

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**Building a bridge
... because it
is needed**

PAGE 14



**The intrusion
of religion into
public life**

PAGE 15



**Atheists have a
responsibility for
social justice**

PAGES 18-19

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John Irving joins FFRF convention

**Acclaimed author to speak in
November in San Antonio**

Acclaimed author and Oscar-winner John Irving has agreed to speak at FFRF's 43rd annual convention in San Antonio the weekend of Nov. 13-15.

He will receive FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes

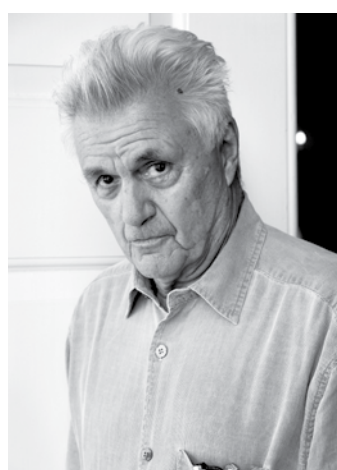


Photo by Nina Cochran

John Irving

Award, for statements such as this remark in a New York Times op-ed in June 2019: "Freedom of religion in the United States also means freedom from religion."

He will be part of a speaker lineup that includes fellow authors Margaret Atwood and Gloria Steinem, among many others. (For more on the speakers, turn to page 2. For details about convention

registration, see the back page.)

Irving has been nominated for a National Book Award three times — winning it in 1980 for his novel *The World According to Garp*. He received an O. Henry Award in 1981 for his short story "Interior Space." In 2000, Irving won the Oscar for Best Adapted Screenplay for "The Cider House Rules." In 2013, he won a Lambda Literary Award for his novel, *In One Person*.

In 2018, the Dayton Literary Peace Prize honored Irving with the Richard C. Holbrooke Distinguished Achievement Award.

Irving achieved critical and popular acclaim after the international success of *Garp* in 1978. Many of Irving's novels, including *The Cider House Rules* (1985), *A Prayer for Owen Meany* (1989), and *A Widow for One Year* (1998), have been bestsellers.



Photo by Steve Apps, Wisconsin State Journal

FFRF staffers, members and others protest during a speech by Vice President Pence (upper level, in front of flag), who came to the Wisconsin Capitol to push for "school choice." For more photos, see page 20.

Standing against vouchers

This op-ed first appeared in the Wisconsin State Journal on Jan. 28 and has been edited to add updated information.

By Patrick Elliott

Vice President Mike Pence and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, who attended a rally on Jan. 28 at the Wisconsin Capitol to bolster "school choice," may love the idea of spending taxpayer money on private religious schools — but families and taxpayers alike should be alarmed.

In part, the rally at the Capitol



Patrick Elliott

the mismanaged program should serve as a warning about what can happen when a state gives public money to unaccountable religious schools.

in Madison was intended to celebrate the 30-year anniversary of the Milwaukee voucher program.

This is not a program worth celebrating.

If anything, the mismanaged program should serve as a warning about what can happen when a state gives public money to unaccountable religious schools.

Wisconsin's voucher programs provide tuition payments to private schools and then reduce state aid to the local school district. The state Department of Public Instruction reported this school year that it will withhold or deduct more than \$145 million from local school districts where voucher students reside.

We have a long tradition in Wisconsin of public schools that welcome all students regardless of background, religion or individual characteristics. But in the

See Vouchers on page 20



FFRF Member Ben Hart shows off his new Kentucky license plate.

Ben Hart dishes about his new plate

After more than three years of fighting a lawsuit, FFRF Member Ben Hart finally got his "IM GOD" license plate in Kentucky.

In 2016, he was denied those plates by the Kentucky Department of Motor Vehicles because the phrase was deemed "obscene or vulgar." So, Hart, backed by FFRF and the ACLU of Kentucky, filed a lawsuit. A federal court ruled in November that Hart could apply for the personalized plates.

He received his new Kentucky plates on Jan. 22.

"They made me go to the courthouse to pick it up," Hart said recently on

FFRF's "Freethought Radio" program.

Hart, while previously living in Ohio, had "IM GOD" plates on his vehicle and said there was no issue getting them there, unlike in Kentucky.

"I did it originally just as a lark," he said on the radio show. "I got it from Ohio, no problem at all. I had it for about 12 years. . . . In Ohio, I got my plates that said 'IM GOD,' and a year or two later, the state came out with the slogan 'One Nation Under God' on the plates. I thought, I gotta have that one!"

So, on his Ohio plates, the "IM GOD" was printed just above "One Nation Under God." Hart enjoyed the

irony so much, he made sure that there was a similar tweak to religion on his Kentucky plates, asking for one of the state's specialty plates.

"I saw that it didn't have 'In God We Trust' on it, so I had them make it over again."

The court ruled on Feb. 10 that the state must pay more than \$150,000 in lawyer's fees to FFRF and ACLU-Kentucky.

Hart will be honored in November at FFRF's convention in San Antonio as one of its Freethinkers of the Year.

See Plate on page 8

Phil Zuckerman added to convention speaker lineup

Register now for FFRF’s San Antonio conference

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is happy to announce that secular studies pioneer Phil Zuckerman will be speaking at FFRF’s convention in San Antonio the weekend of Nov. 13–15.

Zuckerman will join legendary activist Gloria Steinem and literary titans Margaret Atwood and John Irving, along with many others, at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio on the famed Riverwalk. The convention venue is limited to about 900 attendees, so please plan ahead. For more details and to register for the convention, turn to the back page or go to ffrf.org/convention2020.

Zuckerman is the associate dean and professor of sociology at Pitzer College, and the founding chair of the nation’s first Secular Studies Program in Claremont, Calif. He is the author of several books, including *What It Means to be Moral* (2019), *Living the Secular Life* (2014), *Society Without God* (2008) and *Faith No More* (2012), among others. Zuckerman is also the editor of several volumes, including *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism* (2016) and *The Social Theory of W.E.B. Du Bois* (2004).

Steinem and Atwood both will receive FFRF’s “Forward” Award, which is reserved for those who are moving society forward. The award includes a statuette designed by world-renowned sculptor Zenos Frudakis.

Steinem will take part in a conversation with FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor on Friday, Nov. 13, at 3 p.m., breaking for audience questions. She will then sign copies of her newest book, *The Truth Will Set You Free, But First It Will Piss You Off!* from 4-4:30 p.m. at a private reception, a fundraiser for FFRF. The reception is limited to the first 50 individuals who sign up for the \$500 private event, which includes a copy of the book.

Steinem, who’s been billed as “the world’s most famous feminist,” is a journalist who co-founded Ms. Magazine in 1972, helped found the Women’s Action Alliance, the National Women’s Political Caucus, the Women’s Media Center, and was president of Voters for Choice, a political action committee, for 25 years. She is founding president of the Ms. Foundation for Women, Take our Daughters to Work Day, and many other initiatives. Her books include the best-sellers *Revolution from Within: A Book of Self-Esteem*, *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions*, *Moving Beyond Words*, *Marilyn: Norma Jean and My Life on the Road*.

A life-long reproductive rights activist,



Phil Zuckerman



Gloria Steinem



Margaret Atwood



Katherine Stewart



Sikivu Hutchinson



Brian Bolton

Steinem has said: “Do not hang out any place where they won’t let you laugh, including churches and temples.”

“An Evening with Margaret Atwood” will take place Friday night, to include a conversation with journalist Katherine Stewart, who will be speaking herself on Saturday. Atwood has agreed to sign books after her talk. The book signing will be followed by a private reception. Those signing up, also a \$500 fundraiser for FFRF, will receive a copy of Atwood’s new and much-lauded *The Testaments*, which won the 2019 Booker Prize and is a sequel to *The Handmaid’s Tale*.

Atwood is the author of more than 50 volumes of fiction, poetry, children’s literature and nonfiction. Her best-known novels include *The Edible Woman*, *The Robber Bride*, *The Blind Assassin*, and *Oryx and Crake*, which is being adapted into an HBO TV series by filmmaker Darren Aronofsky. A serialized adaptation of *The Handmaid’s Tale* has received 13 Emmy nominations and eight awards including for Best Drama.

“Every totalitarian government on the planet has always taken a very great interest in women’s reproductive rights,” says Atwood. Both women have previously been named Humanists of the Year.

Others confirmed to speak at the convention include:

- Journalist and author Katherine Stewart. In addition to conducting the on-stage interview with Margaret Atwood, Stewart will talk about her new book, *The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*. She is also the author of *The Good News Club: The Christian Right’s Stealth Assault on America’s Children*. In 2014, she was named Person of the Year by Americans United for her coverage of religion, politics, policy and state/church conflicts.
- Black Skeptics Los Angeles founder, novelist and activist Sikivu Hutchinson, Ph.D, will be receiving FFRF’s Freethought Heroine Award. Hutchinson is an educator, author, playwright and director. Her books include *Moral Combat: Black Atheists, Gender Politics, and the Values Wars* (2011),

Godless Americana: Race and Religious Rebels (2013) and the novel *White Nights, Black Paradise* (2015) on the Peoples Temple and the 1978 Jonestown massacre. She also wrote, directed and produced a short film of “White Nights, Black Paradise.”

- Brian Bolton, an FFRF Lifetime Member, has recently endowed a professorship at the University of Texas at Austin that will focus on the growing segment of the population adhering to a secular worldview. The executive wing of FFRF’s office, Freethought Hall, is named for Bolton, due to his support of FFRF’s headquarters expansion. FFRF will be publishing Bolton’s new work, tentatively titled *Why the Bible Is Not a Good Book*, this year. Bolton is a retired academic psychologist with a background in mathematics, statistics and psychometrics. He has edited and authored 10 books.

Future issues of Freethought Today will update the list of speakers and honorees. See the back page for registration form and convention information, or go to ffrf.org/convention2020.



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FFRF thanks 32 new Life Members

FFRF welcomes 32 Lifetime Members, three Beyond After-Life Members, one After-Life Member and seven Immortals.

The three newest Beyond After-Life Members are Alfred W. Johnson, Karolina Johnson and Brent Pickert. That designation is a tongue-in-cheek-named membership category of \$10,000 for those who want their donation to “live on” after them and beyond.

The newest After-Life Member is Janis L. Solomon. That designation is a membership category of \$5,000 for those who want their donation to “live on” after them.

FFRF’s newest \$1,000 Lifetime Members are Elena Allen, Frederick Baum, Steve Bratteng, Orlie Brewer, John R. Burrow, Leonard Fiocca, Dwayne Free, Robert Hewson, William Howell Jr., Clint Johnson, Bruce Kopetz, William Krieg,

Laura Lakin, Jerry Levine, Pam Marcinko, Jessica Mezzacappa, Shirley Moll, Teresa Palomar, Steve Petersen, Joslyn D. Polzien, Abdul Rehman, Philip D. Ross, Wanda Shirk, Scott K. Simonds, Laura L. Smith, Celeste Smither, William L. Sollee, Zoran Svorcan (gifted from Adam R. Rose), Arelis and Shannon Van Breda, Mickey Weinstein and Tracy Wilkins.

FFRF’s newest Immortals are: Phil and Gay Duran, Donald Hayes, Thomas Morris, JoAnn Papich, Vincent Savarese and Laura R. Wenrick.

States represented are: Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Washington, Washington, D.C., and Wisconsin.

Strategic Response Team kicks into high gear

By Andrew L. Seidel

FFRF's Strategic Response Team (SRT) celebrated its second year of fighting theocracy and Christian Nationalism. SRT is a nimble squad that encapsulates FFRF's two main purposes: education and state-church separation. We work to educate the public and keep state and church separate.

After a successful first year, FFRF expanded the team in its second year. Ryan Jayne is now a full-time SRT attorney and we hired a full-time director of governmental affairs, Mark Dann. Ryan, Mark and I make up the core of the team. Also attached to SRT are FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, Director of Communications Amit Pal, Editorial Assistant Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey and the FFRF legal team.

- Our usual work falls into four basic categories:
1. Shaping public opinion with articles and editorials.
 2. Working to stop imminent violations with legal letters.
 3. Lobbying on state legislation.
 4. Lobbying the federal government.

Shaping opinion

Shaping public opinion often involves wading into the news cycle to drive the public debate for FFRF. The best example of this was our complaint against the judge in the Amber Guyger murder trial. Judge Tammy Kemp gave the now-guilty murderer a bible and told her to come to Jesus.

The Guyger bible complaint was widely covered, including by CNN, NPR, The New York Times and Washington Post. Fox News ran five stories on it. President Trump tweeted about it. We shaped the public debate and educated about state-church separation.

We seize teachable moments wherever we can, from a sheriff's deputy who called for the government to kill LGBTQ Americans (he was fired), to a district attorney who consulted the bible before seeking the death penalty, to pushing back against Attorney General William Barr and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, to slamming governors in Oklahoma, South Carolina and Nebraska for abusing a public office to promote their personal religion.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF's Strategic Response Team was gifted jackets by generous member Adam R. Rose. Showing off the jackets are, from left, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Ryan Jayne, Amit Pal, Dan Barker, Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey and Andrew L. Seidel. Missing: Mark Dann.

Shaping public opinion also involves getting FFRF's message out to our members and the public. We did this in 2019 with 46 FFRF statements, 51 press releases, and 45 articles, op-eds, blogs and letters to the editor. I wrote a number of op-eds for Rewire News, Slate, and other outlets, including a three-part series on the history, legality and Christian nationalism of the phrase "In God We Trust."

SRT tackled a variety of issues including Trump tweeting about bible classes, the terror attacks in New Zealand, our support for the Equality Act and proposed legislation.

Stopping violations

SRT worked with the legal team to address 54 complaints requiring immediate action — what we call rapid response. For instance, we heard that the town of Charleston, Ill., was organizing trips to Ken Ham's Ark Encounter and Creation Museum. Ryan Jayne wrote to the town the same day and the town cancelled the trips. Then, SRT sent a letter to every school district within driving distance of the ark park — spanning five states — explaining why it's unconstitutional for public schools to organize similar trips.

Fighting Trump, nominees

SRT has opposed judicial nominees who are particularly bad on state-church issues. We also opposed the confirmation of Barr. Media outlets were surprised by Barr's October speech at Notre Dame — "Among the militant secularists are many so-called progressives, but where is the progress? No secular creed has emerged capable

of performing the role of religion." But SRT warned about Barr's bigotry when he was first nominated. SRT unearthed speeches Barr gave in 1992 saying nearly identical things. We spearheaded an effort to educate senators and drafted the letter that other secular groups signed, including the Secular Coalition, American Atheists and the Center for Inquiry.

Pompeo has a similarly dreadful Christian Nationalist past and has used the Department of State and its website to promote his Christian Nationalist vision of leadership. SRT sent the State Department a letter within an hour of this violation and the offending content was down a few hours later.

State-level lobbying

In 2019, SRT reviewed 2,200 bills. Ryan tracked 500 of those bills, two-thirds of which we opposed. Only 39 of those bad bills became law. Much of the legislation we opposed did not pass, including some of the worst. We stopped:

- Private school voucher-type schemes in eight different states.
- A bill to make the bible the official state book of Mississippi.
- A Florida bill that would have required public high schools to offer for-credit bible studies, which was just reintroduced as H.B. 341 and S.B. 746 (Take action here: ffrf.us/rejectbibleclasses).

We tracked and opposed bills pushed by "Project Blitz," a scheme aimed at codifying Christian Nationalism that features a wide variety of bad bills, including displaying "In God We Trust" in public schools.

What success we have is thanks to you, our members. Last year, 14,000 different FFRF members contacted their legislators more than 180,000 times on the 77 action alerts we sent out. The total number is actually much higher because this includes neither state nor local legislator connections nor in-person contacts.

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.

Government affairs

Mark Dann kicked FFRF's government relations program into high gear after being hired in May 2019 by bringing FFRF members and messages to Congress. Mark had more than 80 meetings with congressional offices and hosted a successful briefing on the Hill, featuring Bonya Ahmed and the Congressional Freethought Caucus, which supports the separation of church and state, reason and science in policy making and the equal treatment of freethinkers.

SRT helped build up the caucus and brought three of its members on FFRF's television show, "Freethought Matters." (All those episodes are available on FFRF's YouTube channel.) Having U.S. representatives appear on FFRF media was unthinkable even a few years ago.

We've also been racking up legislative victories. One of our key legislative objectives is to make sure all Americans have access to a secular recovery option, which is a constitutional right. Religious 12-step programs are widely available and are often a default treatment option.

With the help of partners in the secular community, such as the Secular Coalition for America, and secular recovery providers like SMART Recovery and LifeRing, we got an insertion into the budget that empowers federal agencies to work with secular recovery providers.

Alongside our allies, we are standing up to Christian Nationalists with two of our main legislative efforts: the Do No Harm Act and the Scientific Inquiry Act. The Do No Harm Act bans religious exemptions in laws guaranteeing fundamental civil and legal rights and through our allied lobbying, we've added 43 new co-sponsors. The Scientific Integrity Act bans political meddling in publicly funded scientific inquiry, has been voted out of committee and is on its way to the House floor.

This is just a sample of what the Strategic Response Team does. Ryan, Mark, Bailey, Amit and Annie Laurie handled more than 500 separate projects this year and a lot of those you'll never hear about. By its nature, a lot of our work is behind the scenes. But you should know that FFRF's Strategic Response Team will always be fighting for you.

Andrew L. Seidel is FFRF's director of strategic response.

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HEADS UP

A Poetry Column By Philip Appleman

Our Tree

When we dug it out, thirty summers back,
it wasn't as thick as a wrist, but it was straight,
symmetrical: a hard maple
with good genes.
Small as it was, with its little world of dirt,
it took four of us to lug it back
along the river bank, to shade
the shy grass at a brand-new house.
Once in our ground, as the Bible says,
it was nothing but chattel:
we owned it.

Now paint is scabbing off the house,
and rust is cancer in the eaves again,
but the tree is tall and full
and tropically green. Two of us
who carried that sapling home
are underground forever; the other two
are going gray and making out their wills.
The maple sees it all: every year
it takes a deep breath, puffs
a thousand wings, and murmurs in the breeze:

*There, you flesh-and-bloods who thought you owned me,
my seeds are dancing over fields and meadows,
and when you're lying low and making earth,
I'll send up sturdy shoots around your graves.*

(New and Selected Poems, 1956–1966)

Photo by Brent Nicastro



© 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.

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

Freethought Today caption contest winner!

Congratulations to Chafin Rhyne of North Carolina for winning FFRF's caption contest from the January/February issue. For his winning caption, Chafin wins an FFRF T-shirt.

The winning caption is: **Boy, that was a long sermon!**

Top runners-up include: **Thoughts and prayers in action.** — Chris Kramer of Missouri.

Still open for bingo, Mondays at 7 p.m. — Paul Riley of New York.
Sure, it's run down and old, but so is the dogma that built it. — Stephen Van Eck of Pennsylvania.

Raze the Lord! — Darrell Barker of Washington.
Jesus doesn't live here anymore. — Pat Winchild of Florida.
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.



Submitted photo

Amy Hall sits in the cockpit of a Boeing 747.

After studying religions, pilot lands as freethinker

Name: Amy Hall.
Where I live: Hiding out in the woods of Bible Belt, Arkansas.
Where and when I was born: 1967 in Lorain, Ohio.

Family: My mom, stepdad and one brother live near me. I have another brother in Ohio. My real father died of brain cancer when I was 9. None of us is religious anymore.

Education: Kent State University in Ohio, where I earned a bachelor of science degree and acquired my first series of pilot licenses.

Occupation: Airline pilot. Pilots who carry cargo only are affectionately called “freight dogs.” Boxes don’t complain about the ride or the cabin temperature. I am frequently overseas. Some military contracts have taken me to interesting and not-so-interesting places. A few years ago, I flew an engine for NASA’s 747 Sophia to Christchurch, New Zealand.

Military service: When I first started college, I joined ROTC, hoping to win a scholarship and a flying commission. Neither worked out, luckily, as campus cadet life was not my cup of tea.

How I got where I am today: Through Kent State’s flight program I earned my Private, Commercial, and then Instructor ratings, and so was able to mentor other beginning flight students.

After college, I taught at a private flight school near my hometown before I landed my first airline job, flying small 20-seat aircraft around New Mexico and Colorado. I moved up to larger and larger aircraft and now find myself in command of a Boeing 747 freight-

er and mentoring new-hire pilots and those looking to advance.

Where I’m headed: I have a small developing farm in Arkansas that is part of my retirement plan. I put a little bit at a time into the infrastructure whenever I am home.

Person in history I admire and why: Mary Roach. Her books make me laugh because you cannot believe the lengths that woman will go to in the name of science.

A quotation I like: “If only God would give some clear sign! Like making a deposit in my name at a Swiss Bank.” — Woody Allen.

These are a few of my favorite things: Art museums, meadows of wild-flowers, lofty views and my emus.

These are not: Gaslighters, naysayers, robo-calls.

My doubts about religion started: When I started scrutinizing the lyrics in the hymnals. My mom took us to the Church of Christ, one grandmother to the Methodist Church, the other grandmother to the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Well, I decided that I was perfectly capable of reading that bible for myself. Not so easy, of course. So, I perused bookshops looking for books on how to interpret what I was reading. I found books on all kinds of religions and religious history. However, it took my grandfather’s death to suddenly realize I’d studied my way out of any belief system.

Before I die: Oh, I still have a list of things. Most involve travel, with The Great Wall, Petra, Machu Picchu and Galápagos Islands as just some of the destinations.

MEET A MEMBER

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



Satan To The Rescue

This small bit of mud, revolving in space,
Would be an abysmal and dismal old place,
But thanks to the genius who first thought of sin,
This here is a dear little sphere to be in.

Written by “Over the Rainbow” lyricist Yip Harburg.
Illustrated by Seymour Chwast, published by FFRF.

Buy it from FFRF online — ffrf.org/shop

IN THE NEWS

Database available of credibly accused priests

ProPublica has collected the 178 lists released by U.S. dioceses and religious orders and created a searchable database that allows users to look up clergy members by name, diocese or parish. This represents the first comprehensive picture of the information released publicly by bishops around the country. Some names appear multiple times. In many cases, that accounts for priests who were accused in more than one location. In other instances, dioceses have acknowledged when priests who served in their jurisdiction have been reported for abuse elsewhere.

To see the database, go here: projects.propublica.org/credibly-accused/

Church of England: Sex for married heteros only

The Church of England has stated that sex belongs only within heterosexual marriage, and that sex in gay or straight civil partnerships “falls short of God’s purpose for human beings.” Bishops have issued pastoral guidance in response to the recent introduction to mixed-sex civil partnerships, which says: “For Christians, marriage — that is, the lifelong union between a man and a woman, contracted with the making of vows — remains the proper context for sexual activity.”

The Church of England doesn’t permit same-sex marriage. It allows clergy to be in same-sex civil partnerships as long as they are sexually abstinent.

Minnesota church to usher out older members

The Grove United Methodist Church in Cottage Grove, Minn., will be closing in June, but reopening in November with a much younger parish crowd.

The current members, most of whom are over 60, will be told to worship elsewhere. Officials say the church needs a reset, and reopening the church is the best way to appeal to younger people.

Rev. Dan Wetterstrom said that Methodists’ regional Annual Conference is paying \$250,000 to restart the church.

The older members will not be physically barred from attending, but the expectation is that they will not.

“We are asking them to let this happen,” said Wetterstrom. “For this to be truly new, we can’t have the core group

Jews, atheists know most about Holocaust

A new Pew Research Center poll of 10,971 Americans shows that fewer than half of Americans can correctly cite the number of Jews killed in the Holocaust — 6 million — and even fewer correctly answered that Adolf Hitler became chancellor of Germany through a democratic political process.

While nearly half of Americans got at least three of the four questions on anti-Semitism right, some groups did better than others. Jews, agnostics and atheists got most of the questions right. Mainline Protestants, Mormons, Catholics, evangelical Protestants and Americans who describe their religion as “nothing in particular” answered about half of the questions correctly.

Most Americans (69 percent) know the Holocaust took place roughly between 1930 and 1950. And they know the Nazis created ghettos where Jews were forced to live (63 percent).

Atheists and agnostics most likely to know Hitler became chancellor of Germany through democratic political process

% who know . . .

