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Vol. 28 No. 2

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

March 2011

# FFRF keeps pressure on in Virginia Commandments fight continues



Sarah McNair of Virginia, who began objecting to religion at Giles County High School in 2004, is the 2011 recipient of FFRF's Thomas Jefferson Youth Activist Award. See page 3 story for more on Sarah.

he Freedom From Religion Foundation is keeping the heat on Giles County Public Schools in Pearisburg, Va., to ensure that Ten Commandments displays don't reappear in school buildings. More than a few Christians in the area are livid that they are being asked to abide by the law. Students have staged a walkout to protest the Commandments being removed.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott first complained about the violation Dec. 8 on behalf of a local resident who objected to a Commandments display in the hallway of Macy McClaugherty Elementary and Middle School. Superintendent Terry Arbogast replied Dec. 17 that the display, and similar ones in other district buildings, would be removed during Christmas break and replaced with "another historical document." Then the School Board, overwhelmed by public complaints led by two clergy, voted 5-0 on Jan. 20 to flout the Constitution and flaunt the Commandments. FFRF responded that unless the district removed the clearly unconstitutional displays, a lawsuit would be filed. Elliott called the vote "a disgrace evidencing a total disregard for the Constitution and the rule of law." He warned the School Board, "Do not be duped by possible offers from Religious Right [legal] groups. They may

volunteer some time, but they never pick up the plaintiffs' tab."

FFRF located two school district families who agreed to be co-plaintiffs in a federal lawsuit, with Elliott and Rebecca Glenberg, ACLU of Virginia attorney, acting as co-counsel. The suit would be filed in U.S. District Court in Roanoke. Mat Staver of Liberty Counsel offered Giles County support. Arbogast warned the School Board that fighting a suit could cost the district \$300.000.

"Plaintiffs with children in the schools have come forward," Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president, announced to media in Virginia. "They're our heroes."

The board then held a special meeting Feb. 22 and voted to remove the Commandments in all buildings. The same day, the U.S. Supreme Court declined without comment to hear a Liberty Counsel appeal challenging a ruling that struck down the display of the Ten Commandments inside two Kentucky courthouses [see State/Church Bulletin on page 19].

After the vote, Arbogast ambiguously wrote FFRF on Feb. 22 "no display containing the Ten Commandments will be posted in our schools without express approval of the Giles County School Board."

Elliott responded that removing the displays was a wise decision. "Along with the ACLU of Virginia, we are monitoring the situation to ensure that the School Board does not attempt to skirt the law and put the Ten Commandments back into Giles County schools. Any such attempts to violate the Constitution and Supreme Court precedent would constitute a losing legal battle for the School Board. It is evident that this issue has been divisive in the community. This is precisely why the First Amendment protects citizens from government-sponsored religious messages."



Judy Freeman (left) and Louise Stone are two of the freethinkers featured in Eric Paul Erickson's new book Atheist Bliss. See the story and photo spread starting on page 12. (Photography by Eric Paul Erickson)

lines on religion in the school would bring welcome clarity to the current dispute. It might even convince local officials to reconsider their decision to play favorites with religion and violate the Constitution."

The board has a regular meeting set

unlawful government speech promoting religion.



The Roanoke Times strongly criticized state and local officials in a Feb. 11 editorial. "In 2004, a student complained, but no one fixed the problem.

"Not only does the display violate the First Amendment, but it also goes against the Virginia Board of Education's 'Guidelines Concerning Religious Activity in the Public Schools,' " the paper said.

The editorial concluded, "A clear statement from the state board denouncing Giles County's decision for noncompliance with the state guidefor March 15. FFRF and the ACLU are analyzing documents received after filing an open records request related to the displays.

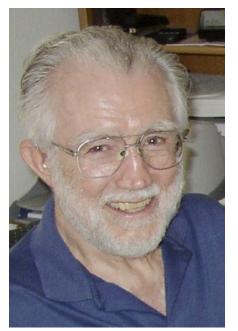
The Roanoke Times reported March 9 that "a small group of students" stayed out of high school classes March 7 to protest removal of the Commandments. Student Dustin Dowdy said he spent about three hours outside the school by himself on March 8, then went home because he got cold. He said his participation in the protest drew a three-day, off-campus suspension.

Television stations reported tensions running high in area schools, in part involving students who were labeled as "atheists" for opposing the Commandments displays. A Christian club ordered T-shirts bearing the Commandments.

Gaylor noted the difference between private speech by students and



# **Ex-priest shed Catholic** vestments, guilt



Steve Uhl says that as he's aged, he's noticed "more of the growing tyranny of the Christian majority in this great land of ours."

Name: Stephen F. Uhl.

Where I live: Oro Valley, Ariz., a north suburb of Tucson.

Where and when I was born: Rural southern Indiana, 1930. My parents had nine children. First came four daughters. I was the second son and was followed by three brothers.

Family: Diane, my wife. We were married on the Winter Solstice in 1968.

Education (formal and informal): At 14, I entered the boarding seminary at Saint Meinrad [Ind.] Archabbey, a Swiss order of Benedictine monks, where I stayed six years. My major seminary studies (also six years) were at Marmion Abbey in Aurora, Ill. I was ordained in 1956 as a priest, after which I was sent to Catholic University in Washington, D.C., where I earned an S.T.L. degree (Sacrae Theologiae Licentia). After I left the priesthood in 1967, I earned a Ph.D. in psychology from Loyola University in Chicago.

Occupation: I taught high school religion and mathematics and counseled at the Benedictine Marmion Military Academy for 10 years. On weekends, I engaged in pastoral work at northern Illinois parishes.

Freed from the priesthood, I taught

a private practice as a psychologist in 1976, from which I eventually retired.

How I got where I am today: My mother not only gave me my vocation to the priesthood, she gave me a deep love of learning. The superstitions learned in early childhood came into conflict with my adult learnings. The common sense I had learned from my father (a farmer) drove me to follow my reasoning conscience and break the bonds of traditional superstition. Now I am more totally free to appreciate the wonders of the real planetary present.

Where I'm headed: Like all of us, I am headed to oblivion soon. But at age 80, I still enjoy a great wife, good friends and neighbors and the inexorable march of scientific progress that shows to all who are alert that facts are more fun than fiction. And I trust that my little book, Out of God's Closet, will help readers enjoy freedom from outdated superstition without any imaginary guilt.

Person in history I admire: Robert Green Ingersoll for his eloquent and courageous efforts in expounding freethought.

A quotation I like: "The time to be happy is now; the place to be happy is here; the way to be happy is to make others so." (Robert Green Ingersoll)

One more, from the Roman philosopher Seneca, is precious: "Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by the rulers as useful."

These are a few of my favorite things: My relationship with Diane, Friday community happy hour, solving practical problems, fixing broken things and enjoying the appreciation from those I helped, the sciencebased frankness of PZ Myers, Richard Dawkins' articulate rants against the pope, and the joyful freedom of atheism.

These are not: Jesus-loving Christians who hate and terrorize atheists; a pope theoretically representing over a billion people taking medieval, anti-scientific stances, especially on birth control and stem cell research; the hypocrisy of "preying" clergy; the that overstresses vengeful punishment *press Press*).



Fr. Stephen Uhl (back row, second from left), in Bradford, Ind., on the day he celebrated his first Mass. He was a Catholic priest for 11 years, but first became a Benedictine monk during 12 years of seminary training.

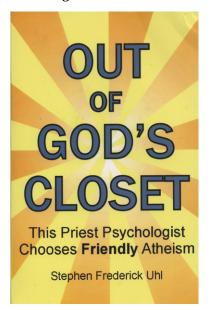
(of the "sinner") and almost ignores responsible restitution to the injured; politicians and ignorant voters who stand in the way of letting the Fair Tax Act (HR 25 and SB 25) eliminate the IRS and most all taxes; witnessing a "smart" President Obama preaching a religious sermon at a National Prayer Breakfast.

My doubts about religion started: Serious doubts started one morning in the monastery chapel in 1964 when I was 34 and was meditating on the intellectual proofs of God's existence. I had a "lightning bolt" insight in which I clearly saw how St. Thomas Aquinas' supposedly strongest proof (his causality proof) fell far short, because it was based on an unwarranted assumption.

Why I'm a freethinker: Because life for me and for fellow human neighbors is richer (and continues to become more so) when based on reason than when guided by thoughtless superstition.

Ways I promote freethought: Periodic lectures, magazine articles, website (outofgodscloset.com) and podcast (nogods.libsyn.com), gifts and sales of the paperback Out of God's Closet and cash donations to outstanding atheist organizations.

To contact the author or order the book, go to outofgodscloset.com/ or call Thank you, Steve, for your \$25,000 Out of Closet billboard campaign gift to FFRF!



The book started as an intimate letter to Stephen Uhl's 31 nieces and nephews after he learned he had prostate cancer. "After starting the family letter, I learned that evidently my cancer was not an aggressive type, and that my death was not nearly as imminent as I had thought," Uhl says. "With a great sigh of relief, I continued to write for my family. But now I had time to write a more complete letter. And since I was writing

public high school math and became a inhumane waste in our penal system 1-800-255-9929, ext. 25 (Publishers Excertified school psychologist. I opened

such a long letter, why not direct it to friends and neighbors also?"

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#### Freethought Today

published by Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc. P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701 (608)256-5800 • FAX (608)204-0422 FTtoday@ffrf.org • ffrf.org Editor: Bill Dunn Executive Editor: Annie Laurie Gaylor Contributing Editor: Dan Barker Production Editor: Scott Colson Assistant Editor: Bonnie Gutsch Contributors: Philip Appleman, John Compere, Jeremy H. Dickman, Eric Paul Erickson, Mike Konopacki, Brent Nicastro, Holli Niesner, Cenk Uygur March 2011

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

## Virginia woman honored for contesting school religion

The Freedom From Religion Foundation's "first commandment" is honor the constitutionally mandated separation of state and church. To that end, FFRF needs cooperation from citizens like Sarah McNair, who is the 2011 recipient of its Thomas Jefferson Youth Activist Award, which includes a \$1,000 scholarship. The award honors students and youth who show special courage or dedication in speaking out to defend secularism or promote freethought.

McNair, now a married 23-year-old student who lives in northern Virginia, began speaking out officially in 2004. She wrote letters of complaint to state officials about the Ten Commandments placed on the walls at Giles County High School in Pearisburg, Va. She received responses dismissing her concerns that students' rights were being violated. She kept copies of all the correspondence.

McNair, who was raised as a Unitarian Universalist and moved to Giles County as a 10th grader, remembers her shock at hearing the morning announcement, "Have a nice day and God bless," she told the Roanoke Times in January. "At the time. I didn't want to be blessed by God. Why do they say that to everyone? What about the people who don't want to start out their day with religion?

"I really strongly wanted to make the school religiously neutral, so the school would speak out for all its students, not just religious students," she said. After she objected to the principal, it stopped but only temporarily.

"The state didn't do their homework, and they passed it back to the school board," First Amendment scholar Charles Haynes told the paper about McNair's complaints. "What they should have done is looked more closely at it and had a discussion with the school board to look more closely at it."

After FFRF complained to Giles

Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning County Schools in December on behalf of a local resident who objected to the Ten Commandments hanging in a middle school hallway, McNair contacted FFRF to express her support.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "It's a pity that Giles County Schools and state education officials didn't listen to Sarah when she complained many years ago. It really takes guts and savvy for a young student to lodge a complaint about an Establishment Clause violation at her school.

"Sarah put her letter of protest into writing, did not back down when the school district didn't listen, and attempted to remedy the violation by alerting state officials. We are really impressed with her activism."

Gaylor also praised McNair's willingness to speak publicly against the Commandments displays to local and national media, including "Nick News" on Nickelodeon, which has a large youth audience.

Foundation Co-President Dan Barker acknowledged the West Coast couple who annually endow FFRF's youth activist award.



While in high school, Sarah McNair wrote to Virginia officials that violation of student rights was a "serious issue that cannot be ignored." They wrote back but dismissed her concerns.

# Fiction picks solicited for reader guide on good freethought books

This is the time of year to curl up with a good freethought book. Freethought Today is seeking your nominations for recommendations of works of fiction of special interest to atheists, agnostics and other freethinkers. This might involve a novel with a nonbelieving protagonist or one with freethought themes or a secular point of view.

Freethought Today previously published a guide to "freethought at the flicks." You can add your nomination updates to this 2002 piece at: *ffrf.org/news/blog/freethought-at-theflicks/.* 

We would now like to invite you to share your favorite freethinking fiction with other FFRF'ers. To ensure that your nomination is published, please include: • The complete title of the novel or short story, name of author, date of publication (or reissue) and publisher, if possible. (If this is something out of print, hard to find, online, etc., be sure to include adequate information so readers can locate it. Sorry, please do not send or nominate unpublished manuscripts.)

• Include a one- or two-sentence synopsis of the "atheist" import, freethought epiphany or why this deserves to be in Fiction for Freethinkers. Include enough information so that someone picking up the book will know why you've nominated it.

(The reference might be as nominal as your favorite private eye's confession of nonbelief. It might involve the entire plot such as *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. Sinclair Lewis' *Elmer*  *Gantry* is obviously a freethought look at religion which may not have an atheist character, but clearly deserves mention in this listing.)

• Optionally, you may want to briefly quote a relevant line or passage, or include a one-paragraph review or summary of freethought plot, character or overall significance. If you can include the edition and page so we can verify quotes, so much the better.

• This guide will be limited to fiction only, so please nominate only novels or short stories, not biographies, etc.

• Your name as the nominator will be included, unless you indicate you prefer anonymity or there are multiple duplicate nominations.

Mail your nomination to Freethought Today, Attn: Fiction for Freethinkers, PO Box 750, Madison WI 53701, and include your full name, ad-

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

It's easy to do. For related information (or to request a bequest brochure), please phone Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608) 256-8900.

FFRF P.O. Box 750 Madison WI 53701

Freedom Depends on Freethinkers

#### What Is a Freethinker?



**free-think-er n.** A person who forms opinions about religion on the basis of reason, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.



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

#### What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists.

The Foundation's e-mail address is *info@ffrf.org*. Please include your name and physical mailing address with all e-mail correspondence.

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

dress and phone number.

E-mail nominations to *fttoday@ffrf. org* with "Fiction for Freethinkers" in the subject heading. Include your full name and address. We may need to follow up with a question about your nomination.

• Please send your nomination or nominations in as soon as possible. Remember to be succinct because space is limited. Thank you!

#### Correction

Liberty University's School of Law was incorrectly referred to in our last issue as tied to Rev. Pat Robertson. Liberty University was founded as Lynchburg Baptist College in 1971 by Rev. Jerry Falwell. Robertson's law school is part of Regent University.

# Heads Up A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

## **Holey Moses**

Cardinal O'Fiaich, primate of all Ireland, while visiting the healing shine of Lourdes, fell ill and died on the spot.

– New York Times, 5/9/90

Priests, when they're triste, pull on pants And trek to the shrines down in France. The dangers? They scorned them, But God coulda warned them, They're taking a helluva chance.

A nun down in old Madagascar Would answer, should anyone ask her Why she went on and on Keeping books in her john: "It's because I'm a real multi-tasker."

A priest who was all flabbergasted When the Cardinal had him dismasted For the boy-toys he'd led Into sin, only said, "Oh well, it was fun while it lasted."

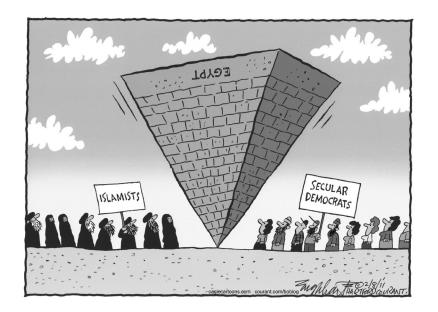
© 2011 Philip Appleman Freethought Today is pleased to publish this new rhyme.



Philip Appleman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His eight published volumes of poetry include Darwin's Ark (new 2009 edition) and Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used Norton Critical Edition, Darwin, and the Norton Critical Edition of Malthus' Essay on Population. His poetry and fiction have won many awards, including a fellowship in poetry from the

National Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Center for Science Education. His work has appeared in Harper's Magazine, The Nation, The New Republic, The New York Times, The Paris Review, Partisan Review, Poetry, and The Yale Review.

He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both Lifetime Members (five times over) of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. They recorded an excerpt of "Noah," Philip's comic masterpiece, for the Foundation's newest musical CD, "Beware of Dogma," featuring Dan Barker. That CD also includes Phil's poem "Fleas," set to the music of "Trees." New and Selected Poems is available for sale from FFRF for \$23 ppd. The Norton Critical Edition, Darwin, is \$22 ppd, Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie, \$27 and Darwin's Ark, \$23 (ffrf.org/shop/).



March 2011



Jane tried to convert me [to religion] and I tried to introduce her to Freud. Marilyn Monroe, on starring with Jane Russell, who died Feb. 28, in "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes" in 1953

Reuters, 3-1-11

Expressing support for designation of Feb. 12, 2011, as Darwin Day and recognizing the importance of science in the betterment of humanity. Part of Rep. Pete Stark's U.S. House resolution in support of Darwin Day govtrack.us, 2-9-11

I don't think he gives a good reason of why someone like Charles Darwin needs to be celebrated and recognized by the federal government. It's a waste, I think, of taxpayers' time. [Congress should instead honor Booker T. Washington or Thomas Edison,] who actually invented things, not just threw out theories.

Tom McClusky, Family Research Council [who appears to confuse Booker T. Washington, an educator, with George Washington Carver, the inventor] Contra Costa Times, 2-10-11

I'm sure there are people out there who'd say I'm the devil's advocate, but I'll give the devil as much chance as any god that people choose to deal with. To say some unknown god up

there in the stratosphere directs all of our lives and our development is naive. Rep. Pete Stark, D-Calif., on his resolution to honor Charles Darwin Contra Costa Times, 2-10-11

Columnist Mark Morford, asking sinners "What are you guilty of today?" San Francisco Chronicle, 2-9-11

The app also tailors the questions if you sign in as "religious." For instance, if you say you're a female and try to select "priest" as your vocation, a dialogue



box appears that says "sex and vocation are incompatible." So much for modernity.

Columnist Maureen Dowd, on an Indiana company's "Confession: A Roman Catholic App" New York Times, 2-9-11

At times it didn't feel like there was a line between sexual abuse and corporal punishment. Every Friday one of the brothers would take a boy in front of the class and, whichever way he hit you, he'd always put his hand on your testicles. We would laugh, but in fact you were in a permanent state of fear. I would vomit in the morning before going out to school. They would hit you across the face if you got a sum wrong. I suppose they did teach me to read and write and that I should be grateful, but I'm not.

Irish novelist Colm Toibin, on attending a Christian Brothers school New York Times, 2-9-11

One of the saddest parts of Obama's speech was his reference to his mother, who, in his words, "grew up with a certain skepticism about organized religion." Obama felt obliged to justify his mother's in-



difference to religion by indicating that she was "one of the most spiritual people I ever knew. . . somebody who was instinctively guided by the Golden Rule." It is indeed a bad day for secularism when a president feels obliged to tell his audience that even though his mother didn't take him to church, she was still a good person. "Spirited Atheist" Susan Jacoby, on the president's speech at the National **Prayer Breakfast** 



produced by the Freedom From Religion Foundation



Hosted by Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gavlor

Broadcasts and streams Saturdays at 11 a.m. Central, Progressive Talk The Mic 92.1 FM, Madison, Wis., and over several other stations.

iTunes or podcasts archived at: ffrf.org/news/radio

Slightly irreverent views, news, music & interviews It literally leaves a bad taste because I know the people who are putting this food in my mouth actively loathe me. I'm all for freedom of religion. It's just that I know where I want my money to go, and where I don't want my money to go.

Douglas Quint, New York City gay resident, on boycotting the Chick-fil-A restaurant chain for its affiliation with anti-gay evangelical Christians New York Times, 1-29-11

Of course, sins only exist if you actually believe in the dreadful concept, which means you also probably believe you are a flawed, miserable fleshball who can do nothing but sin, and therefore God - who is, sadly, way, way out there, completely separate from you is ever staring down with those giant, disapproving eyes. Good thing so many people believe such nonsense, or we'd have nothing to work with, would we?

The Washington Post, 2-10-11

If you're from New York City and find yourself working for a company in Dallas, Texas, you are a gaijin. If you're an atheist running for political office in Missouri, you're a gaijin. If you're a lesbian trying to work as a Girl Scout leader anywhere in America, you are a gaijin.

Robert McKinney, Winona, Mo., on living in the Ozarks after 24 years in Japan (gaijin means non-Japanese) Japan Times, 1-18-11

## Announcing FFRF's 2011 three scholarship essay contests for students

# Tell us why you're a freethinker

Topics, rules and deadlines have been announced for FFRF's 2011 high school, college and graduate/mature student essay scholarship competitions.

FFRF, an educational state-church watchdog that has 16,000 members nationwide, has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979. In 1994, FFRF added a separate contest for college-bound high school seniors. The Foundation debuted its first "graduate/mature students over age 25" competition in 2010, resulting in many excellent essays.

Each competition awards a \$2,000 cash scholarship for the first-place essay, a \$1,000 cash scholarship for second place, \$500 for third place and \$300 for a newly offered fourth place. Several \$200 "honorable mentions" are awarded at judges' discretion.

FFRF members are asked to publicize the essay competitions to their local high schools, colleges and universities. (See ads, back wrap.)

#### Herbert Bushong High School Senior Essay Competition

This competition is named for Texas Foundation member Herbert Bushong, a nonagenarian with an interest in rewarding freetbinking by

rewarding freethinking by students.

College-bound high school seniors are asked in their essays to "Describe a Moment that Made You Proud to be a Freethinker (Atheist/Agnostic/Nonbeliever)." The dictionary definition of freethinker is "one who forms his or her opinion about religion based on reason rather than faith, tradition or authority." Maybe you had a moment, experience or "epiphany" that led to or affirmed your rejection of religion. Maybe you stood up for freethought or spoke out against the encroachment of religion at school social events, in government, in classroom instruction or in your family. Use that moment to illustrate why you are a freethinker.

