

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**Reality, yes
but kindness
and love, too**

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**FFRF's legal
essay winners
announced**

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**Sun has set on
FFRF's dear friend
Diane Uhl**

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Vol. 39 No. 4

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May 2022

FFRF files amicus brief before Supreme Court in coach prayer case

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, joined by a coalition of secular organizations, has filed a compelling amicus brief before the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of a praying football coach who has achieved national notoriety.

The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals had last year ruled in favor of Washington's Bremerton School District, which did not renew Coach Joe Kennedy's contract after he defied reasonable

requests to stop praying with students on the 50-yard line right after games. Kennedy had been singled out for praise by then-President Trump, including in a speech from the Oval Office on Religious Freedom Day, and has been a darling of Christian nationalist organizations and extremist members of Congress.

Joining FFRF on the brief are other national organizations that represent nonreligious Americans, including the Center For Inquiry, the American Humanist Association and the Secular Coalition for America.

The Supreme Court mystifyingly agreed to hear the case, which FFRF is arguing is moot, mandating that the court dismiss the case. After losing in the district court, Kennedy sold his home in Washington and moved approximately 2,800 miles to Pensacola, Fla., FFRF explains. Kennedy and his wife are no longer employed in Washington. The assistant football coach

position at Bremerton High School is a year-round commitment that pays just \$5,304. These changed circumstances are problematic for Kennedy because a Florida resident cannot sue a Washington school district over its policies.

"Under the court's precedents, the case is moot," states the brief. "This is reinforced by the principle that a plaintiff who removes himself from the threat of allegedly unconstitutional policies has mooted his claims for prospective relief."

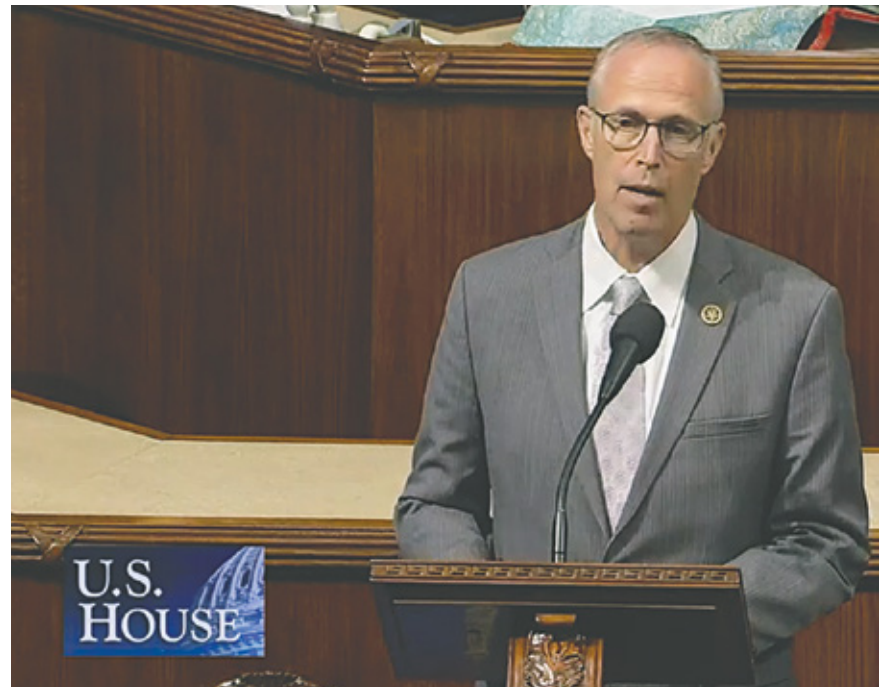
“A review of the court's cases involving religion highlights the need for the court to adopt an even-handed approach to jurisdiction.”

After documenting many instances in which atheist and non-Christian plaintiffs have faced procedural hurdles when seeking judicial relief, FFRF asserts that the Supreme Court must apply jurisdictional doctrines uniformly, otherwise it manipulates its jurisdiction in order to benefit preferred litigants.

"If the court asserts it has jurisdiction to decide such cases, it must apply its jurisdiction uniformly to all litigants, and not only to cases involving preferred litigants," says the brief. "A review of the court's cases involving religion highlights the need for the court to adopt an even-handed approach to jurisdiction."

And if the court is inclined to review the merits of this case, it must take into account the harm caused to students who are nonreligious or who are religious minorities when coaches insti-

See Supreme Court on page 7



Screenshot from CSPAN

U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman speaks to Congress on March 31.

FFRF mentioned in House speech by Jared Huffman

U.S. Rep. Jared Huffman referenced the Freedom From Religion Foundation while denouncing Christian nationalism in a speech to the House of Representatives on March 31.

Here is what Huffman said to his colleagues in Congress:

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to a dangerous ideology threatening our democracy—white Christian nationalism. Most members of Congress don't even know what it means, but experts from the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty have studied it for years and their new report shows that this movement was at the heart of the Jan. 6 insurrection. White Christian nationalism fuses

Christianity with a rigid view of civic life, a view that true Americans are white, native-born and conservative. On Jan. 6 it was the connective tissue that tied disparate groups together and propelled them into action. It's infecting our government, from members of Congress and top officials from the previous administration to the wife of a Supreme Court justice, whose messages to the president's chief of staff leading up to the insurrection smacked of white Christian nationalism. Thankfully, good Americans—people of faith and nonbelievers—are standing up to this violent ideology. I call on members of Congress to educate themselves about white Christian nationalism and reaffirm the separation of church and state.



Three Christian crosses sit on public property in Elizabethton, Tenn.

Screenshot from WJHL News

City is crossing the law

This article first appeared on FFRF's *Freethought-Now.org* blog site on April 14.

By Dr. Karen Heineman

I've recently been caught in the crosshairs of a controversy as a legal fellow at the Freedom From Religion Foundation—and it's been quite an experience.

My primary duty is to send advocacy letters to government entities in response to complaints we receive regarding separation of church and state. We hope for a formal response acknowledging our concern and a correction of the violation. I did not, however, anticipate the public response to my re-

cent letter to a city in Tennessee objecting to a display of three crosses on city property.

FFRF had sent a previous letter explaining our strong legal position and opposition to the city of Elizabethton maintaining three crosses on public property, after receiving a complaint from a city resident in 2018. But FFRF never received a formal response. At that time, it was clearly unconstitutional under existing case law for a government entity to endorse and display such blatantly religious symbols and sectarian displays. The First Amendment prohibits the government from promoting, aiding, funding, sponsoring, or otherwise endorsing, religion.

See Crosses on page 6

Poland native a believer in higher education

Name: Beata Maria Major.
Where I live: In Mequon, Wis., among my very conservative neighbors.
Where I was born: I was born in Poland, in Zakopane, which is the Polish capital of skiing and other winter sports. Infatuated by love of mountains since my childhood, I traveled later throughout several continents, enjoying winter sports and climbing their high mountain peaks.
I grew up in Krakow, a city with the second oldest university in central Europe. Even though I was born in a very Catholic country, my parents were not religious but, instead, science oriented. I was never expected to go to church, but I did go to First Communion, only because I really wanted to march down the church aisle in a beautiful white dress, just like all my girlfriends did. My parents didn't come to see me during the ceremony, nor did I have a fancy celebration at home.
Family: My husband, Kim Paul Petersen, is one of very few liberal physicians that I ever met. He is a loving partner and my best friend. He, like me, believes only in Santa Claus because Santa convinces him to bring me a nice present every year. I've never gotten anything from Jesus!
Education: For my sister and me, at-



Beata Major

taining higher education was mandatory according to my father, who was a university professor. I always loved physics, mathematics and drawing, but hated chemistry! But my sister became a professor of chemistry!
As my parents expected my sister and

me to aim for the highest education, I transferred the same expectations to my two sons, Michael and Pako. Both of them graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, eventually becoming an attorney/engineer and a dentist, respectively. Now they have the same expectations from their children.
Occupation: I studied to earn a master's degree in engineering and architecture. I worked in Krakow and other cities while raising my two sons. Life took us to set down roots in a few countries, and eventually in Canada and the United States 30 years ago.
Person in history I admire and why: Nicholas Copernicus, who is Polish and lived and worked in my city of Krakow, is definitely my favorite person in history. Most people don't know that mathematics and astronomy were his hobbies, not his occupation. But what wonderful discoveries about the universe Copernicus made: The Earth goes around the sun; the Earth rotates every 24 hours; and the Earth tilts its angle to the sun as it revolves. His discoveries provided the foundation for all other physicists and astronomers and broke the

Church's dogma about the universe.
A quotation I like: In my job as an architect, I kept in mind a quote from Picasso: "Everything you can imagine is real." To me, it meant that if you imagine a beautiful construction, you can design it. But, also in life, if you can imagine living in reality without the Church's fantasy and abuse, we can turn it into reality. The quote is short, but it can be applied to many aspects of life.
Things I like: Chopin and Puccini. Music has always been a big part of my life, especially Italian opera.
Things I smite: The smell of cigarettes.
Before I die: I have five beautiful grandchildren that I love beyond words. My goal for the rest of my life is to help them to be-

MEET A MEMBER

come smart, environmentally conscious and real contributors of positive values to the world. Along with their parents, I am exposing them to science and freedom from mythical beliefs.
Ways I promote freethought: Voicing my very strong opinion in every social setting, especially when someone offers prayers for me or my family. I quickly correct them so they don't waste their time praying to fictional creatures because they are meaningless to me.

Doctor hopes to free others from religion

Name: Harold I. Daniel
Where I live: Laurel, Md.
Where and when I was born: Guyuk, northern Nigeria, on July 22, 1952.
Education: Master's of Science, M.D., Ph.D.



Harold Daniel

Occupation: Medical liaison (gene therapy).
How I got where I am today: I am an atheist today because Christianity has no reasonable explanation for pain and suffering in humans and animals. Its presumptions are not reasonable.
Where I'm headed: After 47 years as a born-again evangelical Christian, I hope to write books/essays to show young people that Christianity is a false narrative, built on bigotry and unworthy of their time.
Person in history I admire and why: I would like to meet John Loftus, author of *Christianity Is Not Great*. It was the first book I read when I began to wonder about Christianity.
Things I like: People, especially kids and animals. I am a hi-fi enthusiast with a large collection of vinyl records. I like tweaking my hi-fi system. I like learning new things from all the sciences, especially cosmology. I also like high-speed motorsports, like Formula 1.
Things I smite: Religions, and the bigotry which the monotheistic varieties generate.
My doubts about religion started: When I could not solve the riddle of pain and suffering as a Christian; it became soluble when I rejected Christianity. I could not fathom why children choke to death if God cared. I saw too many as a physician in Nigeria.
Before I die: I will enjoy the happiness, contentment and freedom of escaping from religion. That is the one achievement I am truly proud of. I also want to have a collection of at least 1,000 books that debunk Christianity that I have personally read and give the collection to a child before I die.

MEET A MEMBER

Ways I promote freethought: Helping Christians to think through and see the fallacies which riddle their presumptions. It is ridiculous that Jesus did not know the fruiting season of the fig tree he supposedly created.
Regrets I've had: I regret the childhood indoctrination that I never questioned. I regret ever believing in God.

'FREEFLO' features Barker debate



During the FREEFLO conference in Orlando, Fla., on March 5, FFRF Co-President Dan Barker debates Adam Lloyd Johnson (sitting) on the topic of "Does God exist?"

The Florida Humanist Association's Freethought Florida Conference, "FREEFLO," was held the weekend of March 4-6 in Orlando. The three-day event included presentations from organizational leaders, scientists, activists, authors, and bloggers. Proceeds support the Annual Florida Humanist Association Scholarship in coordination with the Secular Student Alliance.
The main event was a debate between FFRF Co-President Dan Barker and Adam Lloyd Johnson of Ratio Christi on the topic of "Does God exist?" You can watch the debate on YouTube at bit.ly/3xk4mcr.
Other conference speakers included Matt Dillahunty, Mandisa Thomas, Ryan Cragun, Seth Andrews and Alicia Greczyn, among others.
FFRF sponsored the event's service project, which prepared more than a thousand food packs for students who rely on school lunch programs and are undernourished on weekends.

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TODAY

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

EDITOR
EDITOR EMERITUS
EXECUTIVE PUBLISHER
GRAPHIC DESIGNER
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
CONTRIBUTORS

Madison WI 53701
FFRF.org
F 608.204.0422
PJ Slinger editor@FFRF.org
Bill Dunn
Annie Laurie Gaylor
Roger Daleiden
Amit Pal

Dan barker, Harry Finkelstein, James A. Haught, Karen Heineman,
Ingrid Laas, Roger Lindsay Chris Line, Casandra Zimmerman
The only freethought newspaper in the United States

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FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists. FFRF has more than 36,000 members. FFRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and donations are tax deductible for income tax purposes.

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

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

‘DO mess with Texas’ Get signed up for San Antonio convention

FFRF hopes you will join it in San Antonio for its 45th national convention at the Hyatt Regency Riverwalk, 123 Losoya St., on Friday, Oct. 28, through Sat., Oct. 29, followed by Sunday morning membership and state representative meetings.

The 2020 convention was originally to take place in San Antonio, but the pandemic forced the postponement.

FFRF has heard from several members who, due to various Texas policies, wonder why FFRF is holding a convention in Texas at all. “We not only feel our ‘DO Mess with Texas’ can raise awareness, but are contractually obligated, due to the negotiations required in 2020 to postpone,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

Joining the list of speakers will be Nebraska state **Sen. Megan Hunt**, who publicly identifies as an atheist. She will receive FFRF’s “Champion of the First Amendment” award. Her remarks, during debate against an abortion ban “trigger bill” she called a “church bill” sponsored by “Christian religious extremists,” were credited with helping to kill the bill in early April. She is an entrepreneur, activist and parent elected in 2018 to represent District 8 in the Nebraska Legislature and is committed to uplifting the voices of the marginalized and forgotten. She has worked with other senators to tackle food stamp reform, ban the harmful practice of conversion therapy, improve affordable housing, and ensure that caregivers during the pandemic were eligible for unemployment benefits.

The other confirmed speakers include:

• **Jim Hightower.** Iconic Texan commentator and writer Jim Hightower has been dubbed “America’s most popular populist.” He spent four decades battling the Powers That Be on behalf of the Powers That Ought To Be — consumers, working families, environmentalists, small business and just-plain folks. The two-time Texas agriculture commissioner is a national radio commentator heard on more than 150 commercial and public stations.

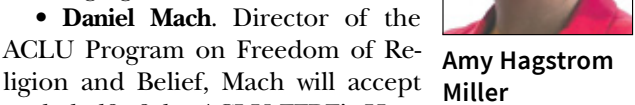
• **John Irving.** The novelist of 14 books, including *The World According to Garp* and *The Cider House Rules*, will be receiving FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award. Irving has won the National Book Award, the O. Henry Award, an Oscar for best adapted screenplay and a Lambda Literary Award for his novel *In One Person*. His all-time bestselling novel is *A Prayer for Owen Meany*. FFRF offered Irving the award after his column, “The long, cruel history of the anti-abortion crusade,” appeared in The New York Times on June 23, 2019.



The “Godless Gospel” will debut at the 2022 convention.

• **Amy Hagstrom Miller.** FFRF’s 2022 “Forward Award” honoree will be Amy Hagstrom Miller, who founded Whole Woman’s Health in 2003. She brought *Whole Woman’s Health v. Hellerstedt*, and she’s also the lead plaintiff challenging Texas’ SB8 abortion ban.

• **Daniel Mach.** Director of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief, Mach will accept on behalf of the ACLU FFRF’s Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award, which has grown to \$35,000. The award is personally endowed by FFRF Lifetime Member Henry Zumach. Mach leads a wide range of religious liberty litigation, advocacy and public education efforts nationwide, and often writes, teaches and speaks publicly on religious freedom issues.



Amy Hagstrom Miller



Daniel Mach

• **Alice Greczyn.** She will be named FFRF Freethought Heroine 2022. She is an actress, author of *Wayward: A Memoir of Spiritual Warfare and Sexual Purity*, and the founder of Dare to Doubt. Her own story includes a painful but rewarding transition from evangelical Christianity to atheism, a journey that inspired her to found *DaretoDoubt.org*.

• **Hector A. Garcia.** He is the author of *Alpha God and Sex, Power and Partisanship: How Evolutionary Science Makes Sense at Our Political Divide*. He has given a TED Talk. Garcia is a clinical psychologist and assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio.

• **Candace R.M. Gorham.** She will be running a workshop “On



Alice Greczyn

Hector A. Garcia

Death, Dying and Disbelief.” She will also be performing as part of “Godless Gospel” as well as participating on a panel of African American nonbelievers. Gorham is also the author of *The Ebony Exodus Project: Why Some Black Women Are Walking Out on Religion — and Others Should Too* and *On Death, Dying, and Disbelief*.

• **Barbara Alvarez.** She will be conducting a workshop on what you can do to help stop the religious war against reproductive rights. She has a master’s degree in Library and Information Science from the University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign. Barbara is the author of the forthcoming book *Library Services for Sexual and Reproductive Health Information*.

• **Elle Harris.** FFRF will be awarding its debut “Out of God’s Closet” \$5,000 student scholarship, given by Diane Uhl in memory of her late husband Stephen Uhl, to 11-year-old Elle Harris, author of *Elle the Humanist*.

• **Max Nibert.** He is the 18-year-old Huntington (W.Va.) High School student who helped organize a walkout protest after the school held Christian-themed assemblies in the public school and is suing the school with FFRF. He will be receiving the Richard & Beverly Hermesen \$5,000 Student Activist Award.

• **Godless Gospel.** An “atheist choir” will debut with “godless gospel” songs, a collaboration of music producer/songwriter Andre Forbes, and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. Songs are by Andre and Dan. Vocalists include: Tahira Clayton, jazz vocalist; Rogiërs Fibby, president of Black Nonbelievers of DC; Candace Gorham; Cynthia McDonald, an activist with Freedmen of Chicago; DeAngela Morant of Florida; and Mandisa Thomas, president of Black Nonbelievers.

Also included will be the usual reports on FFRF’s achievements over the year, including the report by FFRF’s team of attorneys and a reprise of last year’s popular “Ask an Attorney” workshop. Convention registration is online at ffrf.org/convo-2022, along with links to make hotel reservations. Or you can send in the form on the back page of this issue.



Candace R. M. Gorham



Barbara Alvarez



Elle Harris



Max Nibert

CRANKMAIL

In this edition of Crankmail, the letters are all on the topic of the Elizabethton, Tenn., crosses that are on public property. FFRF has asked the city to take them down or move them to private property. Printed as received.

