



Raleigh Day of Reason

The Triangle Freethought Society, a lively chapter of FFRF based in Raleigh, N.C., displaced the usual Day of Prayer crowd at the State Capitol on the National Day of Prayer for the second consecutive year by receiving a permit to hold a Day of Reason rally on May 3. Among the speakers was Dan Barker, FFRF co-president, who also performed freethought tunes with a local band. Dan also spoke to freethought clubs at North Carolina State University, North Carolina Central University, the Wilmington-Cape Fear Humanists and at chapter social events. Dan thanks his hosts Robin and Dan Wascher and chapter director Harry and Charlotte Shaughnessy.

Pennsylvania freethinkers



Dan Barker participated in a “Religious liberals meet the nonreligious” panel discussion April 29 at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in State College, Pa. From left are organizer Chuck Berry, director of FFRF’s Nittany Freethought chapter; Coqui Conkey, interim pastor at Faith United Church of Christ; Dan Barker; Rev. Mark Hayes, minister of the UU Fellowship; and Bob Seibel, retired professor of cognitive psychology and philosophy of science.



A Penn State campus freethought parade stopped outside the football stadium by the statue of the late head coach Joe Paterno, whose legacy was tarnished when it was revealed how the program had covered up sexual abuse by an assistant coach for years. (Dave DeGroot photo)



Declare and share *your* nonbelief in FFRF’s online “Out of the Closet” campaign! ffrf.org/out



Starke reality

FFRF sent a letter of complaint May 14 to the Bradford County Commission in Starke, Fla., about the new Ten Commandments monument at the courthouse. That it was donated by a private party doesn’t make it legal, wrote Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott. During the unveiling and dedication May 3 on the National Day of Prayer, James Jones intoned, “Lord, most of all I thank you for looking beyond all our faults and allowing our time to go on, because it’s not by what we done [sic] and it’s not about the amount of money we have in the bank and it’s not about our education. It’s all about what you done [sic] one Friday afternoon on a place called Calvary — where you allowed them to hang you high and stretch you wide.”

Ask a skeptic

White cover worked fine for The Beatles

Why is the FFRF publication concealed or shrouded in a plain white cover? What are we trying to hide? What is the reason, merit or necessity for your present policy? Might a plan for an interesting, provocative cover promote attention to FFRF and be an advantage to our cause?

— Hugh in Washington state

Thanks for writing. We hear similar comments from others. However, a lot of members, particularly in small towns, don’t want to be “out.” And actually, you’re only being outed to Postal Service personnel. Freethought Today is sent in a wrap, as are most smaller periodicals such as weekly newspapers, for several other reasons:

1) It protects paper. You’ll notice the inner newspaper doesn’t arrive messy or torn (we hope). Freethought Today

is necessarily sent third-class bulk rate, which takes from one to four weeks to get there, so it gets a lot of handling before delivery.

2) You’ll notice the outside of the wrap has your label, barcode and mailing permit number. These must go in a particular spot now, thanks to changing postal regulations. Putting this information on the front of the paper would look unattractive on Page 1 and diminish space, which is already at a premium for our 10 issues a year.

3) The wrap is a bonus for members. We’re able to run the monthly calendar of famous freethinkers and additional itmes like recipes and ads we hope readers will clip and send to schools to publicize our student essay competitions and other events.

Marquee: ‘You Are Toast!’ without Jesus

By Danny B. Crockarell



While traveling back and forth on U.S. 70 from Lebanon, Tenn., to Nashville each day, I can’t help but notice the many church signs along this stretch of road speaking silently to passersby. Most of the time they are benign sources of information — silly, antiquated and sometimes amusing forms of “church marketing.”

Reference to the “F-word” as Forgiveness is common, along with word-play like, “If you think life stinks, come in and sit on one of our PEE-EWWS.” Another warned against “Opening Our Minds Too Much Lest Our Heads Fall

Through.” And, “If You Do Not Have the Bread of Life — You Are Toast!”

Socrates taught us about 2,500 years ago that life’s greatest endeavor is the search for knowledge, while never making the mistake of thinking you have all the answers. An open mind, though not a sufficient condition for this, would certainly be a necessary one. To suggest otherwise to anyone, especially children, is abusive.

I recall a prominent church in Mt. Juliet about 15 years ago gathering all the kids on the grounds and burning old, sinister and devilish Chicago and Three Dog Night albums. What next? Books?

I think to suggest that “You Are Toast” means you’re about to face the schoolyard bully or be destroyed completely in some painful way. I know exactly what this bullying preacher meant, and so does anyone reading

this: deserving of eternal torture by burning in hell. Most of us driving along this road would not be in that category.

