

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



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books a date
with the future**

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**Requiem
for the
Supreme Court**

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**Artificial
intelligence is
already here**

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SUPREME SETBACKS

Three court cases decided in late June upended decades of precedence as women's rights and state/church separation became victims of the religiously motivated Supreme Court.

Voucher ruling upends longtime doctrine

In a 6-3 decision issued June 20, the extremist supermajority on the U.S. Supreme Court has dealt another major blow to true religious liberty in its judgment on the *Carson v. Makin* school voucher case.

Outgoing Justice Stephen Breyer, whose resignation is effective before the next term, wrote the dissent, signed by Justices Elena Kagan and, excepting one section, by Sonia Sotomayor, who wrote her own dissent as well. Breyer warns that the majority is effectively abandoning longstanding doctrine, while Sotomayor fears that it is rejecting the principle of separation between state and church altogether.

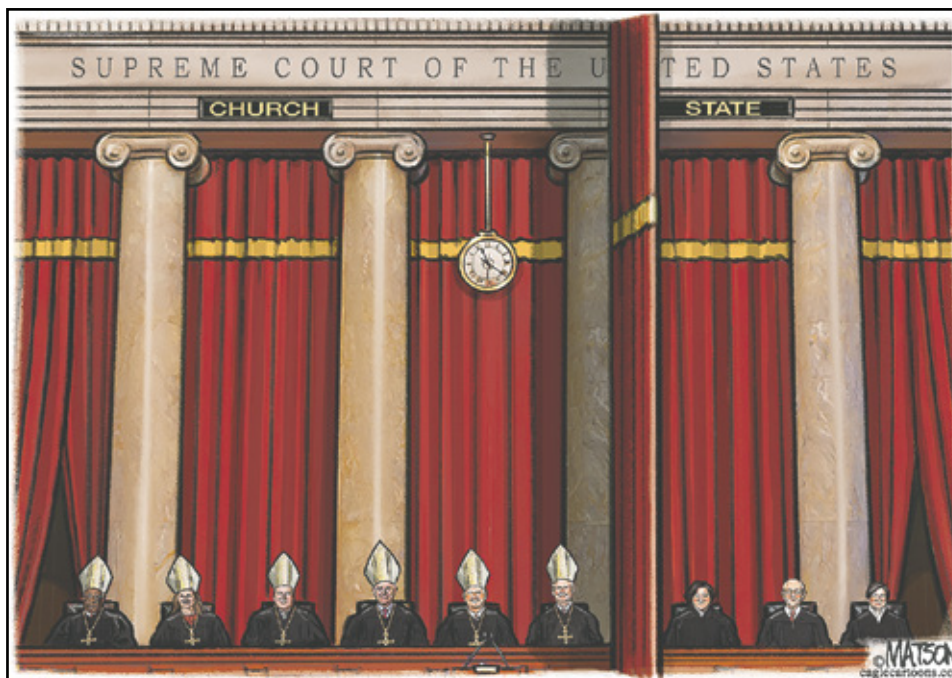


Stephen Breyer

The court has gone contrary to the country's foundational constitutional principles in striking down Maine's "no aid" law, a provision meant to ensure that no citizen is forced to fund religious indoctrination at private religious schools, or any religious education that conflicts with their personal beliefs. The Supreme Court's judicial activism and faulty reasoning will undoubtedly lead to many additional violations and litigation in other states as Christian nationalists seek to fund private Christian education with taxpayer money.

The plaintiffs want to use state money in this instance to send their children to Christian schools that provide religious instruction. One of the schools in question, Bangor Christian School, has a mission of instilling a biblical worldview that is "completely intertwined" with the curriculum and identifies the bible as its "final authority in all matters." The First U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals concluded in its judgment two years ago that the "nonsectarian"

See Voucher on page 15



Fundamental rights lost as *Roe v. Wade* toppled

FFRF condemns in strongest terms the devastating decision June 24 by the Supreme Court's ultraconservative supermajority to dismantle the fundamental right to an abortion, noting the result will be untold harm. Abortion rights have been rolled back in about half the states.

The decision was 5-4 to effectively overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which has been on the books for 49 years. Chief Justice John Roberts wrote a concurrence stating he would have limited the decision to upholding the 15-week ban, making the judgment to uphold the Mississippi state law 6-3. The majority decision closely tracks the draft written by Justice Samuel Alito, Jr., which was leaked on May 2, and created shockwaves, setting off weeks of protests around the nation.

Justices Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor, and Elena Kagan filed a scathing joint dissenting opinion. They write:

"For half a century *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* have protected the liberty and equality of women. . . . that the Constitution safeguards a woman's right to decide for

herself whether to bear a child. . . . The government could not control a woman's body or the course of a woman's life: It could not determine what the woman's future would be. Respecting a woman as an autonomous being, and granting her full equality, meant giving her substantial choice for this most personal and most consequential of all life decisions."

“One result of today's decision is certain: the curtailment of women's rights, and of their status as free and equal citizens.
— From the dissent

for this Court, but more, for the many millions of American women who have today lost a fundamental constitutional protection — we dissent,” they conclude.

With this decision, abortion care for millions of people is being pushed even further out of reach. Thirteen states have trigger laws to ban abortions, and some other states have pre-*Roe* criminal bans also now in effect. More than 600,000 abortions have

See *Roe v. Wade* on page 2

Coach prayer decision opens Pandora's box

FFRF is excoriating a religion-pandering opinion with far-reaching consequences that the U.S. Supreme Court handed down June 27 in a case involving an ostentatiously praying public school coach.

The extremist supermajority on the court overturned a decision from the 1970s, *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), that codified years of Supreme Court precedent declaring unconstitutional government actions with a religious purpose or effect, and is replacing it with a troubling new “history and tradition” test.

In the 6-3 decision written by Justice Neil Gorsuch, the majority held that the Free Exercise and Free Speech clauses of the First Amendment protect an individual engaging in a “personal religious observance” from so-called government reprisal.

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, joined by Justices Stephen Breyer and Elena Kagan, wrote a 35-page dissent that is even longer than the majority opinion, charging that the majority “misconstrues the facts” and once again pays “almost exclusive attention to the Free Exercise Clause's protection for individual religious exercise while giving short shrift to the Establishment Clause's prohibition on state establishment of religion.”



Sonia Sotomayor

Writes Sotomayor: “This decision does a disservice to schools and the young citizens they serve, as well as to our nation's longstanding commitment to the separation of church and state.”

A majority of justices on the court unfortunately have bought the deceitful narrative spun by former Coach Joe Kennedy, who falsely claimed that his prayers on the 50-yard line after high school football games were “personal” and “private,” despite his clear intent to include students and other game attendees in the prayers. Kennedy, with the help of First Liberty Institute, a Religious Right legal outfit, brought the lawsuit after the district placed him on paid administrative leave for continuing to host group prayers on the 50-yard line at

See Coach prayer on page 8

Abortion should be legal: One woman’s story

By Karla Martin

I have heard Christians say that everyone really knows that God exists because we could be aware of him around us, in our mind and in our heart, if we only looked. If this is so, I have never been aware of him. If he exists, he is hateful and has no concern for individuals, especially women.

What has he done to me? He has aborted my only three pregnancies! Yes, I would blame it on him, if I really believed he existed. He would be the most prolific abortionist that has ever been.

According to Christianity, God made and designed our bodies. Well, if so, he did a very bad job of it and he is to blame for how poorly it works. Over half of fertilized ovum fail to implant and are just washed out of our bodies, as of no concern. Were those fertilized ova really babies? I was two days late and asked for a pregnancy test. When they called me with positive test results, I was already bleeding. There is nothing to point to or see, just some changes to the timing of a woman’s bleeding. God gives these fetuses no special concern, so why should our laws? That was pregnancy number two.

Of those ova that do implant, a high percentage fail to thrive and are dismissed



Karla Martin

partway through pregnancy. Again, where is God’s concern? On the cusp between my first and second trimester, I lost a pregnancy. I had to fish the fetus out of the toilet. I can assure you, what I saw/handled was nothing like human. It could easily have been the fetus of a frog that students chop up in biology lab. It had been life, all right, but nothing like a human life that our Constitution requires us to respect and preserve. That was pregnancy number one.

With pregnancy number three, at 8½ months, I finally thought we had succeeded — only for God to kill him just before he could be born. He was definitely human by then, so God was a murderer, who refused to wait just a few more days until my baby could be born alive. I was devastated.

Through all this, both my husband and

I had really wanted children. We had carefully used contraception when we were first married. Did God hold this against us? We were both in graduate school at the time and had no resources or time to support a family. Once we graduated, that changed and we started trying for a family. I have told our result. I did everything the doctor said to support each pregnancy. We wanted so much to have a family. We were not especially religious, but neither of us actively identified as atheist. I guess God decided that we should be atheist, and pushed me, at least, over the brink. He also killed our marriage.

Most importantly, I will not worship a God who acts as this one supposedly has. He has killed more humans than have been killed by other humans throughout the ages. He cares nothing for abortion (since he is the cause of most), so why should he care about making it illegal? Where is the empathy for the pregnant woman? Why should humans have to care more for fetuses than God does? Why should they care more for fetuses than for the woman risking her life to have the baby?

I have little respect for those who are anti-abortion and anti-life (at least women’s lives), just as they have no respect for me and my life. They show no empathy or understanding for pregnant women or for

the real world. All they care about is imposing their religious ideas on the rest of us.

Sometimes, I almost wish that I had died at the end of my last pregnancy (as I almost did) and did not have to see how awful so much of the US has become — all because of religion. If I was trying to have children at this time, and not in the 1980s, I would be so fearful. Something in my body that I had no control over, and which doctors did not understand, killed all three fetuses, one after another. Do you think those Christian anti-abortionists would just let it go? Or would they try to hold me responsible, even though I did everything possible to bring each of my pregnancies to a happy end? If I lived in Texas, what are the chances that I would have been brought to court and held responsible for at least one of those abortions?

I am more at peace believing God does not exist. With God, I would dread the distant future — the pain and suffering in hell or the smarmy boredom in heaven. Without God, the world and nature can be satisfying and uplifting while we live, despite griefs that naturally occur. And there is a nothingness that follows once we evaporate in death. That is enough.

Karla Martin is an FFRF member from Washington.

Roe v. Wade

Continued from page 1

been performed annually in the United States under *Roe*, with more than 1 in 4 women terminating pregnancies during their lifetime.

The Supreme Court’s decision will embolden theocratic politicians to push for total bans on the procedure. As FFRF noted in its amicus brief to the Supreme Court in this case, religion has always been at the heart of anti-abortion legislation and it was no different in the Mississippi ban at hand. This is exposed by various highly sectarian religious statements that Mississippi legislators made in support of House Bill 1510, such as: “I believe that life is precious and children are a gift from God” and “I am not God, but I serve a God who says life is in the blood. And this bill will protect those lives.”

The majority opinion disingenuously denies a religious agenda, claiming, “Our opinion is not based on any view about if and when prenatal life is entitled to any of the rights enjoyed

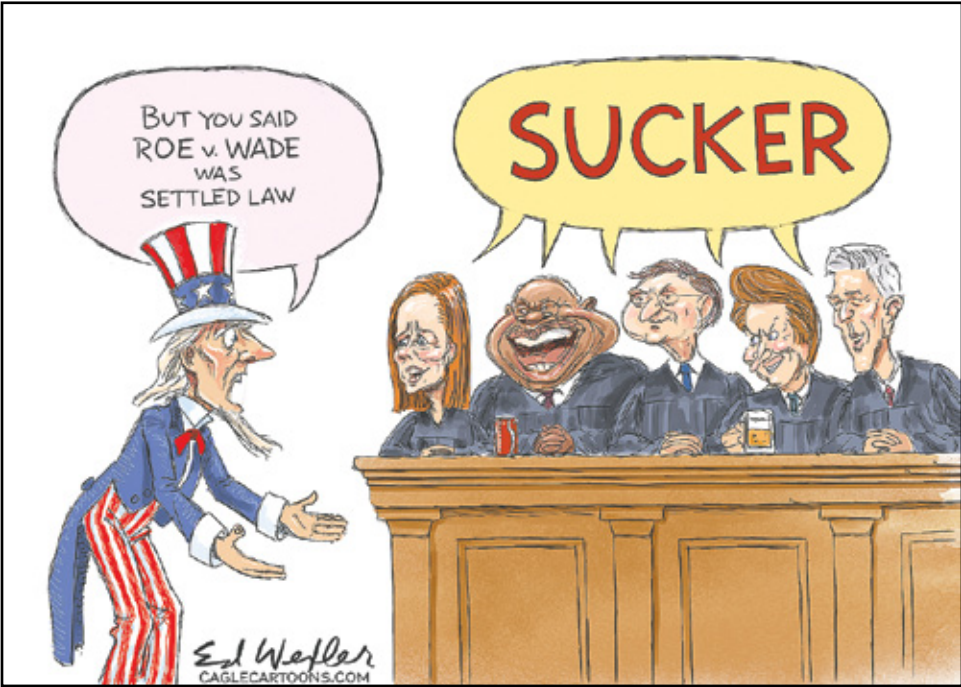
after birth. The dissent, by contrast, would impose on the people a particular theory about when the rights of personhood begin.”

Yet every signer to the majority decision was raised Roman Catholic (with Justice Neil Gorsuch now identifying as Episcopalian). Dissenters Kagan and Breyer identify as Jewish, and Sotomayor is a liberal Catholic, more representative of the majority viewpoint of today’s American Catholic laypeople, who overwhelmingly support at least some abortion rights and are far more liberal than their church.

The opinion ignores the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and continues the trend of privileging religious persons and their beliefs over the rights of all others.

“*Roe* was egregiously wrong from the start,” Alito writes, saying the significant subsequent rulings reaffirming *Roe* “must be overruled” because they too were “egregiously wrong.” Shockingly, Alito even charges that the arguments used in the 7-2 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision and subsequent rulings amounted to “an abuse of judicial authority.”

The final opinion repeats the highly-criticized language of the leaked



draft, in which Alito writes, “The Constitution makes no reference to abortion, and no such right is implicitly protected by any constitutional provision... including the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.”

“Alito claims abortion isn’t among the enumerated rights in the U.S. Constitution, therefore it’s not a right at all — it’s to be left to the whim of whatever legislature happens to run your state — and two-thirds of those legislators, by the way, are male,” comments FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Such reproductive tyranny is suitable for a totalitarian state — or a theocracy.”

Since Roberts has been chief justice, over 20 cases have overturned precedent. This case should be seen as yet another warning that any civil right is potentially on the chopping block. It would be naive and wrong to think that the ultraconservative justices are going to stop there: the constitutional right to birth control (*Griswold v. Connecticut*), right to same-sex marriage (*Obergefell v. Hodges*), right to sexual intimacy (*Lawrence v. Texas*), and even the right to interracial marriage (*Loving v. Virginia*), are all threatened by

today’s decision. Justice Thomas wrote a concurring opinion saying as much, “... in future cases, we should reconsider all of this Court’s substantive due process precedents, including *Griswold*, *Lawrence*, and *Obergefell*.” Interestingly, Thomas, an African-American married to a white woman, omits reference to *Loving*, which is predicated on the same right to privacy.

None of these rights, whose historical opposition has always been rooted in religion, is mentioned explicitly in the Constitution and all of them have a considerable history of being outlawed in this country.

“For the first time ever, the Supreme Court has taken away a constitutional right,” comments FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert. “Today’s decision is not only an affront to women’s rights, but also a direct attack on the separation of state and church. This ultraconservative majority will not stop here, they will work, as Justice Thomas threatens in his concurrence, ‘at the earliest opportunity’ to impose their religious beliefs on us all by next eliminating the right to contraception, right to marry, and love whom we choose.”

ffrf

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TODAY

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

‘DO mess with Texas’

Julia Sweeney joins San Antonio speaker lineup

FFRF has added comedian and author Julia Sweeney to its powerful speaker lineup for its 2022 convention in San Antonio.

Sweeney last spoke at FFRF’s convention in Madison in 2019 when she performed a portion of her “Older and Wider” one-person monologue. Sweeney is a former “Saturday Night Live” actor and also the author of several books, including *If It’s Not One Thing, It’s Your Mother* and *God Said ‘Ha!’*

FFRF’s 45th annual convention will be held Friday, Oct. 28, and Saturday, Oct. 29, at the Hyatt Regency on the Riverwalk. The conference begins with an optional “early bird” registration and reception late Thursday afternoon, Oct. 27, and concludes after the Sunday morning meetings of the membership and FFRF State Representatives, ending by noon.

The theme is “DO Mess with Texas,” a state which has become ground zero for theocratic policymaking.

Please make your room reservations soon, and no later than Oct. 7 at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio, 210-451-6200, ffrf.us/hotel, site of the convention, with overflow options at the Hilton Garden Inn or Menger Hotel. (See full details on hotels, menus, etc., at ffrf.org/convo-2022.)

Headliners include **John Irving**, the bestselling award-winning novelist of 14 books, including *The World According to Garp* and *The Cider House Rules*, who will be receiving FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award. He will give the keynote Saturday night.

Iconic Texan commentator and writer **Jim Hightower**, “America’s most popular populist,” will help open the conference. Another speaker who is an expert at “messing with Texas” will be **Val Benavidez**, director of the Texas Freedom Network.

Abortion rights advocate **Amy Hag-**



Photo by Ingrid Laas

“Letting Go of God” comedian and actress Julia Sweeney, an FFRF honorary director, will speak at FFRF’s national convention in San Antonio in October.

strom Miller, principal plaintiff in the lawsuit against Texas’s draconian abortion ban, SB 8, and CEO of Whole Woman’s Health, a series of abortion clinics, will be named FFRF’s 2022 “Forward Award” honoree.

Nebraska state **Sen. Megan Hunt**, who publicly identifies as an atheist, is a stalwart against Christian religious extremists in her home state, and will receive FFRF’s “Champion of the First Amendment” award.

Daniel Mach, director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief, will accept on behalf of the ACLU FFRF’s Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award.

The Richard & Beverly Hermsen \$5,000 Student Activist Award will go to **Max Nibert**, the brave 18-year-old

Huntington (W.Va.) High School student who helped organize a walkout after the school held Christian-themed assemblies in the public school. He is now principal student plaintiff in FFRF’s ongoing federal lawsuit. Also appearing will be 17-year-old activist **Will Larkins**, a nonreligious student who became a national figurehead in testifying against Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill and leading a walkout at his high school.

As a special musical treat, “Godless Gospel” — a collaboration between artistic producer **Andre Forbes** and FFRF Co-President **Dan Barker** — will debut. The distinguished singers include **Candace R.M. Gorham**, author of *The Ebony Exodus Project*, **Tahira Clayton**, a New York City jazz vocalist who also belts out gospel, **Rogiers Fibby**, president of Black

Nonbelievers of DC, **Cynthia McDonald**, an activist with Freedmen of Chicago, **DeAngela Morant**, of Florida, and **Mandisa Thomas**, president of Black Nonbelievers. They will also participate in a panel discussion on African-American nonbelievers.

Actress and founder of Dare to Doubt, **Alice Greczyn**, will be receiving FFRF’s “Freethought Heroine” Award. Other speakers include the author of Alpha God, **Hector A. Garcia**, of San Antonio. He’s given a TED Talk and has also written *Alpha God: The Psychology of Religious Violence and Oppression*.

The youngest honoree will be 11-year-old **Elle Harris**, receiving the debut “Out of God’s Closet,” a \$5,000 student scholarship endowed by the late Diane Uhl, as the author of *Elle the Humanist*.

Concurring optional workshops Friday at noon will include one on what people can do to help stop the religious war against reproductive rights, conducted by FFRF’s contributing writer **Barbara Alvarez**, and another, “On Death, Dying and Disbelief,” led by **Candace R.M. Gorham**, based on her book of the same name.

Included will be reporting on FFRF’s achievements over the year by FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and **Annie Laurie Gaylor**, the report on legal activism and achievements by FFRF attorneys, headed by Legal Director **Rebecca Markert**, and a reprise of last year’s popular workshop, “Ask an Attorney.”

The convention will feature book and product sales tables, the popular “NonPrayer Breakfast,” and a drawing for “clean,” pre-“In God We Trust” currency.

Register online at ffrf.org/convo-2022 or send in the registration form on the back page.

See you in October!

FFRF’s events manager is no ‘miracle baby’

Name: Sadie May Pattinson.

Where and when I was born: In the village of Belleville, Wis., in 1998.

Education: I graduated from Belleville High School in 2016, and from the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater in 2020, with a bachelor’s degree in communications and a minor in journalism, magna cum laude.