	The Holocaust happened between 1930 and 1950	Ghettos were parts of town where Jews were forced to live	About 6 million Jews were killed in the Holocaust	Hitler became chancellor of Germany by democratic political process	Average number correct out of 4
Total	69	63	45	43	2.2
Christian	66	59	42	39	2.1
Protestant	66	58	41	38	2.0
Evangelical	69	59	44	41	2.1
Mainline	74	68	45	46	2.3
Historically black	35	32	23	11	1.0
Catholic	67	62	43	40	2.1
Mormon	76	61	35	51	2.2
Jewish	90	86	86	57	3.2
Unaffiliated	72	69	48	52	2.4
Atheist	87	84	63	76	3.1
Agnostic	90	87	64	70	3.1
Nothing in particular	62	59	39	38	2.0

Source: Survey conducted Feb. 4-19, 2019, among U.S. adults. PEW RESEARCH CENTER
“What Americans know about the Holocaust.”

of 30 people.

“This whole plan makes me sick. I believe it’s evil,” said William Gacksetter, one of the current older parishioners.

New York town won’t say pledge at meetings

In New York, the Town of Enfield Board will no longer recite the Pledge of Allegiance after it voted to end the practice at its first meeting of the year with two new board members.

Citing the separation of church and state, the idea was floated by new Board Member Stephanie Redmond to remove the words “under God” from the

pledge, which is said at the open of public meetings.

The first meeting of the year is often an organizational meeting. As the board considered a procedure for meetings, Redmond questioned if they could remove the specific language from the pledge. Redmond expressed that the language in the pledge contradicted the board’s mission of inclusion.

Judge allows lawsuit against Pittsburgh diocese

A Pennsylvania judge ruled Jan. 9 that a lawsuit can move forward against the Catholic Diocese of Pittsburgh.

The suit by parents and survivors of sexual abuse by clergy members claims the diocese became a public nuisance because they didn’t fulfill obligations under state law to report abusers.

It was originally filed in September of 2018 against each diocese in the state.

The plaintiffs are not seeking any monetary awards from the suit; instead, they say they want names and information of the alleged abusers to be made public.

Attorney Benjamin Sweet insists there’s plenty more that could be revealed, including information about the church’s religious order.

Some evangelical groups shift to ‘church’ status

The Washington Post has reported that several major evangelical organizations have shifted from nonprofit status to “church” status with the IRS, allowing them to keep private exactly how their money is being spent and the salaries of

their most highly paid employees.

The IRS status change allows these groups, including Focus on the Family and the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, to avoid filing a form that makes details of their institution’s finances public.

The Post reports that leaders of the groups say they are changing their status to avoid administrative costs; some also believe that this status with the IRS could allow them extra religious freedom protections in potential lawsuits over LGBT rights. The potential cost of applying to be a church is that the organizations cannot campaign on behalf of politicians or devote a substantial part of their work to lobbying on legislation. Critics say the option deprives the public of important information about how the tax-exempt organizations are operating.

Tennessee discriminates against same-sex couples

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee signed into law a bill that allows private adoption agencies to refuse to place children with a family that conflicts with their religious beliefs.

It states that “no private licensed child-placing agency shall be required to . . . participate in any placement of a child for foster care or adoption when the proposed placement would violate the agency’s written religious or moral convictions or policies.”

The legislation also prohibits any civil actions being taken against faith-based adoption agencies that refuse on religious grounds to place children in homes they morally disagree with, notably same-sex couples.

Pete Stark dies; was first nonreligious U.S. Rep.

The first openly nonreligious member of Congress, former U.S. Rep. Pete Stark Jr., 88, died Jan. 24 at his home in Harwood, Md., of leukemia.

Stark received FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award, reserved for public figures who make known their dissent from religion, in 2010.

“Our Emperor Award is for those who ‘tell it like it is about religion,’” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Clearly, Pete Stark’s philosophy was to ‘tell it like it is,’ period. We honor his forthrightness and generosity to the free-thought movement, and his lifetime accomplishments.”



Pete Stark

Fortney Hillman “Pete” Stark Jr. was born Nov. 11, 1931, in Milwaukee. He graduated in 1953 from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, then served in the Air Force before receiving a master’s degree of business administration from the University of California at Berkeley in 1960.

After being elected to the House of Representatives in 1972, Stark spent 40 years in Congress, but it was 13 years ago, in 2007, when he announced he was nontheistic (although he called himself a Unitarian).

Stark was known as a staunch backer of health care for all. He helped put together the Affordable Care Act, played a key role in establishing the COBRA program, which became law in 1986, and was an architect of the 1986 Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act.

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Photo by Chris Line

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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.

Go to: ffrf.org/freethought-matters for more information

Thomas W. Jendrock Student Activist Award

Wisconsin student ‘empowered by atheism’

Matthias Chan wrote a blog, narrating his journey to agnostic atheism, after doing classwork at the Center for Religion and Global Citizenry at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. It is also posted at the center’s website.

“I really liked Matthias’ essay: His thoughtfulness, respect for the differing beliefs of others, and his eloquence of writing,” said scholarship benefactor Thomas W. Jendrock, who has been contributing scholarship funds since 2013, for “a student who exhibits an atheist perspective which is positive, confident, introspective, constructive, optimistic and caring — and considerate and respectful toward individuals who do not share our beliefs.”

Matthias received a \$1,000 scholarship.

By Matthias Chan

Be the God you want to see in the world.

Now that I’ve gotten your attention, let me explain.

In my spiritual journey throughout the school year, after exploring many faiths and religions through the Center for Religion and Global Citizenry and



Matthias Chan

discussions with other interfaith fellows, I’ve finally ended up at agnostic atheism. Believing that there is no God, however, wasn’t as liberating as one may think. Instead, it put a huge burden on me. Because God wasn’t telling me what was right and wrong, and there wasn’t some divine plan that worked for the good of everyone, it placed the burden on me to fill in those gaps.

For atheists and agnostics, for whom a divine judge is absent, humanity has become the sole arbiter of right and wrong.

We’re not just the judge, but we are the jury and executioner, as well. To borrow some terminology from Nietzsche, God is dead and we have replaced him. Because God is no longer sitting on his throne in heaven, there’s nobody looking out for us up there and making sure that everything is going to be all right. That is now our responsibility.

Theologians like Irenaeus, Augustine, Al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina have struggled with the question of how suffering exists under the rule of an all-powerful God. But now, in the void vacated by the Almighty, it’s our job to alleviate the wounds of humanity.

This task isn’t just for those who doubt the supernatural. Embodying the compassion our world needs is a fundamental tenet of all the world’s religions. Abraham shows kindness and hospitality to complete strangers and guests. St. Paul urges Christians in Ephesus to embody Jesus’s self-sacrifice. Krishna teaches Arjuna to treat all beings with kindness and compassion, and Buddha commanded his followers to show compassion to all beings. Guru Nanak told early Sikhs that they must show kindness to all. Zoroaster said, “Doing good to others is not a duty.

It is a joy, for it increases your own health and happiness.” All of these holy figures knew the importance of kindness and compassion, and they all practiced it in their daily lives.

I dream of a future where atheists, theists and everyone in between unite to create a better world, because it’s time for us to take up our role and be what we want and need God to be in a world filled with pain and suffering. It’s time for us to become the God we want to see in this world. It’s our duty to become selfless, protective, generous, loving and everything else that we know humanity desperately needs in order to repair the world and work toward the greater good for all. In the words of Jim Greenbaum, founder of the Greenbaum Foundation, “Being a bystander to suffering is not an option.”

Be the God you want to see in the world.

Matthias writes: “I’m studying computer science and religious studies at UW-Madison. I was raised in a nondenominational Christian home in Wisconsin, and although I no longer identify with any organized religion, I have a passion for studying world religions, their history, and their philosophical and theological thought.”

OVERHEARD

How can we be winners, after all, if there are no losers? Where’s the joy in getting into the gated community and the private academy if it turns out that the gates are merely decorative and the academy has an inexhaustible scholarship program for the underprivileged? What success can there be that isn’t validated by another’s failure? What heaven can there be for us without an eternity in which to relish the impotent envy of those outside its walls?

Philosopher, scholar of religion and cultural critic David Bentley Hart, in his op-ed, “Why do people believe in hell?”
The New York Times, 1-10-20

There are many personal decisions that are not the role of government to make, from deciding how & when to grow a family, to deciding how & when to pray. Politicians should not use state resources to encourage prayer, nor use state resources to control our reproductive choices.

Nebraska state Sen. Megan Hunt, after Gov. Pete Ricketts issued a proclamation Jan. 7 urging Nebraskans to pray for an end to abortion on Jan. 22, the anniversary of the *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion in all 50 states.
Twitter, 1-9-20

To Mike Pence, who thinks it’s acceptable that his wife work at a school that bans LGBTQ, you are wrong. You say we should not discriminate against Christianity; you are the worst representation of what it means to be a Christian. I am a Christian woman and what I do know about Christianity is that we bear no prejudice and everybody is welcome. So you can take all that disgrace Mr. Pence and you can look yourself in the mirror and you’ll find it right there.

Singer Lady Gaga, who paused in concert during her song “Million Reasons” to lambast Vice President Pence.
Yahoo.com, 1-20-20

The abuse that I endured at the hands of nuns made me the type of person where I don’t believe in anybody’s dogma. I don’t buy it. It’s just a form of control. I do believe in energy. That’s my religion. The energy of love is necessary for me. That’s what I pray for. People are like, “How come you pray when you say you don’t believe in the Catholic Church?” I say, “Because I made my own church.”

Actress Rosie Perez, in an interview.
New York Times Magazine, 1-13-20

I think [religion is] very black and white, binary, but I don’t think it’s very welcoming. Religion can be a crutch. Because it’s binary, it’s us and them, saved and unsaved, heaven and hell, it’s enlightened and heathen, it’s holy and righteous and sinner and filthy. I think that makes a lot of people feel better about themselves, like ‘I got Jesus and I’m saved and I’m going to heaven.’ I don’t know how you can believe in a God that wants to condemn most of the planet to a fiery hell. What type of loving, sensitive, omnipresent, omnipotent being wants to condemn most of his beautiful creation to a fiery hell at the end of all this?

Aaron Rodgers, NFL quarterback, in an interview with Danica Patrick.
YouTube, 12-27-19



Shutterstock Photo
Aaron Rodgers

It gave us the extra couple of seconds we needed [when the ad ran short]. For most religionists, that cuts to the core. If you tell them you’re not afraid of burning in their hell, they’ve got nothing on you.

Ron Reagan, explaining why, in the TV ad he did for FFRF, he said, “Lifelong atheist, not afraid of burning in hell.”
The Daily Beast, 1-17-20

The battle to reclaim the true meaning of religious freedom has inextricably become increasingly central to the 2020 election, and to the political concerns of virtually all Americans, whether they realize it or not.

Journalist Paul Rosenberg, in his article, “With the Christian Right on the offensive, activists are fighting back.”
Salon.com, 1-20-20

We have 20 years of public health studies all around the world that show not only that abstinence policies are ineffective but that they have nefarious consequences when it comes to teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. We’re making public policy based on religious beliefs.

Debora Diniz, Brazilian law professor and reproductive rights activist, commenting on a new abstinence campaign formulated by Brazil’s minister for women and families — an evangelical pastor. Brazil has a high teen pregnancy rate and rising HIV infection rate.
The New York Times, 1-27-20

For my taste, it’s a little too rote an action. It smacks too much of mindless obedience in a time when independent thinking and independent municipal action is at a premium because there is so little happening on the federal level. Over the course of the last two years, as I’ve been taking a knee, I turn around and look at everybody. People’s hearts don’t really seem to be in it. They’re just doing something out of custom. What’s the point?

Ford Greene, mayor of San Anselmo, Calif., on unilaterally removing the Pledge of Allegiance at town council meetings.
Marin Independent Journal, 1-25-20

I hate religion. The Quran is a religion of hate. . . . I am not racist. You cannot be racist towards a religion. I said what I thought, you’re not going to make me

regret it.

16-year-old Mila Orriols, during a live segment on her Instagram account. Her comments sparked a national debate about blasphemy and freedom of speech in France after she received death threats. She has gone into hiding.
BBC, 2-4-20

Although I have long ago left the Catholic Church, they continue to berate and diminish the reality of what my sister and my family have endured because of their criminal behavior and lack of remorse or contrition.

Rhode Island state Rep. Carol McEntee, after a local priest, Richard Bucci, said any legislators who voted in favor of a bill that protected a woman’s right to choose would be barred from receiving communion. McEntee’s sister was repeatedly abused by a former parish priest starting when she was 5.
Washington Post, 2-3-20



Carol McEntee

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Freedom depends upon freethinkers

Former churches with better missions



Peter Kroopnick sent us this photo of the former Sacred Heart Church in Prescott, Ariz. The building, which was added to the National Registry of Historic Buildings on Dec. 14, 1970, now houses the Prescott Center for the Arts Mainstage Theatre & Art Gallery complex. In 1889, Father Quetu came to Prescott to take over the Sacred Heart Parish and build the Sacred Heart Church. Construction began in 1891 and was completed in 1894. The first

service was held in 1895. During the late 1960s, the church was also used to present plays. In 1967, the church was purchased by Norma Hazeltine, who then donated it for use as a full-time performing arts facility.

Member Rik Smith of Washington sent us this photo of a former Lutheran church, built in 1923, in Ellensburg, Wash., which is now the Yellow Church Cafe. “It is one of the best restaurants in central Washington,” Smith writes. “It’s always worth stopping for a meal when traveling across the state, no matter the time of day.”



Lifetime Member Richard Keene sent us this photo from Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., just south of Jacksonville. Keene writes: “This building was the short-lived home of the former Cornerstone Baptist Church until 2011, when it was bought and converted by St. John’s County into a modern performing arts and multipurpose facility (the Ponte Vedra Concert Hall), hosting rock, country and other musical concerts, plays and events.”



Jules Rensch sent us this photo from Bellevue, Ohio, where the Bismark Senior and Community Center now occupies the building that originally housed St. Sebastian Church’s school.

If you see or know of any former churches that now serve a secular purpose, please send us a photo (preferably with you in it!) and a brief description of the property. Send it to editor@FFRF.org.



Len and Karen Eisenberg sent us a photo of this former Catholic church in Ashland, Ore. “This old Catholic Church, built in 1889, last functioned as the Family Life Bible Church, a part of the Pentecostal Church of God, before it was sold and converted into a private residence in 2013,” write the Eisenbergs. “We toured the place when it was for sale, and it was in dire need of repair, especially the residence behind the church. It is now a beautiful private

residence. The old house, and the land of the parking lot have been developed into four small additional housing units.”

Richard Keene also sent us this photo from Neptune Beach, Fla. He writes; “Built in 1887 as St. Paul’s-by-the-Sea Episcopal Church, and later used from 1970 to 2012 by the Neptune Beach Central Christian (Evangelical) Church, the Beaches Chapel is now part of the Jacksonville Beaches Area Historical Park and used for concerts (rock, jazz, country, classical), lectures and events (weddings and funerals).”



Jeffrey Duplessis sent us this photo from Springdale, Utah. It shows a former Mormon church that was turned into an intimate eatery (Zion Pizza & Noodle Co.) with unique slate-stone-cooked pizzas and year-round beer garden.



Kathy McDonald sent us this photo of her standing in front of Moose Scoops Ice Cream in Warren, N.H. The building used to be St. John Vianney Roman Catholic Church. “He is the patron saint of parish priests,” Kathy writes. “You can see the stained glass window where the entrance used to be. My husband and I vacation near Warren, and I used to take my mother to Mass here when she was alive. This is much nicer!”

FFRF NEWS

Safety scarves



Gary King, president of the Colorado Springs FFRF chapter, shares the story of how that chapter is helping students who are homeless or don't feel safe.

“As a teacher, I had worked in domestic violence and with at-risk kids. There was a girl who told me she was involved with after-school activities because she did not feel safe at home. I got home and thought how my daughter, stressed at college, would come home and sit with her baby blankie for comfort. We were her safe place. I talked with my wife about crocheting a scarf to be used like a blankie, but a little more ‘adult’ or cool. She made six that weekend. I invited that girl to pick one. She came out from the teachers’ lounge with a scarf, held near her heart, with a look of calm and a soft smile.

“Then, Suzanne McReynolds (pictured), an FFRF member, started a meetup for us called ACCS/FFRF Yarn Craftivists. We get about 10 people to knit and crochet scarves and hats and then drop them off for social workers, counselors and nurses. These scarves go to three high schools, two middle schools and one elementary school, along with Inside/Out Youth Services and Urban Peak. Our FFRF chapter has purchased about \$900 of yarn.”

FFRF underwrites law symposium

FFRF is proudly underwriting a scholar-studded late March symposium at the Roger Williams University School of Law focusing on the separation between state and church.

The one-day gathering with the title “Is This A Christian Nation?” will be held March 27 at the main campus in Bristol, R.I. Did the Founders intend the United States of America to be a Christian nation? Does it violate the Establishment Clause of the Constitution to have a Latin cross on a World War I memorial on a public highway or a crèche on the front lawn of a town hall? How should history be used to resolve such questions? Some of the nation’s foremost First Amendment specialists are assembling in an attempt to grapple with the timely subject.

Among them is Erwin Chemerinsky, the dean of the University of California Berkeley School of Law. He is the author of hundreds of professional and popular articles and the author or editor of 11 books, including, most recently, *We the People: A Progressive Reading of the Constitution for the Twenty-First Century*. Chemerinsky is considered one of the most prominent legal scholars and public intellectuals in the nation.

The other notables include University of Pennsylvania Professor Marci A. Hamilton, whose writings include *God vs. the Gavel: The Perils of Extreme Religious Liberty*, nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Also on the roster is John A. Ragosta, a historian at the Robert H. Smith International Center for Jefferson Studies at Monticello and the author of three books, including *Religious Freedom: Jefferson’s Legacy, America’s Creed*. Teresa M. Bejan is associate professor of political

theory at Oxford University and the author of *Mere Civility: Disagreement and the Limits of Toleration*. And Steven K. Green is the director of the Willamette Center for Religion, Law and Democracy and the author of seven books, including, most recently, *The Third Disestablishment: Church, State, and American Culture, 1940-1975*.

Roger Williams University School of Law Associate Dean Jared Goldstein and Professor Carl Bogus will moderate the symposium. The event is open to the public, with paid registration. The cost for the general public is \$195 and includes all symposium sessions, lunch and 6.5 Rhode Island Continuing Legal Education credits.

The fee is \$125 for employees of government, nonprofit, public interest and educational organizations. Roger Williams University law students and members of the judiciary may attend the symposium free of charge but need to register. Friday, March 20, is the registration deadline.

“We’re gratified that we’re enabling a gathering of some of the best legal minds in the country to focus on an issue that defines us a country,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “The belief that the United States is a ‘Christian nation’ is unfortunately a common and dangerous misconception.”

FFRF, which is underwriting the symposium’s costs, thanks its Legal Director Rebecca Markert, a graduate of the Roger Williams University School of Law, and FFRF Strategic Response Director Andrew Seidel, as well the Roger Williams University School of Law itself, for their work and initiative in making possible this symposium.

“After we retired, we happened to be in Texas and some lady came up to me and said, ‘Well, you’re not God.’ I said, ‘I’ll tell you what. I’ve got a \$100 bill in my pocket if you can prove that I’m not.’ She stammers and says, ‘Well, I can’t prove it, but you’re not God.’ I said, ‘Well, I’ll keep my \$100 then.’”

Hart said he has been interviewed for TV, radio and newspapers, including by media outlets as far-flung as Australia and Thailand.

“I have the most famous license plate in the world,” he quipped.

FFRF benefactor endows secular chair at U of Texas

FFRF is hailing the creation of a new secular studies professorship at Texas’ premier public university, which is being endowed by FFRF Lifetime Member Brian Bolton.

The professorship at the University of Texas at Austin will focus on the growing segment of the population that adheres to a secular worldview, thanks to a generous gift from Bolton, a stalwart FFRF supporter. The Brian F. Bolton Distinguished Professorship in Secular Studies

will be held by a senior faculty member whose research and scholarship specializes in secular studies.

There has been a significant recent increase in the United States of people with a secular perspective, especially among the youth. More than one-fourth of the U.S. population currently has no religious affiliation whatsoever; among Millennials, the “unaffiliated” figure jumps to 38 percent. This has prompted increased research in this realm, and the Bolton Distinguished Professorship is a capstone.

The executive wing of FFRF’s office, Freethought Hall, is named for Bolton,

due to his support of FFRF’s headquarters expansion. Bolton has also single-handedly underwritten for a decade FFRF’s essay contest for grad/older students, with up to \$10,000 prize money yearly. And he is financing a bible accountability project to call attention to the continuing harm of the bible to society that includes subsidization of the cost of mailing FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel’s recent book, *The Founding Myth*, to every member of Congress last fall. FFRF will be publishing Bolton’s new work, tentatively titled *Why the Bible Is Not a Good Book*, this year. Bolton, who lives in Texas, will be speaking briefly at FFRF’s annual convention in San Antonio in November.

Bolton is a retired academic psychologist with a background in mathematics, statistics and psychometrics. His contributions in psychological measurement, personality assessment and rehabilitation psychology have been recognized by universities and psychological societies. His 10 edited and authored books include *Handbook of Measurement and Evaluation in Rehabilitation*, *Psychosocial Adjustment to Disability*, *Rehabilitation Counseling: Theory and Practice*, and *Special Education and Rehabilitation Testing: Current Practices and Test Reviews*. He is a licensed psychologist, humanist minister, karate black belt and Distinguished Toastmaster.

Plate

Continued from page 1

“I’m thankful to finally have the same opportunity to select a personal message for my license plate just as any other driver,” Hart said after the lawsuit was ruled in his favor.

When asked on the radio show about repercussions of having that plate, Hart said it’s been pretty civil.

“I had very few negative reactions, mostly no reactions,” he replied.



Brian Bolton

FFRF’s classic ‘Freethinker’ mug

Our classic ‘Freethinker’ mug has been re-created. White imprint on classic blue, matte finish. 13 oz. Americanmade mug.

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SOTU address was Christian Nationalist dog whistle

This article first appeared on Religion Dispatches on Feb. 7.

By Andrew L. Seidel

Amid the ripping paper and misbegotten medals, President Trump’s State of the Union address promised nationalism with a distinctly Christian bent.

Trump wants to steal \$5 billion from public schools (which he decried as “failing government schools”) to give to private, i.e., Christian, schools. Trump wants to roll back reproductive rights and ban abortion. But more than anything, Trump wants to weaponize religious freedom. If he is successful there, it will be a win for his war against abortion and public schools too. He said:



Photo by Chris Line
Andrew L. Seidel

“My administration is also defending religious liberty, and that includes the constitutional right to pray in public schools. In America, we don’t punish prayer. We don’t tear down crosses. We don’t ban symbols of faith. We don’t muzzle preachers and pastors. In America, we celebrate faith, we cherish religion, we lift our voices in prayer, and we raise our sights to the glory of God.”

The Constitution already protects students’ right to pray in public schools. What Trump actually wants is to use the machinery of the state to impose religion

on students.

The allusion to tearing down crosses is a nod to the Supreme Court’s recent decision to allow the 40-foot tall Bladensburg cross to remain on government land and be maintained at government expense. Justice Samuel Alito’s opinion was full of irreconcilable contradictions and it bought in to the idea that curing First Amendment violations would show “hostility toward religion.” Until last summer, that was a claim that the Supreme Court had repeatedly rejected going all the way back to its very first state-church decision.

The placement of this passage, with its Christian nationalist dog whistles, belies its true meaning. It came immediately after Trump touted the Federalist Society’s “pipeline” set up to get conservative lawyers — many patently unqualified — lifetime appointments as federal judges:

“Working with Mitch McConnell — thank you, Mitch — and his colleagues in the Senate, we have recommended 180 new judges to uphold our Constitution as written. This includes Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh.”

Those aren’t Trump judges, they’re McConnell/Federalist judges. And they’re the ones who will make Trump’s religious freedom subtext a legal reality.

It’s also worth noting that immediately following this nod to Christian Nationalism, Trump claimed to be “defending national security and combating radical Islamic terrorism.”

And, in fact, the speech may have been edited to drop an even more blatant call to Christian Nationalism. Politico’s transcript includes the following line:

“In reaffirming our heritage as a free



Photo by Shealah Craighead

President Trump, shown here with Vice President Pence, said during his 2020 State of the Union address on Feb. 4, “In America, we celebrate faith, we cherish religion, we lift our voices in prayer, and we raise our sights to the glory of God.”

nation, we must remember that America has always been a Christian nation.”

