

Freethought Today

Complimentary Copy
Join FFRF Now!

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April 2014

FFRF complaints create buzz



© A Better Life/Christopher Johnson

Rebecca Newberger Goldstein and Steven Pinker, photographed for Christopher Johnson's *A Better Life: 100 Atheists Speak Out on Joy & Meaning in a World Without God*.

March roared like a lion from beginning to end in winter-weary Wisconsin, and so did the Freedom From Religion Foundation, acting on many egregious entanglements between religion and government.

FFRF's complaints stirred up lots of regional and national news coverage, crank mail and crank callers, starting with the March 3 announcement that the Tennessee Board of Judicial Conduct agreed with FFRF that former magistrate Lu Ann Ballew violated codes of judicial conduct by ordering a boy's named changed from Messiah to Martin at an August hearing.

Ballew said Messiah is a title "earned by one person, and that person is Jesus Christ." Staff Attorney Rebecca Markert's letter of complaint set in motion

the board's public censure.

Garnering at least of a week of media attention in March was a letter from Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor to Green Bay Mayor Jim Schmitt, reprimanding him for inviting the pope to visit the Wisconsin city next year to make "a pilgrimage to the Shrine of Our Lady of Good Help."

Schmitt's invitation on city letterhead was signed "Your servant in Christ" and extolled in excited tones "the events, apparitions and locutions" in 1859 that "exhibit the substance of supernatural character," involving "the first and only Blessed Virgin Mary apparition approved by the Catholic Church in the United States."

While noting Schmitt is "welcome to personally believe" in the supernatural sighting of the Virgin Mary a century and a half ago, the FFRF directors told Schmitt he's not free to use his civic office to promote "your personal (and highly embarrassing) religious beliefs." At a press conference Schmitt called to defend himself, he admitted his letter was a "little heavy" on the religion. This is not FFRF's first tussle with Schmitt, who was stopped by FFRF's federal lawsuit from putting a nativity scene atop the entrance of City Hall.

FFRF, by the way, also criticized the invitation to the pope to address Congress from Catholic politicians John Boehner, U.S. House speaker, and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi: "Congress needs a visit from the pope like Boehner needs more time in a tanning booth."

Gaylor and Barker also stirred up an online hornet's nest for reprimanding Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker for misusing his official gubernatorial Facebook and Twitter accounts to promote religion. On March 16, Walker posted

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Pinker named FFRF's first honorary president

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to announce that world-renowned scientist Steven Pinker, already an honorary FFRF director, will serve as its first honorary president.

Pinker, a Johnstone Family Professor in the psychology department at Harvard University, is on Time's list of the "World's 100 Most Influential People." As an experimental psychologist, he's one of the world's foremost writers on language, the mind and human nature. His research on visual cognition and the psychology of language has won awards from the National Academy of Sciences, the Royal Institution of Great Britain, the Cognitive Neuroscience Society and the American Psychological Association.

Pinker told FFRF, when receiving its Emperor Has No Clothes Award in 2004: "I was never religious in the theological sense. I never outgrew my conversion to atheist at 13."

Born in Montreal, Pinker studied at McGill University and Harvard, where he earned his Ph.D. He taught at MIT for 21 years and also at Stanford. He's the author of six critically acclaimed books for a general audience, including *The Language Instinct* (1994), *How the Mind Works* (1997), *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* (2002), and *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Declined* (2011).

Pinker has actively worked against

religious incursions in science and government, including testifying before Congress. He prevailed against a proposal at Harvard to require a course on "Reason and Faith," saying, "[U]niversities are about reason, pure and simple. Faith — believing something without good reasons to do so — has no place in anything but a religious institution, and our society has no shortage of these. Imagine if we had a requirement for 'Astronomy and Astrology' or 'Psychology and Parapsychology,'" he wrote in an op-ed titled "Less Faith, More Reason" in the Harvard Crimson in 2006.

In a 2007 interview with Salon.com, Pinker noted, "Atheists are the most reviled minority in the United States, so it's no small matter to come out and say it."

Pinker is part of an intellectual power couple with his wife, Rebecca Newberger Goldstein, a recipient of a MacArthur "genius grant." A philosopher and novelist, Goldstein was named a Freethought Heroine by FFRF in 2011, when she spoke poignantly about her escape from the strictures of strict Orthodox Judaism.

Among her books are *36 Arguments for the Existence of God: A Work of Fiction*, and the just released nonfiction work, *Plato at the Googleplex: Why Philosophy Won't Go Away*. The Boston Globe calls her "a playful, bouyant, witty stylist who parses intractably difficult philosophical and religious ideas with breathtaking ease."

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Convention

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Get your 'godless' reward — a 'clean' dollar bill

Help FFRF grow by recruiting a member!

Help the Freedom From Religion Foundation continue to grow in numbers and influence by persuading a new member to join today! For each new member a current member recruits, you will receive a "clean," pre-"In God We Trust" dollar bill.

Please specify whether you want us to send your dollar bill to your recruit or keep it yourself.

This offer applies only to current FFRF members paying for or recruiting

a new member who has a U.S. address. Sorry, but renewals for yourself or others do not qualify ("clean" money is hard to come by).

Use the handy, inserted self-addressed envelope inside this issue, which contains full details. Or mail a money order or check for at least \$40 earmarked for membership.

Include your name and address and your recruit's name and address and mail to: FFRF, Membership Recruit-



ment, PO Box 750, Madison, WI 53701. Or phone 1-800-335-4021 9-5 Central weekdays if you'd like to sign up a new member using your credit card. (Sorry, our online form doesn't accommodate this short-term recruitment drive.)

The offer ends June 30.

FFRF began as a mother-daughter

duo back in 1976 and welcomed its 20,000th official member in February. (See Ken Knighton's story, page 3 of the March issue, about becoming FFRF's 20,000th.)

All dues and donations are deductible for income tax purposes.

Freedom depends on freethinkers.

'Immortals' ensure healthy outlook for FFRF

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is pleased to announce additions to "The Immortals," those very generous members who make provisions for FFRF, a 501(c)(3) educational charity, in their estate planning.

The category was suggested by Life Members B. Babow and Mike Kirkland in hopes it would raise awareness of the importance of legacy planning for FFRF's future. Confidentiality is assured. Only "bequesters" giving express permission will be listed.

FFRF's newest Immortals include:

- **Guy T. Craig.**
- **Herbert A. Davis,** who writes that he doesn't "need the publicity but am proud to be a supporter of your organization. Everyone who matters knows I am an atheist and I describe myself as a 'militant atheist.' Anne Gaylor is a heroine and you youngsters are doing

her proud."

- **Linda and Dan Kettner.**

- **David and Linda Reichert.** David writes: "I am always very glad to help FFRF as I am insanely passionate about separation of church and state issues and you are so capably working to prevent the U.S. from becoming a theocracy. I would be honored to be on 'The Immortals' list."

- **Doug Walty.**

- **Stephanie Smith and Harry Wildgen.**

Thanks to all these kind members who have taken steps to ensure FFRF's future. Also taking an unprecedented step to encourage future bequests is Life Member **Monty Cleworth,** who last year kicked off FFRF's official endowment fund with a spectacular \$100,000 gift to create it.

If you would like a copy of FFRF's

bequest brochure, please contact Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor or Director of Operations Lisa Strand at

1-800-335-4021 or email Lisa at lisa@ffrf.org.

Freedom depends on freethinkers.

Lake Hypatia 'Glorious 4th' — mark the date!



The Alabama Freethought Association, FFRF's longest-lived current chapter (based in the "buckle of the bible belt"), will hold its annual Glorious Fourth conference on Independence Day weekend at Lake Hypatia in rural Munford near Talledega.

The event takes place at Lake Hypatia "Advance, Not Retreat!" in FFRF's air-conditioned auditorium set near woody campgrounds owned by Patricia Cleveland, who generously makes the lakeside area available for primitive camping and RVs. There are many area motels.

Meals are served on the cool lakeside pavilion, and the area abuts Talladega National Forest. There are both formal and informal events at this child-friendly event.

It opens at 11 a.m. with registration on Thursday, July 3, continuing all day July 4 and concluding mid-afternoon Saturday. Included are four catered meals. Updates on speakers, registration, etc., will run in the May issue.

Also check at:

ffrf.org/outreach/afa/about-lake-hypatia

FFRF welcomes 15 new Lifetime Members

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is delighted to welcome its newest "Lifers." They are:

Dr. Bob Allen, Robert Aughenbaugh, Seymour Gloger, Neil Graham, Holly Huber, Joan Johnston, Mitchell Kahle, Gary Joel Katleman, Glen Likins, Bernard Mazie, Stephen Parker, Robert Seeman, Esq., N. Lee Skibicki, Ray Stefanski and Richard VanMetter.

States represented are Arkansas, California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan,

New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Texas, Wisconsin and the District of Columbia.

Individual Lifetime Memberships are \$1,000, mean never another renewal notice, are tax-deductible for the generous donor and go into rainy day reserves.

Warmest thanks to Richard, Ray, Lee, Bob, Stephen, Bernard, Glen, Gary, Mitch, Joan, Holly, Neil, Seymour, Robert and Dr. Bob!

A Note to Members

Your address label shows the expiration date of your membership in FFRF, which includes your subscription to Freethought Today and "Private Line." If it says April 2014 or earlier please renew! Your prompt renewal (\$40-single membership; \$50-household; \$100 gung-ho; \$25-student) saves us time and postage, and is tax-deductible. Freethought Today is published 10 times a year, with combined issues in Jan/Feb and June/July. Send membership or renewal to FFRF, Box 750, Madison WI 53701, ffrf.org/donate

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April 2014

The only freethought newspaper in the United States

FFRF 37th annual convention Oct. 24-25 in Los Angeles

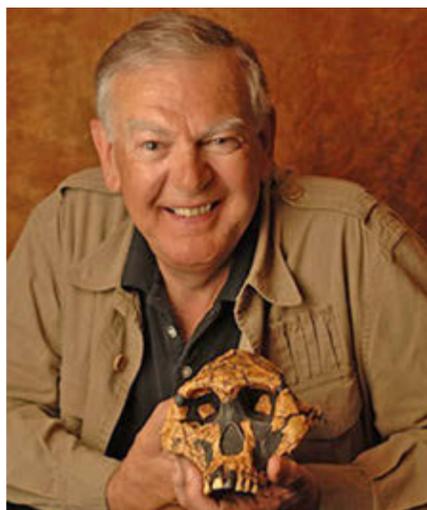
Scientists, authors, attorneys among FFRF's honorees



Erwin Chemerinsky



Marci Hamilton



Donald C. Johansen



Anthony Pinn



Sean Carroll



Edwina Rodgers



Christopher Johnson

annual drawing for “clean” (pre-“In God We Trust”) currency and some entertainment at the piano by FFRF Co-President Dan (“The Singing Atheist”) Barker. It is followed by the annual membership meeting and meeting of FFRF state representatives Sunday morning.

The Biltmore’s eateries include Smeraldi’s and the Rendezvous Court, which offers traditional afternoon tea, as well as the Gallery Bar with jazz nights and signature martinis, along with Bugis Street Brasserie, offering authentic Singaporean-Chinese cuisine.

Meals

Two optional Saturday meals are offered: The Non-Prayer Breakfast and the Saturday Banquet Dinner.

The full breakfast (\$30 including 23% service charge and 9% sales tax) is freshly squeezed orange juice, muffin and danish basket, fresh-cracked country scrambled eggs, thick-cut applewood bacon, herb-roasted red potatoes, freshly brewed regular and decaffeinated coffee and Harney & Son teas. Vegetarian is all of above, but tomato slice substituted for bacon.

Dinner (\$55 including 23% service charge and 9% sales tax) is a choice of chicken or halibut with potato, vegetable and dessert (or chef’s choice vegetarian). Vegan and gluten-free available.

Hotel

Rates of \$169 single or double, \$199 triple and \$229 quad are being held for FFRF through Sept. 23, 2014 (or as availability lasts). Phone 1-800-245-8673 and identify yourself as part of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. You can reserve online by going to ffrf.org/outreach/convention/. Click on the link under “37th Annual National Convention – 2014” to reach the Biltmore’s registration page.

FFRF registration

Registration is \$65 for individual FFRF member, \$70 for nonmember/spouse accompanying member, \$105 for nonmember (includes \$40 annual membership). Student registration is only \$10.

Sign up online at: ffrf.org/convention

FFRF has a successful challenge on appeal in the federal courts of the parish exemption. He’ll talk on “The Vanishing Wall Separating Church and State.”

Attorney **Marci Hamilton**, Cardozo School of Law, Yeshiva University, will receive a Freethought Heroine Award. Hamilton, a constitutional scholar who clerked for Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, is the author of *God and the Gavel: The Perils of Extreme Religious Liberty*, newly updated this year. She wrote FFRF’s amicus brief before the Supreme Court in the Hobby Lobby challenge of the contraceptive mandate.

Anthony Pinn was the first African-American to hold an endowed chair at Rice University after earning degrees from Harvard and Columbia. He’s professor of humanities and religious studies and research director at the Institute for Humanist Studies. His books include *Why, Lord? Suffering and Evil in Black Theology* (1995), *The End of God-Talk: An African American Humanist Theology* and *Writing God’s Obituary: How a Good Methodist Became a Better Atheist*.

Secular Coalition for America director **Edwina Rodgers** will also speak.

Rogers oversees SCA, a coalition to which FFRF belongs, after 20 years of service in the U.S. Senate, White House and private sector. She has a law degree.

New York-based photographer **Christopher Johnson** will give a photo presentation, “A Better Life: Atheists Speak Out on Joy and Meaning.” Johnson traveled the world photographing atheists for a fascinating 254-page book, *A Better Life: 100 Atheists Speak Out on Joy & Meaning in a World Without God* (2014).

Other speakers and honorees will be announced in future issues and online at ffrf.org/convention/.

Those who might enjoy a little sight-seeing can do so Friday morning, then attend afternoon workshops featuring staff attorneys and an appetizer reception from 3-5. Registration opens up at 2 p.m. and continues through the convention.

The program begins formally at 7 p.m. Friday night, including speakers, honorees and a complimentary dessert reception. Saturday begins with FFRF’s nontraditional Non-Prayer Breakfast. An all-day program concludes after the evening keynote speech.

The convention will include the



FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

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

What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

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

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

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

The Freedom From Religion Foundation’s 37th annual national convention will take place Oct. 24-25, 2014, at the legendary Biltmore Hotel, 506 S. Grand Avenue in Los Angeles.

The Biltmore, a luxury hotel and favorite of dignitaries, is celebrating its 90th anniversary this year and is steps away from the L.A. Live entertainment complex, Staples Center, Ahmanson Theatre, Walt Disney Concert Hall and a few miles from Dodger Stadium.

FFRF is delighted to announce two distinguished scientists will accept its Emperor Has No Clothes Award, a brass statuette reserved for public figures who “tell it like it is” about religion. Honorees are paleoanthropologist **Donald C. Johansen**, discoverer of “Lucy,” author of many books and director of the Institute of Human Origins at Arizona State University in Tempe; and physicist **Sean Carroll**, senior research associate in the Department of Physics at the California Institute of Technology and author of *The Particle at the End of the Universe: How the Hunt for the Higgs Boson Leads Us to the Edge of a New World*.

Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of the University of California-Irvine School of Law and author of *The Conservative Assault on the Constitution* is accepting a Champion of the First Amendment Award.

Chemerinsky argued a Ten Commandments case before the U.S. Supreme Court and wrote a brief on behalf of the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals laying out the unconstitutionality of the parish exemption, a law which allows ministers to be paid with “housing allowances” that can be subtracted from taxable income.

Heads Up

A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman

Never Say Die

I know the rules: I'm old and slow,
So one of these days I'll have to go.
Well, I'll be ready for whatever I get,
But –
Not just yet!

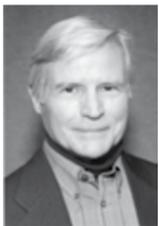
No one lives forever, they say,
And I've been around for many a day,
So it's only fair that I make way,
But hey –
Not right away!

I realize that there's a season
For everything: for rhyme, for reason,
For bodies slowly turning to mush,
But –
What's the rush?

Slow down, there, Mister Inevitable,
This body's still inhabitable.
If we don't rush ahead like fools,
Perhaps, while we're pausing,
They'll change the rules.

© Philip Appleman 2014

Freethought Today is honored 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* (2012), *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 "Afterlife" Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Phil's books: ffrf.org/shop.

YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

produced by the
Freedom From Religion
Foundation

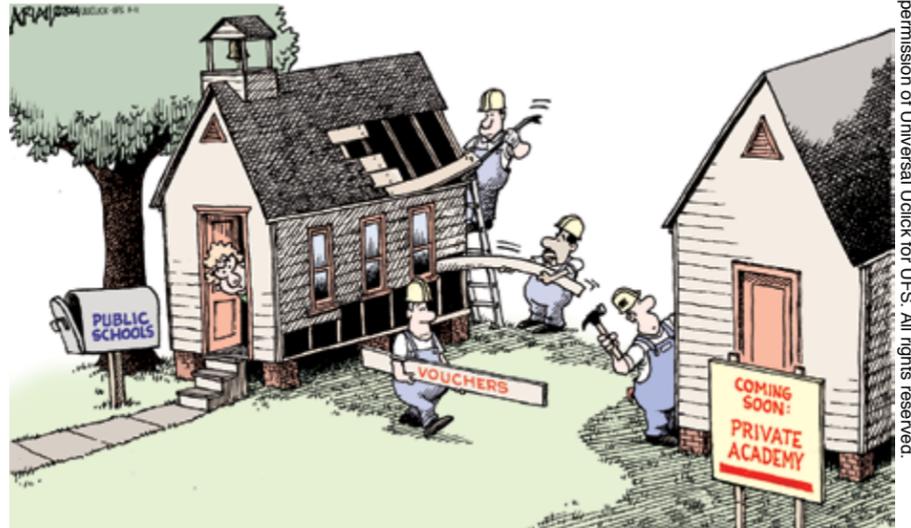


Hosted by Dan Barker and
Annie Laurie Gaylor

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**



Robert Arriall © 2014 Spartanburg Herald-Journal. Reprinted with permission of Universal Uclick for UFS. All rights reserved.

Overheard

Extending free exercise rights to corporations would undercut the rights of actual living, breathing Americans. At stake in this lawsuit is whether corporate chief executives are entitled to impose their religious beliefs on their employees and deny important federal rights to those employees. Hobby Lobby and Conestoga Wood hire workers of all religious faiths and persuasions, but refuse to respect that many of their employees may have a different set of religious views and want and need access to the full range of contraceptives. **David Gans, Constitutional Accountability Center, op-ed, "These claims shouldn't have a prayer"** *Los Angeles Times*, 3-18-14

These companies are not religious organizations, nor are they affiliated with religious organizations. But the owners say they are victims of an assault on religious liberty because they personally disapprove of certain contraceptives. They are wrong, and the Supreme Court's task is to issue a decisive ruling saying so. The real threat to religious liberty comes from the owners trying to impose their religious beliefs on thousands of employees. **Editorial board, "Crying Wolf on Religious Liberty"** *New York Times*, 3-22-14

It's past the point of wanting the pictures. I just want them to look at what's happening. We're praying that Walgreens learns that the bible doesn't belong to anyone, it belongs to everyone. **Kelly Taylor, 46, Gulfport, Miss., after Walgreens relented after refusing to process two prints of bible verses due to concerns about copyright violation** *Fox News*, 2-26-14

Christ's burial is followed by what may be the least necessary title card in cinema history: "Three days later." Surely the resurrection comes as no consolation to the movie's Pilate, who scoffs, "He'll be forgotten in a week." **Ben Kenigsberg, movie review, "History Channel's 'The Bible' is cut into an equally chintzy film, 'Son Of God'"** *avclub.com*, 2-27-14

The board of trustees is requiring professors and staff to sign a statement saying that they believe Adam and Eve were created in an instant by God and that humans share no ancestry with other life forms.

News story on Bryan College's new policy in Dayton, Tenn., home of the 1925 Scopes "monkey" trial *Chattanooga Times Free-Press*, 3-2-14

Your religion is yours; it's not a code that the rest of us must live by. If you have an issue with abortion, don't have one. If you have an issue with gay marriage, don't have one.

Steven Lopez, Sterling, Ill., letter to the editor responding to one headlined "Abortion still heinous, godless" *Sterling Daily Gazette*, 2-22-14

Today, Michelle and I join our fellow Christians in the United States and around the world in marking Ash Wednesday. Lent is a season of reflection, repentance, and renewal — a chance to recommit to loving and serving one another, and to deepen our faith in preparation for the Easter celebration to come.

President Barack Obama, White House statement *USA Today*, 3-5-14

The weather may have been a factor in not many people being out and about at lunchtime.

Linda McVay, St. John's Episcopal Church pastoral care team member, on why only a dozen people in two hours availed themselves of "Ashes to Go" on Ash Wednesday in downtown Portsmouth, Maine *Portsmouth Herald*, 3-6-14

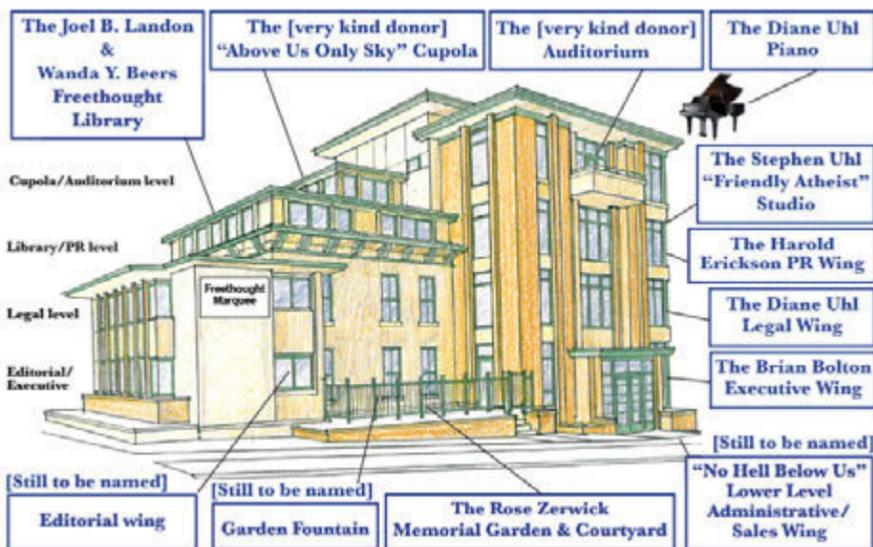
For most of my life, I've been, "Hey, I'm not into it, but I respect your right to believe whatever you want." But as time goes on, weirdly, I'm growing less liberal. I'm more like, "No, religion is ruining the world, you need to stop!" **Irish actor Chris O'Dowd, magazine interview** *British GQ*, April 2014



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

'Above us only sky'

Donors make Freethought Hall expansion possible



The listing below reports FFRF Building Fund donations received from Jan. 24, 2014, to March 27. It's not cumulative except for the total. Donations received before March 27 were listed in previous issues. Freethought Today will list subsequent donations in future issues. To protect privacy, contributors are not named unless granting express permission (so let FFRF know!).