Family: My parents are Ron and Connie Pattinson, and though I’m an only child, I grew up with two best friends Lauren and Kira, who remain like sisters. I also recently rescued a kitten named Violette who has quickly become the love of my life.

How I came to work at FFRF: After graduating during the pandemic, I was looking for a workplace with a mission I felt very driven to fulfill. Knowing I am working toward something that I am passionate about makes it much easier to wake up each day.

What I do here: As the events and outreach manager here at FFRF, I work to plan events, both large and small, from staff lunch outings to the annual national convention. As the chapter liaison, I connect our chapters in states all over the nation, assisting them in outreach efforts. I also have been tasked to take care of our beautiful gardens in the summer, which has been my favorite miscellaneous job task so far.

What I like best about it: I like being able to work with people who are like-minded, yet respectful and open to others’ beliefs. Little things like not getting blessed after I sneeze, and not being judged for wearing “ungodly” clothes is very refreshing in the office.



Sadie Pattinson

MEET A STAFFER

What gets old about it: People asking me not to tell others where I work when introducing me to a new person.

I spend a lot of time thinking about: How almost everything can be thrifted.

I spend little if any time thinking about: Getting

condemned to a hell.

My religious upbringing was: I was born into an atheist family that stressed the beliefs in schooling and nature rather than a religion.

My doubts about religion started: Luckily, I wasn’t ever indoctrinated into any religion, so I do not have any doubts, as I have simply never believed in one. However, there have been many experiences in my life which have further solidified my secularism. The more educated I become, the less I believe.

Things I like: The golden hour before a sunset, tiramisu, spotting a fox, talking to strangers, discovering new hiking trails, sinner’s spinach, Victorian-era decor and giving privileged Christian crank callers a reality check from their sheltered lives.

Things I smite: Capitalism, busy grocery stores, centipedes, the American healthcare system, calculus, single-use plastics, toxic masculinity, and when you put a pizza on broil to crisp it up a bit and it gets a little too crispy.

In my golden years: Life will be golden when I’m taking care of the large garden I grew all by myself.

What is something that makes you different?: It sounds strange, but the story of my conception is quite different. I was created by in-vitro fertilization, made entirely in a lab in the University of Wisconsin-Madison, frozen for a period, and then implanted back into my biological mother, who had struggled to get pregnant for over a decade. Many called me a “miracle baby,” but I see it more as being “science based” since conception.

Freethought Today Cryptogram

EIKEB, WL EBJ ZQEEJIG DU IJPWOWDL,

WG GWZSPM EBJ DSWLWDL EBQE BQG

GKITWTJH. —DGXQI NWPHJ

This puzzle is from *Freethinking Cryptograms* by FFRF member Brooks Rimes, available on Amazon.com for \$8.95. See bottom of page for description and hint for this puzzle. Answer is on page 21.

Freethought Today Crossword

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Answers on page 21

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

- Across
1. “Up for ____”

6. Abscess content

9. Beaver’s coat, e.g.

13. “Little House on the Prairie” protagonist

14. 50 states

15. Hue perception

16. Dark

17. Turkish title of respect

18. Awaken

19. *The ____ International, hotel bible pushers

21. *Irreverent poet Percy

23. “To” follower

24. Period of illness

25. Military hospitals, for short

28. I, to a Greek

30. Cut in two

35. Largest volcano in Europe

37. Prying

39. Another term for potassium nitrate

40. Bona fide

41. Consume (2 words)

43. ____lemon Athletica

44. Mourner’s song

46. Old telephone feature

47. Bagpiper’s tartan

48. Wee one

50. Burden

52. Sol, alt. sp.

53. Comportment

55. Shooting marble
57. *Butterfly ____, first “Freethought Heroine” of “Gone With the Wind” fame

61. *Chief Justice and possible swing vote

65. Predecessor to “truly”

66. “Modern Family” dad

68. Unimpressed

69. Between hip and knee

70. Miner’s bounty

71. #36 Down, pl.

72. Late comedian Bob

73. Oui, in English

74. #63 Down, pl.
- Down
1. Onomatopoetic gurgle

2. Rajah’s mate

3. *Freethinker Robert Burns’ poem “____ Lang Syne”

4. Legal document

5. Sudden understanding, to a Japanese Buddhist

6. Drinking establishments

7. Don’t waste

8. One’s arbitrary assertion

9. Betting game

10. Twelfth month of Jewish year

11. Fail to keep

12. Three pointer, e.g.

15. Not a brainiac

20. Nary a soul (2 words)
22. Center of activity

24. Stronghold

25. *Freethinking “Rigoletto” composer

26. Dined at home (2 words)

27. Chow down greedily

29. Arnold Lobel’s “Frog and ____”

31. Animal-produced thread

32. Lady’s pocketbooks

33. *Freethinker Yo-Yo Ma’s instrument

34. *Diderot: “Skepticism is the first step toward ____”

36. Pond dweller

38. Chinese monetary unit

42. Dwarf planet

45. Catch in a net

49. 50-50, e.g.

51. Witches’ gathering

54. “____ the show!”

56. *Freethinking author of “The War of the Worlds”

57. Opposite of truth

58. Type of salmon

59. Witty remark

60. Craving

61. Whiskey grain, pl.

62. Indian music

63. One of the Romanovs

64. Gets the picture

67. “Is” is to “she” as ____ is to “we”

OVERHEARD

It will embolden others and exacerbate culture wars.

Nancy Armour, sportswriter, in her column, “Supreme Court siding with praying football coach would create larger problems,” regarding the Bremerton School Board vs. Kennedy case, which was decided in favor of the coach.

USA Today, 6-15-22

Back then, I probably would’ve said to work it out in the church. Now I would say get somewhere safe. Write everything down and gather evidence. Don’t go through the church. Go to authorities.

Naghmeh Panahi, who was abused by her husband for years, but stayed with him because evangelical leader Franklin Graham told her to.

Washington Post, 6-20-22

Since the 1960s, parental rights have been a rallying cry for conservative evangelicals who felt repeatedly usurped in their ability to control schools. It was a shock to think public schools could possibly function without religion guiding them.

Adam Laats, a professor of education at Binghamton University State University of New York, as quoted in the article, “How Christian home-schoolers laid the groundwork for ‘parental rights.’”

Washington Post, 6-11-22

Surely, there are atheists in Congress and running for Congress, just as there are atheists everywhere else in America, even if they remain closeted. With the right using God to coax the party into regressive, punitive and at times increasingly scary places, here’s hoping they’ll finally have the courage to come out of the shadows.

Conservative pundit and atheist S.E. Cupp, in her column, “The GOP weaponizes faith; will atheists object?”

New York Daily News, 6-22-22

Privacy, like liberty, is threatened by a Christian nationalist movement that wants to freeze the United States in the 19th century and remove our individual choices.

Jennifer Rubin in her column “The ‘pursuit of happiness’ means having the right to privacy.”

Washington Post, 6-27-22

Let’s be honest: Our rulers don’t come out and say so, but obviously they see this as a Christian nation, not a secular one. We once believed that non-Christians had the right not to have Christianity imposed on them in the public sphere. That was then; this is now.

Eugene Robinson, in his column, “It’s not a court. It’s a junta.”

Washington Post, 6-27-22

They regard secularism, which for centuries has been the liberal world’s understanding of what it means to be neutral, as itself a form of discrimination against religion.

Cornell Law School professor Michael Dorf, speaking of the conservative judges on the Supreme Court, in the article, “U.S. Supreme Court takes aim at separation of church and state.”

Yahoo News, 6-28-22

In previewing this case in April, we suggested the constitutional problems here are so glaring that the eventual ruling would serve as a useful test of whether the court’s conservatives are actually the unbiased constitutional originalists they strenuously claim to be, or just robed right-wing partisans who would shoehorn Republican policies into force with whatever legal arguments served the moment.

We now have our answer, in a ruling that Christian proselytizing to an effectively captive audience of public-school students is somehow consistent with religiously neutral government.

Newspaper editorial regarding the *Kennedy v. Bremerton School District* case titled, “In its latest partisan ruling, the high court erodes church-state separation.”

St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 6-27-22

Americans tend to think of the separation of church and state as one of our foundational principles. And it was. But it’s not anymore. Nothing good can survive the conservative takeover of the Supreme Court. And it doesn’t take these conservatives long to dismantle whatever it is you hold dear.

Elie Mystal, in the column, “The Supreme Court strikes another blow to the separation of church and state.”

The Nation, 6-22-22

Note to members

For those of you who get the PDF version of Freethought Today, there have been a few changes to the content you can see.

Because of privacy concerns — the PDF can be easily forwarded to non-members — FFRF has stopped including in the PDF version the Black Collar Crime report, names of new Lifetime members, and the names of the Letterbox contributors.

The online version at freethoughttoday.com also follows this protocol. Only the actual print newspaper contains all of these items.

If you would like to continue reading

Black Collar Crime, see the names of FFRF’s newest Lifetime members, or see the names of those who contributed to our Letterbox, you will need to change your preferences in how you receive Freethought Today.

In order to do that, follow these simple steps:

Log into your FFRF.org account.

Click on “Update your contact information.”

Go down to “Deliver Freethought Today by” and click on either “Newspaper by mail” or “Both PDF and paper copy.”

Click “Submit.”

Cryptogram hint

A cryptogram is a substitution puzzle in which one letter stands for another. If U equals T, it will equal T throughout the puzzle.

Example:

UOG RLQTM HYVBF DVP SLACN VWGY UOG KJEZ XVI.

THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG.

This month’s clue: Q => A .

IN THE NEWS

196 clerics abused minors in German diocese

A report released June 13 found that at least 196 clerics in the German Catholic diocese of Muenster sexually abused minors between 1945 and 2020, adding to findings from other dioceses that have shaken the church in the country, according to the Associated Press.

The study, commissioned by the diocese in western Germany and carried out over 2½ years by a team from the University of Muenster, pointed to a “massive leadership failure” during the tenures of the diocese’s bishops between 1947 and 2008, with officials covering up scandals or making only superficial interventions, according to a statement from the university summarizing the findings.

“The bishops and other officials in the diocesan leadership were in some cases extensively in the know” about the abuse, co-author Thomas Grossboelting said.

The 196 allegedly abusive clerics account for about 4 percent of all priests in the diocese between 1945 and 2020. About 5 percent of those were “serial” abusers, responsible for more than 10 acts each, the authors found. They said there were at least 610 victims, but the real figure is likely eight to 10 times higher.

Most of the priests suspected of abuse were merely moved rather than having their pastoral duties curtailed, the study found.

New N.Y. laws protect abortion providers

New York has expanded legal protections for people seeking and providing abortions in the state under legislation signed by Gov. Kathy Hochul on June 13, as reported by the Associated Press.

The Democratic governor pushed for the laws in anticipation of the U.S. Supreme Court potentially overruling its 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision, which established a constitutional right to abortion. Abortion providers are worried New York will see a surge in out-of-state residents.

Out-of-state residents accounted for nearly 9 percent — or 7,000 out of roughly 79,000 abortions — performed in New York in 2019, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That’s up from 5 percent — or roughly 4,700 out of 93,000 — in 2015.

One new law protects abortion providers from arrest, extradition and legal proceedings in other states by forbidding New York state and local courts and law enforcement agencies from cooperating in most scenarios.

The laws protecting abortion providers and care take effect immediately.

Officers: Covid test violates our religion

Some San Diego police officers who obtained religious exemptions from taking a Covid-19 vaccine also claim their religion forbids them from putting a cotton swab in their nose to take the test, according to a report by KBPS News.

About 10 percent of police staff, who were exempted on religious grounds, insist their Christian beliefs also instruct them not to use the swabs because they contain ethylene oxide. The chemical is a known carcinogen, but is not actually present on the swabs — it’s used as a gas to sterilize them.

The phrase “I trust in God’s perfect design of my body” was used 19 times by officers seeking the religious exemption,

Positive reception in Arkansas



Chris Sweeny, an FFRF member from Arkansas, hosted an FFRF table at the Bentonville Farmer’s Market on May 28. “I had a very successful first FFRF event,” Sweeny writes. “I engaged no fewer than 50 people, handed out all of the flyers and most of the buttons, and collected 10 new contacts (several of who said they would try to join our June 12 meetup). I definitely had more positive feedback than I expected, and while there were certainly some detractors, I am very excited for what lies ahead.”

according to records reviewed by KPBS.

A previous KPBS investigation found officers repeatedly used identical answers on their religious exemption forms, and those answers were often copied from form letters on the internet.

Medical and religious experts say the employees’ claims are groundless.

“I can’t really understand the idea that you cannot be tested because the swabs that are being used are going to cause you cancer,” said Dr. David Pride, an infectious disease specialist at UC San Diego. “Realistically, there just is no evidence indicating that that would occur.”



Humanist youth authors get books translated

Bailey and Elle Harris, 16 and 12 years old, respectively, have authored four books with a humanist angle that have now been translated into four additional languages.

Through the Center For Inquiry and the Translations Project, all four of their books are available for free in Urdu, Arabic, Farsi and Bahasa Indonesia — languages chosen by the Translation Project to help make scientific and humanist literature more available in Muslim-majority countries, where such literature can be more challenging (and sometimes dangerous) to access.

Bailey has written the three-book-series, *My Name is Stardust*, while Elle

has written *Elle the Humanist*.

Bailey spoke at FFRF’s 2018 convention in San Francisco when she was 12 years old. Elle will be speaking at this year’s convention in San Antonio.

Poll: Americans’ belief in God at all-time low

The vast majority of U.S. adults still believe in God, but a record 17 percent of Americans say they don’t believe, according to a new Gallup poll.

The 81 percent who do believe in God is down six percentage points from 2017 and is the lowest in Gallup’s trend. Between 1944 and 2011, more than 90 percent of Americans believed in God.

Gallup first asked this question in 1944, repeating it again in 1947 and twice each in the 1950s and 1960s. In those latter four surveys, a consistent 98 percent said they believed in God. When Gallup asked the question nearly five decades later, in 2011, 92 percent of Americans said they believed in God.

#ChurchToo revelations growing

Survivors of sexual assault in church settings and their advocates have been calling on churches for years to admit the extent of abuse in their midst and to implement reforms, the Associated Press reports. In 2017, that movement acquired the hashtag #ChurchToo, based off the #MeToo movement, which called out sexual predators in many sectors of society.

Recently, #ChurchToo has seen a set of revelations across denominations and ministries, reaching vast audiences in headlines and on screen with a message that activists have long struggled to get across.

“For us it’s just confirmation of what we’ve been saying all these years,” said Jimmy Hinton, an advocate for abuse survivors and a Church of Christ minister in Somerset, Pa. “There is an absolute epidemic of abuse in the

church, in religious spaces.”

Some advocates hope the front-burner focus on abuse could lead to lasting reforms — if not in churches, then in the law.

Louisiana governor vetoes religious bill

On June 18, Louisiana Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards vetoed a bill that would have allowed churches to be treated the same as secular businesses during a public health emergency, and broadly expanded on the state’s RFRA, saying that any law or executive order must treat churches at least as well as it treats any secular entity.

HB 953 was written to allow churches to hold in-person gatherings during a public health emergency as long as stores like Walmart and Home Depot are allowed to remain open, even if at a limited capacity.

As written, the bill stated “Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, the government shall provide protections of the highest order to every church, synagogue, temple, or other place of worship and shall not discriminate against any church, synagogue, temple, or other place of worship by requiring restrictions that are greater than the least severe restrictions that are imposed upon or enforced against any secular business, service, or assembly.”

Edwards noted after his veto that the bill “purports to provide further protection for the free exercise of religion but could create a circumstance that puts churches and congregation in harm’s way in times of an emergency.”

Nonreligious now make up 40 percent of Australians

The 2021 census in Australia showed that more people than ever consider themselves nonreligious, and, if the trend continues, there soon will be as many nonreligious Australians as there are Christians.

Almost 40 percent of Australia’s population reported having no religion in the 2021 census, an increase from 30 percent in 2016 and 22 percent in 2011.

Christianity is still the most common religion in Australia, with nearly 44 percent identifying as Christian, but that number was at 50 percent in 2016 and more than 60 percent in 2011.

Sex abuse allegations against religious group

Court documents from the 1990s allege that People of Praise, a religious group in which Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett once served in a leadership capacity, took part in child sexual abuse and other sexual misconduct, according to The Guardian.

The documents shared on June 6 also described alleged instances of a sexualized atmosphere in the home of the founder, Kevin Ranaghan, and his wife, Dorothy Ranaghan.

Cynthia Carnick stated in the documents that she had witnessed Dorothy Ranaghan tie the arms and legs of two of the Ranaghans’ daughters — who were 3 and 5 at the time the incidents were allegedly witnessed — to their crib with a necktie. She also said that the Ranaghans allegedly practiced “sexual displays” in front of their children and other adults, such as Dorothy Ranaghan lying with her clothes on and “rocking” on top of Kevin Ranaghan in their TV room.

FFRF’s honorary directors speak out

FFRF asked its honorary directors for their thoughts about the recent Supreme Court rulings that have rolled back rights for women and dismantled the separation of church and state. The following are the responses received.

Geoffrey R. Stone

The Supreme Court’s decisions this term reveal the fundamental values of the Republican appointed justices. What they reveal is that these justices are determined to place their own values — and their personal religious beliefs — above their constitutional responsibility to interpret the Constitution in a fair and principled manner.



Geoffrey R. Stone

In this environment, it is more important than ever that we increase our focus on state supreme courts for protecting our rights and, most important, on the political and electoral process to gain a greater voice in that central component of our democratic process.

Ron Reagan

Anyone who assumed that the religious fanatics on the new right-wing Supreme Court would play by the rules of honesty, decency and decorum have gotten a rude wake-up call. This is about ideology, politics and power. A handful of corrupt, unelected jurists are eagerly poised to drag the country back into the Dark Ages, democracy be damned.



Ron Reagan

The religious extremists making up the majority on today’s Supreme Court have tipped their hand, brazenly and without conscience or remorse as they move quickly to cement minoritarian rule over the American public. Their triumph would mean the end of democracy.

Don’t be fooled by Sam (the Sham) Alito’s expressions of concern for the unborn. In his reckoning, the fetus is a utilitarian object, not a subject, and stands in conveniently voiceless contrast to the women whose full agency he regards with misogynistic scorn.

They are not done, these dishonest, hypocritical faux jurists. They are coming for marriage equality, affirmative action, free and fair elections and the separation of church and state. Interracial marriage alone may escape the chopping block. If you’re wondering why, ask Clarence Thomas!

In the face of a determinedly corrupt Supreme Court majority, the surest road to disaster runs through denial and defeatism. Stand up and fight! Get creative! And vote!

Robin Morgan

We’re reeling at the news that the Supreme Court actually did it. They utterly erased *Roe v. Wade*. Not that we weren’t expecting this, because we were. But we need to fortify ourselves — with will, political will, because make no mistake: Women will die from this decision.

We anticipated this, we know “forelash” when we see it, and we’re ready. This will be an even longer battle than anticipated.

Yet, it’s one we must fight. We’re in the streets, we’re registered to vote, we’re prepared to commit massive civil disobedience, if necessary, and we’re absolutely

Decisions debate on C-SPAN



On June 29, FFRF Legal Director Rebecca S. Markert appeared on the C-SPAN series, “Washington Journal,” to discuss the recent decisions from the U.S. Supreme Court. She appeared opposite Daniel Suhr, managing attorney at Liberty Justice Center, a conservative legal organization that claims to protect constitutional rights. During the 60-minute broadcast, the two attorneys fielded calls from across the country.



Robin Morgan

determined to prevail in all the multiple ways we’ve already laid out and will again: from new legislation to menstrual extraction kits; from court challenges to fundraising groups for poor women who can’t afford to travel, get off work, or pay for babysitters; from morning-after to weeks-after pills; from legal aid to pharmaceuticals sent by mail. We are demanding that Congress immediately pass the Women’s Health Protection Act to restore protections for abortion nationwide. And there is a basic constitutional change in the offing, if we get behind it and push: passage of the ERA would by its existence nullify the Supreme Court’s decision. They want us to give up. Why in hell should we grant their wish?”

Susan Jacoby

We are hearing a good deal about each new Supreme Court decision that seems designed to replace the world’s first secular government with a 21st-century version of theocracy. There is no question, for instance, that the decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* is the result of former President Trump’s having had the opportunity to appoint three far-right-wing judges to the high court.



Susan Jacoby

The basic problem with this court and many of its recent decisions is the idea that our political policies and institutions should be based not on reason but on someone’s idea of what a deity expects us to do.