High school seniors in North America who are college-bound in fall 2011 are eligible. Include your high school's name, city, state and date of graduation.

Essays should be 500 to 750 words.



was an FFRF officer, sociologist and active atheist known by generations of University of Wisconsin-Madison students for fine-tuning their reasoning abilities.

The topic of this year's college essay competition: "Why I Am an Atheist/Agnostic/Unbeliever and Not a

\_\_\_\_\_." Fill in the blank with Catholic or Muslim or born-again, etc. In honor of Bertrand Russell, who wrote the classic, "Why I Am Not a Christian," write your own essay about why you are a nonbeliever and not, for example, a Mormon.

Submit a persuasive essay about why you reject religion and choose reason over faith. Use a personal (first-person) approach. Experiences with being a "heretic" in a religion-drenched society may be included. Or you may wish to employ your best arguments against religious belief.

The competition is open to North American students or students currently enrolled in North American colleges or universities at least through December 2011. Note: The college scholarship is restricted to under age 25. If you are 25 or older or a graduate student, please enter FFRF's competition for grad/mature students (below). College-bound high school seniors enter FFRF's high school competition.

College students should submit an essay of 750 to 1,000 words. (Note other requirements at the end of this article.)

**Deadline**: June 15, 2011. Winners will be announced by September.

Essays must be both mailed and emailed. Mail postmarked by June 15 to:

College Essay Contest FFRF PO Box 750

Madison WI 53701

Also e-mail your essay no later than midnight June 15 to *collegeessay@ffrf.org* with the word "Essay" and your name in the subject heading. Example: Essay (Your full name). Please include a copy of all information indicated in the requirements.

#### Brian Bolton Graduate/ Mature Student Essay Competition

The competition is named for Brian Bolton, an FFRF Lifetime Member who is a retired psychiatrist, humanist counselor and professor emeritus at the University of Arkansas.

Graduate students, or currently enrolled college students age 25 or older, who are enrolled in a North American college or university through at least December 2011, are eligible. The topic: "Why Thomas Jefferson Got It Right!" The Jeffersonian "wall of separation between church and state" is endangered. Write a persuasive essay defending the constitutional principle of separation between religion and government. You may wish to debunk myths such as that the United States is a Christian nation or address ongoing threats to the Establishment Clause. You may wish to use examples of the harm created by religion in government from a personal, legal, topical and/or historical perspective.

The entrant should submit a 900 to 1,200 word essay. (See other requirements below.)

**Deadline**: July 15, 2011. Winners will be announced by September.

Essays must be both mailed and emailed. Mail postmarked by July 15 to: Graduate/Mature student Essay competition FFRF PO Box 750 Madison WI 53701 Also e-mail your essay by midnight

June 15 to *gradessay@ffrf.org* and use the word "Essay" and your name in the subject heading. Example: Essay (Your full name). Please include a copy of all information indicated in requirements.

## Rules applying to all competitions

All essays should be typed, doublespaced, standard margins and stapled. The word count must be included. Put your name and essay title on each page. Entrants choose their own title and include a one-paragraph biography. The bio should include name, age, birth date, hometown, university or college, year in school, major or intended major, degree being earned and interests. Do not include a resumé. Provide both summer and fall 2011 addresses (campus and home), phone numbers and e-mail addresses for notification.

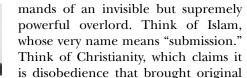
Winners may be asked to send verification of student enrollment. Essay must be submitted both by mail and e-mail by deadlines. Students will be disqualified if they do not follow instructions.

By entering contest, students agree to permit winning essays to be printed in full or in part in Freethought Today, FFRF's newspaper, and later posted online at FFRF's website. Winners agree to provide a photograph suitable for reproduction with their essay. Winners will receive a school-year subscription to Freethought Today. All eligible nonwinning students will be offered a subscription or a freethought book.

Note: FFRF monitors for plagiarism.

**Overheard** 

While Americans worry about the Muslim Brotherhood taking over Egypt or Muslim terrorism here at home, we face a far greater



up to the plate and help. I think if we as Americans or neighbors or friends took the time to get to know someone and take on someone's cause, well, imagine if everybody did that? Lee Castillo, 34, a Virginia IT systems engineer who saved his friend from losing his home in an unscrupulous loan deal



(Note other requirements at the end of this article.)

**Deadline**: June 1, 2011. Winners will be announced in August.

Essays must be both mailed and emailed. Mail no later than June 1 to: *High School Essay Contest FFRF* 

PO Box 750

Madison WI 53701

Also e-mail your essay no later than midnight June 1, 2011, to *highschoolessay@ffrf.org* and use the word "Essay" and your name in the subject heading. Example: Essay (Your full name). Please include a copy of all information indicated in the requirements.

#### Michael Hakeem Memorial College Essay Competition

The late Professor Michael Hakeem

actual threat: Unhinged manipulative (greedy and power-besotted) religion invading millions of lives and covering up, even propagating, a multiplicity of abuses. Religious freedom means freedom to worship in the church of your choosing and to believe anything you want or not to believe. But before a child reaches 18, society should protect her or him from people hiding behind our overly religion-friendly laws. Our American idea of open-ended religious freedom is dumb. We need freedom *from* religion as much as we need freedom *of* religion.

Frank Schaeffer, author and former evangelical

Huffington Post, 2-14-11

If you value freedom, you should flee from religion as the antelope flees the lion. Religion is the very antithesis of freedom, insisting on our complete subjugation to the unachievable desin into the world, with all that entails in terms of suffering and injustice and even earthquakes and tsunamis. Imagine!

Paula Kirby, writer and consultant to secular groups, "Religion: the ultimate tyranny"

Washington Post, 2-15-11

One wouldn't say that one lacks a belief in fairies and leprechauns. I prefer to describe myself more positively as a scientist who struggles to understand the world as it is.

Richard Dawkins, calling the question why doesn't he believe in God "bad phrasing" *Miami Herald*, 2-17-11

I'm not a religious person, but I am very fortunate to have a really good job, and I think it's my duty as a human being, when another human being is going through a hard time, I need to step Huffington Post, 2-18-11

I'm very much in favor of learning what the bible says. But the problem is that I don't believe that's how they're going to teach it. They're going to teach it as truth and religion.

FFRF member Edwin Kagin, opposing a Kentucky "teaching the bible as history" bill

Louisville Courier-Journal, 2-21-11

They refused to use the medical system to save their daughter, but they sure love to use the legal system.

Comment by "J3girls" on legal appeals by a Wisconsin couple convicted of reckless homicide in the faith-healing death from diabetes of their daughter *Wausau Herald*, 2-22-11

# 21 Philadelphia priests suspended

The Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia announced March 8 that it has suspended 21 priests from active ministry due to accusations they sexually abused or had otherwise inappropriate contact with minors.

The action follows a Feb. 10 grand jury report [see Black Collar Crime, page 20] accusing the church of a widespread decades-long cover-up of predatory priests. The report said as many as 37 priests remain in the active ministry despite credible accusations against them.

The archdiocese did not name the 21 men suspended, which drew ire from groups representing abuse victims. "Many parishioners are likely to learn that their priest was accused when he fails to appear for Ash Wednesday services," The New York

Times reported.

Cardinal Justin Rigali, in response to the grand jury report, initially said there were no priests in active ministry "who have an admitted or established allegation of sexual abuse of a minor against them."

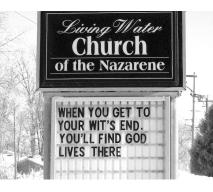
"We may have to be asking, what did the cardinal know and when did he know it?" said Leonard Norman Primiano, chairman of the religious studies department at Cabrini College in Radnor, Pa.

The grand jury concluded the archdiocese failed to clean house after a 2005 grand jury found credible accusations of abuse by 63 priests. It suggested that potentially predatory priests had access to thousands of children for years.



#### Making a SPLASH

Jan Loeb Eisler, FFRF Lifetime Member and founder of the St. Petersburg-Largo Area Secular Humanists (SPLASH), was honored Dec. 11 with the first Florida Humanist Lifetime Achievement Award by the Center for Inquiry Florida, which she also founded. Eisler, a retired trauma nurse, has also been an officer of the Bertrand Russell Society, which her late husband, Lee Eisler, was a founder. She's also been an active member of the NAACP, NOW, NARAL and Planned Parenthood. Congratulations, Jan, from all of us at FFRF!



Don't drink the water "Witless?" in Cedar Falls, wonders

Mark Welty, Iowa.

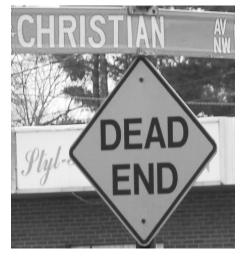
# Marquee **Madness**





#### An inside job?

Linda Allewalt, Kentucky, took these photos. On top is the first marquee she photographed. Several days later she noticed the message had changed and took another photo. "I was lucky to catch it because the church had changed it back by the next day to the original message. I don't know who did this or how they did it, since this location is right on Main Street and has lots of light around it at night. We obviously have someone in town who decided to make a statement against the church's childish arrogance. Enjoy!"



## Karen Wingard, Catholic Community Blind alley, cul-de-sac?



O'II WILLEY INK, INC. 1-20 DIST. BY UNIVERSAL ULICK WILLY INKE CRAPTISLINK, NET GOCOMICS, CON

# They Said What?

She immediately sought the assistance of the military chaplain. When Sgt. Havrilla met with the military chaplain, he told her that "It must have been God's will for her to be raped" and recommended that she attend church more frequently. From a lawsuit filed in Virginia by Sgt. Rebekah Havrilla and 16 other U.S. troops who allege the Pentagon failed to protect them from sexual assault Raw Story, 2-18-11

you start believing that some stuff in the bible's not true, because then we might start believing that Jesus is not true

about sexuality that we can't see what should be obvious.

of St. Francis Xavier, lobbying against Kurt Navratil, Virginia, has one word a Maryland bill allowing same-sex marriage

The Q&A was the most fun, with a number of angry atheistic evolutionists, who became so emotional it was fun maintaining order. As I shared during the outbursts, it reminded me of my zookeeping days when I had to go out into the wolves' and hyenas' enclosure and chase them into the right den with a stick.

Creationist lecturer Sid Galloway, Facebook post after he spoke at Louisiana **State University** LSU Reveille, 2-20-11

You realize that there's a danger when

U.S. Navy Cmdr. John Price, questioning Ensign Michael Izbicki at a hearing to decide whether to discharge Izbicki, a Naval Academy graduate, as a conscientious objector New York Times, 2-23-11

His taking holy communion is objectively sacrilegious. If he approaches for holy communion, he should be denied the august sacrament.

Edward Peters, consultant to the Vatican's Apostolic Signatura tribunal, recommending communion denial to New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo for living part time with Sandra Lee, a Food Network celebrity

New York Times, 2-22-11

Marriage is so foundational to society. We don't just lay eggs and abandon them. Our children need to be raised by a mother and father. We've become so very confused in our understanding Catholic Review, 2-22-11

Religious sectarian law includes Sharia Law, Canon Law, Halacha and Karma but does not include any law of the United States or the individual states based on Anglo-American legal tradition and principles on which the United States was founded.

From an Arizona House bill outlawing courts from adopting Karma, etc. azleg.gov, 2-25-11

If you are a pornstar, there is a bible for you. If you are a cowboy, there is a bible for you. If you are looking for style, then there is a bible purse hybrid for you.

Story in DePaul University's student newspaper, "When Jesus Christ the superhero, cowboys and the bible unite The DePaulia, 2-28-11

for this in Roanoke: "Priceless."



#### Don't like it, don't look

"I thought you might like to see a photo of the license plate on my motorbike. My next-door neighbor hates it, so I park the bike with the plate facing her front door." – Tom Ingram, California

March 2011

#### Atheist educator out after airing nonbelief

Superintendent Tim Turecek of the public Marathon [N.Y.] Central Schools will resign June 30 after coming under fire for talking about his views as an atheist. Turecek, superintendent for seven years, was speaking as a guest to a high school advanced placement psychology class.

The School Board and Turecek issued a joint statement that said he was not asked to resign, but had "admittedly made some errors in judgment in his presentation to that class, but in no way did he seek to impose any personal beliefs on any of the students."

"It's sad that anybody should lose their position for that reason," said Marathon resident Steven Cole. "I just don't believe it's right."

# **SCOTUS: Hate speech** is free speech

The U.S. Supreme Court by an 8-1 vote March 2 said Westboro Baptist Church signs that say "God Hates Dead Soldiers" at military funerals are not like yelling "Fire!" in a crowded theater.

Members of Rev. Fred Phelps' fundamentalist church in Topeka, Kan., picketed the 2006 funeral in Maryland of Matthew Snyder, who was killed in Iraq. A jury awarded Snyder's father \$11 million, which a judge reduced to \$5 million. A federal appeals court overturned the verdict, which the Supreme Court upheld, with only Justice Samuel Alito dissenting.

Chief Justice John Roberts wrote the opinion for the court: "What Westboro said, in the whole context of how and where it chose to say it, is entitled to 'special protection' under the First Amendment, and that protection cannot be overcome by a jury finding that the picketing was outrageous."

# Hawaii governor signs civil unions bill

Democratic Gov. Neil Abercrombie signed a same-sex and opposite-sex civil unions bill into law Feb. 23, making Hawaii the seventh U.S. state to grant essentially the same rights as marriage to gay couples. Linda Lingle, former Republican governor, vetoed a similar bill in 2010. It takes effect Ian. 1, 2012. Supreme Court.

# Canadian mayor fights tribunal's ruling

Mayor Jean Tremblay of Saguenay, a city of 150,000 in Quebec, said in February he won't heed the Quebec Human Rights Tribunal's order to stop reciting Christian prayer before council meetings and to remove a crucifix and a 2-foot-tall Sacred Heart of Jesus statue from council chambers.

The tribunal earlier awarded \$30,000 to Alain Simoneau, a local resident, who had formally complained that the prayer violated his freedom of conscience.

Simoneau belongs to a secular group called *Mouvement laïque québécois*. "Ours is not a struggle against symbols, it's a struggle to maintain the neutrality of public institutions," said Luc Alarie, the group's lawyer.

"When Obama was sworn in, there was a prayer that lasted almost 15 minutes. No one commented," Tremblay told the Globe and Mail. "We recite a 20-second prayer and everyone starts crying."

# Creation Museum bars same-sex couple

Joe Sonka and another man were denied entrance as a same-sex couple to the Feb. 11 "Date Night" at the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Ky. Neither is gay but decided to show up as a couple after buying \$72 tickets online as a way to highlight the museum's discriminatory practices.

The event included dinner, music and a talk from museum founder Ken Ham about love and the biblical view of marriage.

The state of Kentucky is poised to give Ham's Ark Encounter biblical theme park \$37 million in tax incentives.

#### Pope decides Jews didn't kill Jesus

In excerpts from Pope Benedict's new book, *Jesus of Nazareth: Part II*, the pope reenacts Jesus' final hours and analyzes Gospel accounts to conclude that Jews are innocent of deicide. Benedict theorizes that the "Temple aristocracy" and supporters of the thief Barabbas were responsible.

He deconstructs the biblical ac-



In other Vatican news unrelated to sex abuse by clergy, it was announced Feb. 4 that the pope won't donate any of his organs (although he supports organ donation). The Vatican said Benedict's body belongs to the whole church.

Twenty-two popes' organs (liver, spleen and pancreas) are preserved as relics in the church of Sts. Anastasio and Vincent near Rome's Trevi Fountain in Rome.

In relic-related news, Poland's TVN24 reported Pope John Paul II's former longtime secretary is giving a drop of the pope's blood and a fragment of his robe to Polish Formula One driver Robert Kubica. He suffered multiple fractures and partially severed his right hand in a Feb. 6 race in Italy when his Škoda race car slammed into a church wall in a race near Genoa.

John Paul II, who died in 2005, will be beatified (the step before sainthood) May 1. Faithful attending the beatification in Rome will be able to pray before his closed coffin, which will be exhumed for the event.

The Vatican warned the faithful "not to fall prey to fraudsters," particularly online, who are selling tickets because no tickets are needed.

# Pastor's loved ones found in filth

A TV preacher's diabetic husband and 92-year-old mother were hospitalized after authorities found them lying in filth in an apartment in the rear of All for Jesus Church of God in Bluff City, Tenn.

The state Department of Human Services got an anonymous tip, the Bristol Herald Courier reported Feb. 17. Pastor Brenda Viars, 58, told the paper she "got behind on things. I am sorry that things got the way they are. I don't want to bring a reproach on our Lord and Savior." Religious consultants said to possess "prophetic gifts" were invited to the business and one of them said the Lord had instructed him that Hecht was "unclean, unrighteous and . . . struggling with pornography issues," according to the lawsuit. The consultant also said Hecht was "struggling with homosexual issues," reported the San Antonio Express-News.

Hecht also alleged he was told to fire two employees without cause after Mark Fessler said the Lord spoke to him.

#### Texas school fears Tolerance Club

Flour Bluff High School in Corpus Christi, Texas, banned all student clubs from meeting on campus rather than let a gay-straight group called the Tolerance Club form at the public school.

Paul Rodriguez, president of the Gay-Straight Alliance at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, organized protests after the superintendent said the district had no plans to approve the club proposed by senior Bianca "Nikki" Peet, 17. The district asked all groups not tied to the curriculum, including the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, to meet off campus until the situation is resolved.

#### Oregon faith healers may lose protections

Oregon House Bill 2171, which ends legal protections for parents who rely only on prayer for ill children, has no organized opposition and will likely become law, proponents said in a Feb. 20 story in The Oregonian.

Rep. Carolyn Tomei, D-Milwaukie, who introduced the bill, said, "Such gross and unnecessary neglect cannot be allowed. I don't think there'll be

**J** 

Also in February, the Hawaii Senate unanimously approved Abercrombie's appointment of openly gay Circuit Judge Sabrina McKenna to the state count which has the crowd saying, "His blood be on us and on our children" — a phrase long cited by some as evidence of Jews' collective guilt.



Sullivan County Sheriff's Detective George Ann Pascu had to put on a mask and boots to go inside. Pascu said Viars' mother and husband had been badly neglected, and that the husband was scheduled to have a foot amputated.

A grand jury will decide whether to pursue neglect charges.

# Jury finds firing tied to religion

A Texas jury awarded a San Antonio man \$263,000 on Feb. 18. Steven Hecht filed a religious discrimination suit in 2008, alleging he was fired because he stopped going to Christian Family Church, where his employer attended. Hecht was general manager for a private aviation firm owned by Richard and Mark Fessler, father and son. anyone coming to testify against it."

"This will level the playing field so all parents will be operating under the same rules," said Clackamas County District Attorney John Foote. "It's going to make it easier to hold parents accountable who don't protect their children."

# Russian poll shows disquieting findings

A January poll of 1,600 people in various regions of Russia by the Russian Center of Public Opinion Research shows 32% of respondents don't believe the Sun is the center of the universe.

Other findings: 55% believe radioactivity is a human invention, and 29% think humans and dinosaurs lived side by side.

## It Pays to Complain



#### Wayne County Community College District **District Office** Shawna J. Forbes, MA 801 W. Fort Street Detroit, MI 48226

Vice Chancellor School of Continuing Education and Workforce Development Sforbes1@wcccd.edu

February 9, 2011

Freedom From Religion Foundation Patrick Elliott PO Box 750 Madison, WI 53701

Dear Mr. Elliott,

I am in receipt of your January 27, 2011 communication regarding the Ministerial Leadership Academy Studies Certificate program offered by the School of Continuing Education. After careful review of the Establishment Clause it was found the essence of the clause is to ensure "a wall of separation between church and State". As a result, the program is being discontinued. Students currently enrolled will be allowed to complete their certificates, but no new students will be accepted as of this coming semester.

If you have further questions feel free to contact my office.

Sincerely Shawna J. Fórbe

Vice Chancellor/Continuing Education & Workforce Development

Derek Johnson

#### FFRF puts clamps to ministerial program

On Jan. 27, FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote Chancellor Curtis Ivery of the Wayne County Community College District, which has campuses in and around Detroit, to request an end to the publicly funded district's Ministerial Leadership Academy Studies Certificate program. Classes include "Introduction to Christian Education," which taught students "to become a strong Christian witness." The "Personal Relationship and the Word" class is described as helping students "develop stronger Bible based relationships with God." The district agreed (see response above) that the program violates the U.S. and Michigan constitutions.

#### FFRF letter gets cross off school bus

FFRF objected on behalf of a parent of a student of Owasso, Okla., Public Schools, to an 8-inch Latin cross prominently displayed on a public school bus. A letter from Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott on Feb. 25 noted that buses are under the control of the public schools and thus subject to the same treatment under the Establishment Clause as school classrooms.

Superintendent Clark Ogilvie replied Feb. 28 by e-mail: "The cross has been removed from the bus."

#### FFRF stops prayer in kindergarten

prayer, at school functions."

The parent complainant notified FFRF that in November, the prayer song practice had ended. FFRF followed up with letters in December and February, and finally received a response from the Principal, Russell Johnson III, in February, which was a letter he had apparently sent to the district superintendent in October. The forwarded letter notes that FFRF's letter had been shared with the school's seven kindergarten teachers. The teachers reviewed and discussed relevant case law and board policies and were told to stop all prayer immediately. "All teachers will be reminded to immediately refrain from any expression of religious view-

points and praver in the classroom."

constitutional violation."

FFRF received a reply Jan. 27 from Director of Schools Charlie Miskelly: "I have addressed the issues raised in your letter with the appropriate personnel at Adamsville Junior/Senior High School and instructed such personnel that school-sponsored prayer is prohibited at school events, including athletic events and graduation ceremonies.'

