

Freethought Today

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October 2011

FFRF sues Virginia school over Ten Commandments

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia filed a federal lawsuit Sept. 13 against the School Board of Giles County, Va., for unconstitutionally endorsing religion by displaying the Ten Commandments.

The suit was filed in U.S. District Court in Roanoke on behalf of a student at Narrows High School, Narrows, Va., and the student's parent. The plaintiffs filed a motion for a protective order to keep their identities confidential due to the potential for retaliation. Giles County is contesting that request. (See sidebar, back page.)

FFRF first objected to the display in December 2010 when the commandments were posted in all six county schools. The district responded by taking the displays down, then putting them back up after the public pressured the board. On advice of legal counsel, they were again later removed.

The community reacted with acrimony. A large number of students at Giles High School in Pearisburg walked out of classes in protest March

7, demanding that the Ten Commandments be placed again in their school. About 100 people wore Ten Commandments T-shirts and carried decalogue posters at a May 19 board meeting. Then the board entertained a motion to return the Ten Commandments as part of a larger display.

FFRF and ACLU of Virginia sent a joint letter of objection to the district against that proposal. FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott and ACLU of Virginia Legal Director Rebecca Glenberg wrote in the organizations' joint letter:

"The Giles County School Board cannot hide the religious purpose behind this display simply by arranging other documents around the Ten Commandments." The letter pointed out that the U.S. Supreme Court and the Sixth Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals struck down a similar display because the history of the controversy evinced the government's religious purpose. The letter noted that courts afford the highest Establishment Clause protections to impressionable schoolchildren.

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Reprinted with kind permission of Edward Sorel

Edward Sorel, *Ten Commandments*, 2011

FFRF to sue over cross atop Tennessee water tower

Saying "Somebody has to stand up to these atheist sons of bitches, and you can quote me on that," the mayor of Whiteville, Tenn., announced on Oct. 17 that he will fight the Freedom From Religion Foundation in federal court over the illegal cross atop the town's water tower.

After FFRF sent three previous let-

ters of complaint, which were ignored, FFRF hired Nashville attorney Alvin Harris, who sent a Sept. 29 demand letter to Mayor James Bellar: "If you fail to comply with this demand within 30 days from the date of this letter, the FFRF and its Whiteville member will have little choice but to sue you and the Town in the United States District Court for the Western District of Tennessee."

Bellar announced on Oct. 3 that he would move the cross. However, the governing board voted to let the Alliance Defense Fund, a wealthy Christian-right legal firm, "explore other options" besides moving it. Bellar next told reporter Daniel Wilkerson, WBBJ-TV, in Jackson, Tenn., that he had changed his mind, and will fight FFRF in court.

FFRF had cautioned the town to be careful about ac-

cepting outside legal representation: "The town must consider the substantial costs involved in litigating an issue that is settled by the courts. When we won a case against Rhea County Schools in Tennessee for unlawful religious instruction in its schools, the District Court awarded over \$120,000 for plaintiffs' attorney fees and costs. This amount does not include substantial defense costs. This amount was separate from the substantial fees paid to Rhea County's defense lawyers."

In the initial letter to Bellar late last year, FFRF Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert noted: "It is unlawful for the Town of Whiteville to display a patently religious symbol such as a Christian cross on public property. The Whiteville cross, displayed on the Town water tower, unabashedly creates the perception of government endorsement of Christianity. It conveys the message to the twenty-six percent of the U.S. population who are not Christians that they are not 'favored members of the political community.'"

Bellar admitted to the Jackson Sun he'd given FFRF the brush-off. "They've been writing me since December of 2010. I took it upon myself

just to ignore them."

He told Fox News Radio that FFRF's "cause in life [is] to ride up and down the highway and find small towns that maybe have a religious symbol somewhere on public property. I have to admit it — checking their website, they're

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The Christian cross mounted on the water tower owned by Whiteville, Tenn.

Inside This Issue



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Meet a Staffer

Name: Eleanor Wroblewski.

Where and when I was born: Dec. 12, 1989, in White Plains, N.Y. I grew up in Madison, Wis., where we moved when I was 3 and I've hardly left since!

Family: This summer I lived with my parents and my younger brother, all religious to some degree. My dad goes to Sufi "Universal Worship," my mom sometimes sings in the choir at her favorite Episcopal church, and my brother sort of believes in going to church without regularly attending.

I'm close to my extended family, especially on my mom's side, where despite various levels of ambivalence and "unchurchedness," I don't know of any other "out" freethinkers.

Education: I spent my freshman year of college at Tulane University in New Orleans, where I studied Spanish and political science, then came home because I thought I wanted to teach high school physics. Well, it turns out you have to learn all the boring physics to teach the interesting stuff to children, so that didn't last.

Now, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I'm majoring in textile and apparel design. That should get me my bachelor's in only six years total or so, assuming I don't get distracted again.

What I want to do when I grow up: I really enjoy weaving: I took it as an elective and ended up changing my major so I could keep doing it. Hand-producing textiles is a tricky field to break into though, so I probably can't just weave all day.

I'd like to create and exhibit textile art pieces and create wearables and useful items for sale or on commission, but I'm also thinking about writing for magazines like *Piecework*, *Handwoven* or *Craftzine.com*, designing handknitting patterns for sale and getting an MFA with an eye on a university teaching position.

For inspiration, I often draw from history and reinterpret old techniques or motifs, but I do occasionally reference popular culture. I once wove a scarf based on the cover of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Even for class assignments, I like to create items that I (or someone else) will use. The overall "look" of my pieces has been described (by a professor and classmates) as "funky rustic."

I spend a lot of time thinking about: The physical conception of the self, who made the things around me and

how, how to more fully reject Judeo-Christian morality and become a true post-theist, my own connection with women of the past, Harry Potter, hedonism and Doctor Who.

My religious upbringing was: (Theologically) liberal Episcopalian. High church but gay-friendly is an easy way to describe it. I still occasionally go for holidays I spend with my parents, but I haven't been since Christmas. I skipped Easter by spending the night at my boyfriend's (atheist) parents' house. And since my mom switched churches, I don't even have a chance to catch up with my old youth group friends after the service.

My doubts about religion started: When I read Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass* in fifth grade and became entranced by the idea, "What if someone just made it all up?" For a while I decided that it didn't matter, but I started reading Steven Pinker because I was interested in language, and Richard Dawkins because I was interested in evolution (this was back in 2004 or so, before *The God Delusion* had come out). Reading these books helped me critique religion as damaging, not just as untrue.

Around the same time, I was reading a lot of fantasy novels that used Christian mythology just like any other (thank you, Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman), and took a confirmation class that was heavy on ecclesiastical history (e.g., "How they made it all up"). I refused to get confirmed and have never looked back.

How I came to work at FFRF: Sabrina Gaylor and I have been friends since middle school. In May 2009, when I was just starting to get desperate in my job search, she let me know that a student worker position was available here. I've been here practically ever since!

What I do here: Last summer I worked as Annie Laurie Gaylor's assistant, which is a jack-of-all-trades job. I moderated Facebook, sent out mass emails and did a lot of public relations work. Once my classes started this fall, I returned to doing basic clerical work, my original position.

I also moonlighted for a few months writing Freethought of the Day for our website. There's nothing quite like spending an afternoon researching quotes and bios for my favorite freethinking celebrities, like Joss Whedon and Tim Minchin, as well as learning

about more obscure figures in our freethinking history.

What I like best about it: I really enjoy sending thousands of our Facebook fans to vote in polls on state/church or religion questions on local news websites, "so that freethinkers have a voice."

Something funny that's happened at work: I always laugh at the Crank Mail, especially when they use gender-specific words to "insult" all of us. (I use "scare quotes" because it's mostly just not factual to call us all, e.g., "homos.")

Things I like: Knitting, good television, biking around Madison, my friends, World of Warcraft, making something from nothing and achieving well-defined goals.

Things I smite: Ignorant people, Facebook trolls, one-way streets.



Photo: Dan Barker

Eleanor Wroblewski, wearing the "Harry Potter Book 7" scarf she weaved.

FFRF welcomes 19 new Lifetime Members

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to welcome 19 new Lifetime Members. They are:

Bill Calhoun, Ken Clark, John Doody, Herbert Drower, Dorothy Hood, Brion and Vera Hurley, Eugene John Kettner, Gary Knapp, Edward Kort, Juan Marti, Harold McDaniel, Damond Pleasant (gift from Lifetime Member Michael Jacobson), Kurtis Rader, Roger Stafford, Matthew Stan, Tom Sycamore and Freda and Marvin Van Houten.

States represented are Arizona, California, Florida, Illinois, Iowa,

Maryland, Mississippi, Nevada, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia and Washington.

Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000 designated for membership or renewal, are deductible to the fullest extent of the law for income-tax purposes, and ensure never another renewal notice!

FFRF's warmest thanks to Marvin, Freda, Tom, Matthew, Roger, Kurtis, Michael, Harold, Juan, Edward, Gary, Eugene, Vera, Brion, Dorothy, Herbert, John, Ken and Bill!

Overheard

As the Occupy Wall Street movement spreads across the country and the world, we must bring attention to the enablers of the top 1 percent exploiting the 99. Fundamentalist religion made this exploitation possible. Evangelical fundamentalism helped empower the top 1 percent. Note I didn't say religion per se, but religious fundamentalism.

Why? Because without the fundamentalists and their "values" issues, many in the lower 99 percent could not have been convinced to vote against their (our) economic self-interest. . . . Like most evangelical/Roman Catho-

lic fundamentalist movements in history, from the Bay State colonies to the Spanish Inquisition, the American Religious Right of today advocates the fusion of state power and religion through the reestablishment of the "Christian America" idea of "American Exceptionalism" (i.e., a nation "chosen" by God), the form of government adopted by the Puritans' successors during the age of early American colonialism.

Author Frank Schaeffer, "Deference to religion masquerading as politics must end"

AlterNet, 10-13-11

Correction

Annie Laurie Gaylor was a guest speaker at the 12th anniversary celebration, not the 10th, of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association in August.

A Note to Subscribers

Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and "Private Line." If your label shows October or earlier, your subscription has expired. Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 sustaining; \$25-student) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. (Subscription-only is \$20/ year.) Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in Jan/Feb and June/July. Send to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701.

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October 2011

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

Anne Gaylor receives NARAL's Tiller Award

FFRF President Emerita Anne Nicol Gaylor was the recipient Sept. 27 of the second annual Dr. George Tiller Memorial Award by NARAL Pro-Choice Wisconsin. The "wine, cheese and chocolate" reception was held in the beautiful condominium home (with a spectacular view of the Capitol) of state Sen. Fred Risser and his wife, Nancy. Fred is the longest-serving state legislator in U.S. history. He was first elected to the Assembly in 1956 and advanced to the Senate in 1962.

FFRF board member and community activist Nora Cusack nominated Anne for the honor.

By Nora Cusack

Anne Nicol Gaylor has been helping Wisconsin women and girls access abortion care for over 40 years. She is co-founder and administrator of the Women's Medical Fund Inc. (WMF), which has helped over 19,000

Wisconsin women and girls pay for abortions.

In the spring of 1970, after Wisconsin's anti-abortion law was declared unconstitutional, she began referring women to doctors in Wisconsin and elsewhere. On Aug. 12, 1970, she placed an ad in the classified "Personal Interest" section of Madison's two daily papers that read: "ABORTION is legal and available in Wisconsin. If your doctor won't help, contact the Zero Population Growth Referral Service." The ad included the ZPG post office box and her home phone number. The response was immediate. By the end of the month, she had received 93 calls and the phone has not stopped since.

In 1976, Anne co-founded the Women's Medical Fund as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit. WMF's mission is to help ensure that the legal right to reproductive choice is not denied due to lack of money.

WMF is now the largest continuously operating independent all-volunteer



Atheists run charities (and staff foxholes)

NARAL Pro-Choice Wisconsin director Lisa Subeck (center) presents the George Tiller Award to FFRF President Emerita Anne Nicol Gaylor (right). At left is Professor Robert West, a co-founder of the Women's Medical Fund FFRF Lifetime Member. FFRF Board Member Nora Cusack is at right behind Anne.

abortion fund in the nation. Overhead is less than 0.5%. Almost 100% of donations go directly to pay for abortion care.

WMF is a resource of last resort when all other sources of funds have been exhausted. WMF is frugal and strategic with its assistance, walking the fine line between helping with enough financial aid to enable individual women and girls to receive abortions, while helping as many as possible.

In 2010, WMF helped 735 Wisconsin women and girls with an average of \$225 each. Anne, who usually works from her kitchen table, talked with ev-

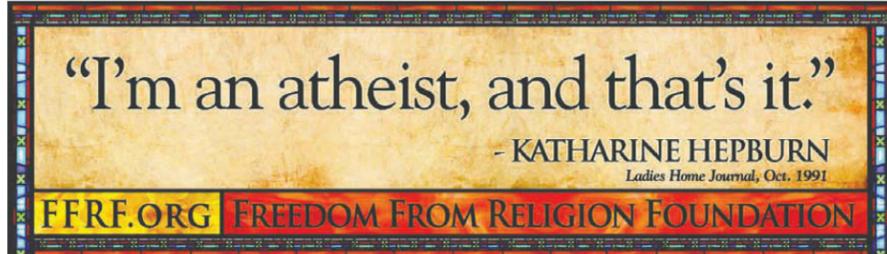
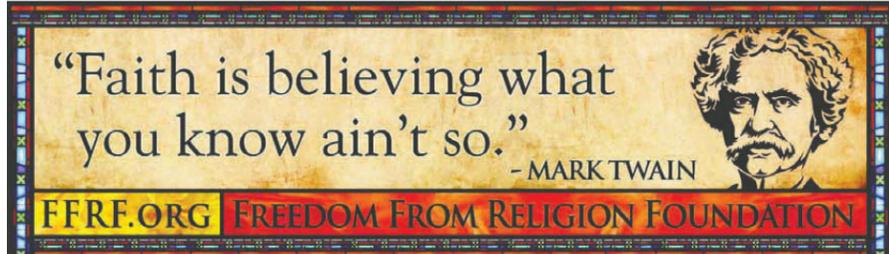
ery one of these women.

In 1989, she and WMF filed and won a suit against the Wisconsin attorney general (for exceeding his statutory authority in joining a brief in the U.S. Supreme Court urging that *Roe v. Wade* be overturned in the *Webster* case).

Anne is a role model for me and many others. She is selfless, fearless, compassionate, kind, focused, determined and effective, and deserves to receive the Dr. George Tiller Memorial Award.

Donations in Anne's honor may go to Women's Medical Fund, PO Box 248, Madison, WI 53701.

FFRF billboards revere Hartford's famed 'irreverents' — Twain and Hepburn



The Freedom From Religion Foundation welcomed attendees at its national convention Oct. 7-9 in Hartford, Conn., with two 14x48-foot billboards honoring freethinker Mark Twain and native daughter and atheist Katharine Hepburn.

A fall-colored billboard off Interstate 91 south of Weston Street quotes Katharine Hepburn saying, "I'm an atheist, and that's it." The remark comes from her *Ladies Home Journal* interview

in October 1991: "I'm an atheist, and that's it. I believe that there's nothing we can know except that we should be kind to each other and do what we can for other people."

Hepburn made many public statements about her nonbelief, including in her famous interviews by Dick Cavett and in her autobiography *Me*.

"We love this quote, which is humble and humanistic and true — there is no proof of an afterlife," said FFRF

co-founder Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Non-believers believe in life before death, not life after death, and in making the best of this world, the only world we know exists," added Gaylor, a lifelong nonbeliever. She directs FFRF with her husband Dan Barker, a former evangelical missionary who is the author of the books *Godless* and *Losing Faith in Faith — From Preacher to Atheist*.

A second billboard at Interstate 84 near Olive Street quotes Mark Twain's

Pudd'nhead Wilson: "Faith is believing what you know ain't so."

"We chose Hartford as the site for our 34th national convention not only because it's a convenient location for many Northeasterners, but literally because we've always wanted to tour Twain's home," Barker said. FFRF arranged a preconvention group tour of the famed Twain home on the afternoon of Oct. 7, in which about half the attendees took part.

"The ranks of nonbelievers are disproportionately filled with giants like Twain and Hepburn, social reformers, iconoclasts, scientists, artists and other achievers who have enriched humanity and advocated rational conduct," Barker noted.

That tradition continues, as exemplified by the speakers and honorees at the FFRF convention. The event was headlined by Harvard University's evolutionary psychologist Steven Pinker, MacArthur scholar and novelist Rebecca Newberger Goldstein and Jerry Coyne, University of Chicago professor in the department of ecology and evolution and the author of *Why Evolution Is True*. A special guest appearance was made by Broadway icon and composer Charles Strouse ("Annie" and "Bye Bye Birdie").

The FFRF billboards and convention received lots of Hartford media coverage. Look for convention coverage and photography in the November issue.

Include FFRF In Your Estate Planning

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

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

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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.



Declare and share your nonbelief in FFRF's online "Out of the Closet" campaign! ffrf.org/out

Heads Up

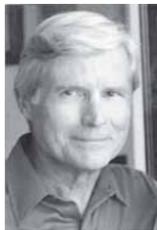
A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

October Spring

When crisp catalpa leaves
come tumbling down the frosty morning air
like tarpaulins for tulips,
it's spring again in little college towns,
October snipping at our brave beginnings,
the new year pruned away to nine lean months
of three-day weeks and fifty-
minute hours. This new year lights
no dogwood, no magnolia to find us
limping through our shrunken moments or
calling courage from our stubborn past,
the long pilgrimage of algae,
sponges, reptiles, flowers,
men. No robins linger
in the haze of this late spring
to whistle, in our fifty-minute hours,
the miracles to come: birds
of brighter plumage, richer songs,
flowers in subtler shades, men and women
walking together in peace.
But the big catalpa leaves
float crippled down the slanting sun,
brown nourishment to our long
hope, and we are clinging to
our thinning years because brown leaves
are clumsy promises: because it's
spring again.

© 2011 Philip Appleman

Freethought Today is pleased to publish this new poem.



Philip Appleman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His published volumes of poetry include *Perfidious Proverbs and Other Poems: A Satirical Look at the Bible* (2011), *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 (four 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., *Kharma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie*, \$27 ppd., *Darwin's Ark*, \$23 ppd., and *Perfidious Poverbs*, \$20 ppd. (ffrf.org/shop/).

YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

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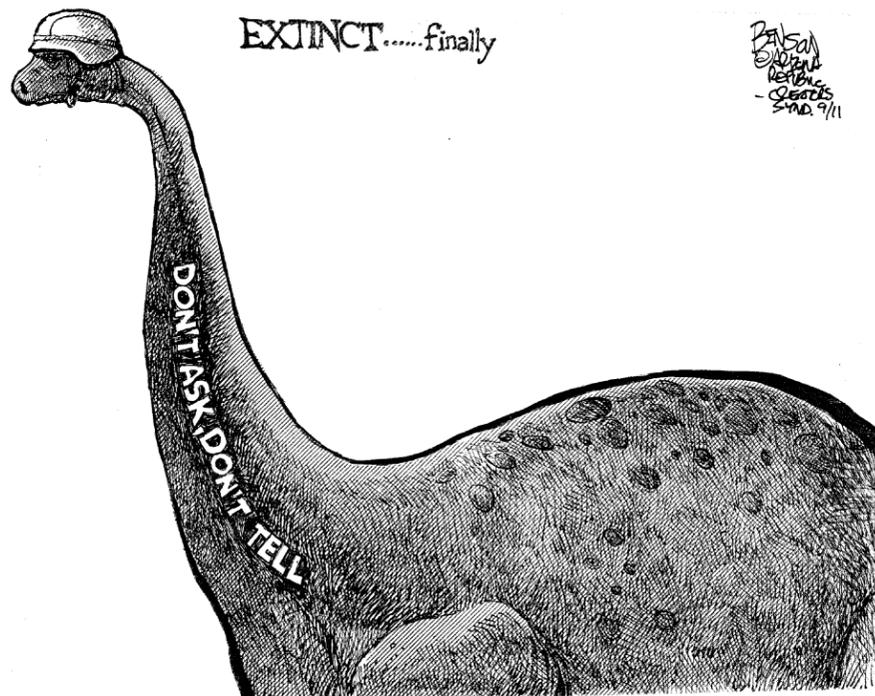


Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

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



Overheard

This is sheer bigotry. If the country club had said, "I'm not having Dawkins speak because he's a Jew, or because he's black, or because he's gay," they would never get away with it.

Richard Dawkins, on the Wyndgate Country Club's refusal to host a Center for Inquiry dinner in Rochester Hills, Mich., because Dawkins was a guest speaker

Detroit Free Press, 10-12-11

I think being an atheist is something you are, not something you do. I'm not sure we need to be honored. We don't need positive reinforcement. On the other hand, we do need to stick up for ourselves, especially in a place like Texas, where they have laws, I think, that if you don't believe in Jesus Christ you can't run for sheriff.

Christopher Hitchens, interviewed at the MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston

New York Times, 10-9-11

I hope he doesn't pray for jobs!

Dan Schulz, Florida FFRF member, about a Weather Channel map showing Texas, where Gov. Rick Perry has been publicly praying for rain for months amidst wildfires and drought, as "excessively dry"

Email comment, 9-21-11

Religion teaches you to be satisfied with nonanswers. It's a sort of crime against childhood.

Richard Dawkins, profile headlined "An Original Thinker Who Bashes Orthodoxy"

New York Times, 9-20-11

Rev. Martin E. Marty, a Lutheran minister and one of the most distinguished religious scholars in this country, once suggested to me that all of these seemingly symbolic battles over matters such

as school prayer and displays of the Ten Commandments in courthouses are really about "ownership and dominion" rather than faith. These symbolic acts are saying to religious minorities and atheists, "This is our country. Whatever the Constitution says, whatever you may believe, we Christians are the ones in charge."

Author Susan Jacoby, "The Spirited Atheist"

Washington Post, 9-14-11

I wish we were back in the day when we worried about foreign policy experience or whether somebody dodged the draft when we sorted through presidential candidates. That way, I wouldn't feel like a bigot because I don't want somebody like Governor Perry, who orders his staff to pray for rain to end a drought and thinks God controls Earth's thermostat.

Columnist Susan Reimer, "Are they running for president or pastor?"

Baltimore Sun, 9-19-11

Casting him as a director or star of Judah Maccabee is like casting Bernie Madoff to be the head of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, Simon Wiesenthal Center, on the possibility of Mel Gibson portraying the Judean priest who commanded the resistance to Greek forces c. 165 B.C.E.

CNN, 9-8-11

We've got girls!

Chant by Cincinnati Colerain High School students to football opponents from St. Xavier, a Jesuit all-male school

Cincinnati Enquirer, 9-9-11

We've got Jesus!

Response chant by St. Xavier fans to Colerain fans

Cincinnati Enquirer, 9-9-11

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Freedom depends upon freethinkers

(Please specify whether the individual is a freethinker.)

FFRF halts Social Security pro-baptism practice

The Social Security Administration, following FFRF complaints, has halted a mandatory baptism question previously asked of all applicants filing for benefits.

In 2008, FFRF received a complaint from one of its members who had applied for benefits at his local Social Security office. Even though he had produced a birth certificate as proof of age, he was next asked the following question: "Was a religious record of your birth made before you were age 5?" When he and his wife objected to answering this invasive question, they were told the application process could not continue until they answered it.

Regulation 404.715 of the Social Security Act asks for documents proving a person's age based on date of birth. The law specifies a "birth certificate or hospital birth record established be-

fore age 5" or "a religious record that shows the applicant's date of birth and was established before age 5."

Attorney James Friedman, on FFRF's behalf, wrote the SSA that FFRF "understands that, under certain circumstances, an applicant may need to rely on a religious record to prove their date of birth. It is not necessary, however, to ask that constitutionally suspect question of all applications."

FFRF sensibly asked SSA to immediately exclude the baptism question for applicants who had already provided a birth certificate.

In a May 2008 reply, SSA insisted that the question, "Was a religious record of your birth made before you were age 5?" was a "mandatory field that our employees must complete to process the application. This question is no more invasive than asking for a

birth certificate."

In a follow-up letter, Friedman pointed out, "First, it is simply not necessary to ask that question of an applicant who presents the preferred evidence of age. The question on the application concerning religious records appears to favor religious applicants over nonreligious and applicants of certain religious faiths who create such records over others who do not. Finally, the application question unnecessarily invades the privacy interests of applicants, forcing them to divulge information about their and their family's personal religious beliefs or lack of beliefs."

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert renewed FFRF's complaint this June.

On Sept. 28, 2011, an official with the Social Security Administration re-

sponded in writing:

"In light of your concerns, we agree that if an applicant has furnished an acceptable public record of birth, it is not necessary to ask whether he or she also has a religious record of age established before age 5. Therefore, we will change our policy instructions so interviewers do not ask for a religious record of age in these situations."

