

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



**Disability rights
in a post-Roe
America**

PAGE 3



**My personal
history of the
United States**

PAGES 8-9



**Winners of
FFRF's high school
essay contest**

PAGES 12-17

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Federal judge orders city to pay \$60K to FFRF

A federal judge has ordered the city of Parkersburg, W.Va., to pay almost \$60,000 to cover attorney fees and costs of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and two of its members related to a winning lawsuit against the city. The case stems from the City Council's decade-plus unconstitutional practice of reciting the Lord's Prayer at every meeting.

In May, U.S. District Judge John T. Copenhaver, Jr. issued a strong 30-page decision in FFRF's favor. He permanently enjoined the city of Parkersburg from continuing its practice of reciting the Lord's Prayer at each City Council meeting. Today, Copenhaver ruled that the city must cover the legal fees and costs of FFRF attorneys and outside counsel, granting \$58,031.40 in attorney fees and \$971.28 in costs to FFRF and its co-plaintiffs.

In 2018, FFRF and two of its local members had sued the city of Parkersburg in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia, to challenge the City Council's formal recitation of the Christian "Lord's

Prayer," which had officially opened every meeting for more than a decade. Council members led the prayer and were joined by city residents at each meeting in reciting it.

The plaintiffs include Daryl Cobranchi, who in the past had frequently attended meetings and been directed to stand for the Lord's Prayer, a practice, he notes, that has made him conspicuous by his nonparticipation and which "assigns to second-class status anyone who is not Christian." Likewise, Eric Engle, a Parkersburg resident, follows city matters and has felt uncomfortable and pressured to participate in the Christian prayer during public meetings.

At least one prior member of the City Council has been openly hostile to nonparticipants in the prayer ritual. Then-Councilman Eric Barber glared at attendees who sat during the prayer at a meeting. At the end of that prayer, Barber positioned himself near his microphone, pressed the button, and shouted, "Amen." In June, Barber was sentenced to 45 days in jail for his role in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

FFRF is delighted with the outcome of the case.

"We are pleased that the First Amendment has been upheld in this case, that Parkersburg citizens who are not Christian or religious will no longer be treated like second-class citizens, and that we have been able to recoup our costs," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

Gaylor warmly thanks the local plaintiffs for standing up for secular government, a linchpin of U.S. democracy. Both Engle and Cobranchi will be receiving FFRF's "Freethinker of the Year" awards.

The case is No. 2:18-cv-01198. Legal representation was provided by outside counsel Marcus B. Schneider, local counsel Kristina Thomas Whiteaker, and by FFRF Attorneys Patrick C. Elliott and Christopher Line.



FFRF and two of its members sued Parkersburg to challenge the council's recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

Prayer decision by appeals court condemned by FFRF

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is deeply dismayed over what it calls a "Christian nationalist" interpretation of the First Amendment's Establishment Clause by an appeals court decision approving courtroom prayer.

A three-judge panel of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled on Sept. 29 that a local justice of the peace's practice in Texas of locking doors and opening with a prayer ceremony is "noncoercive."

FFRF had won its challenge against Montgomery County Judge Wayne Mack's courtroom prayer practice last year in district court. Plaintiffs FFRF and local attorney "John Roe" had sued Mack over his divisive practice of opening each court session with chaplain-led prayer.

U.S. District Judge Kenneth M. Hoyt ruled in May 2021: "The court is of the view that the defendant violates the Establishment Clause when, before a captured audience of litigants and their counsel, he presents himself as theopneustically inspired, enabling him to advance, through the chaplaincy program, God's 'larger purpose.' Such a magnanimous goal flies in the face of historical tradition, and makes a mockery of both religion

and law."

Overturning that decision are U.S. 5th Circuit Judges Jerry Edwin Smith and Kurt D. Engelhardt. Judge E. Grady Jolly, who concurred in part, authored a strong dissent. Despite no evidence of any other U.S. judge currently opening with prayer or that courtroom prayer is a tradition, the ruling claims to be based on historic practice, including because some courts open with "God save this honorable court" or similar utterances. The ruling also inaptly compares the practice to legislative prayer. Jolly witheringly critiqued these conclusions from the majority and wrote that the plaintiffs had produced considerable evidence that Judge Mack's prayers are coercive to those who attend court sessions. Jolly asserts, "For the majority to find that there is no evidence of coercion, suggests, in my opinion, willful blindness and indisputable error."



Judge Wayne Mack

See Prayer on page 2

FFRF brief: Dismiss school's prayer claim

An appeals court should dismiss a Christian school's specious assertion that it be allowed to broadcast prayers over the PA system at state championships, FFRF is contending in an amicus brief.

Cambridge Christian School, in a case before the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, is seeking to force the Florida High School Athletic Association to broadcast prayers over the public-address system at state championship competitions hosted by the association. Cambridge Christian's free speech claim fails because it has not established that a forum exists for private speech at these government-sponsored events, FFRF points out.

"Cambridge Christian is not requesting equal access in this case; it is requesting special treatment," FFRF contends.

"A private religious school does not have a constitutional right to commandeer the PA system at a state-sponsored athletic competition," FFRF's friend-of-the-court brief asserts. "The Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment only protects private speech, it does not implicate government speech."

And the PA system has indeed been used exclusively to communicate government speech. Cambridge Christian cannot point to a written policy for third party use of the PA system at Florida High School Athletic Association-sponsored state

See Brief on page 17

Spreading the word



In Salt Lake City, former Mormon Ray Matthews, with his wife Cheri Larsen, shows off the digital billboard with his image that is part of FFRF's national secular values voter awareness campaign.

Prayer

Continued from page 1

The decision reflects the U.S. Supreme Court majority’s rejection of the Lemon Test to decide Establishment Clause disputes, which measured constitutionality based on whether the action had a secular purpose, advanced or inhibited religion or fostered excessive entanglement with religion. Instead the high court’s extremist supermajority advanced a “history and tradition test” in its recent Kennedy v. Bremerton School District ruling, as well as saying an action must be “coercive” to be unconstitutional.

FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor blasted the decision, saying, “A courtroom is not a church, and a judge’s bench should not be a pulpit. This is a dishonest decision, both in claiming a tradition of courtroom prayer and in denying that it is coercive.” She added that manipulation of the facts to privilege religion and ignore constitutional dictates barring establishments of religion by government actors is a hallmark of Christian nationalist-influenced court decisions.

Mack’s prayer practice involves the bailiff reading a script announcing an invocation by a volunteer chaplain and a disclaimer saying individuals are not required to be present. Everyone is told to rise and stand. Mack enters the room, introduces and thanks the chaplain, mentioning the church he

represents, then the chaplain, invariably Christian, prays. If there is only one bailiff present (typically the case), the doors are magnetically locked as the bailiff speaks and cannot be opened from the outside. Visitors can only leave by pressing a small button that is difficult to spot and makes them conspicuous.

Roe is a local attorney who felt compelled to be present during the prayers because of his duty to his client not to alienate the judge, and stopped taking cases in Montgomery County altogether to avoid Mack.

Mack ran for justice of the peace on a platform promising to create a chaplaincy program and open court with prayer. The decision notes that Mack invites the chaplains to open court with prayer in order to “honor and thank” them.

FFRF and Roe filed the current case against Mack in 2019. Mack was defended by First Liberty, an extremist Christian right legal group that represented Coach Kennedy and previously won the Bladensburg cross case permitting a huge Latin cross to stay on public property in Maryland. As a justice of the peace, Mack has jurisdiction over minor misdemeanor offenses and civil matters, including juvenile cases. Montgomery County is north of Houston, and its county seat is Conroe.

“This is a clear case of religion-based coercion,” comments FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert.

FFRF and Roe are represented by FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover, with Attorney Ayesha Khan of Washington, D.C., serving as co-counsel.