#### Choir leader's prayer strikes sour note

A Texas school district agreed with FFRF that a teacher's prayers were out of bounds.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott objected by letter Jan. 14 on behalf of a Texas complainant to the choir director leading students in prayer at Tascosa High School in the Amarillo School District. "Our complainant in-



Patrick Elliott

forms us that Mr. Talley

is known to have in-class prayers. It is our information and understanding that each Friday, Mr. Talley's students sing 'The Lord Bless You and Keep You.' We are told that it is often sung with students holding hands and heads bowed. We also understand that prior to competitions, Mr. Talley asks the students to bow their heads and then leads them in prayer."

Talley was also alleged to have held a Sunday worship service at a Holiday Inn in Dallas for students who attended a choir competition last March.

An attorney for the district responded Jan. 24 that Talley has been instructed that he may not pray with students or encourage or discourage prayer. "Please know that AISD has thoroughly addressed the concerns that you raised, and does not expect for you to receive any future complaints," wrote Andrea Slater Gulley.

This is the same school district that agreed not to bring back the traveling Liberty Bell and Ten Commandments display that FFRF objected to in 2010.

#### FFRF complaint ends Michigan meal prayer

Liver and onions and shepherd's pie at the Cheboygan Center will no longer be served with an amplified Lord's Prayer. The Michigan senior center, operated by the publicly funded Cheboygan County Council on Aging, agreed to stop allowing prayer five days a week before meals served to 110 participants.

Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney, objected in a Feb. 23 letter about the constitutional violation. According to a local complainant, a center employee led the prayer over a microphone.

Markert pointed out that the center's "support of public prayer during these meals ignored the rights of other seniors who may not wish to participate in the religious activities because they disagree with a particular faith publicly exercised, they prefer to be private in their worship, or they do not believe at all."

The complainant informed FFRF on March 3 that an attorney for the center agreed that the practice was illegal and prayers have been stopped.

Three very capable and dedicated legal interns helped FFRF staff attorneys forge successful conclusions to recent complaints. Jayme Lawson Durkee prepared the Wayne County Community College complaint. Stephanie Schmitt prepared the Amarillo School District complaint, and the Owasso school complaint was prepared by Jane Kleven.

## Army reneges on Fort Bragg pledge

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has formally protested a March 1 decision by Col. Stephen Sicinski, garrison commander at Fort Bragg, N.C., to deny promised support for a nonreligious event slated for April.

FFRF had vigorously protested Fort Bragg's support of the "Rock the Fort" event last fall cosponsored by the base's **Religious Support Office and the Billy** Graham Evangelical Association.

When the Army refused to back down, FFRF pointed out that the base had set a precedent which would now require it to offer the same support of a nonreligious event. Enlisted soldier Justin Griffith organized the "Rock Beyond Belief" event, set for April 2, featuring speakers such as Richard Dawkins and FFRF's Dan Barker. The event has now been canceled due to lack of equal support by the military. In his March 3 letter of objection to Lt. Col. Nelson Van Eck Jr. (Staff Judge Advocate), FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott wrote: "This unequal treatment violates the Establishment Clause, Free Speech Clause, Equal Protection under the Law and DoD regulations." FFRF previously received two written assurances that such an event would receive the same level of generous support from the Army base. Lt. Gen. Frank Helmick, the commanding officer at the time, wrote FFRF on Sept. 22: "[I] am willing to provide similar support to comparable events sponsored by similar non-Federal entities that address the needs of the Soldiers on this Installation."

Van Eck, Jr., Staff Judge Advocate, wrote FFRF on Feb. 17:

"With regards to support for future events comparable to the Rock the Fort event, Fort Bragg continues to be willing to provide the same level of support to comparable events proposed by non-federal entities."

In early March, Sicinski wrote Griffith, a freethinking soldier at Fort Bragg, that he could not have the requested venue of the parade field for "Rock Beyond Belief." Sicinski also said all advertising materials must include a disclaimer that there is "no endorsement by Fort Bragg, the US Army, or Department of Defense," although the Billy Graham Association was given no such instructions. Sicinski also said Rock Beyond Belief "will maintain responsibility for all expenses associated with performers and presenters, transportation, audiovisual support, and meals for associated performers and presenters." Yet FFRF's Freedom of Information Act request to Fort Bragg yielded responses showing at least \$52,475 was directly spent on the evangelical event including for various meals, transportation, performers and presenters, apparently by the Religious Support Office of Fort Bragg. Personnel costs, such as entertainment by the Golden Knights Parachute Team, security, etc., were not disclosed. FFRF has appealed its FOIA request because Fort Bragg was partially unresponsive and unclear in its FOIA response.

FFRF halted a blatant constitutional violation by a kindergarten teacher who led students in prayer every day at Stocks Elementary School in Tarboro, N.C. The violation was discovered when a local complainant's 5-yearold came home from school singing the following (to the tune of "Frere Jacques"):

"God, our father, God, our father, Once again, Once again, We will ask a blessing, We will ask a blessing, Amen, Amen."

Rebecca Markert, FFRF senior staff attorney, wrote a letter of complaint to the Edgecombe County Public Schools, citing how the prayer broke the law of the land and the district's own policy, which states: "The school system and its employees shall not conduct, sponsor, or endorse any form of religious indoctrination or exercise, including

#### **FFRF** halts violations in Tennessee schools

FFRF stopped the practice of broadcsasting prayers over loudspeakers during athletic events and hosting student-led prayers at graduation ceremonies in the Mc-Nairy County School District in Selmer, Tenn.

đ Brent Rebecca

Markert

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert complained initially in November and again in December in letters to the director of schools. She noted that the U.S. Supreme Court has struck down prayer at public high school graduations, and that "it is no defense that graduations are events at which participation or attendance is voluntary. Courts have summarily rejected arguments that voluntariness excuses a

# Member witnesses Egypt's revolution



Editor's note: FFRF member Holli Niesner is in her second year teaching in Cairo, Egypt, where she lives with her cats Bella and Luciano. She filed this report in late February.

**By Holli Niesner** 

grew up in Liberty City in the buckle of the bible belt in northeast Texas. I'm an only child who turned 31 Feb. 19. My mom was raised Baptist and my dad Lutheran. For a long time we were Christmas and Easter Christians at a "liberal" ELCA Lutheran church, but my parents wanted to get more involved as I neared confirmation age, and we did. I taught music at vacation bible school during the summer.

Lutherans are pretty rare in the South, and no one at my school knew I even went to church because 99% of them were Baptists, and they all attended church together. In high school when I told some friends I was Lutheran, they asked, "Is that a cult? Do you believe in god?" I remember thinking, "How can you be so ignorant of the history of your own Protestant church. You know, Martin Luther."

My parents encouraged my questions about religion. Our pastor was accepting of gay couples and helped my dad change and become more tolerant.

After graduating from high school, I enrolled at Texas Lutheran University, a small college in Seguin near San Antonio. Most students were Lutheran, but there were Catholics and nonbelievers and a gay and lesbian student group offer from a great school in (hold your laughter) Wasilla. That was before Sarah Palin became famous, but she was definitely around. I taught advanced math for three years, then signed up for an international schools job fair in San Francisco. In two days I had eight offers, including Colombia, Turkey, Kuwait and Egypt. I chose Cairo.

I like living in places that put me outside my comfort zone and make me adapt to a new way of life. I'm fluent in Spanish and know enough conversational and written Japanese and Arabic to get by.

#### **Teaching in Cairo**

I teach at a prestigious American K-12 international school in Cairo. Most students are fantastic and very motivated. Annual tuition is as high as \$32,000. About half of the 1,400 students are U.S. citizens.

We have many Egyptian students who, due to the high cost, are from wealthy families. Hosni Mubarak's grandson attended, or did before the revolution. In the past, children of Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Anwar Sadat and other names you might recognize also attended.

Our numbers are projected to drop next term, which means staff cuts. About 60% of our high school students have returned since the revolution, but enrollment is projected to be down about 500 for next year. I'm also providing online virtual schooling to students who are out of the country.

Cairo, with about 17 million people, is very crowded. I live in an expatriate "bubble" of sorts, the suburb of Ma'adi. Daily prayer calls blast from a mosque 50 feet away, especially on Fridays, when instead of the few minutes of call to prayer, we are treated to an hour of yelling for the "service."

It's a bit scary. At least in America, if I want to be yelled at about religion, I have to go inside a church. Here, you have no choice. A friend dubbed the one at 4:30 a.m. the "call to pee" since it wakes him up, and as long as he's awake...

Traffic lanes are universally ignored. Drivers just move into wherever a space opens up. Crosswalks are nonexistent. Young and old literally have to run across five lanes of fast-moving traffic.

#### No 'nones' allowed



Holli Niesner at the Great Sphinx of Giza, which dates to circa 2550 B.C.E.

have some latitude, but wear a shawl or wrap when going out.

A blue-eyed blonde sticks out like a sore thumb. When I run errands, I try to take a male friend. Alone, I get followed and prodded to start a conversation, hissed at, etc. I've never been groped yet, but most expat women I know have, usually in crowded situations, which I avoid.

#### **Comes the revolution**

The first demonstrations were Jan. 25 (Mubarak resigned Feb. 11). I felt very unsafe only twice, on nights when gunfire went on all night and prisoners from a nearby jail had escaped.

During that time, an Ethiopian couple and their two young children who live on the ground floor of our apartment complex stayed with us for two nights. Then it quieted down, with a curfew still in effect.

The government had shut down Internet and cell phone service, but my parents were able to call me on my landline. Our school was closed for a week. The only TV channel I had on was CNN. I played hundreds of games of FreeCell and Minesweeper on my computer with CNN on in the background.

On Feb. 23, police burned cars at the Ministry of the Interior. A day later in New Ma'adi, a policeman shot a bus driver dead during a traffic argument. People tried to set fire to the police station. They do not like the police but love the military. Early on, when things got bad and police were off the streets, people pulled together and patrolled neighborhoods themselves, setting up roadblocks at intersections to let in only people they knew belonged in the area. They were my protection. I felt safe knowing they were keeping looters and criminals out. [In a later e-mail, Niesner links to a story about the military beating peaceful protesters with clubs and electric prods and sexually abusing women: "Egypt's revolution has entered a new phase as reform efforts are now aimed at reducing the military's role in political affairs. The violent suppression of protests reveals an Army determined to hold onto its influence in the volatile country."]

a general handyman and doorman, was struggling because banks were closed and markets were running low on supplies. I gave him two bags of groceries from my refrigerator and 200 LE (about \$34, *livre égyptienne*, i.e., Egyptian pounds). When I had *fattir* (a local version of pizza) or other food delivered, I bought extra for his family.

Once when I was leaving for a faculty meeting after a night of really bad gunfire, I told him the teachers might have to leave, and he started to cry. The Egyptian people are wonderful and extremely hospitable overall. I'm very lucky to have lived through this time in history and weathered the storm.

My school pays for my apartment, so the only fees I have here are basic living expenses and utilities. My apartment is huge (three bedrooms, two baths) and it's just me and the cats!

As an expat, if you're paid in U.S. dollars, pound sterlings or euros, living here is extremely cheap. The average Egyptian lives on about 11 LE a day, or less than \$2. I'm able to save 50% of my paycheck. Some examples of average prices I pay for things:

• Use of a driver and cab to take me anywhere in the city, run errands, etc., is \$6 an hour.

• A 45-minute traditional, authentic Chinese foot massage (heavenly) is \$13.

• A beer or drink at the expat pub is \$1.50.

I started to wonder if I was really a Christian. I knew too many amazing people who weren't Christian to just say, "Yep — they're all hellbound." I thought there was no way that a loving, merciful god would allow that.

After graduating, I attended church only as a paid choir member (I double majored in vocal performance and math and sang opera professionally before I started teaching math in San Antonio for a living). I went because I was hired to sing and because I had friends also attending church there.

Though my journey to atheism started in college, about three years ago I picked up Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, Hitchens' *God Is Not Great* and Dan Barker's *Godless*. After reading them, I definitely decided that yes, I am an atheist.

After a few years in San Antonio, I wanted an adventure and signed up for a job fair in Anchorage, Alaska. I got an Religion is pervasive. To get a government ID card, you must check one of two choices: Coptic Christian or Muslim.

I have many Christian and Muslim friends. It seems, as everywhere, that the more educated and wealthy a family is, the less religious and more tolerant they are. I have observant Muslim friends and others who do not fast or pray and drink alcohol whenever they like. But the tolerance extends only to believers.

Although Copts and Muslims often don't get along, they are united in their distaste for atheism, so I have to be extremely careful about revealing my nonbelief.

As a foreigner and a woman, I wear skirts that are knee-length or lower, avoid low-cut shirts and anything sleeveless. My first summer here I wore jeans but switched to mid-thigh-length shorts the second year. As expats we

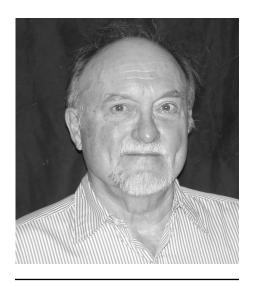
During this time, my *boab*, a man who takes care of the apartment building, washes everyone's cars and acts as

• Maid service, three days a week, four hours a day, is \$200 a month. My maid is Filipino and more expensive. Egyptian maids tend to work much cheaper but also, in general, will take food from your fridge, clothes from your closet and tend to not have the same work ethic.

• A nice dinner for two at a gourmet restaurant, including appetizer, bottle of wine, main course and dessert is \$60. My plan was to stay in Egypt until 2013 or 2014. I want to take a year or more off and become a nomad, backpacking around the globe. Afterward, I plan to return home to stay with my parents and complete work on a master's degree in math education. Then I'll attend another international schools job fair and head somewhere else for a new adventure on planet Earth!

## Imagine seeking modern sacrificial lambs

# Blood religion: A bloody shame



By John S. Compere

**B**lood is front and center in the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. You can talk all you want about the core of religion being love and grace, but you can't get there in these orthodox religions without wading through a ton of blood.

The basic concept is simple, to wit: Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. That's incredibly simple. It's also incredible, that is, unbelievable for anyone with a modicum of logical sense who actually takes the time to analyze it.

Why is it incredible?

Well, think about it. Pretend you've never heard it before. Here's an allpowerful god who creates a world and populates it with various forms of life. He allows the crown of his creation human beings — to disobey in such a way that he can't just let it go. He has to either punish them or figure out some sort of ritual they can perform so he can forgive them.

So he decides that the ritual will be this: Take an innocent animal (unable to disobey the rules and thus displease this god, by the way, and which, interestingly enough, is always a non-predator in the animal kingdom) and slit its throat. Let its blood pour out on the ground while it dies.

Then this all-powerful god can smile and say, "OK, I forgive your screwing up this time, but don't let it happen again or you'll have to kill another innocent, peaceable animal to appease me." Given that this god could have made things any way he chose, does it make any kind of sense whatsoever that bloody sacrifice would have been his brilliant solution to the problem of human beings screwing up? How horrendous is the story of Abraham being told to sacrifice his son Isaac? I dare you to really consider what a terrible message it gives. God supposedly told Abraham that he should take his son to a special mountain and kill and burn him in order to prove that he loved god. According to the story in Genesis 22, the father even had his trusting son carry the wood for the fire and answered Isaac's question about where the animal was that would be killed and burned without telling his son what he had in mind. Once there, he bound his son, laid him on the wood and was ready to kill him before this loving god — Oh happy day! — decided Abraham had proved his faith and intervened to save Isaac.

Can you imagine what that did for the boy's trust in his father? Suppose this were a modern story about some father in your community. The boy lives to tell the tale, which he does to the authorities. Wouldn't you think this man was an utter lunatic if he explained that god had told him to do it? Of course you would, and you'd be right. And this lunatic father who claimed he heard his god telling him to kill and burn his son would be treated for the mental illness he was exhibiting.

But times were different then, weren't they? Yeah, right. Try telling that to the boy whose father was ready to kill and burn him in order to show how much he loved god.

Wouldn't you think a humane god would have realized this wasn't such a swell way to test someone's faithfulness, that it would scar the boy for life and send a horrible message about what it takes to please this almighty being? How in the name of all that is precious can anybody justify the idea that the only way to be able to forgive somebody who has done something bad is to kill some innocent living being?

"Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin." What a sick idea!

Let me try again to put it in modern terms. Suppose you have a daughter who disobeys you. Let's say she slips out of the house to be with her boyfriend and lies to you about it. You find out what happened and say to her, "Before I can forgive you, you have to kill something: your little pet Yorkie who sleeps in your bed every night."

So your daughter takes her beloved pet, slits its throat with a butcher knife while tears roll down her cheeks, lets it bleed to death while the little pet looks up at her with incredulous eyes, and then you say, "OK, now I forgive you."

Would you be a monster or what? It's incomprehensible, isn't it? Nobody in his or her right mind would do such a thing. But that's what we're told this brilliant, loving, all-powerful god decided was the way it should be. Throughout the entire Hebrew scriptures, there is never any questioning of the barbarity of this scheme.

#### 'You'll have to kill another innocent, peaceable animal to appease me.'

Roman Catholic tradition, the claim is made that the wine of the Eucharist actually becomes Jesus' blood. Most Protestant groups reject this idea as being a bit much, but nonetheless blithely go ahead with the idea that symbolically drinking Jesus' blood is honoring him.

When we hear about a primitive tribe vanquishing a foe and ritualistically eating the still-beating heart ripped from the slain enemy's breast and drinking the still-warm blood, we are repulsed. As well we should be. Why oh why, then, are we not able to look realistically at the equally repulsive notion that the god of this universe required that innocent, living beings had to be ritualistically killed, with their blood oozing out onto the ground, in order for him to forgive us for being human and screwing up.

Any way you look at it, this is a bloody religion. And I say it's a bloody shame.

John S. Compere, a Foundation member since 2000, is a retired clinical psychologist and vice president of FFRF's Sun Valley, Ariz., chapter. He was a fifth-generation Southern Baptist minister who resigned from his church at age 32, having rejected the basic tenets of Christianity. He returned to college to earn an M.A. and a Ph.D., taught at Wake Forest University and had a private practice. He lives in Arizona with his wife, Joyce, and enjoys cycling, tennis, racquetball, classical music, theater and good writing, especially on why humanism is much to be preferred over supernaturalism. An avowed feminist, he delights in his four grown children and six granddaughters.

He's the author of **Towards the Light** (2010). This article is excerpted from one chapter in a just-completed manuscript on "Outgrowing Religion," which he hopes to have published soon.

# They Said What?

I'm proud to say I'm a born-again Christian. I hope you appreciate the fact that it is not freedom from religion, it is freedom from a state religion that we celebrate. The great creator, no matter who you worship, is the one from which our freedoms are derived, not the government.

Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, speech at his Inauguration Day prayer breakfast Wisconsin State Journal, 1-3-11

The idea that the Crusades and the fight of Christendom against Islam is somehow an aggression on our part is absolutely anti-historical. . . . What I'm talking about is onward, American soldiers. What we're talking about are core American values. "All men are created equal" — that's a Christian value, but it's an American value.

Former Sen. Rick Santorum, speaking in Spartanburg, S.C.

Politico.com, 2-22-11

believe that a creature crawled out of the sea and became a human being one day.

Rep. Jack Kingston, R-Ga., answering if he believes in evolution

"Real Time With Bill Maher," 1-28-11

One of the most important things that we should always remember is the motto of our country, In God We Trust, and we should stand on that foundation as our founders intended. Ladies and gentlemen, we as a nation must move toward God, not away from God. **Former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, in a speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC)** *Esquire, 2-14-11* 

A physical sign. It could have easily said, "You will now be attacked by Satan. Entering this industry, you are now on the highway to darkness." I think we are right now. No doubt. There's no doubt about it.

And it gets worse, of course. When Jesus is executed in a horrible way (according to accepted religious mythology), it's interpreted that his death was the final and ultimate sacrifice, the quintessential spilling of blood that would allow god to forgive all sins thereafter by harking back to this particular gory spectacle. There are countless references in church hymnody to the power of the blood. We're supposed to immerse ourselves in it, wash our clothes in it, glory in it and rejoice in it, ad nauseam. This is blood we're talking about. Blood!

Somehow god decided that killing some innocent being, which is also supposed to be god's creation, by the way, is the best and only way to show devotion to an almighty being?

The most sacred ritual of the church throughout the centuries has been built around the notion of symbolically drinking Jesus' blood. In the We don't have the answer to everything, but by God, we have the answer to a lot of stuff.

Justice Antonin Scalia, September 2010 comment on constitutional originalism at the University of California's Hastings College of Law professor Jeffrey Rosen, "If Scalia had His Way" New York Times, 1-9-11

One of the most important things that we should always remember is the motto of our country, In God We Trust, and we should stand on that foundation as our founders intended. Ladies and gentlemen, we as a nation must move toward God, not away from God. **Former Minnesota Gov. Tim Pawlenty, in a speech at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC)** *Esquire, 2-14-11* 

I believe I came from God, not from a monkey, so the answer is no. . . . I don't

Singer Billy Ray Cyrus, on seeing an Atheists United Adopt-a-Highway sign on the way into Los Angeles GQ magazine, March 2011

God makes everything happen. He put me in that situation with Death Row, and he took me out of it.

Rapper Snoop Dogg, aka Calvin Broadus Jr., "smoking a blunt and discussing his comeback after leaving Death Row Records"

Wall Street Journal, 2-12-11

Saying we're going to be under the water, that I don't believe. Because people belong to God, and God is not so silly to allow people to perish just like that. **Teburoro Tito, former president of the Kiribati Islands (average elevation 6.5 feet), on flooding danger from climate change** 

National Public Radio, 2-16-11

March 2011

## Meet a Member

## Lover of lifelong learning

Name: Patricia "Pat" (Riley) Dunlap.

Where I live: Tall Timbers, Md., near the mouth of the Potomac River. I grew up in colonial Williamsburg, Va., near the Powder Magazine and the shoemaker and silversmith shops. As a Navy wife, I've lived along most of the nation's coastal areas.

Where and when I was born: Norfolk, Va., 1943.