"It shouldn't have taken five years for the Social Security Administration to accede to FFRF's simple request," noted FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, "but we are pleased with this response. However, we would appreciate it if FFRF'ers who are applying for benefits monitor the situation. Please contact FFRF immediately if you produced a birth certificate, but are still asked whether you have baptismal records."

In Wisconsin federal court

FFRF sues over IRS 'parish exemption' allowance, Round II

The Freedom From Religion Foundation filed a federal lawsuit Sept. 13 that says if "ministers of the gospel" are accorded preferential tax benefits, then their nonbelieving directors should receive the same benefit.

The lawsuit goes after a relatively recent change in the tax code granting clergy significant tax benefits known as the "parish exemption." The lawsuit, *FFRF v. Geithner*, was filed in the Madison courtroom of U.S. Magistrate Stephen Crocker, Western District of Wisconsin. Defendants are Timothy Geithner, U.S. Treasury secretary, and Douglas Shulman, Internal Revenue Service commissioner.

Individual plaintiffs are FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor and President Emerita Anne Nicol Gaylor. All three receive part of their salaries designated for a housing allowance but don't qualify for the parish exemption as they are not "ministers of the gospel."

Barker, an ordained minister who left the ministry in his mid-30s, previously used the housing allowance to deduct such payments from his taxable income. Now, as head of a national atheist/agnostic group, he's denied those tax benefits.

FFRF seeks a declaration that the law creating the parish exemption, as administered by the IRS and the Treasury Department, violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment by providing preferential tax benefits to ministers of the gospel. FFRF asks the court to enjoin the allowance or grant of tax benefits exclusively for ministers of the gospel under 28 U.S.C. § 2201 that 26 U.S.C. §107.

The unique benefits to clergy date from 1954, when Congress amended the tax code to permit all clergy to exempt their housing costs from their incomes taxes. U.S. Rep. Peter Mack, D-Ill., author of the amendment, de-

clared:

"Certainly, in these times when we are being threatened by a godless and antireligious world movement we should correct this discrimination against certain ministers of the gospel who are carrying on such a courageous fight against this foe. Certainly this is not too much to do for these people who are caring for our spiritual welfare."

Ministers, who are paid in tax-free dollars, may deduct their mortgage interest and property tax payments. Under federal law, allowances paid to "ministers of the gospel" are not treated as taxable income. Because "ministers of the gospel" are singled out as a class to uniquely claim these benefits, the statutes convey a governmental message of endorsement and unconstitutionally favor religious employees and institutions over others.

"The income taxation of ministers of the gospel under the general rules that apply to other individuals would not interfere with the religious mission of churches or other organizations or the ministers themselves," FFRF's legal complaint maintains. The statutes are not an accommodation of religion, therefore, but a subsidy.

The §107 tax exclusion can be used by ministers for virtually all of the costs of home ownership, including down payment on a home; home mortgage payments, including both interest and principal; real estate taxes; personal property tax; fire and homeowners' liability insurance; rental payments; and cost of acquiring a home (i.e., legal fees, bank fees, title fees, etc.).

The allowance can also be used for maintaining a home. Eligible costs or expenses include: Home improvements; minor repairs; utilities; furnishings and appliances (dishwasher, TV, refrigerator, pool table, vacuum cleaner, personal computer, etc.); home

decor (rugs, curtains, plants, knick-knacks, wallpaper, paint, towels, bedding, etc.); lawn care (lawnmower, garden hose, sod, landscape tools, etc.); basic telephone services; cable TV; internet service; pest control; and miscellaneous (light bulbs, cleaning supplies, carpet cleaning, etc.).

"Preferential tax benefits provided exclusively to religious clergy violate the Establishment Clause; neutrality is required by the Establishment Clause, which means that tax benefits cannot be preferentially provided to ministers of the gospel," FFRF asserts.

FFRF points out that the IRS and Treasury must make "sensitive, fact intensive, intrusive, and subjective determinations dependent on religious criteria and inquiries, such as whether certain activities constitute 'religious worship' or 'sacerdotal functions,' whether a member of the clergy is 'duly ordained, commissioned, or licensed,' or whether a Christian college or other organization is 'under the authority of' a church or denomination; or whether a full-time cantor in the Jewish faith qualifies as a minister of the gospel. These and other determinations result in 'excessive entanglement' between church and state contrary to the Establishment Clause."

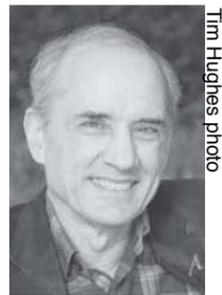
"We don't think the general public realizes the scope of this preferential treatment, how many everyday expenses may be deducted from taxable income for ministers and even retired ministers. They should know that we laypersons pay much more because individual clergy pay so much less," said Annie Laurie Gaylor.



Anne Gaylor



Annie Laurie Gaylor



Dan Barker

"And it is pure discrimination to deny atheist leaders the housing allowance privileges given to clergy as a reward for fighting 'godless foe.'"

FFRF withdrew its previous federal challenge of the parish exemption, filed in October 2009 in federal court in Sacramento, Calif. Individual plaintiffs were 21 FFRF members from California. FFRF was forced to withdraw the suit following the Supreme Court's 2011 decision voiding taxpayer standing in the *Winn v. Arizona* case.

FFRF refiled the case using plaintiffs who have been directly injured by the preferential law.

They Said What?

A Catholic law school should be a place where it is clear, though perhaps unspoken, that the here-and-now is less important, when all is said and done, than the hereafter.

Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, speech at Duquesne University Law School

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 9-25-11

I gave fear up for Lent this year.
Catholic U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., on his willingness to push ideas unpopular with the majority such as replacing Medicare with vouchers
CNN, 9-26-11

'Satan and his imps' at work in Ohio

Auditor: Church must 'render unto Caesar'

A decision by Christ Cathedral Church in Columbus, Ohio, to order removal of an FFRF "Out of the Closet" billboard is proving to be costly for the church.

Right after Columbus atheist Dylan Galos' billboard stating "I can be good without God" went up in late June, Rev. Waymon Malone Jr. said it had to go, and it was moved to a new location. The church owns the property the billboard company was leasing near its parking lot.

After finding no record the church paid property taxes for commercial use of the property, FFRF sent a letter July 7 asking Franklin County Auditor Clarence Mingo II to investigate.

A few days later, FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott got a phone call from a member of Mingo's staff. "He said that the billboard property will be taxed. It is approximately one-tenth of an acre that will be taxed at a yearly rate of \$185," said Elliott.

FFRF further inquired in an Aug. 1 letter to Mingo about the church-owned property at 407 Stelzer Road that is directly behind the billboard. It was purchased in 2006 for \$550,000 and is receiving a tax exemption. Several private businesses lease most of the building.

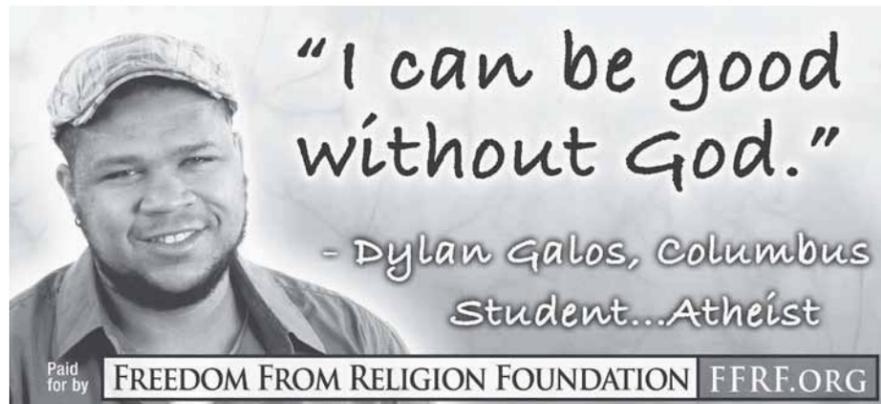
Teach & Learn Child Care, AMC Realty and AMC Transport, all with listed addresses at 407 Stelzer Road, are headed by Anthony Malone. FFRF does not know how Pastor Malone and Anthony Malone are related.

On Sept. 22, FFRF received confirmation that the property will now be fully taxed in 2011.

After assessing the property value for 2011, Mingo determined the property to be for commercial use and valued it at \$735,300. In 2010, the property was assessed at \$673,700, nearly all of it tax exempt, as it was listed as "a place of worship."

The church failed to pay about \$1,645 due for 2010 (for a small portion then considered commercial), and now owes, with penalties, \$1,900. Commercial property taxes are expected to be more than \$18,000. To date, the church has not submitted a new application for exemption and would need to provide evidence of exempt use.

"Apparently, this church doesn't heed the scriptural advice in Matthew 22:21 about 'Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's,'" noted



FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Has this church, that was so offended that a grad student could be 'good without God,' been good *with* God?"

On Aug. 5, Christ Cathedral's Facebook page warned that "Satan and his imps" were going after them. "I think they've been their own worst enemy," said Gaylor.

Pole prayer event during school stopped

FFRF sent a speedy letter of complaint Sept. 26 after Pennsylvania Nonbelievers alerted it to a See You at the Pole prayer event scheduled for Sept. 28 during school hours at East Hanover Elementary in the Northern Lebanon School District.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott's letter noted: "Public schools cannot host religious events during instruction time. While SYATP often occurs during non-school hours at schools around the country, the prayer event in question is scheduled after the start of the school day. The flier that went home with students indicates direct school endorsement. First, it relays that parents would have to opt their child out of the event. Second, it says that teachers will collect the opt-out forms from students. This is school coordination and involvement in a devotional event. It gives the clear impression to students and their families that the school promotes and endorses the prayer event. It also should be obvious that a religious event that is organized by an outside adult and that requires students to be split into participants and nonparticipants should not be taking place during the school day. We question what other ways the school is involved. It appears that teachers will be needed to escort students and that the school

day will effectively be on hold while the prayer event takes place."

An attorney for the school, Robert Frankhouser Jr., responded Sept. 27 that the time of the event would be changed to 8:40 a.m. (school starts at 8:50).

The Harrisburg Patriot-News reported Sept. 28 that Superintendent Don Bell said the flier (below, left) had gone out without his approval and that the event cannot be held during the school day.

"Local nonbelievers were very vocal about this and deserve a lot of credit," Elliott said. "We will follow up with a request for records to determine if the principal was improperly involved in planning this event."

Kentucky school agrees to abide by law

The Martin County School District in Inez, Ky., has agreed to stop pregame prayers at athletic events at Sheldon Clark High School after receiving an FFRF letter of complaint on behalf of a district resident. Not only were the prayers staff-led, they were almost always sectarian and often referenced Jesus Christ.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert noted in her Sept. 6 letter to Superintendent Mark Blackburn that the crowd was asked to join in prayer, and that school officials seemingly organized and scheduled it. "It is our understanding that SCHS Principal Robbie Fletcher delivered this pregame prayer at the home game on Aug. 26."

In a response Sept. 26, school attorney John Triplett said he had interviewed the principal. "Principal Fletcher indicated to me that his actions were a continuation of the practice he had observed as a student at Sheldon Clark High School many years ago and were taken without consultation with the board or other personnel."

The superintendent met Sept. 15 with all principals "and directed that all schools in our system adhere to the current state of the law, and any activities to the contrary should and will cease," Triplett said.

FFRF complaint ends bible distribution

Muhlenberg County Schools in Kentucky will end the distribution of bibles by Gideons International after receiving a letter of complaint from FFRF.

On Sept. 28, a group of men was allowed to enter fifth-grade classrooms at Longest Elementary School in Greenville and distribute bibles during in-

structional time. After the distribution, the Gideons instructed the students to "read and learn from the bible."

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter Sept. 29 to Superintendent R. Dale Todd on behalf of a district parent to request an immediate investigation into the distribution, informing the superintendent that "the district is placing its 'stamp of approval' on the religious messages contained in the Gideon bible."

In an Oct. 5 letter, Todd responded: "The principal was at a conference that day and not present at the school. I have instructed all schools to not allow members of the Gideons International organization to come into the school and distribute Bibles on school property."

(Go to ffrf.org/faq/state-church/ for FFRF's state/church FAQ that addresses bible handouts and many other legal issues.)

FFRF plays hardball with softball prayer

Wynnewood Public Schools in Wynnewood, Okla., stopped school-endorsed prayer before athletic events after receiving an FFRF letter of objection.

FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter Sept. 2 to Superintendent Raymond Cole on behalf of a district parent.

The prayers were recited over the public address system before home football games. "It is our further understanding that the coach of the softball team tells his team to gather in a circle to pray at home and away games. We were told that the coach is actively involved, joining hands with the team on the field for the prayers," Elliott wrote.

FFRF also has reason to believe that similar prayers involving staff occurred at other sporting events.

Elliott asked Cole to begin an immediate investigation, as "prayers at football and softball games constitute an unconstitutional government endorsement of religion."

In a Sept. 9 letter, Cole responded: "We have instructed our coaches to not lead any prayers. If the team members choose to pray, it will be initiated and led by students." Cole added that from now on, the school "will not use the P.A. system to broadcast prayer at any school-sponsored events."

Cole appeared none too happy at being forced to keep school separate from church, adding, "While you may stop us from praying over the P.A. system, your group will *not* prevent our students from praying if they choose to do so. I will make sure Wynnewood School obeys the law."

New York school board stops prayers

After receiving a complaint about sectarian prayers before Iliion [N.Y.] Central School District board meetings, FFRF Senior Staff Attorney sent letters in June and September about the "unnecessary, inappropriate and divisive" practice.

On Oct. 4, Superintendent Cosimo Tangorra called Markert to say that

SEE YOU AT THE POLE DAY! WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 28TH

See you at the pole is a global day of prayer for our schools at a designated time in front of the flag pole. This event is simply a day where students and parents can come to gather as one, standing side by side, to pray for our children, our families, our school, and our community. As a parent of an East Hanover student, I would like to invite all of our students and their families to participate on Wednesday, September 28th at 8:50am at the EAST HANOVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL FLAGPOLE to take part in this event.

If your child would like to be a part of this ten minute activity, we can't wait to see them at the pole. If this is something you would **not** like your child to participate in please sign the bottom of this paper and return to your child's teacher by TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27TH.

Thank you,
Michelle L. Smith, parent volunteer

I do **not** want my child to participate in this event _____
Parent signature

A flier sent home with students at East Hanover Township Elementary School in Lebanon County, Pa.

FFRF Victories

FFRF's letters were the catalyst for the board to vote in August to drop prayers. He said he had told the board, "Enough's enough," and that he agreed with the prayers should stop. Now, he said, meetings open only with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Markert asked the complainant to follow up to ensure that is the case.

Attending church in lieu of jail plan put on ice

FFRF sent a letter of protest Sept. 22 on behalf of a local complainant to judges in Bay Minette, Ala., about an off-the-wall proposal from Police Chief Mike Rowland to have persons convicted of misdemeanors given a choice of church or jail.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott's letter noted that Rowland is working to implement a program called "Operation ROC: Restore Our Community," which would put offenders under the supervision of pastors and require them to attend church services for one year in place of jail.

"We want to teach them that they're valuable, that God has a plan, God has a purpose. That they can be successful, that they possibly can become the person that God wants them to become," Pastor Bruce Hooks said in a Local 15 (Mobile, Ala.) news report. The report said 56 churches have already agreed to sponsor the program.

"This proposal is an egregious violation of the First Amendment. It is a bedrock principle of constitutional law that the state cannot coerce citizens to participate in religious practices," noted Elliott, adding that the U.S. Supreme Court stated in *Lee v. Weisman*, "It is beyond dispute that, at a minimum, the Constitution guarantees that government may not coerce anyone to support or participate in religion or its exercise, or otherwise act in a way which 'establishes a [state] religion or religious faith, or tends to do so.'"

The program would also violate the Alabama Constitution, the letter noted.

According to Baldwin County Now, the Bay Minette City Council voted Oct. 3 to ask the state attorney general to issue an official opinion on the program.

Mayor Jamie Tillery said it could take six months to get an opinion. Until then, she said, the city will "reserve further comment."

Georgia district will now uphold law

FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt sent a letter of complaint Aug. 29 to Superintendent Thomas Lockamy Jr. of Savannah-Chatham County Public Schools, Savannah, Ga., after a local complainant alerted FFRF about constitutional violations.

Before games, soccer team members from Savannah Arts Academy, a public school with a performing and visual arts emphasis, join hands in a circle to pray, with referees often participating. In addition, the annual soccer awards banquet is held at St. Peter's Episcopal Church. A parent who is also a pastor leads the prayer before the meal, with the principal standing beside him.

The law is clear, Schmitt wrote, "Public high school events must also

be secular to protect the freedom of conscience of all students. A public school cannot allow students and officials to join in prayer before athletic events. Nor can a public school invite a minister to deliver a prayer at awards banquets.

Lockamy responded Sept. 13 by letter and by phone Sept. 21 to give his reassurance that the district will uphold its "legal and constitutional obligations."

School admits Christian fliers out of line

FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt sent a letter of complaint Sept. 13 on behalf of a parent in the Huntington Independent School District in Huntington, Texas, to object to school officials coordinating with Salem Missionary Baptist Church to send home fliers for a Christian "youth rally" Aug. 27.

The flier asked, "Do you want God to set a fire in your soul?" The event included "Bible Study, Praise & Worship. Bible & change of clothes are only things needed!" The fliers were distributed by at least one teacher at Huntington Intermediate School, who apparently received the fliers and distribution instructions from the principal.

Superintendent Eric Wright responded Sept. 16 that "it was an oversight as our policy clearly does not allow for the distribution of materials from unassociated third parties. I appreciate your concern and will ensure that our faculty and staff follow the attached policy in the future."

FRFF puts kibosh on religious assemblies

Several buildings in the Highlands County School District in Sebring, Fla., had religious assemblies scheduled for Oct. 5 until FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt put a stop to it with a Sept. 7 letter of complaint to Superintendent Wally Cox.

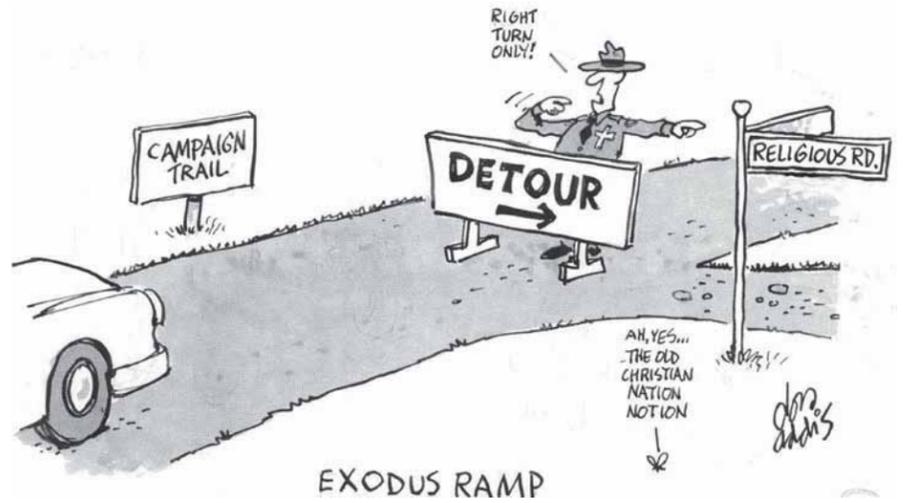
The assemblies were to be put on by Team Impact, self-described on its website as a ministry of "seasoned evangelists preach[ing] the message of salvation by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ." The website's "Reach Your Schools" page says: "With a Team Impact event, your church has the ability to impact your schools with this powerful message. Very rarely do we not couple these effective school outreaches with our local church events."

John McClure, an attorney for the school, responded Sept. 15. "Following receipt of your letter and review of the circumstances, the 'Team Impact' event scheduled for Oct. 5, 2011, has been canceled."

McClure later told Schmitt that the district has scheduled an assembly by Chad Varga that is "100% secular." It appears from looking at Varga's website (*inspirenow.com*), that his assemblies are secular, at least as they are described online.

FFRF stops Louisiana loudspeaker prayer

After a parent in the Arab City School District alerted FFRF to illegal



prayer over the stadium public address system before football games, Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt wrote a letter of complaint Sept. 15 to Superintendent John Mullins in Arab, Ala. (It's pronounced A-rab.)

While the school didn't immediately respond to FFRF, WHNT News in Huntsville reported Sept. 20 that Mullins told a reporter he was reversing the loudspeaker prayer policy he started a decade ago and substituting a moment of silence for prayer. "It's clear, what we've been doing is not in compliance with the Constitution. We're going to cease doing what we've been doing," Mullins said.

After Mullins was quoted in other media as saying he regretted having to stop prayer that many in the community wanted to continue, FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor wrote him Sept. 23 to urge him "to rise to the occasion by taking a leadership role in reeducating your community about the meaning and purpose of the Establishment Clause.

"The hysteria greeting a decision to abide by settled law is a symptom of the fact that students, parents and your community have been victims of miseducation," Gaylor wrote. "The district through its example and its unlawful

conduct have created a climate of ignorance and contempt for a precious constitutional principle that protects all citizens."

Clint Maze, school attorney, responded Sept. 23 to Schmitt's letter, saying that the board wants his official opinion on the constitutionality of letting students use the P.A. for pregame prayers. In the meantime, he said, there will be no prayer over the P.A.

Maze appeared to have his mind made up by Sept. 28, according to an Arab Tribune story. The issue, he told the paper, is not that students are being told they can't pray, but "whether or not a student can or can't lead a prayer on the public address system at an Arab High School football game."

Maze said the law is clear. "I don't have to like the law to interpret it for the school board," Maze said. "When it comes to following Supreme Court precedent, as a lawyer, I have a responsibility to advise the board in ways that will keep them out of trouble. . . . I can't advise the board to go into a lawsuit that it will lose."

He told the paper the school "must not, in my opinion, make available the forum — the P.A. system — to Christian prayer."

"There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state, as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed. Let it once enter our common schools, they would be destroyed."

— *Supreme Court of Wisconsin
Weiss v. District Board
March 18, 1890*

FFRF shores up wall of separation

Texas school welcomes Christian evangelizers

FFRF asked Northwest Independent School District Superintendent Karen Rue to stop the evangelical "Seven Project" assembly in Trophy Club, Texas, a wealthy northwest Dallas suburb. FFRF tried by letter (Oct. 6) and with a phone call to stop the assembly, which took place Oct. 12 at Byron Nelson High School. The topics included abstinence.

Seven Project is directly affiliated with the Assemblies of God National Youth Ministries, whose goal is to "win, build, and send students to the cause of Jesus Christ."

"It is clear that the group is a pervasively sectarian religious organization," said FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott, who also made an open records request for rental or honoraria or other payments to Seven Project.

"The group's stated goal is '[connecting] your community to share Jesus.' Their website also states that the project 'serves as a catalyst to mobilize and equip Christian communities to reach out to schools.' In fact, the website blatantly states that the 'Seven Project is not merely a school assembly or evening rally,' but is 'a comprehensive outreach strategy that equips and trains leaders and students in effective evangelism and discipleship,'" Elliott said.

Charles Crawford, school attorney, responded: "This is not a religious program that gives the appearance that NWISD is endorsing or promoting a religious message. Simply because a presenter at a curriculum-based program has sincerely held religious beliefs is, in the district's view, insufficient to cancel the assembly and/or bar the presenter."

The assembly takes advantage of the captive audience of impressionable students in attendance, charged FFRF. Allowing a Christian organization access to a student body gives the impermissible appearance that the school endorses the program's message.

"This arrangement is opportunistic, parasitical and unacceptable. Groups with an overt religious agenda should not be allowed access to public school students," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

The Forth Worth Star-Telegram reported Oct. 12 that Pastor Kyle Embry preached to 1,400 students at two assemblies. "The carefully scripted presentation avoided references to God, Jesus or religion," according to the reporter.

Terry McDonald, a member of FFRF and Metroplex Atheists, told the Star-Telegram that "We're not trying to get anyone to give up religion or change their beliefs. We're just against using a public forum to proselytize for the Assembly of God."

He likened presentations like Embry's to "a Trojan horse. They don't mention Jesus in the assembly, but when the Greeks left the horse, they didn't mention the soldiers inside."

FFRF contests spiritual insurance for healing

FFRF sent an Action Alert Sept. 30 warning Utah members about a proposal by Christian Scientists to the Leg-

islature's Health Systems Task Force to force insurance companies to cover "spiritual healing" (i.e., prayer).

According to a Sept. 23 Salt Lake Tribune article by columnist Paul Rolly, headlined "Be healed, thou art covered by insurance," legislators listened politely to the Christian Scientist lobbyists but were noncommittal.