More discussion needed about ableism, disability

By Beth Blick

Within the atheist humanist community, I do not see a prevalence of topics relating to ableism (and people with disabilities, in general) when it comes to how we have often been mistreated by people of faith.

When I was attending a Catholic school, I had water thrown in my face by a nun in an attempt to control my behavior. As a result of that, my mother also started doing the same thing to me at home as a way to reinforce the message. I felt even more frustrated and helpless, and not at all heard. While my mother’s actions cannot be excused, it was the nuns who gave her the idea.

Those of us with disabilities were often segregated away from non-disabled kids in religious environments even more severely than in other public places. I have no idea why my Jewish parents sent me to a Catholic school, but they did. We lived in a majority Catholic neighborhood at that time.

I was once physically pushed away from communion by a nun because no one explained to me that Jewish kids shouldn’t take communion. I had no idea what it meant. One of my other disabled friends was slapped on the wrist repeatedly for something that was out of her control. It just wasn’t fair or kind.



Beth Blick

“Ableism is everywhere, and we all need to get better at seeing it, processing it, and working to end it in our own lives and in the lives of others.”

for the ways that we or others were born or have come to be. The bodies that we inhabit are not a punishment from some unseen force. We all deserve to live full, happy lives (as much as possible) and have the people who we need with us when the time calls for it.

I encourage more people to submit articles and other media to the atheist community about disability and ableism so that we can keep these important discussions going. Even if people do not have a disability themselves, we all need to be talking about ableism. What does ableism look like? What does it feel like?

There are still neuro-psych tests that serve as barriers to independence for people with disabilities. That is a huge problem in the medical community when it comes to ableism. Many of us with disabilities already know what our limitations are. We do not need to be told by a professional that we can’t do something, especially not without celebrating all of the things that we already do well. It is disrespectful and often very harmful.

Ableism is everywhere, and we all need to get better at seeing it, processing it, and working to end it in our own lives and in the lives of others. I especially invite atheists into this conversation — first, because I am one, and second, because we tend to be some of the most reasonable people around. Not to mention that it helps to have a sense of humor, and I know a lot of atheists who are damn funny. We have to sort out the mess and start talking about our own experiences with ableism (internalized or enacted) within the atheist community.

These are the kinds of experiences that I would like to hear discussed more openly so that greater awareness would hopefully lead to less abuse.

On another note, while many of us are good about making sure that the public places we stay in live up to the Americans with Disabilities Act, the history of those of us with disabilities has not shown up in a very public way in most atheist and humanist groups. Having more of a prevalence of atheists and agnostics with disabilities in the media, and groups such as FFRF partnering with atheists with disabilities on their podcasts and publications would be very helpful to remedy this. Also, specifically reaching out to atheists with disabilities for annual conferences and gatherings, and working on accessibility in a marked way is something that could really help to turn the tide. I am always on the lookout for more individuals and groups of atheists with disabilities.

In a conversation I had with FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, we talked about how groups of people, whether they are theists or nontheists, cannot be painted with a broad brush. We are all our own people. Freethought is a hallmark of sharing our uniqueness and ensuring that we are not “following the crowd” for things that do not align with our core values. Dan joined me earlier this year for a conversation on atheism and disability on my podcast “Speaking on Ability with Beth Blick.”

Our conversation renewed some of my faith in the human spirit. Dan took the time to listen to me and to offer insights from his years of experience across the spectrum of faith, spirituality and reason.

One important distinction he made was that we cannot blame God (or gods)

I have been a peace and disability advocate for many years and am a proponent of what the late Rep. John Lewis called “good trouble.” On my podcast, I strive to interview people who I hold in esteem and respect who share some of my values. I identify as a progressive feminist, and recently started writing for the Minnesota Women’s Press. My first article for the Women’s Press talks about the 2022 legislative session and how citizens can get involved with upcoming and current legislation focused on making life better for people in the disability community.

Let’s all tune in to the godless greatness that we’re weaving together as we get the word out not only about atheism and humanism, but also about disability and ableism!

Please reach out to me at BlickBeth@gmail.com if you’d like to discuss this topic with me.

FFRF Member Beth Blick lives in St. Paul, Minn.

American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll

By Orvin Larson

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

—Published by FFRF. 316 pages / PB

Buy it from FFRF online @ ffrf.org/shop

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Ask an Atheist

freethought and state/church separation. ffrf.org/freethought-matters

Freethought Radio: Listen each week as Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker discuss relevant issues and interview interesting guests. Also available as a podcast. ffrf.org/radio

Blogs: Read blog posts on various FFRF-related topics, written by FFRF staffers or special guests. freethoughtnow.org

Social media: Become friends with FFRF on Facebook and follow us on Twitter to stay up to date on everything FFRF is working on.

Ask an Atheist: Each week at noon (Central) on Wednesdays, FFRF discusses a topic of the day and answers your questions on Facebook Live. Or, if you can’t catch it live, go to FFRF’s YouTube channel. youtube.com/user/FFRF.org

Freethought Matters: Tune in on Sundays in your home market (or watch on YouTube) FFRF’s lively television show dedicated to

ffrf

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

Disability rights in post-Roe America

By Sammi Lawrence

Disability rights are a state/church issue. While America’s conscience has not consistently recognized this, there are clear ties between the Christian nationalist ideology that pervades legislation and the ongoing reality of stagnant and inadequate disability rights laws. The dangerous theocratic Christian ideology that led to *Roe v. Wade* being overturned is the same ideology that continues to play a part in the oppression of the 61 million disabled adults across the United States. This ideology has guided both harmful disability rights policy and the dismantling of abortion rights. To put it simply, if you care about disability rights, then you also care about the separation of state and church.



Sammi Lawrence

Ever since *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, the issue of bodily autonomy has remained at the forefront of people’s minds. Bodily autonomy is the simple concept that individuals should have the right to control what does and does not happen to their bodies. The Christian worldview is often one in which an individual’s bodily autonomy is subject to debate and compromise whenever that autonomy conflicts in any way with Christian ideology. Too often, the individual whose bodily autonomy is up for discussion is not even invited to the debate, let alone given a seat at the metaphorical table. Those who are anti-choice view a person’s body, typically a woman’s body, as the conduit for something “greater,” a vessel that is subject to a god’s will, whether that will be an unwanted pregnancy or a disability.

Steps toward equality

Disabled Americans have made strides, in fits and starts, toward equality. The same year *Roe* was initially decided, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was enacted. Section 504 prohibits discrimination against disabled people in programs receiving federal financial assistance. However, Section 504 was not enforced until 1977, when a group of over 100 disabled activists staged a sit-in in San Francisco’s local offices of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. The sit-in lasted over a week, leading to the department finally implementing Section 504.

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) was enacted. This was the first time



Image by Shutterstock

that disabled children were able and entitled to access public education. Prior to the act, disabled children were left out of the public school system.

Over a decade later, in 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act was finally passed. The ADA remains one of the most comprehensive civil rights laws ever passed, modeled after the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It prohibits discrimination against disabled people and attempts to ensure that the disabled have the same opportunities as anyone else. More than 30 years later, it remains, in many ways, the touchstone of disability law in the United States, despite the fact that 30 years of hindsight make it plain that the ADA was only the start, not the finish line. The inadequacies of current disability rights were and continue to be highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite legal pushes toward equality, societal views toward disability continue to oppress disabled Americans. The dismissive, harmful and often infantilizing views that many in the United States hold toward the disabled and disability are primarily rooted in Christianity.

One of the earliest models of disability within Western societies grew out of Christianity and the Catholic Church, and became more prominent beginning in the High Middle Ages (roughly 1100 C.E. to 1400 C.E.). In this context, I use the word “model” to refer to a lens through which a society views disability. This model, which I’ll call the Christian model of disability, preaches two inconsistent views on disability and the disabled.

