

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**Bangladeshi
freethinkers are
never safe**

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voters' are an
electoral force**

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**A meeting of
two freethinking
giants**

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Christian Nationalism on full display



Shutterstock photo

Insurrectionists carry a large wooden cross outside the Capitol on Jan. 6.

Has the Capitol attack opened eyes to theocratic extremism?

Is America finally waking up to the threat Christian Nationalism poses? FFRF, which has been educating about the dangers of theocratic extremism for decades, is hopeful the attack on the Capitol has opened the nation's eyes.

"Photos, videos and reportage illuminate the links between this attack and Christian Nationalism," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Bibles, shirts, flags, placards, patches, crucifixes, crosses and prayers were omnipresent during the attack."

The New Yorker published striking video (bit.ly/2MAX3YG) of insurrectionists praying to Jesus on the floor of the Senate. (It comes at about the 8-minute mark of the video.)

Luke Mogelson, a veteran war correspondent and a contributing writer at The New Yorker who has been reporting on the violent edges of the Trump movement and was at the Capitol, captured the moment.

Jacob Chansely, aka "Jacob Angel" and "QShaman," who — bare-chested, face-painted, adorned in furs and a horned Viking hat — figures prominently in footage from the Capitol insurrection, led the Christian prayer. Following the prayer, he scratched out and left a threatening note on Vice President Mike Pence's desk. Chansely removed his horned hat and started to pray as the

See *Extremists* on page 4

Religious zealots in Congress side with secessionists

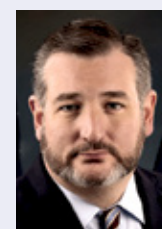
The Christian Nationalists, neo-Nazis, racists and anti-government militia who attacked the U.S. Capitol and our democracy on Jan. 6 have been roundly denounced. But the Freedom From Religion Foundation believes it is also important to call to account the Christian Nationalist views of most of the 147 disruptors inside Congress who voted later that night to deny the will of the voters.

More than a quarter of the members of Congress taking shelter for their lives while a seditious mob rampaged through the heart of our democracy ended up siding with the insurrectionists to try to deny Joe Biden his lawfully won presidency.

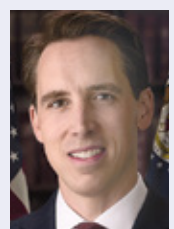
What do we know about these members of Congress, including eight senators? Besides being all Republican, mostly white and mostly male, what do they have in common?

Their religious identity. And more than that, the Christian Nationalist flavor of their religious views (145 of the 147 identify as Christian; the exceptions are Reps. David Kustoff and Lee Zeldin, both Jewish). Almost half of the 138 House members who objected to the Electoral College count were evangelical Christians.

A disproportionate number



Sen. Ted Cruz



Sen. Josh Hawley

Turn to pages 15-17 for FFRF's documentation of the Christian Nationalist voting records and pronouncements of the eight senators and a representative sampling of House members who voted unsuccessfully to nullify the will of the electorate.

of members of Congress claim to be Christian (88 percent versus 65 percent of the general population), but fully 98 percent of the certification naysayers identify as Christian. Many who voted to overturn the presidential election fall into religiously extremist categories.

Christian Nationalists believe, by definition, that the United States is or should be a Christian nation, actively seek to pass laws to privilege religion and Christianity,

See *Zealots* on page 4

FFRF, others sue Trump administration

FFRF is part of a coalition of service and advocacy organizations that have filed suit against the former Trump administration for rolling back civil rights protections for beneficiaries of federal programs.

The prior federal rules had required faith-based organizations providing critical, taxpayer-funded services (like food and shelter) to inform recipients of their legal rights to be free from discrimination, not to have to attend religious programming, and to have the opportunity to get a referral for an alternative provider.

The new rule, which went into effect Jan. 19, makes it harder for already mar-

“The Trump administration shredded important religious freedom and nondiscrimination protections for many of America's most vulnerable populations.

— Joint statement from plaintiffs group

ginalized populations to access essential social services as the United States continues to reel from a historic pandemic and economic collapse.

The Trump administration's rollback is arbitrary and capricious. Among other

things, it provided no reasonable explanation for the rule change, failed to account for its harms, and failed to consider obvious alternatives to the changes they finalized — all in violation of the Administrative Procedure Act.

The lawsuit was filed by a group of plaintiffs: Freedom From Religion Foundation, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, SAGE, the New York City Anti-Violence Project, Ark of Freedom Alliance, American Atheists and the Hindu American Foundation. Filed against the Trump-led Departments of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Housing and Urban Development, Veterans Affairs, Education, Homeland Security, Justice and Labor, the suit seeks to reverse the unlawful rollback of these important protections.

See *Lawsuit* on page 4

MEET A MEMBER

FFRF State Reps push for secular Kentucky

Mikel and Ed Hensley active in freethought community

Name: Mikel Hensley
Where I live: Louisville.
Where and when I was born: I was born in Louisville in 1980 and grew up to the south of Louisville in Shepherdsville.
Education: Public schools from K–8, then homeschooled grades 9–12. Went to Trevecca Nazarene University for two years before getting out of there and going back home to attend the University of Louisville. Graduated with a bachelor’s degree in computer information systems and about 10 years later went to Jefferson Community and Technical College to get an associate’s degree in electrical technology.
Occupation: Electrical technician for a manufacturing organization.
How I got where I am today: One day at a time.
Where I’m headed: I don’t know.
Person in history I admire and why: Ruth Bader Ginsburg, for challenging the patriarchy all the way to the Supreme Court.
A quotation I like: “The nitrogen in our DNA, the calcium in our teeth, the iron in our blood, the carbon in our apple pies were made in the interiors of collapsing stars. We are made of star-stuff.” — Carl Sagan, from “Cosmos.”
Things I like: Walks in the woods, looking at the stars, well done sci-fi shows like “The Expanse” and “Star Trek” and “The Mandalorian,” and spending time with Ed and Cosi.



Mikel and Ed Hensley with their daughter Cosima.

Things I smite: Frickin’ conspiracy theories and pseudoscience and patriarchy.
My doubts about religion started: There are so many ways I could answer this. But I think one of the more major things was learning the actual history of Christianity while I was attending Trevecca Nazarene University and how the bible was compiled basically by councils of men who voted on what the “true” belief should be, and how the Christian sect that got to determine the “orthodox” views suppressed and demonized those who had different views. It was such a different history than what I was taught in Sunday school.
Learning about the history of the cosmos and about evolution and realizing religious authors I had trusted had given me misinformation about scien-

tific fact also drove a nail into the coffin of my Christian belief.
Ways I promote freethought: I’m a State Representative for FFRF, edit and post the “Blasphemy in the Bluegrass” podcast, manage the website for Kentucky Secular Society, and help with organizing and promoting local events for atheists and freethinkers.

• • •

Name: Ed Hensley
Where I live: Louisville.
Where and when I was born: Dallas.
Family: I am divorced, widowed and married. Wife: Mikel; sons Jody, Scott and Braden; and daughters Taylor and Cosima.
Education: B.S. and M.S. degrees in computer science from Texas A&M

University. I was a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Texas at Austin, but stopped work on my dissertation after my wife became ill and died.
Occupation: Software engineer.
Military service: I served seven years in Germany as a civilian with the Department of Defense.
How I got where I am today: I met my wife at a Louisville Atheists and Freethinkers meeting. Our dates included going to conventions and other events together, such as Jane Goodall or Richard Dawkins events.
Where I’m headed: Retirement from UPS to spend more time with family and more time on activism.
Person in history I admire and why: Charles Darwin and Werner Von Braun for their contributions to biology and space travel.
A quotation I like: “Faith is believing what you know ain’t so.” Mark Twain, from *Following the Equator*, Pudd’nhead Wilson’s Calendar.
Things I like: “Star Trek,” “Doctor Who” and other science fiction, national and state parks, travel.
Things I smite: Ark Encounter, violations of church-state separation, most TV sitcoms.
My doubts about religion started: I was brought up as a biblical literalist Southern Baptist in Texas. I left religion slowly from ages 18–24 as I read the bible and studied the early Christian churches and the formulation of the New Testament.
Before I die: I hope the church-state situation in the United States improves.
Ways I promote freethought: I’m a State Representative for FFRF, president of FFRF Kentucky, help organize the Kentucky Freethought Convention, and host the “Blasphemy in the Bluegrass” podcast.

THEY SAID WHAT?

It has been obvious for a while that Christians are under suppression. . . . All of the things the country was founded on are under attack. They are trying to get the name of God out of everything, especially the name of Jesus.
Adam Phillips, who attended the Stop the Steal march and Million MAGA March.
The New York Times, 1-1-21

A Tennessee county mayor said he wouldn’t order residents and visitors to wear masks until “the Holy Spirit” moves him to do so.
Lincoln County Mayor Bill Newman, who tested positive with COVID-19 less than a month after his statement.
AL.com, 12-21-20

There is not one square inch of all

creation over which Jesus Christ is not Lord. . . . We are called to take that message into every sphere of life that we touch, including the political realm. That is our charge. To take the Lordship of Christ, that message, into the public realm, and to seek the obedience of the nations. Of our nation!”
Sen. Josh Hawley, in a 2017 speech to the American Renewal Project.
The New York Times, 1-11-21

The New York Times, 1-22-21

I must point out that our new president has pledged to pursue certain policies that would advance moral evils and threaten human life and dignity, most seriously in the areas of abortion, contraception, marriage and gender. Of deep concern is the liberty of the Church and the freedom of believers to live according to their consciences.
Archbishop José H. Gomez of Los Angeles, the president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, on Joe Biden, a lifelong Catholic.
Washington Post, 1-28-21

As White House press secretary, I never had to worry about the far left and their allies at CNN or The New York Times defining me, because I have a creator who’s already done that. I’m a Christian. A wife. A mom. A proud Arkansan. My opponents will do everything in their power to destroy me.
Sarah Huckabee Sanders, in a video launching her run for Arkansas governor.
YouTube.com, 1-25-21

[Philip Esformes spent his time in prison] devoted to prayer and repentance.
Donald Trump, citing reasons why he pardoned the former nursing home executive who orchestrated one of the biggest Medicare frauds in U.S. history.

You just ruled against God. Get ready for the judgment of God.
Pastor Tony Spell of Louisiana’s Life Tabernacle Church, after a judge denied his motion to dismiss the six criminal counts he faces.
The Friendly Atheist, 1-26-21

Why is it our people are so vulnerable to this stuff?
Lance Wallnau, the granddaddy of Christian Nationalism and 7 Mountain Dominionism, wondering why his followers are susceptible to “false prophecies” and conspiracy theories.
Washington Post, 1-14-21

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TODAY

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

EDITOR
EDITOR EMERITUS
EXECUTIVE PUBLISHER
GRAPHIC DESIGNER
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
CONTRIBUTORS

Madison WI 53701
FFRF.org
F 608.204.0422

PJ Slinger fttoday@FFRF.org
Bill Dunn
Annie Laurie Gaylor
Roger Daleiden
Amit Pal

Dan Barker, Steve Benson, James Haught, Robert P. Jones, Chris Line, Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey, Andrew L. Seidel, Subrato Shuvo, Jake Swenson, Steven Tarter, Alex Torrez, Phil Zuckerman

The only freethought newspaper in the United States



Margaret Atwood Gloria Steinem John Irving John Davidson Sikivu Hutchinson

FFRF’s 2021 Boston convention in limbo

Dear Members:

The Freedom From Religion Foundation’s plans for its 2021 national convention — scheduled for the weekend of Nov. 19–21 at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel in Boston — remain in limbo.

FFRF, like everyone else in our nation, is awaiting pandemic mitigation developments, and hopes to know by summer whether a national convention will be safe and practical. Please continue to hold the date. We’ll keep you posted as soon as we are able to rely on the science.

The amazing roster still includes Margaret Atwood, Gloria Steinem, John Irving and a host of secular authors such

as Katherine Stewart and Phil Zuckerman, activists such as Hispanic American Freethinkers’ founder David Tamayo and honorees such as Black Skeptics Los Angeles founder Sikivu Hutchinson. Newly announced speakers and honorees include New York Times court columnist Linda Greenhouse and singer/entertainer/actor John Davidson.

Look for updates and announcements in future issues of Freethought Today and on our website, ffrf.org/convo-2021.

We look forward to holding a post-pandemic celebratory bash with these powerhouse speakers and seeing you there, when it’s safe.

Hermeneutic pretzel logic

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker appeared on Seth Andrews’ “Thinking Atheist” podcast in January. The following is a transcript of a portion of his discussion.

By Dan Barker

I have done 137 formal public debates, and by now I have heard all the arguments many times over. But the most slippery disputes deal with how to understand the bible. When I quote a passage that makes believers uncomfortable, they often say I am not interpreting it properly.



Dan Barker

For example, when I quote Psalm 137:9, which says, “Happy shall he be who takes and dashes your little children against the stones” as an example of biblical barbarity, some apologists will yell “context” or “metaphor.” But some will say that those are not actually God’s words.

The psalmist is really saying that “Here is what a human might say in the heat of the moment when confronted with the brutality of the Babylonians, that IF someone were to dash THEIR babies against the stones, THEY would be happy.” God is not telling Christians to kill babies.

Well, OK. Then that means that verse is not part of God’s word. It’s just a human hyperbole. But if that is true,

why is it in the bible?

And how are we to know where to draw the line? Using that logic, shouldn’t we dismiss the entire bible? The Old and New Testaments were written, after all — by humans. When Moses told the Israelites that “God gave me these Ten Commandments,” wasn’t that just Moses speaking — perhaps metaphorically? Hyperbolically? Maybe Yahweh himself is just one huge figure of speech.

It’s interesting that believers only invoke their interpretive defenses when confronted with passages they don’t like. I could play the same game.

When John wrote that “God is love,” couldn’t I say that *that* is a metaphor? If you take that verse in the entire context of God’s atrocious actions and cruel commands, it can’t possibly mean that God is really love, as we modern people understand the word. That is just John speaking, after all, and should not be considered the word of God.

Well, I do understand. If you are committed, *a priori*, to the requirement — to the dogma — that God is perfect and good, then you will never see a contradiction or inconsistency, even if it is right there before your eyes.

You have no choice but to twist yourself into a hermeneutic pretzel to keep that baby alive.

Dan Barker is co-president of the FFRF and author of the books *Godless: How an Evangelical Preacher Became One of America’s Leading Atheists* and *GOD: The Most Unpleasant Character in All Fiction*.



FFRF welcomes Life members

FFRF welcomes and thanks its three newest After-Life members, 19 Lifetime members and two Immortals.

The new \$1,000 Lifetime members are Mark Anton, Lawrence M. Axlerod, Richard Carl Brown, Christopher Erbland, Michael Fischer, Laurie Fresh, Rebecca Glenn (gifted by Jeff Glenn), Carolyn M. Jones, Gwen Jones, Keith Miller, Thomas E. Norris, Christopher R. Paul, James Rohrbach, John Rowe, George Saunders (gifted by George’s wife Linda Saunders for his 80th birthday), Ed Scharf, Richard C. Schwartz, Stephen Walrath and Robert M. Zellers.

The three new After-Life members are Edward H. Kolner, Joan Lavier and John Wilson. After-Life is a very generous membership category of \$5,000.

The two new Immortals are George Pedraja and Nicole Andrea Porcaro. The Immortals category is for those who have made provisions in their estate for FFRF.

States represented are California, Florida, Indiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Washington and Wisconsin.

Bill Maher jokes about religion, QAnon overlap

On Bill Maher’s weekly HBO show “Real Time” on Feb. 5, the host and longtime religious skeptic pointed out how there’s tremendous overlap between religionists and the QAnon conspiracy theorists.

During his “New Rules,” segment, he said:

“Magical religious thinking is a virus and QAnon is just its current mutation. That’s why megachurches play QAnon videos. We need to stop pretending there’s no way we’ll ever understand why the Trump mob believes in him. It’s because they’re religious . . . They’ve already made space in their heads for shit that doesn’t make sense.”



Bill Maher

He went on:

“It’s fun to laugh at QAnon with the baby-eating lizard people and the pedophile pizza parlors, but have you ever read the Book of Revelation? That’s the bible. That’s your holy book, Christians, and they’ve got . . . stuff you only see after the guy in the park sells you bad mushrooms.”

And this:

“There’s a lot of talk now about how Republicans should tell their base who still believe the election was rigged that they need to grow up and move on and stop asking the rest of us to respect their mass delusion. Of course, it is a mass delusion. But the inconvenient truth here is that if you accord religious faith the kind of exalted respect we do here in America, you’ve already lost the argument that mass delusion is bad.”

Unabashed Atheist Mug

Sunfire red, glazed ceramic handcrafted mug with Unabashed Atheist medallion. American-made, 14 fl. oz.

\$35 each Item #MU03
\$60 for two

Prices include over \$10 shipping per mug.



Buy it from FFRF online
ffrf.org/shop

Pansy Freethinker Mug

Glazed brilliant blue ceramic handcrafted mug with pansy medallion (symbol of freethought). American-made. 12 fl. oz.

\$35 each Item #MU04
\$60 for two

Prices include over \$10 shipping per mug.



Buy it from FFRF online
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Lawsuit

Continued from page 1

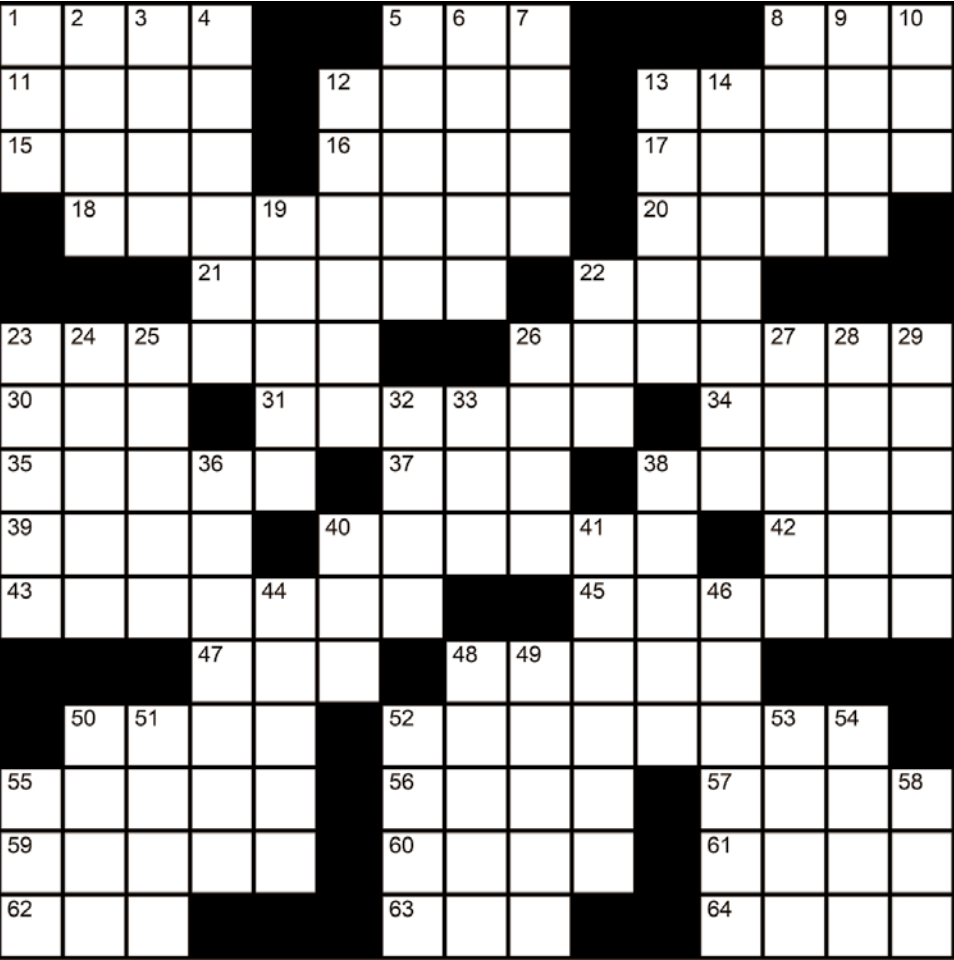
Democracy Forward, Americans United for Separation of Church and State and Lambda Legal represent the plaintiffs. “On its last day in power, the Trump administration shredded important religious freedom and nondiscrimination protections for many of America’s most vulnerable populations and made it harder for them to access taxpayer-funded services in the midst of a pandemic and severe economic downturn,” the groups say in a joint statement. “The outgoing administration’s new rule unlawfully curtails the religious freedom and nondiscriminatory access to services of people seeking to obtain food, shel-

ter, and other essential, federally funded services from faith-based organizations.” The organizations add, “We’re taking our fight against the Trump administration’s unlawful rollback to court so that those in need of help can continue to get it without fear of discrimination or unwanted proselytization.” FFRF felt an urgent necessity to join in the lawsuit. “The Trump administration’s perversion of religious freedom continued until, literally, its last day,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “We’re determined to ensure that individuals not believing in the majority creed know their rights and are empowered to protect themselves against discrimination and marginalization while receiving vital social services.”

On Dec. 17, the Trump administration finalized its sweeping rule, which eliminates common-sense requirements that were put in place in 2016. Those requirements were the result of a historic effort to reach consensus on how religion and government should interact in the context of federally funded social services. The Trump administration’s rollback unlawfully puts the interests of religious organizations, which provide a significant slice of federally funded social services, ahead of the rights and needs of the vulnerable populations they serve. As a result of the 2020 rule, FFRF plans to spend additional time and resources educating beneficiaries and providers who take part in social service programs about the rights of participants. One of the

ways FFRF is doing that is by distributing “know-your-rights” material for program participants. FFRF is also planning to conduct an education campaign directed at faith-based entities that receive federal financial assistance to remind them of the remaining nondiscrimination requirements under the new Trump rules. FFRF further plans to launch an education campaign aimed at secular organizations that serve vulnerable populations in order to enable those groups to support the people they serve in advocating for themselves when receiving services from faith-based organizations. FFRF has in the past pursued complaints about faith-based organizations receiving federal financial assistance.

Freethought Today Crossword



Answers on page 21

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

- Across**

 - 1. Before and after intermission
 - 5. Good, slangily
 - 8. X
 - 11. You, archaic
 - 12. Add to payroll
 - 13. Do not use the chip
 - 15. Between dawn and noon
 - 16. Singular for algae
 - 17. Ubiquitous songbird
 - 18. *1954 addition to the Pledge of Allegiance
 - 20. Related to the ear
 - 21. Shoelace tip
 - 22. Fifth note
 - 23. Unit of electric current flow
 - 26. T in ENT, pl.
 - 30. Homer Simpson’s exclamation
 - 31. Give work
 - 34. Europe/Asia mountain divide
 - 35. Take puppy from a pound
 - 37. Over, poetically
 - 38. Wombs
 - 39. Drop-down list
 - 40. In-____ gait
 - 42. Beatty of “Deliverance”
 - 43. Metallurgy factory
 - 45. Home to Pac-Man and Galaga
- 47. Baron Munchhausen’s statement
 - 48. Parallel grooves
 - 50. Tibetan monk
 - 52. *Ben Franklin: “Lighthouses are more helpful than ____”
 - 55. Echo sounder
 - 56. Great Depression drifter
 - 57. Not written
 - 59. Swedish money
 - 60. All over again
 - 61. Princess Fiona by night
 - 62. Appetite
 - 63. P in mpg
 - 64. Mrs. Lincoln’s maiden name

Down

 - 1. 20s dispenser
 - 2. Cabbage, ‡ Paris
 - 3. Of two minds
 - 4. Ice cream parlor order
 - 5. Lowest part of a ship
 - 6. Vernacular
 - 7. “____ as a doornail”
 - 8. Cone-shaped quarters
 - 9. Homer’s “The Odyssey,” e.g.
 - 10. Volleyball divider
 - 12. Globetrotters’ home
 - 13. Animal trail
 - 14. *Meaning of ‘a’ in ‘atheist’
 - 19. Wading bird
- 22. Like a wallflower
 - 23. *Science fiction/ comedy writer who called himself “radical atheist”
 - 24. It modulates and demodulates
 - 25. Android, e.g.
 - 26. Actress Spelling
 - 27. Sports stadium
 - 28. Weighed
 - 29. Slip ‘N ____
 - 32. Standard’s partner
 - 33. *Philosopher and martial artist
 - 36. **“His Dark Materials” author and C.S. Lewis critic
 - 38. Finno-____ language
 - 40. Tiger’s prop
 - 41. Limited in scope
 - 44. Elizabeth II’s headdress
 - 46. Partnership
 - 48. Did like a star at night
 - 49. Sweet potato, e.g.
 - 50. Urban myth
 - 51. At another time, to Romeo or Juliet
 - 52. Crack in a lip
 - 53. Consequently
 - 54. Deep-red variety of chalcedony
 - 55. *John Lennon: “Above us only ____”
 - 58. ____ Zeppelin

Extremists

Continued from page 1

demonstrators in the chambers threw up their arms in supplication. Chansely was indicted on Jan. 11 for his role in the putsch. A photo of Chansely shaking hands with Rudy Giuliani in November has since surfaced. (Giuliani, Trump’s attorney, called for “trial by combat” at the Save America rally preceding the raid on the Capitol.) Peter Manseau, the curator of American Religious History at the National Museum of American History for the Smithsonian, has crowdsourced a project on social media with scholars, religion journalists, activists, writers and others, including FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel. They have been cataloging the connections with the hashtag #CapitolSiegeReligion. Christian Nationalism is not going away even though its champion is no longer president. FFRF will continue to work to expose the insidious, anti-democratic nature of Christian Nationalism and its role in the attempted overthrow of our government.

‘Year in Review’ mea culpa

The Freedom From Religion Foundation inadvertently omitted the name of two State Representatives from its annual “Year in Review” report, which was mailed to members late last year. Missing from that report were Wayne Thurston, N.Y., and Mike Dubik, Va. FFRF regrets the omission and confusion it created. Thanks, Wayne and Mike, for serving as State Representatives!