"It actually might have been a tough audience for that kind of pitch," Rolly wrote, "since the majority of the committee members, like the full Legislature, are members of the LDS Church, which believes in providing lay spiritual service without charge."

Florida principal promotes prayer

FFRF sent a letter Oct. 11 on behalf of local complainants to Superintendent Ben Wortham of the Clay County School District to stop a weekly "Prayer Around the Flagpole" event at Clay Hill Elementary School, Jacksonville, Fla.

Principal Larry Davis promoted the weekly prayer in the September school newsletter: "The event takes place every Monday at 8:15 at the flagpole next to the office and is sponsored by our area Pastors." The newsletter quoted Rev. Steven Andrew saying, "Our children need God back in schools. . . . The First Amendment was for Christianity, not other religions." Davis wrote that Andrew is calling Christians nationwide to bring back the Holy Bible and Christian prayer to schools.

The program is especially concerning, given the young age of all the elementary school-aged students being solicited by their principal to attend devotions. Andrew is quoted saying, "The First Amendment says, 'Congress shall make no law. . . prohibiting the free exercise of [Christian] religion. . . .' Our Founding Fathers fought for God's unalienable rights of Christian life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Freedom comes from obeying God. Let's get active to bring back the Holy Bible and Christian prayer to schools."

Davis then claimed, "Our prayer around the flagpole gatherings are permissible because they are community led and take place outside of class time."

FFRF Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt said that despite Davis' disclaimer, "[T]he unabashed promotion of the event in the school newsletter and the repeated use of the possessive 'our' would lead any reasonable observer to infer that the event is directly sponsored by Clay Hill Elementary and the School District of Clay County. It is grossly inappropriate for principals, teachers, other public school employees, or outside adults to actively participate in or promote student-run religious organizations and activities."

The brazen and shameless historical and factual errors in the newsletter are highly concerning, Schmitt said.

"That a faculty member of an elementary school — a principal, no less — would attempt to pass such egregiously false information off as fact displays an utter lack of respect for the school environment and the education of the hundreds of children entrusted to his care," added Schmitt. "All students are equal under the law. The principal's promotion of Pastor Andrew's bigoted and ignorant re-

marks raises serious concerns about his professionalism."

School board president mixes state, church

FFRF sent a letter Sept. 14 on behalf of a local complainant to School Board President Mike Delesdernier of Jefferson Parish Public Schools, Harvey, La., regarding Delesdernier's religious references at staff meetings and in emails.

FFRF Staff Attorney, Stephanie Schmitt's letter noted

that Delesdernier reportedly referenced "God" during mandatory teacher inservices Aug. 11-12. Delesdernier also mentioned the bible at least six times during the speech and told a story about Cain and Abel.

"The meetings were required as part of teacher preparation week and your speech included several Christian references. Therefore, the meetings appear to a reasonable observer to be a district endorsement of religion, particularly Christianity. This is exactly the type of government endorsement that is prohibited by our Constitution's Establishment Clause," wrote Schmitt.

"It is grossly inappropriate for government employees to include religious references as part of an official email. It is our information and understanding that you have sent emails to Jefferson Parish faculty and staff, using your school email account, indicating that you are 'praying' for them. We further understand that references to 'God' were also communicated in these emails," noted Schmitt.

In a Sept. 20 New Orleans Times-Picayune story, Delesdernier, a Catholic, said FFRF's letter accurately summarized his comments, but said he has no plans to respond.

"Under this context, wishing somebody good luck would be a violation of church and state." In wishing someone good luck, he said, "You're invoking some supernatural, unexplained power."

He claimed his email to teachers (that he was praying for them before students took standardized tests) was only a simple statement of best wishes. He said he told the story of biblical brothers Cain and Abel at staff training sessions only to stress the idea of "my brother's keeper," that they were responsible for each other's successes.

"The reference to Cain and Abel was more a literary reference," he said.

FFRF protests Texas, Kentucky prayers

FFRF sent a letter Sept. 30 to Judge/Executive Gary Moore and Boone County commissioners in Burlington, Ky., to stop sectarian prayers "in Jesus' name" at Fiscal Court meetings.



A participant at Occupy Orlando greeted passersby on Oct. 15. The photo was taken by a Florida Life Member with the permission of the woman, who said she was happy to help grace the pages of Freethought Today.

"By hosting prayers, which inevitably show preference for Christianity, the Fiscal Court is illegally and inappropriately imposing its religious beliefs on the citizens of Boone County who attend the Fiscal Court's meetings for public business," wrote FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott.

Staff Attorney Stephanie Schmitt sent a letter Sept. 28 to follow up an earlier one to stop sectarian prayers by the Bowie County Commissioners Court in New Boston, Texas.

According to KTBS-TV in Shreveport, La., the Commissioners Court voted unanimously Sept. 26 to accept the Alliance Defense Fund's offer to represent the county on the prayer issue. "This is always a great controversy, but in Bowie County, Texas, we believe we still have a right to pray to God in the name of His son, Jesus Christ," KTBS reported Judge Sterling Lacy saying.

"Unfortunately, the information provided by ADF about legislative prayer is inaccurate, misleading and requires a thorough response," Schmitt wrote. "We understand that ADF routinely claims, 'legislative prayers — even sectarian ones — are clearly constitutional' and that in hosting sectarian prayers, 'government officials run no risk of violating the Constitution.' However, the cases analyzed by federal courts on this issue tell a different story."

FFRF's letter cited the many cases in which courts have ruled such prayer is clearly unconstitutional.

PBS series panders to Catholics

After a Colorado member contacted FFRF about the 10-part PBS series "Catholicism" that began airing in late September, freethinkers were asked to monitor the series.

Fr. Robert Barron, the Chicago priest who produced "Catholicism" and is the protagonist, has a global media ministry called "Word On Fire Catholic Ministries" with a stated mission "to evangelize the culture."

A series trailer states: "The church is going through a dark period. The church is under fire. It's under attack."

Continued on next page

Christians turn public school into worship center

Several flagrant legal violations at New Heights Middle School in Jefferson, S.C., were documented in FFRF's Sept. 19 letter of complaint to Superintendent John Williams of the Chesterfield County School District. FFRF had received reports from multiple local complainants about religious activities at the school, and the district has agreed some were illegal and will monitor them in the future.

The violations included a Sept. 1 school assembly featuring Christian Chapman, a preacher and evangelist, and Christian rap artist B-SHOC (real name Bryan Edmonds), who says on his YouTube channel that "324 students got saved" at the assembly.

FFRF Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert noted that the assembly was promoted and described as a "worship rally" on the public school's website. The video also showed:

- Volunteers being trained by Pastor David Sanders. He tells them, "When it's time for them to go to their next class, they gotta go, so you need to make sure you're very brief, what decision did you make? Have prayer with them."

- Christian Chapman telling the students, "A relationship with Jesus is what you need more importantly than anything else."

- Chapman telling teachers in the room, "You teach evolution five days a week, nine months out of the year. And let me have 30 minutes to tell them that Jesus loves them. . . . I will win."

- Students lining up and volunteers praying with them and taking further information from the students and "[made] sure [they] were plugged into a church."

Evidently, Principal Larry Stinson was aware of the questionable legality of holding a "worship rally" like this one during the school day, but he chose to schedule it anyway. He allegedly told Chapman that "I want these kids to know eternal life is real and I don't care what happens to me, they're gonna hear it today." (at 3:58 in the B-SHOC video).

"Our complainants inform us that various pamphlets, cards and other written materials were handed out to the students," Markert noted. "In particular, fake money with proselytizing language was distributed by the assembly organizers to the students." A "million-dollar bill" asks, "THE MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION: WILL YOU GO TO HEAVEN WHEN YOU DIE? HERE'S A QUICK TEST. HAVE YOU EVER TOLD A LIE, STOLEN ANYTHING, OR USED GOD'S NAME IN VAIN?"

The school's website also said "Connect with Christian Chapman and B-SHOC" and links to their religious sites.

"It is deeply troubling that Chesterfield County School District would allow this 'assembly' to take place. It is well settled that public schools may not advance or promote religion," Markert wrote. "The overtly religious and proselytizing nature of the program was explicit and known to the school's administration before the program was scheduled. In fact, precisely because it was an evangelizing event, Principal Stinson scheduled it so that his students would 'know eternal life' and devote and recommit their lives to Christ."



Christian crosses covered the grass at New Heights Middle School in Jefferson, S.C., to commemorate 9/11.

9/11 memorial crosses

FFRF's letter also noted the Christian crosses erected on the school lawn for the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. The photo was taken by a complainant Sept. 14.

"Courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools," Markert wrote, citing specific legal precedent. "No court of final resort has ever upheld the government's display of a Latin cross on public land as constitutional. The inherent religious significance of the Latin cross is undeniable and is not disguisable. No secular purpose, including memorializing a national tragedy, no matter how sincere, will detract from the overall message that the Latin cross stands for Christianity and the overall display promotes Christianity."

While it's laudable and appropriate for school officials and students to remember the victims of 9/11, it is wholly inappropriate for them to do so by erecting Christian religious symbols, Markert wrote, noting that the nearly 3,000 victims included "an international community of persons of diverse beliefs and nonbeliefs, or whose views on religion will never be known."

See You at the Pole event

A See You at the Pole prayer event on school grounds Sept. 28 should not have been promoted on the school's

website, FFRF asserted in the letter. (Apparently, the school removed it as a calendar event after receiving an email from Markert.) The announcement said, "Join us for See You At The Pole on Wednesday, September 28, at 7:30 am. We will meet at the rear entrance of the building. Everyone welcome!"

There was no indication of the actual sponsor of SYATP on the posting on the school's website. New Heights Middle School also created an "event" on the school's Facebook page for the prayer rally.

Periodic SYATP events are ostensibly "student-initiated" and "student-run," but from all appearances, it appeared the Sept. 28 event was a school-sponsored event.

"We understand that public schools cannot exclude student religious groups from meeting on school property before or after-school hours," Markert noted. "Nevertheless, it is inappropriate for teachers, other public school employees or outside adults to actively organize, participate in or promote these student-run religious organizations."

FFRF asked the district to start an immediate investigation into the circumstances surrounding the decision to allow the Sept. 1 prayer rally. "The alleged statements by Principal Stinson call into question his ability to head a secular public school. He is abusing his public office to promote his private religious agenda. Moreover, schools in your district must be instructed that

such rallies cannot be scheduled in the future, and any current plans to have Christian Chapman, B-SHOC or any other Christian group intending to missionize a captive group of young students through these 'assemblies' must be canceled immediately."

The Cheraw Chronicle reported on Oct. 12 that Superintendent Williams will not discuss Principal Stinson's role, but quoted Williams saying, "I have a personal concern with B-SHOC. He put images of children on the Internet without permission," which is strictly against board policy, Williams said. "I know had my own child been thrown out there to the world, I would have been some kind of upset."

Also on Oct. 12, David Duff, school district attorney, responded to FFRF. Regarding the 9/11 crosses display, Duff wrote, "all administrators will be instructed regarding display of religious messages or iconography in the public schools, emphasizing the point that the Latin cross is a principal symbol of Christianity around the world, and further that display of crosses on public property is considered an unconstitutional endorsement of religion and a particular religious faith."

The board and administrators take what happened at the B-SHOC assembly "very seriously. We have counseled with Mr. Stinson about such matters," Duff wrote. The district is committed to "following the dictates of the First Amendment in regard to all matters pertaining to religion in the schools. We will endeavor proactively to educate the school community about such matters and to monitor and appropriately control all related events and activities."

However, Duff noted, the district is allowing B-SHOC to put on programs at two high schools Oct. 28-29 during noninstructional time. Several churches are sponsoring the events, which Duff alleged are permitted under board policy and for which applications have been made.

FFRF has submitted open records requests for policies and lease agreements.

FFRF Complaints

Continued from previous page

That Catholic story is being told, but told by the wrong people in the wrong way. We need to tell our own story. We need to get the message out so as to draw people in."

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker commented: "It seems clear that PBS stations are putting federal funding and the donations of diverse citizens to use for the purpose of blatant Catholic missionary work."

You can contact PBS Ombudsman Michael Getler at pbs.org/ombudsman/feedback.html.

In turnabout, FFRF educates schools

FFRF sent educational memos to 396 public school superintendents in Mississippi, Louisiana and Kentucky in October to remind them that official prayer at school-sponsored events is illegal and to monitor schools for

violations.

There has been immediate cessation of school-initiated prayer in at least one school district in Mississippi.

FFRF has had several legal victories halting school prayer in recent months. Morehouse Parish Schools (La.) cancelled school-organized prayer at a graduation ceremony this spring, and FFRF letters brought an end to football game prayer at Bell County Schools (Ky.) in August and two other Kentucky school districts since then. DeSoto County Schools (Miss.) halted prayer at athletic events at the start of the fall term after receiving FFRF's request to end the illegal action. Each of these actions brought forth new complaints of state-sponsored prayer by parents and students.

After FFRF halted football prayer in several Tennessee school districts late last year and this year, it sent memos about the state of the law to 132 Tennessee superintendents.

In response to the 151 memos sent to Mississippi superintendents, North Pike High School in Pike County (Miss.) announced that prayer before football games was prohibited. Before receiving FFRF's memo, Christian prayers were routinely recited over the public address system.

ADF's 'Pulpit Freedom Sunday' challenges IRS

FFRF asked members Sept. 30 to report any abuses during the Alliance Defense Fund's "Pulpit Freedom Sunday" on Oct. 2, when the conservative evangelical law firm urged churches to defy the federal law banning political endorsements from pastors' pulpits.

ADF encouraged pastors to abuse their 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status so that they can challenge enforcement by the IRS of the law in court. While leaders of religious organizations may

Continued on page 15

Overheard

Like the Catholic Church, the Boy Scouts have been exposing children to sexual predators for decades. In the process, they've also exposed themselves to enormous financial liability.

Grier Weeks, director of PROTECT, a child abuse prevention group, commenting on suits by 35 individuals who allege molestation by Scout leaders in 11 states since 2007

Reuters, 9-13-11

I've worked with many creationists and I can honestly say that most of them are not ignorant about science. In fact, Mr. Cantor, the founder of the ministry that runs the museum, started a successful biotech company out of his garage and recently built a state-of-the-art plasma donation center. They're just delusional when it comes to creationism.

Chemist John Viggiano, San Diego New Atheists and Agnostics, organizing a "positive protest" of the Creation and Earth History Museum, Santee, Calif.

meetup.com/atheists-518, 9-7-11

I run around the stadium looking for Jews. I get a lot of them here at the hot dog stand.

David Goldis, Hollywood, Fla., accountant, on trying to get a quorum of 10 men in order to have a public prayer minyan at Florida Marlins baseball games

Miami Herald, 9-18-11

God might not be able to stop death, but it seems pretty good at getting taxes down for the clergy.

Editorial supporting FFRF's "parish exemption" lawsuit

The Spectrum (SUNY-Buffalo), 9-18-11

The still-common claim that nine out of ten Americans still believe in God is an outright falsehood. When asked if they believe in God or not, about 90 percent say yes, but when asked about whether or not they believe in God or a higher power or universal spirit, the actual God-believing theists drop to eight in ten. Two Harris polls also show that a fifth of Americans are atheistic to a greater or lesser degree.

Researcher Gregory Paul, "Atheism on the upswing in America"

Washington Post, 9-20-11

For years and years, I would prostrate myself on the floor and ask God to change me. Maybe if I just pray more, fast more, do more "works of charity," the male attraction will go away. After more than 30 years of trying to "burn" the evil out of me, I finally came out at age 54.

Ron Bates op-ed, "Growing up Catholic and gay in Minnesota"

Minneapolis Star Tribune, 8-31-11

Mixing politics and religion is like mixing manure and ice cream. It doesn't do much to the manure, but it surely does ruin the ice cream.

Quote attributed to Will Rogers in editorial by Assistant City Editor Kevin O'Hanlon, "Pray that prayer of the day doesn't stray"

Lincoln [Neb.] Journal Star, 4-1-11

According to a [Michigan State University] survey, in a scant two decades, the number of Americans "uncertain" about evolution has tripled. What's worse, roughly a third of the nation believes evolution to be "absolutely false." Only Turkey ranks lower in such basic smarts. Thanks, megachurches!

Columnist Mark Morford, "How to make a creationist weep"

San Francisco Chronicle, 9-21-11

In today's column you advised a 16-year-old to consult with a pastor about how to tell his parents he does not want to be a part of their church. Another option for him would be to contact the Freedom From Religion Foundation for help. Many members have gone through exactly what this young man is experiencing and can offer ideas other than consulting a pastor, who has a vested interest in keeping his flock together.

Carolyn Kerr, Denair, Calif., response to syndicated columnist "Ask Amy" Dickinson's advice to "Teen churchgoer finds faith faltering"

Chicago Tribune, 10-9-11

We're here to counter the majority view of the people that are here in the Values Voter Summit, which is more of an arrogant, morally presumptuous point of view where they feel that it's OK for people in a public sphere to proselytize their religious beliefs and introduce it into government.

An atheist named Jeff, helping staff an information table outside the Omni Shoreham Hotel, Washington, D.C.

New York Magazine, 10-8-11

I didn't want to talk. I was terrified of saying I was an atheist. When I spoke, I heard a gasp. I knew then that people didn't share my beliefs. It was an unwelcoming atmosphere. People belittled me and treated me like a little kid.

Jessica Ahlquist, 16, on objecting to a school board committee to a Christian prayer banner in the auditorium at Cranston [R.I.] High School West

Providence Journal, 10-11-11

That is ill-considered by any school, public or private. It should be at the cost of losing their public funding.

Lori Johnson, executive director of the Clinic Community Health Centre and the Sexuality Education Research Centre, on students at Christ the King Catholic School, which gets half of its funding from taxpayers, getting community service credits for attending abortion protests in Winnipeg, Canada

National Post, 10-12-11



NO EXIT

© Andy Singer

FFRF rewards 10 graduate/mature essayists

FFRF is pleased to announce that it has awarded cash scholarships totaling \$5,000 to 10 entrants in the Brian Bolton Graduate/Mature Student Essay Competition. The competition, for graduate students and students age 25 and older, is named for its benefactor, a Texas FFRF Lifetime Member who is a retired psychologist, humanist minister and university professor emeritus at the University of Arkansas.

This year's topic was, "Why Thomas Jefferson Got It Right! Why the Endangered 'Wall of Separation between Church and State' Must Be Defended."

The \$2,000 Brian Bolton Award went to **Hilary McKinney**, 25, a third-year law student focusing on Native American law at the University of Tulsa. Essays are reprinted starting page 11. (A few will be reprinted in future issues.)

Second place and \$1,000 went to **Matthew Mingus**, 25, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Florida.

Third place and \$500 went to **Christina Speck**, 26, a junior at Stephen F. Austin State University, Texas.

Receiving \$300 for his fourth-place essay was **Tyler Vunk**, 34, a junior at the University of New England, Maine.

Six students each received \$200 honorable mention awards:

Colin Gillen, 32, a sophomore at the University of Pittsburgh-Johnstown.

Robert Kalonian, 30, a junior at Columbia University.

Ana-Margarita López-Ospina, 36, pursuing her M.F.A. at New York University.

Alana Massey, 26, a second-year graduate student at Yale University.

Chris Redford, 29, a Ph.D. candi-

date at the University of Kansas.

Robin Spoehr, 25, pursuing her M.S. at Rush University, Chicago.

"We consider scholarships to free-thinking students as one of FFRF's most important activities," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

FFRF instituted a separate essay competition for older undergraduate students and graduate students last year, after over 30 years of offering a college competition focused at more "traditional" students. FFRF also holds an essay competition for graduating high school seniors.

FFRF thanks all the entrants for taking the time to write and offers either a school-year membership or a complimentary book to every eligible student.

"We are so grateful to Brian Bolton, a retired professor, for financing the graduate essay competition," said Dan Barker, FFRF co-president.

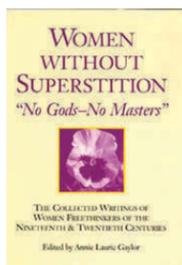
Next year's essay topics will be announced in the February issue of Freethought Today.

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First place: Brian Bolton Graduate/Mature Student Essay Competition

Divine justice and the wall



By Hilary K. McKinney

FFRF awarded Hilary \$2,000 for her first-place essay.

One of the fundamental goals of the Constitution of the United States is to protect minorities from the tyranny of the majority. “The very purpose of a Bill of Rights was to withdraw certain subjects from the vicissitudes of political controversy, to place them beyond the reach of majorities and officials and to establish them as legal principles to be applied by the courts,” wrote Justice Robert Jackson in a 1943 U.S. Supreme Court decision.

The protections inherent in the Establishment and Free Exercise Clauses are supposed to ensure that the religious and the nonreligious are treated equally. Judges and legislators are not allowed to “count heads before enforcing the First Amendment.”

But today, we find them doing just that. Certain judges and elected officials ignore the established principles that the government must not promote one religion over another or promote religion over nonreligion. We are governed by a Constitution that champions minority rights, but somehow the religious majority keeps getting their way.

One shocking example of majoritarian politics hit particularly close to home for me in November 2010. Politicians succeeded in convincing voters that it was necessary to amend our Oklahoma Constitution to prevent Islamic law from being applied in our courts. It passed with over 70% of the votes.

I’m sure we can all agree that no religious law should be judicially enforced in the U.S. But in a state where less than half of 1% of the population is Muslim, this law is much more a statement of who “belongs” in Oklahoma than one addressing a serious legal concern.

Like the Muslim population of Oklahoma, atheists know that it is a constant struggle to fight discrimination and to keep our rights from being trampled by politicians. It is not outrageous to suggest that, as the most mistrusted demographic group in America, atheists could be the next target of hateful anti-minority legislation in Oklahoma and elsewhere.

And when we are, will we encounter a judicial system that dutifully upholds the tenets of the First Amendment, or one that places more value in the archaic beliefs of the majority?

Even for judges who defend atheists’ constitutional rights, there is always a chance that no one is listening. At football games and graduation ceremonies across the country, for example, public school employees encourage student-led prayer and ostracize students who object. Judges in many courts still require addicts to attend Alcoholics Anonymous, a counseling program with faith-based components.

Suggesting that people avert their eyes from courthouse Ten Commandments monuments should not be the Supreme Court’s answer to separation of church and state. Upholding taxpayer-funded government grants for “secular” activities of tax-exempt religious institutions should not be the response to the mandates of the Establishment Clause. So why have many plaintiffs been unable to win their cases in the Supreme Court? Part of the reason is the court’s composition, including one justice in particular: Antonin G. Scalia.

Originalist sin

Since his appointment in 1986, Justice Scalia has never once written or joined an opinion that found a government authority in violation of the Establishment Clause. He has called public prayer a “unifying mechanism” that should not be discouraged because of any potential “inconvenience” to non-believers. By taking this approach, he fails to see that it is not the “inconvenience” of government-sponsored prayer that we take issue with; it is a matter of being excluded from an aspect of civic participation.

His message to nonbelievers is similar to Oklahoma’s message to Muslims.

We are made to feel like outsiders in our own courthouses.

In essence, he is saying that because we will not pray when the rest of society does, we do not belong in that part of civic life. We are made to feel like outsiders in our own courthouses, our own city council meetings, our own high school graduations.

Scalia’s answer to that assertion would most likely be that “leaving accommodation [of religion] to the political process will place at a disadvantage those religious practices that are not widely engaged in” and that this is an “unavoidable consequence of democratic government.”

That gem of democratic philosophy comes from a man who believes that the religious environment of 1791 (the year the First Amendment was adopted) should serve as a model for what can and cannot be reasonably considered constitutional. Now, more than 200 years after adoption of the Bill of Rights, we have seen our nation achieve what we consider to be great hallmarks of our democratic institutions, including the end of slavery and the establishment of universal suffrage. Would Scalia forsake all of those monumental and positive changes to maintain the ideology of an era that couldn’t fathom the invention of the telephone?

If Scalia continues to insist on consulting only those points of view held by the nation’s founders, he should at the very least remember that the tyranny of the majority was a major concern for constitutional framers like James

Madison. Scalia is not the only justice responsible for chipping away at the wall of separation, but he is the most outspoken.

His position threatens the separation of church and state, and the consequences of his viewpoint are frequently reflected in the court’s decisions. Scalia’s strict originalist interpretation of the Constitution and his unbending support of majoritarian interests are inconsistent with democratic ideals. They are not conducive to adequate governance of our diverse and dynamic society.

The Supreme Court is supposed to uphold the Constitution despite the personal political opinions of the justices. The institution is our last line of defense against political attacks and misguided legislation that serves religious interests.

When the court is unwilling to stand up for the First Amendment rights of atheists, we are in danger of losing the faith that we have placed in the U.S. judicial system.