The first is that disability is a punishment from God or exists as a means through which God may display his alleged greatness. To provide but a few examples:

“And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord?” (Exodus 4:11)

And, my personal favorite, in the book of John, Jesus heals a blind man who was born blind for no other purpose than so Jesus could heal him later: “As [Jesus] went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus, ‘but this happened so

that the works of God might be displayed in him.” (John 9) The disabled person is viewed as morally inferior, as a living warning against disobedience or a walking advertisement for God’s mercy.

This viewpoint is reflected in Christians who insist upon praying for disabled people’s disabilities to go away. Many, if not most, disabled people will at some point have the awkward and condescending experience of some well-meaning Christian wanting to pray to God on their behalf to ask God to “cure” or “fix” their disability. I’ve had this unpleasant experience several times in my life, and each time it has taken a significant amount of self-control to not laugh in people’s faces.

No supernatural factors

Of course, beyond being creepy and insulting, the idea that praying to a god can cure a disability is irrational. Disabilities are the result of myriad factors, but none of those factors is supernatural. Praying to a deity is not going to suddenly “cure” blindness, autism, bipolar disorder, paralysis or any other disability. Additionally, it’s incredibly dehumanizing and belittling to assume that all disabled people want their disabilities “cured.” For many disabled individuals, they view their disability as an integral part of their identity and not as something that needs to be “fixed.”

The second view perpetuated by the Christian model posits that disabled people are somehow more pious than the non-disabled. Disabled people are charity cases, martyrs, lack sexual or romantic desires and exist as a walking symbol of purity. Disabled people, likewise, serve as a means for non-disabled people to grow and become better people via taking on the burden of befriending or caring for the disabled person. Unfortunately, these harmful stereotypes persist in contemporary American society.

The Christian Model and both its conflicting viewpoints directly influenced the development of and continuing prevalence of the Medical Model of disability. The Medical Model asserts that disability is always “bad.” It is an abnormality that must be fixed or cured. Under this model, health care professionals, and authority figures generally, hold the exclusive power to cure, fix or accommodate a disability. Disabled people are told that they do not know what is best for themselves, that their input in their own treatment, accommodations and life choices are unnecessary and unpersuasive, and that they should be content with the choices that are made for them. The Medical Model is so pervasive that it invades nearly every aspect of life for disabled Americans, including the workplace and education.

Even while attending law school as a fully functioning, mentally capable 26 year

old, I, along with other disabled students, were repeatedly told that our input on our own accommodations was not persuasive or necessary. Despite being capable of getting accepted to law school, we were still viewed largely as children who did not know what was best for ourselves or what we needed. Authority figures within the institution did not take our complaints seriously, despite evidence of how online learning and the Covid-19 pandemic were negatively impacting disabled students, and acted as though we were incapable of forming legitimate opinions about our own needs.

This infantilization of the disabled extends directly to bodily autonomy. As a result of the Christian and Medical models continuing to pervade society, bodily autonomy is a privilege that disabled people may be deprived of in whole or in part at any time throughout their lives, even as adults, even if they do not have any or significantly diminished mental capacity. Unfortunately, the Medical Model has been the prevailing disability model for decades now and has heavily influenced the ADA.

In contrast, contemporary disability advocates reject the Medical Model in favor of viewing disability as something that is neither morally good nor bad. Disability is simply one facet of an individual’s identity and a key component of how they socialize with the world. The disabled individual should, to the greatest extent possible, be in charge of their own life and medical decisions and be granted the same bodily autonomy that any other non-disabled person would be granted.

Of course, in a post-Roe world, disabled people capable of becoming pregnant are now at an even greater disadvantage. Already, disabled Americans are being forced to carry unwanted pregnancies, being denied access to medication they need, and continue to be discriminated against by health care professionals.

As a recent NBC News article highlighted:

“I think one of the reasons that disabled people are not centered in these conversations, even though we should be, is that typically disabled people are desexualized,” said Maria Town, president and CEO of the American Association of People With Disabilities (AAPD). “We are not seen as sexual beings. In fact, the assumption is that we just don’t have sex, when, in reality, disabled people do have sex. We need and deserve accessible, affordable reproductive and informed reproductive health care, and that includes abortion.”

“Even after years of highlighting the longstanding lack of access to reproductive care, people with disabilities are still less likely to have health care providers and routine check-ups, and are more likely to have unmet health care needs because of the cost, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Access to reproductive services is even slimmer.”

The progress that disability rights advocates have made socially and legally in the past 50 years is not necessarily permanent, nor is it even adequate. *Dobbs* serves as a wake-up call for the disability rights movement. The same Christian theocratic rhetoric that fuels the anti-choice movement and Christian nationalism is already being used to halt and reverse progress. The fight for a society that views disabled people as full, competent, worthwhile human beings who are capable of participating in society and deserving of bodily autonomy and other basic human rights is now more important than ever.

Sammi Lawrence joined FFRF as the Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow in June 2022.

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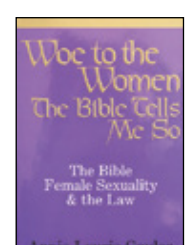
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XL RAIL AY PEMALVALP VFTV TSL PVARR

MEYPVSTAYLG CJ SLRAUAEWP RTXP TYG

VFSLTVLYLG CJ SLRAUAEWP IAERLYML.

— PTO FTSSAP

This puzzle is from *Freethinking Cryptograms* by FFRF member Brooks Rimes, available on Amazon.com for \$8.95. See bottom of page for description and hint for this puzzle. Answer is on page 21.

Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12
13						14				15			
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69						70				71			
72						73				74			

Answers on page 21

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

- Across

1. Body-search

6. Spermatozoa counterparts

9. Bed with bars

13. Hawaiian veranda

14. It's all the rage

15. Cheese in red casing

16. Before editing

17. "To" follower

18. Like a neon sign at night

19. *This state's recent referendum was a win for abortion rights

21. *Philosopher Bertrand ____: Religion is a "disease born of fear"

23. "Think Globally, ____ Locally"

24. Whistle blowers, for short

25. Credit card payment alternative, acr.

28. Aspiration

30. Body of artist's work

35. What beanstalk did

37. 5,280 feet

39. Sales pitch

40. Giant Himalayan?

41. Prepares a Martini

43. Inoffensive manner

44. What periscope and perishables have in common

46. The Big Top, e.g.

47. "I'm ____ you!"

48. Not comic

50. HBO's political satire show (2012-2019)

52. *"Hard Rain Falling"

author and atheist ____

53. Clarified butter

55. Prefix for "new"

57. *Freethinker Aldo Leopold's "A Sand County ____"

61. *Late "60 Minutes" commentator and freethinker Andy ____

64. Awaken

65. *Nonclerical

67. ____ the tail ____ the donkey

69. Living room centerpiece? (2 words)

70. Miller High Life, e.g.

71. France's longest river

72. Bristle

73. "It is" contraction, colloquially

74. Concluded

Down

1. H1N1, e.g.

2. Colonel or captain

3. Cuzco valley empire

4. Sweating room

5. Something tawdry

6. Deals a death blow

7. Variable, abbr.

8. Love intensely

9. Wheel teeth

10. *God to Eve: your husband "shall ____ over thee" (Genesis 3:16)

11. *Irreverent Billy of "Dancing with Myself" fame

12. Cry like a baby

15. Gases, alt. sp.

20. Smallest matter particles

22. E.T. transporter

24. Alleviate

25. Libya's neighbor

26. More unrestrained

27. Popular aquarium dweller

29. *Freethinking English statesman for whom PA city was named

31. "____ no good"

32. Delicious dish

33. Right-hand page

34. *Freethinking knight John, of "Crocodile Rock" fame

36. *Freethinking actress Kristen ____, women's reproductive rights supporter

38. European sea eagle

42. Dictation taker

45. Signature seal

49. Dance step

51. Celebrity news weekly magazine

54. Enthusiastic approval

56. Kitchen tear-jerker

57. A in BA

58. 1970 movie "____ Story"

59. Necessary thing

60. On a cruise

61. Cereal plant, pl.

62. "National Velvet" author ____ Bagnold

63. Yesteryear

66. ____ Baba

68. Flanders of "The Simpsons"

IT PAYS TO COMPLAIN

Stanford ads modified

A California husband and wife who are FFRF household members got a positive response to their Aug. 2 letter of complaint about a full-page newspaper ad in the July 31 East Bay Times for a health care provider with ties to Stanford University.