Love Me: You can go to a different country with your communist garbage. America was founded on a Christian foundation. Don’t like it? Leave. — *Jeremy Brown*

God: You people are ridiculous stay out of Elizabethton and keep your business in Wisconsin you bunch of worthless people. This is Gods people you’re messing with. You really don’t wanna start trouble because God will win in the end. — *Ionne Stockton*

Crosses: If your against crosses then maybe you should rename yourself to “the anti-Christ foundation”. P.s. eat crap you liberal scum. — *Jeffrey Tescher*

Going to hell!: Why don’t stupid foundations like yours just leave things alone. If whoever complained about the crosses don’t like seeing them, they can turn their heads. Nobody is forcing them to look at them.. It’s organizations like freedom from religions that causing America to go to HELL.. — *Thurston Webb*

Elizabethton: Your organization is demanding the removal of crosses in Elizabethton, TN, stating that they are on city property. I say if you don’t like the crosses,

then don’t look at them. They may be on city property, but the citizens pay taxes, and our taxes are part of the city. — *Dora Kinzer*

Godless: NON of you are from my town? I assume some who live here helped you want the CROSSES taken down here? I pay taxes here, I have right to the lands use? You also protect the rights of HOMOSEXUALS, TRENSGENDERS, right? Educated as it seems the Liberal schools tell you, I dont think you’ve really read the BIBLE, maybe the Quran, Historical fact help the idea of a GOD, you know this! BUT, as all GODLESS Socialists/ Communists/ Liberals and Liberal Schools want is a ONE WORLD ORDER as YOU see it. Again a 6,000 year old book talks exactly as it is happening. — *Wesley Asher*

Go away, liberals: My wife and I moved here from Vermont, and one of the reasons was that people here hold Christian beliefs and are respectful, kind, and law abiding Americans. I don’t even go to church, but they have every right to have those crosses on that hill. So why don’t you mind you own fucking business you liberal ass holes. — *Steve Allen*

Crosses: You all may not believe in GOD but here we do those crosses have been there for almost 80 years. So dont come down here in our town and try to remove our rights and beliefs you have my address if

you brave enough to step on my property. GOD BLESS — *Michael Graybeal*

Your ‘foundation’: This saddens my heart. I don’t know what this foundation is and nor do I ever hope to. The “foundation” sounds like something I like to refer to as a spoon, meaning that all business is your business rather it really is or not, and like to stir up trouble. Why can’t the “foundation” stay the hell out of everyone else’s business that the “foundation” has NO business being in. Frankly, I don’t care about your cause or beliefs. — *Nikki Trivette*

Crosses will stay!: Close your fucking eyes if u do not want to see the crosses in tennessee. — *Charles Albert*

Idiots: your group has no right to tell people who live here in the great state of TN or try and push your non-believing attitudes on us. he people who wear those stupid cheese hats during sporting events affends me mind your own business can’t you find something more important to worry about — *Carl Williams*

Losers: I personally hope that horrible horrible things happen to your organization, your employees, and their families. 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. — *Francis Stermer*

Your sick in the head: Stop your insane behavior. Our country was founded by God. — *Betsy Roberts*

No more atheists!: Our COUNTRY was freaking FOUNDED ON RELIGION! Or do you not grasp the concept?! So in essence you are spitting on President Washington’s grave! You disgusting people are the scourge of this country that needs to be eradicated! — *April Mohler*

Lets go Brandon: Your dad was a pos and so are you, your right you can practice any religion or not. Why flaunt your evil on TV? To destroy the country further?? — *Kevin Wurster*

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

Godless Communism/Atheism: You belong in prison for life for your affront to God the Father. — *John Kyles*

Freedom from religion: Hello I just wanted to drop you a line staying you are a bunch of Godless freaks You feel brave together...but what about after work.? What about when you are not strong in a group....well according to my sources, none of you are safe anymore.. keep and eye out... because you are being watched.— *Andrew Williams*

Freethought Today Cryptogram

PVDGD NRID ZMJ M PEBD ZVDR MFF

KDNKFD UDFEDADO ER WNO MRO PVD

IVXGIV GXFDO. PVEJ PEBD ZMJ IMFFDO

PVD OMGH MWDJ. — GEIVMGO FDODGDG

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 19.

Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12
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68						69				70			
71						72				73			

Answers on page 19

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

Across

1. James Dean’s character

6. Opposite of miss

9. Oscar-nominated 2021 movie

13. Dispatch boat

14. Acronym, abbr.

15. Changed apartments, e.g.

16. Irk (2 words)

17. Floral necklace

18. Coming up

19. *San ____, 2022 convention destination

21. * __ After-Life, FFRF membership category

23. Fairytale princess test

24. Greek salad cheese

25. World’s oldest national broadcaster

28. Village People’s 1978 hit

30. Bobbysock

35. Turkmenistan’s neighbor

37. Mountain, in Germany

39. State of dishonor

40. Repeating word on South Pacific map

41. ____ a peak

43. Type of credit card

44. Short for Charlotte

46. Tropical edible root

47. Ricci of fashion

48. Scrape together (2 words)

50. Inbox junk

52. TV revenue source, pl.

53. Duck-like bird

55. Fake news

57. *”Abortion Is a Blessing” author and FFRF co-founder

60. *Ron DeSantis and Ron Johnson, the anti-__

64. A child of Japanese immigrants

65. Quilting get-together

67. Spooky

68. Threesome

69. Boiling emotion

70. Indian side dish

71. Ice crystals

72. Feather glue

73. Stainless stuff

Down

1. Indian music

2. All square

3. Mooring post

4. Bar, legally

5. Warner Bros.’ “ ____ Tunes”

6. Optical phenomenon

7. Rock in a drink

8. Social group

9. Type of salmon

10. Baker’s baker

11. “Wanted!” choice

12. Put together

15. Chichen Itza residents

20. Poetic feet

22. Pilot’s announcement, for short

24. Eastern Asia (2 words)

25. *Tennessee’s official state book

26. Kind of stream

27. ____ blanche

29. Copper coin

31. Genghis or Kubla

32. Mythological bloodsucker

33. Make corrections

34. *”DO Mess with ____,” 2022 convention motto

36. Brussels org.

38. *Freethinker John Irving’s “The World According to ____”

42. Bear down under

45. Father of geometry

49. Excessively

51. Bar stock, pl.

54. Galactic path

56. Leave of absence

57. Cycling helmet brand

58. “Heat of the Moment” band

59. Once around the sun

60. Swerve

61. Southernmost Great Lake

62. Customary practice

63. Fin-footed mammal

64. To the ____ degree

66. Pitcher’s stat

OVERHEARD

These punches from Texas and Florida aren’t about sexuality or gender. They are about the mainstreaming of Christian nationalism and its attempt to break down the separation between church and state. This is a well-organized segment of the far-right that is flush with cash.

Anita Chabria, in her column, “Christian nationalists are behind LGBTQ+ laws. California isn’t immune.” *Los Angeles Times*, 3-24-22

Rarely has so much fear and anger been directed at so few. I don’t understand what they are going through or why they feel the way they do. But I want them to live.

Republican Gov. Spencer Cox of Utah, in a statement, about why he vetoed a bill targeting transgender kids, which was overturned by a supermajority in the state Legislature. *Governor.utah.gov*, 3-22-22

Those toxic messages confirm that when you believe God is on your side, nothing is off limits. And that’s the problem, one that could shatter American democracy.

Mary C. Curtis, in her column, “Can we just leave God out of it?”, responding to the text messages between Ginni Thomas and Mark Meadows regarding the overturning of the 2020 election. *Roll Call*, 3-31-22

Conspiracy theories are more about values than about information. Debunking statements might occasionally be effective, but does little to tackle their root cause. . . . It is important to examine the structures that make conspiracy theories appealing. A focus on individuals’ perceived deficits diverts attention from the social realities — displacement, alienation, repression — that make false theories resonate.

Elzbieta Drazkiewicz in her column, “Study conspiracy theories with compassion.” *Nature*, 3-29-22

Young Earth Creationists don’t like orthodox science because it goes against what the bible says in most cases. Their main purpose is to blow up science as a way of knowing, and they want to go back to the bible as a way of knowing instead.

Geologist and author Sharon A. Hill, as

quoted in the article, “Why Darwin-hating Christians are hunting for a ‘living dinosaur’ in the Congo.” *Inverse.com*, 4-4-22

Don’t pray for Ukraine. Act for Ukraine.

American Evan Lisinski, who is living in Lviv, Ukraine, and is asking for people to donate (supportukraine.co) to help Ukraine. *KitsapSun.com*, 4-4-22

As you mentioned, free exercise of religion and the Establishment Clause — which prevents the state, the government, from preferring [one] religion or another — is foundational.

Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, during her Supreme Court nomination hearings after being asked a question by Sen. Jon Ossoff, who said his family had fled Europe due to anti-Semitism. *CSPAN*, 3-23-22

To a wide array of civil rights, civil liberties and free expression groups, these restrictions represent an effort to enshrine the values of one particular group of parents — conservative whites — over the priorities and experiences of an increasingly diverse society.

Ronald Brownstein, in his analysis article, “Book bans move to center stage in the red-state education wars.” *CNN*, 4-5-22

The devil, in fact, doesn’t exist. This was a fundamentalist speech that we should neither hear nor see. . . . You don’t defend or protect the family with your fists, and no, the devil doesn’t take advantage of key moments to do his work.

Movie director Pedro Almodóvar, who was in the audience at the Oscar ceremony, taking issue with Will Smith’s Best Actor Award acceptance speech when Smith said that Denzel Washington had cautioned him in the aftermath of the slap of Chris Rock, saying: “At your highest moment, be careful. That’s when the devil comes for you.” *The Guardian*, 3-31-22

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: N => O .

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

By Brian Bolton
Foreword by Dan Barker
Illustrated by Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Steve Benson

A sourcebook for all Americans who consider fundamentalist Christian zealots to be a threat to religious freedom.

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By Dan Barker
Illustrated by Kati Treu

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States battle over abortion rights

FFRF condemns the relentless passage of anti-abortion laws at the state level. As we await the Supreme Court’s decision on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, which is likely to overturn the foundation of *Roe v. Wade*, anti-abortion legislation seems to be enacted nearly daily by states with conservative leadership.

While 2021 set a record for anti-abortion laws — with 108 such restrictions passing in 19 states — 2022 is shaping up to be worse. In just the first three months, there have already been 525 restrictions introduced in 41 states.

“The anti-abortion movement is driven almost exclusively by a religious ideology based on the idea that ensoulment takes place at conception,” comments FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. “In a secular nation, laws governing reproductive health care should focus on science — not faith. Women are not breeding machines and the state has no business dictating when or whether they decide to become parents.”

Here is a roundup of recent abortion news (both good and bad) from around the country (as of late April).

Oklahoma law now criminalizes abortions

Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt on April 11 signed into law a bill that creates a near-total ban on abortion, making it one of the most recent Republican-led state to move ahead with strict abortion legislation.

The measure makes performing an abortion “except to save the life of a pregnant woman in a medical emergency” a felony punishable by up to 10 years in prison and a fine of \$100,000.

Another House bill would allow private citizens to file lawsuits against doctors who perform abortions and would only allow a woman to have an abortion if her life were at stake. It now goes to the state Senate.

“It’s terrifying to think that we’re going backwards in time, that we’re actually watching in real time getting our rights taken away from us,” said Kristin Williams, a participant in an abortion rights rally in Oklahoma City.

Michigan gov. sues to protect abortion access

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer filed a lawsuit April 7 seeking to keep abortion legal in her state if the Supreme Court rolls back its *Roe v. Wade* ruling.

A 1931 Michigan law banning abortion has been superseded for nearly 50 years by the *Roe* decision. But if the high court overturns the nationwide right to abortion or leaves it to states to decide, the legislation could take effect. Whitmer is attempting to prevent that, asking that the state Supreme Court to declare abortion protected under Michigan’s Constitution.

In what her office cast as the first lawsuit filed by a governor to protect abortion access since the Supreme Court indicated a willingness to potentially weaken *Roe*, Whitmer is suing prosecuting attorneys in the 13 Michigan counties where abortion providers operate. The attorneys would be required to prosecute violations of the state’s abortion law if it took effect.

Seven Democratic prosecutors named in the suit said in a joint statement that they support Whitmer’s effort to preserve reproductive freedom. They affirmed the right to choose, noting that Michigan’s “archaic” legislation crim-



inalizing abortion was passed when no women served in the state legislature.

Idaho Supreme Court halts abortion ban law

Idaho’s Supreme Court on April 8 temporarily halted the state’s six-week abortion-ban-and-bounty law signed in March by the governor, which was set to take effect April 22.

Planned Parenthood Great Northwest, Hawaii, Alaska, Indiana, Kentucky, which represents the organization’s three clinics in Idaho, filed the case with the Idaho Supreme Court on March 30.

The ban would have empowered biological relatives to sue providers who perform abortions after six weeks for up to \$20,000. Although the bill prohibited a rapist from suing, his relatives would not be prohibited. The court gave the state until April 28 to respond.

“Patients across Idaho can breathe a sigh of relief,” Planned Parenthood spokesperson Rebecca Gibron put it aptly. “We are thrilled that abortion will remain accessible in the state for now, but our fight to ensure that Idahoans can fully access their constitutionally protected rights is far from over.”

If the law is ever implemented, patients would have to travel hundreds of miles out of state to get an abortion.

Colorado law guarantees access to abortions

Colorado joined a handful of other states April 4 in codifying the right to abortion in statute, a party-line response to efforts across the country to limit abortion access in anticipation of a pending challenge to the *Roe v. Wade* decision.

Gov. Jared Polis signed into law the Reproductive Health Equity Act, which passed the Democratic-led Legislature after dozens of hours of testimony by residents and fierce opposition by minority Republicans.

The law guarantees access to reproductive care before and after pregnancy and bans local governments from imposing their own restrictions.

It also declares that fertilized eggs, embryos and fetuses have no independent rights. That’s a response to failed ballot initiatives that sought to restrict abortion by giving embryos the rights of born humans.

“Colorado has been, is and will be a pro-choice state,” Polis said, calling increasing abortion restrictions elsewhere “an enormous government overreach, an

enormous government infringement” of individual rights. “No matter what the Supreme Court does in the future, people in Colorado will be able to choose when and if they have children.”

Colorado joins 15 other states and Washington, D.C., in codifying abortion rights. Currently, 12 states have trigger laws, or abortion bans that will go into effect if *Roe* is overturned. Additionally, eight states, including FFRF’s home state of Wisconsin, have pre-*Roe* abortion bans on the books that may be reinstated.

DeSantis signs into law strict abortion bill

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis on April 14 signed legislation that will ban abortions in the state after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

Florida currently allows abortions up to 24 weeks. The new law, which passed the GOP-controlled legislature in March, includes exceptions for the life of the woman and “fatal fetal anomalies” but does not make exceptions for rape or incest. It would take effect in July.

Senate Democratic Leader Lauren Book said that the bill has left victims of rape and incest out in the cold.

“It became clear, no matter what we do, no matter how hard we try, there will be no exemptions for rape or incest or human trafficking,” Book said.

Florida’s ban is modeled after a Mississippi law at the heart of the case under review by the Supreme Court, which could overturn or roll back *Roe v. Wade*.

Nebraska abortion rights backers block ‘trigger’ law

Abortion rights proponents scored a surprising victory in Nebraska by derailing a bill that would have automatically outlawed abortion if the U.S. Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade*.

The vote on March 24 frustrated abortion rights opponents, who usually win fights over the issue in the conservative Legislature, but abortion rights backers in Nebraska managed to block it using a filibuster in the single-chamber Legislature.

The bill’s supporters fell two votes short of the 33 they needed to end the filibuster and force a vote. The 31-15 vote left the proposal essentially dead for the rest of the year, even though a majority of lawmakers supported it.

Opponents assailed it as an intrusion on women’s autonomy and vowed not to budge in their opposition.

“It is healthy for me, as a mother, as

a rape survivor, to draw a boundary and say if you think that my child should be forced to give birth, you are not my friend,” said Nebraska state Sen. Megan Hunt. “And if I go to the Pearly Gates and meet your God someday . . . I don’t think I’m gonna get in any trouble for killing all of your bills who vote for this. I don’t think your God’s gonna have any problem with that. And I don’t think I’m gonna see any of you there either.”

Kentucky law effectively ends abortion access

The Republican-led Kentucky General Assembly voted 76-21 April 13 to override Gov. Andy Beshear’s veto of a bill that opponents say will effectively end abortion access in the state.

Among the restrictions imposed by the law, it bans the distribution of abortion pills by mail, raises standards for minors seeking an abortion, and mandates the creation of a new and expansive certification and monitoring system to track details of all abortions administered in the state and the physicians who provide them.

Opponents say the system is impossible to implement without additional funding, and as a result, will effectively revoke access to the medical procedure in the state.

Arizona Legislature OKs 15-week abortion ban

The Arizona Legislature on March 25 voted on party lines to outlaw abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy, mirroring a Mississippi law now being considered by the U.S. Supreme Court.

The bill explicitly says it does not overrule a state law in place for more than 100 years that would ban abortion outright if the Supreme Court overrules *Roe v. Wade*.

The bill now goes to Republican Gov. Doug Ducey, an abortion opponent who has signed every piece of anti-abortion legislation that has reached his desk.

The Arizona 15-week abortion ban bill contains no exceptions for rape or incest and would also bar abortions for families that learn later on in a pregnancy that a fetus is not viable. It contains exemptions for medical emergencies in which the mother is at risk of dying or having permanent, irreversible injury.

Maryland expands abortion access

Maryland is joining 14 other states in allowing trained medical professionals other than physicians to perform abortions. That change is part of a bill expanding abortion rights that was passed April 10 by state lawmakers, overriding the veto of Gov. Larry Hogan.

Under the new law, which will take effect July 1, nurse practitioners, nurse midwives and trained physician assistants will be able to perform abortions. The law will also require most insurance providers in the state to cover the cost of an abortion, at no cost to the resident, and directs the state to invest \$3.5 million a year into abortion-care training.

“They stood up for health care, they stood up for access to abortion care — which we believe is health care, and health care is a human right — so they did what was right for the women in the state of Maryland,” said Karen J. Nelson, the president and chief executive of Planned Parenthood of Maryland, referring to Maryland legislators.

FFRF NEWS

FFRF argues case against praying judge

After winning last year, FFRF’s oral arguments heard by appeals court

The Freedom From Religion Foundation’s ongoing challenge against a Texas judge’s imposed courtroom prayer has



Wayne Mack

received a boost during the oral arguments stage in the appeals process. FFRF won its court case last year over Montgomery County Judge Wayne Mack’s prayer in the courtroom. Plaintiffs FFRF and local attorney “John Roe” had sued Judge Mack over his divisive and unconstitutional practice of opening each court session with chaplain-led prayer. Mack, as a justice of the peace, has jurisdiction over minor misdemeanor offenses and civil matters involving up to \$20,000, including juvenile cases. The case is now before a three-member panel (Judges Jerry Edwin Smith, Kurt D. Engelhardt and E. Grady Jolly) of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. FFRF and Roe are represented by FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover, with Attorney Ayesha Khan of Washington, D.C., serving as co-counsel.

During recent oral arguments, Judge Jolly questioned Mack’s attorney about whether there was “voluminous” evidence of prayers in courtrooms. Jolly also asked what the most recent example in this country was of having a prayer in court. In reply, Attorney Brad Hubbard disingenuously replied, “There was one here this morning,” in reference to the court’s opening cry. When Hubbard also referenced the conclusion of the Supreme Court’s opening cry, “God save the United States and this honorable court,” Jolly responded, “Come on, come on. That’s not precedent for what happened in this case.”