Time magazine’s transcript, meanwhile, reflects what the president actually said:

“In reaffirming our heritage as a free Nation, we must remember that America has always been a frontier nation.”

It’s entirely possible that the speech wasn’t deliberately edited; that Trump, who’s famous for ad-libbing, simply misread or decided to deviate from the speech as written, but it’s meaningful that the speech appears to have been toned down.

Even so, the message is out in the open: These judges will make Christian Nationalism the law. They will redefine the Constitution so that it creates two classes of people: conservative Christians and everyone else. That is and has been the goal of Christian Nationalism — to

codify Christian privilege and elevate Christians to a special, favored class. All others will be second-class citizens. As Chrissy Stroop noted in her Religion Dispatches piece on the State of the Union, these ideas have been mainstreamed due to the influence of the radical Christian Reconstructionist movement.

Right now, Christian Nationalists are raging against the dying of their privilege. Trump’s State of the Union encapsulated this rage. And, as America nears the tipping point at which conservative Christianity’s power and privilege are reduced to equality for all, the Christian Nationalist myths will be spouted more often and more loudly. But the end is near for this movement. That is the true state of our union.

Andrew L. Seidel is FFRF’s director of strategic response.

Interested in Camp Quest?

Do you have children or grandchildren who would be interested in a summer camp that sparks interest, empathy and critical-thinking skills?

Try out Camp Quest, which provides an “educational adventure shaped by fun, friends and free-thought, featuring science, natural wonder and humanist values.”

FFRF, as in past recent years, is offering Camp Quest \$10,000 to use as scholarships for students who could not otherwise afford to attend.

The secular, co-ed summer camps offer week-long residential programs for children aged 8-17 and day camps for children aged 4-8.

Go to campquest.org for more information or to sign up.

FFRF to refile church tax case

A cutting-edge legal challenge of the IRS privileging of churches and related charities has experienced a technical setback, but the Freedom From Religion Foundation remains undeterred.

After its case was thrown out of court, FFRF will be refileing its challenge after its plaintiff, Nonbelief Relief, jumps through some legal hoops.

U.S. District Judge Timothy J. Kelly of the U.S. District Court in D.C. issued a 11-page Memorandum Opinion on Jan. 10, dismissing a challenge filed by FFRF on behalf of Nonbelief Relief, a charity related to FFRF.

Nonbelief Relief filed suit in October 2018 after its tax-exempt status was revoked by the IRS. FFRF and Nonbelief Relief are challenging the IRS provision that preferentially exempts churches and related organizations from reporting the Form 990 annual information returns required of all other tax-exempt groups. Nonbelief Relief, founded in 2015, publicly stated that it would not



file the annual Form 990s so long as churches and their related charities are not required to.

Nonbelief Relief suffered serious injury when the IRS refused its request — citing the discriminatory treatment of churches vis-à-vis other tax-exempt nonprofits — to be excused from registering the annual Form 990. Nonbelief Relief’s tax exemption was subsequently revoked on Aug. 20, 2018, for failure to file the Form 990 return for three consecutive years. It has had to basically fold up shop and can no longer receive charitable contributions.

Kelly has not completely closed the door, noting that the “decision does not mean that the church exemption is immune from judicial review. Nonbelief Relief could claim a refund for the tax-

es it paid, and sue when the refund was denied, arguing that its 501(c)(3) status was unconstitutionally revoked.”

FFRF paid \$450.78 in IRS income plus a corporate franchise tax of \$182.90. Nonbelief Relief will be seeking a refund on its taxes in the near future. If and when that refund is refused, Nonbelief Relief and FFRF will refile the suit.

FFRF contends that the court improperly dismissed Nonbelief Relief’s broader challenge to the exemption provided to churches, ruling that the organization lacks standing. According to the judge, Nonbelief Relief’s claim of unequal treatment when compared to churches “is not ongoing or imminent,” because Nonbelief Relief has lost its exempt status, and therefore will not have to fill out a Form 990.

“This circular reasoning would bar any group from challenging preferential treatment of religious organizations,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, who is administrator of Nonbelief Relief and FFRF co-president. “We are so distressed that Nonbelief Relief is in limbo, and unable to help others on behalf of freethought in a world fraught with natural disasters, hunger, displaced people and discrimination that is often religion-based. This injury extends far beyond just the loss of Nonbelief Relief’s tax-exempt status.”

Nonbelief Relief is a humanitarian group created by FFRF’s executive board in 2015 as a separate 501(c)(3) entity for atheists, agnostics and free-thinkers to remediate conditions of human suffering and injustice on a global scale “whether the result of natural disasters, human actions or adherence to religious dogma.”

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION
P.O. Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • FFRF.org

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

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

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

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

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Trump school prayer guidance inadequate

President Trump’s recently released guidance on school prayer and religious instruction, issued on Religious Freedom Day, simply reiterates the state of law. But the Freedom From Religion Foundation contends that it misses the chance to adequately warn schools about common First Amendment violations.

The administration not only unveiled its “Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer and Religious Expression in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools” but is also proposing problematic rules for nine federal agencies on social services programs and funding of faith-based organizations.

For instance, the Department of Homeland Security is proposing a rule to implement Trump’s executive order from May 3, 2018, to “remove regulatory burdens” on religious organizations. These so-called “regulatory burdens” are protections for taxpayers and recipients of federally funded services against the misappropriation of federal funds to advance a private faith-based organization’s religious goals, and they did not go far enough. Removing them sends a message to religious organizations that they are entitled to taxpayer funds and need not worry about misusing the funds to advance religion. The changes will undo decades of gradual progress on this issue and will violate the rights of conscience of both taxpayers and those using federally funded services.

Federal guidelines on religion in public school are not new — both the Clinton and Bush administrations issued such guidance. The Trump guidelines are not a vast departure from prior guidelines, but they do not go nearly far enough to safeguard students from overzealous public school employees who seek to use their government position to promote religion to other people’s children.

FFRF notes that student rights of freedom of conscience are violated any time teachers, principals or coaches misuse their positions and authority to proselytize a captive audience of students and school children, or otherwise endorse or promote their personal religious beliefs.

The problem that ought to be addressed is not the protection of constitutional prayer (such as private prayer in student clubs) in public schools, but the prevalence of unconstitutional prayer in public schools.

The new guidelines are inadequate in this regard, and are primarily signaling to students with majority religious viewpoints that they should be publicly professing their religious beliefs. Instead of reiterating the right of students to pray privately, which no one challenges, the guidelines should have addressed common violations such as public school coaches baptizing their players, as recently happened in Alabama.



Shutterstock Photo

True religious liberty at stake in Espinoza case

The U.S. Supreme Court should appreciate the real issue at stake in the *Espinoza* voucher case, the Freedom From Religion Foundation urged when oral arguments began Jan. 22.

FFRF’s 18-page friend-of-the-court brief, filed in November jointly with Center for Inquiry, American Atheists and the American Humanist Association, cogently argued that true religious liberty would be endangered if the court strikes down a provision of Montana’s Constitution that prohibits funding religious education.

“Religious liberty is imperiled in this case,” its brief asserted. “But this case is not about discrimination; it is about government-compelled support of religion. Every Montana citizen has the right to not be taxed to fund religion.”

When the Montana Legislature adopted a neo-voucher scheme, the Montana Supreme Court held that the scheme violated the “No Aid” clause of the state Constitution and struck down the entire neo-voucher scheme, for all private education, religious and nonreligious. Christian parents, represented by the pro-voucher Institute of Justice, want the Supreme Court to declare that No Aid clauses violate the Free Exercise Clause of the U.S. Constitution. Nearly 90 percent of Montana’s private schools are affiliated with religion. If the court declares No Aid clauses unconstitutional, FFRF warns, all taxpayers may be compelled to fund religious worship and religious education. The 26 percent of nonreligious Americans will be the hardest hit.

An ironic additional consequence of such a ruling might be to bring down regulation on churches and religious schools due to the flow of public money into religious schools. In short, a judgment in favor of the plaintiffs would fundamentally

alter the state-church relationship in place since the nation’s founding.

This is the first time the Supreme Court has taken up the constitutionality of state constitutional provisions against funding religion since its 2017 ruling in *Trinity Lutheran Church v. Comer*. The justices ruled 7-2 that Missouri’s constitutional ban on funding religion and churches was in violation of the free exercise clause of the First Amendment, holding that a church had to be able to compete with secular groups for grants. FFRF strongly urges the Supreme Court to rule this time to maintain the constitutional wall of separation between state and church.

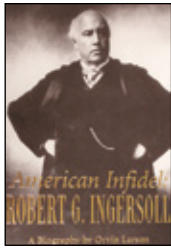
The brief points out the Supreme Court’s historic understanding of the First Amendment means that government cannot subsidize religion: “No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities or institutions,” as the Supreme Court has significantly ruled. The brief takes up the mantle of defending the rights of all citizens, asserting that “the court ought not to strike down No Aid provisions when they have served this country so well in protecting religious liberty.”

This case is not about discrimination; it is about government-compelled support of religion.

Harold meets Charles



Duke University Professor Harold Erickson came for a visit to FFRF in January, where he posed by FFRF’s silicone mannequin of Charles Darwin, created by artist Csam Wheatley. This was Erickson’s first visit to Free-thought Hall, FFRF’s office building in Madison, Wis., which was renovated and enlarged in 2015. The new third floor wing is named “Harold Erickson Public Relations Wing,” thanks to Erickson’s generosity. He is in the field of cell biology, was one of 14 children brought up Roman Catholic, and began thinking his way out of religion in his youth.



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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Kentucky art contest winners announced

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has chosen Kate Benton and Marilyn Buente as winners of its Kentucky ‘In God We (Don’t) Trust’ Student Art Contest, and each received \$250 as collaborators on the winning entry.

The contest was part of an FFRF campaign to combat Kentucky’s new law requiring “In God We Trust” to be displayed in every public school. The Kentucky law specifically states that “In God We Trust” displays may be in the form of “student artwork,” opening the door for clever student artists to

create art displays that conform to the law’s text but not its intent, says FFRF.

Benton, 17, and Buente, 16, both juniors in high school, collaborated to design and illustrate the winning artwork. Both share a passion for activism, media, photo and film.

Benton writes: “I also have a reflection on my reaction to the law: As a Christian, many people thought I would support the law. However, it was quite the opposite. As soon as I heard

about it, I immediately wondered: what about everyone else?”

FFRF also awarded a \$200 honorable mention to Eli Moosy of Georgetown, Ky.

“My name is Eli Moosy, and I’m in the 7th grade at Scott County Middle School in Georgetown, Ky. I am interested in computer programming, architecture and engineering. I also enjoy drawing and identify as an atheist, so that’s why I wanted to participate in this contest. I have gone to many Georgetown Fairness rallies and pride events. I enjoy being an activist.”

The contest was open to any student enrolled in a Kentucky public school who disagrees with the new law. The contest stipulated that artwork must contain the phrase “In God We Trust,”



Eli Moosy holds his artwork that won honorable mention.



Marilyn Buente and Kate Benton came up with this artwork to win FFRF’s Kentucky ‘In God We (Don’t) Trust’ Student Art Contest.



Here is Buente’s and Benton’s prize-winning artwork.

Ex-AG Jeff Sessions fallaciously attacks FFRF

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has taken exception to inaccurate and disparaging statements that former Attorney General Jeff Sessions made about FFRF.

Sessions described to a conservative website FFRF’s efforts to ensure the right of students to a secular public school system as “trying to intimidate people of faith.”

He also listed eight separate times that FFRF has allegedly “attacked” him. This includes FFRF pointing out that he was a poor choice for U.S. attorney general and subsequent objections of the organization to his actions that validated those initial misgivings, including



Jeff Sessions

his abuse of that government office to promote his personal religious viewpoints.

To give just one example, Sessions cited the New Testament, Romans 13, to rationalize the Justice Department’s separation of children from their refugee and immigrant parents. And he was provided this justification during the White House Bible Study — another constitutional problem.

“It is our right to point out that you

undermined the very Constitution you swore an oath to uphold, as well as the religious liberty rights of every American who does not share your beliefs,” FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor write to Sessions.

This time around, Sessions went after FFRF for spotlighting an egregious misuse of public schools in his home state of Alabama to proselytize, with a coach dunking school athletes under his authority to baptize them “in the name of Jesus Christ.” More than 70 years of firm Supreme Court precedent bars our public schools (which exist to educate, not to indoctrinate) from engaging in such behavior, FFRF points out.

Sessions describes FFRF’s efforts to defend the separation between state and church as a “fundamental battle that is raging in America, and it is a battle that is no small matter.” FFRF agrees with that sentiment.

“Secularism in government is a precious founding American principle, and an American original at that,” states FFRF’s letter. “Your hyperbole about FFRF ‘seeking to silence the faithful’ shows that you profoundly misunderstand this fundamental concept. Every American has religious liberty, but no American has a right to a government megaphone to broadcast their religious views.”

Honored Congressman meets sculptor



Photo by Margaret Downey

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and friends met with U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin (third from left) on Feb. 6. Raskin, co-founder of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, was 2019 recipient of FFRF’s Clarence Darrow Award. The statuette (pictured behind Raskin) is a replica of the full-size statue of Darrow standing at the courthouse where the Scopes Trial took place in Dayton, Tenn., created by sculptor and FFRF Member Zenos Frudakis (fifth from left) and commissioned by FFRF.

Pictured, from left, are FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, Rep. Raskin, Freethought Society President and FFRF Life Member Margaret Downey, Frudakis, FFRF Governmental Affairs Director Mark Dann and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

THEY SAID WHAT?

[Nadejda] Reilly related that God took care of her by not having her injured. Reilly expressed no concerns or remorse for the victims. Reilly also stated she did not care if the other people were injured because God would have taken care of them.

Pennsylvania Trooper Bruce Balliet, in the arrest affidavit of Nadejda Reilly, who drove her car into oncoming traffic as a test of her faith in God.

Yahoo News, 1-19-20

The president has dealt the radical atheist lobby a major setback, while at the same time taking a forceful stand on behalf of its victims — the school children who are punished, ostracized and bullied for daring to express their faith.

Mike Huckabee, in his op-ed “Trump and religious liberty — Militant atheists have met their match with our president.”

Fox News, 1-23-20

The problem today is not that religious people are trying to impose their views on nonreligious people. It’s the opposite — it’s that militant secularists are trying to impose their values on religious people, and they’re not accommodating the freedom of reli-

gion of people of faith. **Attorney General William Barr, speaking to Cardinal Timothy Dolan on his SiriusXM radio show “Conversation with Cardinal Dolan.”**

Yahoo News, 1-29-20



Paula White

In the name of Jesus, we command all satanic pregnancies to miscarry right now. We declare that anything that has been conceived in satanic wombs will miscarry.

Paula White, President Trump’s “faith advisor” in a speech on Jan. 5.

Yahoo News, 1-26-20

We had very little chance of victory [in 2016]. Except for the people in this room and some others believed we were going to win. I believed we were going to win. But what they did was have an unwavering belief that God was with them. I believe that, too. God is with the people in this room.

President Trump, speaking at the National Prayer Breakfast.

Whitehouse.gov, 2-6-20

FFRF VICTORIES

Council replaces prayer with secular message

A West Virginia city council has replaced a routine prayer before meetings with a secular alternative following a complaint from FFRF.

A concerned Wheeling citizen reported to FFRF that each Wheeling City Council meeting began with a prayer. These prayers were reportedly led by City Council members, except one led by an outside minister.

FFRF wrote to Wheeling City Council drawing attention to the unconstitutionality of these invocations, since this amounts to an illegal endorsement of religion. Fourth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals precedent prohibits government-led prayer of the sort that was practiced at Wheeling City Council meetings, FFRF pointed out.

“Prayer at government meetings is unnecessary, inappropriate and divisive and the best solution is to discontinue invocations altogether,” FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson wrote to Wheeling Mayor Glenn F. Elliott Jr. “Council members are, of course, free to pray privately or to worship on their own time in their own way, but they should not worship on taxpayers’ time. The prayers exclude the 26 percent of Americans who are not religious.”

FFRF urged the City Council to refrain from starting meetings with prayer in order to demonstrate its respect for the diverse range of religious and nonreligious citizens living



in Wheeling.

“We urge you to concentrate on civil matters and leave religion to the private conscience of each individual by ending the practice of hosting prayers at your meetings,” Johnson concluded.

On Jan. 30, the council heeded FFRF’s suggestion and removed the religious references in the invocation.

According to local news, “Wheeling City Council will shift to secular prayers before opening meetings.” At a recent meeting, one council member read a secular reflection before the meeting was called to order. Johnson also received confirmation from the city solicitor that the language of the invocation would not reference God moving forward.

“We commend the city council for

taking seriously this recommendation,” FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor comments. “A local city body ought not to lend its taxpayer-funded time to religion by starting meetings with a sectarian prayer.”

Nevada district ceases prayer

As of Feb. 10, the Clark County School District in Las Vegas has discontinued the practice of beginning school board meetings with prayer after receiving an official complaint from FFRF.

FFRF was made aware that the Clark County School District Board of Trustees meetings began with prayer. For instance, one meeting in December began with students saying the Pledge of Allegiance, which was immediately followed by an invocation. The board asked everyone present, regardless of their religious beliefs or lack thereof, to “remain standing,” and introduced a preacher from the Messages of Faith Ministry to say the invocation. The prayer asked that the “children be trained up righteously,” meaning that they be trained as Christians.

It is beyond the scope of public school board to schedule or conduct prayer as part of its meetings, FFRF reminded the district. This practice violates the Establishment Clause of the

First Amendment.

“Board members are free to pray privately or to worship on their own time in their own way,” FFRF Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler wrote in a letter to Clark County School District General Counsel Eleissa C. Lavelle. “The school board, however, cannot lend its power and prestige to religion, amounting to a governmental endorsement of religion which excludes the 24 percent of Americans who are nonreligious, including 38 percent of Americans born after 1987.”

FFRF litigated the most recent case striking down a school board prayer practice, in which the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals reaffirmed that Establishment Clause concerns are heightened in the context of public schools “because children and adolescents are just beginning to develop their own belief systems, and because they absorb the lessons of adults as to what beliefs are appropriate or right.” In the end, Chino Valley (Calif.) School District’s board paid out more than \$280,000 in fees and costs. The 9th Circuit opinion is also binding on the Clark County School District.

The district’s legal counsel sent a letter of reply informing FFRF that the board of school trustees will no longer begin its meetings with an invocation. FFRF praises the district on its decision to cease official board prayers.

Arkansas

The Mountain View School District administration has addressed a complaint that Gideons passed out bibles to students in the district.

A concerned parent reported that Gideons were allowed into Mountain View Middle School to pass out bibles to students during class. The teacher apparently welcomed the Gideons into the class, thanked them for being there, and took a bible before letting them distribute bibles to students. The complainant reported that their child felt very uncomfortable and felt pressured to take a bible because everyone else in the class did.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Mountain View School District Brent Howard, informing him about the Gideons’ insidious operation, and reminding the district that it is unconstitutional for public school districts to permit the Gideon Society to distribute bibles as part of the public school day. Courts have uniformly held that the distribution of bibles to students at public schools during instructional time is prohibited.

Howard responded to FFRF’s complaint via email with assurances that the situation has been handled.

Minnesota

A poster advertising a religious camp has been removed from public school property in Fergus Falls, Minn.

A district parent reported that a teacher at Fergus Falls Middle School had been promoting and endorsing a Christian camp to his students. The camp is called Camp Castaway and is run by a Christian youth ministry called Young Life. According to the complainant, the teacher had a poster promoting the camp hanging in his classroom, and regularly mentioned to students that he is a leader at the camp.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote a letter to Superintendent Jeff Drake, pointing out that displaying a poster for Young Life camp in a district classroom and promoting a Christian camp to students impermissibly creates the impression that the district is encouraging students to participate in this religious camp and gives the appearance that the district prefers religion over nonreligion and Christianity over other faiths.

Drake responded by email, informing FFRF that the district met with the teacher regarding the issue and that the poster has been “permanently removed from his classroom.”

Texas

A religious display has been removed recently from public high school property in Montgomery, Texas.

A district community member reported to FFRF that the receptionist at Montgomery High School had religious iconography on display at the school’s front office. Students and community members reportedly had business requiring them to approach the display, where they saw a Christian cross and a sign reading “pray, trust, wait.”

FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover wrote to Montgomery ISD Superintendent Beau Rees, urging the district to cease impermissibly endorsing their personal religious beliefs through religious displays on district property.

The district sent a letter of response informing FFRF that the religious display has been removed.

“We want to assure you that the Montgomery Independent School District is committed to following the requirements of the First Amendment when it comes to the separation of church and state,” Rees wrote.

Texas

The Lovejoy school district in Allen, Texas, has reaffirmed the need for employees to remain neutral on religious matters after a district parent reported that a school board members opened an official event with a prayer.

A district parent reported to FFRF that the Board of Trustees hosted a celebration and award ceremony for students from three of the district’s elementary schools. To open the event, then-Vice President Robbin Wells led the assembled students and their families in prayer. Attendees were reportedly instructed to bow their heads, before directing a prayer to Wells’ personal god — who, she made a point of clarifying, is Jesus.

FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover wrote to Lovejoy Superintendent Michael Goddard and Board of Trustees President Chad Collins, reminding the district that it is unlawful for a school district to schedule prayer at school-sponsored events like this ceremony.

The district’s attorney responded in January to FFRF’s letters with assurances that the district “is committed to ensur-

ing that any potentially inappropriate religious prayer sponsorship by Lovejoy ISD employees does not happen in the future.”

Oregon

A sign advertising a bible release time program is no longer displayed on Bethel School District property.

A district parent reported that last year Malabon Elementary School allowed a sign promoting a bible release time program to be erected on school property.

FFRF Legal Fellow Dante Harootunian wrote to Bethel Superintendent Chris Parra reminding the district that allowing bible release time programs to advertise to students in a public elementary school violates the Constitution. Courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools.

Parra responded by email informing FFRF that the district did not provide permission for the signage to be placed on public property and was not aware of its placement. There is no sign currently advertising the bible study placed on district property.

Your weekly antidote to the Religious Right

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FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

County must pay \$490K

Brevard County, Fla., must pay nearly half a million dollars in legal fees and damages after losing a case to FFRF and others.

The Brevard County Commission refused to allow atheists, including FFRF Member David Williamson, to give an invocation at the start of commission meetings, but two federal courts found that the policy violated the First Amendment by discriminating in favor of Christianity. To settle the case, the county agreed to pay damages and legal fees totaling \$490,000.

The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals on July 8, 2019, unanimously ruled in *Williamson v. Brevard County* that the commissioners' policy of using religious beliefs to determine who can

offer invocations at public meetings is unconstitutional, discriminatory and a violation of religious freedom. The case was brought by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Florida on behalf of several nontheists whom commissioners have barred from offering invocations. (Williamson is founder of FFRF's chapter, Central Florida Freethought Community.)

The settlement includes paying the groups and individuals who sued the county \$60,000 in compensatory damages and paying the plaintiffs \$430,000 to cover their attorney and litigation expenses. Brevard County has an insurance trust which will likely handle the bulk payment. Brevard County Communications Director Don Walker said the county will pay a \$50,000 deductible from its insurance coverage and must also pay \$76,961 for outside attorneys the county used on this case, which was not covered by insurance.

Texas remedies violation

A Texas public school district will properly charge a religious ministry for the use of its property per FFRF's recent advice.

A concerned community member reported to FFRF that an event called "Fields of Faith" has been repeatedly held at the Sulphur Springs High School football stadium. This event is reportedly sponsored by a group called Illuminate Student Ministry.

FFRF submitted an open records request to probe this ministry's entanglement with Sulphur Springs public schools. District policy seems to mandate that any outside group be charged a fee of \$250 per use and that the group be required to sign a written agreement with the district. But since the district's response included no applications, contracts or payment history between the ministry and the district, it appears that the Illuminate Ministry had been using district facilities free of charge without any written agreement, in violation of district policy.

FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson wrote to the district urging it to address this violation. It is well-settled law that public schools may not advance, prefer or promote religion. When a district allows a group special treatment on account of its religious leanings, it amounts to a clear statement of government endorsement of religion, FFRF pointed out.