"Given that Stanford University is ostensibly nondenominational and nonsectarian, we were surprised by the prominence of a Christian cross on the person chosen to represent the university's medical services, with the cross unusually high up on her neck," the letter from Jane Russell and Jon Alexandr said.

"We think it is everybody's right to declare their personal religious affiliation, but it seems inappropriate to highlight only one religion in a Stanford University ad that is presumably aimed at a diverse community of people who have affiliations with various religions, or affiliations with no religions.

"This is especially true now with the divisive decisions of the Christian-dominated U.S. Supreme Court taking away the constitutional rights of women to have autonomy over their own bodies, while also weakening the constitutional foundations for the separation of church and state," the letter continued.

"Why was a decision made — de facto — to promote Christianity by Stanford University in a way that can alienate a significant portion of the ad's readers?"

The letter was promptly and cordially responded to by the associate director of community partnerships for Stanford's School of Medicine before being forwarded to Jennifer Torai, director of local government affairs for Stanford Health Care.

"I shared your concern and the marketing team appreciated you bringing it forward," Torai wrote. "The intent was to fully represent the individual in the ad but understand how it could be misinterpreted. As such, the ads are being



modified for future publishing. Thank you for taking the time to provide this important feedback.

"Please let me know if you have questions or would like to chat about this. Again, I really do appreciate you raising awareness of this!"

In smaller online versions of the ad since the letter was received, the cross no longer appears.

Russell and Alexandr have for 11 years hosted a private San Francisco Bay Area group via Meetup.com — Contra Costa Atheists and Freethinkers. They plan to retire soon from organizing the group.

Note to members

For those of you who get the PDF version of Freethought Today, there have been a few changes to the content you can see.

Because of privacy concerns—the PDF can be easily forwarded to non-members — FFRF has stopped including in the PDF version the Black Collar Crime report, names of new Lifetime members, and the names of the Letterbox contributors.

The online version at freethoughttoday.com also follows this protocol. Only the actual print newspaper contains all of these items.

If you would like to continue reading

Black Collar Crime, see the names of FFRF's newest Lifetime members, or see the names of those who contributed to our Letterbox, you will need to change your preferences in how you receive Freethought Today.

In order to do that, follow these simple steps:

Log into your FFRF.org account.

Click on "Update your contact information."

Go down to "Deliver Freethought Today by" and click on either "Newspaper by mail" or "Both PDF and paper copy."

Click "Submit."

Cryptogram hint

A cryptogram is a substitution puzzle in which one letter stands for another. If U equals T, it will equal T throughout the puzzle.

Example:

UOG RLQTM HYVBF DVP
SLACN VWGY UOG KJEZ XVI.
THE QUICK BROWN FOX
JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG.

This month's clue: G => D .

LOSING FAITH IN FAITH

From Preacher To Atheist

by Dan Barker

Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist

By Dan Barker

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— Published by FFRF, 392 pages / PB

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IN THE NEWS

PP to launch its first mobile abortion clinic

Planned Parenthood plans to launch its first mobile abortion clinic in the border regions of southern Illinois by the end of the year, offering medication abortions — and eventually procedural ones.

Wait times in Illinois for abortion procedures have skyrocketed from four days to two-and-a-half weeks at Planned Parenthood’s Fairview Heights health center, which is just 20 miles from the Illinois and Missouri border, officials said.

“This 37-foot mobile abortion clinic will help reduce travel distances, wait times and other logistical barriers profoundly impacting patients in neighboring states where abortion is now banned,” said Yamelsie Rodriguez, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of the St. Louis Region and Southwest Missouri.

The mobile unit, with two full exam rooms, will be located near the southern border of Illinois. It will not provide abortion care in Missouri, where abortion is now banned. Planned Parenthood said the goal is to try to see 30 patients a day.

Churches defend loophole in sex abuse reporting

The Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act contends that every state should require certain persons to report instances of child abuse — also called the mandatory reporting law. However, clergy are exempt from mandatory reporting in 33 U.S. states, including Utah.

This loophole has resulted in an unknown number of predators being allowed to continue abusing children for years despite having confessed the behavior to religious officials. In many of these cases, the privilege has been invoked to shield religious groups from civil and criminal liability after the abuse became known to civil authorities.

The Associated Press found that the Roman Catholic Church has used its well-funded lobbying infrastructure and deep influence among lawmakers in some states to protect the privilege, and that influential members of the

Celebrating Constitution Day



Standing on the steps of the Benton County (Ark.) Courthouse, members of the new Ozarks Chapter of FFRF organized for a Constitution Day event on Sept 17.

“It was a complete success!” writes Chris Sweeny (top center). “We engaged the community through peaceful activism and helped amplify the voice of secular citizens. We look forward to growing our membership and will continue to be a vocal presence in our local communities.”

Sweeny said the group met at Crystal Bridges Museum in Bentonville, with the original Constitution on display, before marching through town to the steps of the courthouse. “Our group grabbed the attention of patrons walking through the weekly Bentonville Farmer’s Market,” he wrote. “FFRF Member Kirsten Hawkins gave a riveting speech, laying out FFRF’s cause and citing the numerous legislative policies that threaten human rights.”

are and how many other women are affected by this,” Power said. “Like how can we decide that women can’t have this medicine that men can? That’s discriminating on gender. And how can you make a law that doesn’t allow me to provide standard of care for my patients?”

Poll: 23% have prayed for result of sports event

About three in 10 U.S. adults say they believe prayer can play a role in determining who wins a sporting event, and a similar percentage say God plays a role, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Among fans of professional sports, 23 percent say they have prayed about the outcome of a contest, according to the poll. Religious background is a factor: 35 percent of evangelical fans say they have done so, compared with 21 percent of fans of other religious faiths. But professional sports fans don’t have to believe to pray. The poll shows that 15 percent of nonreligious fans say they too have prayed for the outcome of a game.

About a quarter of U.S. adults say superstitions or rituals can play a role in who wins a sporting event, according to the poll. The frequency of prayer is similar for games below the ranks of pro sports: 23 percent of fans of high school or college sports say they pray about the outcome of those games.

Minn. legislators begin Secular Government Caucus

Two dozen Democratic state legislators announced recently the creation of the Secular Government Caucus to counter the rise in Christian nationalism and politicians imposing their personal religious beliefs on others.

The caucus opposes religious discrimination and wants to uphold the constitutional separation of church and state. Christian nationalism asserts that the United States is a Christian nation.

“[Christian nationalists] have been getting more and more vocal, and if they’re going to organize on that, we better be ready to be aware of what they’re doing and speak out on it,” said state Sen. John Marty, who co-chairs the new caucus.

The caucus includes both religious members and nonbelievers and plans to invite all members of the Legislature to join the caucus after the November election, Marty said.

Marty, whose father is a Lutheran theologian, said that members started discussing creating a secular caucus at the beginning of the summer following what they believe are Christian encroachments on the secular state. He pointed to the Dobbs Supreme Court decision, which allowed states to impose abortion restrictions, and proposals by the Minnesota Legislative Prayer Caucus in recent years to post “In God We Trust” signs in public schools.

