently, "At the Feeder & On the Street" (photography), at TSL in 2019.

Michael Hanson created 'Mindwebs'

FFRF Member Michael J. Hanson, 78, of Madison died on Sept. 9 after a long battle with cancer.



Michael Hanson

Hanson was an award-winning radio personality, noted jazz drummer and the creator and host of "Mindwebs" radio show. "Mindwebs" originally aired on WHA Radio in Madison, Wis., from the mid-1970s through the mid-1990s. It featured 169 half-hour shows that presented 188 short stories from 135 authors. Episodes are currently being rebroadcast on WMSE in Milwaukee every Saturday at midnight.

"Thank you for the stories you gave, the music you played and the love you created along the way," said the mes-

sage on WMSE's website. "We will miss your amazing ability to bring stories to life, but look forward to hearing your voice again every week as we air every single episode of your wonderful creation."

To listen to any of the episodes, go to archive.org/details/MindWebs_201410.

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, an accomplished pianist, had the pleasure of playing with Hanson.

"I played with the Michael Hanson Jazz Group a number of times," Barker says. "His style on the drums was breezy and fun, leaving plenty of room for the soloists to express themselves. During breaks, we often talked about music, but Michael especially wanted to talk to me about politics and religion. He really cared about the world."

He is survived by his wife Rosie and sons Rolfe and Stephan.

Hanson's obituary kindly listed FFRF as one place friends and family could send a memorial donation.

Bernard Dworski was major benefactor

FFRF Lifetime Member Bernard M. Dworski, 80, of McLean, Va., died on March 18. He attended high school in Silver Spring, Md., and then went to the University of Michigan and then Harvard Law School. He was a longtime labor attorney for C&P Telephone Co., and Bell Atlantic.

"We were sorry to learn, belatedly, of the death of Bernard, who recently became a very major benefactor of FFRF and cared deeply about FFRF's work and future," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Our condolences to his family."

Congress

Continued from page 1

bluntly, Christianity is un-American."

Renowned constitutional law scholar and Dean of UC-Berkeley School of Law Erwin Chemerinsky calls *The Founding Myth* "a beautifully written book that demolishes the myth that American law is based on scripture."

The cost of the major undertaking was generously underwritten by University of Arkansas Professor Emeritus

Brian Bolton, who has funded FFRF's new Bible Accountability Project.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is a national nonprofit organization with more than 30,000 members and several chapters across the country. FFRF's purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between church and state, and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

LETTERBOX

Giving up the church for Lent — and forever

I so admire the work you do. I was raised Catholic. When I turned 18, I gave up the church for Lent. So many stupid stories. So power hungry. I don't miss it.

William Burkhardt
Ohio

Editor's note: FFRF thanks William for his Lifetime Membership donation!

Is Supreme Court naïve, or does it just not care?

As was anybody who cares about the separation of church and state, I was very disappointed in the *Bladensburg* cross decision. After reading Andrew L. Seidel's article on the reasoning behind that decision, I was even more frustrated. If you want to know whether a Christian symbol has a secular meaning, ask a non-Christian (e.g., Ruth Bader Ginsburg), not a Christian (e.g., Samuel Alito).

Most people are totally incapable of seeing the impact that something that is common and comfortable in their lives has on those in whose lives it is not common and comfortable. The community that Alito cares so much about is the Christian community, not the American community, which is religiously diverse.

If a community wants to preserve a monument (or whatever) for historical significance, put it in a museum or sell the land on which it stands. A history of doing something wrong (i.e., ignoring the First Amendment) is not a justification for continuing the error.

Finally, the belief in the separation of church and state is not hostile to religion. It is only hostile to government-endorsed religion. I believe there will come a time in the future when the current Supreme Court is seen to be as legally flawed in its decisions as the court that decided the *Dred Scott* case. Are they truly that naïve, or do they just not care?

Wendy Koch
Colorado

Glad to have FFRF's TV show back on the air

On Sept. 1, I saw the first episode of the new season of "Freethought Matters," featuring an interview with U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman. First, I would like to state my appreciation for the return of the show. I saw all the episodes presented in the Seattle area a while back and had been missing it.

I intend to send an appreciation letter to Huffman and others related to the Freethought Caucus. I appreciate both the Freethought Caucus and your organization. Thank you for your efforts in all you do.

Brian Wiegman
Washington

'Under God' shouldn't be in Pledge of Allegiance

My hat is off to Alex McDaniel for going along with his conscience and not standing for the Pledge of Allegiance. It took a lot of guts on that kid's part. I certainly admire him for it.

It is past time to take "under God" out of the pledge. No one should be

Cutting-edge technology

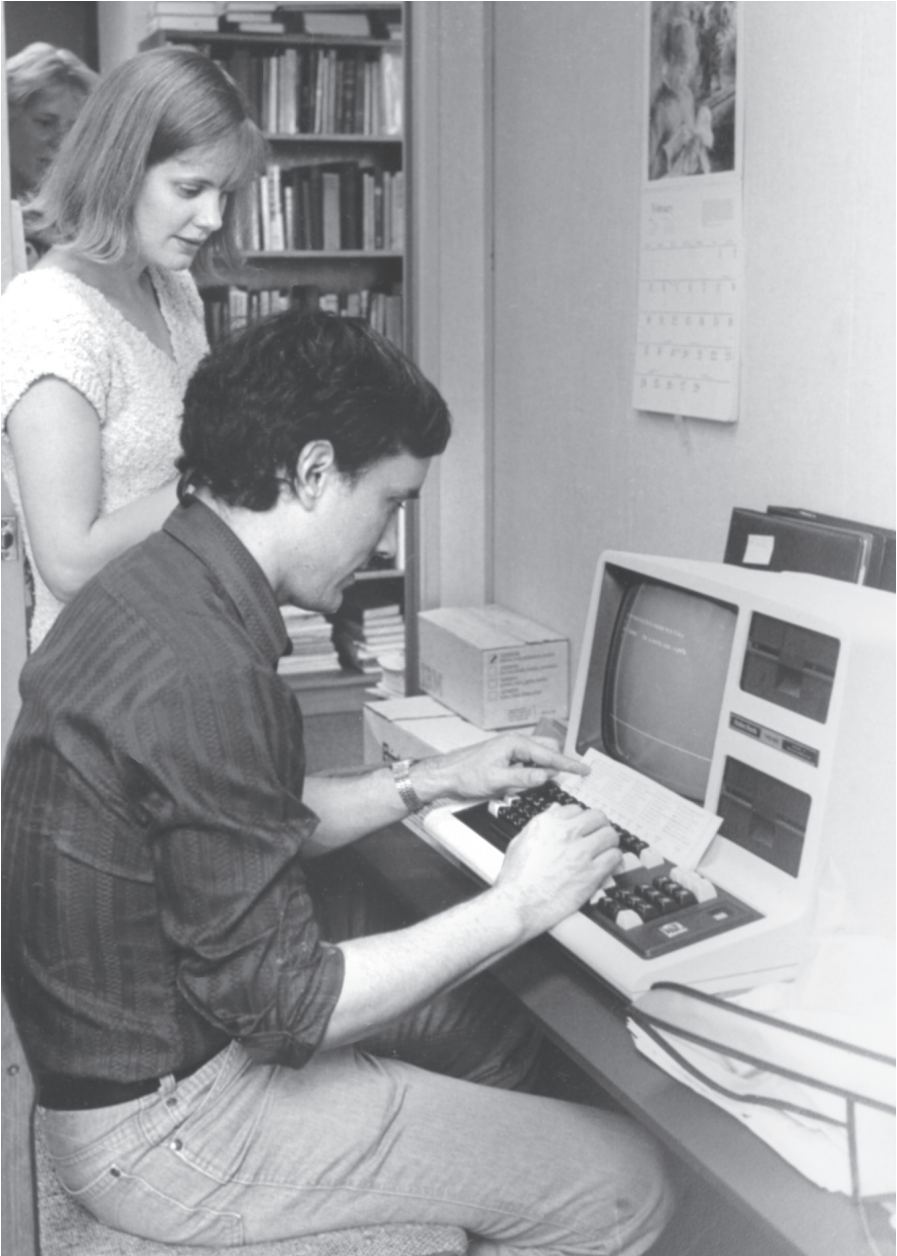


Photo by Paul J. Gaylor

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker types in coding for keyboard shortcuts into FFRF's new computer back in 1985 at its original headquarters in Madison, Wis. Looking on is Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, who was then editor of Freethought Today. The paper was put together on that Radio Shack model.

forced to say that against his or her will.

I noticed his school principal didn't mention the troops; she simply said this kid's actions offended her. As a nearly 10-year Army veteran who is proud to have served, I defend anyone's right not to stand for the pledge, as well as the national anthem.