Grover argued that there is no other modern court that has a practice similar to Mack’s courtroom prayers, which means it is different from the Supreme Court’s decision in *Town of Greece v. Galloway* that governs legislative prayer. Mack’s practices cannot be compared to legislative prayer, FFRF has contended in its briefs. Unlike legislative prayer, Mack’s courtroom chaplains directed their prayers to the audience, not the judge. And in the courtroom setting, many of the audience members are compelled, under threat of a warrant issuing for their arrest or other ordered penalties, to appear in the courtroom. Grover effectively countered the other side’s contentions. When asked how Mack’s prayers were coercive, Grover replied that three different attorneys testified that they felt they needed to participate in order to avoid risking prejudice from Mack against their clients. FFRF and Roe filed the case against Mack in 2019. Mack, a formerly ordained minister who attended Jackson College of Ministries, made the unprecedented decision to solicit chaplains to open his court sessions with prayer, a practice not replicated by any other court in the country. Attendees have reported Mack surveying the courtroom during prayers, causing concern that their cases would be affected if they did not participate. Mack’s bailiff announces the prayers, stating that anyone can leave during the prayer, but then locks the courtroom doors, making inconspicuous re-entry impossible. Mack enters, talks about his chaplaincy program, introduces a chaplain, and gives the name and location of the chaplain’s church. While everyone in the courtroom remains standing, the chaplain, who is almost always Christian, then delivers a prayer. Since entering the lawsuit, Attorney Roe has regularly declined business in order to avoid appearing in Mack’s courtroom. On some matters, where a district court has concurrent jurisdiction with Mack’s court, Roe elected to bring claims in the district court instead of Mack’s court, despite the higher filing fees, higher service fees and the generally slower docket, in order to avoid Mack’s prayer practice.

“ [FFRF Attorney Sam] Grover argued that there is no other modern court that has a practice similar to Judge Mack’s courtroom prayers.



Crosses

Continued from page 1

Then, the Supreme Court’s interpretation of the Constitution changed. Now, some blatantly religious government symbols and displays are presumptively constitutional because the Supreme Court said so in a 2019 decision, *American Legion v. American Humanist Association*, commonly known as the Bladensburg cross case.

The court’s analysis rested on its contrived theory that religious meaning diminishes with age, thereby allowing “longstanding” cross displays to skirt the Establishment Clause obligation. FFRF litigated a subsequent cross case, *Kondrat'yev v. City of Pensacola*, in which the court mused that “divining any sort of clear rule from the seven separate opinions in *American Legion* is a challenge.”

As an attorney, I must interpret and apply the law to the situation. Since the law regarding government displays of crosses changed, I sent an updated letter to the city of Elizabethton explaining how the city crosses are not constitutional based on the new legal framework.

Public interest is generally helpful to our cause. Starting a conversation in the public square can be the first step toward change. Well, we sure fueled a conversation about crosses in Elizabethton.

Unfortunately, the conversation did not



Photo by Chris Line
Dr. Karen Heineman

center around the First Amendment’s protections and restrictions. Instead, the citizens of Elizabethton have rallied to battle the “intervenor from Wisconsin” in a fight to protect Christianity. (Never mind that we are acting on a complaint from a local resident.) Protests were organized and online polls created to prove Elizabethton is a Christian city that will not stand for this assault. “Crusaders for Christ,” a community group, was started with two stated missions: to glorify God and to save the crosses.

The group began a petition drive to put saving the crosses on the ballot. Perhaps most outrageous was the call for citizens to take a stand to fight the “aggression by an outside organization that seeks to infringe on our rights as citizens” with the “same fight, grit, and determination the Ukrainians have as they fight Communist aggression.” To say the point has been lost in this conversation is to understate the obvious. I have been invited to Elizabethton to meet “face to face.”

FFRF’s purpose is clear when we consider the near-impossibility of an Elizabethton resident being heard through the Christian armor that the city residents

have raised. Perhaps even more obvious is how important the First Amendment protections are in safeguarding religious minorities against the mob mentality of the religious majority.

While the Supreme Court can change the meaning of the Constitution, ballot results cannot. This public conversation highlights the lack of basic understanding of constitutional rights, which are not subject to a vote and are not reserved for those who create the most noise. For example, part of the mob’s response to our “assault” on the city’s crosses was to put crosses in private yards throughout the city. Rest assured, Elizabethton Christians, FFRF has no plans to attack your yards. The Constitution controls government actions. Precisely because we have the First Amendment, no government entity can take crosses out of your yards, and, if any try, give FFRF a call.

The First Amendment, however, also prohibits the government from forcing taxpayers to support your crosses. These two rights are entwined. This is what we argue: The city may not put government resources toward any religious display.

Although the aggrandized collective response to fight FFRF has been praised by the local Christians, the lack of tolerance and unwillingness to hear and understand what this “fight” is actually about is a sad narrative for religious minorities and an illustration of how divisive religion can be.

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.”

No, I do not plan to visit Elizabethton, because the Constitution is the same in Wisconsin as in Tennessee. I will stay where religious differences are not fodder for a mob and where I can continue to advocate for those who cannot be heard.

Dr. Karen Heineman is FFRF’s Legal Fellow. She has been a practicing veterinarian in Wisconsin since 1992. She also graduated magna cum laude from Marquette University Law School in 2020.

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FFRF grants \$25K for Ukrainian relief

THEY SAID WHAT?

The board of the Freedom From Religion Foundation has proudly voted to grant \$25,000 to a Polish freethought group organizing humanitarian assistance for Ukrainian refugees.

The relief campaign, “Humanists Across Borders for Ukraine,” is sponsored by the The Atheist Foundation Kazimierz Lyszczyńskiego, Poland’s premier atheist organization. At least half of the nearly 5 million Ukrainian refugees created by Russia’s war so far have fled to Poland, creating a humanitarian crisis there.

“From the first days of the war, we’ve launched a project ‘Humanists Across Borders for Ukraine.’ We would be very grateful if you could join the action or support us with any money or help any other way,” writes Nina Sankari, president of the Polish foundation.

Sankari and colleague Henryk Nazarewicz were guests in March on FFRF’s “Ask an Atheist” program, which streams live on Facebook Wednesdays at noon Central and can be watched on YouTube. The all-volunteer Polish foundation has canceled its annual “Atheist Days” national conference, instead applying the funds toward refugee aid. The group is not only raising money for shelter, food, diapers and clothing, but is also supplying hands-on help to refugees needing required documents, and transportation, child care and schooling.

Sankari notes they are helping anyone they can regardless of religion, but are open about the fact that they are atheists.

FFRF will augment its organizational grant to the campaign by collecting donations from individuals via our charitable arm, Nonbelief Relief. To make a donation (deductible for income tax purposes), select “Nonbelief Relief” at ffrf.org/donate (or note that your gift is for Ukraine in the comment field). Please do more than simply tweet #SupportUkraine.


At one time, science said man came from apes, did it not? . . . If that is true, why are there still apes? Think about it.

Herschel Walker, candidate for Senate in Georgia, in an appearance at Sugar Hill Church in Georgia.
Yahoo News, 3-15-22


Pride parades are designed to demonstrate that sin is one variation of human behavior. That’s why in order to join the club of those countries, you have to have a gay pride parade. . . . If humanity accepts that sin is not a violation of God’s law, if humanity accepts that sin is a variation of human behavior, then human civilization will end there.

Patriarch Kirill, head of Russia’s Orthodox Church, seemingly blaming the war on Russia on gay pride parades.
Moskva News Agency, 3-7-22


Freethought Caucus expands




Rashida Tlaib




Jared Huffman




Eleanor Holmes Norton




Mark Pocan




Julia Brownley




Hank Johnson




Jimmy Gomez




Pramila Jayapal




Jamie Raskin




Zoe Lofgren




Jerry McNerney




Carolyn B Maloney




Don Beyer




Sean Casten



Susan Wild



Dan Kildee



Steve Cohen

Rep. Julia Brownley of California is the newest member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, bringing to total number of members up to 17.

The caucus, founded in 2018 and co-chaired by Reps. Jared Huffman and Jamie Raskin, has four objectives: Promote public policy formed on the basis of reason, science, and moral values; protect the secular character of our government by adhering to the strict constitutional principle of the separation of church and state; oppose discrimination against atheists, agnostics, humanists, seekers, religious and nonreligious persons, and to champion the value of freedom of thought and conscience worldwide; and provide a forum for members of Congress to discuss their moral frameworks, ethical values, and personal religious journeys.

Supreme Court

Continued from page 1

gate prayer, FFRF stresses. The unique features of the coach-student relationship coerce students to participate in coach-led prayers. This type of religious activity, as FFRF demonstrates with many cogent examples, has harmed students in numerous respects, including by marginalizing nonreligious students and making them susceptible to attacks from other students and members of the community.

Plus, school athletic teams foster an atmosphere of both communal activity among players and also allegiance to the coach. These features, combined with the social pressures exerted when an authority figure engages in religious practices, coerce non-Christian

students to participate in Christian prayers.

Coach Kennedy’s religious activity on the 50-yard line was a team activity. He intended to continue to pray with students on the field, as was his prior practice. Kennedy’s post-game prayers were anything but private. They were intended to be team prayers, FFRF emphasizes. This is problematic for students who would otherwise choose not to participate.

Because this case is moot, the Supreme Court should dismiss the appeal for lack of jurisdiction, FFRF concludes. Alternatively, as “it is improper and a gross violation of freedom of conscience to coerce or even encourage student athletes to pray in order to play,” FFRF urges the high court to affirm the ruling of the 9th Circuit against Coach Kennedy.


FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott is the lead drafter and counsel of record for the brief.

The difference between heaven and hell is the difference between right and almost right.

Oklahoma state Sen. Warren Hamilton, allegedly quoting his wife, after the Oklahoma Senate passed six anti-abortion measures, but saying they didn’t go far enough in stopping abortion.
Tulsa World, 3-11-22

I’m just asking this question because how important is your faith to you? On a scale of 1 to 10, how faithful would you say you are, in terms of religion? You know, I go to church probably three times a year, so that speaks poorly of me. Or do you attend church regularly?

Sen. Lindsey Graham, while questioning Supreme Court nominee Ketanji Brown Jackson. Jackson rightly pointed out that “there’s no religious test in the Constitution.”
Washington Post, 3-22-22



Will Smith

In this time in my life, in this moment, I am overwhelmed by what God is calling on me to do and be in this world.

Actor Will Smith, during his acceptance speech after winning the best actor Oscar for his role as Richard Williams in “King Richard.” The speech came shortly after he walked up on stage and slapped Chris Rock for making a joke about his wife.

BBC News, 3-27-21

This is a fight of good versus evil. Evil always looks like the victor until the King of Kings triumphs.

Then-White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, in a text message to Ginny Thomas, wife of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, in the lead-up to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol.
Washington Post, 3-25-22

I’m going to tell you right now what is a woman. We came from Adam’s rib. God created us with his hands. We may be the weaker sex, we ARE the weaker sex, but we are our partner’s, our husband’s wife.

U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, giving her definition of “woman” during a speech at the Georgia Republican Assembly.
Washington Post, 4-6-22

The people at Disney are pedophiles, [pushing a] Satanic, godless, child predatory perspective.

Oklahoma GOP state Senate candidate Jarrin Jackson, after Disney would no longer support new Florida legislation that critics have labeled the “Don’t Say Gay” bill.
Rolling Stone, 4-7-22

Yip Harburg,
from his book:

Rhymes for the Irreverent



A Nose Is A Nose Is A Nose

Mother, Mother,
Tell me please,
Did God who gave us flowers and trees,
Also provide the allergies?

By the lyricist of ‘Over the Rainbow’. Illustrated by Seymour Chwast, published by FFRF.

Buy it from FFRF online - ffrf.org/shop



The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible

By Ruth Hurmence Green

A Missouri grandmother debunks the bible as no one has debunked it since Thomas Paine.

—Published by FFRF. 440 pages / PB

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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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@ ffrf.org/shop

IN THE NEWS

Court: Pastor can touch inmate at execution

The Supreme Court on March 24 boosted the religious rights of death row inmates, ruling 8 to 1 in favor of a Texas murderer who wants his Baptist pastor to touch him and pray aloud at the time of his execution.

Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. wrote for the majority that the rights of John Henry Ramirez were protected by federal law and that Texas could accommodate his requests without compromising the lethal injection process. The lone dissenter was Justice Clarence Thomas, who wrote a lengthy description of Ramirez’s crime in his opinion.

Lower courts had ruled against Ramirez, 37, who was convicted of stabbing to death Pablo Castro in a 2004 robbery in Corpus Christi, Texas, that netted pocket change.

On Sept. 8, the Supreme Court stopped Ramirez’s planned execution as the inmate waited in a holding room next to the death chamber. It set an expedited hearing in the case for Nov. 9.

“There is a rich history of clerical prayer at the time of a prisoner’s execution, dating back well before the founding of our nation,” Roberts wrote.

Discrimination at work differs based on religion

Christians, Muslims, Jews and the nonreligious all face workplace discrimination because of their religion (or nonreligion), but they experience it differently, according to a report by Rice University’s Religion and Public Life Program, as reported by Religion News Service.

Evangelical Christians say they feel singled out when taking an individual stand based on their moral views, the report found.

Muslims and Jews say they’ve felt targeted by anti-Islamic and antisemitic rhetoric.

Among nonreligious participants, 27 percent perceived religious discrimination in the workplace. As for the nonreligious, respondents felt compelled to downplay or hide their identities.

Rachel Schneider, one of the report’s authors, said the study showed people often experienced workplace discrimination in the form of microaggressions — such as stereotyping — not just in the hiring, firing and promotion process.

Support for LGBTQ rights is higher than ever

Americans’ support for LGBTQ rights is higher than ever, according to a new report by Public Religion Research Institute.

Those findings, released March 17, are part of PRRI’s 2021 American Values Atlas project, a seven-year survey measuring Americans’ support for LGBTQ rights policies.

Since PRRI began polling on the issue, the number of Americans who support same-sex marriage has increased among all political and religious groups from 54 percent to 68 percent, according to the report.

That includes 87 percent of those who describe themselves as religious-

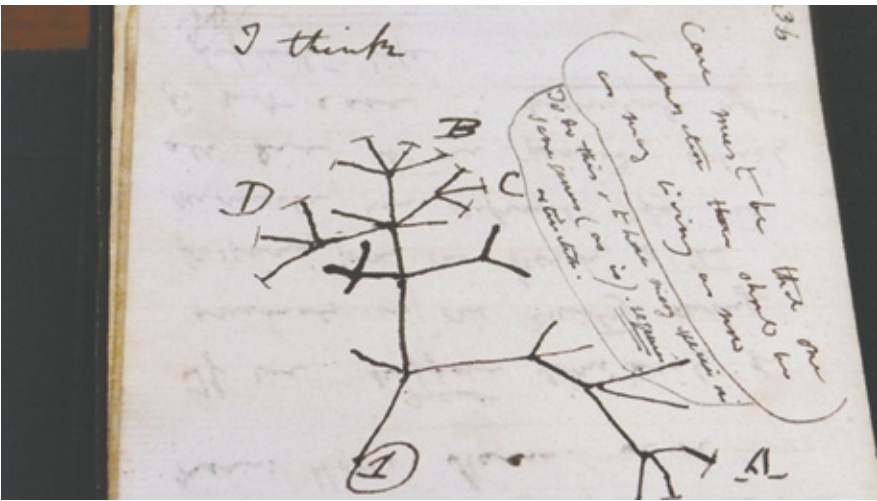


Photo courtesy of Cambridge University

A page from one of Charles Darwin’s long-missing notebooks included the “tree of life” sketch.

Darwin notebooks, missing since 2000, returned

Two “stolen” notebooks written by Charles Darwin have been mysteriously returned to Cambridge University, 22 years after they were last seen.

The small leather-bound books are worth millions and include the scientist’s “tree of life” sketch.

“I feel joyous,” the university’s librarian Jessica Gardner told the BBC.

The notebooks were left anonymously at the Cambridge University library in a bright pink gift bag containing the original blue box the notebooks were kept in and a plain brown envelope. On it was printed a short message: “Librarian, Happy Easter X.”

The notepads date from the late 1830s after Darwin had returned from the Galapagos Islands. On one page, he drew a spindly sketch of a tree, which helped inspire his theory of evolution.

Says Jim Secord, emeritus professor of history and philosophy of science at Cambridge University: “They’re some of the most remarkable documents in the whole history of science.”

The manuscripts were last seen in November 2000 after “an internal request” to remove them from the library’s special collections strong-room to be photographed.

ly unaffiliated (up from 77 percent in 2014); 76 percent of white Protestants (up from 62 percent); and 74 percent of white Catholics (up from 61 percent). Trailing behind are 35 percent of white evangelical Protestants (still up overall from 28 percent).

Judge: Former clerk violated couples’ rights

A federal judge has ruled that Kim Davis, a former Kentucky clerk, violated the constitutional rights of two same-sex couples who were among those to whom she wouldn’t issue marriage licenses. That refusal sparked international attention and briefly landed her in jail in 2015.

U.S. District Judge David Bunning issued the ruling March 19 in two long-standing lawsuits involving Davis, the former clerk of Rowan County, and two same-sex couples who sued her. With the decision, a jury trial will still need to take place to decide on any damages the couples could be owed.

“It is readily apparent that *Obergefell* recognizes plaintiffs’ 14th Amendment right to marry,” the judge wrote, refer-

encing the landmark same-sex marriage *Obergefell* decision. “It is also readily apparent that Davis made a conscious decision to violate plaintiffs’ right.”

Poll: Religious objections to vaccines not sincere

Most adults in the United States do not believe that requests for religious exemptions in the workplace are sincere, according to a Pew Research Center survey.

Two-thirds of U.S. adults say most people who claim religious objections to a Covid-19 vaccine “are just using religion as an excuse to avoid the vaccine,” while about a third say they think the objectors “sincerely believe getting a vaccine is against their religion.”

However, 64 percent of Americans do not think those with religious objections to the Covid-19 vaccine — regardless of the sincerity of their beliefs — should lose their jobs. Around a third disagree, saying the employers should “require employees who have religious objections to get the vaccine if they want to keep their job.”

Disbelief in evolution linked to prejudice, racism

A disbelief in human evolution was associated with higher levels of prejudice, racist attitudes and support of discriminatory behavior against Blacks, immigrants and the LGBTQ community, according to University of Massachusetts Amherst research published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*.

The researchers theorized that belief in evolution would tend to increase people’s identification with all humanity, due to the common ancestry, and would lead to less prejudicial attitudes.

In eight studies involving different areas of the world, the researchers analyzed data from the American General Social Survey (GSS), the Pew Research Center and three online crowdsourced samples. In testing their hypothesis about the associations of different levels of belief in evolution, they accounted for education, political ideology, religiosity, cultural identity and scientific knowledge.