Zealots

Continued from page 1

and impose their religious views on all citizens. They want to turn the godless U.S. Constitution upside down, granting sovereign authority to their “King, the Lord Jesus,” rather than “We the People.” That would be a theocracy, not a democracy. Although some of these Christian Nationalists who voted not to certify the election results are newcomers, the majority are previously seated members with standard resumés, but with declared zealous views. Almost all are stringently opposed to abortion and LGBTQ rights, typically bragging of perfect 100 percent scores from the National Right to Life Committee and Heritage Action For America. Most are dyed-in-the-wool archconservatives, also with high ratings from the NRA and a variety of other ultraconservative lobbying groups. Many proudly trumpet their Christian Nationalist beliefs, are publicly prayerful and evince hostility to the separation between state and church. It is not unusual for these members of Congress to list church membership on their official bios, and to add that they’ve served as deacons or taught Sunday school. Many have made the news for controversial views. “Our nation is properly examining the white supremacist, anti-government, Christian Nationalist ideologies of the insurrectionists who broke into the Capitol to steal the election,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. “But many members of Congress share at least some of these extremist views and are essentially dedicated to overthrowing the secular principles of our government.” See pages 15-17 for more on the Christian Nationalist senators and representatives.

Freethought Matters 2021 Season

An antidote to religion on the airwaves and Sunday morning sermonizing

Watch our show every Sunday!

Photo by Chris Line

Visit FFRF's YouTube Channel to watch the shows.

Freethought Matters TV talk show airs in:

Chicago	WPWR-CW	(Ch. 50)	9 am
Denver	KWGN-CW	(Ch. 2)	7 am
Houston	KUBE-IND	(Ch. 57)	9 am
Los Angeles	KCOP-MY	(Ch. 13)	8:30 am
Madison, Wis.	WISC-TV	(Ch. 3)	11 pm
Minneapolis	KSTC-IND	(Ch. 45)	9:30 am
New York City	WPIX-IND	(Ch. 11)	8:30 am
Phoenix	KASW-CW	(Ch. 61 or 6 or 1006 for HD)	8:30 am
Portland, Ore.	KRCW-CW	(Ch. 32)	9 am (703 on Comcast for HD or Ch. 3)
Sacramento	KQCA-MY	(Ch. 58)	8:30 am
San Francisco	KICU-IND	(Ch. 36)	10 am
Seattle	KONG-IND	(Ch. 16)	8 am (Ch. 16 or Ch. 106 on Comcast)
Washington, D.C.	WDCW-CW	(Ch. 50, 23, 3)	8 am

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

IN THE NEWS

Ex-state Rep. Saccone resigns after comments

Former Pennsylvania state Rep. Rick Saccone, who was the target of an FFRF lawsuit in 2012, resigned from his teaching position at St. Vincent College after comments he made on social media.

Saccone tweeted a selfie from the Capitol on Jan. 6, saying: “We are storming the Capitol . . . We will save this nation. Are u with me?”

A pro-Trump violent demonstration at the U.S. Capitol left five dead. Saccone, 62, resigned as an adjunct instructor the following day, Jan. 7.

In March 2012, FFRF sued against a declaration by the Pennsylvania House that 2012 is “The Year of the Bible,” which was authored by Saccone. U.S. District Judge Christopher Conner on Oct. 1, 2012, dismissed the case, ruling House officials had legislative immunity, but chastised House officials for “premeditated pandering.”

Abortion ban takes effect in Poland

A near-total ban on abortion in Poland went into effect on Jan. 27, despite protests from hundreds of thousands of residents.

The law halts the termination of pregnancies for fetal abnormalities, basically the only kind of abortion performed in Poland.

The decision had been made in October by the Constitutional Tribunal, but its implementation was delayed after it prompted a month of protests. On Jan. 27, the government abruptly announced that the ruling was being published in the government’s journal, meaning it came into effect.

“We are dealing with incompetence, corruption, a total decay of the state, so these men are doing what they know best — taking away rights and freedoms from the citizens,” Marta Lempart, a protest organizer, told a television station.

8-year-old expelled for having crush on girl

Chloe Shelton, an 8-year-old second-grader, was expelled from Rejoice Christian Schools in Owasso, Okla., because she told another girl she had a crush on her.

“[Chloe] said the vice principal sat her down and said the bible says you can only marry a man and have children with a man,” said Delanie Shelton, Chloe’s mother. “My daughter was crying, saying, ‘Does God still love me?’”

Rejoice Christian Schools told Shelton they don’t condone boyfriend/girlfriend relationships on campus.

“The vice principal asked me ‘How do I feel about girls liking girls?’ And I said, ‘If we’re being honest, I think it’s OK for girls to like girls’ and she looked shocked and appalled,” Delanie Shelton said.

Ark. House OKs bill to let churches stay open

A bill passed the Arkansas House 75–10 on Jan. 28 that would prohibit the state from closing churches or prohibiting religious gatherings during emergencies, including a pandemic.

The bill would allow houses of worship to ignore reasonable public health

Court: Boston can reject Christian flag



Photo courtesy of city of Boston

Three flags fly outside the Boston City Hall. One is always the American flag, the second is always the Massachusetts state flag and the third flag varies, based on private groups who submit their flag to be flown. A court ruled that the city may bar the Christian flag from being the third flag.

The city of Boston can refuse a citizen’s request to fly a Christian flag over City Hall, the 1st U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled on Jan. 22, according to Courthouse News.

This doesn’t violate the plaintiff’s right to free speech nor does it discriminate against religion, the court said.

Boston is “entitled to select the views that it wants to express,” U.S. Circuit Judge Bruce Selya wrote for

a three-judge panel. And the refusal to fly the flag “simply cannot be construed to suggest the disparagement of the plaintiffs’ religion.”

The court said the flagpoles represent the government’s speech, not the public’s speech, because a casual observer seeing the flags would assume that the city intended whatever message they convey.

FFRF had originally joined the amicus brief supporting the city.

restrictions, increasing the likelihood that in-person church services will become Covid-19 superspreader events.

The bill now moves to the Republican-heavy state Senate, which is also likely to approve it.

Iowa bill would ‘out’ LGBTQ+ students

A bill introduced in the Iowa Senate has critics saying that it’s a blatant attempt to “out” LGBTQ+ students.

Senate File 80 states that if a school chooses to ask a student or give them a survey which asks them to identify their gender, that information would be required to be provided to the parent or guardian of the student.

One Iowa, whose mission is to improve the lives of the LGBTQ+ community in Iowa, has criticized the bill because not all students who consider themselves LGBTQ+ are comfortable “outing” themselves to their parents.

Survey: Covid-19 in U.S. has strengthened faith

A Pew Research Center survey conducted in the summer of 2020 reveals that more Americans than people in other economically developed countries say the outbreak has bolstered their religious faith and the faith of their compatriots.

Nearly three in 10 Americans (28 percent) report stronger personal faith because of the pandemic, and the same share think the religious faith of Americans overall has strengthened, according to the survey of 14 econom-

ically developed countries.

Far smaller shares in other parts of the world say religious faith has been affected by the coronavirus. For example, just 10 percent of British adults report that their own faith is stronger as a result of the pandemic. In Japan, 5 percent of people say religion now plays a stronger role in both their own lives and the lives of their fellow citizens.

Majorities or pluralities in all the countries surveyed do not feel that religious faith has been strengthened by the pandemic, including 68 percent of U.S. adults who say their own faith has not changed much.

Judge: Church’s beach parking is religious act

A federal judge in Florida ruled on Jan. 29 that the community of St. Pete Beach couldn’t stop a church from allowing beachgoers to use its parking lot, calling the practice a legitimate ministry.

The United Church of Christ parking lot, which has 70 spaces, is about a block from a metered lot run by the city. In June 2016, the city fined the church twice for violating a law governing commercial parking lots. The church filed its complaint in the U.S. District Court of Florida.

As Religion News Service writes, “The arguments in the case hinged, as they often do in religious freedom rulings, on whether the church’s insistence on keeping the parking lot available to the public was ‘a sincerely held belief’ of the church’s faith.”

Researcher: Definition of ‘evangelical’ changing

Ryan Burge, assistant professor of political science and a researcher from Eastern Illinois University, says that the term “evangelical” is morphing into something more political.

In his Jan. 26 op-ed on the Religion News Service site, “Think U.S. evangelicals are dying out? Well, define evangelicalism,” Burge writes: “The assumption is that the term [evangelical] describes those who place high value on the teachings of the bible and strive to evangelize other people into their faith.

“However, that understanding of the term seems to be fading, replaced with a more amorphous concept that melds together religious doctrine and an affinity for conservative politics that experts are only beginning to understand now.”

Burge continues: “For instance, in her book *From Politics to Pews*, scholar Michele Margolis argues that people are choosing their religious affiliation based on their political partisanship with greater frequency now than in prior decades.”

Saudi women’s activist released from prison

Saudi women’s rights activist Loujain al-Hathloul was released from custody on Feb 10, according to several news outlets.

She was best known for challenging the ban on women driving in Saudi Arabia. In 2014, al-Hathloul, tried to drive her car across the border from the United Arab Emirates into Saudi Arabia and was detained for more than 70 days.

She was arrested in 2018 and sentenced to almost six years in prison last December under a broad counterterrorism law. She’s been in prison since then and her release after 1,001 days is due to time served and a partially suspended sentence

But al-Hathloul’s family has said she is not really free because she has been banned from leaving the country for five years and will not be allowed to speak with journalists.

Satanic Temple sues Boston over prayer policy

The Satanic Temple on Jan. 23 sued the city of Boston after the City Council declined to allow Satanists to deliver an invocation at the start of its meetings.

The Satanic Temple said the council’s policy for its opening prayer is discriminatory and unconstitutional because it does not permit prayer from every religious organization that wishes to deliver one.

Satanists have asked to give the opening invocation on at least three occasions, and each time they were informed the council doesn’t accept requests, the organization said.

The Satanic Temple, in its federal lawsuit, argued that the council policy violates the city’s public accommodations statute, which states that any place serving a public function is entitled to protection from discrimination. It also violates the U.S. Constitution’s Equal Protection Clause, which it argues guarantees all religions an equal opportunity to participate in free-speech forums.

FFRF NEWS



Ron Reagan appears in FFRF's television ad.

FFRF's iconic Reagan ad aired on four networks

Three national network television comedy news programs and one national news show aired FFRF's famous Ron Reagan ad several times.

FFRF's iconic ad featuring Reagan's famous line "Unabashed atheist . . . not afraid of burning in hell" made its debut on "Full Frontal with Samantha Bee" on TBS. It also ran on "The Daily Show with Trevor Noah" on Comedy Central and on "The Late Show with Stephen Colbert" on CBS. The ad ran for two weeks on each of the shows beginning on Jan. 20.

It also aired on MSNBC's "Rachel Maddow Show" beginning Feb. 1 through Feb. 11.

In the commercial, Reagan says:

"Hi, I'm Ron Reagan, an unabashed atheist, and I'm alarmed by the intrusion of religion into our secular government. That's why I'm asking you to support the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the

nation's largest and most effective association of atheists and agnostics, working to keep state and church separate, just like our Founding Fathers intended. Please support the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Ron Reagan, lifelong atheist, not afraid of burning in hell."

Reagan's signature line has spawned an interactive digital "billboard," as well as an "unabashed" T-shirt, cap, a lapel pin and a new handcrafted mug.

"These ads over national networks are raising consciousness about the growing numbers of Americans, even the son of a conservative president, who are making known their dissent from religion," says Dan Barker, FFRF co-president.

FFRF thanks Ron Reagan for his gracious endorsement, as well as FFRF members who contribute to FFRF's advertising fund, which makes possible the advertisements and has significantly grown FFRF's membership, now at over 33,500.

FFRF: Supreme Court spreads church preference, Covid-19

The U.S. Supreme Court issued a dismaying order Feb. 5 overriding "the judgments of experts about how to respond to a raging pandemic," as dissenting Justice Elena Kagan put it. "In the worst public health crisis in a century," Kagan writes, "this foray into armchair epidemiology cannot end well."

The order prohibits California from enforcing some of its Covid-19 regulations against churches, such as prohibitions against indoor worship services in high-risk areas (identified as "Tier 1"). A brief unsigned order blocked the total ban, leaving in place a 25 percent capacity restriction and prohibitions on singing or chanting indoors in Tier 1 areas.

The injunction reinforces a recent shift from the court's prior decisions, which had held that treating churches in a neutral manner was constitutional. As the dissent from Kagan recognizes, a majority of the court now requires special preference for churches.

Chief Justice John Roberts concurred in issuing the injunction overturning a complete ban on indoor worship gatherings, but otherwise pointed to judicial deference to state officials: "I adhere to the view that the 'Constitution princi-

pally entrusts the safety and the health of the people to the politically accountable officials of the States."

Kagan's dissent was joined by Justices Stephen Breyer and Sonia Sotomayor.

"Justices of this court are not scientists," Kagan wrote. "Nor do we know much about public health policy. Yet today the court displaces the judgments of experts about how to respond to a raging pandemic. The court orders California to weaken its restrictions in public gatherings by making a special exception for worship services. The majority does so, even though the state's policies treat worship just as favorably as secular activities (including political assemblies) that, according to medical evidence, pose the same risk of Covid transmission."

Kagan further observed: "Under the court's injunction, the state must instead treat worship services like secular activities that pose a much lesser danger. That mandate defies our case law, exceeds our judicial role, and risks worsening the pandemic."

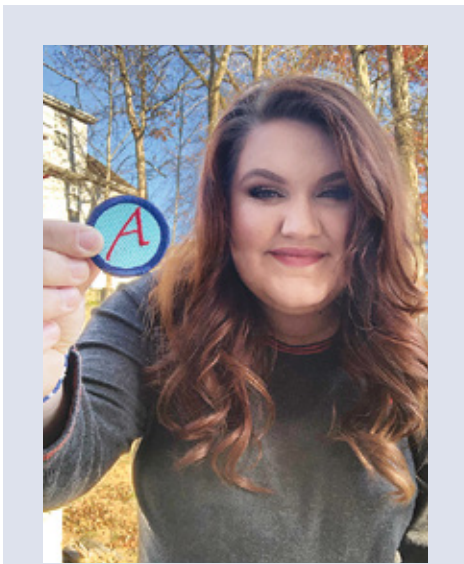
The Supreme Court's injunction will remain in place while the court awaits a formal petition from California churches seeking a ruling on the merits.

Boy Scouts can earn a Freethought badge

The Freedom From Religion Foundation produces a badge to reward free-thinking youths and to challenge the Boy Scouts of America's discriminatory policy against the nonreligious. The badge, based on the Dawkins' "A," is issued in collaboration with the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science.

The Boy Scouts of America formally discriminates against nonreligious boys and their families, officially excluding atheists, agnostics and nonbelievers. Currently, BSA maintains "that no member can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing his obligation to God."

FFRF maintains that no one can grow into the best kind of citizen who discriminates against the nonreligious, and that it's what you do — not what you believe — that makes you a good person.



Miura Pepper Rempis shows off the Freethought badge.

Miura Pepper Rempis of Tennessee earned one of FFRF's Freethought badges. Here is a portion of her essay:

"In the same way that believers are often the most wicked, morals are not defined by the belief in a higher power. Morality and conscience exist independent of a belief in the God delusion and any correlation between the two is purely circumstantial. Correlation does not equate to causation."

Social disapproval prompted BSA to largely drop a similar ban on membership against gay Scouts. But BSA persists in stigmatizing those who use reason and critical thought to evaluate religious claims.

FFRF, at the urging of its late member Richard Kirschman, has produced a badge similar to BSA's merit badges, which are typically sewn on uniforms or sashes.

Scouts who wish to earn this badge are asked to help disprove BSA's misguided claim that nonbelievers cannot be good citizens.

At Dawkins' suggestion, the Scout is also required to send FFRF a short essay that addresses BSA's claim that nonbelievers can't be good citizens. Unlike BSA badge providers, FFRF will not charge Scouts money for the badge.

FFRF intends the badge to reward Boy Scouts who have persevered in an organization that basically has instituted a 'Don't ask, don't tell' policy about atheist and agnostic participants, but has regularly expelled open nonbelievers. While BSA officials dictate the discriminatory policy, Scouting troops vary widely in their enforcement of the ban, so it's believed many Scouts are nonreligious.

But if any young boy — or girl — fulfills the requirements, FFRF will be delighted to reward them with this badge. Many non-religious students who might otherwise wish to join BSA never join, knowing of its bigoted policy. This is also their chance to be rewarded for critical thinking and to earn a keepsake at the same time.

FFRF hopes someday very soon that BSA itself will change its policy and adopt its own official merit badge rewarding critical thinking. It urges those who care about equality for nonbelieving children to contact BSA to protest this invidious discrimination.

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

Buy it from FFRF online @ ffrf.org/shop

The book cover features a portrait of Robert G. Ingersoll, a man with a white beard and mustache, wearing a dark suit and a white shirt with a high collar. The title "American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll" is at the top, and "A Biography by Orvin Larson" is at the bottom.

NOTHING FAILS LIKE PRAYER

CONTEST 2021

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 2021, receiving an expenses-paid trip to Boston Nov. 19-21, 2021, along with a plaque and an honorarium of \$500.

Deadline: August 1, 2021.

MORE INFO AT:

ffrf.org/nothing-fails-like-prayer

FFRF lauds reversal of global gag rule

FFRF applauds the Biden administration for revoking the draconian global gag rule that denied U.S. funding to foreign nongovernmental organizations providing any information, counseling or care about abortion.

President Trump had signed an executive order imposing the global gag rule on his fourth day of office. It's laudable that President Biden, in his second week of office, has lifted it.

First implemented by President Reagan in 1984, when it was known as the Mexico City Policy, it imposes anti-abortion worldviews on not just the United States, but the entire world. This rule, which has either been implemented by every Republican president or revoked by every Democratic president since Reagan, was expanded in 2017, when Trump applied it to any U.S. global funding, including organizations that provide HIV and AIDS programs and services. It has blocked critical funding for services like maternal health, contraception and HIV prevention in 32 countries and some 50 projects that provide essential health care to underserved communities.

The Helms Amendment already restricts any U.S. foreign assistance going to fund abortions. The gag

rule has blocked aid to foreign organizations that use their own (non-U.S.) funds to provide information or referrals, or services for legal abortion, or that advocate for access to abortion services in their own countries. According to Planned Parenthood, this has dismantled general health services in a number of communities.

The horrific impact of the global gag rule has been staggering. Studies have shown that the rule is not only ineffective and dangerous, but that it is counterproductive because it can triple abortion rates. Since many of these clandestine abortions are conducted in unsafe conditions, women needlessly die because of this terrible imposition. In fact, there are nearly 68,000 maternal deaths globally per year from unsafe abortions, with 99 percent of them taking place in developing countries.

FFRF believes that everyone should be able to receive comprehensive health services free of religious interference, and fact-based information. The Biden administration's reversal of the global gag rule is a necessary step in that direction. The Freedom From Religion Foundation celebrates this important moment for women's reproductive rights, human rights and secular values.



Biden should have skipped National Prayer Breakfast

In a misbegotten attempt at bipartisanship, President Biden has continued the lamentable presidential tradition of legitimizing the sectarian annual National Prayer Breakfast.

Biden was in virtual attendance from the White House for the dubious quasi-official prayerfest on Feb. 4. The president asked for unity and courage and exhorted the country to take on political extremism — all of which he could have done at a secular venue.

Unfortunately, Biden also ventured into religious clichés: “For so many in our nation, this is a dark, dark time,” Biden told those watching the event. “So where do we turn? Faith.”

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor responds by quoting Mark Twain.

“As Twain said, ‘Faith is believing what you know ain’t so,’” she remarks. “As we’ve seen in this pandemic, science is where we have turned, and faith has often gotten in the way.”

The Fellowship (also known as “The Family”), which puts together the jamboree, is the subject of an acclaimed Netflix series based on an investigative book by journalist Jeff Sharlet, *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power*, who has spoken at FFRF’s annual convention and appeared on its TV show. His work has revealed that the annual breakfast is the outward face of a rather sinister evangelical organization.

And the U.S. government’s role in arranging the get-together has always been less than transparent. Although



President Biden

the National Prayer Breakfast is technically sponsored by the private Fellowship Foundation, which is dedicated to “the teachings and precepts of Jesus,” the nation’s lawmaking body plays a key role. “The U.S. Congress hosts the National Prayer Breakfast, and the Christian organization, The Fellowship Foundation, organizes the event on their behalf,” a website revealed for the 2017 event.

Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., unfortunately asserted that the event is “an inclusive and positive” one that “recognizes the teachings of Jesus but is not limited to Christianity.”

And the headliner was none other than the nation’s commander in chief. FFRF contends that the (virtual) presence of the leader of our executive branch at a shindig organized by such a cultish organization makes it appear as if the U.S. government approves of a fringe movement within one particular religion. The National Prayer Breakfast makes a mockery of our secular Constitution — and serves to undermine our political system, as well.

Biden’s early executive orders a breath of fresh secular air

FFRF is pleased to welcome many of President Biden’s early actions to reverse course on measures taken by the previous administration, which FFRF had roundly opposed.

Biden’s laudable executive orders include:

Repealing Muslim ban: FFRF long argued, including before the Supreme Court, that banning individuals from entry to the United States based on religion is an egregious religious test and violation of the Establishment Clause. The orders being overturned favored Christians from those countries, exempting them from the ban and allowing them to immigrate. FFRF pointed out that if the United States can exclude Muslims, atheists and other freethinkers would be next on the list.

Rejoining the climate change accord: FFRF’s position is that the climate crisis is a state/church issue. “It’s not just the casual denial of reality that impacts views on climate change, but also the influence of apocalyptic religiosity. The virulent strain of evangelicalism that tends to infect our current government welcomes the end of this world as a fulfillment of prophecy and ‘the second coming,’” we noted in 2017.

Ordering mask-wearing on federal property: Speaking of formulating public policy based on facts and reality, the new administration is already living up to its promise to be guided by science, with executive orders that protect federal employees and citizens by mandating masks on federal property and in interstate travel. FFRF has been advocating for a science-based approach to the pandemic since the beginning, including no exemptions for churches.

Science-minded response to COVID pandemic: Several executive orders have been aimed at combating the COVID pandemic that has been handled ineptly up until this point, with religious leaders and the prior president assuring the country that the virus will “magically” disappear while they themselves actively spread the contagion, denying the advice of doctors and scientists. The new administration has organized a government-wide response and ordered that the response must be driven by data and science.

Ending the transgender military ban:

FFRF has long supported LGBTQ rights and defended them against religious bigotry and attacks. And make no mistake, the transgender military ban was directly motivated by religious bigotry.

Banning discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation: In another instance of correcting religion-based bigotry, the new administration also set out a policy to vigorously enforce anti-discrimination provisions with respect to LGBTQ individuals. Christian Nationalists who had the ear of the prior administration have been consistently obsessed with stopping LGBTQ people from receiving equal treatment under the law.

Promoting racial equality: “Diversity is one of our country’s greatest strengths,” reads the order — and FFRF agrees. The order also explains: “Affirmatively advancing equity, civil rights, racial justice and equal opportunity is the responsibility of the whole of our government,” which is all true, but not the end of the story. FFRF has been working to implement equity, diversity and inclusion into our organization at all levels, from membership to staff to the alliances we forge, such as joining the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights.

Humanistic executive orders: Other executive orders just signed by Biden, with more to come, embody the humanism shared by many of our freethinking members, including over immigration reform and expanded food assistance programs food assistance programs. The pandemic’s blight, both in health and economics, has disproportionately landed on people of color, low-wage workers, indigent Americans and women.

Notably absent from executive orders to date are attempts to repeal the (bogus) revoking of rules prohibiting nonprofits, including churches, from wading into partisan politics, undoing the Christian Nationalist agenda allowing religion-based discrimination by federal contractors and similar acts by the prior administration. FFRF is committed to defending the wall of separation and will hold all administrations accountable for breaching that wall or for excluding nonbelievers from the American tapestry. But we also want to recognize progress and give credit where it is due.

‘IN REASON WE TRUST’ Self inking stamp



Carefully crafted to stamp out ‘god’ on U.S. currency. Good for up to 2000 impressions.

\$20 postpaid — Item#ST01

Buy It Online ffrf.org/shop

After legal battle, secular invocation given in Florida

David Williamson, a director and co-founder of the Central Florida Freethought Community (a chapter of FFRF), offered what is believed to be the first-ever secular invocation to open a meeting of Brevard's Board of County Commissioners.

Williamson's invocation on Jan. 26 was noteworthy because the board previously had denied him and other nontheists the opportunity to offer secular invocations to open its meetings, while permitting a parade of religious invocations, thus sparking a nearly five-year-long legal battle. The case, in which FFRF was a major participant, ended successfully in February 2020 when commissioners agreed not to discriminate against nonreligious individuals or those who don't belong to mainstream, monotheistic religions.

Williamson's remarks reflect on the shared American ideals of public service, democracy, compassion, community and seeking common ground.

"The religious landscape of Brevard includes a fast-growing number of nonreligious people," stated Williamson. "It is an honor to begin the process of including atheists, humanists and others who claim no religion whatsoever as equal members of the community."

Williamson was the lead plaintiff in *Williamson v. Brevard County*, which was filed in 2015 by FFRF, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union and the ACLU of Florida. Other plaintiffs included the Central Florida Freethought Community; the Space Coast Freethought Association and its former president, Chase Hansel; the Humanist Community of the Space Coast and its president, Keith Becher; and Brevard County resident Ronald Gordon.

The plaintiffs settled the case last year after the county agreed to implement a July 2019 decision of the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, which made clear that government officials must not engage in religious discrimination when selecting people to deliver opening invocations. As part of the settlement, the county agreed to pay nearly \$500,000 in damages and legal fees to plaintiffs.