Rusty Bowers, speaker of the Arizona House of Representatives, incurred the ire of Trump for refusing to go along with the big lie about Democrats having stolen the election. Bowers’s explanation for his refusal to cave to Trump, however, was that “it is a tenet of my faith that the Constitution is divinely inspired.” Bowers could not go along with Trump’s lies because he was forbidden by his god to do so. If that god had spoken to him in another voice, presumably it would have been all right to commit election fraud.

The Constitution, of course, does not mention the word “God.” It was written by a group of human beings as fallible as they

were brilliant, as willing to compromise the new nation morally on the founding issue of slavery as they were concerned about freedom for whites. If ever a document was written by feisty, ambivalent human beings, the Constitution is it.

Nevertheless, the Constitution is a remarkable document. But it is being misused in current political strife because so many people — including public officials — do not recognize its secular nature.

During Ketanji Brown Jackson’s confirmation hearings, the flaky Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina asked her (in an exceedingly nasty tone) how she would rate her own faith on a scale of 1 to 10. Jackson had the good sense not to answer. In fact, this was an unconstitutional question. Article 6 of the Constitution explicitly states that “no religious test” shall be applied to any candidate for federal office. There is no ambiguity here. No religious test means no religious test.

In its decision on abortion, the high court is mixing personal religious beliefs with public policy in a truly dangerous way that could be extended to other issues such as gay marriage or contraception. We are in deep trouble.

Michael Newdow

Although the political aspects of the Supreme Court and its composition are surely important, I will leave discussion on that realm to others. What is more interesting to me is the manner in which cases were



Michael Newdow

presented this year, especially in the *Bruen* (Second Amendment) and the *Dobbs* (abortion) litigation. The issue in *Bruen* was the constitutional right to bear arms, which the majority opinion — over 100 times — referenced as a right of “self-defense” and/or a right of “self-protection.” The right in *Dobbs* was referenced as a “right to abortion,” an “abortion right” and similar “abortion” verbiage a similar number of times.

Look at the difference: *Bruen* spoke of a noble and worthy right: the right of each person to self-defense and self-protection. To be sure, when one uses a gun for self-protection, someone is likely to be killed.

But nowhere in Justice Thomas’ *Bruen* majority opinion was there a claim of a right to kill. Contrast that with *Dobbs*,

which also pertains to a noble and worthy right: the right of each person to not be a parent. That’s what people seek. Sure, an abortion may be the byproduct of exercising that right, just as a dead person may be the byproduct of bearing arms. But just as gun rights advocates never characterize their desire as a right to shoot somebody, “abortion rights” advocates should never have sought a “right to abortion.” That’s the wrong right.

The right right, as just noted, is the right to not become a parent when the associated burdens and responsibilities are unwanted. Why was that never argued?

Julia Sweeney

In just this year, the U.S. Supreme Court, dominated by conservative Catholic judges, has rendered three decisions that weaken our country’s founding principles of separation of church and state. In *Kennedy v. Bremerton*, they decided that Christian public prayer by a coach at a public high school’s football game on the



Julia Sweeney

50-yard line, was OK by them. They decided in *Carson v. Makin* that if there were no public high schools available (a situation vague and open to manipulation), the government must fund religious school alternatives. They decided in overturning *Roe v. Wade* that women did not have guaranteed federal rights to decide on the course of their own pregnancies.

These decisions affect all of us, and a great many of us directly, in our everyday lives. These decisions make way for religious views to take precedence over our country’s shaky secular foundation. Now, people will feel free to publicly demonstrate their religiosity by praying in a coercive manner on public property, to manipulate circumstances so that the government will pay for religious instruction, and for women to fear any pregnancy itself as it could be monitored by the state.

The right wing of the Catholic Church has had outsized influence on the laws of the land. This has come about from a concerted, coordinated effort, led by highly conservative, Christian men that has been developed over 50 years of effort and coordination. They have been spectacularly successful at changing the legal landscape, halting the law’s progress toward a more modern, less religiously determined environment.

We must stop thinking that the obvious march toward an open, secular, freedom-from-a-regressive-patriarchal-authority world is inevitable. It isn’t. We could slide into a frightening tyrannical and rigid state quite easily.

Edward Sorel

After I predicted that George McGovern would beat Richard Nixon in 1972 — and McGovern only carried one state — I realized I wasn’t very



Edward Sorel

good at predicting anything. But I do believe there is a chance that the decision of the Supreme Court to outlaw abortions will outrage so many voters that the Democrats will win a majority in the Senate and in the House of Representatives.

Then abortion rights can be placed in the law once and for all.

Requiem for the Supreme Court

This article first appeared in *The New York Times* on June 27 and is reprinted with permission.

By Linda Greenhouse

They did it because they could. It was as simple as that. With the stroke of a pen, Justice Samuel Alito and four other justices, all chosen by Republican presidents running on successive party platforms committed to overturning *Roe v. Wade*, erased the constitutional right to reproductive autonomy that the Supreme Court recognized more than 49 years ago. As the dissenting opinion — written by Justices Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan — observed, never before had the court rescinded an individual right and left it up to the states whether to respect what had once been anchored in the Constitution.

The practical consequences of the decision, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, are enormous and severe. Abortion, now one of the most common medical procedures, will be banned or sharply limited in about half the country. Excluding miscarriages, nearly one in five pregnancies ends in abortion in the United States, and one American woman in four will terminate a pregnancy during her lifetime. Two generations of women in this country have come of age secure in the knowledge that an unintended pregnancy need not knock their lives off course. "After today," as the dissent pointed out, "young women will come of age with fewer rights than their mothers and grandmothers had."

What the court delivered on June 24 is a requiem for the right to abortion. As Chief Justice John Roberts, who declined to join Alito's opinion, may well suspect, it is also a requiem for the Supreme Court.

Consider the implication of Alito's declaration that *Roe v. Wade* was "egregiously wrong" from the start. Five of the seven justices in the *Roe* majority — all except William O. Douglas and Thurgood Marshall — were appointed by Republican presidents. The votes necessary to preserve the right to abortion 19 years later in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the *Roe* follow-up decision that the court also overturned on June 24, came from five Republican-appointed justices.

In asserting that these justices led the court into grave error from which it must now be rescued, Alito and his majority are necessarily saying that these predecessors,



joining the court over a period of four decades, didn't know enough, or care enough, to use the right methodology and reach the right decision. The arrogance and unapologetic nature of the opinion are breathtaking. (Of the justices who decided *Casey* in 1992, the only member of the court still serving is Justice Clarence Thomas, a dissenter then, who wrote in a concurring opinion that now that the court has overturned the right to abortion, it should also reconsider its precedents on contraception, LGBTQ rights and same-sex marriage.)

The dissenting justices wrote, "The majority's refusal even to consider the life-altering consequences of reversing *Roe* and *Casey* is a stunning indictment of its decision." They observed, "The majority has overruled *Roe* and *Casey* for one and only one reason: because it has always despised them, and now it has the votes to discard them. The majority thereby substitutes a rule by judges for the rule of law."

Those sentences are as terrifying as they are obviously correct. Where do they leave the court, now having voluntarily shed the protection offered by its usual stance that it is simply the passive recipient of the disputes that the public brings to its door? For several years, members of the new majority have been openly inviting opportunities to revisit *Roe* and *Casey*, just as the same justices, principally Thomas and Alito, spent years inviting the gun lobby to bring cases affording an opportunity to expand on the Second Amendment analysis of the 2008 *Heller* decision; that campaign culminated on June 23 with the decision in the New York State gun-licensing case. That case, *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association v. Bruen*, of course, did not overturn an old right but expanded on a new one.

The court engaged in no such outreach at the time of *Roe*. To the contrary, the case reached the Supreme Court under a jurisdictional statute, since repealed, that required it to rule on the merits whenever a federal court had invoked federal constitutional grounds to invalidate a state law. A special three-judge federal district court, convened under that statute, had declared unconstitutional the Texas law that made abortion a crime except to save a pregnant woman's life.

For the court to take on *Roe v. Wade*, in

other words, was the opposite of judicial activism. The June 24 ruling, meanwhile, was judicial activism's epitome: A federal appeals court had blocked a Mississippi law on the ground that the law's ban on abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy was obviously inconsistent with *Roe* and *Casey*. (Those decisions protected the right to abortion up until fetal viability, or about 24 weeks.) The state originally asked the justices to decide whether a ban on abortion

before viability was always unconstitutional. Over Roberts's objection, the majority opinion went further, eliminating the right to abortion in its entirety.

In a concurrence, the chief justice underscored

just how aggressive the majority opinion was, writing: "Surely, we should adhere closely to principles of judicial restraint here, where the broader path the court chooses entails repudiating a constitutional right we have not only previously recognized, but also expressly reaffirmed applying the doctrine of *stare decisis*." He added that "its dramatic and consequential ruling is unnecessary to decide the case before us."

But Alito declined that call for restraint. The chief justice's "quest for a middle way would only put off the day when we would be forced to confront the question we now decide," Alito wrote. "The turmoil wrought by *Roe* and *Casey* would be prolonged. It is far better — for this court and the country — to face up to the real issue without further delay."

There will be turmoil now, for sure, as the country's highways fill with women desperate to regain control over their lives and running out of time, perhaps followed by vigilantes across state lines. But the only turmoil that was caused by *Roe* and *Casey* was due to the refusal of activists, politicians and Republican-appointed judges to accept the validity of the precedents. Alito's reference to "turmoil" reminded me of nothing so much as Donald Trump's invocation of "carnage" in his inaugural address. There was no carnage then, but there was carnage to come.

Forty-nine years is a long time, but professional lives, including mine, are long as well. I was a freshly minted journalist at *The New York Times* in 1969 when I received an assignment to write about the

growing controversy over abortion. I immersed myself in the issue, interviewing and learning from lawyers on both sides of the debate. On Jan. 25, 1970, *The New York Times Magazine* published my article under the headline "Constitutional question: Is there a right to abortion?" It was, I believe, the first article in a general-interest publication to survey the nascent constitutional arguments, and it has been quite widely reprinted. When I finished reading the June 24 decision in preparation for writing this essay, I realized that I will have chronicled this profound issue across its entire arc, a perspective I never could have anticipated.

Except, of course, that the story isn't over. Although Justice Brett Kavanaugh proclaimed with evident relief in his concurring opinion that the court was now bowing out of the picture and "will no longer decide how to evaluate the interests of the pregnant woman and the interests in protecting fetal life throughout pregnancy," that is not likely to be the case. Those pesky women will keep coming up with problems: What about pregnancy-related medical issues short of imminent death? Rape? Incest? Fetuses doomed to die in the womb or shortly after birth? Will young teens be forced to bear children? Will women who receive a prenatal diagnosis of a serious fetal anomaly be forced to bring a child into the world whom they can't care for adequately and in whom the state has little postnatal interest? What happens when states start prosecuting not only doctors but women?

Alito has an answer to these questions: "rational basis." A law regulating abortion, he writes, "must be sustained if there is a rational basis on which the legislature could have thought that it would serve legitimate state interests." And what might be such an interest? The list of "legitimate interests" is frightening:

Respect for and preservation of prenatal life at all stages of development . . . the protection of maternal health and safety; the elimination of particularly gruesome or barbaric medical procedures; the preservation of the integrity of the medical profession; the mitigation of fetal pain; and the prevention of discrimination on the basis of race, sex or disability.

With the exception of the first and second interests — the *Casey* decision itself recognized the state's interest in unborn life throughout pregnancy — these are anti-abortion dog whistles. The "particularly gruesome" procedures include a common method of second-trimester abortion that some states have tried to outlaw. The "integrity" of the medical profession is a slam on doctors whom the Supreme Court majority refers to as "abortionists." The "fetal pain" issue is a canard, as fetuses lack the neural development to experience pain until late in pregnancy. And the discrimination issue refers, at least in part, to current state laws that would criminalize the abortion of fetuses with a Down syndrome diagnosis; currently, most such pregnancies are terminated.

And the dissenting opinion asks, "What about the morning-after pill? IUDs? In vitro fertilization?" Or medical management of miscarriage, often by the same methods used for abortion?

No, justices, your work isn't done. What you have finished off is the legitimacy of the court on which you are privileged to spend the rest of your lives.

Linda Greenhouse reported on the Supreme Court for the *Times* from 1978 to 2008 and was a contributing writer from 2009 to 2021.



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FFRF VICTORIES

By Casandra Zimmerman

Virginia sheriff to end religious endorsement

The Scott County Sheriff's Office in Virginia will no longer post religious messages on its social media pages or host churches after a concerned county resident reported that the Sheriff's Office hosted a religious Easter event, "Eggs-stravaganza 2022," with Calvary Bible Church on April 9.

A post by the Calvary Bible Church on its Facebook page showed that the event was planned by the Sheriff's Office and included "shar[ing] the gospel with . . . kids." On Easter, the Sheriff's Office also posted an image of a cross with the words "He Has Risen!" on its official Facebook page.

"The Scott County Sheriff's Office's explicit endorsement of religion is a serious constitutional violation," wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heineman to Sheriff Jeff Edds. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits the government from hosting or endorsing religious events or activities.

Edds responded to FFRF's letter to say that he will be taking precautionary steps to prevent any future occurrences.

School input event moved to a secular location

A concerned district parent contacted FFRF on June 2 to report that a public input session for the Madison (Wis.) Metropolitan School District was scheduled at Life Center, a Christian church.

Asking parents, who may be of varying faiths or none at all, to enter a Christian house of worship for a public session to discuss the MMSD's "guiding document" alienates non-Christians, including the almost 50 percent of the Madison population who are not religious, insisted FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heineman.

Heineman wrote to Superintendent of Schools Carlton D. Jenkins that to fulfill MMSD's obligation for religious neutrality and to recognize Madison's diverse range of religious and nonreligious citizens, he must provide a secular setting for the Strategic Framework Recalibration public input session so that all concerned district families can feel welcome

and comfortable attending.

The special assistant to the superintendent responded swiftly to FFRF's request and confirmed that the meeting location had been changed to an area high school.

Event organizer won't use school logo in flyers

A local resident reported a state-church violation to FFRF after seeing a religious flyer in a post office with the Denver (Iowa) Community School District logo. The flier invited "the entire body of Christ" to a Mile Wide Worship Night to be held once a month in the Cyclone Center. According to the flyer, the worship night is to "lift up the name of Jesus in Denver."

"Denver Community School District cannot sponsor a worship night." FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heinemann wrote to Brad Laures, superintendent of Denver Community School District. "The government must respect the rights of conscience of all people."

The organizer of the event will no longer use the school's logo in their flyers, Laures wrote to FFRF.

Christian music no longer playing in Iowa school

FFRF intervened after a teacher at Metro West Learning Academy in Iowa was reported to have been playing Christian music in the background of classes. The music had lyrics such as "I put my faith in Jesus" and "my savior."

"No public school employee may urge religious points of view on students. Students are especially susceptible to the coercive influence of messages from authority figures, such as teachers," wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heineman to Mike Moran, director of Metro West Learning. "Parents, not teachers, have the right to direct the religious, or nonreligious, upbringing of their children."

The Metro West Learning Academy reassured FFRF that action had been taken to make sure staff is aware of their constitutional obligations to religious neutrality and to refrain from promoting religion in the classroom.

"It has been resolved. [The teacher] now has local news as her background noise," the school's response stated.

Coach prayer

Continued from page 1

the games' conclusion. Tellingly, Kennedy has claimed that God has called him to become a coach and that he promised God to "give you the glory after every game, win or lose." The school district tried repeatedly to accommodate Kennedy but the coach, after initially complying, changed tack.

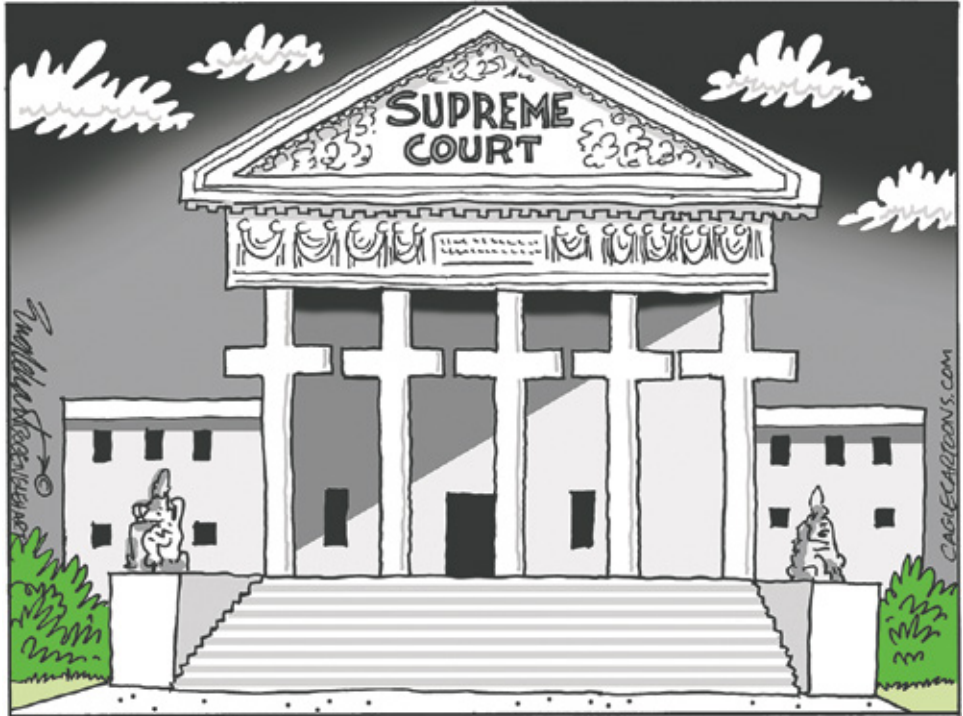
The dissent notes that the majority ignores the history of the violation, in which Kennedy consistently invited others to join his prayers "and for years led student athletes in prayer at the same time and location." Sotomayor also wrote that the court "ignores the severe disruption to school events caused by Kennedy's conduct."

Gorsuch argues that the school district violated the Free Exercise Clause because the district sought "to restrict Mr. Kennedy's actions at least in part because of their religious character." Gorsuch, likewise, found that the school district violated the Free Speech Clause because his prayers were "private speech" and other coaches at that time "were free to attend briefly to personal matters — everything from checking sports scores on their phones to greeting friends and family in the stands."

Gorsuch casually kills off the Lemon Test, which ultra-conservatives on the high court had long complained about but which had never been officially overturned, by simply saying that "this court long ago abandoned *Lemon* and its endorsement offshoot."

The Lemon Test asked whether a government action has a secular purpose, a primary effect that neither advances nor inhibits religion or fosters excessive government entanglement of religion. Sotomayor charges that the court's new "history and tradition test offers essentially no guidance for school administrators. . . . How will school administrators exercise their responsibilities to manage school curriculum and events when the court appears to elevate individuals' rights to religious exercise above all else?"

The dissent highlights the problematic nature of religion in our public schools: "Official-led prayer strikes at the core of our constitutional protections for the reli-



gious liberty of students and their parents, as embodied in both the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment," writes Sotomayor.

The dissent concludes with a warning: "[T]he court sets us further down a perilous path in forcing states to entangle themselves with religion, with all of our rights hanging in the balance. As much as the court protests otherwise, today's decision is no victory for religious liberty. I respectfully dissent."

Despite the fact-sensitive nature of the decision, FFRF anticipates that other school employees will now attempt to push religion on students at their schools.

FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott emphasizes, however, that the Supreme Court's prior precedents protecting public school students from prayers imposed by school officials remain good law. "Any coaches or teachers that think this decision gives them free rein to abuse their position and impose prayers on a captive audience of students would be sorely mistaken," he adds.

"This decision will hurt vulnerable public school children who deserve protection from religious intrusion," says Rebecca S. Markert, FFRF legal director. "FFRF will continue to fight for the rights of students to be free from proselytizing

public school personnel."

FFRF filed a compelling amicus brief before the Supreme Court that argued in part that the case was moot. After losing in the district court, Kennedy sold his home in Washington and moved approximately 2,800 miles to Pensacola, Fla. FFRF's brief cites ample case law establishing that when a plaintiff leaves the state under circumstances such as Kennedy's, the case cannot continue.

The brief also documented how students who are nonreligious or are religious minorities are harmed when school coaches instigate prayer.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals had last year ruled in favor of Washington's Bremerton School District. Kennedy has been singled out for praise by Donald Trump, including in a speech from the Oval Office on Religious Freedom Day, and has been a darling of Christian nationalist organizations, Fox News and extremist members of Congress.

"This ruling strikes yet another blow against the rights of conscience of students by an ultraconservative Supreme Court hellbent on privileging religion," remarks Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. "The extremist majority is signaling its hostility to more than 75 years of Supreme Court precedent ensuring that a captive audience of public school students are free from religious indoctrination, ritual and coercion."