“We found the same results each time, which is basically that believing in evolution relates to less prejudice, regardless of the group you’re in, and controlling for all of these alternative explanations,” lead author Stylianos Syropoulos said.

The happiest nations are strongly secular

According to the World Happiness Report, the happiest nation in the world is Finland. The report is based on an analysis of a host of sociological, economic, and psychological factors. Finland has held that ranking for five straight years.

Following Finland are Denmark, Iceland, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Sweden, Norway, Israel and New Zealand.

“All of them are among the most secular/least religious nations on Earth,” writes Phil Zuckerman, a secular studies professor at Pitzer College. “Aside from outlier Israel — which is growing more religious as it grows more brutal and undemocratic — all of these top-10 happiest nations have experienced dramatic degrees of secularization over the last century.”

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FFRF VICTORIES

By Casandra Zimmerman

West Virginia teacher won't use religious coloring booklet

FFRF was alerted by a Putnam County Schools parent that a first-grade teacher at the West Virginia school assigned students a "Jesus is Born!" informational booklet coloring assignment. The booklet recounted religious stories from the bible. FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent John G. Hudson advising the district to take immediate action to stop teachers from giving religious assignments to students.

Hudson responded and said that Putnam County Schools is aware of its obligations and that the incident was an isolated one and will not recur.

No more religious notes at Oklahoma elementary school

A concerned parent contacted FFRF to report that their child received a bag of toys and candy from Eugene Field Elementary School in Oklahoma City that also contained religious messages.

The gifts were accompanied by a note, which explained, "Have a wonderful Christmas! We pray that your weeks are filled with joy and love! And, we hope you enjoy these gifts." The note included a bible verse.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line requested that Superintendent Sean McDaniel take corrective action and train district staff on their constitutional duties as public school employees.

In response to the FFRF's letter, the general counsel for Oklahoma City Public Schools wrote that it was determined that a volunteer family placed the note in the backpack "unbeknownst to the community partner and the school." The principal was then counseled on the religious parameters and told that this could not happen again and such a message violates students' religious freedoms.

North Carolina sheriff drops religion from summer camp

A North Carolina sheriff has listened to FFRF and made secular a summer camp that his department operates.

Several county residents had reported to FFRF that the Dare County Sheriff's Office was planning to hold a "faith-based" camp (as the Sheriff's Office's official Facebook page had been declaring it) for children during the summer. The camp, which has been run by the Sheriff's Office for many years, included religious worship.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Dare County Sheriff Doug Doughtie. "By hosting a 'faith based' camp that includes religious worship, the Sheriff's Office creates the appearance that it endorses religion," Line wrote.

The sheriff took heed of FFRF's exhortation. "Friendly Atheist" Hemant Mehta writes that Doughtie posted a message on Facebook explaining why his camp would drop the faith aspect: "A statement from one of the people who posted on our Facebook account was 'There are many in our community who are not Christian or not religious at all and the Sheriff's Office should be well attuned to that. Why would these children be made to feel "other" at a county camp?' When I read that statement, I realized that it shouldn't make any child feel that way."

FFRF ends elementary school intercom prayer in Louisiana

FFRF's objection to daily intercom prayer in a Louisiana elementary school has quickly had the desired effect.

A concerned parent had informed FFRF that Riverbend Elementary School in West Monroe, La., required its students to recite a prayer each day following the Pledge of Allegiance. A different child was reportedly selected every morning to deliver the pledge and then the prayer over the intercom. The prayer was described as "Student Expression," but was clearly a prayer and was delivered to "Father God."

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the legal counsel for Ouachita Parish Schools demanding that the school cease its daily prayer.

"Ouachita Parish Superintendent Don Coker said the situation has been addressed," states a story in the local newspaper about FFRF's intervention.

Waiting to get in?



Photo provided by Margaret Downey

Sculptor Zenos Frudakis, FFRF Lifetime Member Margaret Downey, FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker, and FFRF Lifetime Member Tom Schottmiller are at "The Gates of Hell," located at the Rodin Museum in Philadelphia. Frudakis, who cites Rodin as a great inspiration, took the group on a tour of the museum on Easter Sunday. The tour took place after FFRF Video Director Bruce Johnson, Dan and Annie Laurie did an interview of Zenos and shot on-location footage at Frudakis' studio in suburban Philadelphia.

"The principal knows that we won't be reading prayers over the intercom," the article quotes Coker as saying. "It has actually been handled and dealt with. Now I think they do a moment of silence."

Georgia school employee told not to pray with students

A Georgia school will no longer allow employees to pray with students or force students to pray at events after it was reported that David Turpin, an employee at Stephens County High School, had been praying with students as part of the high school's JROTC events. It was also reported that Turpin required multiple cadets to pray before a school-sponsored meet that took place at the school. Turpin is a district employee who is listed on the school's website as part of the JROTC program.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line insisted that the district must make certain that school programs and activities do not include prayer and that none of its employees are unlawfully and inappropriately indoctrinating students in religious matters by leading prayer, encouraging them to pray, or setting aside time for prayer.

Counsel for the Stephens County School system informed FFRF that the administration is convinced that "Mr. Turpin understands the issues concerning the First Amendment as it relates to the freedom of religion and the Establishment Clause."

Texas middle school staff to stop promoting religion

A Texas school district has stopped letting its staff endorse religion after a community member reported multiple instances of religious promotion by staff members.

Andrews Middle School football team was selling shirts that featured a bible quote on the back: "Trust in the Lord, Our God, forever, for He is our everlasting rock. — Isaiah 264:4." The shirts had been promoted on the official Andrews ISD Facebook page.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line, in a letter to the district, wrote that the staff "send a message on behalf of the district to non-Christian and nonreligious students that they are outsiders in their school community." Superintendent Bobby Azam wrote back to reassure FFRF that he will work to ensure that the district will no longer allow its staff to promote or endorse religion by selling T-shirts with religious messages as part of school-sponsored activities, or by including religious messages on official calendars for school-sponsored events.

Alabama school will stop using religious songs in class

An Alabama elementary school is no longer letting proselytization happen during music class.

A district parent reported to FFRF that their child, a first-grade student at Montevallo Elementary School in the Shelby County School District, came home singing a "Thanksgiving song" that they learned in music class. The lyrics to the song included: "Thank you God for the friends we keep, thank you God for the food we eat."

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the counsel for the school district. "This 'Thanksgiving song' is essentially a prayer and thus would be appropriate in a church setting, but not in a public school."

After the school received FFRF's letters, the district counseled staff about the importance of selecting programming that does not highlight a particular religion, and it is incorporating additional refresher training on those issues.

FFRF is told Florida 'prayer' invitation was sent in error

The city of Orlando, Fla., has reassured FFRF that it takes the separation of church and state seriously after it was reported that the city was officially sponsoring "40 Days of Prayer and Fasting" from March 6 to April 14.

The event invitations said, "The city of Orlando invites you to '40 Days of Prayer and Fasting.'" Invitations were sent out through official city communication channels and noted that the invitation for this religious event was on behalf of "Mayor Buddy Dyer and District Two City Commissioner Tony Ortiz."

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote a letter to Dyer. Doug Richards, director of community engagement and outreach for Orlando, responded, saying that the invitation was sent in error, as the event was not being hosted or sponsored by the city.

FFRF gets police department to take down social media post

The Kingsport (Tenn.) Police Department has taken down a post on its official Facebook page thanking the "Rock of Ages" prison ministry for providing the department with 160 bibles.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the police department saying that the Kingsport P.D. must refrain from endorsing religion on social media.

In a letter from Chief of Police Dave Phipps, FFRF was informed of the post being removed. "To my knowledge, no resident voiced any concern over the post; only 1 out of 56,000+. Regardless, we have removed the post," Phipps wrote.

Tennessee medical center removes religious Facebook post

A local citizen contacted FFRF regarding the endorsement of religion on the Cookeville (Tenn.) Regional Medical Center's official Facebook page.

The post included a prayer for frontline workers that said, "Heavenly and Almighty God, who has all power and might to heal and protect."

"CRMC must refrain from endorsing religion," wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heineman. "It cannot suggest that it cannot treat patients without God's help or that patients must say prayers while in its facility."

Chief legal counsel for the Cookeville Medical Center informed FFRF that both of the postings were removed shortly after the medical center received the letter.

FFRF ends Alabama district's prayers over loudspeaker

An Alabama public school district has stopped opening its football games with prayer after FFRF called a penalty.

Several high schools in Jefferson County School District, including Gardendale High School and Pinson Valley High School, had been starting their football games with prayers broadcast over the loudspeaker.

It is unconstitutional for a public school to sponsor religious messages at school athletic events, wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line in a letter to the district.

FFRF's advice fell on receptive ears. The legal counsel for the district sent a letter informing FFRF that "the superintendent met with school principals and the administration will not allow prayer at school-sponsored events."

Convention speech

Finding beauty, joy in our togetherness

This is the (slightly edited) speech Sasha Sagan gave at FFRF's national convention on Nov. 20, 2021, in Boston. She was introduced by FFRF's then Director of Strategic Response Andrew L. Seidel. To watch the video, go to: ffrf.us/speeches-2021.

Andrew Seidel: I'm thrilled to introduce my friend Sasha Sagan. She's been a regular guest on FFRF's "Freethought Matters" and "Ask An Atheist." She is an amazing speaker and writer and television producer and filmmaker.

She was inspired by the work of her parents, who you may have heard of — Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan. They had a gift for inspiring, and inspiring with beautiful writing. It's very clear to me that they passed that gift on to Sasha. Her wonderful book, *For Small Creatures Such as We: Rituals For Finding Meaning in Our Unlikely World*, is beautiful. It's part memoir, part guidebook and part social history, and it's one of my favorites over the last few years.

Please welcome Sasha Sagan.

By Sasha Sagan

I'm so happy to be with you tonight.

Tonight's honoree later this evening, my wonderful, brilliant mother, Ann Druyan, and my dad — the late astronomer and educator Carl Sagan — raised me with a sense of awe and wonder about the universe that you can also find in their many books and essays and the original season of the television series "Cosmos" that they wrote together and created that my dad hosted. This sense of the majesty of nature and the beauty of it and the interconnectedness of life on Earth and how much there is to rejoice in nature as revealed by science is one of the guiding ideas in my life.

I'm so grateful to my parents for this concept that now seems somehow to be getting away from us. This idea that science isn't just a way of knowing things, but a source of deep beauty and understanding. We have this idea sometimes that facts are cold and hard and that science is so devoid of emotion. I think that my parents' work contradicts that so beautifully in so many ways.

So many of us crave that feeling of being part of the grandeur and part of the majesty of the universe and the idea that there's a way to feel those feelings and understand that deeply in the information in our DNA, the cells in our body, our place in the solar system, the information that we are able to glean almost every day, a new revelation that brings us deeper understanding of who and where we are.

I'll tell you a little something about the way that I grew up and the stories that were passed down to me through my parents' elegant and colorful, beautiful storytelling. One story comes from my mother and her family that stayed with me powerfully from early childhood. Her grandparents were Orthodox Jews who came from Eastern Europe, and her father, Harry, was born in New York, and he lived to be 99. I knew him very well. He was one of the closest people to me. When he was a young man, growing up with the customs and traditions and beliefs of his parents, they were passed down to him carefully. He was the first person in his family to enroll in college and went to New York University. And you know how it



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Speaking to the FFRF convention audience on Nov. 21, 2021, Sasha Sagan says that “our place in this vast universe, the consciousness and awareness of being here at all is so profoundly moving.”

goes when you go off to college and get cosmopolitan and skeptical. He started to question. One day he decided that he was going to have to tell his parents that he had had a change in his philosophy.

Harry told his father, “Look, I’ve got to tell you something. I’m not going to keep Shabbat. I’m not going to keep Kosher. I’m not going to do all of these things because I don’t believe. I don’t believe in God. I don’t believe in any of it.” And his father, Benjamin, looked up at him and said: “The only sin would be to pretend.”

And that idea of openness and welcoming a different philosophy and letting go of the sense of rejection and personal slight and forcing belief on someone else set Harry free, and he was able to be secular, which he was for the remaining 75 years of his life. And he and his father remained close. This idea, this almost mantra, that the only thing would be to pretend that going through the motions doesn’t do anyone good, was so profound. It was this idea that my mother, by telling this story, and in the ways that our legends, our family legends, all kinds of legends have to be retold to children in order to be remembered.

I can picture hearing it, and it stayed with me as a real crystallization of the ethos of my family.

The other phrase, the other sentence that stays with me powerfully as a perfect crystallization of a similar ethos, is this one line that appears in the novel *Contact*. It’s the only work of fiction that my father ever published, and he and my mom collaborated on the novel and the film, as they did with everything that they wrote in the 20 years that they were together before his death.

The line is “For small creatures such as we, the vastness is bearable only through love.” It’s a line that my mom wrote. This idea that when we zoom out and see ourselves as this pale blue dot, as this tiny world against this enormous vastness of space, where we don’t know if there’s anyone else out there or anything else that happens after we get to spend a blink of an eye here, it’s hard not to feel a little anxious.

And the existential crisis is something that many of us have to go through. But on the other side of it, once we accept the brevity of our time here and the mysteries unsolved about what else there may be, what do we have? What is the solace that we can find that is true and real? I think that it’s one another. It’s that we’re on this little lifeboat together at this moment, with so many tributaries in history that could have gone another way.

Yet, still here we are in this moment. And I think that those deep connections and appreciation for this moment and our place in this vast universe, the con-

sciousness and awareness of being here at all is so profoundly moving.

For those of us who don’t believe that there is anything else or don’t claim to know that there is anything else, there’s often a sense of cynicism that can come. I often talk about this idea that my parents were so good at teaching skepticism without cynicism and finding the joy and beauty of our place in the universe as it really is, and as we’re able to understand it, as opposed to either leaning on things that are not substantiated by evidence or just letting the fear and the existential crisis take over.

I think there’s something so profound and so magnificent as we view ourselves as smaller, as our picture widens from over the last few millennia, from our little communities to our world to our solar system and zooming out further to realize that our galaxy is just one of many and that there is vastness in all directions that we can only begin to comprehend.

I think that there’s something deeply profound about taking solace in knowing that we’re in it together. Those lessons bestowed to me by my parents are one of the reasons that I’m so grateful for them. But, also, for those of us who don’t believe that everything happens for a reason, who do not believe that there is rhyme or reason, that there’s a system in place to which the good guys will get their reward and the

bad guys will get their comeuppance.

I think that there is an impetus on us to make the world more fair and more just. If we don’t think that there is any other way for the things to even out fairly, I think that there is an argument that it’s our duty through this philosophy and through this way of seeing things, to motivate ourselves to fight to make the world more fair, where maybe more of those things will happen, and there will be more evenness to how it all shakes out. That’s something else that my parents taught me.


I think that there’s so much a sense of beauty and awe for the universe as it truly is, where we can look at a secular worldview, a humanist worldview, not just as a reaction to religion, but as something that is in many ways more ancient and more traditional.

This idea that understanding nature deeply as it truly is and our sense of — for lack of a better, perhaps more secular word, — our spirituality, our sense of awe and wonder is something that my mother likes to call post-Copernican stress disorder, which is so brilliant. It’s such a great way of thinking about it. I think there is a way to find that feeling of our deep connectedness and not forsake our understanding of science and our evidence-based view of the world and go back to a perspective where those things were one and the same, and find the beauty and joy in that view of our tiny place in this grand universe.



Photo by Chris Line

Sasah Sagan listens to an FFRF member as she signs a copy of her book, *For Small Creatures Such As We*.



You can buy Sasha Sagan’s book, *For Small Creatures Such As We*, at ffrf.org/shop for \$16, postpaid.

Convention honoree

Reality, yes, but kindness and love, too

This is the (slightly edited) speech that Ann Druyan gave at FFRF's national convention in Boston on Nov. 20, 2021. She was introduced by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. To watch the video, go to: ffrf.us/speeches-2021.

Dan Barker: We first met Ann Druyan in 1997, which was less than a year after [Druyan's husband] Carl Sagan had died. It was just a few months after the release of the blockbuster movie "Contact," which was based on the book that Carl wrote and the movie which Ann co-created. She is a Peabody and Emmy award-winning writer, producer and director of the two seasons of "Cosmos" she helmed alone.

Ann wrote the original "Cosmos" series, along with books like *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors*. She also served as the creative director of the NASA project to design the images, music and ideas for possible alien civilizations that was placed on Voyager 1 and Voyager 2.

Twenty-four years ago, Ann received FFRF's Freethought Heroine Award. Today she's receiving our Emperor Has No Clothes Award. It's inspired by the Hans Christian Andersen story of the honest and fearless child who saw the naked emperor and just told the truth — "He's got nothing on!" So, Ann, come on up to receive your Emperor Award.

By Ann Druyan

I am humbled to be with this community, a community whose embrace of reality is so completely central, not only to an appreciation of the romance of life, of the beauty of life, of the need for us to stand up for life now at this crossroads, but, also, so completely central to our survival as a civilization.

What is called for? What form of human agency can save us from ourselves at this moment when the destruction of our environment and our climate casts such a long shadow over our future? What is it, if not the fearless embrace of reality? What is it, if not the employment of an error-correcting mechanism which will give the highest rewards to those who prove our most cherished beliefs are wrong?

This is what we need now. How do we reach our fellow citizens and inspire them to embrace this perspective, this way of looking at things, this error-correcting mechanism which has the power to save us from ourselves? We know that science can deliver the goods. You can't lie your



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Ann Druyan is given FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker on Nov. 21, 2021, at FFRF's national convention in Boston.

way to Mars. Every step of every spacecraft mission is something like 100,000 people deciding to tell the truth about what they're doing. And, of course, there are redundancies and ways of preventing disaster if one fails. But it's a chain of trust that people believe that it matters, what's real.

So, to be with this community that feels so strongly that we have to face squarely what are true circumstances in the universe, what existence really is, what the little we know about it, that's why it moves me so much to be here with you and to receive this award, which I have to say I do not feel worthy of.

There are others who've been given this award because they were willing to risk their very lives to tell the truth. Not me. All I did was follow my bliss. I had a loving family, grandparents who believed completely and had a totally different worldview than mine and my parents, but who did not believe in a God that was so weak and defenseless that they had to punish someone else for not believing in it. My grandparents actually did believe, which was the amazing thing.

And that gave me a model of what it means when a person really believes something — they are secure, they don't

have to resort to violence or cruelty because they really do believe. And I honor that, even though that's not my personal belief, because what I think is called for now is not just an adherence to reality, the kind of adherence that science demands, but also fearless acts of kindness and love.

Because the basis of our disagreement with people who are traditional believers it's not amenable to logic very often.

I'd like to recall for you a kind of miracle, a secular miracle that Carl Sagan performed in the early 1980s. He was asked to testify in one of the so-called creation science trials in the South. He was asked by the ACLU to be a friend of the court and to testify to the court, to bear witness why the notion of creation science was a kind of oxymoron. He gave his testimony, and about a year later he re-



Ann Druyan Photo by Ingrid Laas

ceived a letter from the opposing expert witness, the "creation scientist."