According to the Minnesota Legislative Prayer Caucus’ website, caucus members are “committed to advancing policies and initiatives that promote religious freedom, America’s Judeo-Christian heritage and prayer.”

Mormon church and Jehovah’s Witnesses have also worked in statehouses and courts to preserve it in areas where their membership is high.

“They believe they’re on a divine mission that justifies keeping the name and the reputation of their institution pristine,” said David Finkelhor, director of the Crimes Against Children Research Center at the Uni-

versity of New Hampshire, speaking of several religious groups. “So the leadership has a strong disincentive to involve the authorities, police or child protection people.”

Teen denied medication under new abortion law

A 14-year-old Tucson girl was denied a refill of a life-saving prescription drug she had been taking for years just two days after Arizona’s new abortion law had taken effect in August.

Emma Thompson has debilitating rheumatoid arthritis and osteoporosis, which has kept her in and out of the hospital for most of her life. She relies on methotrexate to help tame the effects of the disease. But methotrexate can also be used to abort ectopic pregnancies.

The girl’s physician, Dr. Deborah Jane Power, said Thompson was the first pediatric patient that had been denied her medication because of the new law.

Thompson was ultimately able to get her prescription filled, but the delay highlights the medical complications some patients are facing in states with strict abortion rules.

“I don’t think everyone understands what the ramifications of such a broad, sweeping antiabortion law


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Freedom depends on freethinkers

Keep Catholicism out of health care

By Barbara Alvarez

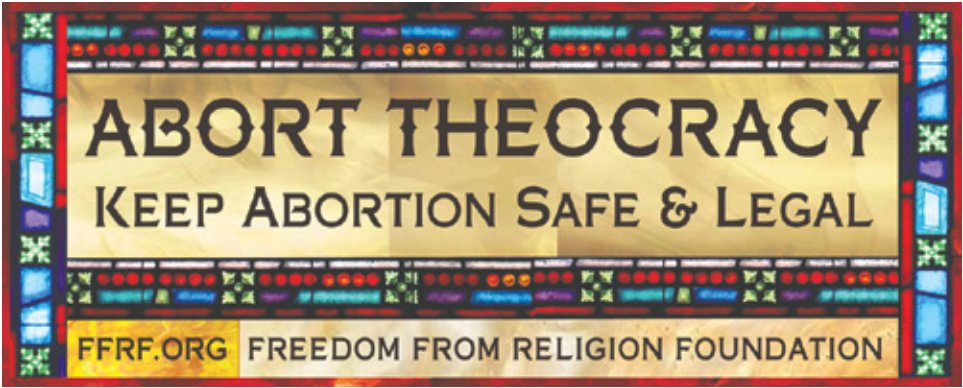
There is no room for religious doctrine in health care procedures. And yet we are seeing religion increasingly intrude into health care throughout the country.

A new Washington Post article notes that Catholic hospitals now control about one in seven hospital beds in the United States. In Wisconsin, Freedom From Religion Foundation’s home state, 43 percent of hospitals have a Catholic affiliation — the highest in the nation. These religion-based health care organizations are often located in low-income, historically marginalized communities. For example, St. Joseph Hospital in Milwaukee is situated in a community that is predominantly low-income Black and where nearly one-third of its residents live in poverty.

But this is just not a Wisconsin-based trend. In other states such as Alaska, Iowa, South Dakota and Washington, Catholic facilities make up 40 percent or more of hospital beds. In fact, a recent report by Community Catalyst



Barbara Alvarez



notes that four of the nation’s 10 largest health systems are Catholic. The report also observes that there has been a 50 percent increase over the past two decades in terms of Catholic-controlled short-term, acute care hospitals.

This is a major health crisis, since Catholic hospitals follow directives from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. It means that such hospitals prohibit treatment of procedures they deem to be “immoral.” This includes vasectomies, tubal ligation, contraception, the “morning after pill” for rape victims and abortion. As the Washington Post reports, “These policies can limit treatment options for obstetric care during miscarriages and ectopic pregnancies.” However, most Catholic hospitals do not disclose their religion-based restrictions on their website. This means people may simply be

unaware that their local hospital will not provide the sexual or reproductive health care they need or want.

This is even more problematic for low-income people. For example, low-income women on Medicaid, by law, are supposed to have access to at least some providers that offer contraception. However, research has found that this isn’t typical; sometimes the only options in a patient’s network are Catholic health care facilities.

To add salt to the wound, Catholic hospitals often receive tax dollars to fund their operations. Catholics for Choice, a Catholic abortion rights group that supports affirming sexual and reproductive health care for all, has written a scathing piece about the hypocrisy of using government money for religious purposes: “By using their status as religious nonprofits to refuse care

to the LGBTQIA-plus community and those in need of abortions or contraception, Catholic hospitals have succeeded in having their cake and eating it, too. These institutions rely on government funding while defying federal and state bans on discrimination.”

Even secular hospitals are at risk. Many secular hospitals are merging with Catholic hospitals for financial reasons. As a result, local hospitals and health care facilities are increasingly subject to religious indoctrination. After all, religious directives declare that “the professional-patient relationship is never separated, then, from the Catholic identity of the health care institution.”

Access to contraception and comprehensive reproductive health care is needed more than ever. As a secular country, people should be able to access comprehensive health care without fear of religious intrusion. Catholic hospitals threaten that possibility — and their monopolies in many communities and demands to merge with secular hospitals should not be tolerated.

Barbara Alvarez is a contributing writer for FFRF. Previously she had held the role as FFRF’s inaugural Anne Nicol Gaylor Reproductive Rights Intern, a program set up to memorialize FFRF’s principal founder, who was an early abortion rights activist and author of the book *Abortion is a Blessing*.



FFRF billboard proclaims the truth of science

“Science doesn’t care what you believe,” declares a 10-by-22 feet billboard that has gone up in Toledo, Ohio, on the corner of Dorr northeast at Reynolds.

A local member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation suggested and generously paid for the billboard message. Lloyd Jones, 80, a retired biology professor from the University of Toledo, was inspired to place the message because “Right now there’s a lot of anti-science out there and it’s causing people to have mistaken beliefs.” Jones advocates basing opinions on evidence, as does the national association of 38,000 freethinkers (atheists and agnostics) working to keep state and church separate.

Although FFRF has placed billboards in more than half of the states, including a September billboard in Bowling Green as part of its national secular voter campaign, this is its first billboard message in Toledo.

The billboard is an obvious rejoinder to the backlash against Covid-19 vaccination. Atheists have repeatedly been shown to be more likely to be vaccinated for Covid-19 than Christians. A Pew sur-

vey in August 2021 of 10,000 Americans shows that white evangelical Protestant Christians are least likely to have been vaccinated for Covid-19 (at 57 percent) and atheists most likely (99 percent).

“We trust in reason and science,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president, “and encourage Americans to do their part to protect themselves and others by staying up to date with the coronavirus vaccinations and boosters.”

As the population grows more non-religious, freethought messages are increasingly seen in the United States. Currently, 29 percent of adult Americans — almost one in three — are atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” a segment that researchers have dubbed the “Nones.” The “Nones” are currently the largest group by religious identification, surpassing Roman Catholics, Southern Baptists or any other individual sect in America.

FFRF hopes that the billboard will not only encourage vaccinations, but also points out that the slogan celebrates the power of reason and science to improve this, our only world.

FFRF lauds support for high court expansion

FFRF is pleased that a major new poll shows more than half of Americans support the expansion of the number of justices on the U.S. Supreme Court.

The results of the latest Marquette University Law School poll indicate that 51 percent favor court expansion, which notably contrasts with the 56 percent who opposed court reform last year. This is a clear indication that respondents are taking note of the more polarized — and more extremist — Supreme Court.