Jesus is said to have suggested avoiding anything that might cause someone else to stumble. The pastor’s response to my subsequent inquiry and suggestion that he may be running people off instead of drawing them into church was a very terse, “I have to witness.”

I have patients whom I consider dear friends who certainly must represent many different beliefs, whether Christian, Jew, Jewish-Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu or “spiritual.” I have agnostic and atheist patients. I would never want to see any one of them hurt or discriminated against because their belief system was different from mine or anyone else’s.

Logically, they can’t all be true, but certainly the most difficult position to defend is that only one of them is. That sort of dogma frightens me most when I think about the ultimate religious war fought on the fatuous, naive, battleground of the tenacious willingness to proclaim “one true religion.”

Some signs indicate a new level of tolerance and willingness to try to understand each other’s differences. I’m fairly certain that Franklin, Jefferson and Paine understood freedom of religion as one of the most important foundations of America. “You Are Toast” makes me yearn for freedom from religion. Freud probably described it best

in *The Future of an Illusion*. I highly recommend it for the pastor of the “Toast” church.

Finally, I think it should be at least considered that all of this — from signs or marquees, whether silly or amusing or profane and threatening, to histrionic displays such as the three men “crucified” on telephone poles on Good Friday in the 5 o’clock traffic on Route 70 — seems to be taking on a carnival atmosphere.

I have to ask: Wouldn’t the contemplation of something as central and important in one’s life as the concepts of “God and Ultimate Reality” be deserving of more respect, dignity and even, awe?

When I was in college the “Honk if you love Jesus” bumper stickers were very popular. I’ll never forget when my music theory professor, Dr. Howard, was asked his opinion of them. “Why, I just don’t think Jesus would appreciate all the noise!” he said tersely.

Maybe that’s why the gospel writers appear to agree on one thing, that Jesus was always “going to a quiet place.”

FFRF member Danny Crockarell has practiced dentistry in a Nashville suburb for 28 years. “It’s not easy being an atheist in the bible belt, and I feel like I’m always on the edge in my practice. Last year in response to more ‘marquee madness’ than I could take, as well as a Good Friday display that almost caused several car wrecks, I decided to write about the phenomenon described above.”



‘Is this not the carpenter?’ (Mark 6:3)

“I’m not sure whether the damage to this sign was due to vandalism or an act of god,” writes Robin Hamilton-Pennell about this Baptist church sign in Portland, Ore., “but I find the latter far more amusing.”



A word to the wise

“Finally, religion comes with a warning label,” writes an Iowan wanting anonymity.

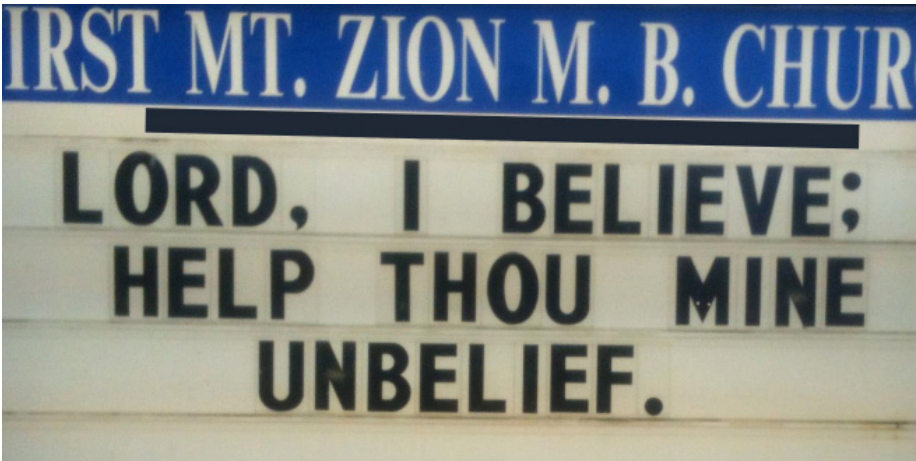
Officer, arrest this sign

Ronald Spikloser, Maryland, asks about this sign for a church near Baltimore, “They not only don’t know the Constitution, but aren’t churches supposed to stay out of politics because they’re tax-exempt?”



You snooze, you lose

Tony Rush, Alabama, spotted this warning in Dothan. A word to the wise: “And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.”



Clear as mud

Hal Webre spotted this sign in northwest Florida and writes: “Coincidentally, the day after I sent you this, I was listening to one of my favorite podcasts, ‘The Bible Geek,’ with Robert M. Price, when he mentioned the quotation on the marquee. It turns out to be from Mark 9:24. At first I was slightly embarrassed that I didn’t recognize it earlier as scripture and had assumed it was the bewildering coinage of the pastor. Then I thought, ‘It comes from the bible, it’s no surprise that it doesn’t make any sense to me.’ ”



What *will* I wear?