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Is America’s gun problem a God problem?

This article first appeared in *The New York Times* on June 23 and is reprinted with permission.

By Peter Manseau

The AR-15-style rifle used in the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas, in May was made by an arms manufacturer that regards selling weapons as part of its Christian mission. In a state where Gov. Greg Abbott declared, six months after an earlier massacre, “The problem is not guns; it’s hearts without God,” the gun’s provenance challenged pious suggestions that declining religiosity might bear some of the blame.

Daniel Defense, the Georgia company whose gun enabled the slaughter at Robb Elementary School, presents its corporate identity in explicitly religious terms. At the time of the shooting, the company’s social media presence included an image of a toddler with a rifle in his lap above the text of Proverbs 22:6 (“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it”). For Easter, it posted a photograph of a gun and a cross resting on scriptural passages recounting the Resurrection.



Peter Manseau

Its weapons have now been found at the scenes of two mass shootings — Uvalde and Las Vegas — that left a total of 81 people dead. While some might suggest a Christian firearms company is a contradiction in terms, Daniel Defense is hardly alone. According to a Public Religion Research Institute study, evangelicals have a higher rate of gun ownership than other religious groups. Across the country, they account for a significant share not only of the demand but of the supply.

In Florida, Spike’s Tactical (“the finest AR-15s on the planet”) makes a line of Crusader weapons adorned with a quote from the Psalms. Missouri-based CMMG (“the leading manufacturer of AR15 rifles, components and small parts”) advertises its employees’ “commitment to meet each and every morning to pray for God’s wisdom in managing the enormous responsibility that comes with this business.” And in Colorado, Cornerstone Arms explains that it is so named because “Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of our business, our family and our lives” and the “Second Amendment to our Constitution is the cornerstone of the freedom we enjoy as American citizens.”

For many American Christians, Jesus, guns and the Constitution are stitched together as durably as a Kevlar vest.

“We are in business, we believe, to be a supporter of the Gospel,” Daniel Defense’s founder, Marty Daniel, told *Breitbart News* in 2017. “And, therefore, a supporter of



Image by Shutterstock

the Second Amendment.”

Entwining faith and firearms this way has a long history. It encompasses the so-called muscular Christianity movement that began in England in the 19th century with a focus on physical fitness as a path to spiritual strength and that in America made exemplars of pastors roaming the frontier armed with bibles and six-shooters.

More than a hundred years ago, this trope was already so well established that a popular silent western from 1912, “The Two Gun Sermon,” told the story of a minister assigned to a rough-and-tumble outpost; when ruffians menace him, he holds them at gunpoint until they listen to him preach. The film’s message is one with which 21st-century Christian gun enthusiasts would probably agree: Sometimes guns are necessary for the Lord’s work.

It is easy to miss, but this melding of evangelism and the right to bear arms is a step beyond the “natural rights” argument for gun ownership, which holds that self-defense is a law of nature required to protect life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These rights are often said to be God-given in the sense of being taken for granted, and they are enshrined as such in the Declaration of Independence. As interpreted by many evangelicals, the distant deistic “creator” Thomas Jefferson credited with endowing such rights has become a specific, biblical deity who apparently takes an active interest in the availability of assault rifles.

Why does this subtle shift in the meaning of “God given” matter? It’s important to understand that for the manufacturer of the Uvalde killer’s rifle, and many others in the business, selling weapons is at once a patriotic and a religious act. For

those who hold them to be sacred in this way, the meaning of firearms proceeds from their place at the intersection of American and Christian identities. Proposing limits on what kinds of guns they should be able to buy — or how, when, where and why they can carry them — is akin to proposing limits on who they are and what they should revere.

To be sure, there are gun owners for whom a gun is just a gun. But many of our fellow citizens don’t just own guns, they believe in them. They believe the stories told about guns’ power, their necessity, their righteousness.

We can see the implications of this even in ostensibly nonreligious aspects of our current gun debate, which are influenced by theological assumptions in surprising ways. The insistence that guns are used constantly and successfully for self-defense and protecting the community found its most infamous expression in the wake of the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, when the National Rifle Association’s Wayne LaPierre said, “The only way to stop a bad guy with a gun is a good guy with a gun.”

Since then, despite being debunked by data showing that firearms are more likely to injure their owners or their owners’ families than safeguard them, the protection offered by good guys with guns has emerged as an article of faith, supported with anecdotal evidence passed around like legends of the saints.

One of the most repeated of these tales recounts the story of a man who truly did halt a mass shooting, albeit only after 26 people were dead. On Nov. 5, 2017, when a gunman attacked the First Baptist Church of Sutherland Springs, Texas, a soft-spoken plumber and former firearms instructor named Stephen Willeford shot him with his AR-15. Contributing to the NRA’s effort to spread the Gospel of the Good Guy With a Gun, Willeford spoke to the group’s Leadership Forum six months later.

“We are the people that stand between the people that would do evil to our neighbors,” he told the assembled gun owners. “I responded for what God told me to do. The Holy Spirit took care of me. . . . Each one of you would have done the same thing.” Invoking the name of Jesus, he added, “What happened in Sutherland Springs was all him and it’s his glory.”

As the thunderous applause that greeted this testimony made clear, gun culture is largely Christian culture. To imagine yourself as a Good Guy With a Gun, as Willeford invited NRA members to do, may inspire action-movie day dreams, but it is ultimately a religious vision of a world in which good and evil are at war, where God and firepower make all the difference.

The Good Guy With a Gun is a religious myth so powerful it has begun to transform the tradition that bore it. When U.S. Rep. Lauren Boebert recently quipped, “A lot of the little Twitter trolls, they like to say ‘Oh, Jesus didn’t need an AR-15. How many AR-15s do you think Jesus would have had?’ Well, he didn’t have enough to keep his government from killing him,” it was a joke meant to deride and dismiss charges of hypocrisy against followers of a man sometimes called the Prince of Peace arming themselves to the hilt. Yet it was also a view into a fascinating religious development currently underway, one shaped by an understanding that bullets could have prevented the sacrifice at the heart of the Christian faith.

It would be a mistake to paint the connection between firearms and religiosity with too broad a brush. The evangelical influence on the sale, use and marketing of firearms in the United States does not mean Christianity is at fault for the recent spate of shootings. After all, in Buffalo, in Uvalde, in Tulsa, and this month at a church supper in Vestavia Hills, Ala., Christians have been among the victims. Christian clergy members have rushed to every scene to comfort the survivors. Friends and families have gathered at Christian funerals to mourn the dead.

As the historian Daniel K. Williams has noted, “Gun rights advocacy is not an intrinsic feature of every brand of evangelicalism.” While recent surveys find that four in 10 white evangelicals own guns, the majority do not, and other denominational affiliations offer examples of religious participation discouraging a fixation on firearms. It is possible that the less one sees oneself as an itinerant loner in a hostile world, like the armed preacher in a silent western, the less one is likely to look to guns as a source of salvation.

Nonetheless, the ways Christian ideas may be contributing to a gun culture that abets our epidemic of mass shootings by helping to keep the nation well armed should inspire reflection. None of the recent mass shootings had explicitly religious motivations, but the religious contexts of our seemingly eternal problem with gun violence — its history, its theology, its myths — are too important to ignore.

Mass shootings are, in a way, assaults on the idea of community itself. They occur where there are people gathered — for entertainment, for learning, for shopping, for worship — in the spaces we create together. Some believe that such attacks are the fault of armed individuals alone and can be addressed only through armed individual response. Others believe they occur within the framework of what we collectively allow and must have communal solutions.

That these two positions each have beliefs at their core is one reason our disagreements over guns remain so intractable. We are arguing not just over policy or public health, bans or background checks. Without quite realizing it, we are also arguing over the theologian Paul Tillich’s definition of faith: a matter of “ultimate concern.”

Peter Manseau is the author of 10 books on religion and history, including *One Nation, Under Gods: A New American History*.

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After a summer hiatus, Freethought Matters resumes production in Sept.

Convention awardee

Margaret Atwood books a date with the future

By PJ Slinger

Esteemed author Margaret Atwood admitted to the FFRF convention audience late last year that she initially thought her dystopian book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, might be too outlandish to be published. "I put it aside because I thought it was too crazy, even for me," she said in Boston on Nov. 9, 2021. "I thought, 'Oh, come on, nobody's going to believe this.'"

Now, of course, with *Roe v. Wade* overturned, and the wall of state/church separation being dismantled by a Christian right Supreme Court, Atwood's book seems prescient.

At the convention, Atwood, interviewed on stage by author and journalist Katherine Stewart, spoke about *The Handmaid's Tale*, the fragility of democracy in the United States, her upbringing in a remote setting, the Future Library project, and numerous other topics, including her love of hockey.

Atwood was presented with FFRF's Forward Award, which recognizes individuals whose lives and achievements move society forward. Previous recipients of the award have included the writer Katha Pollitt, the activist and former head of Planned Parenthood Cecile Richards, and Nancy Northup, who leads the Center for Reproductive Rights.

Atwood earned the award for showing, through her books, the dangers of the loss of reproductive and other rights. Atwood has authored more than 50 books of fiction, poetry and critical essays. Her most recent novel, *The Testaments*, a sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, won the 2019 Booker Prize. She's received the German Peace Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Franz Kafka International Literary Prize, the Pen American Pen Center USA Lifetime Achievement Award, among others. In 2019, Atwood was presented with a companion of Honor Award by Queen Elizabeth, making her the third civilian Canadian ever to receive this distinction.

When Stewart brought up how the Supreme Court is likely to reverse *Roe v. Wade* and how "we have a political party that seems to want to unite church and state," Atwood said she hoped the pillars of American democracy are strong enough



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Author Margaret Atwood speaks with Katherine Stewart during FFRF's national convention in Boston on Nov. 19, 2021.

to withstand such a political storm.

"Let's count on the American Constitution, such as it is, to hold firm against church and state uniting," she said. "There would be a big problem in this country [if it didn't]."

She expanded upon that claim, wondering which religious sect would be in charge if religion were to prevail.

"Does the United States want to see religious wars dividing their country? . . . One reason they made the Constitution the way they did was that they had seen the religious wars in Europe in the 17th century, and they had been horrific. Theology would win the day if they decided to unite church and state."

Atwood continued: "I think the one of the tasks in a democracy is — and the framers of your country knew this — is to limit the power available to any given individual or group. Unfortunately, you haven't been doing a very good job of it lately. It was a big mistake [for the Supreme Court] to say that corporations are the same as people. They're not. It's not true. I mean, wow."

Stewart pointed out that many of Atwood's works show how there is abuse of power and its effects on people.

"Where there is power, somebody is going to abuse it," Atwood said. "I'm very interested right now in utopias and dys-

topias because they are the yin-yang of each other. And looking back over the 20th century, it had its jolly moments, but then it had its other moments that were pretty brutal. A number of these things started as utopias. The Soviet Socialist Republic was going to be just great. They were going to do away with all of these bad problems that they had had before, such as aristocracies and accumulations of wealth, and that was all going to be fixed. Didn't happen."

Getting more personal, Stewart asked if Atwood paid a price early in her career for writing about power and gender dynamics.

"Well, I probably did, but I was so oblivious," she said. "I wasn't properly socialized, and I think this explains a lot."

She told the audience how she had grown up in the woods, which was different than growing up in the country.

"In the country, you've got cows and stuff like that," she said. "In the woods, you've got bears. But even if you grow up in a small town, you're very aware of what other people think of you. But if there aren't any other people, like in the woods, you're not aware of what they think because they aren't there."

She said that by not having a strong social upbringing, she felt out of place in public settings.

"Other people just grow up and they know you're not supposed to do this or that," she said. "They know there's some kind of social hierarchy. They know who's bottom dog and who's top dog. But, for me, it was a little bit like being an alien from outer space, like, 'Oh, these are your customs, Earthlings. What strange customs you have.'"

Atwood said one of the weirdest customs she encountered was religion.

"As a teenager, I was somebody who went around to all the religions I could get my hands to see what they were doing. Often, I thought to myself, 'Oh, this is strange.'"

Stewart questioned Atwood on how she gets her ideas for novels.

"It's never just an idea that would be a thesis," she said. "If it's a novel, it's usually a scene. And in *The Handmaid's Tale*, that scene was the hanging of people on the Harvard wall."

Atwood then described a humorous detail of how the filming of that scene for a 1990 movie (not the Netflix series) wasn't allowed by Harvard University, so they filmed it at Duke University.

"We were filming the hanging scene and you've got all of these people in

costume doing this," she said. "And the door to the Duke chapel opened and a wedding rehearsal party came out. There were quite upset. They even wrote a letter to the [university] president. I don't blame them. It's not what you expect at all."

In 2016, when they started working on the filming of *The Handmaid's Tale* for the Netflix series, the presidential election happened, with Donald Trump winning.

"Had the election gone the other way [with Hillary Clinton winning], it would still have been a good show, but it would have been viewed differently," Atwood said. "It would have been viewed more like, 'Whew, look what we missed' or 'That's not going to happen now.' But, as it was, it was viewed like, 'Here it comes.' Very much so."

Atwood then spoke of The Future Library project of Norway and her involvement in it. The Future Library is a public artwork that will collect an original work by one popular writer every year from 2014 to 2114. The works will remain unread and unpublished for 100 years. One thousand trees were specially planted for the project in the Nordmarka forest at its inception. Then, in 2114, the 100 manuscripts will be printed in limited-edition anthologies using paper made from the trees.

Atwood, in 2014, was the first author to be chosen to write a manuscript. The title of her unpublished work is called *Scribbler Moon*, although no one will be able to read it for 92 more years.

"You write a manuscript — it's going to be made of words, no pictures," she said. "So, it could be a poem, a word, a novel, a short story, a letter, a laundry list, a sermon, a diary of any of these things. But you can't tell anybody."

"In the 100th year, in a Sleeping Beauty-ish way, the boxes will all be opened. They won't have to be kissed by a prince first. . . . But think of all the optimism involved in that. The trees will grow. People will still be interested in reading. I think that's just amazing."

And finally, prompted by Stewart, Atwood spoke of her love for hockey.

"People often ask me whether I'd prefer to be a novelist or a poet, but what I really want to be is a goalie," she said puckishly. "Go on YouTube and search for 'Margaret Atwood goalie.' That's what I want to be."



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Margaret Atwood gives the FFRF audience her thoughts about her writings, world history, religion and several other topics.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Margaret Atwood holds her Forward Award, bestowed by FFRF for moving society forward.

Not surprisingly, nothing fails like prayer

The following is an excerpt from Donald Ardell's new book, *Freedom From Religion in 30 Days: A REAL Wellness Approach to Critical Thinking, Exuberance and Personal Freedoms*. The book's foreword was written by FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker.

By Donald Ardell

If you ever face a choice between a wing and a prayer, go with the wing. Robert Ingersoll said, "Hands that help are better than lips that pray." I often recall that line when politicians and others robotically offer their cliched thoughts and prayers. Neither represents a commitment of any kind to do something actionable about a tragedy, crisis or disaster that invites reflection, reform or the need for change.

Actor and writer Hannibal Buress made this point rather well: "People say, 'I'll pray for you.' So, basically, you're going to sit at home and do nothing. That's what your prayers are — you're doing nothing while I struggle with the situation. Don't pray for me. Make me a sandwich or something."

Frederick Douglass, an escaped slave who became a renowned orator, social reformer, abolitionist, author and statesman in the latter half of the 19th century, famously remarked, "I prayed for 20 years but received no answer until I prayed with my legs."

Every so often, a Christian group sponsors a study hoping to show the efficacy of intercessory prayer. One such effort was conducted concurrently with more than 1,800 patients at six medical centers over an eight-year period at a cost of \$2.5 million. The funds came primarily from the John Templeton Foundation, a Pennsylvania group that encourages the study of spirituality. One of the principal investigators was true believer Herbert Benson. The project was an attempt to lend scientific credibility to the notion that a supernatural power exists and sometimes elects to play doctor, that is, facilitate or cause healing in response to prayers.

Three different congregations were instructed to pray to a god to grant a successful surgery with a quick, healthy recovery and no complications. The prayer beneficiaries were separated into three distinct groups: Those advised they were being



Donald Ardell

prayed for; those who got prayers but did not know about it; and those for whom nobody would be doing any praying.

Alas, to the dismay of the faithful, the project was a big disappointment. Not only did prayers have no positive effect, they seem to have made patients prayed for worse — an outcome that proved embarrassing to the sponsors, if not the investigators. Overall, a little more than half of all patients (52 percent) suffered complications. However, the highest percentage of complications was in the prayed for group (59 percent). The lesson I took from this study was if you are to undergo an operation, don't ask for prayers.

Why did patients prayed for have a higher rate of complications? Maybe this knowledge frightened them. They might have assumed doctors had otherwise given up on them. The bottom line is that prayer failed, once again, as it always does.

Perhaps telling people they are being prayed for introduces the stress response. Patients might have thought, "Am I so sick that they had to call in the prayer team?"

A predictable result for the failure of prayer was do more studies. The big unanswered question is why there was an excess of complications in patients who knew all those people were praying for them. There is no clear explanation, so, to find out will require additional study.

The Benson study only demonstrates,

“Prayer is no more (or no less) effective than rain dances, a rabbit’s foot, a four-leaf clover [or] coins tossed in a fountain.”

once again, that prayer is no more (or no less) effective than rain dances, a rabbit's foot, a four-leaf clover, coins tossed in a fountain, salt sprinkled over the shoulder, knocking on wood, a visit to Lourdes, Mecca or Jerusalem, or a fall-down televised healing session onstage with evangelist Benny Hinn.

It seems self-evident but worth noting that such studies appeal only to those who believe that a god (and devil) exists, and that it has the time and inclination to meddle in human affairs. Those who fund and conduct such studies probably would not accept Robert Ingersoll's view expressed in his talk, "Improved Man": "He will not endeavor by prayers and supplication, by fastings and genuflections, to change the mind of the Infinite, or alter the course of nature; neither will he employ others to do those things in his place."

The next prayer study Templeton funds should explore what kind of prayers are best, how fervent and sincere must they be, from what place are they best transmitted, and how many can be requested before the supplicant becomes a pest. There is no consensus about the criteria for world-class, high-performance praying. Maybe all prayers are equal or some are more equal, perhaps some days are best, and so on. More likely, there's just no there there.

I think prayer is totally useless and a waste of time, except for whatever positive effect might obtain from the delusion that a beneficial effect might ensue from thinking help is on the way. This phenomenon, of course, is a recognized placebo effect, not unique to prayer.

Dr. Richard Sloan, a physician renowned as an expert on the intersection of religion and health care, wrote the book, *Blind Faith: The Unholy Alliance of Religion and Medicine*. He suggests the problem with reducing religion to quantifiable elements makes for bad science and bad religion.

Stephen Barrett, another physician who tracks pseudostudies for *Quackwatch.com*, provided this assessment: "Intercessory prayer studies accomplish nothing. Believers won't change their view if further stud-

ies are negative, and nonbelievers won't change theirs if additional studies appear positive. Prayer may help some people feel reassured when they are worried, but to me it makes more sense to spend one's time and energy on more constructive health-promoting activities. Although luck is still a significant factor, I think it is more sensible to believe that health is more likely to be influenced by prudent living than by magical thinking. Also, if praying for people worked, would strangers praying against them cause them to become sicker? Or, as one of my religious friends put it, 'Is God so stupid that he or she would respond to popularity contests?'"

My favorite assessment of such studies is a critique by the late Paul Kurtz, chairman of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. Asked why the study found no evidence for the power of prayer, he replied, "Because there is none. That would be one answer."

Prayer does have some unintended benefits, as actor/comedian Ricky Gervais pointed out: "I've just discovered praying. This is going to save me millions in charity donations."

Maybe Christopher Hitchens was on to something with his refrain that "God is either impotent — he can't do anything; or malevolent — he can do something but chooses not to." Of course, Hitchens didn't believe, either. Like singer-songwriter Robbie Fulks, he knew that "God Isn't Real."

Finally, anyone who thinks about prayer should consider the Epicurean paradox: "God either wishes to take away evils, and is unable, or he is able, and is unwilling, or he is neither willing nor able, or he is both willing and able. If he is willing and is unable, he is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God. If he is able and unwilling, he is envious, which is equally at variance with God. If he is neither willing nor able, he is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God. If he is both willing and able, which alone is suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Or, why does he not remove them?"

Pray if it floats your boat, but check the weather report to time requests for best results.

Don Ardell is an FFRF member who lives in Wisconsin.

THEY SAID WHAT?

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Yahoo News, 6-20-22

The Not So Good Book: What Does the 'Holy Bible' Really Teach?