“This exciting shift showing majority support for court reform indicates a recognition by the American public that our civil rights are in danger, given recent decisions by the extremist supermajority,” says Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. Gaylor added that President Biden and most elected officials who are

shying away from court reform should take heed.

The waning public confidence and a recognition of a negative ideological shift in the highest court is reflected by the solid 60 percent who “disapprove” of the way the Supreme Court is handling its job.

FFRF has long maintained that the dramatic shift in the court’s ideology is out of touch with the views of the majority of Americans and that, with a third of Supreme Court justices nominated by President Trump, the high court has been captured by Christian nationalists.

FFRF will continue to advocate for an independent federal judiciary that will uphold the constitutional principle of separation of state and church, and is gratified to see that the majority of the public is with us on the need to expand the high court.

Freethought Matters

An antidote to religion on the airwaves and Sunday morning sermonizing

Watch our show every Sunday!

Photo by Chris Line

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Freethought Matters TV talk show airs in:

Chicago	WPWR-CW	(Ch. 50)	9 am
Denver	KWGN-CW	(Ch. 2)	7 am
Houston	KUBE-IND	(Ch. 57)	9 am
Los Angeles	KCOP-MY	(Ch. 13)	8:30 am
Madison, Wis.	WISC-TV	(Ch. 3)	11 pm
Minneapolis	WFTC-29	(Ch. 29)	7:30 am
New York City	WPIX-IND	(Ch. 11)	8:30 am
Phoenix	KASW-CW	(Ch. 61)	8:30 am
		(Ch. 61 or 6 or 1006 for HD)	
Portland, Ore.	KRCW-CW	(Ch. 32)	9 am
		(703 on Comcast for HD or Ch. 3)	
Sacramento	KQCA-MY	(Ch. 58)	8:30 am
Seattle	KONG-IND	(Ch. 16)	8 am
		(Ch. 16 or Ch. 106 on Comcast)	
Washington, D.C.	WDCW-CW	(Ch. 50)	8 am

Go to: ffrf.org/freethought-matters for more information

FFRF VICTORIES

By Matt Langer

Texas school district to end invocation

FFRF put a stop to a sectarian prayer in a Texas school district’s in-service training for faculty and staff.

A concerned Frenship Independent School District employee contacted FFRF about the religious invocation. Reportedly, a state legislator also spoke during the in-service training, who claimed that a history teacher in the district must “inform students that their rights come from God, their creator, not the government,” and that “the government serves only to uphold what God put in place.”

“Prayers and religious messages at employee meetings inappropriately alienate district faculty, staff and students who practice a minority religion, as well as those who are part of the almost thirty percent of the American population who are not religious,” FFRF Legal Fellow Samantha Lawrence wrote to Superintendent Michelle McCord. “Their participation in employee meetings is adversely affected by these prayers and religious messages, which turn them into outsiders in their workplace. Additionally, the mandatory nature of in-service training and many other District meetings means that District employees essentially have no choice but to subject themselves to a coercive and offensive religious exercise that violates their right of conscience.”

A response from the district’s legal counsel, David P. Backus, assured FFRF that this violation will not occur in the future.

“Although it was not the superintendent who introduced the invocation, she has reviewed its in-service practice of allowing an invocation during its in-service and determined to cease such activities in the future,” Backus wrote. “The congressman’s remarks were not previously reviewed or approved by the district or its administration. Consequently, the remarks that the congressman made to the teachers were not endorsed in any way by the district.”

Plant managers



Photo by Chris Line

Meet the FFRF staff members who help keep the flowers, bushes and trees around Freethought Hall looking good from spring through fall. From left, Freethought Today Editor PJ Slinger, Events and Outreach Manager Sadie Pattinson, Legal Assistant Greta Martens, Director of First Impressions Lisa Treu and Clerical Assistant Alexica Schultz.

FFRF gets chaplain to resign from Texas district

After FFRF contacted a Texas school district over the unconstitutional use of a Christian chaplain as a “mental health interventionist,” the chaplain was placed on leave before resigning.

It was reported to FFRF by multiple members of the Trinity Independent School District that the chaplain had been spreading his personal religious beliefs to students. He reportedly told students who were depressed or suicidal that it was because they do not have a good relationship with God. It was also reported that he told LGBT students that they were going to hell. In addition to these remarks, the chaplain reportedly distributed Christian literature to students that presented the “absolute truth” about issues that young people are confronted with, including “sexual purity,” “evolu-

tion,” “abortion,” and “homosexuality.”

“The district cannot employ an official chaplain, and it must make certain that none of its employees are unlawfully and inappropriately indoctrinating students in religious matters by handing out religious materials or promoting their personal religious beliefs,” FFRF Staff Attorney Christopher Line wrote to Superintendent John Kaufman. “We ask that the district immediately investigate this situation and ensure that [the chaplain] either fully complies with the Establishment Clause and stops violating the rights of students and their parents, or is removed from his position within the district.”

A response from Kaufman confirmed that the chaplain is no longer employed by the district. “[The chaplain] was placed on administrative leave effective Jan. 14 and remained on administrative leave until his resignation from the district on July 28,” Kaufman wrote.

Ohio school district to end graduation prayers

FFRF was able to put an end to prayers at an Ohio high school graduation ceremony after being alerted to the constitutional violation by a concerned citizen.

During the 2021 graduation ceremony, the principal of Barnesville High School reportedly invited a student to the stage “to lead us in prayer.” The student, who identified himself as the class president, started the Christian prayer with “Let us pray. Dear Lord, thank you for this day.” The prayer ended with “May they always turn to you for direction. We ask this in your name. Amen.”

During the 2022 graduation ceremony, the principal reportedly asked the audience to “please rise” and to “remain standing for the invocation.” He then called up a student “who will lead us in prayer.” The prayer began with “Heavenly Father” and ended with the wish to “Please keep us safe . . . as we continue our destinies. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.”

“Requiring nonreligious students and attendees to make a public showing of their nonbelief by not participating in a prayer or else to display deference toward a religious sentiment in which they do not believe is coercive, embarrassing, and intimidating,” FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heineman wrote to Barnesville Schools Superintendent Angie Hannahs. “Barnesville Schools students and families have the right to a prayer-free celebration . . . The district has a duty to remain neutral toward religion. By scheduling prayers at graduation, the district abridges that duty and alienates non-Christians, including the almost 30 percent of the population who are not religious.”

A response from Hannahs assured FFRF that this issue has been addressed. “I have investigated the matter,” Hannahs wrote. “[T]he Barnesville School District will not schedule prayers at school graduations in the future.”


Christianity is collapsing in Western democracies

This article first appeared on FFRF’s blog site, [FreethoughtNow.org](#).

By James A. Haught

We are living through a historic culture change that many of us oldsters weren’t sure would ever happen. Christianity is collapsing in Western democracies with astounding speed. The long-awaited Secular Age is rolling like a juggernaut. Freethought efforts finally are winning the day.

Christianity remains strong in tropical places, where millions “speak in tongues” and exhibit holy-roller behavior. But it is disintegrating in America, Europe, Can-



ada and Australia. Soon, Christians will be a minority in the West. Hurrah. Intelligent scientific thinking now dominates — not supernatural fairy tales.

Why did this great transformation arrive in our lifetime?

Many explanations have been offered.

Several sociologists contend that Western life has improved so much — with prosperity, health care, job security, few wars, modern comforts, good pensions and better education — that

people no longer need to hope for rewards after death. When couples stop going to church, their children grow up without being indoctrinated.

Some scholars like Mary Eberstadt, author of *How the West Really Lost God*, suggest that the sexual revolution curtailed much of the patriarchal family, leaving fewer traditional households to fill church pews. Others, such as computer scientist Allen Downey, say the rise of the internet, with its great power to spread skeptic messages, has helped fuel the decline. Yet others have reasoned that never-ending sex scandals involving priests and ministers have taken their toll. And it is frequently observed that the intense involvement of white evangelicals in narrow-minded politics has alienated millions of moderate young Americans.