Family: Husband, Steve, 69; son, Steve, 43, and daughter-in-law, Stephanie; daughter, Tricia, 42; son, Matthew, 39; four grandchildren, Annie, 20, Joseph, 13, Hank, 9, and Carter, 7.

Education: B.A. in philosophy from the College of William and Mary; M.A. in American history from George Mason University; D.A. in history and teaching history in higher education from George Mason University.

After being asked to teach a course in the history of science at the college level, I delved into the evolution of science from ancient Babylon to the present and found it fascinating. I'm particularly intrigued by biological evolution and cosmology.

I'm also very politically involved as the president of my county's League of Women Voters. I also worked with the Virginia Obama for President campaign. Virginia went blue for the first time since 1964. My efforts on behalf of the League and the Obama campaign taught me a great deal about the current state of politics in the U.S.

Finally, I travel whenever possible. I've been to most of Europe, Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand and most of North America. Travel is the second-most enlightening experience after formal education. Seeing ourselves from another's perspective is eye-opening, as is the obvious contrast among nations and cultures.

Occupation: Retired program manager, publication editor and marketing director. I've taught college-level history courses part time since 1987, and I continue to do so at various colleges, often online. I'm the author of Riding Astride: The Frontier in Women's History

(Arden Press, 1995).

Military service: My husband is a retired U.S. Navy captain. We've been married for 46 years.

How I got where I am today: My husband's job brought him to St. Mary's County, and I came with him as I always have. We built a nice, small home on the water and purchased a boat which we keep at a slip behind our house.

Where I'm headed: We're planning a camera safari in Africa for 2011, so that's where I'm headed geographically. Intellectually, I intend to keep teaching as long as I'm able to do so, and I would like to find a way to establish an FFRF chapter or something like it in southern Maryland (Charles, Calvert and St. Mary's counties).

Person in history I admire: Thomas Jefferson was a deist — which is as close to atheist as one could be before Charles Darwin and Edwin Hubble a scholar, and a servant of the people of the emerging American republic.

A quotation I like: "Skepticism is the highest duty, and blind faith the one unpardonable sin." (Thomas Huxley)

These are a few of my favorite things: My husband, children and grandchildren; college students who ask questions and seek truth; travel, boating and understanding why things are the way they are.

These are not: Blind ignorance and refusal to explore recently introduced ideas and concepts.

My doubts about religion started: Religion has raised questions for me since I was in seventh or eighth grade. I began to read books on classical Greek and Roman mythology and, at some point, asked my mother why these ancient belief systems were called myths when they weren't any more silly than Christianity. Why, I asked, is it less likely that many gods exist than that one does? Why can't gods act much like humans do instead of being some sorts of spirits beyond our reach and understanding? I honestly don't remember her response, but I continued to attend church and eventually reared my children to do the same.

In my 30s, I began to read mythology again, including the many great works of Joseph Campbell



Pat Dunlap unwinds from earthly cares on the water.

The nearly complete lack of rational thought in their concepts was nearly as alarming as the insistence that the faithful discard reason in favor of faith and obedience. So, religion is mythology and nothing more. That made me an agnostic, since it's possible that mythology has a basis in fact.

My explorations into cosmology pushed me that extra mile. We've widened our knowledge base about the universe from our solar system to a knowledge base that includes a theory of origin called the Big Bang, thousands of galaxies and increasingly rapid expansion of the universe. Hubble has sent back billions of photographs, and nowhere is there any sign of heaven (the biblical heaven is just beyond the reaches of Earth), god, angels, cherubim, or any of the other minions of the

spirit world.

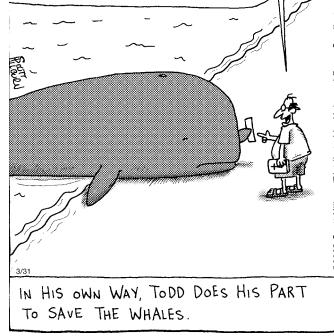
In other words, there's no actual evidence that any of this nonsense is true. I'm an atheist, and I'm far more comfortable in the truth of that statement than I ever was as a Christian.

Why I'm a freethinker: Because to be anything else is to deny the realities of factual information backed by physical evidence.

Ways I promote freethought: I try to get the FFRF newspaper into as many hands as possible. I've shared it with friends and relatives, deliberately left it in public places such as restaurants, airports and trains, and sent particularly pertinent articles to people online. I also forward the best of Annie Laurie's "Freethought of the Day" to a reasonably wide audience.



WELL, THERE'S OUR BROCHURE AND IF YOU CAN MAKE IT, WORSHIP SERVICE IS SUNDAY AT 11:00. I'LL BE PRAYING FOR YOU



The similarities between Judeo-Christian mythology and preceding religions (e.g., Zoroastrianism and Mithraism) were startling. Believers of many of these ancient dogmas based their faith on heroes born of virgins who overcame death. They each had fascinating creation myths and hierarchies of god and godlike creatures.

That led me to the works of people like Billy Graham, Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell.

#### Hawkeye State motto: 'Our liberties we prize and our rights we will maintain.'

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker spoke Feb. 10 on the fact that "America Doesn't Have a Prayer" at the final event of Darwin Week at the University of Northern Iowa in Cedar Falls. The event was sponsored by the UNI Freethinkers and Inquirers, which is associated with the Secular Student Alliance. A crowd of 125 students, faculty and community members packed the room. From left, front, are UNIFI President Trevor Boeckmann, Laura Castro, John Chesley, Dan Barker and Membership Director Alex Popinga. MIDDLE ROW, from left: Aaron Friel, Ben Musset, Activities Director Quinn Jones, Loren Thalacker, Kelsey Waugaman, Miranda Burroughs and Tony Mangello. BACK ROW: Finance Director Michael Dippold, Brett Wheeler, Adam Shannon, Vice President Cory Derringer, Brian Hart and Joe Enabnit.

# Please don't dismiss Atheist Bliss



**Eric Paul Erickson** 

**E**ric Paul Erickson dedicates *Atheist Bliss* to mythologist Joseph Campbell for his oft-quoted advice to "follow your bliss," wherever it may lead.

It led Erickson, an FFRF member, to envision and complete *Atheist Bliss*, "a photo exploration of atheists in America." It features 44 photographs — a mix of color and black and white — of "ordinary" freethinkers posing with short statements of their choice.

For example, Bob Kitson, a stand-up comic, chose "Fully Evolved Mammal" for his poster. George Carlin's words are on the facing page: "Atheism is a non-prophet organization."

Musician Cris Caplan posed with his guitar and a sign, "Music is my Religion!" His statement: "The absence of religion in my life allowed me to better understand my unique self and creativity. That is why I am happy."

"I found my subjects in various ways," says Erickson, "some through ads on Craigslist and other online sources, some through working with freethinker groups and some through word of mouth. There was also a lot of 'You know, my friend so and so is an atheist. I should ask them if they would be interested.' "

The ground rules were simple. Participants were asked to create signs on poster board. The sign could either describe how they refer to themselves, quote a famous freethinker who resonated with them or put forth their own statement to share with the world.

Erickson, who lives with his wife Shari in Los Angeles, is a University of Southern California graduate who for a time worked in television, film and theater before joining the Roswell [N.M.] Daily Record and later the Chicago Tribune as a journalist. His 2005 freelance investigative piece "Over the Ocean, Under the Knife" detailed medical tourism in Thailand and Malaysia. He co-wrote *The Civil War* and *Weird, Scary and Unusual* for Publications International's Armchair Guide series.

Now, his Temple of the Cave Photography, a multimedia studio company, crafts images for clients that include bands, theater companies and models. He also started The Marian Project, which helps women from troubled or abusive backgrounds express their natural beauty before the camera to boost self esteem or just replace photos left behind when they were running for their lives. The city of Los Angeles recognized the project with an award in 2010.

The Marian Project "proudly stands as a secular organization working to better the lives of others," Erickson says.

He says he didn't quite know what to expect when he started the atheist photo project. He *did* want to counter any perceptions that atheists are unhappy people.

"People for the most part were very open to it. Sometimes I had a problem when people thought they were atheists but were actually spiritualists or had a type of New Age — for lack of a better term — beliefs. I had many requests from New Age believers to participate, but obviously that wouldn't have worked."

Erickson said he bonded with some project participants more than others and that he encountered all kinds of freethought outlooks, from strident to more accommodating. One thing he discovered quickly:

"Atheists have many shared experiences. Time and time again, I heard stories that reflected my own history. Relationships dashed to pieces over religion. Parents turning their backs on their own children. Discrimination at work, even the loss of jobs. Public humiliation. Hatred, even violence."

The logistics: Each atheist was asked

to create three signs, one saving how they refer to themselves, another quoting a famous freethinker who resonated with them, and a third with a short statement they wanted to share with the world. "Some of the shots are done as conceptual portraits," Erickson says. "Other times it was simply a snapshot, capturing a moment. I wanted to show the differences in people as well as in their own approach to life." Along with giving a voice to nonbelievers, he hopes to spur discussion. His main goal is "to chip away at the ignorance of how atheists live their lives. The idea that atheists can't be happy Sandra Garcia

will eventually be revealed as a myth, just like the myth of the invisible man who sits up in the clouds and reads our minds."

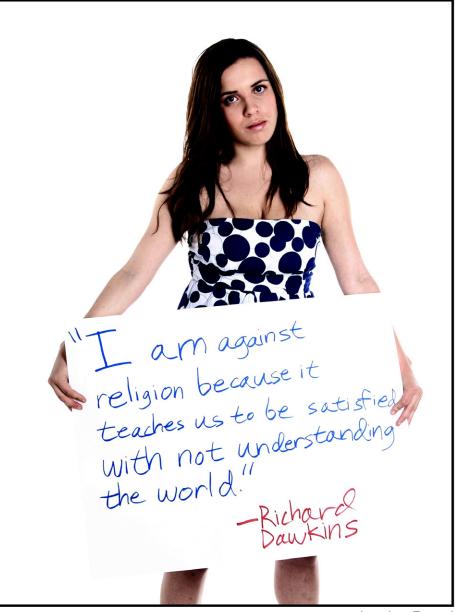
Because Erickson strongly believes in a strong wall between state and

church, he's generously donating a portion of sales to FFRF.

Atheist Bliss (TOTC Press, 2010, 102 pages), is available from *templeofthecave*. com and at *ffrf.org/shop/books/* for \$22 ppd.



Drew Pruitt





Jessica Parral

March 2011

# More Atheist Bliss



Marian Shapiro





Michael Gobaud

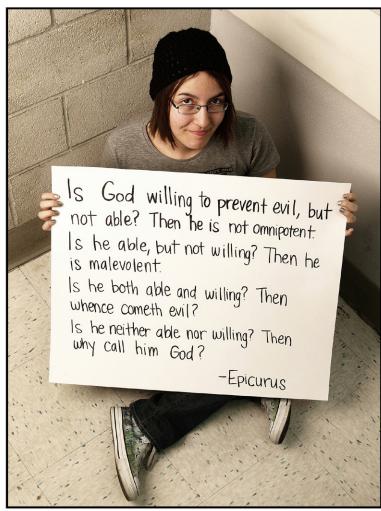
# 'I ain't 'fraid of *no* ghost.'— *Pedrom Adeli*

"Happiness isn't about selectively explaining away sadness and inequality. It's about addressing it head-on. Believing everything is part of 'God's Plan' isn't being happy, it's being oblivious."

— Ian Gary, performer and writer

"The most difficulties I've had are when the parent of someone I'm dating finds out I'm an atheist. Then suddenly I'm not good enough to date their child, even though they thought I was a wonderful person beforehand." — Valerie Macias, social activist

"My heart and mind tell me that I will never understand a world allegedly governed by one god that allows for so much wrong, cruelty and injustice." — Mark Bedrosian, aquatics industry consultant



Stefanie Seng

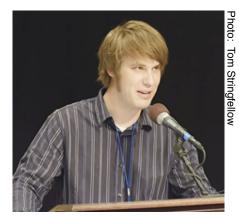
# 'God equals the square root of negative 1.'— Alex Jacobson, scientist

**Ronna Humphries** 

## **Emperor Has No Clothes Award 2010**

# They're afraid of our truth

## Photography by Brent Nicastro



Scott Colson, FFRF webmaster, production editor and UW-Madison philosophy grad, introduced Cenk Uygur [Jenk YOOgur] to attendees at the 33rd national convention Oct. 30 in Madison, Wis.:

This next speaker is a mix of mystery, intrigue and excitement. MSNBC financial host Dylan Ratigan once took to the streets of New York to ask a very important question: What is a Cenk Uygur? The answers varied from an exotic locale to an (infamous?) mountain peak to a strange animal that scientists have just discovered.

But to understand just what a Cenk Uygur is, you have to know what a Young Turk is. A Young Turk has historically meant a modern, pluralist, secularist member of the newly formed Ottoman political class at the turn of the 20th century. Their efforts at shedding empire and deposing of the sultan were ultimately successful, leading to a secular constitutional republic.

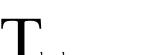
In the 21st century, we are at the dawn of a second Young Turks revolution. This one started in 2002, on Sirius Satellite Radio, and then spread online. The Los Angeles Times referred to "The Young Turks" as the pioneers of Internet programming. So what is it? Well, it's the first ever daily online program that now has over 300 million YouTube views worldwide. Recent guests included powerhouses Nancy Pelosi, Russ Feingold, Alan Greenspan, Jimmy Carter, Brian Williams, the lovable Pat Buchanan and John Kerry. The show has won many awards, including 2009 Best Political Podcast.

Cenk takes his duties on the soap

my father was a Muslim! I have the seed of Islam!"

We have high expectations for this acceptance speech. On his show just a few days ago, he spilled the beans: "There will be a declaration of war." Egging on Bill O'Reilly, Cenk asked, "You want a culture war? Let's have at it, Hoss!"

By Cenk Uygur



hank you so much, Freedom From Religion Foundation, for this award. I really appreciate it. I know I probably got it for saying things on national television, which aren't often said. But we're the future. Television is a part of it, but as Scott was telling you, we've got a little bit of an audience online. We're actually the largest online news show in the world, and what's neat about that is, now the host of the largest online news show in the world is an agnostic. So we're coming.

Part of my speech today is about that. It's about a new generation and affecting a new generation. And as I teased on the show, I will be declaring a culture war. But before I do that, I want to be really, really careful as to whom this war is with. I'm sure that a great majority of you agree, but I want to be absolutely clear. It's not against the religious. Are there some religious folks in the country I disagree with? Of course. The list could take hours. But there are great, great religious people in the country. I'm going to give you a couple of examples.

We were on the flight here, sitting next to a little old lady named Linda from California on the way to visit her grandchildren in Colorado. She loves them to death, and she loves her daughter, whose children they are, and that's why she goes to visit them often. She loves her son, who's gay, and she's frustrated that he doesn't vote. She It doesn't make any sense, but it doesn't have to it's religion.

made him vote on Prop. 8, dragged him out there and said, "You gotta vote on this."

He said, "I don't want to get married." She said, "I don't care. You're going to vote on this." She's largely a Democrat, though she gets frustrated, like a lot of us do. She had cancer seven years ago and she thinks that God helped her to get through it. Now, I have nothing against Linda. I love Linda. I might disagree with her, but there's nothing wrong with someone like Linda thinking that God got her through that cancer. As long as she fought the cancer with medicine, etc., that also helps, and she did.

I know a woman in L.A. She's from Guatemala and works really hard as a housekeeper. She takes two weeks off a year and goes back to her home country, and feeds the poor for two straight weeks. That's her idea of a vacation. Now, that's what we used to call a Christian, and there are great, great Christians like that in the world. More power to them. If that's their interpretation of Christianity, I couldn't be happier with that. My personal role model is a reverend: Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Christians like that have helped the world become a much better place.

Let me just give you two last examples: my mom. She's a Muslim. She's a person of faith. Does she get into the details of the dogma? No. But she has an enduring faith, and I don't want to take her faith away from her. I don't even want to challenge her faith. It's not about that. It's about the specifics of the religion and the dogma. So if somebody ever says, "Hey, you're declaring a culture war and you're against religion," yes, but you know how the Christians say "hate the sin, love the



Cenk Uygur

sinner," right? I don't like the religion, but I love a lot of religious people, like my mom.

Then finally, one last guy. I knew this kid who was 20 years old, who was a Muslim in college. He was devout, didn't drink, fasted for the whole Ramadan. Reasonably smart kid, inquisitive, looked into all the different religions. And I'm definitely not against that kid, because that kid was me.

We have to be open to other people changing. I changed. I think a lot of people in this room have changed. How many of you grew up in a religion? [Many hands raised.] That's a lot of you! And you all changed. That's also part of my message tonight: That we can help others change, and that we should help others change, like I did and like a lot of you did.

I'm not against faith. There's a good argument to be made by atheists who say, "No, there is no God. There is no higher consciousness. There is no Flying Spaghetti Monster. There is no Zeus. There is no Thor." I understand that, but that's not the point I'm making. If people want to have faith, and that helps them get through cancer, it helps them get through life, I don't pretend to know. I really don't.

Sometimes, I can be very sure of my opinions, as you're about to see. But is there a higher consciousness? I hope so! Are human beings the highest consciousness in the universe? God help us if we are. So I don't know the answers. So I'm not saying if you believe certain things — whether it's a higher consciousness or a supreme being of some sort, if you just generally have faith — that I'm against you, or I don't believe that, or that I've got a problem with that, or I'm going to declare war against you. I'm not saying any of that.

I think it's very important because

box very seriously, especially for the secular cause. "I'm agnostic now. I was born Muslim. My whole family is Muslim. They didn't knock down the towers; they were scared in New Jersey." Later that day, with Ratigan, Cenk offered his take on gay marriage: "What have gay couples done to marriage that Larry King or Liz Taylor haven't done?" He then referred Ratigan to Leviticus, where mixing of fabrics and eating shellfish are considered an abomination. Cenk called for stonings at Red Lobster.

Cenk guest-hosted "The Ed Show" for Ed Schultz on Aug. 20. Rev. Franklin Graham had just made some really idiotic comments about the "seed of Islam" and whether President Obama is really a Muslim. As Cenk put it, "You don't get infected when you are born," and added, "Muahahaha! Don't trust me. My father is now an agnostic. I'm an agnostic. But at the time I was born,



Cenk accepts the Emperor Award from FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor.

we have to tell people, in order to help them change, in order to effect that change, "Hey, listen. At least from my perspective, we're not against your god. We're not against your beliefs, necessarily. We're not against your faith. We're just telling you that the way you are getting to that faith - this avenue, this religion — is wrong. Now, you can have faith through other means, but these texts are demonstrably false. And we can show you how they're false. So just stay open-minded for a second. I'm not telling you I know the answers. The only thing I'm telling you (and the point of this speech tonight), is that I do know what is not true. And what is not true is the bible, the Quran, the Old Testament, the New Testament and, by the way, the texts of the Hindus and the Buddhists. I know. I studied them.

The reason I not only didn't like Buddhism but honestly hated it —

don't tell Richard Gere — is that, and I know people will say these are broad generalizations, but generally speaking, Buddhism is about escape from this life. And I thought, I don't want to escape from this life! I like this life. I like watching the Steelers on Sunday, I like eating my subs, and at the time, I liked trying to hook up with girls trying.

#### Who declared this war?

Bill O'Reilly and others on FOX News and other conservatives are always talking about a "culture war." I always think, like, what culture war? Who on our side ever declared war? Who on our side said that we were going to make sure that they couldn't practice their religion? Who on our side said, "Government has to be run by our belief"? It's always them saying, "No, you have to run government by our beliefs, and we don't give a damn what your beliefs are!" And then they pretend we started a war? Are you kidding me?

I want to tell you about their war on us. It's all across the world. I'm talking about conservatives, fundamentalists, of all the religions, of all the countries. Those are the people we have to fight back against with reason and logic and with a lot of effort. You may have heard of the recent case in Iran of the woman who was accused of adultery. At first they were going to give her 99 lashes, but then since she didn't want to get the 99 lashes, she got a lawyer. They drove her lawyer out of the country and then they decided, "OK, we've got to step this up a notch."

They decided to bury her up to her head and stone her until she dies. Now, people are fighting that and there's a lot of back-and-forth whether that's going to happen. So *you're* going to throw heavy stones at a woman's head who's buried and can't defend herself, and kill her, and *we* declared war on *you*?

This war has been going on for a long, long time all over the world. In Afghanistan, religious fundamentalists throw acid in girls' faces for going to school. In Nigeria, Christian pastors say they are experts in exorcism. Some of them call themselves "witch doctors." It's a little confusing because they're also against witchcraft. In other countries like Ghana, women are largely attacked. Do you see a theme here? People who can't defend themselves have few rights and get attacked by tough guys. That's what tough guys do: They bury women up to their neck and throw stones at their faces.

In Nigeria, they poured acid into a kid's eyes and nose. He suffered for a month before he died. In another case,



Cenk Uygur at the convention podium.

In another, a woman tried to open her daughter's skull. Always, it's the weak and defenseless who are attacked.

But I think it's possible that the most dangerous of all are American fundamentalist Christians. It's because the policies they push are more dangerous. One particular policy that had a lot of fundamentalist Christian backing, including a fairly important guy by the name of George W. Bush, was the invasion of Iraq. There's a story in Jacques Chirac's biography where Bush goes and talks to the French president and says, "You know, Gog and Magog are supposed to come out of Iraq." And Chirac is like, "What? What the hell are Gog and Magog?" He literally has to turn to an aide and say, "Hey, can you look that up for me? This guy's a lunatic!"

That story is so incredible that I almost can't quite believe it, but it's confirmed by French authorities that Bush said that. Gog and Magog: That's why we invaded Iraq? Hundreds of thousands of civilians died. We found out through WikiLeaks last week: "Oh, oops! We forgot to count another 15,000 civilians who were killed in that war." Those are real people, aunts and uncles and grandmothers that somebody cared about, and kids that they had hope in, and they all died because an idiot thought Gog and Magog come out of Iraq.

