

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



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'value' of life?**

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Christian nationalism A threat to American democracy

This article first appeared on CNN on July 24 and is reprinted with permission.

By John Blake

Three men, eyes closed and heads bowed, pray before a rough-hewn wooden cross. Another man wraps his arms around a massive bible pressed against his chest like a shield. All throughout the crowd, people wave “Jesus Saves” banners and pump their fists toward the sky.



John Blake

At first glance, these snapshots look like scenes from an outdoor church rally. But this event wasn't a revival; it was what some call a Christian revolt. These were photos of people who stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, during an attempt to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

The insurrection marked the first time many Americans realized the United States is facing a burgeoning White Christian nationalist movement. This movement uses Christian language to cloak sexism and hostility to Black people and non-White immigrants in its quest to create a White Christian America.

A report from a team of clergy, scholars and advocates — sponsored by the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, two groups that advocate for the separation of church and state — concluded that this ideology was used to “bolster,



Photo by Associated Press

A man holds a bible outside the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, during the insurrection.

justify and intensify” the attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Much of the House Jan. 6 committee's focus has been on right-wing extremist groups. But there are plenty of other Americans who have adopted teachings of the White Christian nationalists who stormed the Capitol — often without knowing it, scholars, historians, sociologists and clergy say.

White Christian nationalist beliefs have

infiltrated the religious mainstream so thoroughly that virtually any conservative Christian pastor who tries to challenge its ideology risks their career, says Kristin Kobes Du Mez, author of the New York Times bestseller, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*.

“These ideas are so widespread that any

See Democracy on page 8

Media are finally taking note of this movement

The gloves are off as public officials and political candidates reveal themselves as self-avowed Christian nationalists. And, finally, the mainstream media are paying attention.

It used to just be the Freedom From Religion Foundation and Christians Against Christian Nationalism, an off-shoot of the Baptist Joint Committee, (plus a handful of authors and academics) focusing on the threat of Christian nationalism. FFRF and BJC co-published a damning report earlier this year documenting Christian nationalism's role in the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol.

While Christian nationalism has been present throughout modern history — one only has to look at Manifest Destiny — Rachel Maddow devoted part of a fascinating show in July to the 20th-century political origins of the Christian nationalist movement within the Republican Party. Gerald L.K.

See Media on page 9

Leaving their religion



Photo by Ingrid Laas
Linda LaScola



Photo by Ingrid Laas
Daniel Dennett

A new play about clergy who have stopped believing in God is being brought to the stage in New York City.

The play, “The Unbelieving,” is inspired by interviews with clergy conducted for the book, *Caught In The Pulpit: Leaving Belief Behind*, by philosopher and writer Daniel Dennett and qualitative researcher Linda LaScola. (Dennett and LaScola are both FFRF members.)

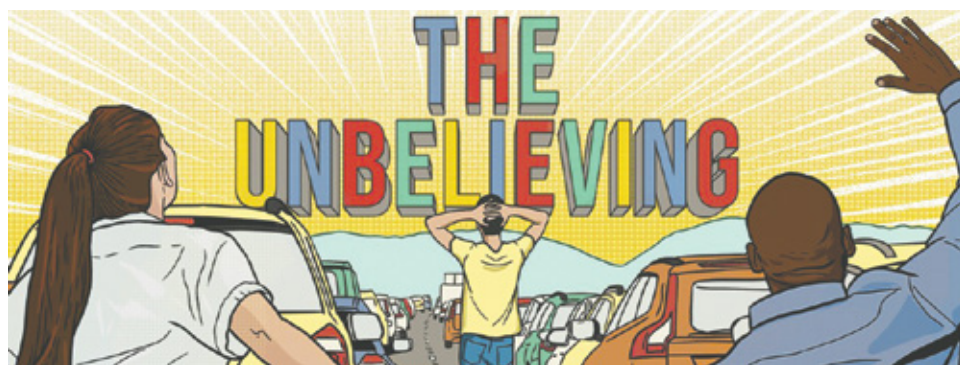
“The play is drawn almost en-

tirely verbatim from Linda's astonishing interviews with these brave, lonely, good folks,” Dennett wrote to FFRF.

Dennett and LaScola are also founders, along with FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, of The Clergy Project, which creates a safe and secure online community of forums composed entirely of religious leaders who no longer hold to supernatural beliefs.

“The Unbelieving,” to be performed at 59E-59 Theater, will run from Oct. 20 through Nov. 20. The play was written by Marin Gazzaniga, directed by Steve Cosson and produced by LaScola and Dennett.

From “The Unbelieving” play's website: “In the classic tale of religious conversion, finding God holds the promise of a life filled with purpose and meaning. But what happens when this trans-



formation occurs in reverse, and a faith you have built your life around begins to fall away? ‘The Unbelieving’ takes a penetrating look into the lives of practicing clergy members — Catholics, Episcopalians, evangelicals, fundamentalists, Jews, Mormons, Muslims — who have stopped believing in God.”

The play will be staged by New York City's acclaimed downtown theater company The Civilians. “The Unbelieving” tells the intimate stories of faith leaders

“showing the struggles, courage and humor of these ‘unbelievers’ as they face the hardest decision of their lives — whether to continue living in secret or to risk everything by telling the truth” the play's website states.

“In the face of Covid and other setbacks, we've been working on getting this on the boards for several years, and now it's really happening,” Dennett writes.

For tickets or more information, go to bit.ly/3oD1wK3.

Ann McCulloch was longtime teacher

FFRF Lifetime Member Ann Pogson McCulloch, age 79, died on July 5 after a long illness. Ann was born in Niagara Falls, N.Y., on Feb. 19, 1943, the daughter of James McCulloch and Verna Mae Pogson. Ann graduated from Alfred University in 1965 and taught high school social studies at Albion High School until her retirement.

Ann was also employed at Genesee Country Museum in Mumford, N.Y., in the art gallery for 20 years and was a staunch supporter of the mission of the Genesee Country Museum. For many years, Ann was active in the Genesee County Democratic Party and was elected and served a term on Batavia City Council. Ann also was a supporter of the Batavia Cemetery Association, FFRF, and was an active member of the Rochester Area Vegan Society. As

a diabetic and a kidney transplant patient, Ann understood the benefits of a plant-based diet, especially for diabetics and for those with the difficulties of a chronic illness.

In her later years with her close friend, Walter McBurney, Ann traveled to various places for fun and to follow her interests including Madison, Wis., San Francisco, Washington, D.C., Roanoke, Va., Boston, and elsewhere. She also traveled to Scotland to explore her family heritage and to the Galapagos islands and elsewhere to explore the many wonders of the world. Ann loved to play bridge and was very well-liked at her residence, St. Ann's at the Greens in Le Roy.

Memorials may be made to the Freedom From Religion Foundation or to Rochester Lifestyle Medicine.

IN MEMORIAM



Walter J. McBurney and Ann McCulloch

Meeting Ann changed my life

By Walter J. McBurney

Ann McCulloch was on the Batavia, N.Y., City Council in 1999. At that time, Ann publicly voiced objection to the city about a nativity scene at City Hall. I heard about the controversy and contacted FFRF about the situation. FFRF responded with a complaint. The local newspaper reported on it and the publicity resulted in a public uproar for months after. The following year, the nativity scene was moved to private property. Some years later, Ann was also involved in the “Angel in the Park” controversy in Genesee County, N.Y., that

also caused a public uproar. Because of the nativity scene at City Hall, I met Ann, which changed my life!

“Our Story” appeared in Free-thought Today in 2007.

Going forward, I will miss Ann terribly, but, thanks to FFRF and what I learned as a freethinker, I can be grateful for the wonderful experience I’ve had knowing Ann. It makes me think and be grateful that years ago I was fortunate to see Dan Barker on the Phil Donahue show and thus discover what was then a small but energizing powerhouse that has become FFRF. This whole experience has truly been amazing.

OVERHEARD

The right pretends that ending Roe returns abortion to the democratic process, but Roe’s demise was made possible by democracy’s erosion.

Michelle Goldberg, in her column, “Lessons from the terrible triumph of the anti-abortion movement.”
The New York Times, 6-28-22

This is a court unafraid of the electorate and unashamed of showing its hand. The emperor does not care that he wears no clothes.

Tressie McMillan Cottam, in her column “What the reversal of Roe means for women’s work.”
The New York Times, 6-29-22

Christian nationalism, while pervasive and long-standing, cannot be normalized. I think Christians, who continue to make up a majority of Americans, have a special responsibility to step up at this critical moment to reject Christian nationalism.

Amanda Tyler is the executive director of Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty.
CNN, 7-27-22

The stench of illegitimacy emanating from the court only grows stronger, the need for change more urgent.
Columnist Pamela Paul, in her column, “If only Roberts would retire.”
The New York Times, 7-10-22

It offends me to see sanctimonious public prayer in any circumstance — but a coach holding his players hostage while an audience watches his piety makes my skin crawl.
Novelist Anne Lamott.
The New York Times, 7-11-22

I don’t believe in man-made religions. I don’t believe in man-made gods.
Taika Waititi, director of “Thor: Love and Thunder.”
Wall Street Journal, 7-12-22

[Republicans had “fixed” the Supreme Court] with a few justices seated by an autocratic president. They behave as theocrats.
Rep. Madeleine Dean, Democrat of Pennsylvania, quoted in an article titled, “House passes two bills seeking to ensure access to abortion.”
The New York Times, 7-15-22

When states are led by zealots, many of the people who live there are governed by laws they vehemently oppose. And with no help coming from the U.S. Supreme Court for the foreseeable future, we now have a country in which the citizens of red states don’t have the same rights and civil liberties as the citizens of blue states.
Margaret Renkl, in her column, “‘Stay and fight’ isn’t so easy when a red state puts your child at risk.”
The New York Times, 7-14-22

The reality is that it’s not going to be Muslim coaches praying from the field or Jewish teachers reading from the Torah. The reality is that it’s going to be Christians who take advantage of this ruling and Christianity that is introduced into schools.
Caroline Mala Corbin, professor of law at the University of Miami School

of Law, in describing the practical effects of the Kennedy v. Bremerton School District ruling by the Supreme Court in June.
Washington Post, 7-15-22

I am back and stunned that Ireland and the United States have traded places. Ireland leaped into modernity, rejecting religious reactionaries’ insistence on controlling women’s bodies. America lurched backward, ruled by religious reactionaries’ insistence on controlling women’s bodies.
Once, Ireland seemed obsessed with punishing women. Now it’s America.
Maureen Dowd, in her column “Irish eyes aren’t smiling.”
The New York Times, 7-16-22

The [Supreme] court is facilitating a movement many fear is a threat to American democracy — a concept known as Christian nationalism that asserts America is a nation by and for Christians alone.
Dave Zweifel, editor emeritus, in his column “Court rulings on religion put us on a slippery slope.”
The Capital Times, 7-20-22

It feels to me that the churches in this area are no longer true Christian churches. They’ve morphed into something that’s completely unrecognizable. And I don’t think a lot of people know that they’ve been radicalized. . . . Something has happened to these people. I think it’s Fox News. I think it’s social media, causing division among people. And they’re using Christianity as a means to divide people.
Noah Jones, quoted in the article, “Christian nationalism drove these people out of their churches.”
Vice.com, 7-18-22

Unhappy with what much of the country believes, the court’s right wing chooses to believe what it would like and foists the results on the rest of us. Just like Coach Kennedy, they’re out to proselytize.
Pamela Paul, in her column “In the face of fact, the Supreme Court chose faith.”
The New York Times, 7-18-22

There is another norm, too, one that has for too long restrained the rest of us from calling out the pervasive role that religion is playing on today’s Supreme Court. In recognition that it is now well past time to challenge that norm, I’ll take my own modest step and relabel Dobbs for the religion case that it is, since nothing else explains it.
Columnist Linda Greenhouse, describing how Roe v. Wade and Dobbs were not legal decisions, but rather religious ones, in her column “Religious doctrine, not the Constitution, drove the Dobbs decision.”
The New York Times, 7-22-22

I hope the Democrats are sufficiently radicalized that they reform the court, expand it and make our podcast obsolete. But I’m not very optimistic.
Attorney Michael Liroff, one of three attorney hosts of “5-4,” a podcast about “how much the Supreme Court sucks,” which endorses court reform to balance the high court.
The New York Times, 7-26-22

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

October 28-30

Reserve your spot now for FFRF’s convention!

Each day brings us one day closer to the always entertaining FFRF convention! This year’s convention in San Antonio will feature awesome speakers, FFRF award winners, great meals, late-night treats, a “clean” money drawing, and of course, the opportunity to interact with other like-minded people.

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

This year’s theme is “DO Mess with Texas,” a state that has become ground zero for theocratic policymaking.

Headliners include author **John Irving**, who will give the keynote Saturday night, and comedian/actor **Julia Sweeney**, who will deliver the keynote on Friday night.

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

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

Irving, the bestselling award-winning 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.

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

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

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

Another “Champion of the First Amendment” will be Professor **Anthea Butler**, author of *White Evangelical Racism*. She is associate professor of religious studies and African studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Butler’s research and writing spans African American religion



The outdoor terrace at the Hyatt Regency Riverwalk in San Antonio overlooks the famed Alamo.

and history, race, politics, evangelicalism, gender and sexuality, media and popular culture.

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

The Richard & Beverly Hermen \$5,000 Student Activist Award will go to **Max Nibert**, the brave 18-year-old Huntington (W.Va.) High School student who helped organize a walkout after the school held Christian-themed assemblies in the public school. He is now principal student plaintiff in FFRF’s ongoing federal lawsuit. Also appearing will be 17-year-old activist **Will Larkins**, a nonreligious student who received an FFRF activist award for becoming a national figurehead in testifying against Florida’s “Don’t Say Gay” bill and leading a walkout at his high school.

As a special musical treat, “Godless Gospel” — a collaboration between artistic producer Andre Forbes and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker — will debut. The distinguished singers include **Candace R.M. Gorham**, author of *The Ebony Exodus Project*, **Tahira Clayton**, a New York City jazz vocalist who also belts out gospel, **Rogiérs Fibby**, president of Black Nonbelievers of DC, **Cynthia McDonald**, an activist with Freedmen of Chicago, **DeAngela Morant**, of Florida, and **Mandisa Thomas**, president of Black

Nonbelievers. They will also participate in a panel discussion on African American nonbelievers.

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

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

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

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

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

Register online at ffrf.org/convo-2022.

Convention Schedule*

THURSDAY, OCT. 27			
4 – 6 PM Pick up check-in materials Complimentary appetizers & cash bar			
FRIDAY, OCT. 28			
8 AM Check-in re-opens & stays open			
9 AM Welcome			
Die Gedanken Sind Frei Dan Barker			
Welcome Attendees Lisa Strand, Director of Operations			
Year in Review Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF Co-Presidents			
Nothing Fails Like Prayer Award			
9:45 AM “Do Mess with Texas” Val Benavidez, President of Texas Freedom Network			
10:15 AM “Alpha God” Hector Garcia			
10:45 AM Break			
11 AM Clarence Darrow Award Jim Hightower			
11:45 AM Book signings Break			
12 – 2 PM Lunch break with optional activities			
12 – 12:30 PM Pick up optional box lunches			
12:30 PM Two concurrent workshops			
“On Death, Dying, Disbelief” workshop Candace Gorham			
“What you can do to support abortion rights” workshop Barbara Alvarez			
1:30 – 2 PM Break			
2 – 3:15 PM Legal Legislative Lobbying Reports			
3:15 PM Freethinkers of the Year Daryl Cobranchi, Parkersburg court victor			
3:30 PM Student Activist Honorees Will Larkins, Max Nibert			
4 – 4:15 PM Break			
4:15 – 5:15 PM Black Activist & Nonbelief Panel Rogiérs Fibby, Andre Forbes, Candace Gorham, Cynthia McDonald, DeAngela Morant and Mandisa Thomas			
5:30 – 7 PM Optional Dinner Buffet Break			
7 PM Avijit Roy Courage Award Ensaf Haidar on behalf of Raif Badawi			
7:30 PM Julia Sweeney			
8:15 PM Godless Gospel Dan Barker, Rogiérs Fibby, Andre Forbes, Candace Gorham, Cynthia McDonald, DeAngela Morant, Steve Phelps and Mandisa Thomas			
9:15 PM Cake and beverage reception			
SATURDAY, OCT. 29			
8 – 9:30 AM Optional Nonprayer Breakfast “Moment of Bedlam”			
9:30 AM Debut Out of God’s Closet Student Scholarship Award Elle Harris			
9:45 AM Student Essay Winners			
10:15 AM Freethought Heroine Award Alice Greczyn			
11 AM Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Daniel Mach on behalf of ACLU			
Book signing Break			
12 – 2 PM Lunch break on your own			
Chapter lunch			
2 PM Champion of the First Amendment Award Anthea Butler			
2:30 PM Champion of the First Amendment Award Nebraska State Senator Megan Hunt			
3:00 PM Forward Award Amy Hagstrom Miller			
3:45 PM Book signing for Anthea Butler Break			
4:15 PM “Ask an Attorney” Q&A with FFRF attorneys			
6:30 PM Optional Banquet Dinner			
8 PM Drawing for Clean Money			
8:30 PM Emperor Has No Clothes Award John Irving			
SUNDAY, OCT. 30			
9 AM Membership Meeting Open to all current FFRF members			
11 AM State Representatives Meeting Adjourn by Noon			
*(Schedule is subject to change)			

Freethought Today Cryptogram

AZ AVXXFQT USFCYXVB DFAS ASV FKGJV ZQ
SVCC, AZ UZBOFYVX DZKVB GB FBQVXFZX
UXVGAFZB — FO ASGA JZZY QZX ASV DZXC?
— USXFOAZHSVX SFAUSVBO

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 25.

Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12	
13						14				15				
16						17				18				
	19					20			21	22				
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44				45		46				47				
48					49		50			51		52		
				53		54			55		56			
	57	58	59					60				61	62	
63						64	65			66				67
68						69				70				
71						72				73				

Answers on page 25

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

- Across

1. Like beer at a kegger (2 words)

6. Bo Peep’s follower

9. Silly talk

13. There you are!

14. Salmon on a bagel

15. Brownish gray

16. Be a pest

17. Type of resort

18. Slide to open

19. *Irreverent “Lawrence of Arabia” actor

21. *Freethinking author of “The Call of the Wild”

23. Common infectious disease

24. Be inclined

25. Like Billy Bob Thornton’s Santa character

28. Initial bet, in poker

30. Wiped out

35. Done after you sow?

37. Attention-getting interjection

39. Santa Anna’s siege site

40. Aquarium show star

41. Advised, in the olden days

43. Mr. ____ or ____ Xtra, Coca Cola product

44. Neopagan religion

46. Exude

47. Back wound, possibly

48. Accurately and cleanly
- Down

1. Lab eggs

2. Unacceptable, to a baby

3. Windshield option

4. Cool and distant

5. DJ’s bribe

6. “Or ____?”

7. Stir fry pan

8. Napoleon’s time on Elba

9. Marching performers

10. Anis-flavored aperitif

11. Tell a tale

12. In the know

15. Arctic plain
20. Like 1969 landing

22. “____ Mississippi, two...”

24. Started a hole, in golf (2 words)

25. *Ketanji ____ Jackson

26. Bird of prey’s nest

27. Capital of Bangladesh

29. *____cracy, or rule of priests

31. European mountain range

32. Says, archaic

33. Imprison

34. *Jackson Women’s Health’s 2022 opponent

36. Warsaw ____

38. Selection of small dishes, in a Middle Eastern restaurant

42. Indian metropolis

45. Even though

49. Pro vote

51. Tapeworm

54. Court order

56. Arm cast holder

57. Underwater “nose”

58. Capri, e.g.

59. Ponce de ____

60. Captured in a game

61. Deity, in Sanskrit

62. Do like Ella Fitzgerald

63. Old horse

65. Fake news

67. Before, poetically



Robert and Helen Phillips around the time of his 83rd birthday.

Robert Phillips invented the ubitron

The following is from FFRF’s deep catalog of “Freethought of the Day” entries.