"Public schools have a constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward

religion," Johnson wrote. "Preferential treatment of faith groups unconstitutionally entangles the district with a religious message — here, a Christian message. This alienates those non-Christian students, teachers and members of the public whose religious beliefs are inconsistent with the religious messages being promoted by the church."

If a public school district allows a religious group to use its property outside of official school time, it must require the ministry to pay to use the property as it would any other group. FFRF recommended that the district charge Illuminate Student Ministry the policy-mandated \$250 per event and that it collect rental fees from the group for any instance it has used the property without paying.

In a letter of response, the district indicated to FFRF that it would follow its recommendations.

"We will retroactively charge Sulphur Springs First Baptist Church the appropriate fee, \$250, for the 2019 Fields of Faith Event," Superintendent Michael Lamb responded. "Furthermore, if the church or any other entity chooses to use our facilities to host this or any other event in 2020 or thereafter, we will execute a proper facility use agreement and charge the appropriate fee as listed in our schedule."

FFRF commends Sulphur Springs Independent School District for swiftly taking action to remedy this issue.

Mars, maybe?



Pat Webb sent us a photo of this marquee outside of Brevard, N.C. in early January. "My husband and I both enjoy your publication. It's informative and confirms that we are not alone in our thinking," Pat writes. "When we first saw this sign, I thought, 'Really?'" But then again, it was in Transylvania County, N.C., home to U.S. Rep. Mark Meadows."

ON THE ROAD



FFRF's Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel was in New Orleans on Jan. 16 as part of his book tour for *The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism is Un-American*. Hosted by the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association, Seidel spoke to a crowd of about 75 people. Shown in this photo are, from left to right: Charlotte Klasson, Audrey Coulter, Andrew, William Gautreaux, Jim Dugan, Beth Deitch and Clay Richard.



The Arkansas Society of Freethinkers hosted FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott in Little Rock on Jan. 19 for his presentation on "The Theocrats' Playbook," which explores the tactics used by officials who try to inject religion into government. Patrick got a first-hand look at the Ten Commandments monument at the Arkansas Capitol. The monument is subject to a lawsuit brought jointly by FFRF, the American Humanist Association and members of the Arkansas Society of Freethinkers.

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

Freethought Heroine

Building a bridge . . . because it is needed

This is an edited version of the speech given by Mandisa Thomas at FFRF’s national convention on Oct. 19 in Madison, Wis. She was introduced by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor:

Mandisa Thomas is a native of New York City who now lives in Atlanta. She is the founder and president of Black Nonbelievers Inc. Black Nonbelievers is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that she founded as a volunteer in 2011, dedicated to connecting black nonbelievers and allies who are living free from religion to provide secular fellowship, reduce stigma, support nonbelievers in coming out, and which celebrates racial diversity in our movement. Black Nonbelievers’ motto is “Walking by sight, not by faith.” You may have caught Mandisa on “CBS Sunday Morning,” CNN.com, Jet magazine or on the cover of The Humanist magazine with four other fierce black women freethinkers.

When a group of us representing various secular organizations lobbied together in Congress last February, members of Congress were most interested in hearing from Mandisa about a highly overlooked constituency — black nonbelievers. Two weeks ago, Mandisa, with help from some other activists, put on the historic Women of Color Beyond Belief conference in Chicago, of which FFRF is proud to have been a sponsor, Dan and I were there with some other staff.

Like so many innovators and activists, Mandisa Thomas saw an important need going unfilled and she didn’t wait for someone else to fill it and do the work. She stepped up to the plate to meet that need and create Black Nonbelievers, which performs a vital service, not just for black nonbelievers, but for the freethinking community. It’s my pleasure to introduce the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s 2019 Freethought Heroine, Mandisa Thomas.

By Mandisa Thomas

Thank you to all of you for being here today. For those who came before me, those who work with me and those who will eventually come after me, it is nice to bask in this moment. Thank you once again for this.

It’s a very interesting thing for me to be considered a heroine because I am simply an organizer with a background and expertise in hospitality and event management, with a heavy secular influence. I’m a proud — very, very proud — black woman who definitely saw a need that wasn’t being fulfilled in this movement. Just like “nothing fails like prayer,” nothing fails like just sitting back and waiting for something to be done. The stronghold of religion in the black community is something that we are very much contending with, so I’m not going to prolong that point, because hopefully everyone in here gets it.

In starting Black Nonbelievers, we have been about overturning the stronghold of religion within the black community, as well as the dependence on the savior mentality, this idea that God is going to come and save our community from the atrocities that have been committed, all the while overlooking the fact that if this god existed, he was responsible for it in the first place.

We knew that there were more of



Mandisa Thomas, founder of Black Nonbelievers, spoke at FFRF’s national convention on Oct. 19 in Madison, Wis.

us out here. We knew there were more black folks who were sitting in churches. They didn’t believe anymore, but they thought that they were the only ones. That is actually very common. We just knew we needed to fill those gaps within the high religiosity in the black community, as well as the lack of representation within the secular community. A bridge needed to be built.

Black Nonbelievers as an organization is now eight years strong and counting. And our mission is to build the community and increase the visibility and support for black folks who either identify fully as atheist or who are questioning religion in favor of leaving, while also encouraging an evidence-based approach to life. It is important to show that, yes, there are more than a few black atheists out there.

We had to build up this community and network in order for us to really get it. We hosted a number of events. We are almost day-in and day-out engaging with other black atheists, as well as all kinds of atheists. We are coming up on our 10th anniversary in 2021.

Our work has also led to not only more black folks, black atheists, black secularist humanists, etc., coming out to various events, but has also led us to contributing to research, as well as to literary projects. Projects such as the American Humanist Association’s cover of its magazine, which was the first time there have been multiple black women simultaneously featured on any secular magazine’s cover.

I know this is a room, a group here, that values literary works. I don’t know if you are familiar with any of these books: Jeremiah Camara’s *Contradiction*, the *New Anthology of Black Freethinkers* by Dr. Chris Cameron, the *Ebony Exodus Project* by Candace Gorham, which is an anthology on black women leaving religion, or Anthony Pinn’s *Colorblindness Isn’t the Answer*.

And there is a full amount of works that are coming from the black atheist demographic, and it was up to us to help facilitate it. Why? Because it was needed.

Will everyone make it as much as we would like? Ideally, we would hope that everyone who comes out as an atheist would be rational and objective, even while they are trying to overcome their religious beliefs. However, I have had to tell quite a few people in my years of activism this: “Bye, bitch.” And the reason is because some people aren’t ready, and that’s OK. That’s a part of managing our spaces and also managing the people, which is very important.

We have to consider that, even in our secular spaces, even when we are engaging people who are leaving these ideals behind, they do come in with a lot of baggage and we try to help as much as possible. I am not a licensed counselor, so I

can’t put but so much on my plate, nor will I. I’m still a volunteer in this movement. I come from a demographic that is already overworked and undercredited, which is black women. Even in this community, where there is more attention paid to people of color as far as membership, is there is a genuine interest when it comes to leadership?

When it comes to financial support, that is still very lacking. For myself as a black atheist, mother, wife, someone who was pansexual and sex-positive and unapologetic, I am not seen as a heroine but as a threat. And, sadly, that comes from within our own movement. You know what, even through the pitfalls and other things that we deal with, it has been important to keep going. Why? Because it’s needed.

[Shows photo of building on screen] Who here is familiar with this building? It is the new Smithsonian’s National Museum of African-American History and Culture.

I had a phone call from one of the directors at this museum regarding a project last year about black Millennials leaving religion. We are now in the preliminary stages of collecting archives of the Black Nonbelievers’ work. This is significant because there is a possibility that we will end up in this museum in the very near future. We are making history and it must be understood that black secular history

and the activism that we are doing now is important, not just to the black community, but to American history and in the world. We are doing some serious work. The growth of a movement, especially one rooted in critical thinking and freethought, will depend on the acknowledgment and support for institutionally marginalized demographics, which means taking seriously the diversity and inclusion efforts and how you treat people of color when they enter these spaces. There is no getting around that.

I also want to announce that Women of Color Beyond Belief conference is coming back to Chicago next year. You may find more information at WOCBeyondBelief.com. What was so important about that event? It was very monumental because it showed that we’re accomplishing what other organizations are still trying to figure out, which is how to bring out more people of color. We welcome you to attend our events so that you can actually see how many people of color are involved in this movement, especially black women. I also want to thank FFRF for its support.

But the most important lesson that we can take here is to put your money where your mouth is. So to the person I spoke with earlier this morning, you don’t get a pat on the back for joining the NAACP, you don’t get a pat on the back for saying, “Hey, I have this black person as a friend” or “I know this person.” But you do get our sincere thanks and you do show that you are serious when you consistently support our efforts just as much as you support the Freedom From Religion Foundation. As much progress as FFRF is making — which we acknowledge and appreciate for being one of our most valued supporters — it also takes the people involved in these organizations to see the importance, even if it doesn’t directly apply to you. In some way it really does. I promise you that.

Again, it’s going to take all of us if we truly care about the marginalized people in this movement. If you say you need our voices, you say you need our leadership, it’s going to take deconstructing and re-evaluating these notions that you have about black and brown folks and other people of color, and especially women, in order for us to really move forward. Because it is needed.

Thank you.



Mandisa Thomas

Convention speech

The intrusion of religion into public life

This is an edited version of the speech given by R. Laurence Moore at FFRF's national convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 18, 2019. He and Isaac Kramnick shared the stage to talk about their book, *Godless Citizens in a Godly Republic*. (Kramnick's speech is reprinted on pages 12-13.) Moore was introduced by FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott:

One of the classic works in our specialized field at FFRF of defending the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment is a book called *The Godless Constitution: The Case Against Religious Correctness*. It came out in 1997 and was co-written by our next speakers, the distinguished scholars Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore. Although *The Godless Constitution* is hard to obtain these days, the pair followed it up in 2018 with a new classic: *Godless Citizens in a Godly Republic: Atheists in Public Life*. And, by the way, the Freedom From Religion Foundation gets a wonderful shout-out in the chapter "The Atheist Awakening."

R. Laurence Moore is the Howard A. Newman Professor of History and American Studies, Emeritus, at Cornell University, where he taught from 1972 until his retirement. He was born in Houston and was educated at Stanford, Rice and Yale. Moore has lived abroad with fellowships from the Rockefeller Foundation, from Lady Margaret Hall at the University of Oxford. He has also been a fellow of the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington. He has taught and written in the field of American culture and intellectual history. Please join me in welcoming Larry Moore.

By R. Laurence Moore

I want to begin by taking back something that Isaac and I once wrote — the first lines of a book we published in 1996: *The Godless Constitution*. "Americans seem to fight about many silly things: whether a copy of the Ten Commandments can be posted in a city courthouse, whether a holiday display that puts an image of the baby Jesus next to a Frosty the Snowman violates the Constitution, whether grade-schoolers may stand for a moment in silent spiritual meditation before class begins. Common sense might suggest that these are harmless practices whose actual damage is to trivialize religion. Otherwise they threaten no one."

We were trying to establish some priorities to highlight what was our main target — the intrusion of religion into American politics. But 20-plus years observing the behavior of leading American evangelicals has changed our minds. In fact, everything that privileges belief over nonbelief in our public culture matters. Every intrusion of religion into American public life works to create a culture where rhetoric that makes no sense passes for normal. That's a position we take in *Godless Citizens*.

The number of people in this country who say they have no affiliation with any religion — who pollsters call the Nones — are as numerous as the number of conservative evangelicals — around 26 percent of the population. Yet, evangelicals make cowards out of politicians. Even the non-believing ones duck if asked about their religion. "Yes, God blesses this country," they all chime in, regardless of party.

And that's because polls clearly show that a declaration of nonbelief is a poor way to begin a political campaign. Around 50 percent of people in both political parties say they would not vote for a well-qual-

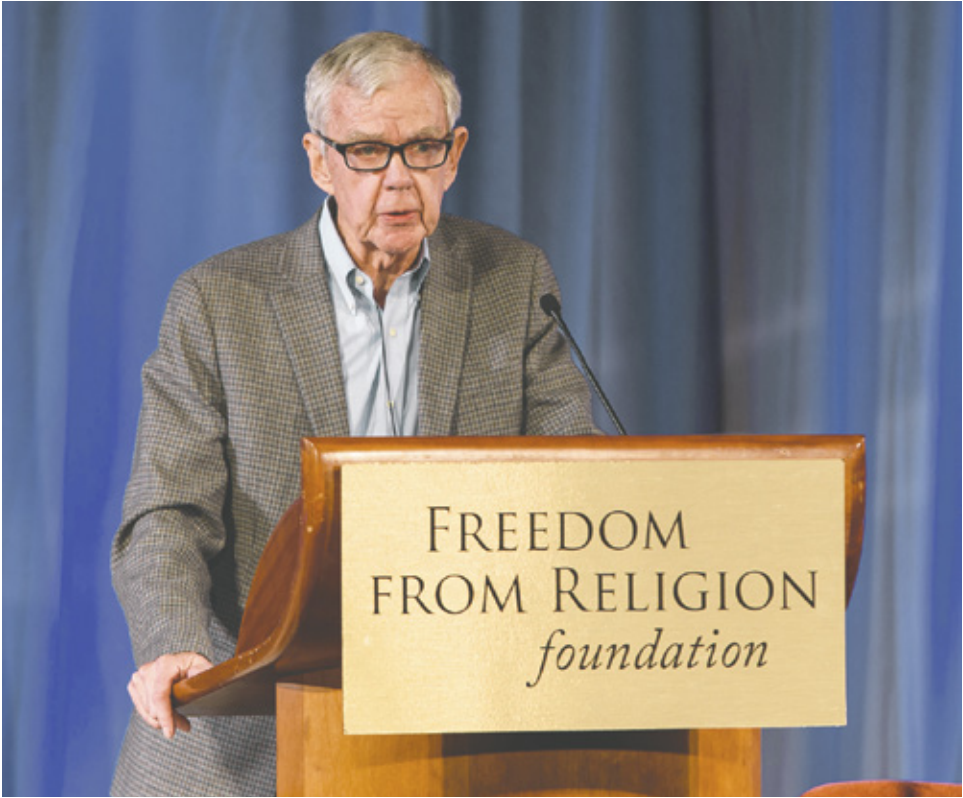


Photo by Chris Line

Author and scholar R. Laurence Moore spoke on Oct. 18 at FFRF's national convention in Madison, Wis.

ified candidate nominated by their party who didn't believe in God. A woman, yes. An African-American, yes. A Muslim, yes. An atheist, no.

A belief that predated the founding of the United States, one championed by an early advocate of religious liberty, John Locke, held that anyone who would not take an oath before God could not be trusted. This outdated prejudice nonetheless has persisted into the 21st century. One of the things we try to do in our book is praise organizations like FFRF for doing something about it.

Early in the 1800s and continuing through the 19th century, small groups of urban freethinkers began a tradition of meeting on Jan. 29 to celebrate Thomas Paine's birthday. Paine's pamphlet, *Common Sense*, published early in 1776, did as much as any written document to spark the American Revolution. He was a lionized patriot for 10 years, but, when he died in 1809, his days as a popular hero were over. His reputation had plummeted. What happened?

He went to France, got behind a very different revolution that was stridently anti-clerical, and wrote *The Age of Reason*, the treatise that celebrated reason over the claims of the revealed religion laid down in the bible. Paine now used the same common sense that he had employed in 1776 to show the worthlessness of the crowned despots of Europe to unmask the tyranny of biblical scripture.

Paine believed in a designer god who gave human beings the reason necessary to understand creation, but he was a sort of absentee landlord god who didn't demand worship or prayer or much attention at all. Not atheism — just militantly anti-Christian and the tenets of any revealed religion. Religious leaders, as soon as the book was published, equated Paine's deism with atheism.

Their campaign to make Paine a "filthy little atheist" (Teddy Roosevelt's phrase 100 years later) was long and determined and successful. Atheism became in the 19th century a blanket term for any sort of religious freethought. It was a term of

opprobrium.

I'll mention one 19th-century example to show how quickly this bias became rooted in our politics. Robert Ingersoll demonstrates how, in a short time, you can go from being a household name in the United States — and Ingersoll was during his lifetime — to a forgotten man, which he became almost instantly after his death. As a young man, he emerged as an extremely talented political aspirant who many thought was headed for high office.

When he died, a eulogy in the Washington Post in 1899, said, "With his splendid gifts of oratory, his magnetic manners, his genial humor . . . there was no position of honor to which he might have aspired with an almost certainly of success but for his agnosticism."

Ingersoll developed his doubts about God at almost the same time he set out after the Civil War (served with distinction) to win a political office in Illinois. He could have done what many other politicians have done and doubtlessly still do, and followed the advice of his close friends, who told him to shut up and go to church. Instead, he publicly embraced

the label "agnostic," a word just coined by Thomas Henry Huxley, Darwin's English champion, and began to publish articles attacking theistic faith in sarcastic terms that Paine would have relished. Paine was one of his heroes.

At first, the political fallout wasn't clear. At the 1876 Republican convention, he was picked to nominate for the presidency the senior senator from Maine, James G. Blaine. In a fiery speech widely regarded as the best at the convention, he dubbed Blaine the "Plumed Knight" — still a useful detail for high school students taking an AP test in American history. Despite the speech, the nomination went to Rutherford B. Hayes and Ingersoll ended up campaigning for him. Hayes prevailed in a contested general election, and a grateful Hayes tried to make Ingersoll the American ambassador to Germany. The nomination went nowhere. This was from The New York Times: "The suggestion that a declared and boasting unbeliever should be chosen to represent a Christian country brought a storm of indignation." The political consequences were now clear.

Ingersoll never thereafter ran for office, but he had a successful and controversial career as a lecturer, appearing in almost every state and filling the biggest auditoriums to attack Christianity, the bible and clerics. Public oratory was a form of entertainment and no one did it better than Ingersoll — humorous and good natured, but he did not mince words: "What is real blasphemy? It is to prevent the growth of the human mind, to pollute children's minds with the dogma of eternal punishment, to excite the prejudice of ignorance and superstition."

Ingersoll was basically a conservative who loved his country. Atheism has often in American history been equated with political radicalism, especially during the era of the Cold War, when the linkage commanded bipartisan political support. Ingersoll was a great orator who could make complex issues seem simple and clear. He had an abiding love of his wife and daughters who were often in his audience. A family man with family values. He might have become president and even a good one — except he didn't believe in God and that fact disqualified him. At the end of his life, he didn't record any regrets and went to his grave committed to Thomas Paine's statement "that any system of religion that has anything in it that shocks the mind of a

See Moore on page 17

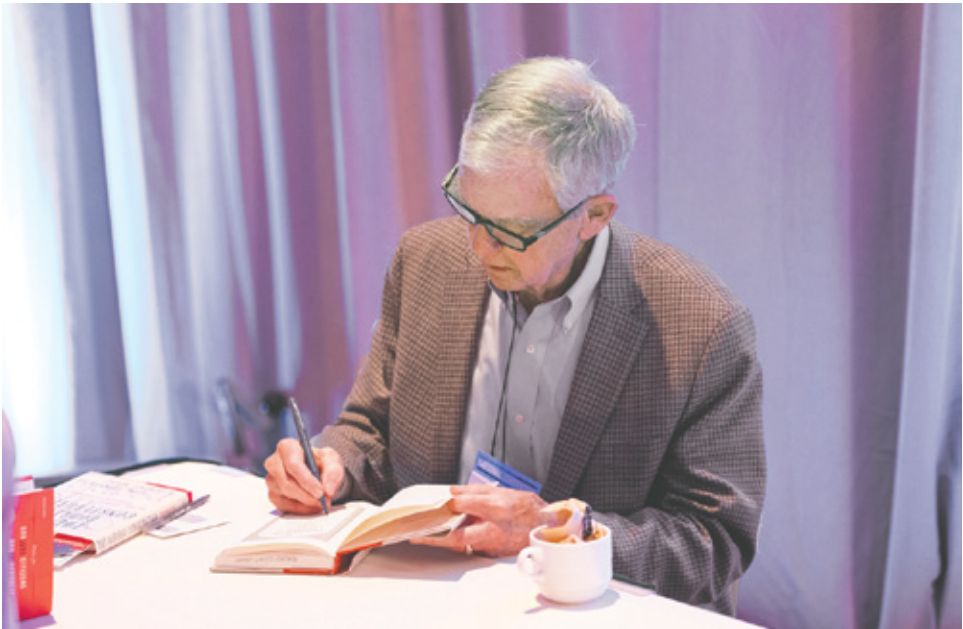


Photo by Chris Line

R. Laurence Moore signs copies of his book *Godless Citizens in a Godly Republic* following his speech.

Convention speech

‘Under God’ marries religion to citizenship

This is the speech, edited for space, given by Isaac Kramnick at FFRF’s national convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 18, 2019. (Sadly, Kramnick died at age 81, on Dec. 21, just two months after giving this talk.) He was introduced by FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott:

Isaac Kramnick is the Richard J. Schwartz Professor of Government, Emeritus, at Cornell, where he has taught since 1972. Prior to coming to Cornell, he had taught at Harvard, Brandeis and Yale. He is from rural Massachusetts and was educated at Harvard and Cambridge University. He has taught and written principally an area of English and American political thought and history. He has written or edited some 20 books.

By Isaac Kramnick



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Isaac Kramnick spoke on the history of how “under God” became part of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Every morning at most American public schools, the day begins with students participating in a teacher-led Pledge of Allegiance to the flag. That pledge, of course, involves God: “I pledge allegiance, to the flag, of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

The pledge was written in 1892 as part of a public relations campaign, run by a respected and popular Boston-based magazine, *Youth’s Companion*. The magazine had launched a national initiative in the late 1880s to “have a flag fly over every schoolhouse in America.” Offering sales of flags with a printed order form, the periodical campaigned in 1892 to have 13 million schoolchildren participate in that October’s national celebration of the 400th anniversary of the so-called discovery of America in 1492, when Columbus sailed the ocean blue. How better to sell flags to schools than to have the *Youth’s Companion* invent a pledge to the flag that could be recited in every schoolhouse?

The author of this pledge was Francis Bellamy, a cousin of the famous socialist writer and activist Edward Bellamy, who had written the bestselling utopian novel *Looking Backward* in 1889. The pledge that Francis Bellamy wrote to help sell flags in 1892 made no reference to God, nor even to the United States. His pledge, published in the *Youth’s Companion* on Sept. 4, 1892, was: “I pledge allegiance to my flag and to the republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

Washington state in 1919 became the first state to require the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance in public schools. By the 1950s, reciting Bellamy’s pledge had become a morning ritual in most American public schools, with the pledge to “my flag” replaced officially by Congress in 1942 to the “flag of the United States of America.” But for that tiny change, Bellamy’s pledge remained as he wrote it until the 1950s, when “God” was added.

Religion, God embraced

As the Cold War developed, religion and God were publicly embraced. President Eisenhower initiated a prayer breakfast in the White House, and Congress created a prayer room in the Capitol. “In God We Trust” was made the nation’s official motto, replacing “E pluribus unum,” — one out of many — which, despite the civil war, had done fairly well for nearly 200 years.

“In God We Trust,” which had been placed on some currency during the Civil War, was placed on all American money in the 1950s. In such a Cold War political environment, the Catholic fraternal organization, the Knights of Columbus, well aware of the historical linkage of Bellamy’s pledge of allegiance to Columbus Day, proposed in 1951 during the Korean War to add the words “under God” between the words “nation” and “indivisible” in the pledge. In part because it was being pushed mainly by the Catholic organization, such a bill introduced in Congress in 1953 had little public support and was even publicly opposed by Bellamy’s son.

But in February 1954, one sermon, delivered before one important parishioner, married American patriotism to godliness. That month, George McPherson Do-

cherty, the pastor of The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., which Eisenhower attended, delivered a sermon with the president sitting in front of him.

Docherty lamented that the Pledge of Allegiance could be the pledge of any country and that it needed “under God” added to it. He said, “I could hear little Muscovites repeat a similar pledge to their hammer and sickle flag. The Soviets claim to be an individual republic, too.” The Cold War, Docherty insisted, was not about political beliefs, between Thomas Jefferson’s political democracy and Lenin’s communistic state, or about economic systems between Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* and Karl Marx’s *Das Kapital*.