Hilary McKinney, 25, born and raised in Denison, Texas, is a third-year law student at the University of Tulsa College of Law and a 2007 graduate from Trinity University with a bachelor’s in anthropology and Latin American studies. She spent a year volunteering with AmeriCorps on an Arizona Indian reservation. She’s president of the UT Native American Law Students Association and completed a U.S. State Department internship in Washington, D.C., working on Colombian foreign policy and human rights issues. Hilary was featured in FFRF’s “Out of the Closet” billboard campaign in Tulsa in June. Her interests include activities with the Atheist Community of Tulsa, traveling, cooking Indian food with her boyfriend and playing with their two cats.

Second place: Graduate/mature student essay

Rejecting ‘His story’ for ours

By Matthew Mingus

Matthew received a \$1,000 award from FFRF for his second-place essay.

The year was 1998. I was 12 and starting seventh grade at Dayton Christian Middle School, a nondenominational institution determined to provide children with an education saturated with evangelism and religious dogma.

My first class was social studies. History had always been one of my favorite subjects, and I was excited to make a good first impression. Mr. Tatum opened his first lecture by asking us what the word “history” meant, and my hand shot up through the air. I’m sure that I grimaced with the kind of squirmy know-it-all impatience only fellow bookworms can relate to (and that we quickly learn to suppress in high

school).

When Mr. Tatum called on me, I was confident in my response: “History is a Greek word that means ‘inquiry’ and ‘learning through investigation.’” Mr. Tatum looked at me for a second, and in a moment that has forever burned itself into my memory, curtly and rhetorically rebutted, “Sure, but what does it really mean? History really means ‘His story!’”

He went on to describe how the linear progression of our culture’s historical development had been guided by the Christian god, how the United States was an exceptional nation, a new Israel of chosen people, and that to understand the past we had to study it through the lens of a “biblical worldview.” This was a much different kind of social studies than what I was used to, having only left public school the year before. Taken aback and a bit frustrated, I became reluctant to par-

ticipate in later discussions throughout the year, preferring instead to simply read “worldly” books.

While freethinkers might interpret this anecdote as a radical anomaly only possible at a parochial school, this is not (and has never been) the case. From the execution of Socrates for (among other things) his blasphemous questioning of the gods to the Texas Board of Education’s recent obsession with Christianizing our nation’s history, educators have been under constant pressure to incorporate mainstream religion into the curriculum.

This is, perhaps, most obvious and contentious in science classrooms, where the teaching of climate change, plate tectonics and evolution have been loudly challenged. Yet science education, steeped in empirical methods and facts, has a distinct advantage over religion, forcing many religious

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leaders to reject and/or alter their ideologies in an effort to incorporate their beliefs into a freshly rediscovered natural world.

Nearly everyone today accepts that the sun is the center of our solar system, and many religious denominations work to ease the tension between science and their bibles by adopting tolerant political worldviews and by constructing pseudo-scientific doctrines such as “long-day creationism.” Indeed, the authority of science is so deeply ingrained in our culture that, rather than reject it, religions have begun to steal its terminology to justify their beliefs.

But that is not the case with history. While grounded in primary sources, archival material and records, history also depends on oral testimony, recollection and, perhaps most of all, written material. How we understand the past is driven by the historical narratives we are taught, and these narra-

tives can often be extremely difficult to demystify or disprove.

When history education in public schools emphasizes only the religious beliefs of some of our nation’s founders and fails to disclose Thomas Paine’s skepticism or the role of religion in perpetuating the Atlantic slave trade, secular teaching transforms into religious advocacy.

Politicians are well aware of this, and many are more than happy to pass legislation meant to impose contemporary Christian evangelicalism onto the pages of history textbooks. A recent North Carolina bill called for schools to display “objects of historical significance that have formed and influenced the United States’ legal or governmental system.” One example offered in the bill is the Ten Commandments. Omitted, of course, are any texts related to state-church separation, even though many of our nation’s most powerful political ideologues (such as Thomas Jefferson and Roger Williams) advocated for just such a division. In Texas, the State Board of Education chairman proclaimed that history textbooks should reflect his belief that “America was built on biblical ideas.” That insistency forced him to initially call for Thomas Jefferson to be replaced by Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin in a section devoted to great political thinkers.

Secular school battles

Such lunacy is nothing new. When public schools first began to secularize in the mid-19th century, the Religious Right responded similarly to their modern-day successors: by ostracizing those calling for freedom of thought and by attempting to infuse their already dominant beliefs more deeply

Omitted, of course, are any texts related to state-church separation.

into the political framework.

The Cincinnati public school system in 1869 decided to ban bibles, prayer and hymns. As more and more European immigrants moved to the city, many of whom had just fought in the Civil War, it became harder to label their “Romanism, Atheism and Infidelity” (as one newspaper put it) as “un-American.” Regardless, Cincinnati’s fundamentalist Protestants took the issue all the way to the Ohio Supreme Court, which decided in favor of the school board in 1872 and led the way to secularization for countless other school districts.

In fact, one of my favorite freethinkers, J.B. Stallo, was a German immigrant who served as a lawyer for the school board during its Supreme Court battle. He was also a political philosopher who, in a lecture entitled “State Creeds and Their Modern Apostles,” delivered in a local church during the Cincinnati uproar, claimed that, “Government can protect and help to maintain religion, as well as everything else which constitutes the life of the soul, only in one way: by guarding the freedom of its development. Whoever asks it to do more is seeking to convert it into an abominable engine of tyranny and oppression.”

I like to imagine it was with this in mind that Stallo made his case for a United States that “at least ought to

be, not a Christian, but a free people.” That phrase certainly wouldn’t be welcome in a Texas or North Carolina history textbook.

Religion may, indeed, be co-opting scientific language to further its own ends and force its way into science education, but it looks to recast history in its own image. The racism, misogyny — remember, it’s “His story!” — and cultural chauvinism inherent in the history of our national state was, at times, deeply tied to our nation’s adherence to religion.

To ignore that — to, in effect, only show the mixture of religion and government as positive — is willfully misleading. Educators, and especially history teachers, should certainly be discussing the role of religion in their classrooms, but to approach that topic from a “biblical worldview” is to do our past a grave disservice.

Students, teachers, and our national community would be much better off worrying less about “His story” and focusing more on our own. Only then can we truly fulfill the meaning of history — an honest and open investigation in which skepticism, critical thinking and questions are preferable to biblically mandated answers.

Matthew Mingus, 25, is a native of Catawba, Ohio, and has a B.A. in history, philosophy and political science from Ashland [Ohio] University and an M.A. in European history from the University of Florida, where he’s pursuing a Ph.D. in the same field. His primary focus is the cartographic redevelopment and occupation of post-World War II Germany. Matthew is interested in modern German history, European intellectual and cultural history, maps and the history of cartography. He lives in Gainesville, Fla., with his partner, Lindsey, and his dog, Dixie.

Third place: Graduate/mature student essay

A secular call to arms

By Christina Speck

FFRF awarded Christina \$500 for her third-place essay.

There is a dangerous and pervasive movement to make America a theocracy and to return it to the fictitious “Christian roots” from whence it supposedly came. The mythology of our forefathers crafting a Christian nation for the purpose of free worship is deeply skewed and must be dispelled.

Many people point to the founders’ religious affiliations as evidence of deep religious motivations for their actions. Others take it a step further, saying they were endowed with a “divine purpose.” As these men are no longer around to shed light on this debate, we should let their words speak for themselves.

Thomas Jefferson, the man who coined the phrase “separation between church and state,” said, “Religions are all alike — founded upon fables and mythologies.” John Adams wrote, “The divinity of Jesus is made a convenient cover for absurdity.” James Madison insisted, “In no instance have . . . the churches been guardians of the liberties of the people.”



Any concerns about context or connotation can be alleviated with the conciseness of a lesser-known axiom, “Lighthouses are more helpful than churches,” courtesy of Benjamin Franklin. Thomas Paine continues to be a thorn in Christian revisionists’ sides as well, with numerous documented accounts describing his open contempt for Christianity.

Our forefathers, in fact, realized the insidious nature of religion in government and took many measures to keep it out. It is now our job to uphold them.

To counter this increasingly popular view of America’s beginnings, one

The Constitution is what unequivocally protects us from a theocracy.

must examine the documents that are the very core of this country: the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Pledge of Allegiance. The phrase, “endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights,” in the Declaration of Independence is a favorite for the Christian heritage crowd. But Jefferson’s original words, “All men are created equal and independent. From that equal creation they derive rights inherent and inalienable,” make no mention of any creator at all. This carefully chosen wording did not make it to the final draft after congressional revisions.

In the Constitution, some references to religion are cloyer, while others are obvious safeguards against entangling church and state. One such barrier is in the First Amendment, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

While the Establishment Clause

clearly states that America indeed has no established religion, James Madison’s initial proposal of this amendment removes any remaining ambiguity: “The civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief or worship, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of conscience be in any manner, or on any pretext, infringed.”

No religious test

With regard to holding office, Article 6 states, “No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” Supposedly, this protects candidates from discrimination based on their religion, or lack thereof.

A subtler irreligious reference is found in the original presidential oath: “I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of the President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

By including “or affirm,” the Constitution includes those who are without a higher power to “swear” to. Despite all constitutionally mandated separa-

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 tion, the most prevalent American oath, the Pledge of Allegiance, openly acquiesces to service and commitment “under God.” This can in no way be interpreted as indicative of religious intentions from the author, as the phrase was added over 60 years later as propaganda to separate us from our communist (and atheist) enemies during the 1950s. Francis Bellamy’s original version reads, “I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

While the Declaration of Independence and the Pledge of Allegiance are both important, the Constitution

is what unequivocally protects us from a theocracy. But regardless of the protections in Article 6, several state laws do not allow anyone who does not acknowledge a supreme creator to be elected. The Texas Constitution, for example, says, “No religious test shall ever be required as qualification to any office, or public trust, in this State; nor shall anyone be excluded from holding office on account of his religious sentiments, provided he acknowledge the existence of a Supreme Being.”

Tennessee, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Mississippi, Maryland and Arkansas all similarly discriminate. Some state laws, such as Arkansas, even allow for the testimony

of a witness to be dismissed based on their lack of religious belief: “No person who denies the being of a God shall hold any office in the civil departments of this state, nor be competent to testify as a witness in any court.”

With a new fundamentalist movement growing in size and political strength, it is imperative we do not shirk our responsibilities as secular Americans. The wall between state and church is under attack, and it is our duty to fiercely protect it. It is our job as freethinkers, humanists and atheists to defend the real history of this country by reinforcing this separation and our rights as nonbelievers before both cease to exist.

As Thomas Paine said, “It is necessary to the happiness of man that he be mentally faithful to himself. Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what one does not believe.”

Christina Speck, 26, is an education major and psychology minor at Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, Texas. She has an associate’s degree from Tarrant County College and is pursuing a bachelor of interdisciplinary studies degree and math teaching certification for grades four through eight. Christina is a graduate of South Grand Prairie High School. Her interests include reading, writing and almost anything athletic.

Fourth place: Graduate/mature student essay

Theocracy winks at democracy

By Tyler R. Vunk

FFRF awarded Tyler \$300 for his fourth-place essay.

The common perception that 21st-century America successfully celebrates religion without infringing on the nation’s democratic process is a misconception. By continuing the infamous practice of amalgamating politics, law and religion, the U.S. has failed to maintain a healthy balance between church and state, resulting in a social climate ripe for disaster.



In the midst of a cataclysmic financial meltdown, a decade-long war and after the worst ecological disaster on record, effective leaders are needed now more than ever. Yet, more incumbents seem to be interested in the moral ethics of their party’s religious affiliation rather than in coming up with solutions to the nightmares that loom over our heads.

What is increasingly suspect is the extent to which both Democrats and Republicans pander to their spiritual constituents. In doing so, an important question is raised: Is America as religious as it appears? To answer this, one must first look at the breakdown of our population by faith.

In February 2008, the Pew Research Center released a 143-page report entitled “The U.S. Religious Landscape Survey.” It said that 16% of Americans defined themselves as unaffiliated, while roughly 75% subscribed to the Christian faith. Similarly, a 2010 Gallup Poll of 100,000 Americans reaffirmed the notion that 16% were, indeed, unaffiliated.

But any survey taken via landline telephones can hardly be called perfectly accurate. The New York Times displayed a Nielsen report in 2008 that concluded over 17% of American homes no longer have landlines, which means those people were excluded from both studies. Curiously enough, of this group of cellphone-only users, two-thirds are under age 35.

Another Pew report outlining the religious makeup of the 2011-12 U.S.

Congress show that the bulk of our legislative branch is comprised of Protestant (including many Baptists) and Catholic believers, while virtually no members claim unaffiliated status. Why is there such a bold contradiction? The answer is chilling.

The translucent truth unclothes a sordid power play: The candidate who is a nonbeliever limits his or her fan base to like-minded citizens, while the thrifty politician who applies just the correct amount of dogma will be able to obtain nods from the spiritual and unaffiliated alike. In other words, nonbelievers are forced to vote for a person who proclaims a faith whether they like it or not, so it behooves a politician to make face time with God.

With the heathen vote secure, a candidate is free to solicit in other markets by posing as a card-carrying member of a given faith. Having an “in” with a religion translates to results at the polls. One can assume that obtaining realistic demographic reports on religion will never be high on Washington’s to-do list (the Census Bureau doesn’t collect information of religious affiliation or practices). An accurate estimate of the unaffiliated population would only make the abuse of the First Amendment that much more noticeable.

Evidence of this quid pro quo relationship between religious groups and candidates is abundant. The [Lyndon] Johnson Amendment of 1954 limits interaction a nonprofit organization can have with an elected official. Orators in a house of worship are expressly forbidden to confirm their personal preference for a candidate from the pulpit, but many preachers are no longer abiding by the federal law, and reports of dissent are popping up everywhere. The Internal Revenue Service periodically investigates religious institutions for tax law violations, but penalties are rare.

As the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause continues to be challenged by the criminal acts of fundamentalists, the fragility of this law is often placed into the hands of our country’s higher courts for interpretation. Yet, can the same judges appointed by a pressured president be considered unbiased? With the nation’s highest office being won and lost over a spiritual preference, it should come as no surprise that not one nominated or confirmed Supreme Court justice, past or present, has ever admitted publicly to being a nonbeliever.

It behooves a politician to make face time with God.

The progress and security of abortion, gay marriage and stem cell research have all been undermined because of spiritual constituent appeasement. Again, the unaffiliated are easily ignored.

As long as our beliefs are used against us as a form of political control, no American can claim that they are free from persecution. We must demand that religious references be cleared from all aspects of our govern-

ment, be it in the form of a campaign speech or an incumbent’s routine address. Places of worship that violate tax codes must be punished so that their appointed shepherds keep true to both the notion of public service and the Constitution.

When religion is coveted above a healthy democracy, even the greatest of civilizations will topple under the accrued sacrifice.

Tyler Vunk, 34, Edgartown, Mass., is a third-year premed student at the University of New England, Biddeford, Maine. After completing a B.A. in music at age 21, he worked as a musician and songwriter. Tyler writes: “However, a few years ago, my love for science crept back in and so, after a lot of soul searching, I’ve decided to go to medical school to become a physician.”

Graduate/mature student essay contest

Honorable mentions

Believers infiltrate government

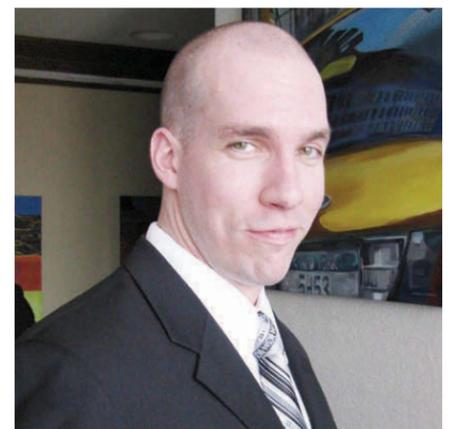
By Colin P. Gillen

FFRF awarded Colin \$200 for his essay.

Freedom is paramount in the U.S., although at times it seems more like a motivating war cry mindlessly repeated by pandering politicians rather than an actual ideal to be actively pursued. But for those of us who find ourselves denied what others take for granted, the issue of freedom couldn’t be more real.

The First Amendment’s Establishment Clause guarantees separation of church and state. But like any freedom, it must be defended by those who cherish it.

Popularized in elementary schools nationwide, the semi-mythical tale of pilgrims fleeing England on the Mayflower illustrates the wrongheadedness of the Christian Right in terms they should be able to understand. The dis-



traught worshippers fled the Church of England because it dictated what they must believe. Yet here we are, nearly 400 years later, facing the same issue from some of our political leaders.

A number of politicians are happy to let religion infiltrate government because their constituents can’t comprehend why anyone, properly introduced to the concept, would refuse to be a Christian. It appears to not matter that Christians already have a venue to espouse their beliefs in their churches. But they find themselves unsatisfied by

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that and have the gall to declare themselves oppressed.

The recent New York law legalizing gay marriage came with an opt-out “conscience clause” for clergy whose beliefs conflict with such unions. Yet, in typical hypocritical fashion, Christians are not willing to show the same respect to government institutions that are required by the Constitution to show no preference to any religion at all.

Christians wail about oppression when denied the chance to teach creationism in public schools, oblivious to the fact that non-Christians find creationism as distasteful as a Christian would find evolution in Sunday school.

The crux of the issue is power. Each generation is more secular than the previous one. Churches can feel their influence waning, so the obvious last-ditch solution is to indoctrinate young minds. Fortunately, many young minds are not so easily coerced.

Stuck in my own memory is the mockery I suffered as a fourth-grader in Oklahoma for being the only kid who admitted aloud believing that “people descended from monkeys.” It is very reassuring to see students today standing up for their right to science-based biology education, but it is a battle that must continually be waged.

We do not mean to prevent anyone from worshipping whatever god they may choose. Tolerance is the watchword of religious freedom. Most bible interpretations do not allow for tolerance or compromise, and in a multicultural nation we cannot survive without those virtues.

Christians would like to pretend that Quran-burning pastors and “God hates fags” sign-bearers are extremist outliers, but as someone who lives in a rural and very religious area, I can vouch that they are not. The xenophobic and sometimes racist sentiments are pervasive in areas where people rarely come into contact with anyone different from themselves. Atheism is synonymous with devil worship. Never mind the logical fallacy involved in thinking that.

Most disheartening is that many Christians don’t seem to care that freedom of, or from, religion is vitally important to every person on a very deep and personal level. Their perceived majority should be as unimportant to government policy as any racial or ethnic majority.

We will not allow any single, power-hungry group to jeopardize the freedom we value so dearly.

Colin Gillen, 32, was born in Skokie, Ill., and has lived in Washington, Oklahoma, Norway, Delaware, Nevada and Bedford, Pa. He’s a sophomore at the University of Pittsburgh-Johnstown and is pursuing a double major in chemistry and applied mathematics. His interests include playing golf, watching baseball, writing, cooking, drinking wine and reading Christopher Hitchens and many other authors.

Religious zealots hazardous to nation’s health

By Robert Kalonian

Robert received \$200 from FFRF for his essay.

The influence of religion on Ameri-



can politics is nothing new. From the establishment of the first colonies, Western European groups seeking religious freedom and tolerance instituted their own versions of Christianity in their respective colonies. They passed so-called “blue laws” to regulate behavior and business on Sundays, many of which are still in force. Those who failed to live up to these religious norms were severely punished. While the hypocrisy was lost on these first European-Americans, it was not so with Thomas Jefferson.

As one of the foremost authors of the Constitution, Jefferson reflected on the European experiences of absolute monarchy and constitutional monarchy. Seeking to build on the freedoms obtained during Britain’s Glorious Revolution, in which the role of Parliament was strengthened and certain individual freedoms were guaranteed, he devised the Establishment Clause creating a “wall of separation between church and state.” No longer would a nation be obliged to shift between religions as its rulers came and went.

As then-President Jefferson wrote later in a letter to the Danbury Baptist Association, “Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his god, . . . I contemplate with the sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between church and state.”

Despite attempts by Jefferson and others to keep religion out of government, its reach into public institutions and spaces remained alarmingly high. At times, it was blatant. Members of Congress stood up in the House and Senate to proclaim that such and such proposal was a violation of God’s law, citing passages from scripture. Slavery, Jim Crow laws, interracial marriage bans, prohibitions on homosexuals and even gender discrimination all have deep religious roots.

While tempered to some extent, religion still plays a key role. Same-sex marriage is banned in most states. Scientific research is hampered by onerous restrictions as a result of Christian beliefs that stem cells are actual human beings. Women die because they are refused abortions in Catholic hospitals when their own lives are in danger. Even something as banal as gays serving in the military was prohibited until being overturned this year after a grueling struggle.

It’s high time that Americans come to terms with the numerous injustices which have been committed in their names by religious zealots. By so doing, our democratic institutions can be purged of religious influences and once again serve a noble purpose.

Fortunately, with the number of religious Americans declining, the time is

ripe. Through grassroots efforts, voter education and registration, and collective lobbying, America can once again become that land of equality and opportunity which attracted so many immigrants to its shores.

Robert Kalonian, 30, was born in Yerevan, the capital of Soviet Armenia. When Robert was young, his grandfather told him the harrowing story of surviving the Armenian genocide, which started in 1915 and sparked Robert’s interest in history and politics. His family moved to Los Angeles when he was 10. After high school he worked at a governmental relations firm, volunteered at various community organizations and advocated for same-sex marriage equality. He has an A.A. degree from Santa Monica College and is pursuing a B.A. in American history at Columbia University, with an eventual goal of becoming an attorney specializing in constitutional law.

God: Out at home!



By Alana Massey

Alana received \$200 from FFRF for her essay.

The recent surge in Americans pointing to references to god in our national documents and proclaiming them as evidence of a “Christian nation” is indeed a legitimate threat to the freedom from religion. There’s also a disturbing claim by the historical revisionists that when we see or hear about “god” in any number of public contexts, that we are not hearing about “god” at all.

This non-god has been explained away as a transcendent force to revere in moments requiring solemnity. It is part of “ceremonial deism” instead of “public worship.” It is alleged to unite Americans for the grand purposes of the nation.

This non-god also requires a number of public servants to swear on books dedicated quite explicitly to named deities. It appears in nearly all state constitutions. Most notably, it is virtually unknown to the majority of the American public whose varying combinations of ignorance, apathy and faith-based hostility make them understandably believe that this non-god is exactly what his nametag says: God.

This movement poses two considerable threats to nontheists: The deceptive claim of inclusivity — alleged to be inclusive because no particular religion’s deity is being invoked by the word “god” — and the demonstrably false narrative that the word has a nonreligious meaning in our national documents.

Michael Novak claims that words like “god” in these contexts are “like pointers, which each person must define for himself. Their function is to

protect the liberty and conscience of all, by using a symbol which transcends the power of the state and any earthly power.” Catholic scholar William T. Cavanaugh says that “god” here is not a deity but a placeholder, “swept clean out of reverence for the transcendent.”

It is a testament to the total saturation of religious dogmas that the virtue of subservient humility to some invisible force (Nature, Wisdom, the Golden Rule) is so prevalent that even those without strong religious convictions are aghast when atheists refuse to submit.

In the courts, a similarly ludicrous claim that “god” is not religious has held up for nearly three decades. In *Lynch v. Donnelly*, for example, courts claimed that these words “have lost through rote repetition any significant religious content.”

Decisions to keep god in the Pledge of Allegiance and in the national motto are egregious examples of judicial doublethink. It is either meaningless because of rote repetition or imperative to solemnize national occasions, but it cannot simultaneously be both. If the word is so rote as to have lost religious significance, then its removal to eliminate a threat to the Establishment Clause is clearly a more compelling interest than avoiding the inconvenience of editing the documents.

Repetition is precisely what has given it religious meaning. Its deep saturation in the national language causes ordinary citizens to believe that it is an essential thread in the fabric of our national identity and, by extension, that those who reject god are un-American.

The truth is, god arrived in a number of these places much more recently than those defending his presence will acknowledge. It is no coincidence that the additions occurred in the 1950s, one of the most regrettably reactionary decades in American history, in reaction to the perceived threat of “godless communism.”

A lack of foresight from the authors of state constitutions and the frenzied zealotry of the Red Scare are mistakes I can forgive. But the continued denial that there was any mistake in adding “god” to a secular nation’s documents is intellectually dishonest and constitutionally unsound, particularly as the number of self-identified unbelievers grows. The courts cannot continue to claim that these objections are only unreasonable nitpicking by a whiny intelligentsia.

If we ever hope to claim that we are a country willing to do whatever it takes to let people of all religious identifications in on freedom of and from religion, then we must be willing to write god out.

Alana Massey, 26, has a bachelor’s from New York University with a history major and African studies minor. She’s in her second year of a Yale University master’s program in religion and has also started coursework in development studies at Yales. Alana writes: “Although the setting of a divinity school may seem an odd place for an atheist, I have found that studying religion amidst future religious leaders and similarly academically oriented nonbelievers to be instrumental to a robust understanding of the many dimensions of religious belief that dominate the country. My nonacademic interests include cycling, activism, exceptionally bad action movies and even worse pop music.”