Jeffrey Conner
Washington

Imagine if everyone were as open-minded

I just received the September issue and noticed several of the essay contest winners mentioned John Lennon's song "Imagine." Which brings me to this story.

For years, I've had a somewhat improbable email friendship with a well-known Catholic inspirational singer whom I'll call "T." Recently, I saw an online video of a recent performance she gave at a Methodist church, and one of the songs she sang was "Imagine"! And she didn't change any of the words — she sang it completely straight! Well, here's what I wrote to her after seeing the concert:

"I sincerely hope you didn't catch heat for doing this song, especially in a church. Many Christians I know just can't forgive John Lennon for (a) his statement that the Beatles were 'more popular than Jesus,' and (b) his early solo song 'God.' And nonbelievers consider 'Imagine' to be one of their

anthems."

Here's how she responded: "Regarding 'Imagine,' it's a beautiful song. If someone has a problem with it, it's their problem, not mine. If the Scriptures are an accurate account of Jesus' teachings, then forgiveness and the ability to forgive is pretty much one of central themes. No? At the United Methodist Church, where we performed that show (and videoed it), they LOVED it! So, it's all good!"

Well, if this very Catholic singer can get away with performing "Imagine" in a church, not change any of the lyrics, and not get raked over coals for it, maybe there's some reason for hope after all.

Andrew C. Jones
Michigan

Crankmail only makes us stronger, more resilient

Please continue to publish the all-too-real Crankmail. I use these letters as a type of inoculation for when someone says something like that to me. The Crankmail assures me not to take it personally and that it has been said before (and probably worse). Those letters make us stronger and more resilient. Please keep publishing them!

Pete Prunkl
North Carolina

Dying woman's poem showed heart of atheist

I recently came across a letter/poem from a person I had known who had gotten back in touch with me when she became diagnosed with lung cancer. She sent it to me shortly before she died.

I had few philosophical conversations with her except to tell her I was not religious when she brought up the God question. I had no interest in a discussion of her beliefs or my nonbeliefs. Keeping her fed and housed was more important at that point in her life.

I always enjoy reading Freethought Today and thought other readers might find her poem useful or entertaining.

Anonymous
California

Atheists get it right

I always thought that if I were ever in true need

It would be the Christian, the Jew, whatever.

But NEVER the atheist who would be there for me.

Was I ever wrong.

Atheists see your need.

Atheists take care of your need and may not know your name.

Atheists take the fear and terror of the unknown away.

Atheists do not ask when and if you can repay them.

Atheists do not even tell anyone they are doing good.

No one knows and they are good with that.

That's a tough one to get your head around.

Atheists bring health equipment if it is needed.

Atheists bring fruit you could not afford but love and need for healing.

Pancake mix you lust for, banana bread that heals on the spot!

Atheists bring caffeine to a dreary day.

All my life I got it wrong.

It is the atheist, my atheist, who gets it right.

And this one sends Christmas cards and has a Christmas tree.

Who knew?

I do now. And I am grateful.

Reading freethinking books can lead to love

Fifty years ago on the Fourth of July, I sat reading in my college friend's communal kitchen in San Francisco.

That day, one of my friend's acquaintances came to visit, and he brought a friend. Fifty years later, that friend and I are still together.

"I wanted a girlfriend who reads a book on the Fourth of July," he said to me back then.

Recently, at a warehouse where I volunteer (selling donated books to raise money for literacy and foster care), I found a battered copy of *Why I Am Not a Christian*, the book I was reading on that lucky day. Who needs an imaginary supernatural matchmaker when good old mortal atheist Bertrand Russell is still in print?

For anyone still seeking true love, I recommend reading Andrew L. Seidel's brilliant book, *The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism is Un-American*. It just might lure a perfect freethinking mate to your arms.

Jehnana Balzer
Arizona

All sorts of people, but only one Constitution

There are militant atheists, who regard everything about religion with contempt and consider religious people to be stupid, gullible or deluded.

There are philosophical atheists, who don’t believe in God or any deity, but are willing to “live and let live,” unless someone’s religion is being rammed down their throats as public law.

There are philosophical agnostics, who have decided the question of God is unsolvable.

There are generic agnostics, who are unable to make up their minds.

There are reluctant atheists and agnostics, who would prefer to believe in God, but just don’t feel it.

There are “apatheists,” who find the whole subject boring.

There are hidden atheists who go through the motions of a religion to avoid hostility or rejection from family and community.

There are those who are “spiritual but not religious,” even if they may not be quite sure of what that means.

There are people who are believers but practice no religion.

And there are people in transition from one category to another.

When I joined the Army, I took an oath to protect and defend the Constitution. I have always understood that as an obligation to defend the right of all Americans to practice their own faith. And my right not to have one.

David M. Shea
Maryland

Haught column, essays, AmazonSmile all great

I look forward to reading each issue of Freethought Today. One of my favorite recent articles was by James Haught in the June/July issue (“Religion fad-

ing as intelligence rises”). It captured my sentiments exactly. Also, I’m always impressed by the quality of the student essays. In these dark times, they give me hope for the future.

In your last issue, I saw the notice regarding AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.com) and I have signed up and use it for all my Amazon purchases. I suggest every FFRF member use it, too. The prices are the same, but based on my purchases, Amazon makes a donation to my favorite charity: FFRF.

Kenneth Rowe
Tennessee

Handmaid’s Tale could happen, is happening

My mother and I recently read Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*. While we were reading, she made the prescient observation that the events in the story could happen here and even said they were already happening. A few months later, religiously motivated anti-abortion laws started showing up in the news. Then, I saw FFRF’s ad in The New York Times, and Mom’s prophecy was right at the top: “It could happen here. It is happening here.”

Thank you, FFRF, for all that you do to keep America from becoming Gilead. Next on the reading list is Atwood’s sequel, *The Testaments*.

Christopher Santiago
South Carolina

Inspirational words from new Lifetime Members

Keep up the good fight and don’t let the bastards get you down!

We’re proud to be new Lifetime Members.

David and Mary Balint
Pennsylvania

Hiring based on religion has bad consequences

This is regarding President Trump’s idea of making religious discrimination legal in employment for federal contractors.

When religion is used in hiring, competency goes out the door. Only incompetent people need to substitute religion for a skill set. The consequences of using religion to determine hiring has resulted in business failures requiring government bailouts, industrial accidents and predatory business practices that destroy business startups.

Charlie McKay
Ontario, Canada

Bumper sticker leads to obvious question

I was sitting at a stoplight recently and noticed this bumper sticker on the car in front of me which read, “Not Today Satan.” That caused me to think, “OK, then, what day is good for you?”

Keep doing that wonderful work you do.

Steven Wiggs
South Carolina

I left my reincarnated heart in San Francisco

The article in the June/July issue by Erin Louis, “Mom is not in heaven, but she still lives on” was sweet, and reminded me of my own mom’s death.

Mom lived in Toronto and my dad was from New York. They met when my mom came to New York to visit her cousins in 1949, and they got married the following year. Sometime in the 1970s, they visited San Francisco and were charmed by the city. So, they playfully agreed that when they each died, they would go to San Francisco. That

way, they’d be reincarnated in the same city and it would be easier for them to meet each other again.

Mom died of Alzheimer’s in 2015. Any time someone offered the comforting “your mother is in a better place now,” I’d reply, “I know, she’s in San Francisco.” The totally puzzled looks I got actually were somewhat comforting!

Linda Palter
Michigan

‘In God We Trust’ is apt for our currency

Perhaps “In God We Trust” is appropriate on our money, considering money is the god in which we trust. A close second might be guns. Maybe there’s a third, then we’d have a trinity.

Marillyn Owens
Michigan

Barker’s story showed there are more of us

I just wanted to say thank you to Dan Barker for sharing his story. I was actually an evangelical minister in the Assemblies of God church during my 20s and, through a long journey, left the religion and eventually became an atheist (more than 10 years ago). I honestly didn’t know there were other people like me. I don’t know any atheists personally, and I guess I just felt like I was the only one who had traveled this kind of path. I’m very happy with my life, but there has been a sense of being alone that has lingered, like there is no one who can relate. It made me feel less alone to hear there were other people who had gone through the same painful transition I once had to endure. Thank you, Dan. It has really made a difference for me.

Leslie Bienz
Illinois

CRANKMAIL

Welcome to another edition of Crankmail, where you can feel better about yourself by knowing you aren’t one of these letter-writers. Printed as received.