Current summation of "naming rights" donors. FFRF is so grateful to:

- **Charlie Brooks**, \$434,385.44 Auditorium, and grandfather clock dedicated to Anne Nicol Gaylor
- **Steve and Diane Uhl**, \$255,500 Diane Uhl Legal Wing
- **Stephen "Friendly Atheist" Uhl** Recording Studio, & Dan Barker's concert grand piano bearing Diane's name
- **Brian Bolton**, \$125,000 Brian Bolton Executive Wing
- **Harold Erickson**, \$100,000 Harold Erickson Public Relations Wing
- **Joel Jandon & Wanda Beers**, \$100,000 Joel Landon & Wanda Beers Library
- **Rose Zerwick Memorial**, \$50,250 Rose Zerwick Memorial Courtyard & Garden
- **Very Kind Donor**

"No Heaven Above Us" Cupola
As yet unnamed: The "No Hell Below Us" Mailing Wing, the Editorial Wing and the fountain in the courtyard. FFRF will also erect a non-church marquee (think of the fun quotations!), which can bear a donor's name on a plaque.

Names of the 18 most generous

building fund donors will be etched on a 14-foot tall metal wall of honor in the **Anne Nicol Gaylor** lobby. (If you want to know whether you're in the running, contact bookkeeper Katie Daniel at katie@ffrf.org or phone 608/256-8900.) Names of all other donors who contribute \$5,000 or more will appear on a separate lobby plaque.

Other ways to become part of freethought history: Handmade, hand-etched vestibule tiles bearing names only (or names in memoriam) are still available for \$2,500. Paving stones with names or messages are also still available for \$1,000 (6x12 inches) and \$2,000 (12x12). Visit ffrf.org/donate for details.

- \$1,000-\$5,000**
- Anonymous, CA, \$5,000
- The Magic Pebble Foundation, WA, \$3,000
- Anonymous, IL, \$1,000
- Anonymous, PA, \$1,000
- Jay Sorensen, VA, \$1,000
- \$101-\$500**
- Anonymous, AK, \$500
- Alex Coyier, WI, \$500
- Richard Venti, CA, \$275
- Oguz Poroy, IA, \$249
- In loving memory of Mildred & David Randolph from Stanley Rosenberg, WA, \$101
- \$25-\$100**
- Anonymous, AZ, \$100
- Anonymous, CA, \$100
- Ron Fredrickson, CA, \$100
- Tyler Matthews, MN, \$100
- Gary and Jaye Welch, NE, \$100
- Pam Marcinko, OH, \$100
- Beverly Board, TN, \$100
- Anonymous, TX, \$100

- Anonymous, WA, \$100
- Stefanie Moritz and Vince Jenkins, WI, \$50
- Anonymous, WA, \$40
- Anonymous, SC, \$25

Subtotal: \$13,640

New Cumulative Total: \$1,748,123.66**

Steven Bentley, TN, previously listed as anonymous, has since granted his permission to acknowledge his

\$5,000 contribution by name. Joyce McChesney, PA, also listed as anonymous previously, has also granted her permission to acknowledge her \$1,000 donation.

The following donors were inadvertently left out of prior Building Fund donor listings:

David Watkins, WA, \$100; James Bernard Hampton, FL \$200; EJ Breider, WI, \$1,000; Anonymous, PA, \$2,500.

**Cumulative total has been adjusted due to fluctuations in stock values between receipt and sale.

Overheard

This is an excessive lifestyle.
Beth Maguire, Cathedral of Christ the King parishioner, Atlanta, on the Catholic archdiocese spending \$4.4 million on two residences for clergy from a \$15 million bequest from Joseph Mitchell, nephew of "Gone With the Wind" author Margaret Mitchell
Atlanta Journal-Constitution, 3-22-14

We're not anti-religious. We just think a public school should be inclusive for all kids. If they want to have a religious prayer, it should be said in scripture or prayer groups, but not during a core school activity like assemblies.
Kersten Tuckey, who withdrew her

daughter from Kororo Public School in New South Wales after parents voted to retain school prayer
Sydney Morning Herald, 3-23-14

According to a survey conducted by the Israeli Science Ministry, the profession of rabbi or any other clergyman is the least well-thought-of by the Israeli public.

News story in which the medical profession was "most admired" in the poll
The Algemeiner, 3-25-14

What to give up for Lent: Religion.
Hulda Pelzl, Texas FFRF member
Letter, 3-24-14

FFRF founder has helped 20,000 women

Women's Medical Fund going strong after 4 decades

Hemant Mehta, *thefriendlyatheist.com* blogger, Illinois public high school teacher and FFRF member, featured Anne Gaylor in his blog Oct. 28, 2013, and kindly granted FFRF permission to reprint it in edited form.

By Hemant Mehta

Anne Nicol Gaylor, [now 87], is an abortion “provider” with no medical training of her own. Her “office supplies” consist of little more than a pen, paper, checkbook and a telephone. On a Tuesday morning this past July, in a retirement home just outside of Madison, Wis., I sat in her living room as we waited for calls from women who wanted an abortion but couldn’t afford one.

She is their last hope for a helping hand.

As founder of Women’s Medical Fund Inc., a nonprofit she started in the 1970s, Gaylor asks intimate questions of strangers with no hesitation. There’s no time for emotion. There’s work to be done.

Are you single or married? How much money do you make? Did you use contraception? Is the man involved helping you? How much will your procedure cost? Did you see a doctor yet? Have you had an ultrasound?

Gaylor has answered the phone like this more than 20,000 times. Since 1995, WMF has raised and spent nearly \$3 million to help women, with most of the money (about \$200, on average, per caller) going to a small handful of providers like Planned Parenthood.

The funding comes mostly from individual donors. About a quarter of last year’s came from foundation grants. WMF’s mission is to make sure that a woman’s right to reproductive choice is not denied because she doesn’t have enough money.

It has no paid staffers, only dedicated volunteers. And, for the moment, Gaylor is just sitting in her recliner, waiting for the next caller, waiting to write her next check.

Depending on whom you ask, I’m either sitting in front of a sweet woman in the final years of her life or someone who will dread meeting her maker, a modern-day savior and great feminist activist or, as one newspaper columnist put it, “Granny Blood-Money.”

A few prerequisites must be met before a check can be written: The caller must live (or plan to get the abortion from a very short list of clinics) in Wisconsin, be more than seven or eight weeks pregnant and have already had her first required clinic appointment.

After the woman has had the procedure, Ann writes a check for up to \$400 directly to the hospital, clinic or physician. She also refers callers to another national group that may be able to write an additional check, allowing indigent women to owe as little out of pocket as possible.

She used to give out some of the money as a loan, hoping WMF would be repaid and could recycle the money to other women, but she knows better now. The women are just too poor. Still, she tries to get them to put up a little money of their own, even if it’s only \$25.

When I ask how young callers are,

‘Contrary to popular opinion, Playboy readers rarely went to bed.’

she pulls out a folder with the records of her phone conversations over the past few days. A sheet near the top documents a call the day before concerning a 13-year-old girl who reported being raped by her 17-year-old brother.

How is anyone even supposed to process information like this?

Clinics are required to report crimes to the police, so Gaylor doesn’t have to deal with these reporting issues. Her primary concern is whether the caller (in this case, the girl’s older sister) has the means to end the unwanted pregnancy. She regularly hears horror stories. The youngest caller this year was only 11.

Gaylor knows the trends, too. Most calls come near the end of the week, when some of the women receive a paycheck, and around the first of the month when welfare checks arrive.

Women don’t cry as much as they used to. They all cried when abortions were harder to come by, she recalls, but now only some shed tears. Most are just nervous. Emotional. Worried about how to pay for it. Wondering how they’ll reconcile their religious faith with their decision. Wondering if they can keep this a secret from their immediate and extended families.

Do you ever hear back from the women who call for help? Gaylor shakes her head “no.” Few want to talk about the procedure after it’s over.

Gaylor herself has never had an abortion. In 1958, a few years after giving birth to her fourth child, she had a tubal ligation (something she highly recommends to women who’ll listen).

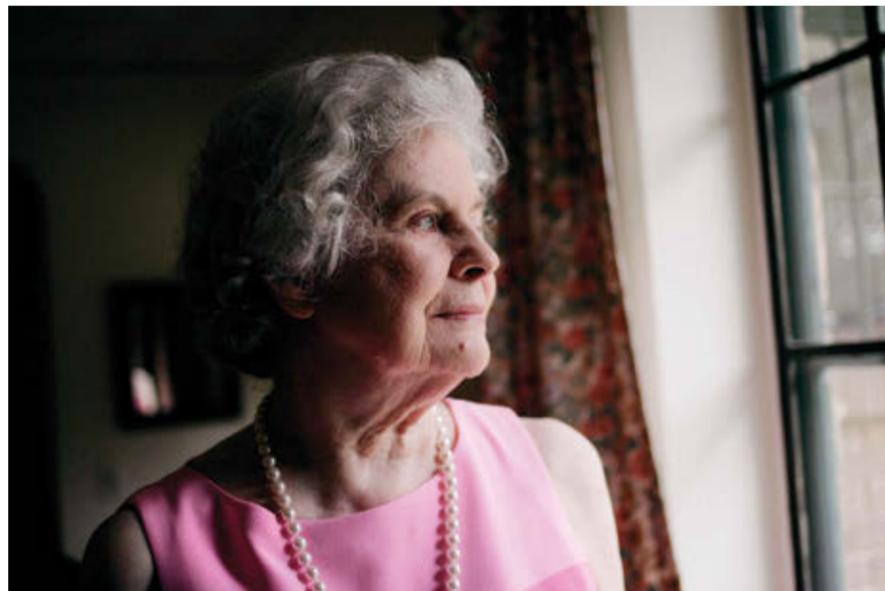
I wonder if there’s anything that could help make things better. Paid staffers? Nope. None of that, as the need for funding help is so great that Anne believes all donations should go to help women. She just wishes women had easier access to birth control. She wishes young women could more easily report instances of rape and get immediate help, but thinks that “as long as men keep attacking women, you’re going to have a need” for abortion services.

The early days

Women’s Medical Fund Inc. unofficially began in March 1970, just after Wisconsin’s anti-abortion laws were declared unconstitutional by a federal district court. The ruling effectively made first-trimester abortions legal. (It wasn’t until 1973 when the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Roe v. Wade*, took a similar position.)

Gaylor was already vocal about abortion rights. In 1967, she wrote an op-ed supporting overhaul of the state’s abortion laws. She joined the Association for the Study of Abortion and started the Wisconsin Committee to Legalize Abortion, spoke about the issue on radio and TV shows and wrote letters to the editor. Her phone started ringing.

In 1970, building off a program launched by scientist Paul Ehrlich, Gay-



lor started Zero Population Growth Referral Service (ZPG), where she could direct women to cities where abortion was available. Before long, Gaylor started referring callers to sites in Mexico. Abortions were illegal in Mexico and still are in many parts of the country, but police could be bribed to leave doctors alone. Referrals to New York soon followed when that state legalized abortion July 1, 1970.

Gaylor placed an ad in two newspapers in 1970 that included ZPG’s post office box and her personal phone number. The ad urged women to contact her if their doctors weren’t helping them, and nearly 100 women did. Playboy magazine later mentioned her as a resource, which only ramped up the calls. (“Contrary to popular opinion,” she later wrote, “Playboy readers rarely went to bed.”)

In February 1971, Madison provider Dr. Alfred Kennan, opened an outpatient clinic, seeing about 100 patients a week. But there was still great need for sources of funding for indigent women and students.

With the help of University of Wisconsin professor Robert West, Gaylor began Women’s Medical Fund Inc. in 1972 as an outgrowth of the service she was already providing. It was incorporated as a nonprofit in 1976 and is now said to be the country’s largest and oldest independent, continuously-operating all-volunteer abortion fund.

The Hyde Amendment, passed by Congress in 1976 and still in effect, resulted in an even greater demand for Gaylor’s service. The legislation bans the use of federal funds to pay for abortions, with exceptions made only for rape, incest and to save the life of the woman.

Because Medicaid funds are included in this ban, poor women are disproportionately affected and often need financial help. According to the National Network of Abortion Funds, of which WMF is a member, “[T]here are 15 states that use their own money to pay for abortion care as part of their Medicaid programs, but there are 35 that do not.” Wisconsin is one of the 35.

WMF no longer advertises as it once did, but local clinics are aware of it and frequently refer clients to WMF. It’s not hard to see why: The nonprofit has virtually no overhead and, as the group’s financial records show, more than 99% of its income goes right back to paying for abortion care.

Ties to FFRF

If you called WMF today, using information available on some older websites, you might reach the offices of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, another organization Gaylor founded in the late 1970s. FFRF, based in Madison, advocates for state/church separation. Gaylor officially retired from FFRF 2004, though she still holds the title of president emerita. Staffers at FFRF still screen the occasional callers before referring them on to Anne.

After 61 years of marriage, Gaylor’s husband Paul died of brain cancer in 2011. She moved into the retirement home in the summer of 2012. Gaylor suffers from macular degeneration and glaucoma, but her voice, while frail, is still strong enough to answer the calls. (Her son-in-law, FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, said in a 2004 tribute, “She may be losing her eyesight, but she is not losing her vision.”)

Gaylor’s only daughter inherited her mother’s activist streak. Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president, is also no stranger to anger from the opposition. At FFRF’s headquarters, serious threats go in one pile, angry letters in another.

According to Annie Laurie, fighting for state/church separation is similar to fighting for abortion rights, but “they want to kill you more” when you do abortion work.

The elder Gaylor is used to that kind of hostility, too. When I asked how she responded to threats, her voice became a little stronger, a little more confident. “I ignore them.”

Plans for future

Just as I’m leaving Gaylor’s apartment, with my computer packed up and my keys in hand, the phone rings. She answers it while instinctively picking up a pen and a form and listens quietly for a few seconds while jotting down some basic information.

Gaylor asks where she’s from, how much the provider is charging and if she’s visited the clinic for her first appointment. There’s an extended pause, after which I hear Gaylor gently cut in, “You have to have that appointment before I can take your application, because at that point, they will do the ultrasound which will confirm exactly how far you are, and then they’ll be able to tell you exactly what the cost will be.”

Continued on next page

Meet a musical member

Name: Andy Shernoff.

Where I live: Greenpoint, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Family: My beautiful fiancée Carla Rhodes and my rescue dog Duchess.

Education: P.S. 148, Flushing High School, State University of New York at New Paltz.

Occupation: Songwriter/musician/producer.

How I got where I am today: I was raised in a safe, supportive environment by parents who nurtured an appreciation for art, music and different cultures. They provided me with the solid foundation to pursue my dreams. Probably the only issue in which religion and I are in accord is the importance of a strong family structure. The world would be a better place if every child was born from love. Of course, that doesn't require the supernatural, just sensible birth control.

Where I'm headed: We come from stardust and we will return to stardust.

Person in history I admire: John Lennon, for inspiring me to become a musician and setting a high artistic standard. Neil deGrasse Tyson, the smartest man in the room and a noble warrior for science, reason and logic.

Quotations I like: "With or without religion, you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion." — Steven Weinberg

"One man's theology is another man's belly laugh." — Robert Heinlein

I love to hear Christian apologists try to squirm their way out of this one, and why does an almighty god need an apologist anyway? "However, you may purchase male or female slaves from among the foreigners who live among you. You may also purchase the children of such resident foreigners, including those who have been born in your land. You may treat them as your property, passing them on to your children as a permanent inheritance. You may treat your slaves like this, but the people of Israel, your relatives, must never be treated this way." — Leviticus 25:44-46, New Living Translation

These are a few of my favorite things: Music, wine, barbecue, travel to exotic locales, Jon Stewart's "Daily

I resent the stigma attached to atheism.

Show," focusing on the process not the destination.

These are not: Faith, original sin, people who call themselves "spiritual."

My doubts about religion started: As a child, I found that no matter how hard I prayed, I never got a response. I eventually realized I was simply talking to myself.

Before I die: Life is simpler when you know what makes you happy, and I know that every day I make music is a good day. I hope to continue to enjoy its healing power as long as I am on this planet.

There's a reason why many churches open their services with a band and sing-along. The magic in the music gives the congregation a high, which is then misconstrued as being closer to god. I strive to get that feeling without delusion.

Ways I promote freethought: I recently released a CD of songs about religion and faith. I felt the need to take a musical stand and "come out of the closet." I resent the stigma attached to atheism. The nonsense that we lack morals and can't be trusted is appalling. According to a recent poll conducted by University of British Columbia and the University of Oregon, atheists are trusted less than rapists!

In my lifetime, I've seen blacks and gays improve their status by demanding equal and fair treatment. I think it is time for atheist liberation!

I wish you'd have asked me: What's the story behind your song "Are You Ready to Rapture?"

I come from New York City, where nobody thinks Jesus is actually returning to Earth. I grew up completely unaware of "the Rapture." A few years ago, I was surprised to learn that evangelical Christians were offering financial support to settlers on the West Bank of Palestine in an attempt to destabilize the tense situation and accelerate the End Times prophecy. It could all be dismissed as the rantings



Andy Shernoff asks the musical question, "Are You Ready to Rapture?" He entertained at the 2012 Reason Rally.

of religious fanatics, except there are powerful people in government who believe this implicitly. It used to be just nutjobs standing on a street corner in Times Square screaming about the end of the world, now they are running for

president.

I would never mock somebody's religion, but if it's going to affect public policy, then I have a right to satirize it. And if I can get a good laugh out of it, even better.

'Are You Ready to Rapture?'

Andy Shernoff modestly omits his decades-long musical influence as a rock journalist and co-founder of the early punk band the Dictators in the mid-1970s, predating the Ramones by a year. He later collaborated with Joey Ramone and several other groups. Shernoff played at the March 2012 Reason Rally in Washington, D.C., the nation's largest secular gathering ever.

He released his first solo EP "Don't Fade Away" in 2012 and his second solo EP "On the First Day Man Created God" in 2013. The latter features "Are You Ready to Rapture?" "Skeptical," "Fisher of Men" and "Get on Your Knees for Jesus." Check out andyshernoff.com and cdbaby.com/cd/andyshernoff3 for more. Google "shernoff rapture" too see the "Ready to Rapture" video.

He wrote "Rapture" to poke fun at the late Pastor Harold Camping's predictions of Armageddon. Shernoff told Dangerous Minds online: "I had the phrase Jewish zombie rolling through my brain and wanted to incorporate it into a song. I developed a fascination with Christian eschatology and researched it extensively. I wanted everything in the song to accurately represent what these knuckleheads believe. It took a few months, and I prob-

ably wrote 25 verses until I had the right combination of drama, truth and sarcasm."

Are You Ready to Rapture?

The skies part
as a light shines through
guess who's back
it's the zombie Jew.

He's really pissed
at the unmarried fornicators
the stem cell crusaders
and the butt hole invaders.

So the towers fell
and the earth did quake
just a little taste of his vengeance
America prepare for your fate.

'Cause when the trumpets sound, he
will astound
watch the rivers turn to blood
the sinners cry and the dead will rise
judgment day has come.

Are you ready to rapture?
The savior that you spurn
Loves you forever
But the unbelievers must burn
When the zombie Jew returns. . .

Four decades strong: Women's Medical Fund

Continued from previous page

The call lasts only two minutes before Gaylor hangs up and smiles at me. "Ordinarily, they're more interesting to listen to," she jokes.

WMF won't last — can't last — much longer in its current form. Gaylor won't always be around to answer the phone. But a contingency plan has already been drawn up. When the time comes, the group's board of directors and additional volunteers will take over the phone calls and other menial tasks that Gaylor has been doing for decades now.

They haven't worked out all the logistics yet, but thankfully, they haven't had to. They're considering getting a dedicated cell phone that is assigned to volunteers during shifts or getting a phone number that goes straight

to voice mail and having volunteers call the women back. For now, Gaylor is able to answer all the calls on her home landline.

Board member Nora Cusack wrote to me that if abortion services were covered by health insurance or Medicaid the same way other medical procedures are, the phone might just stop ringing, or at least not ring as much. That, too, would ease the succession problem.

Gaylor's mission hasn't changed, but as she sits down to wait for the next call, she reflects on the grander vision she has for the future: "It would be nice to not be needed."

Tax-deductible donations to this "pure" charity can be sent to: Women's Medical Fund, PO Box 248 or via Paypal:

wmfwisconsin.org.

fool me once...

THE RAPTURE

9/7/1994
Wrong.

THE RAPTURE

5/21/2011
Wrong again.

THE RAPTURE

10/21/2011
Still wrong.

FFRF.ORG **FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION**

In October 2011, FFRF placed 42 billboards, using five different designs, in Oakland and San Francisco, Calif., to counter Pastor Harold Camping's ridiculous End Times predictions.

FFRF Legal Victories

FFRF stops bible ads on school marquee

A high school in North Carolina no longer displays church advertisements on its marquee because of FFRF. Several proselytizing ads, including "1 Peter 5:7" ("Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you"), were featured on the marquee at South Caldwell High School in Lenoir, N.C. These ads were purchased by "Day 3 Church."

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter to the district on Jan 8, explaining why displaying religious messages are an egregious violation on public school property:

"Messages on the South Caldwell High School sign are prominently featured and are intended to directly reach students. These messages have the imprimatur of the school and are subject to the Establishment Clause. Advertising on the sign may be properly limited to serve the school's objectives."

FFRF requested that if the school would not remove the church ads, FFRF would also purchase ad space itself.

The school district's attorney promptly responded that the school had removed all ads, which a photo sent by a local complainant verified. The district has changed its policy to ban all nonschool ads on the marquee, the attorney told FFRF.

Lamb of God off Minn. school menu

A public high school in Fertile, Minn., will no longer place a nativity scene in the cafeteria, as it did last December. According to local news sources, the display was temporarily removed, then put back up after a vote of the school board late last year.

Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott sent a letter to the Board of Education in December, explaining that the school may not lawfully maintain, erect, or host a nativity scene:

"The placement of a scene of the legendary birth of Jesus in a public school places the imprimatur of the school district behind Christian religious doctrine. Endorsements of Christianity in public schools are disturbing for those parents and students who are not Christians."

On Feb. 28, the district's attorney replied in writing that the board "rescinded its previous directive, which would allow 'religious symbols as part of holiday decor as long as it is accompanied by other holiday decor.'"

The letter added, "The school district is fully aware of the current status of the applicable federal and state statutes as well as court decisions regarding the issues at hand and intends to proceed in a fashion consistent with the law."

School pulls Christian film after letter

A school in New York will no longer show the Christian film "How to Save a Life" in a sophomore health class. FFRF received a complaint from a parent of a high school student in the Jamesville-DeWitt Central School District, DeWitt, N.Y.

Senior Staff Attorney Rebecca Mark-

ert sent a letter to the district to point out the constitutional problems with showing Christians films to a captive audience of students:

"The film tells the story of a high school basketball star named Jake who loses a former friend to suicide, and Jake's path to saving another friend from committing suicide by joining a church group and thus reforming his ways. The film also involves acts of premarital sex, drug and alcohol use, cutting, discussion of abortion and so on. Other films these companies have been involved with have had overt Christian messages, primarily involving accepting Jesus Christ and the Christian religion."

On March 14, the district responded that although the film had indeed been shown during the school day, it was an "isolated incident" that does not represent and is not consistent with school policy.

The district added, "After speaking with the teacher in question, be assured that this film will not be used as a resource in the future."