On Sept. 27, 1929, scientist and inventor and FFRF Member Robert Matthews Phillips was born in Arcadia, Calif., the fourth of five children of Annette (Matthews) and Edward Ashley Phillips. One month later, stocks started their deep decline, ushering in the Great Depression.

His father was an economics professor at the University of Southern California, where he met Phillips’ mother, who was majoring in language and later taught high school Spanish before becoming a stay-at-home mom. Just as the Depression loomed, his father was terminated at the insistence of the alumni association for giving deservedly low grades to academically underperforming athletes, threatening their football eligibility.

The family subsisted on the proceeds from a chicken/egg ranch and an acre of land devoted to growing fruits and vegetables. “My mother was a devout Methodist and my father was a luke-warm Presbyterian,” Phillips recalled. “She would read passages from the bible to us before we went to sleep. By the tender age of 7, I was convinced that these bible passages were based on fiction.” But overall, despite the economic challenges, his childhood was quite happy.

The family’s prospects turned positive after his father went to work for the Internal Revenue Service and Phillips was able to enroll after high school at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena. He graduated from Caltech in 1952 with a B.S. in electrical engineering and joined General Electric’s advanced engineering program in Schenectady, N.Y., where he met Helen Cascio. They married in 1957 and have three daughters: Laura, Carol and Roben. They celebrated their 65th anniversary in 2022.

Phillips had transferred to GE’s microwave lab division in Palo Alto, Calif., in 1956. He invented the ubitron a year later, a vacuum tube that was the most powerful microwave amplifier of its time. In recognition of his pioneering work, he received the Free-Electron Laser Prize in 1992.

Today’s free-electron lasers employ the same basic principle as the ubitron. They produce powerful electromagnetic radiation used to explore the dynamics of chemical bonds, understand photosynthesis, analyze how drugs bind with targets and create warm, dense matter to study how gas planets form.

His career continued with research and management positions at GE, Varian and Eimac. He started a solar products company called Solartronics in 1975 and helped develop Star Microwave in 1991. In the mid-1990s, he joined the Stanford Linear Accelerator operated by Stanford University in Menlo Park, Calif., as a researcher. He retired there in 2005.

“There is so much to yet to discover, and I am perplexed and frustrated by religion, which holds humanity back from its potential to evolve and to discover by clinging to improbable stories that deny evolution and so many observable and verifiable truths,” Phillips wrote to FFRF in a July 2022 email at age 92.

— Compiled by Bill Dunn

To read FFRF’s “Freethought of the Day,” go to ffrf.org/day.

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: D => W .

Lead Us Not Into Penn Station
Provocative Pieces

By Anne Gaylor

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

—Published by FFRF. 80 pages / PB

Buy it from FFRF online
@ ffrf.org/shop

IN THE NEWS

Kansas votes to preserve abortion rights

Kansas voters on Aug. 2 resoundingly decided against removing the right to abortion from its state Constitution, a huge victory for the abortion rights movement in a strongly conservative state.

The defeat of the referendum was the most tangible demonstration yet of a political backlash against the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark decision that had protected abortion rights throughout the country. The decisive margin — 59 to 41 percent — came as a surprise.

“The voters in Kansas have spoken loud and clear: We will not tolerate extreme bans on abortion,” said Rachel Sweet, the campaign manager for Kansans for Constitutional Freedom, which led the effort to defeat the amendment.

Registered Republicans far outnumber Democrats in Kansas — and abortion rights activists made explicit appeals to unaffiliated voters and center-right voters. In interviews last week in populous Johnson County, Kan., a number of voters said they were registered Republicans but opposed the amendment — a dynamic that almost certainly played out across the state, given the margin.

Massachusetts 7th state to end child marriage

Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker on July 28 signed a law that raises the legal age for marriage to 18, with no exceptions, ultimately ending child marriage in the state. The law went into effect immediately.

“This is a huge win for children in Massachusetts, which is now the seventh state to end child marriage by setting a minimum age of 18, no exceptions,” said Alex Goyette, Senior Public Policy Associate at the Tahirih Justice Center.

The state recorded nearly 1,200 marriages involving children under 18 between 2000 and 2018, including some as young as 13, according to data from the Department of Public Health.


“With this law, Massachusetts has gone from one of the least protective states in the country, setting no minimum marriage age by statute, to a true leader in the movement to end child marriage,” Goyette said. “This progress is a testament to the years of hard work done by advocates, legislators, and most importantly survivors, and sends a message to every other state that now is the time to end child marriage.”

WHAT ARE YOU MISSING?


FFRF offers much more than just **Freethought Today** for news, information & lively banter about freethought & state/church separation.

Check out these other offerings!

- Ask an Atheist online weekly show
ffrf.org/ask-an-atheist
- Freethought Matters TV weekly show
ffrf.org/freethought-matters
- Freethought Now blogs
freethoughtnow.org
- Freethought Radio weekly show
ffrf.org/radio
- FFRF press releases
ffrf.org/releases
- FFRF action alerts
ffrf.org/action
- Freethought of the Day
Daily online calendar of famous freethinkers
ffrf.org/day



Court rulings discussed (or disgust!)



OnlySky @onlyskymedia · 5h
We're so thrilled to have these guests with us tonight, chatting live about all the recent #SCOTUS rulings from a secular perspective. What does this m...

FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert, top left, and FFRF Attorney Liz Cavell, bottom left, joined American Humanist Association's Legal Director and Senior Counsel Monica Miller, upper right, for a discussion of the recent Supreme Court rulings in a virtual event on OnlySky Media on July 18. OnlySky's Chief Impact Officer Sarah Levin, bottom right, was the moderator. The three attorneys also host the new "We Dissent" podcast.

Gen Z women less religious than men

In the United States, young women are less likely to identify with religion than young men, according to a new Pew Research Center poll. Among those aged 18-25, 49 percent of women are “Nones,” compared to 46 percent of men.

While the difference between men and women identifying as Nones doesn't disappear until those born in the 1990s (today's 30-year-olds), the gender gap in church attendance has closed for earlier generations, too.

For people born as early as 1973 (in their late 40s today), men and women are equally likely to say they never go to church.

Survey data from October 2021 found that among those born in 1950, about 25 percent of men identified as atheist, agnostic or nothing in particular, compared to 20 percent of women of the same age. That same five-point gap is evident among those born in 1960 and 1970, as well.

Fundamentalism, brain damage found to be linked

A new study published in the journal *Neuropsychologia* has shown that religious fundamentalism is, in part, the result of a functional impairment in a brain region known as the prefrontal cortex. The findings suggest that damage to particular areas of the prefrontal cortex indirectly promotes religious fundamentalism by diminishing cognitive flexibility.

Religious beliefs differ from empirical beliefs, which are based on how the world appears to be and are updated as new evidence accumulates or when new theories with better predictive power emerge. But religious beliefs are not usually updated in response to new evidence or scientific explanations. They are fixed and rigid, which helps promote predictability and coherence

to the rules of society among individuals within the group. Fundamentalist groups generally oppose anything that questions or challenges their beliefs or way of life.

IRS says Family Research Council a church group

The Family Research Council, a right-wing policy think tank and political pressure group, is now a church in the eyes of the IRS, according to ProPublica.

The FRC filed an application to change its status to an “association of churches,” a designation commonly used by groups with member churches like the Southern Baptist Convention, in March 2020. The agency approved the change a few months later.

The FRC is one of a growing list of activist groups to seek church status, a designation that comes with the ability for an organization to shield itself from financial scrutiny.

Once the IRS blessed it as an association of churches, the FRC was no longer required to file a public tax return, revealing key staffer salaries, the names of board members and related organizations, large payments to independent contractors and grants the organization has made.

On Aug. 2, Congressional House Democrats asked the IRS to review the tax-exempt status as the change “strains credulity” because the group operates primarily as “a political advocacy organization.”

Pope apologizes for abuses of Indigenous

Pope Francis on July 25 apologized to Canada's Indigenous community for the role the Catholic Church played in overseeing decades of abuse at some of the nation's residential schools. The schools, which were run by both churches and Canada's federal government, removed about 150,000 Indige-

nous children from their families — and used hunger, sexual violence and religious indoctrination to forcibly assimilate the students.

The Catholic Church has reportedly only paid \$1.2 million of its share of reparations to survivors (as of April), despite operating 70 percent of Canadian residential schools and agreeing to pay \$25 million Canadian dollars to compensate survivors.

Ark Encounter ticket sales down in June

Attendance at Ark Encounter had a slight downturn this past June compared to the same time period last year, and the numbers are significantly lower than they were before the pandemic, according to a report by Hemant Mehta on his OnlySky blog.

Ark Encounter had 102,639 paying visitors in June, which is lower than the 109,694 it had last June, and much lower than the 124,230 it had in June of 2019, before the pandemic.

The Ark's parent company, Crosswater Canyon, received between \$1 million and \$2 million from the Paycheck Protection Program. And founder Ken Ham also raised more than \$1 million in a separate fundraiser to offset Covid-related losses.

The attendance figures are much smaller than the 1.4 to 2.2 million visitors that Ark Encounter's parent company predicted it would be pulling in several years ago.

Christian mission ousted from reservation

On July 22, the Oglala Sioux tribe issued a statement demanding that the Jesus is King Mission leave the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota after pamphlets were distributed that promoted that Jesus, not Tunkasila, is the “true god.”

“The Jesus is King Missionary was found distributing material that literally demonizes the Lakota culture and faith,” said the Oglala Sioux in a statement. “This is unacceptable and completely disrespectful. Hate has no place on Oglala land. . . . Thus, President Kevin Killer and the council demand that Missionary Matthew Monfore and the Jesus is King Mission leave the Oglala Lakota Sioux Nation immediately and cease any further hate speech actions.”

Report: Taliban abuses, limits freedom of women

Women in Afghanistan have faced an onslaught of violence and human rights abuses since the Taliban's return to national power a year ago, according to a new report by Amnesty International.

Shortly after sweeping into Kabul in August 2021, the Taliban offered assurances that it would respect the rights of women, but journalists and activists quickly questioned that narrative and began to amass evidence of abuse.

The 98-page report reveals the extent to which the Taliban has limited the freedoms of women and girls by imposing harsh, arbitrary, punishments — from forcibly detaining women for appearing in public without a male chaperone, to physical and psychological torture in confinement.

FFRF NEWS



‘Freethought Matters’ fall season begins!

Starting on Sunday, Sept. 3, and airing in 13 cities, the new season of FFRF’s lively weekly TV show “Freethought Matters” begins.

The first episode features an entertaining interview with pithy Texas iconoclast Jim Hightower (who will also be speaking at FFRF’s national convention in San Antonio in October).

Other timely guests include Sam Perry, co-author of the new book, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*. Professor Anthea Butler, author of *White Evangelical Racism*, and *Power Worshipers* author Katherine Stewart, also warn about the growing dangers of White Christian nationalism. Chicago Law School Professor Geoffrey Stone, who clerked for Justice Joseph Brennan, critiques the Supreme court’s reversal of *Roe v. Wade* and recounts the history that led up to *Roe*.

For a lighter change of pace, “Freethought Matters” co-hosts Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor interview actress Randa Black, winner of FFRF’s “Nothing Fails Like Prayer” contest for her freethought invocation before a Florida city.

- “Freethought Matters” airs in:
- **Chicago**, WPWR-CW (Ch. 50), Sundays at 9 a.m.
 - **Denver**, KWGN-CW (Ch. 2), Sundays at 7 a.m.
 - **Houston**, KIAH-CW (Ch. 39), Sundays at 11 a.m.
 - **Los Angeles**, KCOP-MY (Ch. 13), Sundays at 8:30 a.m.
 - **Madison**, Wis., WISC-TV (Ch. 3), Sundays at 11:00 p.m.
 - **Minneapolis**, (Ch. 45, Digital

- Channel 5.5), Sundays at 9:30 a.m.
- **New York City**, WPIX-IND (Ch. 11), Sundays at 10:00 a.m.
- **Phoenix**, KASW-CW (Ch. 61, or 6 or 1006 for HD), Sundays at 8:30 a.m.
- **Portland, Ore.**, KRCW-CW (Ch. 32), Sundays at 9 a.m. Comcast channel 703 for High Def, or Channel 3.
- **Sacramento**, KQCA-MY (Ch. 58), Sundays at 8:30 a.m.
- **San Francisco**, KICU-IND (Ch. 36), Sundays at 10 a.m.
- **Seattle**, KONG-IND (Ch. 16 or Ch. 106 on Comcast), Sundays at 8:00 a.m.
- **Washington, D.C.**, WDCW-CW (Ch. 50 or Ch. 23 or Ch. 3), Sundays at 8 a.m.

Please tune in or record according to the times given above regardless of what is listed in your TV guide (it may be listed simply as “paid programming” or even be misidentified). And spread the word to freethinking friends, family or colleagues about a TV show, finally, that is dedicated to providing programming for freethinkers!

For those who don’t get a chance to view it live on television, all episodes are available to watch on FFRF’s YouTube channel or through FFRF’s website at ffrf.org/news/freethought-matters. (You can find it under the “News” category and then under “Videos.”)

The intent is to introduce communities to leading freethought authors, thinkers and activists in a non-threatening and positive way. You can also receive notifications when FFRF posts new episodes of “Freethought Matters” by subscribing to FFRF’s Youtube Channel.

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

FFRF, others: New rules needed for faith groups

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is part of a coalition that is urging the Biden administration to implement new regulations for funding of faith groups.

Faith-based organizations should not be allowed to take government funds and then place religious litmus tests on whom they hire, whom they serve, or which of the required services they will provide, the Coalition Against Religious Discrimination asserts in a recent letter to the Biden administration.

“The Trump administration-instituted rules make it harder for people to get the services they need and undermine the effectiveness of government-funded programs,” the letter states. “That’s why the coalition is urging the Biden administration to restore critical protections for program participants and to make certain that the regulations adhere to longstanding religious freedom principles.”

The Coalition Against Religious Discrimination was formed in the 1990s to monitor legislative and regulatory changes affecting government partnerships with religious and other nonprofit social service providers, and, in particular, to oppose government-funded religious discrimination. The American Civil Liberties Union, American Humanist Association, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Center For Inquiry and People For the American Way are some of the other members.

Giving participants notice of their

rights is critical to protecting their religious freedom. Ensuring participants can request an alternative provider is also essential, the coalition advises. And forcing program participants, who often are in a vulnerable position, to find an alternative provider on their own is likely to prevent them from getting help at all. The responsibility for implementing the alternative provider requirement should shift from the provider, where it fell under the Obama regulations, to the government.

And, the coalition urges, because people retain fewer religious freedom protections in voucher programs, agencies should use vouchers only sparingly and must ensure that voucher programs abide by constitutional requirements. Where people can choose to use a voucher, there must be a secular option available.

Remove references to religious exemptions that harm program participants, the coalition insists. Exemptions for service providers are likely to undermine the effectiveness of taxpayer-funded services and come at a cost that likely will be borne by program participants. This is especially true when exemptions could lead to participants being denied services.

The Biden administration needs to adopt a thorough process for complaints and robust procedures for monitoring, enforcement and training, the coalition is asking. Protections for program participants lack meaning if the government does not enforce them.

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.”

Lorraine Hansberry scholarships announced

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to announce, in association with the Women’s Leadership Project, the awardees of the Hansberry Humanist Scholarship Awards.

FFRF has helped to fund scholarships for six college students this year. The honorees were chosen by the Women’s Leadership Project, which, with Young Male Scholars, conducts school and community-based peer education programming, outreach and professional development, offering invaluable life and job training skills.

Six students with humanist orientation have been chosen for the awards. They are:

- Zorrie Petrus**, \$500 (El Camino College)
- Arrai Lugo**, \$500 (El Camino College)
- Ashantee Polk**, \$500 (Los Angeles City College)
- Kim Ortiz**, \$1,000 (California State University Los Angeles)
- Liz Tecuapetla**, \$1,000 (Cerritos College)
- Deaven Rector**, \$500 (Howard University



Law School)

The award memorializes Lorraine Hansberry, the freethinking playwright, who famously wrote in 1964: “Though it be a thrilling and marvelous thing to be merely young and gifted in such time, it

is doubly so — doubly dynamic — to be young, gifted and Black.” Hansberry’s play, “A Raisin in the Sun” (1959), was the first drama by a Black woman produced on Broadway.

Participating students meet weekly

with program coordinators and interns and are trained in sexual harassment and sexual violence prevention, LGBTQ+ youth leadership outreach and homeless education.

They elect their own group officers and assume responsibility for campus outreach and other communications, writing blogs, articles, poems and crafting video. They initiated two youth-facilitated forums on Black homeless women, anti-racism and mental health, as well as LGBTQ+ Youth of Color and mental health sexual harassment and campus climate.

“We express our appreciation for Sikivu Hutchinson, a founder of Black Skeptics Los Angeles, for her work with the Women’s Leadership Project and for making FFRF’s participation in this worthy cause possible,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. Hutchinson received FFRF’s Freethought Heroine Award at its annual convention in Boston last year.



Paine memorial gets boost with support from commission

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to announce that the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission has unanimously voted to support the proposal for a memorial to Thomas Paine in Washington, D.C. The vote on July 27 was a critical step to get the Department of the Interior and related agencies to support the bill.

While HR 6720, introduced by Rep. Jamie Raskin, to authorize construction of a memorial to Thomas Paine, must still pass Congress and clear other hurdles, the support from the advisory commission is a shot in the arm for the project.

During the hearing, Raskin gave a master class to the commission on why Paine is a figure of great historical significance to the United States and to the American people. FFRF Governmental Affairs Director Mark Dann, representing the Thomas Paine Memorial Association, thanked Chair Peter May and members of the advisory commission for scheduling the hearing.

Margaret Downey, president of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association, told the commission, “A Thomas Paine memorial highlighting his life and work may very well help heal divides in this country under the banner of true American liberty.”

Justice Alito makes disturbing remarks against nonreligious

FFRF takes umbrage over Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito’s recent remarks casting aspersions on nonbelievers as obstructors of religious liberty.

Alito appeared to single out nonbelievers as implied enemies of religious freedom at the Notre Dame Law School’s Religious Liberty Initiative in late July in Rome.

“It is hard to convince people that religious liberty is worth defending if they don’t think that religion is a good thing that deserves protection,” Alito claimed. “The challenge for those who want to protect religious liberty in the United States, Europe and other similar places is to convince people who are not religious that religious liberty is worth special protection. That will not be easy to do.”

Patronizingly, he then offered, as though it were original, the obvious idea of finding “common ground” with nonreligious people on the topic of religious liberty, such as by pointing out that religious liberty promotes domestic tranquility.

“Contrary to Alito’s biased remarks, nonbelievers and heretics have always been the first and most ardent defenders of religious freedom,” notes Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. “We have the most to lose when religion is allied with the state.” She asks: “How can nonreligious appellants before Alito expect a fair hearing?”

If Alito’s definition of religious liberty actually means privileging religion and religionists, he’s right that nonbelievers will challenge such interpretations. If by religious liberty Alito means that believers can take away other peoples’ reproductive freedoms or be exempted from civil rights ordinances against discrimination, then that is a redefinition of “religious liberty” nontheists emphatically will take exception to.

Alito also repeats tropes crediting re-

“It is hard to convince people that religious liberty is worth defending if they don’t think that religion is a good thing that deserves protection.”
— Justice Samuel Alito



Photo courtesy of CNN
Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito speaks in Rome at the Religious Liberty Summit in late July.

ligious groups and people with leading the movement to abolish slavery in the United States. Yet the bible explicitly sanctions slavery. That’s why it was repeatedly invoked to justify chattel slavery. The majority of church denominations, except Quakers and some Universalists, were johnny-come-latelines to the abolition movement. The Southern Baptist denomination was founded explicitly as a pro-slavery breakaway.

Gaylor points out that Alito ignores the fact that the earliest to call for abolition of slavery, for women’s rights to vote and full citizenship, for the right to contraception and abortion, for abolition of the death penalty and humane treatment of the mentally ill, in fact, have been free-thinkers — precisely because the bible opposes such rights.