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Foreword by Dan Barker
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I have found comfort in the one who designed me and knows me. He knows the darkest parts of me that I want no one to know about and he constantly welcomes me into his loving arms. This perspective has given me peace during this horrific storm that I'm facing. I know this storm will pass but in the meantime JESUS IS WITH ME.

Justin Bieber, who has Ramsay Hunt syndrome, a rare virus that has caused partial facial paralysis.
Instagram, 6-14-22

Nationalism is a good thing. . . . We should be proud of nationalism . . . and, lastly, we should be most proud of Christianity. So, if Christian nationalism is something to be scared of, they're lying to you.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, on her show "MLG Live."
Time, 5-25-22

We gotta unify in prayer. We have to unify in faith. . . .This was a country

founded on faith, Tucker.
Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, speaking to Fox News host Tucker Carlson.
Fox News, 5-25-22

[The change] can even be perceived as discrimination consisting of open de-Christianisation . . . [which], over time, will result in the atheisation of members and not only moral but ideological conflicts.

The pastoral council of ZHP, the Polish Scouting Association, in response to the group now allowing scouts a choice between the current oath, in which they swear to "serve God and Poland," or an alternative one that omits mention of God.
NotesFromPoland.com, 6-2-22

God created us to bear children. To carry them. That is a gift, that is not a curse. That is a gift.

And we are special. . . . I took a life, I should give my life.
Christine Schwan, 63, who had an abortion when she was younger and now thinks death would be a suitable

punishment.
The New York Times, 7-1-22

Something has happened to our society. I go back to abortion, when we decided it was OK to murder kids in their mothers' wombs. Life has no value to a lot of these folks.

U.S. Rep. Billy Long, R-Mo., blaming gun violence on abortion.
Rolling Stone, 6-2-22



Lauren Boebert

The church is supposed to direct the government. The government is not supposed to direct the church. That is not how our Founding Fathers intended it. . . . I'm tired of this separation of church and state junk that's not in the Constitution.

Rep. Lauren Boebert, speaking at a religious service in Colorado.
Washington Post, 6-28-22

‘Secular values voter’ ad blitz a success



Kentucky
Ed and Mikel Hensley, activists with the FFRF Kentucky Chapter, were featured in full-page ads on July 3 in both the Frankfort State Journal and Lexington Herald-Leader. In the newspaper ads, Ed is identified as a “a husband, father, grandfather, retired software engineer, Kentuckian . . . and Atheist.” Mikel is identified as a “wife, mother, electrical technician, lifelong Kentuckian . . . and an Atheist.”



Georgia
Black Nonbelievers Founder and President Mandisa Thomas shares a photo of herself in front of the billboard featuring herself that went up in early July in Atlanta.



Iowa
Paul and Dianne, pictured in front of the Iowa State Capitol, are featured in a full-page ad headlined “We’re Secular and We Vote.”
Paul identifies himself in the ad as a “father, grandfather, emergency medicine physician, pilot, Iowan . . . and Humanist.” Dianne is identified as “a mother, grandmother, nurse anesthetist, Colonel, USAR Retired, Iowan . . . and Humanist.”



North Carolina
Candace R. Gorham, was featured in the full-page ad that ran July 3 in the Raleigh News & Observer, where she was pictured in front of the North Carolina State Capitol. The ad describes Candace as “an author, activist, mother, lifelong North Carolinian . . . and an Atheist.”

The Freedom From Religion Foundation was all over the country on billboards and in newspapers during the Fourth of July weekend. FFRF’s timely and vital national “I’m Secular and I vote” ad campaign began that first weekend in July and will finish around Constitution Day, Sept. 17. (FFRF had the wrong date in the previous issue.) FFRF featured one member per state (or couples, in some cases) in full-page ads in daily newspapers in state capitals on July 3. Companion billboards also went up in those cities. To hit larger metropolitan areas, FFRF also had ads in Portland, Ore., Philadelphia and Chicago, and The New York Times. Each ad features the photo of a local FFRF member, most taken in front of their state Capitol building, and a description about them. The ad encourages secular voters to join FFRF. It also links to the results of FFRF’s impressive secular values voter survey. (ffrf.org/valuesvoter) FFRF thanks participants and donors to its advertising fund for making possible this campaign.



Arizona
Zenaído Quintana is featured on this billboard in Spanish in Phoenix at 7th Avenue, south of Polk Street. He also appeared in the full-page ad in the Arizona Republic, where he was identified as “a retired corporate executive, small business owner, great-grandfather, native Arizonian . . . And Humanist.”



Connecticut
Suzanne Flathers is shown on the billboard in Hartford on Allyn Street. She was also featured in the full-page ad in the Hartford Courant. She is described in the ad as “Grandmother, contract specialist, gardener, lifelong Nutmeg . . . and Atheist.”

Participants still needed

FFRF is looking for members interested in representing FFRF in its “I’m Secular and I Vote” campaign in remaining states.

FFRF is seeking a cross-section of U.S. citizens demographically, by age (18 and up), gender, race, sex, ethnicity, etc. They must be registered voters. (To aid in representing younger freethinkers, members may wish to recruit freethinking, voting-age children or grandchildren.)

Volunteers commit to obtain two different sets of photographs: one ideally in front of their state Capitol (possibly substituting a different iconic site).

It’s helpful if you live near your capital city or are willing to travel there.

The second photograph is a studio portrait taken for commercial use for the billboard. FFRF will reimburse for reasonable photographic fees.

FFRF will provide a modest scholarship for students-only who participate.

FFRF will finalize photographic and other details by the end of July and is seeking individuals who can follow through and meet deadlines, since the campaign involves contract commitments.

FFRF is still seeking a representative in these states: Alaska; Hawaii; Idaho; Kansas; Mississippi; Montana, Nebraska; New Mexico; North Dakota; South Carolina; South Dakota; West Virginia and Wyoming.

If you’re interested, please fill out an application form and read more about it at: secularvote.ffrf.org.



Vermont
Grant “Chip” Taylor, shown in front of the state Capitol building in Montpelier, Vt., is a Humanist Air Force veteran. The full-page ad ran in the Barre-Montpelier Times Argus and Rutland Herald.

Chip worked in human resources, then did radiological protection for State Emergency Management. He’s been a volunteer firefighter for 55 years on four fire departments and served as chief on two of them.

A history of the Lake Superior Freethinkers

The Lake Superior Freethinkers is one of the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s chapters, based in Duluth, Minn. LSF was formed in 1997 by psychiatrist Dr. Bill van Druten as a friendship group in support of morality without superstition, freedom from religion, state/church separation and rational thought.

The group has been active in various efforts around the city since its founding 25 years ago. The following are some of the highlights of LSF’s history (as stated on the group’s website *lsfreethinkers.org*).

Meeting with the gov

On Dec. 27, 2000, van Druten and others from the Minnesota Secular Council met with Gov. Jesse Ventura. They had an opportunity to present the concerns of the secular community about practices and regulations imposed by religion on Minnesota citizens. They presented the governor with a Political Courage award from Atheist Alliance International and a First Amendment Freedom Fighter award from their own secular council.

Hospitals and choice

In 2001, van Druten went to the administrator of St. Luke’s Hospital to explain what a merger with Catholic Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother would mean. Both major Duluth hospitals (the other being St. Mary’s) for the city would then be under Vatican restrictions. Van Druten knew this affiliation would lead to imposition of the “Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care,” which place restrictions on the lawful rights of patients in matters concerning sterilization, fertilization, contraception, emergency contraception for victims of rape, pregnancy termination, and end-of-life decisions.

This led van Druten to form a coalition with the Women’s Health Center. With the important presentation to the Gynecology Department by LSF Member Dr. Robert Goldish, the hospital board reversed the decision and the merger was blocked.

Boy Scouts

On June 25, 2002, van Druten wrote to the Duluth News Tribune pointing out that the Boy Scouts of America’s national resolution of Feb. 6 made clear that “duty to God . . . is an obligation” and praised “faith-based values.” But a growing number of Americans resented having their sons excluded from the ranks of the Boy Scouts because they are nonbelievers.

In August 2002, former Eagle Scouts, including van Druten, returned their medals and badges to the Boy Scouts, marked as Badges of Shame. On Aug. 22, 2002, a group of about a dozen Lake Superior Freethinkers protested in Duluth against a Boy Scout ban on gay and atheist scout leaders.

Ten Commandments

A Ten Commandments monument was donated to Duluth by the Fraternal Order of the Eagles in 1957. The Eagles gave similar monuments to many American towns during the 1950s and 1960s to encourage “good morals” and promote Cecil B. DeMille’s movie “The Ten Commandments.”

But, in 2003, nontheist groups, including LSF and the Minnesota ACLU, complained about religious symbolism on government property. They pointed out that such displays amounted to an endorsement of Judeo-Christian religious tenets. The Minnesota ACLU wrote to LSF’s van Druten and Dale Hagen to seek local



Submitted photo

The Lake Superior Freethinkers are responsible for keeping a two-mile stretch of Arnold Road in Duluth free from litter.



Submitted photo

In 2017, the LSF placed a sign that read, “Questioning religion? You’ve got friends here,” on a bus that rotated through the routes of the Duluth Transit Authority.

plaintiffs. Together, they requested that the monument be removed to a non-government location. Van Druten suggested that the base instead support a new monument to the Bill of Rights.

When the lawsuit was filed in federal court in Minneapolis, Duluth Mayor Herb Bergson and the City Council members were named as defendants. The Minnesota ACLU said it had given Duluth three months to remove the monument, and it had not been removed. The City Council then voted 5-4 to remove the monument. However, one member changed his mind and the mayor vowed to fight, citing overwhelming public support.

The city realized that it could lose the lawsuit and end up with large financial liabilities. The city agreed to remove the monument. It was taken down quickly and quietly, and ended up in a storage facility while its final disposition was considered.

A Twin Cities church bought the stone and, on Oct. 24, 2004, the Ten Commandments monument was placed in Duluth’s Canal Park. Minnesota Atheists magazine announced Certificates of Appreciation were given to van Druten, Dale Hagen, Maxine Caserta and Dave Davidson for serving as plaintiffs.

Kroc Center

Joan Kroc was the third wife of McDonald’s founder Ray Kroc. When he died in early 1984, she inherited the fortune he had made as a partner in McDonald’s. When she died in 2003, she left \$1.5 billion to the Salvation Army to establish and maintain Kroc Centers across the nation.

In 2004, Mayor Bergson asked the City Council to divert \$6 million, which had been earmarked for road maintenance, to fund an attractive bid for a local Kroc Center.

By the next summer, however, it was becoming apparent that the Duluth Salvation Army was planning a religious building with a chapel, large external cross, and biblical quotes throughout the building. It refused to consider removing or relocating those religious symbols. The new Kroc Center would provide all the facilities specified in the trust, but it would also be a religious center with discriminatory hiring of employees who shared the Salvation Army’s religious ideas.

City Council member Russ Stewart and the Lake Superior Freethinkers were concerned about the funneling of so much public money into what seemed to be a thinly disguised church.

So, the city hired an attorney to see what it would take to avoid running afoul of the Establishment Clause. The attorney stated that supporting the project would be permissible as long as the Salvation Army agreed to the following terms: No religious symbols could be visible from the entrance or displayed in areas that would be used by the community, the name of the center could not have any religious connotation, and the architecture could not suggest a place of worship. Also, the city should be allowed to inspect the site and review its financial records from time to time. With these precautions in place, the city could safely use public money to support the project.

The city offered these proposals to the Salvation Army office in Chicago, which would make the final

decision about proceeding with the project. But the Salvation Army said it would never agree to these terms, so the Duluth council backed off of those terms and agreed to risk an Establishment Clause lawsuit in order to proceed with the project.

But, on March 14, 2007, the city was shocked to hear that the Salvation Army decided not to proceed with the proposed Kroc Center in Duluth. The Salvation Army said one of the reasons for the rejection was that it had gotten pushback on identifying the center as religious outreach, thanks in part to the Lake Superior Freethinkers.

Nonprofit status

On May 24, 2016, Lake Superior Freethinkers became a registered Minnesota corporation recognized as a nonprofit organization by the IRS. It is organized with a four-person executive team: president, vice president, secretary and treasurer) and a nine-member Board of Directors.

Local billboard

A billboard was placed at West Third Street and Second Avenue during the holiday season of 2016. That area is used heavily by local commuters and reminded the community that the organization was alive and well, and available to anyone struggling with their faith or just overwhelmed with religious messages over the holiday season.

Adopt-A-Highway

Jon Eggleston and other members arranged for LSF to adopt a section of roadway. The group is responsible for keeping a two-mile stretch of Arnold Road clean. The new sign was put up in 2019.

Bus banner

The LSF placed a sign that read, “Questioning religion? You’ve got friends here,” on a bus that rotated through all the routes of the Duluth Transit Authority. It was on display in September 2017, when thousands of students returned to Duluth after summer. The banner was initially placed on the right side of the bus, but was quickly moved to the left side so that it was visible to passersby and less focused on those who happened to be at the bus stop.

National Day of Reason

The National Day of Reason is a secular celebration established in 2003 by the American Humanist Association, observed annually on the first Thursday in May, the same day as the National Day of Prayer. This year, more than 70 people gathered to support secular government and policy based on reason, science and evidence. LSF Secretary Jim Lytle was there and a dozen legislators spoke or dropped by to show support. The event was sponsored by Humanists of Minnesota with the First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis and Or Emet: the Minnesota Congregation of Humanistic Judaism. It was endorsed by 12 freethought groups including the Lake Superior Freethinkers. Organizers hope that this will be the beginning of a statewide coalition of secular voters who can act as a counterpoint to the religious right.

Religious indoctrination is child abuse

By Jim Curtis

I realize how repugnant this will be to many people, but facts are facts — imposing religion on children is child abuse.

Children have been terrorized with the threat of living an eternity in a lake of fire. That’s unequivocally been the source of nightmares and PTSD for millions of kids. Lesser abuses include instilling false hope of post-life justice for evildoers, teaching wishful thinking, and lying about the effectiveness of prayer.

Sadly, but accurately, religion, alcoholism, drug and domestic abuse trend in families from parents to children. Abuse victims tend to become abusers when they have their own families.

Some of the most abusive government officials in the country are Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. It’s quite possible that they



Jim Curtis

were victims of religious child abuse. And, now, they are abusing defenseless citizens of their states.

While victims of abuse deserve some compassion for their victimhood, at some point in the life of adults, we should all come to a realization that we were gaslighted and indoctrinated into abusive relationships and mindsets. People with integrity will do critical self-evaluations to determine if what we have been led to believe — about everything — is valid, true, and supported by evidence and/or logic.

There is no widely disseminated, publicly known evidence for any purely religious claim. No evidence for any god. No evidence that prayer works. No evidence for post-life existence. While there is plenty of testimony, we all should know how fallible testimony is as “evidence.” We should all know about conditioning, and how people routinely misinterpret personal experiences. Testimony is unreliable. Two witnesses who provide contradicting testimony of a singular event prove how unreliable testimony is.

Virtue signaling

We all should know what tribal virtue signaling is. It’s a way to signal membership in a tribe, whether that’s a nation, state, community or any other grouping of people. Virtue signaling doesn’t necessarily prove belief or adherence to tribal rules or norms. What much virtue signaling does is appeal to other members of the tribe for inclusion. Claiming to believe the tenets of a religious sect or belonging to a church tribe is often a form of virtue signaling.

I can regale you with stories from mostly male friends who don’t believe much of the Christian dogma, but they find membership in a church tribe useful for social and business purposes, and to keep peace in the family. I’m not sure how one could calculate how prevalent this is, but based on my observations of self-described Christians, very few of them act very Christ-like. I surmise the prevalence of insincere virtue signaling is significant.

There are logical arguments which attempt to prove that the cosmos has a creator, or had to have a creator, using the logic that the cosmos couldn’t have created itself or popped into existence without external stimulus or causation. These arguments are promulgated in numerous websites, debates, lectures, books, etc. Most of them fail on faulty premises. The most common fallacy I’ve observed is what’s called “presuppositionalism.” This methodology presupposes that a creator exists (or existed) and then uses syllogisms to come to the conclusion that a creator exists (or existed). That’s circular, invalid, fallacious reasoning.

Here’s their biggest weakness: One cannot prove any claim by logic alone. Only evidence counts as proof, and there’s no evidence for any purely religious claims. If you doubt that, please produce the evidence and claim your Nobel Prize in science and the admiration of half the planet’s population. If there was evidence for any religious claim, there would be no reason for doubters to doubt, just as nobody doubts the



Photo: Shutterstock

existence of diamonds and gold.

So, when are we going to acknowledge that religious beliefs are delusional? When are we going to break the cycle of abuse?

Please consider this: The perpetuation of religious beliefs is a thousands-of-years-old conspiracy that’s had millions of conspirators working to make people believe purely religious claims. The evidence for this is monumental, overwhelming and convincing. Churches are institutions devoted to the perpetuation of religious beliefs. Families and communities have been both victims and victimizers who conspire to maintain purely religious beliefs.

In what we call the Dark Ages, the Roman Catholic Church held power over the state, and enshrined purely religious offenses into secular legal code. Blasphemy and heresy were statutory crimes. Who’s the victim in these crimes? A fictional character called “God.”

Religious grifters

In the secular world, if we put grifters out of business, does anybody cry crocodile tears over their loss of livelihoods? No, we consider that a good thing — justice.

In the same vein, I have no concern for the loss of livelihood that would be inflicted on modern-day religious professionals. They are not only abusing their victims and engaging in fraud, they are profiting from it. They are selling an invisible product, for which the evidence could only be confirmed should their claims about afterlives turn out to be true. If it turns out they’re lying about an afterlife, which is almost certain, none of their victims will ever know. They’ll be dead. Their consciousnesses die with them. It’s quite a genius scam. And, it’s 100 percent legal over most of the planet.

And, to make matters worse, most of these grifters are held to be respected members of their communities. Who tells you to respect religious professionals? Their victims.

It’s a popular conception that before intrepid sailors departed Europe to seek new riches and trade routes, the majority of Europeans likely believed the Earth was flat. The primary guidebook to Christian religious misinformation, a collection of Bronze Age fantasy fiction called “the bible,” describes a flat Earth with “four corners.” Galileo was put under house arrest for claiming, contrary to the bible, that the Earth wasn’t the center of what’s come to be known as our solar system. The bible proposes a demon theory of diseases and the existence of witches. We know better now.

Billions of people can have incorrect beliefs. Popularity has never been and never will be a determiner of what is true. It doesn’t matter how many

billions of people have been defrauded by religious claims. They have still been defrauded.

No amount of past abuse, even a strong tradition of abuse, can justify continued abuse. No matter what you call it, imposing religion on children is abusive. Tricking gullible adults into believing fantasies is abusive. Billions of us need to acknowledge that we are or were victims of abuse, and end this cycle, end our participation in this vast conspiracy. We need to destroy institutions of lies and fraud called “churches.”

“When are we going to acknowledge that religious beliefs are delusional? When are we going to break the cycle of abuse?”

I’m sure that at least some religious professionals have good intentions and are in the business to help people. But they should be able to utilize their humanitarian

talents in secular humanitarian organizations, such as Doctors Without Borders. There should be no place in an ethical society for preachers with mansions, yachts, private jets, deluxe wardrobes, trophy wives (or boytoys), fame, and other rewards from their swindling.

There should be no exemptions from laws for “sincerely held religious beliefs.” Do we give exemptions for sincerely held racist beliefs? If your neighbor sincerely believes that Blacks and Hispanics are inferior to Whites, should he or she be able to deny employment to Blacks and Hispanics? Our laws and courts don’t reward delusional racist beliefs. Nor should they. Nor should our courts recognize and reward delusional religious beliefs.

The hatred against transsexuals being demonstrated in Texas, Florida and other states is entirely based on religious delusions. Our courts are granting special treatment to people who claim to have religious delusions. The courts aren’t even asking for evidence of sincerity as they did for conscientious objectors to the draft in the 1960s and ’70s. They are accepting sincerity purely on the claim. Why the special treatment for religion?

Increasingly, victims of religious indoctrination like Abbott and DeSantis are proposing and signing into law persecution of transsexual teenagers — teenagers! — based on their abusive indoctrination. We must not let this stand. Where will this end? What other laws can we expect them to enact based on their religious delusions? What other group of children or minorities can we expect them to bully and persecute based on their religious delusions?

We must vote out these degenerate victimizers. We must reject their religious fantasies. We should value honesty and truth over wishful thinking and religious delusion-inspired bigotry. Yes, we should declare war on religion, which will certainly provoke Fox “News” and other broadcasters. But, we have the evidence of a longstanding conspiracy and tradition of abuse that they cannot honestly defend.