FFRF helps nonbeliever become citizen

The Freedom From Religion Foundation helped nonbeliever Adriana Ramirez, a native Colombian living in California, become a U.S. citizen after her naturalization application was initially rejected by the San Diego office of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Ramirez had refused to swear an oath "to bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law," asking for an exemption because, she wrote, "The strength of my moral and ethical convictions in this matter is greater than any religious training or indoctrination that I may have had in my upbringing."

She also objected to the phrase "so help me God," saying, "I do not hold such religious beliefs."

The agency, which is part of the Department of Homeland Security, responded by writing that "the oath of allegiance [sic] must be based on religious training and belief. . . . [Y]our unwillingness is not based on religious training and belief."

On Feb. 21, Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel wrote USCIS a forceful complaint letter, noting Supreme Court precedent. "It is shocking that USCIS officers would not be aware that a non-religious yet deeply held belief would be sufficient to attain this exemption. This is a longstanding part of our law, and every USCIS officer should receive training on this exemption."

On March 20, FFRF was informed that Ramirez received a letter stating her application had been accepted and giving information on attending a naturalization ceremony.

In 2013, FFRF helped Margaret Doughty become a U.S. citizen, surmounting a nearly identical situation at the Houston USCIS office. The office relented and let her take the oath without the "bear arms" requirement.

The repeated violations led FFRF to write a comprehensive letter to USCIS Director Alejandro Mayorkas. Seidel asked Mayorkas to issue a clarifying policy memorandum to prevent future nonreligious citizens from going through similar ordeals. He also took issue with prayers at citizenship cer-



Godly messages will no longer greet the public at this school in Lenoir, N.C.

emonies and ceremonies occurring in Catholic institutions.

"We thought this discriminatory policy was dropped, and here another applicant encounters the same barrier. The U.S. government must resolve this problem permanently," said FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

FFRF letter assures Gideon-free school

An FFRF letter of complaint ensured that bibles will no longer be distributed by Gideons International in a Tennessee high school.

A concerned parent informed FFRF that the Gideons were allowed to distribute bibles at Madisonville Intermediate School. A parent reported that at different times during the day,

teachers took their classes to the guidance counselor's office where Gideons preached to students and handed them each a Christian bible.

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel sent a letter in December to the district, explaining the constitutional violation: "The district may not allow any religious groups to enter school property to distribute religious literature. Even if the students are not forced to accept these bibles, the school sends a clear message to the children in its charge who are nonadherents 'that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community.'"

On Feb. 21, the Monroe School District responded that it would not allow further bible distribution and would "work diligently to ensure student rights under all laws are upheld."

Overheard

Science is not there for you to cherry-pick. You know, I said this once and it's gotten a lot of Internet play, I said the good thing about science is that it's true whether or not you believe in it. All right? I guess you can decide whether or not to believe in it, but that doesn't change the reality of an emergent scientific truth.

Neil DeGrasse Tyson, host of "Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey" and Hayden Planetarium director, on why media shouldn't give equal time to creationists and "flat-earthers"
"Reliable Sources," CNN, 3-9-14

As a creationist, I find Neil deGrasse Tyson's presumption to educate America on the meaning of science as host of "Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey" repulsive and sad. I am repulsed by Tyson's transparent attempt to promote atheism and discredit the Word of God, and saddened that so many cannot recognize the Dark Age a priori pseudo-

science animating his slick words.

Robert Bowie Johnson Jr., op-ed
Canada Free Press, 3-19-14

Whatever one might hear on the right about a war on religion, in this country we still care more about catering to religious sensibilities, even in liberal Hollywood, than we do about encouraging the open questioning of the claims of the faithful.

Lawrence Krauss, physicist and subject with Richard Dawkins of the film documentary "The Unbelievers," op-ed titled "Why Hollywood Thinks Atheism Is Bad for Business"
The New Yorker, 3-5-14

Dead "Snake Salvation" Pastor Jamie Coots Had No Life Insurance
Headline about a snake-bitten Kentucky pastor who's survived by his wife, father, two children and a grandchild
Christian Post, 2-17-14

Ask a Skeptic

Dear Skeptic:

How can I politely attend the Episcopal wedding of a close friend's daughter? The friend and I get along because we don't talk religion, she knows my facts and I am aware of her beliefs. However, whenever we dine at their house, we are invited to bend our heads and say grace. My husband and I just stare silently at each other.

The wedding will be heavy on God, and my friend has told me I will have to suck it up and take communion. I don't even know what communion is! I do know I don't want to take it.

At other church weddings, I've sat quietly during prayer time and changed the words to songs, even using "dog" for the mythical one.

I don't think my quiet protests will go unnoticed at this wedding though. I am also afraid I might shout out something inappropriate or start shushing people. Maybe I should just go to the after-party, where my discomfort is less likely to be noticed.

What would Ann Landers say?

— Linda in Virginia

P.S. We're also invited to a Church of England wedding in the U.K. My friend, who is the only religious one in her family, is planning a wonderful party for after the service. She excitedly told me we were on the A-list.

I wondered what she meant until she explained this meant we were invited to both the service and the party. The lucky (in my opinion) B-listers only get invited to the party!

Scott Colson, production editor:

I think it's more offensive to eat the Jesus cracker because that's their god, or for Episcopalians, a supposedly adequate representation of him. A cracker is better than the scary carving of Jesus with nails and thorns at some of the more graphic churches I've seen. Crackers any day.

The reception is more fun and a chance to interact with the lucky couple and their family without the formalities and incense (unless it's a Baptist reception — then, run).

Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president:

I vote for the party! There you can truly celebrate the newlyweds, not the religion, without artifice or feeling like a hypocrite. No one is likely to notice your absence at a church wedding, and you can circulate and truly enjoy the reception.

I no longer attend religious weddings (with exception of Unitarian). I vowed "never again" after being a "captivity" bridesmaid in my 20s in a Catholic wedding for a friend, as the priest went on for two hours about "sin."

Even firmer is my resolve not to

attend religious ("fill in the blank") funerals, typically more about "sin" (again) than the loved one.

Funerals, especially with open casket, are a relic of religion. Emotions are too raw, families are too upset and have too much to do to force upon them a burial funeral. A memorial service at most, which can be held when everyone has a chance to make travel arrangements and adapt to grief, is far more humane and civilized.

Joan Reisman-Brill, "The Ethical Dilemma" columnist:

You have to politely but firmly tell your friend you will not suck up anything, whether it's wine and wafers, or just your own values. If that demotes you to the B-list (or off all lists), so "B" it.

If you were Jewish or Muslim, would she expect you to take communion? Even if you were Episcopal, it's out of line — and perhaps even a sin in the eyes of the faith — to command anyone to perform a sacred ritual against their own conscience.

It's fine (even fun) during prayers to keep your head up, eyes open and lips not moving (or moving to alternative words that amuse you). But it would be inappropriate for you to register anything that others read as disrespect or protest.

If you really do fear you might lose control, beg off the ceremony and say how much you want to attend the party. Explain to your friend you just aren't comfortable at a religious service and don't want to make anyone else uncomfortable, but you would want to be there to celebrate.

A friend who isn't willing to accept you on these terms is not a true friend. (If you weren't such a VIP, you could just show up too late for the vows but in time for the kiss; but that's not an option in this case.)

You can do the same for the U.K. event. This will make room for someone on the B-list who's eager to get promoted to your spot on A. And again, if this friend says not to bother coming at all, she'll have saved you a long expensive trip just for a party, however nice.

Even if your friends dump you in a huff, you would do well to leave the door open. Many lovely ladies turn into Mother-of-the-Bridezillas. It could take time, but maybe they'll one day see things differently and want to reconnect (and perhaps beg forgiveness), which is easier if at least one of you didn't do any slamming.

Patrick Elliott, staff attorney:

Weddings are supposed to be enjoyable for those getting married and their guests. If the religious ceremony is too much for you to handle, than it



may be best to just attend the reception. The people actually getting married will not worry about whether the bride's mother's close friend is at the ceremony. You can let them know you care by giving them a personal card and nice gift. Your friend may not fully grasp why you may not want to attend a church service, but there is not much you can do about that.

On the other hand, attending a wedding ceremony is not the end of the world. As an atheist, I have never declined to attend a wedding service. My curiosity won't allow it, and I don't want to miss out on the main event. I stand and sit when told but do not otherwise participate by singing or taking communion.

In the Episcopal Church, only baptized Christians may take communion. That means it is more respectful of the church for you to remain in the pew rather than to take communion as your friend told you.

Finally, so what if people notice that you are not taking communion or singing hymns? My Roman Catholic extended family has never approached me and asked about it even though they know I took the sacraments of first communion and confirmation. It may be noticed, but people are there to see a marriage, not to observe who is eating symbolic human flesh.

Of course, if your blood sugar is running low, there are no gods that will smite you for eating a piece of bread.

Secular lobbying event June 12-13 in D.C.

The Secular Coalition for America, of which the Freedom From Religion Foundation is a member organization, is holding its 2014 Lobby Day and Secular Summit in Washington, D.C., on June 12-13. It will include lobbying training, visits with legislators and staffers on Capitol Hill and a policy conference.

Registration is \$50 for students and \$99 for others and includes breakfast, lunch and lobbying training Thursday morning, lobbying visits Thursday afternoon and a pool party and reception Thursday night. Friday includes breakfast, lunch and a variety of panels and workshops.

A discounted room rate of \$159/night at the Liaison Capitol Hill expires May 19.

Visit secular.org/lobbyday2014/.

'No Religion 4' set in B.C. in May

Rational thought comes to Kamloops, British Columbia, May 16-18, when Humanist Canada and BC Humanists sponsor the fourth annual Imagine No Religion conference.

FFRF Co-Presidents **Dan Barker** and

Annie Laurie Gaylor will speak, along with **Jerry Coyne**, professor of biology, author of *Why Evolution Is True* and an FFRF honorary officer and Emperor Has No Clothes honoree.

Other speakers include **Eugenie Scott**, who is stepping down as executive director of the National Center for Science Education; "The Thinking Atheist" video producer and Blog TalkRadio podcaster **Seth Andrews**; **Jerry DeWitt**, first graduate of the Clergy Project, who left Pentecostalism after 25 years in ministry; **Margaret Downey**, founder of Freethought Society; Friendly Atheist blogger **Hemant Mehta**, author of *I Sold My Soul on eBay* and *The Young Atheist's Survival Guide*; **Wanda Morris**, executive director of Dying with Dignity Canada; and **Carolyn Porco**, leader of the imaging science team on the Cassini mission currently orbiting Saturn, and a popular science writer.

Sign up to attend and make travel and accommodation arrangements at imaginenoreligion.ca/. The event begins Friday, May 16, at 7 p.m. and continues through Sunday. Beautiful Kamloops is in south-central British Columbia.

They Said What???

First off, I want to thank God, because that's who I look up to. He has graced my life with opportunities that I know are not of my hand or of any other human hand.

Matthew McConaughey, accepting the Best Actor Oscar for his role in "Dallas Buyers Club"

The Daily Beast, 3-3-14

You know what? You're an ass. I've had enough of you. You're a real punk. You know that? You have contributed

nothing to this program in 10 minutes, zero. And you're not that smart. You may think you're smart, but you talk in circles. . . . The problem that some of you atheists have is you're intolerant. And you're a punk. So get lost. Get out of here.

Radio talk show host Mark Levin, after a caller disagreed that atheism should disqualify a person from being president

mediacite.com, 3-17-14

In the News

Millennials quit church over LGBT issues

In a Public Religion Research Institute survey released Feb. 26, about a third of millennials who left organized religion said “negative teachings” or “negative treatment” related to gays and lesbians played a significant role.

Of adults between age 18 and 33, 17% said negativity about religion’s LGBT issues was “somewhat important” to leaving, and 14% said it was a “very important” factor.

A majority of the 4,500 Americans polled (58%) also said religious groups are “alienating young adults by being too judgmental on gay and lesbian issues.” Among millennials, that percentage jumped to 70.

The polls was conducted in November and December 2013.

Religious bills draw vetoes in Virginia

Virginia Democratic Gov. Terry McAuliffe’s March 27 veto of a bill giving military chaplains wide latitude to proselytize brought predictable howls from conservatives.

The Family Foundation said in an e-mail that McAuliffe denied “good sense and the General Assembly’s voting record” in favor of acquiescing “to the ACLU’s wishes.” Bill sponsor Sen. Dick Black, R-Loudoun County, said the veto reflects a “sort of unspoken antagonism to Christianity that’s based on gay marriage and abortion,” the *Virginian-Pilot* reported.

In his veto message, McAuliffe said the bill “would seriously undermine the religious freedom of National Guard members by potentially exposing them to sectarian proselytizing.”

Chaplains can minister as they choose at voluntary services or in private settings but don’t “have the right to use official, mandatory events as a platform to disseminate their own reli-

gious views,” McAuliffe wrote.

The governor’s office said he intends to veto a student religious expression bill that passed 20-18 in the Senate and 64-34 in the House of Delegates. Religion Clause reported that the bill would protect voluntary student prayer and prayer gatherings before, during and after school; wearing of clothing or jewelry displaying religious messages; and expression of religious viewpoints by neutrally selected student speakers at graduation and similar events.

The *Roanoke Times* reported that McAuliffe’s office said he’ll veto the bill out of concerns about its constitutionality and unintended consequences.

Religion trumps rights in Mississippi

The Mississippi Legislature has approved a “turn away the gays” bill to let businesses and individuals refuse services to LGBT people on religious grounds. The Republican-controlled House and Senate both passed a conference report April 1 on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act. The House vote was 78-43. The Senate vote was 38-14.

Gov. Phil Bryant has not said if he’ll sign it. A similar bill was vetoed by Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer.

The *Washington Blade* reported that the bill also adds “In God We Trust” to the state seal.

Church ousts Scouts but keeps money

Fr. John De Celles, pastor of St. Raymond of Peñafort Catholic Church in Springfield, Va., ended parish support for Cub and Boy Scout groups because of Scouting’s new policy on gays. De Celles took the popcorn money and another \$1,200 that Pack 683 had raised to sponsor a unit of Trail Life USA, founded in 2013 to offer “Christ-centered” Scouting, reported the *Washington Post* on March 1.

While De Celles had authority to transfer the money, that didn’t sit well with some. “He hurt these children for no reason so that he didn’t have to fund his own new program,” said Pack 683 parent Stephanie Curb.

“I don’t think it was the moral thing to do,” parent Melanie Frola said. The Frolas are leaving the parish because of the decision. Their son sold \$84.66 worth of popcorn.

The Disney Co. announced Feb. 28 it will stop supporting the Boy Scouts of America in 2015 over the Scouts’ ban on gay leaders. Disney does not contribute directly, but employees can do volunteer work in exchange for donations to organizations of their choice.

One Florida Scout leader said some troops were getting up to \$6,000 a year through Disney’s VolunteARS program.

SCOTUS hears Hobby Lobby challenge

The Supreme Court heard arguments March 25 on challenges by Hobby Lobby Stores and Conestoga Wood Corp. to the Affordable Care Act’s contraceptive mandate. The firms are Christian-owned and claim the law abridges their religious freedom.

Reuters speculated a majority could



You got that right

“Finally, some ‘good news’ that atheists can agree with! I’m still getting over the shock of seeing this in 21st century America,” writes Illinois Life Member Al Wagner.

rule that corporations have a right to make religious claims, but that the contraceptive mandate does not merit one. The AP called the court “divided.”

The *Wall Street Journal* said:

“Chief Justice Roberts appeared to tip his hand when he told [Solicitor General Verrilli] that the parade of horrors — all kinds of religious exemptions being claimed by all sorts of employers, punching holes in the uniform application of the laws — could be avoided by a ruling limited to closely held enterprises, like S corporations that pass their earnings through to their shareholders. That would leave the issue of, say, an Exxon claiming religious freedom rights to another day. Later, Justice Breyer suggested he might be open to that type of resolution.”

Mother Jones reported April 1 that Hobby Lobby has invested millions in companies that manufacture contraception and abortion-inducing medication.

The report said several of its retirement plan mutual funds are invested in Teva Pharmaceutical and Actavis.

Seek salvation, take home a weapon

The Kentucky Baptist Convention is leading “Second Amendment Celebrations” in which churches give away guns, which the Baptists are billing as “outreach to rednecks” to “point people to Christ,” said a March 1 story in the *Louisville Courier-Journal*.

Chuck McAlister, the convention’s team leader for evangelism, said 1,678 men made “professions of faith” at about 50 such events last year. In Louisville, he said, more than 500 people showed up one January day for a gun giveaway at Highview Baptist Church, and 61 made decisions to seek salvation.

“How ironic to use guns to lure men in to hear a message about Jesus, who said, ‘Put away the sword,’” said Rev. Joe Phelps, pastor at Independent Highland Baptist Church.

Setback for abortion rights in Maryland

In *Centro Tepeyac v. Montgomery County*, a Maryland U.S. District Court on

March 7 enjoined enforcement of a 2010 county resolution that requires each “limited service pregnancy center” to post to post a sign in English and Spanish in its waiting room that reads:

(1) “the Center does not have a licensed medical professional on staff” and (2) “the Montgomery County Health Officer encourages women who are or may be pregnant to consult with a licensed health care provider.”

The resolution expressed concern that “clients may be misled into believing that a center is providing medical services when it is not. Clients could therefore neglect to take action (such as consulting a doctor) that would protect their health or prevent adverse consequences, including disease, to the client or the pregnancy.”

So-called “crisis” pregnancy centers are typically operated by religious groups that try to talk women out of having abortions while misleading them about its risks. The court ruled the resolution was content-based and violated the First Amendment.

Scottish priests decline in Glasgow parishes

A March 12 report in the *Scottish Herald* estimated that within 20 years, the Catholic Archdiocese of Glasgow will have only 45 priests, less than half the number needed to staff current parishes.

Between 1991 and 2012, attendance at funerals in the archdiocese dropped 14%, along with a 39% decline at baptisms and declines of 41% at Sunday Mass and 54% at weddings.

Sentenced to hang on blasphemy charge

A Pakistani judge sentenced a Christian to death for blasphemy, Reuters reported March 27. Sawan Masih was sentenced to hang after a Muslim said Masih insulted the prophet Muhammad a year ago in Lahore. The accusation against Masih sparked a riot during which than 100 Christian homes were torched.

At least 16 people are on death row in Pakistan for blasphemy and at least 20 others are serving life sentences. No one has yet been executed for blasphemy.

In Memoriam

Edwin Kagin, 1940–2014

Edwin Frederick Kagin, 73, Union, Ky., died at home March 27, 2014. He was born Nov. 26, 1940, in Greenville, S.C., the son of a Presbyterian minister.

After serving as an Air Force medic, he earned a J.D. from the University of Louisville in 1972 and practiced law, with an emphasis on civil rights and the Constitution.

Ed, a longtime FFRF member, was serving as national legal director for American Atheists at the time of his death. He and his late wife, Helen, who died in 2010, founded Camp Quest in 1996 as a way to counter the exclusion of freethinkers and nontheists from the Boy Scouts. The idea has spread across the U.S. and into Europe and Canada.

He is the author of *Baubles of Blasphemy* in 2005 and a contributing author to *The Fundamentals of Extremism: The Christian Right in America* (2003).

Survivors include two sons, Stephen and Eric; two daughters, Heather and Kathryn; a stepdaughter, Caroline; and five grandchildren.

FFRF offers sincere condolences to Ed’s family and friends.

We swear, blasphemy laws *still* on the books



Photography by Brent Nicastro

By Andrew Seidel

Every great idea starts out as blasphemy. (Bertrand Russell)

“Where there is no belief, there is no blasphemy.” (Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses*)

“Blasphemy is a victimless crime.” (FFRF T-shirt issued to condemn a 1989 fatwa on Rushdie for writing *The Satanic Verses*)

Indonesian civil servant Alexander Aan was freed Jan. 27 after serving a year in prison and being fined \$8,000 for committing blasphemy. He posted words on Facebook that at least 75 million humans around the globe agree with: “There is no god.”

Aan was released “on license,” meaning he’s required to report regularly to authorities. He’s also vulnerable to vigilante retribution.

In December, two members of the Russian feminist punk band Pussy Riot were released from prison for committing “hooliganism and inciting religious hatred.” Their crime? Singing a one-minute protest song on the altar of Moscow’s main cathedral to condemn the Russian Orthodox Church’s social repression and its ties to President Vladimir Putin.

Internationally, blasphemy prosecutions are chillingly on the rise. It’s not just places like Pakistan and Iran. Ireland passed a law in 2010 punishing blasphemy with a €25,000 fine (\$34,000).

While such laws clearly violate the First Amendment, America has also seen its share of persecutions. Blasphemy laws turn thoughts objectionable only to some religionists into “crimes,” thereby clearly violating the First Amendment’s protection of freedom

of conscience.

Robert Ingersoll captured the injustice of blasphemy statutes marvelously while defending C.B. Reynolds of New Jersey in 1887:

“By making a statute and by defining blasphemy, the church sought to prevent discussion — sought to prevent a man giving his honest opinion. Certainly a tenet, a dogma, a doctrine, is safe when hedged about by a statute that prevents your speaking against it. In the silence of slavery it exists. It lives because lips are locked. It lives because men are slaves.”

The few antiquated blasphemy laws still on the books in the U.S. discriminate against non-Christians. By definition, blasphemy must discriminate. Any profession of faith in favor of one sect is blasphemy against another (i.e., you either believe that Jesus was the son of God, or not; that the angel Gabriel spoke to Muhammad, or not; that a dry cracker is the body of a noncorporeal being, or not).

Establishing a religion

Blasphemy statutes place the religious sensibilities of the chosen sect on a pedestal. As Bertrand Russell observed of the English common law, “[C]learly no one ought to speak ill of Christianity in such a way as to be likely to promote a breach of the peace. Those who use this argument do not, however, propose to extend the same protection to other religions. If you abuse Lenin to a Communist until he gets so angry that he hits you on the nose, the Communist is sent to prison. If the Communist abuses Christ to you until you get angry so that you hit him on the nose, it is again the Communist that is sent to prison.”

As stated by former Associate Justice Abe Fortas in *Epperson v. Arkansas*: “Government in our democracy, state and national, must be neutral in matters of religious theory, doctrine, and practice.”

Speech and blasphemy

Freedom of speech is not absolute. Fighting words, threats, defamation and libel are included in prohibited speech. Merely uttering a phrase that would once have been considered a sin against God must now fall into one of those categories if it is to be punished.

In a case challenging a Michigan law that made “profanely curs[ing] or

damn[ing] or swear[ing] by the name of God, Jesus Christ or the Holy Ghost” a crime, the court held that “God damn” was not speech justifiably prohibited by law. The court referenced a Supreme Court holding that states may not make a “single four-letter expletive a criminal offense” and found “no principled distinction between the expletive in [that case] and the milder profanity in this case.”

In a challenge to a Pennsylvania law prohibiting corporate names containing “[w]ords that constitute blasphemy, profane cursing or swearing or that profane the Lord’s name” another court found the statute violated the First Amendment because it restricted speech on the basis of viewpoint.

The Supreme Court summed it up, “from the standpoint of freedom of speech and the press, it is enough to point out that the state has no legitimate interest in protecting any or all religions from views distasteful to them which is sufficient to justify prior restraints upon the expression of those views. It is not the business of government in our nation to suppress real or imagined attacks upon a particular religious doctrine, whether they appear in publications, speeches, or motion pictures.” *Joseph Burstyn Inc. v. Wilson* (1952).