This man had since given up his job teaching creation science and gone back to school to become a biology teacher. I can still recall his letter very clearly. He said, "If you hadn't have been so patient and so thoughtful, and if you hadn't listened so carefully to what I was saying, and taken my questions to heart the way that you did with such humility and without any attempt to demean me or my beliefs, I never could have seen the truth of what you were saying. But you were so open-hearted to me that I felt I had to pay attention to what you were saying. And once I began to pay attention, I realized that my life was unraveling, that my belief system, that what I had completely staked everything I had on, was worthless."

That's what's called for. It's not the haughtiness. We all know how good it feels to hate. We all know how good it feels to feel superior, to say to ourselves, "I'm better than that person because my beliefs are so much better, because my identity is so bound up in those beliefs." But that's not what is going to grow our community.

I just came from the Free University of Brussels, which was founded in 1834 as a way for higher education to break the stranglehold of the Church. And its motto is "Science vanquishes darkness." It's a thriving community. They know all about the Freedom From Religion Foundation. They were very excited that I was on my way here and they asked me to tell you that they want to join with your community.

It's an enormous university with more than a third of its student body coming from around the world. It was thrilling to address that group and to see all of the hope and conviction on the faces of these young, intellectually curious people.

What I'd like to suggest is that winning the argument is not necessarily going to get us where we want to go. There is a need to embrace and to welcome and to talk positively, because I think that we have a better story to tell.

We are talking about a continuity of life that's 4 billion years old, just on this little planet. That's something so precious. We're not talking about a disgruntled parent, who, in Diderot's fantastic formulation, loved his apples more than his children. We're talking about a family of life that includes every living thing on this planet. We have looked at other planets in the vicinity, just a few — just a tiny, tiny fraction of the multitude. And to see them is to know how magnificent our little world is and how worthwhile it is to fight for its future.

So thank you for this award. Ever since I was a child, I always loved the story of the emperor having no clothes. The idea that it matters what's true and that you should stand up and say what you see, what you know to be true. I will try to be worthy of this wonderful award and your great kindness to me.

I'd just like to say that I think of myself as certainly one of the most fortunate people who has ever lived. I spent 20 years with Carl Sagan, who was as extraordinary in his capacity for love as he was in his genius, his intellectual prowess, his learnedness, his courage.

So, I feel like I've seen the best of us. And now you've all seen the love that exists between my beautiful daughter and me. What more is there in life, really, than such goodness? Thank you so much.

“We know that science can deliver the goods. You can’t lie your way to Mars.”

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Photo by Chris Line

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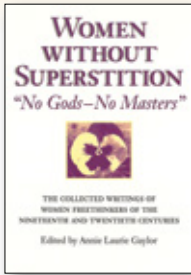
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Q&A with Sasha Sagan and Ann Druyan

Sasha Sagan and Ann Druyan answered FFRF members' questions following their respective speeches on Nov. 21, 2021, at FFRF's national convention in Boston. Here is an edited version of that Q&A session. To watch the video, go to: ffrf.us/speeches-2021.

Richard Halasz (Texas): My question is for Ann, who I'm guessing had a very hands-on editing relationship with one of my top 10 books, *The Demon-Haunted World*. I remember seeing Carl Sagan on "The Tonight Show" many years ago. Then, a few years ago, I read that after Carl would appear on the show, he would go to Johnny Carson's house for dinner afterward. And since Johnny was an amateur astronomer, my speculation runs that after dinner they would fire up a joint and look through the telescope at the billions and billions of stars. Did that happen?

Ann Druyan: Actually, the dinner happened, and it was wonderful, but not the firing up of the joints. We never smoked with Johnny, but I would love to tell a very quick Johnny Carson story.

There was a high school teacher in Iowa who had a dream that every kid who graduated from public high school in Iowa would get a chance to look through a telescope. After Carl died, this teacher called me and he told me that Johnny had given 300 Celestron telescopes to the Iowa public school system. He didn't want anyone to know it was from him, and each one had a little brass plaque on it that said, "From a friend of Carl's."

Isn't that wonderful? He was very passionate about astronomy and very curious. My recollection of our conversations, the ones I was lucky enough to be present at, was he would pepper Carl with wonderful questions about the universe. They were very stimulating conversations and hilarious, even though we never really got to light one up with him.

...

Jessica Ramsaran (Virginia): Our physics class was watching "Cosmos" and the quote "If you wish to make an apple pie from scratch, you must first invent the universe," blew our minds. That night, I made four apple pies from scratch. Your father passed away, so the next morning turned into a memorial instead of a worship for your father.

I want to know what scientist quote brought you to love science. Is there a quote out there for either of you that just kind of blew your mind in the scientific world, in books or in writings or in just scientific research?

Sasha Sagan: Wow. That's amazing story about the apple pie. Thank you for sharing that. The quote that jumps to my mind immediately is, I'm paraphrasing, but it's something like "I'm a very religious



Photo by Chris Line

Ann Druyan gestures as Sasha Sagan listens during the Q&A session following their speeches.

nonbeliever. It's a somewhat new kind of religion." Albert Einstein. The concept of the paradox of a very religious nonbeliever, although I don't think it's necessarily so new. I actually think it's arguably the most traditional, most ancient way of seeing things. But that is something that comes to mind immediately.

Ann Druyan: I'm a tremendous fan of Charles Darwin. I'm kind of in love with him. I also love Michael Faraday, who was a fundamentalist Christian. He was so much of a fundamentalist Christian, that, in fact, at the end of his life, when he was asked if he wanted to be buried with Isaac Newton in Canterbury Cathedral, he said no. He wanted to be buried in a Sandemanian sect cemetery next to his beloved wife, Sarah. His laboratory partner at the Royal Institution was one of the great atheists of the time, another scientist named John Tyndall, and they worked side by side in very close quarters for decades, with a kind of tremendous mutual admiration.

Tyndall was publishing what was, for the time, almost inflammatory indictments of religion and of a belief in the gods of the Old and New Testaments. And yet they have this deep affection for each other. And, of course, without Faraday, who couldn't do the math — just like me — it wasn't until James Clerk Maxwell came along and translated Faraday's brilliant insights about light and magnetism

and the fields that surround us that were invisible, and no one had realized existed until Faraday revealed them.

It's just without Faraday, there would be no electronic media. And yet, here was this man from another world, really with a belief system completely different and almost antithetical to science and yet so beloved and so humble. Without him, the dynamo, the motor, the basis of the Industrial Revolution, never would have happened. And yet this was a man who didn't want a single patent on anything because understanding a single cause of how nature worked was the greatest reward of all.

...

Woody Kaplan (Massachusetts): Sasha, I want to know what you're going to do in the future. What are you doing now and what are you going to do?

Sasha Sagan: Well, I would say this is the main immediate project is right here [points to pregnant belly], but there are a few things I have cooking that I would like to get a little further down the road before I talk about them. But I will say this one thing — I really do dream of someday writing a children's book about how to teach children to question and how children can learn to try to understand what's true when someone tells you something. How do you parse out whether it's supported by evidence or not? So, maybe someday I will get around to writing a really subversive children's book that no parent will want.

...

Eva Quinones (Puerto Rico): Everybody knows that the movie "Contact" was filmed at least partially in Puerto Rico, at the radio telescope at Arecibo. Did any of you ever go to the radio telescope during the filming or afterwards?

Ann Druyan: Sadly, no. Carl and I wrote treatment for "Contact" in 1981, and we were motivated by the fact that, at that time, there was a kind of snarky comment in the culture which was widely heard, which was, "Oh, if women are so smart, where are the female Da Vincis and the female Einsteins?" Carl and I were inspired originally by the story of Hypatia and her murder at the hands of a mob of fanatical Christians. We were inspired to tell the story of a female scientist who got to go on the great odyssey while everyone else stayed home.

And it took 16 years to actually make it into a motion picture, with three directors

and three different movie studios. Tragically, by the time it actually was becoming a motion picture, Carl was already ill. While we spent time with director Bob Zemeckis and the principal actors, it really was in the last months of Carl's life, and we were much more taken up with Carl's illness than we were with the actual production. So, we didn't get to go to Arecibo. And I'm sorry to say I haven't been there since.

Puerto Rico, generally, is a place that really deserves our attention and support. And in the last year, of course, as you all know, the majestic Arecibo Observatory sustained a fatal blow and is, tragically, no longer functioning. I would love to see our country step up for a part of itself, which is Puerto Rico, and support that community, as well as bringing the magnificent Arecibo Telescope, one of the most beautiful sculptural creations on Earth, back to life.

...

Richard Hogaboom (Massachusetts): Perhaps you could provide high quality frameable photos of that Voyager photo of the "Pale Blue Dot" along with Carl's lengthy quote and then do signatures on that. I would value that even more than an autograph book. (See sidebar on next page.)

Ann Druyan: Thank you. Yes. What's amazing to me about "Pale Blue Dot" is that it has touched the hearts of people all over. All of us recognize the truth of it.

If it wasn't for Carl, Voyager 1 would never have taken that picture. He lobbied NASA, starting in 1981 and then finally culminating with the actual taking of the picture in the early 1990s on Valentine's Day. He kept going to NASA headquarters, and they would say, "What's the scientific value of this picture? If we turn the camera back to Earth, the lens will possibly be fried by the sun." They just couldn't understand the value of this picture. And, of course, it was the last of the tens of thousands of pictures that Voyager was taking, having given us with its partner, Voyager 2, our first close-up look at the world of the outer solar system.

That was a mere 20 years after Sputnik, so, in 20 years, we went from launching a bowling ball into Earth's orbit to building two interstellar craft, launched in 1977, moving at 40,000 miles an hour every single hour since, and yet still functioning, 45



Photo by Ingrid Laas

FFRF members give a standing ovation to Ann Druyan and Sasha Sagan following their Q&A session.

years later, meant to work only for 12 years and showing us not only the outer solar system for the first time, but the shape of the solar system as it moves through the galaxy. We still talk to these two Voyagers, which were built with less computing power than what you all have in your phones.

Just think of it with early 1970s technology, and yet it's still only 21 light hours and 30 light minutes from here — not even a light day from Earth. That's how big the universe is. Think of it. All of that hard traveling and still not at all far from home.

So, when I think of the Voyagers, I think of what an occasion for human self-esteem. We can do these very hard things. And if we can do those hard things, those mythic things of stepping on the moon and going to the stars, we can make this planet worthy of Sasha's future child.

...
Sohan D'Souza (Massachusetts): There has been talk recently and discoveries made about potential life on Venus, which Carl speculated about. I'm wondering what your thoughts are about it and what he might have thought about our discoveries of late, and maybe what you would have thought about those and possibility of life elsewhere in the solar system.

Ann Druyan: Thank you so much for this very stimulating question. Well, I think he would have been just like hopping up and down with excitement about the James Webb Space Telescope, which will see so much farther than we have ever seen before. It's an order of magnitude better, if it succeeds. Of course, it's such a delicate and immense challenge. So many things could go wrong. But if it works, once it deploys, it will open up our eyes and enable us to see so much farther in space, but also so much farther back in time than we've ever seen before. It is a mythic achievement. Carl would have just been so thrilled.

Think of the firehose of scientific discovery that we are the recipients of every single day. He would have loved it. I think he would have been very pleased about the possibility, which is only a very small possibility, of life in the clouds of Venus. When he proposed this initially in 1961 and then with another scientist a few years later, it was the beginning of the ridicule that he received chronically for being so speculative.

If you look back to the media of that time, when he was working on these questions, they viewed him as a kind of thorn in their side. Now, Carl is an iconic, beloved figure. Even NASA really loves Carl now. But if you read the editorials and the things written about him at the time, they were so critical of his speculations. Yet, the accuracy of his speculations has been extraordinary. He was very disciplined. He had that amazing combination of



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Ann Druyan answers a question while her daughter Sasha Sagan listens during the Q&A session following their respective speeches on Nov. 21, 2021 in Boston.

wonder and skepticism and never one at the expense of the other.

What made him so powerful, really, was his truthfulness, his curiosity. When Carl would debate people who had beliefs that were different from his own, his ability to quote scripture and the sacred texts of all the world's religious traditions was so astonishing because his curiosity was absolutely bottomless. He was fascinated by absolutely every aspect of human culture. One of his great gifts to all of us was his belief that science was culture, too, and it was a birthright for every single one of us.

And if you want to aspire to have a democracy, then it can't be that the knowledge of a civilization built on science and technology is the property of a tiny priesthood. We all have to be informed decision-makers. We all have to be able to weigh the evidence. And as happy as I think he would have been at the prodigious amount of scientific discovery, I think he would have been equally concerned because as many of you probably have seen online, his prophecy about this abandonment of logic and reason in the future and us, entertaining ourselves to death, and an abandonment of the standards of evidence.

That was his deepest fear. And we've all seen manifestations of that on a national level, the likes of which I had never seen before in my lifetime.

I won't speculate about the question of life elsewhere because I'm not qualified, and also because we simply don't know. And in the absence of evidence, we have to reserve judgment.

...
Nicole Shea Niebler (Colorado): My four paramount values in life are love, learning, science and life. So, when you think about each other either as a mother or as a daughter, what are you most proud of for the person that you love?

Sasha Sagan: Wow. I'll tell you a brief story that sort of goes along with this.

When I was little, I was kind of peculiar and really curious about death, as I remain. I had a lot of questions about it.

Besides my secular parents, one other adult lived in our household, Maruja Farge, who took care of me with my nanny. And she had been a cloistered nun in the Andes mountains before she became a nanny in Peru. And she left not at all because of crisis of faith, but she waited two years to get permission from the Vatican, writing back and forth to the Vatican from the Andes mountains to get the OK that she could leave without being excommunicated.

And she was really a true believer, went to church every Sunday. She didn't drive, so my mom or sometimes my dad would drive her and bring her back. And she was very open about her beliefs. There was no censorship about that, and they really believed that my understanding of the world, my education, would not be complete if I didn't understand what people believed in the religions of the world.

And one day I went to my parents

and I said, "When you die, Maruja says that you're with God in heaven, and you guys say that it's like you're asleep forever without dreaming. Pray tell who is right?" And my parents, in unison, joyfully without missing a beat, said, "Nobody knows!" That kind of like joyful exuberance about our understanding of how things are and the willingness to always welcome curiosity and to have long, sometimes difficult, conversations about ideas and from early childhood, when children are in the stage of asking "why, why, why" all day long, never discouraging that kind of curiosity.

If I could ask a question to which they didn't know the answer, they were overjoyed. Looking it up together was such a sacrament, like a special, beautiful, holy thing to try to understand more. And I think that is one of the things I feel most gratitude for and most appreciation for, perhaps because now the shoe is on the other foot. I have a 4-year-old at home and this one coming and I'm aware of how much effort that takes and how difficult it is sometimes to have really complicated ideas, understandable and welcoming and safe enough for children to feel that they can ask them and honor their questions with real answers and without sugar-coating things, but without making them terrified.

Ann Druyan: Let me count the ways, really. It really chokes me up to talk about Sasha and her brother Sam, and Carl's son Nick. There's no one I've ever met on Earth I would rather spend an evening with. The family that Sasha and her astonishingly wonderful husband, Jon, have built is, I guess, the greatest form of gratification. I mean, read her book and you'll know the answer to the question because I can't imagine as a parent having a greater sense of pride and feeling as loved as you make me feel.

Sasha Sagan: Thank you so much.
Ann Druyan: What a great evening.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert (center) poses with Ann Druyan and Sasha Sagan.

Pale Blue Dot

By Carl Sagan, 1994

Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "super-

star," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there — on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

... Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds.

Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are

challenged by this point of pale light. ... In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves.

The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.

... There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known. — From Carl Sagan's book *Pale Blue Dot*.



A photo of Earth taken Feb. 14, 1990, by Voyager 1, which was 3.7 billion miles from the sun when the image was taken.

FFRF’s 2022 law student essay contest winners

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the three winners of the Diane and Stephen Uhl Memorial Essay Competition for Law Students.

FFRF paid out a total of \$9,000 to the winners of this year’s contest.

Law school students were asked to write on the topic of “Why religious exemptions from vaccine requirements are not legally required.” People who oppose Covid-19 vaccines for political or other reasons are using religious exemptions in order to flout vaccine mandates. Against this backdrop, lawsuits have surged, challenging vaccine requirements on religious grounds and arguing that religious exemptions to such requirements are required by the First Amendment.



The essayists were told to craft an argument that religious exemptions from vaccine requirements are not legally required, addressing constitutional questions as well as other legal issues raised

by such mandates.

For ease of reading, the essays appearing in this issue do not include the footnotes and citations that were included in the authors’ submissions. Grading

and selection of the winners was done by the FFRF Legal Team and the names of essayists were not revealed during grading to avoid unintentional bias.

Winners are listed below and include the law school they are attending and the award amount.

First Place: James B. Aird, University of Wisconsin Law School, \$4,000.

Second Place: Jacob Stock, Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law at Arizona State University, \$3,000.

Third Place: Jacob H. Larson, University of Virginia Law School, \$2,000.

FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994 and grad students since 2010. The law school contest began in 2019.

DIANE & STEPHEN UHL MEMORIAL WINNER

When the only alternative is death

FFRF awarded James \$4,000.

By James B. Aird

Most religions preach that people should care for one another.

Unfortunately, when offered a life-saving vaccine, many religious citizens have turned their backs on that principle, citing their religion as the reason they cannot help protect their neighbors.

Given that most religions do not oppose vaccination as a matter of official doctrine, the truth is that refusal to take the vaccine is often a political rather than religious choice. Still, to the extent these religious beliefs are sincere, requiring an exception for religion from vaccine mandates is nonetheless not mandated by the First Amendment.

Religious exemptions from vaccination requirements are not constitutionally required because vaccine mandates are usually neutral and generally applicable laws under the rule of *Employment Division v. Smith*, because they pass strict scrutiny, and because requiring a religious exemption violates the Establishment Clause by granting a benefit to religion over nonreligion.

Vaccine mandates are nothing new. Before the nation’s founding, George Washington famously inoculated his soldiers against smallpox. Over a century later, the Supreme Court upheld the right of a state to mandate vaccinations to combat the spread of contagious and deadly disease. “Real liberty for all could not exist,” the court wrote, “under the operation of a principle which recognizes the right of each individual person to use his own, whether in respect of his person of his property, regardless of the injury which may be done to others.”

While an individual certainly has rights against the will of the community, so, too, does the broader community have a right to protect itself from the unbridled will of a minority of its members. Individual rights are not, and never have been, wholly free from restraint “at all times and in all circumstances.” This remains the law of the land today.

As we enter the third year of a global pandemic, most of us are well aware that a primary method of stopping transmission and mutation of a pathogen like Covid-19 is to achieve herd immunity. This occurs when enough individuals are protected against in-



James B. Aird

fection such that a virus can no longer spread. A large majority (approximately 70-95 percent) of a population must be immune to achieve herd immunity, depending on the infectiousness of the agent. We will not be easily rid of this disease unless we all stop contracting it.