David Williamson



FFRF's pro-science billboard remained up throughout February in the Lincoln Square neighborhood of Chicago.

FFRF displays Chicago, Madison Darwin billboards

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and its Chicago chapter unveiled a secular advertising campaign promoting science and pandemic safety in the Windy City in February.

The artwork features a striking image of Charles Darwin wearing FFRF's "In Science I Trust" face mask next to the message: "In Science We Trust. Please Stay Safe." It combines FFRF's pro-science thrust with a celebration of Darwin Day (Feb. 12 was the birth anniversary of the scientific giant).

The 14-by-48-foot display was located on Lincoln Avenue near Foster Avenue in Chicago's Lincoln Square neighborhood and remained up through the end of February.

FFRF warmly thanks its FFRF Metropolitan Chicago Chapter Executive Director Tom Cara.

"This new billboard is timely in two ways," comments Cara. "First, to encourage everyone to help keep us all safe by trusting in science, not superstition, and to mask up! Second, to give science the respect it deserves by honoring the birthday of Charles Darwin. During this critical time in our history, it is very important we recognize the outstanding contributions of those in the science and medical fields."

A similar billboard saying "Masks on. Sleeves up," was placed on University Avenue in Madison, Wis., through February.

DOJ needs to probe Church abuse

FFRF has called on the Wisconsin Department of Justice to launch a statewide probe into the Roman Catholic clergy's serial sexual abuse and cover-up.

FFRF is not alone in demanding a statewide inquiry. The nonprofit Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) has also requested an investigation in light of recent events, and other groups, such as Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty (CHILD USA), have been sounding the alarm on this problem for decades alongside FFRF.

In a letter to Attorney General Josh Kaul, FFRF describes a recent, tragic Wisconsin case in which St. Norbert Abbey in De Pere, part of the Roman Diocese of Green Bay, reportedly sent a victim annual checks, totaling \$400,000, to pay for counseling and medication resulting from abuse by Abbey priests. After the Abbey stopped sending these checks, Nate Lindstrom fell into a deep depression that ultimately led to suicide.

"This widespread abuse, largely unreported to secular authorities, is not

limited to St. Norbert Abbey or to the Diocese of Green Bay," FFRF's Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker emphasize to Kaul. Twenty-one states, as well as Washington, D.C., have looked into this issue since 2002. "It is time for Wisconsin to follow the lead of these states, and the nations of Ireland and Australia, and investigate this massive and coordinated abuse of minors throughout the country."

A 2018 1,400-page Pennsylvania grand jury report detailing thousands of instances of sexual abuse by clergy in six of the states' eight dioceses made major headlines. It also revealed that the Catholic Church's secretive and imposing structure allowed hundreds of offenders to escape prosecution for decades. This systemic sexual abuse and cover-up in the Cath-

olic Church is not confined to Pennsylvania — or even to the United States. The Irish and Australian governments have conducted inquiries of their own. "A multistate investigation is especially fitting because the Church's 'musical chairs' history of deliberately moving offenders to new locations — shielding them from local exposure and outrage, and providing them with fresh victims — creates an interstate crisis that no individual state is equipped to handle," FFRF writes.

Pope Francis' failure to provide any meaningful action to correct the problem confirms what FFRF and many victims' rights groups have asserted for decades: The methodical, organized sexual abuse in the Catholic Church will not stop until secular authorities intervene.

“The Wisconsin Department of Justice should not sit idly by while a hyperwealthy, tax-exempt organization facilitates the sexual abuse of thousands of children.”

FFRF decries appeals court reasoning

FFRF criticized an appeals court ruling handed down Feb. 2 that dubiously claims a historical framework justifies a government nativity display.

Although FFRF was not party to the lawsuit, the national state/church watchdog had sent a December 2018 letter demanding removal of the Christian nativity display erected annually on the lawn of the Jackson County Courthouse in Brownstown, Ind. The request was greeted by a "save the nativity" rally with prayers and a speech by the president of the county commissioners. The county moved some figures of Santa Claus and carolers closer to the Christian devotional scene to argue that the overall impact of the display was supposedly secular.

The Indiana ACLU then filed suit on behalf of atheist Rebecca Woodring to challenge the county display of the creche, which is owned by the Brownstown Ministerial Association. U.S. District Court Judge Tanya Walton Pratt ruled in Woodring's favor last May, writing that the scene continued to convey religious endorsement. The county, represented by the ultra-Christian Right Liberty Counsel, then took the case to the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

Writing the decision for the three-judge panel, which ruled 2-1 in favor of the display, was U.S. Circuit Judge Amy St. Eve, a President Trump appointee: "We conclude that the county's nativity scene is constitutional because it fits within a long national tradition of using the nativity scene in broader holiday displays to celebrate the origins of Christmas — a public holiday."

St. Eve claimed that the district court wrongly felt itself bound by the "purpose" and "endorsement" tests based on the Lemon Test, a codification of court rulings that considers a government display constitutional if its purpose is secular and it does not appear to endorse religion. She asserted that the facts of the case must be scrutinized "under the historical approach" from a set of outlier cases dealing with governmental prayer, in which a supposed unbroken practice of congressional chaplaincies creates a justification for governmental prayer.

The appeals court decision invoked the 2019 Supreme Court ruling in *AHA v. American Legion* that approved a huge cross on public property in Bladensburg, Va. The 7th Circuit asserted that the *American Legion* decision required the court to not apply the traditional Lemon framework to



The Jackson County Courthouse in Indiana displays a nativity scene during the month of December. An appeals court ruled that the nativity scene is not unconstitutional.

nativity scene cases. Shockingly joining St. Eve was Judge Diane Wood, a President Clinton appointee considered a counterweight to the circuit's well-known conservatism. In his vigorous dissent, U.S. Circuit Judge David Hamilton, a President Obama appointee, noted that "the religious content dominates the county's Christmas display here" and correctly concluded, "Viewed in its entirety and in context, the display therefore sends a strong message of government endorsement of Christianity."

Report: \$1.5B PPP abuse by Catholic Church

Another new bombshell report by the Associated Press shows once again that churches are stealing from the American taxpayer:

“As the pandemic began to unfold, AP revealed Feb. 4, “scores of Catholic dioceses across the U.S. received aid through the Paycheck Protection Program while sitting on well over \$10 billion in cash, short-term investments or other available funds, an Associated Press investigation has found. And despite the broad economic downturn, these assets have grown in many dioceses.”

AP reports that “[t]he 112 dioceses that shared their financial statements collected at least \$1.5 billion in taxpayer-backed aid. A majority of these dioceses reported enough money on hand to cover at least six months of operating expenses, even without any new income.”

The PPP is not even a year old and already the grift and abuse by church has been enormous. And, unfortunately, we’ll see more: The Paycheck Protection Program was reopened on Jan. 11.

Remember all the state/church problems with PPP that FFRF has fought and brought to light in the past year?

First, the Small Business Administration violated the Constitution and trampled longstanding agency rules to extend these loans to churches. This was clearly unconstitutional, as FFRF explained to the SBA at the time.

The SBA is currently — even under the new administration — working to make these rules permanent.

Second, this rule change was not authorized by the COVID relief act that created PPP. The CARES Act extended eligibility for loans from the SBA to nonprofits, which was new. But the law did not give the SBA the power to extend



this eligibility to churches, nor could it — the Constitution prohibits government funding of religion. The CARES Act only mentions religion once, to prevent universities from using taxpayer funds for “capital outlays associated with facilities related to athletics, sectarian instruction, or religious worship.”

However, the SBA ignored that language, and the centuries-old bar on taxpayer-funded religious worship, and issued rules and guidance declaring that your taxpayer funds “can be used to pay the salaries of ministers and other staff

engaged in the religious mission of institutions.” To do this, SBA had to suspend numerous rules that, correctly, prevented taxpayer funds from flowing to churches.

SBA was spurred to do this because a few congressmen, like Christian Nationalist Josh Hawley who has since helped incite an insurrection,

declared after the fact and against the language of the law and the Constitution, that churches were beneficiaries. Again, FFRF was there to explain why this was wrong.

Third, the Trump administration

was using the program to reward his closest political allies. FFRF broke the story of secretive White House calls between SBA officials and religious leaders that supported Trump politically. The preachers were encouraged to apply for the PPP funds and promised help. Trump-allied faith leaders were assured by the federal government that even a discriminatory fly-by-night “church” that provides absolutely no secular social services, and of which the owner is the sole employee, could have its wages covered by taxpayers during the PPP time period. On one call, Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, a member of Trump’s Evangelical Advisory Council, explained that the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute, which took in \$350,000–\$1 million, “has literally been kept solvent . . . by the Paycheck Protection Plan (sic)” and explained that in 43 years of leading two faith-based ministries, he has “never asked for, nor received, one cent from the federal government” expressing his surprise that taxpayer funds could now flow to his ministry.

Finally, there’s well-documented but still emerging abuse. FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel wrote, “American churches took in as much as \$10 billion in taxpayer funds through PPP loans. More than 400 evangelical churches received loans of at least \$1 million. The Catholic Church might have taken in as much as \$3.5 billion.” He explained that Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church took in nearly \$5 million in taxpayer funds. Other mega-churches purchased private jets, returning the taxpayer money when they were caught.

And this is only the tip of the corruption, as the latest AP report shows.

“A majority of these dioceses reported enough money on hand to cover at least six months of operating expenses, even without any new income.”
— Associated Press report

CRANKMAIL

Here is the March installment of Crankmail, your one-stop shop for religiously inspired vitriol. Printed as received.

Macon county: We do not want you in Macon County. If you do not like the “Free Thinking” (as you are all about) that we have here then drive on to another town where your closed minded, alienating, atheistic ways may be appreciated. — *Misha Biltmore*

boise state/byu prayer: I am writing to ex-

press my utter disgust at your request to eliminate the chaplain position at Boise State. You are no friend to the values on which this great nation is based and ought to be ashamed. Shame shame shame on you. — *Kevin Pulsipher*

Salvation: I peruse your Facebook page occasionally, to see what you’ve attacked this week. What I find laughable is the comments, the expressions from those that shall face the Almighty God, have convinced themselves IF they don’t be-

lieve it, it won’t happen. They say it’s ‘we believers who are weak minded’. That’s funny. Oh, your good for a laugh, so, Thank you. It’s sad too, to read the names of people who shall perish and be separated from God. You have no idea what your fighting so hard to achieve. You shall, just not until you’re no longer breathing. It’s your choice, spreading your sickness, hindering others and deceiving them that there is no God, will be on each and every one of you. Repentance is good, Salvation is glory, it’s truly good for the soul. — *Leslie Friedel*

Constitutional rights and violations: idaho is a very religious state! You are in violation of every individual on the boise state football team that believes in God. It is the constitutional right for them to have freedom of religion and that means on the football field as well. I am sorry you don’t believe in God, but you will when Jesus comes back! You all will. But it will be way to late for you at that point. I will pray for you! I am also contacting the ACLJ to take up the tyranny of atheism to push there beliefs on all people and violating everyone’s constitutional rights. — *Scott Moore*

Media: Hello You are still a bunch of assholes, fuck u — *Joden Donitche*

Toys for Holidays: What the hell do the jews want?!?!? Always meddling in everything from being Ultra Othodox to hating religion always going after Christians as if murthering the son of God wasn’t enough. Jews are both the most out spoken Communists and Capitalists. Can’t you fuckers just shut your pie holes and leave people alone for once?!?!?!? — *Hillary Spencer*

Threatening Schools: Stop your propaganda of going after religious scenarios in schools. The students in school have freedom from religious discrimination and you are discriminating. Shame on you for threatening a school that is collecting kids items for the poor. Do something else with your time that will help the poor and hungry in our nation. In God we trust also belongs on our money. This nation was started on Christian principles so get over yourselves. — *Marilyn Solamito*

Aborting fetus: You are completely wrong! And you are not God! Only God gives life and only he should take it away! Wrong to abort babies at any stage! As is suicide! — *Josh Sam*

Content: Just wanted you all to know you are a bunch of retards. When you die, you will burn in hell. Just because you have no lives of your own, you should swim out in the ocean and just keep swimming — *Craig Eisman*

**Losing Faith in Faith:
From Preacher to Atheist**

By Dan Barker

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

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**WOMEN WITHOUT SUPERSTITION
“No Gods—No Masters”**

Edited: Annie Laurie Gaylor

Collected writings of 50 women freethinkers of the 19th & 20th centuries (51 photographs).

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

By Bailey Nachreiner-Mackesey

School to end singing of ‘God Bless the USA’

A religious song will no longer be played in Simi Valley (Calif.) Unified School District.

A concerned parent reported that Sycamore Elementary asks its students to sing a new “patriotic song of the month” each month following the Pledge of Allegiance. One month, the song “God Bless the USA” was chosen.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Jason Peplinski, urging the district to cease asking students to sing that song and make only secular selections for future songs of the month.

FFRF was informed in a letter of response from the district’s attorney that the school will not choose “God Bless the USA” as a song of the month in the future and has removed references to it from the school newsletter.

Religious iconography removed from school

Religious iconography has been removed from multiple spots in the International Leadership of Texas Grand Prairie School in Richardson, Texas.

One sign, located in a counselor’s office frequented by students, stated “the Lord is good.” A second wall decoration, located in a third-grade classroom, read “God, thank you for everything.”

FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson wrote to Superintendent Eddie Conger, requesting that these signs come down as they constituted the appearance of government endorsement of religion.

The school’s attorney has informed FFRF that both displays have come down.

FFRF intervenes in Texas city’s ‘day of prayer’

The city of Wills Point, Texas, has addressed concerns about a religious proclamation made on behalf of local government.

Multiple Wills Point residents informed FFRF that Mayor Mark Turner declared a “Day of Prayer and Fasting,” which was advertised on the official city Facebook page. In the proclamation, issued in his official capacity as mayor, Turner invited residents to join “Christians of all traditions in prayer,” and urged them to spread the word to others “willing to humble themselves, repent and ask God to heal their land.” Additionally, the proclamation — to which the official Wills Point city seal is affixed — stated “Now therefore we proclaim the healing of the City of Wills Point in Jesus’ name! Amen.”

FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson sent a letter to Turner urging him to dis-

continue all endorsement of religion in his official capacity as mayor. Government officials are free to worship, pray and participate in religious events in their personal capacities, FFRF emphasized, but may not provide credibility or prestige to their religion by lending a government office or title to religious events.

The city’s attorney informed FFRF via email that the post promoting the event has been removed from the city’s Facebook page and the district will “be more cognizant of [these] concerns in the future.”

South Carolina school removes framed prayer



A religious display has been promptly removed from a South Carolina school following a complaint from FFRF.

A Palmetto High School community member informed FFRF that a framed prayer was prominently displayed on a table in the school’s front office near the spot tardy students are required to stand and wait for their temperature to be checked before attending class.

FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson sent a letter to Anderson School District One Superintendent Robbie Binnicker, urging the district to immediately get rid of the religious display, since it constituted an inappropriate government endorsement of religion.

The school district took down the framed prayer from the school office the same day as it received the letter of complaint.

“The sign was removed and the principal dealt with the issue at the school level,” Binnicker informed FFRF via email.

School ceases sending home Christmas items

Anderson School District Two in Honea Path, S.C., has ceased sending home religious materials with students after intervention from FFRF.

A Marshall Primary School parent alerted FFRF that their child was given religious Christmas materials by the school. The parents reported that when they went to the school to pick up essential materials for distance learning, they were given a Christian coloring book, nativity stickers and a candy cane with the message “Happy Birthday, Jesus!” and a bible verse attached.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Interim Superintendent Donald An-

draws urging the district to take corrective action and train school and district staff on constitutional requirements.

Andrews sent a letter of response with assurances that this distribution of religious materials was a mistake, does not comply with district policy, and will not happen again in the future.

Bible verse display taken down in Virginia

A Virginia police department has agreed to strip a religious display from its office property.

Multiple South Hill, Va., residents informed FFRF that the South Hills Police Department was prominently featuring a “thin blue line” flag on its side door. This flag was overlaid with a quote of Proverbs 28:1 from the bible, stating “The wicked flee though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.”

FFRF Legal Fellow Brendan Johnson wrote to Chief of Police Stuart Bowen to request that the department move this and any other religious displays from its premises.

Bowen informed FFRF in a letter of response that he has taken action to remove the bible verse from the office door.

School religious display taken down in Oklahoma

A religious display has been taken down from Achille Public School property in Achille, Okla.

Multiple local residents alerted FFRF that in December, Achille Elementary School was displaying a nativity scene with the message, “Our world needs a stable influence.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote

to Superintendent Rick Beene to request that the district ensure that the nativity scene, or any other religious displays, will not be displayed in the future.

Beene assured FFRF via email that the display was taken down and he spoke with the person that put it up about the issue.


Michigan coach won’t lead pregame prayers

Coach-led prayer has been stopped in the Clinton Township, Mich., public school district.

A district parent informed FFRF that a Wyandot Middle School basketball coach had been leading his students in prayer before basketball games. According to the parent, the coach would have the players gather in a circle, make them hold hands and then say a prayer. When he finished saying his prayer, he would ask any of the players if they wanted to say a prayer.

FFRF Legal Fellow Dante Harootunian sent a letter to Chippewa Valley Schools Superintendent Ronald Robert urging the district to stop any and all prayers occurring within any school athletic programs.

Assistant Superintendent Adam Blanchard sent a letter of response, alerting FFRF that the coach “has been informed that his involvement in this type of religious activity cannot occur during school or a school event.”



NOT AFRAID OF BURNING IN HELL

Ashley Riester

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Were a little bit more democratic,
That is, if the Lord didn't lord it
And weren't so doggone dogmatic,
The world would be one bed of roses,
Sweet psyches and better digestions
If the tablets he handed to Moses
Were inscribed not commands but suggestions.


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Bangladeshi freethinkers are never safe

Subrata Shuvo was given \$5,000 as part of FFRF’s secular program to aid exiled freethinkers.

By Subrata Shuvo

I am Subrata Shuvo and was one of three bloggers who were arrested on April 1, 2013. Police took me away from my Dhaka University residential hall, which they said was for my security, but actually it was a trap to grab me for interrogation and eventually to put me in jail. After my release from jail, I maintained a low profile to keep myself safe. But in 2015, extremists again began “blogger hunting” and I left the country for good. I flew to another country to save my life.

The history of religious killing in Bangladesh is long. Islamic fanatics believe that freethinking writers call for freedom from religion and thus they consider their beliefs under threat.

That’s why many writers, bloggers and publishers have been attacked or killed in the country for their writings and views — sometimes only for their Facebook posts. Those who live in the Western world can never imagine such a thing.

The chief of the fundamentalist He-fazot-e-Islam declared in a huge gathering that those who become infidels are subject to be killed. “We are assigned to assassinate you; it’s our holy duty. If you want to live in the country of Allah, you have to believe in Allah without any question.”

The following are among the deported or slain freethinkers from Bangladesh.

Daud Haider

Daud Haider was the first writer and poet from Bangladesh who was forced



Daud Haider

into exile shortly after independence for his freethoughts and writings. His poem “Kalo Surjer Kalo Joshnay Kalo Bonnay,” published in 1974, depicted eminent characters of different religions. When it was released, a Dhaka College professor filed a case, accusing him of anti-religious poetry. Shortly after, religious fundamentalist groups in Bangladesh began to complain against him. He was arrested for offending the core values of religious groups. He subsequently escaped to India and then to Germany with the help of the Bangladesh government. He could never again enter Bangladesh.

Taslima Nasreen

The distribution of copies of the book *Lajja*, written by the Bangladeshi feminist



Taslima Nasreen

author Taslima Nasreen, was restricted by the Bangladesh government in 1993. Politicized Muslims campaigned for her punishment. However, she did not stop, and the government called for her arrest under pressure from Islamist fundamentalist groups. (Later, her novel was translated into more than 30 languages and spread like fire around the world.) In May 1994, she also angered conservatives when she was quoted in the Statesman newspaper as saying that the Quran should “be thoroughly checked.” This brought more ardent protests and demands to put her to death. The government called for her detention, relying on a blasphemy law of



Bangladeshi blogger and freethinker Subrata Shuvo was arrested in 2013 because of his writings. He now lives in another country after seeking asylum.

the 19th century. She appeared before the court and was released on bail, but had to leave Bangladesh permanently.

Shamsur Rahman

Shamsur Rahman was one of the leading poets of Bangladesh. On Jan. 17, 1999, members of the Harkatul Jihad al-Islami group, who had begun to visit his house under the guise of collecting his poems, attacked and wounded Rahman and his wife. Nine detainees arrested in this connection stated that they planned an Islamist revolution by killing so-called anti-Islamic poets and intellectuals.

Monir Hossain

The radical organization JMB killed author Monir Hossain Sagar in 2000 for writing the book *Girl, When Were You Human?*

Asif Mohiuddin

Asif Mohiuddin is a well-known Bangladeshi atheist blogger. For several years, he has been writing about issues such as atheism, religious beliefs, women’s rights and freedom of speech. He was attacked on Jan. 15, 2013, outside of his house, but has survived. He now lives in Germany.



Asif Mohiuddin

Humayun Azad

In 2003, Humayun Azad’s novel *Pak Sar Zamin Saad Bad* was published in It-tefaq magazine. As soon as the book was released, radical groups in the country started protesting against Azad. In the book, Azad refers to the Jamaat-e-Islami — a fundamentalist political party opposed to Bangladesh’s independence in 1971 — as a fascist organization. The writer was attacked by assassins on his way home from a book fair at Dhaka University on Feb. 26, 2004. After intensive care for years, he improved physically but died, likely due to complications from the attack, in Germany. Shaikh Abdur Rahman, the leader of the JMB militant group, admitted that he had ordered the assassination of Azad.

Arifur Rahman

Cartoonist Arifur Rahman worked for the Alpine — a satirical journal. In 2007, he was arrested for one of his cartoons that allegedly hurt the religious feelings of the masses. Islamist extrem-

ists targeted him for assassination. He is now living in another country.

Ahmed Rajib Haider



Ahmed Rajib Haider

Ahmed Rajib Haider was a blogger and architect. On Feb. 15, 2013, he was attacked and hacked to death by machete-wielding activists. He was the first blogger in Bangladesh to be murdered by Islamic militants.

Saniur Rahman

On March 6, 2013, engineer Saniur Rahman survived a stabbing attack by extremists for anti-religious blogging. The attack on Rahman came within 20 days of the murder of Ahmed Rajib Haider.

Arrest of three bloggers

On April 1, 2013, the government of Bangladesh arrested Russell Parvez, Moshir Rahman Biplab and me, avid freethinkers and bloggers, to meet the demand of extremists. On April 3, police additionally arrested Asif Mohiuddin. After 32 days of jail, Parvez and I were released on bail, while other bloggers were released conditionally. All of us fled the country for the sake of our security.

Avijit Roy

Avijit Roy was often called the “Richard Dawkins of Bengal.” He founded the blog Muktomona, which is still the leading platform of freethinkers. Many extremists intimidated Roy in broad daylight for his writings, even announcing they would kill him.



Avijit Roy

On Feb. 26, a sleeper cell was waiting with machetes near Dhaka University for Avijit and his wife Rafida Bonya Ahmed. The extremists hacked at both of them, and the two were rushed to the hospital. Roy did not make it. Ahmed healed after months-long medication and treatment.

Washiqur Babu

Extremists killed Washiqur Babu on March 30, 2015, in broad daylight, accusing him of hurting religious sentiments through his blogging and writings on Facebook.

Ananta Bijoy Das

Four extremists killed Ananta Bijoy with sharp machetes in May 2015. He was a vigorous writer on the Muktomona blog and was an activist against fundamentalism.

Niloy Neel

On August 7, 2015, extremists assassinated Niloy Neel at his home in



Niloy Neel

Dhaka. Ansar al-Islam claimed the responsibility for the killing. One person entered the house in disguise, claiming to ask for rent. Then a bunch of killers joined in. They locked Neel’s family

in a room and hacked him to death.

Attack on publishers

Extremists of Ansar al-Islam killed the publisher Foyzal Arefin Dipon, who was accused of publishing Avijit Roy’s book. They hacked him at his office and then locked the gate to let him die.

Radicals also attacked writer and blogger Ranodipam Basu and poet Tarek Rahim, along with publisher Ahmed Rashid Tutul, who left Bangladesh forever and now lives in Norway. The publisher and owner of Rodela got death threats from Islamist groups, and in 2018 they killed Shajahan Bachu, who was the writer and publisher of Bishakha Publications.

Muhammed Zafar Iqbal

Professor Muhammed Zafar Iqbal is one of the prominent, popular and



Muhammad Zafar Iqbal

progressive writers of Bangladesh. He is always with freethinkers and critical of fundamentalists, which is why several times he has received death threats. On March 3, 2018, Foyzur Rahman, a self-motivated assailant, attacked Iqbal. He survived. Police arrested the attacker.

Nazimuddin Samad

Extremists killed Nazimuddin Samad on April 6, 2016. He mainly wrote on Facebook and was killed only for his Facebook posts and comments. Samad was a law student at Jagannath University and on his way home a band of terrorists stopped him on the street and launched an attack with sharp machetes. The terrorists then shot him to ensure his death. Ansar al-Islam claimed responsibility.

Xulhaz Mannan and Mahbub Tanoy

The magazine Roopban was dedicated to the news and well-being of LGBTQ community of Bangladesh. In 2016, extremists killed Xulhaz Mannan, who was the editor of Roopban. On the same day, Mahbub Tanoy was also killed by Ansar al-Islam. Tanoy was a cultural activist, theatre worker and an activist for LGBTQ rights.

Government actions

Various Islamist organizations demanded arrest of bloggers. To meet their demand, the government ordered security groups to make a list of bloggers who defame religion, especially Islam. On March

From the archives

Science reveals the code of the universe

This essay appeared in *The Humanist* magazine, September/October 1988, and was reprinted in Haught's 2007 book, *Honest Doubt*.)