I think rising intelligence and growing scientific knowledge have enabled millions to see that gods, devils, heavens, hells, prophecies, miracles, etc., are just fantasies — they don’t actually exist. Magical church tenets are fiction — complete lies.

For instance, each human personality — all 8 billion of us — is created by our huge brain, the most complex object in the universe. When the brain dies, along with the body, it’s unlikely that the psyche can come out of the corpse and travel to a hereafter. The

personality simply dies with the brain. So, promises of heaven are vaporous.

Undoubtedly, all these factors pushed the profound transition we are watching. It’s mostly a phenomenon of young adults. As old churchgoers die off, they are followed by young generations who say their religion is “none.”

Christianity, which shaped our world for millennia — causing crusades, inquisitions, witch hunts, Catholic-Protestant wars, pogroms against Jews and Anabaptists, burning of “heretics,” blasphemy trials and the like — is quickly retreating before our eyes.

Sixty years ago, philosopher-historian Will Durant wrote in *The Age of Reason Begins*:

“Is Christianity dying? Is the religion that gave morals, courage and art to Western civilization suffering slow decay though the spread of knowledge, the widening of astronomic, geographical and historical horizons, the realization of evil in history and the soul, the decline of faith in an afterlife and of trust in the benevolent guidance of the world? If this is so, it is the basic event of modern times.”

Durant’s prophecy seems to be coming true at last.

James A. Haught was the longtime editor at the *Charleston Gazette* and has been the editor emeritus since 2015.



'We Dissent' is a monthly podcast by four women who are powerhouse attorneys at the major secular organizations in the U.S., including FFRF’s Rebecca Markert and Liz Cavell.

Listen in as they discuss developments affecting state/church separation in the U.S. Supreme Court and lower federal courts.

Join us @ [we-dissent.org](#)

My personal history of the United States

FFRF Lifetime Member Dick Hewetson is one of FFRF's longest-tenured members, having joined the foundation in its first year as a national organization in 1978. Here, he recounts his life and how it has played out against the backdrop of American history.

By Dick Hewetson

At the age of 92, I realize that I have lived through over one-third of the history of the United States of America. (Our republic is 246 years old.)

I was born on March 31, 1930 — six months after the stock market crash that led to the Great Depression. My father was the cashier of the Flossmoor State Bank in Flossmoor, Ill., a suburb of Chicago. Shortly after I was born, the bank closed. After a brief time with the South Side Bank of Chicago, my father became unemployed. We soon became “homeless” and lived with relatives or friends for the first four years of my life. I do not remember these times.

Both the Civil War and the Great War (World War I) were recent memories. There were people who remembered Abraham Lincoln and the Emancipation Proclamation that “freed” the slaves. The slaves may have been freed, but they were certainly not full citizens. They only held certain menial jobs.

1930s

The major forms of entertainment were radios at home and movie theaters that showed black and white movies with sound, and, if you could afford it, a piano in the parlor. Sound had only recently been added to movies. Until then, movies had no soundtrack, and the dialogue was flashed as text on the screen. Movie theaters had pianos.

Milk and ice (we had no refrigerators) were delivered in horse-drawn wagons.

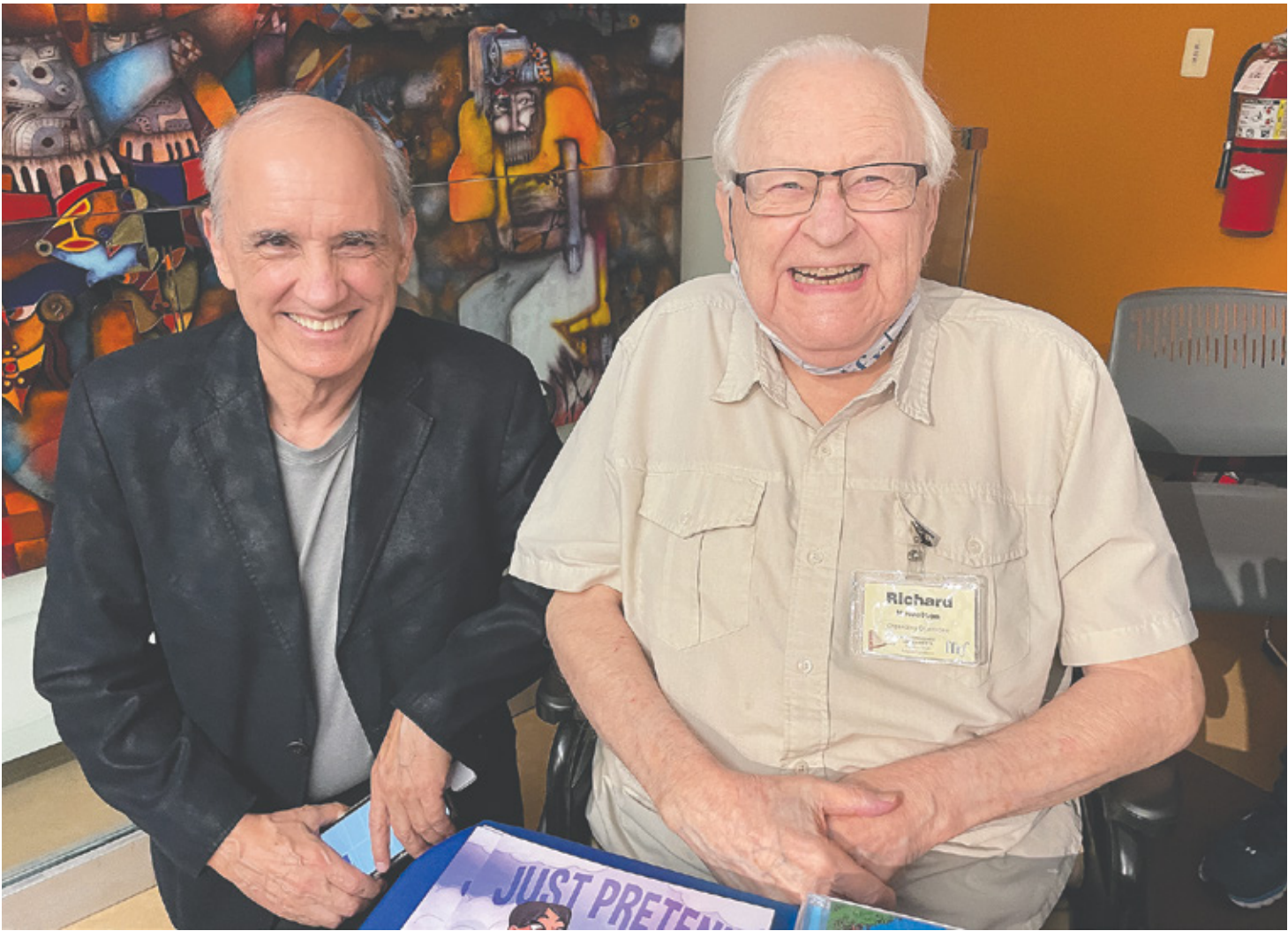
In history books in my public schools, the American Indians were referred to as “savages.” We now know that their children were placed in schools that robbed them of their culture.

In grade school we sang a song:
*Such a kind policeman stands
At the corner every day.
Little children, who are lost,
Go to him to find their way.*

The street policeman was a member of the neighborhood. He knew us. We knew him. Now the police cruise in pairs in automobiles, and many people fear them.



Dick and his little sister Anita pose under a tree in the early 1940s.



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker joins Dick Hewetson for a San Francisco FFRF event.