Under current doctrine of *Employment Division v. Smith*, there is no Free Exercise violation where a law is neutral and generally applicable, even if the law incidentally burdens religious practice. Religion does not get a pass on laws which we all must follow.

Modern Supreme Court jurisprudence has not overruled *Smith*, but it has muddled the waters. *Fulton v. Philadelphia* requires that when discretion is given to a governmental decision-maker to make exemptions from generally applicable laws, then a religious exemption must be one of the offered exemptions. When the law would grant an exemption to a “comparable secular activity” over a religious activity, an exemption must be given to religious exercise. With proposed Covid-19 vaccination mandates, there is no comparable secular activity which is left unregulated.

It is true that all vaccination mandates include a medical exemption, but the fact that a law may have a medical exemption is not a discretionary exemption to which *Fulton* applies. No government actor — be it the city of Philadelphia, the California Legislature or the federal government — can force a vaccine upon a citizen when it knows the vaccine would cause great physical harm. If the government were to require a citizen known to be at certain medi-

cal risk to nonetheless take the vaccine, they would violate the citizen’s 14th Amendment rights to deprivation of life without due process of law. Here, no government decisionmaker has a choice — a medical “exemption” exists not because the government exercises its discretion, but because the 14th Amendment requires it. A Covid-19 vaccination requirement that only allows a medical exemption is thus a generally applicable law, which has no discretionary exemption process, and allows no religion to circumvent it under the rule of *Smith*.

But as the Supreme Court has recently made clear, *Smith*’s days may be numbered. *Smith* survives primarily because the court’s conservatives do not know what to replace it with. Even in a post-*Smith* world, a religious exemption from a vaccine mandate is not constitutionally required. Prior to *Smith*, a law which imposed a substantial burden on religious exercise could be sustained only if it was narrowly tailored to serve a compelling government interest, or in other words, only if it passed “strict scrutiny.” Though strict scrutiny is a higher standard, it is strict in theory but not always fatal in fact.

A vaccine mandate furthers the compelling governmental interest of public health and safety. “The power of the

state to take steps to prevent the introduction or spread of disease . . . is beyond question.” Because vaccine programs must reach a high level of compliance in the community to be effective, the mandate is as narrowly tailored as it can be.


Furthermore, a requirement that the government must always have a religious exemption for a vaccine (or any other generally applicable health and public safety law) violates the Establishment Clause by giving a benefit to religious citizens that the secular amongst us cannot

enjoy. The Establishment Clause “mandates governmental neutrality between religion and religion, and between religion and nonreligion.” To require that there always must be a religious exemption allows any religion (however newly created and however clearly a sham) to opt out of a public health law to which an atheist “anti-vaxxer” would be forced to comply.

Courts have “an overriding interest in keeping the courts ‘out of the business of evaluating the relative merits of differing religious claims,’ or the sincerity with which an asserted religious belief is held.” If a vaccine mandate exemption is required for any religion, ad hoc “religious groups” could become a law unto themselves, opting out of all


“If a vaccine mandate exemption is required for any religion, ad hoc “religious groups” could become a law unto themselves, opting out of all manner of laws whenever they please.

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manner of laws whenever they please. Such a requirement allows grifters to make a buck by endangering public health. When the disease in question is contagious and lethal, it is a threat to us all which cannot be tolerated.

A majority of the Supreme Court seems to agree that where a law does not allow for discretionary exceptions, the government is not required to go out of its way to create one for religion. In a recent denial of certiorari, only Justices Neil Gorsuch and Samuel Alito would

have heard a case in which the state of New York, responding to myriad (likely contrived) religious exemption requests, removed a religious exemption from its vaccine mandate law altogether. Where the law grants discretion, *Fulton* requires religion be included, but where the law gives no latitude to a government decisionmaker, religion cannot demand an exemption for its own sake.

The Free Exercise Clause affords broad protections for religious practice in the United States. Its protections have

allowed multimillion-dollar companies to exempt themselves from employee insurance requirements and small business owners to discriminate against LGBTQ+ citizens in places of public accommodation. It exempts certain religions from truancy statutes and the requirement of those on unemployment insurance to take a new available job. But a line must be drawn when the religious practice endangers public health by allowing deadly and contagious disease to run rampant. Since the vast majority of the popu-

lation needs to be inoculated to defeat Covid-19 (and future diseases to follow), a carve-out for religious practice is not only constitutionally unnecessary, but a direct threat to the health and safety of every American. *James Aird is a student at the University of Wisconsin Law School. Prior to law school, James worked in real estate to pay the bills before realizing he wanted to work as an attorney. When he's not immersed in reading about the law, he enjoys cooking, traveling and tabletop gaming.*

SECOND PLACE

Hybrid-rights claims and vaccine mandates

FFRF awarded Jacob \$3,000.

By Jacob Stock

It is settled law that religious exemptions for public school vaccine mandates are not constitutionally required. Six states do not offer religious exemptions to vaccine mandates for students beginning school.

Despite multiple challenges, courts have consistently upheld these statutes. Several states recently repealed existing religious exemptions in responses to public health crises, reflecting an understanding of the health risk religious exemptions pose. But lurking in the shadow of this trend toward better protecting students is a threat to states' ability to eliminate religious exemptions. The hybrid-rights theory that emerged in the wake of *Employment Division, Dept. of Human Resources of Oregon v. Smith*. Since *Smith*, circuit courts have split over applying heightened scrutiny to Free Exercise challenges involving other constitutional claims — including parenting rights.

Challenges to school vaccine requirements without religious exemptions necessarily involve the rights of parents alongside claims of religious liberty. Thus, such statutes are at risk of invalidation if courts apply heightened scrutiny in hybrid-rights cases.

PART I

Religious exemptions to school vaccine mandates

States have long enjoyed broad powers to legislate regarding public health. The earliest recognition of states' prerogative to mandate vaccination was *Jacobson v. Massachusetts*. Following closely in *Jacobson's* footsteps was *Zucht v. King*, which upheld a state law mandating vaccination prior to admission to public school in Texas. Currently, every state has some vaccination requirement for children entering public school. All states offer medical exemptions to the vaccine requirement. All but six offer religious exemptions. Parents, nonprofits and religious groups have challenged all but one of



Jacob Stock

the statutes lacking a religious exemption. No challenge to these laws has yet succeeded.

But before thinking school vaccine mandates without religious exemptions are immune from invalidation, a closer look at these decisions may give pause. Courts did not decide any case under strict scrutiny: Instead, *F.E.* and *We the Patriots USA, Inc.* explicitly upheld the mandates under the rational basis test. To be sure, Workman and Brown opined in dicta that the laws under review would hypothetically survive strict scrutiny despite upholding them on other grounds.

Regardless, neither case moved beyond the inquiry of whether public health is a compelling government interest to address whether the mandates were narrowly tailored to that interest. Courts particularly sympathetic to government imposition on religion may deem alternatives such as masking, social distancing, and remote learning as viable less-restrictive means to achieve public health goals and therefore invalidate such mandates as impermissibly burdensome on religious practice.

Of course, this concern would be warranted only if courts apply strict scrutiny when faced with challenges to vaccine mandates lacking religious exemptions. Enter the hybrid-rights theory.

PART II

The hybrid-rights circuit split

Understanding the threat posed by the hybrid-rights theory begins with *Smith*. There, the Supreme Court refused to apply strict scrutiny to a generally applicable criminal law that burdened two individuals' free exercise of religion. Petitioners in *Smith* relied in part on *Wisconsin v. Yoder* for their argument in favor of adopting strict scrutiny. In *Yoder*, the Supreme Court sided with Amish parents who, based on their religion, did not wish to send their children to public school as required by state law. The *Yoder* court held that the parents' Free Exercise rights outweighed the state's interest in mandating school attendance.

Though petitioner's reliance on *Yoder* was unsuccessful in *Smith*, the majority distinguished *Yoder* in a way that has proved challenging for the circuits. The court held *Smith* could be distinguished from "hybrid cases" such as *Yoder*, cases in which the free exercise of religion was burdened along with another constitutional right, and — importantly — cases in which heightened scrutiny might be warranted. One hybrid case the court contemplated involved a burden on both Free Exercise and "the raising of one's children in [particular religious] beliefs."

Since *Smith*, several circuit courts have grappled with how to address hybrid-rights cases. The decisions broadly fall into three categories. The first approach considers the *Smith* commentary regarding hybrid-rights cases as dicta and therefore not binding. The 2nd and 6th circuits have adopted this reasoning. Another approach, taken by the 1st and D.C. circuits, is to apply heightened scrutiny only when the plaintiff can demonstrate they have an "independently viable companion claim" to a Free Exercise claim. Attempting to strike a balance, the 9th and 10th circuits devised a related but slightly more lenient approach. Their solution is to apply heightened scrutiny if a plaintiff shows a companion claim to the Free Exercise challenge has a fair probability of success, short of the near certainty required in the 1st and D.C. circuit approach.

Recall that courts resolved the cases discussed in Part I by applying rational basis review. With such a low bar, it is little wonder the statutes survived challenge. But how would the same or similar statutes do when confronted with a theory accused of being "strict in theory, fatal in fact"? An empirical

review of religious liberty cases subject to strict scrutiny showed the challenged laws fared poorly — only 21 percent survived. To be sure, courts uphold laws against challenges seeking religious exemptions more frequently than against challenges based on discriminatory treatment. Nonetheless, application of strict scrutiny to laws mandating vaccination without religious exemptions poses a serious risk those laws will be struck down. The question remains, though, whether *Smith* demands such a result.

PART III

Resolving the split

From the outset, several courts viewed hybrid-rights with a healthy dose of skepticism. In addition to holding that the mention of hybrid rights in *Smith* was merely dicta, the 2nd and 6th circuits pointed out the incoherency of the theory. Primarily, these courts took issue with applying a different standard of review based on the number of constitutional claims a plaintiff brought. The 2nd Circuit expressed this concern in *Leebaert v. Harrington*: "We . . . can think of no good reason for the standard of review to vary simply with the number of constitutional rights that the plaintiff asserts have been violated."

Unpersuaded by this criticism, several circuits apply hybrid-rights tests that explicitly base the level of review on the number of claims raised. In *Brown v. Hot, Sexy & Safer Prods., Inc.*, the 1st Circuit held a plaintiffs' claim failed because "[t]heir free exercise challenge [was] . . .

not conjoined with an independently protected constitutional protection." Requirements for the quality of the accompanying claim vary by court from near certitude to a fair probability of success. But absent from decisions applying the hybrid-rights theory is an independent justification for its use. Courts applying the theory seem to be making honest attempts to craft workable tests in light of what they view as a requirement from the Supreme Court, all the while aware of the persistent criticism of hybrid-rights claims.

Reliance on a dubious mandate from the Supreme Court is shaky ground for subjecting state laws to the most demanding review. Justice Souter's concurrence in *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. City of Hialeah* echoed some circuits' concerns:

“States have been, and should remain, free from as many unnecessary obstacles when seeking to legislate to protect the health and safety of students.”

er al circuits apply hybrid-rights tests that explicitly base the level of review on the number of claims raised. In *Brown v. Hot, Sexy & Safer Prods., Inc.*, the 1st Circuit held a plaintiffs' claim failed because "[t]heir free exercise challenge [was] . . .

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See Jacob Stock on page 16

Jacob Stock

Continued from page 15

[I]f a hybrid claim is one in which a litigant would actually obtain an exemption from a formally neutral, generally applicable law under another constitutional provision, then there would have been no reason for the court in what Smith calls the hybrid cases to have mentioned the Free Exercise Clause at all.

Justice David Souter’s critique,

though particularly applicable to those tests requiring near certainty of success for a companion claim, extends also to those that merely require a fair likelihood of success for an accompanying claim. Even courts adopting the hybrid-rights theory recognize the danger of “opening the floodgates” to a jumble of claims attacking laws on religious grounds. Given the unstable foundation and incoherence of the hybrid-rights theory, it would be unlikely to survive a challenge in the Supreme Court. Eliminating this approach

would place laws vital to the health and well-being of children out of the easy reach of religious challenges.

PART IV

Conclusion

While the issues addressed here predate the Covid-19 pandemic, the urgency of vaccination has only increased since its inception. Unfortunately, the increased urgency has been matched by increased controversy and efforts to evade vaccination. States have been, and should remain,

free from as many unnecessary obstacles when seeking to legislate to protect the health and safety of students. Thus, as between laws aimed at keeping students safe and parental challenges based on religion, conscience — and the law — dictate the scales be tipped toward the former.

Jacob Stock is a third-year student at the Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law at Arizona State University. Following graduation, Jacob will begin work at the Arizona Attorney General’s Office in the Child and Family Protection division.

THIRD PLACE

Not party to the decision

FFRF awarded Jacob \$2,000.

By Jacob H. Larson

My civics teacher once had us subject each First Amendment right to a “Survivor”-style vote. After summarily axing press, petition and assembly, our choice was between speech and religion. Near unanimously, religion won. It may be unsurprising that so many Bible Belt high schoolers voted like this, but several students (like me) did not belong to an evangelical or charismatic tradition. Perhaps we all understood the importance of a constitutional right to personal, private belief.

Today, vaccine mandates hardly have this level of unanimous support. In the generation-defining Covid-19 pandemic, courts continue to decide which rights to keep and which to axe. Despite recent these rulings, however, religious exemptions from vaccine mandates contravene decades of First Amendment jurisprudence that limits expressions of personal belief when they cause third-party harms.

Free Exercise and third-party harms

Though the First Amendment protects the expression of personal beliefs in speech, assembly, press and petition, circumstances sometimes require a temporary, limited abrogation of these inalienable rights. One such circumstance arises when third parties face risk.

For instance, the government may restrict “well-defined and narrowly limited classes of speech,” including “the lewd and obscene, the profane, the libelous, and the insulting or ‘fighting’ words.” It may similarly convict a public speaker “if he commits acts or make statements likely to provoke violence and disturbance of good order.” Thus, while the Constitution protects content — that is, beliefs themselves — it permits some regulations on how citizens express their beliefs.

Even the First Amendment’s textual right to Free Exercise does not protect religious practices that harm third parties. Such third-party harms may be concrete and realized, or they may be more generalized harms to American society. The Supreme Court first articulated this principle in *Reynolds v. United States*, where it upheld a statute criminalizing bigamy in federal territories. The court held that the government could find bigamy threatening to American society for any number of reasons, and so could outlaw it. It further noted that there, in fact, must be constitutional limits on the right to certain religious practices, or else it would “make the professed doctrines of religious belief superior to the law of the land.” At the very least, the Free Exercise Clause cannot bar the government from preventing human sacrifice.

The link from bigamy to human sacrifice may seem tenuous, but the court has since elaborated upon other third-party



Jacob H. Larson

harms that limit Free Exercise rights. It has held that states may not require employers to honor every employee’s chosen Sabbath day, as this could create “burden or inconvenience” for the business or coworkers. Conversely, it found that the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA) was constitutional because it did not harm “significant interests” of third parties, like the safety of pris-

on officials and other prisoners. It has continued to look to third-party harms in the recently decided *Holt v. Hobb* and *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores Inc.*

Most critically here, however, the doctrine creates a stark difference between free exercise in the public and private spheres. Few would question the constitutionality of personal self-harming religious conduct like fasting. The Supreme Court has likewise found that religious institutions can make internal hiring decisions. But when a religious person or institution steps into the world, when they confront the multitudes of beliefs making up society, then the Constitution equally protects third parties. For example, an Amish farmer cannot be exempted from paying his employees’ Social Security taxes and so deny them a statutory benefit of citizenship. As the court held, “[w]hen followers of a particular sect enter into commercial activity as a matter of choice, the limits they accept on their own conduct as a matter of conscience and faith are not to be superimposed on the statutory schemes which are binding on others in that activity.” In public, we all play by the same rules.

Exemptions as third-party harms

Religious exemptions to vaccine mandates create constitutionally unacceptable third-party harms. These harms are particularly acute given the Covid-19 pandemic. There have been over 75 million

confirmed cases of Covid-19 in the United States, and the virus has killed nearly 1 million Americans. This exceeds the deaths from any war in American history, with a significantly disproportionate impact on people of color. Meanwhile, vaccines are incredibly effective at preventing illness. While over 70 percent of Americans have received at least one dose of the vaccine, only a fraction of hospitalizations are of those who have been vaccinated. President Biden has even gone so far as to call it “a pandemic of the unvaccinated.”

Nevertheless, failure to vaccinate threatens others. Some Americans cannot use vaccines due to underlying age or health conditions, and so face illness unless enough are vaccinated to create “herd immunity.” This is to say, with a large enough vaccinated population, those who cannot be vaccinated remain shielded. But each eligible person who refuses to be vaccinated creates a chink in the armor. Such refusals have already had documented consequences. Before the pandemic, the anti-vaccination movement — including certain religious groups — caused a resurgence of measles, which had long been dormant in the United States. At least one immunocompromised woman died as a

direct result. Religious exemption from a vaccine mandate is thus far from a personal choice.

Religious exemptions in this way involve the public sphere just like similarly unprotected free exercise.

Though attempted mandates have ranged in scope from businesses to schools to the federal workforce, none could be less public facing than an Amish farmer or Mormon family in a distant territory. Any recluse so removed as to avoid the third-party harms of religious exemptions would likely escape the strictures of a vaccine mandate altogether. Just as federal taxation and marriage are institutions that affect large swaths of American society, the unvaccinated come in regular contact with coworkers, neighbors and schoolmates. Furthermore, many Americans pay no federal taxes or do not marry, yet laws remain in place for those who do. The fact that a vaccine mandate is not truly “universal” does not mean that courts or lawmakers can discount the broad third-party harms of religious exemptions across American society.

Judicial review of exemptionless mandates

In short, because religious exemptions to vaccine mandates cause clear third-party harms across American society, neither federal nor state governments are constitutionally required to provide religious exemptions. Governments or private

institutions need not mandate vaccines at all, of course, and perhaps a constitutional exemption could exist for some small, hyper-insular group. However, for the kinds of mandates that exist in practice, courts should apply the third-party doctrine when subjecting the mandate to judicial review. To this end, after establishing that a sincerely held belief has been substantially burdened, Free Exercise challenges require different levels of review, depending on the circumstances. The standard today is rational basis for neutral and generally applicable laws under *Employment Division v. Smith*, but this can increase to strict scrutiny for a variety of reasons.

Despite recent contrary decisions, mandates without a religious exemption should survive any level of judicial review. Though rational basis review is more forgiving, the protections for third parties do not disappear upon reaching strict scrutiny. *Lee* and *Caldor* were decided before *Smith*, when the court applied strict scrutiny to all substantial burdens of Free Exercise. The court developed the *Cutter* factors, which included third-party harms, under the strict scrutiny required by RLUIPA. The principles of the third-party doctrine should therefore apply regardless of the level of scrutiny. They are a core part of the jurisprudence that courts must carefully factor into their consideration of how governments tailor mandates and exemptions.