By James A. Haught

Did you know that Albert Einstein, although Jewish, went through a brief childhood phase of devout Christianity?

In an autobiographical sketch written at age 67, he described his short-lived faith, planted in him by daily indoctrination at a Catholic school to which his parents had sent him:

“Thus I came — despite the fact that I was the son of entirely irreligious (Jewish) parents — to a deep religiosity, which, however, found an abrupt ending at the age of 12. Through the reading of popular scientific books, I soon reached the conviction that much in the stories of the bible could not be true.

“The consequence was a positively fanatic freethinking, coupled with the impression that youth is intentionally being deceived by the state through lies. It was a crushing impression.

“Suspicion against every kind of authority grew out of this experience, a skeptical attitude toward the convictions which were alive in any specific social environment — an attitude which has never left me, even though later on, because of a better insight into the causal connections, it lost some of its original poignancy.

“It is quite clear to me that the religious paradise of youth, which was thus lost, was a first attempt to free myself from the chains of the ‘merely personal,’ from an existence which is dominated by wishes, hopes and primitive feelings. Out yonder there was this huge world, which exists independently of us human beings and which stands before us like a great, eternal riddle, at least partially accessible to our inspection and thinking. The contemplation of this world beckoned like a liberation. . .

“The road to this paradise was not as comfortable and alluring as the road to the religious paradise, but it has proved itself as trustworthy, and I have never regretted having chosen it.”

Commenting on Einstein’s reminiscence, physicist Heinz Pagels wrote:

“What this passage reveals is a conversion from personal religion to the ‘cosmic religion’ of science, an experience which changed him for the rest of his life. Einstein saw that the universe is governed by laws that can be known by us but that are independent of our thoughts and feelings.

“The existence of this cosmic code — the laws of material reality as confirmed by experience — is the bedrock faith that moves the natural scientist. The scientist sees in that code the eternal structure of reality, not as imposed by man or tradition but as written into the very substance of the universe. This recognition of the nature of the universe can come as a profound and moving experience to the young mind.”

Pondering the universe

Looking into the soul of the universe isn’t just for world-class physicists. It can happen to anyone who ponders the awesome discoveries of science, from quarks

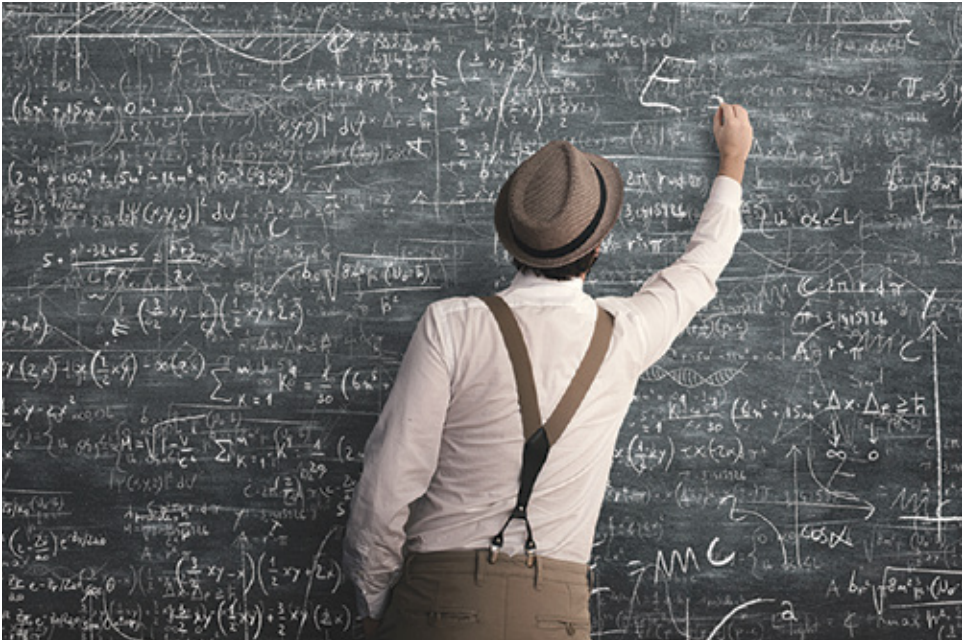


Image by Shutterstock

to quasars.

When I was a farm boy in rural West Virginia, my grandfather taught me the orbits of Earth and the moon, and I thought it was utterly amazing that these colossal balls weighing quintillions of tons whirled and circled and rolled forever in open space — and that we live on one of them.

When I studied chemistry in high school and learned the combining valences of atoms, I thought it was utterly amazing that this hidden code governs virtually all matter — Earth and the moon, our bodies, trees, water, air. How could atoms lock together into substances because of gaps in their outer layers of electrons — electrons eternally streaking at nearly the speed of light?

Why do the mysterious electrical parts of atoms whirl forever, like the planets and stars?

Why do electrically neutral atoms seize onto each other, just because their outer electrons lack the magic number of eight?

Why do they turn into remarkably different things as they combine? Hydrogen gas and oxygen gas are nothing like water, yet they constitute it. Some carbon atoms lock in tetrahedrons to become diamonds; others lock in layers of six-sided carbon rings to become graphite pencil lead.

Why do atoms link into carbon-based molecules that link into amino acids that link into proteins that link into living cells as complex as whole cities — and why does all this link into a thinking, feeling, loving, fearing, aging, dying human?

How can a combination of amino acids write a symphony or join the Republican party or commit stock fraud or feel patriotism for a section of Earth likewise composed of molecules?

The old “planetary” model of the atom was envisioned like a solar system — orbits around a nucleus. This raised a far-out theory that our solar system might be an atom in some stupefyingly larger universe, and that our atoms might be tiny solar systems with people living on some of the particles. I first encountered this idea in a Captain Marvel comic book.

The great astronomer Harlow Shapley once gave a talk at West Virginia State University. I hung around afterward and asked him, “What’s the name of the theory that atoms might be solar systems?” He

looked at me and said, “The name of it is damn nonsense.” I later learned that it’s called the subatomic universe theory — but Shapley’s name probably is better.

Astonishing truths

During this period, when I was muddling over the boggling impossibilities that science revealed, I started reading books on Einstein and relativity, and found that his scientific truth was even more astonishing. What our common sense tells us is real can’t be real if space shrinks to nonexistence or time runs slower and stops under some conditions.

I hatched mental experiments that short-circuited my brain. For example, Einstein says the speed of light is the great constant of the universe — nothing can go faster. He also says all speeds are relative between moving objects. Well, if you strike a match, photons of visible light fly out in all directions. If one photon is going west at the speed of light and another is going east at the speed of light, how fast are they separating from each other?

It gets even worse when you read quantum physics. The more I studied, the more I developed an eerie sense that the world we think we inhabit and all existing things are some sort of fiction.

For example, take steel. It can be a 100-foot bridge girder or it can be the coil of a bass piano string, a long wire spiraled into a hard spring. All the curves of that spring are composed of iron atoms locked rigidly to each other in a strong crystal lattice that is nearly unbreakable.

And yet, those atoms are basically empty. They are a void of unknowable electrical charges, which don’t actually touch each other. They are virtually a vacuum. They are as empty as the solar system. If you look at the night sky and see how remote the planets are, that’s how remote the parts of an atom are from each other.

If an atom were the size of a 14-story building, the nucleus would be a grain of salt in the middle of the seventh floor, too tiny to be seen. Therefore, heavy, rigid steel doesn’t exist the way we think it does. It’s 99.999999 percent vacuum — as vacant as the night sky.

Sometimes I picture atoms as soap bubbles: empty but bumping against each other and sticking together. The buzzing outer electrons are negative, and they repel the negative electron clouds of adjoining atoms. This holds

the atoms apart and gives them an illusion of solidity. Yet, they are bound to each other by valence bonds and hydrogen bonds and Van der Waals bonds and other electrical links.

Atom emptiness is the key to white dwarfs, pulsars and black holes.

At the end of their life cycles, stars explode. Then, what’s left of them collapses, and gravity pulls the collapsing material into incredible density. If the residue is small, compressed electrons in the seething stellar plasma of crushed atoms push back fiercely and resist further collapse. This produces a white dwarf that is nearly impossible to comprehend. The material of a white dwarf weighs around 10 tons per thimbleful. How could something the size of a thimble be so heavy that 100 strong men couldn’t lift it? It might crush a house. A large crane would be required to pick it up.

But that’s just the first step in removing the empty space inside atoms. A teenage genius, Subrahmanyan Chandrasekhar, computed that, if a collapsing star has 1.4 times the mass of our sun, its gravity would be too great to be stopped by the resistance of the electrons. He didn’t know it, but he was predicting pulsars, or neutron stars, which later were discovered. Their enormous gravity squeezes the electrons into the nucleus of each atom, where they merge with protons to form a solid mass of neutrons. This material weighs about 10 million tons per cubic centimeter. A cc is the size of a bouillon cube. Can you imagine a bouillon cube weighing more than the World Trade Center? But that’s what matter is when the empty space is removed between the nucleus and the electrons of atoms.

If 10 million tons of actual substance is the size of a bouillon cube, how much real material is in a 180-pound man or a 120-pound woman? Not as much as a dust speck. Not enough to see with a microscope. Our 5-foot or 6-foot bodies, like all material things, are an illusion made of vacuum and whirling electrical charges.

It gets worse. Even the packed neutrons in a pulsar are not basic material. They, too, are empty and compressible. If the remains of a collapsing star are 3.2 times larger than our sun, the gravity is too strong to be checked at the pulsar level. The collapse continues until it passes the point of no return — the Schwarzschild Radius — and becomes a black hole, the ultimate pit of gravity, where everything is compressed to nothing.

If planet Earth were squeezed to its Schwarzschild Radius, it would be the size of a pearl. Can anyone imagine the matter of the entire Earth being reduced to fingernail size — but retaining all its weight — and continuing to shrink beyond that point?

This isn’t Captain Marvel comics. Pulsars are real. So are black holes, the astrophysicists say. If they are actuality, then what is our everyday world?

The nonreality of matter is just one of many enigmas that science reveals. Consider these:

- As we lie “still” in bed, we are flying 67,000 miles an hour around the sun and 600,000 miles an hour around the Milky Way galaxy.

- When we see the North Star, we are looking back in time to the medie-

Cliff Richards Student Activist Award

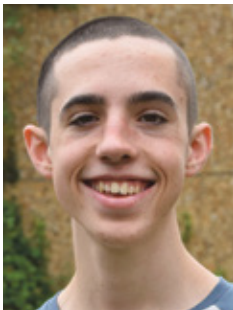
Debate was chance to break the rules

Alex Torrez received FFRF's \$1,000 Student Activist Award, endowed by a generous couple in the Northwest who prefer anonymity.

By Alex Torrez

I'm a home-schooled high school junior and I've been competing in national circuit Lincoln-Douglas Debate competition for three years. I'm also an atheist.

Debate has caused me to dramatically change the way I look at the world and converse with others. It's the single most important thing I've done since I started high school. We debate a resolution that changes every two months, but usually revolves around a proposed policy, such as "The United States should implement a federal jobs guarantee," or "States ought to abolish their nuclear arsenals."

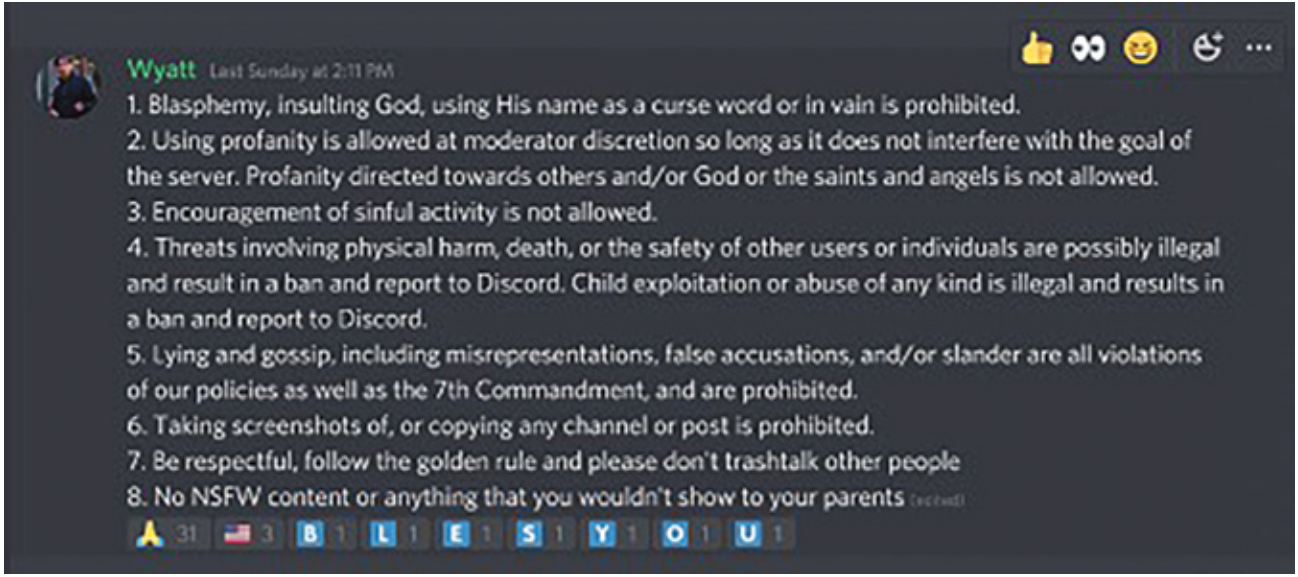


Alex Torrez

When Covid-19 hit, debate went from being an in-person activity hosted by high schools and colleges around the country to an online platform. The first major online tournament was hosted by Strake Jesuit High School in Texas. It drew nearly 200 participants, making it one of the most highly attended tournaments of the year.

After signing up, I was sent to the rules page. The rules for this tournament — the first of its kind — specifically allowed debaters to use profanity, unless that profanity was "blasphemy" or "directed toward others and/or God or the saints and angels." This tournament put three expressly Christian rules ahead of the rule prohibiting *child exploitation or threats of physical harm*!

I was shocked. But then I realized that this was the perfect opportunity to use my experience as both a debater and an atheist to not only raise awareness about atheist voices in debate, but also to call attention to the very real possibility that we could be excluded from all major debate tournaments going forward if they modeled themselves after this one. I



couldn't let that happen.

Like any good debater, I started by doing the research. I found peer-reviewed academic literature by psychologist Will Gervais showing that atheists are viewed as negatively as rapists. I read psychology journals proving that people are biased in favor of moral arguments when made by theists and against those same arguments when made by atheists. I also found evidence of real-world violence against atheists. But I still wasn't sure how to turn all of that into a coherent debate case.

Then it hit me: civil disobedience. I was going to break the rules — and encourage others to break them too. I was going to accept whatever punishment they handed down for breaking them, and I was going to change this event forever. Rule 2 specified that profanity was OK, as long as it wasn't directed towards others.

Here's how I opened my speech: "Fuck God and all his stupid fucking angels!" (I didn't say I was subtle.)

Then, I ran my case. I explained the research, and I wove everything together into an argument for why the judge had to join me in civil disobedience to protest. To be honest, I don't think I've ever debated as well as

I did in that round. And, after I finished my last speech and sat down, I looked at the server and realized that more than 50 people had joined the online room as observers! My room. Throughout the round, word had spread and people gathered to watch.

I lost that round. Ten minutes later, I was kicked out of the entire tournament for violating the rules.

For a second, I was hurt. I was the better debater. I wanted to win. But then I saw the bigger picture: 50 people learned something that day. A judge asked me for a copy of my case. People noticed.

Since that day, there have been dozens of online debate tournaments, including another one hosted by Strake Jesuit. And you know what? None of them use those bigoted rules. Now, I don't know how much of that is due to my civil disobedience (if any), but I'm proud that I was the first person to raise the issue.

I'm a debater, and I'm an atheist.

Alex Torrez, 18, is a homeschooled 11th-grade student from Arbutus, Md. When not competing in high school debates, Alex enjoys designing board and card games, as well as playing a variety of other tabletop games such as Magic: The Gathering.

Bangladesh

Continued from page 11

31, 2013, Directorate General of Forces Intelligence and leaders of the religious organization Bangladesh Awami Olama League together made a list of bloggers who were allegedly critical of religions. Most of the bloggers either killed or arrested were from that list.

The government did nothing to stop this open declaration and motivation for assassination. Rather, government and various executive bodies started victim-blaming. After the assassination of every blogger, the government became far more concerned with what the bloggers wrote rather than arresting those who were involved in the butchery. Here are some of the actions against freethinking bloggers:

- The prime minister of Bangladesh told the media on Nov. 8, 2015, that bloggers should not criticize religion.
- The law and order-related cabinet committee on Aug. 10, 2015, decided to arrest anyone who writes anything

against religion.

- Just after the assassination of Nazimuddin Samad, the interior minister briefed the media on April 7, 2016, that the government would investigate his writings.
- Parliamentarian Selim Osman advocated on Nov. 12, 2016, that people should report atheists.
- The government ordered the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission to open an email account and asked for the public to send detailed information of those who defame Islam.

So, it's very clear that Bangladesh became an extermination ground for nonbelievers and alternative thinkers. Citizens usually ask their government to save them from the aggression of extremists, but that's not what we see in Bangladesh! To save our lives, we have had to leave our beloved country forever to a completely unknown situation and culture. I am one of those exiled.

Science

Continued from page 12

val era, because the light we see began traveling 680 years ago.

- Every second, the visible universe expands by a volume as large as the Milky Way.
- Peaceful atoms of rock, lying still for centuries, have a power in their nuclei that is beyond comprehension: Only as much matter as a dime was transformed into the energy that destroyed Hiroshima and killed 140,000 people.
- The smallness of atoms likewise is beyond grasping: A cubic inch of air contains 300 billion billion molecules, all moving at 1,000 miles an hour and hitting each other 5 billion times a second.
- Although atoms are generally indestructible, their electrons keep coming loose to produce lightning and the other electricity of the world.
- The light we see, the sun warmth we feel, the radio and television signals we receive, the X-rays we use — all of these come from electrons. Electromagnetic radiation is emitted by excited electrons oscillating or dropping to lower layers in atoms.
- Most life on Earth comes from a tiny electric current: When sunlight hits chlorophyll molecules, excited outer electrons jump through a mosaic of molecules, and this energy drives plant processes.
- As for the DNA that conveys our genetic code, there is six feet of it inside each cell or our bodies. The body has more than 10 trillion cells, so every person contains several billion miles of DNA.
- The "spin" of electrons is so power-

ful it can suspend railway locomotives in the air (in "maglev," or magnetic levitation, trains). Electrons of most atoms are in balanced pairs with opposite spin, so the atoms have no magnetism. But ferrous atoms have a few electrons that aren't balanced, giving each atom a magnetic field. When an electrical current induces all the atoms in a piece of iron to align their polarity in unison, a strong electromagnet is created.

These amazing realities are profoundly important, yet when I try to discuss science with my chums in the news business or music circles or political groups, they look at me as if I'm babbling in the Unknown Tongue. They are highly educated people who know multitudes of facts, but they shrug at what I think are the most crucial facts of all.

If religion and philosophy are an attempt to comprehend the universe and the meaning of life, then science is the best portal. Every time I learn another rule of subatomic forces or cell behavior or galactic motion, I get an eerie sense of glimpsing the mysterious code underlying our existence. Physicists often apply the word God to this order, but they don't mean God in the church sense.

In a world of supernatural religions, mystical religions, guilt-based religions, violent religions, money-collecting religions, social club religions and cult religions, grasping the code of the universe is the most religious experience I know.

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

FFRF'S

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Wednesdays at Noon (Central)

Strong link ties Christianity, white supremacy

This article first appeared on the Religion News Service site on Jan. 7 and is reprinted with permission.

By Robert P. Jones

If there was one thing of value to come out of the shameful chaos of the attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, it's that the horrific events made plain the powerful ideological and theological currents of American politics that often stay just under the surface.



The emblems carried by the rioters — particularly the comfortable juxtaposition of Christian and white supremacist symbols — bear witness to these forces. There were crosses, “Jesus Saves” signs and “Jesus 2020” flags that mimicked the design of the Trump flags. Some of the participants, organized as part of a “Jericho March,” blew shofars — Jewish ritual horns — as they circled the Capitol, reenacting the siege of the city of Jericho by the Israelites described in the Book of Joshua in the Hebrew bible. And one video showed the Christian flag — white, with a blue canton containing a red cross, used by many white evangelical churches — being paraded into an empty congressional chamber after the doors had been breached and members of Congress evacuated.

I recall that same flag standing behind the pulpit of my Mississippi Southern Baptist church, where as a child I was led in a pledge of allegiance to both the American and Christian flags.

The Atlantic’s Jeffrey Goldberg wrote that “the conflation of Trump and Jesus was a common theme at the rally”



A man wears his thoughts on his cap outside the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6 during the insurrection.

among people he interviewed. “It’s all in the bible. Everything is predicted. Donald Trump is in the bible. Get yourself ready,” one told him. “Give it up if you believe in Jesus!” said another, then “Give it up if you believe in Donald Trump!” — which elicited loud cheers from nearby rioters.

Comfortably intermingled with Christian rhetoric and these Christian icons were explicit symbols of white supremacy. Outside the Capitol, Trump supporters erected a large wooden gallows with a bright orange noose ominously dangling from the center. These Trump supporters managed to do something the Confederate army was never able to accomplish — fly the Confederate battle flag inside the U.S. Capitol.

One widely shared image showed a ri-

oter with the Confederate flag strolling past a portrait of William H. Seward, an anti-slavery advocate and Abraham Lincoln’s secretary of state, who was seriously wounded as part of the broad assassination plot in 1865 that killed Lincoln.

At least one protester sported a “Camp Auschwitz” hoodie, a reference to a concentration camp where over 1 million Jews were killed by the Nazis, even as others made outlandish comparisons between Christians as victims of American society and European Jews in the Third Reich.

Crowds also formed at state capitols in Ohio, Kansas and Michigan.

If we are to understand the events of Jan. 6, and the challenges ahead for us as a nation, we must take these symbols and this rhetoric seriously, not in isola-

tion, but in combination and conversation with each other.

This seditious mob was motivated not just by loyalty to Trump, but by an unholy amalgamation of white supremacy and Christianity that has plagued our nation since its inception and is still with us today. As I show in my book *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity*, there remains a disturbingly strong link between holding racist attitudes and identifying as a white Christian.

We should remember that this moment, and the divisions of the last four years, are set against the upheaval of religious and demographic change.

Since 2008, the country has moved from being a majority Christian nation to one that is no longer a majority Christian nation (from 54 percent white and Christian to 44 percent white and Christian). This change took place during the tenure of our first African-American president. The dysfunction and violence we are seeing is in large part an attempt to preserve a vision of white Christian America that is passing from the scene.

The willingness among those in the crowd Jan. 6 to believe outlandish conspiracy theories and the unwillingness to accept the election results are born from the same source: a desperate desire by some white Christians to hang onto ownership of a diversifying country.

As many have rightly declared, the violent disregard for the rule of law we witnessed is not the best of who we are. But if we’re going to heal our nation, we need to confess that it remains, still today, a troubling part of America’s political and religious heritage.

Robert P. Jones is the CEO and founder of PRRI and the author of *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* and *The End of White Christian America*.

OVERHEARD

Christian Nationalists’ acceptance of President Trump’s spectacular turpitude these past four years was a good measure of just how dire they think our situation is. Even a corrupt sociopath was better, in their eyes, than the horrifying freedom that religious moderates and liberals, along with the many Americans who don’t happen to be religious, offer the world.

Katherine Stewart, in her column, “The roots of Josh Hawley’s rage.”
The New York Times, 1-11-21

Let the science speak.
Dr. Anthony Fauci, discussing how “liberating” it is not to be muzzled by President Trump.
The New York Times, 1-25-21

Facts matter, and the facts couldn’t be clearer: Abortion is essential health care and plays a critical role in reducing health and social inequities in the United States and globally.
Herminia Palacio and Daniel Grossman in their op-ed, “How the Biden administration should stand up for abortion rights.”
Washington Post, 1-27-21

You can’t understand what happened today without wrestling with Christian Nationalism. . . . They provided the political and theological underpinnings of this, and it has allowed

anarchy to reign.
Andrew Whitehead, a sociologist at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, talking about the Capitol insurrection on Jan. 6. He added that white evangelical movements have tolerated far-right extremism well before President Trump.
The New York Times, 1-12-21

We know, for example, that the [Supreme] court is exquisitely attentive to the slightest hint of discrimination



Linda Greehouse

Apocalyptic evangelical beliefs about the end of the world and the coming divine judgment blur with QAnon conspiracy theories.
Elizabeth Dias and Ruth Graham, in their article, “How white evangelical Christians fused with Trump extremism.”
The New York Times, 1-11-21

The Capitol insurrection was as

Christian Nationalist as it gets. . . . [It] reflects a mindset that clearly merges national power and divine authority, believing God demands American leadership be wrested from godless usurpers and entrusted to true patriots who must be willing to shed blood (their own and others’) for God and country.
Samuel L. Perry, co-author of Taking America Back for God.
The New York Times, 1-28-21

The big question going forward is whether it is possible to integrate Christian Nationalists back within a pluralistic civil society when so many of their views are out of the mainstream — or whether they will continue to be a source of right-wing extremists willing to undermine American institutions on the basis of conspiracy theories.
Paul A. Djupe and Jacob Dennen, in their op-ed, “Christian Nationalists and QAnon followers tend to be anti-Semitic. That was seen in the Capitol attack.”
Washington Post, 1-26-21

It is not piety but policy that matters most. The real triumph is when evangelical convictions become encoded into law.
Gerardo Marti, a professor of sociology at Davidson College, on the fundamental strategic shift from the Religious Right toward a more embattled approach.