And what better spot than outside Tractor Supply Co., where she will be beating swords into ploughshares? Gary Grant photographed this scene off Interstate 30 in Little Rock, Ark.



But he brings Peeps

“I thought you would enjoy adding this to your gallery of inappropriate church signs,” writes Amy Tan, Maine.

Marquee Madness



You don't say?

This angel all in white showed up after an earthquake, told you the body of the man they killed Friday is gone without a trace, but he isn't dead anymore? Hmm. Scott Putty and Carolyn Meehan, on their way to meet up with the Metroplex Atheists near Dallas, couldn't help but see double trouble on a Granbury marquee.



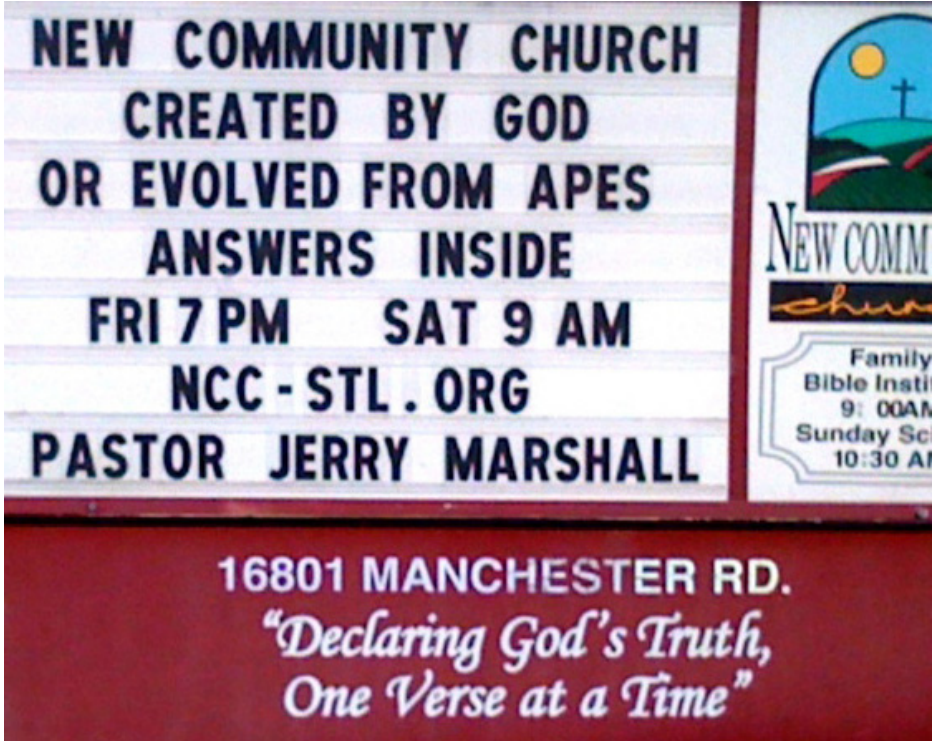
Fade to black

Jerry Agin, Pennsylvania, writes about this church in Pittsburgh: “Darkness and light are obvious metaphors for ignorance and knowledge. The sign may be paraphrased, ‘I’d rather defend my religion than seek the truth.’ ”



‘Out’ but not ‘of shape’

Bill Smythe, Oregon, wears his Friendly Neighborhood Atheist T-shirt at a rest stop at a Christian retreat center on the Portland Century 100-mile bike ride in August. He says he got a lot of smiles at rest stops and supportive comments. “I appreciate that you have in the guts to wear that,” one rider told him. Several people asked if he reads the bible. “My standard reply was, ‘Yes, that’s how I became an atheist.’ ”



Feel itchy in these pews

“The first thing that came to mind was, BUZZZZZ — wrong answer, Jerry,” says John C. Walter. The church is in Grover, Mo.



Speakers gather for a group photo with some GAC planners.



FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker addressing the crowd.

Global Atheist Conference — Melbourne, Australia



David Nicholls, president, Atheist Foundation of Australia, opening the Global Atheist Conference, April 13-15, 2012, Melbourne, Australia. With 4,000 attendees from more than 20 countries, GAC is the largest convention of atheists in history. Speakers from around the world included three of the “Four Horsemen”: Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett and Sam Harris, and there was a memorial to the missing fourth, Christopher Hitchens. Ayaan Hirsi Ali joined them in a roundtable.

Photography by
Rocco Ancora



Amazing Aussie Atheists: The hardworking “12 apostles” as volunteers put on the world’s largest atheist convention and ran an incredibly organized conference, plotting every detail down to the minute. Hat’s off to you from Dan and Annie Laurie, recipients of unparalleled hospitality.



The first day of GAC, Christian zealots picketed.



The second day, Muslim extremists took their place.