Jim Curtis is an FFRF member who lives in Texas.

FFRF offers freethinking badge for Boy Scouts

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has produced a badge to reward freethinking youths and to challenge the Boy Scouts of America’s discriminatory policy against the nonreligious.

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.

At the urging of its late member Richard Kirschman, it has produced a badge similar to the Boy Scouts’ merit badges, which are typically sewn on uniforms or sashes. The badge, featuring a red “A” based on a symbol of atheism and agnosticism popularized by distinguished scientist and atheist Richard Dawkins, is being issued in collaboration with the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason & Science.

At Dawkins’ suggestion, the Scout or youth seeking a badge need only send FFRF a short es-

say addressing the Boy Scouts of America’s claim that nonbelievers can’t be good citizens. FFRF will not charge Scouts money for the badge.

The badge is intended 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.

“If any young person fulfills the requirements, we’d be delighted to reward them with this badge,” says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “Many non-religious students who might otherwise wish to join the Boy Scouts Association, knowing of its bigoted policy, don’t try. This is also their chance to be rewarded for critical thinking and to earn a keepsake at the same time. We hope someday very soon that Boy Scouts of America itself will change policy and adopt its own official merit badge rewarding critical thinking.”

The requirements, paralleling typical merit badge requirements, ask scouts to learn about secularism and the rich history of dissent from religion. The full requirements can be found at FFRF’s website: ffrf.org/freethought-badge.

‘I am a good person’



I believe that people who aren’t religious can be good people. My ballet teacher isn’t religious and she is teaching an art and the arts are important. My friend Lucy is a good friend and she is not religious. Lucy’s mom is a school counselor and helps kids in school get help and clothes and food. My mom works for the county and helps people with intellectual and developmental disabilities who are in need. My dad works for the county and helps people who are aging, veterans or physically disabled get what they need. People who are religious can also do bad things; religion doesn’t stop them. I am a good person, I don’t hurt people or animals. I am a good student, a good scout and a good son and I didn’t need a book or religion to tell me to do that.

— Edwin Parise, age 9

Voucher

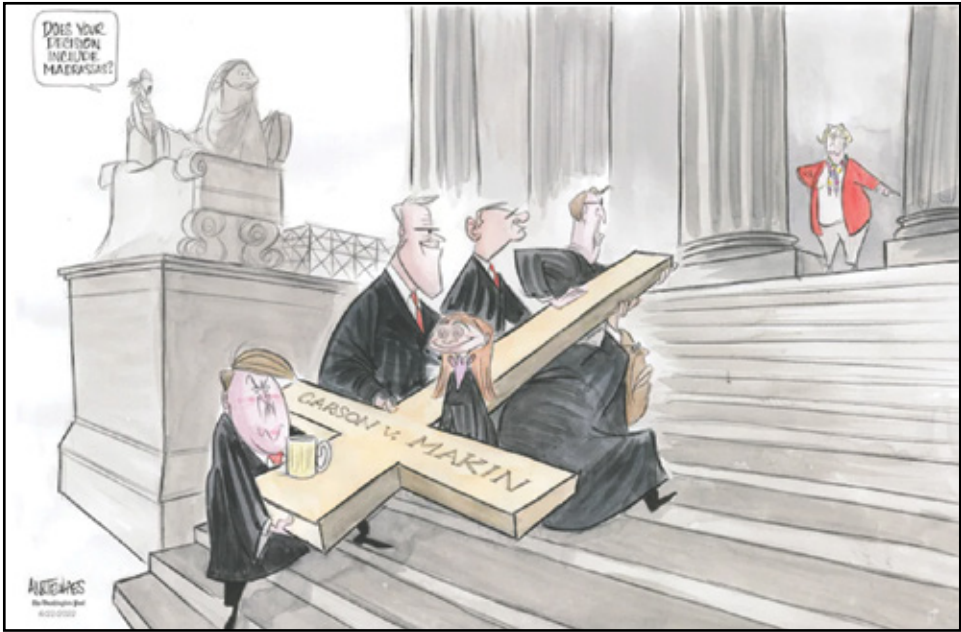
Continued from page 1

requirement in Maine’s tuition assistance program did not exclude religious schools based on their religious status, but rather protected the state’s interest in only supporting nonreligious education.

However, the majority opinion, written by Justice John Roberts, asserts that Maine’s law impermissibly infringes on the rights of religious schools: “A State’s antiestablishment interest does not justify enactments that exclude some members of the community from an otherwise generally available public benefit because of their religious exercise.” Roberts added, “A state need not subsidize private education. But once a state decides to do so, it cannot disqualify some private schools solely because they are religious.”

This claim misconstrues the real religious freedom at stake in the case, which is the right of every taxpayer to be free from funding religious indoctrination, and the right of every student in Maine to an education free from religiously motivated discrimination. Shockingly, the Supreme Court’s opinion explicitly acknowledges that private religious schools are very different from the public school education that Maine’s program is intended to offer. Roberts notes, “private schools are different by definition because they do not have to accept all students. Public schools generally do,” and moreover, “the curriculum taught at participating private schools need not even resemble that taught in the Maine public schools.”

The two religious schools acting as plaintiffs in the case “candidly admit that they discriminate against homosexuals, individuals who are transgender and non-Christians,” according to Maine’s brief to the Supreme Court. But rather



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than observing that these differences warrant Maine’s decision to limit its funding to schools that do not indoctrinate students, the court reasons that giving money to any private school means the state must fund religious education as well.

FFRF filed a brief (prepared by FFRF Constitutional Attorney Sam Grover) with the Supreme Court siding with the state of Maine in its refusal to use taxpayer money to fund religious education. As FFRF’s brief points out, Maine’s original purpose in passing its no aid law is unimpeachable; the principle itself dates back to the Founding era. Striking down Maine’s law has the immediate, disastrous effect of compromising the religious freedom of every citizen in the state. “The Supreme Court could not have gotten this one more wrong in its results-oriented pursuit of solidifying Christian favoritism,” Grover observes.

Breyer’s dissent notes that the Free Exercise clause does not require Maine to fund schools that will use public money to promote religion, and that longstanding

doctrine, which this decision is overthrowing, has permitted states to adopt constitutional language that is stricter than the federal Establishment Clause.

The heart of Breyer’s dissent is this paragraph:

“In my view, Maine’s nonsectarian requirement is also constitutional because it supports, rather than undermines, the Religion Clauses’ goal of avoiding religious strife. Forcing Maine to fund schools that provide the sort of religiously integrated education offered by Bangor Christian and Temple Academy creates a similar potential for religious strife as that raised by promoting religion in public schools. It may appear to some that the State favors a particular religion over others, or favors religion over nonreligion. Members of minority religions, with too few adherents to establish schools, may see injustice in the fact that only those belonging to more popular religions can use state money for religious education. Taxpayers may be upset at having to finance

the propagation of religious beliefs that they do not share and with which they disagree. And parents in school districts that have a public secondary school may feel indignant that only some families in the State — those families in the more rural districts without public schools — have the opportunity to give their children a Maine-funded religious education.”

“As Breyer points out in his dissent, the Supreme Court is increasingly ignoring the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment — which was adopted by the Framers to avoid the ‘anguish, hardship and bitter strife’ that results from the union of state and church — and concentrating only on the Free Exercise Clause,” comments Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

“By abandoning the concept of ‘play in the joints’ between the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses, the Supreme Court is engaging in blatant judicial activism, supplanting Maine’s approach to public education with the court’s own views,” notes FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert. “Like Justice Sotomayor, I’m increasingly concerned about where the court is going next as we await another religious liberty decision this summer.”

In a blistering dissent, Sotomayor writes: “What a difference five years makes. In 2017, I feared that the Court was ‘lead[ing] us . . . to a place where separation of church and state is a constitutional slogan, not a constitutional commitment.’ Today, the Court leads us to a place where separation of church and state becomes a constitutional violation. If a State cannot offer subsidies to its citizens without being required to fund religious exercise, any State that values its historic antiestablishment interests more than this Court does will have to curtail the support it offers to its citizens. With growing concern for where this Court will lead us next, I respectfully dissent.”

Convention speech

Videos help underserved populations Think

This speech was given on Nov. 20, 2021, at FFRF's national convention in Boston by Bonya Ahmed, leading up to the awarding of the Avijit Roy Courage Award. Bonya was introduced by Cheryl Kolbe, president of the Portland Area Chapter of FFRF. You can watch it at ffrf.us/speeches-2021.

Cheryl Kolbe: Many of you will remember that Rafida Bonya Ahmed was FFRF's first Forward Award recipient. She and FFRF co-sponsor the Avijit Roy Courage Award in honor of her husband, an author and well known Bangladeshi-American atheist who was killed by Islamic terrorists in 2015 in an attack that nearly killed her. Bonya has since co-founded the educational charity Think, which creates and publishes short, appealing videos on science, reason and history, and which reaches out to those in her home country and to the world to educate and inspire critical thinking.

Bonya will tell us more about the Avijit Roy Courage Award and Think. Please welcome the talented and courageous Bonya Ahmed.

By Bonya Ahmed

Thanks, Cheryl. It's nice to see you all here in Boston. And I'm really honored today to announce the third annual Avijit Roy Courage Award with FFRF. This year's award goes to Shashant Singh. Congratulations!

As many of you know, this award was first announced by FFRF in 2018. Avijit



Photo by Ingrid Laas
Rafida Bonya Ahmed

Roy, my husband, and I were brutally attacked by the Islamic militants while we were visiting our home country, Bangladesh, for a book signing trip in 2015. He was killed and I barely survived. It took me a few months to recover from the wounds. It will be seven years on Feb. 26, 2022.

Avijit love to write. He wrote about science, philosophy, religion. He wrote eight books on subjects like the philosophy of no religion, homosexuality, the origin of life.

We were attacked because of these writings, because we were atheist, because of what he wrote, the way he criticized religion. After the attack on us, a killing spree went on in 2015. It was a bloody year in Bangladesh. The militants vowed to kill one person a month, and they succeeded. It went on for a year. Many of the secular writers, teachers, bloggers and publishers in Bangladesh were attacked. Many of them were killed. Many others were either silenced or forced to flee the country. And with that, they didn't just kill people. They killed ideas.

The Bangladeshi government also started clamping down. They still have a very draconian digital act where you can be sued or you can be put in jail for criticizing religion, among other things. Anyway, the rich humanist content that people like Avijit had been creating for decades actually all stopped, came to a halt.

But I have told this story many times. So, today, let's not talk about



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Rafida Bonya Ahmed talks about her new YouTube video project "Think Bangla" at FFRF's national convention on Nov. 20, 2021, in Boston.

that. Let's talk about the present, the future and how we are showing respect to Avijit, his memory, his sacrifice. After all, we only live once.

At the core, Avijit was an educator, a humanist educator. He was all about open source, opening up the cumulative wealth of human knowledge to everybody. I wrote one book, but he wrote so much more. Mukto-Mona is the first freethinking Bangla site that Avijit founded in 2001 when he was a Ph.D. student in Singapore.

I wrote a book on evolution almost 15 years ago and it is still the go-to book on that subject. You can imagine if it's such a big taboo here, how big of a taboo it can be over the other parts of the world. I am flattered that this is still the go-to book, but it's also sad. There should have been hundreds of books like that.

Avijit and I always actually wondered why free, high-quality education should be limited to the West, and only in English? There is a lot of crap on YouTube, on social media, even in English. But, you can also find good content, reliable content, dependable content online.

But there is close to nothing in many other languages or many other countries. For the people who do not understand English, it's very hard for them to get this wealth of knowledge that we share over here. So, I looked through the Bangla YouTube world, and it's littered with religious content, fake news, unreliable information, pseudoscience. And sadly, those videos have millions and millions of views.

So, we thought we would honor Avijit and the other fallen comrades by going back to the basics, going more mainstream. We created high-quality dependable content in native languages like Bangla, Hindi and Arabic that will make young people curious, will make them think, will make them ask questions and question the status quo. I'm sure you all will agree that you first have to question something if you want to break the status quo.

Imtiaz Shams, who has traveled here from London and who works with me, and I decided to start a YouTube channel. It's kind of funny that I am a You-

tuber now. This is not the age that you become a YouTuber, but we have to go where the young people are. We have to talk to them. We have to share what we have encountered, what we have seen, what we have learned.

Our first stop was Bangla, of course. That's my first language. I lived in Bangladesh until high school. There are 250 million people who speak it. Dan Barker told me yesterday that it ranks as the fifth most-spoken native language in the world.

We will show some of our videos and you can see what we have done so far. The "Think Bangla" channel on YouTube was started in 2020. We already have 80,000 subscribers [127,000 as of May 2022] and more than 3 million views [5.6 million as of May 2022]. It was unexpected. And we had the support of the world's best and biggest humanist organizations, like FFRF. Thank you.

[Video plays] This is one of our favorite videos. This is on periods. Seems benign, right? But this is a very taboo subject. Anything to do with your body, especially with women's body or sex education is a big, big taboo. Some other YouTube channels got in trouble for making video on periods, so, we thought we would just make our own showing how it happens, why it happens.

To our surprise, we got such a good review on those. Some organizations are telling us that they are using it for training. The people like us who have founded Think, we have built charities before. Imtiaz and I have created charities before. I have worked with Avijit

on Mukto-Mona. On every video we make, we work with researchers, professors, experts from all around the world. We are definitely the first to do that. Recently, we have worked with Humanist International to focus heavily on climate change content. At the beginning of Think, we built our first studio in London. We were really worried that we would get shut down by the government, mass reported or cancelled. They know who I am.

But as we grew, something wonderful happened. Even our most taboo subjects, like human evolution, we got really good audiences and conversations started, comments even from religious people.

Our audiences love our astronomy videos. Space is mysterious, mind boggling. And the animations are cool. But I think there is something else to it. I think people like astronomy videos because they don't really challenge your ideas about religion like evolution does.

[Shows video] This video is actually one of our favorite videos that we have made. She is a trans woman in Bangladesh. As soon as we made this video, our audience started talking about how it's important we should not ignore or hate the people who have been historically maligned. It got more than 800,000 views on Facebook.

So that's "Think Bangla." Imtiaz actually will kill me if I don't mention "Think English," as well, because he was the presenter there. So we initially started with "Think Bangla" and "Think English," but funding and resource issues meant that we had to pause the English channel. But, to our surprise, of very few videos that we have done so far, some of them went viral.

So that's Think, the charity foundation that we have created. We have registered it in London, in the UK and also in the United States as a charity organization. And we think Avijit would have loved it if he were here.

It's amazing to see that that conversation has started again and we are out there teaching a new generation of young people who are engaging with this kind of content, getting curious, asking questions.

I will end with Steven Pinker's quote. He said "There is no universal law of progress. You have to be the progress you want to see." I often say something in Bangla, translated as "Progress doesn't happen in a linear way. You have to sometimes go backward a few steps to go forward." We are trying to bring the conversation forward in places where people have very limited access. Thank you.

FFRF'S

Ask an Atheist

Wednesdays at Noon (Central)*

On Facebook Live

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

*With occasional reruns.

Avijit Roy Courage Award

The price for speaking the truth in India

This is an edited version of the pre-recorded video speech given by Sushant Singh at FFRF's national convention in Boston on Nov. 20, 2021. Singh has received a memorial plaque and \$5,000 as part of the award. He was introduced by FFRF Director of Communications Amit Pal.

Amit Pal: Indulge me for just a moment while I give you a mini history of independent India. India was founded in 1947 as a secular, nonaligned progressive democracy. Fast forward to 2014, when a prime minister by the name of Narendra Modi came to power and has been in power ever since. He's attacking these pillars of India as a secular, nonaligned progressive democracy.

Why is this relevant to our Avijit Roy Courage Award and the awardee? Because actor Sushant Singh is one of those people in India who is not letting the attack on those pillars go unchallenged. There are still many people in India who believe in India's founding ideals.

Sushant Singh is a famous actor. He has been in many movies in India, including "The Legend of Bhagat Singh," which is about a radical atheist who is a hero in India. "Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar" is about the writer of the Indian Constitution. "Satya," which is his first movie and is a classic of the mafia genre in India, is analogous to "The Godfather." He was host of a show called "Savdhaan India" or "Beware India," which was a true crime show with re-enactments from 2012 to 2019.

Sushant went to take part in protests against a really discriminatory citizenship law. The next day, he received a text from the show basically saying, "You're done. We're done with you."

He has taken part in farmers' protests. Farmers are being left to the mercy of big business. Just yesterday, Sushant and his side had a victory. Those farmers laws have been repealed. So that's great. And now we hope that we are bolstering Sushant's courage and helping him persevere on the citizenship front, too.

It's dangerous to speak out in India. He's lost his job. It could be much worse. There have been things such as income tax raids, not audits. They raid your house and seize your assets. There have been people jailed. There have been people killed. In fact, a previous Avijit Roy Courage awardee was with this organization whose founder was killed by a Hindu militant group.

So, it takes courage. And that's why we've given this award to Sushant. And now Sushant himself sent us a video from India. He would have been here, but with all the weirdness and the restrictions because of the pandemic, he isn't able to be with us in person. So here is Sushant Singh explaining what he's been up to and why he's so appreciative about us giving him the award. Thank you.



Sushant Singh (on video screen) was given FFRF's Avijit Roy Courage Award for speaking out against Hindu nationalism in India. Watching the video is FFRF Communications Director Amit Pal, who introduced Singh.

By Sushant Singh

Hi, everyone. Freedom From Religion Foundation, thank you so much for this honor. I'll try my best to live up to your expectations.

In India, our society is at a very strange and dangerous point. A couple of days back, a Muslim boy in Lucknow was picked up by police for interrogation because they suspected a case of "love jihad," which is a cooked-up notion by the government where they think that Muslims are posing as Hindus and luring Hindu women and then converting them to Islam under the guise of love. Hence, love jihad.

The father of that 21-year-old boy took the boy to police station because police asked him to be brought in. The next morning, the boy was found dead. Police claimed that he committed suicide in the washroom of the lockup. They say he hung himself by the rope of his hoodie from a tap that was only two-and-a-half-feet high.

So, that's where we are today. It all started after 2014. We have been an Islamophobic society ever since I have known, but at least people had the fear

of law, so they hesitated in being openly Islamophobic.

But, now, people have actually been rewarded for acting against Muslims. There are vigilante mobs who have openly lynched people in the name of cow protection and they have been rewarded. And they are all supporters of the present government, which is the BJP government led by Narendra Modi, who is India's prime minister.

The government does not promote Islamophobia, but it doesn't stop it. And, at times, the ministers reward people. So, in the steps of demonizing Muslims by terms like "ghar wapsi," which means "welcoming back to the fold," that means reconverting Muslims to Hinduism.

And then there are laws against love jihad, land jihad. Anything which Muslims do is a jihad. If they're selling fruits, they must be doing vendor jihad. There are media channels dedicated to spreading Islamophobia.

There was another masterstroke by the government called CAA — Citizenship Amendment Act. What they did was they arbitrarily choose three neighboring countries — Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, where the dominant

population is Muslim — and said that any illegal immigrants from these countries who have illegally come to India are eligible for Indian citizenship — as long as they are not Muslims. They can be Hindu, Christian, etc., but not Muslims.

The law was so arbitrary and against the ethos of our Constitution. It has been more than two years when the law was enacted, passed in the Parliament by brute majority. Rules for that law have not yet been framed, so that law cannot be applied to anyone.

There were massive protests against that act throughout the country, most prominent being in Delhi, which resulted ultimately in riots by people who supported this law. You can check out the videos on YouTube. And you'll see that police almost colluded with rioters who were rioting against Muslims. And in the aftermath, mostly Muslims were arrested, as if they rioted against themselves.

So, I, along with a lot of other activists, was against CAA, even when it was being proposed as a bill, which was CAB — Citizenship Amendment Bill. We were against it because our Constitution says that any person within the territory of India — not just a citizen, but any person — will not be discriminated on the basis of their religion, caste, creed, sex, etc. No discrimination.

And now for the first time, I think in our history of free India, we have an amendment to the Constitution where citizenship has been linked to your being from particular religions. So, I was against this act.

And, then, in the December 2019, I attended a protest march, which was organized by university students, to protest the police brutality on Jawaharlal Nehru University students. I attended this march because I wanted to show my solidarity. I wanted the youngsters to feel that somebody was standing with them, that they're not alone.

I attended that march and had written something against the Citizenship Amendment Act. I read those lines at the march, also. And that night at 2 a.m., I received a message from my channel. I was hosting a show that was very popular. I had been hosting that show for almost eight years. But I received a message that my journey, that show, was about to end. My contract was still valid for another month or so.