The New York Times, 1-28-21
I grew up in the Christian Nationalist movement. . . . I came to understand how racism is ingrained in the teachings of the white evangelical church. . . . I worry that neither the white evangelical church nor the public at large understands the danger that Christian Nationalism poses to democracy.
Dierdre Sugiuchi, in her column, “I grew up evangelical and the Christian Nationalist insurrection did not surprise me.”
Religion Dispatches, 1-28-21

Many observers commented on the jarring mixture of Christian, nationalist and racist symbolism amongst the insurrectionists: there were Christian crosses and Jesus Saves banners, Trump flags and American flags, fascist insignia and a ‘Camp Auschwitz’ hoodie. Some saw apples and oranges. But it was really a fruit cocktail: White Christian Nationalism.
Philip Gorski, professor of sociology at Yale.
The New York Times, 1-28-21

Christian Nationalism is the pursuit of tribal power, not the common good; it is identity politics for right-wing (mostly white) Christians.
Paul D. Miller, professor of international affairs at Georgetown University.
The New York Times 1-28-21

Christian Nationalist senators who voted ‘Nay’

Although many senators with extremist views ended up voting for President Biden’s certification, the following eight senators who voted “Nay” fall squarely in the ranks of Christian Nationalists.

See sources at ffrf.us/senate and ffrf.us/house.

TED CRUZ (Texas)

Cruz has served in the Senate since 2013 and attends Houston’s First Baptist Church. His father was a Catholic Cuban refugee who became a born-again Christian and a traveling preacher who pastors a Dallas church and directs Purifying Fire Ministries. Cruz attended two private evangelical high schools, and kicked off his Senate campaign at Jerry Falwell’s Liberty University.

As solicitor general of Texas, Cruz fought for the “constitutionality of the Ten Commandments monument at the Texas Capitol and the words ‘under God’ in the Pledge of Allegiance.” He told Liberty University students “our rights don’t come from man. They come from God Almighty.” “God” and “religious liberty” were primary stump speech themes for Cruz, according to Religion News Service.

Cruz announced a “national prayer team” for his presidential campaign. He has been pictured making a show of kneeling in prayer outside the White House. Cruz has called to amend the Constitution to prohibit same-sex marriages. He has called for a ban of medical abortion.

After FFRF complained about public school cheerleaders routinely opening games by holding banners with bible verses for football players to run through, Cruz sided with the cheerleaders. FFRF condemned Cruz’s statement on school shootings supposedly being caused by a lack of school prayer. FFRF letters to him include one condemning his climate change denial.

JOSH HAWLEY (Missouri)

Hawley, who was elected in 2018, was raised Methodist, but now identifies as evangelical. He formerly clerked for Chief Justice John Roberts and worked for the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty. He is one of the most overtly Christian Nationalist members of Congress, with his stated goal to “transform our society to reflect the gospel truth and lordship of Jesus Christ.” Journalist Katherine Stewart has thoroughly documented Hawley’s Christian Nationalist views in a



recent New York Times op-ed.

At a “Pastors and Pews” event in Kansas City when he was Missouri attorney general (which he referred to as a “form of ministry”), Hawley stated:

“There is only one god. That god is Jesus Christ, who is seated on the throne and is lord over all and [...] as believers we are charged to take that message — that the lord reigns, that Jesus Christ reigns, that he is risen and is seated on the throne — . . . our charge [is to] take the lordship of Christ, that message, into the public realm and to seek the obedience of the nations — of our nation . . . to influence our society, and even more than that, to transform our society to reflect the gospel truth and lordship of Jesus Christ.”

FFRF wrote him a letter over this egregious violation. Hawley, as Missouri attorney general, joined an amicus brief against FFRF’s challenge of the IRS’ preferential housing allowance for ministers, as well as FFRF’s litigation against a cross in a Pensacola, Fla., public park.

Hawley notably participated in a “worship protest” on the Mall last October with “prayer, singing and baptisms, but virtually no social distancing or mask-wearing,” where he prayed over the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett for the Supreme Court. As a member of the House Judiciary Committee, he said he would not support any SCOTUS nominee unless they had stated on the record prior to their nomination that *Roe v. Wade* was “wrongly decided.”

CINDY HYDE-SMITH (Mississippi)

Hyde-Smith, elected in 2018, is a member of the Macedonia Baptist Church, and reportedly “attended and graduated



from a segregation academy that was set up so that white parents could avoid having to send their children to schools with Black students.” She was once photographed in a Confederate army cap and is anti-gay.

“Cindy believes all children, including the unborn, are guaranteed the right to life by our Creator,” her campaign website proclaims. “As senator, Cindy will fight for and vote to confirm pro-life judges who will interpret the law as written, and not legislate from the bench.”

She filed an amicus brief last October supporting a so-called “religious freedom lawsuit” filed by a church against D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser over social distancing guidelines. She signed an amicus brief in support of the Little Sisters of the Poor lawsuit challenging the right of workers to access birth control under the Obamacare contraceptive mandate. She regularly tweets bible quotes. FFRF contacted her a few months ago regarding complaints by constituents over her use

of her official governmental Facebook page to promote her religious views.

CYNTHIA LUMMIS (Wyoming)

Lummis, a newly elected senator, is a member of the archconservative Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: “I’m a Christian,



and I have seen a tremendous rise in anti-Christian activities in the United States and elsewhere.” Her Facebook post on Dec. 8, 2020, began: “Calling All Prayer Warriors!”

She has been endorsed by Concerned Women for America, among other extremist evangelical groups. Her campaign website promised to “fight for religious freedom and the rights of the unborn.” As a U.S. representative, she played a key role in attacking Planned Parenthood in 2015 over phony charges that the group profits from selling fetal tissue for research. She has co-sponsored a variety of anti-LGBTQ bills.

JOHN KENNEDY (Louisiana)

Kennedy, elected in 2016, is described by his campaign website as a founding member of his local Methodist Church.



His stated priorities include “defending the unborn” because life “is a gift from God,” and advocating “conscience protections for health care providers, insurers, and business owners.” Among the legislation he has sponsored is a bill to allow a state to exclude from its Medicaid program a provider who performs abortions.

“I am a Christian and believe that Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life. That belief informs every decision I make and my commitment to serve the public.

“It was only by God’s divine providence that our Founders established the Constitution and the checks and balances that now define our great nation,” Kennedy has said. The American Family Association reported he supports a Judeo-Christian framework of morality and considers religious liberty at risk in the United States.

Following President Trump’s comments that Haiti and Africa were “shithole nations,” Kennedy defended him, saying Trump is “not a racist.” FFRF sent a complaint letter to Kennedy over a religiously exclusionary Thanksgiving tweet in 2019, in which Kennedy quoted from the bible and wrote: “The people of Louisiana are hard-working, fun-loving and God-fearing.”

ROGER MARSHALL (Kansas)

Marshall, who was elected to the Senate in 2020 after serving in the House since 2016, identifies as a “nondenominational Christian.” “Faith and community continue to be pillars in Marshall’s life. He taught Sunday school for over 25 years and has served as an elder, deacon and board chairman of his church,” says his Senate website.



He was endorsed by Family Research Council President Tony Perkins for standing “strong for faith, family, and freedom.” He grew up in a strict Christian household with a police chief father who believed in corporal punishment. The OB-GYN doctor earned an A-rating from the anti-abortion Susan B. Anthony List. He was a major backer of Kyle Duncan, who was confirmed to the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, despite his anti-LGBTQ rights record.

Marshall has apparently “tried to read the bible every day since I was 10 years of age, so a lot of the wisdom I’ve been given comes from reading the bible,” he told the Kansas City Star. “Ultimately, that’s the issue . . . every decision I make: Is it consistent with my faith both in word and action.”

RICK SCOTT (Florida)

Scott, elected in 2018, previously the governor of Florida, identifies his religion as “Christian.” Despite getting Covid-19,



he supported a resolution saying “there is no pandemic exception to the First Amendment,” condemning governors and mayors for using emergency powers “as a sword to go after churches, synagogues, mosques

and other houses of worship.” As governor, he signed a bill to defund Planned Parenthood, spending thousands of tax dollars on a bogus investigation of the organization, and signed into law harassing anti-abortion bills.

He also signed into law a so-called religious expression bill requiring public schools to allow students to lead prayers during school-sanctioned events.

FFRF had urged Scott as governor to cancel the Florida Faith Symposium and objected to his involvement in another faith-based conference.

TOMMY TUBERVILLE (Alabama)

Tuberville assumed his Senate seat in January. He cites the Church of Christ as his denomination. As head coach at several



college football teams including Auburn University and the University of Cincinnati, Tuberville was a prominent villain in FFRF’s Pray to Play report, which exposed how public university football teams use chaplains to impose

Christianity on student athletes in violation of the First Amendment. He also has spoken against nonwhite immigrants, warning that “Shariah law has taken over.”

“A Christian conservative, I will always stand up for those who can’t do so on their own. I will fight to protect the sanctity of every human life because future generations may very well look back at the current wave of infanticide sweeping across our nation as this generation’s holocaust,” says his campaign website.

“I do believe today that God sent Donald Trump to us,” Tuberville told Alabama Farmers Federation in a campaign speech. “We’re losing Christianity in this country. We’ve got to get it back. But it starts by teaching it. We should teach all religions in our schools. We’ve definitely got to get God back in our schools.”

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Christian Nationalist House members who voted ‘Nay’

The following is a representative sampling of the Christian Nationalist views of some of the 138 House members who voted unsuccessfully to nullify the will of the electorate on Jan. 6.

ROBERT ADERHOLT (Alabama’s 4th District)

Aderholt, serving his 13th term, is the evangelical son of a Congregationalist lay minister. As a member of the secretive Christian Nationalist organization known as “The Family,” which organizes the annual National Prayer Breakfast, he reportedly traveled to Romania and met with a local Holocaust denier.

He sponsored a House bill, the “Ten Commandments Defense Act Amendment” in 1999, to permit the display of the Ten Commandments in schools, despite a Supreme Court decision to the contrary, and in other public buildings. He issued a press release applauding the court dismissal of a lawsuit FFRF and others had taken challenging “In God We Trust” on U.S. currency. He and 40 other members of Congress joined an amicus brief filed by the American Center for Law and Justice (run by Jay Sekulow, later serving as President Trump’s personal attorney) against the lawsuit. He also signed a letter in support of coach Joseph Kennedy, after the Bremerton School District, Wash., took action against the proselytizing coach following an FFRF complaint.

RICK ALLEN (Georgia’s 12th District)

Allen, elected in 2014, is an active member of Trinity on the Hill United Methodist Church. Following the mass shooting at an LGBTQ nightclub in Orlando, Fla., in 2016, he read bible verses from Romans 1:18–32 and Revelations 22:18–19, which say homosexuals are “worthy of death,” to the House Republican Conference. When called on it, he said, “Well, I’m imperfect. And I consider that we are all imperfect and we all fall short of the glory of God, which is why we need a savior, by the way.”

Allen issued a press release for National Bible Week, “God’s Word Can Heal our Nation,” recognizing “the importance of honoring God’s word.” “I made a covenant with God, and that covenant was to put Him first . . . If we debated what the scripture says about these issues [that divide us in this chamber], we would all come to agreement that God is correct and that His way is the only way.”

Allen, like Aderholt, signed a letter in support of Joseph Kennedy after the Bremerton School District in Washington took action against the proselytizing coach following an FFRF complaint. Among the 47 members of Congress who signed on were Reps. Paul Gosar, Louie Gohmert, Barry Loudermilk and Tim Walberg (see their entries).

BRIAN BABIN (Texas’ 36th District)

Babin, first elected to the House in 2014, is a member of the First Baptist Church of Woodville, where he is a deacon, Sunday School teacher, choir member and member of the all-male Gideons International. “Pro-Life” is a “key issue” on his official



website, where he lists that he is a member of the House Pro-Life Caucus, favors permanent defunding of Planned Parenthood, and would prevent taxpayer funding of abortion altogether. He condemned the *Obergefell* Supreme Court decision allowing same-sex marriages. He has accused the “radical Left” of “vandalizing/destroying churches.”

Babin withdrew an op-ed, “Religious freedom is at risk in a Biden administration,” after the Washington Examiner edited his references casting doubt on the outcome of the 2020 election. After non-religious constituents complained about receiving sectarian Easter and Christmas emails from Babin, FFRF sent him complaint letters for using his official office to proselytize and endorse religion.

ANDY BIGGS (Arizona’s 5th District)

Biggs, elected in 2016, is Mormon. As state representative in 2013, he was tied to the religious advocacy group United Families International, which the Southern Poverty Law Center has labeled an anti-gay “hate group.”

Biggs is chair of the House Freedom Caucus, a reactionary congressional group. Biggs “was seen by leaders of the Stop the Steal movement as an inspiration,” and spoke at a 2015 event where a member of Oath Keepers called for hanging Sen. John McCain.

Ali Alexander, the man who says he came up with the idea to hold an insurrection, claims Reps. Biggs, Brooks and Gosar (see separate entries) were co-planners. Says Alexander: “We four schemed up of putting max pressure on Congress while they were voting so that who we couldn’t lobby, we could change the hearts and the minds of Republicans who were in that body hearing our loud roar from outside.” Biggs denies any involvement, but two of his brothers subsequently wrote a public letter calling for Biggs’ removal, saying he is “at least partially to blame” for the deadly assault.

DAN BISHOP (North Carolina’s 9th District)

Bishop, elected in 2019, identifies as “Christian.”

As a state legislator, he reportedly threatened to sue media outlets if they broadcast an ad about his 2017 investment in Gab, a website frequented by white nationalists, after the neo-Nazi violent rally in Charlottesville. He authored HB2, the notorious 2016 “bathroom” bill that discriminates against transgender people and others. The Charlotte Observer opined that he had a decade-long “history of discrimination.” Bishop reportedly compared LGBTQ activists to the Taliban and said “I don’t fear man. I fear God.” He sought “the Lord’s help and your prayers” in passing the bathroom bill.



LAUREN BOEBERT (Colorado’s 3rd District)

Boebert, who just took office, says she became a born-again Christian in 2009.

Boebert has had skirmishes with the law, and is primarily known as a gun-rights activist who slings a pistol on her hip, and for refusing to open her bag for Capitol police after it set off a metal detector. She promised to remind “Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the Squad and the rest of these left-wing lunatics” in Congress “that our belief in God, Country and Family are what built the United States of America into the greatest nation the world has ever known.”

MO BROOKS (Alabama’s 5th District)

Brooks, a six-term member of Congress, converted to Mormonism in 1978, but now considers himself a nondenominational Christian, citing his wife and “Jesus Christ” as his greatest influences. Brooks derided last summer’s Supreme Court case ruling that Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act extends to LGBTQ citizens.

He is facing House censure for an incendiary speech at the Jan. 6 Save America rally near the Capitol, where he said: “Today is the day that American patriots start taking down names and kicking ass.”

In defending that action, he said: “I make no apology for doing my absolute best to inspire patriotic Americans to not give up on our country and to fight back against anti-Christian socialists in the 2022 and 2024 elections. I encourage EVERY citizen to watch my entire rally speech and decide for themselves what kind of America they want: One based on freedom and liberty or one based on *godless dictatorial power*.” [Emphasis added.]

FFRF has written him letters, on behalf of complaining nonreligious constituents, over his promotion of religion over social media and participation in a National Day of Prayer event.

MICHAEL BURGESS (Texas’ 26th District)

Burgess, elected in 2002, is a Reformed Episcopalian. He infamously said in 2013 that because the hands of the male fetus sometimes appear to be gripping its genitals, abortion should be banned at least by 15 or 16 weeks.

JERRY CARL (Alabama’s 1st District)

Carl was just elected. He is a Southern Baptist whose campaign website describes him as “a devoted Christian and deacon at his church who is saved by God’s grace.” In supporting Israel, Carl said: “It has nothing to do with converting Jews to Christianity. When



my Jesus comes back, he’ll come back to where he wants to come back.”

MADISON CAWTHORN (North Carolina’s 11th District)

Cawthorn, newly elected, identifies as Christian. The part-time preacher has tried to convert Jews and Muslims. In response to a question on state/church separation, he replied: “I always think of that question as just so silly.” “[Religion] is the basis of all of my experience and everything I’ve learned, everything that I believe in, how I’ve formed all of my worldview. My family is a bunch of true frickin’ believers.” Cawthorn maintains that “Life begins at conception.”

He visited “Eagle’s Nest,” Hitler’s holiday home, in 2017, where he took selfies and posted them on Instagram. He stated that Hitler’s retreat had been on his “bucket list.” Cawthorn has reportedly referred to Hitler using the honorific of “Führer,” named a company SPQR, a term popular with white nationalists, and displays an early American flag in his home that has been appropriated by far-right extremists.

After the November election, FFRF sent an educational letter to Cawthorn correcting his constitutional misconceptions.

MICHAEL CLOUD (Texas’ 27th District)

Cloud, who assumed office in 2018, is a graduate of Oral Roberts University and formerly was communications director at Faith Family Church.

SCOTT DESJARLAIS (Tennessee’s 4th District)

Desjarlais, who took office in 2011, attends an Episcopal church.

The anti-abortion public official reportedly supported the decision of his first wife to have two abortions and testified that he slept with six women during his first marriage, including two patients. A taped phone call has the doctor reportedly offering to take his patient/mistress to Atlanta to have an abortion. Now remarried, Desjarlais maintains he is “a consistent supporter of pro-life values,” and that God has “forgiven me.” The Tennessee Board of Medical Examiners fined and reprimanded him for having sex with patients.

JEFF DUNCAN (South Carolina’s 3rd District)

Duncan first assumed his House office in 2011 and is a member of the First Baptist Church of Clinton, S.C. He routinely uses social media to promote his religious views: “I’m a Christian, I believe in intelligent design,” he said in support of tapping offshore oil reserves. He gave a “Being thankful to God” speech on the floor in 2011, and stated, “My relationship with Jesus Christ is the most important thing in my life.”

FFRF sent him a complaint letter last



April over an official email he sent out to constituents that read in part: “On this Easter weekend, please take time to reflect on the resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ” and promoting the use of a “public prayer line” run by Miracle Hill Ministries.

MATT GAETZ

(Florida’s 1st District)

Gaetz was elected in 2016, and is a member of the First Baptist Church of Fort Walton Beach. He advocates for tougher abortion restrictions and for federal funding of faith-based pregnancy centers. He has said: “It is my sincere hope that *Roe v. Wade* will be overturned

as a consequence of President Trump’s transformational changes to the federal judiciary and our Supreme Court.” He invited Holocaust denier Chuck Johnson to be his guest at the State of the Union.

As a state representative, Gaetz condemned a lawsuit by FFRF and the American Humanist Association to challenge a large Latin cross in a public park in Pensacola: “America will always be a friendly place for the cross and we won’t be taking any down in Northwest Florida.”

From the House floor after the insurrection on Jan. 6, Gaetz spread a lie that members of antifa were in the mob that attacked Congress, which was picked up by Fox News and shared on Facebook. He offered to resign his congressional seat in order to defend Trump at his impeachment trial, calling the “cancellation of the Trump presidency and the Trump movement as one of the biggest threats” to his district.

LOUIE GOHMERT

(Texas’ 1st District)

Gohmert first took House office in 2005, and attends Green Acres Baptist Church in



Tyler, where he has served as a deacon and Sunday school teacher for many years. “He now frequently speaks or preaches at churches throughout his district and around the country,” according to his official House bio.

During a House Judiciary Committee hearing on religious liberty in 2014, Gohmert said: “Either you believe as a Christian that Jesus is the way, the truth, the life, or you don’t,” and if you don’t, you go to hell. He reportedly warned of same-sex marriage leading to bestiality marriages, and blamed the 2012 shooting rampage at the movie theater in Aurora, Colo., on “attacks on Judeo-Christian beliefs” and too few guns.

He gave a House floor speech in 2013 insisting: “No country has ever fallen while it was truly honoring the god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob . . . Because when a nation’s leaders honor that God, that nation is protected. It’s only when it turns away that it falls.”

PAUL GOSAR

(Arizona’s 4th District)

Gosar, serving his fifth term in Congress, is a Roman Catholic. “As a conservative Republican, a medical provider, and a father, I strongly support the sanctity of human life. Nothing is more precious. I believe that life begins at conception,” accord-



ing to his official government website.

He uses social media to promote religion, including this tweet on June 22, 2020: “Shit is gonna get real if you mess with Jesus.” He has reportedly followed several Twitter accounts pushing racism.

MARJORIE TAYLOR GREENE

(Georgia’s 14th District)

Greene was elected in 2020. Her official governmental website puts “Protecting the Unborn” as its first link, even before “About” or “Contact.” “Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene’s number one policy goal is to end abortion in America.” She reportedly promoted the online QAnon conspiracy theories in a 2017 video, but later backtracked.

She has expressed racist, anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim views, including accusing the liberal Jewish philanthropist George Soros of collaborating with the Nazis. Facebook scrubbed her post on Sept. 4, 2020, where she held a rifle next to images of Reps. Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez below the words: “We need strong conservative Christians to go on the offense against these socialists who want to rip our country apart.” Twitter temporarily locked her account on Jan. 17 over continued voter fraud allegations.

She was removed from two committees following a House vote because of her past statements and actions, including videos that have surfaced showing her claims that mass shootings have been staged, and a pattern of online activity showing approval for the notion of executing Democratic leaders and federal agents. These include Greene “liking” a Facebook post in January 2019 that said “a bullet to the head” would be a quick way to remove House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

Another video surfaced in which Greene films herself leading a group through the halls of congressional office buildings ranting about how Reps. Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar are “not really official” because “they swore in on the Quran.” The group’s plan was “to let them know what our law says, that you can’t swear in on the Quran . . . it has to be the bible” and to “go ask them to swear in on the bible.” Of course, no law requires anyone to take an oath on the bible, but this kind of disinformation is a cornerstone of Christian Nationalism.

JIM JORDAN

(Ohio’s 4th District)

Jordan, serving since 2007, is considered an unspecified Protestant. When the Supreme Court approved marriage equality in 2015, Jordan issued a release saying: “I am also concerned that this ruling opens the door for discrimination against those who believe in traditional marriage.” His House website notes: “I am proud to stand and defend the lives of the unborn.” He was the keynote speaker at the Iowa Faith & Freedom Coalition’s Fall Dinner and Rally in 2018.



Jordan was one of 67 Congress members to sign an amicus brief against FFRF’s historic challenge of the National Day of Prayer. FFRF called on the IRS to investigate the American Family Association in 2018, after it sought to influence members to support Jordan to run for House Speaker, in violation of the group’s tax-exempt status.

BARRY LOUDERMILK

(Georgia’s 11th District)

Loudermilk, elected in 2017, is a Southern Baptist, who was endorsed by Christian Nationalist propagandist David Barton, whose “scholarship” has been roundly condemned. Loudermilk was part of a group of evangelical Christians who conducted a barnstorming tour of Georgia to promote “biblical citizenship” and “restoration of biblical values and constitutional principles” as part of Georgia’s runoff election for two U.S. Senate seats. “The tour is headlined by Rick Green, founder of the Christian Nationalist Patriot Academy; conservative Christian author and activist David Barton; and his son Tim, a minister who runs the activist group WallBuilders with his father,” the Washington Post reported.

Loudermilk compared the Supreme Court’s marriage equality decision to the *Dred Scott* opinion upholding slavery. And he portrayed the racist massacre of nine Black churchgoers by a white man in Charleston in 2015 as motivated by anti-Christian persecution rather than racism.



KEVIN MCCARTHY

(California’s 23rd District)

McCarthy, elected in 2012, is a Baptist. After winning House Majority leadership in 2014, he told Ralph Reed’s Faith & Freedom Coalition that he’s “proud to be a Christian” and thanked “my Lord and Savior for his grace, his strength and for never leaving me.” McCarthy was accused of “personally twisting arms on the floor,” to defeat a bill to deny contracts to federal contractors who discriminate against the LGBTQ community.



TROY NEHLS

(Texas’ 22nd District)

Nehls, just sworn in, is a graduate of Liberty University, founded by Rev. Jerry Falwell. He attends Faith United Methodist Church.



When sheriff of Fort Bend County, he suggested churches should choose some members to “pack a heater” while attending Sunday services, following a massacre in a Texas Church. “I would encourage the church congregation to pack their heaters concealed.”

BARRY MOORE

(Alabama’s 2nd District)

Moore, elected in 2010, is a Southern Baptist and a Sunday school teacher and deacon at Hillcrest Baptist Church in Enterprise. He campaigns as having a “true love for God and country.” He is a “strong supporter of Israel” because “The bible is very clear — those who bless Israel will be blessed. That’s one of the things that’s fundamental to my faith.”



He posted a meme that appeared to support Kyle Rittenhouse, charged with killing two protesters of police violence against Black Americans in Kenosha, Wis. He deleted his Twitter

account after attention was drawn to two comments with racial overtones.

BILL POSEY

(Florida’s 8th District)

Posey, serving his fifth term, is a United Methodist.

Posey released the following statement in recognition of the 2012 National Day of Prayer:



“America is rooted in a Judeo-Christian faith. George Washington said, ‘It is impossible to govern the world without God and the bible.’ We are one nation under God — Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD. The Mayflower sailed through uncharted waters to an unknown land — a land that was claimed ‘for the glory of God and the Christian faith.’ — Mayflower Compact, Nov. 11, 1620. Today America is once again on uncharted waters. We need to return to America’s roots and founding principles.”

STEVE SCALISE

(Louisiana’s 1st District)

Scalise, in office since 2008, is Roman Catholic. Scalise gave a speech at a white nationalist convention hosted by a group founded by David Duke, later apologizing. He bills himself as fighting to promote traditional marriage and the right to life.



In a speech before a prayer breakfast in 2019, Scalise credited “faith, heroes and miracles” for surviving after being shot in a 2017 attack against GOP members of Congress practicing for an annual baseball game. He said the United States is based on a “deep belief” in God. “There’s this misconception these days that there is a separation of church and state as if there should be no involvement of God in government,” he stated.