Stupid atheists: The message of the Cross is foolishness to those who perish.: God is much smarter than dumb atheists, they wish to remain unwise, God lets them be unwise, STUPID IS AS STUPID DOES. their choice. — John Carboni

You are dumb: When alleged intellectuals like yourselves claim Bible contradiction, its because you choose to make the scriptures match your preconceived idea of what you decide is right and what seems true. But in the end, your just full tripe — Richard Hava

Illegal: All of your “Legal Successes” are a violation of the Constitution. That is to say that they are illegal acts. — Steve Johnson

FFR: Why you are u American You could keep your evil thoughts to yourself — John Bowker

Stay out of George county: Leave our county alone. We live in the bible belt. Just because ysl dont believe dont mean you can go to other states and schools and tell them to remove their stuff. Shove

it. We are proud of our beliefs here. — Nicole Lyn

Prince of peace: Jesus was practical..his presence did not bring peace if you are children of the devil.....your demons will get angry that live in your bodies..when he shows up.

..jesus was and is the enemy of satan..eventhough he is the prince of peace his presence stirs up anger in Satan’s children...that is why he says i did not come to bring peace...family members coming against each other is very common...because..when one family member believes in JESUS the whole family rise up against him...so familt fued starts...that is what jesus ment Sorry for calling atheists dumb asses....but i get upset...that they are running towards hell..rejoicing...and cheering... — Cia Ghavami

A world without God: Someday soon the whole world will finally get it’s wish and God will be gone from this world and all of his influence and even the conscience to do right will go with him, and for seven long, dark years, years in which men will want to die but can’t. All of humanity will finally get to experience what they have always wanted to, a world without any God. Good luck because I sure

as heck don’t plan to be here. — Vincent Kyle

Fakers: Your atheist society give money to addicts. You fund alcoholics, drug addicts. You allow them to be afflicted as you condemn them by saying it is their choice. Cultures have their own way of telling the truth. You lie about your size of sexual organ. What fools you are to claim this has any bearing on truth. You believe in love. You never tell ppl you love of the contradictions you experience in love. This is why you DIVORCE your spouses and God. God does not divorce you. He keeps his promise. God defined love. Your idea of love is based on your biased understanding and desire of how it should be. Love is kind. Then help the poor. Do it. You contradict your belief in love. You are fake. — Graham Jeacocke

Jesus is love: Peace with man is not possible till he is reigning as king !!! Yes I came not for peace between men but between god n man so that there might be goodwill to all you fools!man is a liar only god is the truth.so what if you find minor discrepancies which more than half can easily be explained .but how do explain your unbelief by biblical contradictions because creation itself proves the creator according to romans 1. The love of the truth is what it’s about ! This is not edification it’s questionable theoligal demonic disturbing babble !!!! The paul witnesses is easy explained bro!!! Really !!! Because it’s discretiting Jesus by discrediting the Bible’s authoritative essence!!! Hanging on nothing ? Alfull lot of lie??? The tomb stone was rolled away ..the first time they had not gotten to the door but at the site of the place where the area was , then when they got to the rolled away door , they freeked out at what they saw!!!! Psh!!!!!! Amature — Michael Olivero

America: Just so you ignorant stupid people know, a Facebook post inviting people to pray for the schools in a gym has absolutely nothing to do with the separation of church and state. Shut your stupid whiney libtard mouths and go stick your head in the sand. I have tried on numerous occasions to see things from your point of view but I just

can’t get my head that far up my ass — Brent Young

Fyffe alabama: If the people of Fyffe Alabama want to have back to school prayer it is none of your business. You people are not welcome down here, if you don’t like it then don’t attend. But quite frankly you can all piss off. There is no law of separation of church and state. — Luke Laweon

SD - In GOD We Trust: Why do you suddenly care about South Dakota? The phrase “In God We Trust” can have a unlimited meaning. It could mean the Christian God, it could be the Catholic God, it could be the Muslim God, it could be any God you want....I personally am Christian and thats my meaning. If you automatically get offended because that’s what you think of, that is your problem, not mine. Think, believe what you want, it is non of my business. I am not imposing my beliefs on you, why do you feel you can impose yours on me? If I am correct in my beliefs, you and I will be judged by my God for our decisions. If I am wrong, neither of us will know the difference. God bless. — Nate Moser

Beliefs: You shouldn’t have any religion rights. You’ve admitted that Satan is fictional. Therefore your religious beliefs are fictional. If I made a he-man is the master of the universe religion, then admit it’s a joke, I should lose all religious rights. Religion is about belief not comedy. How are you not being crushed in court. — Bobby Thompson

The devil confuses: This two are instruments of satan and don’t even know it. All religions are invented by the devil to confuses human kind. We are not fighting against flesh and blood but against demonic principality and weakness in the air. Jesus was the only one to exposed all demonic principality in his way to the cross and even defeated them in the cross and even defeated dead by rising on the third day. Colossians 2:15. — Homar Carrion

Sick: I really think your organization should be sued for just being. Not once but as may times as it takes until you run out of money. You’re disgusting people. — Bill Pullman

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A meaningful message and the logo of FFRF’s new TV show. Ivory imprint on tapered burgundy, 8 fl. oz. American- made mug.

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BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Kristopher Gorden, Fargo, ND: Disorderly conduct. Gorden, pastor at Olivet Lutheran Church, was arrested Aug. 9 at 6:45 a.m. at Izzy's Lounge in Warroad, MN. Further details weren't released. He has asked the Eastern North Dakota ELCA Synod to be placed on leave to be treated for alcohol addiction.

Gorden was Olivet Lutheran pastor in 2011 when he was convicted of DUI after his vehicle slid into a snowbank while entering a freeway on-ramp. *Source: West Fargo Pioneer, 8-12-19*

Conrad E. Valdez, 59: Las Cruces, TX: Sexual assault of a child. Valdez, pastor at Restoration Outreach Christian Church, allegedly assaulted a 15-year-old church member who had gone to him for counseling about a previous sexual assault. She told authorities it started with inappropriate touching and progressed to intercourse.

Valdez allegedly threatened to expose their relationship to her family if she ended it. Now 30, she said she decided to file a complaint after watching a documentary on abuse survivors. *Source: Houston Chronicle, 8-10-19*

Cesar Guerrero, 38, Sharonville, OH: 3 counts of sexual battery stemming from an August incident with a 17-year-old girl who belongs to Misión Cristiana El Calvario, the church where Guerrero is pastor and is considered a prophet. Federal pornography charges are pending. An affidavit said the native Guatemalan told the girl she "needed to be cleansed from being molested as a child."

"He used bible scripture and prayer to cleanse her as she performed oral sex on him — " a prosecutor told the judge at Guerrero's arraignment. "That's enough," interrupted the judge. "If I may just finish my last sentence," continued the prosecutor. "That's enough!" the judge replied. *Source: WKRC, 8-9-19*

Shmuel Rennert, 65, Milwaukee: Harassment, false imprisonment and criminal restraint. Rennert, an Orthodox rabbi and father of 10 who has been associated with the Wisconsin Institute for Torah Study, was arrested in Lakewood, NJ, where he also has a home. He's accused of refusing to let a woman out of his car after driving around for about an hour on July 31. He eventually dropped her off unharmed at her home, police said. *Source: nj.com, 8-8-19*

Cameron S. Giovannelli, 42, Orange Park, FL: Sexual abuse of a minor, perverted practice and 4th-degree sexual offense, alleged to have been committed in 2007 when he was Calvary Baptist Church pastor in Baltimore. His accuser, church member Sarah Jackson, says she was 16 when assaulted. She also babysat for his 3 children.

Giovannelli left Calvary Baptist in 2014 to become president of Golden State Baptist College in Santa Clara, CA. After Jackson posted on Facebook about her alleged abuse, he moved to Florida to become associate pastor at Immanuel Baptist Church in Jacksonville. *Source: Baltimore Sun, 8-7-19*

Joseph Gates, 35, Sanibel, FL: Driving under the influence. Gates, pastor at St. Isabel Catholic Church, was arrested after nearly hitting a fire hydrant, a report said. He gave the officer his bank card instead of his driver's license and later showed a blood-alcohol content of 0.185 despite claiming he'd only had a single drink. The report stated the church's female business manager was a passenger. *Source: Miami Herald, 8-5-19*

JianGang "Frank" Lan, 34, Chapel Hill, NC: Felony use of a counterfeit trademark. Lan, associate pastor at Deer Park Community Church, was arrested after authorities acting on a tip from the federal Department of Homeland Security found 3,200 fake Cartier bracelets in the church.

The bracelets would have an estimated retail value of \$24.4 million if they were authentic. It's believed Lan planned to sell them online. *Source: AP, 8-3-19*

Stefano Segalini, Piacenza, Italy: Charges related to drugging and molesting young men while he was Catholic pastor at the church of San Giuseppe Operaio before abruptly retiring after being suspended in May. It's alleged he abused victims who weren't parish members during spiritual retreats and evening activities after plying them with alcohol and drugs. *Source: Crux, 8-3-19*

Paige Williams, 61, and **Abby Leach**, both of Hopkinsville, KY: 1st-degree complicity to criminal abuse of a child under 12 years of age. The women, respectively, are First United Methodist Church senior pastor and church day care director. Williams and Leach intentionally breached their legal duty to protect at least 7 children, all under 13 months old, the indictment said.