[Additional honorable mention essays will run in a future issue.]

In the News

First U.S. bishop ever held liable

Bishop Robert Finn and the Catholic Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph pleaded not guilty Oct. 14 to one count of failure to report child abuse. A grand jury indicted Finn and the diocese. Prosecutors in Jackson County, Mo., alleged Finn knew in December 2010 about hundreds of photos of children on Rev. Shawn Ratigan's laptop but did not notify authorities for five months. In May 2010, a school principal warned the diocese about Ratigan's behavior with children.

The New York Times reported that it's the first time in U.S. history that a bishop has been held criminally liable for the behavior of a priest he supervised. The diocese has hired a former federal prosecutor to investigate its actions in the Ratigan case. His report concluded that diocese leaders "failed to follow their own policies and procedures."

Ratigan is charged with taking sexually explicit photographs of at least five young girls, ages 2 to 12, between 2005-11. He's also being sued by several plaintiffs and attempted to commit suicide.

Prosecutor Jean Peters Baker said the case is not religiously motivated. "This is about protecting children," she said.

Man at Mass heard voices, gouges eyeballs

Parishioners at Mass in Viareggio, Italy, watched in horror Oct. 2 as Aldo Bianchini, 46, stood up during the sermon and gouged both his eyeballs out.

The Daily Mail reported Binchinia told doctors he "heard voices" telling him to do it. He will be blind for life.

The Gospel of St. Matthew, Jesus tells his disciples, "If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."

Oregon faith-healing couple are guilty

A jury in Oregon City, Ore., found Dale and Shannon Hickman guilty Sept. 29 of second-degree manslaughter for refusing to get medical care for their newborn son. The Hickmans belong to the Followers of Christ, who believe in healing by religious faith only.

The baby, who lived nine hours, was two months premature and weighed 3 pounds, 7 ounces. A pediatric expert who testified at the 10-day trial said he had a 99.9% chance of surviving if he had been taken to a hospital.

Lavona Keith, church midwife and the baby's great-aunt, testified that "It wasn't God's will for David to live."

Asked by a prosecutor why he didn't call 9-1-1, Dale Hickman answered, "Because I was praying." About 10 minutes after he anointed David with olive oil, he died.

Polish secularists challenge church

A new political party in Poland called the Movement of Support, or Palikot Movement, got 10% of the vote Oct. 9 in the nationwide election after campaigning for liberalized abortion, voluntary religious education and legalization of gay marriage and "soft" drugs.

Millionaire businessman Janusz Palikot accused the Catholic Church of "taking sides in politics," and said religious symbols have been "used disgracefully for political struggles," according to Catholic News Service. Poland needs "defending against Catholicism, not Catholicism against Poland," Palikot said. He will try to get a cross removed from the Sejm, the lower legislative chamber.

Quran contest winners get AK-47s, cash

A radio station run by Somalia's al-Shabab Islamist group awarded weapons to children who won a Quran-reciting and general knowledge contest, the BBC reported Sept. 20. First prize in the Ramadan competition was an AK-47 rifle and the equivalent of \$700. Second prize was AK-47 and \$500. Third prize was two hand grenades and \$400.

Winners were also given religious books. It's the third year for the contest. The BBC's Mohamed Moalimu in Mogadishu says this is the third year the contest has been held.

Ohio creationist teacher's firing upheld

Knox County Common Pleas Judge Otho Eyster ruled Oct. 5 in Columbus, Ohio, that the Mount Vernon School Board was within its rights to fire science teacher John Drinkwater for religious proselytizing and advancing creationist views.

Freshwater was also accused of using a tool to burn students' arms with the image of a cross, but that allegation was not a factor in his firing.

Freshwater told The Associated Press he's "reviewing all of my options and speaking with [The] Rutherford Institute and my personal attorneys."

Meet a Member

Name: Bruce Gleason.

Where I live: Villa Park, Calif.

Where and when I was born: Long Beach, Calif., 1955.

Family: Two sisters.

Education: Long Beach State when I was younger and reading lots of secular books.

Occupation: Video producer. I produce swing dance competition DVDs around the country and do an occasional corporate job.

How I got where I am today: I've always been an agnostic and started my brush with religious dogma in my 20s, when I finally got around to reading the bible!

Where I'm headed: I'm an advocate of atheism and freethinking. I like to think of myself as if I were young, maybe 15 or so, and meeting my older "self" by accident (like in a time-travel scene from a science fiction movie). I'd have some of those worldview questions answered in minutes and probably be where Dan Barker is today!

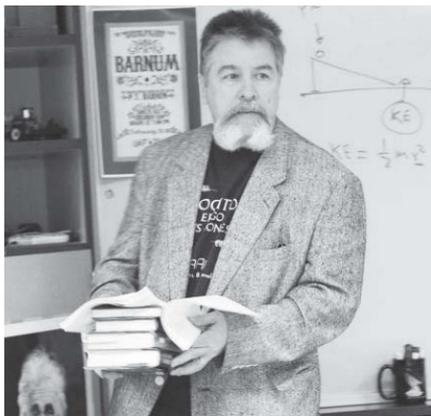
Person in history I admire: Bertrand Russell. He combined the rare attributes of comedy and mocking to a new level in his relentless attack on religion.

A quotation I like: "Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by the rulers as useful." (Seneca the Younger, born 4 B.C.E.)

Things I like: West Coast swing dancing, producing documentaries, organizing secular events, woodworking and riding my Harley like the wind.

Things I deplore: Religious leaders who influence their "flocks" with ideas that change the congregation's behavior. As most of us atheists agree, it's not the belief system one inherits but how that belief system controls the mind through unconscious means.

My doubts about religion started: It



Bruce Gleason speaks to a secular student group at Northwood High School, Irvine, Calif.

seriously became an issue after 9/11. How can people commit such a horrible atrocity by believing in an ideology? After I read how this could happen in any culture, my desire to "change the world" inspired me to start Backyard Skeptics.

Ways I promote freethought: Five years ago, after visiting many secular meetup groups in the Southern California area, I decided to start my own. I have a nice-sized patio, so I called it Backyard Skeptics. We started having meetings with a semi-formal agenda (news, book and movie reviews). Meetings now have a topic, guest speaker or the occasional open-mic night. We now have almost 500 members in Orange County.

I debated creationist evangelist Ray Comfort at the Huntington Beach pier. I was a little worried because I had never debated, but soon realized that he was actually low-hanging fruit. His arguments, sorely lacking in logic, were easy to take apart. (To see the YouTube video, search for "Ray Comfort debates Bruce the atheist.")

I started holding outreach pro-

grams about three times a year at the pier, holding signs saying "Good Without God" and "Live This Life Now — There Is No Afterlife." Now we have about 20 members with a variety of signs to attract those who also do not believe in the big sky daddy and to talk to others who are on the fence.

In September at the pier, we decided to go a bit further by tearing pages from the bible. Even some of my atheist friends warned against doing this for fear it might backfire and would probably be misrepresented in the

press. Near the end, I tore one page at random from a bible. Surprisingly, no one moaned or gasped. Maybe they were astonished at the verses they did not know were in their own holy book.

Activism is very fulfilling and enjoyable. Our purpose has shifted from monthly meetings and field trips to more activism. There's a need to educate those who might be labeled "lazy atheists," because once they know how close our country is to a theocracy, they'd probably contribute more time and energy to our cause.

FFRF Complaints

Continued from page 9

express their opinions on political matters as individuals, they are precluded from making "partisan comments in official organization publications or at official functions of the organization."

Last year, nearly 100 pastors participated. ADF bragged that "none of the participating churches have had their tax exemption revoked."

This year, ADF said, more than 475 pastors in 46 states and Puerto Rico gave sermons "that present biblical perspectives on the positions of electoral candidates."

FFRF requested a formal review by the IRS last year of a Minnesota church, but the agency has not disclosed if any action was taken.

FFRF Action Alerts keep you connected

FFRF urged members Sept. 30 to comment to government agencies on the Obama administration's proposal to require contraception coverage by insurance companies without a co-pay. Religious groups were pushing for broad exceptions to proposed new

rules on "conscience" grounds.

On Aug. 1, the Internal Revenue Service, Department of Labor and Department of Health and Human Services announced guidelines for access to preventive care. The proposal also requires that insurance providers offer services such as wellness visits, screening for gestational diabetes and HPV and other STD testing without a co-pay.

The guidelines do exempt group health plan sponsors whose primary purpose is religious indoctrination and who primarily employ and serve only members who share their beliefs. FFRF would prefer that there be no religious exemptions.

"Allowing providers to deny coverage based on a personal religious belief is unconscionable," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "It creates such nightmare scenarios as the rape victim denied emergency contraception by a Catholic hospital, or the working class family who cannot afford the often steep price of contraceptives to bear the burdensome cost of an unplanned pregnancy. The matter of whether or not to utilize family planning options is a private decision for individuals, not employers, priests or pastors."

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Kazuaki Kinoshita, 56, Nagasu, **JAP**: Inflicting bodily injury resulting in death. Kinoshita, a priest at an unnamed temple, and Atsushi Maishigi, 50, the father of a 13-year-old girl, are accused of drowning the girl during a ritual "aimed at exorcising evil spirits from her." During the "waterfall ablation," the girl was strapped to a chair while a pump poured water on her head. It's alleged she was subjected to the procedure about 100 times. *Source: Mainichi Daily News, 9-28-11*

Harry Himes, and **James "Jeb" Bryant**, Hamilton, **MT**: 6 counts of theft, fraudulent practices and conspiracy to commit the same. Himes, pastor at Big Sky Christian Center, and Bryant, pastor for an unidentified church, are accused by the Office of the Commissioner of Securities and Insurance of defrauding a man of \$150,000 in a phony investment scheme. *Source: Ravalli Republic, 9-28-11*

Rev. Anthony M. Adinolfi, 55, Kingsport, **TN**: Solicitation of statutory rape by an authority figure and solicitation of aggravated statutory rape. Adinolfi was pastor of the Church of Jesus Christ in 2010 when the alleged solicitations by text message to a 16-year-old girl occurred, the indictment said. *Source: Kingsport Times-News, 9-28-11*

Brian T. Funk, 40, Pasadena, **MD**: Allowing a minor to engage in child pornography and displaying an obscene image to a minor. Funk, who was track coach at Archbishop Spalding High School in Severn, is accused of exchanging explicit photos by cellphone with a 16-year-old female team member and dating her. The Diocese of Baltimore said the married father of 2 was fired. *Source: Baltimore Sun, 9-27-11*

Fr. Melvin dela Cuesta, Monkayo, **PHI**: Rape. Dela Cuesta is accused of raping a part-time clerk in 2006 at St. Therese of the Child Jesus Catholic Church. The alleged victim, now 26, told police it started with the priest asking her for a massage.

She submitted a 2006 medical certificate confirming she was abused and suffered genital injury. "No woman in her right mind would openly acknowledge the violation of her person and allow the examination of her private parts if she has not been raped," said a Department of Justice resolution calling for charges to be filed. *Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer, 9-26-11*

Rev. Clyde D. Myers, 63, Prattville, **AL**: 5 counts of possession of child pornography. Myers, pastor of Prattville Community Church, had numerous porn images on his computer, court records show. Jan Little, who lives near the church, expressed shock at the charges. "I know him. I just can't believe he would do something like this. There has to be some kind of mistake." *Source: Montgomery Advertiser, 9-23-11*

Fr. Jose Silva, 34, Hamilton, **ON**: Sexual assault. Silva, pastor at St. Mary's Catholic Church, is accused of assaulting an 18-year-old Toronto band member who was playing at a church festival. It allegedly occurred at Silva's residence. The youth told police Silva invited him there to look at his guitar. *Source: Hamilton Spectator, 9-23-11*

Kumara Gurukkal, 46, Vellore, **IND**: Rape and murder. Gurukkal, a Hindu priest, is charged with the acts after allegedly kidnapping a 5-year-old girl. Her body was found in a well.

"The postmortem confirmed that the girl had been raped several times and that she died of suffocation," police officer Sylendra Babu said. Another officer, Inspector G. Srinivasan, said, "Based on suspicion, we interrogated the priest and he confessed to the crime." *Source: Times of India, 9-23-11*

Gilbert Deya, Peckham, **UK**: 5 counts of child abduction. Deya, founder of Gilbert Deya Ministries and a self-styled evangelical archbishop, is accused of telling infertile women in Britain that he could deliver "miracle babies." The abductions allegedly took place in his native Kenya, where he is charged. The British government agreed to extradite him.

Women who came to Deya allegedly had to travel to backstreet clinics in Kenya to "give birth." *Source: The Guardian, 9-21-11*

David Scratchley, 52, Seattle: Attempted rape of a child in the 1st degree and communicating with a minor for immoral purposes. Scratchley, clinical manager at the Matt Talbot New Hope Recovery Center, a faith-based treatment program, is charged with sexual contact with a 10-year-old boy whose mother was connected to the program. It's overseen by Catholic Community Services of Western Washington. *Source: Seattle Times, 9-21-11*

Bishop Charles E. Brown, 58, New Orleans: Sexual battery. Brown, the jurisdictional bishop for Greater New Orleans in the Church



of God in Christ, a Pentecostal body, is accused by a 39-year-old woman of molesting her when she was between the ages of 14-16. Her affidavit said at the time of the alleged abuse, Brown was her aunt's boyfriend. *Source: Times-Picayune, 9-20-11*

Rev. Lowe B. Dongor, 35, Worcester, **MA**: Possession of child pornography, larceny of more than \$250 and larceny from a building. Dongor, a Philippines native, was removed as associate pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Parish after being charged.

He's accused of having images on his laptop of prepubescent girls in various stages of undress and of stealing small amounts of money from the parish office. *Source: Catholic Free Press, 9-19-11*

Army Sgt. Jonathan McGoech, 27, Fort Drum, **NY**: Felony attempted dissemination of indecent material to a minor and possessing a sexual performance of a child. McGoech, a chaplain assistant, is accused of arranging to have sex with 2 minor boys on Facebook. Chaplain assistants provide support for ministry teams and worship services. *Source: Syracuse Post-Standard, 9-18-11*

Rabbi Leib Glanz, Brooklyn, **NY**: Theft and conspiracy. Glanz, who oversaw Satmar Yeshivas, a \$35 million operation serving 8,000 children in 17 buildings, is accused of stealing \$220,000 in a federal Section 8 rent subsidy scam over 15 years.

Glanz was fired in 2009 as a Correction Department chaplain for arranging a lavish jailhouse bar mitzvah for a wealthy inmate. His brother, **Menashe Glanz**, is also accused of tenant fraud. *Source: AP, 9-15-11*

Rev. Roger Morgan, 50, Chickamauga, **GA**: Felony theft by conversion. Morgan, pastor at North LaFayette Baptist Church, is accused of turning a blind eye to alleged theft by his wife, Christi Morgan, 44, of at least \$165,000 from a woman for whom she was legal guardian. Roger Morgan knew his wife bought their Chickamauga home using the alleged victim's money, authorities said.

The woman's family has also filed a suit alleging that Christi Morgan won't or can't account for about \$800,000 worth of assets. *Source: Chattanooga Times Free Press, 9-15-11*

Rev. C. Jay Matthews, 58, Cleveland: 6 counts of willful failure to collect or pay over taxes. Matthews, senior pastor at Mt. Sinai Baptist Church, is charged with withholding \$90,600 in Social Security and Medicare taxes from employees without paying the money to the IRS. He also failed to report and pay the employer's share of the taxes, according to the charges. *Source: Plain Dealer, 9-13-11*

Medger Chauncey Duckens, 43, Houston: Online solicitation of a minor. Duckens was sound technician at Heavenly Star Baptist Church, where his uncle was pastor and where he met the 15-year-old alleged victim, who worked in the sound room.

The girl told police Duckens kissed and fondled her numerous times. Police have 266 text messages from 2 months last spring, including Duckens saying: "If just this 1 time I could get that butt pic w/ or w/o da thong, I could look at it all da way 2 work," and "If u promise 2 stay cool w/ me, I will teach you all about the master'n tricks of sex u don't know. It will drive the guys u want crazy." *Source: KTRK News, 9-12-11*

Bishop Oscar Perez, 68, Lake Forest, **CA**: Suspicion of committing lewd acts. Perez, a bishop in The Old Catholic Church (not affiliated with Roman Catholics), rented space at St. George's Episcopal Church in Laguna Hills, where he said Mass once a week. The alleged victim is the young son of a church member. A potential second victim is being sought. *Source: Orange County Register, 9-12-11*

Rev. Francis J. Drabiska, 60, Swissvale, **PA**: Theft. Drabiska is accused of stealing over \$143,000 from Word of God Catholic Church over 8 years. He has resigned from the parish, where he was paid \$1,400 a month.

In October 2009, auditors dropped six \$10 bills with recorded serial numbers into the collection basket after they became suspicious. Just 3 of the bills later appeared in the collection account, according to the affidavit. *Source: Pittsburgh Tribune-Review, 9-9-11*

Rev. Homer R. Clifford Sr., 64, Coatesville, **PA**: Endangering the welfare of a child, 3 counts of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, 4 counts of indecent assault, 3 counts of rape involving a child under age 13 and 4 counts of corruption of minors. Clifford, pastor at Crossroads of Faith Baptist Church, allegedly molested a girl, now 21, when she was between 5-8 years old.

Court records allege Clifford molested her 4 times in his home, twice in his attic and while he babysat the alleged victim and her 2-year-old sister at their home. *Source: West Chester Daily Local, 9-7-11*

John Langworthy, 49, Clinton, **MS**: 7 felony counts of gratification of lust. Langworthy, who has resigned as music minister at Morrison Heights Baptist Church, is accused of molesting 5 boys ages 10-13 in 1980-84.

A prosecutor said Langworthy was "involved heavily" with youth choirs then at 2 Baptist churches in Jackson. Some of the alleged abuse occurred in his college dorm room while he was babysitting the boys. *Source: Jackson Clarion-Ledger, 9-7-11*

Rev. Roland L. Smith Jr., 56, Alvarado, **TX**: 2 counts of indecency with a child. Smith, pastor at Alvarado Baptist Temple, is accused of molesting 2 females under age 17. The girls told police he touched them and made inappropriate remarks. *Source: Cleburne Times-Review, 9-6-11*

Rev. Joe Nix Ivey, 74, Walkersville, **MD**: Sex abuse of a minor, 2nd-degree sex offense and 2nd-degree assault. Ivey resigned as senior pastor at Barnesville Baptist Church after being charged. He's accused of molesting a 10-year-old girl in 2010 at his home where she was an overnight guest.

Court documents said the abuse occurred after he locked the door while they were watching a movie. Ivey told the girl what happened was between "you, me and God." Police heard him say that on a phone sting they set up.

Ivey initially denied the charge, but later admitted he abused her "a little bit." The girl told police a similar thing happened when she was 6, court documents said. *Source: WTOP News, 9-3-11*

John E. Gamboa, 38, American Canyon, **CA**: Committing lewd acts with a child under age 14, contacting a minor to engage in lewd behavior and burglary. Gamboa, youth pastor at a Solano County church, is accused of carrying on a relationship with a female, including sneaking into the girl's home.

The girl's mother found inappropriate text messages on her daughter's phone. *Source: KGO News, 9-1-11*

Joey David Chapa, 35, Mountain Home, **ID**: Commercial burglary, theft of property, theft by receiving and possession of drug paraphernalia. Chapa allegedly broke into the Brand New Church in July, where he was formerly a youth pastor. He's also accused in break-ins at an RV park and mini-storage facility. *Source: Baxter Bulletin, 8-30-11*

Pleaded / Convicted

Rev. Christine Daniel, 57, Northridge, **CA**: Guilty of 11 counts of mail and wire fraud, tax evasion and witness tampering. Daniel, an or-

'He deserves to die in prison and let God deal with him after that.' — District Attorney David McDade

ained Pentecostal minister with an M.D. from Temple University, operated Sunrise Medical Clinic in Mission Hills. She sold what prosecutors called snake oil treatments for cancer on Christian TV and at her clinic. Her trial included testimony from relatives of terminal patients who died while taking Daniel's products.

"The defendant used her victims' religion to blind them to logic, to overcome their common sense," said prosecutor Joseph Johns. Daniel also failed to report \$1.3 million of income from 2002-04. *Source: L.A. Daily News, 9-28-11*

Patrick Railsback, 60, Santa Fe, **NM**: Found guilty by a federal jury on 5 counts of receiving visual images of minors engaged in sexually explicit conduct and 2 counts of possession of child pornography. Railsback was organizer for the Cathedral Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi for 5 years.

The investigation started when AOL notified authorities about an email with an attached photo file depicting "three juvenile males . . . in a shower room fully nude with the genitalia exposed." The email under the username "daddnsons" was traced to Railsback. *Source: KOB News, 9-17-11*

Troy Grant, 42, Danbury, **CT**: Pleaded guilty to 2 counts of 2nd-degree sexual assault, 6 counts of risk of injury to a minor and 1 count each of providing liquor to a minor and attempted illegal sexual contact.

Grant, assistant youth minister at New Hope Baptist Church, former executive director at Pathways Danbury and a volunteer with several programs for at-risk teens, targeted teen boys he was counseling, prosecutors said. Some of the 9 victims lived with him. *Source: Danbury News-Times, 9-14-11*

Santos A. Rosado, 45, Bethlehem, **PA**: Pleaded guilty to 2 counts of statutory sexual assault and 1 count each of indecent assault, corrupting a minor and endangering the welfare of a child. Rosado, former pastor at Bethlehem Community Fellowship and Centro de Adoracion, admitted to sexually abusing a girl for years starting when she was 12.

The victim, now in her 30s, told police he would crawl in bed and rape her. At 18, she got pregnant and refused to have the abortion Rosado wanted. He agreed in court to give up parental rights to his 10-year-old son. *Source: Morning Call, 9-13-11*

Rev. Leslie Carter, 84, Bath, **UK**: Pleaded guilty to 9 counts of indecent assaults against 3 boys between 1957-77, when he was chaplain or teaching at Anglican schools in South Africa and the U.K.

Prosecutor Justin Bearman told the court Carter "used his position of respect, his position as an Anglican priest and a teacher to breach that trust in the most devastating way possible towards these 3 young men over an extensive period of time." *Source: BBC, 9-13-11*

Lon H. Kennard, 69, Heber City, **UT**: Pleaded guilty to 3 counts of aggravated sexual abuse of a child, each count involving a different victim. Kennard initially faced 43 counts stemming from 1995 on, about the time he was a ward bishop in the Mormon Church. The female victims are among 6 children he and his wife adopted from Ethiopia. Victims as young as 10 told police they'd been molested hundreds of times. *Source: AP, 9-9-11*

Sentenced

Eric Caverly, 37, Colorado Springs, **CO**: A minimum of 10 years' intensive supervised probation after being found guilty of sexual assault on a child by one in a position of trust. Caverly and his wife were both lay pastors at Springs Community Church, where he met the 15-year-old girl he admitted having sex with, including intercourse, "200 to 400 times" over 3 years. A plea bargain dropped similar charges stemming from allegations by another teen girl.

One victim's father, also a lay leader, told the judge Caverly manipulated his daughter by using information the father disclosed at prayer meetings about her bipolar disorder. *Source: Coloradi Springs Gazette, 9-26-11*

Rabbi Edmond Nahum, 58, Deal, **NJ**: 1 year probation after pleading guilty to operating an illegal money-remitting business. Nahum, cantor at a Deal synagogue, admitted taking money from a federal informant and passing it

to another rabbi who laundered it through a religious charity. *Source: AP, 9-26-11*

Rabbi Israel Weingarten, 61, Monsey, NY: 30 years in prison on 5 sexual assault convictions. Weingarten, who operated and taught in Satmar Hasidic Jewish schools, appealed his original sentence but received a 30-year term at resentencing.

He was convicted of taking his juvenile daughter to Israel and Belgium and molesting her there in 1997. At trial, his daughter, son and their mother testified against Weingarten. Two other daughters testified on his behalf and accused their mother of molesting their older sister. *Source: lohud.com, 9-15-11*

Rev. Joseph Mayo, 53, Roanoke, VA: 8 months in prison and 8 months of home confinement after pleading guilty to underreporting income. Mayo will be allowed to leave home only to pastor at Paradise Cathedral.

Mayo admitted getting more than \$100,000 in Social Security benefits for a back injury he said kept him from working, when in fact he was preaching and running a firm that offered services to mentally disabled people.

Prosecutors said Mayo evaded \$583,000 in taxes by not reporting business income. He drove a Rolls-Royce and lived in a home assessed at \$615,000.