Rather, he said, it is a theological war. It is a Judeo-Christian civilization in mortal combat against modern secularized godless society. Docherty’s sermon ended with his ringing call for Eisenhower to help pass legislation adding “under God” to the pledge.

And Eisenhower did. By June 1954, four months later, the law had passed Congress and was signed by the president. On June 14, 1954, Flag Day, the president signed the legislation. For nearly 50 years after 1954, “God” sat comfortably in the Pledge of Allegiance — until the year 2000 and the historical intervention of one man named Michael Newdow.

Newdow’s court battle

Newdow was a graduate of Brown University, UCLA Medical School and the University of Michigan Law School. Newdow, who practiced law and also worked as an emergency room physician in Sacramento, Calif., filed a federal lawsuit in March 2000, claiming that the teacher-led daily recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance with the phrase “one nation, under God” harmed his daughter, a student at Elk Grove Elementary School in California. He argued that the state-run ritual proclaimed the exis-

tence of God and was an unconstitutional violation of the First Amendment’s prohibition of an establishment of religion, which courts have regularly interpreted to mean “a prohibition of state sponsorship or endorsement of religion.”

Newdow and the mother of his daughter had never married and were not living together. The girl’s mother described herself as a born-again Christian. Newdow was himself a Jewish atheist. At the time of the suit, the child’s mother had sole custody of the daughter. The district court dismissed Newdow’s case in 2001. He then appealed to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. The 9th Circuit Court is, as some of you may know, the nation’s most liberal circuit court. In June 2002, to the nation’s amazement, a panel of the appeals court ruled two to one that it was indeed an unconstitutional sponsorship of religion, a violation of the First Amendment for public schools and Elk Grove to ask students to recite “under

God” as part of the Pledge of Allegiance.

As soon as the ruling was publicized, every politician in America raced to appear on television to denounce it. President Bush called the decision “ridiculous” and that it reinforced his resolve to appoint “common-sense judges who understand that our rights are derived from God.”

Sen. John Kerry, soon to be the Democratic candidate for president, said that holding “‘under God’ in the pledge unconstitutional was half-assed justice, the most absurd thing. That’s not an establishment of religion.”

Almost immediately, the Elk Grove School Board, supported by the Bush administration, took the case to the United States Supreme Court. Judge Alfred Goodwin, a Republican appointed to the 9th Circuit Court in 1971 by President Nixon, and known to his friends as Tex, the very next day postponed any implementation of his ruling until the Supreme Court heard the case. The U.S. Senate quickly passed legislation reaffirming the words “under God” by a vote of 99 to 0. And the House of Representatives did the same by a vote of 416 to 3.

Political firestorm

Judge Goodwin’s ruling, joined by Judge Stephen Reinhardt, was eclipsed by the ensuing political firestorm. Goodwin strongly sided with Newdow, who had argued his own case that the words “under God” had a religious, not a secular purpose. “To say the United States,” Goodwin writes, “is a nation ‘under God’ is a profession of a religious belief, namely a belief in monotheism, and therefore was an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion.” The dissenting judge, Ferdinand Fernandez, appointed to the court by George H.W. Bush, offered what he described as judicial good sense, a worrisome warning that “to rule against ‘God’ in the pledge allows atheists like Newdow to put America on the slippery slope that would end by evicting religion from the American way of life and the triumph of religion itself.”



Photo by Chris Line

Author and scholar Isaac Kramnick speaks at FFRF’s national convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 18, 2019. R. Laurence Moore, sitting, and Kramnick co-authored several books, including the most recent, *Godless Citizens in a Godly Republic*, available from ffrf.org/shop. Moore spoke prior to Kramnick at the convention.

Those are his words.

When the appeal reached the Supreme Court on March 21, 2004, Newdow, a lawyer, again argued his own case. However, the justices never ruled on Newdow’s claim that “under God” was an unconstitutional establishment of religion. On June 14, 2004, Flag Day again, exactly 50 years to the day after President Eisenhower had signed the legislation putting God into the pledge, the Supreme Court preserved God’s place in it with a unanimous decision, which held that Newdow had no standing. The court made no elaborate argument. It made a procedural distinction, saying that it would not decide the case.

Newdow had no standing. He was not married to his daughter’s mother, who had custody of the child and, who, according to her lawyer, was giving her daughter a religious upbringing and wants her to say the pledge with “under God.” “God” was safe in the pledge and is to this day. But there is yet another chapter with Newdow’s crusade. The indefatigable Newdow was not silenced. In September 2005, he brought a new case on behalf of himself and three other unnamed parents and their children in the nearby Rio Linda Union School District, which is in the same California district court he had tried in 2000. The district court judge in January 2006 again ruled in Newdow’s favor, holding that the pledge’s “under God” violated the First Amendment. He stayed the carrying out of his ruling pending an appeal by the Rio Linda School Board.

The case was indeed appealed to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals again, with arguments heard on Dec. 4, 2007. It took more than two years, until March 2010, for the 9th Circuit Court panel to make a decision. Exactly 10 years after Newdow brought the first and the ill-fated suit on behalf of his daughter, the 9th Circuit Court panel finally and definitively resolved the legal status of the phrase “under God” in the pledge. It decided that the two words were not state sponsorship of religion, thus overturning the 2006 ruling of the district court judge.

‘Patriotic, not religious’

The court’s 58-page ruling was written by Justice Carlos T. Bea, a 2003 George Bush appointee. He was joined in the majority by Justice Dorothy Nelson, who was appointed to the appeals court by President Carter. The pledge Bea wrote was “of allegiance to our republic, not of allegiance to God or to any religion. Congress’s purpose in 1954 in adding ‘God’ to the pledge was patriotic, not religious.” Bea held that adding the words had a secular, political purpose and did not endorse, favor or promote religion, did not endorse one religion over another, nor did it coerce students into participating in a religious exercise. Bea held quite absurdly that “under God” in the pledge had no religious significance, but was merely a secular political statement. “It is not a prayer, but patriotism.”

It was added to the pledge in 1954, he wrote quite erroneously, to make the political point that America has a limited government, unlike the Soviets all-powerful government division of the Cold War that provided for and dominated the people. It represented the American political belief that government was not supreme, but that a power greater than government, God, gave

the American people their rights. Students reciting “one nation, under God” are thus referring to the historical traditions of America, not making a personal affirmation through prayer or invocation that the speaker believes in God or that God even exists. The court went on to insist that citing God in the pledge is merely rhetorical, stylistic and ceremonial. “Under God” in the pledge, as the court concluded in 2010, “is unrelated to religious belief.” That’s a quote from the decision.

To all of this, the single dissenting circuit court justice responded: “Pure poppycock.” Stephen Reinhardt, who had sided with Goodwin in the original *Newdow* case, was the sole dissenter, the one vote against the two. (He died about six months ago.) He had been appointed to the court by President Carter. Reinhardt argued that the two words were, in fact, “for the purpose of indoctrinating public school children with a religious belief that God exists.”

The 9th Circuit majority ruling saw it otherwise. “Under God” in the pledge was not an unconstitutional endorsement of religion because the reference to God is understood to be religiously meaningless, stripped of spiritual significance. God is secularized and performs political patriotic and ceremonial purpose. Citing God has nothing to do with religion.

‘God’ a nonreligious term?

No surprise then that many religious figures, while approving of the panel’s majority ruling, were critical of Bea’s argument about the pledge’s lack of religious content, his relegation of God to be a nonreligious term. Father Richard John Newhouse, the respected founder of the religious journal *First Things*, announced “Most Americans agree with Mr. Newdow that a reference to God is a reference to God, the government’s brief notwithstanding. Have we come to the point when references to God in public are permissible because nobody really believes what they say?” He, of course, approved of the decision of the court, he just disagreed with its argument.

Similarly, in the recent court case with a 40-foot cross in Maryland, Larry [Moore] and I just had an article in *The Hill*, which pointed out that to say that a 40-foot cross is not really a cross, but a symbol of war dead, is, of course, to be a gross insult to religious people for whom a cross is a cross and a central issue in the Christian faith. Those like Bea, for whom the post-1954 pledge has a predominantly patriotic purpose, and those like Newdow, Reinhardt and Father Newhouse, for whom it has an indisputably religious purpose, are all correct.

What the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals did in 2010 was codify and legitimize the intimate linkage of Americanism and religiosity, which had been a drumbeat since the Cold War. Changing the pledge in 1954 was an establishment and sponsorship of religion because it marries religion to citizenship. Being religious, believing in God, is declared in the pledge to be central to what it means to be an American, and becomes a litmus test for citizenship. It is the core of an American civil religion, a

“Being religious, believing in God, is declared in the pledge to be central to what it means to be an American, and becomes a litmus test for citizenship



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Isaac Kramnick: “The court is saying to be an American, one must be a believer, affirming a religious identity is here taken as a sign of being a good American.”

merging of the political and the spiritual. The court is saying to be an American, one must be a believer, affirming a religious identity is here taken as a sign of being a good American.

Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance is, as many of you know, the last ritualized act in the naturalization ceremony for new citizens, which makes it clear that affirming loyalty to America requires asserting a belief in God, even if God is so allied with the United States that the courts could see God as a secular figure. I repeat, it signifies that what defines an American is being a believer and that nonbelievers are unwelcome in the American political community.

Newdow’s decade-long atheist crusade against “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance had produced an unintended consequence: The judicial doctrine of civil religion, the assumption that one has to be religious, i.e., believing in God, to be a good American. This linkage is assumed in the courts even as, paradoxically, they insist that they are not affirming or establishing a religion. And even more paradoxically, as the number of self-proclaimed nonbelieving Americans grows dramatically.

Now, I have to end this rather sad story of where the Pledge of Allegiance is today, with a bit of comic relief. The late iconoclastic comedian Robin Williams, like millions of nonbelievers and like many in this room, remained unpersuaded about America’s dependence on divine guidance. If he could, he would tell audiences that he would yet again rewrite the Pledge of Allegiance, this time with less attention to religion, and more to geography. And so, he would, often in his appearances, offer a new pledge of allegiance.

“I pledge allegiance, to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic, for which it stands, one nation, under Canada and above Mexico, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.” Thank you.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Isaac Kramnick

Moore

Continued from page 15

child cannot be true.”

Still, Ingersoll presented a clear lesson. If you want a high political office in the United States, don’t mix your work with an insistence that Christianity is a foolish set of superstitions that cripple the progress of reason and science. The political exclusion of nonbelievers continues to plague our politics and poison our public culture.

Textbooks of American history are filled with examples of how religion shaped our country. Puritans did what they did because they were religious. Slave religion proved an essential way for African-Americans in the antebellum South to define their humanity and free blacks in the North relied on black churches to build resistance to discrimination. That’s true and ought to be told.

But what we need to challenge is the habit of saying nothing about the importance of nonbelief to many people who also helped to build this country: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Jane Addams, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, Andrew Carnegie, Alexander Graham Bell. Contributions noted, but not with any suggestion that their break from religion had anything to do with their creativity. It did.

Our book seeks to give nontheists a reason to be angry and not just shrug their shoulders when religious symbols exclude them. A cross erected on public land to memorialize war dead is not a case of in-offensive ceremonial deism, whatever the Supreme Court says.

Inspired by Ingersoll, the botanist Luther Burbank, when he was 77, wrote an article that declared “I Am an Infidel.” His decision to announce publicly views he had long held was prompted by the dismay he felt over the so-called

Scopes-Darwin trial in 1925 that pitted the religious fundamentalist William Jennings Bryan against the agnostic lawyer Clarence Darrow. When John Scopes was convicted for illegally teaching evolution to the children of Dayton, Tenn., Burbank wrote in exasperation, “And to think of this great country in danger of being dominated by people ignorant enough to take a few ancient Babylonian legends as the canons of modern culture.” Burbank was ashamed that he had been afraid to speak out earlier. Speaking out is important.

In the Parc Montsouris in Paris, there is a full-size statue of Thomas Paine. There is no memorial to him of any kind in Washington. *The Age of Reason* kept him out of the pantheon of American heroes. There ought to be a statue because no one better represented the boldness, the rudeness if you like, of the American experiment than Paine. It should be



Photo by Ingrid Laas

R. Laurence Moore

inscribed with the words he penned in 1775 that were not controversial to our revolutionary forebears and should not be controversial now, “When we yield up the exclusive privilege of thinking, the last shadow of liberty quits the horizon.”

Emperor Has No Clothes Award

Atheists have a responsibility for social justice

This is an edited version of the speech given by Professor Anthony B. Pinn at FFRF's national convention on Oct. 19, 2019, in Madison, Wis. He was introduced by Stephen Hirtle, chair of FFRF's Executive Board:

It is my pleasure today to introduce our Emperor Has No Clothes Award recipient, Professor Anthony B. Pinn. Anthony grew up in the African-American church and was on his way to becoming a minister, but today is a leading humanist and freethinker, serving as the Agnes Cullen Arnold Professor of Humanities at Rice University. Professor Pinn, who earned a B.A. from Columbia and a Master of Divinity and Ph.D. in the study of religion from Harvard, is the founding director of the Center for Engaged Research and Collaborative Learning at Rice University. In addition, he is director of research for the Institute of Humanist Studies, which is a Washington, D.C., think tank. Professor Pinn has authored or edited more than 35 books, including his most recent, *When Colorblindness Isn't the Answer*.

Representing the American Humanist Association at the 2016 Reason Rally in D.C., Professor Pinn noted that America “is a country that too often dismisses people who don’t believe in ghosts, who don’t reject evolution, who don’t pray for change, rather than rolling up their sleeves and doing what they can do through creativity, compassion and hard work.” Very inspiring words from a man who does embody the small child in the fairy tale who “tells it like it is” about religion. Please come up, Tony, and get your award.

By Anthony B. Pinn

I am delighted to be here with you. I’m deeply honored and grateful to be a part of this outstanding group of honorees. I don’t know that I deserve it, but I’ll take it. The work being done by the Freedom From Religion Foundation is extremely important. I am by disposition an atheist and by practice a humanist, but also an odd creature in that I study religion. I study religion not to belittle it, but to take it seriously.

Why? Because it is a cultural force that over the course of centuries has determined how we understand life, what we appreciate as meaningful. And I appreciate the work done by this foundation because it takes to task the type of influence theism tries to demonstrate within the public arena.

Think about it this way: There are ways in which theism is a parasite. It infects and it influences. We have recent examples of this. We live within the context of a social world in which truth no longer matters, facts are irrelevant and, for people who look like



Professor Anthony B. Pinn speaks at FFRF's national convention on Oct. 19, 2019, in Madison, Wis.

me, there is something extra pernicious in the “make America great again” claim.

But we’ve heard this before. We’ve felt this before. It is a thin veil for rabid populism and a bizarre sense of whiteness that masquerades as nationalism that does extreme harm. It understands difference as a problem, a problem that has to be addressed. And religion works to safeguard this. Theism works in a way that provides a moral and ethical rationale for this sort of behavior. But this is not new.

Public harm of theism

This work of religion allowed a justification of the slave trade. It provided a justification for the wiping out of native populations. It provides a rationale and a justification for keeping small brown children in cages and arguing that toothbrushes and showers are luxuries. It provides a rationale or justification for assuming that we live within the context of a nation that has to be protected through strong barriers that amount to a physical disregard for difference. This is not new.

And, again, religion undergirds this theism, provides a justification for this sort of behavior and it needs to be tackled. It has to be recognized and called to task. So, on one level, I understand what I say, what I do and what I write as an effort to decrease the public harm that theism does.

I’m not trying to close churches, mosques and synagogues. What you want to do on Friday, Saturday, Sunday, that is your personal business. But the public arena should not be restricted, should not be strangled by the theological claims and wishes of any particular population. It’s bigger than that. It’s more robust than that.

It requires a grammar and a language of life that allows us to live out our best ideals. It requires a grammar and language of life that allows us to take seriously what Thoreau tried to teach us to do — to live deliberately, so that at the end we know that we have lived. We need a grammar, we need a vocabulary of public life that allows us, in the vein of Thoreau, to suck the marrow out of life, to take all that we can out of life, to allow for a robust existence that is available to all.

It, the public arena, allows us this grammar, this vocabulary that shapes our moral and ethical vision, allows us to stand with Thoreau, who said, “I will not support through my finances a country that belittles and enslaves.” And, so, from his jail cell, he looks out at his friend Emerson, and Emerson wants to know “What

are you doing in there?” and Thoreau’s response is the better question: “What are you doing out there?”

To live life deliberately, we need a vocabulary, a language of life that will allow us to honor what my grandmother told me before she sent me to New York, to college: “Walk through the world knowing your footsteps matter.” For my grandmother, this wasn’t a way of telling little Tony that you have to get all that you can. It wasn’t her way of saying that this education is about your personal well-being. This was not her way of saying that this education is about securing a middle-class existence. For my grandmother, Annie Hargrave, it was bigger than that. The idea was simply this: You have an obligation to do beyond yourself; that you measure your success not through your own acquisition, but the ways in which your efforts, your conversation, your doing, helps even a little bit, helps someone else have a healthier existence. Walk through the world knowing your footsteps matter.

Vocabulary of life

We need a vocabulary of life that will allow us to achieve this. Maintaining, critiquing, being dedicated to making certain that theism doesn’t rule the public arena is a huge element of that.

But here’s the catch. While separation of state-church is vital — and I will always applaud that work — I’m not quite convinced that even a more perfect application of state-church separation would have kept Trayvon Martin alive. Or would’ve kept Sandra Bland alive. Or would have changed the life options and reduce the violence that trans folks encounter.

For me, it’s a recognition that theism needs to be challenged when it enters the public arena. But the other half of my obligation and what I say, what I do and what I write, is to decrease the harm that freethought, humanism and atheism do in the world.

I have not encountered very many freethinkers, humanists or atheists who don’t embrace Thomas Jefferson. But here’s the catch: In embracing Thomas Jefferson, you are also embracing a legacy of sexual violence and racial disregard.

So, the question is this: Does humanism, does atheism, does freethought matter in the 21st century? Does it provide a way forward? Does it provide a moral and ethical posture toward the world that allows us to advance life, to celebrate its beauty and all of its diversity? I will today and always say it cannot and it does not if it doesn’t understand, as central to its mission, social justice.

Look at me and see someone who comes from a long legacy of folks for whom the challenges of existence, the demonizing of life, extends well beyond separation of church and state and science education. It has something to do with a deep disregard for blackness and the ever-present celebration of whiteness.

So, from this day forward, I encourage you, don’t say “people of color” anymore. That category “people of color” leaves unchallenged whiteness as normative because the implication is that there is white and there is everybody else. If you can’t get rid of that language all together, then perhaps a slight modification — “people of a despised color.”

Social justice obligation

Part of our obligation is to rethink ourselves on the individual level, on the level of our community, on the level of our organization, so that our ethical impulse, the mission of our organizations, is so tied to social justice that if we are not doing something about social justice, we have failed as organizations. That this is not an add-on, this is central to who we are and what we do. It says something about our humanism. It says something about those we are thinking about in our freethought. If we’re not doing this, we have failed. Social justice has to be central.



Anthony Pinn shows off his Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

To watch Anthony Pinn’s convention speech, go to ffrf.us/pinn

But how do we get there? I just want to highlight a few things. One: It requires recognizing that simply because you are new to the presence of black and brown humanists, freethinkers and atheists, doesn’t mean that we have just come on the scene. You’ve just been slow. When you think about humanism, freethought, atheism within the context of the United States, you cannot understand it properly if you are not taking into consideration how these traditions live within communities that are brown and black. You are missing something. Because we’ve been here. We’ve been doing this.

Another thing to keep in mind is there are some complexities in terms of black and brown folks who remain within theistic communities. Rather than asking me and other folks like me, “Why are black people still in the church? Why are brown people still in the church?” the better question is this: “Why haven’t we done something that is so compelling that they want to be with us?”

I will quickly give you a sense of why so many African-Americans remain in church. It has nothing to do with buying the theology provided by that pastor. For the black middle class, after the civil rights movement, theism within the United States begins to decline. This is not simply black churches, but churches by and large experienced a decline. It’s not until the 1980s that black folks began to come back to these churches in large numbers. Why? They played by the rules. You told us: Don’t code switch, speak like us and you’ll do better. You said go to these schools and you’ll have opportunities. You said live in these neighborhoods and you’ll have opportunities.

And we played by those rules and still hit racism. And not only did we hit racism, but in this process, we had given up something of our cultural heritage, our connections. So, 1980s folks began to go back to these black churches. Again, not because they did not necessarily buy the theology, they weren’t looking for soul salvation, but social networking, cultural connections, economic opportunities, a space in which they could catch their breath and not have



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Life Member and State Representative Kevin Gough chats with Anthony Pinn after Pinn signed a copy of his book, *When Colorblindness Isn’t the Answer*.

to explain to anybody why they were angry.

When you talk in terms of the black church, you also have to talk in terms of Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser, Henry McNeal Turner, Jarena Lee, Ida B. Wells. Henry McNeal Turner argues in 1895 in Atlanta that God is a Negro. I don’t imagine that’s the black religion you have in mind, is it?

Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser argued that the worth of blacks, the deep value of blacks, is such that if it requires the slaughter of whites in order to celebrate it, so be it. That’s probably not the kind of black church you’re critiquing, is it?

I’m simply saying it’s complex, and rather than pointing the finger at the folks in the church, we need to point the finger at ourselves and ask, “Why aren’t we doing something that is so compelling they can’t help but join us?”

Next, do some homework. We are a community that prides itself on being informed. We read, but when it comes to issues of diversity, we want to rely on

ignorance and the goodwill of those who don’t look like us. Pick up a book. Read. Learn.

Finally, if you’re really interested in diversity, if we’re going to do the social justice thing right and we are going to do it in a way that fundamentally changes our communities, then it requires discomfort. You can’t make change and be comfortable. So, rather than understanding discomfort as a problem that has to be solved, that you’ve got to reach equilibrium again, understand discomfort as an opportunity. Your mind being opened up for new ways of thinking, new ways of doing, new ways of communicating.

It seems to me this is our obligation if we are convinced that the only thing that can alter the circumstances of life in the United States and beyond, if we are convinced that it requires the material effort of those like us, let’s recognize a deeper obligation to appreciate, to celebrate, to be uncomfortable in our effort to secure a type of diversity that represents us and defines a new type of possibility for living. Thank you.

Professor Anthony Pinn answered several questions from FFRF members following his talk. Here is an edited version of that discussion.

What is your opinion of a black judge offering forgiveness to a white cop who gunned down a black man in cold blood?

I understand why, but it points to a problem. Forgiveness, from my vantage point, requires a recognition of wrongdoing and an effort to correct that wrongdoing. I did not sense that, and so it cheapens forgiveness. Forgiveness ought to be premised upon a demonstration of accountability and responsibility, and I did not see that.

Can you give me a legislation suggestion that I can take to my congressperson and say, “Here, bring about this legislative change” that will help us move one step in the direction that you’re suggesting?

I’ll go back to something that was in Jeremiah Camara’s movie, “Contradiction.” There are lots of religious organizations with which I’m familiar that understand themselves to be concerned with poverty and the transformation of communities. It seems to me one way to get at that is not to ask for extra money, but for the proper use of existing money. So, [churches], pay your property taxes.

Black churches that are committed to rethinking the economic plight of their communities could do this by saying: “We don’t care what the federal government is saying. We have an obligation to make a difference. And this money that we would give in property taxes within the county, we are going to use to challenge poverty. We may not be legally ob-

Q&A with Anthony Pinn

ligated to do it, but we understand that this is our responsibility.” And rather than trying to determine politics in the public space, use this money to transform the neighborhoods in which your churches reside.

Can you speak about recognizing white privilege?

The first order of business, and this is not guesswork, is that if you are recognized as white within the context of the United States, you have privilege. Period. I could drop the mic with that.

If you are white in the United States,

you have privilege. It comes across in a variety of ways. One, white privilege authorizes you to feel comfortable and confident that you are right in occupying time and space. That being in your living room, enjoying your living room, will not result in your death. That walking down the street will not result in your death.

Think about it in simple ways. I’ll give you one example. If you go to a restaurant and they seat you near the restroom and you’re thinking, “What the hell? Why did they put me here?,” then you probably have a form of privilege. If you go and buy

a car and the consideration is simply “What can I afford to drive?” and you don’t have to consider what kind of police interest the vehicle might get, you have privilege.