#### It's called Armageddon

Yes, the witch doctors and the Taliban are incredibly dangerous and violent. But they don't have the largest army built by man. That's why our fundamentalists are scarier and more dangerous in a lot of ways. In 2003, Bush was doing the road map to peace in Israel and Palestine. It's his halfhearted effort, but at least he did something.

He threw a road map out there. The evangelicals called it a satanic road map — the reason being it might lead to peace, which they desperately do *not* want.

Twenty-four of the leading evangelicals in the country, led by Gary Bauer, wrote a letter to President Bush, a born-again evangelical: "It would be morally reprehensible to be evenhanded between Israel and the Palestinians." Now, why don't they want evenhandedness? Why don't they want peace in the Middle East? Because of their asinine beliefs in this ridiculous book written centuries ago by a bunch of politicians. Jesus didn't write the bible — they wrote it 300 years later. And what happens when politicians write something?

The idea among some evangelicals in this country is that Israel needs to be *Greater* Israel, and when that happens, they will eventually tear down a holy mosque in Jerusalem. When they tear down the Muslim mosque, then we will have war. That war has a cute little nickname: It's called Armageddon. And they love that, because they think right after that, Jesus comes. Jesus can't come until we have Armageddon, and everyone in the world, except for 144,000 people, die. Is there anything more dangerous on this planet? I don't think there is.

What did George Bush do after he received the letter from the evangelicals? He assured them in a conference call, "Don't worry, we're just kidding. Of course we won't be evenhanded." So we don't have peace in the Middle East partly because our evangelicals don't want the peace. We invaded Iraq partly because our evangelicals thought Gog and Magog come from Iraq. What's scarier is, what can someone who's even dumber than Bush do? Sarah Palin, maybe? Some of these religious leaders had a meeting with Sarah Palin before she was picked as the vice presidential nominee. This is all in the record, absolutely verifiable. They came away from the meeting thinking, "Perfect - just like Bush. Tabula rasa, doesn't have many opinions, easily filled. She just wants to get ahead and she'll play ball." That is their war against us, and I think it's time to start fighting back. I'm offended by their actions, but I'm not offended by their opinion. They believe in a sky god who's going to suck them up into the sky with a vacuum cleaner. What's there to get offended by? That's funny! That's hilarious! Have at it, Hoss, I'd love to see it!

#### Do you really believe Gandhi is roasting over an open fire right now?

ing a pitchfork into him. That's one of the questions I'd like to ask American fundamentalists: Do you really believe Gandhi is roasting over an open fire right now?

#### How do we fight this?

They have so much power, although they love to play the victim. You watch O'Reilly on any night with his culture war: "Ugh, these atheists are coming! What's happening in Boulder, Colo., and Madison, Wis., and San Francisco?"

The religious are about 85% of the population. How do we fight back, when in reality, there have been no agnostic or atheist presidents? There is only one member of Congress, Pete Stark, who has the courage to say he does not believe in religion. We are at a 534 to 1 disadvantage. But O'Reilly says *we* have all the power.

All of you in your local communities have had to deal with this. You know what we're up against. I saw the student from Indiana who spoke earlier today. What a courageous kid. I'm an emotional guy. I almost cried, man. I'll tell you why: He stands up to his school, when they said they were going to allow prayer at the graduation ceremony. At the time, he's a Christian and he stands up for the Constitution. When he goes to make the speech, people start coughing and in essence heckling him. To go up against all those students, all those peers, all the community, all the administrators, and have the courage to make that speech anyway.

But we have a very important thing on our side. It's called the truth. That's why they're so afraid of us. That's why they don't want to hear the argument. That's why they scream "I'm offended! I'm offended! I'm offended!" That's why they've made up a whole fantasy of rationalizations for things you challenge them on, that they don't have an answer for.

When I say "war," I don't mean it like they do. I mean with ideas and with logic and with reason, but forcefully. That doesn't mean you scream at people. It means you do what that student did, which is have the courage. and even if you whisper, to an audience or a friend or a family member, "Hey, you know what, I don't think it's right." When you do that, you have so many weapons at your disposal. Open the bible to any page. Leviticus is, of course, famous: "A man shall not lie with a man." Right above that verse is the one that I've alluded to on occasion on our show and on MSNBC, that you shall not eat shellfish. It is an abomination against God. An abomination, just like lying with a man. So do you hate shrimp? Why does God hate shrimp? You eat shrimp. If you eat shrimp, you are an abomination. I want every one of you here, and everybody that watches this at home, it's easy, just ask somebody, "Why do you think God hates shrimp?" Next you ask, "So which one is it? Because you have to pick. You can't say that you are against gay rights, or Continued on next page

they drove a nail through a kid's head. effort, but at least he did something.



Meeting the audience after his acceptance speech.

Most of us here believe in rationality. We believe in evidence. We believe in science. By the way, Gandhi did not believe in Jesus Christ, so according to Christianity, right now Satan is stick-

#### Continued from previous page

gay marriage, or whatever it may be, because God is against it, and then say it's OK to go to Red Lobster. You can't have it both ways. So which one is it? Just pick. You're either in favor of gay rights because you realize Leviticus doesn't make any sense, or, that's it, stop eating shrimp." They're going to hate that.

All of a sudden they're gonna be like, "Eh, gay rights aren't so bad." One day, I do really want to push for a Red Lobster amendment.

#### Heapin' helpin' of hypocrisy

Gay rights is the civil rights issue of our generation. The issue is also a great example of religion's hypocrisy. "Oh, the bible says that marriage should be between one man and one woman — except for all the times it doesn't!" Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines, which we would call mistresses or prostitutes. But he's Solomon, so that's cool.

Abraham had sex with his wife, her sister, his maid and his sister's maid. What happened? I thought it was one man, one woman? How come Abraham gets four chicks? You go through the bible and see dozens of examples where it's not one man and one woman. They made it up.

Here's something else they made up — I could do a whole speech on this — abortion. Nothing in the bible says you can't have an abortion. They want to be strict interpretationists of the Constitution, but not of the bible. There is a verse in the bible that says, "If you think your wife has cheated on you, and she's pregnant, then give her poison. Make sure an accredited witch doctor or priest or rabbi does it. Then if she has a miscarriage, she cheated on you. If she keeps the baby, then it's yours." Isn't that an abortion?

But they don't care about the truth. In fact, as I told you before, they're scared to death of the truth. What we have to do, politely but forcefully, is keep telling them the truth. I don't want to just pick on Christianity. If you're discussing these issues with Muslims, it's exceedingly easy. Of course, men get to have four wives. I don't think women get to have four husbands. It's funny how religious leaders like Muhammad and Joseph Smith always have a conversation with God where God goes, "Ah, go ahead, screw 'em all!"

If you read the history of Mormonism, one person who did not believe in polygamy was Joseph Smith's wife. I'm not kidding. Who did he first start the polygamy with? The maid. I see a theme here. With Muslims, this is very uncomfortable, but Ayaan [Hirsi Ali] talked about it last night, and it's true: Muhammad consummated a marriage with a 9-year-old. So ask a Muslim, and I do it on the show all the time, "Do you think that men should be allowed to marry 9-year-olds and consummate the marriage? That's what Muhammad did. I'm not trying to offend you. I'm not even telling you you're wrong. I'm just asking you a question." If they answer "no," great. I then suggest they read other verses in the Quran to see what else they might disagree with. (If they say "yes," call the authorities.)

#### So many religious people have no idea what's in the bible.

could be. A lot of Turks will get mad about that: Some Turks are very Muslim. But generally, Turkey is known as a secular country. The founder of Turkey, Kemal Atatürk, was very impressed by America's founders and thought it made a great deal of sense to make Turkey a secular nation.

Turks, honestly, they cheat. Not all Turks, but a lot. For example, they'll drink all year. You're not supposed to drink in Islam, but they'll drink all year. But when it gets to Ramadan, they won't fast, but they won't drink. At night, at Ramadan, if they catch you drinking, they're like, "What kind of Muslim is this?" It doesn't make any sense, but it doesn't have to — it's religion.

So I take Introduction to Islam. I have this great Irish teacher who is such a sweetheart. He's doing his best to be unbiased and does a great job of presenting Islam in the best possible light. For example, women had no rights in that area before Islam; after Islam, because if you learn something, then you might realize that these books are ridiculous and completely and utterly untrue.

Madison, Wisconsin

As soon as I had read that, I closed the book. There's a saying in Turkish: "Close the book. Drink a cold glass of water. You're done with it." I drank a cold glass of water, and then a beer. I said, "If that is god, well then, I'm against him, because I believe in humanity. I want us to work together. I want us to communicate. I want us to learn. I want us to advance."

It's not because I'm trying to show up God. It's not like my agenda is "I'll show God!" We're just trying to build a tower. We want to work there or something, go to work, raise our kids. So I said, "If God is that cruel and that petty and that silly and that much against humanity, well then, we've got to fight him. We might lose. If they're right, we're going to lose, but I'll go down fighting." Part of the reason that I named my son Prometheus: Steal fire from the gods and give it to humans. I'm a fan of man.

Isn't it amusing how O'Reilly and the rest of them consider that such a disparaging thing to say: "a secular humanist!" What are we supposed to be in favor of? I mean, we're in favor of humans! Does he want us to be in favor of giraffes? Aliens?



they had some rights — a tiny bit. So I think, "Well, that's an improvement, so Islam is good." Because, you know, you're brainwashed, and it's hard to get rid of that brainwashing. You try to justify everything.

I read the Ouran and I started reading the bible and I had the reverse of a "come to Jesus" moment. I was reading about the Tower of Babel. So humans get together. They decide they're gonna build a lovely tower. They all work together, they build it, it's nice. God gets angry. God says, "How dare you? My ego is so large I can't have you little people challenging it." So he knocks down the tower and makes evervone speak a different language, and that's the origin of the idea of everyone speaking different languages. Well, the story's not true! So he spreads us across the world and says, "That ought to show you to work together." I thought, "This is the most hideous thing I've ever read." Now, the tower didn't do anything wrong. It didn't do anything evil. It didn't even have a golden calf. It was just people working together and achieving something together, and God doesn't want that. He doesn't want us to work together. He doesn't even want us to talk to one another. God forbid we should learn something. By the way, the forbidden fruit in Eden that they ate from was from the tree of knowledge,

#### Steps to restore sanity

The first thing you've got to do is tell everyone to read the bible and the Quran and every religious text, because they don't know. Study after study has shown that so many religious people have no idea what's in the bible. They think that the people who wrote the books in the bible were actually Jesus' apostles. They're not. They didn't even know them. They don't know that the bible was written 70 years after Jesus Christ. It's tough to tell what happened 70 years ago today, and we've got TV and computers. They had nothing. Ahmed told Mehmed who told Ishmael 70 years later, and that was the first of the books. We have to demand that they teach religious history, the history of religion. That seems ironic, but it's really important, and maybe they'll accidentally agree to it. There are two parts. One part is studying the religions before Christianity, and then when they see a prophet that dies and rises three days later, they might be like, "Whoa! Wait, I think I've seen that before!" When they see it again, and again, and again, in all of these myths, these fables, the things that we laugh at now, whereas we take our current religion seriously. Noah's Ark is in almost every religion that has ever existed, which leads me to believe that they had a

little issue with a flood at some point, historically speaking.

Another aspect of the history of religion: These great archaeology professors from Israel went to study Moses. They were generally believers who wanted to show some historical path of Moses. They knew they weren't going to find that he had split the Red Sea, but thought they would find some record of Moses in Egypt. They're earnest professors and honestly went and tried to find that record.

First, what they found is amazing in that notes were incredibly detailed: "Ahmed sells a loaf of bread to Mehmed, and then Hussein sells it to Hussan, and then they traded it for this." They're like, "Whoa, this is great, because we've got great records here!" Not a trace of Moses. A complete and utter fiction.

Some of you might know this, but religious folks don't know it. They think Moses was real. They don't realize he's like Harry Potter. He's Dumbledore or Gandalf. There's no record of him whatsoever, let alone a record of splitting the Red Sea, let alone a record of frogs raining down.

It's very important to teach the history of the current religions. Two aspects of this are Christianity and Islam. Christianity, as a lot of you know, 300 some odd years later they do a council, and they get together and go, "All right, guys, what do we want to do to subdue the masses and maintain our power? We've got a lot of these things floating around talking about a Jesus. Some are from Nazareth. Some are from somewhere else. Another one's from Mars. We've got all these fun stories, and John and Bob and whoever else wrote these stories. So let's figure out which ones to keep and which ones to burn."

They mix and match. That's why if you read the New Testament, a lot of the stories don't match. I find that amazing, because even the powerful people at that time who were going to use this book for their own ends thought, "You know what? Let's not bother factchecking. John doesn't agree with Matthew, but who cares? Just print it, print it! It'll be fine! They're not gonna read it anyway — it's in Latin."

Once Christians find out, "Oh my god, you're telling me that a bunch of politicians picked these things? It wasn't God, it was somebody who wrote it 300 years later and then somebody else edited and arranged it?" It makes them start asking questions. Pose those questions. Help them to pose those questions.

For Islam, there are many stories bout Mecca and how that got to be the center of where Muslims pray to. One that's very interesting, and these are hard to confirm because a lot of scholars disagree, but one thing we know is that there were multiple gods at the time in the area. There was, for example, Al-Uzzá and Al-Lat and a god called Allah. "Al" is a common beginning in Arabic, so Al-Walid is a name you'll hear a lot. One of the gods was Allah. Muhammad is on his conquering tour, and he's got Medina, he's got a good army going. He gets to Mecca, which is very important as the trading capital. It's also got this little area that's a great tourist trap. It's like the Disney World of its time. "Come see Al-Uzzá and Al-Lat and Allah!" So they say, "Look, we can't let this thing go. But you've got a nice army over there and we're a little scared, so let's strike a deal. Why don't you pick Continued on next page

#### Introduction to Islam

In the beginning, I was Muslim. I took Intro to Islam. I should clarify: I was a Turk. I was as Muslim as a Turk

**Freethought feline** 

# Uygur's Emperor Award speech



*Continued from previous page* one? If you're going to be monotheistic, just pick one."

Muhammad was like, "Should I go with Al-Lat or Al-Uzzá? I'll go with Allah." Then Allah became god.

What I'm asking is, let's look into that. Is that the right story? Let's get some archaeologists looking into it. Let's get some historians looking into it. If that is the right story, it's fascinating. It turns out, as we find out here in America, a lot is about trade. Islam in its beginning, of course, was about appeasing trade in the businessmen of their time and the corporations of their time. Very interesting to know.

Finally, how do we spread this? That's the message, very easy: Ask them about what's in the text. Well, we have to be aggressive about it. Here is the hope that we have: It seems that if you're going to fight religion, everybody will tell you that it's a losing fight. "No, people believe in religion. They're always going to believe in religion."

Go to a museum and look at all the hundreds of old religions that existed. They didn't make it. Religions die all the time. Why? Because they're not true. All we need is two generations. It is possible. We have to dare to believe. What you do is you convince the first generation, and you convince the second generation, and you'll be shocked at how quickly it can happen. Look at what's happening in Europe, and nobody even tried.

In Europe, people just started going, "Oh my god, maybe this isn't true!" You know why? They went to church more. They went to church and were like, "That's weird." Then they stopped going to church.

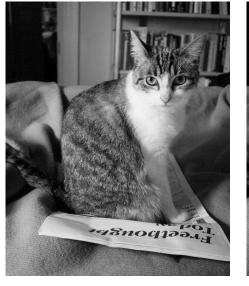
That is part of saying, hey, if they want a culture war, let's give it to them. Let's be strong and bold and smart enough to tell our children. And they freak out over this, but they brainwash their kids all the time. That's part and parcel: Nobody would believe this stuff if you didn't brainwash. Let's tell college kids. Let's evangelize. They evangelize, why can't we evangelize? Why can't we strike back? But we do it peacefully. We do it with ideas. They should have no problems with it, because they think their ideas are truer. Let's have an ideological battle and see who comes out ahead.

We can all be part of this change in our communities and in our local colleges. You just have to be strong enough, brave enough, smart enough, to start asking these questions and demanding answers.

We can be — I think somebody said this before — the change we believe in.

Thank you so much, everybody. I really appreciate it.

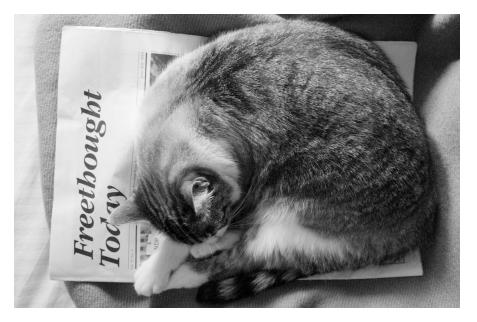
Cenk Uygur was born in Istanbul in 1970 and came with his family to the U.S. when he was 8. He grew up in New Jersey and is a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University School of Law. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, Wendy, and their son, Prometheus Maximus, born in July 2010.





"When the new issue arrived, our cat Daisy was the first to pounce on it," reports Lisa Anne Auerbach from California.

Black Collar Crime makes Daisy a crabby tabby, or was it the Crank Mail?



Any time of day or night, it's hard to beat the comfort of freethought.

Freethought Funny

ESKIMO: "If I did not know about God and sin, would I go to hell?" PRIEST: "No, not if you did not know." ESKIMO: "Then why did you tell me?" — Annie Dillard



Below is a sampling of recent Crank Mail received by FFRF, printed as received.

citizens, but it is certainly reason for us to pray all the harder for your poor lost souls. We pray that with the Lord's guidance, you will find a in his word (The Holy Bible if you do not know what I am talking about) — *Troy P* 

#### FFFR Organization

As one of those 200 or more who attended the [Giles County, Va.] school board meetings and objected to the removal of the Ten Commandments from our school walls, I have been watching closely how the devil has dealt with your organization. I hope the Lord will bless my heart with the grace to pray for you and your followers. Right now I am finding it hard. I think most of the school board members are God fearing-serving-obedient believers. They tried to honor the wishes of the majority and it is a shame that 2 or 3 can impose their will on 200. I hope your organization is faced with a similar situation soon. — *Betty S. Williams*  smith, davesmith@ffrfblows.com, illinois [Note: This crank earlier called FFRF several times to harass two young staff members before one told him to "stop being so aggressive."]

**keep your noses in your own back yard** don't you have any thing better to do than stick your nose where it doesn't belong. I was born and raised a catholic. and there is only one god no matter what you dumb asses think or say. Keep your thoughts and bullshit in your own city not any place else. People like you give any religion believes a bad name. get your heads out of your asses and smell the coffee and see the reality in this screwed up world. — *joe blow, Wisconsin* 

#### Giles County Removal of the Ten Commandments

Why dont you idiots find something better to do with your time then cutting GOD out of the country. IN GOD WE TRUST!!!!!! GET OVER IT YOU FREAKS!!!!!!! – Susan Smith, Gospel Drive, Virginia

#### The 10 Commandments in Giles County Schools

Why don't you dumb asses mind your own business. Always someone trying to change things that have been existing for years and years. I guess wanna be's want attention. Oh I just noticed you all are located "UP NORTH". That says alot. Why don't you Yankees keep your noses where they belong! If students don't want to look at the 10 Commandments that are posted on the wall--THEY DON'T HAVE TO!!!!!! Keep you stinking asses and big noses up north where they belong!!!!!!! — Madeline Hill, Virginia

#### Giles County, Virginia

I imagine you might find it a victory that your interference in a place you don't live and know nothing about has resulted in the removal of God's word from our schools, despite the expressed wishes of the local population. Your looming eternal damnation is no comfort to our glimpse into how positive life can be before the remainder of your lives and talents are wasted. — Jesus Christ

#### **Giles County Constitution in Schools**

Why is it such a big deal to your organization that a small town in the middle of nowhere in Virgina CHOSE to put up the 10 commandments? It's not like there is a hall monitor in the schools saying HEY LOOK AT THESE, BELIEVE THESE? It's not an advertisement , it's something that is CONSTITUTIONALLY CORRECT. How you can you say religion is unconstitutional when the constitution was written with biblical principles? BUTT OUT! — Andrea St. Clair

#### IRONY

I find it quite ironic that your show is broadcast on God's holy Sabbath day. — Julie Vulich

#### Giles County 10 Commandments

Dear, freedom from religion....if this is your name. I believe that the 10 commandments should stay in schools and these atheist or the seperations of church and state are ingornant. The Preachers, Christians, and all of us who believe the 10 Commandments should stay up are believing God will help us through and God says

#### You idiots

I am sick and tired of you idiots trying to block my God, its you people that are bringing Gods wrath down on this country you have lit a fire under my ass to do everything i can to bring you down. It time the rest of this country start knocking heads seems to be the only way you idiots are gonna shut up. Oh yea cant wait to see your face when you meet God will be there and you will have condemed yourself with your own words. Sick of your crap and not gonna take it anymore Bikers against the ffrf — *Jerry Leary, Indiana* 

#### enjoy your meaningless lives!

without men who were willing to die for their God, your pathetic little organization wouldn't even exist. maybe if you didn't threaten to sue everyone who believes in God i wouldn't be so "aggressive". LOL hugs and kisses! — dave

#### Dear Free thought haters,

I find what you are doing (like in Marshfield WI) limits freedom of speech and thought. I am turned off by any group that seek these type of power plays. This type of colonialism of coming in a forcing your world-view and thought on other as if it is the only one is quite self centered and narrow to our pluralistic culture. It only shows me how week your world-view must be that you need to silence others in order to be heard. — *Brad Eidsen* 

#### prayer in Connersville, Indiana

Our City Council received a letter stating that we had to cease having a prayer in the meetings. Why don't you keep your nose out of our business. This is Bible belt country and we want to keep it that way. Your group is acting like a God by trying to dictate to us what to do. Most of us here are God fearing people and don't need some goofy group to tell us what to do. Law or no law. — *linda frye* 

Madison, Wisconsin

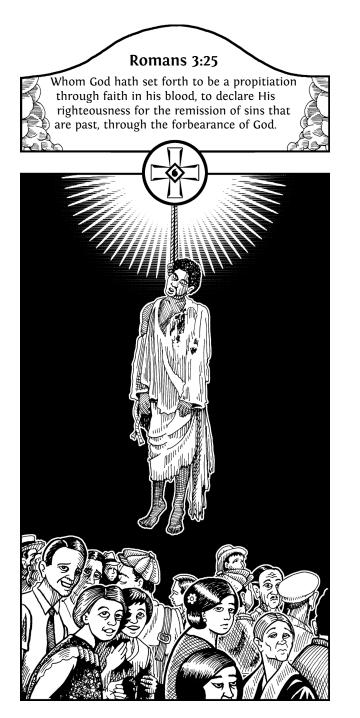
We are pleased to present the third installment of "One Nation Under God: A Bible History," written and illustrated by Mike Konopacki. It was part of the coursework for his master of fine arts degree in 2010 from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and was also presented at FFRF's convention in October.