Day care employee **Allison Simpson** was indicted in April on counts of wanton endangerment and criminal abuse of a child under 12. It's alleged she's seen on video subjecting an 8-month old and a 10-month old to cruel care and confinement on Jan. 10. *Source: WHVO, 8-3-19*

Frederic S. Smith, 62, St. Augustine, FL: Simple battery. Smith's Facebook page lists him as a minister and president of Servant's Heart Disaster Relief, a nonprofit "evangelical hands-on ministry devoted to helping hurricane victims." Hope of Christ Ministry is listed at the same address as the nonprofit.

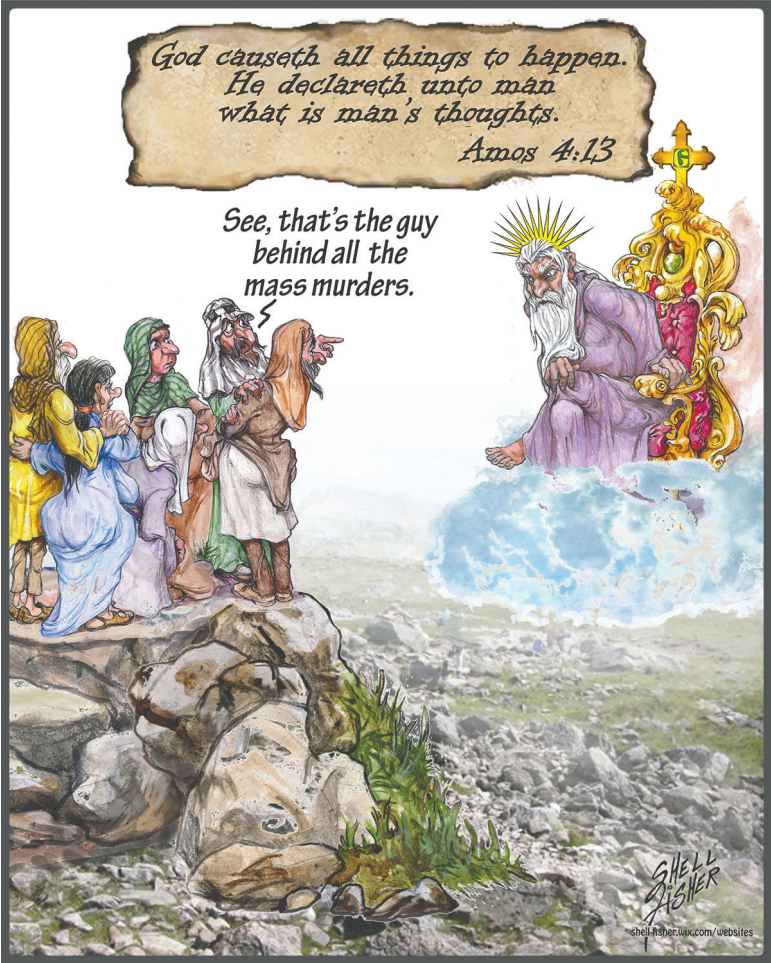
Smith is accused of writing a gay slur on his restaurant waiter's receipt, then ripping it up and stuffing it down the manager's blouse, touching her breast, after she confronted him outside. He had written "if he wasn't gay" with a zero-dollar tip. *Source: Naples Daily News, 8-1-19*

Henry Masten II, Richland County, SC: Failure to register as a sex offender. Masten, pastor at Bethlehem Grove Baptist Church in Clinton, was convicted in Ohio for gross sexual imposition in 2014. An investigation was launched in Clinton after church members voiced concerns. *Source: WYFF, 8-1-19*

Reginald Williams, 67, Bronx, NY: Grand larceny. Williams pastor of Charity Baptist Church of Christ and president of the Addicts Rehabilitation Center Foundation and its affiliate fund, is accused in a scheme that scammed the nonprofits out of about \$631,000 meant to help HIV-positive drug addicts. **Bennie Hadnott**, 74, and **Naomi Barrera**, 42, are also charged.

Williams allegedly got kickbacks from Hadnott's consulting group

Holy Smoke



that he awarded a contract to between May 2010 and January 2015. Barrera allegedly played a shell game with proceeds from an affordable housing real estate sale.

Prosecutors said Williams also had a lucrative expense reimbursement hustle, alleging he expensed \$100,000 on trips to the Bahamas, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic and submitted \$170,000 worth of dinners and bar tabs separately to both nonprofits. *Source: NY Daily News, 7-31-19*

Laverne P. Fox, 60, Erie, PA: 3 felony counts related to the sexual assault of a 15-year-old girl in 1991-92 when he was assistant pastor at Faith Baptist Church in Wildomar, CA. The alleged victim told investigators Fox was transferred to an affiliate church in Indiana and the incident was never reported to law enforcement.

Detectives became aware of Fox's alleged offenses while investigating sexual abuse of 3 teen girls by another Baptist youth pastor in Wildomar, **Malo V. Monteiro**, 46. He pleaded guilty last November and was sentenced to 64 months in prison. *Source: Desert Sun, 7-31-19*

Peter Romans, 59, Orient, OH: 4 counts each of aggravated murder and aggravated arson and 3 counts of murder. Romans is accused of setting the 2008 fire that killed his wife Billi, their son Caleb, a 12-year-old athlete at Grove City Christian School, and their daughter Ami, 16.

Billi Romans was receptionist at Grove City Christian. "The whole family was intimately involved at Grove City Nazarene Church," the Columbus Dispatch reported.

The victims died when fire from the family SUV parked in the carport spread to the house. Peter Romans ran outside and later said the flames stopped him from reentering. He sued Ford, Texas Instruments and Bridgestone, claiming a faulty cruise-control switch caused the fire. Tests later showed the switch burned from the outside in and there was evidence that a "significant quantity" of accelerant had been poured inside the Ford Expedition.

Romans was indicted by a grand jury after authorities reopened the investigation. *Source: Columbus Dispatch, 7-30-19*

Bicente V. Morales, 43, Sarasoto, FL: Sexual battery of a victim under 12. Morales, pastor at House of Restoration Ministry, allegedly assaulted his 6-year-old niece on 3 occasions by digitally penetrating her. Morales stopped molesting her once because it was time to get ready for church, the girl alleged. *Source: Herald-Tribune, 7-28-19*

SM, 31, a native of Pakistan, and **ALJ**, 46, a Moroccan national, were arrested in Barcelona, Spain, on charges of molesting 2 children ages 9 and 12. The men, identified only by their initials, are imams at different mosques. According to the indictments, both alleged victims were enrolled to study the Quran when assaulted in 2017. *Source: La Vanguardia, 7-28-19*

La Wanpirun, 81, Wat Kho Hua Khao, Thailand: Rape of a minor under age 15. La, a Buddhist monk, is accused of raping a 13-year-old girl in 2001 after giving her 2 glasses of beer. She awoke with vaginal pain the next day, when La assured her he would take responsibility if she became pregnant, said police Col. Arun Warichasrisukanya.

The mother filed a complaint but police found La had already left the area. He claimed he didn't know he was wanted on an arrest warrant. The statute of limitations was due to expire in 2 years. *Source: Bangkok Post, 7-27-19*

Charles Andrews, 66, Osprey, FL: 500 counts of possession of child pornography and 3 counts of failure to meet the registration requirements of a sex offender. Andrews, pastor at Osprey Church of Christ, was arrested after tips from online watchdogs allegedly showed 2 email accounts belonging to Andrews were used to download about 70 images of child pornography.

Andrews is a registered sex offender convicted in 2006 of sexual abuse in Alabama. *Source: Herald-Tribune, 7-24-19*

James R. Brown, Madison, MS: 22 counts related to alleged embezzlement of \$332,000 from Broadmoor Baptist Church, where he was executive pastor from 2014-17, when an audit discovered irregularities. It's alleged he used church checks for his mortgage payments

to Bank of America and transferred church funds into his personal bank account. *Source: WLBT, 7-24-19*

Howard W. Geck, 62, Huntingburg, IN: Failure to make a report. Geck, pastor at Jasper Apostolic Church, allegedly didn't report incidents of sexual abuse that occurred from 2012-15 at the church or at Jasper Christian Academy despite learning of them about 2 years ago. An investigation led to the arrest of **Dexter Hensley** on May 21, 2019. The alleged victims were between 5 and 9 years old at the time of the incidents. *Source: Free Press, 7-17-19*

Pleaded / Convicted

Urbano Vazquez, 47, Washington, DC: Guilty by jury of 3 counts of 2nd-degree child sexual assault and 1 count of misdemeanor sex abuse of a child. Vazquez, pastor at Shrine of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church, was charged with touching a girl's breasts twice inside her shirt in the church in 2015 when she was 13 and with abusing a 9-year-old girl for about a year until she was 10 in 2016.