Mayo's wife, Linda, testified the expensive car was merely "trying to portray an image where we could attract people to help us with our ministry." *Source: Roanoke Times, 9-12-11*

Joshua Amoroso, 22, Colorado Springs, CO: 60 days in jail and 10 years-to-life intensive supervised probation. Amoroso, youth pastor at Gateway Christian Church, admitted having a sexual relationship with a 14-year-old girl in his youth group.

Amoroso, who's married, courted the girl on Facebook and sent her 16,000 text messages over 3 months. They had sex the first time at the girl's home while her stepmother slept in another room and later at the head pastor's house while Amoroso house-sat. "You, sir, have no shame," Judge Scott Sells told Amoroso. *Source: Colorado Springs Gazette, 9-8-11*

Rev. Paul Nkansah, Akim Achiase, GHA: 20 years in prison. Nkansah, pastor at Jesus Faith Tabernacle Prayer Centre, pleaded guilty to raping a 15-year-old girl. The girl had gone to visit her mother and sister at a prayer camp, where she was raped by Nkansah, who warned her she would die if she told police. *Source: Ghana News Agency, 9-7-11*

Rev. Mark Holick, Wichita, KS: 12 months' unsupervised probation, \$300 fine and stay 1,000 feet from the Islamic Society of Wichita after being found guilty of loitering and disrupting business. Holick, pastor of Spirit One Christian Ministry, was charged with blocking access to the Islamic center by handing out bibles and refusing to move to a public sidewalk. About a dozen followers were with him.

"Wichita is confused," Holick said at sentencing. "I am not your enemy. Islam is." *Source: Wichita Eagle, 9-1-11*

Keemonta Peterson, 30, Portland, OR: 5 years' probation and undergo mental health treatment after pleading guilty to 1st-degree criminal mistreatment. Peterson said she was inspired by the biblical Old Testament to circumcise her 3-month-old son at home. She thought a doctor wouldn't do it due to her son's age. She watched "how-to" YouTube videos, but had to call 9-1-1 after the bleeding wouldn't stop. Doctors completed the procedure. The boy has recovered. *Source: The Oregonian, 9-15-11*

Lt. Col. Steven F. Michalke, Douglasville, GA: Life in prison, with a minimum of 25 years. Michalke, a U.S. Army chaplain, pleaded guilty to aggravated child molestation, incest and enticing a child for indecent purposes. The acts spanned a decade and started when the girl was 6.

"He deserves to die in prison and let God deal with him after that," said Douglas County District Attorney David McDade. "I mean, he wrote what amounted to love letters detailing what had happened and what would happen."

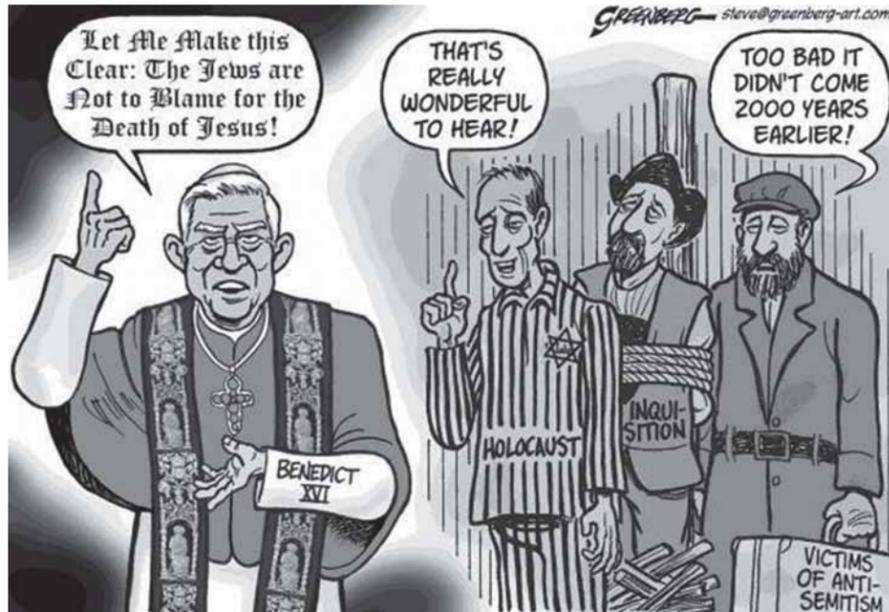
The indictment said Michalke took a child under age 16 "on her first 'date' to a secluded spot off Dorsett Shoals Road, where he engaged in sexual intercourse . . . [in a] minivan." *Source: Douglas County Sentinel, 9-2-11*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

A Missouri man alleges in a lawsuit against **Fr. Joseph Matt** and the Catholic **Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph** that Matt fathered a son with the plaintiff's wife in 2005 after she'd gone to him for counseling.

Matt, now assigned to St. Joseph the Worker Catholic Church in Independence, MO, "acknowledged the relationship and the results of a recent paternity test," the diocese said in a statement. He was suspended for a time but has returned to the parish.

The plaintiff provided a newspaper copies of DNA tests that show a 99.999% probability that Matt is the boy's father. The plaintiff said he had suggested his wife get counseling with Matt after losing her job and that Matt had baptized the couple's children. Matt still is a member of a diocesan tribunal that rules on issues like marriage annulments. *Source: Kansas City Star, 9-26-11*



A Missouri couple are suing the **Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph** and former **Msgr. Thomas J. O'Brien**, alleging their son's 1983 suicide at age 14 was due to years of O'Brien's sexual abuse in the church sacristy.

The diocese told O'Brien in 2002 he could no longer serve as a priest. Plaintiffs contend the diocese had complaints dating back to the 1970s about O'Brien, and that they didn't know their son was molested until last July when a former classmate told them he saw the abuse.

O'Brien kept the boys silent "by telling them that they would be kicked out of the Catholic Church, they would go directly to hell and their parents would disown them," the suit said. *Source: Reuters, 9-7-11*

The **Archdiocese of St. Louis**, **Archbishop Robert Carlson** and **Michael S. McGrath** are being sued by a man who alleged McGrath molested him as an altar boy in the 1970s at St. Ferdinand Catholic Parish in Florissant, MO.

McGrath, who was defrocked in 2005, has been sued at least 20 times. The suit alleges he took the plaintiff as an altar boy to a nursing home and molested him in a visitor's room while waiting to perform last rites. *Source: Post-Dispatch, 9-3-11*

Jon David Couzens Jr., 41, is suing former **Msgr. Thomas J. O'Brien**, **Brother Isaac True**, the **Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph** and **Conception Abbey**, alleging the priest and monk sexually abused him multiple times starting when he was 9.

Couzens alleges in the lawsuit that True, a relative, molested him for several months in the late 1970s, and shortly after that O'Brien sexually abused him and 3 other altar boys at Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church. One boy later committed suicide, Couzens said.

"We have all of these little boys who are burying the sins of these priests in their own guilt and shame," said Couzens at a press conference. "It's time to stop."

True was president-rector of Conception Seminary from 1973-88 and was honored last year for serving 50 years of religious life. *Source: Kansas City Star, 9-1-11*

"Jane Doe" of Canada has sued **New Tribes Mission**, a large Christian mission organization based in Sanford, FL, alleging she was sexually abused by a dorm dad and bible teacher at a New Tribes boarding school in Fanda, Senegal, where her parents were missionaries 25 years ago.

An earlier suit, filed in May by another woman, Jane Doe No. 7, alleges abuse at a New Tribes school in the Philippines. She alleges she was raped repeatedly from age 8. The suits identify the accused dorm dads, but neither is named as a defendant.

New Tribes is accused of failing to investigate allegations and of covering up abuse.

GRACE, a Christian group hired by New Tribes has reported that 2 dozen children were sexually abused by a dozen employees in Fanda in the 1980s and '90s. *Source: Orlando Sentinel, 7-29-11*

Rev. Hugh Monahan is being sued for allegedly molesting "John Doe" when Monahan was a priest at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Holden, MO, in the late 1970s. The **Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph** is also a defendant. The plaintiff alleges he told the diocese in 1979, but it took no action, resulting in abuse of 5 more victims.

Monahan is reportedly living outside the U.S. The diocese said he left the priesthood in 1989. *Source: Kansas City Star, 7-28-11*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

A jury awarded \$2.3 million to an Idaho teen and her mother in a sexual abuse case in which **Ryan VanHook**, 35, was sentenced earlier to 20 years in prison for lewd conduct and sexual abuse of a minor. VanHook, a former minister, was a dorm manager in 2009 at Project PATCH in Garden Valley, where he met the girl, then 15, and started grooming her for an eventual sexual relationship.

A jury decided the Christian-based residen-

tial program was negligent in hiring VanHook and its overall handling of the case. Plaintiffs' attorney Shelly Shannahan said PATCH didn't call a California Seventh-Day Adventist church, whose employees would have said they wouldn't recommend VanHook, a former pastor there, for a job with at-risk children. *Source: Idaho Statesman, 9-17-11*

The **Diocese of Crookston, MN**, paid \$750,000 to settle a lawsuit brought by a woman who says she was raped in 2004 as a child by a visiting priest from India.

The accused priest, **Fr. Joseph Jeyapaul**, was charged in the U.S. with 2 counts of sexual abuse after he returned to India. The victim said she reported the rape to the diocese but was ignored.

The diocese agreed to contact the Indian Diocese of Ootacamund to express concern about Jeyapaul's continued public ministry. Prosecutors are seeking to extradite him to face criminal charges. *Source: Catholic Culture, 9-7-11*

Legal Developments

An appeal by **Rabbi Shalom Rubashkin** for a new trial on a 2009 conviction on 86 fraud counts was denied by a federal appeals court. Rubashkin, 51, CEO of Agriprocessors kosher packing plant in Postville, IA, claimed the trial judge was biased against him and that his 27-year sentence was too harsh.

One of his lawyers, Guy Cook, said Rubashkin, imprisoned in his home state of New York, will appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court. "He's extremely observant of his Jewish faith and places his faith in his God." *Source: Des Moines Register, 9-16-11*

A suit against the **Legionaries of Christ** in Hartford, CT, can go forward, a Superior Court judge ruled. Jose Raul Gonzalez of Mexico claims his late father, **Rev. Marcial Maciel**, founder of the Legionaries, molested him for years and alleges the order was negligent.

Plaintiff's attorney Joel Faxon said the ruling boosts efforts to obtain documents and gain access to Vatican officials. *Source: AP, 9-7-11*

The sexual abuse trial of **Rev. Matthew A. Kidd**, 55, Muncie, IN, was rescheduled for January. Kidd, pastor at Freedom Point Apostolic Church, is accused of assaulting 3 teen brothers who were congregation members in 2002-04. He's accused of having the boys disrobe for therapeutic massages and performing what were purported to be hernia exams.

A civil suit is scheduled for July. *Source: Muncie Star Press, 9-18-11*

A New Brunswick court set a May 2012 trial date for **Albert LeBlanc**, 82, Bouctouche, NB, a former priest facing 50 counts of indecent assault and gross indecency involving 6 complainants, who were mostly between ages 7 and 11 at the time of the alleged abuse in 1964-85. LeBlanc also coached youth hockey and organized overnight trips for altar boys and young players to watch NHL games. *Source: Nova News, 8-30-11*

The Navajo Nation Supreme Court, Window Rock, AZ, reversed a lower court's dismissal of a lawsuit alleging clergy sex abuse on the reservation. A tribal member sued **Fr. Charles Cichanowicz** and the **Diocese of Gallup, NM**, in 2007, alleged the priest gave him alcohol and molested him as a teen in the mid-1980s.

The Supreme Court said the lower court erred in finding that statutory conditions to allow a late filing weren't met. Two other suits are pending in Navajo courts against Cichanowicz. *Source: AP, 9-15-11*

Allegations

Authorities continue to investigate allegations about **Philip Livingston** of Light of the World Ministries, Wauconda, IL, who has female followers touching his naked body while he touches theirs, including their genitals and his, during "light therapy," which he calls prayer sessions that can cure everything from drug addiction to yeast infections.

Livingston claims it was done only with consenting adults, but a participant testified otherwise. A Kane County judge ordered 3 children

Creep of the Month



A court sentenced 7 male members of a Mennonite community to 25-year prison sentences for raping more than 100 women and girls in Manitoba, Bolivia. They were found guilty of sneaking in victims' rooms at night and sedating them with a narcotic spray derived from belladonna and used by veterinarians. One victim was 6 months pregnant. Another was age 9. The drug supplier, from a different Mennonite colony, got 12½ years in prison. He also allegedly sold the men Viagra.

The exact number of victims isn't known. Some may fear speaking up for fear of being ostracized. Others may not recall being raped.

Prosecutor Freddy Perez said colony elders suspected foul play, followed a man one night and saw him going through a window.

Paraguay and Bolivia have about 40,000 Mennonites. Many speak only low German. *Source: BBC, 8-26-11*

be kept away from Livingston and his church. Later, a Cook County judge ordered Livingston, his wife and his top aide to stay away from a former follower who alleged child endangerment.

Testimony alleged that Livingston induced a follower's then 13- and 10-year-old daughters to take off their clothes with him in his home, and that about once a week he took the older girl into a room used for the ritual. *Source: Chicago Tribune, 9-28-11*

The **Swiss Catholic Church** released a report on sexual abuse committed by priests and pastoral workers over the past 60 years. Overall, 146 victims reported alleged abuse to Swiss dioceses in 2010. Abuse was committed by **125 priests and lay clergy**, a commission of the Swiss Bishops Conference said.

Most occurred between 1950 and 1980. Most of the victims were teen boys (25%) and adult men (23%). About 20% were children aged under 12. *Source: swissinfo.ch, 9-15-11*

Rev. Robert J. Donat, a retired Catholic priest who taught at Aquinas High School in San Bernardino, CA, for 24 years has been accused of sexually abusing at least 5 former students, officials with the Diocese of San Bernardino and an attorney for some of the alleged victims said.

The diocese sent emails and letters to 1,600 students at the school when Donat taught there between 1969-83.

At least 5 men have contacted a Newport Beach law firm about the alleged abuse. "He was at this high school for a long time," said attorney Rebecca Rhoades said. "This is just the tip of the iceberg."

Donat, who lives in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, has been stripped of all priestly duties. *Source: Riverside Press-Enterprise, 9-15-11*

Victims of sexual abuse by **Catholic clergy** lodged a complaint with the International Criminal Court in The Hague. The document accuses **Pope Benedict**, former Vatican Secretary of State **Cardinal Angelo Sodano**, current Secretary of State **Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone** and **Cardinal William Levada**, former archbishop of San Francisco, of crimes against humanity.

The 4 are accused of failing to prevent or punish perpetrators of rape and sexual violence and of "systematic and widespread" concealment of abuse. *Source: The Guardian, 9-13-11*

Removed / Resigned

Fr. Peter Muldowney, Mooncoin, IRE, was put on leave by the Diocese of Ossory during an investigation by police and the National Board for Safeguarding Children. At this time, said Bishop Séamus Freeman, "The presumption of innocence must prevail." *Source: Irish Times, 9-26-11*

Thomas Teczar, 70, serving 50 years in prison in Texas, has been defrocked by the pope, the Diocese of Fort Worth announced. Teczar was sentenced to 25 years in 2007 for molesting an 11-year-old boy, but the sentence was overturned on appeal. Jurors in 2009 re-convicted him and doubled the sentence. *Source: AP, 9-9-11*

Other

A **14-year-old male**, name withheld, is charged in Niceville, FL, with 2 counts each of indecent exposure and lewd and lascivious exhibition by someone under 18 years old against a victim under 18 years old. The police report said 4 female victims told the pastor at First United Methodist Church that the boy was masturbating at services Aug. 28. He admitted to police he'd done the same thing the previous Sunday. He said he knew it was wrong and added, "I was bored."

The church's website asks, "New here? Great! We want you to feel as welcome as possible. That's why we make it a priority to have a 'come as you are' atmosphere on our campus to make you feel at home the minute you arrive. And don't let the size of our campus intimidate you." *Source: The Smoking Gun, 9-13-11*

State/Church Bulletin

Tel Aviv judge OKs 'without religion' status

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, a Tel Aviv judge ruled Sept. 27 that Israeli author Yoram Kaniuk could register his religious status as "without religion."

"Freedom from religion is a freedom derived from the right to human dignity, which is protected by the Basic Law on Human Dignity and Freedom," wrote District Judge Gideon Ginat, said an Oct. 2 story in Haaretz.

Kaniuk, 81, asked the court in May to order the Interior Ministry to let him "be liberated from the Jewish religion" by changing his "religion" entry in the Population Registry from "Jewish" to "without religion." Kaniuk told Haaretz he was thrilled. "[T]his way I can be without religion but Jewish by nationality."

Kaniuk's petition said he had no wish to be part of a "Jewish Iran" or to belong to "what is today called the religion of Israel."

Jane Doe, ACLU sue Virginia board

The ACLU of Virginia filed suit Sept. 20 on behalf of an anonymous plaintiff against the Pittsylvania County Board of Supervisors in Danville, Va., alleging that its practice of opening meetings with Christian prayer violates the First Amendment.

The plaintiff is called "Jane Doe" in legal papers and is a county resident citizen who regularly attends board meetings. She fears retaliation based on the anger the controversy has aroused in Pittsylvania County.

Online godless pledge petition popular

A petition created Sept. 22 by "Dimitar T" on the White House's "We the People" website was titled "Edit the Pledge of Allegiance to remove the phrase 'under God.'" It got more than 13,000 votes and was the fourth most popular petition on the site on Sept. 26, reported the Christian Post. Petitions which get 5,000 votes within 30 days supposedly get the attention of White House staff. (The threshold was increased to 25,000 signatures Oct. 3.)

The petition said the pledge is government sanctioning certain religions' beliefs. Dimitar T had another petition calling for removal of "In God We Trust" from U.S. currency.

It had garnered 8,792 signatures on Sept. 26.

Create a petition at whitehouse.gov/petitions/.

Top USAF general warns proselytizers

Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Norton Schwartz sent a memo Sept. 1 telling "leaders at all levels to balance the Constitution's protection of religious freedom and the prohibition on government intrusion," the Air Force Times reported Sept. 16.

"We have seen instances where well-meaning commanders and senior non-commissioned officers appeared to advance a particular religious view among their subordinates, calling into question their impartiality and objectivity,"

said Lt. Col. Sam Highley, Schwartz's spokesman. The memo, titled "Maintaining Government Neutrality Regarding Religion," also warned against even the appearance of proselytizing.

Mikey Weinstein, founder and president of the Military Religious Freedom Foundation, called the memo a strong mandate of "constitutional religious compliance."

"While MRFF wishes that such a letter had been sent by the chief of staff of the Air Force a very long time ago, the old adage 'Better late than never' most certainly applies."

9th Circuit: Classroom not a bully pulpit

A three-judge panel of the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals ruled Sept. 13 that Poway, Calif., School District officials did not violate the constitutional rights of Westview High School math teacher Brad Johnson by ordering him to remove two large classroom banners. One had the phrases "In God We Trust," "One Nation Under God," "God Bless America" and "God Shed His Grace on Thee." The other said "All Men Are Created Equal, They Are Endowed By Their Creator."

"We consider whether a public school district infringes the First Amendment liberties of one of its teachers when it orders him not to use his public position as a pulpit from which to preach his own views on the role of God in our Nation's history to the captive students in his mathematics classroom. The answer is clear: it does not," Judge Richard Tallman wrote.

Gideons blocked students' passage

"I don't care if they're handing out \$100 bills," Webber Middle School parent Joanne Pelletier told The Coloradoan in Fort Collins, Colo., in a Sept. 14 story about Gideon bible distribution on a public sidewalk. "You shouldn't hand anything to a child. If they want to express their feelings on religion, they should hand the bibles to parents and parents can decide if they want them to have it or not."

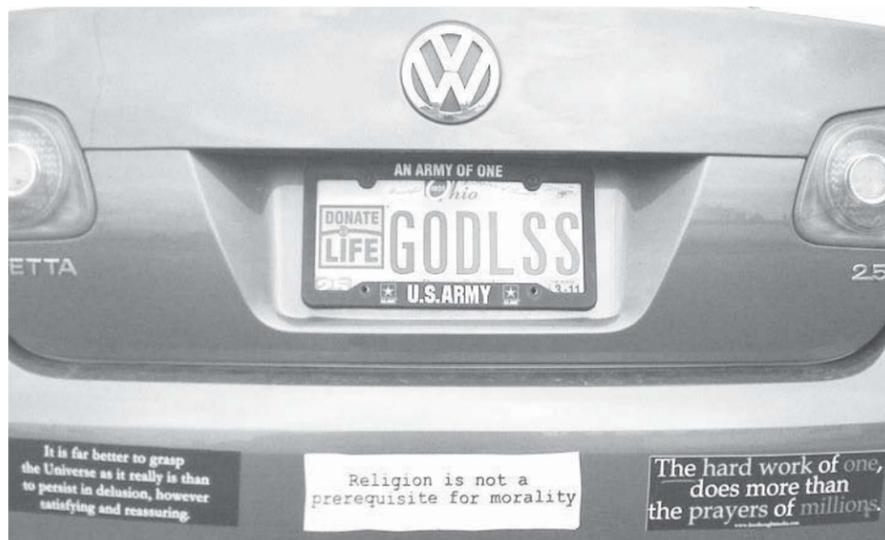
Pelletier, who said she's a Christian, said when she picked her son up from school, several Gideons were "blocking the sidewalks" and not letting students pass without being approached about taking a bible.

Principal Sandra Bickel said the men allegedly violated their training protocols by taking photos of students and putting bibles into the bicycle basket of one student who said she didn't want one. Staff stopped the men from taking photos, she said. FFRF wrote a letter of complaint.

UW-Madison must pay Catholics' legal fees

The University of Wisconsin-Madison will have to pay \$496,500 in legal costs to Badger Catholic, the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported Sept. 19. The student group first sued in 2007 over the university's refusal to fund some of the group's activities.

The 7th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled 2-1 in 2010 that UW-Madison's policy violated Badger Catholic's First



Ohio NFIDEL

Tim Rohal II, Ohio, says, "Even though I am surrounded by Christianity and came from a Catholic upbringing, I chose the stickers to make clear my thoughts on all religions."

Amendment rights. The U.S. Supreme Court declined to hear UW-Madison's appeal.

Student government officials approved a \$253,000 appropriation in 2007, but the school rejected \$35,000 of that because it was earmarked for religious worship activities.

Badger Catholic filed suit, saying the denial violated its First Amendment rights. The school argued that funding a group that runs evangelical training camps and spiritual retreats illegally endorses religion.

Perth students freed from Lord's Prayer

Edgewater Primary School in Perth, Australia, stopped public school students from regularly reciting the Lord's Prayer after complaints from parents. The school had allowed it for 25 years, The Age reported Sept. 21.

Principal Julie Tombs said the school has students from a range of backgrounds, "and it is important to consider all views and not promote one set of religious beliefs and practices over another."

Officials said the school was deluged with hate mail and phone calls after the decision.

Kazakhstan getting tough on religion

Kazakhstan's Senate in Astana, following similar action in the lower legislative house, approved a bill Sept. 29 banning prayer rooms in state buildings, Reuters reported. President Nursultan Nazarbayev reportedly favors the bill.

Kazakhstan, which is 70% Muslim, has started to experience violence from militant Islamists. The law also requires review of all religious literature and mandatory annual registration of all foreign missionaries.

Hilton Head says no to staff prayer

You can't yell prayer in this fire station, crowded or not.

Hilton Head Island, S.C., Fire & Rescue Division's senior staff stopped opening monthly officer meetings with prayer, a tradition started after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

Staff attorney Brian Hulbert, who asked for an opinion, said the prayers are not protected by the First Amendment, The Island Packet reported Sept. 28. "Historically, the Supreme Court has said it's OK to have an open-

ing prayer before a legislative session, but that doesn't extend to everything — for example, a workplace meeting."

Hulbert said it's inappropriate because employees might feel obligated to participate. "The problem becomes, if your boss is leading and participating in the prayer, will you feel comfortable doing that or feel pressured to participate?" he said. "The practice had to stop."

Resolution barring church use loses 3-2

The Bernalillo County [N.M.] Commission voted 3-2 on Sept. 27 to defeat a resolution prohibiting use of churches for county employee ceremonies, with some exceptions, the Albuquerque Journal reported.

The proposal came after a Sheriff's Office decision to hold a cadet graduation at Legacy Church, where Sheriff Dan Houston is a member.

Commission Chairwoman Maggie Hart Stebbins objected to forcing employees to attend a mandatory event at a church. They might be afraid to complain, she said, and everyone's religious beliefs should be respected.

"This is not an attack on religion," Stebbins said. "I'm not anti-church. I'm not anti-God."

The proposal would have required "all public ceremonies involving county employees be held in public facilities" unless one wasn't available.

Commissioner Michael Wiener said the ACLU, which backed the resolution, "can go to hell."