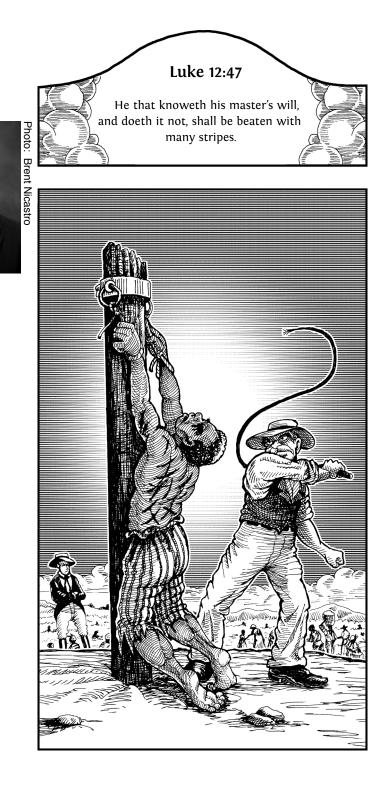
## **Frederick Douglass**

rederick Douglass was born a slave in 1818 on a plantation in Maryland. He was bought and sold many times and eventually escaped to freedom in 1838. He became an abolitionist, a women's suffragist, a writer, editor, orator and statesman.

In 1845 he wrote an autobiography entitled, Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave. He tells of how he was brutally tortured by a number of slave holders. One was a man named Thomas Auld. As Douglass described him, "The leading trait of his character was meanness; and if there were any other element in his nature, it was made subject to this. He was mean; and, like most other mean men, he lacked the ability to conceal his meanness." Thomas Auld was not a religious man, however in August of 1832 he attended a Methodist camp-meeting and experienced religion. "I indulged a faint hope that his conversion would lead him to emancipate his slaves, and that, if he did not do this, it would, at any rate, make him more kind and humane. I was disappointed in both these respects." In fact Auld became more brutal. "Prior to his conversion, he relied upon his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his savage barbarity; but after his conversion, he found religious sanction and support for his slave holding cruelty."

Douglass believed religious slave holders were the worst. "I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the South is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes, – a justifier of the most appalling barbarity, – a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds, – and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slave holders find the strongest protection. Were I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to that enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity that could befall me." To Douglass, the worst religionists were the **Reformed Methodists**.





## The Biblical Justification for Lynching

The Civil War and emancipation of the slaves didn't end racism, discrimination, or the "Curse of Ham." Denied slavery, Southern whites created new methods to control blacks. Jim Crow laws were passed to enforce segregation and prevent black political participation. African Americans were imprisoned on trumped up charges to provide unpaid convict labor for coal mines, lumber mills and factories. Lynching was used to terrorize and punish blacks for the crime of being free.

The growth of lynching between 1870 and 1930 coincided with the rise of religious fervor in the South. In his paper *The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice,* Donald G. Mathews of the University of

North Carolina at Chapel Hill argues that lynching had a clear religious component. "The Christianity of the white South was a religion of sin, punishment and sacrifice. It was a religion of violence." Blood sacrifice, Mathews writes, "is the connection between the purpose of white supremacists, the purity signified in segregation, the magnificence of God's wrath, and the permission granted the culture through the wrath of 'justified' Christians to sacrifice black men on the cross of white solidarity." In Paul's **Epistle to the Romans [3:25]** Christ died for our sins. In the South, blacks were lynched.

Mathews criticized contemporary studies of lynching for ignoring the use of religion to justify the public hanging and burning of blacks. "The silence about the meaning of religion in discussions of lynching is strange because of the common knowledge that crucifixion, an act of violence, is at the very core of the Christian paradigm that was so essential a part of Southern culture. African Americans understood this; they understood that Christ, too, had been lynched."



#### **SCOTUS** declines case on Commandments

In McCreary County v. American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky, the U.S. Supreme Court declined without comment Feb. 22 to reconsider its landmark 2005 ruling and earlier lower court rulings that barred posting of the Ten Commandments in courthouses in McCreary and Pulaski counties in Kentucky. The displays first went up in 1999.

The case took a new tack in recent years after Commandments proponents tried to make an end run around the Constitution by adding other historical elements to the displays, calling them the "Foundations of American Law and Government." Those documents used selective and often erroneous statements attributed to the nation's founders to show that America was founded as a Christian nation.

The court apparently agreed with former Justice David Souter's 2005 contention that the documents' secular purpose "has to be genuine, not a sham."

Mat Staver of Liberty Counsel, the evangelical law firm which is fighting FFRF's effort to keep the Ten Commandments out of Giles County, Va., Public Schools, represented the appellants in McCreary.

#### High court declines to hear Newdow case

The U.S. Supreme Court on March 7 declined without comment to rehear Newdow v. Lefevre, a challenge to "In God We Trust" on the coins and currency by California physician Michael Newdow. The Obama administration and the conservative Pacific Justice Institute had opposed the lawsuit.

Newdow told the San Francisco Chronicle that he was disappointed but would refile the suit in another jurisdiction. "A nation that holds itself out as a beacon of religious liberty chooses an exclusionary term as its national motto, and says one religious view is better than another."

#### **Funding for UW Catholic group upheld**

The U.S. Supreme Court declined on March 7 to review a 7th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals 2-1 decision from last September in Badger Catholic Inc. v. Walsh.

lar prayer to before the meeting formally started. He was handcuffed and charged with resisting an officer without force, disorderly conduct and possession of drugs without a prescription (he had one prescription anti-anxiety pill in his pocket). Vice President EllenBeth Wachs was threatened with arrest if she didn't leave the school grounds, which she eventually did.

Wachs told the Lake Wales News that that neither she nor Kieffer stopped the pastor from presenting the invocation, and since it had been offered before the official call to order, it was inaccurate to say they were disorderly.

"The whole point in doing this was to show how unworkable [praying before the start of the meeting] was, she said. "This is civil disobedience." The board's ire was "simply because we were doing it during their prayer. They got furious."

In Lakeland on March 3, Wachs, who also serves as AoF's legal affairs coordinator, was charged by the state's attorney with misrepresenting herself as qualified to practice law, a third-degree felony. She hold a juris doctor degree from Widener University but isn't licensed in Florida.

Florida atheists, along with FFRF, have also criticized the Polk County sheriff for taking down basketball hoops at county jails and giving them away to churches. The state's attorney claims Wachs misrepresented herself in letters contesting the action, which she denies.

Wachs posted \$1,000 bail and was released. She told the Tampa Tribune she's retired as an attorney. "I honestly knew immediately that this was pure retaliatory conduct. This is simply to stop us.

'This is Polk County," she said. "This is a Christian theocracy. They don't want the boat rocked, and we have rocked the boat."

Listen to her interview on Freethought Radio, March 5 podcast: ffrf.org/news/radio/shows

#### Honolulu council set 'Aloha' guidelines

The Honolulu City Council has a new policy to govern meeting openings, which it calls the "Message of Aloha."

silence, thought for the day or nonsectarian prayer. Prayers:

• may invoke Divine guidance. Ref-

The message can be a moment of

# WHEN N TH COURS OF HUMN EVENTE IT BOOMS NECSSY 4 A PEEP 2 DIS TH POLTCL BONDS WHCH HV ...



#### local governments. Judge dismisses MRFF suit against Air Force

U.S. District Judge Christine Arguello ruled Feb. 9 against the Military Religious Freedom Foundation's request for an injunction to stop the National Prayer Luncheon on the campus of the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo.

Arguello said the plaintiffs - MRFF and Air Force Academy professor David Mullin — had no legal standing to challenge the event, despite the overtly Christian keynote speaker, Marine Corps Lt. Clebe McClary. McClary is a favorite of evangelicals and is known to mix military values with his Christian beliefs.

#### Judge: Illinois funds for cross OK

U.S. District Court Judge Michael McCuskey dismissed on Feb. 8 Chicago atheist Robert Sherman's suit seeking return of a \$20,000 state grant that will go to restore the 11-story Bald Knob Cross at Alto Pass, Ill.

McCuskey ruled the grant was legal because it was awarded by the state's executive branch and wasn't a designated legislative "earmark." The Friends of the Cross group has raised more than \$400,000 (\$100,000 over the goal). Former Friends' president Rev. Bill Vandergraph was charged in July with predatory criminal sexual assault of a child under the age of 13. He's been ruled mentally unfit to stand trial.

#### Virginia board backs bible as history

The order reversed a trend that in recent years let pharmacists refuse to fill prescriptions for the emergency contraceptive Plan B, let doctors in California reject a lesbian's request for infertility treatment and allowed an ambulance driver in Chicago to turn away a woman who needed transportation for an abortion.

"Without the rescission of this regulation, we would see tremendous discrimination against patients based on their behavior and based just on who they are," said Susan Berke Fogel of the National Health Law Program.

The new rule does leave intact "conscience" protections for doctors and nurses who refuse to perform abortions or sterilizations.

#### Judge: New Jersey borough must pay

A New Jersey Superior Court judge ordered Point Pleasant Beach to reimburse the ACLU of New Jersey a total of \$11,200 in legal fees incurred in its two lawsuits to stop sectarian prayers from being said at borough council meetings.

The ACLU, which sought \$38,000 in fees, represented a Jewish resident who claimed the Lord's Prayer at meetings violated her civil rights. After the borough agreed to allow only nonsectarian prayers, one was given ending with "in Jesus' name" so a second suit was filed.

#### **Colo. House moves** prayer after gavel

The Colorado House voted 49-25 to say a prayer after sessions are gaveled to order, a change from the old rule. That means lawmakers will be counted absent if they show up post-prayer. Some Democrats argued the change could make some people uncomfortable by having to register their presence and then leave again if they prefer not to pray.

The appeals court overturned a University of Wisconsin policy barring funding from student activity fees of a religious student group formerly called the Roman Catholic Foundation. The university must now fund Badger Catholic programs to the same extent that programs with a secular perspective get money.

#### Florida atheists see retaliation in arrests

Two Atheists of Florida officers who are also FFRF members were arrested in separate incidents that smack of retaliation for their ongoing outspokenness about prayer at public meetings.

AoF President John Kieffer was arrested Feb. 22 at a Polk County School Board meeting in Bartow because he was talking during the opening invocation. The school board, in response to an FFRF compaint, moved its reguerences to God should be general, such as "God" or "Lord."

• may not proselytize, advance or disparage any faith or belief.

• must not make specific reference to deities, symbols or beliefs peculiar to the religion of the speaker. "References to Jesus Christ, Mohammed, Allah, Buddha, Brahma or multiple Gods are not permitted."

The Hawaii House of Representatives will continue to hold prayers before daily session, unlike the state Senate, which canceled them last month.

The House voted Feb. 9 to adopt new rules that call for prayers to be held before the start of the official business of the lawmaking body.

Prayers can continue to mention a deity or God, but they can't be used to disparage any religion.

FFRF member Mitch Kahle has been instrumental in contesting injection of religion into Hawaii's state and

The Chesterfield County [Va.] School Board voted 5-0 on Feb. 9 to approve a textbook for an as-yet unscheduled elective course on the bible's impact on history.

Board member U. Omarh Rajah called the bible "the greatest book of all time. What a great time to rejoice," Rajah told the Richmond Times-Dispatch. "To me, this is a hurdle we've jumped across."

The board approved the class in 2009, but due to funding cuts, lack of student interest and qualified instructors, it hasn't been offered and may not be this fall either.

#### **Obama order boosts** patient protections

The Obama administration on Feb. 18 rescinded most of a federal "conscience clause" rule put in place by President George W. Bush.

#### Prayer won't go away in Rhode Island gym

A School Board subcommittee voted Feb. 22 to keep displaying a Christian prayer banner in Cranston [R.I.] West High School's gym despite ongoing complaints and an ALCU threat to sue. A similar banner hangs at Hugh B. Bain Middle School.

Backers want the banner to stay up despite a district policy says "the proper setting for religious observance is the home and places of worship."

# Black Collar Crime Blotter

#### Compiled by Bill Dunn

#### Arrested / Charged

Ronnie Powe Jr., 27. Chattanooga, TN: Aggravated rape. Powe, youth pastor at United Tabernacle Church of God in Christ, is accused of performing oral sex on a 15-year-old boy and masturbating in a car behind a vacant elementary school. Powe's father is pastor at the church.

After Powe told police he was counseling a troubled teen (neglecting to mention he'd met him on a dating site), he was unable to explain why his zipper was down, the report said. Source: Times Free Press, 2-17-11

Rev. Dirk Jackson, 32, Port Orchard, WA: Arrested for investigation of 2 counts of 2nddegree child rape. Jackson was the alleged victim's teacher in 2002-03 at Manchester Christian Academy in Manchester. The alleged rapes involve at least one victim when she was 12 or 13 years old, said a Kitsap County Sheriff's spokesperson. Detectives suspect there may be more victims. Source: KOMO News, 2-16-11

Bishop Marc Neal, 48. Fairlawn, OH: Felonious assault, kidnapping and abduction. Neal, pastor at Jerusalem Missionary Baptist Church in Akron, is accused of driving off in his black 2007 Lexus with a repo man hanging on for dear life on the \$60,000 car's hood.

#### 'I thought, man, is this what Jesus would do?'

- Repo man Ken Falzini, after a pastor knocked Falzini onto the hood of a Lexus and drove off

Neal had met the repo man, Ken Falzini, in the church parking lot during Sunday services. Neal started the car, hit the gas and Falzini flew up on the hood. "I thought, man, is this what Jesus would do?" Falzini said.

He told police Neal drove off and hit speeds between 40 to 60 mph, making sharp moves trying to dislodge him. "He hit the windshield wipers to try to knock my hands off the hood," Falzini said. "He was laughing at me, telling me he was going to take me on the interstate.'

Adam VanHo, Neal's lawyer, said Falzini was overzealous and that coming to the church was "absolutely disrespectful." Source: Akron Beacon Journal, 2-12-11

Revs. Edward Avery, 68, Charles Engelhardt, 64, James Brennan, 47, Msgr. William Lvnn. 60. and Catholic school teacher Bernard Shero, 48, Philadelphia, PA: Lynn, former secretary for clergy for the archdiocese, faces 2 counts of endangering the welfare of a child. He was responsible for investigating reports that priests had sexually abused children between 1992 to 2004

Shero allegedly molested a 10-year-old boy at St. Jerome Parish in 1998-99. Brennan allegedly molested a 14-year-old boy in 1996. Avery and Engelhardt allegedly molested the boy Shero is accused of molesting. Avery, defrocked in 2006, faces charges of rape, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, aggravated indecent assault, indecent assault on a minor. 2 counts of endangering the welfare of a child and corruption of a minor.

2



the alleged theft of \$1.4 million from his former parish

Police found hoards of cash and rare coins in his home that had been intended to go to the church. He's also accused of channeling church funds into personal savings and annuity accounts. The priest was "famously frugal," shocked parishioners said. Source: The Local, 2-8-11

Marcelino Tinajero, 33, Porter Ranch, CA: 30 felony counts related to his alleged sexual relationship with a teen girl he met at Shepherd of the Hills Church, where he was a volunteer youth counselor. Authorities suspect there may be more victims.

"My first response was we need to get on our knees," said Prayer Director Jane Kasel, adding that the church does background checks on all volunteers. Source: KABC News, 2-8-11

Paul K. Groover, 56, Darrell V. Moore, 45, Jacksonville, FL: The men are charged with sexually assaulting children at Greater Refuge Temple in cases that go back a decade. Groover, the son of Temple founder Bishop Gentle Groover Sr., is charged with 3 counts of sexual battery. Moore, the elder Groover's sonin-law, is charged with 4 counts of sexual battery and 3 counts of lewd or lascivious conduct.

Charging documents said Paul Groover molested a teen boy inside the church. Moore is accused of molesting 3 girls, including one who told police she was raped at knifepoint in the church's video room where Moore worked.

Police said Paul Groover exchanged naked photo phone messages with the boy and would text him locations in the church to meet for sex. Police monitored a phone call between Groover and the victim, now 21, in which Groover told him he didn't need therapy, just prayer and time to forget. Source: Florida Times-Union, 2-4-11

Garrett Orr, 57, Pittsburgh, PA: 3rd-degree sexual offense and 2 counts of child abuse. Orr. a defrocked Jesuit priest since 2008, is accused of molesting boys at a prep school in North Bethesda, MD, where he taught from 1989 to 2003

An earlier Jesuit investigation in 2006 concluded Orr had inappropriately touched a boy at the school. The new allegation came to light in December 2009 and stems from 1989. Source: Washington Post. 2-3-11

Very Rev. Charles Abdelahad, 55, Worces-MA: Rape, 4 counts of assault and battery and 5 counts of assault and battery with a dangerous weapon. Abdelahad, longtime pastor at St. George Antiochian Orthodox Cathedral, resigned in November.

counts. Source: News Journal. 2-3-11

Dr. Michael Clare, 38, Bronx, NY: 1st-degree rape. Clare, pastor at Harvest Worship Center and principal at Harvest Prep, allegedly impregnated the girl, now 15, court documents said. The girl told police he'd sexually preyed on her for years.

On his MySpace page, the married pastor is described as "a paragon, a model of excellence and ideal example of living and preaching the Gospel of Christ." Source: N.Y. Daily News, 1-28-11

Rev. Samuel Peters, 41, Newbern, TN: Theft over \$1,000 by fraudulent conversion. Peters, pastor at Holy Ghost Deliverance Center, is accused of withdrawing a total of \$1,175 on 3 occasions from the Newbern Lions Club account while he was club president. Source: Dyersburg State Gazette, 1-26-11

Rev. Jason Roberts, 36, Brooksville, FL: Lewd and lascivious molestation of a victim over 12 and less than 16 years old. Roberts, pastor at Christian Fellowship Church in Dade City, is accused of fondling a girl in 2006 while she slept in her bedroom. The girl told deputies Robert stopped and immediately apologized when she woke up. A report said Roberts admitted the act to his wife and church members, all of whom authorities interviewed. Source: St. Petersburg Times, 1-26-11

An unidentified Cypriot monk, 42, Kykko Monastery, and 2 other men were charged with theft and desecrating the remains of a deceased person after being found with human remains in luggage at an Athens airport. They are accused of stealing the remains of a deceased nun after a memorial service marking the 4th anniversary of her death.

"Our compatriots claimed they dug up the remains because they considered the deceased a saint," said police spokesman Michalis Katsounotos. Source: Cyprus Mail, 1-19-11

James Benjamin Harris, 33, Lawrenceville, GA: Enticing a minor for indecent purposes, 2 counts of child molestation and 4 counts of child molestation by electronic device. Harris, a volunteer youth counselor and Sunday school teacher at Brookwood Baptist Church, is accused of assaulting a 14-year-old boy who was his student. Harris, married with 2 children, is a Coca-Cola Co. finance manager.

Police said the boy's mother found sexually explicit text messages on a cell phone Harris bought him for Christmas, and that they'd shared a motel bed at a church retreat in Macon in December. Source: Gwinnett Daily Post, 1-18-11

Surinder Singh, 52, India: Sexual assault. Singh, a married Sikh priest in Scotland on a visa, is accused of touching a 12-year-old girl on the hands, attempting to kiss her on the mouth. kissing her face and placing food in her mouth at the Guru Nanak Temple in Glasgow. Source: BBC News, 1-17-11

Alexander Bede Walsh, 57, Abbotts Bromlev. Staffordshire. UK: 13 counts of indecent assault and 2 counts of serious sexual offense. Walsh, a former Catholic priest, is accused of the alleged offenses between 1982-94 involving four males under age 16. Source: Coventry Telegraph, 1-25-11

Douglas Hicks-Bey, 48, Baltimore, MD: Rape, child abuse, assault and perverted practice. Hicks-Bey heads B-Moor Youth Services, a faith-based mentoring program allied with the National Youth Ministries Alliance. He's accused of sexual incidents with a 15-year-old female client of the agency at his home. Source: Baltimore Sun, 1-14-11 Rev. Raleigh Trammell, 74, Dayton, OH: Grand theft and 25 counts each of forgery and tampering with government records. Trammell, pastor of Central Missionary Baptist Church and former national head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, is accused through his social service agencies of misspending thousands of dollars of state, local and federal funds.

movement is an evil institution" out to defeat "the marriage-based society." Source: Springfield Republican, 1-14-11

Rev. Jason LaPierre, 35, Kingsbury, NY: Grand larceny and falsifying business records. LaPierre, pastor at River Church and a married father of 6, is accused of stealing about \$400,000 from Hudson River Community Credit Union in Corinth, where he was a human resources and marketing executive.