TIM WALBERG

(Michigan’s 7th District)

Walberg, elected in 2006, attended Moody Bible Institute, Taylor University, which is evangelical, and Wheaton College. He spent nearly a decade as a pastor, before being elected to the Michigan State House. He attends Element Church. He’s been an outspoken anti-abortion proponent: “And every life deserves a chance to realize their God-given potential, even the most powerless.”



A critic of Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s emergency pandemic restrictions, he tested positive for Covid-19.

LEE ZELDIN

(New York’s 1st District)

Zeldin, first elected in 2014, is Jewish. He joined a friend-of-the-court brief asking the Supreme Court to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, one of 168 House members who signed on. He supports the First Amendment Defense Act, an anti-gay bill, and opposed President Obama’s transgender bathroom directive.



Secular ‘values voters’ an electoral force

This article first appeared on *TheConversation.com* on Dec. 21, 2020, and is reprinted with permission.

By Phil Zuckerman

The voting patterns of religious groups in the United States have been scrutinized since the presidential election for evidence of shifting allegiances among the faithful. Many have wondered if a boost in Catholic support was behind Biden’s win or if a dip in support among evangelicals helped doom Trump.

But much less attention has been paid to one of the largest growing demographics among the United States electorate, one that has increased from around 5 percent of Americans to over 23 percent in the last 50 years: “Nones” — that is, the nonreligious.



Phil Zuckerman

I am a scholar of secularism in the United States, and my focus is on the social and cultural presence of secular people — nonreligious people such as atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers and those who simply don’t identify with any religion. They are an increasingly significant presence in American society, one which inevitably spills into the political arena.

In the 2020 election, the emerging influence of secular voters was felt not only at the presidential level, but also on many down-ballot issues.

New ‘values voters’

For years, both scholars and pundits have referred to the political impact of “values voters” in America. What that designation generally refers to are religious men and women whose scripturally based values coagulate around issues such as opposing marriage equality and women’s reproductive autonomy.

But dubbing such religious voters as “values voters” is a real semantic bamboozle. While it is true that many religious Americans maintain certain values that motivate their voting behavior, it is also very much the case that secular Americans also maintain their own strongly held values. My research suggests they vote on these values with just as much motivation as the religious.

Sex education

This played out in November in a number of ballot initiatives that have flown under the national media radar.

Voters in Washington state, for example, passed Referendum 90, which requires that students receive sex education in all public schools. This was the first time that such a measure was ever on a state ballot, and it passed with ease, thanks, in part, to the significant number of nonreligious voters in the Pacific Northwest.

The fact is, Washington is one of the least religious states in the union. Well over a third of all Washingtonians do not affiliate with any religion, more than a third never pray and almost 40 percent never attend religious services.

The referendum’s passing was helped by the fact that nonreligious adults tend to value comprehensive sex education. Numerous studies have found that secular Americans are sig-



Photo image by Shutterstock

Secular Americans are becoming a notable voting force, as 23 percent of the electorate is now considered nonreligious.

nificantly more likely to support comprehensive sex education in school. In his research, sociologist Mark Regnerus found that secular parents were generally much more comfortable — and more likely — to have open and frank conversations with their children about safe sex than religious parents.

Meanwhile, voters in Oregon — another Pacific Northwestern state that contains one of the most secular populations in the country — passed Measure 110, the first ever statewide law to decriminalize the possession and personal use of drugs.

This aligns with research showing that nonreligious Americans are much more likely to support the decriminalization of drugs than their religious peers.

For instance, a 2016 study from Christian polling firm Barna found that 66 percent of evangelicals believe that all drugs should be illegal as did 43 percent of other Christians, but only 17 percent of Americans with no religious faith held such a view.

Secular people are generally more trusting of scientific empiricism, and various studies have shown that the nonreligious are more likely to accept the evidence behind human-generated climate change. This translates to support for politicians and policies that take climate change seriously.

It may also have factored into the success of a November ballot measure in Denver, Colorado, to fund programs that eliminate greenhouse gases, fight air pollution and actively adapt to climate change. The ballot passed with over 62 percent of the vote — and it is of note that Denver is one of the most secular cities in the nation.

Meanwhile voters in California — an-

other area of relative secularity — passed Proposition 14 supporting the funding of stem cell research, the state being one of only a handful that has a publicly funded program. Pew Research studies have repeatedly found that secular Americans are far more likely than religious Americans to support stem cell research.

Values vs. values

On issues that the Religious Right has held some sway in recent years, there is evidence of a counterbalance among secular “value voters.”

For example, while the religious have been more likely to oppose same-sex marriage, secular Americans are

more likely to support it, and by significant margins. A recent Pew study found that 79 percent of secular Americans are supportive, compared to 66 percent of

white mainline Protestants, 61 percent of Catholics, 44 percent of Black Protestants and 29 percent of white evangelicals.

There are many additional values that are prominent among secular Americans. For example, the U.S. Secular Survey of 2020 — the largest survey of nonreligious Americans ever conducted, with nearly 34,000 participants — found strong support for safeguarding the separation of church and state.

Other studies have found that secular Americans strongly support women’s reproductive rights, women working in the paid labor force, the DACA program, death with dignity and opposition to the death penalty.

For instance, according to FFRF’s 2020 survey of secular voters, while 75 percent of all Americans support abortion rights, 98.8 percent of secular vot-

ers do; while 61 percent of all Americans support marriage equality, 98.9 percent of secular voters do; while 78 percent of all Americans support medical aid in dying, 99.2 percent of secular voters do; while 39 percent of all Americans oppose the death penalty, 68 percent of secular voters do; while 60 percent of all Americans support gun safety laws, 94 percent of secular voters do; while 69 percent of all Americans support police/prison reform, 95 percent of secular voters do; and while 76 percent of all Americans believe that racial discrimination is a major problem in the United States, 96 percent of secular voters do.

Secular surge

According to Eastern Illinois University professor Ryan Burge’s data analysis, around 80 percent of atheists and agnostics and 70 percent of those who described their religion as “nothing in particular” voted for Biden.

This may have been decisive. As Burge argues, “It’s completely fair to say that these shifts generated a two percentage-point swing for Biden nationwide. There were five states where the gap between the candidates was less than two percentage points (Georgia, Arizona, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and North Carolina). Four of those five went for the Biden — and the Nones were between 28 percent and 37 percent of the population in those key states.”

As this past election has shown, secular values are not only alive and well, but they are more pronounced than ever. It is also noteworthy that more openly nonreligious candidates were elected to public office than ever before. According to an analysis by the atheist author and activist Hemant Mehta, not only did every member of the secular Congressional Freethought Caucus win re-election, but 10 state senators who are openly secular — that is, they have made it publicly known that they are nonreligious — were voted into office, up from seven two years ago. There is now an all-time high of 45 openly secular state representatives nationwide, according to Mehta’s analysis. Every one of them is a Democrat.

Religious voters will certainly continue to vote their values — and for politicians that express similar views. But so, I argue, will secular voters.

FFRF Member Phil Zuckerman is professor of sociology and secular studies at Pitzer College.

“As this past election has shown, secular values are not only alive and well, but they are more pronounced than ever.”

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Freedom depends on freethinkers

How ‘So help me God’ got in presidential oath

By Andrew L. Seidel

The Constitution is often deliberately vague, but in the case of the presidential oath it is explicit. The president-elect “shall take the following oath or affirmation: ‘I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the office of president of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.’”

Period. That’s it. The popular addition “so help me God” is not there. It never was.

In other contexts, adding words to the Constitution is considered an amendment.



Andrew L. Seidel

And this is done with help from the chief justice of the Supreme Court. So why, after promising to preserve the Constitution, do presidents immediately add words to the precise oath, as President Biden did on Jan. 20? Where did this presidential tradition come from? In my recent book *The Founding Myth*, I set out to answer these questions.

Omitting God from the oath was no accident. The Founders deliberated this language at the Constitutional Convention, a deliberation that is mirrored in the first bill Congress passed under the Constitution and the first bill President Washington signed into law. As originally proposed, that law proposed congressional oaths with clauses reading “in the presence of Almighty God” and “So help me GOD.” Both were edited out.

The spoken words have been as deliberate as the written words. We know that Washington didn’t add the words to the oath. Nobody knows Washington’s words better than Edward Lengel, former editor-in-chief of the *George Washington Papers*. Lengel concluded, “any attempt to prove that Washington added the words ‘so help me God’ requires mental gymnastics of the sort that would do cred-



Shutterstock image

President Joe Biden, with his hand on a bible, takes the oath of office during the Inauguration ceremony next to First Lady Jill Biden at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 20.

it to the finest artist of the flying trapeze.” Like so much American mythology, including Rip Van Winkle, Ichabod Crane and the Headless Horseman, we owe this Washingtonian myth to Washington Irving.

Irving recalled as a 6-year-old watching the inauguration “from the corner of New Street and Wall Street.” You can stand on the corner of New and Wall streets today, as I did while writing *The Founding Myth*. The experiment is not perfect, since the current Federal Hall, with its iconic steps, was built in 1842. Washington took his oath on a balcony with no access from the street. But stand on that corner and peer through the streams of pedestrians to the tourists taking photos on the steps of Federal Hall. Try to hear what they are saying. Now imagine you’re a 6-year-old swamped, waist high, in an “innumerable throng” straining to hear a notoriously soft-spoken man whisper those few words, and accurately recalling

those words 50 years later. The claim is not much more believable than The Legend of Sleepy Hollow.

Washington did not say “so help me God” when he took the oath. Nor did any other of the first 26 presidents.

The first reliable, contemporaneous account of any president saying these words along with the oath comes nearly a century after the country’s founding, at Chester A. Arthur’s public inauguration in 1881. Arthur was actually already president. He had taken the oath immediately after learning that President James Garfield had finally succumbed to the assassin’s bullet, after a lingering 10-week-long infection. For the second, public oath, Chief Justice Morrison Waite read the oath and Arthur didn’t repeat it verbatim, instead replying simply, “I will, so help me God.” We wouldn’t hear those words in a presidential oath for another 28 years.

“The public nature of the supplement suggests a desire to appear pious rather than actual piety.”

Inaugural’s religious rhetoric was divisive

During the much-anticipated Inaugural on Jan. 20, kicking off a hopeful new administration, it’s unfortunate that President Biden, while trumpeting a message of unity, remains tone deaf about the divisiveness of religious rhetoric.

U.S. politicians’ often gratuitous use of religion at official events makes us nonbelievers feel like outsiders and second-class citizens. While a diverse and thoughtfully planned series of events marked Biden’s hard-fought inauguration, there was still a whole lot of religion going on.

The inauguration kicked off on Jan. 19 with a moving ceremony at the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, which was lined with 400 lights representing the more than 400,000 Americans who’ve died from Covid-19. The president-elect and his wife, with the vice president-elect and her husband, stood in front of the pool. Many communities and buildings, such as the Empire State Building and the Space Needle, also lit up in solidarity and unity around the nation.

But for the nonreligious as well as non-Christian Americans, the unity of that moment was spoiled when it morphed into a religious service. After nomi-

nally religious remarks by Joe Biden and Kamala Harris, we were treated to an invocation by the archbishop of Washington, D.C., and a rendition of the Christian hymn, “Amazing Grace.”

There were many brief repeated references to religion in the inauguration. Although the Freedom From Religion Foundation had duly requested that Joe Biden follow constitutional dictates and take an entirely secular oath of office as written in the Constitution, as expected he placed his hand on a huge family bible and added the piety, “So help me God.” FFRF had also requested he jettison the invocation and benediction. But the invocation was led by Father Leo J. O’Donovan, a Jesuit priest, and the benediction by Rev. Silvester Beaman, pastor of Bethel AME Church in Wilmington, Del., both personal friends, and both, of course, Christian.

Biden gave a powerful, gracious and

conciliatory speech about being the president of all, as a “once-in-a-century virus silently stalks the country,” as “millions of jobs have been lost . . . businesses closed” and as “a cry for racial justice, some 400 years in the making, moves us.” There was much to applaud there.

But he also referred to “one nation, under God,” said “History, faith and reason show the way, the way of unity” and mentioned being “sustained by faith.” He quoted St. Augustine and the bible, albeit both passages secular, mentioned a prayerful verse from a song, “American Anthem,” and, no surprise, ended with the inevitable “May God bless America and may God protect our troops.”

But the bit that rankles most came when Biden actually himself said and led a prayer: “In my first act as president, I would like to ask you to join me in a moment of silent prayer to remember all those we lost this past year to the pan-

The first time “so help me God” was added to the oath that made a man president was 1909, 130 years after our founding. Chief Justice Melville Fuller added the phrase and William Howard Taft repeated it.

But it’s not until 1917, with the United States on the brink of entering World War I, that the tradition really takes hold. Like Arthur, Woodrow Wilson took two oaths, adding “so help me God” to the second, superfluous oath. He had taken the presidential oath the day before in a somewhat private ceremony and did not add the phrase, though he did add it in the public ceremony the next day. Up through Wilson’s private 1917 oath, the phrase was used twice in 40 oaths. Beginning with Wilson’s public 1917 oath, it has been used in 29 of 30 oaths.

Every subsequent oath has been highly public. Even those sworn privately or without the pomp of a full inauguration ceremony were recorded. Not coincidentally, every oath since, save Herbert Hoover’s in 1929, included the request for divine assistance. The public nature of the supplement suggests a desire to appear pious rather than actual piety.

Wilson was an academic before he was a politician. He authored a poorly regarded biography of Washington in 1896. In that romanticized biography, Wilson wrote that Washington “said ‘So help me God!’ in tones no man could mistake.”

The modern tradition of adding “God” to the godless oath the Constitution mandates traces directly to the 6-year-old Washington Irving standing on the corner of New and Wall streets, through Woodrow Wilson, the president largely responsible for that modern trend.

The explicit language of our Constitution’s presidential oath was good enough for George Washington and Abraham Lincoln — the oath that made every one of the first 26 presidents.

Andrew L. Seidel is FFRF’s director of strategic response and the author of the *The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism Is Un-American*.

“U.S. politicians’ often gratuitous use of religion at official events makes us nonbelievers feel like outsiders and second-class citizens.”

demic. . . . Let us say a silent prayer for those who lost their lives, for those they left behind, and for our country. Amen.”

He compounded it all by the irony of making an oath “before God” to defend our Constitution — a Constitution that is godless, whose only references to religion are exclusionary, which bars a religious test for public office and which separates religion from government.

As the inauguration ended, FFRF immediately began hearing from some of our more than 33,000 members, who were disappointed by the religious tone deafness, who expected our 46th president to make references to believers and nonbelievers, as President Obama did in his inaugural speech.

We “Nones” have work to do, not only to untangle the union of church and state from the last administration, but to make public officials who serve our Constitution understand that they may have whatever religious beliefs they like, but should stop assuming the rest of us need to hear about those views. Pieties do not make them better leaders. And religion in government is innately divisive and exclusionary.

LETTERBOX

Vacation conversation revealed similarities

I was invited on a fly-fishing trip on the Cinder River, which is on the north side of the Alaskan peninsula. There were seven of us on the trip, but the only person I knew beforehand was the trip’s host, a longtime friend of mine who was an outdoor leadership professor in college.

During the trip, we had three straight days and nights of around 30 mph winds, so anytime we weren’t fishing we were cooped up in a large tent. We had plenty of hours to talk about all manner of subjects. It didn’t take long for us to realize we were all on the same page on many topics. It turns out that nobody in the group was a believer. One of us brought up FFRF and it turned out that three of the seven of us in the tent are members of FFRF, including one Lifetime member.

Media often show people in the “outdoors” industry (hunters, fishermen, etc.) as conservative Christians, but the reality is far from it. There are many freethinkers in the outdoors industry, but they don’t get a lot of attention. I’m hoping that there will be more outspoken atheist outdoors people featured in the media.

Aaron Glaser
Alaska

Let’s take ‘In God We Trust’ off our currency

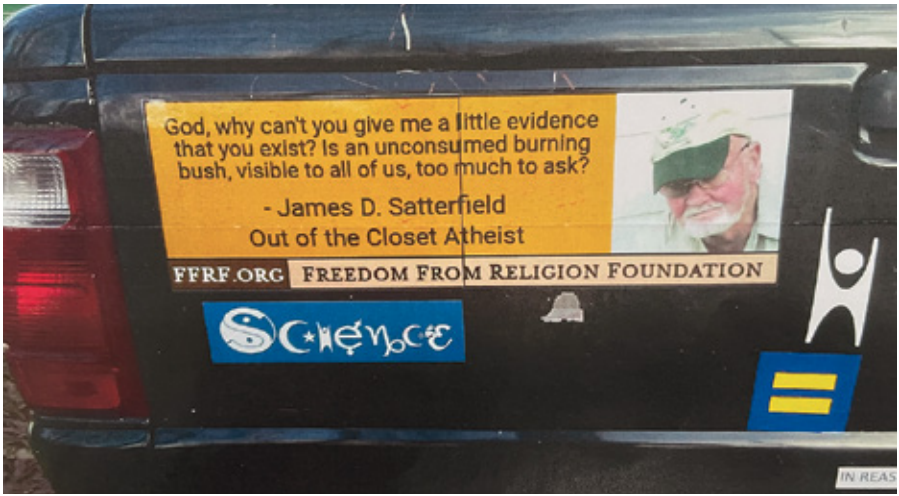
This morning I had the radio on and heard White House spokesperson Jen Psaki state that putting Harriet Tubman on the \$20 bill is under consideration again because it is very important that our money reflect our diversity. That’s a great idea! I say let’s go all in on this concept and look beyond racial diversity to religious diversity.

A very significant segment of our population, around 20 percent, does not worship any gods at all. These people go by various terms: free-thinker, atheist, agnostic, humanist, none of the above, nontheist, etc. As one of these people, I feel that we are among the last remaining group for which it is both legally permissible and socially fashionable to discriminate against. While redesigning our money, let’s get the offensive statement, “In God We Trust,” off of it. The statement is factually incorrect, and it makes those of us without religious faith feel intentionally excluded from the “we.”

The statement is also completely unnecessary, as other countries are able to function perfectly well without having it on their currency. And let’s not forget that we operated without it well over a hundred years until that great pre-Trump political unifier Sen. Joseph McCarthy wrote the law to put it on our currency. President Biden said he wants to be president of all Americans. Well, talk is cheap and actions speak louder than words.

I ask that while redesigning our currency to reflect our racial and ethnic diversity, you show a little good faith and also remove “God” from our money. It’s the morally correct action.

Mark Klock
Maryland



Tailgate ‘billboard’ shows support for FFRF

I decided to dress up the tailgate on my old Ford Ranger truck a bit to show off my views and support for FFRF.

I created this from the “billboard” I made on FFRF’s website. At 87 years old, I’m not driving as much as I used to, but when I do, I hope it calls attention to FFRF and this old atheist, in particular.

I’ve had a lot of controversial bumper stickers on my truck over the years, and seldom are any comments made to me. We’ll see about this.

Jim Satterfield
Georgia

Editor’s note: Make your own digital message at ffrf.org/out.

Thanks to complainant, FFRF for Kansas action

I want to thank you for the action you took to inform staff at Liberty Middle School in Pratt, Kan., of the unconstitutionality of their promotion of Christianity. Our child is not yet old enough to attend school, but this is a concern my wife and I have had living in this small, rural community.

I know that you cannot provide the name of the complainant and we are not requesting it, but we hope FFRF can reach out to that person and let them know that we support them. It is terrible that they had to make the complaint in the first place, and we hope they have not been alienated in any way. We very much appreciate their actions in hopes that our child will not have to endure such proselytization when attending public school in the future.

Thank you again and keep up the fantastic work. Also, I loved *The Founding Myth* by Andrew L. Seidel.

Jordan Hofmeier
Kansas

Capitol insurrection was heavy on religion

History has shown us that there is nothing more dangerous than a religiously inspired mob. That mob will burn, loot, vandalize and kill with glee. On Jan. 6, we saw red-cap-wearing MAGA supporters carry Jesus flags and Trump/Jesus flags and place a cardboard “Jesus Saves” sign on our nation’s Capitol steps. The building was desecrated. Bible-thumpers were running loose. Yet, the evangelical preachers promoting President Trump have been silent. They lost their tongues. Quite doubtful they would have been so silent if the protesters were carrying signs about Allah. There would have been a call for war, in that case.

Let us hope the storming of our nation’s Capitol is something where Americans learn the need to keep church and state separate.

Jeff Baysinger
Colorado

Glad to see number of religious voters drop

I was pleased to read in the December issue that the percentage of religious registered voters has dropped from 79 percent in 2008 to 64 percent in 2020. That’s 15 points in 12 years!

If that trend continues, it will be down below 50 percent, something I never expected to see in my lifetime . . . the majority of voters being sane. I give FFRF a great deal of credit for this increase in rational thinking and the acceptance of science over the supernatural, reality over myth. With a majority of registered voters being nonaffiliated with religion, just imagine what gains we could make!

I am disappointed, though, each Sunday when I watch “Freethought Matters” and hear that FFRF has only about 33,000 members, considering the number of legal cases that are being won, FFRF’s activism, the great work of Annie Laurie Gaylor, Dan Barker and the staff, Ron Reagan’s TV ad, etc. My only hope is that those 33,000 members will continue to push FFRF’s message and we can convince more than 0.001 percent of the population of the fallacies and insanity of organized religion.

Don Stockard
California

Religion has long outlived its usefulness

There was a time in the history of humanity when religion served an important and generally useful function, but no longer.

Throughout the ages, up until about several hundred years ago, life for most people was brutal and short. The belief in an afterlife and in ultimate redemption was the only salvation. But con men knew a good thing when they saw it: Religious believers, trying to maintain their hopes, could be easily manipulated and exploited.

And religious believers were taught that humans are the “crown of creation,” made in God’s image and that

humanity was given dominion over the Earth. For centuries, then, this kind of human arrogance ran rampant, backed up by the belief that the deity of choice would bail out humanity if the species ever started to screw up.

Well, has humanity ever started to screw up! This “dominion” has given rise to unending warfare, polluted air and oceans, melting polar ice, vanishing coral reefs, slaughter and extinction of large numbers of animal species, rising sea levels, toxic dumping, global warming and much more. The stewardship of humans has been a disaster, and there’s no cavalry riding to the rescue. Religion nowadays does more harm than good.

Tom Guccione
New York

‘Heathens Greetings’ pamphlets are great

I will be ordering more of FFRF’s “Heathens Greetings” pamphlets. It is so well written and so free of any ill will.

I live in a 203-home homeowner’s association community for individuals over the age of 55. We have rural mailboxes in front of our homes and many of the residents walk past them daily. For Christmas this past year, I put my last 22 “Heathens Greetings” pamphlets in a plastic baggie with a decorated sign that read, “Free. Take one” and hung it on my mailbox. Eleven of them were taken. I am pleased because my car is parked in my carport and my one-word “Atheist” bumper sticker is quite visible.

Of course, no one has ever asked any questions about this (they never do), but they have to appreciate my low-key approach.

Pat Hall
California

Tune in to these two YouTube programs

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis has been hosting a YouTube channel featuring humanist discussion and critique of religious myth.

Called “Din of Conversation,” the channel is archive to two programs. “Bibles and Beer: Humanist Bible Study” presents updated twists on bible studies that you may have grown up with. “Bibles and Beer” is presented live most Wednesday evenings.

On “Coffee and Wisdom,” First Unitarian Senior Minister David Breeden shares a few ideas about humanism — past, present and future. The “Coffee and Wisdom” live presentation occurs most weekday mornings, followed by a chat with others via Zoom.

Bruce Nelson
Minnesota

Why are Catholic clergy getting vaccine already?

I wanted you to be aware of something that has infuriated me ever since I heard it. In December, Cardinal Cupich of Chicago was given the Covid-19 vaccine along with other members of the clergy, indicating they are regarded as “essential.” How nice for them. This special privilege was granted to them, which, as a result, took vaccines away from senior citizens, front-line hospital workers, police and firefighters and

others more deserving, given what risks they endure on a daily basis. How on Earth are the Catholic clergy considered “essential”? Isn’t the Catholic Church all about putting others ahead of themselves? Hypocrites all! I think this is of great value in noting just one more hypocrisy of the Catholic Church.

Glenn Joselane
Illinois

Hasidim extremists in New York cause problems

Back in November, Rabbi Zalman Teitelbaum, the Grand Rebbe of the large Satmer Hasidim community of Brooklyn, stated to his brethren that they should not consider themselves as Americans but rather as Jews in exile.

Despite not considering themselves Americans, they hold American passports and bloc vote. They were strong supporters of Donald Trump. They refuse to report for jury duty and get away with it, and never serve in the military. With their large families and expertise at gaming the system, they receive more taxpayer benefits than any other religious or ethnic group in the country. Yet the Satmars and other Hasidic groups are slumlords, nursing home operators and developers of luxury condominiums in New York City, controlling hundreds of millions, if not billions, of dollars in real estate assets.

Also, back in November, Teitelbaum officiated at an indoor wedding ceremony attended by 7,000 celebrants who were singing, clapping and dancing, in open defiance of city Covid-19 restrictions. None of them was wearing a mask. The result? Since November, Teitelbaum and hundreds of the wedding guests have contracted Covid-19! Who knows how many other people they have infected?