6 of 9 justices attend Catholic Red Mass

Six U.S. Supreme Court justices were among the members of the legal profession who attended the annual Catholic Red Mass on Oct. 2 at the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington, D.C. Chief Justice John Roberts joined associate justices Antonin Scalia, Anthony Kennedy, Clarence Thomas, Stephen Breyer and Samuel Alito for the service. All are Catholic except Breyer, who is Jewish. Justice Sonia Sotomayer, the other Catholic, didn't attend, nor did Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

The Red Mass is so named because of the color of the garments worn by clergy. When it started in 1953, the court had no Catholics.

Attendees included Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood and White House Chief of Staff William Daley.

Sharing the Crank Mail

A small sampling of FFRF's recent fan mail, spelling and punctuation left intact, from people who really don't get the concept of tyranny of the majority.

Great job

Mr. Dan Barker, I truly hope you get extremely painful rectal cancer and SLOWLY die while your family and friends watch helplessly. And Ms. Katie Daniel, weren't you in the low budget movie "godless whores" with Ron Jeremy? Have a nice weekend. — *Justin Case, Chapel Hill, N.C.*

Other religions

So I was wondering if the Christian religion is the only one you guys attack? If yes, why do you only attack the Christians? Is it because that we believe in God and not another god out there? Is it because you choose to only attack Christian organizations and not other organizations that do not believe in "God" but have their own god to worship?

I look forward to hearing from your organization. Sincerely and open minded (not like you people) — *Fred Jones, skull_corps@yahoo.com*

Send sample issue

America is a Christian country founded on those principles and you are liberals who are helping to destroy it. Anybody who feels threatened by a cross or nativity display or 10 commandments on display at a court house is a very weak and insecure person. Nowhere does the constitution prevent this. In short, you are a bunch of assholes! — *Mike Kellar, Buckhannon, WV*

Remove Cross in Tennessee

I have never in my fifty years heard the cross described as an 'insult to humanity' and cannot imagine 'many residents' of Whiteville or any other town in the United States feeling thusly. I'm appalled there is an American such as Mr. Barker making a nuisance of himself in this way. It would seem he actually is a terrorist of sorts and needs reminding that it is more truly patriotic to be religious as our county was founded by God fearing, faithful men. The best way Mr. Barker can help his country is to leave it altogether. Bless his sorry soul. — *Lisa Smith*

Remove Cross in Tennessee

godless heathens. and you think you can ram it down everyone else's throats. how did we learn about FFRF the was a pile of dog shit on the sidewalk and it looked and smelled like FFRF. — *Chance Salem, Ariz.*

Cross on water tower

You pathetic mother fuckers! You challenge Christians everywhere and hate their religion because you people are immoral scum! I hope you piece of shit die a fucking horrible death as well as your families and together you can burn in hell. Fuck you! — *Dwight Weatherford*

I'M OUTRAGED

LEAVE THE POOR FOLKS OF TENNESSEE ALONE! YOU PEOPLE ARE WORSE THAN BATTERY ACID ON THE FABRIC OF OUR NATION!!!! — *Jeff Tilley, Owensboro, Ky.*

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION ???

HOW DO YOU THINK YOU GOT TO THIS POSITION OF BEING ABLE TO VOICE YOUR THOUGHTS ??? AMERICA, IN CASE YOU FORGOT GAVE UP MILLIONS OF LIVES IN WORLD WAR 1/2 TO AVOID BEING HELD CAPTIVE IN A FREELESS NAZI OR JAPANESE SOCIETY BACK THEN !!! — *WALLY BERESFORD*

Fuck you people

What the fuck is wrong with you people? At what point did you begin to believe that freedom is the express right of you nut job atheists? Personally, I think you're all fucked in the head, but whatever, that's your (however misguided) right. Now back the fuck up off the rest of our rights. Or prepare yourselves for a fight you will not ever win. Fuck you all, see you in hell. — *Mrs. Jones*

Go Fuck Yourself

Oh, did I mention, go fuck yourself? — *Doug Seiber, 100 Up Your Assway, Dickweed, KY*

Hypocrites

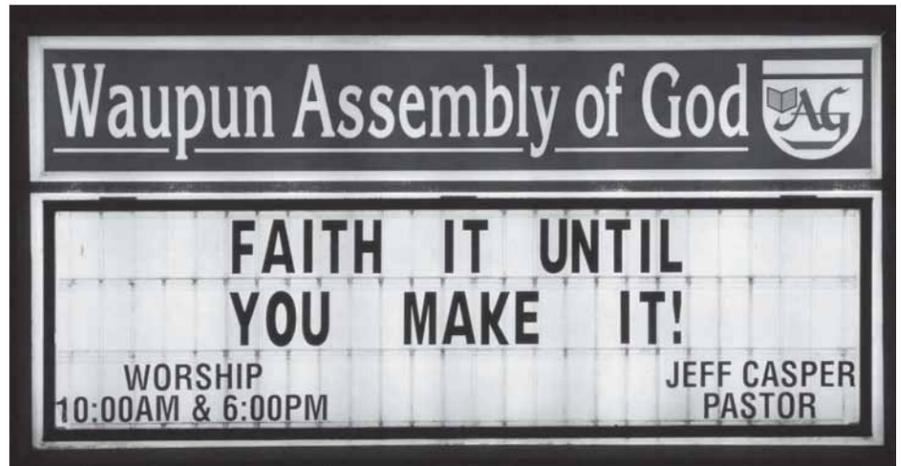
You people are such fucking hypocrites. Fight a cross on a water tower but you don't give a flying fuck about a Mexican pile of dog poop (snake god) at a St James park in San Jose. You don't give a shit about freedom of religion, all you want to do is silence Christians. Give me a fucking break. — *San Jose Resident*

masses offered

Hello Friends, I will be offering Catholic masses for you folks. Expect conversions to Jesus. — *Robert Kroll*

terrorists

You people are terrorists. Fuck yourselves, seriously. Stop infringing on religious liberty with your atheist death cult. Fuck off you fucking mother fuckers. Seriously, fuck off and go away. — *d b*



Believing what you know ain't so

Steve Biever, Wisconsin, writes: "I wonder if the irony of the new word occurred to them? Probably not."



Not so all-knowing?

Richard Valcourt, North Carolina, took this photo in Raleigh. "What I want to know is, how can you surprise someone who knows everything? I guess omniscience isn't what it used to be. Perhaps even god would be surprised (pleasantly) if they learned how to spell."

you need prayer

Do you know anything about history? The life and death of Jesus Christ had 10,000 witnesses. He is the reason you exist, he is the giver of life. Oh, you must think you "evolved" from a monkey? Well, here is a newflash for you, if we came from monkeys why are there still monkeys? — *John Thompson*

your a bunch of fucking assholes

I should start an opposition site called Freedom for assholes,,, because that is what you are a binch of assholes. I will pray that god removes his grace from you and that you are sent directly to hell when you die, never mind that for you are already dead... What a bunch of fuck-nig monron, pussies, and stupid sons-of-bitches — *Fuck Your, assholeville, CA*

Stupidity

I am a 59 year old male and I live right here in Wisconsin. I just want you people to know that you don't represent me and alot of other people that I know also right here in Wisconsin. We pray for everyone that represents satan and especially here in Wisconsin. I am also a life long non smoker, non drinker, non illegal drug user and I do not gamble and life is anything but boring to me. — *Gary Dunst, Gordon, WI*

symbols

If you are so interested in FREEDOM FROM RELIGION maybe you can do something ABOUT the jew symbols on a lot of food products KOSHER etc. They are religious symbols and I DO NOT LIKE IT. My seventh grade daughter brought this information to me and she obtained it from a PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER. I love the CROSS in WHITEVILLE Tennessee. Today there will be one on this house along with a SWASTIKA. — *Eric-Gunther Oberhauser, Bolivar, TN*

Va case (10 commandments)

Hey Dan, I only PRAY that you and your God haters go down the toilet with the new government after the next election, we've had enough of you socialist America haters. I only wish you would consider residence in France. Drop dead you communist. — *Bill Nevin*

Arab Alabama

YOU PEOPLE AT THE FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION SHOULD BE DRAWN AND QUARTERED. — *JEFF TILLEY*



In case tractors have souls

Rich Lane, Kentucky, writes: "I took a picture of the following stupidity in August 2010, prior to joining FFRF." The church is in Newport, Ohio.

Your billboards & more

As far as the people whose faces and words appear on your bill boards, old common sense says you are not using your money as effectively as you could be. OR, do you really think companies would spend all kinds of money paying to have celebrities touting their product if average joes doing the same achieved the same results? — *Neil Reinhardt*

question

If someone were to tie you to a tree during a thunderstorm or tornado- who would you pray to? — *Mike Powers*

Desoto county

Why don't you stop the schools from teaching Darwin theory, it offends me, now I complained a out that, what are you going to do about it? Can't sue God, I agree with Mr kurkendall and we stand behind him. stop med ing in a town you don't know about. — *Laura Jenkins*

Bastards

You sick son of bitches need to mind your own business and stop trying to prevent citizens of this great country to pray no matter where they are. You have every right to not join in, but for a few agnostic bastards to use the law to prevent a prayer before a football is sick and twisted. I'd love to have just a few moments with your leaders. You would be in the need of prayers. Sick bastards. — *Tommy Belcher, Pineville, Ky*

Religion

If you people want to remover prayer from schools do one better if it is all about so called religion and have them freaking Indians remove their dots from between their eyes because that offends me, and make the jewish eat pork. I may not agree with what some people or religions do but I don't try to stop them, I just don't participate. — *Sara Biffle, Courtland, MS*

Who do you think you are??

I've got some pretty far out beliefs, but I don't push them on anyone. Who the fuck do you assholes think you are by bothering anybody that sees things different from your backward ass goat raping ways of thinking??? Suck my dick, you chicken fucking homo's who can't mind your own goddamn business!! — *Sal P*

Your belief systems

Your attacks on believers who wish to practice their beliefs are wrong and will result in your not being allowed in Heaven on that fateful day of your demise. It's very good that you feel that you can be good without religion, but if you don't have a higher being to believe in where will you end up when you die? — *Frank Fescue*

State/Church Bulletin

Tax Court extends parsonage allowance

The Wall Street Journal explored the ramifications in an Aug. 23 story of a 7-6 ruling in March by the U.S. Tax Court that lets clergy members buy or live in multiple homes tax-free.

The court ruled that Phil Driscoll, an ordained minister and Grammy Award-winning trumpeter in prison for tax evasion, didn't owe federal income taxes on \$408,638 provided to him by his ministry to buy a second home near Cleveland, Tenn.

The ruling extends the so-called "parsonage allowance" to an unlimited number of homes, which may be owned by the religious organization or the clergy member.

The panel ruled that the word "home" is equivalent to "homes," just as "child" is interpreted to mean "children" in the tax code.

Before the decision, most tax experts believed the allowance only applied to one home, said Ellen Aprill, a professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles.

In January, a U.S. Senate committee released a report that showed Kenneth and Gloria Copeland of Kenneth Copeland Ministries in Fort Worth, Texas,

live in an 18,280 square-foot parsonage valued at \$6.2 million in 2008. Taxes were \$0.

Illinois moment of silence stands

The U.S. Supreme Court declined on Oct. 3 to hear a challenge to a 2007 Illinois law requiring a daily period of silent prayer or reflection. A federal appeals court upheld it 2-1.

The court also turned down a Ohio state-church case. Richland County Common Pleas Judge James DeWeese put a poster in his courtroom that listed the Ten Commandments as part of a "Philosophies of Law in Conflict" display including personal commentary like "I join the Founders in personally acknowledging the importance of Almighty God's fixed moral standards for restoring the moral fabric of this nation."

Lower courts ruled DeWeese's display was illegal.

The appeals court said in light of DeWeese's 2000 Ten Commandments poster that was ordered removed by courts, "the history of [the judge's] actions demonstrates that any purported secular purpose is a sham."



Letterbox

'Pastor' Perry's prayer gets sparse praise

Thank you so very much for bringing a lawsuit against Gov. Rick Perry's prayer event.

Your newspaper is the highlight of my week. I read it cover to cover and back again! I am *so* glad I joined FFRF. It makes me feel "not so alone."

Revealing my atheism to my family has meant that I am no longer included in sharing Christmas holidays with my grandchildren, and that is tough to take. But I watch Richard Dawkins' tape, and it makes my day a whole lot better!

Thanks for being there.

Jeanne Owers
Texas

...

If Gov. Rick Perry needs proof of the futility of prayer, he need only look to his fellow Texans. Despite incessant and fervent prayer, the drought in his state continues without letup — almost in defiance of prayer.

When the rain finally comes, of course, he'll proclaim that prayer was the answer. Such is the human capacity for self-delusion!

Peter Haverhals
New Hampshire

...

When I was young and foolish I lived for a time in Texas. That's where there are more rivers and less water, more cows and less milk, and you can look farther and see less than anyplace in the world.

Read Gov. Perry's scary words. Anyone who can fill a stadium to pray for rain is really *preying* on the ignorant!

Del Roy
Oregon

...

Texas governor and presidential hopeful Rick Perry prayed for rain. Instead, the state got wildfires. Up and down the East Coast, people were praying for the rain and storms to stop. That didn't work either.

Has it dawned on these people that praying just doesn't work, despite the connections way up high Perry and the like claim to cultivate and enjoy? Do they really believe what they preach, or is it just a ploy to fool the gullible?

That part seems to work, though.

Jorg Aadahl
California

Billboard is antidote for religion overdose

Thank you for the wonderful "Imagine No Religion" sign that I spotted today here in Terre Haute, Ind., off U.S. 41.

Terre Haute is *so* overdosed with religion. Thanks again!

Rob Everhart
Indiana

It's time to end parsonage allowance

It's way past time for someone to question the tax benefits of the clergy and their properties. Things are different now than they were when small churches provided shelter and food to travelers and whomever.

The megachurches with their social clubs and meeting rooms and entertainers and acre-size asphalt parking lots, with police directing traffic (mak-

ing those going about their business on Sunday morning wait in their idling cars, wasting gas and time while the "faithful" pour out of the parking lots), have got to start paying their fair share, for pastors and the facilities.

Go get 'em!

Sue Schuetz
Wisconsin

Kudos to Barker for Indiana debate

I want to thank Dan Barker for making the trip down to Zionsville, Ind., for the debate. As usual, he was great! I really enjoyed meeting him and shaking his hand afterward. He and Annie Laurie Gaylor give me a lot of inspiration.

Greg Dye
Indiana

...

Dan was in top form at the debate in Zionsville, Ind. I know he was disappointed he didn't get to really take on the rabbi the way he wanted to, but boy, did he ruffle his feathers. I hope they taped the event because you could often see his opponents squirm.

Keep up the great work, Dan. You were, and are, great.

Andrew Hubbard
Indiana

Sept. 11 prayer was far from presidential

I, too, was terribly disappointed with President Obama's words [reciting all of Psalm 46 on Sept. 11 in New York City]. I tell myself that it was an entirely political maneuver. Not only did prayers fail to protect us on 9/11, the perpetrators were acting in the name of God, doing God's work!

Keep up *your* good work.

Steve Kern
Indianapolis

Young essay writers inspire sexagenarian

Reading the winning student essay contest entries in August was inspirational. I was much impressed that these people had the courage, some even before reaching their teens, to break away from religious indoctrination. My commendations to all. As long as we have young people like them, all is not lost.

I hate to admit how long it took me to do what they did — 60 years. But at least I did it, and that beats some people I know.

Jerry Brown
California

Essayists appreciate the ink and cash

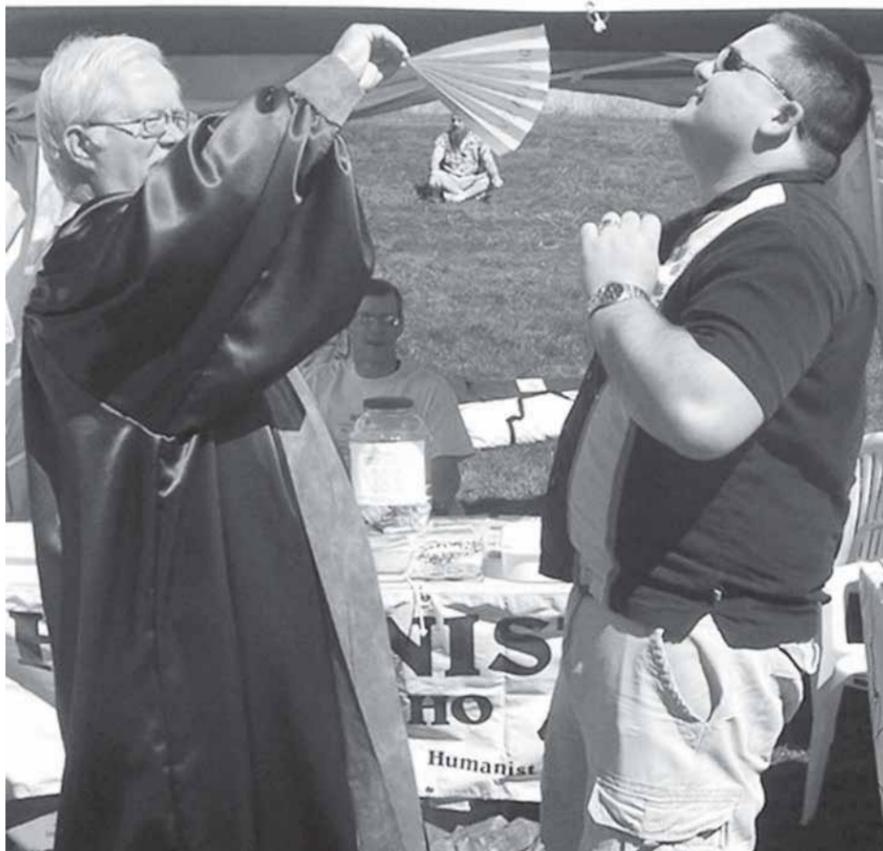
Thank you for awarding me one of FFRF's fourth-place scholarships this year. It's really nice to have such supportive organizations for freethinkers. Thank you, thank you!

Samantha Schrum
California

...

Thank you very much for the scholarship prize money. It will help me a lot to pay for college. I'm also excited for my essay to be published in Freethought Today!

Thank you also for everything the



Secular Idaho

D G Van Curen, Humanists of Idaho president, FFRF member and debaptism celebrant, fans away any lingering holy water residue on Dan Thering's face during an outreach effort Sept. 16-18 in Boise at the Hyde Park Street Fair. The coalition of seven freethought groups distributed more than 100 debaptism certificates provided by FFRF. "Our sincere thanks to FFRF for their support and generosity, which contributed to our success," writes D G. "A steady stream of visitors to our booth packed away our entire supply of Freethought Today, as well as most of the literature, bumper stickers, etc." Participating were Humanists of Idaho, Idaho Atheists, West Valley Freethinkers, BUUF Humanists, Boise Non-Theist Meetup, Cosmo Coffee Club and Boise State Secular Student Alliance.

Foundation does to stand up for state/church separation.

Sierra Buehlman Barbeau
Wisconsin

'12 Steps for a Nonbeliever'

I recently heard your podcast of 5/17/2010. I agree that there's enough religion involved in Alcoholics Anonymous that AA shouldn't be supported by taxpayers. Much of the clergy abuse of children is fueled by substance abuse. But AA does a tremendous amount of good despite its religious origins. Most members are atheists or agnostics and ignore the religious references. The follow-up emotional support at free meetings is key to staying clean and sober. The courts have noticed this and frequently require AA attendance.

As a supervisor of counselors at three agencies in Las Vegas, which I call the addiction capital of the world, my solution is to suggest my "Universal 12 Steps for a Nonbeliever." I don't believe in a supernatural higher power but in the wisdom and experience of the sober group. My version is universal since it works for addicts of all sorts.

We:

1. Admitted we were powerless over our addiction, that our lives had become unmanageable.

2. Came to believe that the wisdom of other abstinent members could restore us to sanity.

3. Made a decision to follow a path of recovery.

4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to let go of our defects of character.

7. Humbly overcame our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had

harmed and those who had harmed us and became willing to make amends and forgive them all.

9. Made direct amends and forgave such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it and forgave those who harmed us.

11. Sought through meditation to improve our integrity in all areas of our lives.

12. Having had an awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others addicted like us and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

More information and a free download of the Universal 12 Steps, with commentary, is available at 6BasicLivingSkills.com in the "About" section. (©2011 by Dennis Fitzpatrick. May be freely copied and shared for any non-commercial purpose.)

Dennis Fitzpatrick
Nevada

Religious rituals destined to fade away?

Thanks so much for Jim McColum's eye-opening history [Sept11] of the Pledge of Allegiance's evolution. I had nearly forgotten how my parents, who predated the insertion of "under God," would charge past that phrase and indignantly inquire where the heck it came from.

I was indoctrinated into the current version in public school, where we followed the daily pledge with a reading of the Lord's Prayer, Psalm 23 or Psalm 100, a fact I had also nearly forgotten. I can still recite them from memory, to the amazement of religious friends who cannot.

I've always been uncomfortable with pledging allegiance to a flag. I feel it smacks of blind obedience, which I op-

pose. But I'm even more uncomfortable sitting it out and receiving glares or hostile comments from others who misinterpret my lack of participation as enmity or disloyalty to my country, which it adamantly is not. So I usually stand and say nothing at all, with my hands at my sides (if I haven't managed to duck out of the room in time). It's not a satisfying solution, but the best I've got for now.

But this too may pass. I'm delighted to note that my kids, who are educated in public schools, have never learned the pledge (or those prayers and psalms). Maybe these rituals are destined to just fade away along with those who promote them.

Joan Reisman
New York

Huckabee's prayer robocall backfires

I received a robocall Sept. 17 from Mike Huckabee, who wanted my help defending the National Day of Prayer from FFRF. When a "real" person came on the line, I told her that while I hadn't donated to FFRF recently for financial reasons, I was sending you a check for \$100 in response to Huckabee's call.

You will find that check enclosed. If you ever meet Huckabee in person, please be sure to thank him.

James Wallace Thomte
Georgia

Best wishes sent from across the pond

It was good to see the report by Paul Harris ["Rising atheism in America puts Religious Right on defensive"] in the Oct. 1 edition of *The Observer* (the world's oldest Sunday newspaper). I'm pleased that a report of this kind has emerged.

I catch you on Freethought Radio on my Wi-Fi most weeks on Sunday mornings when worship is on BBC Radio 4.

Don't think all is good for freethinkers in the U.K., as the religious establishment makes continuing efforts to undermine us, but we are better off than you. All the best.

Arthur Threlfall
United Kingdom

Living 'Life' on the installment plan

I really enjoyed your 33rd convention in Madison last year. I'm very proud to see how many Lifetime Members FFRF has. I started making installment payments of \$250 in 2008.

If I ever get sick and need something to live for, I can always count on living for my making the last payment for Lifetime Membership in December.

Virgil Buss Jr.
Illinois

These days, Gideons not just for reading

I would encourage all FFRF members who might be occasional (or frequent) hotel guests to bring home the lovely complimentary Gideon bibles, and/or the free Books of Mormon, for later enjoyment. They have many uses, such as kindling, compost or emergencies when one has run out of certain other types of paper. It is so thoughtful of them to provide these for free to travelers.

I have a collection of 12 Gideon bi-

bles and two Books of Mormon, which I look forward to making excellent use of at some point! I just have to remember to bring some FFRF pamphlets to leave in my hotel room during my next trip. It's the least I can do!

Mark Patrick
Massachusetts

Like asbestos, FFRF guards against hellfire

Thank you so much for having a website that I can go to for support. I have been told numerous times that I have no feelings because I am an atheist. They tell me I will burn in hell. They go on and on about things that science has proven are wrong.

Jerrid Burdue
Michigan

In FEMA we trust gains currency

The only plausible explanation for the "teavangelical" crowd's assault on beneficial government programs is apparently related to their pathetic belief that "God will provide" whatever they stand in need of. When that fails to happen — when droughts wreak misery, when floods wash away homes and crops, when tornadoes destroy towns, when bridges collapse and oil spills ruin the environment — then suddenly the government can't be there fast enough with money and manpower.

Those most critical of government's role in promoting the common welfare by curbing the excesses of the few and extending opportunity for the many are always the first to scream that its relief measures are too little and too late.

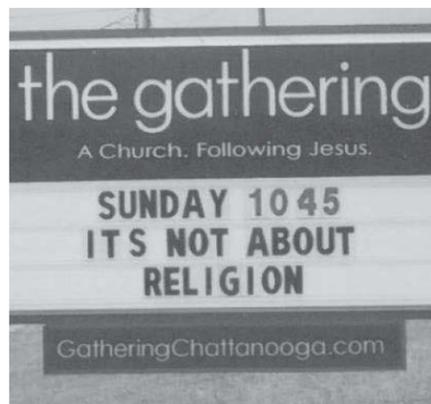
Dorris Paolo
Texas

Salem church fittingly is witch museum

I read Annie Laurie Gaylor's article [Sept 11], "Churches I have met and liked is in Salem, Mass. The early 19th century Gothic Revival structure was built for the East Church, the oldest branch of the First Church of Salem. Fires damaged it in 1902 and in 1969 (when it housed the Salem Auto Museum), but since 1972 it's been home [drum roll please], to the Salem Witch Museum.