Alito also opined during his talk that you can “not extinguish the religious im-

pulse.” He added: “Our hearts are restless until we rest in God. And, therefore, the champions of religious liberty who go out as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves can expect to find hearts that are open to their message.”

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker notes that the verse in Matthew 10:16 that Alito cites describes how Jesus sends out disciples as sheep in the midst of wolves. In other words, Alito is portraying non-Christians and nonbelievers as wolves and threats to “sheep.” The two verses preceding the cited passage say that if a city doesn’t welcome Christians, then the city’s punishment will be “worse than Sodom and Gomorrah on Judgment Day.” The verses following warn that the followers of Jesus will be dragged out and flogged in the synagogues and by councils, governors and kings.

“The whole context of this passage is that Christians are being persecuted by non-Christians,” comments Barker, a former evangelical minister and author of many books about religion, including *Godless*. “This is a highly disturbing message coming from a justice of the Supreme Court.”

THEY SAID WHAT?

Today we wake up in a state where the church doors are open and the abortion clinic’s doors are closed. All the Glory to God the Father! Amen!
Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves
Twitter, 7-7-22

We need to be the party of nationalism and I’m a Christian, and I say it proudly, we should be Christian nationalists.
Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene.
Huffington Post, 7-24-22

They kicked God out of schools and welcomed the drag queens. They took down our flag and replaced it with a rainbow. They seek to disarm Americans and militarize our enemies. Let’s bring back the basics: God, guns and glory.
Kari Lake, candidate for Arizona governor.
Twitter, 6-17-22

Again, what’s the purpose of a public education? Love of God, love of country.
Blaine Conzatti, president of Idaho Family Policy Center, who argues for state-sponsored Christian education for American children.
Deseret News, 7-15-22

[His] goal is to tear up, tear down public education to nothing and rebuild it. And rebuild it the way God intended education to be.
Dorothy Burton, a former GOP activist and religious scholar, speaking of Farris Wilks, a billionaire, in the article, “How two Texas megadonors have turbocharged the state’s far-right shift.”
CNN, 7-24-22

Our nation has lost its way in having lost a belief of a higher power. So in my community, there has been a cry for help — a cry to allow prayer in our schools. . . . I hope it brings back our country to its foundation.
Christi Fraga, a Miami-Dade school board member who in May successfully proposed establishing an annual day of prayer in her district.
Washington Post, 7-26-22

Last month at long last, with the support of three Supreme Court justices appointed during the Trump-Pence administration, we sent Roe v. Wade to the ash heap of history where it belongs. But in a very real sense, we’ve only come to the end of the beginning. As my fellow

conservatives, it now falls to this generation to take the case for life to every state and state house in America. Our freedom agenda calls for advancing pro-life protections in every state in the union, every single one.
Former Vice President Mike Pence, calling for outlawing abortion in every state.
Mediaite, 7-26-22

Why is it that the women with the least likelihood of getting pregnant are the ones most worried about having abortions? Nobody wants to impregnate you if you look like a thumb.
Rep. Matt Gaetz, speaking at the Turning Point USA Student Action Summit in Tampa, Fla. A 19-year-old, Olivia Juliana, then responded to Gaetz on Twitter and ended up raising over \$250,000 for abortion rights.
Washington Post, 7-27-22

My policy is not to conduct interviews with reporters who aren’t Christian or with outlets who aren’t Christian . . . These people are dishonest. They’re liars. They’re a den of vipers, and they want to destroy you.
Andrew Torba, CEO of Gab, a far-right

social media site, speaking out against Jews and atheists.
Washington Post, 7-28-22

If the language of this bill isn’t changed, innocent children will die, God’s wrath will continue to be stored up against this state and the Republican Party will lose many of its God-fearing constituents.
Seth Leeman, the pastor of a Baptist church in Noblesville, Ind., in a speech to state lawmakers, complaining a contemplated abortion ban had exceptions for rape, incest and life of the woman.
New York Times, 7-28-22

What it means to truly be America first, what it truly means to pursue happiness, what it truly means to be a Christian nation are actually the same thing.
Jenna Ellis, former co-counsel in President Trump’s effort to overturn the 2020 election.
New York Times, 7-9-22

In November, we are going to take our state back, and God will make it so.
Doug Mastriano, Pa. state senator.
New York Times, 7-9-22

Democracy

Continued from page 1

individual pastor or Christian leader who tries to turn the tide and say, ‘Let’s look again at Jesus and scripture,’ are going to be tossed aside,” she says.

The ideas are also insidious because many sound like expressions of Christian piety or harmless references to U.S. history. But White Christian nationalists interpret these ideas in ways that are potentially violent and heretical. Their movement is not only anti-democratic, it contradicts the life and teachings of Jesus, some clergy, scholars and historians say.

Samuel Perry, a professor of religious studies at the University of Oklahoma who is authority on the ideology, calls it an “imposter Christianity.”

Here are three key beliefs often tied to White Christian nationalism.

1) A belief that the United States was founded as a Christian nation

One of the banners spotted at the Jan. 6 insurrection was a replica of the American flag with the caption, “Jesus is My Savior, Trump is My President.”

Erasing the line separating piety from politics is a key characteristic of White Christian nationalism. Many want to reduce or erase the separation of church and state, say those who study the movement.

One of the most popular beliefs among White Christian nationalists is that the United States was founded as a Christian nation; the Founding Fathers were all orthodox, evangelical Christians; and God has chosen the United States for a special role in history.

These beliefs are growing among Christians, according to a survey last year by the Barna Group, a company that conducts surveys about faith and culture for communities of faith and nonprofits. The group found that an “increasing number of American Christians believe strongly” that the United States is a Christian nation, has not oppressed minorities, and has been chosen by God to lead the world.



Photo courtesy of Be-Still.com

Christian nationalists often think of Jesus as how he is described in Revelation as the “Warrior Christ,” who led the armies of heaven on white horses in a final, triumphant battle against the forces of the antichrist.



Shutterstock Photo

But the notion that the United States was founded as a Christian nation is bad history and bad theology, says Philip Gorski, a sociologist at Yale University and co-author of *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy*.

“It’s a half truth, a mythological version of American history,” Gorski says.

Some Founding Fathers did view the founding of the nation through a biblical lens, Gorski says. (Every state constitution contains a reference to God or the divine.) But many did not. And virtually none of them could be classified as evangelical Christians. They were a collection of atheists, Unitarians, Deists and liberal Protestants and other denominations.

The Constitution also says nothing about God, the bible or the Ten Commandments, Gorski says. And saying the United States was founded as a Christian nation ignores the fact that much of its initial wealth was derived from slave labor and land stolen from Native Americans, he says.

For evidence that the United States was founded as a secular nation, look no further than the 1797 Treaty of Tripoli, an agreement the United States negotiated with a country in present-day Libya to end the practice of pirates attacking American ships. It was ratified unanimously by a Senate still half-filled with signers of the Constitution and declared, “the government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on Christian religion.”

Does this mean that any White Christian who salutes the flag and says they love their country is a Christian nationalist? No, not at all, historians say. A White Christian who says they love America and its values and institutions is not the same thing as a White Christian nationalist, scholars say.

Gorski also notes that many devout Black Americans have exhibited a form of patriotism that does not degenerate into Christian nationalism.

Gorski points to examples of the 19th-century abolitionist Frederick Dou-

glass and the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Both were devout Christians who expressed admiration for America and its founding documents. But their patriotism also meant that “they challenged the nation to live up to its highest principles, to become a place of freedom, equality, justice and inclusion,” he says.

The patriotism of White Christian nationalists, on the other hand, is a form of racial tribalism, Gorski says.

“It’s a ‘My tribe. ‘We [White people] were here first. This is our country, and we don’t like people who are trying to change it or people who are different’ form of nationalism,” Gorski says.

2) A belief in a ‘Warrior Christ’

Videos from the Jan. 6 attack show a chaotic, tear-gas-soaked scene at the Capitol that looked more like a medieval battle. Insurrectionists punched police officers, used flagpoles as spears and smashed officers’ faces against doors while a mob chanted, “Fight for Trump!” The attack left five people dead and nearly 140 law enforcement officers injured.

The incongruity of people carrying “Jesus Saves” signs while joining a mob whose members are pummeling police officers leads to an obvious question: How can White Christian nationalists who claim to follow Jesus, the “Prince of Peace” who renounced violence in the Gospels, support a violent insurrection?

That’s because they follow a different Jesus than the one depicted in the Gospels, says Du Mez, who is also a professor of history and gender studies at Calvin University — a Christian school — in Michigan. They follow the Jesus depicted in the Book of Revelation, the warrior with eyes like “flames of fire” and “a robe dipped in blood” who led the armies of heaven on white horses in a final, triumphant battle against the forces of the antichrist.

White Christian nationalists have re-fashioned Jesus into a kick-butt savior who is willing to smite enemies to restore America to a Christian nation by force, if necessary, Du Mez and others say.

While warlike language like putting on “the full armor of God” has long been common in Christian sermons and hymns, it has largely been interpreted as metaphorical. But many White Christian nationalists take that language literally.

That was clear on Jan. 6. Some insurrectionists wore caps emblazoned with “God, Guns, Trump” and chanted that the blood of Jesus was washing Congress clean. One wrote “In God We Trust” on a set of gallows erected at the Capitol.

“They want the warrior Christ who wields a bloody sword and defeats his enemies,” says Du Mez. “They want to battle

with that Jesus. That Jesus brings peace, but only after he slays his enemies.”

And that Jesus sanctions the use of righteous violence if a government opposes God, she says.

“If you deem somebody in power to be working against the goals of a Christian America, then you should not submit to that authority and you should displace that authority,” she says. “Because the stakes are so high, the ends justify the means.”

That ends-justify-the-means approach is a key part of White Christian nationalism, says Du Mez. It’s why so many rallied behind President Trump on Jan. 6. She says he embodies a “militant White masculinity” that condones callous displays of power and appeals to Christian nationalists.

But with few exceptions, White Christian nationalists do not accept this “militant masculinity” when exhibited by Black, Middle Eastern and Latino men, Du Mez writes in *Jesus and John Wayne*. Aggression by people of color “is seen as a threat to the stability of home and nation,” she writes.

Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson echoed this double standard last year when he said on a radio talk show that he never really felt threatened by the mostly White mob that stormed the Capitol.

“Now, had . . . President Trump won the election and those were tens of thousands of Black Lives Matter and Antifa protesters, I might have been a little concerned,” Johnson said.

Johnson later elaborated, saying “there was nothing racial about my comments — nothing whatsoever.”

This embrace of a warrior Christ has shaped some White evangelicals’ attitudes on issues ranging from political violence to gun safety laws.

A survey last year by the Public Religion Research Institute revealed that of all respondents, White evangelicals were the religious group most likely to agree with the statement, “true American patriots might have to resort to violence in order to save the country.”

There are also some White Christian nationalists who believe the Second Amendment was handed down by God.

Samuel Perry, co-author of *Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States*, wrote in a recent essay that among Americans surveyed who believe “The federal government should declare the United States a Christian nation,” over two-thirds rejected the idea that the federal government should enact stricter gun laws.

“The more you line up with Christian nationalism, the less likely you are to support gun control,” wrote Perry. “Guns are practically an element of worship in the church of White Christian nationalism.”

3) A belief there’s such a person as a ‘real American’

In the 2008 presidential election, vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin introduced a new term to the political discourse. She talked about “the real America” and the “pro-America areas of this great nation.” Since then, many conservative political candidates have used the term “real Americans” to draw contrasts between their supporters and their opposition.

Such language has been co-opted into a worldview held by many White

“Those who want the United States to become a Christian nation face a huge obstacle: Most Americans don’t subscribe to their vision of America.”

Democracy

Continued from page 8

Christian nationalists: The nation is divided between “real Americans” and other citizens who don’t deserve the same rights, experts on White Christian nationalism say.

Gorski, author of *The Flag and the Cross*, says he found in his research a strong correlation between White Christian nationalism and support for gerrymandering — an electoral process where politicians manipulate district lines to favor one party or, some critics say, race over another. He found similar support among White Christian nationalists for the Electoral College, which gives disproportionate political power to many rural, largely White areas of the country.

When White Christian nationalists claim an election was stolen, they are reflecting the belief that some votes don’t count, he says.

“It’s the idea that we are the people, and our vote should count, and you’re not the people, and . . . you don’t really deserve to have a voice,” Gorski says. “It doesn’t matter what

the voting machines say, because we know that all real Americans voted for Donald Trump.”

Those who want the United States to become a Christian nation face a huge obstacle: Most Americans don’t subscribe to their vision of America.

The mainstreaming of White Christian nationalism comes as a growing number of Americans are rejecting organized religion. For the first time in the United States last year, membership in communities of worship fell below 50 percent. Belief in God is at an all-time low, according to a recent Gallup poll.

Add to that the country’s growing racial and religious diversity. People who identify as White alone declined for the first time since the census began in 1790, and the majority of Americans under 18 are now people of color.

On the surface, White Christian nationalism should not be on the ascent in America.

So, White Christian nationalists look for salvation from two sources.

One is the emboldened conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court, where recent decisions overturning *Roe v. Wade* and protecting

school prayer offer them hope.

Critics, on the other hand, say the high court is eroding the separation of church and state.

Not all Christians who support the high court’s overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and its school prayer decision are White nationalists. For example, plenty of Roman Catholics of all races support racial justice, yet also backed the overturning of *Roe*.

But White Christian nationalists are inspired by those decisions because one of their central goals is to erase the separation of church and state in the United States.

A recent study concluded that five of the justices on the Supreme Court are the “most pro-religion since at least World War II,” and that the six conservative justices are “all Christian, mostly Catholic,” and “religiously devout.”

While some Americans fear the dangers of one-party rule, others like Pamela Paul, a columnist, warn of the Supreme Court instituting one-religion rule.

“With their brand of religious dogma losing its purchase, they’re imposing it on the country themselves,” she wrote in a recent New York Times editorial.

Gorski says White Christian nationalism represents a grave threat to democracy because it defines “we the people” in a way that excludes many Americans.

“The United States cannot be both a truly multiracial democracy . . . and a white Christian nation at the same time,” Gorski wrote in *The Flag and the Cross*. “This is why white Christian nationalism has become a serious threat to American democracy, perhaps the most serious threat it now faces.”

The other source of hope for White Christian nationalists is a former occupant of the White House. Their devotion to him is illustrated by one of most striking images from the Jan. 6 insurrection: A sign depicting a Nordic-looking Jesus wearing a red “Make America Great Again” hat.

If Trump returns to the presidency, some White Christian nationalists may interpret his political resurrection as divine intervention. His support among White evangelicals increased from 2016 to 2020.

And what the men carrying wooden crosses among the Capitol mob couldn’t achieve on Jan. 6, they might yet accomplish in 2024.

Media

Continued from page 1

Smith, running for president in 1948, openly promoted a Christian nationalist movement predicated on overt anti-Semitism and drawing off of the “America First” movement.

Joining Maddow’s show in reporting on the rise of Christian nationalism was also CNN. There’s been growing coverage of the issue due to instances such as Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene’s recent remarks overtly advocating that the Republican Party needs “to be the party of nationalism, and I’m a Christian and I say it proudly. We should be Christian nationalists.”

On her own video blog, Greene said: “I believe that Republicans need to prove to the American people that we are the party of American nationalism. Christian nationalism. I’m a Christian, I have no problem saying I’m a Christian nationalist, and I think that’s an identity that we need to embrace, because those are the policies that serve every single American, no matter how they vote. They can be a Democrat and a progressive, but Christian nationalist or American nationalist or America first policies still serve those people because they’re the right policies for everyone.”

In other words, Greene and her ilk believe that “We the People” — whether atheist, Jewish, Muslim or liberal Christian



Shutterstock Photo

— must be under the thumb of a Christian theocracy. White Christian nationalism is an identity movement predicated on the false belief that the United States is a Christian nation, that “every knee should bow” to Christianity, and that only certain brands of Christians are the true Americans who deserve privileged status and rights. The movement also whitewashes U.S. history to a supposed idyllic time when a Christian government was in charge. Of course, that would actually be the Puritans of Massachusetts Bay Colony — or maybe the colony in Salem, infamous for its witch trials.

Underlining the clear intent to turn

the United States into a Christian theocracy are the pronouncements of Andrew Torba, the notorious CEO of Gab social media, who recently used his anti-Semitic platform to tell Jews that “we’re not bending the knee to the 2 percent anymore,” that people are “done with them” and that folks like Torba won’t be “told what we’re allowed to do in our own country by a 2 percent minority.”

Torba added:

“So, no, we don’t want people who are atheists. We don’t want people who are Jewish. This is an explicitly Christian movement because this is an explicitly Christian country. Now, we’re not saying that, you know, we’re gonna deport all these people, or whatever. You’re free to stay here, right? You’re not gonna be forced to convert or anything like this. But you’re gonna enjoy the fruits of living in a Christian society under Christian laws.”

It’s a “comfort” to know that we atheists and Jews are not going to be rounded up or deported . . . yet.

Shockingly, Doug Mastriano, a Pennsylvania state senator, similarly believes that God intended America to be a Christian nation and hired Torba to be one of his paid consultants. (Reminder: One of Gab’s users was the mass shooter charged with killing 11 people in 2018 at Pittsburgh’s Tree of Life synagogue.) Mastriano was not only at the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol, but spent more than \$3,000 to bus 100 Trump supporters to Washington, D.C., that day. While he

was seen crossing police barricades, he says he did not enter the Capitol. He was accompanied by former Pennsylvania state Rep. Rick Saccone, a theocrat who is a longtime FFRF nemesis.

There’s a lot of scary talk these days about Americans “kneeling to God,” including by Donald Trump. American citizens, in fact, may not be told to “kneel to God,” whether by ex-presidents or rogue members of Congress. Under the First Amendment, citizens may have as many gods as they like or none at all, and government may not direct how or whether they worship.

At least, that’s the America we still live in.

The big question facing us is do we have a Christian nationalist supermajority sitting on our high court? The six religiously extreme members of the Supreme Court are casually overturning decades of Supreme Court precedent on abortion rights and against religion in our public schools. They are not evangelical Christians, unlike Trump, Greene and fellow Rep. Lauren Boebert, but they likewise are tilting in the Christian nationalist direction. The six extremists are all Roman Catholic (or were raised Catholic, in the case of Neil Gorsuch). FFRF is pleased to see not only the esteemed New York Times commentator Linda Greenhouse breaking the media taboo against pointing this out, but also now Marcia Coyle, who is chief Washington correspondent for the National Law Journal and frequent contributor to “PBS NewsHour.”

Greenhouse has long called out the Catholic majority and its impact on decisions, most recently in her column, “Religious doctrine, not the Constitution, drove the Dobbs decision.” She writes, “It was not constitutional analysis but religious doctrine that drove the opposition to *Roe*.”

Coyle, in a July 15 piece for the National Constitution Center, asks if “the news media [are] afraid to make the connection?” She notes this is not an anti-Catholic rant. Empirical data tracks how the Roberts Court “represents a break in the development of the two religion clauses.”

While the threat of white Christian nationalism is growing in the United States, it is gratifying to see that the media and others are paying increasing attention to this menace to our democracy. As the gloves come off Christian nationalists, secularists will need all the allies we can get.

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Christian nationalists excited about future

This article first appeared in The New York Times on July 5 and is reprinted with permission.

By Katherine Stewart

The shape of the Christian nationalist movement in the post-Roe future is coming into view, and it should terrify anyone concerned for the future of constitutional democracy.

The Supreme Court’s decision to rescind the reproductive rights that American women have enjoyed over the past half-century will not lead America’s homegrown religious authoritarians to retire from the culture wars and enjoy a sweet moment of triumph. On the contrary, movement leaders are already preparing for a new and more brutal phase of their assault on individual rights and democratic self-governance. Breaking American democracy isn’t an unintended side effect of Christian nationalism. It is the point of the project.



Katherine Stewart

A good place to gauge the spirit and intentions of the movement that brought us the radical majority on the Supreme Court is the annual Road to Majority Policy Conference. At this year’s event, which took place in June in Nashville, three clear trends were in evidence.