He allegedly wrote credit union checks to phony companies he'd set up and deposited them into accounts at other banks. Source: AP, 1-13-11

Rev. James Boudreau, 67, Guelph, ONT: Sexual assault. Boudreau, who retired in 2009 from the Diocese of Hamilton, is alleged to have assaulted a 17-year-old boy while he was pastor at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in 1984. Source: Guelph Mercury, 1-13-11

James M. Wilson, 44, Moberly, MO: Kidnapping. Wilson, former pastor and principal at Terrill Road Christian Academy, allegedly took a 16-year-old student to a hotel. The indictment alleges his intent was to perform 2nd-degree statutory sodomy or 2nd-degree statutory rape. The victim may have been chosen because she had the mental capacity of a third grader at the time, court documents said. Source: Columbia Daily Tribune, 1-11-11

#### **Pleaded / Convicted**

Rev. Angel Morales, 32, Leominster, MA: Guilty of 2 counts of child rape aggravated by age difference. A jury found the former pastor of Casa de Restauracion Pentecostal Church guilty of having sex with a 14-year-old parishioner

The victim testified she and the married pastor had intercourse once at her home while her parents were gone and twice at Motel 6 after she sneaked out of the house. He was acquitted on one count. Source: Worcester Telegram & Gazette, 2-18-11

Rev. Alonzo McCowan, 50, Camarillo, CA: Pleaded guilty to grand theft and money laundering. He is pastor at Solid Rock Christian Center and has a TV ministry that promoted an online "Monthly Money Member System."

Charges stemmed from real estate transactions in 2004-06 and involved duping an 86-year-old man, including stealing his home equity, and acquiring 2 other properties under false pretenses. Source: Ventura County Star, 2-17-11

Rev. Gary Mercure, 62, Troy, NY: Guilty of indecent assault and battery on a child younger than 14 and 3 counts of forcible child rape. Mercure, removed as a priest in 2008 by the Diocese of Albany, was convicted in Pittsfield, MA, of raping 2 altar boys on outings in the 1980s. Five former New York altar boys, now in their 30s, testified Mercure assaulted them.

After the verdict, a jury member who declined to give her name said. "Whatever the sentence is, 100 times that wouldn't even scratch the surface of what he deserves." Source: Berkshire Eagle, 2-10-11

Imam Mohammed Hanif, 42, Nottingham, UK: A jury found Hanif, a Muslim worship leader and educator, guilty of sexual activity with a child and 2 counts of rape. The jury couldn't reach a decision on another rape count and 4 of attempted rape involving a 12-year-old male victim and his cousin, 15. The alleged incidents took place over 6 months at a mosque in 2009.

The younger boy told authorities Khan had

Engelhardt and Shero face the same charges. Brennan faces the same charges except for corruption of a minor and endangering the welfare of a child.

"The grand jury believes that many priests, dozens of them, have remained in active ministry despite solid, credible allegations of abuse," said Philadelphia District Attorney Seth Williams. Source: NBC News, 2-10-11

Rev. Royce Shorter, 54, Tacoma, WA: 3rddegree rape and 3rd-degree child molestation. Shorter is pastor at Ecclesia Community Church and owner of 'N Time Music Productions in Renton, where he teaches music. Prosecutors allege he had sex multiple times with a female student from 2006-08, starting when she was 15.

Shorter was convicted of 2nd-degree statutory rape in 1985 involving a 13-year-old girl who was a member of a choir he directed. In 1993 he was acquitted of charges he molested a 15-year-old girl he met at church. Source: Renton Reporter, 2-10-11

An unidentified retired Catholic priest, 77. Wuerzburg, GER: 50 counts of fraud related to

The complaint alleges he battered a 43-year-old victim with his fists several times at the church complex between 2007-09. He's also accused of hitting her with a religious icon, scratching her with keys and forcing her against a wall to sexually assault her. Source: Worcester Telegram & Gazette, 2-4-11

Rev. Daniel Belcher, 61, Spartanburg, SC: Obtaining goods by false token over \$10,000 Belcher is former pastor at Chesnee Weslevan He also worked at Shippers Supply, where the owner alleged Belcher wrote multiple checks on the firm's account between 2003-10 totaling \$170,000 He's also accused of giving himself several unauthorized raises totaling \$30,000.

The South Carolina Wesleyan Church said Belcher has surrendered his ministerial credentials. Source: Spartanburg Herald Journal, 2-3-11

Rev. Cornelius Breslin, 59, Wilmington, DE: 2 counts of felony theft over \$100,000 and 2 misdemeanor counts of falsifying business records. Breslin is on leave from the Catholic parishes of St. Patrick and St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception. He's accused of writing checks to himself for \$358,000 from parish ac-

A suit against Trammell for alleged sexual harassment of a female employee is pending. Source: Dayton Daily News, 1-14-11

Michael J. Frediani, 38. Springfield, MA: Failing to register as a sex offender. Frediani, aka Michael Free, is volunteer manager at Holy Grounds Coffee Shop, which is owned by Rev. Scott Lively, a controversial anti-gay pastor.

Frediani was convicted in 1996 of sexually abusing an 11-year-old girl, with the offense described as "deviate sexual intercourse." Lively said he was unaware of that conviction.

Frediani said he's been "born again" and is "a minister of Jesus." Holy Grounds, which offers free coffee to students from a high school a block away, is a safe place for students, he said. "I invite God to touch them and he does."

Lively spoke at a 2009 seminar on exposing the "homosexual agenda" in Uganda and is heard in a YouTube video saying, "The gay

him lay out his red prayer mat at various places not covered by video cameras. After he was abused, he would pray, wash the areas where Khan assaulted him and return to class. Source: U.K. Press Association, 2-1-11

Rev. Aaron Witcher, 38, Roy, UT: Pleaded guilty to 2 counts of rape in a plea bargain that dropped 6 other rape counts. Known as "Pastor Soulja" at his Crosswalk Christian Training Center, Witcher admitted to having sex with a 15-year-old girl in his congregation. A police officer had found him in a parked car with the girl. Source: Salt Lake Tribune, 1-27-11

Matthew Linngren, 38, Fridley, MN: Pleaded guilty to failing to appear for prison. Linngren, a former Lutheran Church youth director, fled to California last September days before he was to begin a 15-year sentence for distribution of pornography. His criminal past includes a conviction for sexual contact with a 10-year-old boy while with the church. Court records described it as "a fleeting event" of "buttocks touching." Source: Minneapolis Star Tribune, 1-12-11

#### Sentenced

Rev. Simeon Stefanidakis, 60, Cape Cod, MA: 7 years in prison and 5 years of supervised release after being found guilty of 4 counts of transportation of child pornography and possession of child pornography. Stefanidakis, a minister, counselor and "medium" at First Spiritual Temple, Brookline, MA, went by the name UnclePaul48 online.

He "meticulously organized his child pornography files in numerous digital folders and subfolders that he created and named," said the state's sentencing submission. "Defendant's [10,000 images] of child pornography is also distinguished from that of many other offenders in that he specifically collected images and videos depicting the rape and molestation of infants and toddlers." *Source: Greenwich Time, 2-10-11* 

**Revs.** Kristopher Gorden, 44, Jeffery Sandgren, 50, Fargo, ND: \$625 each in fines and fees, 30 days in jail (suspended) and attend alcohol education classes after pleading guilty to driving under the influence of alcohol. The men, both pastors at Olivet Lutheran Church, were arrested Jan. 13 as Sandgren tried to help Gorden get his car out of a snowy ditch he'd slid into. Both failed field sobriety test. Sandgren's blood-alcohol level was 0.11. *Source: Fargo Forum, 2-3-11* 

Wilfred E. Dennis, 75, Vale Park, AU: 9 years in prison on 4 counts of unlawful sexual intercourse and 3 counts of indecent assault. Dennis, a former Anglican priest, was sentenced on new charges after being sentenced to 20 months in 2010 for sexually abusing an altar boy in the 1970s. *Source: Australian Broadcasting Corp., 2-1-11* 

Justin D. Krohn, 20, Fridley, MN: 30 days in jail, 2 years' probation and register as a sex offender after pleading no contest to showing a child harmful material, a felony. Felony charges of use of a computer to facilitate a child sex crime and attempted sexual assault of a child under age 16 were dropped. Krohn met the 15-year-old female victim when he was a counselor at a bible camp she attended. He worked there for 4 years.

He was caught in an online sting in which he contacted an undercover agent posing as the girl's friend. Krohn's parents had become suspicious. He was arrested in a McDonald's parking lot where he planned to meet the girl to have sex. *Source: Eau Claire Leader-Telegram, 1-19-11* 

Shawn Baxley, 35, Albany, GA: 2 years in prison and 18 years' probation for child molestation. Baxley, former bible studies and geometry teacher and track coach at Sherwood Christian Academy, was convicted of molesting a female relative, who was 13 at the time. He also has to surrender his teaching license. *Source: Albany Herald, 1-31-11* 

[First name unavailable] **Kang**, 65, Gyeonggi Province, **S. KOR**: 9 years in prison for having sex with an 11-year-old girl at his church and sexually molesting and threatening several other teen victims at his church in 2006.

"The defendant assaulted 5 teenagers by coercing them with his religious authority and satisfied his sexual desire while watching the [photos] that he took. He left serious, untreatable scars on the young victims," the court ruling said. *Source: Korea Times, 1-24-11* 

#### Civil Lawsuits Filed

A lawsuit alleges accused **Rev. Edward Fitz-Henry** of the Catholic Diocese of Monterey, **CA**, sexually assaulted a 14-year-old boy 7 years ago while Fitz-Henry was pastor at Madonna del Sasso Church in Salinas. Allegations include sexual harassment, sexual misconduct and infliction of emotional distress. The alleged victim said the abuse took place while he was an altar boy and choir member and that Fitz-Henry started talking about sex in the confessional.

"He did know him as a parishioner, but he's shocked by the allegations," Fitz-Henry's lawyer Charlie Keelv said.

The diocese in an earlier probe found that an incident 20 years ago which the church at the time called a "boundary issue" was indeed sex-

'I invite God to touch them and he does.' — Michael Frediani, charged with failing to register as a sex offender while managing Holy

million in 2004 to settle abuse cases against Glendinning. Source: Canadian Press, 2-7-11

Grounds Coffee Shop

The Catholic **Diocese of Wilmington**, **DE**, which filed for bankruptcy in 2009, agreed to settle 142 claims of sexual abuse by priests for \$77 million. The settlement covers the diocese, with a Catholic population of about 233,000, and its parishes but not religious orders. *Source: Reuters*, *2-3-11* 

A Texas man settled his sexual abuse suit against the Archdiocese of Omaha, the Diocese of Corpus Christi and the Society of Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity, the religious order Fr. John Fiala belonged to. The suit alleges Fiala, 52, repeatedly molested him 3 years ago when he was 16. Terms weren't disclosed. The Archdiocese of San Antonio, Fiala's former employer, earlier agreed to pay the youth \$946,000. A civil trial is set for Aug. 15 in Bexar County where Fiala individually remains a defendant.

Fiala is in jail on a charge of attempting to pay a hit man to kill his accuser. *Source: San Antonio Express-News, 1-29-11* 

A Kansas City woman settled a suit for an undisclosed amount with defendants **New Life Bible Church**, Easton, **MO**; **Michael J. Landy**, 52, of St. Joseph; and **OATS Inc.**, a Columbia transportation service.

The woman alleged that the church and OATS were negligent in failing to stop Landy's sexual abuse that entailed "everything but intercourse" from 1995-99, starting when she was 13 and he was a church youth leader. It went unreported until she disclosed it in 2009. Landy pleaded guilty in 2009 to 2nd-degree statutory sodomy and was sentenced to 7 years in prison, with all but 120 days suspended, and 5 years' probation.

The church claimed part of the blame should be laid on the girl's parents for allowing Landy to have access to her. *Source: St. Joseph News-Press, 1-24-11* 

#### Legal Developments

**Fr. Antoine Videau**, 64, Calacuccia, **Corsica**, had his 2-year sentence reduced by an appeals court and was freed from prison after serving 8 months. The French priest was sentenced last June for stealing 2 million euros over 20 years from the Catholic Church, which he spent in part on "cultural pilgrimages" to Las Vegas and other places.

Videau will have to repay 1.3 million euros in damages to the Diocese of Ajaccio and 250,000 euros to the family of Archbishop Luigi Antonio Arrighi of Casanova. *Source: CNN, 1-27-11* 

The 5th District Illinois Appellate Court upheld a 2008 civil award of \$5 million against the Catholic **Diocese of Belleville** to a former altar boy. Nearly half the 85-page decision detailed sexual abuse against boys and at least one girl, allegedly committed by Rev. Raymond Kownacki. The diocese removed Kownacki from the ministry in 1995. He now lives in Dupo. *Source: Belleville News-Democrat, 1-14-11* 

#### Allegations

Attorney Jeffrey Anderson, who represents clients in 23 sexual abuse lawsuits against the **Milwaukee Archdiocese**, will seek depositions from **Archbishop Timothy Dolan** and other church officials in order to prove allegations that the archdiocese moved \$130 million off its books to avoid paying claims. Anderson alleges \$75 million disappeared from the church's investments in 2005 and that \$55 million more that had previously been unaccounted for appeared in a cemetery trust in 2008, and that the archdiocese claimed that money in that fund was protected by state law and could not be used for payouts. *Source: New York Times, 2-13-11* 

"This reexamination will be undertaken to determine the suitability of these priests for active ministry," said Rigali. *Source: The Intelligencer, 2-17-11* 

Freethought Today

**Fr. Martin O'Loghlen**, 74, San Dimas, **CA**, was removed as associate pastor at Holy Name of Mary Catholic Church the day before a newspaper reported he admitted to having sex several times with a woman, now of Phoenix, while she was a high school student in the 1960s.

Three decades later, O'Loghlen's attempts to ask for the woman's forgiveness led to her suing him and his religious order, the **Congregation of the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary**, which settled for \$100,000.

Spokesman Tod Tamberg said the archdiocese acted quickly after learning of O'Loghlen's misconduct. "Within an hour and a half he was gone from the ministry and gone from the diocese." *Source: San Gabriel Valley Tribune,* 2-14-11

**Fr. Thomas Euteneuer** was recalled by the Diocese of Palm Beach, **FL**, and resigned the presidency of Human Life International, an anti-abortion group, after admitting "violating the boundaries of chastity with an adult female who was under my spiritual care."

HLI said in a statement that allegations of inappropriate conduct "occurred within the context of his exorcism ministry." HLI's board later learned of more allegations.

Euteneuer, a "trained" exorcist, was touted by HLI as being adept at tying abortion to "the demonic." His "Evening With an Exorcist" talks were also canceled.

In 2007, he told Fox host Sean Hannity that he wouldn't give him communion because Hannity wouldn't condemn birth control. Hannity responded, "Are you perfect, Father? Have you not sinned?" *Source: Sun-Sentinel, 2-6-11* 

**Rev. Christopher Turczany** resigned as pastor of St. Mel's Catholic Church, Flushing, **NY**. The parish has been roiled by the news that Joseph Denice, 24, was working with children at the church's school despite a conviction last June on sex charges.

Denice was also charged in January on counts of grand larceny, petit larceny and criminal possession of a forged document, for allegedly bilking St. Mel's out of thousands of dollars through a check fraud scheme, said the district attorney in Queens. *Source: yournabe.com, 2-3-11* 

The Archdiocese of Detroit said it would investigate why Herbert Richey, defrocked as priest in 1997 due to allegations he sexually molested boys, was employed as organist at St. Margaret of Scotland Parish in St. Clair Shores, MI. A parishioner confirmed Richey played the church organ Jan. 23.

After news reports, archdiocese spokesman Ned McGrath said Richey "will no longer serve as the organist or in any other capacity at the parish."

Though Richey supposedly was barred from working in any parish or school in 2002, Bob Saelens, St. Margaret's Parish Council secretary, said he knew nothing of his controversial background. "This floors me. It's a total, total surprise." *Source: Detroit Free Press, 1-27-11* 

**Rev. Gerald Hechenberger**, pastor since 2006 at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Smithton, **IL**, is on a temporary leave of absence that might become permanent, said a letter to parishioners from Rev. John McEvilly, vicar general of the Belleville Diocese. Hechenberger removed himself to "address the very serious personal, pastoral and legal challenges that he is currently facing," the letter said.

Checks of court records in six area counties did not turn up his name. *Source: Belleville News-Democrat, 1-27-11* 

#### Other

An arrest warrant against **Rabbi Dov Lior**, Kiryat Arba, **ISR** (a suburb of Hebron), brought a letter of protest from 70 rabbis. Lior is refus-



DRY RIDGE, Ky. – Rev.

Jerry L. Cannon, 62, pastor of God's House Church, called himself Terry Lewis online. Unlike the Jerry Lewis "kids" helped by the comedian's Muscular Dystrophy Association telethon, Terry Lewis' kids were naked.

Cannon was arrested on federal charges, originating in Alabama, of soliciting and distributing child pornography. An FBI complaint said he used several Facebook accounts to post porn. Todd Cummins, head deacon, said the church has fired Cannon, who is married. His name on the church's sign was covered by duct tape.

"Terry Lewis" offered to swap pictures of girls between 9 and 21 years old. "I like them to be 10-16 myself." The account had over 600 images, including prepubescent girls with genitalia exposed and multiple videos of adults performing sex acts on young girls. Facebook investigators determined the account was controlled by Cannon, whose profile said he lived in Mobile, Ala.

The affidavit included a post in which Cannon was quoted as writing, "Well, I like looking at young beautiful girls and I cannot seem to get it out of my system. I have tried to put it behind me but cannot seem to bury it." *Source: Cincinnati Enquirer, 2-22-11* 

23, who shot himself Feb. 3 outside Blessed Mother Catholic Church. Jarboe had posted a farewell to friends on Facebook that said he was abused by priests when younger. The post included 3 priests' names but didn't directly identify anyone as an abuser.

He praised and thanked one priest, but to Fr. William Baer he wrote, "You get no thanks. You are an evil man. Period." To Fr. Freddie Byrd he wrote, "I forgive you."

A funeral Mass was held at Blessed Mother. Bishop William Medley convened the 13-member Diocesan Review Board on Feb. 5, the statement said. The board recommended hiring an outside investigator. *Source: WFIE News, 2-7-11; AP, 2-12-11* 

Sister Mary Turcotte, 26, a member of a splinter Christian sect called Apostles of Infinite Love, admitted to Brooklyn, NY, detectives she made up a sexual assault claim. Charges haven't been filed. Turcotte, who is white, claimed she was attacked on the street a 6-foot-4, 250-pound black man. She told police the man choked her, dragged her through the streets and left her unconscious in a snowbank with her underwear down and her torso exposed.

A suspect sketch was released along with a plea to the public. After more questioning, Turcotte admitted she made up the story to cover up her sexual tryst with a bodega worker. *Source: N.Y. Daily News, 2-2-11* 

Parents were denied a meeting with **Bishop Robert Lynch** of the **Diocese of St. Petersburg**, **FL**, to discuss what they considered inappropriate behavior in the confessional by **Rev. Joseph Waters**. Last Christmas, Waters asked at least 8 children questions about purported sins, questions that parents considered out of bounds such as what the children looked up on the Internet and whether they masturbated.

On his blog, the bishop wrote, "The 'seal of confession' is so sacred to the church that priests and bishops have gone to prison to protect what was said during this sacrament." *Source: St. Petersburg Times, 1-28-11* 

**Fr. William Christensen**, a Marianist priest who once taught at Chaminade University in St. Louis, **MO**, is accused of molesting boys con-

Source: KSBW News, 2-17-11

"John Doe 10," 28, alleges in a suit filed in Philadelphia he was abused as a Catholic school student in second or third grade and as a high school freshman, when he sought counseling about the first abuse. He names **Rev. Richard Cochrane** and **Martin Satchell**, an ex-priest, as his abusers. Also named in the suit are the archbishop of Philadelphia, **Cardinal Justin Rigali**; Rigali's predecessor, **Cardinal Anthony Bevilacqua**; **Msgr. William Lynn**, former secretary of the clergy; **Karen Becker**, director of child and youth protection; and **Maggie Marshall**, victim assistance coordinator.

Institutions named are the archdiocese, Malvern Preparatory School for Boys and the Order of St. Augustine, which runs St. Aloysius Academy in Bryn Mawr.

A 2005 grand jury report on sexual abuse allegations had no apparent consequences. "I was shocked when I learned last week that in 2011, the Archdiocese of Philadelphia has done virtually nothing," said plaintiff's lawyer Marci Hamilton. *Source: Reuters, 2-14-11* 

#### **Civil Lawsuits Settled**

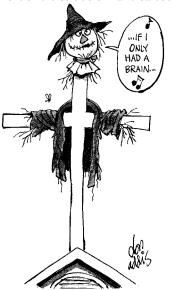
The Catholic **Diocese of London, ONT**, will pay \$1.5 million to 10 victims of sexual abuse by the late **Rev. Lawrence Paquette** and ex-priest **Barry Glendinning**. The diocese paid \$1.4 Retired Dutch **Cardinal Ad Simonis** is accused of covering up sexual abuse by a predator priest and moving him to another parish, where he abused again after he was not monitored.

Simonis said that at the time he believed that the priest, who has not been named, had changed his behavior. He called the priest's renewed abuse "lamentable." Officials said 6 of the priest's victims reported incidents from 1987 to 2008. *Source: BBC News, 2-11-11* 

#### Removed / Resigned

Revs. Joseph DiGregorio, Joseph Gallagher and Stephen Perzan were placed on administrative leave by Cardinal Justin Rigali of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia after the priests were named in a grand jury report which said as many as 37 priests remain in active ministry with credible allegations of child sexual abuse against them. ing to cooperate in an investigation of a book titled *Torat Hamelech*, which discusses conditions under which Jewish law sanctions killing gentiles. Lior endorsed the book. The letter said the Torah is not subject to police investigations. *Source: Jerusalem Post. 2-8-11* 

The **Diocese of Owensboro**, **KY**, released a statement on the suicide of David Jarboe Jr.,



nected to a charity where he worked in Bangladesh. The Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests picketed at Marianist headquarters to protest Vatican silence.

"Not once have Catholic officials anywhere in this country told people that he's accused of molesting 30 kids in Bangladesh, and that he's been formally defrocked by the Vatican," said David Clohessy, SNAP executive director.