Conclusion

High schoolers, probably more than anyone, believe they are always right. But it is hard to imagine that even high schoolers would vote for a Free Exercise Clause that leaves them defenseless against others’ harmful acts. More than just game theory, this is a fundamental part of how rights work: “Liberty consists of the freedom to do everything that injures no one else.” And today, as deaths from Covid-19 continue to mount, as diseases like measles spread once more through vulnerable Americans, any anti-vaccine beliefs have a real human cost.

Religious opposition to vaccines is no less costly. First Amendment jurisprudence has traditionally allowed governments to protect Americans lives and society, even when it substantially burdens the free exercise of sincerely held religious belief. This essay has not questioned the sincerity of religious vaccine opposition or whether mandates impose a substantial burden because this does not matter. So long as the third-party doctrine stands, courts should not require religious exemptions to vaccine mandates.

Jacob Larson attends law school at the University of Virginia. Prior to that, Jacob attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. “I love being outdoors, and have run two marathons,” Jacob writes. “I came to law school to pursue a career in government service. I will be working at the IRS after graduation.”

Religion has played a key role in civil wars

By James A. Haught

Faith conflicts have factored in many deadly civil wars. As we recently observe the 30th anniversary of the siege of Sarajevo, a horrendous outcome of just one such instance, here are a few examples.

Yugoslavia

Let's start with the war of which the besiegement of Bosnia's capital became the chief symbol.



James A. Haught

When armed control is removed from a nation, religious hostilities can erupt into violence. That's what happened to Yugoslavia after communist strongman Josip Broz Tito died in 1980. His nation pulled apart along religious lines. In 1991, Slovenia and Croatia, both Catholic, declared independence. Fighting erupted, but subsided after a while. Then, in 1992, Bosnia-Herzegovina (where Muslims are the largest religious group) voted for independence, and a horrible war flared with Orthodox Serbia. Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic called for "ethnic cleansing" to purge Muslims from the region. Slaughter became hideous.

Ironically, most of Yugoslavia had been secular, not highly religious, but the nation quickly aligned into faith groups. Former U.S. House Speaker Jim Wright wrote in the Fort Worth Star-Telegram: "This war is not about land or race or political philosophy. It is about religion. . . . The Slavs are the same race. They look alike, live alike, talk the same language, bleed

the same color. Only their religion divides them."

England

England's horrible civil war in the mid-1600s involved early steps toward democracy, with landed gentry in an incipient Parliament seeking some powers against the "divine right" of King Charles I. But the war also was riddled with religion.

It began when Charles tried to impose a new Anglican prayer book on Presbyterian Scotland. Scots rebelled in the Bishops' War and defeated an army sent by Charles. The king was forced to call a Parliament, which had power to raise taxes, so he could get funds to fight the Scots.

However, the Parliament was full of Puritan and Presbyterian sympathizers unhappy with Charles. The "short Parliament" didn't satisfy him, so he summoned a "long Parliament" to get war money. It was a disaster. Puritans in Parliament resisted so fiercely that civil war erupted between royalists loyal to the king and the Puritan wing in Parliament. Oliver Cromwell became commander of Puritan forces, called "Ironsides," who carried bibles and sang hymns as they lunged ferociously against rival armies. Cromwell defeated Charles, who was beheaded, then slaughtered thousands of Catholics in Ireland, and subsequently became a Puritan Lord Protector (holy dictator) of England. Puritans imposed rigid strictures such as the death penalty for adultery. But their era ended when the Restoration returned monarchy in 1660, with Parliament gaining more powers.

Puritans also brought their intolerance to New England, where they hanged Quakers and "witches," decreed death for blasphemy, and flogged merry-makers. (Old joke: An Australian tells an American, "We were the lucky ones — we got the criminals, you got the Puritans.")

India

After World War II, Britain created Pakistan for Muslims, with India proper remaining a Hindu-majority country. The separation in 1947, however, didn't prevent colossal massacres that killed hundreds of thousands. Mahatma Gandhi himself was assassinated by a Hindu fanatic who thought the "Great Soul" was soft on Muslims.

Sudan

In the Nile Valley south of Egypt, recurring conflict between ruling Muslims in the north and rebellious Christians and animists in the south killed at least 1 million. Britain agreed to free the colonial territory in 1956, but rebellion flared a year before, ensuing for 17 years and killing a half-million. A truce was reached in 1972, but the Muslim president tried to impose brutal Shariah law on the south, and warfare resumed. The war finally subsided in 2011 when South Sudan gained independence.

Armenia

In the rugged Caucasus between the Caspian Sea and Turkey, Armenia became the first Christian nation when its king converted in year 301, a decade before Constantine made it the official church of the Roman Empire. Muslim Turks seized the region in the 1500s and treated Christians as inferiors. Armenians sought help from Orthodox Russia, which triggered the Crimean War in the 1850s. During World War I, Turkey sided with Germany and Armenians rebelled — causing a historic genocide of Armenians. Shortly after World War I, Armenia was swallowed into the Soviet Union, but finally gained independence in 1990. Ever since, Christian Armenia has battled with neighboring Muslim Azerbaijan, mainly over an enclave of Christians living inside the Muslim nation (most recently in 2020).

Lebanon

This lovely Mediterranean nation fell into tragedy in the 1970s after its various religious groups formed their own militias and plunged into civil war. Journalist Mark Patinkin wrote: "Lebanon split by faith. Religions began to form militias. And imagine what hatreds would grow in America if the Protestants formed an army, and then the Catholics, then the Jews, each arming themselves not merely with handguns but with artillery." Years of seesawing combat killed at least 130,000 people and wrecked the beautiful land.

Central African Republic

Pure religious war has been ravaging the landlocked Central African Republic. In 2012, minority Muslims formed a powerful Seleka militia and seized the government. In retaliation, majority Christians created a counterarmy and massacred Muslims. Of the nation's 436 mosques, 417 were destroyed. Ensuing holy war has killed thousands and displaced a million refugees, despite the intervention of U.N. peacekeepers.

As can be seen from these instances, religion has caused or greatly exacerbated civil conflicts through much of history.

James A. Haught is editor emeritus of the Charleston Gazette.



Greater Sacramento Chapter Vice President Barri Babow, right, presents President Judy Saint with a certificate signed by FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker.

Sacramento chapter celebrates 10 years

A speech by author and journalist Katherine Stewart highlighted the 10th anniversary gathering of the Greater Sacramento Chapter of FFRF on March 12.

Each attendee received a one-page handout that summarized 10 years of the Sacramento chapter's proudest legal wins, impressive projects and grant giving.

Chapter President Judy Saint was presented with a certificate from FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker recognizing Judy's service as founder and founding president of the Greater Sacramento Chapter, and congratulating her on "10 'Unsaintly' Years of Secular Leadership and Irreverent Activism."

Keynote speaker Stewart then spoke about "Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism." She detailed the inner workings of the far-right's orchestrated, well-funded efforts to turn the United States into a Christian nationalist country.

"The talk was riveting, and no one stirred the entire 40 minutes that she spoke," wrote Chapter Vice President Barri Babow. A lively Q&A session followed Stewart's speech.

The anniversary event was staffed by 15 volunteers, about whom Saint raved.

"It blows me away how people step up and love to help. No one said no, and some asked how they could help at future events. It makes me swell with pride and appreciation for the love they have for this cause and this chapter."

Babow summed up the anniversary event: "All in all, it was a fabulous celebration, and we look forward to the next 10 years as the Greater Sacramento Chapter continues to educate the public on nontheism and have a positive impact on keeping church and state separate in our community."

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Centenarian: Why I no longer believe in God

By Harry Finkelstein

I am a centenarian who has evolved from someone who was a devout believer in the existence of a supreme being to someone who became a dubious believer and who is now a denier. I mention my age only to highlight that these changes have evolved over a number of years.

My current belief — or rather nonbelief — is based on a number of axioms that to many people are as incontrovertible as the mathematical axiom that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. If I could be convinced that these axioms are true, I would agree that there is a God. But they are not true.

Axiom 1: “Good people are rewarded, and evil people are punished.”

If there were a God, why would this not be true? But one does not have to have lived 100 years to know otherwise. There are good people who have had miserable lives, and evil people who have



Harry Finkelstein

flourished. It is true that many good people are blessed, and some evil people punished, but “some” does not mean “all” or even a significant number.

Axiom 2: “The apple does not fall far from the tree.”

Good people should be blessed with happy, healthy, accomplished children. The fact is that sometimes they are and sometimes they are not. It is equally true that evil people may or may not have happy, healthy, accomplished children. While I have no statistics that either support or disprove this, it should be obvious that not every good person is rewarded with model children, and not every evil person is cursed with children who dishonor them. These blessings, or lack thereof, appear to occur randomly.

Axiom 3: “The bounties of nature should be distributed fairly evenly throughout the world.”

Again, this axiom is insupportable. The United States is blessed with acres and acres of golden grain from sea to shining sea, while many Africans are dy-

ing from drought and starvation. Why is obesity a significant health problem in the United States, while hunger is the norm in other nations? And why do so many children enjoy all the nourishment they require while other children go to bed with empty stomachs and empty dreams? In other words, why would God favor some nations with a superfluity of the Earth’s blessings while depriving others of enough food

or even enough clean water for survival? Why is there such a disparity in the life expectancy of populations in various parts of the world? Why would God favor some people over others?

Axiom 4: In any conflict, “God is on our side.”

We may have prevailed during two world wars because “God is on our side,” but the United States armed forces alone suffered about 400,000 deaths during World War II. If God were instrumental in our victory, couldn’t he have accomplished it without so much death and destruction? If God were on our side, why did we have to incinerate

so many innocent Japanese noncombatants with nuclear bombs? And if God were on our side, couldn’t he have eliminated Hitler and his cohorts without the need for war?

Axiom 5: “You reap what you sow.”

Never-ending life is an oxymoron. No one lives forever, and if we did, the world eventually would run out of the resources needed to sustain life. I’m not sure about taxes, but death is inevitable.

But why do some people live to a ripe old age, generally free of debilitating disease or injury, while others die a painful death at comparatively early ages? More specifically, why would an omnipotent God not have eliminated cancer?

Axiom 6: “God moves in mysterious way, his wonders to perform.”

The Holocaust. Why?

It must be comforting to believe that there is a supreme power ruling the universe, that the fate of nations and their inhabitants does not depend on the whims of nature and imperfect people. Even when I see the casualties of war, famine, pestilence and all the ills that mortals are heir to, I would like to believe in God.

But I can’t.

Harry Finkelstein is a retired federal employee living in Maryland.

Christianity’s God akin to DC Comics’ Superman

By Roger Lindsay

For a period of time in the 1970s, if I had a little extra pocket money (and there wasn’t a new issue of Mad available), I’d buy superhero comic books. I couldn’t afford them all, of course, so I had to pick a few favorites. One usually had to stick with these choices, because superhero comics were basically soap operas that strung you along month to month with unresolved story arcs and cliffhangers.



Roger Lindsay

For some readers, myself included, part of this selection process involved evaluating a particular publisher’s brand of superhero — that offered by Marvel versus that offered by DC Comics. Generally, Marvel superheroes seemed more youthful and socially relevant (Spider-Man, X-Men) while DC superheroes seemed stodgier, more old-school (Batman, Superman).

I chose Marvel, focusing mainly on Spider-Man, who was so popular that Marvel published multiple titles featuring him. Peter Parker (Spider-Man) was young and smart, but had trouble balancing school, dating and a part-time job with crime-fighting and looking after his Aunt May. To me, his limitations and handicaps made him interesting and his battles more challenging. He was, for a superhero, somehow slightly more plausible.

Deep down, I felt that DC’s Clark Kent (Superman), by comparison, had it pret-

ty easy. It was problematic — from a story-telling standpoint, at least — that he was so perfect that he could pretty much solve any problem or do anything using super strength, super speed, heat vision, or maybe just blowing really hard.

Going way back in time, the ancient Israelites, early on, seem to have chosen the more Marvel-esque superhero formula. They gave their god limits and constraints, kept him somewhat local, created Yahweh as, so to speak, Spider-Man. What some now call the Old Testament is suspenseful and episodic; the battles might go either way. Yahweh loses, or loses it, occasionally.

The developers of Christianity fashioned a different god, one firmly in the DC Superman mold: all-powerful and cosmic in scope. And here’s where we run into the problems which spring out of this type of storytelling. For one thing, the New Testament is mostly pretty boring (once you get past some initial drama involving Supergod’s alter-ego, the mild-mannered Jesus Kent), and its conclusion is foregone and final.

But, just as for the writers of Superman comic books, the difficulties of an all-powerful “capital G” God character are even more fundamental. That is, once you create a superhero/deity who can fix everything, you have

to do a lot of theological heavy lifting to concoct a satisfactory explanation for why he doesn’t, or at least why the situation is not a great deal better than it is. Because of Superman’s super powers, his hometown of Metropolis should be an orderly and perfectly static heaven; instead, there’s bank robbers.

Resolving this seems to require plenty of fast talk and changing the subject. Seriously, why are there still criminals



Image by Shutterstock

in Metropolis? Well, Superman can’t prevent all crime in Metropolis because something something kryptonite, or mumble mumble secret identity, or cough Hey! Lois Lane’s been kidnapped again. Come on, surely a real Superman could figure this out!

Similarly, God can’t prevent human suffering — and cannot even prevent an ongoing epidemic of sexual assault in his own church — because something something Satan, or mumble mumble free will, or cough Hey! He works in mysterious ways. Come on.

Superman’s boundless abilities don’t really explain Metropolis as it is, and, likewise, Christianity’s omnipotent God is a good reminder that (paraphrasing Karl Popper, I believe) a theory which claims to explain absolutely everything doesn’t really explain anything.

The paradoxes proliferate: An all-powerful, all-knowing entity who is the first cause and creator of everything and exists everywhere but who is not responsible for evil or suffering? An eternal, perfect, unchanging entity who listens to and actively responds to prayers, often changing his plans or, indeed, changing his mind? An entity who is the direct inspiration for, if not the author of, holy scriptures — “the word of God” — which, accord-

ing to evangelists, should provide moral guidance to all cultures in all periods of history. Yet, this entity’s inerrant “word” is so flexible, so full of loopholes, so subject to various interpretations that it can be used selectively to justify any human activity, from peace to war, from altruism to the hoarding of wealth, from commune to empire?

Bible-based ethical guidance is like a guardrail made of Silly Putty. Christians first decide what they want to do and then are delighted to discover that the bible, read the right way, approves. And, having foreseen all this, their omniscient god does nothing to clarify these paradoxes but only promises eternal torture or infinite reward . . . someday. Super.

FFRF Member Roger Lindsay is a retired public librarian and lives in Minneapolis with his wife.

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.

With Satan, the devil is in the details

By PJ Slinger

“At your highest moment, be careful, that’s when the devil comes for you.”

This is allegedly what Denzel Washington told Will Smith shortly after Smith slapped Chris Rock in the face at the Oscars ceremony on March 27.

So, the devil made him do it?

Now, whether Washington meant the literal devil or was speaking more metaphorically, we’ll never know. However, it is known that Washington is a fervent believer in God, (“I’m a God-fearing man,” he has told The New York Times) so, it’s not out of the question to assume he is also a believer in the literal devil.

In fact, numerous surveys over the past dozen years or so show that between 50–60 percent of Americans believe in



PJ Slinger

the devil as a real entity and slightly more (64 percent) believe in a literal hell. The two kind of go hand-in-hand in religious mythology.

So, let’s say that slightly more than half the people believe in the literal devil and literal hell. To quote the Church Lady from “Saturday Night Live”: “Well, isn’t that special!”

But, what is it about the devil that they believe? I’m no theologian, so I’m not going to suggest I know more about the devil than anyone else. What I do “know” is what I learned at Sunday school as a child and from books, movies and discussions. What I understand about the devil probably isn’t too far off from what most Americans, including Christians, think.

However, as an atheist, I believe in the devil exactly as much as I believe in God — that is, I don’t.

So, what is it that I do know about the devil? Well, it’s a male. I’ve yet to see a female representation of the devil (other than Halloween costumes). He goes by several names, including Satan, Prince of Darkness, Antichrist, Lucifer and Beelzebub, among others. He has horns, hooved feet and a tail, and is often pictured with a thorny trident. He is associated with fear, punishment and immorality and his home base is hell.

In Christianity, the devil is God’s main rival and nemesis. According to many Christians, he’s mentioned right there in the first book of the bible, Genesis. They believe that the serpent who appeared in the Garden of Eden to tempt Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Knowledge was actually the devil.

One origin story says that at the beginning of time, the devil, still then an angel



Image from Shutterstock

named Lucifer, defied God’s wishes and was therefore turned into the devil.

“In punishment for his rebellion, he is cast from heaven together with his mutinous entourage, which were transformed into demons,” according to the “devil” entry in Britannica.

Well, to believers, don’t all of us defy God’s wishes at some point in our Earthly lives? Shouldn’t we all be devils? Or do you have to be an angel first? Or is Satan the devil only because he was the first? (No fair! I wanted to be the devil!)

Since this also happened “at the beginning of time,” who else was around at that point? Was it just God, the devil and the angels hanging out (where?) until God decided to create the universe? What were they doing for all that time? How long between the beginning of time and the beginning of our universe? Was the devil pestering God to make the universe so eventually people would be around for him to tempt? Otherwise, what the devil is he doing with his time?

We also have to assume that God created the devil. I mean, who else has the power to turn someone into a devil? It’s gotta be God, right? But, why would this allegedly all-benevolent being create such evil? (And, again, you can’t say “because God works in mysterious ways.” That’s a cop-out answer — and everyone knows it.) Is it so he can show off his goodness when compared to evil? After all, if there was no evil, how would people even know of such a thing if they lived in an all-benevolent world? Maybe the devil is just a pro-God marketing campaign.

Well, apparently there is a (question-

able) rationale for how an all-benevolent God can create such terribleness.

“Christian theologians have come to this conclusion: If God created the universe, and everything God creates is good, then Satan must have been something good that went bad,” according to Jerry Walls, a professor of philosophy at Houston Baptist University, as reported in an article on LiveScience.

So, yes, that description includes the angel-tuned-devil storyline, but it still doesn’t resolve the whole “evil” question. God’s omnipotence should have known that evil would result from Lucifer’s rebellion.

Many theologians, however, have tried to play down the tale of Satan, saying he’s not a real entity, but rather more of an idea. But, some Christian apologists, including C.S. Lewis, say that the devil’s most heinous trick is to make people believe he isn’t real, and that, therefore, is proof of his existence. Ugh.

That’s like playing a game of hide-and-seek by yourself and claiming, because you’ve looked everywhere and can’t find any other players, that it’s because they are so good at hiding.

So, what is the devil’s job, exactly? Some think he is the caretaker or proprietor of hell. You know, hell, that place where people will burn in agony for eternity, as most Christians believe. Ah, good times.

It is assumed that those who are sentenced to hell have made extremely poor choices in their Earthly life. Murder, rape, stuff like that, right? But, isn’t the devil a proponent of those atrocities, with him being the ultimate evil being? So, why is the devil torturing the souls of those who have done his bidding? Aren’t those his people? Shouldn’t the devil be like, “Yo, Jeffrey Dahmer, my man! You’ve done some good work up there!”