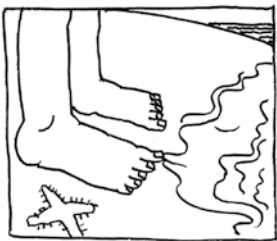
The theme of the show was to inspire the citizens to fight against injustice. It was called "Savdhaan India: India Fights Back."

I tweeted that my journey with the show had come to an end. Somebody asked me, "Is it the price you paid for speaking the truth?" I said, "So be it." And the rest is history. That's why I'm standing here today.

Once again, thank you so much. Dan Barker, Annie Laurie Gaylor, my friend Amit Pal and all of you people at FFRF, thank you so much.

“Now, people have actually been rewarded for acting against Muslims. There are vigilante mobs who have openly lynched people.”

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



Illustrated by Seymour Chwast, published by FFRF

A Toehold On Divinity

Before me, the horizon rings the ocean,
Barefoot on the beach I stand astride
To greet the madcaps of perpetual motion
That scamper up the shore and leave the tide.
They leap up . . . kiss my toes . . .
Then back they lope;
Can this be what it feels like
To be Pope!

Buy it online @ ffrf.org/shop

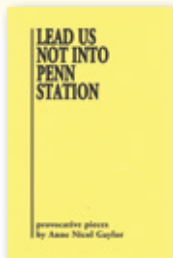
Lead Us Not Into Penn Station Provocative Pieces

By Anne Gaylor

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

—Published by FFRF. 80 pages / PB

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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.

Convention speech

Artificial intelligence is already here

This is an edited version of the speech given by David Tamayo at FFRF's national convention in Boston on Nov. 20, 2021. He was introduced by Eva Quinones, president of Humanists of Puerto Rico. You can watch the speech here: ffrf.us/speeches-2021.

Eva Quinones: It is my personal pleasure to introduce David Tamayo, who is founder and president of Hispanic American Freethinkers, also known as HAFree. David also serves on the board of the Freedom from Religion Foundation. HAFree is the first and only Latino nonprofit educational organization of its kind. Its mission is to serve as a resource and support for all Hispanic freethinkers. David is chief information officer for a large aerospace engineering firm in Washington, D.C. He sponsors and assists 10 cybersecurity teams at Langley High School, which compete in the U.S. Air Force National Cyber Patriot Competition.

He is vice president and founder of the Hispanic Business and Technology Council, a nonprofit that educates young Hispanics to become IT leaders. David is the organizer of the HAFree High School Outreach Mentor Program to Latino and immigrant students, teaching critical thinking skills and career planning.

I present to you my friend and fellow dog lover, president of Hispanic American Freethinkers — thank dog for David Tamayo.

By David Tamayo

Now, it doesn't matter if I do a presentation on A.I., on economics, on anything like that, I always get the same question: Should I call you Latino, Hispanic, Mexican? I always tell people that a majority of those things are just a distraction from the real issues of education and poverty and religiosity and all these other issues. For the purpose of this presentation, I'm going to be using interchangeably Hispanic and Latino to mean kind of the same thing. And I don't care what you call me, so long as you call me.

I'd like to take this opportunity to let everyone know that there are 62 million Hispanic Americans in this country. That means one in five people is Hispanic. Education is the biggest contributor to secularism, so we want to make sure we provide that to Hispanic Americans.

Another thing I want you to know is that more people speak Spanish in the United States than any other country in the world, except for Mexico. There are more Spanish speakers here in this country than in Colombia, Chile, Argentina or even Spain. And there's no official language in the United States, by the way. I like to tell people that if you don't have a Latino in your family yet, you will pretty soon. Might as well start getting used to that a little bit.

Now, what does all of this have to do with the price of tea in China? But, I figured, OK, I'll do a presentation on artificial intelligence, since I do that for a living, rather than talking about all the terrible things regarding religion in the community.

We'll start here with the most important question today. I don't know if you saw this, but the Carl Sagan Center for



Photo by Ingrid Laas

David Tamayo speaks at the 2021 FFRF national convention.

Research at SETI has an alien intruder detection system that says that aliens are going to be here in 29 years. The question is, should humans do something about it? The answer is, that's a stupid question. Of course, we've got to do something about it. Are they coming here to work with us? Are they coming here to eat us? Are they coming here to give us anal probes? What are they here for? It's an important question.

Now, keep in mind that really is fake news, of course. The center is real, but the news is false. Artificial intelligence is coming, and it is already here to a certain degree. And a lot of luminaries have said this is dangerous. Steven Hawking said A.I. "could be the best thing or the worst thing for humanity." The problem with A.I.

is that computers, computing power, the memory, all of that, has had exponential growth for the last 50 years.

Now, let me put exponential growth in perspective. If you take 30 linear steps, you cross the street. If you take 30 exponential steps, you go around the Earth 26 times. And that's how fast memory and things in computers are increasing in computing power. The problem with exponential is that by the time you realize that something is exponential, it's already too late. By the way, Covid is exponential.

The cool factor

The problem that A.I. has is that it's cool. It's got a cool factor. Wow. My Roomba goes around and maps my room. And, oh, you've got cars now that you can call from the parking lot and they'll come on a rainy day and pick you up. This has got a cool factor. We're like the proverbial frog in the pot of water. We're just not seeing the dangers that this is bringing up until it's maybe too late.

Before we go on to some of those,

let's define some things.

Let's just define intelligence as the ability to process information. Very simple. We know that the lump of matter between our ears, that is intelligence. It's a bunch of neurons. But what's critical about that is patterns. Patterns are really what makes intelligence. It's not so much the stuff that is made out of.

I will prove it to you in a minute that intelligence is independent of the substance. It's independent of the material that is intelligent, whether it's a computer chip or a brain, whether it's hardware or wetware.

Keep in mind that all the atoms in your body are not the same atoms that were there 10 years ago. You shed your skin and all of that and you eat and it replaces just about everything in your body.

But still, you're the same person that you're more or less about 10 years ago. And someone sees you and your ideas and all of that because your mental patterns are still there. That's what makes you, you. We could almost argue that life is the ability to process information while retaining that complexity. And, of course, sex.

We can ask: Is artificial intelligence artificial life? That's to be determined, right?

Artificial intelligence really means nonbiological intelligence. That's our definition. Right now, there are three stages of this type of artificial intelligence. Stage three is machine learning — your Alexas, your devices that are learning from you. And that's been all put together by supercomputers. I and many others think that they'll become conscious at some point.

So, yes, you're all skeptics and you say, "Prove it to me." Well, all matter in the universe is made out of two things — quarks and leptons. Quarks are the parts that make up the neutrons and protons, and leptons are electrons and other things. But for our purposes,

everything is made out of those two things. When I say everything, I mean brains and computer chips are all made out of the same thing.

Computing the ability to process information is one function. One computer function does all the computing in the world, keeping aside quantum computers and other stuff, just to keep it basic. Logic can compute anything. And then we have the neuron, the very simple cell, one cell that by itself doesn't do much. It fires a one or a zero. We have about 100 billion of those and you put them together and, boom, you've got intelligence, you've got your ability to think and understand what I'm saying.

Again, it's the pattern that makes the brain intelligent. You take a person, scramble their brain and they're no longer intelligent because you scrambled their patterns.

Loss of jobs?

Will A.I. create greater unemployment? Yes and no. For every technology, that's has been the case. There are already self-driving trucks on the road, you just don't know about it. And most of them have babysitters. But yes, it will save lives. It will help people not get killed or hurt. But it will destroy jobs. Again, positive and negative.

Does it produce inequalities? Oh, yes.

Recent news said that automation has destroyed 70 percent of the middle class. Will that stop automation? No, it'll continue to move forward. The problem with automation, with robots, is that they don't pay taxes. No Social Security taxes. So you have fewer people paying into Social Security. Computers work 24/7. They don't ask for a raise, etc. So, the competition with humans is real. A.I. is changing our humanity.

How many of you have seen the captchas? We want to make sure you're not a computer, so fill in this weird text. And you can talk to people on the phone, or you think it's a person, but it turns out it's a computer. And, of course,



Photo by Ingrid Lass

David Tamayo

all social media. Each one of us is the product. They know you better than you know yourself. That’s why they can target you so well. And they’re selling you to other companies.

Now, a lot of organizations, courts, banks, they decided that they wanted to do good, and they got A.I.s to do loan applications to eliminate discrimination and all of that.

But, A.I. systems have turned out to be racist, sexist and biased in just about every field. That’s because it’s garbage in and garbage out. The A.I.’s learn from experience. They learn from history. They learn from the data. And, yes, we are a society that is racist, sexist and biased. So, these systems turn out to be the same. We have to be careful about that. And then as computers become super A.I., the “evil God” problems arise, basically where we are irrelevant to the system.

And to me, that’s even worse. Imagine a computer system that would say, “I keep rusting. Let’s just eliminate oxygen and our rust problem will go away,” not caring at all that we humans are the little ants that are being paved over by that road. So that is something that we have to watch out for.

A.I. and security

The enemies of the country are attacking us with A.I. We are defending ourselves with A.I. And I’ll never admit that we’re attacking with A.I. The one thing that is really scary is the Google deep fakes. It’s a way of creating videos that look as authentic as any video of people saying and doing anything.

So, you can no longer look at a video and say, “Yeah, it wasn’t real,” because you don’t know. We can’t talk about A.I. without talking about the singularity. So, if you remember one word today, it’s that.

Let’s talk about the singularity. It’s this hypothesis that our systems are going to continue to get smarter and smarter and smarter. You’ll get to the point that they’ll

be creating their own systems. And now we have a runaway intelligence system where the system becomes the human, and we become the chicken. You can try to teach a chicken trigonometry, but it’s never going to learn it.

It’s not an if, it’s a when. And some people think it’s as early as 2045, when we have a computer that can create another computer.

Now, don’t get me wrong, there is lots of good stuff with A.I. The study of Alzheimer’s is being conducted with A.I. We use robots. One is being used in Japan to clean up the nuclear accident there, so no humans are being harmed. You just send out these robots. A.I.s are everywhere.

And for all of you who flew to this convention, about three minutes of the flight was a pilot. The rest was a computer. So that’s something to keep in mind.

Religion and A.I.

Let me try to connect things with religion a little bit.

Obviously, there are companies right now that are trying to come up with something called the artificial moral reasoning. They try to put morality into machines. So, if a self-driving car says, “I’m going to crash, I’m going to have to kill somebody,” the typical scenario is that there are two 80-year-old people here and a 9-year-old boy there. Which one should the car hit? The computer’s going to have to make those decisions.

Keep in mind that theology will keep reinventing itself. And we saw that when Galileo proved that we weren’t in the center of the universe when Darwin came out and showed evolution, they just evolved. The evolution evolved.

Will intelligent machines have a soul? Keep in mind that theologians were the ones that said that Native Americans didn’t have souls and we could kill them all or that you could grab people from Africa and enslave them because they didn’t have souls.

These are the same people, regarding in vitro fertilization, who say, “Oh, yeah, those children were created in a petri dish. But, yeah, they have souls, also.” We’ve got to be reminded of those things when these machines become persons, if you will.

If you encode the human brain, will that encoding encode the soul, also? This is a very scary quote: “I don’t see Christ’s redemption limited to human beings. It’s redemption of all creation. It’s redemption of creation. Even A.I. If A.I. is autonomous, we should encourage it to participate in Christ’s redemptive purposes.” In other words, pastors are already thinking, “Hey, once my Alexa becomes a person, I’m going to indoctrinate the hell out of it.” It’s kind of scary.

Keep in mind that the same thinking that made those A.I.s racist are the same ones that are going to be used for religious zealotry. And that’s scary. You can also ask: How can A.I.s commit sin?

What happens to human depravity? You’ve got to remember that in Christianity and a lot of religions, you are depraved, and therefore you need saving. How can you do that with A.I.? And should the A.I. pray — or, one that I like, is if we apes created the A.I., which is more intelligent than us, does that mean that the God that created us is less intelligent than we are since we’re all made in each other’s mind?

Should the A.I. follow the Ten Commandments, or should it follow the human Bill of Rights?

Should the churches start using A.I. pastors, A.I. preachers? Guess what? It’s already happening. So that picture you see, there is an actual Buddhist priest that costs \$1 million and is being used in Japan because they didn’t have enough people. They got this Buddhist monk robot that teaches everything. They will know the holy scriptures better than any other priest. We want to make sure that we keep all these things in mind.

The bible says, “Kill all witches.” So, should the A.I. go searching for witches to kill? Will it find witches? And one thing that I worry about is that a lot of the people doing the programming for these A.I. systems are also religious people. Think of one that, instead of just teaching general ethics, teaches its own religious ethics. Think of an A.I. created by Jehovah Witnesses working in a hospital, and it doesn’t allow blood transfusions. So that’s pretty scary.

I think A.I. is going to happen and it’s going to become autonomous and it will become smart. It will happen. And it will happen certainly in our children’s lives, for sure. The question is, what are we going to do about it? There is a race right now with unlimited funds from governments and private industry to get A.I. to create this general artificial intelligence that basically is a person.

When there’s money, stuff gets done. It’s going to happen unless we do ourselves in, unless we kill ourselves. Some people say that if we discovered aliens, a lot of people would become atheists. And I think that A.I. can be the same way. We can use A.I. to tell people, “Hey, do you really want to be in heaven with a robot?”

There are no policies whatsoever being done today at any level in politics for A.I.s.

Remember when I said by the time you realize you have exponential growth, it’s already too late? That’s what’s going to happen. And unfortunately, it’s very difficult to convince policymakers that the policy needs to be made. Perhaps humans are destined to move over like the Neanderthals and say, “A.I. is the new life, it is more advanced. Let’s just move over and let them take over.” And some people say if we find aliens, those aliens will probably be robots. It may be.

The last point that I want to make is that Hispanics can follow whatever goddamn career choice they want.

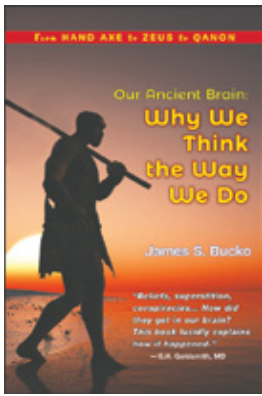
Freethought books

The following books are by FFRF members on the topics of religion or free-thinking. FFRF does not do book reviews. These books are not offered through ffrf.org/shop.

Why We Think The Way We Do

By James S. Bucko
\$19.99 (paperback)
\$4.99 (Kindle)
Hallard Press LLC, 2022

This book traces the evolution of the brain from the advent of the first bifa-



cial stone tool to the beginning of belief in gods and the related phenomena of conspiracy theories. Why is our species the only one that demonstrates the belief in abstract concepts including reli-

gions and so willing to believe in conspiracy theories? What do our brains have that facilitates imagining the future and even life after death?

Ruled by Faith

By James A. Galezewski
\$2.99 (Kindle)
\$9.98 (Paperback)
Outskirts Press, 2021

Countries throughout the world have long made political decisions about governance by relying on their religious



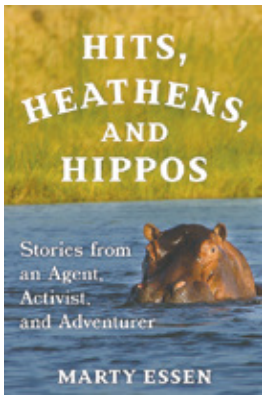
beliefs, often producing bad outcomes. This book challenges the premise of such faith-based decisions, including the reliance on scripture and its interpretation. It was written for those who dare to wonder

and question conventional wisdom to aid in their search for the truth.

Hits, Heathens, and Hippos: Stories from an Agent, Activist and Adventurer

By Marty Essen
\$17.95 (paperback)
\$4.99 (Kindle)
Encante Press, LLC, 2021

As Minnesota’s youngest DJ, he survived an on-air assault. As the owner of a talent agency, he survived everything



the music industry threw at him. As a wild-life adventurer, he survived a fierce hippo attack. But can he survive an over-the-top, born-again Christian father, who prayed aloud in restaurants, faith-healed

his old Toyota, and believed demons possessed his Masonic Lodge watch? Find out in the hilarious new memoir from multi-award-winning author Marty Essen!

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By Dan Barker

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By Dan Barker

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

—Published by FFRF. 392 pages / HB

\$20.00

Item # FB26

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LETTERBOX

The court’s attack on reproductive rights

By overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the Supreme Court has imposed on our secular nation the religious belief that women have no constitutional right to control their own reproduction. This outrageous decision, among others, calls for change. Supreme Court terms should be for a finite time, just as legislative and executive terms are. Lifetime appointments are for totalitarian states, not for democracies.

The opinion ignores the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and continues the trend of privileging religious persons and their beliefs over the rights of all others.

The court’s dissent stated, “One result of today’s decision is certain: the curtailment of women’s rights, and of their status as free and equal citizens. With sorrow — for this court, but more, for the many millions of American women who have today lost a fundamental constitutional protection — we dissent.”

At present, with predictable inaction by Congress, it is up to the states to defend citizens’ rights to abortion. Oregon has been in the lead, but more can be done.

Gov. Brown’s office reports: “Oregon led the nation by passing the most comprehensive reproductive health legislation at the time. Gov. Brown signed Oregon’s Reproductive Health Equity Act into law in 2017 — a first-of-its-kind bill that expanded access to reproductive health services for all Oregonians and codified the right to an abortion into state law.”

Now Oregon, and all other states, need to require all hospitals, with no exceptions, to perform abortions, and other reproductive procedures, such as vasectomies.

I’m a Lifetime Member to help FFRF keep fighting

I have enclosed \$1,000 to become a Lifetime Member of FFRF to help aid and assist you in your continuing struggle against religious persecution in this country.

I would like to thank you so very much for your continuing efforts to keep this country safe and out of the hands of those hyper-religious individuals and organizations that would bring about its downfall as a country built on freedom and democracy!

Texas

Ardell’s column on life really resonated with me

I took the April and May issues of Freethought Today with me camping. I settled in next to a nice stream and began reading. No distractions. I find most of your essays and articles interesting, but “Live your best life in a meaningless universe” by Donald B. Ardell really resonated with me.

I’m a geologist, so the artwork showing the meteors and dinosaurs grabbed my attention. His essay perfectly captured how I understand life. After reading the piece, I laid the paper down, looked at the stream, insects buzzing about, and felt calm. Beautiful writing will do that. Thank you for publishing such a wonderful essay.

Maine

Denver Pride



Pat Brodbent, Claudette StPierre and Marci Radin of the Denver Chapter of FFRF work a tent during Denver Pridefest in June, selling merchandise and talking with passersby.

“We got a ton of traffic at our booth,” said StPierre, president of the Denver group. “Of course, a very receptive crowd helps! We had so many people interested in our message and the organization especially after the Supreme Court ruling last week. We raised over \$1,500 in donations!”

Like Diane Uhl, help fund End of Life Options

John was 86 when he got his diagnosis of pancreatic cancer. After going through two courses of chemotherapy, his cancer had spread. He was put on hospice and given a six-month terminal diagnosis. His PeaceHealth doctors had not spoken to him about medical aid in dying because they are a Catholic hospital. Not even a referral. The hospice was also owned by PeaceHealth and their nurses are prohibited from speaking about that option, but are allowed to talk about further medical treatment, palliative care, and Voluntary Stopping Eating and Drinking. A resident of Washington state, which has had a medical aid in dying law in place for 10 years, John luckily talked to a neighbor about that option. He contacted End of Life Washington and was assigned a volunteer who was able to walk him through a number of steps so that he had a choice to self-ingest medication to end his life with dignity. Since he was eligible for the law, his prescribing physician wrote him a prescription for the medication. Now John could choose to take that medication or not. He decided to do so a week after the prescription was filled at his pharmacy.

Eleven states have medical aid in dying laws in place. The late FFRF donor Diane Uhl was an ardent supporter of Arizona End of Life Options, pledging \$10,000 in matching funds for this grassroots organization. Diane not only supported our organization financially, but was a proponent for herself for a death with dignity.

Many states have such bills in front of their legislators. Check compassionandchoices.org for the status in your state.

Arizona End of Life Options and Volunteer for End of Life Washington

Questions as a youth awakened me to reality

I read with interest PJ Slinger’s column about Satan and the logical fallacies associated with his origins. As a 13-year-old, I realized many of the same logical reductions while I was attending a small Baptist church in rural South Carolina. I began asking questions that,

in essence, wondered how God could have ever created Lucifer, as he, owing to his omnipotence, had to have recognized that Lucifer would ultimately become a fallen angel.