Name withheld by request
New York

Freethought Radio is a real comfort



Enclosed is a photo [above] taken in Hixson, Tenn. Makes you want to get out of bed and go to church, doesn't it?

Our stove is 23 years old, so we went looking for a new one. The fanciest had a setting for "perfect turkey" (no thanks, I don't celebrate religious holidays like Thanksgiving) and for "Sabbath." I had heard of this before but had never seen it.

After five years of wishing, I finally



Atheist out of foxhole

Warren Allen Smith, 90, FFRF member, is pictured in New York City on Oct. 10 during the Wall Street protests. The back of his sign says TAX THE CHURCH! Acting 1st Sgt. Smith led his company onto Omaha Beach in 1944 and became a chief clerk for an adjutant general in Gen. Dwight Eisenhower's Supreme Headquarters American Expeditionary Forces command.

got a monitor with built-in speakers, just for listening to Freethought Radio. You've probably heard way too much praise for your program, so I'll just say that as I sit there listening in that back office in a fairly comfortable chair, I feel as if Annie Laurie and Dan are right there with me. Forget the comfort of the presence of God!

Rose Secrest
Tennessee

[Editor's note: According to *wired.com*, the Sabbath mode is strictly kosher: "When the feature is enabled, lights stay off and displays are blank; tones are silenced, fans stilled, compressors slowed. In a kosher fridge, there's no light, no automatic ice-maker, no cold-water dispenser, no warning alarm for spoiled food, no temperature readout. Basically, it converts your fancy, and expensive, appliance into the one your grandma bought after World War II."]]

Agnostics' anthem: 'None of the Above'

There's an interesting pop song by Duran Duran with an agnostic/existential theme. The song, from the 1993 album "Duran Duran" (aka *The Wedding Album*), is "None of the Above." ("I am I myself alone/Realize I never need to use no one/Money, power, holy roads/Freedom puts my faith in none of the above.")

Give it a listen. It's well-done with a great rhythm to boost the lyrics.

William Shumaker
Florida

Putting science deniers in their place

The improper and undue influence of science-denying extremists in our public school science classes is due to the abdication by scientists of our rightful roles. We are the experts in science, not political or religious extremists. It is up to us to decide what constitutes the commonly accepted scientific positions on evolution and climate change and whether or not there are any valid scientific alternatives to these well-established, proven theories.

I suggest we do this simply by polling the long-established members of the scientific societies that deal with these questions, which would be the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology for evolution and the American Physical Society for climate change, and adopting positions that receive more support by more than 90% of the members.

In addition, school administrators should not abdicate their responsibilities for enforcing decorous behavior at public meetings on these questions so as to prohibit any harassment and intimidation of teachers and scientists by political extremists. Steps should also be taken to prevent any attempted stealth takeovers of scientific societies by these extremists by the proper rigorous enforcement of credentials requirements and by requiring evidence of adherence to objective scientific principles in prior investigations by applicants for membership.

Eric A. Stone
New York

Kudos for FFRF's Connecticut convention

I'm just back from the conference in Hartford and want to compliment the FFRF staff on a job well-done. It was well-organized, and the speakers were very inspirational. I would sure urge all FFRF members to attend an annual conference. It's very educational and you meet some fascinating people! I had such a wonderful time meeting kindred secular spirits and listening to all of the speakers as they shared their personal stories.

I particularly enjoyed the young people's talks and was awed and impressed with their strength and their perseverance for their causes. I feel safer knowing that in a few years the country will be in their hands, and the hands of many just like them.

Jack Red
North Carolina

•••

I came away from the Hartford conference with this observation: What a lively, friendly, kind, fun and interesting bunch of people we atheists are! I began to wonder about the hotel staff's opinions of us heathens, especially any God believers who waited on our group at the meals we shared. Our moment of bedlam at the nonprayer breakfast had to have left them with the impression that we are definitely a bunch of fun people and not evil devils in human clothing.

I'll wager they've not been to a church supper that was so uninhibited and lively as ours. It pleases me to think that perhaps a few of the staff (or maybe only *one*) came away from their experiences with us questioning their belief in God.

Jane Minner
Pennsylvania

They Said What?

If you want to be addicted to something, be addicted to Jesus because he never runs out. He's free and you can get as much as you want and there's no hangover. Hallelujah!

Pastor Terry Prong, Cosby, Tenn., leading Cocke County's weeklong tent revival to fight drug abuse
WBIR News, 19-3

I personally believe that someday we're going to stand before God, and he's going to pull out a ballot and say, "How did you vote in this election?" And there are going to be people who say, "Why do you care about that, God?" And he's going to say, "Because I created that country and I put you in charge."

Ken Eldred, venture capitalist behind Champion the Vote, a project seeking to register 5 million conservative Christians nationwide
Los Angeles Times, 9-15-11

He's known for his vulgarity, he is very anti-religious, and since I think we are the only institution on this block, it would be an insult.

Fr. Raymond Rafferty, Corpus Christi Catholic Church, objecting to renaming a Manhattan street after comedian George Carlin, a Corpus Christi School alumnus
WABC New York, 10-10-11

You can safely assume that you have created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do.

Quotation by novelist Anne Lamott included in FatherBen's online comment on the Champion the Vote project
Los Angeles Times, 9-15-11

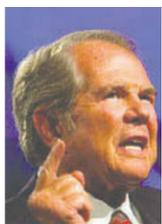
God is telling us that government is not the answer. We have to stop looking for solutions in the wrong places.

Rev. Rene Monette, Living Word Church, Houma, La., "The foundation of our country"
The Courier, 9-9-11

She is passionate for the Lord Jesus Christ who has given her the gifts and freedom to bring healing to the world through upper cervical care.

Web bio for Dr. Rebecca Basilio, who practices "Christ-centered" chiropractic with her husband in Vista, Calif.
nuccawellness.com, 9-12-11

I know it sounds cruel, but if he's going to do something, he should divorce her and start all over again, but make sure she has custodial care and somebody looking after her. . . .



If you respect that vow, you say, "Till death do us part." This is a kind of death.

Rev. Pat Robertson, about a man's extramarital affair because his wife has Alzheimer's disease
"The 700 Club," 9-14-11

Several leading rabbinic figures have weighed in on the continuing furor surrounding the expulsion of four Israel Defense Forces soldiers from the officer's training school last week for refusing to return to an event involving women singing after instructed to do so by their commanding officer. It is generally held that according to Jew-

ish law, men may not listen to a woman singing in person, a situation the Talmud considers akin to seeing a woman naked.

News story, "Rabbis differ over women singing in army"
Jerusalem Post, 9-16-11

The premise is simple: Haggard and Busey will swap wives for a short time. The first couple of days, the husbands make the rules for their new "spouses." After that, the wives take charge. The fun could come from the conflict between Haggard and his reality wife (no word if it's Busey's fiancée and mother of his new son, or one of his ex-wives), whom sources say is a spiritual woman but not a fan of organized religion.

News story on disgraced Pastor Ted Haggard and actor Gary Busey appearing on the ABC reality series "Celebrity Wife Swap"
Colorado Springs Gazette, 9-20-11

The group of nurses provide their service with Christ-like love to address both the physical and emotional needs of their patients through the program, which meets seven times a year.

News story on the Pamper and Prayer Foot Clinic in Holland, Mich.
Holland Sentinel, 9-26-11

As has become increasingly clear ever since Sept. 11, religion is alive and kicking, and America is blundering its way through the 21st century, its education system trapped in the secularist fantasies of Thomas Jefferson and his Enlightenment pals.

Op-ed by Tom Moore, sophomore in the Cornell University College of Arts and Sciences
Cornell Daily Sun, 9-27-11

God showed me how to do it, baptize people in the fire of the Holy Spirit. This is not bad after all. It's a blessing in disguise.

Taukinukufili Taufa, Brisbane, Australia, who ran the Church of Baptism With Fire & Holy Spirit in a house where his wife, daughter, three grandchildren and six extended family members died in a fire
New Zealand Herald, 9-20-11

Andrew Schmeltzer, an English teacher and assistant baseball coach at Wilson Central High School, sang along to student-led hymns but said he was careful to step aside when prayers began. "As long as I don't do any leadership with that, that's fine," he said.

News story on a See You at the Pole school prayer event in Lebanon, Tenn.
The Tennessean, 9-29-11

Do I think religion should be in school? Heck yeah. FCA gives me and the others the opportunity to reach the lost and secondly to grow with each other. Teachers can't share Christ with students, but FCA is a chance for us to do that.

Sophomore Michael Bookwalter, Johnson High School, Gainesville, Ga., on the Fellowship of Christian Athletes club that meets in the school library
Gainesville Times, 10-2-11

At Reformed Theological Seminary, our classroom teaching, the very same courses by the very same professors, as well as sermons and teaching by some of the most notable pastors of our gen-



More like Finland than Graceland

Glenn Hardie, British Columbia, provided this photo of Ron Tomlinson's restored 1960 Cadillac that's used in parades and other events to promote the Humanist Association on Vancouver Island.

eration, are being downloaded onto Macs, and yes, even PCs, as well as iPads and iPhones all over the Earth.

Michael Milton, chancellor-elect of Reformed Theological Seminary, "Bible publishers mourn death of Steve Jobs"
bosnewslife.com, 10-6-11

I think it's Satan involved in it. I think that we just all need to get together and show our Lord how much we love them and appreciate him for dying on that cross for us.

Debbie Welch, speaking at a high school

football game in Summit, Miss., where the superintendent read an FFRF letter of complaint about school-sanctioned prayer at athletic events
WLBT News, 10-10-11

We're praying to a God who loves us and asking his protection over this football game and over these people. I see nothing wrong with that.

Pig Terrell, prayer supporter in Summit, Miss.
WLBT News, 10-10-11

'God' in Government

God has appointed Putin to Russia to prepare for the coming of Jesus Christ. **Mother Fontina, leader of the Temple of the Resurrection of Russia, a sect which believes Prime Minister Vladimir Putin is St. Paul reincarnated**
Der Spiegel, 9-29-11

When you elected me, you elected Jesus. **Don Merricks, Virginia House of Delegates, supporting sectarian prayer by the Pittsylvania County Commission**



Danville Register & Bee, 9-6-11

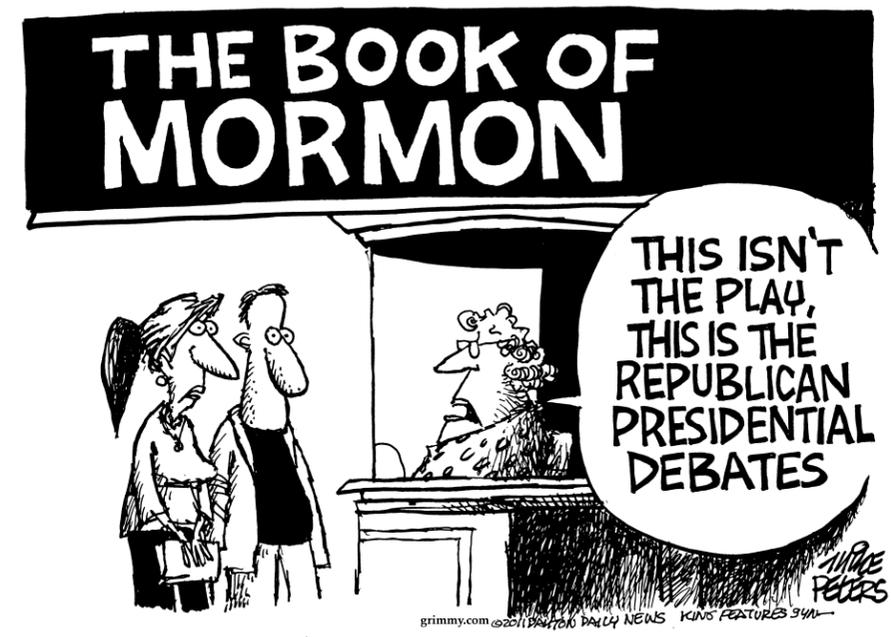
There are circles of villains seeking to give away parts of this land to our enemies. Luckily, God Almighty causes the

camel riders [Palestinians] to refuse to meet with the government.

Rabbi Dov Lior, Kiryat Arba, criticizing left-wing Israelis
Jewish World, 9-20-11

I think Mitt Romney's a good moral man, but I think those of us who are born-again followers of Christ should always prefer a competent Christian to a competent non-Christian like Mitt Romney. So that's why I'm enthusiastic about Rick Perry.

Rev. Robert Jeffress, First Baptist Church of Dallas pastor, speaking on CNN after endorsing Texas Gov. Rick Perry for president at the Family Research Council's Values Voters Summit, where he called Mormonism "a cult"
"The Situation Room," 10-8-11



Office Birth Announcements



Here's Clara!

Clara Kay Douglas was born Aug. 23, 2011, in Madison, Wis., to Jackie and Matt Douglas. Vital statistics: 8 pounds, 1 ounce; 20.5 inches long. Jackie is FFRF office manager and has been a valuable member of FFRF's team since 2002. Congratulations, Jackie and Matt!



Meet Mr. Markert!

Dexter Joseph Markert was born on Oct. 12, 2011. He arrived at 2:14 p.m. in Meriter Hospital in Madison, Wis., to parents Rebecca and Michael Markert. He weighed 7 pounds, 4 ounces and was 20 inches long. Rebecca was hired as FFRF's first staff attorney and started work in October 2008 and is now senior staff attorney. Congratulations, Rebecca and Michael!

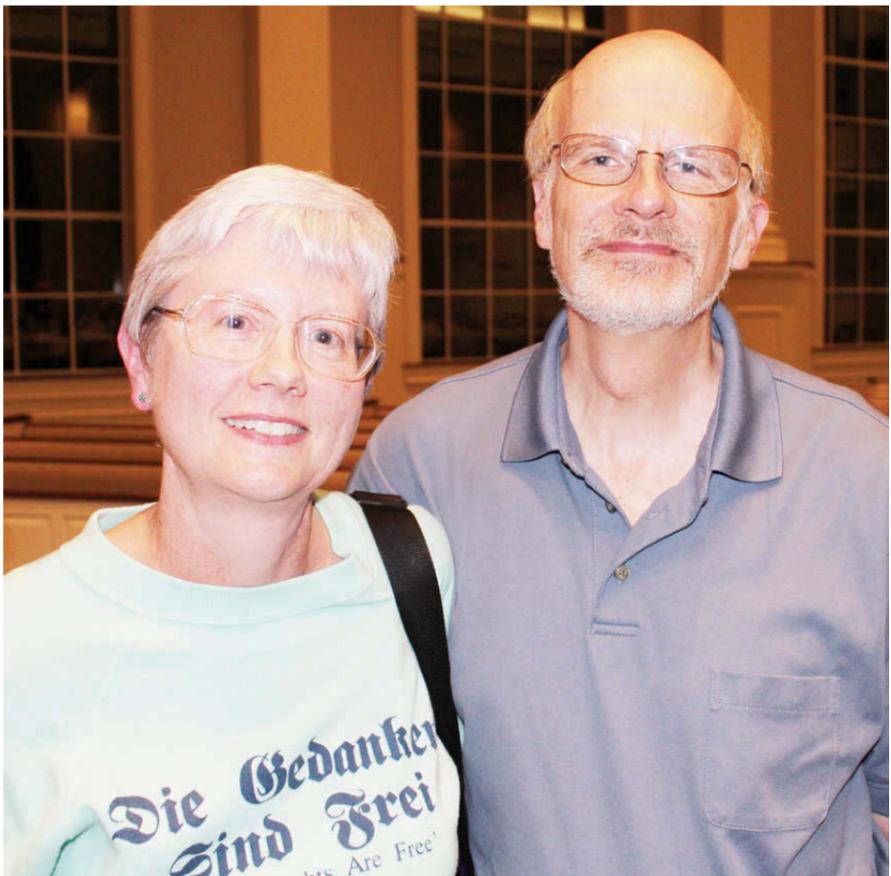


'You can be good without God' — Indiana debate



Against all odds

FFRF Co-President Dan Barker was convincing, living proof that "you can be good without God" (the debate topic) Sept. 14 at the United Methodist Church in Zionsville, Ind. The crowd of about 300 included more than 50 freethinkers from FFRF and the Center For Inquiry, Indiana. From left are moderator David Carr, debater and Methodist Pastor Art Collins, debater and Rabbi Benjamin Sendrow of Congregation Shaarey Tefilla, Dan Barker and Rev. Scott Tyring, debate organizer.



25 years a couple

Longtime FFRF members Marcia and Bruce Gascho, whose thoughts are free, were in the debate audience. Dan Barker officiated at their wedding in 1986.



Charles Strouse with FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor at the conclusion of FFRF's 34th annual national convention in Hartford, Conn. Strouse, 83, is the composer of the musicals "Annie," "Applause" and "Bye Bye Birdie" and many other songs, including "Those Were the Days," the "All in the Family" theme song sung by Archie and Edith Bunker. Strouse spoke about his nonbelief, then gave a magical concert at the piano, singing and playing some of his legendary songs. Convention photography and coverage will start in the November issue.



Photos: Jeff Yards

An atheist of note(s)

Broadway composer and atheist Charles Strouse enjoying his Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

FFRF sues Virginia school over Ten Commandments

Continued from front page

Nevertheless, in June the board voted 3-2 to put the Commandments up again, along with other documents in the misguided belief that the documents would put the display on stronger legal footing. The other elements included a depiction of Lady Justice, "The Star-Spangled Banner," the Bill of Rights, the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, the Declaration of Independence, the Virginia Declaration of Rights, the Mayflower Compact and the Magna Carta.

Taking the suit on behalf of the school is the Liberty Counsel. The Kentucky counties of Pulaski and McCreary as of May owed the ACLU of Kentucky a total of \$456,881, nearly all of it for attorneys' fees, after they lost their lengthy fight, taken by the Liberty Counsel, to post copies of Ten Commandments in their courthouses.

Judge-Executive Doug Stephens told the Lexington Herald-Leader that he believed that Liberty Counsel, the Christian legal group that represented the counties, might help with fundraising to pay the judgment. Liberty Counsel founder Mathew Staver said his organization has never raised money for that purpose.

The bible display at Narrows High School is in a main hallway where the student plaintiff encounters it daily. The display "promotes a particular faith to which Doe 1 does not subscribe," the suit charges. "Doe 1 understands the current display to be merely a continuation of the board's longstanding policy, practice, and custom of promoting the Ten Command-

ments in the school."

Given the public outcry when the Commandments were removed and the clamor for their reinstatement, "any alleged secular purpose for the current displays are, and will be perceived as, a sham," the plaintiffs contend.

A former Giles High School student, Sarah McNair, began protesting the Ten Commandments displays in 2004 in written letters to many officials. She contacted FFRF after its letter of complaint went out, and FFRF awarded her its Thomas Jefferson Student Activist Award. Sarah has noted in media interviews the school's hostile climate and bullying of nonbelievers.

The Supreme Court ruled in *Stone v. Graham* (1980) that public schools may not post the Ten Commandments:

"The pre-eminent purpose for posting the Ten Commandments on schoolroom walls is plainly religious in nature. The Ten Commandments are undeniably a sacred text in the Jewish and Christian faiths, and no legislative recitation of a supposed secular purpose can blind us to that fact. The Commandments do not confine themselves to arguably secular matters, such as honoring one's parents, killing or murder, adultery, stealing, false witness, and covetousness. See Exodus 20: 12-17; Deuteronomy 5: 16-21. Rather, the first part of the Commandments concerns the religious duties of believers: worshipping the Lord God alone, avoiding idolatry, not using the Lord's name in vain, and observing the Sabbath Day. See Exodus 20: 1-11; Deuteronomy 5: 6-15."

"One has only to read the First Com-

mandment, 'Thou shalt have no other god before me,' to realize why a public school may not post such a demand," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "A school board has no business deciding whether a student embraces one god, 10 gods or no god at all. The First Commandment is the antithesis of the First Amendment."

The plaintiffs seek a declaration that the policy and postings are unconstitutional, a permanent injunction prohibiting Giles County Public Schools from displaying the Commandments,

nominal damages and attorneys' fees and costs.

Plaintiffs' attorneys are FFRF Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott and Rebecca Glenberg, Thomas Okuda Fitzpatrick of the ACLU of Virginia and Frank Feibelman, ACLU of Virginia cooperating attorney.

The case, filed in the U.S. District Court, Western District of Virginia, is *Doe v. School Board of Giles County, 7:11-cv-00435*. You may read documents online: ffrf.org/legal/challenges/ffrf-aclu-sue-virginia-school-over-ten-commandments/

Giles County contests protective order

Showing the vindictive nature of its battle against constitutional liberties, the School Board of Giles County, Va., represented by the Liberty Counsel, is taking the nearly unprecedented step of contesting the request by the ACLU of Virginia and FFRF to protect the identity of its student plaintiff in *Doe v. Giles County*.

Rebecca Glenberg, ACLU of Virginia attorney, noted in the reply memorandum, that "The strong community reactions provoked by Establishment Clause cases — including, historically, harassment and violence — combined with the vulnerable age of the student plaintiff," should ensure confidentiality is protected. She added, "The defendant has not pointed to a single case in which anonymity was denied in an Establishment Clause case involving schoolchildren."

The ACLU and FFRF have submitted evidence of "an atmosphere of hostility toward those who brought this lawsuit." Comments at online news sites and in emails sent to the two organizations have included suggestions that the plaintiffs and their attorneys should "take a ride" to "you know where," that there is "a special place in Hell" for them, that "non-Christians ought to move out of Giles County before things get ugly over there," that plaintiffs and their lawyers are "allowing Satan [sic] to rule them" and "other hateful sentiments."

Giles County complained to the court that the letters were directed to the ACLU and FFRF, rather than to the Does themselves. Glenberg's memo noted, "This is only natural, given that the ACLU and FFRF have been publicly identified with this case, while the Does' identity is unknown to

the public. There is no reason to assume that the Does would not receive similar mail if people knew where to send it. Indeed, the public comments, as opposed to the letters, submitted in evidence disparage the Does at least as much as they disparage the ACLU and FFRF."

Some example of these public comments, online and in print:

- "Maybe we should ship these 'families' overseas to play in the sand with al-Quaida for a little while."
- "we won't let an anonymous coward tell us how to run our business."
- "Maybe 'DOE 1' and 'DOE 2' need to move to Iran where their beliefs would be mainstream."
- Doe 2 is "a cowardly parent hiding behind a child supposedly offended by the public display of the Ten Commandments."
- "These people that don't want anything in our buildings about our Lord Jesus Christ, find you another country to live in."

Glenberg noted, "These comments represent more than, as defendant would have it, a mere expression of disagreement with plaintiffs' point of view. Rather, they express personal animosity and contempt for those who oppose the posting of the Ten Commandments in a public school."

Dan Barker, FFRF co-president, observed, "Such expressions become nearly inevitable when the government confers its endorsement, based on religion, upon one group over another. Giles County has sent a message to nonadherents that they are outsiders, and an accompanying impermissible message to believers that they are insiders, a favored class. As Thomas Paine noted, persecution is 'always the strongly marked feature of all religions established by law.'"

Water tower cross contested

Continued from front page

batting 100 percent on this stuff."

"I think he has us confused with Google Earth," said FFRF Co-President Dan Barker. (An online commenter posted, "If that's really what Freedom From Religion is doing, they are even more awesome than I thought. I grew up in these oppressively Christian small towns, and I would have loved someone to ride into town and show me how to stand up for my rights!")

"A terrorist is more than a guy that flies the planes into the building," Belar told Fox. "If they can disrupt your routine in life, that's what they want to do. They are terrorists as far as I'm concerned."

Far from the truth, responded Barker. "He's the one who is against diversity, against religious freedom, and yet because we complain, and point out the fact that he's breaking the law, he calls us the terrorist?"

The Jackson Sun editorialized about the controversy, asking the town to remove the cross.

"To our fellow Christians who may disagree, we issue a respectful challenge borrowed from a local church youth production: God doesn't call governments to be Christians, he calls Christians to be Christians," the editorial said. "The government is not the instrument to spread God's word. We are."

FFRF's efforts on behalf of a local complainant and Tennessee members have brought hundreds of nasty emails and phone calls into the FFRF office, along with a serious death threat being investigated by the Dane County (Wis.) District Attorney's Office.

FFRF has also acted on local complaints about a cross atop a water tower in nearby Somerville, Tenn., but currently lacks a resident willing to be a plaintiff.