First, the rhetoric of violence among movement leaders appeared to have increased significantly from the already alarming levels I had observed in previous years. Second, the theology of dominionism — that is, the belief that “right-thinking” Christians have a biblically derived mandate to take control of all aspects of government and society — is now explicitly embraced. And third, the movement’s key strategists were giddy about the legal arsenal that the Supreme Court had laid at their feet as they anticipated the overturning of Roe v. Wade.

They intend to use that arsenal — together with additional weaponry collected in cases like Carson v. Makin, which requires state funding of religious schools if private, secular schools are also being funded; and Kennedy v. Bremerton School District, which licenses religious proselytizing by public school officials — to prosecute a war on individual rights, not merely in so-called red state legislatures but throughout the nation.

Although metaphors of battle are common enough in political gatherings, this year’s rhetoric appeared more violent, more graphic and more tightly focused on fellow Americans, rather than on geopolitical foes.

“The greatest danger to America is not our enemies from the outside, as powerful as they may be,” said former President Donald Trump, who delivered the keynote address at the event. “The greatest danger to America is the destruction of our nation from the people from within. And you know the people I’m talking about.”

Speakers at the conference vied to outdo one another in their denigration of the people that Trump was evidently talking about. Democrats, they said, are “evil,” “tyrannical” and “the enemy within,” engaged in “a war against the truth.”

“The backlash is coming,” warned Sen. Rick Scott of Florida. “Just mount up and ride to the sounds of the guns,



Photo by Shutterstock

Insurrectionists carry a large wooden cross on the Capitol grounds on Jan. 6, 2021.

and they are all over this country. It is time to take this country back.”

Citing the fight against Nazi Germany during the Battle of the Bulge, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson of North Carolina said, “We find ourselves in a pitched battle to literally save this nation.” Referring to a passage from Ephesians that Christian nationalists often use to signal their militancy, he added, “I don’t know about you, but I got my pack on, I got my boots on, I got my helmet on, I’ve got on the whole armor.”

It is not a stretch to link this rise in verbal aggression to the disinformation campaign to indoctrinate the Christian nationalist base in the lie that the 2020 election was stolen, along with what we’re learning from the Jan. 6 hearings. The movement is preparing “patriots” for the continuation of the assault on democracy in 2022 and 2024.

The intensification of verbal warfare is connected to shifts in the Christian nationalist movement’s messaging and outreach, which were very much in evidence at the Nashville conference. Seven Mountains Dominionism — the belief that “biblical” Christians should seek to dominate the seven key “mountains” or “molders” of American society, including the government — was once considered a fringe doctrine, even among representatives of the Religious Right. At last year’s Road to Majority conference, however, there was a breakout session devoted to the topic. This year, there were two sessions, and the once arcane language of the Seven Mountains creed was on multiple speakers’ lips.

The hunger for dominion that appears to motivate the leadership of the movement is the essential context for

making sense of its strategy and intentions in the post-Roe world. The end of abortion rights is the beginning of a new and much more personal attack on individual rights.

And, indeed, it is personal. Much of the rhetoric on the right invokes visions of vigilante justice. This is about “good guys with guns” — or neighbors with good eavesdropping skills — heroically taking on the pernicious behavior of their fellow citizens. Among the principal battlefields will be the fallopian tubes and uteruses of women.

At a breakout session called “Life Is on the Line: What Does the Future of the Pro-Life Movement Look Like From Here?” Chelsey Youman, the Texas state director and national legislative adviser to Human Coalition Action, a Texas-based anti-abortion organization with a national strategic focus, described the connection between vigilantes and abortion rights.

Instead of the state regulating abortion providers, she explained, “you and me as citizens of Texas or this country or wherever we can pass this bill can instead sue the abortion provider.” Youman, as it happens, played a role in promoting the Texas law Senate Bill 8, which passed in May 2021 and allows private citizens to sue abortion providers and anyone who “aids or abets” an abortion. She was exultant over the likely passage of similar laws across the nation. “We have legislation ready to roll out for every single state you live in to protect life, regardless of the Supreme Court, regardless of your circuit court.”

To be sure, Christian nationalists are also pushing for a federal ban. But the struggle for the present will center on

state-level enforcement mechanisms.

Movement leaders have also made it clear that the target of their ongoing offensive is not just in-state abortion providers, but also what they call abortion trafficking — that is, women crossing state lines to obtain legal abortions, along with people who provide those women with services or support, like cars and taxis. Youman hailed the development of a new “long-arm jurisdiction” bill that offers a mechanism for targeting out-of-state abortion providers. “It creates a wrongful death cause of action,” she said, “so we’re excited about that.”

The National Right to Life Committee’s model legislation for the post-Roe era includes broad criminal enforcement as well as civil enforcement mechanisms. “The model law also reaches well beyond the actual performance of an illegal abortion,” according to text on the organization’s website. It also includes “aiding or abetting an illegal abortion,” targeting people who provide “instructions over the telephone, the internet or any other medium of communication.”

Youman further made clear that Christian nationalists will target the pills used for medication abortions. “Our next big bill is going to make the Heartbeat Act look tame, you guys; they’re going to freak out!” she said. “It’s designed specifically to siphon off these illegal pills.”

Americans who stand outside the movement have consistently underestimated its radicalism. But this movement has been explicitly antidemocratic and anti-American for a long time.

It is also a mistake to imagine that Christian nationalism is a social movement arising from the grass roots and aiming to satisfy the real needs of its base. It isn’t. This is a leader-driven movement. The leaders set the agenda, and their main goals are power and access to public money. They aren’t serving the interests of their base; they are exploiting their base as a means of exploiting the rest of us.

Christian nationalism isn’t a route to the future. Its purpose is to hollow out democracy until nothing is left but a thin cover for rule by a supposedly right-thinking elite, bubble-wrapped in sanctimony and insulated from any real democratic check on its power.

Katherine Stewart has reported on the religious right for more than a decade. She is the author of “The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism.”

“The hunger for dominion that appears to motivate the leadership of the movement is the essential context for making sense of its strategy and intentions in the post-Roe world.”

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FFRF VICTORIES

By Casandra Zimmerman

Illinois district ends religious activity

FFRF has persuaded an Illinois school district to stop allowing proselytization events on campus during the school day.

A concerned community resident reported to FFRF that Ray McElroy, a former NFL player who is now a pastor, was speaking to students at Richards High School in Oak Lawn, Ill. The posters and announcements for the lunch event enticed students to come to hear an ex-NFL player’s story and receive free Chick-Fil-A sandwiches. Students who attended said that they were told they could not take a sandwich until they listened to the speaker and took his book. The book is titled *How to Find God*. Reportedly, the talk was essentially a sermon by McElroy.

The religious event was reportedly organized by Doug Groters, a Navy Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps instructor at the high school. NJROTC instructors are “employees of the school.”

FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heineman wrote to Community High School District 218 Superintendent Ty Harting. “The district cannot allow its schools to be used as recruiting grounds for religious missions,” Heineman wrote.

A response from the school assured FFRF that the issue was taken care of.

“We have investigated the matter and have addressed with our staff,” Assistant Superintendent Greg Walder responded. “We will refrain from allowing such events to occur in the future.”

District won’t promote baccalaureate service

FFRF got involved in Oregon after a concerned West Linn-Wilsonville School District community member reported that West Linn High School organized a baccalaureate service in its auditorium on June 5th.

The school advertised the event in its weekly “Roar” newsletter and mentioned the ceremony in its weekly address to the students. The service was open to all West Linn seniors and was described as “a spiritual and inspirational interfaith ceremony honoring the WLHS graduating class of 2022.” The ceremony program listed religious prayers, songs and speeches, such as “Faith and Perseverance” and “Living in Faith.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the district, stating that “The District’s role in promoting the baccalaureate ceremony would cause any reasonable graduating senior or parent to conclude that the West Linn-Wilsonville School District supported the religious messages espoused at these services.”

The district responded to FFRF to report that it would look into who is responsible for advertising the event, who was sponsoring it and make sure that it wouldn’t happen in the future.

Religious sign-off taken off of school email

A concerned resident contacted FFRF about a school employee in the Menomonie, Wis., district who included biblical scripture in the official district email signature. The resident reported that they recently received

an email from the student service administrator with the biblical quote “Act Justly Love Mercy Walk Humbly — Micah 6:8” in the email signature.

FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Hieman wrote to District Administrator Joseph Zydowsky, who then responded by assuring that the signature was removed and staff members would be reminded of their duties for the new school year.

Religious display in Texas school removed

A concerned Mansfield (Texas) ISD community member has reported that the “Serenity Prayer” is on display on a door in the main hallway of Glenn Harmon Elementary School. It says: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote Superintendent Kimberley Cantu to ask that the school immediately take it down. “Courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools.”

In a response from legal counsel for Glen Harmon Elementary, the district investigated FFRF’s complaint and removed the display.

Teacher’s evangelizing halted in Alabama

An Alabama school district has put a stop to a teacher’s blatant proselytizing after FFRF got involved.

A concerned Shelby County Schools parent had informed FFRF

that their child’s teacher had been openly pushing Christianity onto his students. Alan Waring, a biology teacher at Calera High School, had sent home religious materials with students and signed a student’s yearbook with a religious message.

The handout Waring gave to students was titled, “God loves you and He has a plan for your life,” a religious screed meant to indoctrinate students into Christianity. And Waring put a similarly over-the-top religious inscription in a student’s yearbook: “... you are designed for a grand incredible purpose that has cosmic significance. The God of the Universe, your creator and mine, has made a way for men and women to commune with Him and to be found in Him. This purpose is tied up in His identity, who He is, God is triune, three persons one God.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the school district’s counsel, stating that “The district must make certain that none of its employees are unlawfully and inappropriately indoctrinating students in religious matters by discussing their personal religious beliefs, preaching, handing out religious materials, or otherwise creating a religious environment in their classrooms.”

The school district initiated a probe after FFRF’s missive — and arrived at an appropriate course of action.

“Following the investigation, they have had repeated conversations with the teacher, required him to review materials emphasizing the importance of separation of church and state, and had him put together a written reflection confirming he understood the importance of the issue,” the attorney for the district recently emailed Line.

OVERHEARD

The situations that people find themselves in, and in need of abortion care are some of the most difficult that you could imagine. And that’s why we, as physicians, need to be able to provide that care unhindered, that medical decisions need to be made between a physician and their patients. . . . I’m not the only provider who has taken care of young children needing abortion care.

Dr. Caitlin Bernard, speaking to anchor Norah O’Donnell on “CBS Evening News,” about how the attorney

general of Indiana, Todd Rokita, is investigating her for how she had reported an abortion she gave to a 10-year-old to state officials. Bernard is looking into a possible defamation lawsuit against Rokita.

Washington Post, 7-27-22

I am old enough to remember when there was prayer in schools. While my elementary school class recited the Lord’s Prayer, I mumbled or stayed silent, knowing that it wasn’t my prayer.

Justices, please don’t make my grandchildren feel the same discomfort. These are public schools. They belong to everyone.

Burt Solomon, in a letter to the editor.

The New York Times, 7-27-22

Taken together, the rulings [this term] proclaim a new day in modern jurisprudence. A newly installed conservative bloc is now in control, eager to forge ahead, with little regard for real-world consequences — for women, public safety or the life of the planet.

Columnist Carl Ramey, retired attorney.

Gainesville Sun, 7-27-22

On the one hand, we’ve had almost every parliamentary leader applaud the diversity of the Parliament and so if we are genuine about the diversity of the Parliament, we cannot continue to say a Christian prayer to open the day. Personally, I would like to see the prayers gone. I’m an atheist. I don’t want to say

the prayers. If others want to say the prayers, they’re open to do that.


New Australian Senate President Sue Lines, urging the Senate to cease its 121-year-old Christian tradition.

OnlySky, 7-31-22

This [Bremerton School District v. Kennedy] decision was a mistake — not because public schools should be devoid of any religious expression, but because students should not feel pressure from their teachers, administrators or coaches either to be or not to be religious, let alone subscribe to a particular faith. . . . We have enough problems in our public schools. We don’t need to turn them into religious battlefields.

E.J. Dionne, in his column, “The Supreme Court punts on religious liberty.”

Washington Post, 8-3-22



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2022 BIPOC student essay winners

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the 11 top winners and 18 honorable mentions of the 2022 David Hudak Memorial Black, Indigenous and Persons of Color Student Essay Competition.

FFRF has paid out a total of \$19,350 in award money for this contest this year.

BIPOC students were asked to write a personal persuasive essay about “How atheism/humanism makes me a better person.”

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

- FIRST PLACE**
Jajuan Lawson, 18, Loyola University, \$3,500.
- SECOND PLACE**
Aiden Kong, 18, University of Toronto, \$3,000.
- THIRD PLACE**
Sylvie Leyerle, 18, University of Illinois, \$2,500.
- FOURTH PLACE**
Marcus Brown, 17, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, \$2,000.
- FIFTH PLACE**
Luke Ortiz-Grabe, 19, Colorado College, \$1,500.



- SIXTH PLACE**
Claudia Moses, 19, Stanford University, \$1,000.
- SEVENTH PLACE**
Elayna Whiteman, 19, University of Chicago, \$750.
- EIGHTH PLACE**
Mary Musa, 19, University of Delaware, \$500.
- NINTH PLACE**
Torrie Boykins, 17, Michigan State University, \$400.
- TENTH PLACE (tie)**
Riya Bhargava, 19, Yale University, \$300.
Vaishnavi Nayak, 18, Ohio State University, \$300.
- HONORABLE MENTIONS (\$200 each)**
Anika Becker, 20, University of San Francisco.
Vanessa Bien-Aime, 19, University of Maryland.
Alexandria Calloway, 18, Duke University.
Tenaya Coward, 19, Portland State University.
Austin De Nijs, 18, Savannah College of Art and Design.
Dystanee Foy, 18, University of Denver.
Landsay Frankoer, 19, Stockton University.
Whisper Johnson, 21, Bowling Green State University.
Jordyn Jones, 20, Kennesaw State University.
Elayna Kash, 19, University of Michigan.

Tiffany Lin, 18, University of Michigan.
Zyon Loiseau, 18, University of Wisconsin.
Mary Membreno, 19, Roanoke College.
Daniel Ogunwale, 18, Swarthmore College.
Christopher Rodriguez, 20, Texas A&M.
Amani Turner, 17, University of Texas-Austin.
Jordan Wilson, 18, UC-Santa Cruz.
Liam Wisner, 18, Oklahoma State University.

FFRF thanks Lisa Treu for managing the details of this and FFRF’s other student essays competitions. And we also would like to thank our “faithful faithless” volunteer and staff readers and judges, including: Dan Barker, Bill Dunn, Kate Garmise, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Ricki Grunberg, Dan Kettner, Gloria Marquardt, Brent Messer, April O’Leary, Andrea Osburne, George Pevarik, PJ Slinger, Mandisa Thomas, Karen Lee Weidig, Sarah Weinstock and Casandra Zimmerman.

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

FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994, grad students since 2010, one geared explicitly for students of color since 2016 and a fifth contest for law students since 2019.

FIRST PLACE DAVID HUDAK MEMORIAL AWARD

Doubt begets thought and a chance for growth

FFRF awarded Jajuan \$3,500.

By Jajuan Lawson

To become an agnostic in a world that holds the existence of the supernatural as axiomatic, one must, by the very nature of such defiance, doubt society, doubt the world and doubt themselves. This is the principle from which my agnosticism is formed. A doubt — perhaps, more accurately, a refusal of certainty — toward the way things are and how they “should be.”

Doubt begets thought: If one cannot fully accept the way something is said to be, is it not logical to form one’s own opinion? If something may be wrong, what might be right? Does “right” exist? Instead of relying on “truths” delivered by a God, inscribed on texts passed down from those who came thousands of years before me, I decide to forge my own beliefs and challenge them in an endless cycle of moral creation and destruction, day by day, decision by decision.

Each circumstance in which I meet a new moral challenge is a chance for



Jajuan Lawson

growth. An opportunity to ask, “Who am I? What do I value?” Every day, who I am is ripped apart: My choices are inspected, doubted, corrected, or supplemented. I am a collection of thousands of decisions — proven and disproven opinions — each one informing the next. With each moment, I become more of “myself,” more “truthful,” more “just.” This is my morality: ever-evolving and always mine.

Adopting a religious, moral system removes your responsibility in providing

thought to substantiate your moral beliefs, but more importantly, it opens the possibility of allowing others to make those substantiations for you. Even if God exists and is omnibenevolent, because its moral communication cannot be proven to have actually occurred in a clear, literal manner, then “justice” is an interpretation pulled from hearsay. When you have faith in a doctrine, you must also have faith in its proper transcription and interpretation — that your examination of the text is one made without error. Perfection is antithetical to humanity. Therefore, you must ignore the motives of those who transcribe and interpret, allowing those motives to become impressed upon you.

Instituting group morality is one of the best means to regulate and control members of society. You can manufacture systems that hold the individuals whom you support in positions of power and make those you dislike suffer. When someone interprets a religious text,

they inherently insert their biases and personal viewpoints into the analysis: even if the intent is not malicious, the original message is altered.

And, so I doubt, as I must. If I cannot entirely trust the intentions and statements of those who create and those who interpret, then I will not risk the lack of moral cognizance caused by giving up my own self-reflection. I do not need God, or a priest, to “teach” me how to be kind. I am good not because I am told to be, but because I choose to be. My love is purely mine, internal, and I express it with each of my decisions.

Jajuan, 18, who is from Guynn Oak, Md., and attends Loyola University, writes, “I work primarily to educate others on class, race, gender, sex, sexuality and a host of other issues that plague my school environment. I’ve racked up over 100 service hours working in food pantries and with environmentalist groups. I’ve received awards for writing and creating/ participating in safe spaces for LGBTQ+ and Black students on my high school campus.”

“I do not need God, or a priest, to “teach” me how to be kind.

SECOND PLACE

‘I’ll pray for you’

FFRF awarded Aiden \$3,000.

By Aiden Kong

When times are tough and when others are going through hardships, many religious people offer their thoughts and prayers to the less fortunate. While these people mean well, what is the true impact of prayer? Does sitting in silence while talking to the sky to

a force no one truly knows exist help others in the long run? How do people know when their prayers have actually helped others?

My mother grew up in Kingston, Jamaica, attending Catholic school her whole childhood. For years, she studied bible scriptures, attended daily Mass, and prayed to Jesus for a better world. However, while in her devout Catholic community, she noticed a trend of inaction among the

other churchgoers. They saw church as a safeguard from immorality and accountability, choosing to attend Mass and pray for others instead of helping themselves and others. Many of them argued that they were good people because they went to church, not that they were good people because they carried out good deeds. This dissonance between the beliefs and actions of people in her religious community led my mother to become less religious and allow her children to form their own opinions about religion; I chose to be an agnostic.

I gravitated toward agnosticism for a few reasons. For starters, as a person who believes in science, observation



Aiden Kong

and evidence, there is no concrete evidence that shows whether there is some type of higher power. Moreover, there are thousands of religions in the world that have all evolved over the centuries, so the idea that one is “correct” and all of the others are wrong seems illogical to me. Lastly, as an agnostic, I feel more compelled to become a better person through a wide scope of philosophies and teachings rather than the limited scope of one religion. Furthermore, nonreligious people do not have religion to hold onto as a crutch for their moral ego. Since I don’t believe in a higher power or that I’m serving some type

of god, my perspective focuses on believing in the power of people and helping others as much as I can. Instead of hoping and praying that a god will come to help me and others, I choose to take matters into my own hands and improve the world myself. From tutoring others and donating the profits to charity to volunteering with my Scouts BSA troop to help nonprofits

in need, I have been able to make a positive impact on the world, just like so many other nontheists. “I’ll pray for you,” say so many religious people to the families of victims of the Uvalde school shooting. This phrase has gotten the United States nowhere in helping to secure the safety of school children across the country. If we continue to hope and pray that things will

get better, then they never will. The world doesn’t need prayer — it needs action. *Aiden, 18, is from Pinecrest, Fla., and attends the University of Toronto. “Throughout high school, I immersed myself in science and math competitions, student tutoring, and badminton,” he writes. “I’ve also been involved in Scouts BSA for six years, reaching the rank of Eagle Scout. I have always been interested in STEM, from mixing concoctions in a science kit to building bridges out of basswood. In the future, I wish to combine my interests in STEM and service to pursue an M.D. or Ph.D. and conduct cutting-edge research on Alzheimer’s disease.”*

THIRD PLACE

The sin of freethought

FFRF awarded Sylvie \$2,500.