Vazquez, ordained as a Capuchin Franciscan priest in 2014, declined a plea deal offered in March for an 11-year sentence and now faces 45 years. He's separately charged with groping an adult woman during confession. Two other minors and an adult accused him of similar crimes but the statute of limitations barred charges. *Source: NBC4, 8-14-19*

Christopher Rossman, 46, Baldwin City, KS: Pleaded guilty to possessing child pornography. Rossman, pastor of Catholic parishes in Baldwin City and Lapeer, admitted having child porn on his Samsung Galaxy tablet in September 2016, when the investigation started.

Authorities discovered Rossman's sister tried to run over the tablet several times but a forensic exam still located files depicting prepubescent girls engaging in sexual activities, U.S. Attorney Stephen McAllister said. *Source: Kansas City Star, 7-26-19*

Sentenced

Michael Cameron Sr., Des Moines, IA: 1 day of jail time (already served) and a \$65 fine after pleading guilty to disorderly conduct. Charges of domestic abuse, intimidation with a deadly weapon and child endangerment were dismissed.

Cameron, pastor at Revival Center Church of God in Christ, was accused of shooting at his daughter's car with 2 children inside while he was following her. He denied pulling the trigger. *Source: KCCI, 8-14-19*

Paul R. Dorr, 63, Ocheyedan, IA: \$125 fine on a misdemeanor criminal mischief conviction for publicly burning 4 LGBTQ-themed books he had checked out from the Orange City Public Library. Dorr, director of a Christian group called Rescue the Perishing, burned the books in a barrel live on Facebook in October 2018.

Dorr claimed he was singled out for prosecution because of his anti-gay message. A judge rejected that argument, saying the only message being sent was that "he cannot burn books that do not belong to him." *Source: Des Moines Register, 8-9-19*

Andre Thorpe, 36, Roxboro, NC: Up to 40 years in prison and lifetime probation after pleading guilty to 1 count each of possessing and making pornography. Thorpe was affiliated with several churches in the area and with the Boys and Girls Club of Durham.

Thorpe was accused of driving a 13-year-old boy, now 19, across state lines to carry on a sexual relationship and having his name tattooed on the victim. He's been identified as a suspect in other underage child sex cases yet to be adjudicated. *Source: WRAL, 8-6-19*

Michael Higginbottom, 76, Newcastle, UK: 9 years in prison and 9 years' home detention after jurors found him guilty of 5 counts of buggery and 7 counts of indecent assault of 2 boys at a Catholic school in Lancashire in the 1970s and 1980s. Judge Andrew Woolman said the priest's abuse was "accompanied, time after time, by threats or actual violence under the guise of a normal school punishment." *Source: BBC, 7-30-19*

Paul J. Brothers, 40, Waynesville, OH: 10 years' probation after pleading guilty to 2 counts of felony sexual battery on a minor. Brothers was staying at the female victim's home while preaching at North Mt. Zion Church of God in Hiawasse, GA. He admitted touching her breasts and vaginal area. Rape, statutory rape and other molestation charges were dropped in a plea agreement.

Prosecutor Jeff Langley said a plea deal was the best he could do after repeated case delays. But because Brothers got credit for the nearly 6 years he's been under house arrest in Ohio, the probation will last only 4 years. "The jury sees a 21-year-old woman, not that 14-year-old victim," Langley said. "We were relying on witnesses remembering something that happened in 2012."

Brothers' lawyer was state House Speaker David Ralston. At the time, state law let lawyers serving in the legislature delay court proceedings by claiming they had state-level duties to tend to. Ralston has delayed 226 cases 966 times since 2010. The law allowing that has since been amended.

The victim's mother, Laurie Wilson, said Brothers got "a slap on the wrist" but agreed to the plea deal because of her daughter's medical issues. She has a congenital heart defect, suffers seizures and needs oxygen. *Source: AP/Journal-Constitution, 7-20-19*

Christopher C. Stutts, 37, Birmingham, AL: 20 years in prison after pleading guilty to abusing a child younger than 12. Four other charges, including rape and sodomy, were dismissed in a plea deal. Stutts, a part-time youth and worship leader at Westwood Baptist Church, was arrested in February 2018 after a 14-year-old girl told investigators he had assaulted her over the past 3 years. *Source: Tuscaloosa News, 7-18-19*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Over **100 lawsuits** were filed Aug. 14 in New York state on the first day the Child Victims Act went into effect. The majority of defendants are listed as Catholic dioceses but at least 3 suits name the Boy Scouts of America.

One plaintiff, now 65, alleges she was raped by an older boy while nuns watched and was repeatedly abused sexually by nuns and other staff at the Mt. Loretto Mission on Staten Island, where she lived for 5 years in the 1960s. Several other suits allege similar abuse at the

shelter. Abuse survivors up to age 55 now have 12 months to sue. Criminal charges can now be filed until victims turn 28 for felonies and age 25 for misdemeanors. “I think there will be thousands of suits filed statewide,” said state Supreme Court Judge Paula Feroletto. Statewide, 45 judges have been assigned to hear these cases. *Source: NY Post, 8-14-19*

William Weaver, Linden Presbyterian Church (Linden, NJ), Presbyterian Church USA and Elizabeth Presbytery are being sued by “D.L.,” who alleges Weaver sexually assaulted him after he went to him in 2001 or 2002 for pastoral counseling. Weaver, 69, was the officiant at D.L.’s wedding in 2000.

D.L. alleges he told Weaver in 2005 that he’d been sexually abused as a child by his brother and beaten by his father and that “his wife had recently shared with him that she has had and may still have been having an inappropriate sexual relationship with her father.”

It’s alleged Weaver told D.L. he was under spiritual attack that had something to do with his penis, and at the next session he reached around D.L.’s back to cup his genitals, asking “How does that feel?” D.L. was “shaken” by the incident.

Three other men and a woman previously filed similar “sexorcism” suits against Weaver. *Source: Courier News, 8-1-19*

The **Diocese of Belleville**, IL, is being sued by “John Doe,” alleging he was molested as a child from 1987-89 by Catholic priest **Joseph Schwaegel**, who died in 2016. Schwaegel was arrested for sexual misconduct with an adult in 1987 and received probation while he was in charge of St. Peter Cathedral Parish and its grade school in Belleville, the suit states.

He was arrested again in 1994 for requesting sex from an undercover police officer at a highway rest stop. He was removed from ministry in 1994 and admitted publicly he was a “sex addict” while denying any inappropriate sexual behavior with minors. *Source: News-Democrat, 7-29-19*

The **Village Church** of Flower Mound, TX, is being sued by “Jane Doe,” who alleges she was “sexually violated” in 2012 at age 11 by church employee **Matthew Tonne** at a summer camp. Tonne was arrested Jan. 9 on charges of indecency with a child stemming from the incident and is awaiting trial.

The church, which has 5 campuses and 10,000 members in the Dallas area, is being sued for gross negligence. It’s alleged pastor **Matt Chandler** misled members by telling them an unidentified culprit didn’t have access to children and was leaving the church because of an alcohol problem. Tonne even got a severance package.

Doe’s parents allege their “energetic, funny, caring child” became “withdrawn and angry” and developed an eating disorder after the incident but before she told them what had happened at camp. It was only in early 2018 when she told them that they were able to piece everything together. *Source: NY Times, 7-26-19*

The **Episcopal Diocese and Grace St. Paul’s Church** of Tucson, AZ, are defendants in a suit filed by Charles Taylor, who alleges he was repeatedly molested by now-deceased priest **Richard Babcock** in the 1970s, starting when he was 12. It’s alleged the diocese knew Babcock was abusing children and covered it up by “reassigning him to other churches.”

Taylor tried to sue in 1991 but was barred by the statute of limitations. But in May a new state law went into effect that lets victims sue until they’re 30 and allows anyone to file until Dec. 31, 2020, no matter how long ago the abuse occurred. *Source: Episcopal News Service, 7-25-19*

The **Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles** is being sued by Patricia Harner, a Florida resident who alleges she was molested by **Paul J. Kowalewski**, 71, when he was preparing in the 1970s to be a Catholic priest in the Diocese of Buffalo, NY. She alleges the California diocese let Kowalewski stay in active ministry despite being aware of accusations against him.

Attorney Jeff Anderson represents another woman alleging sex abuse by Kowalewski in the town of Tonawanda when she was 16. A suit in New York is pending. He is currently a pastor at the Church of St. Paul in the Desert in Palm Springs, CA, and has been an Episcopal priest since 1990. *Source: Buffalo News, 7-23-19*

The **Catholic Diocese of Knoxville**, TN, is being sued by Michael Boyd, who alleges he was sexually assaulted by now-deceased priest **Xavier Mankel** in the 1990s and at least twice by former Bishop **Anthony O’Connell**, who died in 2012. O’Connell resigned in 2002 after admitting inappropriate conduct with minors in Missouri before he was in Knoxville.