Unknowingly, I had stumbled upon Hume’s fundamental problem of evil — a world supposedly protected by a benevolent deity. My questions went unanswered by the Sunday school teacher, who was a septuagenarian farmer with barely more than a grade-school education. It was the beginning of the end of my belief in the illogical, indeed nonsensical, Christian doctrine. It also awakened me to the reality that not all adults are capable of logical thinking or critical thought. Today I’m an open atheist and proud to be so.

No more regrets: I’ll be attending convention

At two conventions, I missed out on saying hello to Julia Sweeney. The first time I bailed on the extremely long line of fellow conventioners but later saw her walking through the hotel, alone. So, I angled toward her and then noticed she was talking on her phone.

The second time I was determined to wait out the line and as I got closer, I saw the very talented co-performer with Sweeney, Jill “I Kissed a Girl” Sobule, who walked up to me and said she liked the Shroud Of Turin T-shirt I wore (and had designed).

In 2009, I kicked myself in the ass for not attending FFRF’s 32nd annual convention in Seattle, where Ursula K. Le Guin, one of my many favorite atheists and science fiction writers, received the Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

While I saw Anne Nicol Gaylor at conventions, I never got a chance to say hello and thank her for co-founding FFRF, as there always seemed to be people gathered about her. After her husband died, I sent her a letter of condolence and she returned a letter to me.

All of the preceding is to say I am sick and tired of regrets and I hope to see YOU at the San Antonio FFRF convention this October.

Texas

We can make America smart again

This letter was first published in the Santa Fe New Mexican on June 8.

As evidenced by recent actions taken by some states to solidify the religious right-wing agenda, it is worth noting that almost 30 percent of our citizens have no religious affiliation, are atheists, agnostics or simply don’t care about any religion or mythology.


The Christian nationalist movement claims religious freedom abounds here but falls short of defining real religious freedom, inclusive of “other” religions, or the right to freedom from religion. Make no mistake, the right-wing Christian nationalist agenda has some of its roots in race superiority just as the “holy” bible has been used to justify slavery, hatred and exclusion, past and present. Christian nationalists are also masters at cherry-picking the alleged “good” book while ignoring or making excuses for sections that don’t suit their narrative.

Over the last 6,000 years, there have been at least 1,800 religions created by man (in their image), with many of them spewing forth the same stories such as a virgin birth, etc. Most of these man-made religions preyed on the circumstances, curiosity and questions of their times for answers to where the sun would go at night, phenomena such as earthquakes, or medical and scientific issues, etc.

Most, if not all, atheists and “Nones” couldn’t care less about religions or the mythologies that rule some people’s lives. However, they also do not want it mandated through law, cultural dictates or the misuse of our taxes. Your religion is yours — please keep it that way.

The Founding Fathers were clear about religion’s place (or not) in our government, but religion is being used as a lightning rod for cultural issues in place of common sense and political ambitions. On hot-topic issues like abortion (barely mentioned in the “Good Book”), lifestyles, women’s rights, banning books or immigration, the views of the majority of American citizens are contrary to many of the views of elected officials making the laws.

However, they are quick to use religious justification in the process as they rail against theocracies



Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

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

IT’S EASY TO DO!

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

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

Freedom depends on freethinkers

elsewhere (Islam, of course), while intentionally laying the Christian groundwork for the same thing here. God, guns and flags could very well be the icons of the death of our republic. I highly recommend Katherine Stewart’s book, *The Power Worshipers*, which covers this phenomenon perfectly.

We are heading dangerously toward a fascist autocracy where the less-than-sane factions of the right wing have no interest in governing this country or its citizens but only seek total unchecked power.

For those of you who think you are on the “winning team” and have no worries, consider Martin Niemöller’s stark warning: “First, they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out — because I was not a socialist. Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out — because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out — because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me — and there was no one left to speak for me.”

These reasons and more are why I am a Lifetime Member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. It’s an organization of atheists, agnostics, freethinkers and even a smattering of the religious who believe religions have no place in our government. We are working tirelessly to keep the church and the state separated as the founders intended. I encourage everyone to explore this organization and the good work they are doing, on everyone’s behalf, before it is too late. Make America smart again! **New Mexico**

‘Natural law’ could be influential to justices

The late Antonin Scalia, as well as Justice Clarence Thomas, stated that the Constitution is subject to “natural law” (as defined, of course, by the

Catholic Church). Amy Coney Barrett clerked for Scalia and she said he was her “mentor,” so I am sure she concurs, along most likely with Brett Kavanaugh and Samuel Alito, and possibly former Catholic Neil Gorsuch. I am not sure about John Roberts. As far as I am aware, none of these arch-Catholics was asked in their confirmation hearings if they agreed with Scalia and Thomas that the Constitution is subordinate to “natural law.” I wonder how they would have responded.

In any case, gay marriage and contraception, along with abortion, are against “natural law” as defined by the Vatican, so I have little doubt as to how at least four Catholic Justices cited here (i.e., Thomas, Alito, Kavanaugh and Barrett) would rule on those two issues if and when they come up before the court.

The media, of course, are oblivious to the question as to how Catholic “natural law” might have influenced the decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade* and how it may lead to gay marriage and legal access to contraception being ruled unconstitutional. **New York**

Ready to set clocks back to Alito time?

Are you ready to set your clocks back to “Alito time”? The new abortion ruling basically creates a new “Alito date” for “personhood,” so are you ready for all the changes that will follow?

Who knew that for thousands of years our birthdays were actually nine months before what is shown on our birth certificates? Thankfully, Justice Samuel Alito is about to rule that Jesus Christ himself became a “person,” not on Dec 25, as previously assumed by millions of Christians, but nine months earlier, on March 25.

If a census taker appears at your

door during the first two months of pregnancy, you’ll no longer be able to say it’s just a 1½-inch embryo. If the woman is between her third and ninth month, she won’t be able to call it a “fetus” anymore, because Alito will soon be labeling every unborn a “person.” Parents should frankly start picking baby names during the act of sex.

For those who believe in infant baptism, once a pregnancy is determined, they’ll need to high-tail it to the church immediately, just in case of a “spontaneous abortion” or miscarriage.

Parents who must register their children for school by age 5 will have to do the math, and add ninth months to their child’s existing age, as all pre-Alito birth certificates will be outdated.

I suppose most teenagers will rejoice upon learning about Alito’s new “judge-made” birthdate, and they’ll start lining up to take their driver’s test a mere three months after their 15th birthday.

College students will certainly file lawsuits to gain access to bars nine months before the legal drinking age. After all, they’ll argue they were “persons” nine months before they were born.

What about the military draft lottery? Toward the end of the Vietnam war, each year all 365 birthdates were put into a tumbler and were then picked one-by-one. The first birthdate drawn reported for duty first, and so on, until the draft quota was met. If we had Alito’s system back then, my birthdate of Sept. 30th would have become Dec. 30 in the previous year, and I would have found myself in an earlier lottery that had a much larger draft call. No thank you.

Have you considered what your gravestone will say? Are you going to stick with your traditional birthdate, the one you received when you be-

Write to us

To send a letter to the editor for Freethought Today, please email it to editor@ffrf.org.

came a “person” at birth, or are you going to add nine months to comply with Alito’s new “sperm and egg date”? **Wisconsin**

‘Beware of God’ brings back memories

Thanks for your ongoing work.

I see in the FFRF catalog that you offer items declaring “Beware of the God.” This transformation has always amused me. About 30 years ago, I cut and pasted a “Beware of Dog” poster to read “Beware of God,” but was warned off of displaying it for fear of affronting the neighbors and even inviting property or personal retaliation from local Christers.

Now, living in Trump territory has further intensified my feelings of fear and loathing. Last year, I encountered a woman leaving her parked car, which had a bumper sticker “God = √-1” declaring that God equals the square root of minus one. I told her that I thought it was the best I’d seen and admitted that I was too intimidated by Christers to have my own car bear such witness. She said she felt the same, but figured anyone who understood that impossible formula would be too smart to be other than amused and unlikely to harm her car. You folks are gutsier than I, by far, but that one is one I’d post if I could find one. **Michigan**

CRANKMAIL

The crank is strong in these folks. Printed as received.

Abortion: I just want to tell you that your view on abortion is wrong. The thing is yes God breathed the life of breath into Adam’s nostrils, and he did the same for Eve but since the breath of God was already in Eve anything that’s inside her is alive including the growing baby inside her womb. How else can it be animated and how else can it be growing without the life that God gives it? I seriously think that you should reconsider what you’re teaching people. — *John Ziemer*

Constitution: Hey jerks, if you really care about the constitution it says freedom OF religion not freedom from religion. You can’t even read and you want people to listen to you. Bahahahahahahaaaaaaa

— *Craig Bichette*

FFR: Wow you mocking GOD YOU will die tomarow — *Howard Placer*

Godless Communism/Atheism: You people are destroying America. You belong in prison for life for your affront to God the Father. May you burn in Hellfire forever and ever. In Christ Holy name, Amen. — *John Kyles*

God is real: Im not into religion im a lover of jesus christ an our creator. .i was a none believer until i felt the creater power. An jesus sprit. .these are puppets from the devil . too lead you away from god. God is real .heaven is real so is Hell .think when your flesh die .your sprit what gives you life will be judge .please dont follow this fools .pray too highest power who created life in all of the unvierse .there is

a god TRUST.. — *Donnell Smith*

Give thanks: You poor things, nobody ever taught you how to correctly divide the word of God. How will you give thanks for water, heat and food among everything else? Or did you think people made these things? — *Carlos Hernandez*

Proof: You will burn in hell. The earth is fixed....immovable. fake science will send many to hell.. Look at everything. Trust nothing. Prove all things. Demand proof for anything you believe. Don’t let your pride control you. — *Pam Scarsdale*

Heaven: If you believe in Hellas your commercial states, you admit there is a heaven. That’s a start. God Is Goog — *Stacey Messier*

Atheism is evil: You people should be ashamed of yourselves. You are monsters. — *John Smith*

Crossword answers

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| G | R | A | B | S | | P | U | S | | P | E | L | T | |
| L | A | U | R | A | | U | S | A | | C | O | L | O | R |
| U | N | L | I | T | | B | E | Y | | R | O | U | S | E |
| G | I | D | E | O | N | S | | S | H | E | L | L | E | Y |
| | | | F | R | O | | B | O | U | T | | | | |
| V | A | S | | I | O | T | A | | B | I | S | E | C | T |
| E | T | N | A | | N | O | S | Y | | N | I | T | E | R |
| R | E | A | L | | E | A | T | U | P | | L | U | L | U |
| D | I | R | G | E | | D | I | A | L | | K | I | L | T |
| I | N | F | A | N | T | | O | N | U | S | | S | O | H |
| | | | M | I | E | N | | T | A | W | | | | |
| M | C | Q | U | E | E | N | | R | O | B | E | R | T | S |
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| T | H | I | G | H | | O | R | E | | A | L | G | A | E |
| H | O | P | E | | | Y | E | S | | T | S | A | R | S |

Cryptogram answer

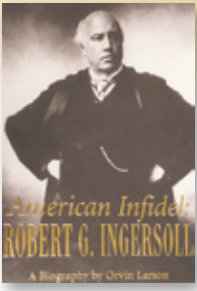
Truth, in the matters of religion, is simply the opinion that has survived.

— Oscar Wilde

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

No peace: Mr Reagan, wait when you get there, you will be screaming bloody murder for all eternity. You will never have any peace, no relief from the constant fire and severe loneliness and no light will penetrate. — *John Pembroke*

Question everything: What evidence you have that there is no God. And how do explain the mystery of child birth. And the mystery of the breath that you breathe. As well as your heart beat. Who do you think is responsible or what. How do you explain the existence of the stars. — *Chris Adams*

Go away: I personally hope that horrible horrible things happen to your organization, your employees, and their families. Any organization that reaches across the country with its narrowminded views to force them on others to “help”.. your organization is like a missionary force for the church of moral modern douchbaggery. Again, I just hope that karma plays out an actual plague or meteorites for you and your fellow zealots. — *Jeff Terndale*

Quran: Oh you Muslim who Cannot read his Quran , and believe the word of His Allah, Read !!! and be put to Shame. ,!! You recit your Quran from Cover, to Cover. Yet you do understand the Contents. JESUS is the WORD Of God, The SPIRIT of GOD, JESUS CHRIST. God Created the World Wit h The Word, Jesus Is Sinless, Is Alive, Will Come Back, Will Judge The World .He is The Messaih. Mohammed and The Alllah of Mohammed ,came. 600 yrs After Christ. — *Trudy Malcolm*

FFRF convention, Oct. 28-30

On to San Antonio!

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation in San Antonio for its 45th annual convention from Oct. 28-30 at the Hyatt Regency San Antonio. (For information on the guest speakers, see page 6.)

General schedule

The official starting time of the convention at the Hyatt Regency is 9 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 28, continuing through Saturday night. Registration will open by 8 a.m. on Friday, Oct. 28. FFRF's membership and State Representatives meetings will take place Sunday morning, ending by noon.

The conference will offer an optional Thursday 4-6 p.m. appetizer/cash bar reception and early registration.

Plan to come early and/or stay late if you want to sightsee in this exotic locale. The hotel is less than five minutes from the Alamo and many other attractions.

Return the handy registration form on the right or sign up at ffrf.us/2022convention.

Registration

Registration for the convention is only \$75 per FFRF member, \$80 for a companion accompanying a member, \$130 for nonmembers (or you can save money by becoming a member for \$40). High school students or younger are free and the college student rate is \$25.

Make your room reservations directly (see info box on this page). We encourage you to register early and book your hotel rooms as soon as possible. Sorry, only partial refunds after the Oct. 10 registration deadline. After Oct. 23, no refunds will be issued.

Optional Group Meals

We've provided meals with the most commonly requested dietary preferences. Please specify other requirements on the registration form under ADA/food allergy accommodations.

Friday Grab & Go Box Lunch (\$60)

Grilled Vegetable Wrap (Vegan)

Wrap of baby greens stuffed with a duo of grilled zucchini and roasted butternut squash with sweet, roasted pecans and wrapped in a spinach tortilla spread with roasted red pepper hummus

Garden Salad with Grilled Chicken (gluten free)

Grilled chicken garden salad with baby lettuce, grape tomatoes, artichoke hearts, cucumbers, candied pecans, dried cranberries with grilled chicken breast, served with a creamy balsamic vinaigrette

Turkey Sandwich

Oven roasted breast of turkey with early harvest lettuces, provolone and slices of cucumber on a potato bun and maple-pumpkin butter cream cheese

Friday Dinner Reception (\$65)

Hearty reception with beef steamship for carving with horseradish cream, au jus and mini rolls; pulled BBQ pork slider with pickled onions on sesame roll; ranch spiced chicken satay with tomato BBQ dip; vegan jackfruit al pastor quesadillas with roasted corn, black beans, Monterey Jack cheese served with mango salsa; crudité's with poblano hummus and spinach dip; Southwest Caesar salad (charred corn, black beans and croutons with Ancho Caesar dressing); self-serve mac & cheese station (white cheddar mac & cheese tossed with green chiles, mushroom and caramelized onions). Cash bar provided.

Saturday Nonprayer Breakfast (\$55)

Eggs, potato, bacon, and fruit cup service. Vegetarians will receive "melted" tomato in place of bacon. Vegan meal is vegan scrambled eggs with melted tomatoes and vegan cranberry orange scone. Beverages are orange juice, coffee and tea.

Saturday Dinner (\$95)

Caesar salad; seared chicken breast with jalapeno-apricot glaze, melted leek and bacon jam; mascarpone risotto, and mixed cauliflower. The vegetarian option is roasted acorn squash stuffed with vegetables and herb qui-



The Hyatt Regency San Antonio is home to the 2022 FFRF convention.

noa, coriander spiced carrot puree and aged saba. The vegan/gluten-free option is vegetable ravioli, wilted spinach, asparagus tips, charred cauliflower, tomato-caper sauce. Dessert is chocolate cappuccino cake with vanilla whipped cream or vegan/gluten free chocolate-banana mousse with fresh berries. Beverages are coffee and tea. Cash bar provided.

Please note that meal costs reflect the cost to FFRF; we do not mark up these prices.

Room Reservations

If you need an accessible room, please state your needs when you make the reservation. Indicate you're with the "Freedom From Religion Foundation" block.

Hyatt Regency San Antonio

123 Losoya
San Antonio, TX 78205
210-451-6200, ffrf.us/hotel
\$205 (single/double occupancy)
\$215 (triple/quad occupancy)
State and local taxes (currently 16.75%) and fees will apply. Group rate includes standard internet. Cutoff date for reservations is Oct. 1

Overflow options

Hilton Garden Inn Downtown San Antonio

408 E Houston St.
San Antonio, TX 78205
210-222-8811
Rates are \$149 for single or double occupancy. Cutoff date is Oct. 1, 2022.
In addition, state & local occupancy taxes of 16.75% and a city tourism fee of 1.25% apply.
Valet parking, subject to availability, is \$33 plus tax of 8.25% per night per vehicle. Cutoff date is Oct. 1

Menger Hotel

204 Alamo Plaza
San Antonio, TX 78205
Phone: 210-223-4361
Toll-free 24-hour reservations: 800-345-9285
Rates are \$139 for single through quad occupancy. Cutoff date is Oct. 8.
In addition, state & local occupancy taxes of 16.75% and a city tourism fee of 1.25% apply.
If guest leaves earlier than the scheduled departure date when guest is in-house at the hotel, there will be a charge of \$75, plus 16.75% tax. Cancellations less than 48 hours prior to arrival will be assessed one night's room and tax.
Overnight parking, subject to availability, is \$18 plus 8.25% tax. Cutoff date is Oct. 8.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

NATIONAL CONVENTION

SAN ANTONIO | OCTOBER 28-30, 2022

45TH CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: ffrf.us/2022convention

| REGISTRATION FEES | Number Registering | Cost |
|---|--------------------|--------------|
| Member | ___ | \$75 \$ ___ |
| Spouse or Companion (Non-member accompanying member) | ___ | \$80 \$ ___ |
| Child (High school or under accompanying registrant) | ___ | Free \$ ___ |
| College Student with ID | ___ | \$25 \$ ___ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am interested in hotel, meal or travel scholarship | | |
| Non-member | ___ | \$130 \$ ___ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Or, I will join FFRF for \$40 (and save \$15) | ___ | \$115 \$ ___ |

OPTIONAL MEALS / EVENTS

We've provided meals with the most commonly requested dietary preferences. Please specify other requirements below under ADA or food allergy accommodations.

Friday, October 28

| | | | | |
|---------------------|--|---|--|-------|
| Grab & Go Box Lunch | | | ___\$60 | \$___ |
| Registrant 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Chicken Salad (Gluten Free) | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetable Wrap (Vegan) | <input type="checkbox"/> Turkey Sandwich | |
| Registrant 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Chicken Salad (Gluten Free) | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetable Wrap (Vegan) | <input type="checkbox"/> Turkey Sandwich | |

| | | | | | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|-------|
| Friday Dinner Reception | | | | | ___\$65 | \$___ |
| Registrant 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Regular | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegan | <input type="checkbox"/> Gluten Free | | |
| Registrant 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Regular | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegan | <input type="checkbox"/> Gluten Free | | |

Saturday, October 29

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------|-------|
| Non-Prayer Breakfast | | | | | ___\$55 | \$___ |
| Registrant 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Regular | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegan | <input type="checkbox"/> Gluten Free | | |
| Registrant 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Regular | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegan | <input type="checkbox"/> Gluten Free | | |

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|--|--|---------|-------|
| Saturday Dinner | | | | ___\$95 | \$___ |
| Registrant 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> Chicken | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian Stuffed Squash | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegan/Gluten Free Ravioli | | |
| Registrant 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> Chicken | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian Stuffed Squash | <input type="checkbox"/> Vegan/Gluten Free Ravioli | | |

► Total \$ _____

☐ I am adding a donation to sponsor student convention scholarships. \$ _____

Please tell us about any ADA or food allergy accommodations needed in order to fully participate.

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

- ☐ I attest that I and my guests will be fully vaccinated for Covid-19 as of 10/14/22.
☐ I attest that I have a physician's order against my vaccination.

| | |
|---|--|
| Name of Registrant 1 | |
| | |
| Name of Registrant 2 | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I am including additional registrants (enclose your additional list, with meals, if any). | |
| | |
| Address | |
| | |
| City | State / ZIP |
| | |
| Phone* | Email* |
| | |
| Credit Card Number | Expiration Date / Security Code |
| | |
| Billing Name / Signature | *Contact information for in-house use only |
| Registration deadline October 10, 2022 (Unless event is sold out) Registration cancellations received Oct. 11 through Oct. 23 may be refunded, less a \$25 cancellation fee. After Oct. 23, no refunds will be provided. | |