From blasphemers’ mouths

American colonial punishment was severe. Massachusetts had the death penalty until 1697, with the later sanction of branding the blasphemer’s tongue with a hot iron. With the adoption of the federal and state constitutions, these laws dropped into disuse. But before that happened, brave American freethinkers paid a price.

Thomas Jefferson Chandler of Delaware was found guilty in 1837 of declaring that “the virgin Mary was a whore and Jesus Christ was a bastard.” Another blasphemer, a **Mr. Ruggles**, was convicted in 1811 for observing “Jesus Christ was a bastard, and his mother must be a whore.”

A tamer utterance by **Abner Updegraph** in Pennsylvania in 1824 was condemned: “The Holy Scriptures were a mere fable, that they were a contradiction, and that although they contained a number of good things, yet they contained a great many lies.”

Abner Kneeland of Massachusetts was convicted in 1838 of uttering the following:

• “The Universalists believe in a

god which I do not; but believe that their god, with all his moral attributes, (aside from nature itself,) is nothing more than a chimera of their own imagination.”

• “Universalists believe in Christ, which I do not; but believe that the whole story concerning him is as much a fable and a fiction as that of the god Prometheus, the tragedy of whose death is said to have been acted on the stage in the theatre at Athens, five hundred years before the Christian era.”

• “Universalists believe in miracles, which I do not; but believe that every pretension to them can be accounted for on natural principles, or else is to be attributed to mere trick and imposture.”

• Universalists believe in the resurrection of the dead, in immortality and eternal life, which I do not; but believe that all life is mortal, that death is an eternal extinction of life to the individual who possesses it, and that no individual life is, ever was, or ever will be eternal.”

The aptly named **Michael X. Mockus** was found guilty in 1921 for saying:

• “Mary (meaning the Virgin Mary) had a beau. When her beau called one evening (both being young) he seduced her. He brought her a flower and put her in a family way. No woman can give birth to a child without a man.”

• “Look how the priests teach you, the falsifiers, thieves. It is not possible that he could be of the Holy Ghost, there must be a man. A young Jew was the father of the Christ. No woman can have a child without a man; that never happened and never can happen.”

• “The father of Christ was a young Jew and was no Angel Gabriel. Any girl who wants a child can call a Gabriel or some John.”

• “All religions are a deception of the people.”

• “There is no truth in the Bible; it is only monkey business.”

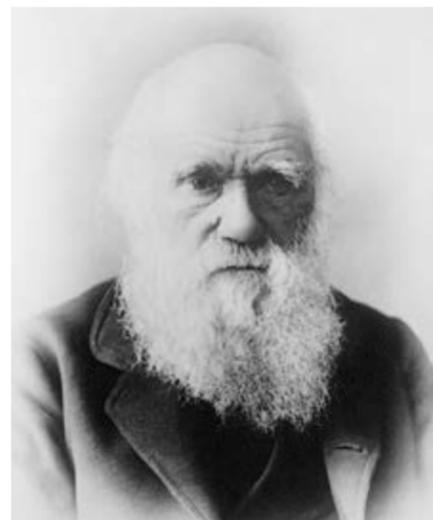
If you’re accused of blasphemy, you’re in good company. Throughout history, some of the greatest artists and writers have been accused of (though perhaps not criminally tried for) blasphemy. Among them are **James Kirkup**, author of the poem “The Love that Dares to Speak Its Name,” **Monty Python** for “The Life of Brian,” **John Steinbeck** for “The Grapes of Wrath,” **H.L. Mencken** (pretty much constantly from 1899-1956), **Charles Darwin** for “On the Origin of Species,” **Percy Bysshe Shelley** for “Queen Mab,” Thomas

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If you’re accused of blasphemy, you’re in good company



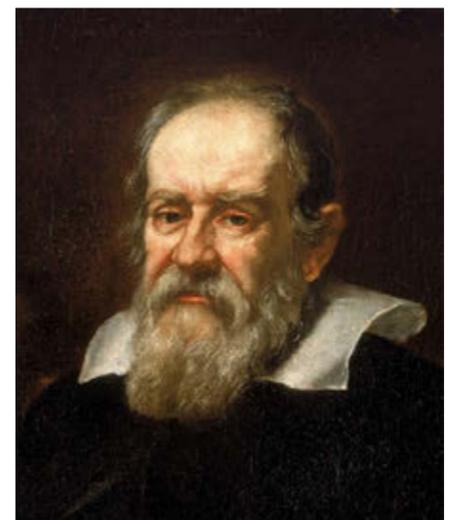
H.L. Mencken



Charles Darwin



Percy Bysshe Shelley



Galileo Galilei

FFRF convention speech, Sept. 28, 2013, Madison, Wis.

'Coolest job' includes building community

(Atheist journalist Jamila Bey spoke to attendees at FFRF's 36th annual convention. The speech was edited for print.)

By Jamila Bey

Thank you one and all for coming. Thank you for the work you do. Thank you for showing up and showing *up* the fact that we heathens exist, that we enjoy community and we come together.

I'm a journalist and reporter and a radio show host in Washington, D.C. I've been a hellraiser since before I was allowed to cross the street by myself. As a journalist, I really take issue with a lot of what's happening in this country.

I really take issue with the fact that, frankly, in this modern era, reporters are people who like to be on television, talking in this weird voice, flipping their "helmet hair" and asking questions that a really smart 22-year-old intern has written for them. There is not much critical thought to what they do. They don't understand history, and they certainly don't understand science. They don't understand politics, yet they're informing our population.

I'm really happy to be talking to you now because this morning built upon what I want to explain to you. We got to see how the local reports about FFRF's work are kind of skewed. Nobody wants the picture of our lord and savior Jesus Christ taken down. Why would anyone ever object? Use a different stairwell if you don't like it.

My show, the "Sex, Politics and Religion Hour: SPAR with Jamila," is on the radio in D.C., New York, Chicago and Miami. After January, the Voice of Russia radio network is going to broadcast me in English to 166 different countries. I'm really excited about that because voices like mine were not heard for way too long.

The minute I hit 18, I was like, "Yes, it's happened. I can say what I want," and that's what I've really been working to do. I am a student of democracy. I'm a student of this great American experiment. We've got it right — this is a nation formed by secular ideals, where everyone is valued, but we have to be able to go to the public square and put forth our ideas.

At least that's the way it was supposed to be. The problem and the opportunity is that in this modern era, anybody can get up and say anything and if you have money behind you, your money equals speech. I've got a huge, huge problem with that.

It's my obligation as an American to try my damndest to advance the principles upon which this great nation was founded. I understand that we're not perfect. I can give you a whole lot of reasons why I take issue with the founders, but let's not throw the baby out with the bath water.

So I get to be loud and obnoxious and cheeky and I have the coolest job in the world. But I need some help from smart folks like you. I need you to go back to your respective hamlets and townships and big cities and I need you, when you see reporting like we saw [in a video] earlier, I need you to call up those stations. I need you call

We all have to take responsibility for this democracy in which we live and raise our voices.

up those news directors. I need you to write letters to the editor and say, "Why was it that you didn't — there's a university here! Why didn't you ask anyone from the biology department? Why would you only interview . . . ?"

We all have to take responsibility for this democracy in which we live and raise our voices. I love the fact that we're *here*, in the heartland, where you know, this is Jesus country. And it don't look too Jesus-y 'round here [in this room] to me. That makes me smile.

Each of us has to do a better job. We're doing a lot, but we're outnumbered at the moment. However, I love to point out, we own the Internet, folks under 30, who are less inclined to be religious. They're more inclined to be pro-same gender marriage.

I'm going to surround myself with people who aren't hateful, who understand the way things are. I'm really excited that we have a legislator here [Arizona Rep. Juan Mendez]. We need to take a page out of that Christian Right handbook. We need to be running candidates. We need people to get in there at town halls and wear our flair and T-shirts: "I am secular and I vote," that's an important one. We need to be asking questions of our politicians.

I can't remember, if you can help me on this? The Louisiana legislator who was all pro-voucher and then realized, "Oh my God, a Jew could get this money too, oh no! I'm not for that!" She didn't want it to go to a Muslim school, but Christian schools, it was just fine. [Rep. Valarie Hodges, R-Watson, said later she regretted her vote.]

I guess I'm a radical. I'm very glad that today we recognize what will happen if we continue to be silent, if we continue to be hidden. I need to see us on more news programs. I need to see us on more editorial pages, and I certainly need to see more of us having lunch at various places wearing shirts! I love the shirts, please buy some shirts and wear them.

I am delighted to be here. FFRF is doing some amazing work and it's getting noticed. I'm honored that you had me here today. Thank you very much!

Q&A time

Q. I know that you're funded by the Russians. How do you feel about Vladimir Putin and the "homosexual propaganda" situation?

A. Yes, the station that I work for is funded in part by the Russian government. The reason I was hired is because I'm an expert in American politics. I'm trained as a health reporter. I'm good in live, breaking news situations. They hired me for my particular skill set. I of course don't support [Putin's anti-gay views] or that members of Pussy Riot were jailed for blasphemy.

My bureau is three blocks from



Photography by Brent Nicastro

the White House. I defend the First Amendment. When Chelsea Manning announced to the world who she was, I had two experts from the Human Rights Campaign on my show to talk about how we talk about transgender issues and rights. My employer is *never* going to dictate or mandate my ethics or morals to me.

Q. Last night, we went to dinner and as we walked out of the hotel, there was a man there with a sign that said, "God loves you atheists." I wanted you to share with the audience your response when he asked, "What state are you from?"

A. Hah! I have a firm policy. I do not engage with the idiots until after I've done my speaking. I need my intellect and energy for the crowd, but it just flew out! I just couldn't stop myself, so I said, "I live in the state of reality!"

Q. Do people have a right to pray in schools and at work?

A. Can the satanist pray? If the [public board] is going to have prayer, we're going to have a Wiccan come and have a whole celebration. Nudity is optional. Wait, wait, wait, they say. Whoa, they say. What's your problem, they ask? And I say, prayers for all!

But I like conflict. I love confrontation. I love "going there," because there is where the fun happens for me. But yeah, it's madness.

Q. I would imagine you must have come from a religious background. The question is then, what did you have to go through to become the person you are?

A. I started doing stand-up comedy by talking about my family, and people thought I was doing material, and I going "I'm not being funny, I'm telling you the truth." My father was raised as a Black Muslim, a follower of Elijah Muhammad in Pittsburgh in the mid-1950s. My mother was a Southern Baptist, "submit unto your husband, Jesus will stop him from beating you when it's appropriate" type.

She converted to Catholicism about when it was time for me to go to Catho-

lic school and get that discount. Many of my friends in school were Jewish. I went to a scholars program where there were a couple of Orthodox Jewish kids. By the time I was 7, I realized that nobody knew what the hell they were talking about, and they were making up crap as they went along.

I've always been loud and obnoxious, I cannot have a thought that I don't express, and if it's a question, it burns until I get it out. It was hard, growing up. I have a second-grade teacher, who's still friends with my mom, who swears that the only difference in me then and now is that now I'm taller and have a baby.

Yeah, I've been pissing people off since I was embryonic. According to Mom.

Q. I'm wondering how we can get more politicians who are on our side in Washington?

A. I can't answer that in the time I have. *But*, I had a lovely exclusive interview last week with Sen. Ernie Chambers [1983 Supreme Court victor in *Marsh v. Chambers*]. Give it up for Ernie Chambers! He's been called the scariest man in Nebraska. They changed the state constitution and instituted term limits after his 38th year of service. It's been two years and now he's back. He says there's no way that anybody who speaks honestly the way he does, and who believes in the rights of his constituents to be served as he does, can get on the national stage. There's too much money.

The way elections happen, I fear that Mr. Chambers is right. I think that the political system would do well with somebody like me. No way in hell can I be elected as things stand today. No way, no way. We need to change that.

Thank you.

Jamila Bey also writes for The Washington Post blog "She the People" and worked as a producer and editor for a decade at National Public Radio. She's currently writing a book on the role religion plays in the lives of African-American women.

We swear, blasphemy laws *still* on the books



Continued from page 11

Paine and his publisher **Richard Carlile** for "The Age of Reason," Shakespeare contemporary **Christopher Marlowe**, arrested for atheism and blasphemy, **Galileo Galelei**, **Aesop** (born c. 620 B.C.E) and **Socrates** (died 399 B.C.E).

According to the "Encyclopedia of Unbelief," Charles Lee Smith, in 1928, was the last person in the U.S. to be convicted of blasphemy as a crime. Smith had moved to Arkansas to protest the anti-evolution statute that was about to be passed. (It was overturned 40 years later by *Epperson*.)

Smith had rented a storefront and distributed leaflets such as "The Bible in the Balance," "Godless Evolution" and "The Ape Ancestry of Man." What got him into trouble was the sign he put in his window, "Evolution is True.

The Bible's a Lie. God's a Ghost." He was arrested for selling literature without a permit, even though he was giving the pamphlets away. In court, he refused to swear an oath, wishing to affirm instead. The judge, appalled at his atheism, refused to let him testify and fined him for distributing obscene literature.

After numerous threats, arrests and an attack on his storefront, Smith was charged with blasphemy. Again he was not permitted to testify and was convicted, although the conviction was overturned.

In the most recent U.S. case, George Kalman wanted to name his film company "I Choose Hell Productions." His choice was rejected by Pennsylvania because corporation names were not allowed to be "blasphemous." In 2010,

the court held that the blasphemy statute violated the First Amendment.

Despite the numerous cases overturning blasphemy laws and the fact that "it is proper to regard the statute before us not only as obsolete, but as repealed by implication in such essential parts as an advanced and enlightened civilization justifies with due regard for the personal liberties of the citizen," several states still have them, although they're rarely enforced and would fall to a constitutional challenge. The following are still on the books:

Massachusetts: "Whoever wilfully blasphemes the holy name of God by denying, cursing or contumeliously reproaching God, his creation, government or final judging of the world, or by cursing or contumeliously reproaching Jesus Christ or the Holy Ghost, or

by cursing or contumeliously reproaching or exposing to contempt and ridicule, the holy word of God contained in the holy scriptures shall be punished by imprisonment in jail for not more than one year or by a fine of not more than three hundred dollars, and may also be bound to good behavior."

Michigan: "Any person who shall wilfully blaspheme the holy name of God, by cursing or contumeliously reproaching God, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor."

Oklahoma: "Blasphemy consists in wantonly uttering or publishing words, casting contumelious reproach or profane ridicule upon God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Ghost, the Holy Scriptures or the Christian or any other religion."

South Carolina makes it a crime to "use blasphemous, profane or obscene language at or near the place of [religious worship]."

Blasphemy prosecutions are still rampant in many other countries, and not just places like Pakistan and Iran. Ireland passed a blasphemy law in 2010 punishing the crime by a €25,000 fine. The United Nations debates a "defamation of religion" resolution every year.

They should instead listen to Dan Barker, sage and FFRF co-president: "You cannot be convicted of a victimless crime."

FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel graduated cum laude from Tulane University with a B.S. in neuroscience and environmental science and magna cum laude from Tulane University Law School. Go online to see the complete Blasphemy FAQ:

ffrf.org/faq/state-church/item/20308-blasphemy

FFRF complaints create buzz

Continued from front page

the words "Philippians 4:13" — a verse from the bible reading: "I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me."

FFRF's press release added that "this braggadocio verse coming from a public official is rather disturbing" and seems more like "a threat, or the utterance of a theocratic dictator than of a duly elected civil servant."

Florida school violations

FFRF sent letters of complaint in March to two Florida school districts in Orange and Seminole counties over entanglement with a Christian congregation called The Venue Church (whose "venue," ironically, is only in public schools).

Already, Seminole County Public Schools has promised to end the constitutional violations outlined by Seidel in FFRF's letter.

Orange County allegations detail rampant religious activity at Apopka High School, including weekly services and other events sponsored by the church, which asserts, "We are permanently planting churches in Central Florida Schools."

Other issues:

- Regular prayer sessions attended by football coaches and players, including prayers led by Venue Pastor Todd Lamphere, who is also team chaplain. Lamphere is also "bowling team chaplain." A video shows him and other adults praying with the team.

- Bible verses on signs and apparel

are common. A large banner saying "Prepare for Glory, 2 Corinthians 4:17" was displayed at the football field as was a banner with a verse from John 15:13. Several T-shirts and jerseys combine the school logo with religious messages.

Similar constitutional concerns were voiced to Seminole County Schools, including public endorsement of the church by district officials, who appeared in a promotional video for the church using their titles. The video was shot on campus. Seminole County Schools agreed almost immediately to end all such ties with the church.

Idaho, Kentucky letters

A letter sent by FFRF in November dominated March news and airwaves in Idaho, with more than 100 people turning out March 19 at a city meeting in Sandpoint over FFRF's request that the Farmin Park Ten Commandments monument be moved to private property. The monument is one of several placed by the Eagles Club.

FFRF also called out Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear's use of state resources to promote a March 13 prayer breakfast. The governor's home page included a tab promoting the breakfast, and Kentucky.gov included a link to the event, named "Governor's Prayer Breakfast."

FFRF has received regular complaints about Beshear's annual event, particularly from state employees who received two email invitations from the governor to the event. The prayer

breakfast invitations included the official state seal and were sent to most state employees in violation of the state's Internet policies.

Chief's prayer walks

Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel's complaint about the police chief of Birmingham, Ala., received statewide and national coverage. Police Chief A.C. Roper, an ordained minister, created a Christian ministry called Prayer Force United. In his capacity as police chief, he leads monthly prayer walks through different neighborhoods, "claiming the city of Birmingham for God," ostensibly to lower crime.

Roper has opined that one of Bir-

mingham's biggest problems is a "lack of godliness." Seidel noted Roper can't use his public office to "advance promote or endorse one religion over another, or religion over nonreligion."

He also debunked the notion of prayer as a crime-fighting technique, citing statistics showing that nonreligious states and nations are safer. (View a video Seidel created documenting Rogers's sermons with commentary on their legality on FFRF's YouTube channel.)

FFRF members can sign up to receive FFRF news releases, action alerts, blogs or daily news links by emailing info@ffrf.org and specifying what you'd like sent to your inbox.



Darwin Day

"Charles Darwin," aka living history impersonator R.J. Lindsey, spoke Feb. 23 at FFRF's Metro Chicago chapter's Darwin Day event at the Ethical Humanist Society. At right is chapter member Allen Cosnow, who along with about 30 others enjoyed the presentation and buffet of Ecuadorian food in honor of Darwin's voyage to the Galapagos.

State/Church Bulletin

USAF Freethinkers Club wins validation

The Freethinkers Club at the U.S. Air Force Academy, which sponsored "Ask an Atheist" days, did not violate any rules and can maintain display tables and offer information to interested persons at its annual fair, academy officials announced March 19. The group is an authorized cadet club.

Military.com reported the school's announcement came after seven cadets, faculty and staff members contacted the Military Religious Freedom Foundation.

Religious plates win Wisconsin vote

Both houses of the Wisconsin Legislature approved a bill to issue special "In God We Trust" license plates. The bill passed 91-0 in the Assembly and 30-2 in the Senate (opposed by Dem-

ocratic Sens. Fred Risser and Mark Miller. Risser, 86, of Madison, is the longest-serving legislator in the U.S., first elected in 1956.)

FFRF has taken issue with the godly plates since September and sent an action alert to Wisconsin members. Staff Attorney Patrick Elliott noted in his testimony at a public hearing: "Legislators are elected to represent all citizens, including those who do not believe in a monotheistic god or any gods. Both supporters and opponents of the bill recognize that 'In God We Trust' is a religious statement."

Gov. Scott Walker hadn't signed the bill at press time.

Judge's religious bias hit again

A unanimous three-judge panel of the Oklahoma Court of Civil Appeals on March 21 reversed a decision by Oklahoma County District Judge Bill

Graves that denied a name change from James Dean Ingram to Angela Renee Ingram after Ingram's gender reassignment surgery.

The Associated Press reported it's the second name-change case in the last two years in which the appeals court has reversed Graves. He earlier rejected a change from Steven Charles Harvey to Christie Ann Harvey. In both cases, he cited specific bible passages as justification for denial.

Graves, a former Republican state lawmaker, told the AP he's very disappointed. "We can't change our sex, the way God made us. These things are really counterfeit."

After being term-limited, Graves was replaced by current GOP Rep. Sally Kern, who has called homosexuality a greater threat to the U.S. than terrorism.

Ingram was represented by the ACLU of Oklahoma.

Salvation Army to pay \$450,000 in suit

The New York Civil Liberties Union

announced court approval March 18 of a settlement in *Lowe v. The Salvation Army* in which the plaintiffs will receive \$450,000 in damages and attorneys' fees to two plaintiffs.

Reuters reported that the decade-old federal suit involved now-former employees who alleged the charity pressured them to follow its religious mission while they worked on government-funded projects.

The Salvation Army's Greater New York division also agreed to provide employees of its government-funded services with a document saying it won't ask about their religious beliefs or make them adhere to religious policies.

The suit was filed in 2004 after the administration of former President George W. Bush made it easier for churches to get federal money for so-called faith-based initiatives. The greater New York division currently has more than \$188 million in government contracts to provide social services and nearly 300 employees are paid with public money.

Overheard

The second goal is that particularly unchurched servers would understand that not all Christians are rude, impatient, lousy tippers.

Lead Pastor Chad Roberts, Preaching Christ Church, Kingsport, Tenn., on the website he set up named "Sundays Are the Worst" for restaurant workers to vent on

Kingsport Times News, 3-3-14

All of a sudden he just snaps. [It] just clicked like that and then he said he hopes I rot in hell.

Skyler Joly, 15, accusing his parish priest, Fr. Roman Manchester of Our Lady of Good Help in Burrillville, R.I., of inappropriate behavior during religion class

WJAR-TV, 3-12-14

In my own parish, several longstanding parishioners have ceased all financial contributions to the parish because they do not want a cent of their gift to go to the diocese.

Catholic parishioner John Veal, supporting a petition to remove Robert Finn as bishop of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph for alleged cover-up of clergy sex abuse

Kansas City Star, 3-13-14

While most invocations are traditional and uneventful, the Rev. Joe Nelms of Lebanon, Tenn., garnered national attention in 2011, when he thanked God for several series sponsors by name and his "smokin' hot wife" prior to a Nationwide Series race at Nashville Superspeedway.

News story, "NASCAR only pro sport to televise weekly prayer"

Bristol Herald Courier, 3-15-14

Shakespeare is my religion. Shakespeare has more wisdom and insight about our lives, about how to live and how not to live, how to forgive and how to understand our fellow creatures, than any religious tract. One hundred times more than the bible.

Sir Trevor Nunn, British theater director

The Telegraph, 3-17-14

The thing that's really disturbing about Noah isn't "the silly," it's that it's

immoral. It's about a psychotic mass murderer who gets away with it and his name is God. Genesis says God was so angry with himself for screwing up when he made mankind so flawed that he sent the flood to kill everyone — men, women, children, babies. What kind of tyrant punishes everyone just to get back at the few he's mad at? I mean besides Chris Christie.

Entertainer Bill Maher, on the movie "Noah" that debuted March 28

"Real Time With Bill Maher," 3-14-14

And on the 12th day of his murder trial, Oscar Pistorius broke out what appeared to be a bible study guide.