The suit also contends **William Lovelace**, a Sacred Heart Cathedral music teacher, tried to get Boyd to “touch him inappropriately” during a guitar lesson. The diocese suspended Lovelace after the suit was filed. *Source: News Sentinel, 7-22-19*

St. Joseph Catholic Parish, O’Hara, PA, and the **Diocese of Pittsburgh** are defendants in a suit filed by “D.A.L.,” who alleges he was molested as a 6th and 7th grader between 1975-77 by an **unidentified teacher** at the parish school.

It’s alleged the teacher would lean over the boy sitting at his desk, kiss the top of his head and touch his genitals and that there were other victims. A walkout after students went to the principal — a nun who ignored their allegations — ended the abuse but the teacher kept his job, the suit claims. *Source: Tribune-Review, 7-22-19*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Catholic Archdiocese of Portland**, OR, agreed to settle 8 claims of sexual abuse involving former North Bend priest **Pius Brazauskas** for nearly \$4 million. The alleged abuse took place from about 1975-85 and involved mostly altar boys who were between 5 and 16. Brazauskas died in 1990 at age 84. He came to the U.S. from Lithuania in 1949. *Source: Oregon Public Broadcasting, 8-2-19*

Finances

The **Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh** has received formal notice from over 400 people who have either filed or may file claims for compensation for alleged sexual abuse by clergy. The diocese has so far paid about \$4 million to 26 victims, or roughly \$150,000 per person, said administrators Kenneth Feinberg and Camille Biros of the Independent Reconciliation and Compensation Program, which was launched after a 2018 grand jury report on sexual abuse by priests in the diocese during the past 7 decades.

State Attorney General Attorney General Josh Shapiro objected in court filings to Bishop David Zubik’s plan to tap a trust fund set up in 1989 to compensate survivors. The donor left

the money to start a home for orphans and troubled boys. The fund now exceeds \$8 million and the facility is closed.

The donor “would never have intended his charitable gift to be used for this purpose,” Shapiro’s office asserted in court papers. The diocese estimates abuse claim liability will top \$10 million. *Source: Post-Gazette/KDKA, 8-1-19*

The **Catholic Diocese of Scranton**, PA, awarded 85-year-old “Jane Doe” a 6-figure settlement (at least \$100,000) for being molested in 1940 by **Martin J. Fleming**, pastor at Holy Name Parish in Sawyerville when she was 6. Fleming died in 1950. The announcement came on the last day that clergy abuse victims could register for the diocese’s new compensation program, which has already paid about \$7 million to 44 survivors.

State Attorney General Josh Shapiro said 1,862 calls were made to his office’s hotline in the 12 months since a grand jury report exposed decades of abuse within Catholic dioceses. While not limited to abuse by Catholic clergy, about 90% of the calls involved Catholic clergy or institutions.

A review of all grand jury and media reports, diocesan and religious order disclosures and lists maintained by BishopAccountability.org shows 592 publicly accused clergy and laypersons in Pennsylvania. *Source: NBC/Tribune-Review, 7-31-19*

New Jersey’s **5 Catholic dioceses** have made their first settlement offers to people alleging abuse by clergy. “The program is up and running and going well with 44 claims received as of today,” said co-administrator Camille Biros. “Three claim determinations have been made and three settlement offers have been sent to claimants.”

Claimants named 20 priests, including 12 who have never before been identified as alleged abusers. A similar fund in New York offered maximum payouts of \$500,000 each to abuse survivors. *Source: nj.com, 7-25-19*

Legal Developments

Rabbi **Yaakov Litzman**, 70, should be charged with bribery, fraud, witness tampering and breach of trust, says a recommendation from the Israel Police, the nation’s civilian police force. Litzman, who heads the United Torah Judaism Party and serves as deputy health minister, is accused of pressuring a psychiatrist to testify that **Malka Leifer** was mentally unfit to stand trial for molesting girls at an Australian ultra-Orthodox school where she was headmistress from 2003 to 2008, when she fled to Israel.

Because of the psychiatrist’s opinion, Leifer, now 53, was not called to testify. A new assessment in 2018 determined she was faking her mental status. She remains in custody awaiting extradition.

The bribery allegation stems from the closing of a food business the health ministry determined had serious sanitation violations. Litzman is accused of offering benefits to employees in exchange for preventing the restaurant and catering service from being closed. *Source: JTA, 8-6-19*

Illinois sexual predators will be subject Jan. 1 to a new law signed by Democratic Gov. J.B. Pritzker that lifts the statute of limitations for criminal sexual assault, aggravated criminal sexual assault and aggravated criminal sexual abuse. The law states prosecution “may be commenced at any time” instead of within 10 years of commission of the offense.

Illinois is the 8th U.S. state to eliminate the statute of limitations for sex crimes. *Source: AP, 7-26-19*

Dale G. Terry, Des Moines, IA, a volunteer pastor at Faith Baptist Church, was ordered by a judge to pay \$51,875 in restitution for violating consumer fraud and door-to-door sales laws. Terry, who received state money to make improvements and repair flood damage for low-income homeowners, spoke often of his position as a pastor when contacting potential customers, said Ben Bellus, an assistant attorney general.

Court records show Terry has previous criminal convictions, including for felony theft, false reporting to law enforcement, assault, trespassing, criminal mischief and contempt. *Source: Des Moines Register, 7-25-19*

Naasón J. García, 50, a Mexican national who heads a worldwide Pentecostal church called La Luz del Mundo, was denied bail on 26 charges, including human trafficking, rape of a minor and production of images of child sex abuse. Three church-affiliated women — **Alondra Ocampo**, **Susana Medina Oaxaca** and **Azalea Rangel Melendez** — were also charged with coercing underage girls into performing sex acts between June 2015 and August 2017.

“This is a man who preyed on young girls,” said Superior Court Judge David Fields. “Religion was used against these girls. They were told that if they didn’t comply, they were sinning.”

Forensic examiner Steven Stover testified that videos showed García in a threesome with a woman and an underage male and females “of a very young age” performing sexual acts.

In a statement, church leaders said “the legal team representing the Apostle of Jesus Christ Naasón Joaquín García will appeal this decision in hopes to revise and modify this ruling.” *Source: Christian Post, 7-18-19*

Over 150 cases of sexual abuse or cover-up involving the **Chil-**

ean Catholic Church are being investigated by Chile’s Public Ministry and President Sebastián Piñera has signed into law a bill to remove the statute of limitations on sex crimes involving children.

The law ends impunity in cases that previously barred prosecution after 5 or 10 years depending on the nature of the crime. The new law is not retroactive. *Source: Reuters, 7-11-19*

Allegations

Calvary Gospel Church in Madison, WI, “has concealed allegations of sexual assault among its congregants for over 30 years, and continues to perpetuate a culture of fear and control that fosters abuse, former members say,” according to a news story in the Capital Times. Four women told the newspaper they were molested as children from the 1980s through about 2005 by adult members of the Pentecostal church, while 9 others, including a pastor, corroborated allegations by the women, all of whom agreed to be identified by name.

Their alleged perpetrators were men in their 20s and 30s and the alleged victims were all under 18 and as young as 11. The paper didn’t name the alleged perpetrators because they haven’t been charged.

The church was led by John W. Grant from 1968 to 2015, when he named himself bishop. His son, Roy Grant, became co-pastor in 2013 and now serves as senior pastor. The women said they told the Grants about their assaults but there were no repercussions for the alleged perpetrators while the women were “slut-shamed,” sometimes publicly.

The church has about 1,000 members served by 6 pastors. It operates a full-time child care center and ran Calvary Christian Academy until it closed in 2008. *Source: Capital Times, 8-7-19*

Opus Bono Sacerdotii (OBS), a conservative nonprofit operating out of unmarked buildings in Dryden, MI, has for nearly 2 decades provided “money, shelter, transport, legal help and other support to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Catholic priests accused of sexual abuse,” according to an Associated Press investigation. Some “powerful clerics” who have publicly pledged to hold the church accountable have surreptitiously arranged meetings, offered blessings and sent checks to OBS, the AP found.

Two of its founders, **Joe Maher** and **Peter Ferrara**, were forced out recently after Michigan’s attorney general found OBS had misused funds and misled contributors. A third co-founder, **Eduard Perrone**, was removed from ministry in August after the AP began asking about an allegation he sexually abused a child decades ago. The group claims that priests and the church itself are neglected victims. *Source: AP, 7-29-19*

The **Catholic Archdiocese of St. Louis** released the names of **61 clergy members** with substantiated abuse allegations dating back 70 years, as well as 3 priests found to have possessed child pornography. At least 34 are dead and none are in active ministry.