How do we talk and listen in a way that leads to productive discussion?

First, we have to attempt to recognize why people hold positions. We have to appreciate their context, appreciate the dynamics of their life experience, try to understand where they are.

Second, and for me this is fundamental, rather than outcome-driven strategies, we ought to have process-driven strategies because we cannot guarantee anything will improve. We are not saying God is on the throne and all is well. Or that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice. We don’t know this. But we know that we can try.

So, rather than outcome-driven strategies, we ought to follow what Albert Camus outlines when he talks about Sisyphus. You’re familiar with Sisyphus, right? This is the dude who’s being punished by the gods and this punishment involves rolling this rock up a hill. And once he gets it to the top, it comes rolling back down. And what Camus wants us to understand is that perpetual effort doesn’t have to break you. Rather than fixating on the end, the outcome, one should celebrate and recognize the importance and the value in the struggle. Recognize that there is something freeing, something liberating in saying “no” to injustice. Perhaps all we can hope for, all we can do, is make certain that we are loud and persistent in saying “no.”



Photo by Chris Line

Anthony Pinn listens to a convention attendee during a conversation after his speech.

Only absence of religion can bring peace

By Barbara G. Walker

It is very unlikely that there will ever be real peace in the world as long as religion exists. Religion by its very nature is confrontational and contentious, dividing the “ins” from the “outs,” the “we” from the “they” and the “saved” from the “damned” in arbitrary ways that require a non-questioning faith.

For one thing, major religions today insist that divinity is male. No supreme mother symbol, no hint of female sexuality is allowed. The absurdity of this belief is emphasized by the simultaneous notion that this manlike God has no physical body, which means “he” is without any of the kind of genitalia or hormones that define maleness. “His” (nonphysical) form is also seen as exclusively human, a dead giveaway of the fact that God is strictly man-created, a glorification of man’s self-image and



Barbara G. Walker

egotistical dreams of constant praise, power and authority.

For another thing, religion tends to divide the world into warring factions: the in-group vs. everyone else, the saved vs. the damned. It caters to the human desire for special significance in a universe that is quite obviously indifferent to what humans think of it, one way or another. It condemns the nonbeliever to spiritual hells and even more ubiquitous Earthly ones, typified by crusades, holocausts, pogroms, inquisitions, holy wars, shunings, witch hunts, condemnations, physical and social punishments and intolerance of every conceivable kind. Religion says, basically, “If you don’t believe what I believe, then you are devilishly deluded, and my God declares you evil and worthless; he orders your persecution.” This is the basic attitude of fundamentalists everywhere.

Throughout history, religion has enabled men to put down women and subject them to truly horrendous forms of abuse. It has enabled “civilized” conquerors to wipe out whole populations of “pagan” tribes throughout the world. It has attacked and robbed and enslaved, rather than enlightened. Indeed, knowledge is religion’s traditional enemy. Knowing the truth behind natural or social phenomena almost always contradicts the tenets of faith. Even in a scientifically enlightened age, religion still insists on belief in the patently unbelievable.

Religious leaders forbid their congregants to engage in discussions with nonbelievers, on pain of invoking God’s nastiest forms of displeasure. There is a quite justifiable fear that such discussions might lead to rational doubts and serious questioning of creedal improbabilities. Religions can’t abide research; that’s why they insist on being taken “on faith” and never investigated.

For these and many related reasons, it seems clear that the world will never

be mentally or emotionally free, or at peace, until religion has disappeared and been replaced by real knowledge, genuine sympathies, and true heart-felt humanity that respects all of our fellow creatures. We don’t deserve to be locked into mutually exclusive categories of belief any longer. They are destructive and dangerous. We need to teach our children and our children’s children to understand mythologies, but not to subscribe to them; to seek real knowledge rather than belief systems; and to realize that only the absence of religion will ever really bring about world peace.

FFRF Life Member Barbara G. Walker is a researcher, lecturer and author of 24 books on comparative religion, history, mythology, symbolism, mineral lore, knitwear design, the tarot, the *I Ching*, a collection of original *Feminist Fairy Tales*, an autobiography, a novel, and two essay collections: *Man Made God* and *Belief and Unbelief*. Her *Woman’s Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* has been in print since 1983 and was named Book of the Year by the London Times.

CRANKMAIL

We hope you enjoy this issue’s installment of Crankmail, where we don’t edit the letters for spelling, grammar, clarity or profanity. Read at your own risk.

Money: You might want to visit this website which I don’t support about 5 people who bear their testimonies about visiting the other side. I think it will “wake you up”. Your all going to be held accountable. It’s not a joke. God’s for real and apparently it look’s like Hell is too. Here’s one example. It will make you shiver inside.... You’ll know he’s telling the truth. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nIN6xXRz0> — Andy Bartholomew

Atheism: You are trying to take us back to the days of USSR and what China is doing today: eliminate freedom to practice a religion of our choice, erase our National Heritage and make Atheism our National Religion. Yes, through your organization, you are advocating that our taxpayer-paid public schools preach the faith of atheism. Shame on you! You are so hypocritical. — Jeff Linsy

Freedom from You: Stop pushing your belief on me. I know God is real and what you do with your life is your choice. I don’t want you to face eternity and regret your choice. —Jacqueline Miniard

Cowards: Stop being cowards and liars. We all know you are statnists and we want freedom from you. You are the problem cowards. — Donald Koller

your ideas: Please come to my town and walk down the street.You wont last log. FUCK OFF AND DIE YOU COMMIE CUNTS — Steven Walther

Pope Joan: Hello my name is Tisha, I had came across an article that was written in 1998 in regards to Pope Joan. I’m reaching out in regards to Pope Joan because I believe it’s time for the truth to be known about her being the true Jhesus Christ.

I have reason to believe because of my experiences with God, and what I understand in regards to the book of revelations, that I am her direct bloodline. There are those whom are her enemies that knew she was my bloodline before I did, and I was attacked from a spiritual perspective because of it. Today I reach out in hopes to find the right door that can help me reclaim her throne. I carry something that was give to me that I believe leads to that inheritance, and if I can find the correct door that leads me to her. Then I will be able to do what God has sent me to do for humanity. — Tisha Martin

Fake: I’ll believe that the FFRF really believes in it’s stated purpose when it protests the require writing or recitation in some public school systems of the Islamic Shahada by the pupils whether or not the students are Muslim, Christian, Jewish, etc. Your organization does not stand for the freedom of religion, or even a secular weight in the public square. You stand against Christians and Christian values. You’re fakes and liars. — David Payton

Prayer: I wanted to tell yall that Ill pray for you poor, dumb, hell bound bastards. — Joe Franlin

Get a life: You people need Jesus. You shit-balls rank up there with the worst people imaginable. I just read a story about you trying to

intimidate a sheriff’s office. Take inclusive and stick it up your ass. — Uri Stentson

Ffef: YOU can STOP being UN-AMERICAN and STOP telling ME how to raise MY children. But mainly STOP being a total bunch of ASSHOLES!! — Gary Crittenden

You will rot in hell: You and your entire organization will rot in HELL. You have no business with your violent threats against our schools and the god fearing children that attend. You ever try that bullshit with me our my kids and you will not see the next day. — Dave Bawenda

Yopu people are creeps: How may you be of assistance? How about this: Throw yourselves into the Grand Canyon rather than bullying an elementary school into cancelling a live nativity scen for third graders. All your member have ever wanted in life was “attention” for being “different” due to your low self-esteem. What trash you truely are. — Greg Hoover

Gift: please send me a gift of \$30,000 make check payable to vaughn drum — Vaughn Drum

GO AWAY: IF YOUR ORGANIZATION DOES NOT CEASE OPERATION IN 7 DAYS, WE WILL HAVE NO OTHER OPTION THAN TO FILE A COURT ORDER AGAINST YOU FOR HARASSMENT. PLEASE PUBLICLY STATE THAT YOU ARE CEASING OPERATIONS OR WE WILL CONTINUE TO FOLLOW THROUGH WITH OUR LAWSUIT. WE HAVE THE NAMES OF EVERYONE THAT SUPPORTS YOUR GROUP. THEY WILL BE LISTED IN THIS LAWSUIT WITH POSSIBLE JAILTIME FOR HARASSING CITIZENS OF THIS COUNTRY. PAPERWORK HAS ALREADY BEEN FILED IN THE US COURT SYSTEM AND WILL APPEAR AS PUBLIC RECORD. PLEASE DO THE RIGHT THING AND STOP THE HARASSMENT OF US CITIZENS. YOU STUPID HILLBILLY GROUP — Everett Jameson

school prayer: You can by stopping your interference in fredom of religion and freedom of speech. If you people want to worship your devils, go ahead...just do it in your basement. I think you all should be deported to a desert island in the Indian Ocean. You are all worse than

the devil himself. This country was founded on Christianity and You are stepping on my rights as a citizen. You should all just shut up and read the Bible. You , sir, do more harm to this country than war. I personally take offence that you want to separate school students from their churches while in school. They have a right to pray, You only make enemies by your life style. How many of you guys are there compared to Christians in this country..Majority always rules so stay out of it. — Ann Barnes

God: Do not let the DEVIL Deceive you. There is a SATANIC WORLDWIDE ORGANIZATION in which it’s basic purpose is to implant DOUBT in the mind of mankind. You need to OPEN your Mind’s EYE. — Jeff Vandermause

Walker county: Stay out of Walker county and mind your business. When the sheriff references prayer that gives hope and comfort. This world is so full of evil prayer is the only thing people can do to help those in need. I don’t know what kind of demonic organization this is but I vow to advocate to have it shut down. You are part of the evil corrupt swamp and it’s time to drain. — Kimberly Brown

East Knox High School: Raised in Howard Ohio my life. 1st and only warning. You will stop all harassment towards the football team. Or there will be a calling coming. — Brett Rittenhouse

End of atheism: God prepared me to beat Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Matt, and all Atheists; once and for all. I simply need assistance to meet with these atheists in public debate. God prepared me, from 325 AD. Nothing is hidden from me. Each and every soul we lost to atheism will return with interest. — Nicky Verster

Brain Dead Dopes: You atheists and agnostics are brain dead dopes. You guys know full well that God exists but you brain dead dopes want to be your own gods and don’t want to be under the authority of God. Stupid brain dead dopes. — Michael Mazar

View daily entries and quotes at ffrf.org/day



FREETHOUGHT OF THE DAY

“I became an atheist after Hitler came. I said, what is this? If there was a God, would he not be hearing 18 million people, 16 million Jews, or 20 million other people, saying, ‘Please God, don’t do this, make him stop?’ God was so busy doing what? Striping zebras or fixing the long necks of giraffes?”

Carl Reiner

Interview, Moment magazine

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LETTERBOX

Losing Faith in Faith made me an atheist

My friend gave me a year-old copy of Mother Jones magazine which had your ad in it, and per that ad, I would like to become a Life Member of FFRF!

I love the Ron Reagan ads you have from time to time on MSNBC: “Not afraid of burning in hell.”

Dan Barker’s book *Losing Faith in Faith* made me an atheist on Dec. 1, 1998. Based on other readings, I made the big step after a friend sent me Dan’s book. I received it Nov. 30, 1998, read half of it that very day and got up the next morning and said: “As of today, I am an atheist.”

When I then went out to my car to drive to work, the Christian radio station came on automatically when I started the car. I thought, “I have to find another radio station. Enough of this nonsense!”

I have been in debt to Dan Barker ever since, so it is about time I send you some of the money that no longer goes to church tithes, about which I had always been very conscientious.

Wanda Shirk
Pennsylvania

Letter to FFRF helped stop prayer breakfast

Last year at about this time, I contacted FFRF about the 45th Annual Arcadia Mayor’s Prayer Breakfast, featuring the State of the City Address. I had contacted the city and talked to the assistant city manager. He was dismissive of my concern about mixing public business with a prayer event, which included clergy from three different religions. He told me nobody was forced to attend, people were paying for it, it’s always been done like this, will continue as is in the future, and, if I didn’t like it, I didn’t have to go.


After this response, I reached out to FFRF, knowing full well how busy you are. A short while after that, I was informed that one of your lawyers had sent a letter to the city of Arcadia. Recently, I received the city’s announcement for this year’s City Address. It was under the heading of “46th Annual Mayor’s Community Breakfast,” and no prayers or clergy were on the program. Your letter worked!

William Syth
California

Anti-abortion movement is centered on religion

Understanding the driving force behind the anti-abortion movement may help the fighters for reproductive rights focus more clearly. Anti-abortion arguments are grounded in religious faith, not scientific fact, information or rea-

Visit Rationalist House in New Zealand




This photo of Robert Ingersoll sits in the Rationalist House in Auckland, New Zealand.

As a member of FFRF, I am glad to have had the opportunity to visit the Rationalist House in Auckland, New Zealand. I was able to meet with the secretary, Judy de Leeuwe, who took the time to give me a tour of the office and library areas. She also gave me, unexpectedly, two books (*The Secular Trend in New Zealand* and *Heathen in Godzone*), pamphlets like “What do you know about your school’s religious instruction,” and three issues of its magazine, *The Open Society*.

We had about a half-hour discussion about secularism in New Zealand and the United States. New Zealand Rationalists have a proud history of fighting the intrusion of religion into its education system and government. I talked about FFRF and its approximately 31,000 members, brought a copy of my book *Thoughts of a Freethinker* for them, and was glad to add a small donation to their very worthy organization. Hope other freethinkers from FFRF get the opportunity to visit.

Michael Kaye
Florida



son. Studies show that the more people are involved with religion, the less they support the right of a woman to have an abortion. Conservative religious institutions are vocal about fiercely held anti-abortion views. Anti-abortion protests are rife with signs about God and Jesus. And anti-abortion laws are driven by religion.

Gov. John Bel Edwards of Louisiana, who recently signed an anti-abortion bill, said his view on abortion “comes from my religion.” When Gov. Kay Ivey of Alabama signed her state’s new law, she remarked, “Every life is a sacred gift from God.” Identifying the anti-abortion movement for its reality — attempts by religious citizens to impose their beliefs on others — helps clarify the antagonists in the debate.

Ken Lefkowitz
Pennsylvania

Many Christians show their hypocrisy daily

It was disturbing but well within the realm of reality to see that the FFRF sign outside the Washington state Capitol had been vandalized. It’s probably a good thing that most billboards are out of reach, while sending the necessary message of reason.

However, I am not sure that message is getting across after reading your Crankmail section! I have been a merchant seaman in the Army, in Vietnam, etc., and the language that these “Christians” use makes me blush — almost. It is hilarious, and the daily dose of hypocrisy we see around us is very educational, to say the least. Now, I am off to buy some miracle spring water! Ha!

David Ford
New Mexico

FFRF a worthy cause for state-church separation

I’m 52 years old and cannot recall a time in my life when the critically important principle of state-church separation has been more under siege than it is today. I am accordingly pleased and honored to be able to continue donating to the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

James W. Bailey
New Jersey

Are the religious more charitable? Unlikely

Phil Zuckerman’s article (“Secularism doesn’t destroy society or moral order”) in the December issue, while defending secularism from the smears of Attorney General William Barr, repeated a claim that I have often heard before: Namely, that in the United States, religious people volunteer more often and contribute more to charity than do the nonreligious.

This assertion originated in a study conducted earlier this century by Arthur C. Brooke, who just happens to be an evangelical Christian with an obvious axe to grind. I have long been skeptical of this claim.

The only way to definitively confirm the alleged disparity with respect to charitable contributions would be to conduct an extensive double-blind study of audited tax returns from a random sample of religious and nonreligious Americans to determine how much they actually contributed as opposed to what they claim to have contributed. Suffice it to say that Brooke did not, and could not, do this, as the IRS does not require taxpayers to indicate religious affiliation on tax returns and certainly does not provide tax returns to researchers in any case.

If Brooke had solicited audited tax statements from religious and nonreligious citizens, he would not have been provided with the necessary random sample, but a self-selected one. Instead, Brooke appeared to rely heavily on anecdotal data, which is notoriously unreliable. I saw him on C-SPAN years ago defending his thesis. He gave the example of two Red Cross donation pails, one placed on a street in secular San Francisco and the other on a street in the more religious Fargo, N.D. He stated that far more people put far more money in the Fargo pail, supporting his argument! I wonder what the



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



The Born Again Skeptic’s Guide to the Bible
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result would have been if instead of two Red Cross pails, Brooke had placed AIDS relief pails in the two cities!

In addition, secular people like me, in stark contrast to the strongly devout, tend to reside in high-tax states like New York and California, which provide needed social services, funded by tax dollars, reducing the need for charitable contributions to the poor. However, I am willing to bet that the secular population contributes far more than do the religious to cultural institutions such as museums, opera houses, the ballet and symphony orchestras. I suspect Brooke had no interest in those types of charitable contributions.

Many leading American philanthropists have been or are atheists or agnostics, such as Andrew Carnegie, Ted Turner, Bill Gates and Warren Buffett.

Finally, it is no secret that much of the volunteering and charitable contributions among the religious benefit their own houses of worship, where volunteering and tithing is mandated or strongly encouraged. The religious benefit directly from the time and money they devote to their churches, synagogues, mosques and temples, where they spend much of their lives in religious services and social events. How this proves their moral superiority over nonreligious people eludes me.

Dennis Middlebrooks
New York

Nails in hands can’t hold up a body

Bill Bryson’s *A Short History of Practically Everything* should be required reading for anyone identifying as a freethinker. His newest book *The Body* (currently on The New York Times bestseller’s list) should also be a good read.

Bryson notes in *The Body*, “A good deal of what we know about the comparative strengths of the hand . . . comes from a series of improbable experiments (done by a French scientist in the 1930s) to test how well humans would remain on a cross . . . discovered nails driven through the palm of the hand . . . would not support the weight of a body . . . because the hands would literally tear apart.”

So, if you need any more evidence that the crucifixion was simply made-up by Saul (aka Paul), read this for yourself, preferably before “Good Friday.”

And, be reminded, that “Good Friday” is still an official “full-paid” state holiday in New Jersey.
William Dusenberry
Oklahoma

Where do you Freethought?



A good time to catch up on my Freethought Today reading is waiting to have my car serviced. And I happily leave it in the busy waiting area with its tables of reading material.
Susan Bath
Maryland

Christmas music, teapot agnostics and perspicuity

A few of my random thoughts for FFRF members.

- If there is one thing I dislike about Christmas the most, it would be the insufferably banal music. Whom-ever is responsible for “The Little Drummer Boy” should be tried for crimes against music. I would make an exception for “O Holy Night,” not for the cliché words, but it’s a really lovely melody. It could be striking as an instrumental piece.
- Recently, I came across the charming phrase “teapot agnostic,” which is based on something Bertrand Russell said. If he claimed there was a teapot in orbit around the moon, Russell said you could not disprove it. But failure to disprove something is not a good reason to believe in it.
- In general, the word “perspicuity” means freedom from ambiguity or obscurity. In religion, however, “perspicu-

ity” has acquired the specialized meaning that scripture is clear and obvious. By inference, anyone who is capable of reading the bible can understand it. The MacArthur Bible Commentary is 2,040 pages to explain the clear and obvious. Apparently, people who write such things do not see the irony.
David M. Shea
Maryland

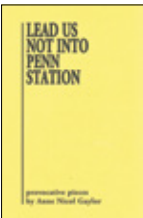
Next time they’ll get my ‘Scroll of 10 Truths’

On occasion, I have well-meaning young members from Christian churches come to my door with leaflets in hand. Of course, they know nothing of my past experiences with a dangerous and radical fundamentalist cult. To politely say, “No, thanks, I’m not interested,” works for a while, but eventually they reappear. So, for the inevitable next time, I’ve drafted a message page of my own to hand to them, called “Scroll of the 10 Truths.” Basically, I’m just interested in their reactions when they come face-to-face with the truth. I’m not the confrontation type. I prefer education presented with reason and restraint.

Scroll of the 10 Truths

1. Faith in God or the devil is delusion.
2. “In God we trust” is not what we know.
3. Adam and Eve were not the first

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.
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- humans.
4. Religion serves to exploit and subjugate.
5. Forgiving wrongdoing is a complicit wrong.
6. Introduction of religion divides, not unites.
8. “One nation under God” is a nation divided.
9. Religions are deceptions promoted as holy.
10. Creation of all things in six days is a lie.

Paul Wellmer
Missouri

FFRF pushed council to end religious invocations


As an FFRF member, I was overjoyed to see the article in the Feb. 3 Venice (Fla.) Gondolier detailing the organization’s efforts to stop the practice of a religious invocation at the beginning of City Council meetings. Apparently, the new mayor (if only temporarily) agreed that a moment of silence would be more respectful of all in attendance. It will be interesting to see if he will maintain that position, especially as the city is undoubtedly already planning the 11th Annual Bible Read-A-Thon in a public park, where the mayor has historically been the first reader. At least that event is attended voluntarily, and doesn’t subject a captive audience to potentially unwelcome religious indoctrination as do the City Council’s invocations.
Kevin Bobier
Florida

Pastor burning book wants us back in the Dark Ages

I saw the picture of Pastor Locke burning a copy of *The Founding Myth* in the latest issue of Freethought Today and was sickened by it, but not surprised. The look on his face would be the same evil look if he were watching an innocent woman accused of being a witch being burned alive. He is among many who wish to return society back to the Dark Ages where humanity stagnated for a millennium. People of his same mind are those who also destroyed the classical world in the first few centuries AD. With the relentless efforts by FFRF, reason and science will keep our society moving forward.
Bill Van Scoy
Louisiana

Religion has been worse than pornography

I was driving along I-70 through the interminable flatlands of Kansas when I passed an “adult entertainment store” called The Lion’s Den. In a field immediately adjacent to this establishment, some religious types had erected a sign saying: “Pornography destroys — Jesus heals and saves.” While allowing that pornography (even where only consenting adults are involved) certainly has its dark side, it should be pointed out to whoever put up the sign that religion has done far more harm to humanity than pornography has ever done, or is ever likely to do. Just think of all the countless deaths in the religious wars fought through the centuries! When was the last war fought over pornography? It sounds like the basis for a good Onion article or a Monty Python skit. In parting, let me recommend Tom Lehrer’s song “Smut” — if you haven’t heard it, check it out.
John Pratt
Kansas



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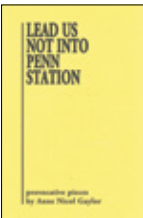
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BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Rodney D. Luffman, 58, State Road, NC: 80 counts of indecent liberties and 35 counts of sexual offenses. Luffman, pastor of Open Arms Outreach Ministries, is charged with alleged incidents involving a female and 2 males, including a 4-year-old, mostly between 2000–15. He has also been a Methodist minister. *Source: WXII, 1-21-20*

Gary A. Jacobs, 74, Albuquerque, NM: 8 counts of criminal sexual conduct alleged to have been committed in 1981–84 when he was a Catholic priest in Michigan. One involves a child under age 13.

Prosecutors from state Attorney General Dana Nessel's office, which has fielded a clergy abuse investigation team, also charged **Roy Joseph**, 52, who lives in India, with 1st-degree criminal sexual conduct involving a 2006 incident in Marquette County, where Joseph served as a priest. *Source: AP, 1-18-20*

George R. Scott, 64, Marietta, GA: Child molestation. Scott, a Sunday school teacher at Covenant United Methodist Church in Smyrna, is accused of molesting a 13-year-old girl at the church in November. It's alleged he grabbed the girl's breast and that the incident was observed by an adult who was present. *Source: Daily Journal, 1-17-20*

Paul Michaelson, 79, San Mateo, CA: Suspicion of terrorist threats and violation of civil rights by threat of force. Michaelson, a part-time outreach pastor at Hope Lutheran Church, is accused of delivering letters between Jan. 7–16 threatening to shoot members of Holy Trinity Church in San Carlos, where he was a former member.

The letters chronicled "deeply rooted" anger against Holy Trinity, said Detective Rosemary Blankswade, who didn't provide the alleged reason(s). *Source: Pacifica Tribune, 1-17-20*

Robert McWilliams, 39, Strongsville, OH: Possessing criminal tools and 20 counts of pandering obscenity involving a minor. McWilliams, a pastor at St. Joseph Catholic Church, allegedly assumed a false identity and extorted minors to send him nude images. *Source: Plain Dealer, 1-17-20*

Obniel González Viro and **Mario González Blanco**, leaders of a Panamanian religious sect called "Nueva Luz de Dios" (New Light of God), and **8 sect members** are charged with the murders of 7 persons in a bizarre exorcism ritual. Mario González, 60, the sect's self-described "messiah," is the grandfather of 5 of the 6 slain children, whose pregnant mother was also killed.