News story on the South African Olympian accused of shooting his girlfriend to death on Valentine's Day 2013

New York Daily News, 3-19-14

Reason has been under siege and been slapped around. Believing things on the basis of something other than evidence and reason causes people to misconstrue what's good for them.

Peter Boghossian, author and philosophy instructor at Portland State University, speaking to the Freethinking Frogs student group at Texas Christian University

TCU 360, 3-20-14

Unfortunately, Fred's ideas have not died with him, but live on. Not just among the members of Westboro Baptist Church, but among the many communities and small minds that refuse to recognize the equality and humanity of our brothers and sisters on this small planet we share. . . . [N]or will this be the last we hear of his words, which are echoed from pulpits as close as other churches in Topeka, Kansas, where WBC headquarters remain, and as far away as Uganda.

Nate Phelps, atheist son of Pastor Fred Phelps, on his father's death March 19

Recovering From Religion, 3-24-14

HORRIFYING ALERT!!! IF YOU ARE A CHRISTIAN, AS I AM, WAKE UP!!! Much to my surprise last night, I found out that my opponent is not a Christian. She does not have faith in God and feels there is no heaven.

Facebook post by Marilyn Ustler Mc-



Mark of a feast!

Don Cummings, Indiana: "So after a server apologized for the total on my bill, I just had to tip accordingly — twice." Nice work, Don!

Queen, Apopka [Fla.] City Council incumbent, adding that someone should bring challenger Diane Velazquez to Christ. [Velazquez, a former New York police detective, won 55% to 45%.]

Orlando Sentinel, 2-26-14

OBAMA HAS RELEASED THE HOMO DEMONS ON THE BLACK MAN. LOOK OUT BLACK WOMEN. A WHITE HOMO MAY TAKE YOUR MAN.

Sign outside Pastor James David Manning's ATLAH World Missionary Church in Harlem

New York Daily News, 2-27-14

Am I too WHITE to be your pastor?

Sign held by Patrick Kelley, pastor at River Pointe Church, suburban Houston, for a promotion to get black people to attend his Sunday service honoring Martin Luther King Jr.

Houston Chronicle, 3-1-14

There are [all-night] prayer vigils all over Ukraine. They are praying for peace and for aggression to stop. God is in ultimate control. We trust him. We never expected Russia to move in so swiftly.

Vitaly Sorukun, pastor of New Hope Church in Kharkov, an hour from the Russian border

Christianity Today, 3-3-14

Let's skip the Oscars and take our families to see Son of God this weekend. #SonofGod #JesusoverOscar

Tweet on the day of the Academy Awards by Pastor Matthew Hagee, Cornerstone Church, San Antonio

Christian Post, 3-4-14

More bothersome than the replacement of biblical characters with birds who, for example, gorily get their heads cut off, is the deliberate portrayal of the Christian parents as plastic, phony, mean and indifferent, predictably simple-minded and against imagination. This negative portrayal of believing Christians is part of the left's ongoing attempt to demonize Christians.

Rabbi Aryeh Spero, author of [Push Back: Reclaiming Our American Judeo-Christian Spirit, panning "The Bird Bible" skit on "Saturday Night Live"]

theblaze.com, 3-4-14

Regardless of what some people believe, we were not founded to be secular.

Baptist Pastor Chris McCombs, speaking in favor of prayers "in Jesus' name" at Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, city council meetings, to which FFRF has objected

Akron Beacon Journal, 3-5-14

We want to tell lots of people about Jesus by every means available.

Mars Hill Church spokesman Justin Dean, Seattle, justifying spending at least \$210,000 to get Pastor Mark Driscoll's book *Real Marriage* on The New York Times best-seller list

World Magazine, 3-5-14

Atheist activist in a foxhole

Sergeant Davis is a member of FFRF and the Inland Northwest Freethought Society, FFRF's chapter in eastern Washington and northern Idaho.

By Tech. Sgt. James Davis
U.S. Air Force

I'm originally from New York and have been in the military 16 years. My family was mainly secular. My parents never forced me to hold any of their personal philosophies while I was growing up. They left that for me to figure out on my own.

After college and entering the Air Force, I came to a balanced general understanding of everything theological but have since stopped wasting my time on theology. I focus more on a humanist and scientific approach to matters with practicality and reason. So I've been a freethinker for as long as I can remember, probably around when I found out Santa wasn't real.

During my deployment in 2010, my oldest Air Force friend, Rick Hamelin, established the first "official" freethought group in the Middle East, the Southwest Asia Freethought Association. SWAFA (swafreethought.jimdo.com/) was recognized by the base as a private organization. When I arrived, I helped Rick run it.

To our surprise, it grew quite fast, from about five people to 30 or so, including freethinkers, Buddhists and a Wiccan, who had no support groups. We welcomed everyone. Our group was first met with some doubt and confusion, even some hostility. People took down our signs on the public boards and threw out business cards that we handed out.

We asked for space in the chapel to hold our meetings, but Rick had Pascal's Wager pulled on him and was pretty much told "no."

We were soon holding two meetings a week and a movie night every other

This last enlistment, I used 'gods' plural, just to get a funny look.

Thursday. Our growth got the chapel's attention. They even sent a chaplain's assistant to one of our meetings. We wore PT [physical training] uniforms to remain anonymous. Rank would not be an issue for anyone, so we were free to speak our minds.

The chaplain's assistant came in uniform. I asked her if she was on duty and attending by direction of her boss. My suspicions were correct. But, all in all, she was most likely proved wrong if they assumed we just sat around bashing religion. She left actually liking how our group discussions went and how respectful we were of others' diverse opinions.

Religion didn't come up much unless it was part of another topic. Otherwise, it was opinions on general and miscellaneous science news — unless we had a new member, who would typically unload on us. People were just coming out as nontheist or had endured years of frustration.

Speaking up for others

I went to the Equal Opportunity Office in September 2013 with a complaint about an inappropriate display of a religious symbol on government property (civilian office in the hospital). I showed them that it was incompatible with Air Force Culture/AFI 1-1 and actually won one for once. The head chaplain went over and told them the display was not allowed. They removed it.

I have been battling with the base over miscellaneous things for the past few years and have met several times



In Spokane, Wash., Air Force Sgt. James Davis and FFRF Co-President Dan Barker brainstorm where to drop freethought books across enemy lines. (Just kidding!)

with the base chaplain. We discussed and debated a bit back and forth about policy and a little philosophy, but mainly about what's right in a government setting. Most of these things I did by myself, since many people here at Fairchild AFB who are Freethinkers choose to remain silent about many things. They have their reasons, so I ask them to tell me and I'll do it for them.

I've never asked for help on these matters because I believe that most of them can be solved at the lowest level, with tactful dialogue and understanding gained throughout. Also, I guess I like the challenge. I have talked with one of the attorneys at FFRF for advice on a complaint and, for another case, I sought advice from Mikey Weinstein, head of MRFF.

As far as the Oath of Enlistment topic which came up while talking with FFRF Co-President Dan Barker in February, I have always thought that the little injected "God" word at the end of "So help me" was pointless. To me

it's ludicrous to have to swear an oath on behalf of myself and some "Cosmic Being," so I decided to do things differently before others really started to publicly challenge it.

On one of my enlistments, I left "God" out of it. I had an officer staring at me with hand still raised because I left that word out, like he was waiting for me to say it. I didn't and just gave a nod to signal I was done.

This last enlistment, I used "gods" plural, just to get a funny look. Most people at work know me well enough and so they expected it. However, it would have been neat to add a random "god" of my choice (Zeus, Thor) at the end of each of my enlistments. At one of them, I almost said "Odin," but couldn't bring myself to do it.

Sgt. James Davis is on his sixth deployment and is headed to Afghanistan after completing combat adviser school. SWAFA membership is open to all personnel currently assigned to the base hosting the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing, including military, DoD civilians and contractors.

Former clergy enjoys atheist peace of mind

By Mason Lane

When I was a Christian, we'd talk about the "peace that passeth understanding" that neither I nor anyone else I knew experienced. I did frequently see theists uttering incantations, while clinging desperately to their straw of belief, during one of life's flash floods.

When I was a theist, that was also my kind of peace. I was taught that atheists never have peace of mind. That was a huge lie.

Sometimes I see believers on TV with ecstatic happiness on their faces, and in such moments I recall George Bernard Shaw's thought on the subject: "The fact that a believer is happier than a skeptic is no more to the point than the fact that a drunken man is happier than a sober one."

Since I became an atheist, I've observed believers under stress, mentally and emotionally struggling with all the "why, why, why Lord" questions, while

offering supplications to the sky Lord. As if the emotional turmoil of a crisis event alone isn't enough, the theist is also cast into additional mental chaos with unneeded irrational and absurd thoughts.

I saw this first hand at hospice group counseling several years ago. It was pitiful seeing the believers in the group trying to process their grief while also irrationally juggling their God delusions.

The peace I've experienced as an atheist for the past 42 years is not some futile attempt to go past human understanding. To the complete contrary, it's based on understanding. I've experienced peace as an atheist in the midst of terrible relentless pain, frustration, death of my spouse, near death myself and other very stressful and painful human events. So what is the etiology of my atheist peace that's so very different from my former theistic kind of peace?

As an atheist, I don't have delusional "God" thoughts confusing, disturbing, complicating, filtering, warping and frustrating my daily life and sense

of reality.

My peace emanates from my understanding of verifiable sciences (not ancient religious tales), about what and who I am and my place as a living creature in the universe.

My peace comes from not having nonsense and extraneous thoughts unnecessarily disturbing me, during critical times when I need to deal with and focus on the crisis and problem at hand.

Because of the first two reasons, I have a solid, clear, unshakable peace. It is a philosophical and resilient peace. It's like a strong safety net, woven from rational information, not fantasy tales.

I find the meaning of "philosophical" very interesting as it relates to the subject of peace:

(1. Relating or devoted to the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality and existence; (2. having or showing a calm attitude toward disappointments or difficulties.)

My knowledge of what and who I am, how I came to exist and how all my atoms will return to the universe's re-

cycle bin. That is enough for me.

Peace is always with me because my primary *raison d'être* is rational: survival. I also determine the purposes of my life, not the edicts of superstitious clerics, past and present.

Integrity and backbone

Science and theistic religion both offer explanations for life and the universe. Only science offers verifiable, falsifiable evidence. Monotheistic religion asks for belief with no evidence and often threatens anyone who dares question monotheism's most ethically immoral edicts and scientifically absurd writings and teachings.

I find the lives and words of atheists and agnostics like Thomas Edison, Democritus, Helen Keller, Carl Sagan, Dan Dennett, Andrew Carnegie, Ted Williams, Christopher Hitchens, Neil deGrasse Tyson, George Bernard Shaw, Stephen Hawking, Linus Pauling, Richard Dawkins, Dan Barker, Peter Higgs, Steven Weinberg, Mada-

Continued on page 17

Honorable mentions: Graduate/mature student essay contest

No to bigotry, persecution

Below: three final essays awarded honorable mentions in FFRF's 2013 graduate/mature student essay competition. The topic: "Why the U.S. is not a 'Christian Nation.'" Top-placing essays ran in the October issue. Brian Bolton generously endowed the graduate/mature competition and Dorea and Dean Schramm kindly added a \$50 bonus for each honorable mention. The essays are edited for space.



By Roksana Stalinski

Not a single day goes by that I am not grateful to be a citizen of the country [Canada] in which I live. Part of that gratitude is due to the fact that I live in a country where laws and governmental decisions are not based on religious doctrine.

I surely share this sentiment with many of my neighbors to the south. Unfortunately, despite this freedom, theism (e.g., Christianity) is often favored as the most acceptable form of belief (atheists believe in many things, but God is just not one of them) due in part to ideas of a "Christian nation."

Christianity and Christian values become synonymous with good citizenship in the U.S.. Surely an atheist cannot be an upstanding, patriotic citizen in a country where the currency avows "In God We Trust," right?

Colonial settlers did practice Christianity, which played a role in shaping U.S. history and culture, but the Declaration of Independence makes no specific reference to Christian practices or beliefs. Perhaps the drafters and signatories believed in a deity, but nevertheless, the declaration affirms that "Governments are instituted among Men."

The most powerful argument against the notion of the U.S. as a Christian nation is the First Amendment: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. . ."

Some find it difficult to accept that the Constitution makes no reference to God, Jesus and the like. Some grasp at straws by noting that the date of ratification is written as "the Seventeenth Day of September in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and Eighty seven." (Fun fact: "Year of our Lord" is the translation of the Latin *Anno Domini*. I learned this at the same Catholic high school in Ottawa where I learned about evolution.)

Let us examine two statements by two different presidents, one in 1811 and the other in 2008. The first: "Here in America you'll find a nation that welcomes the role of faith in the public square." The other regarded "practical distinction between religion and civil government as essential to the purity of both, and as guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States." Can you tell in which year each was made?

The first was by George W. Bush when he welcomed Pope Benedict XVI to the White House in 2008. The second was by James Madison in his 1811 letter to Baptist churches. The one conviction that united the key founders, despite their religious difference, was the principle of the separation of church and state. Thomas Jefferson stated in his 1802 letter to the Danbury Baptist Association:

"Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with 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 & State."

The religious views of the Founding Fathers are irrelevant, what are relevant are the views they shared on the role of religion in government, and their words are not the words of those who intended for the United States to be a Christian nation.

As an outsider looking in, I feel that I have provided a "not completely biased" perspective. Maintaining the separation of church and state as supported by the First Amendment ensures freedom for all citizens, notwithstanding individual religious convictions.

If Americans continue to recognize that religion does not a citizen make, then the United States could truly realize its potential as a nation which "to bigotry gives no sanction, to persecution no assistance."

Roksana Stalinski, 25, was born in Poznan, Poland, and has lived in Ottawa, Ontario, since 1994. After earning a bachelor's in international studies and modern languages, she worked as a federal public servant. She's pursuing a law degree at the University of Ottawa.

Land of the free

By Jessica J. Abernathy

Originally, in part to escape religious persecution, small groups of Europeans established colonies in the New World. During the American Revolution, many brave people died to be free from Great Britain's tyranny and to establish a government that was in the interest of all of its people rather than a select few.

Today's "Christian nation" adherents claim to know what the founders were thinking when they wrote the Constitution, but the document's text



life and validity were breathed into it by the voice of the people, speaking through the several State Conventions," Madison asserted.

In order to maintain our cherished American freedoms, church must always be separate from state. Many Americans are Christians, but some are not. A secular government that remains unconcerned with its citizens' chosen deity or deities promotes freedom and justice by maintaining a standard that can traverse faith and be meted out fairly and consistently.

Jessica Abernathy, 30, a native of Rockford, Ill., lives in northern California and is a second-year graduate student in U.S. history at San Francisco State University.

The United Secularists of America



By Daniel Urban

doesn't support their conclusions. This country has many citizens who are Christians, but it is not a Christian nation. While many of the founders were themselves Christians, they ensured that non-Christians could assume positions in government.

Further, Article I, Section 8 allows Congress the "Power to lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defence and general Welfare of the United States." Money may be borrowed "on the credit of the United States" for many purposes including the promotion of the "Progress of Science and useful Arts," but no church or religion is mentioned.

The Constitution reflects the founders' awareness of how the English and colonists had suffered or flourished based on their chosen faith. The American conception of government is intended to be representative of all of its people.

The Christian Nation Foundation website admits it was never the founders' intent to make "Christianity the official religion of our country." But the next lines say that the foundation "will reclaim and restore our nation's Christian heritage and values by acting as an umbrella organization for all like-minded Americans of all faiths in the cultural war against secular progressives."

In other words, you can be of any faith so long as you are Christian. But it's not just Christians who sacrifice to preserve American freedom, but people of no faith or other faiths. This is also their country.

A government based on religion denies the concept of liberty and justice for all, a principle to which everyone who has taken the pledge of allegiance has sworn. The U.S. Constitution provides a true framework for justice because it avoids religion.

Christianity allows forgiveness for crimes in exchange for prayer and penance based on the arbitrary dictates of a priest rather than judgment in a court with a jury of one's peers. Church structure is one that invites corruption due to the very private nature of church determinations and the prohibition of dissent or debate.

James Madison argued in 1796 to the House of Representatives that the meaning of the Constitution could not be determined from the intentions of the founding fathers. The Constitution "was nothing more than the draft of a plan, nothing but a dead letter, until

Every day we are assaulted by Christian propaganda proclaiming this country to be something it clearly is not. The fact this essay even needs to be written highlights a fundamental flaw in the consciousness of most Americans.

The U.S. is not, nor has it ever been, a Christian nation. A not-so-subtle attempt to shift us toward a theocracy is perpetuated daily by preachers in politicians' clothing and stealthily inching into mainstream culture.

The greatest victims of the offensive are science and education. Legislative budget cuts and other limitations hamper intellectual and medical gains. The campaign to undermine secular education and the teaching of evolution, injecting faith in their place, continues daily, despite years of litigation.

In light of continued resistance to facts, it's necessary to remind misinformed citizens of America's truly secular foundation. Upon thorough reading of our nation's most important document, the Constitution, one would observe a rather conspicuous absence. There is neither a specific reference nor even an allusion to a god. Surely, a Christian nation would not fail to state its founding theology clearly and boldly.

One need only read the opening sentence of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights to find the reason for the previous omission. It begins, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." Incidentally, Christianity is most assuredly classi-



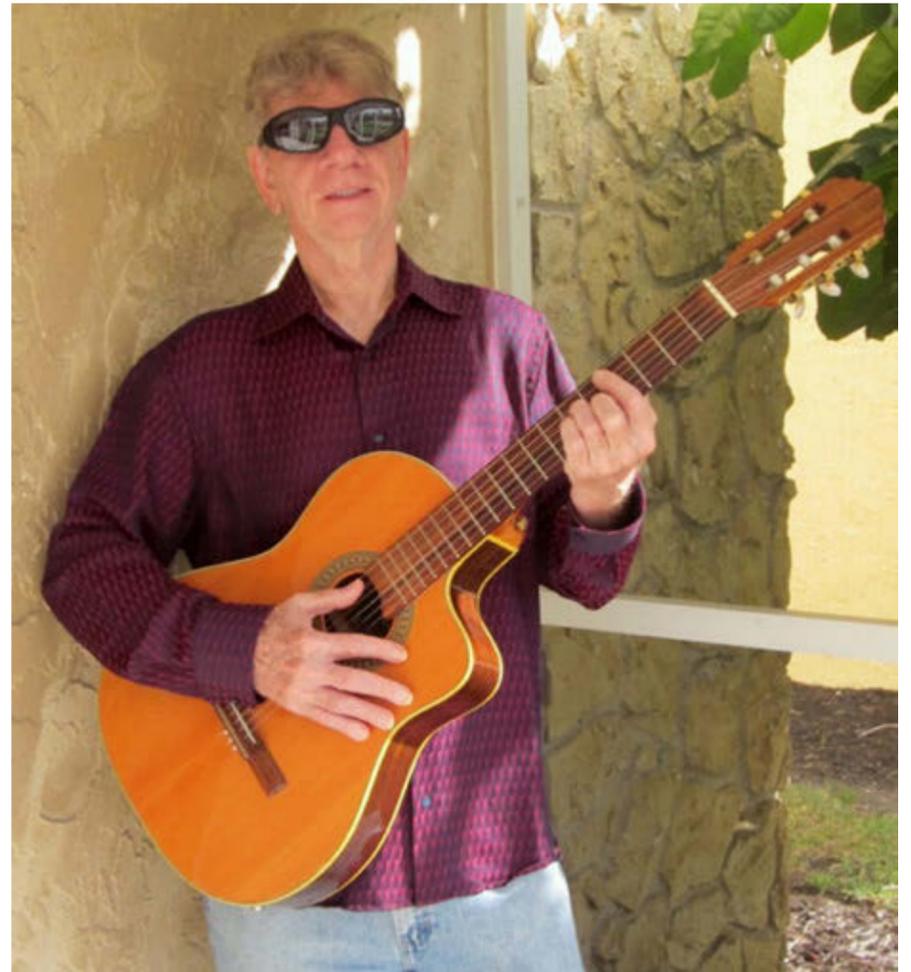
Way beyond Compere

The Phoenix-area chapters of FFRF, American Humanists and Americans United held a joint meeting in Arizona in late February. It was organized by Dr. John S. Compere of Chandler, a member of all three groups. Featured speaker was John M. Compere (at podium), Baird, Texas, who addressed the topic "We Have to Fight the Battle of Church & State or the Wall Will Come Tumbling Down: A Patriotic Perspective from the Texas Battleground."

Top, left, are Dolores Compere (John M.'s spouse) and John S. and Joyce Compere. The Arizona Compere's performed a clever church-and-state duet to the tune of "Joshua Fought the Battle of Jericho."



Former clergy enjoys atheist peace of mind



Mason Lane enjoys picking and grinning about being free from the clerical collar.

Continued from page 15

lyn Murray O'Hair, Robert Ingersoll, Marlon Brando, Sam Harris, Gore Vidal, Sigmund Freud, Bertrand Russell, Katherine Hepburn, George Carlin, Arthur C. Clarke and Thomas Paine (to name just a few) are testimony to the kind of peace I've attempted to explain here.

As a member of the Clergy Project, I recall how my dear fellow member "Grandparaja" recently provided so much wisdom and emanated such peace before his impending death. What a beacon. I'll never forget him. But he was not an anomaly. I have never observed an atheist go through the added emotional turmoil, and the begging for answers from the Sky God, that so many theists do when facing death.

I certainly don't contend all atheists have the kind of peace I've written about, but at least they should be free of monotheistic bats banging around in their mental attics.

Reading the bible led to my becoming an atheist. The explanations about human life and the universe that I'd been taught all crumbled, and the moral disconnect of blood sacrifice of a son became repugnant.

Then, as I studied the sciences, I found new rational information on which to hang my faith hat. I think we humans do best knowing verifiable truth.

There are many atheists for whom the sciences are not a major part of their reading or study, but they also project the kind of atheist peace I'm writing about. Therefore, I conclude that their peace comes from a lack of delusional nonsense in one's thought process, and does not require the knowledge of the sciences.

My wife (and my former wife, who died in 2001), would fit that category. Even as children, they did not eat the

Humans do best knowing verifiable truth.

baloney placed in front of them. I greatly admire humans who possessed unwavering integrity and backbone, even as children. Mark Twain would be another with enough common sense and natural perception to write, "It was the schoolboy who said, faith is believing what you know ain't so."

Thomas Edison was not privy to the scientific information available to anyone curious enough to search the Internet today. His take on religion was frank: "I have never seen the slightest scientific proof of the religious ideas of heaven and hell, of future life for individuals, or of a personal God." Also: "So far as religion of the day is concerned, it is a damned fake. . . . Religion is all bunk."

I think the bunk, in the brain, that Edison mentioned makes it impossible for theists to ever experience the peace of mind that is possible for an atheist. The bunk is like opium for the addict, and it's still a damned fake.

*Florida FFRF member Mason Lane was born Dean Aughinbaugh and changed his name for the music business, from which he's retired. Before that he was general manager of WHME-FM Radio (Christian programming) and pastor of Christian Faith Church in South Bend, Ind., then dean of students and soccer coach at DeVry University in Phoenix. **Justifiable Homicide**, available on Kindle or Nook, is the story of his journey to atheism. Google "reverbnation" and "mason lane" to sample his music online.*

Honorable mentions: Graduate/mature student essay contest

fied as a religion, despite Bill O'Reilly's assertion that it is merely a humble philosophy.