Christensen is appealing his October 2010 laicization. A Marianist statement said "until the appeal is settled, he remains a priest and a member of the Society of Mary."

Former Chaminade student Michael Powel sued Christensen in 2002 for allegedly molesting him as a child. Powel, 42, died in 2007 of a brain tumor before the suit was resolved. *Source: KMOX News*, 1-13-11

Brother Joe Bonet, 63, Valletta, MAL: Bonet, a Catholic priest facing criminal charges of molesting children, died of bone cancer shortly after Maltese officials announced a church tribunal would consider canonical penalties against him as well.

Bonet was one of three clerics first accused 7 years ago of molesting children at St. Joseph's Home decades ago. Pope Benedict met the victims in April on a visit here. *Source: Times of Malta, 1-13-11* 

blackcollar@ffrf.org



Letterbox

# Foundation fights many-headed beast

Living in a small town awash with religious fervor, I am reminded nearly every day of the valuable contribution FFRF is making to the preservation of our secular society. Whether it's the anti-choice rhetoric that surrounds me, the constant drumbeat against evolution, or the many signature lines on public school e-mails containing verses or religious sayings, I know that it would be much worse if there were not groups like yours out there fighting.

Political religion, like the Hydra, is a many-headed beast, and it seems like two heads grow back for every one that's lopped off. Still, the growing number of "nones" and out-of-the-closet nonbelievers in the U.S. and worldwide offers encouragement leading me to hope that our fight is not in vain.

Thanks so very much for everything you do. I'm proud to be a part of it. **Robin Buckallew Nebraska** 

#### Refusing to drown or torture children

I'm having a button made that states, "Better Than God." Hopefully, someone will ask what I mean. The answer will be, "Well, what do you mean by God?" And then I'll say, "Well, I'm better. For one thing, I don't drown children or torture my son." (Examples are everywhere.) Maybe that questioner will think.

Carl Scheiman Maine

# Slow and steady wins the race

Enclosed please find a check for your legal fund. The contribution is in response to a complaint I made in November about Horicon High School's production of "Godspell." The letter to the school district by attorney Patrick Elliott was well-written. FFRF artfully used the school's own policies to make the case.

I attended the convention in Madison last October with a friend who is still mildly active in her church. She has read all my copies of Freethought Today and several books by Dan Barker, Richard Dawkins, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and others. On our drive home. I received one of the best comments about the weekend and all she had learned Florida lately. She said she felt that she "had been lied to all along." This made me feel good to know that my challenges to friends and family, and your work, are making a difference, even if at a glacial pace.

a mandatory attendance requirement, i.e., schools and government. It is for these reasons that I support FFRF and the efforts to curb the encroachment of religion into areas which should and must remain secular.

Please continue your good work, and may you do so in good health.

P.S. I would find great amusement if a politico were to introduce a bill requiring the teaching of the Quran, Rigveda or other nonbiblical religious texts in a state such as Texas. Oh, the uproar!

Dale Higgs Washington

# Thanks for protecting our civil rights

I am so enjoying Freethought Today and the FFRF-related news. Thank you for your wonderful work keeping an eye on the creeping of religion into our government. How good I feel knowing that FFRF exists to stop the illegalities. The blatant disregard of our freedoms by Christianity (the biggest offender in the USA) is beyond belief. James Robertson

California

#### Woden on Wednesday, Thor on Thursday

Freethought Today is a wonderfully interesting publication, and I read each issue with great pleasure. The letters of other readers always intrigue me — both the astonishingly ugly negative, and the happily enthusiastic positive! I was especially interested in the letter from the Baptist clergyman, Ed Stetzen, which said that "Jesus being the reason" for the holiday season meant no more than the fact that the fifth day of the week is named for Thor, the mighty pagan god whom we certainly do not worship.

I've never known anyone else to voice that opinion — and for years I've been boring my friends by telling them that I don't mind saying Merry Christmas — a phrase associated with so many happy festive times in my youth. It doesn't mean I worship Christ — not any more than I worship Woden on Wednesday or Thor on Thursday!

All these fantasy figures are part of the ancient legacy of myths our race has inherited. So, congratulations, Ed Stetzen. Thanks for agreeing with me! **Abigail Ann Martin** 



er made such a claim about the Commandments being the basis of modern law, I don't know anyone who did, and I never came across this claim in any reputable Western Civ textbook.

The ancient code always mentioned in textbooks in the context of early sources of law is the Code of Hammurabi (18th century B.C.E.), a compilation of some 300 laws with the same crimes (theft, perjury and murder) proscribed by the Commandments, plus much more. Unlike the latter, this code still exists in the original as a 7-foot-tall column of basalt on display in the Louvre in Paris. If these people really wanted to be true to history, they could demand to display facsimiles of the Code of Hammurabi in their courthouses.

What then is the source of modern law? For most modern states, it derives from Roman law, especially from its sixth century codification known as the *Corpus Juris Civilis*. Because this massive work emphasizes the supreme authority of the state over the individual, the Roman Catholic Church adapted it to its own purposes around the 12th century, and the French emperor did likewise in his early 19th century Code Napoleon. Many modern countries use some form of Roman law. The other source of modern law is English common law.

Now here is your pop quiz. Which of the 50 U.S. states bases its laws on Roman law? Hint: It does so by way of the Code Napoleon. William Hairston

#### Alabama

#### From Tuscany comes an 'atheist' wine

I always enjoy reading Freethought Today. I enjoy reading it even more with a nice glass of red wine in hand (helps to keep me relaxed when I read about some of the outrageous shenanigans of the Religious Right).

One wine that stands out as not only delicious but also rather appropriate for the occasion is a Tuscan wine made by the highly respected producer Ciacci Piccolomini d' Aragona. Although they make several different wines, the one I am referring to is *Ateo Rosso Sant'Antimo* or "Ateo." In case your Italian is rusty, that translates as "atheist."

To find it I check around the Internet to see what's available. If your state allows shipment, that's probably the easiest way to go. One good site is *wine-searcher.com/*. I recently got some Ateo from Woodland Hills Wine Co. in California for \$20 a bottle. I can recommend them as an easy and reliable merchant to deal with.

If you like good wine, I think you'll be pleased. So I raise my glass of Ateo to all of you at FFRF. Keep up the good work!

#### Steven Eakman Washington

Editor's note: The company says that while Ateo "first came into existence as a provocation," it's now an estate classic aged in small French and American oak barriques. "With the 2007 vintage, we showcase a new blend, one that focuses only on cabernet sauvignon and merlot."

# Freethinkers deserve first-class berth

I'd like to comment on statements like "They took prayer out of schools," and "They are taking away Christmas." Some people seem unable to see the difference between religious expression by private individuals and groups and direct support of particular religions by government.

The First Amendment guarantees your freedom of religion. You can put up religious displays on private property paid for by private funds and, as the saying goes, as long as there are algebra tests, there will be prayer in schools.

The First Amendment, as consistently interpreted by the Supreme Court, also says government cannot directly support any particular religion, or religion over nonreligion. This restriction actually protects your right to free religious expression.

When the government starts favoring one religion, control of that religion falls at least partially into government hands, and anyone whose beliefs differ from what is officially promoted is no longer a first-class citizen.

#### Steve Biever Wisconsin

# Dale ascends, but not to heaven

Please accept my membership renewal and ascension to Life Membership.

Personally, I do not care if folks choose to believe in a god. That's their business, and it's fine by me. I become concerned when some of those people decide that I and others must hold their same beliefs. I am also concerned with the insistence of some on proselytizing in venues which have essentially

#### Hang Hammurabi in public halls

One of the courses I taught in my 30-year career was the History of Western Civilization. To keep my focus on intellectual honesty, one of the quotes taped to my filing cabinet was one attributed to writer-journalist Ernest Hemingway: "The most essential gift for a good writer is a built-in, shockproof, shit detector." The cynical claim by those who would display the Ten Commandments in public buildings that the Commandments are the basis of modern law is a case in point.

Opposition to these displays is always, and properly, based on First Amendment grounds, but the "appeal to history" argument of the proponents seems to go by default. But this claim, this argument, is at best highly dubious and at worst debatable. I nev-

#### Atheists are far from endangered species

I had my DNA tested by 23andMe, a genetic testing service. They ask you to fill out questionnaires to help in research. After you answer a question, they send you the percentages of what the other participants answered. I thought you might be interested in the results I received on 1-29-11 to the question, "How would you describe your religious beliefs?":

Very religious (2%); religious (11%); somewhat religious (13%); spiritual but not associated with any one religion (25%); agnostic (18%); atheistic (22%); other (2%); not sure (1%); I'd rather not say (1%).

I answered "atheistic" and was shocked at the 22% it got. I'm not as rare as I thought.

#### Jim Marsh

Texas

#### Steve Clamage

#### California

#### Accepting the credit but not the blame

"In God We Trust" proudly proclaims the U.S. dollar. Indeed, but which God, and just what is He, She or It entrusted to do?

When there is a drought, knees are bent to pray for rain. But He, She or It takes no blame for disasters such as Katrina.

C.M. Halle South Africa

# In Memoriam



# Hannah Simons-Scalise, 1992–2011



This article originally appeared Feb. 2, 2011, and is reprinted with the kind permission of Jeremy H. Dickman, news editor of The Morning Sun, Mt. Pleasant, Mich. Hannah's parents are longtime FFRF members Lynn Simons and John Scalise.

By Jeremy H. Dickman

**F**or five years, Hannah Simons-Scalise fought a courageous battle with Ewing's sarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer.

That battle ended Jan. 31 when Simons-Scalise, 19, died at her home while surrounded by family.

A 2009 Mt. Pleasant High School graduate and a sophomore at Central Michigan University, Simons-Scalise would not let cancer define her life.

"She was a very impressive girl who would not let cancer get in her way of accomplishing her goals," said her mother, Lynn Simons.

First seen at Central Michigan Community Hospital after recurring fevers and severe pain, where a chest X-ray and CAT scan picked up the malignant tumors on her lungs, Simons-Scalise then had to be taken by ambulance to the University of Michigan's Mott Children's Hospital, and would later receive treatments at MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston and the University of Pennsylvania Cancer Center.

She underwent chemotherapy every

three weeks as an outpatient for nearly a year.

The family received a great deal of help from Community Cancer Services, which is an Isabella County group that helps patients with expenses, and the Corporate Angel Network, which is based out of White Plains, N.Y., and eases stress, physical discomfort and financial burdens of travel by arranging free flights to treatment centers, using the empty seats on corporate aircraft flying on routine business.

The family was able to get matched up with Dow Chemical, which made regular business trips to Texas and Pennsylvania. Last summer, over a 40day period, Simons-Scalise made eight flights to Houston. "They were incredible to work with," Simons said of Corporate Angel Network, Dow Chemical and Community Cancer Services.

Over the course of her five-year struggle, Simons-Scalise would have 900 doses of chemotherapy, including a stretch where she received 15 doses a month for a year. She also underwent underwent five thoracotomy lung surgeries.

"Sometimes I think about what she did and how impressive she really was," her mother said.

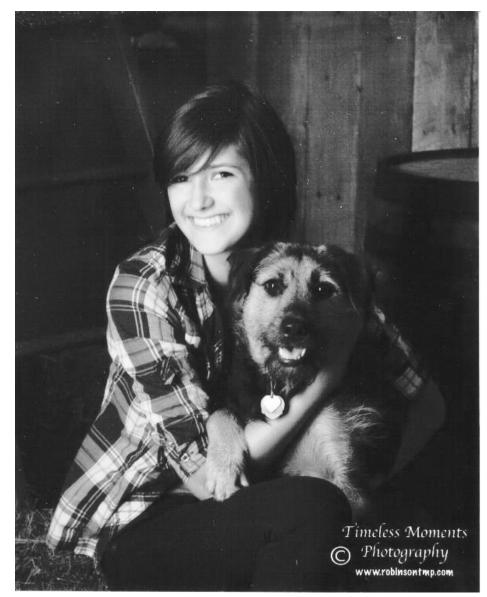
She had 10 tumors on her lungs and was still undergoing chemotherapy when she died. "She was still battling right up until the end," Simons said.

Her daughter was a history buff, she said, and always had a fondness for animals. She would donate her lemonade stand money to the Isabella County Animal Shelter. When she got older, she volunteered at the shelter and adopted a dog, a 50-pound terrier mix named Sophie.

"Sophie and Hannah would snuggle up together in the recliner," Simons said. "She was in seventh heaven when they were together."

Simons-Scalise also had a part-time job at Spinning Wheels roller rink and keynoted West Intermediate's "Miles for Miracles" fundraiser. "She did whatever she could to show people you had to live your life to the fullest and not let cancer define you," her mother said.

Simons-Scalise was a four-year member of the MPHS cross country team



Hannah with Sophie.

and was a co-captain as a senior.

"When she became too weak to run, she would ride her bike and the team would run on the roads so she could still be a part of the team," Simons said.

How determined to run was she? One time Simons-Scalise had to get her oncologist to sign a sports physical so she could run, and she brought the form into his office and simply said "just say yes," Simons said of her daughter.

Track coach Brian Sponseller said she always had the drive to compete despite what she was going through. "She was great to have on the team. She kept all the traditions going with the younger runners and always had a smile on her face." grade. "I will always remember her positive attitude about life."

For Tyree, who got to know her during the "Wizard of Oz" musical in sixth grade, their time running cross country together for six years will always be memorable. "She could make anyone laugh. She was very high-spirited and funny, and I will always remember her determination."

attends McDevitt-Irwin, who Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, said she talked every day with her best friend and that Simons-Scalise visited her in Canada last fall. In turn. she visited her best friend just before she died. "This past weekend I came up to see her and she was still herself and making jokes," McDevitt-Irwin said. "She was the most caring, funny and sweetest person ever. She was so supportive and caring and inspired so many people."



Hannah (center) pictured in 2001. Hannah quickly chose the "Godless" FFRF T-shirt to wear at an FFRF appearance in her hometown. She is pictured with her sister Abby (left) and Sabrina Gaylor. Simons-Scalise insisted on finishing each year of high school on time.

"She finished ninth, 10th, 11th and 12th grades on time, although she had to finish some of it at home, she did it," Simons said. "Each year with newer reoccurrences of tumors, we were very impressed with her finishing school."

Her friends Jamie McDevitt-Irwin, Staci Galgoci and Arlena Tyree all agreed she had a great sense of humor.

McDevitt-Irwin, a friend since sixth grade, said, "We were always doing funny, silly things together. Our personalities just clicked."

"She was an amazing, outgoing person who never was in a bad mood and was always bubbly. She was the type of person who would always brighten up a day," said Galgoci, a friend since fifth Survivors include her mother, Lynn Simons; her father, John Scalise; a brother, Benjamin Scalise; her sisters, Sarah and Abby Scalise; and many friends.

A private memorial is planned. Per her wishes, in lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Humane Animal Treatment Society, Box 732, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48804; Community Cancer Services, Box 36, Mt. Pleasant, MI 48804; or Corporate Angel Network, Westchester County Airport, One Loop Road, White Plains, NY 10604.

Madison, Wisconsin

## 34th FFRF convention, Hartford, Conn., Oct. 7–9

# Early birds can sign up now

The Foundation's 34th annual convention is set for Hartford, Conn., at the Marriott Hartford Downtown on the weekend of Oct. 7-9, 2011.

"We chose Hartford for East Coast convenience and so that members might have a chance to tour the fascinating Victorian house that Mark Twain built, which is now a museum," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF copresident.

The free Hartford Star Shuttle connects the Connecticut Convention Center (across the street from the hotel) and riverfront with other downtown hotels, restaurants, shops and attractions.

A major attraction not on the shuttle route is the Mark Twain House and Museum. If enough convention-goers sign up (check registration form), FFRF will reserve the Twain Home and Museum for a staggered group tour on the afternoon of Friday, Oct. 7, before the convention opens. (See sidebar.)

Other Hartford attractions are Katherine Hepburn's gravesite, at Cedar Hill Cemetery, and the Harriet Beecher Stowe house.

Professor Jerry Coyne will accept FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award at the convention. Coyne, a professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolution at the University of Chicago, is author of the 2009 book, *Why Evolution is True.* His plain-spoken column, "Science and religion aren't friends," appeared in USA Today in October 2010, in which he wrote:

"Science and faith are fundamen-

tally incompatible, and for precisely the same reason that irrationality and rationality are incompatible. They are different forms of inquiry, with only one, science, equipped to find real truth. And while they may have a dialogue, it's not a constructive one. Science helps religion only by disproving its claims, while religion has nothing to add to science."

Also receiving awards will be two FFRF activists. **Steve Trunk**, an FFRF Board and Lifetime Member, will receive the Atheist in Foxhole Award as plaintiff in a lawsuit in which the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals in January declared the Mount Soledad cross in San Diego unconstitutional.

Mitch Kahle, founder of Hawaii Citizens for the Separation of State and Church, will be named Freethinker of the Year for persuading the Hawaii Senate in January to drop prayers to open legislative sessions. Kahle, a longtime FFRF supporter, was roughed up by Senate security for protesting prayers.

The convention will open formally on Friday night with speeches and a celebratory dessert reception, continue through Saturday and conclude by noon Sunday morning after membership and Board of Director meetings. To tour the Twain house, plan your itinerary to make time on Friday afternoon.

FFRF group rates at the Marriott Hartford Downtown, 200 Columbus Blvd., Hartford, Conn., are \$159 plus tax, single, double, triple or quadruple. Reserve your rooms directly by requesting "Freedom From Religion Foundation" Group Block by calling toll-free to 866-373-9806.

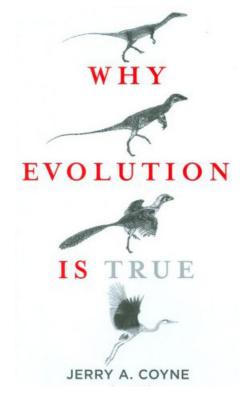
Rooms for FFRF conventions always go fast, so plan ahead to avoid disappointment. Rooms are held until Sept. 6 unless filled before then. **Head's up**: There are no shuttles from the airport. Taxi rides from airport to hotel typically run \$36 to \$44, so try to share. FFRF decreased its convention registration rates accordingly. Parking is \$19 daily/\$23 valet. Union Station is less than a mile from the hotel.

To register for the convention (only \$50 per member, \$55 per spouse or companion accompanying member, \$95 for non-member), send back the handy registration form this on page or go online to:

ffrf.org/outreach/convention

#### Reserve spot now for Twain group tour

Hartford, Conn., is home to the Mark Twain House and Museum. Samuel Langhorne Clemens commissioned architect Edward Tuckerman Potter to design the 11,500-square-foot Victorian home. It was completed in 1874, and the family lived there until 1891. It has 25 rooms on three floors. In 2003, the Mark Twain Museum Center opened with permanent and rotating exhibits, including a Ken Burns mini-documentary on Twain. The Murasaki Café offers Japanese cuisine from 11:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Saturday.



Jerry Coyne is an Emperor Has No Clothes Award recipient for 2011.

If enough members reserve tickets, the Twain House and Museum will close for FFRF-only guided tours Friday, Oct. 7 (11:30 a.m. to last guided tour at 4:30 p.m.). Admission to the house is by guided tour only (approximately 45 minutes) and is limited to 16 persons per tour. The self-guided tour of the museum usually takes viewers an hour to 90 minutes.

A group tour, including cost of the FFRF-hired shuttle, would be less than the usual fee of \$16 per adult, \$10 per child. The exact tour price will be announced after the Twain House is reserved. The shuttle bus would depart from the hotel about every 15 minutes on a first-come, first-served basis.

If interested, please check the boxon the registration form to reserve tickets. FFRF will bill you separately for the tour once details are confirmed.

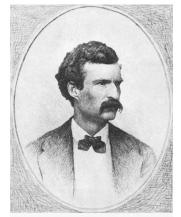
## Return to: FFRF, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701 *Freedom From Religion Foundation's* 34th Annual Convention October 7–9, 2011

Make checks payable to "FFRF"

Marriott Hartford Downtown Hartford, Connecticut

No. registering

FFRF Member registration(s) @ \$50 per person .....



ן .. ש FFRF welcomes 10 Life Members, 2 After-Lifers

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, which is a 501(c)(3) educational charity, is delighted to welcome its 10 newest Lifetime Members. These kind members recently contributed \$1,000 to FFRF specified as a membership or renewal for lifetime status.

They are: Peter Dashevici, Masato lowers, Wendell Funk, C. Leon Harris, Gary King, Margaret A. Lehto, Fred C. Smith, Marjorie Thompson, June Trudeau and John Wolff. Two individuals signed up as "After-Lifers," FFRF's slightly tongue-in-cheek category for freethinkers who wish their contribution to live after them. They are: Jon Darwin Soder and Steven Bentley. States represented are: Colorado, Florida, Illinois, Mississippi, New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Wyoming. Additionally, one new Lifetime Member lives in Australia! Warmest appreciation to Steve, Jon, John, June, Marjorie, Fred, Margaret, Gary, C. Leon, Wendell, Masato and Peter! All dues and contributions to FFRF are deductible for income-tax purposes. Lifetime Memberships go into a safe "rainy day" endowment, and mean never another renewal notice.

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Non-member	registration(s) @ \$95	\$
(or joi	n for \$40, save \$5!)	
Student registration(s) @ \$25 (Ask about student group rate)		\$
Saturday Non-	Prayer Breakfast @ \$25* per person	\$
Veget	arian option no. of vegetarian Uegan option no. of vegan	
Saturday Nigh	t Dinner @ \$45* per person	\$
Veget	arian option no. of vegetarian Uegan option no. of vegan	
0		otal:
	* Meal prices include 21% gratuity and 6% sales tax	
Reserve tic	ket(s) to tour Mark Twain home, afternoon of Fri., Oct. 7.	
	Fwill bill you later. Tour will take place if enough members respond.)	
Name(s)	Please include names of all registrants for nametags	
Address		