Critics blasted the list compiled by the archdiocese for not including details about allegations and for the disparity in numbers. Records from a 2014 lawsuit showed credible complaints made against 115 priests. *Source: Post-Dispatch, 7-26-19*

Utah Mormon Church leaders did nothing to alert authorities about crimes **Benjamin Alyk** at least twice in 2017 told multiple church officials he committed when he was 14 to 17. Alyk, 20, served as a missionary in the Dominican Republic.

Alyk surrendered to authorities in 2018 and pleaded guilty to recording children as young as 4 in his mother’s bathroom and sharing the images online. She operated a home day care but closed it in February 2017, 2 months after Alyk returned from his mission to live there and a full year before he turned himself in.

Utah clergy aren’t legally required to report abuse if it’s made public through confession of a perpetrator. State Rep. Angela Romero announced plans for a bill to do away with the exemption. *Source: NY Post, 7-25-19*

Oscar Diaz, Santa Rosa, CA, was suspended as pastor at Resurrection Catholic Parish after EMTs responding to a June accident found bags containing stolen parish collections totaling over \$18,000 inside his vehicle. Diocese of Santa Rosa officials then discovered another \$77,000 was missing from parishes where Diaz previously served.

Bishop Robert Vasa asked police to investigate but they determined that “protocols surrounding collection accounting would make it difficult to arrive at sufficient proof of theft to pursue criminal prosecution,” said Vasa’s statement. He called Diaz’s future with the church “uncertain.” *Source: Mercury News, 7-22-19*

Removed / Resigned

Zalman Heber, Tacoma, WA, resigned as rabbi of Chabad of Pierce County after 2 women accused him of sexual harassment and unwanted physical contact. Traci Moran, whose husband is stationed at Joint Base Lewis-McChord, said she first complained to Army Capt. **Michael Harari**, her husband’s unit chaplain, in 2018.

An Army probe found that Harari violated Moran’s confidence by sharing her allegations with Heber and that the men worked together to “harass and attempt to intimidate and ostracize the Morans” from civilian communities around the base.

Chabad member Kim Shomer, who first met Heber in 2007 at her son’s circumcision, alleged a similar pattern of harassment after starting weekly Kabbalah study sessions with him in March 2015. *Source: JTA/Seattle Times, 8-11-19*

Other

Social media posts by **Erik Richtsteig** (see graphic), pastor at St. James Catholic Church in Ogden, UT, led over 150 parents to sign a petition to block his transfer to St. Ambrose Parish and its K-8 school in Salt Lake City. Richtsteig has come under fire for posts seen as bigoted and misogynistic. He’s also posed with an assault rifle.

He wrote in a May Facebook post, “I hate June approaching. Looks like a gnome vomited in my newsfeed.” June is Pride Month. He pledged not to accept friend requests from people using a rainbow filter with their photo and shared a meme suggesting a black U.S. senator who has advocated for reparations should perform oral sex on a man.

Richtsteig would be replacing **Andrzej Skrzypiec** as St. Ambrose pastor. Skrzypiec, who pleaded no contest in 2018 to offering a female undercover officer \$30 for oral sex, was moved to St. Olaf Catholic School in Bountiful. *Source: Salt Lake Tribune, 8-1-19*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org



Fr. Erik Richtsteig’s Facebook post. (See “Other” to the right.)

FFRF ON THE ROAD



Denver: FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel met with the Denver FFRF Chapter on Sept. 7, when he discussed his debut book *The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism is Un-American*. “It was a PACKED house! I don’t think we have ever had such a turnout,” chapter President Claudette StPierre said. Members of the FFRF Denver Chapter board and others joined Seidel for a photo after the event. Front row left to right: Unidentified, Becky Greben, Jocelyne Morris. Back row left to right: Barb Sanwald, Chauncey Williams, Tom Kellogg, Andrew L. Seidel, Claudette StPierre, Joel Brown, Caitt Johnson and Dirk Huizenga.



Puerto Rico: FFRF Co-President Dan Barker spoke at the Asamblea of the Secular Humanists of Puerto Rico (Humanistas Seculares de Puerto Rico) on Sept. 8 in San Juan. In the front row (left to right) is Gerardo Rivera, an organizer with Humanists of Puerto Rico, Dan Barker and David Tamayo, president and founder of Hispanic American Freethinkers. The back row includes Mandisa Thomas (maroon dress) and Eva Quiñones (center back), the president of Humanists of Puerto Rico. The others are some of the attendees and members of the humanist group.



San Antonio: As part of the four-stop “Mess With Texas” leg of *The Founding Myth* tour, Seidel spoke to the Freethinkers Association of Central Texas in San Antonio. Here, he poses with the FACT board, including Katie Gaines, center, and Phil Session, right. While in Texas, Seidel also spoke in Austin, Houston and Hurst.



Madison: U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, second from left, a member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, met with an FFRF contingent in August in Pocan’s district office in Madison, Wis., to discuss issues important to FFRF members and his upcoming appearance at the FFRF convention. Others in the photo are, from left, FFRF Director of Governmental Affairs Mark Dann, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor and FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel.



Louisville: On Aug. 21, FFRF Legal Fellow Colin McNamara, second from left, participated in a panel discussion in Louisville, Ky., on the topic of “The Establishment Clause in Public Schools,” which also featured discussion of Project Blitz. Shown in the photo are, left to right, Kate Crosby, Colin McNamara, Michele Henry, Heather Gatnarek and Rev. Jason Crosby. Gatnarek, attorney with ACLU of Kentucky, and Crosby, minister at Crescent Hill Baptist Church, were also on the panel. The event was co-sponsored by the Americans United Louisville Chapter and the American Constitution Society.



Puerto Rico: The Secular Student Alliance group at the university in Mayagüez held a tabling event while FFRF Co-President Dan Barker was visiting Puerto Rico. From left, Dan Barker, Eva Quiñones, Mandisa Thomas and Gerardo Rivera, a student in the SSA group at the University of Puerto Rico in Mayagüez.



Louisville: FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel debated Mark David Hall on the question, “Did America Have a Christian Founding?” at the University of Louisville on Sept. 11. Hall is George Fox University politics professor and author of a number of books on religion and politics in American life. Seidel observed that Hall couldn’t name any Christian principles on which the nation was built. Hall countered with principles like “life,” “liberty,” and that people are “sinful.” Seidel hit back, arguing that those are universal human principles which Hall was arrogantly claiming for his religion. The debate aired on C-SPAN2 on Sept. 21.

‘Heretics, infidels, renegades . . . Welcome to Amsterdam’



About 100 red balloons were distributed during the Celebrating Dissent conference, a festival on freedom of thought, taking place at the deBalie culture house in Amsterdam Aug. 3-Sept. 1. Each balloon represents a modern atheist or freethinker who has been persecuted, arrested, imprisoned or killed. The balloon event was put on by performance artist Victoria Guggenheim. Pictured in the center is FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor examining the names on the balloons. Among the many commemorated were murder victims Avijit Roy, assassinated in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Asad Shah, assassinated in the UK, and Cheb Hasni, assassinated in Algeria. The event was put on by deBalie with the assistance of Maryam Namazie of UK’s One Law for All, and included participants from many nations, largely former Muslims-turned-nonbelievers. The mayor of Amsterdam opened the conference, noting the city’s proud history as a safe haven for freethinkers since Spinoza. She said, “Without dissent and protest, change and progress are not possible. Heretics, infidels, renegades . . . welcome to Amsterdam!”



Omar Makram, founder of Ex-Muslims of Sweden, spoke about why he had to desecrate the Koran in order to gain asylum in Sweden, after fleeing Egypt when he was threatened with arrest for apostasy. Listen to his interview on Freethought Radio at ffrf.org/radio. (Scroll to the Sept. 5, 2019 program.) Omar was one of many ex-Muslims in attendance who has had to leave his country.



Among the many presentations and panels during the 2-day event was one on Separation of Religion and Government. Pictured from left: panelists Homa Arjomand (an Iranian-born activist who runs the International Campaign against Sharia Court in Canada); Elzbieta Podlesna, who is facing charges for blasphemy in Poland for placing LGBTQ rainbows on religious posters; deBalie director Yoei Albrecht and panel moderator Bercan Gunel; Afsana Lachaux, UK, who is in a three-nation battle to regain custody of her son due to Sharia law; Sadia Hameed, Council of Ex-Muslims of Britain, and FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.