The next bit of evidence is unquestionably the most damning in its bluntness. The Treaty of Tripoli was initiated while George Washington was still in office and signed by his successor, John Adams. Article 11 of said treaty states, unambiguously, "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."

This clear-cut declaration hardly leaves room for misinterpretation. Was such a shockingly candid statement agreed on in secrecy and cleverly hidden from the American public? Hardly. Major newspapers of the day printed the treaty in full, and not a peep of protest was raised. The outcry that would rage forth if a sitting president made such a proclamation today is representative of a shift in public understanding (based upon a massive misinformation campaign by religious dogmatists).

One should also consider the founders' religious ideologies. It is reasonable to assert that James Madison and John Adams were among the most influential members of the Constitution drafting committee with George Washington overseeing them. Though raised with religious backgrounds, Madison was deistic. John Adams was a Unitarian (whose members notably reject the core tenet of Christianity, namely the trinity). Thomas Paine and Thomas Jefferson, although not part of the Constitutional Convention, were

significant founders, and deists.

There is always a vocal party attempting to point out "In God We Trust" on our money and "under God" in the pledge. One would assume from the smug contempt by those highlighting these phrases that they were always present, but the godly additions came in 1957 and 1954, respectively.

In order to consider the U.S. a Christian nation, one would have to fundamentally rewrite our founding documents. Sandra Day O'Connor foresaw the error of such an editing: "Those who would renegotiate the boundaries between church and state must therefore answer a difficult question: Why would we trade a system that has served us so well for one that has served others so poorly?"

Americans should also recall the sage words of Jimmy Carter, "the government ought to stay out of the religious business."

United we stand as a secular nation. Let's keep it that way.

Daniel Urban, 33, a native of Fairless Hills, Pa., joined the Army out of high school and served eight years on active duty. Afterward, he was a police officer in Charlotte, N.C., for several years before earning a B.S. in biology from the University of South Alabama in 2011. He's now working toward a Ph.D. in evolutionary developmental biology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, with a particular interest in researching the reptile-to-mammal evolutionary transition.

Black Collar Crime Blotter

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Elias Daniel, a Carmelite Order Catholic priest in Bangalore, **India**, is charged with murder along with 2 other persons in the 2013 Easter Sunday bludgeoning death of Fr. K.J. Thomas, 65, rector at St. Peter's Pontifical Seminary. Police identified the others only as **William Patrick** and **Peter**.

Sources said the case is tied to a 3-decade-old language dispute. Catholics who speak Kannada feel they are shortchanged by policy decisions and appointments, which are dominated by migrant Catholics from neighboring Tamil Nadu and Kerala states.

Five people, including 3 priests, were subjected to narco-analysis (truth serum). *Source: Union of Catholic Asian News, 3-20-14*

Matthew Luetke, 35, St. Charles, **MO**: Promoting child pornography. Authorities allegedly found 9 indecent images of girls between the ages of 9 and 13 on a computer belonging to Luetke, youth pastor at Good Shepherd Evangelical Lutheran Church.

An arrest affidavit said he told police he allowed his genitals to be touched by female relatives when they were preschool age when the family lived in Wisconsin and Minnesota in 2004-08. *Source: KSDK, 3-19-14*

Tyler D. Bliss, 27, Oakdale, **CA**: Suspicion of receiving or distributing images of a minor engaged in sexually explicit conduct. Bliss is a youth minister at Bethel Church and is pursuing preaching certification with the Assemblies of God.

Google Inc. allegedly found an image of 2 girls about 5 to 8 years old engaged in a sexual act with an adult male on Bliss' email account and notified authorities. Others, including some of an underage female he was having a relationship with, were found. "Bliss developed the relationship with the minor female through his work as a youth pastor," an FBI agent said.

As a handcuffed Bliss was ushered out of court, he mouthed "I love you" to family and supporters watching. *Source: Modesto Bee, 3-19-14*

Robert Genevicz, 67, Stratford, **CT**: Felony larceny. Genevicz, pastor at Stratford Baptist Church, allegedly stole \$170,000 from a 71-year-old retired teacher and church member. Police are investigating more allegations involving other older parishioners.

Genevicz and a female accomplice allegedly used some of the money to buy a Mercedes and a Hummer. *Source: AP, 3-18-14*

Grzegorz K. [last name withheld by police], a Catholic priest at 2 parishes outside Warsaw, is charged with having sex with a minor and showing the alleged victim pornography between 2000-03. The alleged victim complained to police last October.

The priest has a previous conviction for molesting an altar boy in 2001, for which he received a suspended sentence. *Source: Polskie Radio, 3-18-14*

Police in **Greece** arrested an **Orthodox priest**, 30, and an **unemployed accomplice**, 45, both unidentified, on fraud charges for allegedly running a job placement scam in Thessaloniki that bilked victims out of \$108,500. *Source: AP, 3-17-14*

Homer D. Rudd, 61, Bartow, **FL**: 40 counts of sexual performance by a child. Rudd, who holds an unspecified "leadership position" at Lake Hamilton Baptist Church, was arrested after a relative gave Rudd's laptop computer to detectives, who allegedly found pornographic images of girls ranging in age from about 4 to 16.

A police report said Rudd claimed the images would "pop up" on non-porn sites he visited to look at preteen models. *Source: WFTS, 3-15-14*

Christopher S. Kay, 32, Greenville County, **SC**: Lewd act on a minor and indecent exposure. Kay, a former teacher at Shannon Forest Christian School, is accused of twice touching himself into a state of arousal in front of a 12-year-old student and also of touching the student once.

Kay taught and coached baseball at the time of the alleged incidents, deputies said. He was fired from the school for unrelated performance reasons in 2011, a school official said, and now teaches at Spartanburg Day School, where he was placed on leave after the school learned of the allegations. *Source: WYFF, 3-14-14*

Jerome A. Clay Sr., 41, Perris, **CA**: Suspicion of rape, oral copulation with a person under 16 and sexual penetration by force. Clay, a pastor at Compassion Church, was arrested after sheriff's officials served search warrants at home and the church.

"There was a lot of bad stuff that goes on at this church. They say it doesn't, but it does," said Perris resident Jordan Egbert. *Source:*

Press-Enterprise/KABC-TV, 3-14-14

Stephen Howard, 54, Fontana, **CA**: Suspicion of lewd acts with a child under 14, oral copulation with a person under 18 and sodomy with a person under 18. Howard, lead pastor at Muscoy United Methodist Church, is accused of molesting 2 boys, now ages 14 and 23, who attended his church.

The 23-year-old alleges his abuse started at age 9 and continued into adulthood. The victims allege Howard paid them for sex. *Source: Press-Enterprise, 3-14-14*

Emil S. Payer, 69, Yukon, **PA**: Theft by deception, theft by unlawful taking, theft by receiving stolen property and theft by misappropriation of entrusted property. Payer allegedly took the money from Seven Dolores Catholic Parish, where he was pastor from October 2008 through August 2011 and drew a \$2,600 monthly salary.

Investigators allege Payer used to money for personal credit card bills, 6 trips to Rome and mass mailings to recruit people for the junkets.

The parish was "financially stable" with \$65,000 to \$70,000 in an operating account in 2008 when Payer became pastor, but that was down to about \$1,500 a year later, court documents said. *Source: AP/WTAE, 3-12-14*

Michael Kirkpatrick, 68, Plymouth, **UK**: Suspicion of a historic sexual offense. Kirkpatrick is a Catholic priest at the Cathedral of Sts. Mary and Boniface. Bishop Mark O'Toole made the announcement at March 2 Masses.

"The matter relates to historic offenses which occurred before the individual entered the Catholic Church," said a statement from Plymouth police. *Source: Plymouth Herald, 3-12-14*

Scott Sechrist, 61, Bristol Township, **PA**: 20 counts of involuntary deviate sexual intercourse with a person under age 16 and 10 counts each of aggravated indecent assault and statutory rape. The charges stem from the time Sechrist was pastor of First Baptist Church of Morrisville. The alleged victim, now 34, came forward in 1992.

She alleged Sechrist's inappropriate comments and touching escalated to intercourse and only stopped when she reported them at age 12. She later recanted.

At Sechrist's preliminary hearing, portions of an audio recording the woman made last November were played. A male voice on the recording, identified as Sechrist, is heard saying he wished he knew why he behaved the way he did.

"I thought about that for years. I babysat my nieces. I changed diapers. I don't know why it was you. . . . I don't know. I can't answer that."

The woman's husband cried in court while the recording played. *Source: Levittown Now/Courier Times, 3-12-14*

Shalom Dov Wolpo, a **Jerusalem Chabad** rabbi, and his assistant, **Rabbi Shabtai Weintraub**, were indicted for inciting Israel Defense Forces troops to disobey direct orders.

According to the indictment, the men contacted soldiers to persuade them to disobey potential orders to evacuate Jewish West Bank settlements and outposts. They allegedly offered 1,000 shekels (\$287) for each day spent in military prison as a result of disobedience.

The indictment centers on an incident in October 2009. *Source: Times of Israel, 3-11-14*

Jerrold Ketner, 79, Dodge City, **KS**: Rape, attempted aggravated criminal sodomy, aggravated sexual battery, attempted rape, attempted aggravated criminal sodomy, aggravated sexual battery and blackmail. Ketner, leader of a ministry called New Hope on the Plains Inc., is charged with alleged assaults on a 33-year-old woman in 2013 and last March.

The complaint alleges Ketner blackmailed the woman so she wouldn't report the 2013 assaults. *Source: Hutchinson News, 3-11-14*

Abraham Azhakathu, 59, Manning, **Albarta**: Sexual assault and sexual interference. Azhakathu is a priest in the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church, a missionary order based in India. A minor reported the alleged 2013 assault to police. *Source: CBC, 3-9-14*

Larry Durant, 59, Sumter, **SC**: 2 counts of 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct, allegedly involving a 16-year-old female congregation member during "private sessions of prayer" at Word International Ministries, where Durant was pastor in 2012-13.

Three others have alleged sexual misconduct by Durant, who's also charged with forgery for allegedly forging the name of a victim's grandmother on a quit claim deed. *Source: The State, 3-11-14*

Edwin Mercado Viera, 53, Diocese of Arecibo, **Puerto Rico**: Lewd acts. Viera, a defrocked Catholic priest, allegedly molested a 13-year-old altar boy in 2007. He's the first of 6 laicized priests from the diocese to face criminal charges. *Source: WRAL, 3-6-14*

Cory D. Moses, 38, Charlotte, **NC**: 1st-degree assault and battery, criminal sexual conduct with a minor and committing or attempting

a lewd act. At the time of the alleged crimes, Moses was pastor at New Mount Zion Church and Redeemed Christian Ministries, both in York, SC.

The female victim, now 19, told York police the incidents started in 2009 when she was 14.

Moses was convicted in 2003 of taking indecent liberties with a minor in Gastonia, NC, as pastor at Faith Chapel Fire Baptized Holiness Church. When arrested in 2002, he signed a statement saying "he might have accidentally rubbed his genitals against both girls."

His sentence included lifetime sex offender registration. The York churches have come under fire for hiring a convicted sex offender. *Source: Charlotte Observer, 3-6-14*

Samuel Waldman, 52, Brooklyn, **NY**: Transporting or distributing child pornography. Waldman, a rabbi who teaches at a Jewish girls' school, was arrested in a federal sting and allegedly admitted downloading videos from sharing sites.

Videos allegedly depicted girls as young as age 4 fellingating males and being raped, a boy masturbating and an adult fondling a prepubescent boy.

Waldman's friend Leo Eckstein said he doesn't believe it. "I know the gentleman, I know this person, everything about him. There's not one grain of truth in this alleged situation." *Source: Daily Forward/NBC 4, 3-5-14*

Robert Moore, 52, Mentor, **OH**, and **Richard Muse**, 43, **Cleveland**: Extortion, bribery, theft in office and soliciting or receiving improper compensation. Moore, pastor at Church Cathedral Worship Center and Richmond Heights school superintendent, allegedly conspired with Muse to get cash kickbacks from a firm doing business with the school. Muse was district buildings director.

Investigators said the alleged shakedown involved about \$3,700. *Source: WTAM/Sun News, 3-3-14*

An unidentified Catholic priest, 61, Marshfield, **New South Wales**, faces 14 counts of aggravated indecent assault which allegedly occurred between 1975-82 at St. Stanislaus secondary college in Bathurst. The priest is the 11th cleric to be charged with child abuse at the school in incidents dating to 1960.

Two other priests, ages 71 and 73, face "historical" abuse charges involving boys at Bathurst and St. Mary's Church in **Sydney**. *Source: AAP, 3-3-14*

David "Scott" Lemley, 43, Baton Rouge, **LA**: Aggravated rape and theft of a motor vehicle. Lemley, pastor of New Harmony Baptist Church, is accused of raping a 20-year-old disabled woman with the mental capacity of a 7-year-old.

The arrest warrant said the woman's father told her to have sex with Lemley because his wife had been bedridden. Lemley is accused of giving away a car, which he was supposed to be fixing as a favor, to a church member who allegedly sold it for \$250 to a scrap metal dealer.

The woman's father also faces several sex counts and has been in custody since November. *Source: The Advocate, 3-3-14*

Kevin Lohse, 39, Russellville, **KY**: 1st-degree indecent exposure. Lohse, interim pastor at Woodlawn Baptist Church, is accused of exposing himself to a shopper in the juniors section at Burkes Outlet.

"In the [store] video, you can clearly see Mr. Lohse manipulating his zipper, then exposing his penis to the 15-year-old girl," Detective Samantha Reeser said.

Lohse turned himself in after a still photo from the video was made public. He told police his 7-year-old son was with him in the store. *Source: Bowling Green Daily News, 3-1-14*

Daniel A. Dominguez, 21, Ocala, **FL**: Lewd and lascivious behavior. Dominguez, a student ministry intern at Church at the Springs, allegedly had sexual contact with a 15-year-old girl at the church.

The girl told police Dominguez grabbed and kissed her and touched her breast over and under her shirt, her buttocks over her clothes and her private area while they were cleaning water jugs for an upcoming event. *Source: Star-Banner, 2-28-14*

Ronald Norris, 27, Roebuck, **SC**: 3rd-degree criminal sexual conduct. Norris, pastor of The Church in Spartanburg, was arrested after police were notified by an official at Woodruff High School that a girl had been touched inappropriately multiple times, starting when she was 16. *Source: WSPA, 2-25-14*

Dalvis "Steve" Conerly, 62, Raleigh, **NC**: 2 counts of taking indecent liberties with a child. Conerly, a pastor at New Beginnings Fellowship, is charged with alleged offenses on Feb. 2 and Feb. 4 with a 12-year-old girl. The law says that "liberties" must be "for the purpose of arousing or gratifying sexual desire." Conerly's online bio says he's a licensed professional counselor with a doctorate in spiritual guidance. *Source:*

News & Observer, 2-24-14

Philip Briganti, 67, El Paso, **TX**: Criminal sexual contact. Briganti, a retired Catholic priest, allegedly committed the offense after he officiated at a November wedding in Prospect Park, NJ. The alleged unwanted contact occurred with another man on a bus ride to a hotel after the reception.

The Paterson Diocese, where Briganti served before retiring, has suspended him from the ministry. He's also a former military chaplain who retired as a lieutenant colonel. *Source: AP, 2-21*

August B. Kreis, 59, Columbia, **SC**: 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct and disseminating obscene material to a child. Kreis, described by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a "hot-tempered, longtime white supremacist and Christian Identity minister," was arrested after the mother of an alleged victim went to authorities.

Sheriff Leon Lott said Kreis is accused of molesting the victim, a child under age 12, and providing obscene material for about 3 months.

Kreis was sentenced to 6 months in prison in 2011 and ordered to pay back over \$193,000 that prosecutors said he received improperly from a federal pension. *Source: WISTV, 2-19-14*

Horace Sheffield III, 59, **Detroit**: Domestic violence assault and battery and preventing a crime report. Sheffield, pastor of New Destiny Christian Fellowship Church, is charged with assaulting his wife in January at their home. Media reports said they are in the midst of a divorce. *Source: Free Press, 2-14-14*

Riaz Tasawar, 35, **Sydney**: Solemnization of a marriage by an unauthorized person. Tasawar, a native Pakistani imam, is charged with marrying a 12-year-old girl to a 26-year-old man at the girl's home. He's the first person ever charged under the 1994 law.

The girl's father, a Muslim convert, supported the union and is in custody on 25 counts of sexual intercourse with a child. The Islamic Centre of Newcastle has ended Tasawar's employment. *Source: news.com.au, 2-12-14*

Clyde W. Way, 68, Albemarle, **NC**: 4 counts each of taking indecent liberties with a child and indecent exposure. Way, a volunteer student ministries team leader for the Stanly Baptist Association, allegedly exposed himself to 4 boys, ages 10-13, while playing strip poker at a church retreat in June 2013. He originally faced 24 counts. *Source: State Port Pilot, 2-5-14*

Pleaded / Convicted

Leo Koppala, 47, Blue Earth, **MN**: Pleaded guilty to 2nd-degree criminal sexual conduct involving a victim under age 13. Koppala, pastor at Sts. Peter and Paul Catholic Church and St. Mary's in Winnebago, admitted fondling a girl while at a dinner at her grandmother's home.

The Diocese of Winona put Koppala on leave. He will likely be deported to his native India. *Source: AP, 3-18-14*

Gerald Ridsdale, 79, an imprisoned Australian Catholic priest, who earlier pleaded guilty to carnal knowledge of a girl and buggery and 27 counts of indecent assault, appeared in **Melbourne** at a presentence hearing. Charges stem from incidents with boys and girls between 1961-80.

Victims testified Ridsdale gave them lollipops after molesting them. A girl said she went to a nun and was told, "Good little girls don't talk about such things. Off you go."

Another victim testified Ridsdale called her "God's little angel" and said he took her out of the school kitchen where she was cutting up vegetables and raped her. Another priest walking past saw what was happening, she said. *Source: The Age, 3-18-14*

Matthew Caminiti, 29, and **Alina Caminiti**, 27, Black Earth, **WI**: Convicted respectively on 4 and 3 counts of child abuse for forcefully striking their children's bare buttocks with a wooden dowel and spoon when they were as young as 6 weeks old.

Matthew is the son of **Philip Caminiti**, who led the Aleitheia Bible Church, where parents were taught to punish their children "biblically" to instill proper behavior. Sheriff's deputies arrested several members of the church in November 2010. Philip Caminiti and several others have already been sentenced. *Source: State Journal, 3-12-14*

Jeffrey D. Eddie, 41, Muscle Shoals, **AL**: Pleaded guilty to 16 counts of sodomy, 3 counts of sexual abuse of a child under the age of 12 and 1 count of child pornography. Eddie, children's pastor and administrator of Highland Park Baptist Church, was arrested after the church's worship arts pastor found pornographic images of young males on Eddie's laptop and saw a child sitting on Eddie's lap with his hands up the child's shirt.

Eddie told police there were more victims than he could remember. He has 2 sons and

Pastor Moses said 'he might have accidentally rubbed his genitals against both girls.'

is being divorced by his wife. *Source: Baptist Press, 3-12-14*

Stan Hogan, 69, Adelaide, **Australia**: Pleaded guilty to accessing child pornography and an aggravated count of possessing child pornography. Hogan, a Jesuit priest and teacher at St. Ignatius College, admitted to offenses in 2012-13. *Source: abc.net.au, 3-6-14*

David Hellman, 31, Brooklyn, **NY**: Pleaded guilty to traveling in interstate commerce to commit extortion. Hellman was accused of conspiring with 9 others, including 2 rabbis, to violently coerce a Jewish man in New Jersey to give his wife a religious divorce known as a "get."

The rabbis charged are **Mendel Epstein**, 68, and **Martin Wolmark**, 55. Hellman is the only person to plead guilty so far. *Source: Star-Ledger, 3-6-14*

Andrea Lewis, 54, Shreveport, **LA**: Guilty by jury of 3 counts of transportation of minors with intent to engage in criminal sexual activity. U.S. Attorney Stephanie Finley said the crimes happened from 1994 to 2000 when Lewis used his status as pastor and choir director to coerce female church members to have sex with him. *Source: KATC, 3-1-14*

Tim Lambesis, 33, Carlsbad, **CA**: Pleaded guilty to solicitation of another to commit murder and conspiracy to commit a crime. Lambesis, lead singer for the Grammy-nominated Christian metal band As I Lay Dying, admitted hiring a hit man to kill his estranged wife, Meggan Lambesis, who filed for divorce in 2012.

Lambesis eventually gave an undercover agent an envelope with \$1,000 for expenses, Meggan's address and gate codes, photos of her and dates when he would have the children and thus, an alibi. Their children are ages 4, 8 and 10. *Source: NBC, 2-25-14*

Francis P. Cullen, 85, **Tenerife**: Pleaded guilty to 21 counts of indecent assault when he was a Catholic priest in the UK. The sexual abuse of 7 boys and girls aged 6 to 16 took place from 1957-91 at various parishes.

He was arrested in 1991 but skipped bail and fled to the Canary Islands. *Source: BBC, 2-24-14*

Sentenced

Patrick Braud, 56, Angoulême, **France**: 2 years' suspended, mandatory counseling and €3,000 (\$4,170) restitution to 1 of 2 teen sisters Braud was convicted of molesting between 1994-98 when he was vicar of the Catholic cathedral of Angoulême. The sisters are now 22 and 32. *Source: France 3, 3-18-14*

Gerald A. Poynter, 48, **Kansas City**: 13 years in prison and restitution of \$952,000. Poynter, aka Brother Jerry Love, encouraged people to claim false tax refunds from 2008-11. Co-conspirators, 11 of whom have pleaded guilty, shared some of the \$3.5 million in refunds with Poynter's Jerry Love Ministries as "love donations." *Source: Kansas City Star, 3-13-14*

David Yonggi Cho, 78, **Seoul**: 3 years in prison for embezzling \$12 million from Yoido Full Gospel Church, which he founded and is said to have the world's largest Pentecostal congregation.

Cho allegedly told church officials in 2002 to buy stocks owned by his eldest son, **Cho Hee-jun**, at 4 times the market value. Cho Hee-jun was sentenced to 3 years.

Cho must also pay back \$4.6 million to the church and \$3.2 million in taxes he avoided paying. The church is affiliated with the Assemblies of God and has more than a million members. *Source: Christianity Today, 2-27-14*

Craig L. Davis, Stone Mountain, **GA**: 20 years in prison with 10 years suspended for 2 counts of reckless conduct. A jury found Davis, former pastor of Atlanta's Full Gospel Church, guilty of knowingly exposing a female congregant to HIV.

"I'm pleased with the sentence," said the victim, Ronita McAfee, who agreed to let her name be used.

Davis' 15-year-old son took the stand and told the judge his dad "teaches me how to be a man," adding, "Not only that, he's the person I get my good looks from." *Source: Journal-Constitution/Christian Post, 2-21-14*

George L. Spencer, 59, **New Orleans**: 7 years in prison after pleading guilty to child molestation and sexual misconduct with a child. Spencer, former associate pastor at Greater Works CME Church in Kansas City, admitted he groped and digitally sodomized a 13-year-old girl in 2012 in his church office while she was naked from the waist up as he exposed his genitals. Her mother and grandmother were at bible study upstairs. *Source: Kansas City Star, 2-20-14*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Linda Grindstaff, a former member and employee of **Emissaries of Divine Light** in Glen Lvey, **CA**, is suing the "global spiritual network" for breach of contract, fraud and intentional infliction of emotional stress. Founded in 1932, its stated mission is to "assist in the spiritual regeneration of humanity under the inspiration of the spirit of God," according to the suit.