By Sylvie Leyerle

The undeniable message of Psalm 53:1 is that people who do not believe in God are “corrupt” and “abominable” — that, among atheists, “There is none who does good.” As a nonbeliever who is, nevertheless, an ethical and loving person, I know this pronouncement is ignorant and slanderous. Furthermore, I would never pass uninformed judgment on another person in this manner.

Right out of the gate, I contend this makes me a better, not a worse, person. Acceptance of differences is an admirable trait, and there are other good traits that go along with my freedom from religion. Far from being an abomination, independent thought is beneficial and even essential for humans to survive and thrive, and I refuse to consider it a sin.

As an immigrant from China, I am all too familiar with the sense of “otherness” that goes along with the color of my skin and the shape of my eyes. I am well acquainted with stereotypes, and they make me bristle. Perhaps that is why I have re-



Sylvie Leyerle

sisted all attempts to indoctrinate me into any religion, preferring to make my own decisions regarding justice and morality. I already feel judged by strangers, so I have never broadcast my lack of belief in any religion. I have feared being viewed as even more of a heathen, even more of an irreligious, uncultured and uncivilized outsider — despite the fact that I have lived in the United States since I was a toddler and have grown up as an American.

It is my perception that most Christian Americans look down on people from China, which is officially an atheist state. China is not, and has never been, perfect, but it is an ancient civilization that has bestowed numerous gifts upon the world, including papermaking, printing and the compass. Independent of organized faith systems, Chinese inventors have enriched and improved the world with ingenious ideas that facilitated communication and interaction among people across the globe. Science and ingenuity, not superstition and religion, were the driving forces behind these vitally important manifestations of human effort and creativity.

I am not religious, but I am principled, honorable and honest. I try to be a logical and independent thinker with an open heart and mind. I believe many Christians think atheists reject a belief in God because they don’t want to be restricted by the moral constraints contained in the

bible, but I think most people become atheists because the existence of God is not supported by evidence. Psalm 53:1 is saying nonbelievers are bad solely because they do not believe, but I reject this foolish and unfair characterization and point to my own good character and behavior and the achievements and good works of other nonbelievers as evidence that freethinkers make the world a better place. If forming my own world view and allowing it to guide my actions is a sin, just call me a sinner.

Sylvie, 18, is from Champaign, Ill., attends the University of Illinois and plans to major in studio art. “I was born in China in 2004 and adopted by American parents when I was 13 months old, and I have an older sister,” Sylvie writes. “I am an artist who enjoys exploring my birth culture through my art. My status as a woman, an Asian immigrant, and a member of a multiracial household shapes my work, as does my experience as a person with a hearing impairment.”

“Far from being an abomination, independent thought is beneficial and even essential for humans to survive and thrive, and I refuse to consider it a sin.”

FOURTH PLACE

The morality of my nonbelief

FFRF awarded Marcus \$2,000.

By Marcus Brown

There is a prevalent viewpoint that having a strong sense of morality is exclusive to those with belief in a higher power. Throughout my own life, I have grown in my understanding of just how mistaken this link is. The reliance on faith to live a moral life is a confirmation that one is simply an immoral person. Despite popular sentiment, belief in a higher power has no significant effect on how selfless a person lives their life. Personally, being humanist provides me with a greater respect for our Earthly life.

Regardless of background, class, virtue or decency, every person simply experiences one mortal life. It is entirely up to the individual to use their single opportunity to lead a noble life

that positively contributes to the state of the world. All religions undermine this fact by trusting in an existence beyond Earthly life, thus making mortal life less significant to believers. Conversely, my lack of belief in an afterlife pushes me to work toward improving the state of the only world that I know of. Having no belief in life after death means that I have no incentive to selfishly work toward an afterlife for myself. The morality I live by, throughout my limited time here, is entirely dictated by me, instead of by teachings that do not necessarily improve the world. This means that any moral actions that I take come directly from me alone. Unfortunately, religion causes people to burden themselves in many decisions that they make, strictly out of fear of judgment from a higher power. However, strangely, religion has hardly prevented the carrying out of



Marcus Brown

immoral actions. In fact, religion has been used to justify evil since the beginning of humanity. The absence of religion in my life gives me absolute freedom to do what I believe is ethical, rather than fixating on following the teachings of a particular belief. In my own practice, this means pushing for

universal health care instead of being concerned about a woman’s choice to have an abortion. This also means advocating for gun control legislation instead of worrying about same-sex marriages. There is an endless list of genuine issues that are overshadowed by the non-issues fostered by the members of a particular religion. Leaving it up to myself to determine what is right and wrong leads to grounded decisions on how I can leave behind a better world than the one that I was born into. Avoiding faith when making decisions has caused me to lead a more altruistic lifestyle that is more centered on improving the tangible well-being of others. *Marcus, 17, is from Yonkers, N.Y., attends Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and plans to major in mechanical engineering. “I was born to an immigrant mother from Belize and an immigrant father from London,” Marcus writes. “I like playing basketball, table tennis, painting and working with children. I enjoy volunteering at a local soup kitchen and New York Blood Center.”*

“Leaving it up to myself to determine what is right and wrong leads to grounded decisions on how I can leave behind a better world than the one that I was born into.”

FIFTH PLACE

Agnosticism benefits community involvement

FFRF awarded Luke \$1,500.

By Luke Ortiz Grabe

Through embracing agnosticism, I have strengthened my moral values and gained a commitment to community involvement and service. Though theist spaces often boast about their community service, my agnosticism leaves my dedication to service unimpeded by external motivations. As I analyze why I engage within my community, I discover that it is not because some deity has commanded that I go and serve others or that I wish to spread the word of my faith. Instead, my agnosticism has strengthened my sentiments of compassion and has sparked a desire to engage within my community because I have the privilege, resources and ability to do so. As an agnostic, I know that I must do more than prayer and religious practice to help those around me. Through thoughtful, efficient action, I can go out into my community and make it a better place for all those who reside within it.

Further, secularism’s growth has sparked the proliferation of nonreligious organizations that are more attuned to fighting systemic inequality within our communities. Utilizing a naturalist per-



Luke Ortiz Grabe

spective on the world, I realized that our social systems and hierarchies are human-constructed. This perspective admits the guilt of humankind in the suffering that exists in our world today and argues that it will be through the action of humanity, not a higher power, that will eradicate these unequal systems. When engaging within my community, my agnosticism encourages me to utilize the power that I have to change the systems around me,

not to defer to a god in hopes they will solve the problem. Through strengthening my agnosticism, I rid myself of external motivations for community service and realize that it will be only through human action that we can eradicate these unequal systems from our society.

Finally, as a Mexican-American, agnosticism has allowed me to develop an objective view of the harm that religion continues to create within my community and how I can help resolve this through service. When discussing the issue of colonization with my community, I have realized that we have not dealt with the communal trauma from our forced conversion to Christianity. However, my journey through my agnosticism has allowed me to realize the harm that religion has created within our community. Realizing the faults of Christianity and reconciling moving away from Christianity inspires us to reconnect with the culture that we lost and not deflect to a higher power when confronted with the

“When engaging within my community, my agnosticism encourages me to utilize the power that I have to change the systems around me, not to defer to a god in hopes they will solve the problem.”

current problems stemming from colonization. Agnosticism has given me knowledge of what lies beyond the confines of religion for the Mexican-American community, and through my engagement efforts, I can bring this knowledge to others and help fix the problems from which we suffer. Through the knowledge agnosticism has given me, I cast aside the defamation of believing that there is “none who does good,” and use my newfound agency to rectify the problems within my community, easing the trauma of the past while paving a bright path for our future.

Luke, 19, is from Highlands Ranch, Colo., and attends Colorado College, majoring in international political economy. “I have a strong passion for community engagement, focusing on uplifting LGBTQ+ and Latinx experiences,” he writes. “I am currently working to increase health equity for LGBTQ+ people in Colorado Springs, serving on my institution’s Antiracism Commitment Committee, and participating in various community engagement efforts as a Bonner Fellow.”

SIXTH PLACE

Categorical opposition of religion and progress

FFRF awarded Claudia \$1,000.

By Claudia Moses

It is widely accepted that, with every generation, society’s standard of living improves. Health is better, food is better, and all of it can be attributed to advances in science. And while science and religion are not necessarily mutually exclusive (and plenty of scientists themselves are religious), it holds that, throughout history, religion has often served as a hindrance to scientific progress.

As an aspiring scientist, I feel fortunate to have the clarity to see that I need not be religious to find guidance in my science. The problem with religion is that it argues that our driving force — for innovation and for life in general — is external. This causes numerous problems. It allows for outside opinions to influence decision making, which muddles critical thinking. It also prevents us from using inner motivation to innovate.

“The problem with religion is that it argues that our driving force — for innovation and for life in general — is external.”

Humans are naturally inventive, and even religion itself was an invention intended to provide comfort in times of desperation. As humans innovate, we discard older technologies that have become obsolete. Typewriters were replaced by laptops, landlines were replaced by cell phones. As science itself padded the hardships humanity faced, the need for religion as a source of comfort faded. It was an invention whose need was replaced simply by ingenuity. However, because it was politically and financially beneficial, religion was not discarded.

In my belief, this is why religion puts up a mighty battle to remain relevant. It is inherently threatened by any shred of scientific progress, because with every forward stride and every improvement to human life, it becomes more and more unnecessary to be religious (and hence the world becomes less religious with every generation). Unfortunately, the fact that religion is juxtaposed with science means that re-



Claudia Moses

ligion argues against humanity’s progress. And that is why nontheists’ values are improved by naturalistic views.

So, how are my moral values improved by the fact that I am not religious? Simply by the fact that I am intrinsically motivated to improve and to innovate, and to do so for everyone. I intend to apply my degree in data and computational science to create solutions to the energy challenge — to

develop sustainable energy technologies and to combat climate change. I intend to do this not because I am influenced by some deity, but rather because I am interested in the betterment of our collective world. I do not have an external pressure to remain stagnant, and that is my moral strength. I want to improve collectively, not just for the brethren of my religion, but for everyone.

Ultimately, it is not impossible to want to improve the world and to be religious at the same time. But being both categorically creates a moral conflict of interest, and it is for this reason that nonbelief has driven all positive change throughout human history.

Claudia, 19, is from Eagan, Minn., and attends Stanford University, where she is majoring in data and computational science. “I have been heavily involved in state and local politics in the Twin Cities,” Claudia writes. “In 2020, I was elected as a delegate for Bernie Sanders at the Democratic National Convention. At Stanford, I interned at the Precourt Institute for Energy. It is here where I found my life’s passion: the development of sustainable energy to facilitate our global transition away from polluting energies to green ones.”

SEVENTH PLACE

Aligning my compass

By Elayna Whiteman

“I’m lost, Mr. C! I have no idea where I’m going,” I sobbed. We were in the backpacking unit during camp, and my counselor was trying in vain to teach us how to use a compass. I was shocked to find out I couldn’t just walk the direction the needle was pointing. We were supposed to follow a 10-step scavenger hunt using the

compass and specific instructions. But by step three, I was so twisted around, I somehow ended up in the parking lot. In hindsight, it seems obvious; of course, not aligning the needle with true north doesn’t work. But in the moment, I just assumed the compass would lead me to the prized treasure chest Mr. C had hidden. I never got there.

Without aligning the compass with north, you cannot properly use a com-

pass. And using a religion to align your own personal navigation discounts using your life experiences and evaluation of facts around you to figure out your fundamental beliefs.

In almost all religions, there is some sort of doctrine that is the result of hundreds or even thousands of years of accumulating information and stories. But many of these writings are riddled with antiquated ideology from a time when

things like earthquakes needed to be explained by incorporating gods.

The explanation of everything under the sun by religion comes from a time before the scientific method was developed. But in the last 500 years, science has been butting heads with religion. From the Enlightenment to Copernicus, religious leaders trying to impose the dogmas of people who walked the Earth thousands of years ago on anyone

of their time prevented the progression of science.

It's hard to imagine just how much faster the Western world could have adopted the heliocentric universe if religious leaders in the Church didn't blindly follow the idea of a Eurocentric solar system, or if bloodletting wasn't a cure-all solution for every illness. There is no problem with having religious beliefs. However, issues arise when we only use religion to govern our lives and ignore science and facts. Because as we progress, our world is more and more ruled by science, rather than mythology.

Being nonreligious affords me the opportunity to only use my own perception of reality and intake of facts to build my own morals. I'm not concerned with following the mistranslated and misremembered moral dictations of those long gone. I took up debate during high school, and have spent hundreds of hours poring over readings and crafting arguments based on facts. I can determine my own morals based on consuming a variety of perspectives and evaluating them based on how

Issues arise when we only use religion to govern our lives and ignore science and facts.

I have come to understand the world, or how they challenge what I believe. I'm more able to adapt to changes since my own values, the ideas and concepts that make me me, aren't contingent on just a couple thousand pages.

When I choose to be an atheist, I choose to align my own true north.

Elayna, 19, is from Glencoe, Ill., and attends the University of Chicago, with plans to double major in economics and sociology.

"I interned for a representative in the U.S. House of Representatives, competed in Congressional Debate, led my school's Mock Trial Club, and helped tutor students in English," Elayna writes. "I hope to one day work in the public policy sector trying to help change people's lives using solvent legislation."



Elayna Whiteman

EIGHTH PLACE

Goodness for the sake of goodness

FFRF awarded Mary \$500.

By Mary Musa

From as early as I can remember, Catholicism has dominated my life. In the Catholic schools I attended and in the Catholic community around me, a person's religious beliefs or lack thereof were always equated with the strength of their morals. Religious people were almost always viewed as good, while nonreligious people were continuously vilified.

I was a voracious reader as a child, and by the time I reached middle school, I realized that this narrative was false. I questioned everything I had been taught about Catholicism. As I matured and started to form my own sense of morality and learn more about world issues and the history of Catholicism, I no longer wanted to identify as Catholic. I was young and still unsure of my religiosity, but I felt a fundamental disconnect with my Catholic faith on many issues. By the time I left middle school, I identified as agnostic, which has improved my moral values and passion for social justice in many ways.

Identifying as agnostic has undoubtedly helped me develop a better sense of morality. In Catholicism, nonreligious



Mary Musa

people have often been painted as lacking a sense of morals. However, I believe nonreligious people, including myself, have a stronger sense of morality and firm moral values, because the component of a "reward" in an afterlife is not a motivation for performing good deeds. In Catholicism and many other belief systems, there is an underlying sense that good acts should be performed with a goal in mind: to appease a higher

being, and to earn a place in heaven. To me, this belief has always felt hypocritical and contrary to the image that many religions try to portray. I question why the motivation for being a good person is driven by the fear of punishment, or the promise of a reward, rather than an understanding that it is the right thing to do. Thus, many religious people's motivations for kindness, and basic human goodness, can be inherently selfish.

Since I have begun to identify as agnostic, my motivation for helping others has become more humanistic and less focused on the needs of a god. I developed the belief that human kindness should not be centered around one's concern about divine punishment, but rather on improving society and the lives of others. Furthermore, I became less afraid to advocate for issues impacting women and women's health that Catholicism opposed.

Nonreligious people have improved the world in countless ways, including

I question why the motivation for being a good person is driven by the fear of punishment, or the promise of a reward, rather than an understanding that it is the right thing to do.

through human rights activism. Andrei Sakharov, who was a Soviet nuclear physicist and lifelong atheist, worked tirelessly for human rights and free speech throughout his life. He faced exile and persecution at the hands of the Soviet government, yet continued to advocate for his beliefs. His lack of belief in a god did not preclude him, as it does not preclude other nonreligious people, from having a fundamental belief in improving human life and upholding their moral values.

Mary, 19, is from Townsend, Del., and attends the University of Delaware, with plans to major in materials science and engineering. "Some of the places I have been fortunate to visit include Aruba, Canada, Sierra Leone and the British Virgin Islands," she writes. "I have worked as a K-12 tutor for over two years and one of my passions is helping people who are struggling in school. I eventually hope to start a makeup and skincare company that caters to the unique needs of black women's hair and skin."

NINTH PLACE

Because I am good

FFRF awarded Torrie \$400.

By Torrie Boykins

If the purpose of religion was for the betterment of all and brought out only the best of people, then I'd have no problem with it. Instead, religion often brings out the worst in people. It brings out the ugly, the bad, the rotten. KKK meetings, the Holocaust, 9/11, the Crusades — all events rising from an ideology that is meant to provide humanity more good than bad, but has mostly done the opposite.

For example, look at my people. For us, religion has never been used for good. The very same religion that was used to justify shackling and bonding us in chains was the same religion

[Religion] gives them the false impression that their "thoughts and prayers" are enough in dire situations of injustice. Well, it's nowhere near enough.

that was forced upon us so heavily that we eventually believed it was going to save us from our misery and suffering. And today, it is the religion we use to condemn our LGBTQ+ children and brothers and sisters and ignore the painful origin of our belief in it. Black people deserve better than that.

That is not to say that only Black people face homophobic discrimination, but to highlight the overwhelmingly dark presence of it in the Black community due to religion. But, in fact, religion is used to discriminate against all groups of people. It is written with and rooted in misogyny, homophobia, hatred for nonbelievers or other religious groups, bigotry, the criminalization of sex, and racism. I — and we, as a people — deserve better than that



Torrie Boykins

and can do better than that, which is why my faith is not in religion, but in myself.

I can be good without religion because I value people and the heart and sake of them more than I value blindly giving myself up to a persecuting god.

Religion has made people lazy. It

gives them the false impression that their "thoughts and prayers" are enough in dire situations of injustice. Well, it's nowhere near enough. And that's why I want to do more. I can be good because I will take the actions to make the world a better and more equitable place, even if that means speaking out against principles of various religions. I want to help people who are underprivileged, underrepresented and marginalized — not further oppress them like religions often do. And, I don't need to have a reason to do these things or an incentive of being granted to heaven. I can be good because I am good.

Torrie, 17, is from Southfield, Mich., and attends Michigan State University with plans to major in humanities in the pre-law program.

"I am very interested in social justice," she writes. "I enjoy reading, journaling, planning, shopping and baking. My goal in life is to be able to fight for human rights and help change laws/systemic principles that harm people."

TENTH PLACE (tie)

There is no inherent value in suffering

FFRF awarded Riya \$300.

By Riya Bhargava

Is there an inherent value in suffering? The short answer is no.

One need not look far to find examples of human suffering. As a girls rights’ advocate, I have documented the stories of girls and young women fleeing violence on rotting boats and rafts, or those who have lost their families, homes and sources of livelihood in forest fires or floods. Some of us are more intimately familiar with personal loss, grief or disease.

A few years ago, I would have turned to religion to seek comfort, where I would have been told that such gratuitous suffering may have a “divine purpose,” like “atonement for sinful behavior” or as “a test of faith.” Religion ascribes value where there is none, and reverses the cycle of cause and effect into effect and “divine purpose” or a “mysterious” justification for perfectly quantifiable human misdeeds.

The world’s great evils, such as poverty, tyranny and hatred, are very much caused by human actions, and to me, blind belief in a “divine purpose” seemed detrimental to how I sought



Riya Bhargava

accountability and for injustices in a globalized world. My disillusionment with religion was gradual, and grew the more I understood the nature of conflicts throughout history.

Religions of the world — which theoretically espouse peace and harmony — are also commonly connected with intolerance and violent aggression. Detaching myself from a religious position allows me to better understand how political conflicts use religious identities, traditions and martyrdom to sanction

violence that profits them, as seen in the persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar or the xenophobic social anxiety growing across the world.

As a nontheist, it is easier for me to see how the brand of religion is used to give moral certitude and legitimacy to “just wars” and militarism, and later, “thoughts and prayers” to the victims of the same.