Dennis Middlebrooks
New York

Reading the paper in jacuzzi a challenge

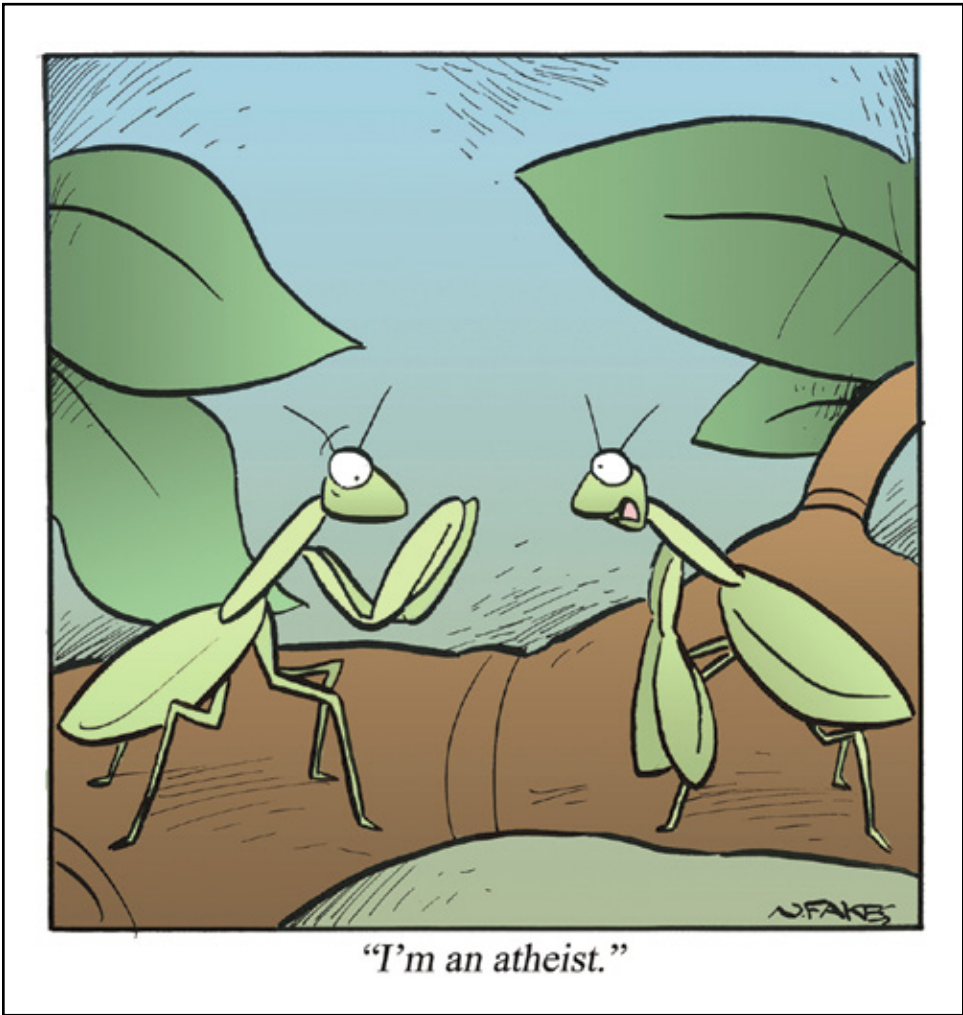
I’m always excited to receive the latest issue of the paper, which I always read in the jacuzzi, which creates a challenge to keep it dry enough to read Black Collar Crime by the time I get that far. (I don’t wanna miss seeing which man of prayer preyed the most.)

I am especially glad to see so many young people involved and writing excellent essays.

I never did get a stimulus check, but I’m gonna pretend I did and send the whole mythical thing to you for real. Spend this \$1,200 where you need it the most and keep the paper coming!

Larry Hallock
Illinois

Crossword answers														
A	C	T	S		B	A	D		T	E	N			
T	H	O	U		H	I	R	E		S	W	I	P	E
M	O	R	N		A	L	G	A		P	I	P	I	T
				U	N	D	E	R	G	O	D		O	T
					A	G	L	E	T		S	O	H	
A	M	P	E	R	E				T	H	R	O	A	T
D	O	H		E	M	P	L	O	Y		U	R	A	L
A	D	O	P	T		O	E	R		U	T	E	R	I
M	E	N	U		T	O	E	I	N	G		N	E	D
S	M	E	L	T	E	R				A	R	C	A	D
					L	I	E		S	T	R	I	A	
	L	A	M	A				C	H	U	R	C	H	E
S	O	N	A	R			H	O	B	O		O	R	A
K	R	O	N	A			A	N	E	W		O	G	R
Y	E	N					P	E	R			T	O	D



Jan/Feb issue was full of interesting reading

I was sorry to hear about the death of Ben Bova. One of the first full-length books I ever read was one of his.

The article about Julian Scheer (“The man who kept God off the moon”) was incredible. He’d be a great subject for a movie (or at least a TV documentary).

When I first began receiving Freethought Today in the early 1990s, one of my favorite features was the “In Others’ Words” cryptogram. I’ve never been much for crossword puzzles, but I was surprised and happy to see the crossword in the latest issue, and I hope there’ll be more.

Well, I suppose it had to happen. After a few months of (relatively) civilized Crankmails, the fangs and claws came back out in the Jan/Feb issue.

As usual, thanks for all you do, and here’s to (somewhat) better days ahead.

Andrew C. Jones
Michigan

Inauguration events were too religious

My husband and I are proud FFRF members. On Jan. 20, we sat in rapt attention and anticipation for Joe Biden’s inauguration, only to feel excluded and disappointed by all of the Christian inclusions via a pastor, a bishop and a poet. Faith was the dish served up by each and every speaker and left us cold. We hoped for so much

and got a lot — more by far than the previous administration — but at one point it appeared we were meant to jump out of our seats and shout “hallelujah!” I felt unseen, unheard and ignored all over again.

Thank you for your recent message and for being there for the millions of “Nones” who are still looked at as nothings.

KaZ Akers
Florida

Black Collar section helps expose wrongdoing

Although they make for unpleasant reading, the items in Black Collar Crime have too often been swept under the rug by churches and hidden from public scrutiny. Publicizing the names and allegations against the accused brings their crimes out into the open and might help their victims feel a little more acknowledged.

I also enjoy the Crankmail section. I feel both amused and depressed by the letters, but they give us members a little insight into the sort of vitriol that FFRF staff have to deal with every day. Thank you for everything you do!

Megan Amselle
Virginia

Pilots put faith in aviation, not rosaries

I enjoyed reading Justin Pripusich’s letter in the last issue, relating his “come to atheism” experience as a passenger in a maximum turbulence flight out of Denver.

Justin’s plane landed safely because when the going gets rough, pilots are trained first to aviate, then to navigate and lastly to communicate. Justin and all the other people on board could have been toast if the crew had pulled out their rosaries and reversed that order.

But then, one has to wonder, what good praying would have done when the deity that created the storm knew full well that airplanes could be sure candidates for a spectacular disaster.

David Werdegar
Illinois

Let’s add this phrase to nonbeliever vocabulary

I once heard a nonbeliever challenge another for referring to the death of their loved one as having “passed.” Their objection was that it inferred the existence of another place to which a person would go after death. Although it seemed neutral to me at the time, the more I thought about it, the more I realized that our vocabulary is lacking in an expression or description of death among nonbelievers.

This may be a time to suggest another description that is not only neutral but elegant and more profound. When we die, we only live on in the memories of others as part of their continuing lives. So, essentially, we have been committed to memory from that day forward — in the memory of those who loved us — or in some cases by those who won’t forget us for other reasons.

If I could create a meme, I would say that those in our memories, those who influenced us one way or another are “committed to memory,” from the day they die until the day that we ourselves become “committed to memory.”

Betty Hammerle Inman
North Carolina

FFRF’s critical work needed more than ever!

It is obvious to me that, given the composition of the Supreme Court, we need to protect our freedom from religion and the critical work of the Freedom From Religion Foundation more than ever.

Robert M. Zellers
North Carolina

‘Freethought Matters’ an excellent TV program

I’ve been a member of FFRF for well over 10 years and I just want to thank you for the excellent TV program you have, “Freethought Matters,” airing every Sunday morning in New York City. I’m in southern Connecticut, so I’m able to see it every week.

I appreciate the wide variety of guests who are on the show — from writers to authors to artists, including John Davidson, of all people. It’s really entertaining and very well done.

Also, I almost dropped my cup of coffee in my lap earlier this week when I saw the Ron Reagan ad during the “Late Show with Stephen Colbert”! That is very much appreciated. I hope you’re getting a lot of people to join FFRF.

I appreciate everything you’re doing. Stay safe.

Jim Lonczak
Connecticut

Crossword puzzle is a welcome addition

When I received my January/February issue, I was so happy to see that you included a crossword puzzle. Thanks so much!

I’m a 71-year-old retiree and The New York Times crossword is too difficult and the AARP crossword is too easy. Like the proverbial three bears bowl of porridge, your crossword is just right!

Harold Nicol
Minnesota

Lead Us Not Into Penn Station
Provocative Pieces
By Anne Gaylor
A must-have for any freethinker, this gracefully readable book contains Gaylor’s classic writings.

—Published by FFRF. 80 pages / PB

Buy it from FFRF online
@ ffrf.org/shop

BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Rogelio Vega, 50, Queens, NY: Attempted use of a child in a sexual performance, attempted criminal sexual act, attempted disseminating indecent material to a minor and attempted endangering the welfare of a child. Vega, a deacon at St. Sebastian Catholic Church since 2011, allegedly began using the app Grindr in July 2020 to meet a 14-year-old boy for sex who was actually a detective.

The married father of 4 allegedly asked for nude images, shared several photos of his genitals and set up a meeting. When Vega arrived, he flashed his headlights to identify himself and the officer climbed into the car and arrested him. *Source: NY Post, 1-22-21*

Toddrick Gordon, 50, Muncie, IN: Dealing in a narcotic drug, maintaining a common nuisance and 2 counts each of possession of meth and possession of a narcotic drug. During an interview, Gordon allegedly told a deputy he started selling meth and heroin after his longtime affiliation with a local church ended in 2018. He was community outreach pastor at Urban Light Community Church.

An affidavit said he sold drugs at his home on 4 dates in December. He was arrested in possession of a small amount of drugs and 10 syringes. *Source: Star Press, 1-15-21*

Jazmonique Strickland, 28, Kalamazoo, MI: 3 counts each of 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct and human trafficking of a minor and 2 counts of child sexual abusive activity. Her husband, **Stricjavar Strickland**, 37, pastor of Second Baptist Church, was arraigned in September on 11 similar counts.

It's alleged the pastor paid teen boys to have sex with his wife and to send him nude photos between 2015–18. She was pregnant with their 6th child when he was arraigned. *Source: WOOD, 1-14-21*

Victor Philip, 66, Norfolk, VA: 6 counts of indecent liberties against a minor (dates unspecified) when Philip was pastor at Norfolk Calvary Church of the Nazarene and chaplain at Lake Taylor Transitional Care.

Phil Fuller, superintendent of the Virginia District Church of the Nazarene, said he was shocked to learn of the arrest: "Victor Philip has not been an employee of the Norfolk Calvary Church of the Nazarene (or any Church of the Nazarene) since June 1, 2020, when he officially retired. The Norfolk Calvary Church became inactive in June 2020 due to lack of attendance, finances and involvement." *Source: WTKR, 1-12-21*

Jakirul Islam Jakir, 50, Gohelapur Boria, Bangladesh: Rape. Jakir, imam of a local mosque, and 2 others are accused in a complaint filed by a 40-year-old widow who alleges she refused Jakir's marriage proposal about 2 years ago.

Jakir is accused of raping her Nov. 10 and beating her 4 days later. The woman alleges she told 2 local officials, but they urged her to not press charges and to take the case to financial arbitration. *Source: Dhaka Tribune, 1-12-21*

John R. Griffin II, 73, Daytona Beach, FL: 30 counts of possession of photos of sexual performance by a child. Griffin, pastor at Riverbend Community Church in Ormond Beach and an associate professor at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, allegedly had 251 pornographic images when arrested after a tip was received from the National Center of Missing and Exploited Children.

Griffin asked his wife to forgive him as police led him away in handcuffs, the arrest report stated. Images on his iPad showed girls ages 3 to 7 and 9 to 14 engaged in sexual acts with men.

He had recently asked a state agency to license him and his wife as foster parents for children and infants, the arrest report said. *Source: News-Journal, 1-8-21*

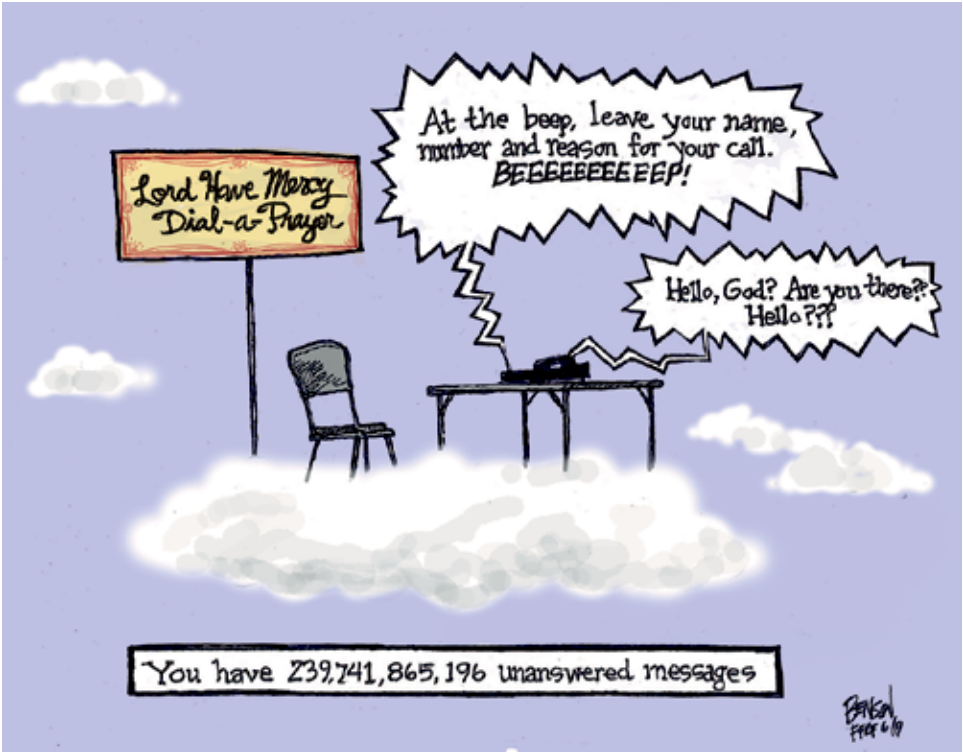
Kisha L. Clayton, 36, Paragould, AR: 5 counts of rape of a minor. Detective Robert Sexton said text messages between Clayton and the minor showed evidence of a "long sexual history" between them but that it wasn't clear if she met the alleged victim through her employment at Children's Home Inc., a "Christ-centered" youth organization. *Source: KATV, 1-7-21*

David A. Walker, 46, and **Anna Walker**, 39, N. Ridgeville, OH: David Walker faces 7 counts of felony sexual battery and 1 misdemeanor count of sexual imposition. Anna Walker is charged with 2 counts of felony sexual battery.

The assaults allegedly occurred from May 2005 to December 2007 when David Walker was a youth pastor at Church Alive International in Cleveland and later at the Dwelling Place Family Worship Center in N. Olmsted. He was also a teacher and coach at the now-closed Cleveland Christian Academy.

The indictment alleges forced intercourse. Police said the female victim, now 30, was a member of the youth groups at both churches and a parishioner. *Source: WJW, 1-6-21*

Satya Narayan, 45, an Indian Hindu priest in the state of Uttar Pradesh, and 2 aides are accused of the fatal gang rape Jan. 3 of a married 50-year-old woman. Her son told reporters that the men dropped her off at home: "They said she fell into the dry well on the ashram premises. She was



bleeding profusely and soon she died. Before we could ask anything, the three left."

Narayan was found in a hut in a forest near his village after police received reports he was hiding there. An autopsy revealed the woman "had been brutalized," said social activist Shafi Ahmed. *Source: The Hindu, 1-6-21*

Nikolai Romanov (aka Fr. Sergiy), was arrested for encouraging young people to commit suicide. The arrest may be related to a YouTube video in which he called on followers to die for Russia. An Orthodox priest, he was arrested at a convent he took over in June in the Urals.

The church excommunicated him in September for ignoring a ban on religious services during the coronavirus pandemic, which he calls a hoax. *Source: Reuters, 12-29-20*

Marcelo Crivella, 63, Rio de Janeiro: Corruption, defrauding public tenders, misappropriation of funds and money laundering. Crivella is a bishop in the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, an evangelical church founded by his uncle in 1977. He's also the outgoing mayor of Rio, a recording artist and author of Christian books.

Five associates were also charged in the alleged kickback scheme "that acted within City Hall since 2017," said a statement from Rio's public prosecutors' office.

His book "Evangelizando a África" details the 10 years he spent as a missionary. He is widely considered as a preacher of the prosperity gospel. *Source: AP, 12-22-20*

William D. Milam, 62, Milton, FL: 2 counts of promoting sexual performance of a child and 25 counts of possession of child pornography. Milam, pastor at Olivet Baptist Church and a former Navy chaplain, possessed multiple devices containing child pornography that depicted children as young as 3 engaged in sex acts, the complaint said.

Milam was vocal during a 2016 campaign by municipalities to allow Sunday liquor sales. "There are a significant amount of people who appreciate that the streets of our city could be just a little safer with no Sunday sale of liquor," he said then. *Source: Pensacola News Journal, 12-14-20*

Mark R. Hession, 62, Barnstable, MA: Indecent assault and battery on a child less than 14, intimidation of a witness and 2 counts of rape. It's alleged Hession committed the crimes between 2005–08 when he was pastor at Our Lady of Victory Catholic Parish in Centerville.

In 2019 he allegedly used church money for personal expenses and sent inappropriate communications to several adult parishioners at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish in Seekonk, where he was serving. He was then removed from active ministry.

In 2009 he delivered the homily at Sen. Edward M. Kennedy's funeral. He has served at 12 different parishes since his 1984 ordination. *Source: Cape Cod Times, 12-14-20*

Clifford Brower, 57, Linden, NJ: Sexual assault and endangering the welfare of a child. Brower, a minister at Blessed Assurance Church, is accused of "various acts of sexual assault" on a 14-year-old girl in August 2019. *Source: Daily Voice, 12-9-20*

Zachary Crowley, 33, Taylorville, IL: 2 counts of felony grooming. Crowley is a student pastor at Taylorville Christian Church, athletic director at Vision-Way Christian School and assistant football coach at Taylorville High School.

Police Chief Dwayne Wheeler said grooming is "basically trying to lure kids in for sexual acts with their phones and things like that. We had enough

evidence to charge him with that. ... Usually when this happens, you'll have more victims that come forward." *Source: State Journal-Register, 12-8-20*

Christopher C. Trimpe, 59, Crystal Lake, IL: Theft of over \$10,000. Trimpe, who belongs to a religious order known as the Congregation of the Resurrection, was business manager until late 2019 for Resurrection Catholic Church in Woodstock, where he's accused of misappropriating \$34,977. *Source: Northwest Herald, 12-5-20*

William McCandless, 56, Wilmington, DE: Possessing child pornography for importation into the U.S., transporting child pornography in interstate and foreign commerce and attempting to access with intent to view child pornography. McCandless was pastor at St. Charles Catholic Parish and an adviser to Princess Charlene in the principality of Monaco from 2010–17 and principal from 2005–09 at Salesianum School in Wilmington, a high school operated by his religious order, the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales.

He's accused of amassing thousands of images of child pornography while working in Monaco and trying to access others after returning to the U.S. in 2017. The Oblates settled 39 suits against the order and Salesianum in 2011 for \$24.8 million for abuse of minors from 1955–91. *Source: Catholic News Service, 12-3-20*

Pleaded / Convicted

William Metzger, 76, Baraboo, WI: Plead guilty to 1st-degree child sexual assault. Metzger, pastor at Open Door Baptist Church until March 2020, is accused of assaulting a girl multiple times between August 2016 and December 2018, starting when she was 6.

Metzger told police he only touched the girl twice and that she had tried "fondling herself" so he showed her how.

"I started feeling bad about this," Metzger allegedly told police, after explaining that the girl's parents had attended a bible study session where children were advised about adulthood and identifying sexual misconduct. *Source: News Republic, 1-25-21*

Rotem Cooper, 54, Poway, CA: Plead guilty to defrauding the government and his employer by claiming thousands of dollars in false donations. He's the 8th person to plead guilty in connection with Yisroel Goldstein, a rabbi and director of Chabad of Poway.

In the scheme, Cooper donated \$27,330 to a Chabad-affiliated charity, which his employer, the tech company Qualcomm, matched. Goldstein then secretly funneled 90% of the donation back to Cooper and split the Qualcomm funds with a person identified only as "Y.H.," who had introduced them. Cooper then illegally claimed the entire donation as a tax deduction of \$7,960.

In April 2019, a 19-year-old man fatally shot a woman and injured 3 others in an anti-Semitic attack in the synagogue's foyer. *Source: The Forward, 12-30-20*

Joseph Quigley, 56, Stone, Staffordshire, UK: Guilty by jury of cruelty, 4 counts of sexual activity with a child and 2 counts each of sexual assault and false imprisonment. Quigley, the former national education adviser for Catholic schools, was accused of physical and sexual abuse of a boy while he was a parish priest in Warwickshire from 2002–08, when he was forced to resign.

He was sent for treatment to the U.S. before returning after 6 months and put on restricted duties.

Describing Quigley as a "sexual sadist and voyeur," Judge Peter Cooke remanded

him in custody while a report is prepared to assess the danger he poses in the future. "A lengthy prison sentence is inevitable," Cooke said. *Source: Coventry Telegraph, 12-5-20*

Sentenced

Josue Rodriguez, 62, Jersey City, NJ: 15 years in prison after pleading guilty to aggravated sexual assault. Rodriguez was a pastor and religion teacher at Temple Refugio. Both victims were students in his classes. The church is part of the Congregation of Yahweh, which combines elements of Judaism and Christianity.

Prosecutors said a girl was molested between the ages of 6 and 9. She told detectives that Rodriguez would touch her over and under her clothing and forced her to kiss him. The other victim was between 8 and 15. *Source: AP, 1-25-21*

Angelo Caloia, 81, longtime president of the Vatican bank (officially named the Institute for the Works of Religion), and his former lawyer **Gabriele Liuzzo**, 97, were found guilty by a Vatican court of embezzling millions of euros through shady real estate deals between 2002–07. They were sentenced to 8 years and 11 months in prison and ordered to pay the bank damages of over €20 million (\$24 million).

Fabrizio Lemme, Liuzzo's attorney, said it was unlikely that either would see the inside of a prison cell because of their ages. They were also fined €12,500 each. *Source: NY Times, 1-21-21*

Kirbyjon H. Caldwell, 67, Houston: 6 years in prison, \$125,000 fine and \$3.5 million restitution after pleading guilty to wire fraud for a scheme hatched in 2013 when he was pastor at Windsor Village United Methodist Church. Caldwell and financial planner **Gregory Smith** lured investors into buying Chinese bonds that had no value and weren't recognized by the current government.

The indictment said Caldwell "used religious references to give investors hope they would soon be repaid." Caldwell rose to prominence as leader of the megachurch and confidant of former President George W. Bush. *Source: NY Times, 1-14-21*

Adnan Oktar, 64, a Muslim televangelist and cult leader known in Turkey for holding theological discussions surrounded by glamorous women, was sentenced to 1,075 years in prison on 10 charges, including leading a criminal gang, engaging in political and military espionage, sexual abuse of minors, rape, blackmail and causing torment.

He was also charged with aiding a network led by U.S.-based cleric **Fethullah Gulen**, accused of masterminding a failed 2016 coup attempt. Under the pen name Harun Yahya, he published a series of books promoting creationism over the theory of evolution. *Source: AP, 1-11-21*

Thomas Kottoor, 69, and **Sister Sephy**, 55, respectively a Catholic priest and nun, received life sentences after an Indian court found them guilty of murder, conspiracy and destruction of evidence in the 1992 death of Sister Abhaya, 21. Her body was found in the well at St. Pius Convent in Kottayam district, Kerala.

Prosecutors alleged Abhaya discovered Kottoor and another nun in a compromising position and that he strangled her while Sephy beat her with an axe. *Source: Indian Express, 12-23-20*

Manuel LaRosa-Lopez, 62, Richmond, TX: 10 years in prison after pleading guilty to 2 counts of indecency with a child for molesting a 13-year-old girl and a 15-year-old boy while he was a priest at Sacred Heart Catholic Church in Conroe from the late 1990s to early 2000s.

He'll have to serve at least 5 years. Prosecutors said victims reported the abuse to church officials at the time but the allegations were never relayed to law enforcement.

One victim, now a mother, told LaRosa-Lopez at sentencing, "I stand here proudly for all the children who will never have to meet you." *Source: KHOU, 12-16-20*

Jonathan Chang, 64, Cupertino, CA: 4 years in prison after a jury found him guilty of several counts of wire fraud and money laundering. Chang, an elder responsible for managing finances at Home of Christ Christian Church in Saratoga, was also ordered to pay \$11.7 million in restitution.

Between 2004 and 2016, Chang defrauded a wealthy donor and set up entities with names similar to the church, directing more than \$6.7 million to his own organizations, according to federal authorities. His average annual salary was reported as \$65,000 but he purchased millions of dollars in real property, owned a Mercedes and lived a luxurious life, prosecutors said. *Source: San Jose Inside, 12-14-20*

Sherman Smith, 74, Monterey, CA: 87 months in prison and \$2.19 million restitution after pleading guilty to wire fraud. Smith, executive pastor of Sunrise Church in Clovis, "is a con man and a thief," said U.S. District Judge Dale Drozd.

He defrauded investors by collecting cash, checks and rolled-over retirement accounts to fund church projects but used the money for personal expenses, to operate a publishing business and to invest in foreign ventures, prosecutors said.

Smith previously served 37 months in prison for securities fraud that caused a loss of over \$5 million to 38 victims. *Source: gwwire.com, 12-11-20*

Craig McCulloch, 34, Manchester, UK: 3 years in prison after pleading guilty to 4 counts of fraud by abuse of position for stealing over \$624,000 from a church, a charity and a college.