Grindstaff alleges she was forced to work for free and pay monthly fees to live in her own home, which she says Emissaries is trying to sell out from under her.

The complaint says Emissaries doctrine promotes sexual "triangles" of a man and 2 or more women, even if they're married, in order to "handle and protect" the man's spiritual expression and spiritually purify the women. *Source: Courthouse News Service, 3-17-14*

Jennifer Herrick, 60, New South Wales, is suing the **Australian Catholic Church**. Herrick alleges that when she was 19 and sexually naive with a severe physical disability, **Fr. Tom Knowles** started grooming her for sex. They first had intercourse 3 years later, she alleges, and continued the relationship until Knowles ended it when she was 35.

"I'm surprised you hung on as long as you did," Herrick alleges Knowles said to her at the time. She lodged a breach of trust claim after her 2011 complaint to Knowles' order, the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, resulted in the church confirming the long relationship and disciplining Knowles. He was reinstated in December 2012 with no public explanation of his 16 months' administrative leave.

He was again put on leave in February 2013 after media and victims' groups started asking why priests weren't subject to the same penalties as doctors who have sex with patients.

Herrick's condition, bilateral congenital hip dysplasia, left her self-conscious but "suddenly here was a charming and charismatic priest, who was interested in visiting me and didn't seem to worry about how I walked," her claim states. *Source: Newcastle Herald, 3-7-14*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

Miller County Circuit Judge Kirk Johnson awarded 7 women \$525 million in damages for physical, sexual and psychological abuse by imprisoned evangelist **Tony Alamo**. The Arkansas-based **21st Century Holiness Tabernacle Church**, an arm of Alamo Ministries, failed to respond to the suit.

The suit also names Alamo and **Jeanne Estates Apartments**, operated by the church and controlled by Alamo. Rulings have not been issued against those defendants.

Alamo, 79, is serving 175 years on a 2009 conviction for taking girls across state lines for sex. Victims in the civil case are among the victims from Alamo's criminal case. *Source: AP, 2-27-14*

Jackson County Circuit Judge Jack Grate OK'd a \$1.275 million settlement in a suit filed by 2 parents on behalf of their minor daughter against the Catholic **Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph**, **Fr. Shawn Ratigan** and **Bishop Robert Finn**.

The same week, Circuit Judge Jim Kanatkar approved a \$525,000 settlement against the same 3 defendants in a suit filed by 2 other parents and their minor daughter.

Including 2 suits it settled in 2013 for nearly \$2 million, the diocese has agreed to pay \$3.75 million in cases involving Ratigan, with at least 2 others pending. A total of \$1 million in default judgments have also been entered against Ratigan, sentenced to 50 years without parole in 2012 for sexually exploiting little girls. *Source: AP, 2-22-14*

Finances

First National Bank of Illinois foreclosed on 4 condos owned by the **Family Christian Center** of Munster, **IN**, and senior pastor **Steve Munsey**. The bank says it's owed \$604,447 for de-

linquent payments. The IRS also has tax liens of \$54,000 against the church.

A recent newspaper series showed Family Christian was spending millions on leadership compensation, travel, meals and jet fuel while not making mortgage and other payments.

California-based Evangelical Christian Credit Union foreclosed in 2011 against Family Christian after the church defaulted on the mortgage for its worship center. The case is still pending. At the time, church revenues were about \$10 million annually and the monthly mortgage payment was \$98,000.

All 4 condos were eventually sold in a treasurer's tax sale because of unpaid taxes. The church redeemed one of the condos, with the bank paying on the church's behalf to save the others. *Source: NWI Times, 2-21-14*

Legal Developments

The 4th District Court of Appeals in **Wisconsin** upheld 8 convictions of **Philip Caminiti**, 56, pastor of Aleitheia Bible Church in Black Earth, who was found guilty in 2012 of conspiracy to commit child abuse for telling church members to hit their children to make them behave.

Caminiti claimed his rights to free speech and religious exercise were violated, but the court said the jury could have reasonably inferred that Caminiti's teachings produced lawless action, and the state has a compelling interest in preventing child abuse.

Caminiti's attorney, Robert Henak, said he'll appeal to the state Supreme Court. *Source: State Journal, 3-20-14*

Bernard J. Hartman, 74, Dayton, **OH**: 2 counts each of gross indecency with a child under 16 and assault and 14 counts of indecent assault. Hartman, a Marianist brother, was extradited to Australia to stand trial for molesting 2 boys and 2 girls more than 30 years ago.

After a committal hearing, Magistrate Jo Metcalf found sufficient evidence for the case to proceed. Hartman is accused of molesting 2 teen boys in 1981-82 at St. Paul's College and 2 girls between 1974-78 when he visited their homes as a family friend. The girls were between ages 6 and 11.

Hartman returned to the U.S. in 1984 and was working for the church when the allegations were made. *Source: The Age, 3-19-14*

Allegations

Bill Gothard, 79, Oak Brook, **IL**, was put on administrative leave after allegations were made of sexual harassment of women who worked at his ministry and failure to report child abuse.

Gothard's Institute in Basic Life Principles was popular for thousands of Christian families. His Advanced Training Institute conferences were also popular among devotees of the Quiverful movement, which promotes large families and eschews birth control.

In a statement, Basic Life board chairman Billy Boring said, "After completion of the review, the board will respond at an appropriate time, and in a biblical manner."

Numerous allegations have been posted since 2011 on the Recovering Grace website, including a charge Gothard molested an underage woman in the early 1990s.

Gretchen Swearingen alleged Gothard, who is single, arranged in 1992 for them to be together on a ride from the airport. "That's when he first put his hand between my legs and felt me all the way up," she wrote.

Rachel Frost, who also worked at the institute when she was 16, wrote, "There was a very common grooming pattern of creating emotional bonds and physical affirmations, the footsie, the leg rubs, the stroking of the hair, the constant comments on physical appearance."

A woman who's involved with Recovering Grace said 34 women allege they were sexually harassed and 4 say they were molested. *Source: Religion News Service, 3-1-14*

Serena Harris, pastor at Holy Temple Evangelical Christian Church in Norfolk, **VA**, which

operates a free meals program for poor children, hasn't paid for thousands of meals cooked for the Holy Temple Feeding Program, alleges vendor Sherrey McGill.

McGill said she hasn't seen a dime and has lost her business, Sherrey's Kitchen, after hiring 20 people and signing a contract to provide 180,000 meals for \$405,000. McGill said she delivered 6,300 meals over 11 days to 5 locations.

Harris' husband is church bishop. *Source: WAVY, 2-26-14*

Removed / Resigned

Michael Fugee, 53, **New Jersey**: Expelled from the priesthood by the Vatican. Fugee was defrocked for repeatedly defying a 2007 judicial agreement barring him from ministries involving children. He was convicted in 2003 after admitting he fondled a teen boy's genitals, but the verdict was overruled by an appeals court, which ruled the trial judge gave improper jury instructions.

Fugee's interactions with children led to national criticism of Newark Archbishop John J. Myers, who had repeatedly defended the priest and returned him to ministry. *Source: Star-Ledger, 3-18-14*

Archdiocese of Philadelphia Archbishop Charles Chaput permanently removed 2 more Catholic priests from ministry for substantiated claims of sexual abuse. Removed were **John P. Paul**, 67, former pastor of Our Lady of Calvary Parish, and **James J. Collins**, 75, professor of religious studies at Holy Family University.

Church officials said allegations both involved 17-year-old victims and occurred decades ago, with authorities declining prosecution because the statute of limitations had expired. *Source: The Inquirer, 2-24-14*

Other

Bishop Bobby Davis, 72, Monroe, **CT**, pastor of Miracle Faith World Outreach Church in Bridgeport, collapsed in front of his congregation while confessing to marital infidelity and was pronounced dead at the hospital.

"After the service on Sunday, the bishop's family asked us to remain in the church and the bishop confessed to us something that happened long ago," said church elder Judy Stovall. "He wanted to come clean with all of us. He wanted to ask our forgiveness."

Davis and his wife Christine co-founded the church and had been married 50 years. He graduated from Vision Christian College in Ramona, CA, with a doctorate degree in ministry and a master's degree in theological studies. *Source: Connecticut Post, 3-13-14*

Archbishop John J. Myers of the Catholic **Archdiocese of Newark** and his Presbyteral Council adopted a policy that allows clergy removed from their posts for credible abuse charges to be buried in their vestments.

The policy also prohibits obituaries from listing the time, date or funeral location. Funerals aren't allowed to take place at a church where an abusive priest worked or lived.

Victims rights groups such as Road to Recovery criticized the policy, including a section encouraging other clergy to attend pedophiles' funerals. *Source: Star-Ledger, 3-17-14*

Carlos Urrutigoity, a Catholic priest accused of molesting boys in Shohola and Moscow, **PA**, has been promoted to vicar general for Ciudad del Este Diocese in **Paraguay**.

Former Diocese of Scranton **Bishop Joseph Martino** let Urrutigoity transfer even though court statements alleged he had sex with boys in his care, calling it "spiritual direction." He was one of 3 defendants in a 2002 civil case brought by a student in which the diocese settled for \$400,000.

A 2002 diocesan review board said about Urrutigoity: "In view of the credible allegation from the seminarian, his admitted practice of sleeping with boys and young men and the troubling evaluation by the Southdown Institute, Father Carlos Urrutigoity should be removed from active ministry; his faculties should be revoked; he should be asked to live privately."

"I'm concerned for the children of Paraguay. From everything I've learned, Father Carlos has not stopped. This is a basic child protection issue," said Patrick Wall, a former priest who advocates for abuse victims.

"This is a grand example of a worldwide policy that a priest can sexually abuse kids in another country and go somewhere else and become vicar general of the diocese," Wall said. *Source: Pocono Record, 3-12-14*

A Christian pastor identified only as **Rev. Njohi** got a lot of international publicity at Lord's Propeller Redemption Church in Dandora, a suburb of Nairobi, **Kenya**, due to his edict barring female congregants from wearing underwear.

Njohi said the rule would allow God to more easily enter women's bodies. Mothers were instructed to make sure their daughters were in compliance. According to the UK Metro, most women did comply, although resentment later surfaced publicly. *Source: nigerianwatch.com, 3-2-14*

Email: blackcollar@ffr.org



Letterbox

'Blasphemous Brian' brought big crowds

I couldn't help but chuckle when I read about the attempt [In the News, March 14] by the Newtownabbey Borough Council in Northern Ireland to censor the blasphemous play "The Bible: The Complete Word of God," which led to sold out ticket sales to all subsequent performances.

Back in the mid-1980s, I was teaching a film studies class at a Washington state college. The Friday night film screenings were mandatory for my students but were also open to the general public. Normally, about a dozen people from the community augmented my 30 students, but the scheduled film "The Life of Brian" created a whole new dynamic.

The local Baptist church got wind of the movie and created a double line gauntlet with placards, bibles and scolding at the entrance to the auditorium in hopes of shaming attendees. Immediately, word got out about the confrontation and people began to arrive in droves. By 7:30 we were packed to the rafters in the 300-seat theater.

After the first screening, I opened the doors to find another huge crowd in the foyer. At 9:30 I cued up the movie again to a packed house. At 11:30 the same thing happened. People were literally sitting in the aisles. I finally got home about 2 a.m.

Thanks to the Baptists, we had the largest turnout in the history of the film program. (You can find both the play and the movie on YouTube.)

Warren Dunn
California

God less you, good folks

Many atheists celebrated Charles Darwin's birthday Feb. 12. Atheists think evolution will put an end to the God idea, which the late Madalyn Murray O'Hair once said has caused more misery to the human race than any other single idea.

God is what you make it, it is said, and God is make-believe. Without proof you have nothing, and without nothing, the word God is useless, a word that does not make any sense.

God less you.
Percy Prestenbach Jr.
Louisiana

Apologists have much to apologize for

I attended Dan Barker's debate at the Catholic university near where I live. I've seen Dan entertain on several occasions but not debate. His opponent's arguments seemed very scripted, and he used the same tired ideas that have been proven wrong time and time again. Dan's remarks were more spontaneous and more effective. It helped that I agreed with everything he said.

All in all, it was a very enjoyable evening. One interesting argument was when Dan, in the course of the subject at hand, brought up the clergy pedophile scandal. The moderator immediately cut him off. I don't know if she did it on her own or was instructed to do so. Dan's opponent [Trent Horn of Catholic Answers], to his credit, forcefully said, "Let him speak."

I wanted to hang around and introduce myself, but there were too many people around the book table and it was getting late for this old lady to be out alone. The Council for Secular Humanism to which I also belong had two events in San Diego last year, both of which were also within a few miles from my home. I feel so "blessed."

The defenders of religion are called apologists for a reason. They have much to apologize for.

Vee
California

Grateful for action to get Gideons out

I saw reports recently that Gideons would not be able to distribute bibles in the Madisonville School District in Tennessee because of FFRF. I'm not sure if any direct communication happened or if your other work was just noticed by the district.

Regardless, I want to thank you because son won't be proselytized at his school. This makes me proud to be a member.

Drew Winder
Tennessee

Editor's note: Yes, FFRF sent a complaint letter. See legal victories on page 8.

Walker's 'infinite egotist' fits God well

Thanks to Barbara Walker for "God the father, God the son, God the monster" [Jan/Feb 14]. As I read her words describing the God of the Old Testament as "An infinite egotist, demanding eternal praises, a jealous tyrant, a monument of cruelty, a constant threat," it occurred to me that God was indeed invented by man in his own im-



Lordless Ford

Randy Heine, Florida, writes, "It's funny how people with a 'fish' emblem on their cars give me the finger even though their Jesus character tells them not to judge others."

age.

There are new calves in the fields and hyacinths have poked through the soil on the sunny south side of my house. Spring is near! See you all in Los Angeles in October.

Alice Elliott
Montana

Quotation shows Jefferson not Christian

I was taken with the Thomas Jefferson quote about "the Three-headed Christian Beast-god" [student essay, Jan/Feb 14]. At second glance, it did not sound like it was written in the 18th century, let alone by Jefferson.

It appears to be spurious and has a wide Internet footprint, but no one has shown a source for it in Jefferson's writings. The Monticello Foundation's website shows that the quote mirrors parts of genuine Jeffersonian writing but is not genuine.

Here's a documented Jefferson quotation that I love: "The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus,

by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter."

The man who wrote that incisive, elegant sentence was not a Christian.

Dave Pitts
Ohio

'Death with dignity' article spurs comments

Thanks to Annie Laurie Gaylor for "Extend death with dignity nationwide" [March 14]. Unfortunately, as Ms. Gaylor suggested, ALS sufferers like Read Schuster may be helped by our Death with Dignity Act only if they can still swallow when their doctors say they are within a few months of death.

Good judgment and mental health are additional criteria for suicide assistance; one must be thinking clearly and not depressed, despite being near death and often in pain.

I hope I will be eligible for a lethal drug prescription and capable of swallowing without help should the need arise. But my greatest fear is being diagnosed with Alzheimer's before succumbing to other causes. I can only hope that, if so stricken, I will have the ability and will to end my life without leaving a mess for others to deal with or, preferably, the good luck to find someone who'll help me to die neatly and painlessly, as did Jack Kevorkian's first client, Janet Adkins.

Authors of a study recently published in the Journal of the American Academy of Neurobiology concluded that more deaths are attributable to Alzheimer's than are reported on death certificates. Obviously, once diagnosed, one can never satisfy the criteria for assisted suicide under today's laws.

Legal language needs to be devised whereby one can specify the conditions under which one wants to be euthanized and be confident that one's directives will be fulfilled if said conditions are met. Had Adkins lived in an enlightened society free of inhumane religious influence, she and her family might have enjoyed a few more years together.

Moreover, her death could have occurred at home in the midst of loved ones, attended by respected medical professionals, rather than surreptitiously and alone in the back of an old Volkswagen minibus.

Michael J. Gonsior
Oregon

•••

As a member of FFRF and longtime right-to-die activist, I want to thank Annie Laurie Gaylor for her great piece. This, of course, is the goal of the RTD movement.



Equal time

Chris Stone, Pennsylvania, writes, "I stay in hotels (Marriott) about a third of the year for my job. I always leave my Freethought Today as an alternative for traveling atheists like myself! Keep up the good fight! You do it right! Much respect."



There's no 'i' in failure

"Proud atheist" Julia Fausette-Bruno, New York, spotted this sign and one with a conflicting message less than half a mile away. "I have my own little billboard message on most of my mail: 'Atheists are honorable, honest, good people who do not believe in destructive mythologies.'"

As a Hemlock Society member, when that organization still existed, and now as a member of Final Exit Network, I greatly appreciate Freethought Today bringing this subject to your readers. It is indeed, the final civil right.

The World Conference of Right-to-Die Societies is in Chicago in September. Check Final Exit's website for details.

Bernie Klein
Michigan

•••

Each time I read Freethought Today, I am just amazed that such great information comes to me time after time. I read every page (and pass it on). The March issue was no different, yet I was surprised and disappointed that the "death with dignity" stories included no mention of the organization I believe to be the most important on that subject in our nation at this time, Compassion & Choices.

May I encourage you to obtain and promote information about their program, online at compassionandchoices.org/? The mailing address is Box 101810, Denver, CO 80250-1810.

Keep up the great work.
Richard C. Burrows
Washington

Joan on getting mom fairly 'stoned'

Thank you for the excellent piece on funerals [March14] by the wonderful Barbara G. Walker. Her comments about funerals as a business reminded me of an episode a few years ago, when my mother passed away four months after my father died.

Mom had made every possible arrangement for both of their funerals but was unable to take care of her own headstone, since she couldn't predict her date of death. Within a week of her passing, I started hearing from the company she'd hired to make my father's headstone, with a proposal for hers and the fee. I also received cards from other headstone companies. In Judaism, you have a year before you "unveil" the stone (in case of resurrection?).

Since there was no rush, I applied the lessons my parents had taught me. I took the specs from the first company and sent them to a couple others. One came back with a proposal for half the price. I contacted the first company and asked them to help me understand why theirs was double, since I was more

concerned with value than price.

They couldn't come up with any material differences and questioned the reliability of the other company. I called the cemetery and inquired about dealing with both companies and heard no complaints. I went back to the first company and asked them if they'd like to match the lower bid. They came down slightly, but still hundreds of dollars above the other.

I awarded the job to the cheap guys. The stone was completed and installed just fine. My parents would have been proud!

Joan Reisman-Brill
New York

Editor's note: Easter is on 4-20 this year. Just sayin'.

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Thank you for the article by Barbara Walker on funerary rituals. Please convey to Barbara that I have two copies of her *Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets* and read in them often.

Ray Flesher
Colorado

'16 ways' great resource to counter believers

I was delighted to see "16 ways atheists can stand up for rationality" by Jeffrey Tayler [March14]. Tayler condensed the crucial facts from the many books written by great authors on this subject.

This would be great as one of your pamphlets. I am going to keep the page and carry it with me, not only to refer to but to spur me on in my endeavor to let people know that it's OK not to believe.

Even my believer friends have made me feel uncomfortable when they disagree with me "arguing with people about what they believe." This article reinforced my belief that I am doing nothing wrong in bringing reality to people's attention.

We normally reticent and easygoing nonbelievers need this encouragement to speak out and these facts to refer to in order to do so.

Ms. Pat Hall, Lifetime Member
California

•••

Great article by Jeffrey Tayler, except for one thing. Although he rightfully called out religion for the barbarous slicing off of clitorises and labia majora, he wrongfully failed to mention the slicing off of baby boys' penile foreskin.

Forced male circumcision, when compared to the female variety, is equally barbarous, equally religiously based and sanctioned, and equally immoral.

Jay Clem
California

•••

Jeffrey Tayler writes, "1. Let's say grace!" Can anyone suggest a more diplomatic way of getting the same message across when one is seated at a gathering of people one doesn't know well? One wants to point out that not everyone believes as they do, not everyone wants to be forced to swallow that bitter pill. One wants to plant the seed of critical thinking and healthy skepticism without actually offending others.

Perhaps one of the wordsmiths among our "flock" can suggest some gentler words that achieve these ends? Thanks, and continued best wishes from an ardent member and supporter.

J.R. Dreyer
Massachusetts

Mormon member values 1st Amendment

Although I am not an atheist, the great importance of preventing an establishment of a government-sponsored religion is very critical. I was born in 1949 in western Kentucky and grew up in the traditions of Baptists. As an adult, I discovered the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. I was converted and am now a member. Being a member of the Mormon Church, I see how it is to be persecuted by mainstream religions — Catholics, Protestants and nondenominational.

We cannot have a government-sponsored religion, of which the Roman Catholic Church claims to be the "one true church," and pretty much did control governments throughout the Dark Ages. Then came her Protestant offspring vying to be the governmental religion. Islam is also a great threat.

My being a believer probably seems strange that I would subscribe to what seems to be an atheist organization, but I have always been an openminded freethinker. Protection of the First Amendment is critical, just as protection of the whole Constitution is critical.

Steven D. Gossum
Kentucky

Alleged 'habitual' offender shows hypocrisy

I'm enclosing a Washington Post article for the Black Collar crime blotter. Killing one's newborn [charge a student nun faces] is so not "pro-life." One might think the Catholic Church is hypocritical.

Keep up the good work! Freethought Today makes my day.

Jim Rocca
Maryland

Chick gospel tracts are 'soul losers'

When I first subscribed to Freethought Today, I still had some weak ties to Christianity. These are now broken. I have to say, though, that this wasn't due to anything I read in Freethought Today. The cause was a Chick tract.

Chick tracts are those little cartoon booklets left lying around in restaurants, restrooms, blood-pressure stalls, etc. This one, "Why Should I?" de-

scribed hell.

"Hell is so horrible, we're not allowed to know how bad it is. There's screams, fire, unbearable pain. What did they do to go there? NOTHING!"

I thought, "That does it! Even if that god exists, he's not worth worship, any more than Molech was worth worship!" Chick's people call their tracts "soul winners," but this one is a soul loser.

One of my oldest friends is a born-again who's tried to save me by the bible. I read the whole King James Version but didn't get saved. We had the following dialogue (paraphrased):

"I can't understand how you could read the bible and not see the Truth!"

"I can't understand how you can read the bible and believe it, with all those prophecies that didn't come true. Look at the beginning of Revelation, which says the things prophesied 'must shortly come to pass' and they haven't in nearly 2,000 years!"

"Maybe it doesn't mean what we think it means. You should read the bible with faith, not logic."

"In order to read it with faith, I would have had to have faith before I started reading it. Why did you think it would convert me?"

"Well, I guess all I can do is pray for you."

No such luck: She soon sent me a list of badly paraphrased verses that made God sound like Susan Smith. "His death was the ultimate expression of love for you." (John 4:10.) I bet Smith said that to her boyfriend, after she killed her children because he didn't want kids.

I did learn some interesting things from the bible. I had always been sickened by the many priests and ministers who sexually abuse children. I thought it was simply an extension of "get 'em while they're young" but discovered that there is nothing in the bible which forbids sex with children.