The final straw which made me realize the pitfall of associating morality with religion is the inevitable dilemma of accountability versus freedom of religion, that is, how to hold religious leaders accountable when their irrational ideas turn harmful. A majority of people who oppose abortion as a fundamental reproductive right cite religious reasons for doing so; willful ignorance of the rights of queer people translates into conversion therapy being seen as “basic, faithful” religious service.

In cases like these, faith is the negation of reason, and only when one acts out of their rationality, as a thinking and observing creature, is one capable

of acting morally.

There are atheists, agnostics and humanists like me who lead moral lives every day, guided by principles of reason, honor and justice. For a long time, prescribing morals has been a fundamental function of organized religions, and it is difficult to comprehend how this force that has the capacity of being seemingly ethical in times of abundance, changes face in times of austerity. This is because people change in crisis, and religion is so much more about the people refusing to reason than any divine entity it may claim to worship.

Riya, 19, from Lucknow, India, attends Yale University with plans to major in biomedical engineering. “As a published scientific researcher, award-winning student of philosophy, and an international advocate for digital equity, I have always worked at the intersection of many different areas of studies, effectively combining them to produce research and projects that further scientific curiosity and innovation, and positively impact the society at the same time,” she writes.

“Religion ascribes value where there is none, and reverses the cycle of cause and effect into effect and ‘divine purpose.’

TENTH PLACE (tie)

An ethical analysis of atheism

FFRF awarded Vaishnavi \$300.

By Vaishnavi Nayak

When talking about the moral worth of a person — evaluating their actions as being relatively good or bad — the first thing to come to my mind is ethics. Ethics, being the study of morality, can be used to prove why my atheistic beliefs make me a better person in my everyday life through an evaluation of the three main sectors of ethics: deontology, consequentialism and virtue ethics.

First, let’s assess my atheistic beliefs through the lens of deontology. Deontology judges morality through the perspective of intent. An action is deemed moral when the intent behind the action is moral, regardless of the consequence. Every day, I act morally — volunteering at my school, spending time with my family, trying to be more sustainable — because I genuinely have the intent of helping others. I do not act morally because I in-

tend to get into heaven or save myself from a horrifying fate in hell. I do not care about moral dessert. My intentions, whether good or bad, are at least pure. Moreover, atheism has made my intentions more grounded in reality because it has made me realize the futility of reality. There is no eternity in the afterlife, and this makes life seem so much more valuable. I intend to make use of every second of my fleeting existence to make a

difference in the world because I realize that I do not have an eternity to make up time.

Now, let us look at consequentialism. Consequentialism, as implied by its name, argues that an action’s moral worth can be determined by its conse-

quences. There is an endless list of atheists whose actions have created lasting good in this world — Alan Turing, Albert Einstein, Thomas Edison and Rosalind Franklin, to name a few. These nonbelievers changed the world, regardless of their nonreligious nature. However, even looking at a smaller scale, atheism has made me a more empathetic, accepting person. For one, I do not



Vaishnavi Nayak

judge people simply for believing in different gods because my nonreligious beliefs do not compel me to characterize every person with a dissimilar belief as a heretic. Secondly, my atheistic beliefs have caused me to have a more subjunctive view of morality. I understand that morality is more fluid than I realized and that each person’s experience leads to their actions. Atheism led me to become more open-minded and

made me a better person, even from a consequentialist viewpoint.

Finally, let’s look at virtue ethics. Virtue ethics focuses on the person doing the action instead of the intent or consequence of said action. For example, a generous person would always act generously. By making me more empathetic, more caring and kind, atheism has imbued within me virtues that make me moral.

Morality is often a complex combination of these various philosophies. However, as I have demonstrated, atheism has made a better person regardless of the philosophy one employs.

Vaishnavi, 18, of Highland Heights, Ohio, attends Ohio State University with plans to major in biomedical engineering and history.

“I have been a highly involved student in high school as a member of seven different clubs,” she writes. “I’ve competed in the Academic World Quest competition, and earned a trip to Washington, D.C., for nationals. I was also an officer of the Science Olympiad team and the treasurer of our high school’s Science National Honor Society. I’ve been a two-time state qualifier for Science Olympiad and placed third in Fossils at the state level.”

“I do not act morally because I intend to get into heaven or save myself from a horrifying fate in hell. I do not care about moral dessert.

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Honorable mentions



The following are snippets taken from the essays of those who earned honorable mention distinction.

Religion often serves as a gateway to create an exploitative tool that systematically oppresses others.”

Christopher Rodriguez, 20, is from College Station, Texas, attends Texas A&M University and is majoring in electrical engineering.

“The nonreligious, including humanists and agnostics, do not preach for a world of duplicity and iniquity. Instead, they highlight the virtues of ethics, accountability, and curiosity as human nature.”

Alexandria Calloway, 18, is from Davie, Fla., and attends Duke University with plans to major in biochemistry or chemistry with a minor in global health or mathematics.

“I am a black queer woman and religion has never served people like me throughout history. . . . Nonreligiousness does not exclude people or shame people for who they are; it accepts people as they are. This is the type of mantra I’d rather live by.”

Jordyn Jones, 20, is from Suwanee, Ga., attends Kennesaw State University and is double majoring in computer science and psychology.

“I have often heard phrases alluding to the testament that ‘God will provide.’ I find that statement to be contradictory to the American ideal that a person must be self-made and work

diligently toward their goals.”

Elayna Kash, 19, is from Flint, Mich., attends the University of Michigan and is majoring in linguistics with a Minor in Crime and Justice.

“There is no innate good in belief, and there is no innate evil in disbelief. Instead, there are only people, and personally I see my nonbelief as a foundation for being a better person.”

Tenaya Coward, 19, is from Las Vegas, attends Portland State University and plans to major in applied linguistics and minor in psychology.

“Religion breeds ignorance; and ignorance gives birth to bigotry.”

Dystanee Foy, 18, is from Denver, attends the University of Denver with plans to major in psychology before going to medical school.

“Many nontheists that are charitable do it out of compassion for others, compared to many religious folk in which their charitableness more comes from ‘doctrine, a communal identity, or reputational concerns.’”

Mary Membreno, 19, is from Goodview, Va., attends Roanoke College and plans to major in biochemistry.

“While not all religious people are bigoted or prejudiced, only religion gives you the impression that your prejudice is moral or righteous.”

Daniel Ogunwale, 18, is from Brooklyn, N.Y., and attends Swarthmore College.

“Not having a religion to guide your beliefs means that you have to be self-motivated to find the answers you are looking for. A nontheist individual can be deemed as genuine, as they are not clouded by religious claims that are

often advertised to be set in stone.”

Vanessa Bien-Aime, 19, is from Germantown, Md., attends the University of Maryland with plan to major in Romance languages and international relations.

“Religion provides people with a basis for their moral code, but it also cements those morals in a way that cannot evolve over time.”

Amani Turner, 17, is from Houston, attends University of Texas – Austin with plans to major in theater and linguistics.

“Many faith-based systems are abhorrent to my morality because they impose a flawed interpretation of our vacation from nonexistence; this allows us to waste it on illusions of an afterlife or creator.”

Liam Wisner, 18, is from Bartlesville, Okla., attends Oklahoma State University with plans to major in finance and accounting.

“I can stand up for myself and what I believe in, instead of being scared of getting sent to hell or ridiculed by those who call themselves loving because they have faith.”

Austin De Nijs, 18, is from Dublin, Va., and attends the Savannah College of Art and Design.

“I’ve seen first-hand how religious people can be abhorrent human beings, and that is why I now believe that being agnostic or a ‘nonbeliever’ does not equate to being an immoral person.”

Landsay Franckoer, 19, is from Egg Harbor Township, N.J., attends Stockton University and is majoring in economics.

When complimented on my grades,

great interpersonal relationships, and loyalty to my community I would feel pride in myself instead of attributing this to my religious upbringing. What did my grades have to do with God?”

Whisper Johnson, 21, is from Massillon, Ohio, attends Bowling Green State University and is majoring in criminal justice.

Nonreligion isn’t a ticket to hell; in fact, it inspires people to believe and improve in themselves to become better persons.

Tiffany Lin, 18, is from Gaston, S.C., attends the University of Michigan with plans to major in nursing.

“I truly believe that the best way a person can express love for others is not through being motivated by the will of a god, but by being motivated in making this world a better place.”

Zyon Loiseau, 18, is from Skokie, Ill., and attends University of Wisconsin.

“When those who do not worship do something for the benefit of another, it is genuine. It is not performative or to cover up the evil doings of their past.”

Jordan Wilson, 18, is from Dallas and attends the University of California Santa Cruz.

“Being an atheist, acutely aware of Christianity’s impact on our world, has allowed me to consciously and intentionally create my own morals. I have control over how I want to navigate this oppressive, hypocritical, capitalistic, but also beautiful, exciting and joyous world.”

Anika Becker, 20, is from Portland, Ore., attends the University of San Francisco and is majoring in critical diversity studies.

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‘Secular values voter’ ad blitz continues

Continuing its “I’m Secular and I Vote” advertising campaign, FFRF is placing full-page ads in dozens of newspapers around the country, as well as highlighting FFRF members on billboards in time for Constitution Day, Sept. 17.

In each ad, FFRF has been featuring one member per state (or couples) with photos taken in front of their respective state Capitol buildings, and a description of the members.

The ad encourages secular voters to join FFRF and also links results of FFRF’s secular value voters survey (ffrf.org/valuesvoter).

FFRF thanks participants and donors to its advertising fund for making possible this campaign.

I’M AN ATHEIST

and I vote

Jodette C Lenser | Missouri

Paid for by

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Missouri
Jodette Lenser is shown on a billboard that will appear in Jefferson City, Mo. Her ad says: “I’m a retired academic adviser, wife, grandmother, volunteer activist . . . and Atheist.”



Oklahoma
Jamie Hamel poses in front of the Capitol building in Oklahoma City.

Jamie’s ad says: “I’m an ICU nurse, a ‘dog mom’ and ‘cool aunt,’ Oklahoman and . . . an Atheist.”



Utah
Raymond Matthews, a Republican state delegate, smiles in front of the state Capitol in Salt Lake City.

Raymond’s ad reads: “I’m a retired librarian, poet, former Mormon, adopted Utahn . . . and Atheist.”



New Jersey
Emily Eckhart stands outside the Capitol building in Trenton, N.J. “I’m an author, environmentalist, Garden Stater . . . and Atheist,” she says in the ad soon to appear in Trenton and Newark.

I’M AN ATHEIST

and I vote

Chris Nelson | Alabama

Paid for by

FFRF.ORG | FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

Alabama
Chris Nelson was one of FFRF’s successful plaintiffs in a case involving a religious test to register to vote in Alabama. He earned FFRF’s Freethinker of the Year award.

The ad for Chris states: “I’m rural working-class, a lifelong Alabamian (and no respecter of class or distinction). . . and an Atheist.”



Arkansas
Chris Sweeny and Megan McGuire are shown in front of the Capitol in Little Rock, Ark.

FFRF’s ad states: “Steve is a father, husband, rugby player, Arkansan . . . and Atheist. Megan is a mother, wife, feminist, professional businesswoman . . . and Atheist.”



Michigan
Steven and Emily Eikhout stand in front of the Capitol building in Lansing, Mich.

Their ad states: “Steven is a father, educator, lifelong Michigander . . . and Humanist. Emily is a mother, graduate student, exchange student host, lifelong Michigander . . . and Freethinker.”

Football coach pressured us into prayer

This article first appeared in the *Houston Chronicle* on July 8 and is reprinted with permission.

By Michael Parker

Recently, the U.S. Supreme Court held that a public high school football coach could pray at the 50-yard line of the field after football games. In the majority opinion, the court focused on a claim that there were no high school football players who complained that they were coerced into praying with the coach. The court also stated that firing the coach for prayer “would undermine a long constitutional tradition under which learning



Michael Parker

how to tolerate diverse expressive activities has always been part of learning how to live in a pluralistic society.” I was a high school football player in Katy, Texas, from 2001-2003 and what I experienced with prayer during football games and activities was far from the Supreme Court’s out-of-touch decision. That few players complained speaks to the pressure they face, and the need to protect them from having religious beliefs imposed on them. I played varsity football at Katy High School and served as the co-captain of the 2003 team that won the state football championship. Playing in that environment demanded discipline. Everyone knew that we had to fall in line, do what the coaches asked of us and never question the system that was leading us to championships. I was — and am still — incredibly grateful for the opportunity to compete and succeed at the highest level, and I felt rewarded for my efforts. That is only to say that, despite my leadership position and success in the program, I never knew or thought that I could speak out when religion was incorporated into our games and activities.



There are three separate religious practices that I remember participating in with the football team during this time. Before Saturday games, we would go to Luby’s restaurant as a football team for breakfast. All the coaches and players were there. I assumed that if anyone missed the breakfast, the coach would make an example of that person in some way because people were punished for other misbehaviors with physical exercise or missing game time. I never tested that assumption and attended the team breakfasts each Saturday. During the breakfast, a person who I assume was affiliated with a church would come into the Luby’s dining room, give a short sermon, and end the breakfast with a prayer. It was uncomfortable. Although I casually participated in religious activities to fit in socially, I was privately ambivalent with a growing skepticism. I never believed the prayers would have an impact on the team’s performance later in the day. But I did not know why it was wrong. I only knew that I had to fall in line. Before each football game, the play-

ers most vocal about their religious convictions would lead the team in prayer in an area near the locker room. Players would sweep through the fieldhouse calling for those not already in the room to join them in the prayer room. Coaches would encourage those who were unaware the player-led prayer was about to begin to join the prayer room. It did not matter whether a player was getting his ankles taped or just relaxing by his locker, there was always an urgency to gather in this room and hold hands in prayer. I never felt I had a choice, I just knew to fall in line. This was especially true while I was a co-captain. I believed I had to set a good example by joining the majority of players and following the coach’s example. After the games, the coach also would initiate The Lord’s Prayer by asking the players who wanted to lead the team in this prayer. Did the coach ever tell us we were required to pray? No. But I knew better than to question the coaches or their process. Sometimes players would volunteer to lead the prayer or if someone had a particularly good game, the

coach would highlight their performance and ask him to lead it. I wouldn’t volunteer, but I did lead prayer when asked. I never thought to say no, especially if the coach had just praised the game I had. It was not until after I graduated high school and moved out of state that I realized why the religious practices imposed by the team had made me feel so uncomfortable. I was being indoctrinated — whether intentionally or not — by a group’s beliefs. I had succeeded on the field based on my discipline and by doing what the coaches told me to do. Naturally, I thought I had to submit and conform by participating in the religious practices just as I was participating in the football practices. I do not know the exact legal nuances of what it takes to be “coerced” into religious practices, but I do know based on my experience that it should not matter that students don’t speak out when a football coach prays after a game. And because I was only exposed to prayer by one religious group, I was not taught “to tolerate diverse expressive activities” as the Supreme Court claims. For me, playing high school football was the opposite. While these experiences were almost 19 years ago, I can understand if the Bremerton High School players didn’t speak out. Kids, including teenage football players, are easily influenced by the authority figures in their lives who they are taught to follow, no matter where they lead. As I experienced, the indoctrination of young people works because they do not know or do not feel comfortable enough to question the beliefs imposed on them, making it hard to simply break away or even speak out. I question how the U.S. Supreme Court could suggest that if players did not speak out against the prayers of a football coach, then the coach’s religion was not imposed on them.

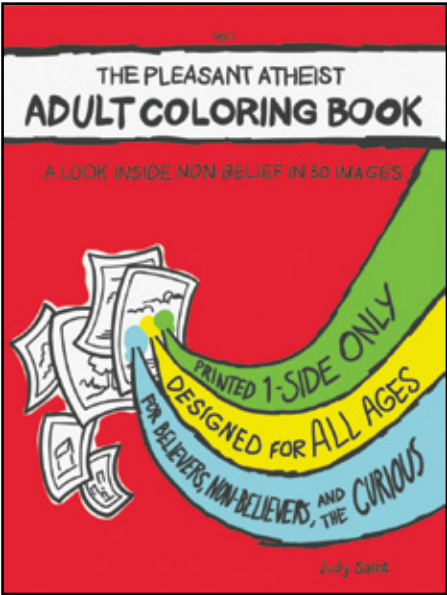
Michael Parker was born and raised in Katy, Texas, and is currently a Houston resident.

Atheist coloring book seeks to break down barriers



Author Judy Saint feigns surprise after reading negative comments on social media about her atheist adult coloring book.

Judy Saint, president of FFRF’s Sacramento chapter, wanted a way for nonbelievers to break through to the religious, to perhaps find some common ground, to open lines of communication. Then she had her eureka moment. “I shall make an adult coloring book!” she wrote to FFRF. “I’ll use illustrations that are entertaining. I’ll avoid divisions, labels and definitions.” And, thus, was born *The Pleasant Atheist Adult Coloring Book*. “I worked this last year to create a nonconfrontational and humorous set of drawings and captions that read like a bedtime storybook,” Saint writes. “It fills a void on bookstore shelves — a pleasant, positive view of nonbelief that seems to be lacking.” Saint was shocked (OK, not really) when she first showed the book on social media. “When I presented it on social media, people had a hard time understanding what it was,” Saint wrote. “Comments were quite negative, rude, and even threatening.” But, Saint said, despite those negative comments, the book does seem to be making some inroads with the religious.



“My wife took some with her on a visit to her very conservative family in Ohio and West Virginia,” she wrote. “She said she was prepared to have the books thrown back at her, or for some to refuse to touch it. She was shocked to find the opposite. Each one accepted it and some read through it. No one gave it back. No one said anything negative. After all, it’s just a coloring book. It’s as nonconfrontational as a child offering flowers.” Saint said that the book can act as a breakthrough mechanism. “It’s disarming,” she wrote. “It says what we all want to say to our relatives about atheism and separation of church and state when we can’t find an open door for discussion. Even just leaving this book on a table speaks for us. We can try to get these books into the hands of our relatives who find it hard to talk with us anymore. Or, we can read it and color it ourselves to feel empowered to discuss nonbelief and separation of church and state without confrontation, following the examples in the book.” To purchase a copy, go to [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and search for “Pleasant Atheist Adult Coloring Book.”

Abortion bans are already hell on Earth

This column first appeared in the Washington Post on July 22 and is reprinted with permission.

By Monica Hesse

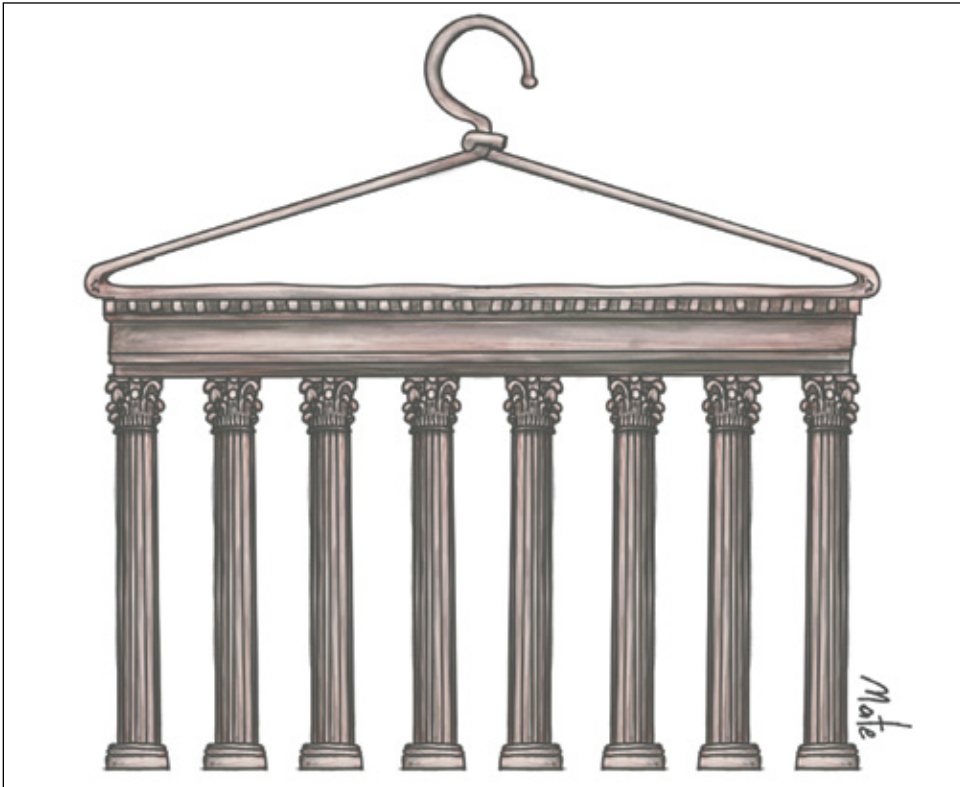
A woman in Louisiana was 16 weeks pregnant when her water broke recently. Sixteen-week fetuses are not viable, or “not compatible with life,” in medical parlance. They are the size of a small avocado. There is no medicine, no magic, no prayer in the known world that could allow such a fetus to survive, no matter how desperately the mother may have wished differently. The woman’s doctor suggested ending the pregnancy via a dilation and evacuation rather than subjecting her patient to the anguish of a pointless labor; according to an affidavit the doctor filed in court, as reported by the Advocate.