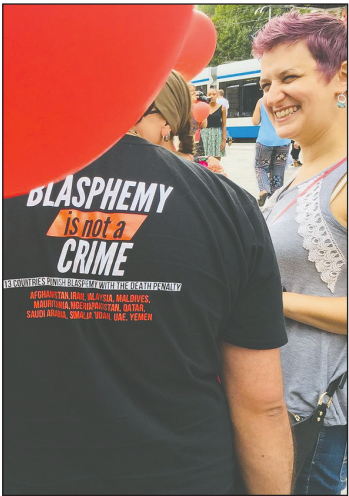
Conference co-convenor Maryam Namazie is pictured with the Swedish artist Jenny Wenhammar, who painted Maryam and herself as Femen protesters. Femen is an international women’s movement of topless female activists who are painted with slogans (Maryam’s slogan reads: “Neither god nor master”) and who use their own bodies to protest Islam, religion and other patriarchal forms.



Atheist and author Taslima Nasrin, left, who can’t go back to Bangladesh after a fatwa against her was issued in the early 1990s, with Saif-Ul-Malook, the Pakistani attorney who successfully defended Asia Bibi, a Christian peasant who’d been condemned to death for blasphemy, and FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.



Participants took to Amsterdam streets to commemorate the many targets and victims of blasphemy laws and Islam’s “crime” of apostasy. At right, leading the march, is Maryam Namazie, an Iranian-born United Kingdom secular leader.



“Blasphemy is not a crime” was a recurring theme during the Celebrating Dissent conference.

Last call for FFRF’s annual convention!

“The Family” author Jeff Sharlet added as convention speaker

FFRF is excited to announce the addition of Jeff Sharlet to its lineup of speakers at its national convention in Madison, Wis., from Oct. 18-20, at the Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center.

Sharlet is an award-winning literary journalist, author of The New York Times best-seller *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*, and executive producer of the new Netflix documentary series based on his book.

Jeff is an associate professor of English



Photo: Eli Burakian
Jeff Sharlet

and creative writing at Dartmouth College and a contributing editor for Harper’s, Virginia Quarterly Review and Rolling Stone. He is the publisher of 40 Towns, a periodical of literary journalism, and the co-creator of two online journals, Killing the Buddha, an online magazine of religion, culture, and politics, and The Revealer, a review of religion and media published by the New York University Center for Religion and Media.

His work has earned numerous awards, including the National Magazine Award, the Outspoken Award, the MOLLY National Journalism Prize, and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation’s Thomas Jefferson Award.

Sharlet joins an impressive list of convention speakers, including Sarah Vowell, Amber Scoriah, U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan, Rachel Laser, Mandisa Thomas, Hemant Mehta, Deven Green and Andrew Bradley (as the comedy team of Mrs. Betty Bowers), Trae Crowder, R. Laurence Moore and Isaac Kramnick, Anthony B. Pinn, Jeremiah Camara, Avinash Patil, Andrew L. Seidel and more!

Remember, deadline for pre-registration and meals is Monday, Oct. 7. Mailed-in registration forms also must be received by this date. However, you can still register at the convention, excluding meals. Call 1-800-335-4021 during regular business hours or sign up online at ffrf.org/convention2019.

FFRF’s 42nd annual convention schedule

Subject to minor changes

Friday, October 18	Saturday, October 19
MORNING OPEN HOUSE <i>Pre-convention event</i>	<i>All Saturday events held in Madison Ballroom, unless otherwise noted.</i>
9:30 -11:30 AM OPEN HOUSE Freethought Hall in Downtown Madison <i>(Free, but reservations required!)</i>	8:00 AM Nonprayer Breakfast (ticketed event) — Exhibit Hall A
EARLY REGISTRATION OPENS <i>Complimentary pastries, juice, hot beverages, Champagne, OJ, Mimosas</i>	9:00 AM Madison Ballroom <i>Sales tables open</i>
AFTERNOON FORMAL OPENING Monona Terrace Community & Convention Center Monona Terrace, 1 John Nolen Dr. Madison Ballroom	9:30 AM WELCOME Lisa Strand
Noon REGISTRATION REOPENS (continues throughout convention) <i>Sales tables open in the Madison Ballroom</i>	MUSIC Dan Barker
1:00 PM SHORT WELCOME “The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism Is Un-American” Andrew Seidel <i>Book signing during break</i>	9:40 AM Film Preview, Jeremiah Camara, Director, “Holy Hierarchy: The Religious Roots of Racism in America”
1:30 PM Henry H. Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award Rachel Laser accepts on behalf of Americans United	10:00 AM Trio of student essay winners
2:00 PM A Conversation with Sarah Vowell with Dan Barker, followed by Q&A	10:30 AM “The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power” Jeff Sharlet
3:00 PM BREAK — Refreshments (lobby) <i>Book signing for Sarah Vowell in ballroom concurrent</i>	11:00 AM Battle of Church & State: Legal Accomplishments FFRF Legal Staff & Mark Dann, FFRF lobbyist
3:30 PM “Godless Citizens in a Godly Republic: Atheists in American Public Life” Authors R. Laurence Moore & Isaac Kramnick	Noon - 2:00 PM LUNCH BREAK <i>Optional Grab & Go Lunch</i> <i>Book signing for Jeff Sharlet</i>
4:15 PM Forward Award, Nancy Northup, Center for Reproductive Rights	12:15 - 1:45 PM FILM SCREENING “Holy Hierarchy: The Religious Roots of Racism in America”
5:00 PM DINNER BREAK Buffet in Grand Terrace (ticketed event) <i>Book signing for Moore & Kramnick concurrent</i>	2:00 PM Freethought Heroine Award Mandisa Thomas
FRIDAY EVENING PROGRAM Madison Ballroom	2:30 PM Avijit Roy Courage Award Avinash Patil, on behalf of Maharashtra Andhashraddha Nirmoolan Samiti
7:00 PM EVENING WELCOME, MUSIC FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker & Annie Laurie Gaylor: Year in Review	3:00 PM Emperor Has No Clothes Award Anthony B. Pinn
Video speech: U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin	3:30 PM BREAK <i>Book signing for Anthony Pinn</i>
7:30 PM “Nothing Fails Like Prayer Award” & Speech “Is Atheism Still Taboo in Politics?” Hemant Mehta	4:00 PM Leaving the Witness Amber Scoriah
8:00 PM God Gets His Annual Job Performance Review Mrs. Betty Bowers (America’s Best Christian™) and Andrew Bradley	4:30 PM U.S. Rep. Mark Pocan
<i>Complimentary gourmet cupcakes and hot beverages — Grand Terrace</i>	5:00 PM <i>Book signing for Amber Scoriah</i>
10:15 PM Film: “Holy Hierarchy: The Religious Roots of Racism in America” <i>Hall of Ideas</i> <i>To be repeated at 12:15 p.m. Saturday</i>	6:30 PM SATURDAY NIGHT DINNER (Ticketed event) — Exhibit Hall A
	Evening program in Madison Ballroom
	8:00 PM “Clean Money Drawing”
	8:30 PM An Evening with Trae Crowder, “Liberal Redneck”
	Sunday, October 20
	ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING Hall of Ideas FG
	8:30 AM <i>Complimentary pastries & hot beverages</i>
	9:00 AM Annual Membership meeting Open to current FFRF members
	Annual State Representatives meeting
	ADJOURN BY NOON

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

NATIONAL CONVENTION

MADISON | OCTOBER 18–20, 2019

2019 CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: ffrf.org/convention2019

REGISTRATION FEES

	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___\$60	\$___
Spouse or Companion (Non-member accompanying member)	___\$65	\$___
Child (Under 18 Accompanying Registrant)	___Free	\$___
Student with ID (Over 18)	___\$10	\$___
<input type="checkbox"/> I am interested in hotel, meal or travel scholarship		
Non-member	___\$115	\$___
Or join for \$40 and save \$15	___\$100	\$___

OPTIONAL MEALS / EVENTS

	Number Registering	Cost
Friday, October 18		
Freethought Hall Open House 9:30–11 AM / Must register to attend	___Free	
Friday Welcome Party (Dinner Buffet) 5–6:30 PM	___\$35	\$___
Registrant 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian
Registrant 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian
Registrant 3	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian
Saturday, October 19		
Non-Prayer Breakfast	___\$20	\$___
Registrant 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian
Registrant 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian
Registrant 3	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian
“Grab and Go” Box Lunch	___\$25	\$___
Registrant 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian
Registrant 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian
Registrant 3	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian
Saturday Dinner	___\$50	\$___
Registrant 1	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian
Registrant 2	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian
Registrant 3	<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	<input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian
		► Total \$___
<input type="checkbox"/> I am adding a donation to sponsor student convention scholarships \$___		
Please tell us about any ADA accommodations you need in order to fully participate in this convention:		
(Make checks payable to FFRF) Return with payment to:		
FFRF, Attn: Convention P.O. Box 750 Madison, WI 53701		
Name of Registrant 1		
Name of Registrant 2		
Name of Registrant 3		
Address		
City		
State / ZIP		
Phone*		
Email*		
Credit Card Number		
Expiration Date / Security Code		
Billing Name / Signature		
*Contact information for in-house use only		