Bellín Valdés Flores, 33, was beaten in the abdomen with sticks, machetes and bibles until she died. Her children witnessed the beating before they were killed, chief prosecutor Rafael Baloyes alleged. The captives, as young as 1 year old, were going to be killed "if they did not repent their sins," he said.

Burning sticks were allegedly inserted into the mouths of some victims. Fifteen people were rescued from captivity, officials said. *Source: NY Times/Daily Beast, 1-16-20*

Jaime Marin-Cardona, 51, Bridgeport, CT: 3 counts each of illegal sexual contact, sexual assault and risk of injury to child. Marin-Cardona was removed as pastor at St. Mary Catholic Parish in September when the Diocese of Bridgeport received a letter from parents concerned by the priest's "contact with a family member who is a minor," said a statement by Bishop Frank Caggiano.

Court documents say he is being charged for incidents in 2014 and 2016 while he was pastor at Our Lady of Guadalupe in Danbury. *Source: Danbury Patch, 1-15-20*

Aharon Ramati, 60, Jerusalem, was arrested on suspicion of running a cult in which dozens of women and children lived in slave-like conditions. Rabbi Ramati, who runs the Be'er Miryam seminary, is also suspected of sexually exploiting the women. **Nine women**, including his wife, were also arrested for aiding him.

Sect recruits "were taught to disassociate themselves from their parents, their families and their friends," police said. To reinforce "multiple lessons of modesty," their fingers were thrust into a fire "to make them understand what hell is." *Source: Jerusalem Post, 1-14-20*

Gershon Kranczer, 67, an Orthodox rabbi who fled from New York to Israel in 2010 after being accused of sexually abusing female relatives, was arrested in Israel and awaits extradition. Kranczer, former principal of a Brooklyn yeshiva, allegedly molested underage relatives in his home from 1996 to 2004.

Kranczer's arrest came amid news that an Israeli psychiatric panel found **Malka Leifer**, a yeshiva principal wanted in Australia on sex abuse charges, is fit to stand trial. Leifer's claims of mental illness had delayed her extradition. *Source: The Forward, 1-10-20*

Clarence Smith Jr., 45, Chicago: 4 counts of fraud related to charges he stole nearly \$1 million by fraudulently billing a federal program in 2015–16 for meals for needy children while he was pastor of New Life Impact Church. It's alleged he spent the money on a \$142,000 Bentley luxury sedan and other personal expenses.

Smith pleaded guilty in 2011 to using forged

signatures to swindle an elderly man's estate out of more than \$100,000 and was sentenced to 6 months in jail and restitution, which he still owes. He has been sued by at least 2 food supply companies for defaulting on contracts and owes over \$8,000 in overdue property taxes on his church. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 1-10-20*

John D. Spaulding, 74, Phoenix: Child molestation and 6 counts of sexual misconduct with a minor in 2003–07 while he was a pastor at 2 Catholic parishes. He was removed from ministry in 2011 and defrocked in 2014 but is appealing his laicization. Incidents allegedly involved 2 boys under age 15.

Spaulding also had at least four allegations against him in 2011 involving abuse of boys under age 13 in the 1970s and 1980s. *Source: Arizona Republic, 1-9-20*

Lacey Jo Cunningham, 32, Conroe, TX: Felony improper relationship between educator/student. Cunningham, an anatomy teacher and basketball coach at Woodlands Christian Academy, allegedly had over 20 sexual encounters with a female high school student before the girl told her mother. The relationship started in August 2019 with text messages from Cunningham asking the girl to meet her outside of school for coffee and inviting her to her church.

Cunningham admitted sleeping in the same bed with the student but claimed there was "never any physical contact" and that the overnight stays were initiated by the girl, the arrest affidavit said. *Source: Houston Chronicle, 1-8-20*

Richard A. Logsdon, 52, Ocala, FL: Using a computer to seduce or solicit a child. Logsdon was caught up in a sting in 2018 around the same time he stopped working as an associate pastor at an unidentified church in Tampa. Until January he had evaded a warrant for his arrest issued after he had talked to police in November 2018.

In the sting, a deputy posing as a 14-year-old girl chatted with Logsdon, who spoke graphically about wanting to have sex with her. *Source: Ocala.com, 1-8-20*

Nathan S. Clinkscales, 29, Trenton, TX: Theft. Clinkscales is charged with stealing an undetermined amount as pastor at First Baptist Church. It's believed to total tens of thousands of dollars. He resigned as pastor last fall after being confronted.

A church website says "Nathan is married to his wonderful wife Jordan, and they have four children. Trace, Lillian, Titus, and Judah are being raised as arrows to be shot for the mission of God." *Source: KXII, 1-7-20*

Helio S. Ferreira, 41, Valdosta, GA: Identity theft, 1st-degree sexual abuse, 2 counts each of sodomy and kidnapping and 3 counts of rape. Ferreira, senior pastor at Grace Fellowship Seventh-day Adventist Church, was indicted in Oregon for assaulting 3 women in 2012, 2016 and 2018. He worked part-time for the Seventh-day Adventists Oregon Conference from 2014 to March 2019. *Source: Journal-Constitution, 1-1-20*

Juan A. Cruz, 41, Houston: Indecency with a child. He is accused of fondling a girl at least 4 times in his church office at Iglesia Pentecostes Templo Adonai, starting when she was 8 or 9 in 2016.

Cruz denied the charges and told investigators he thought the girl was "in love with him because she would always sniff him and tell him he smelled good," court documents said. *Source: KHOU, 12-27-19*

Abdullah Al Hadi, 32, Dhaka, Bangladesh: Sexual abuse. Hadi, imam at Shahid Park Central Jame Mosque, is accused of assaulting a 14-year-old male at a madrasa, where he had gone to seek financial help for his mother's medical treatment. *Source: Dhaka Tribune, 12-25-19*

Bramwell Bernardo Retana, 44, Las Vegas, NV: Sexual assault of a child under 14, luring a child with a computer to engage in a sexual act, sexually motivated 1st-degree kidnapping and child abuse and 7 counts of lewdness with a child under 14. (In January, 24 additional felony counts were added.) It's alleged the abuse occurred "over several years" and involved more than 1 victim.

Retana, a native Costa Rican, and his wife are pastors at Iglesia Cristiana Oasis de Paz, which they founded in 2004 in their living room. *Source: Review-Journal, 12-20-19*

Douglas Hammond, 67, Olivet, MI: Embezzlement of \$100,000 or more between January 2014 and November 2019 while he was pastor at First Assembly of God Church. At his arraignment, Hammond's attorney entered a not-guilty plea on his behalf but Hammond told the court otherwise: "I'm sorry I did it. I'm guilty, I'm guilty, I'm guilty." *Source: WILX, 12-17-19*

Pleaded / Convicted

Lawrence M. Ventline, 70, Port Austin, MI: Pleaded no contest to misdemeanor indecent exposure. Surveillance video showed him exposing his genitals to a female employee in Murphy's Bakery in Bad Axe in August, prosecutors said. Ventline, a Catholic priest, refused to give a statement to police.

The Archdiocese of Detroit restricted him from public ministry in 2016 due to abuse allegations. He hasn't been assigned to full-time parish ministry for nearly 20 years. State Attorney General Dana Nessel has suspended his counselor's license, alleging he molested an 11-year-old boy during the 1989–90 school year when he was assigned to a parish and its school. *Source: mlive.com, 1-23-20*

Ken Harvell, 60, Colorado Springs, CO: Guilty in a federal jury trial of conspiracy to commit marriage fraud and making false statements regarding that fraud to the government. Harvell, senior pastor of Southeast Baptist Church, and 3 others were convicted of a scheme to obtain immigration benefits for **Rajesh** and **Diann Ramcharan** and their minor child.

The Ramcharans, who were also found guilty, came to the U.S. from Trinidad & Tobago on visitor visas in 2007 but overstayed their visas and settled in Colorado. The scheme had several steps. Harvell signed a marriage certificate for the Ramcharans in 2010 and after they divorced, signed one for Diann Ramcharan and Army Sgt. **Galima Murry**, who was stationed at Ft. Carson. Murry was also convicted.

Several months later, Rajesh Ramcharan married U.S. citizen Angelica Guevara and Harvell signed the certificate. *Source: ice.gov, 1-17-20*

Brian Cassidy, 35, Park Hills, MO: Pleaded guilty to 1st-degree child molestation involving 2 minor girls. A charge of statutory rape was dropped in a plea agreement. A 2017 probable cause statement detailed an interview with a girl who alleged Cassidy started touching her sexually when she was 13 and he was a youth pastor at First Baptist Church in E. Bonne Terre.

She alleged they had intercourse twice, once in-

side the church and later in a field near her home. The other girl involved was 15 at the time. *Source: Daily Journal, 1-16-20*

Michael Oluronbi, 60, Birmingham, UK: Convicted by a jury of 15 rape charges, 7 indecent assaults and 2 sexual assaults. **Juliana Oluronbi**, 58, his wife, was found guilty of 3 counts of aiding and abetting rape.

Michael Oluronbi, originally from Nigeria, headed a splinter group of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church and allegedly targeted at least 7 victims over about 20 years. Four girls became pregnant and had abortions; some had several. "Spiritual baths" took place in a bathroom, a pretext for abuse ranging from indecent assault to rape. Children were often made to wear red sashes during the abuse. *Source: BBC, 1-14-20*

David J. Croyle, 61, Kittanning, PA: Guilty by a jury of statutory sexual assault, unlawful contact with a minor and related charges. At the time of the alleged assaults on a 14-year-old boy about 4 years ago, Croyle was senior pastor at Family-Life Church, publisher of the Kittanning newspaper and Kittanning Council vice president. *Source: Tribune-Review, 1-10-20*

John E. Harris, 41, Prattville, AL: Pleaded guilty to felony assault. Harris resigned as student pastor at Glynnwood Baptist Church a month before he was arrested in 2017 and charged with sexual abuse, facilitation of travel of a child for a sex act and enticing a child for immoral purposes.

The victim's age was key in the plea agreement, said prosecutor C.J. Robinson. Harris and the teen boy had developed a relationship through the church. "We are confident the abuse occurred," Robinson said. "But as we prepped for trial, there was some question on when the act occurred, if it occurred when the victim was not of age. The relationship continued after the victim became of age." *Source: Montgomery Advertiser, 12-10-19*

Sentenced

Jackie D. Woodburn, 64, Burtchville, MI: 17 years in prison for sexually exploiting preteen and teen girls by posing online as a 15-year-old boy. Woodburn, associate pastor at Colonial Woods Missionary Church and director of its counseling center, is a married father of 3.

Woodburn used the screen name jdwindwalker while coercing girls into undressing and engaging in sex acts on camera. Victims included a 12-year-old girl from Texas, a 13-year-old from Kansas and a 9-year-old from Virginia. Steven D'Antuono, head of the Detroit FBI, called him "a wolf in sheep's clothing, looking to prey on the most vulnerable members of our society." *Source: Deadline Detroit, 1-16-20*

Anthony Brooks, 49, Florence, KY: 6 years in prison after pleading guilty to criminal abuse for acts between July 2016 and July 2019 when he was pastor at Jesus House of Believers Worship Center.

The victim told Brooks before he was led away: "Unfortunately it just isn't in my heart to hate you. I wish you the best and I wish that you can overcome this. But make no mistake, if this action is repeated with my siblings, I will find you."

He was ordered to return a car to the victim and her family, which she apparently helped him buy. *Source: Fox 19, 1-9-20*

Kelly Shannon, 48, Warwick, RI: 5 years in prison with 18 months' home confinement and 3½ years suspended with probation. She pleaded no contest to 2 counts of knowingly making or causing to be made 2 false police reports: That a 13-year-old boy had raped his girlfriend and, 6 months later, that he violated an order barring him from contacting the girl.

Shannon is a graduate of Zion Bible College and an evangelist with the Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal denomination. She also records Christian music.

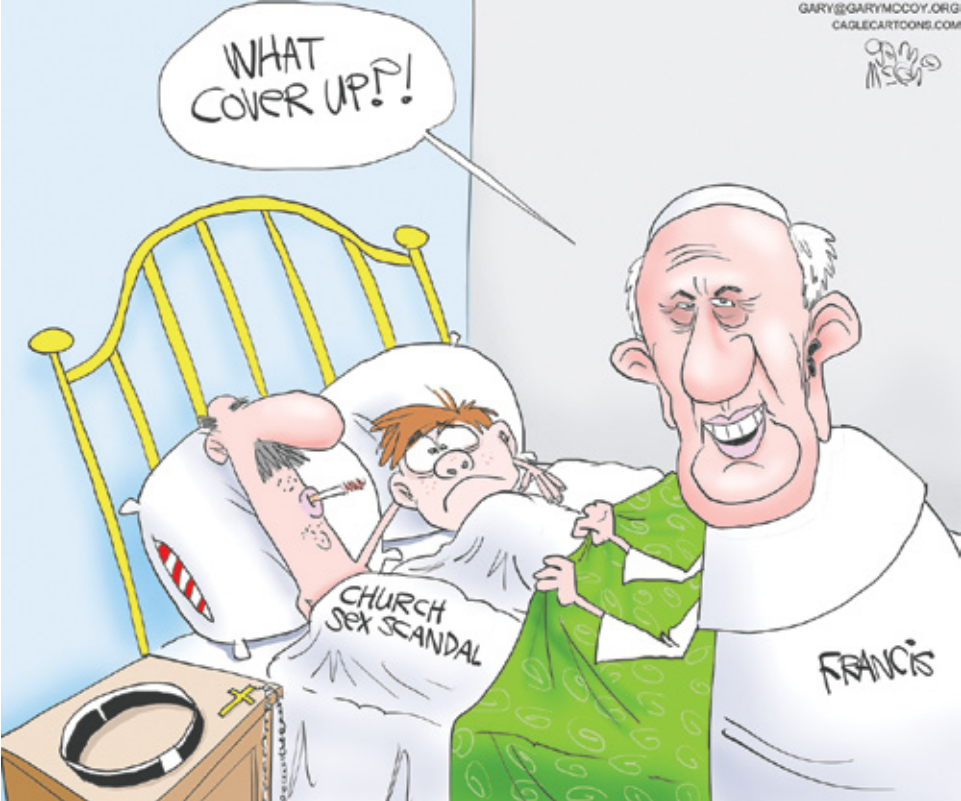
In exchange for her plea, prosecutors amended a count of possessing child pornography to fraudulently using a computer to send and receive photographs. According to an affidavit, she possessed images of a teen boy's erect penis and took nude photos of a teen girl, identified as a relative, that she shared with boys. *Source: Providence Journal, 1-9-20*

Philip Grandine, 33, Toronto: 15 years in prison after jurors found him guilty of manslaughter for the 2011 drowning death of his wife when he was a part-time pastor at Ennerdale Baptist Church. Anna Grandine, 29, was 20 weeks pregnant when she drowned in the couple's bathtub.

Tests showed she had lorazepam (Ativan) in her blood despite not having been prescribed it. Grandine had access to the drug through his other job as a retirement home nurse.

He had resigned as pastor after it came to light he was having an affair with a parishioner who was Anna's friend. Another pastor agreed to give them marriage counseling if he stopped cheating and gave up pornography, conditions they accepted. Prosecutors alleged he uninstalled a computer pornography blocker 40 minutes before he called 911. *Source: AP, 1-7-20*

James R. Gillette, a priest in the Catholic Diocese of Boston, was sentenced to 5 years' probation, GPS monitoring and sex offender registration after pleading guilty to 2 counts of unnatural acts with a minor. Charges of child rape and indecent



assault and battery on a minor were dismissed in a plea agreement.

Anthony Sgherza, one of Gillette’s 2 accusers, filed a civil complaint against him in 2014, alleging he was abused for about 4 years starting when he was 9 in the 1970s. The diocese settled the suit before trial.

Gillette is still an ordained priest. Records show he has not been assigned to a church since 1999 and has lived at Catholic residences. Sgherza’s attorney Mitchell Garabedian said Gillette started abusing boys in 1971, the year he was ordained, alleging he “was shuffled from town to town, from city to city and then country to country. The blueprint is there.” *Source: Boston Herald, 1-6-20*

Cameron Giovannelli, 42, Orange Park, FL: 90 days in jail and 5 years’ probation and pleading guilty to misdemeanor sex offense and assault in Maryland. He was accused of coercing a girl who was his babysitter into having sex in 2007 when he was pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Dundalk. She was 17 and he was 29. *Source: WBAL, 1-6-20*

Acton Bowen, 39, Gadsden, AL: 1,008 years in prison and \$840,000 in fines after pleading guilty to 28 counts of criminal sexual conduct — including enticing a child for a sexual act, sodomy and traveling to meet a child for a sexual act — perpetrated on 6 boys between ages 13 and 16. He is the founder of Acton Bowen Outreach Ministries.

Judge Debra Jones gave Bowen the maximum on each count and ordered the sentences to be served consecutively, not concurrently. His trial is set for April on 3 similar counts in another county. *Source: al.com, 12-20-19*

Ahmed Moussa Ahmed, Pazardzhik, Bulgaria: 8½ years in prison for spreading hatred on religious grounds and propagating war. Moussa, imam at a mosque in Pazardzhik, is already serving a 4-year sentence on a previous conviction for encouraging would-be jihadists.

Thirteen followers, 12 men and a woman, were also found guilty and sentenced to terms from 1 to 3½ years. The woman received a 2½-year suspended sentence. Bulgaria is 13% Muslim. *Source: AFP, 12-13-19*

Allegations

At least **25 priests** who served in the Catholic **Diocese of La Crosse**, WI, over the past several decades sexually assaulted children. The disclosure, posted on the diocese website at dioc.org, brings the number of priests with substantiated accusations in Wisconsin to nearly 160.

Most are now dead, and the diocese said none are serving in active ministry. *Source: Wausau Daily Herald, 1-19-20*

David Mitchell, a Reform rabbi and head of the education department of the West London Synagogue in the UK, is accused by multiple persons of bullying staff and behaving inappropriately in front of young people. After 5 people filed complaints initially, several more came forward.

A former synagogue member alleged that on a trip to New York that included youth, she heard him make comments during a restaurant meal to a girl about rape: “The young person was raising the fact she didn’t feel safe getting home to the shared hotel alone. Rabbi David said to her, ‘Who would want to rape you?’”

A former staffer alleged “I left because of the bullying,” adding, “A lot of what happened to me was him making faces in meetings and making up rumors about my family and talking about me behind my back.” *Source: Jewish Chronicle, 1-16-20*

Disgraced Catholic cardinal **Theodore McCarrick** gave hundreds of thousands of dollars in church money to powerful clerics over nearly 2 decades, according to records obtained by a newspaper, while the Vatican failed to act on claims he had sexually harassed young men.

Starting in 2001, McCarrick sent checks totaling more than \$600,000 to clerics in Rome and elsewhere, including Vatican bureaucrats, papal advisers and two popes. In 2018 he was removed from public ministry amid allegations of misconduct decades earlier with a 16-year-old altar boy. In 2019 he became the first cardinal to be defrocked for sexual abuse.

The checks were drawn from an account at the Archdiocese of Washington. The “Archbishop’s Special Fund” enabled him to raise money from wealthy donors and spend it with little oversight. It took in more than \$6 million over 17 years.

Among the biggest contributors was Maryanne Trump Barry, the sister of President Trump and a former federal appellate judge. She gave McCarrick at least \$450,000 over 4 years. *Source: Washington Post, 12-27-19*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

The **Archdiocese of Newark**, NJ, is being sued by 2 men who allege molestation in 1966–68 and 1976 by Catholic priest **David Ernst**, who died in 1998. Ernst was assigned to St. Mary’s Parish in



Rutherford and taught at Our Lady Help of Christians School in East Orange. One of the plaintiffs is now an Orthodox priest.

An abuse suit against Ernst and 9 other priests in 2004 was settled for \$1 million. *Source: Daily Voice, 1-23-20*

The **Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers** are being sued in New York by a plaintiff alleging abuse as a child in Ossining by **Ronald Bocchieri**, a Catholic priest who died in 2015. The plaintiff, whose parents were lay missionaries, alleges he was groomed on the nearby Maryknoll campus and assaulted at a cabin in the Catskills.

Bocchieri convinced him to shower with him in order to save water and afterward drugged him, according to the suit.

The suit was among the last filed in 2019 under the Child Victims Act that removes the statute of limitations. The window remains open until August. Over 1,300 filings have been made. *Source: Times Herald-Record, 1-14-20*

Paul Burak, 73, Palos Heights, IL, faces a wrongful death suit for fatally striking 61-year-old Margaret Leja in the parking lot of an Orland Park restaurant with his vehicle Dec. 4. Burak, retired pastor at St. Michael’s Catholic Church, and Leja, technology teacher at the parish school, had attended a Christmas party.

Burak drove off after hitting Leja and another teacher but was followed by a restaurant patron. He has pleaded not guilty to causing and leaving the scene of a deadly accident. Prosecutors dropped an aggravated DUI charge.

He told police he takes medication for Parkinson’s and blacked out after having a Manhattan and glass of wine at the party. *Source: Patch/Sun-Times, 1-13-20*

The **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** is being sued for \$9.54 million by a woman in Turner, OR, after her husband’s confession to church leaders led to a 15-year sentence on child sexual abuse charges.

The suit accuses church leaders of violating the “priest-penitent privilege.” **Timothy Johnson**, 47, and his wife Kristine were members of a Stayton ward when she learned he had “engaged in inappropriate conduct” with a girl under age 16. The couple followed church doctrine by having Johnson confess and repent his sins to clergy and an official church court. But leaders failed to tell Johnson if he confessed to them that they would report him to law enforcement, the suit alleges. *Source: Statesman Journal, 1-8-20*

James “Sonny” Tucker, the **Arkansas Baptist State Convention**, **Teddy Leon Hill Jr.**, **Millcreek Baptist Church** and the **Diamond Lakes Baptist Association** are defendants in a suit filed by “John Doe,” now 19, alleging Hill sexually abused him from 2014–18 as Millcreek senior pastor. Hill became the boy’s legal guardian in 2016 when he moved into the parsonage.

It’s alleged Tucker failed to report the suspected abuse after a February 2018 meeting with Hill’s ex-wife, Carolyn Latham, and the abuse of Doe “was allowed to continue on multiple occasions and for months after.” *Source: Democrat-Gazette, 1-5-20*

Catholic priest **Richard Reina**, 75, and the **Diocese of Buffalo**, NY, are defendants in a suit filed by an unnamed plaintiff alleging Reina molested him at age 15 in 1972 when Reina was pastor at Holy Cross Parish in Buffalo.

Reina will celebrate 50 years as a priest in May. “But this certainly takes the joy out of it,” he said, while denying the accusation. *Source: Buffalo News, 1-2-20*

Ann Peterson, a Catholic nun, is accused of molesting then-10-year-old Pamela Hayes at St. Joseph School in Middletown, NY, in the mid-1960s. Hayes’ lawsuit alleges Peterson asked her to stay after school and then kissed her and put her hands under her clothes.

Peterson’s order, the Ursulines, operates the Ursuline School in New Rochelle. Its website lists her as a board member. She has also served as an advisory board member for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers. *Source: Times Herald-Record, 12-10-19*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Archdiocese of Seattle** reached a \$1.7 million settlement involving a priest accused of sexually abusing a child in the 1980s. **Dennis Champagne** served at St. Michael Catholic Parish in Snohomish from 1979–99. In 2006 he was placed on “permanent prayer and penance,” a penalty removing him from public ministry.

Where or how the alleged abuse took place was not specified, nor was the victim identified. Champagne was among 16 Snohomish County priests named on a list of abusers. *Source: Daily Herald, 1-9-20*

The Catholic **Diocese of Knoxville**, TN, settled a suit filed by Michael Boyd. Terms weren’t disclosed. Boyd alleged he was repeatedly molested for about 2½ years in the early 1990s by Knoxville priest **Xavier Mankel** and that Bishop **Anthony O’Connell** abused him at least twice. Mankel and O’Connell are dead.