But attorneys advised against the procedure. A dilation and evacuation is a procedure used for abortions, after all, and abortions at that stage of pregnancy were now banned in the state of Louisiana. So the woman was forced to deliver the baby she knew would not survive, and as she did so, she was screaming. “Not from pain,” the doctor wrote, “but from the emotional trauma she was experiencing.”

And so I ask the antiabortion activists who spent the past nearly 50 years praying for the end of Roe v. Wade: Is this what you wanted?

I am speaking to the ones who wept with joy outside of the Supreme Court, the ones who said they wanted the whole country to realize that not only should abortion be illegal, but it should also be unfathomable. Is this the utopia you fathomed? A grieving woman in stirrups, forced to expel her dearest wish from her body while she cried out in agony?

It has been two months since the Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization ruling came down from the Supreme Court, and the stories of how it has landed in the world of maternal health have revealed chaos and cruelty: pregnant women forced to cramp and bleed for days on



end, long after heartbeats disappeared; doctors paralyzed into inaction, afraid that if they delivered what they knew to be the best medical care, they would face legal repercussions; and pharmacists unwilling to fill prescriptions for drugs that ease miscarriages, because they are the same drugs used for abortions.

A Texas woman learned her fetus no longer had a heartbeat but was told that she was now required to wait for a confirmation ultrasound before she could be given any medical attention. For the next two weeks, she carried the dead fetus in her body. She told The Washington Post that she felt “like a walking coffin.”

Another Texas woman asked for an abortion after miscarrying one of her twins at 15 weeks and learning the remaining pregnancy made her susceptible to life-threatening infection, according to the New York Times. She was told her life wasn’t endangered enough yet, that she had to be closer to death to receive the abortion she’d asked for. When she returned to the hospital weeks later, she was suffering from sepsis and an acute kidney injury. Her body and

soul sufficiently battered, she was allowed to end her pregnancy.

Again, I ask the activists: Is this the love you imagined when you waved your protest signs reading “love them both”? When you explained that your opposition to abortion was not only about saving fetuses but also about protecting women?

Is this what you wanted?

The president of Texas Right to Life, John Seago, told the New York Times that, no, medical professionals balking at treating miscarriages or dying women isn’t what he’d wanted. In situations where the health of the mother is in jeopardy “he acknowledged that such

delays could cause medical complications for women,” according to the Times, “but said ‘severe’ complications could legally be treated immediately.” Miscarriage patients weren’t meant to be targeted by these laws, Seago said. He attributed situations like the ones mentioned above to “a breakdown in communication of the law, not the law itself.”

But the laws — Texas’s original six-week ban and the trigger law that went into ef-

fect after Dobbs — contain no special provisions for treating miscarriages. They do not specify how “severe” a complication must be before an abortion would at last be considered a lifesaving procedure. It is unclear how lawyers, much less doctors, are supposed to know what actions they are allowed to take, and on whom.

However you might have felt about these antiabortion laws’ intent, you cannot deny that there is a catastrophic coldheartedness in their effect. There is no mercy at the margins, only the blunt-force instrument of trigger laws so intent on saving fetuses that the women carrying them are left suffering or dying. There is no nuance in the ways these laws were written, no curiosity in the ways they were conceptualized, no forethought in the way they were enacted.

There appears to be no desire to understand how women’s bodies work, or how abortions are actually performed, or who might get trapped in the expansive net of this new justice. Abruptly, access to abortion ended, and while antiabortion advocates were still congratulating themselves in church, women were fighting for their lives and sanity in hospitals.

Part of the issue, I think, is that many antiabortion activists think of an “abortion” as a murderous procedure that a bad woman has when she wants to kill her baby.

But a woman who takes medication to end an ectopic pregnancy — a life-threatening condition in which an embryo has implanted outside the uterus, usually in the fallopian tubes — is having an abortion. A patient who has undergone in vitro fertilization — and whose doctor suggests reducing her resulting embryos from three to two to improve maternal and fetal health — that reduction would be an abortion. An expectant mother who learns she will labor to birth a baby who will die minutes after birth and wants to spare her child the pain? That is an abortion.

The stories of the past month are the stories of what abortion actually means and the stories of what happens when that access is taken away. It is exactly what anti-abortion activists asked for. But I hope it’s not what any of them wanted.

Monica Hesse is a columnist for The Washington Post’s Style section, who frequently writes about gender and its impact on society. She’s the author of several novels, most recently, *They Went Left*.

1792 case shows Founders’ thinking on abortion

Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito, in writing the Dobbs decision overturning Roe v. Wade, basing the action in part on a claim that abortion in the United States was always considered a criminal act. Alito’s claim is wrong for many reasons, including ignoring the fact that common law viewed “quickening,” usually at 16 to 22 weeks gestation, as the point where abortion became criminal.

A column by Sarah Hougen Poggi and Cynthia A. Kierner in the Washington Post (July 19) about a sensational case in 1792 sheds further light on how the Founders actually viewed abortion.

“In fact, contrary to Alito’s assertions in Dobbs, three Founders from Virginia — Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and John Marshall — did not seek charges in a sensational court case from that era in which evidence of an abortion was discovered,” they report.

Martha Jefferson Randolph, the daughter of Thomas Jefferson, visited her unwed cousin and sister-in-law,

Nancy Randolph, age 18, in September 1792. She lived with her sister Judith and Judith’s husband, Richard Randolph. Finding Nancy unwell and appearing

pregnant, Martha recommended gum of guaiacum, an herb to treat “menstrual obstruction” (a euphemism for pregnancy) and later sent her the herb, telling her it could “produce an abortion.”

Two weeks later, following an evening after which Nancy cried out and her bedclothes were bloodied, a white fetus was found on the woodpile. Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to Martha expressing sympathy: “I see guilt but in one person, and not in her.”

Richard Randolph publicly claimed to be innocent of impregnating his sister-in-law, but was charged with “feloniously murdering a child delivered

of the body of Nancy Randolph or being accessory to the same.” In April 1793, he went before a tribunal of county judges, and was defended by Patrick Henry and John Marshall, among others. Martha Randolph’s testimony was recorded, stating that Nancy was pregnant and she had given her an herb to abort. The tribunal released Richard. Significantly, Nancy and Martha (her accomplice) were never charged with any crime.

Poggi, an ob-gyn, and Kierner, a his-

“Contrary to Alito’s assertions in Dobbs, three Founders from Virginia — Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and John Marshall — did not seek charges in a sensational court case from that era in which evidence of an abortion was discovered.

— Sarah Hougen Poggi and Cynthia A. Kierner

torian, write: “If anything, the saga demonstrates that the concept of abortion as a private matter was ‘deeply rooted’ in the minds of our nation’s Founders. As Americans consider their next move on the abortion issue at the state level, they should be mindful of the precedents followed by these early giants of our republic.”



Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist

By Dan Barker

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

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Since when are we a one-faith nation?

This article first appeared in USA Today on July 19 and is reprinted with permission.

By Jill Lawrence

I lived in Ireland for a year in the 1970s, when both contraception and abortion were illegal. I still remember the news story about a young German couple whose birth control was confiscated as they entered the country for their honeymoon. Welcome to Ireland!

Contraception became legal in Ireland in 1979 and widely available in 1985. But the tide on abortion did not start to turn until the 2012 death of Savita Halappanavar, a 31-year-old dentist carrying a doomed 17-week fetus.



Jill Lawrence

In a BBC interview at the time, her husband said she was told she could not end the pregnancy because it was against the law in Catholic Ireland. She said she was Hindu, not Catholic, and asked “Why impose the law on her,” said her husband, Praveen. The answer she received: “I’m sorry, unfortunately it’s a Catholic country and it’s the law that they can’t abort when the fetus is live.” By the time the fetus’ heart stopped, it was too late for Savita. She died of septicemia.

No abortion consensus

Make no mistake, the abortion debate is about religion. For some believers, it’s simple: Abortion amounts to murder.

In reality, that word is fraught and harder to define than it seems. Our laws consider many circumstances: Was a killing premeditated, impulsive, accidental, committed in self-defense?

Capital punishment is legal killing. So is war, except when it’s not; for instance, if a party targets civilians or uses weapons of mass destruction. Some people oppose even “legal” war killings due to their moral or religious principles and may be granted conscientious objector status.

Author Amy Bloom’s husband had Alzheimer’s disease and he did not want to deteriorate until it killed him. She researched assisted suicide for months on how to do it (do-it-yourself suffocation? Pentobarbital?) and where to do it (Dig-



Photo by Shutterstock

A sign hangs outside a synagogue in Washington D.C. on July 25.

nitias in Zurich was the only real option). In her book *In Love: A Memoir of Love and Loss*, she describes supervising his application process, watching him drink the fatal potion and holding his hand as he embarked on his “long journey; miles and miles of Nought.”

Was Bloom an enabler, an accessory to a crime? Not in Zurich. Is assisted suicide considered murder? Not in the 11 U.S. jurisdictions that allow it. What about other types of euthanasia? When you have a vet put your terminally ill pet out of its misery, is that murder – or mercy?

No religious consensus

Is abortion murder? It depends on when you think life begins. Is it at conception, at viability, at birth? Arthur Caplan, a New York University bioethicist, talks of symmetry: “We agree that people are dead and no longer exist when their brains have ceased to function. So, I think a key landmark is when a brain is able to totally function.”

He and other scientists say that happens at 24-25 weeks. That’s when a fetus develops the coordinated “brain activity required for consciousness,” Dr. Tomás Ryan, an associate professor at Dublin’s Trinity College Institute of Neurosciences, wrote in 2018.

There is no consensus among religions on these questions. In fact there is no consensus among Muslims, says Asifa Quraishi-Landes, a professor of U.S. constitutional law and modern Islamic constitutional theory at the University of Wisconsin Law School. Quranic vers-

es can be interpreted in many ways and “Muslims simply select whichever sharia school of thought they want to follow,” she wrote in the San Francisco Chronicle. “That means it is normal for some Muslims to oppose abortion while others insist on its legitimacy.”

The National Council of Jewish Women says a fetus is considered “a physical part of the pregnant individual’s body” until labor and childbirth. Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg, the council’s scholar in residence, posted a Twitter thread quoting from the Talmud and Orthodox authorities to show Judaism permits abortion for many reasons, among them preventing disgrace, preserving dignity, keeping “domestic peace” and sparing people emotional and physical pain. To save a pregnant person’s life, Ruttenberg wrote, “it’s required.”

Freedom of faith

For nearly 50 years, Roe v. Wade created space for disagreement on abortion. Caroline Mala Corbin, a constitutional law professor at the University of Miami School of Law, put it to me this way: “Each person is able to live their religious truth when abortion is legal.”

You’d think that right would be guaranteed in America by the First Amendment: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” In other words, the people have religious liberty and the government can’t establish an official religion or favor one religion over another.

But Corbin notes that in a 1980 case about abortion restrictions, the Supreme Court ruled that the restrictions did not favor a particular religious view — they just happened to coincide with it. On top of the court’s rulings in June that abortion cannot be “deemed fundamental” like other rights and that a football coach has the right to pray publicly on the field (an Establishment Clause “wrecking ball,” Corbin says), national prospects appear dim.

Some states have explicit constitutional or statutory rights to privacy, and they are the basis of many legal challenges. Religious freedom is also a right in some states and it is in play in at least two lawsuits, in Florida and Ohio.

Ten days before Roe was overturned, a Florida synagogue filed suit on June 14 claiming that the state’s 15-week limit on abortion “prohibits Jewish women from practicing their faith free of government intrusion and this violates their privacy rights and religious freedom.” The rabbi noted with anxiety that Gov. Ron DeSantis had signed the law in an evangelical Christian church.

In Ohio, a coalition of Jewish groups said recently that it would join the ACLU in challenging the state’s six-week ban on freedom-of-religion grounds.

Ideally, Congress would pass a law setting a national minimum standard for abortion rights and access. For Ireland, it took tragedies, traumas and pressure from groups like the European Convention on Human Rights, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and the U.N. Human Rights Committee. In 2018, Irish voters overwhelmingly repealed a 1983 constitutional amendment that gave equal weight to “the right to life of the unborn” and “of the mother.” A new law establishing a legal right to abortion took effect in 2019.

Patients are increasingly at risk as doctors try to navigate new laws and stay out of jail.

The plight of Ohio’s 10-year-old rape victim has dramatically defined the impact of Roe v. Wade’s demise. Maybe this child will be this country’s Savita Halappanavar – shocking enough consciences to blast America out of the 18th century and back into the 21st.

Jill Lawrence is a columnist for USA Today and author of *The Art of the Political Deal: How Congress Beat the Odds and Broke Through Gridlock*.

CRANKMAIL

We hope you enjoy this month’s installment of Crankmail, where we publish some of the correspondence FFRF receives from those who don’t quite see eye-to-eye with our mission. Printed as received.

How are you even legal? According to the first amendment atheism is a religion, which ironically means you’re ironically breaking the very law you assume you’re upholding. — David Brook

American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll

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

—Published by FFRF.
316 pages / PB

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@ ffrf.org/shop

Religion: Dear Sirs: You have no religion. You have no faith. You have no rules. You have no guidelines. And you have no guidance. You do not believe in God. You even believe you are smarter than God. The United States of America was based on religious freedom by people who were suppressed from following their religious beliefs. Not to be suppressed by heathens. Religion and evolution are not in conflict in any way shape or form. Only by shortsighted, fallible human beings. I will pray anywhere and anytime I wish. And neither you or your organization will stop me. Quit shoving your agenda down our throats. Your ads should be illegal. — Dave Hafner

Freedom: Why don’t you just let Christians alone? We don’t oppose others living out their ideas in public, so why are you so upset that we kneel, cross ourselves, or even silently pray? As a teacher, I could not wear a cross (however small) but my students could wear profane shirts. I don’t take Pride in gays, but I turn the other cheek when they march. Please let us live our lives in peace and all get along. — Loretta Bedford

Your goals: Constitutionally, it’s freedom of religion, not from religion, you hateful fucking scumbag! They should airlift you and drop you in the middle of a hostile Muslim nation — John R. Roberts

Abortion: So you’re saying that a fetus is not a baby which is human being being developed you people are wicked evil people science has proved

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

Hell: Look up the accounts of folks on their death beds regretting their choice to join Satan and his wickedness. If you have ever experienced darkness imagine that for eternity, not to mention the fact that your in flames for all eternity with not a drop of water ever your permanently there no one will pray you out of there you have sealed your fate. If you have low tolerance of pain hell is not the place for you. — Debbie Guinn

He exists!: Just because you choose to not accept and acknowledge GOD/Jesus as Lord, Savior, and King doesn’t stop HIM from existing nor does it stop who HE is and the absolute power that HE has...you may boldly claim yourself as an atheist, but when your time ends the second you take your last breathe you will be in HIS presents bowing before HIM. You WILL bow and fully acknowledge HIM as the ONE and only GOD, LORD, and SAVIOR then hit Hell wide open to burn for eternity... — Brent Mobeley

Your opinion: “freedom from religion” is by definition a specifically religious ideology entirely focused on spreading a specific religious opinion of spiritual matters, with emphasis on proselytizing converts for gaining political influence as a religion-focused organization (all things filtering through spiritual belief system as first & foremost determining factor of all decisions ever made). This foolishness, is a waste of time. On top of dumb front, it’s a shame such lies are hid behind by ppl too weak & dishonest to admit they are obvious whole-hearted satanists. I predict this will be censored, not that I care. — Ron McMurtry

Liars: That’s pretty offensive maybe the fact that you even got a television show called ask an atheist is offensive as hell to all of the humanities intelligence please stop f**** with mine a very top and bottom from reality no reality is everything in existence has a full knowledge of God existence as the Creator and know that he is so even if you claim to not believe in God you’re lying to us and yourself who you trying to convince me or you that God is not real because anybody that got a belief system of their own and they’re going to stick to it till the very end it’s not going to sit and have a debate and have a simple ass TV show called I asked an atheist cuz we know where your mind is at the middle of nowhere and any dimension and we ain’t going to ask you a m***** thing — Veronica Poullard

Meet FFRF’s grad student summer interns

Each summer, FFRF hires about a half-dozen grad school students to work full-time. This summer, FFRF hired six law school students to help in FFRF’s legal department and one intern to work as an editorial assistant.

Here’s a look at each of this year’s interns.

Chloe Garcia

Hometown: I am from St. Louis!

Religious upbringing: I was raised Catholic, but my whole family stepped away from the church when I was in middle school.

Undergrad school: Truman State University in Kirksville, Mo.

Grad school: University of Kansas School of Law.

Why did you want to intern at FFRF?: It was one of the only internships I found that combined both policy and law. Most people I know wanted to work at firms, but I felt that the public interest sector was more suited for my aspirations.

Favorite part of working at FFRF: I thought it was very fulfilling to be able to collaborate with attorneys and staff to figure out how to juggle the changing legal atmosphere that resulted from the Supreme Court’s most recent term. I also loved the treat days!

Something interesting about you: My mom is a German teacher, so I can sort of speak German with a terrible accent (or so I’ve been told).

Cahler Fruchtman

Hometown: Milwaukee.

Religious upbringing: I was raised Jewish.

Undergrad college: Brandeis University.

Current school: University of Wisconsin Law School

Why did you want to intern at FFRF?: Growing up Jewish in a Christian dominated area allowed me to experience a wide variety of religious ideas and I was lucky enough to be able to think freely for myself in that regard. The separation of state and church is a critical aspect of our nation’s constitutional underpinnings and I strongly support FFRF’s mission to uphold that separation and allow others to think freely for themselves as I was.

Favorite part of working at FFRF: The people. Walking into an office filled with people who get along and genuinely enjoy working here makes all the difference.

Something interesting about you: I have a first initial W., so my first name is actually W. Cahler, but I only go by Cahler.

Jon Helmandollar

Hometown: I spent about half my childhood in North Carolina, including all of middle school, high school, and college.

Religious upbringing: My family was ostensibly Church of Christ, and I was

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.



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF 2022 summer interns are, from left, Chloe Garcia, Cahler Fruchtman, Katie Sticklen, Jeff Mollet, Mallory Nordin, Jon Helmandollar and Sarah Weinstock.

brought up learning bible stories and going to the occasional Sunday school, but religion was never an enforced issue and I was encouraged to think and believe what I wanted.

Undergrad college: University of North Carolina - Charlotte, where I received a B.A. in history.

Current school: University of New Hampshire Franklin Pierce School of Law in Concord, N.H.

Why did you want to be an intern at FFRF? I have long been a secularist and always believed that freedom of religion requires freedom from religion as a necessary corollary, so when I discovered that there was an organization dedicated to that principle, I knew I wanted to contribute to it in some way.

Favorite part of working at FFRF? Getting to work on issues that I think are both meaningful and incredibly urgent in today’s political and social climate.

Something interesting about you: In the last five years, I have been to two different war zones created in part by religious extremism: Iraq and Ukraine.