Isn't that strange, because almost all other kinds of sex are forbidden, or at the very least tolerated as a lesser evil. Paul even damns marriage with faint praise: "Better to marry than to burn."

Moses forbade adultery, incest, male homosexuality and bestiality. Jesus tightened the divorce laws and praised self-made eunuchs. Paul condemned fornication and lesbianism (though that verse is a little ambiguous) but children are apparently fair game.

Elizabeth Brooks
Indiana

Check out 'skeptics bible' for a good time

We're longtime members and say you *must* see the "Skeptics Annotated Bible" at skepticsannotatedbible.com/.

Click on "what the bible says about" and then go to the keywords. It's an instant pop-up of all the passages that bible thumpers do not want anyone to see. It is just fantastic.

Names withheld by request
Wisconsin

What Is a Freethinker?



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

State/Church Bulletin

Board backs veto of church subsidy

Milwaukee Common Council members voted 13-1 on March 4 to sustain Mayor Tom Barrett's veto of a resolution giving up to \$5,000 to the Retail Christian Network for a breakfast at the International Council of Shopping Centers convention in May in Las Vegas.

The Journal Sentinel reported that Barrett felt there was no public purpose to spend tax dollars to finance RCN's year-round ministry or to support Higher Call, its parent organization based in Franklin, Tenn.

Idaho kills bill on faith healing

Idaho House leaders denied a hearing on a bill to address the number of children who die because their parents choose faith healing and not medical assistance for religious reasons, The Associated Press reported.

Judiciary Committee Chairman Rich Wills said Feb. 26 he was told by House Speaker Scott Bedke that the bill wouldn't be brought up.

Democratic Rep. John Gannon had proposed changes to state law in the wake of dozens of deaths of children whose parents belong to the Followers of Christ in southwestern Idaho. Similar deaths from treatable conditions have occurred in Oregon, the Followers' home base.

Home schoolers lose but stay anyway

The U.S. Supreme Court denied certiorari March 3 in *Romeike v. Holder*. The 6th Circuit earlier denied asylum to a German evangelical Christian family seeking to stay in the U.S. because of Germany's ban on home schooling, reported Religion Clause.

The appeals court ruled in May 2013 that the Romeikes didn't have a "well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion," as U.S. immigration law requires.

However, on March 4, the Department of Homeland Security granted the family "indefinite deferred status" to stay in the U.S., according to Fox News.

The Romeikes moved to Morristown, Tenn., in 2008 after facing fines and risking loss of custody of their children for refusing to send them to a state-approved school in Germany. The family was granted asylum in 2010 based on religious freedom grounds, but the Obama administration appealed the decision and won.

Soledad cross groups seeks certiorari

In *Mt. Soledad Memorial Association v. Steve Trunk*, the association announced March 4 it will seek Supreme Court review of a lower court ruling that the 29-foot-tall cross must be moved out of a public park in San Diego, Calif. Trunk is an FFRF "foxhole atheist" member and award recipient. The cross has been the subject of litigation since 1989.

The association, which is represent-

ed by the evangelical Liberty Institute, contends a Christian cross looming over the 1954 war memorial has no religious significance and somehow honors all of the 3,300 veterans whose names are on memorial plaques, even non-Christians and nonbelievers.

State pushes bible as 'official' book

Louisiana Rep. Thomas Carmody, R-Shreveport, introduced HB 503 in the House to declare the bible as the official state book, KTSB reported. FFRF has formally complained about the constitutional violation to state officials.

"The official state book shall be the Holy Bible, published by Johannes Prevel . . . which is the oldest edition of the Holy Bible in the Louisiana State Museum system," the legislation says. The Prevel bible was published in the early 16th century.

The legislation also proposes that the state's motto should be changed to read: "A state, under God, united in purpose and ideals, confident that justice shall prevail for all of those abiding here."

The session started March 10. In a March 3 online Times-Picayune poll, 62% of respondents said the bible should not be the state's official book.

Commandments bill on governor's desk

The Georgia Senate gave final passage March 12 to a bill that authorizes placing a Ten Commandments monument at the Capitol. The bill passed the House 138-37 and the Senate 40-10.

The bill prescribes placement of a "historic granite monument" depicting the preamble to the Georgia Constitution, a line from the Declaration of Independence and the Ten Commandments. Private funds would be used.

Some Democrats said they voted "no" because such a law won't survive a constitutional challenge. "The state doesn't necessarily need to endorse private individuals and their expenditure of money in supporting their own religion," Sen. Steven Henson told a television reporter.

Gov. Nathan Deal hadn't signed the bill as of press time. FFRF sent an action alert to members March 14 urging them to tell Deal to veto the bill.

Arguments heard in commandments case

A federal judge heard arguments March 11 on whether a 6-foot-tall, 3,000-pound Ten Commandments monument in front of City Hall in Bloomfield, N.M., is constitutional. The American Civil Liberties Union of New Mexico filed the suit against the city on behalf of two plaintiffs who practice the Wiccan religion.

Attorneys for the city contend that "private parties" paid for the monument under a 2007 city resolution that lets members of the public "erect historical monuments of their choosing," reported the Albuquerque Journal.

The Alliance Defending Freedom, which calls itself a "legal ministry," is defending the city.

"This is not a free speech case," plaintiffs' attorney Andrew Schultz



Thank you, Nick!

FFRF member Nick Bakker (pictured with his wife, Shawnee) is generously sponsoring this FFRF billboard in the Hawley, Pa., area. The iconic billboard's message includes a Lincoln penny altered to read "In Reason We Trust" and bears the Freedom From Religion Foundation name and website ffrf.org/. Nick is also sponsoring regular ads in his local newspaper. Any other members wishing to underwrite such advertising via a tax-deductible contribution may contact FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor at 1-800-335-4021.

said during opening arguments. "It is a case of government speech."

Buddhist student wins relief in court

A federal district court on March 14 ordered the Sabine Parish School District to refrain from unconstitutionally promoting or denigrating religion. The consent order came after the ACLU of Louisiana sued on behalf of C.C., a sixth-grader of Thai descent and a practicing Buddhist.

School officials allegedly told C.C. that Buddhism was "stupid," suggested he transfer to a school with "more Asians," incorporated prayer into class and nearly every school event, hung a portrait of Jesus over the main entry and participated in a number of other activities that blatantly violated the separation of church and state, said the ACLU's Heather Weaver.

In February, C.C.'s mother was accosted while doing yard work, Weaver said. "Three people wearing KKK-type white hoods drove by her and shouted, 'You fucking nigger Asian-loving bitch.'"

According to the ACLU, C.C.'s science teacher, Rita Roark, repeatedly told students that the Earth was created by God 6,000 years ago, that evolution is "impossible" and that the bible is "100 percent true."

The court order also mandated in-service training for school staff on their First Amendment obligations.

Jail won't stop her from praying

The Carroll County commissioners in Baltimore must stop opening meetings with sectarian prayers, a federal judge ruled March 25 in granting a preliminary injunction, reported the Baltimore Sun.

U.S. District Judge William Quarles Jr. said commissioners can continue to pray at meetings but can't refer to deities linked to any specific faith.

Plaintiff Bruce Hake, a Catholic immigration attorney, sued last May after commissioners started taking turns saying a prayer. "It's un-American to im-

pose one flavor of religion on people," Hake said.

Local resident Neil Ridgely and the American Humanist Association were co-plaintiffs with Hake.

Two days later, reported the Carroll County Times, Commissioner Robin Bartlett Frazier opened the board's budget meeting with a prayer containing references to Jesus Christ, Lord, our Father, merciful Father and the Holy Spirit. She said she's willing to go to jail to fight the injunction.

"If we cease to believe that our rights come from God, we cease to be America," Frazier said. "We've been told to be careful. But we're going to be careful all the way to communism if we don't start standing up and saying 'no.'"

Tenn. bill boosts school religion

The Tennessee Legislature on March 24 passed the Religious Viewpoints Anti-Discrimination Act requiring schools to let students express their religious views in class, at assemblies, over the school's P.A. system and at public events such as graduation, the Baton Rouge Advocate reported.

The legislation, which passed 90-2 in the House and 32-0 in the Senate, must be signed by Republican Gov. Bill Haslam to become law.

"An evangelical student, for example, could preach the gospel during a science class, or 'witness' during English," said David Badash of the New Civil Rights Movement, an online journal. "Attacks on LGBT people and same-sex marriage are automatically protected under this bill, offering anti-gay students a state-sponsored license to bully. And of course, a student could claim they worship Satan and subject their classmates to that 'religious viewpoint' as well."

Oklahoma state Rep. Sally Kern has co-sponsored a similar bill with the same title. It received unanimous House passage (with 13 absentions) in February and was referred to the Senate Education Committee as an "emergency" bill.

Roaring, rational '20s

David Null, director of University Archives and Records Management Services at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, writes: "I was looking at the men's dormitories (now Adams and Tripp halls) newsletter from 1926-27 to answer a question, when I ran across this article from 1927. I thought you might find it interesting."

Page 2

The TRIAD

Official Publication of the Men's Dormitory Association, Tripp and Adams Halls, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin.

WHAT TO DO?

"The Circle of the Godless" they call it!

A group of Adams hall residents, convinced that they have solved the problem of the ages, have banded themselves together for the ridicule of man's greatest "weakness", religion.

There will be those champions of the church who will rant and tear in denouncing these young men, pointing out the fact that they are undermining life itself and spreading a germ more deadly than the white plague. Those same champions will demand the punishment of the boys for daring and doing as they have, and at least expecting dishonorable dismissal from the university for the "wild young atheists." All of which will have little or no effect, save to stimulate the movement they seek to check.

The thinking person will not become alarmed over the atheists, nor any of their actions. He will not fear for the future of civilization because a small group of young boys brazenly announce that they are atheists and proud of it. The fireworks can be set off at any time, and when the last spark dies the world will be found to be pretty much the same. Students will still be dropped from the school for low grades.

Dear Editor:

We are a group of lads out at the dorms who after six months of bull sessions have started a club to which only atheists can belong. Isn't it interesting? We thought so. WE tried to read a little Philosophy and the Bible, but we could not understand either of them. Don't you think we are justified in becoming atheists? One of the boys read about them in an almanac, so we thought we would like to go in for it. We are only Frosh, but my how smart. We have had English 1a and Chemistry 1a so we can judge knowledge pretty critically. Declaring oneself an atheist is loads easier than the quadratic equation so we thought it would be both facile and intellectual to adopt Atheism. No, we aren't telling our mothers about it. But we are leaders in thought of the university. Just think, we are atheists! And to think that we are only Freshmen. Why should this man Meiklejohn believe in God? He ought to hear us argue it down.

We are prime asses,
Atheist Club
The Dorm

This article in the 1928 yearbook *The Badger* satirized the godless group.



Meet your editor.



Christian nation? No way!

More than 70 people turned out March 29 in Sacramento, Calif., to hear FFRF Staff Attorney Andrew Seidel discuss the myth that our nation is founded on Judeo-Christian principles. FFRF's Sacramento chapter, led by Judy Saint, and several other local groups organized the event. A spirited Q&A followed the talk and several new members joined FFRF. Thank you, Judy!

John Lucas, FFRF-Sacramento board member, and Andrea "Andi" Griffith put their freethought heads together.

You Suck: Crawl back under your rocks and STFU! — *Jimmy Door, Wisconsin*

Comment's on Hannity: I would like to respond to your assertion that most free societies were free from religion? How did that work in Russia? China? Burma? Honduras, Venezuela? Nepal? North Korea? Vietnam? Cambodia? Laos? What happened to Christians in Hungary, Poland, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Czech? What about Georgia? Ukraine, Serbia, Croatia. They were free of religion weren't they? — *Charles Kunold, California*

I have a Challenge: Apparently, you folks have allot social & legal clout. Why don't you go after the Evangelists that are transplanting approx.1000 middle east refugees into Appleton & other Wisconsin cities; and other states. You worry about our tax dollars spent in the name of religion!! The estimated End cost is 750Grand to a million a person. This is really imposing religion on the general populace at our expense. — *Axel Roberts, Menasha, Wis.*

Freedom From Religion Foundation: I WOULD LIKE TO ASK YOU ONE THING! HOW DOES IT FEEL....TO BE THE ASS-HOLES OF AMERICA? — *Stan Knowles, North Carolina*

Freedom of Speech: No where in the Constitution does it talk about separation of Church and State. That came about from a letter from Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Paine or vice versa. Atheism is a religion itself and u can't even see it. You believe in God. You have to believe in something to deny it's existence. By the way, God loves u and their is nothing u can do about it. — *Robert Jacquart*

Praying for you: I PRAY IN JESUS' NAME THAT HE WILL TOUCH EACH MEMBER OF YOUR GROUP. I WILL HELP FIGHT IN BRINGING BACK PRAYER IN SCHOOLS, AND CHRIST IS THE THE REASON FOR EVERY SEASON. I KNOW WHERE I AM GOING TO SPEND ETERNITY. DO YOU? — *Lynne Carroll, Toledo, Ohio*

Gov. Walker: I read your letter in response to Gov. Walker's tweet and I just wanted to tell you, Aw, get to your fainting couch, Myrtle, and stop blighting the public sphere with your presence. I would also suggest that your co-presidents do not operate any motor vehicles, as the grotesque lack of perspective they demonstrated in that letter means that they would pose a serious collision threat to both themselves and other drivers. — *Karl Collins, New York*

stay out of our religion!!! GOOD GRIEVE GIVE ME A BRAKE !! WHEN WILL YOU STOP WHEN THERE IS NO RELIGION LEFT AND WE ARE ALL ATHEIST!! YOU REALLY PISS ME OFF WITH PUSHING YOU LEFT WING AGENDA ON US!! JUST SHUT UP!! — *Mieke Sijen, Long Beach, Calif.*

The Bible: It is a love letter from God to us. Why would you want to deprive people of that! By the way...ALL your efforts are in vain. You can TRY to remove Him but He is God and on the last page of the book you so despise guess what? He wins! You are on a path straight to hell. — *Julie Fincham, North Port, Florida*

The bible: Who is forcing you to practice any type of religion ,you must believe you came from a monkey lie Obama right.? you have no power whatsoever to lengthen your stupid life or create anything as god can you can't turn the day into night or stop a hurricane let alone create one. I'd like to meet you in person bitch. — *Samuel Ruiz, San angelo, Texas*

U.S. Air Force Academy: If we erase all religion, then isn't atheism the de facto religion? So in fact, you are supporting the idea of a state sponsored religion. How the communists and fascist would love your organization. — *Mark Lutz, Sanford, S.C.*

Pope in Green Bay: The mayor has every right to invite whom he pleases, just as the ludicrous president obama does. You want some atheist to visit the mayor? Set it up you imbeciles. — *David Woehning*

Sharing the Crank Mail

Some suggested destinations for freethinkers besides the ever-popular hell and Honduras (murder capital of the world) come via the crank mail, printed as received.

ten commandments: ten commandments is every americans rite if you want to change the laws in your state that's fine stay out of our business in north Idaho we love god here if you choose to walk in darkness that's your choice but here we will fight you tooth and nail to keep our rites as americans stay out of our business here believe if you want a war on this matter we will stay the fuck out of our business go worship the devil and keep working for satin. — *tom johnson, coer d alene, idaho*

Walker's religious tweet: Wow, have you two lunatics become unhinged! Wanna take me up on a public challenge to either of you, Barker or Gaylord, for a debate on the Bill of Rights, Constitution and Declaration of Independence? Say YES (which I would crave) and I'll dissect and dismantle your horribly flawed constitutional views. The ball is in your court. Game? — *Ned Kareiva*

Hello Dan: You sir are a problem. Look at today's society and ask yourself, is it better now with the FFRF crapping in everyone's cereal or was it better in earlier times say before the late 1960's. Check the statistics on out of wedlock child birth, abortions (hell, half the black pregnancies were aborted in NYC, Eugenicists will celebrate that little number). Let me be clear, I am an extremely poor example of a Christian, but for fucks sake, you guys are doing more damage to society than the Scott Walkers of the world. But, maybe that is what you want. Have a nice day. — *Mike Williams, Blossom, Texas*

Gideon Bible removal: Prior to sending this, I have prayed and claimed that the supernatural presence of God move through this email to everyone in your organization, and that everyone

in your organization be saved. Every knee will bow, every tongue confess. — *Terri McMahan*

10 Commandments in park: Take your heathen bullshit out of my state and go corrupt shit-consin you wannabe Nazi pigs. — *Jake Rogers, Sandpoint, Idaho*

Police chief's prayer walks: If you want to be a none believer, be one. Don't interfere with others freedom of religion. We dont bother you athiest's even if you're gonna burn, it's your choice. Don't try to take the rest of the world with you, go burn by yourself and mind your business. That is one of the biggest problem's today...Minority's trying to make majority's bow down to there stupid want's and demand's. Mind your own fucking business. — *Richard Lovelace, Crane Hill, Ala.*

Atheists and the Bible: You will never convince me to your viewpoint, because at one time I "was" you. You have no idea how wonderful the freeing from self becomes once you trust in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice and shedding of blood on the cross just for you! — *A. Barry Hess*

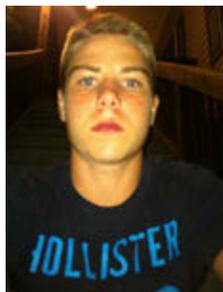
Freedom OF Religion: This country was founded on "FREEDOM OF RELIGION". My ancestors had to leave Europe because they were Lutheran Ministers and were threatened with death. Many of the early European immigrants got along quite well with the Native Americans and provided much mutual support. Sadly, Atheists and Atheistic Agnostics now want to force us out of OUR country. I say OUR country because my religious ancestors founded it. Hitler was only two month short of world domination and the execution of all Jews. Some of the Jewish in the 1930's could run to the U.S. for safety. But if FFRF gets the IRS and the Justice Dept. to persecute us and force religious groups out of the U.S., like Hitler did to Europe in the 1930's and 40's, WHERE ARE WE TO GO? — *Burns Searfoss, Colorado Springs*

Final call! Raleigh regional FFRF conference: May 2-3, 2014

Freedom From Religion in the bible belt



Kalei Wilson



Ben Wilson



Mandisa Thomas



Todd Stiefel



Max Nielson



Sophia Winkler



Stuart Watson



Candace R.M. Gorham



Matt Killingsworth



Michael Nugent



Dan Barker



Bart Ehrman

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, in conjunction with the Triangle Freethought Society, its Raleigh-area chapter, will hold a lively conference the weekend of May 2-3 at the Sheraton Raleigh Hotel, 421 South Salisbury St., in downtown Raleigh, N.C.

Phone the Raleigh Sheraton at 1-800-325-3535 and identify yourself as a member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Convention rates while offered are \$129 single/double, \$139 triple, \$149 quad and \$169 club, plus tax.

Formal proceedings start at 7 p.m. Friday, May 2 (dinner on your own) with registration opening up by 5 p.m. Two optional group meals will begin and end Saturday (with Saturday lunch on your own). The event will conclude

Saturday night after the banquet dinner and final programs.

Registration costs: \$50 for FFRF member; \$55 for non-FFRF spouse/companion accompanying member; \$90 for nonmember (includes \$40 to become FFRF member); and \$5 for students. Registration at the door is available but early registration and **meal orders must be received** at FFRF's office no later than Friday, April 25. Included in registration is the complimentary Friday night dessert reception and hot beverages, and all events including entertainment to conclude Friday evening by **The Village Idiots**, a local comedy troupe.

Meals. A classic breakfast with scrambled eggs, bacon, hash browns, juice, coffee, tea and pastry rolls is \$20

(inclusive of 23% service and 7.75% sales tax). **Vegetarian option** will substitute a tomato for meat. A **vegan option** is available. All options are gluten-free, skipping the bread basket.

Dinner of \$40 inclusive includes choices of **Chicken Saltimbocca**, a chicken breast stuffed with sliced prosciutto, sage and fresh mozzarella served with penne with garlic cream sauce and sautéed asparagus; or **Grilled Salmon** or **Farm-Fresh vegetable plate**. The vegetable plate and salmon are gluten-free. All entrees include garden salad, warm rolls with butter, chef's choice dessert, sweet iced tea and Starbucks coffee.

Don't delay! Register now:
ffrf.org/raleighcon2014

Schedule

Subject to minor revisions

Friday, May 2

- 5 p.m.: **Registration opens**, continues through conference
- 7: **Opening, Greetings**, a little music FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker & Annie Laurie Gaylor Triangle Freethought Society President Harry Shaughnessy TFS Board Member Sue Kocher
- 7:30: **"Sophia Goes to Good News Club,"** film by Scott Burdick Student Activist Award – Sophia Winkler Remarks by Scott Burdick
- 8:30: **Complimentary desserts & hot beverages**, cash bar, Meet 'n Greet with speakers, activists
- 9: **The Village Idiots Comedy Troupe**

Saturday, May 3

- 8 a.m.: **Non-Prayer Breakfast** (optional)
- 9: Sales tables/**registration reopens**
- 9:30: **FFRF/Chapter Welcome**, Harry Shaughnessy and Sue Kocher
- 10: Todd Stiefel, Stiefel Freethought Foundation, **"The Importance of Being Out"**
- 10:30: **Student Activists Awards** to Ben and Kalei Wilson Remarks by Max Neilson, student plaintiff
- 11: Mandisa Thomas, Black Nonbelievers **"Black Nonbelievers: Past, Present & Future"**
- 11:30 Sarah Morehead, Executive Director, Recovery from Religion **"The Consequence of Faith"**

Noon to 2 (Lunch/sightseeing)

- 2 p.m.: **The Clergy Project Panel: Apostles to Apostates** Emcee, Dan Barker, Panelists Candace R.M. Gorham, Randy Bender, Matt Killingsworth
- 3: Michael Nugent, founder, Atheist Ireland **"Blasphemy is a Victimless Crime"**
- 4: **Bart Ehrman** Critical bible scholar, author Book signing follows in lobby
- 6:30: **Banquet Dinner** (optional) (extra chairs will be brought in after dinner for non-diners)
- Drawing for "clean" money** Stuart Watson, Investigative reporter, WCNC-TV Charlotte **"Democracy vs. Religion"** Socializing with chapter follows.

Return with payment to: FFRF, Attn: Convention, P.O. Box 750, Madison, WI 53701

Freedom From Religion Foundation's Raleigh Mini-Convention

May 2-3, 2014

Raleigh, North Carolina



Make checks payable to "FFRF"

Number registering

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| _____ FFRF member registration (s) @ \$50 per person | \$_____ |
| _____ Non-member spouse or companion accompanying member @ \$55..... | \$_____ |
| _____ Non-member registration (s) @ \$90..... | \$_____ |
| (Includes \$40 annual FFRF Membership) | |
| _____ Student registration (s) @ \$5 | \$_____ |
| _____ Saturday Non-Prayer Breakfast @ \$20* per person | \$_____ |
| _____ Classic _____ Classic Vegetarian _____ Vegan | |
| All gluten-free minus bread basket | |
| _____ Saturday Night Dinner @ \$40* per person | \$_____ |
| _____ Chicken _____ Salmon _____ Vegetarian/Vegan | |
| Salmon and Veg./Vegan gluten-free | Total: \$_____ |
| <small>* Meal prices include 23% gratuity & 7.75% sales tax</small> | |

Name(s) Please include names of all registrants for nametags

Address

City/State/ZIP Please include phone/email (in case we have a question about your registration)