McCulloch stole from St. James Church in north London, the Anglican parish where he served as volunteer treasurer from 2013–18, from the children’s charity XLP and the Oasis College of Higher Education in Kennington. Detective Constable Mark Baker called him “one of the most devious individuals I have ever dealt with.” *Source: BBC, 12-11-20*

Nathan L. Rogers, 36, W. Seneca, NY: 6 months in jail and 5 years’ probation after pleading guilty to 2nd-degree unlawful surveillance. Rogers, part-time youth pastor at Life Church Buffalo, was arrested in August 2019 after an investigation determined he used 2 cellphones to video a girl changing clothes in his camper during Kingdom Bound, a 4-day Christian music festival. *Source: Batavia Daily News, 12-10-20*

Willie Wilkerson, 62, Dorchester, MA: 4 to 5 years in prison and 3 years’ probation after pleading guilty to trafficking and intent to distribute Class B and Class C drugs. Wilkerson, pastor at Mission Church, hid the drugs in his home, the church and a food trailer he owns, prosecutors said.

Investigators found 53 grams of cocaine, 45 oxycodone pills, 9 grams of fentanyl, 73 grams of Buprenorphine, 32 Clonazepam tablets, 45 methadone pills, 259 gabapentin tablets and 62 sildenafil pills. He was also charged with unlawful possession of ammunition. *Source: WBTS, 12-10-20*

Randolph Brown, 65, Cleveland: 18 months in jail after pleading guilty to 2 counts of compelling prostitution. Brown, pastor at Inner-City Missionary Baptist Church, was charged with paying or agreeing to pay 2 female minors, aged 16 and 13 at the time of the incidents, to engage in sexual activity in 2018.

Brown said he would appeal and claimed he engaged in inappropriate behavior because he was grieving: “I may not have grieved my father’s death properly. Losing both my parents months apart from each other was traumatic.” *Source: ABC Cleveland, 12-10-20*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

The Catholic **Parish of St. Padre Pio**, Vineland, NJ, has been sued by a woman alleging sexual assault by **Robert L. Sinatra**, the church’s pastor. The plaintiff, 38, is a “parishioner and participant in church activities” who asserts Sinatra, 46, exploited his position of authority to engage in sexual contact with her.

Sinatra, in a January letter to parishioners, denied assault allegations but admitted having a “two-month affair with an unmarried woman” in 2018. “Although ending the relationship was difficult for me, it was obviously very difficult for her as well,” Sinatra wrote.

He said he has paid for her counseling since ending the affair, has blocked her phone number and her access to his social media accounts, while assuring Diocese of Camden Bishop Dennis Sullivan that he won’t violate his vow of celibacy again.

Spokesman Michael Walsh said the diocese is reviewing the lawsuit “but at this time has no plans to remove Father Sinatra as pastor, as he refutes the accusation and there has never been any indication or report in his past of any abusive relationships in any element of his personal or public life.” *Source: Vineland Daily Journal, 1-3-21*

The Catholic **Diocese of Brooklyn**, NY, shouldn’t be eligible for insurance coverage to pay settlements with sexual abuse survivors, says a suit filed by Arrowwood Indemnity Co., its insurer, because of “allegations of the Diocese’s long-standing specific knowledge of individual instances of abuse and its decades-long culture of coverup.”

Arrowwood’s complaint names the diocese, **over 30 parishes and schools** and former priest **Romano J. Ferraro**, who is accused in over a dozen pending suits and is serving a life sentence in Massachusetts. Former priests **Thomas O’Rourke**, **Vincent Sforza** and **James Sickler** are the subjects of at least 14 suits.

Arrowwood alleges the diocese has failed to provide copies of internal documents that would shed light on what it knew about allegations and what steps it took in response: “The information the Diocese has provided ... is inappropriately redacted, contains large chronological gaps, and is missing numerous pages without explanation.” *Source: Democrat & Chronicle, 12-29-20*

The **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints** is alleged in 7 lawsuits filed by former Boy Scouts of covering up decades of sexual abuse in Arizona. The church “must be held accountable in order to bring healing and closure to Mormon victims of childhood sexual abuse,” said a statement from the plaintiffs’ law firm Hurley McKenna & Mertz.

It’s alleged that members of church-sponsored Boy Scout troops would reveal their abuse to bishops, who would then tell them to keep quiet so the church could conduct its own investigations. In the meantime, accused troop leaders and volunteers would be allowed to continue in their roles or be assigned to another troop.

The church sponsored at least 7 troops in metro Phoenix and Tucson. *Source: AP, 12-8-20*

Memorial High School in W. New York, NJ, **St. Joseph’s of the Palisade Parish** and the Catholic **Archdiocese of Newark** are being sued by “A.G.,” who was a 14-year-old freshman at Memorial in 1985 when he alleges he was first molested by **Al-**

bert Sosa, a school counselor and church deacon.

It’s alleged Sosa showed him pornography, which escalated to kissing, oral sex and sodomy, which took place about 3 times a week for over 4 years, including at the church. *Source: Jersey Journal, 12-8-20*

Mirosław Krol, a Catholic priest from Orchard Lake, MI, was sued for sexual harassment by 2 men alleging he pressured them for sex. Krol is chancellor of Orchard Lake Schools, which includes St. Mary’s prep school, a seminary and a Polish cultural center.

The men, one a priest and the other a lay staffer, are Polish natives who claim Krol recruited them in 2018 and then preyed on them. During a previous stint at Orchard Lake from 2006–11, it’s alleged Krol recruited seminarians from Poland and had sex with them in the rectory at Sweetest Heart of Mary Parish in Detroit.

Krol graduated from Immaculate Conception Seminary in New Jersey, where he studied under defrocked Cardinal **Theodore McCarrick**. *Source: Detroit Free Press, 12-14-20*

“Jane Doe” filed a suit against **Portsmouth Abbey School**, Portsmouth, RI, and her former high school humanities teacher, **Michael Bowen Smith**, alleging he sexually abused her from 2012–14. “Grounded in the Catholic faith and 1,500-year old Benedictine intellectual tradition, the School fosters reverence for God and the human person,” its website says.

Smith started to flirt with her when she was a sophomore and he was in his mid-40s, then introduced sexual banter into their conversations and coerced her into sexual acts, it’s alleged, with abbey staff brushing aside her mother’s concerns before allowing Smith to “quietly resign.”

He went on to teach at Siena College, a Franciscan school in upstate New York, and started “a relentless pattern of harassment and cyber-stalking behavior against [her]” from 2015–17, the suit asserts. *Source: Newport Daily News, 12-4-20*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The Catholic **Diocese of Yakima**, WA, settled a suit filed by “John Doe” in 2019 by agreeing to pay \$5,000 for counseling in addition to \$10,000 it had already paid. The settlement frees the diocese from any further claims regarding 3 **allegedly abusive priests**.

The plaintiff from Ellensburg, WA, alleged abuse occurred in the late 1970s and early 1980s when he was between the ages of 10 and 18. The suit asserted **Richard Scully**, **Peter Hagel** and an **unidentified priest** repeatedly molested him at St. Andrew’s Church and in a YMCA building the diocese previously used for services. Scully has been defrocked. Seamus Kerr, 91, an earlier defendant, was exonerated after the plaintiff recanted allegations against him. *Source: Yakima Herald-News, 12-19-20*

The Catholic **Diocese of Speyer**, Germany, paid a clergy abuse survivor, now age 63, €15,000 (\$18,100) for assaults at a children’s home by **Rudolf Motzenbäcker**, a priest who died in 1998. During the 10 years that he lived there, nuns allegedly took him to the priest’s apartment once or twice a month.

The man estimated he’d been assaulted about 1,000 times. Other priests and politicians sometimes joined in, and nuns brought more boys and girls in to be victimized, he alleged.

“The nuns earned money from it. The men who were present would have donated generously,” he testified at a hearing on the abuse. *Source: dw.com, 12-11-20*

The Catholic **Diocese of Oakland**, CA, settled a suit for \$3.5 million in which former seminarian “John Doe” accused Livermore priest **Michael Van Dinh** of raping him in 2017. The plaintiff, a 27-year-

old Mexican immigrant, alleged Van Dinh lured him to the St. Michael’s Parish under the pretense of helping him land a job for a friend as a receptionist.

A search of Van Dinh’s living quarters turned up a meth pipe, sex toys and condoms, according to the police report. He hasn’t been criminally charged. In a statement, the diocese said Van Dinh remains on leave and continues to receive compensation.

Attorney Sandra Ribera-Speed said her client settled under pressure because the diocese “was essentially threatening to depose his parents and ... he didn’t want to tell his parents about the sexual abuse he experienced.” *Source: NBC Bay Area, 12-8-20*

The **Archdiocese of Chicago** agreed to pay \$1.5 million to settle a suit filed by a man alleging abuse by **Daniel McCormack**, a defrocked priest imprisoned for sexual assaults on several boys. The plaintiff attended a Catholic elementary school in Chicago in the early 2000s.

The archdiocese has paid \$11 million to settle suits alleging abuse by McCormack. A judge in 2018 found him to be “sexually violent” and ordered the state to hold him in custody indefinitely. *Source: AP, 12-3-20*

Finances

The Catholic **Diocese of St. Cloud** had its Chapter 11 reorganization plan approved by the Minnesota Bankruptcy Court. The plan provides for a \$22.5 million trust to compensate survivors of clergy sexual abuse.

The funds include \$14 million in insurance settlements, \$5.25 million in property sales and \$3.25 million in contributions from parishes and a line of credit. The plan also includes non-monetary protocols for the protection of children. *Source: St. Cloud Times, 12-4-20*

The Catholic **Archdiocese of Philadelphia** sold the **St. John Vianney Center**, a behavioral health facility founded in 1946 in Downingtown, PA, where priests accused of sexual abuse are sometimes sent for treatment.

In exchange for its independence as a 50-bed nonprofit psychiatric hospital, the center paid the archdiocese \$12 million. A 2018 state grand jury report sharply criticized the center and similar ones in Maryland and New Mexico for doing a shoddy job of protecting children: “Put plainly, these institutions laundered accused priests, provided plausible deniability to the bishops, and permitted hundreds of known offenders to return to ministry.”

The archdiocese as of Nov. 18 had settled 319 claims for \$60.9 million through its victim compensation program. *Source: Philly Inquirer, 12-3-20*

Legal Developments

Jack Schaap, 63, Hammond, IN, a Baptist pastor serving a 12-year federal sentence since 2013 for taking a 16-year-old girl he was counseling across state lines to have sex in Michigan and Illinois, has asked a judge for early release to care for his parents, whose health is failing.

After being charged, he blamed the girl’s “aggressiveness” for inhibiting his “impulse control” and leading him into sex. His scheduled release date to a halfway house is Feb. 2, 2023. *Source: nwtimes, 1-29-21*

Errol Victor Sr., 54, an evangelical pastor who fled to Georgia from Louisiana after a jury voted 10–2 in 2014 to convict him, is running as a Republican for Congress as he awaits retrial on a murder charge. He would replace a Louisiana congressman-elect who died of COVID-19 complications before he could take office.

Victor was charged with murder in 2008 after the death of his 8-year-old stepson. His wife **Tonya Victor** was also charged but both fled before their arrest in Georgia in 2012 after being profiled on “America’s Most Wanted.” They told people there

they were trying to plant a church.

Tonya Victor was found guilty of manslaughter in 2014 by a unanimous jury. Errol Victor was found guilty of 2nd-degree murder but on a split 10–2 vote. After he spent nearly 6 years in prison, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled non-unanimous juries were unconstitutional, vacated the pastor’s conviction and sent the case back to state court, where it’s pending.

The Victors’ blended family includes 13 boys, 2 of which they had together after marrying. *Source: WWL, 1-21-21*

Stalking and intimidation civil suits brought by 4 women accusing TV actor **Danny Masterson** of rape must go through mediation within the **Church of Scientology**, a Los Angeles judge ruled.

The suits were filed by former Scientologists who signed a contract letting the church resolve “any dispute, claim or controversy” through internal arbitration. Another woman, who was not a Scientologist, will have her civil case heard in court. Criminal charges against Masterson on 3 counts of rape between 2001–03 aren’t affected by the ruling.

Journalist Tony Ortega summarized the ruling: Scientology has once again derailed a major lawsuit through its contracts, which former top officials have testified were designed to deny members justice. *Source: Reuters, 12-31-20*

William Wasmus, 64, a Grove City, OH, evangelical pastor who conducted services on public access TV and was sentenced to 220 years in prison for child rape in 1994, had his petition for parole denied by a state board. He has served the required minimum of 15 years.

Former church member Dave Wexler opposed his release. He and his ex-wife, who later married Wasmus, discovered pornographic images and videos of children Wasmus had been molesting and turned them over to police. He can request early release once every 5 years. *Source: WCMH, 12-7-20*

Allegations

Widespread abuses at 14 Irish Catholic and 4 county-run homes for unwed mothers and their children between 1922–98 resulted in over 9,000 deaths, said a government report detailing a 6-year investigation. The institutions, where women and girls were sent to give birth and pressured to give their children up for adoption, were also responsible for unethical vaccine trials and traumatic emotional abuse, the 3,000-page report said.

The commission was set up after the remains of nearly 800 children were found interred in an unmarked mass grave at a home run by nuns in County Galway. The report said about 56,000 mothers and 57,000 children were housed in the homes nationwide until the last one closed in 1998. *Source: NY Times, 1-12-21*

Faith-based institutions in New Zealand and those run by the state were responsible for the abuse of about 250,000 children between 1950–2019, said a report by the Royal Commission of Inquiry. That’s about 40% of the 655,000 people in care during that period.

Abuse included physical and sexual assaults — with staff in some psychiatric institutions forcing male patients to rape female patients — improper and needlessly invasive medical procedures, racial slurs and verbal abuse.

The report said the likelihood of children abused in faith-based or religious homes ranged from 21% to 42% and that indigenous Māori children probably suffered the most. The Catholic Church of New Zealand said in a statement that it would study the report to learn how to better deal with complaints and prevent abuse.

Some faith-based institutions sought to “cleanse” cultural identity from Māori people through sexual and physical abuse, the report said. *Source: Reuters, 12-16-20*

Sexual abuse by **Colorado Catholic clergy** involved **9 diocesan priests** with “substantiated” allegations involving 70 more underage victims in addition to 43 abusers identified in a 2019 report.

The most prominent priest named in the new report is **Charles Woodrich**, known as “Father Woody,” who died in 1991. The Denver Catholic Register, which he had served as editor, called him “Denver’s patron saint of the hungry and homeless.” *Source: Catholic News Agency, 12-2-20*

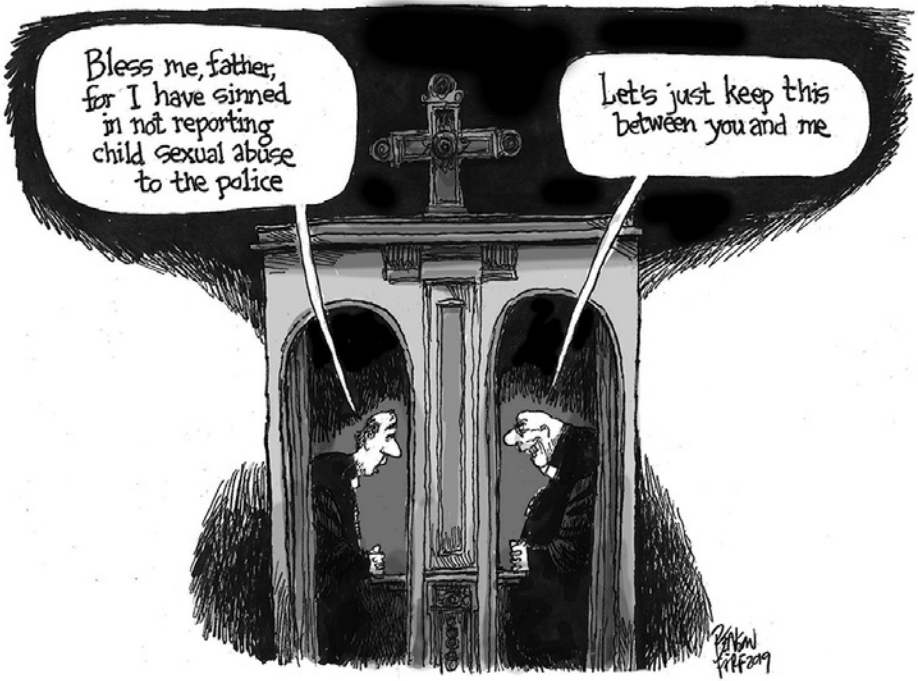
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John Zuhlsdorf, a Catholic priest from the Italian Diocese of Velletri-Segni, will leave the Diocese of Madison, WI, where he has served since 2014 as president of the Tridentine Mass Society of Madison, an association to preserve the Latin Mass.

Zuhlsdorf has been a strong critic of Pope Francis and publicly sympathetic to much of former President Trump’s agenda. He wrote on a recent blog, “There is a Catholic antifa now. They are feeling their ascendancy and they are applying it. We will see more persecution leveled at anyone who strays from their demands.”

During YouTube livestreams before the Jan. 6 certification of President Biden’s Electoral College win, Zuhlsdorf held exorcisms to drive away what he said were demonic influences to steal the election.

A statement sent to Diocese of Madison priests said he will relocate to “pursue other opportunities” and noted it was a mutual decision between Zuhlsdorf and Bishop Donald Hying. *Source: WKOW, 1-19-21*



A meeting of two freethinking giants

In 1870, two forces for freedom met for the first time in Peoria

This article first appeared in the January 2021 issue of Peoria Magazine (peoriamagazines.com) and is reprinted with permission.

By Steve Tarter

Two of the greatest personalities of the 19th century met for the first time on a cold February morning in Peoria. The year was 1870 when Frederick Douglass, the great reformer, writer and orator, dropped by the home of Robert Ingersoll, freethought evangelist and the city's most illustrious citizen, who was then serving as Illinois attorney general.

Visit from a stranger

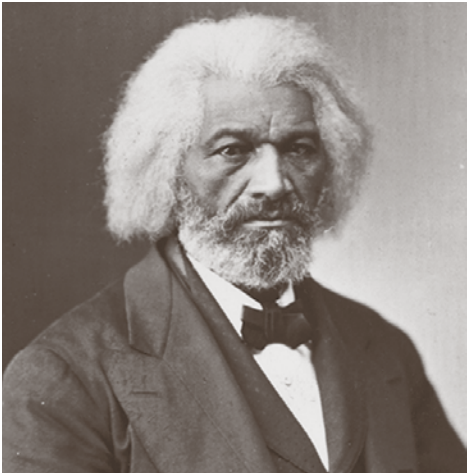
Crossing the country on a speaking tour, Douglass had addressed a crowd in nearby Elmwood the previous evening. He was told that if he needed accommodations in Peoria — a city where he had been unable to secure a hotel reservation on a previous visit — he should call on Ingersoll. “It would not do to disturb a family at such a time as I shall arrive there on a night as cold as this,” Douglass protested in his autobiography. But he was assured Ingersoll would receive him warmly, regardless of circumstance.

By then a recognized celebrity, Douglass reported finding quarters that night “at the best hotel in the city.” His curiosity aroused, however, he decided “to know more of this now famous and noted ‘infidel’” — the man who reportedly would have taken him in. Before leaving to catch his train, Douglass paid a morning visit to the Ingersoll home. His published account reads:

“Mr. Ingersoll was at home, and if I have ever met a man with real living human sunshine in his face, and honest, manly kindness in his voice, I met one who possessed these qualities that morning. I received a welcome from Mr. Ingersoll and his family which would have been a cordial to the bruised



The statue of Robert Ingersoll in Peoria, Ill., was refurbished by Zenos Frudakis and then rededicated in August 2016. FFRF led the fundraising drive for the restoration and contributed more than \$35,000 from nearly 250 donors.



Frederick Douglass

heart of any proscribed and storm-beaten stranger, and one which I can never forget or fail to appreciate.” The experience also moved Douglass to speculate openly about matters of faith in an Ingersollian vein. “Genuine goodness is the same, whether found inside or outside the church, and that to be an ‘infidel’ no more proves a man to be selfish, mean and wicked than to be evan-

gelical proves him to be honest, just and human,” Douglass wrote. “Perhaps there were Christian ministers and Christian families in Peoria at that time by whom I might have been received in the same gracious manner . . . but in my former visits to this place I had failed to meet them.”

Kindred spirits

Ingersoll and Douglass were kindred spirits in many respects. Not only were they among the most gifted — and busiest — speakers of their day, both were heavily involved in politics, urging equal rights for African-Americans and women when those causes were anything but popular. In 1883, 13 years after their first meeting in Peoria, Douglass and Ingersoll both raised their voices to oppose the Supreme Court’s ruling that invalidated the Civil Rights Act of 1875, which had been enacted in response to civil rights violations against African-Americans.

“The difference between colored and white here is that the one, by reason of color, needs legal protection, and the other, by reason of color, does not need protection,” Douglass said. “It is nevertheless true that manhood is insulted, in both cases. No man can put a chain about the ankle of his fellow man, without at last finding the other end of it fastened about his own neck.” “The decision takes from seven million people the shield of the Constitution,” Ingersoll said about the decision, which allowed states to set their own restrictions for minority citizens. Ingersoll’s speech on the occasion spanned 50 pages.

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.

Both Ingersoll and Douglass became national figures for supporting causes that were considered controversial. Douglass, a former slave, focused on abolishing slavery while advancing the rights of women and African-Americans. Ingersoll took on organized religion while still promoting so-called Christian ideals, notes Susan Jacoby, author of *The Great Agnostic*, a 2013 biography. He also campaigned passionately for women’s rights, against racism and in opposition to the death penalty.

Promoters of freedom

At a time when attending speeches and lectures was a popular form of entertainment, Ingersoll is said to have delivered more than 1,300 in his career. “More people probably heard his voice than any other American prior to mass media,” notes Tom Krupa, who became interested in Ingersoll while volunteering at the Peoria Historical Society’s Flanagan House. The house, built in 1837, displays a portrait of Ingersoll and a desk he used while living in Peoria from 1857 to 1877. A successful attorney, Ingersoll later moved to Washington, D.C. and then New York City.

Douglass was also a traveling man, visiting Peoria on at least three occasions. His message — before, during and after the Civil War — called for equality for all Americans. One of his most famous speeches took place in 1852 at a Fourth of July celebration in Rochester, N.Y., where he told the predominantly white audience: “What to the slave is the Fourth of July? This is the birthday of your national independence. You may rejoice, I must mourn.” Douglass never stopped promoting freedom. It should be remembered that on the last day of his life, in 1895, he attended a meeting of the National Women’s Council in Washington, DC.

Ingersoll likewise supported women’s rights while covering a wide variety of subjects, most notably criticizing organized religion. “With soap, baptism is a good thing,” he once famously quipped. “That Ingersoll made a good living out of questioning religion particularly enraged his opponents,” wrote Jacoby. What set him apart from the crowd was his erudition and good humor. “He called Shakespeare his bible and Burns his hymnal,” Krupa notes.

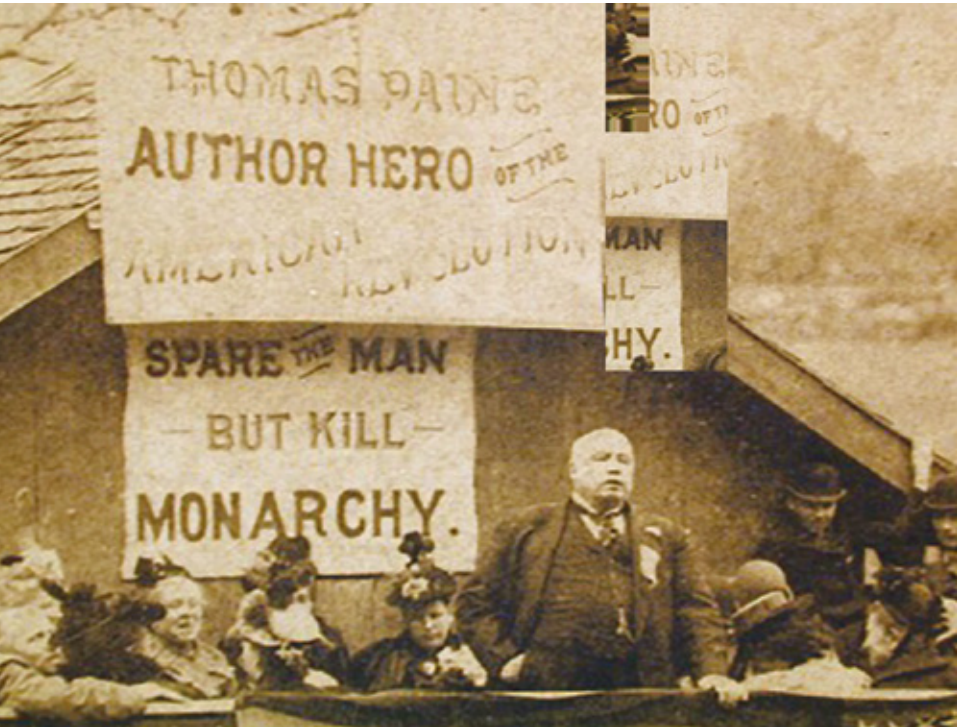
Among Ingersoll’s many admirers was no less than Mark Twain, who also became successful on the lecture circuit. “It was just the supremest combination of English words that was put together since the world began,” Twain wrote to his wife after witnessing an Ingersoll speech. “Lord, what an organ is human speech when it is played by a master.”

The Douglass visit with Ingersoll that took place 150 years ago represents a special moment in American history when two giants of the freethinking world came together.

During the Civil War, Douglass made a speech that pointed to the power of photography, a technology that by then had spread across the country. Even small towns had photo studios, he said. “The universality of pictures must exert a powerful though silent influence upon the ideas and sentiment of present and future generations,” Douglass stated.

If only there were a picture of these two giants when they met in 1870 in Peoria.

Steve Tarter is a freelance writer/blogger and podcaster from Peoria, Ill.



Robert Ingersoll speaks in New Rochelle, N.Y., on May 30, 1894.