Which brings me to the phrase, “There’s a special place in hell for him.” Excuse my ignorance, but isn’t hell basically just one big cauldron of fire and brimstone? How are the “special places in hell” different from regular hell? Are the fires hotter? “Oh, you were bad, sure, but not as bad as Hitler, so you only have to burn in 1,000-degree heat. Hitler, over there, he’s scooping lava 24/7 in 1,500-degree flames!”

Is the devil an actual physical manifestation, or does he reside solely in souls? From the Genesis story, it’s assumed the devil appeared as a serpent, so he is able

to, at a minimum, create a physical body. Is his physical body present in hell, too? Or does he just live in the minds of the unfortunate beings down there?

But, we “know” that he occupies people’s minds with evil thoughts during their time as living humans, too, so hell isn’t the only place where the devil works. Allegedly the Prince of Darkness can inhabit, much like God, billions of brains at once. That’s a pretty good feat!

Which then forces us to ask: Does the devil have the same powers as God, except for evil rather than good? That would be a true clash of the titans.

Most Christians believe that God is omniscient and omnipotent. But if he’s all that, no other entity can be, including the devil. If you’re omnipotent, that means you are, by definition, all powerful.

For example, let’s say that the all-benevolent God decides that, going forward, no human will ever murder another human. But the devil decides that humans will continue to murder other humans. Only one of these outcomes is possible. If somebody kills another, then clearly God is not omnipotent, or he would have prevented it. Or, if no murders ever happened again, clearly the devil was unable to exert his power, meaning he is not omnipotent.

So, what is it? Is God omnipotent or not? If he is, then why do people even worry about the devil? God can clearly outperform the devil in whatever situation that develops.

And if God is omniscient, as many/most Christians also believe, he then knows exactly what will happen in the future. God knows whether he or the devil will ultimately prevail. But how could the devil possibly prevail if God has more powers? Seems like the game is rigged, again.

It’s true that religions do need a devil, otherwise there’s no “bad guy” to be used as the foil for God’s all-perfectness. Gotta keep filling those church seats and coffers to keep the devil at bay! The devil becomes the scapegoat for believers when something bad happens, because God certainly wouldn’t allow that . . . or would he?

I’ll let Epicurus, from around 300 B.C.E, take it from there:

“Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.

“Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.

“Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?

“Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?”

PJ Slinger is editor of Freethought Today.

Crossword answers

R	E	B	E	L		H	I	T		C	O	D	A			
A	V	I	S	O		A	C	R		M	O	V	E	D		
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I	R	A	N		B	E	R	G		S	H	A	M	E		
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L	O	T	T	E		T	A	R	O		N	I	N	A		
E	K	E	O	U	T		S	P	A	M		A	D	S		
						C	O	O	T		L	I	E			
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T	R	I	A	D		I	R	E		R	A	I	T	A		
H	O	A	R			T	A	R		S	T	E	E	L		

Cryptogram answer

There once was a time
when all people believed in
God and the church ruled.
This time was called the
Dark Ages.

— Richard Lederer

LETTERBOX

‘Freethought Matters’ a Sunday morning treat

What better way to spend a half-hour on Sunday mornings than watching an edition of “Freethought Matters” (situated between religious programming) with Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker hosting an array of interesting guests.

I tune to KCOP Channel 13 in Los Angeles, and particularly enjoyed the show featuring a very impressive and articulate high school student, Max Nibert and FFRF Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott. The federal lawsuit in which Max is one of 11 plaintiffs is a primary reason I strongly support FFRF and its vital work in safeguarding the separation of state and church. The insidious efforts to religiously indoctrinate students in public school settings must be legally challenged whenever and wherever they occur.

California

Thomas Paine statue will need to be protected

Many Americans regard Thomas Paine with virulent antipathy because he never concealed his contempt of Christianity, which he ridiculed with brilliance and wit in his book, *The Age of Reason*.

President Theodore Roosevelt even mistakenly labeled him “a filthy little atheist,” which he certainly was not. Rather, he was among the Deists who believed in a supreme “creator,” but not in Jesus as a god.

With that in mind, I hope that those who select a place for his statue will take precautions to ensure its safety. In any event, although the gift of prophecy is not in my resume, I predict that no matter how well protected it is, some pious Christians will find ways to take vengeance on the image of that “filthy little atheist.”

Let’s not forget how proficient Christians are at destroying vestiges of anyone or anything they hate. Remember their wanton destruction of the Library of Alexandria and other irreplaceable treasures of art and literature from antiquity?

California

A poem for everyone: ‘Where Were Y’all?’

For myriad generations,
More than 150,000 years,
We humans lived, loved and died
Shared smiles and endless tears.
We created gods and goddesses,
Worshiped animals and the sun,
Got tired of a religion?
We’d create another one.
All this time that we existed,
Our deities were true,
So Jesus, Jehovah, Muhammad,
Where the hell were you?
For 150,000 years,
We were here, the human race,
It’s such a puzzling mystery,
You never showed your face.

Florida

March issue worth passing on to friends

I thoroughly enjoyed the March issue of Freethought Today. The articles on Christian nationalism, anti-vaxxing, and debating heaven were well-written

A Daley special




Photo by Bob Elmore

Steve Foulkes, Bob Hunter and Shane Stapley of FFRF’s Metropolitan Chicago Chapter helped install a spring display in Daley Center Plaza on April 14. The FFRF sign was there until April 21 to counter a Catholic Easter display sponsored by the Thomas More Society.

and informative. But my favorite was Ryan Jayne’s essay about his kindergarten daughter’s questions regarding the pledge and Christmas. Every child should be so lucky to have such enlightened parents. I also enjoy reading the member profiles. This is an issue I will definitely pass on to friends.

Wisconsin

FFRF’s efforts are worthy of donation

We have been atheists since the 1940s. I joined FFRF as soon as I learned of your organization. I read every issue of Freethought Today and applaud. I hope you continue to run the Ron Reagan ad on TV. The issue connecting religion to the Jan. 6 insurrection is seldom mentioned in the media, but your articles clarify it.

Please accept a donation for your efforts in memory of my wife, Jo.

Arizona

Ad on TV alerted me to existence of FFRF

Thank you so much for your ad on TV! I didn’t know of your existence before that.

I spent 17 years in the disillusioning process of seeking Episcopal priesthood. I was married to an Episcopal priest for 23 years. My father was a mostly secular Jew and my mother was an Episcopalian.

I’m 62 and working on a book titled, *The Healing Power of Atheism*.

New York

A good Samaritan free from religion

John Kelly (1928–2019) was such a good Samaritan. He was born into Catholicism, then led into Catholic schools before being lured to Catholic priesthood. After hearing and preaching made-up biblical stories for his first 51 years, he eventually saw the light and was able to shed the religious shackles, amply described in Thomas Huening’s biography, *The Quintessential Good Samaritan*. It’s a captivating, informative and thought-provoking piece of out-

standing literature.

As a purebred atheist from a secular country who was allowed to grow up as a freethinker, it is very difficult for me to understand the iron grip scripture-based religion has on such a vast part of the U.S. population, even on many otherwise quite intelligent and well-educated people.

I understand how difficult it may be to untangle yourself from what you’re brought up with as the unquestionable truth, but John Kelly and many others have shown it is possible. The rest of us have always understood that scripture-based religion is all made up. Not even Albert Schweitzer could find a shred of evidence for a historical Jesus, although he set out fairly convinced that he would.

John Kelly shows the rest of us that even someone born into religiosity can be “saved” for a happier and more productive life, for themselves, and others. There’s hope for this world!

California

Mantis artwork should be made into postcards

Just like the Ig Nobel Prizes, “The three stages of mantis belief” in the March issue made me laugh and then made me think. Carla’s artwork is beautiful, and I am writing to suggest printing her mantis triptych as postcards on good paper, either all three panels together on one card, or as a three-card set. I would love to send them to everyone.

If you agree, may I suggest the Latin names be formatted — dare I write it? — canonically, with two names, first starting upper case, and the second lower case (like *Homo sapiens*) — *Mantis religiosa*, *Mantis ambigua*, *Mantis atheosa*.

California

Did ‘spiritual gifts’ help grandma avoid purgatory?

While rummaging through family relics recently, I came across an “Everlasting Gift” folder dated Sept. 28, 1982, which noted that my grandmother had been enrolled by an aunt and uncle on my mother’s Catholic side of the family in the “Salesian Purgatorial Society”

and would “share in various ‘spiritual benefits’ provided by the Salesian Fathers and Brothers.”

My grandmother, who had died about a week earlier, was a hardcore Presbyterian. I guess my aunt and uncle must have assumed she wound up in purgatory, since she was not a Catholic. Poor grandma! I guess if those “spiritual gifts” got her out of purgatory, she must have been very grateful. But we’ll never know, will we?

New York

Darwin Day talk well worth viewing online

The Dubuque Area Humanists hosted Anthony Barnhart, chair of psychological science at Carthage College, who, for our Darwin Day Lecture, spoke on “Science, Deception and Magic.” He explained how superstition comes from the need to control and how we are deceived by others and how we deceive ourselves. He also discussed alternative health remedies. I urge you to watch this excellent video on YouTube at bit.ly/3O0qzLP.

Iowa

FFRF’s outstanding work deserves contributions

I’m happy to make a donation of \$2,000 to FFRF! I’m pleased to be doing this because of the outstanding work FFRF is spearheading in so many areas — and especially because of the terrific leadership. Please look at this contribution as a thank you for your dedication, as well as that of the entire FFRF staff.

You make me proud to be a Lifetime Member of FFRF. I read all of your emailed news releases, and I read Freethought Today from cover to cover. So, for all those reasons and many more, thanks for making FFRF such a smart, active, passionate leader of American atheism.

Georgia

Thanks for taking on Elizabethton crosses

I would like to express gratitude for your foundation raising the issue of the large Christian crosses on city property in Elizabethton, Tenn. It has clearly been an overt symbol endorsing and promoting one religious belief system with no other reasonable purpose, paid for by taxpayers. I grew up in that town and, as a nontheistic person, was always disturbed by that display.

Your organization may also be aware of an organization operating within the middle and high schools called the FCA or “Fellowship of Christian Athletes.” When I attended Elizabethton High School, I witnessed meetings of this group held in the school after classes had been let out at the end of the day. These meetings started with a Baptist Christian prayer and basically consisted of Christian religious discussion.

The group is ostensibly for students participating in school athletics, but anyone was encouraged and allowed to attend. Essentially, it appeared to be a church meeting.

Tennessee

IN MEMORIAM

Sun has set on Diane Uhl, FFRF’s dear friend

Freethought Today is saddened to report the death of Diane Uhl on April 6, 2022. Diane, of Tucson, Ariz., was a longtime member and benefactor of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

Diane, 84, who once named Frank Sinatra singing “I Did It My Way” as one of her favorite things, did it her way. After finding she faced almost total vision loss to the wet form of macular degeneration, she took control of her own fate, using nitrous oxide.

She was born in Milwaukee on June 13, 1937, and raised in the small town of Evansville, Wis., earning her B.A. from Ripon College. She received her Master’s from Northwestern University in speech correction/special education. As she wrote for Freethought Today’s “Meet a Member” column in June/July 2013, she thought she would “save all those children with special needs [but] those children taught me more about life than I ever imagined.”



Photo by Brent Nicastro

Diane Uhl

She spent 33 years teaching in public schools. According to Greg Uhl, her nephew, Diane was an innovator in Chicago schools, introducing Apple computers to students and breaking new ground. “The one action item I took from my Lutheran upbringing that seemed to make sense was the Golden Rule,” she wrote. “I always say they should put ‘She Tried’ on my tombstone (which I won’t have).” Reading Bertrand Russell’s *Why I Am Not a Christian* started her on her path to freethought. By her sophomore year in college, she had rejected religion. She always taught her students, “Show me, prove it!”

She particularly admired activists, such as then-Arizona state Rep. Juan Mendez (now a state senator), who opened up a House session with a freethinking invoca-



Stephen and Diane Uhl were incredibly generous benefactors to FFRF.

tion. Mendez is among the “real people stepping up, not just a number in the ‘Nones’ column of a Pew Research report.” She added, “More power to them.”

She met and married her “best friend,” Steve Uhl, and in 1993, they retired, sold everything, bought an RV and traveled full time to all 49 continental states. The couple first joined FFRF in 1999.

Diane and her late husband gave \$250,000 toward FFRF’s building fund, when FFRF added on five floors to its original two-story building in 2015. The legal wing is named for Diane Uhl, who also purchased the Steinway piano in FFRF’s Charlie Brooks Auditorium. The studio where FFRF’s radio show, TV show and Facebook Live shows are recorded is named the “Friendly Atheist Stephen Uhl Studio.”

Among projects they helped underwrite was an “Out of the Closet” billboard campaign in Tucson and Phoenix.

Diane’s billboard carried her motto, “I respect people for their deeds not their creeds.”

Diane gave \$100,000 this year to FFRF to underwrite the Diane and Stephen Uhl Essay Competition for Law Students, as well as \$25,000 for “Out of God’s Closet” scholarships for freethinking student activists. The title is a nod to Steve’s book, called *Out of God’s Closet: This Priest Psychologist Chooses Friendly Atheism*. Diane personally approved of Elle Harris, author of “Elle the Humanist,” as first recipient of this special \$5,000 scholarship, which will be bestowed at FFRF’s 45th annual convention.

“We had hoped that Diane would be there to personally hand over the scholarship check,” said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. “We are so grateful for everything Diane and Steve did for FFRF, for the freethought movement and for students in their own community. They have done so much good for the freethought community and the world, and their deaths leave a hole.”

After Steve died at age 91 in February 2021, Diane wrote a letter to FFRF as she sat watching “Steve’s final sunset, which I will toast with a glass of wine from our sunlit patio.” She ended the letter by saying, “Steve would close with a big smile and his wish to all of you to ‘Live long, die short.’”

She followed this advice. In her “Meet a Member” reply to the question, “Where I’m headed,” Diane Uhl wrote: “To dust, but I like to think of it as my personal sunset.”



Diane Uhl helped underwrite the “Out of the Closet” billboard campaign in Arizona.

‘Mischief maker’ Ed Scharf dies at ‘43’

I wanted to extend a heartfelt thanks for the kindhearted sympathy card from Annie Laurie regarding the loss of my dad, Ed Scharf. His quick wit, irreverence and passion to push for positive change (mostly by stirring up trouble) was a true inspiration to so many.



Ed Scharf

FFRF meant a lot to him and does to me as well. I was tickled to learn that Jean Frank (my de facto mother-in-law) had become a Lifetime Member in his honor. He turned her onto FFRF, as well, and would give me his Freethought Today copies to pass on to her, which she thoroughly enjoys. He was great at spreading his infectious enthusiasm and the best guy I ever met. Here’s my tribute. Dad would’ve liked it.

Darren Scharf

HEAR YE, HEAR YE!

To all interested parties, let it be known that on the sixth of February in the year 2022, Edwin E. Scharf, Gadfly of Grey Forest, Texas, Dogfather extraordinaire, maker of mischief, and probably the greatest of humans to ever have existed, has decided to pursue his intellectual curiosities and explore the mysteries of the afterlife (or

lack thereof.) In other words (his), he has kicked the bucket, caught the glory train, transcended to other-worldly realms, and also woke up dead. We will let you know if his status changes.

Having opted to only celebrate his birthdays on odd numbered years (he was an odd guy), he lived to the ripe old age of 43. He was known for his eye-rolling jokes and causing trouble everywhere he could, including moonlighting as a state comptroller circuit judge, Green Party congressional candidate, real estate broker, master planner, enthusiastic entrepreneur, nature conservationist, local historian, devout freethinker, ordained minister of the Universal Life Church and much, much more.

Somehow, when he wasn’t busy raising hell alongside his even more impressive wife and partner-in-crime, Irene, he also raised a couple of pretty great kids, Darren (his favorite son) and Lorna (his favorite daughter.) And while normally a stickler for timeliness, in this case he was the last one of his nine brothers and sisters to cross the finish line. Even his beloved Schnauzer, Streudel, beat him by a few years and she wasn’t particularly fast.

His final achievement was earning the self-awarded posthumous title of assistant professor emeritus (with tenure) from Texas State University’s Forensic Anthropology Department for the generous donation of his mortal remains. When asked how he’s doing otherwise, he said, “Other than not being vertical anymore, I could be young, intelligent, wealthy, talented, charismatic, energetic, and effervescent like you . . . but hey, not even one out of 10!”

He asks that any thoughts and prayers be kept to yourself and all donations be directed to the Freedom From Religion Foundation or your favorite animal rescue charity. He is greatly missed.

Love you and like you, Dad!!

Microwave ovens safer because of Allan Eckhaus

FFRF Member Allan Eckhaus died Feb. 6, 2022, at the age of 86 at his home in Chapel Hill, N.C. His wife of 62 years, Naomi, was at his side, as were his children.



Allan Eckhaus

Allan was born in the Bronx in August 1935 to Minnie and Harry Eckhaus. After high school, Allan had his choice of several prestigious universities to attend and chose Massachusetts Institute of Technology over Princeton. He obtained a degree in mechanical engineering.

He met his wife at a singles weekend at Tanglewood in Massachusetts. They were engaged three weeks later and married in three months. They began their life together in Great Neck, N.Y., moving to New Rochelle before they started their family.

As a loyal reader of Consumer Reports magazine, he noticed an ad for an engineer in their appliance division. Something told him that this was just the job for him, utilizing his skills as an engineer and as a writer. He was in charge of testing appliances.

One of his most satisfying accomplishments was his work on the then-new microwave ovens. He found that the door seals were not well designed and leaked radiation. Not having any

data that evaluated a safe radiation level, the magazine declared the ovens “not recommended.” Manufacturers were up in arms and the federal government stepped in. He testified before the FDA, got his picture in The New York Times, and even had a conversation with Walter Cronkite. The microwave standards were subsequently changed.

As a result of that work, he was asked to serve on several FDA panels evaluating medical devices and often traveled to Washington for the meetings.

He thrived at Consumers Union, the publisher of Consumer Reports, ultimately being promoted into management.

Allan retired from Consumers Union in 1996 and he and Naomi moved to Chapel Hill, N.C. There, he was able to give his creativity his full attention. He was an artist who created works of wonderful energy, using acrylic medium and often found objects to produce three-dimensional works.

And not to be forgotten is his enjoyment of working on antique cars. He owned a number of them, beginning with a 1932 Packard called “The Duchess.” As a suitable finale, the first Packard came with a trunk (external) that was falling apart. He carefully disassembled it and used the pieces as templates to create an exact replica. The pieces then got repurposed as a fabulous piece of art which, along with others, has its future waiting for it in a museum.

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, Monterrey 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 (heart of romaine, aged Parmesan, smoked garlic ciabatta croutons with creamy Caesar dressing); seared chicken breast with jalapeno-apricot glaze, melted leek and bacon jam; mascarpone risotto, and mixed cauliflower. The vegetarian option is



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

roasted acorn squash stuffed with vegetables and herb quinoa, 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.

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.

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.

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.	