Jeff Mollet

Hometown: Park Ridge, Ill.

Religious upbringing? I grew up in an atheist household.

Undergrad college: Lawrence University in 2013 with a B.A. in English and Spanish.

Current school: I am entering my third year at the University of Wisconsin Law School, where I serve as president of the Technology Law Student Association and secretary of the American Constitution Society.

Why did you want to be an intern at FFRF?: As a lifelong atheist, I was drawn to FFRF’s mission of protecting the constitutional separation of state and church and educating the public about nontheism. Given the rise of Christian nationalism and an ultra-conservative Supreme Court that is hell-bent on eroding the Establishment Clause (among other basic rights), this work is critical to our democracy.

Favorite part of working at FFRF? Having the opportunity to learn and

work with skilled attorneys and staff, supporting the separation of state and church, and reminding elected officials that our Constitution is a godless document.

Something interesting about you: My high school biology teacher told our class that while she was required to teach evolution, she believed in intelligent design. I’d like to thank her for inspiring me to pursue a career where I can advocate for education that is rooted in logic, reason and science.

Mallory Nordin

Hometown: Baraboo, Wis.

Religious upbringing: I was half-heartedly raised Catholic. However, I refused to go to church as soon as I was old enough to stay home alone.

Undergrad school: University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

Grad school: University of Wisconsin-Madison Law School.

Why did you want to intern at FFRF?: Even before starting law school, I knew my ideal summer position would be with FFRF. When I was an undergrad, I took a class about the Supreme Court where my professor would choose interesting cases with pending cert petitions and have the class pick sides and write a brief. I chose to write an amicus brief for the *Freedom From Religion Foundation for Kennedy v. Bremerton*. I feel very lucky to have gotten to intern here the summer that the decision finally came out!

Favorite part of working at FFRF: I love the people that work here and the community they have built. Everyone is passionate about their work in a different way. I love being in a community of nonbelievers for the first time in my life.

Something interesting about you: I sparkle my own water at home using a CO2 tank.

Katie Sticklen

Hometown: Joplin, Mo.

Religious upbringing?: I was raised Catholic.

Undergrad college: University of Missouri.

Current school: University of Wisconsin Law School.

Why did you want to be an intern at FFRF?: I grew up in the Bible Belt and attended a public school that did not have a clear separation of church and state, which made me feel excluded even as a practicing Catholic. I was very interested when I learned about FFRF, because I wish I had known about the unconstitutional behavior occurring at my own school. It is very important to me, personally, that there is a clear separation of church and state, especially in public schools, because students should be cultivating their own thoughts and ideas, and should not be influenced or excluded by others.

Favorite part of working at FFRF?: I get to work with passionate, hardworking individuals who share similar values to myself. It makes me have hope for the future.

Something interesting about you: In 4th grade, I did a project on Leonardo da Vinci, and he signed his paintings backwards because he was left-handed and that was the only way he wouldn’t smear his signature, so I taught myself how to read and write backwards. This skill absolutely never comes up in real life, but I still think it’s fun!

Sarah Weinstock

Hometown: Healdsburg, Calif.

Religious upbringing: My parents did not raise me religious. They did it so well that I didn’t know Easter or Christmas were religious holidays until I was 15ish.

Undergrad school: Sonoma State University, B.A. in history.

Grad school: Sarah Lawrence College: Master’s in women’s history.

Why did you want to intern at FFRF?: Growing up secular and studying world history, I view religion as inherently violent and I believe in the message FFRF and the work we do.

Favorite part of working at FFRF: Helping out with the “Ask an Atheist” show.

Something interesting about you: I bought my first real winter coat when I was 25, as there is no real need for them in California.

LETTERBOX

New member found what he was looking for

I just discovered the Freedom From Religion Foundation about a month ago. I saw a billboard near my apartment showing a candidate for Chicago mayor looking to God for election advice and thought, “There must be someone who is fighting against this stuff.” I searched online and found FFRF . . . and decided to join.

I got my first Freethought Today in the mail and read it cover to cover. I was pleased to see the article about the Lake Superior Freethinkers in Duluth, Minn., where I spent my first 40 years. I recall a lecture in my ninth-grade civics class at Central High School about separation of church and state and I questioned why the Ten Commandments monument was on the City Hall lawn. I’m glad it was finally moved.

I’m delighted to have found you. Thank you for your work.

Illinois

Where is the outrage over Catholic justices?

“It is a credit to the Catholic Church that it led the discussion on the morality of abortion for all these years. This ruling makes us proud to be Catholic.” — Bill Donohue of Catholic League.

Donohue is willing to admit the paramount role of the Catholic Church in the holy war against women’s reproductive freedom. Why hasn’t the media done so? It ignores the role of the Catholic Church in overturning Roe v. Wade and continues to talk about the “conservative justices” on the Supreme Court, and not about the fact that five of the six justices who voted against Roe are right-wing Catholics and the sixth is a former right-wing Catholic who is now a right-wing Protestant, all of whom were appointed to the Supreme Court based on their conservative religious views, in open violation of Article VI, Section 3’s “no religious test” clause of the U.S. Constitution.

New York

Religions should stay in their own lanes

I saw your ad in the Nashville paper and The New York Times on July 3. I have enclosed a check to become a Lifetime Member.

As an individual who strongly believes in the separation of church and state, here is my belief: Any religion that finds it necessary to go beyond its teachings, its faith and its self-determined morality and rely on the state to impose upon the people religious dictates, that religion has minimized and diminished its self-proclaimed divine authority while interposing itself between the governed and the governors.

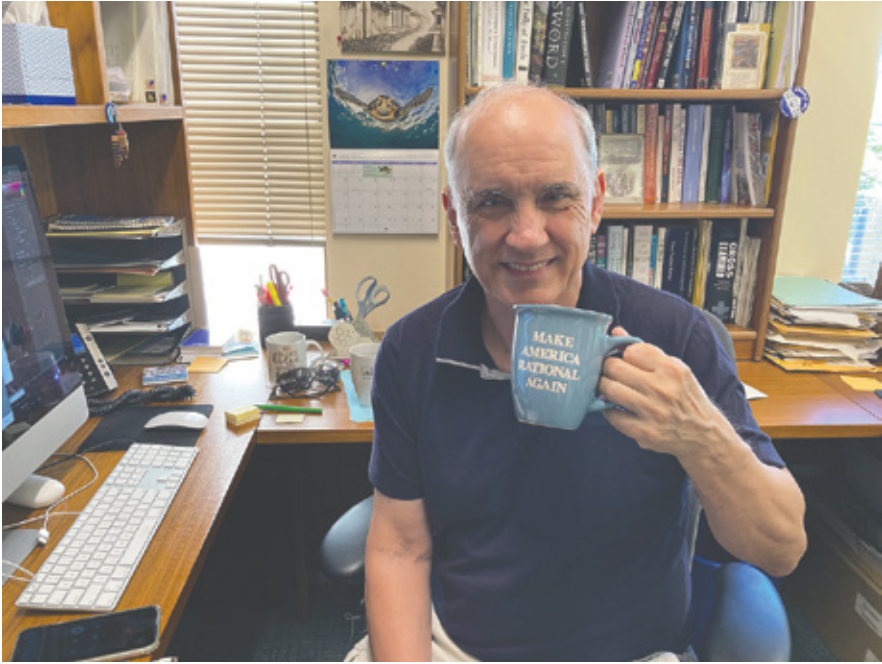
Tennessee

Religion has nothing to do with outcomes in life

Life is 50 percent planning, 50 percent chance and religion has nothing to do with it.

Idaho

Dan Barker’s mug shot



FFRF Member George Saunders of New York kindly sent a mug saying “Make America Rational Again” to FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker (holding mug) and Annie Laurie Gaylor. Writes George: “When you have your java jolt each morning, I hope this cup will remind you there are some sane people in the United States, especially your members.” Dan and Annie Laurie send their thanks for the gift and concur with George’s reassuring message.

Bowers’ testimony at odds with his vote

Watching the Jan. 6 committee hearings, I was very moved by the testimony of Arizona House Speaker “Rusty” Bowers. Bowers, a staunch Republican, had steadfastly refused to give in to pressure from former President Trump and others to call a special session of the Legislature and deliver a slate of false electors in order to change the outcome of the Arizona election results, which had resulted in a surprising win for Joe Biden.

Bowers came across as a very thoughtful man of sincerity and integrity, who refused to put his party and fealty to Trump above his duty to his state and country. He became emotional when stating that his “faith” would not allow him to betray his oath to uphold the Constitution, which he apparently considers having been “divinely inspired.”

And, yet, when asked sometime after his testimony at the hearing whether he would vote for Trump in 2024 if he were a candidate for president, Bowers said he would. I’m sure I’m not alone in feeling both amazement and disgust at the hypocrisy of religious Americans like Bowers, who would still cast their vote for a person they must know is vicious, corrupt and a danger to democracy. Even the threats and harassment that Bowers and his family — including his terminally ill daughter — were subjected to by Trump supporters are evidently insufficient to inspire a vote for someone else. Go figure.

California

The religionization of the Supreme Court

Has the dumbing down of America reached the bottom yet, or what? Several books have been written about the dumbing down of the country, especially over the last 40-50 years, showing educational decline and growing disrespect for science and math, both in schools and among the general population.

The election of Donald Trump to

the presidency made us hit rock bottom, where the evangelicals flocked like sheep behind him and brought him into the most important office in the world. He didn’t know or understand much, but he was shrewd enough to wave the bible to fool the ignorant masses.

Among the numerous decisions made during Trump’s minority-supported reign was loading the Supreme Court with even more religiously infested justices than ever before, with devastating, lasting effects. So far, we may only have seen the tip of a very scary iceberg, where the court stripped women of their most basic right — self-control over their very own body! What more of a human right violation can that be?

What happened to the First Amendment about freedom of religion? Doesn’t that mean that no one, and certainly not a justice on the Supreme Court, has a right to impress their own religious hang-ups on others? With so many Catholics already on the court, more of the same kind was the last thing we needed. The last three even lied their way through the nomination proceedings, while one position was simply stolen right under President Obama.

And, finally, there is a very simple solution to the abortion issue: If you are against abortion, just don’t have one yourself!

California

Change of voting venue from church was welcomed

I was very delighted and overjoyed to receive the temporary (unfortunately) polling location change notice for Chester Township. It is unconstitutional, in my opinion, to vote in a church. Keep God out of government!

When religion ruled, it was called the Dark Ages. Atheists, agnostics and secular humanists would agree.

As Justice Hugo Black said in Engel v. Vitale: “A union of government and religion tends to destroy government and de-grade religion.”

Ohio

Founders were clear about state/church separation

This was first printed as a letter to the editor in the Miami Herald.

Gov. Ron DeSantis infusing religion into the Florida educational system indicates either a lack of knowledge of history or is politically motivated. The Founding Fathers were very clear about the nonestablishment of religion, a cornerstone of American liberty. They sought to free the new nation from the autocratic rule of church as well as government that was prevalent at the time. The newly minted nation stated in 1779 that, “the government of the United States is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion.” Of course, almost all Americans at the time were Christian, but the country was founded as a secular nation, advocating “a wall of separation between church and state.” The wall has been chipped away and now is threatened to be demolished entirely.

The recent decisions furthering state-sponsored religion, abortion bans and unlimited gun ownership have little to do with the Founding Fathers or the Constitution and everything to do with the extreme right politicians and current Supreme Court revisions.

Florida

Claims of freedom, justice are hypocritical

I realized I can no longer celebrate my country. It is withdrawing from its promises instead of working to implement them. I used to say the Pledge of Allegiance when asked, just leaving out the “under God” part, which I doubt anyone noticed. I’ve decided I will continue to do so, but will have to change the ending to say “with liberty and justice for a select few.” I’m sure people will notice that change, but, at least, I will be honest.

Women make up more than 50 percent of the U.S. population, so when you add in Blacks, gays, and other marginalized groups, it is indeed just a “few” who are granted liberty and justice, nowhere near “all.” I have always been sympathetic to the plight of many minorities in the United States, but now I can understand even better how they feel. The utter hypocrisy of the claims of freedom, liberty and justice are really hitting home right now.

Colorado

MOVING?



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Abortion bans are good news for drug dealers

In overturning Roe, the Supreme Court handed your local drug dealer another source of ill-gotten money. Was it a case of unintended consequences?

When red states trigger more anti-abortion laws, these states likely will outlaw medication-induced abortions. Guess who shows up? Drug dealers with access to illegally manufactured abortion pills. Or black-market medication.

Back-alley abortions and bootlegged abortion pills will be the only choices of women needing an abortion, regardless of the reason. Their choice for safe abortions will be gone.

Women will die because of fake abortion-inducing pills bought from drug dealers who don't care about a woman's dilemma. The impoverished and women of color will suffer the most as they are most likely to be victimized.

Our nation, thanks to evangelicals, has not recognized that any time laws dealing with morality are passed, they open the doors to increased illegal activity — and huge profits. Justices and evangelicals don't understand or care about the suffering that drug dealers unleash on the public.

The Supreme Court's majority shows it has no idea of what it just unleashed. It is evident to me that the Supreme Court, which I once revered, has now been politicized. It's no better than a political action committee.

I will not be surprised if our North Carolina Republican-led Legislature will now get on board with trigger law states and make abortion a thing of the past. Now we wait to see what they do.

North Carolina

New motto: Don't give me that old-time religion

As a still-recovering former Baptist, my motto is "Don't give me the old-time religion — it's not good enough for me."

Michigan

Alito's arguments on Roe were egregiously wrong

Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito, in his opinion in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, which overturned the Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion, said at the outset that Roe was "egregiously wrong" from the day it was decided. Alito then wrote 107 pages of fulsome legal reasoning, citations and appendices. However, despite his extensive arguments, his "egregiously wrong"

Crossword answers

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

Frozen in time



Photo by Lisa Strand

To say goodbye to FFRF's Legal Intake Assistant Stephanie Dyer, who is heading off to Marquette University Law School, FFRF hosted a Kona Ice (flavored shaved ice) party on July 26 outside Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis. Shown enjoying the frozen treats are, from left, Sadie Pattinson, Katina Gehn, Stephanie Dyer, Sarah Weinstock, Casandra Zimmerman and Eleanor McEntee.

characterization of Roe makes a basic fundamental error of logic and general semantics.

First, his statement that Roe was "wrong" is irrational since there is no absolute right or wrong, except in established scientific and mathematical areas and for verifiable facts. Alito's "wrong" is a pure statement of a personal, subjective feeling or opinion in a field which is not provable or falsifiable by logic or science. It's akin to other subjective adjectives like "beautiful" or "right," which have no place in a supposedly logical, reasoned proof. Basically, he couched his personal feeling or belief as an established fact. Anyone with any elementary training in basic logic can see right through it.

Second, the Roe decision was made after seven wise and learned justices (Blackmun, Stewart, Douglas, Burger, Brennan, Marshall and Powell) carefully studied the facts and arguments for months and then decided that the anti-abortion statute violated the Constitution. (Two equally wise and learned justices — White and Rehnquist — made a similar study and voted to uphold the statute.) If Roe were so "egregiously wrong," why was it initially decided by an overwhelming 7-to-2 majority, why was such an egregious error not readily apparent

To terrify children with the image of hell, to consider women an inferior creation — is that good for the world?

— Christopher Hitchens

Write to us

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

fertilized eggs have a soul.

We now have a government which gives financial support for religious education, mints U.S. currency which states, "In God We Trust," and has accepted a religious test by the former president that the Supreme Court justices he appointed must belong to the Catholic Church (i.e., would overturn Roe v. Wade). That, in fact, is contrary to Article 6 of the Constitution: "No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States."

Those justices were not only improperly appointed, but also were illegally appointed. It was a religious decision.

Florida

'Dumb' member just wants freedom from religion

When I was young, I was sent to Catholic parochial school. I was taught that only a Catholic could go to heaven and the rest would go to hell. I was taught that we were not to read the bible because we would misunderstand it. I was also told I was dumb and that I had to learn my place because I was either going to dig ditches or push brooms.

I got lucky and got kicked out for not signing a pledge. I ended up going to the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, where people didn't know I was dumb, and got a degree with a major in math and minor in physics.

Shortly before my mom died, she told my brothers and me that it had been a mistake to send us to that Catholic school.

Now, I have heard that they want to use my tax dollars to pay for parochial schools — cults. It is just too much.

I want freedom from religion.

Wisconsin

Court has sabotaged rights of Americans

The U.S. Supreme Court is now quite the cesspool and the stench gets worse by the hour.

Woman's rights are now sabotaged; EPA effectiveness is now sabotaged; gun control, such as it was, is now further sabotaged.

And if that weren't enough, the distinct separation of church and state is now on the road to substantial sabotage. When the school authorities at Bremerton, Wash., notified the high school football coach that if he wanted to pray, he should not do so at the 50-yard line immediately after a game. Find a more private place. The school does not want religious activities to pressure students to participate. The school is so right. Students may not be Christians. They may not believe in or want to pray at a function, which is authorized at the school. They may very well be atheists.

Public school is part of government. No religious activity is sanctioned by any government activity. That is well specified and defined in the Constitution.

Have these justices even read the Constitution?

Maryland

to everyone for the last 49 years, and why did it take 107 pages of argument and tortured reasoning attempting to prove it was wrong?

It's time that we made training in elementary logic and reasoning a requirement for a judicial office.

California

World appalled at failed state U.S. has become

Most of the rest of the world is horrified and appalled at the failed state that the United States has become.

Icelandic Freethought Organization

Poem reflects on status of women's bodies

In light of the Supreme Court decision on Roe v. Wade, I am submitting this poem of mine, from my first poetry collection ("Trash Picker on Mars"), published by Kelsay Books.

Better to Own a House

It's your body, you say, but not if you're a woman. It's not like property. There you have real rights — possession, exclusion, disposition . . . enjoyment. With a house, you get to decide who can enter and who can stay. With your body, men have all the keys. They'll open your vagina and lock up your womb. They'll cover your body with a tent to resist temptation, then cut your clitoris to rob you of pleasure. You can sell a house but not your body. For that you need a pimp. He'll work you till you bleed, and keep all the profit. Better to own a house than a body.

Arizona

Justices were selected for religious reasons

We can now accept the Pledge of Allegiance which says "one nation, under God," since the Supreme Court has finally made us into a Christian nation by allowing laws that assume

FFRF convention, Oct. 28-30

On to San Antonio!

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

General schedule

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

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

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

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

Registration

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

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

Optional Group Meals

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

Friday Grab & Go Box Lunch (\$60) Grilled Vegetable Wrap (Vegan)

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

Garden Salad with Grilled Chicken (gluten free)

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

Turkey Sandwich

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

Friday Dinner Reception (\$65)

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

Saturday Nonprayer Breakfast (\$55)

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

Saturday Dinner (\$95)

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



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

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
210-222-1234, ffrf.us/hotel
\$205 (single/double occupancy)
\$215 (triple/quad occupancy)
State and local taxes (currently 16.75%) and fees will apply. Group rate includes standard internet. Cutoff date for reservations is Oct. 1

Overflow options Hilton Garden Inn Downtown San Antonio

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

Menger Hotel
204 Alamo Plaza
San Antonio, TX 78205
Phone: 210-223-4361
Toll-free 24-hour reservations: 800-345-9285

Rates are \$139 for single through quad occupancy. Cutoff date is Oct. 8.
In addition, state & local occupancy taxes of 16.75% and a city tourism fee of 1.25% apply.
If guest leaves earlier than the scheduled departure date when guest is in-house at the hotel, there will be a charge of \$75, plus 16.75% tax. Cancellations less than 48 hours prior to arrival will be assessed one night’s room and tax.
Overnight parking, subject to availability, is \$18 plus 8.25% tax. Cutoff date is Oct. 8.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

NATIONAL CONVENTION

SAN ANTONIO | OCTOBER 28-30, 2022

45TH CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: ffrf.us/2022convention

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

OPTIONAL MEALS / EVENTS

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

Friday, October 28

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

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

Saturday, October 29

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

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

► Total \$_____

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

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

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

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

Name of Registrant 1 _____

Name of Registrant 2 _____
☐ 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.