O’Connell was the diocese’s first bishop when it was formed in 1988. In 1998 he became bishop in Palm Beach, FL, but resigned in 2002 after admitting inappropriate conduct with minors in Missouri. *Source: News Sentinel, 1-2-20*

The **Mormon Church** settled for undisclosed terms a lawsuit in Hawaii filed by “Jane Roe,” alleging molestation by a **missionary** in his early 20s when she was about 6 in the early 1970s at a church get-together in a private home. She never learned his name.

Several days after her parents confronted church officials, her mother told Roe the missionary was going to be sent “far away.”

“How far?” Roe asked. “She said, ‘Over the ocean.’ And that didn’t make me feel better,” Roe said in her deposition. *Source: The Garden Island, 12-16-19*

Legal Developments

The **New Orleans Saints** pro football team has asked a court to keep the public from seeing hundreds of emails allegedly showing team executives doing public relations damage control related to the Catholic **Archdiocese of New Orleans’** burgeoning sexual abuse crisis.

Attorneys for about 2 dozen men suing the church allege the 276 documents they obtained through discovery show that the team, whose owner Gayle Marie Benson is devoutly Catholic, aided the archdiocese in its “pattern and practice of concealing its crimes.”

Attorneys for the team said it has “no interest in concealing information from the press or public.” However, they argued in court papers in January that the 2018–19 emails were intended to be private and should not be “fodder for the public.” *Source: AP, 1-25-20*

Harry Thomas, 76, Medford, OR, had his 18-year prison sentence upheld by a state appeals court, which denied his request to withdraw his guilty plea. The panel found Thomas, who must serve his full term, had reached the plea agreement “freely,

knowingly and voluntarily.”

Thomas was pastor at Come Alive New Testament Church and co-founder of the Creation Festival, billed as the country’s largest Christian music festival. He admitted sexually assaulting a 9-year-old, having sexual contact with 3 girls ages 7 to 9 and exposing himself to a girl. *Source: AP, 12-23-19*

Removed / Resigned

Salvatore DiStefano, chaplain at Oratory Catholic Preparatory School in Summit, NJ, was placed on administrative leave. “The Archdiocese of Newark takes very seriously any and all credible complaints of sexual misconduct or sexual abuse of minors by members of the clergy, religious, lay staff and volunteers of the Archdiocese,” spokeswoman Maria Margiotta said in a statement. *Source: Summit Patch, 1-22-20*

Joseph O’Meara, a retired priest-in-residence, was removed from active ministry by the Catholic Archdiocese of Baltimore and will no longer be allowed to live at St. Agnes/St. William of York Parish after being accused of touching 3 women inappropriately. *Source: WJZ, 1-14-20*

Thomas A. Derzack, 70, pastor of St. Nicholas Catholic Parish in Walnutport, PA, was removed from ministry after he was seen taking “disturbing” photos of wrestlers at a high school tournament, the Diocese of Allentown announced.

Derrick took the photos Dec. 27 at the Bethlehem Catholic High School gym from behind the wrestlers waiting to compete, leading to a complaint by a spectator. District Attorney Terence Houck said the photos included zoomed-in images of boys’ buttocks but were taken in a public place and did not capture nudity. As such, they did not amount to a criminal act, he said.

“Disturbing, I guess is the word you would use without it being criminal,” Houck said. *Source: Morning Call, 1-6-20*

Donald “Bud” Heckman, accused of sexual misconduct, reached a resolution with the West Ohio United Methodist Conference that called for him to retire as an ordained deacon and no longer perform ministerial activities.

He was accused in November 2018 by his ex-wife, an ex-girlfriend and 2 young women who alleged he harassed them at an interfaith conference. A total of 15 women have come forward with allegations but not all were willing to be part of the formal complaint.

Laura Heckman, who was divorcing him around the time of his guilty plea for stalking another complainant and chalking messages at her apartment in 2012, said she grew frightened due to his vehement threats not to pay support for their 2 children. Once, she alleged, he implied he would kill the children rather than pay for their care. She called the church. “I said, ‘Please, please help me. One of your ministers is threatening to kill my children,’” she recalled.

Megan Anderson, a Catholic college student, met Heckman in 2015 at an interfaith conference in Salt Lake City. He asked her to come to his hotel room after a tourist outing and tried to put his hand in her pants, according to the church’s charging document. She fled the room but the harassment didn’t end. For months, she said, Heckman sent her texts about his sexual thoughts about her.

Emily Farthing, who also got explicit texts, met Heckman in 2014 at a similar conference, where she received a student award. He offered to help her write grants and get into divinity school. In 2015 he paid for her room, separate from his, at another conference, where he came into her room in his underwear and sat on her bed.

She later learned he was telling other women, including Anderson, that they had dated and he had helped her through a dark time. “I felt like he was using me as a prop to gain the confidence of other women,” Farthing said. *Source: UM News/Washington Post, 1-2-20*

Other

Pedophile priest **James J. Cunneen**, 60, died of a heart attack before his scheduled Feb. 14 sentencing for molesting 6 Australian boys dating back to the 1980s. Cunneen joined the Franciscan Order of Friars Minor in 1979 before leaving the priesthood. “To hear the lies spew out of his mouth is quite sickening,” one victim said after sitting through the 3-week trial. *Source: Daily Mail, 1-9-20*

Elijah Misiko, Mombasa, Kenya, assistant pastor at Ground for God’s Gospel Church, fatally stabbed his wife during a church service and then killed himself in a murder-suicide witnessed by the congregation. He left his front-row seat and approached his wife, senior pastor Ann Mughoi, at the pulpit and stabbed her twice with a knife. He then stabbed himself 3 times in the stomach and slit his throat.

The couple had been engaged in a long-running feud over church leadership and had 4 children. *Source: CNN, 1-6-20*

Email: blackcollar@ffrf.org

IN MEMORIAM

FFRF lauds Ken Proulx, a major friend, supporter

The Freedom From Religion Foundation sadly reports the death of a beloved member, Kenneth L. Proulx, 95, who died at home in Kenosha, Wis., on Dec. 1. His death was not reported publicly until the end of January.

Ken, who preferred privacy to public accolades, has, over the years, been one of FFRF's most generous benefactors. Raised Roman Catholic, he came to eschew that faith and all religion:

"That damned disease separates people. It's a learned lunacy — nobody's born that cuckoo. One of the greatest shortcomings of the human species is that they're vulnerable to indoctrination. The human race has paid a high price for that vulnerability: bloodshed and misery all over the world, and it isn't over yet."

The cupola at Freethought Hall, FFRF's newly expanded office in downtown Madison, unveiled in 2015, is called the "Above Us Only Sky Kenneth L. Proulx Cupola," or "Ken's Cupola" for short. The cupola features photographs of Ken at different ages.

"I'm rewarded by having couples marry in Ken's Cupola," he said, when learning of several (very small) weddings taking place in the cupola.

The oldest child of Lawrence and Mabel (DuCharme) Proulx, he was born on July 8, 1924, in Prairie du Chien, Wis. Some of his French-Canadian ancestors were among the first landowners in the Wisconsin territory. He would smile about how often his surname was misspelled and mispronounced (it is pronounced "Prue").

At age 2, he traveled with his parents in a motorcycle and side car to Kenosha, and lived most of his life in the family home. At age 12, he returned to Prairie du Chien to work on his maternal grandparents' farm and there, to his great joy, attended a one-room school.

"They were the best years of my life," he reminisced. The teacher paid Ken 50 cents a week in 1935 to keep the wood stove burning and perform other duties.

One of the reasons he liked his new school so much is that it rescued him from the parochial elementary school he'd attended in Kenosha. He called those days "the worst days of my life" and "an injustice." Even in his 90s, he would recall the sting of a nun hitting his hand with a pointer.

Ken worked at American Brass in Kenosha before enlisting to fight in World War II at age 18, where he served three years at Pearl Harbor. "World War II did get me away from the Church. I went three years without seeing the inside of a church — and nothing happened



The "Above Us Only Sky" Kenneth Proulx Cupola is on the fourth floor of Freethought Hall and shows photos of Ken throughout his life.



Kenneth Proulx, shown on his 90th birthday with FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, was an ardent supporter of FFRF. In the background is one of the lamps Ken created.

to me, and that got me thinking."

He worked at American Motors in Kenosha upon his return for 24 years, installing instrument panels and retiring in 1984. He was a member of U.A.W. Local 72.

Ken became an expert woodworker with a full shop in his basement, fashioning elaborate parquet-like wooden lamps and other gifts that he shared with friends and family, one of which proudly resides in FFRF's Joel B. Landon and Wanda Y. Beers Library. Ken maintained a modest, frugal lifestyle. He took great care of a vintage 1970s Matador and drove it for more than 40 years (it has only 30,000 miles on it).

When he came back from the war, Ken said his family discouraged him from taking advantage of the GI Bill. However, he became a life-long learner, proud of his collection of books on atheism, religion, philosophy and science, which he faithfully read and re-read, making notes in the margins. He collected obituaries of famous people, organized by year. He had a life-long subscription to the Wall Street Journal, and stewarded careful, shrewd investments, coming home from work at lunch every day to check on the stock market.

Ken first joined FFRF in 1992, after hearing Anne Nicol Gaylor, FFRF's principal founder and then-president, interviewed on a radio program. Anne, and FFRF's Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, now co-presidents, visited Ken at his home regularly for more than 25 years.

Dan says, "Ken was very humble, but, in reality, was smart, funny and well-read. While a gentle person, Ken despised the harm of religion, especially the role of the Catholic Church."

Ken's ashes will be interred in a ceremony at Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery, Union Grove, Wis., on May 22.

"He was a true friend of FFRF and fierce defender of freethought and the need to keep religion out of government," says Annie Laurie. "Ken has quietly played a vital role in establishing FFRF and its future. We will deeply miss him, and are so grateful he was such an ardent supporter of FFRF."

Ken's wise words

Over the years, Annie Laurie transcribed some of Ken's many pithy remarks and quotable quotes. Here's a sampling of wisdom via Ken Proulx.

On turning 90 (in 2015):
"They talk about plastic surgery to make you look younger. The trouble with that is you can't fool a flight of stairs."

About the Catholic Church:
"The pope was saying it's wrong to kill in the name of God. Why, the Catholic Church got where it is by killing people, with a history as black as the ace of spades. In Spain alone, 25,000 people were killed during the Inquisition."

On the cross:
"Instead of a cross, the symbol of the Catholic Church should be the rack and the stake."

On prayer breakfasts:
"They're talking to outer space, plaster and pancakes."

On persuading others to think freely:
"You can make a sound case, but if people don't want to think rationally, their mind is just like cement. People aren't satisfied with a life-span, so they invent a place to go and a way to get there. And, voila, you've got religion."

On Jesus:
"There isn't a single writer who makes a reference to this Jesus character when he was putting out all these party tricks with fishes and loaves of bread. There isn't an ounce of evidence Jesus even existed. People invent their own gods."

Ken's most memorable aphorism:
"The Mafia and the Catholic Church are the largest crime syndicates on Earth. One of them is illegal."

Dorothy Poulsen dies at 97

Longtime FFRF Member Dorothy E. Poulsen, 97, died Aug. 1, 2019.

Dorothy was born Aug. 8, 1921, on the Howarth farm in Racine County, Wis. She always spoke fondly of her memories on the farm and her education at Badger School, a one-room school in the county.

Her family moved to Ives Grove, and then to Racine during the Depression. Dorothy graduated from Park High School, and with the onset of WWII, did war work at Rainfair. She said the factories in Racine hummed 24 hours a day during the war.

She met Earle Winther Poulsen while



Dorothy Poulsen as a young woman and later in life.

he was on leave from Galesburg Military Hospital. They married June 17, 1945.

Dorothy was a loving mother, an avid reader, gardener, seamstress, an outstand-

ing cook, and a master of the pun. She loved bird watching and travel. Her journeys took her to India, England, the Baltic region and much of the United States. Most of all, she loved spending time with her immediate family, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

She and Earle, who died in 1986, have applauded FFRF's efforts from its beginnings.

Dorothy's daughter, Ane, wrote: She was an ardent supporter of FFRF and I am making a donation on her behalf. My father died in 1986 and was with you since the beginning. Keep up with the efforts your organization does. I would like to continue an FFRF membership under my name. Thank you again for all your hard work."

Coming next month



Read the convention speeches from Jeremiah Camara and Amber Scorah.

Neil Peart was freethinking drummer/lyricist for Rush

By PJ Slinger

My heart sank when I heard the news that Neil Peart, the drummer for the rock band Rush, had died.

Yes, I knew he had been in poor health the last few years, but you mostly put that out of your mind as you go about your day-to-day living. Then, my son, a 19-year-old who is a drummer in a rock band, texted me the news. Peart had died Jan. 7 at age 67 of brain cancer.



PJ Slinger

Peart was/is my favorite drummer (aside from my son, of course), with his technical mastery of the kit and odd time signatures that made his playing so hard to duplicate.

A college roommate had a drum kit that I banged on when no one else was around, often trying to keep time to such Rush classics as “Tom Sawyer” or “Red Barchetta.” Sure, it sounded good to me, but to a bystander I’m sure it would have been laughable. Even my air drumming couldn’t keep up with Peart’s speed and precision.

“Peart was one of rock’s greatest drummers, with a flamboyant yet precise style that paid homage to his hero, The Who’s Keith Moon, while expanding the technical and imaginative possibilities of his instrument,” Brian Hiatt wrote in Rolling Stone.

Peart was also the main lyricist for Rush, a “power trio” consisting of Peart, guitarist Alex Lifeson and singer and bassist Geddy Lee. Rush was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2013.

But his drumming virtuosity is not central to my point.

Peart was known for his lyrical themes of sci-fantasy, philosophy and Ayn Rand libertarianism. (I even wrote an end-of-the-semester paper in my college literature class comparing the lyrics and storyline from the dystopian-themed Rush album “2112” to the story of Adam and Eve.)

But what I really appreciated were Peart’s songs that touched on freethinking. Foremost, it was the song “Free Will,” off the band’s 1980 album “Permanent Waves,” that really hooked me. At that time, I was a sophomore in high school and was already pretty certain that I was an atheist. Hearing that song helped cement my disbelief. It made me realize that I wasn’t so “out there” to be skeptical of religion and the idea of God. To have a great drummer and lyricist like Neil Peart share my (non)belief, well, that immediately endeared him to me even more.



Shutterstock image

Neil Peart, drummer and lyricist for Rush, died on Jan. 7.

Here’s a portion of the “Free Will” lyrics:

You can choose a ready guide
In some celestial voice
If you choose not to decide
You still have made a choice
You can choose from phantom fears
And kindness that can kill
I will choose a path that’s clear
I will choose free will

Each of us
A cell of awareness
Imperfect and incomplete
Genetic blends
With uncertain ends
On a fortune hunt
That’s far too fleet

People assumed Peart was an atheist by his words and actions, although he never called himself that. He once said in an interview that he was “a linear agnostic,” whatever that means.

In an interview with journalist Jim Ladd in 2015, Peart said: “I always say, too, if I’m going to go up to heaven and meet St. Peter and Jesus and God and Allah and Buddah, whichever one you wanna pick, I’m gonna be OK because . . . I believe in generosity and charity and kindness and courtesy. Those are things that just seem good to me anyway. I don’t need a threat to make me behave that way and I don’t need a reward.”

Here are a few other samples of his lyrics that show his freethinking attitude.

“Tom Sawyer” (1981)

No, his mind is not for rent
To any god or government
Always hopeful, yet discontent
He knows changes aren’t permanent
But change is

“Roll the Bones” (1991)

Faith is cold as ice
Why are little ones born only to suffer
For the want of immunity
Or a bowl of rice?
Well, who would hold a price
On the heads of the innocent children
If there’s some immortal power
To control the dice?
We come into the world and take our chances
Fate is just the weight of circumstances
That’s the way that lady luck dances
Roll the bones

“Ghost of a Chance” (1991)

I don’t believe in destiny
Or the guiding hand of fate
I don’t believe in forever
Or love as a mystical state

“Faithless” (2007)

I’ve got my own moral compass to steer by
A guiding star beats a spirit in the sky
And all the preaching voices
Empty vessels of dreams so loud
As they move among the crowd
Fools and thieves are well disguised
In the temple and marketplace

I don’t have faith in faith
I don’t believe in belief
You can call me faithless
I still cling to hope
And I believe in love
And that’s faith enough for me

Peart’s lyrics and songs have been an indelible part of my life. As he writes in the song “The Spirit of Radio,” his music gives me “emotional feedback, on a timeless wavelength, bearing a gift beyond price, almost free.”

Thank you, Neil.
PJ Slinger is editor of Freethought Today.

Thomas Johnson was Marine, cartographer, world traveler

FFRF Lifetime Member Thomas E. Johnson died Dec. 20, 2019.

His daughter Carole Johnson-Wolff graciously took the time to write this obituary for Freethought Today:

Thomas E. Johnson was born in Center City, Minn., in August of 1923. Like many in town, his family was affected by the Great Depression. They often ate fish from the lake next to their house and vegetables from the large garden Tom’s father kept. Tom helped with the family income by delivering newspapers and working on farms in the area. Before he was of age to join the service, he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps and was stationed in northern Minnesota, where he helped with the camp newspaper. Later he got a job with Woodward Governor as a lathe operator, supporting the war effort.

At the age of 19, Tom joined the Marines and was trained at several military bases around the United States. Before

and after joining the service, he traveled extensively from coast to coast by train, car and hitchhiking. He told many colorful stories of his experiences on the road.



Submitted photo

Thomas Johnson as a young man in the Marines.

University of Colorado. While driving a tour bus in Rocky Mountain National Park, he met his wife-to-be, a youthful tourist passenger from Rockford, Ill., named Pauline. They married a year later, settled in the Denver area and had four children.

Thomas worked for the federal gov-

ernment as a cartographer until his retirement at the age of 55. Many contour lines on USGS 7.5-minute topographic maps are the products of his sure hand and keen eye.

Upon retirement, Tom and Pauline traveled extensively. They took three trips to Europe, one of them riding bicycles across England. Tom was an avid bicyclist and also loved driving. He and Pauline traveled by motorhome across the United States and Mexico, and even took a trip to Central America once. They participated in bicycle races as seniors, and Tom won many medals!

He remained devoted and married to his wife for 67 years. He became Pauline’s caregiver when she developed dementia until she was moved into memory care. After that, Tom lived on his own at home, keeping touch with family and friends via emails. He was a good writer and wrote many stories about his life. Two months before his death, at the ripe age of 96, he finally moved into assisted living and he died shortly thereafter.

He was a staunch believer in science and logic, and was a Lifetime Member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. He kept his favorite quote by Col. Robert G. Ingersoll posted on his desk: “Blasphemy is an epithet bestowed by superstition upon common sense.”



Submitted photo

Thomas Johnson was all smiles as he celebrated his 95th birthday in 2018.



The Hyatt Regency is along the famous San Antonio Riverwalk.

FFRF convention, Nov. 13-15

On to San Antonio!

Here’s what you need to know about lodging, schedule, meals, etc.

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation in San Antonio for its 43rd annual convention from Nov. 13-15 at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio. (For information on the guest speakers, see pages 1 and 2.)

General schedule

The official starting time of the convention, at the Hyatt Regency (123 Losoya), is 1 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 13, continuing through Saturday night. FFRF’s membership and State Representatives meetings will take place Sunday morning, ending by noon. Registration will open by 11 a.m.

Plan to come early and/or stay late if you want to sightsee in this exotic locale. The hotel is less than five minutes from the Alamo and many other attractions. The convention schedule, as always, includes irreverent music, FFRF merchandise sales, complimentary snacks and beverages on Friday and Saturday afternoons and a Friday night dessert reception.

Return the handy registration form on the right or sign up at ffrf.org/convention2020.

Registration

Registration for the convention is only \$60 per FFRF member, \$65 for a companion accompanying a member, \$115 for nonmembers (or you can save money by becoming a member for \$40). High school students or younger are free and the college student rate is \$10.

Make your room reservations directly (see info box on this page). This convention is limited to 900 guests, so we encourage you to register early and book your hotel rooms as soon as possible. Sorry, no refunds after the Oct. 31 pre-registration deadline.

Private receptions

On Friday afternoon, sign up for the VIP Book Signing/FFRF Fundraiser with Gloria Steinem. The event goes from 4-4:30 p.m. (\$500)

This reception will be limited to 50 guests! Those signing up for this special event will receive Steinem’s most recent book, *The Truth Will Set You Free, But First It Will Piss You Off! Thoughts on Life, Love, and Rebellion*, signed by the author during the reception. A major portion of the ticket price is a tax-deductible, charitable contribution to FFRF.

To cap off the Friday schedule, sign up for the VIP Dessert Reception/FFRF Fundraiser with Margaret Atwood, which takes place after her public conversation with Katherine Stewart Friday night. (\$500)

Room reservations

Hyatt Regency San Antonio
123 Losoya
San Antonio, TX 78205
210-451-6200
Indicate you’re with the “Freedom From Religion Foundation” bloc or reserve online at ffrf.us/hotel.

\$205 (single/double occupancy)
\$215 (triple/quad occupancy)
State and local taxes (currently 16.75 percent) and fees will apply.
Group rate includes standard internet.

This reception is also for a limited number of attendees, so don’t wait to sign up! Attendees will receive Atwood’s most recent book, *The Testaments*, signed by the author during the reception. A major portion of the reception cost is a tax-deductible, charitable contribution to FFRF.

Meals

Friday Dinner Reception (\$60)
Hearty reception with beef steamship with horseradish cream, au jus and mini rolls; pulled BBQ pork slider with pickled onions on sesame roll; ranch spiced chicken satay with tomato BBQ dip; crudité including carrots, cucumbers, jicama and cauliflower with poblano hummus and spinach dip; Southwest Caesar salad (charred corn, black beans and croutons with Ancho Caesar dressing); self-serve mac & cheese station (white cheddar mac & cheese tossed with green chiles, mushroom and caramelized onions). Cash bar.

Saturday Nonprayer Breakfast (\$50)
Eggs, potato, bacon, and fruit cup service, with orange juice, coffee and tea. Vegetarian/vegan option available.

Saturday Dinner (\$90)
Caesar salad (Heart of Romaine, aged Parmesan, smoked garlic ciabatta croutons with creamy Caesar dressing); seared chicken breast with jalapeño-spricot glaze, melted leek and bacon jam; mascarpone risotto, and mixed cauliflower; chocolate cappuccino cake with vanilla whipped cream; coffee and tea. (Vegetarian/vegan option: Roasted acorn squash stuffed with vegetable and herb quinoa, coriander spiced carrot puree, aged saba.) Cash bar.

Immediately following the Saturday dinner in the Regency Ballroom, the evening program will be presented. As space allows, limited seating for non-diners will be provided. Please note that meal costs reflect the cost to FFRF; we do not mark up these prices.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

NATIONAL CONVENTION

SAN ANTONIO | NOVEMBER 13-15, 2020

43rd CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: ffrf.org/convention2020

REGISTRATION FEES	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___\$60	\$___
Spouse or Companion (Non-member accompanying member)	___\$65	\$___
Child (High school or under accompanying registrant)	___Free	\$___
College Student with ID <input type="checkbox"/> I am interested in hotel, meal or travel scholarship	___\$10	\$___
Non-member	___\$115	\$___
<input type="checkbox"/> Or, I will join FFRF for \$40 (and save \$15)	___\$100	\$___

AUTHOR RECEPTIONS

Friday, November 13

VIP Book Signing / Fundraiser with Gloria Steinem ___\$500 \$___
4:00-4:30 PM | Includes author book
You have my permission to list me as a reception sponsor. ☐ Yes ☐ No

VIP Dessert Reception / Fundraiser with Margaret Atwood ___\$500 \$___
9:15 PM | Includes author book
You have my permission to list me as a reception sponsor. ☐ Yes ☐ No

OPTIONAL MEALS / EVENTS

Friday, November 13

Friday Dinner Buffet ___\$60 \$___
Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free
Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free
Registrant 3 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Saturday, November 14

Non-Prayer Breakfast ___\$50 \$___
Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free
Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free
Registrant 3 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free

Saturday Dinner ___\$90 \$___
Registrant 1 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free
Registrant 2 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free
Registrant 3 ☐ Regular ☐ Vegetarian ☐ Vegan ☐ Gluten Free
► Total \$_____

☐ 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

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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
Pre-registration deadline Saturday, October 31, 2020 (Unless event is sold out) No refund after pre-registration deadline.	