1940s

I grew up in Minneapolis, which I now understand was a tremendously anti-Semitic city. Jewish people could not be buried in the city's cemeteries. With the exception of the University of Minnesota, Jewish doctors could not be affiliated with any hospitals. They could practice across the river in St. Paul. After World War II, the Jewish doctors in Minneapolis built Mt. Sinai Hospital.

One Sunday when I was 11 years old, I rode my bike to a former neighborhood to visit a playmate. When I arrived, he came running out of his house to tell me that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. I had no idea where Pearl Harbor was or what that meant.

The ensuing war had a profound effect on my life. Patriotism was at a high level. Food and gasoline were rationed. We collected scrap metal for the arms industry. Families had flags in their windows with blue stars representing members in the armed services and gold stars representing those who had died in battle.

As a young person, I saw the middle class grow because of the work of labor unions. I saw the return of prosperity after World War II. Because of the G.I. Bill, veterans were able to get an education and buy homes. Both my brother and brother-in-law received an education through the G.I. Bill. The gap between the rich and the poor became the smallest in history. The following years led to a growing middle class. The gap between the rich and poor grew even smaller. For most Americans, these were good times.

1950s

From 1950 to 1954, I attended the University of Minnesota. I worked 40 hours per week to support myself. The tuition was \$33 per quarter! I went on to Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, an Episcopal school in Evanston, Ill. With summer jobs on the Great Northern Railroad and washing pots and pans in the seminary kitchen, I was able to pay for my education.

Although I was living a rather “cloistered life,” I was aware of the anti-communist atmosphere in the United States. Wishing to distinguish us from Marxist-Leninist countries, Congress changed the motto of the country from “E Pluribus Unum” to “In God We Trust,” and added the words “under God” to the Pledge of Allegiance. I still love the ring of the phrase as I learned it: “one nation, indivisible.” Scariest to me were the hearings of Sen. Joseph McCarthy to weed out communists and homosexuals from the government.

Because I grew up poor and was taught that waste was not good, I remember being appalled by the idea of throwing useful things away —what I call our “throw-away society.” Cleaning rags were made from used clothing. Now we purchase them at the hardware store. The worst example of this is single-use plastic gadgets. Decades later our landfills and oceans are filled with plastic!

Also, I remember a time when being in debt was something to be avoided. With the exception of homes and automobiles, most things were purchased only when we could afford them. Now, with the plethora of credit cards, being in debt is normal. Living beyond one's means is normal.

The priesthood years

I now realize that my motives for going into the priesthood were very subliminal. It was a place to “hide” and be considered all right as an unmarried man. I also thought that if I had enough faith, my homosexuality would fade away.

Having lived my entire life in Chicago and Minneapolis, my first assignment was a real culture shock. When I graduated in 1957, I was assigned to St. John's Church in Hallock, Minn., and Christ Church in St. Vincent, Minn. St. Vincent is in the northwest corner of Minnesota. Hallock is 20 miles south. To give some perspective, Hallock is 375 miles northwest of Minneapolis. Driving south from Hallock, it was 70 miles to the first traffic light! However, it was only 85 miles north to the wonderful city of Winnipeg, Manitoba. That city



A portrait of Dick when he was an Episcopal priest.

became a haven for me.

Two years later, I was living and working as an Episcopal priest in International Falls, Minn., which was a unique experience. This border community is known as the “Ice Box of the Nation.” Forty degrees below zero is not unusual in the winter; I once experienced 50 below. While I was living there, coaxial cable arrived from Duluth, and I bought my first TV. This led to a connection with the rest of the world that we had never experienced.

My next assignment, starting in 1963, took me to Owen, Wis., where I served St. Katherine's Church, as well as St. Mary's in Medford, for five years. Owen was an unusual community for central rural Wisconsin. The town began in the early 1900s, built around a lumber yard established by John S. Owen from Milwaukee. The population was varied because they all came as “outsiders” from surrounding areas to work for Mr. Owen. He was an Episcopalian, so he established St. Katherine's congregation. The Episcopalians in Eau Claire, Wis., were building a new church, so he purchased the old church, dismantled it,



Dick greets tourists in San Francisco’s Castro neighborhood.



Dick with his life partner John.

shipped it by rail, and reassembled it in his new community.

Regardless of their background, most of his employees went to “his church.” This created a sense of community that I had never witnessed before. Again, I saw ordinary people uniting to live and work together.

1960s

The awareness of my sexuality led to a mental breakdown in 1967. This led to my leaving the parish ministry and taking a job with the Minnesota Department of

Employment Security. I continued to fill in on Sundays for Wisconsin churches when the local clergy were vacationing, or there was a temporary vacancy. Some of these vacancies were because of misbehavior or alleged misbehavior of the local priest. I found the coverup by the church disgusting. Also, I realized more and more that church folk were too trusting of the words and teaching of the clergy.

The 1960s and ’70s brought the civil rights movements. Much progress was made, but certainly not enough. Recent times with Black Lives Matter have shown how deep systemic racism is. I have always been grateful that my racism was tempered by the fact that I attended an “integrated” school before we knew that term. A nation that promised to be a “melting pot” could be so beautiful. I relish the diversity. Today, it thrills me that the talking heads on television are no longer all white males.

1970s

Once I came to terms with my sexuality, I began having doubts about my religious beliefs. I soon became aware that my doubts about religion were real. I left the church in 1972. Now that my livelihood was no longer with the church, I could see more clearly.

I became aware of the budding gay rights movement and became involved. It was difficult for me because most of the activists were young, counterculture people and I was this middle-class conformist in my 40s.

In 1978, I joined the Freedom From Religion Foundation because it worked for the separation of church and state — keeping religion out of government. Most

members were atheists, and when I realized what that meant, I realized that I had always been an atheist!

At the height of my career with the state of Minnesota, there was affirmative action. That meant that as a white male, I could be bypassed in order to promote minorities and women. I was comfortable with this because I understood the concept and rejoiced that women and minorities were getting a “fair chance.”

During my career as a state employee, I became active in our union, the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Because of my involvement, AFSCME Council 6 was the first union in the United States to have anti-discrimination against LGBTQ people.

1980s

In 1981, President Reagan fired the striking air traffic controllers. From that time on, unions lost much of their power. The Minnesota Legislature broke up our bargaining units. Since then, the income gap has continually grown between the wealthy and the working class. Beginning with General Electric in 1981, corporations paid shareholders more by not giving raises to employees to keep up with inflation.

Today

The two issues in which I have been most active are LGBTQ rights and the separation of state and church. We still have no national law to protect LGBTQ people, and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, signed by Bill Clinton, has set us back on both of these issues. “Sincere religious beliefs” allow discrimination. One person’s religious belief cancels the human rights of another.

It has become evident to me that this country built its wealth on white supremacy and slavery. I contend that it still operates in the same way, except the wealthy are not necessarily white,

and the slaves are no longer only people of color and are called “minimum wage workers.” Wealth runs the country. Cheap labor is still the backbone.

In the 19th century, Chinese laborers were brought to this country to build our railroads, but were not allowed to become citizens. Throughout our history, they have been our cheap laborers. Many of them set up their own businesses in Chinatowns in our major cities. Now they are being blamed for the Covid pandemic, and their businesses are suffering.

Money drives elections and influences our elected representatives. Our K-12 education system is a disaster. The Founding Fathers believed that democracy depended on an educated public. In my opinion, we do not teach critical thinking and good citizenship to our children. I have long believed that a high school diploma or G.E.D. should require passing the citizenship test that immigrants must pass.

Fewer than 50 percent of voters elected Donald Trump as president in 2016. I predicted that he would win. Most people in this country, including myself, do not think that Washington politicians really care about them. An example is Social Security. My parents, who died in the late 20th century, lived on Social Security. That is no longer possible because of inflation. Also, I paid into Social Security my whole working life with the promise the benefits would not be taxed. When I retired, Congress changed the law to tax 85 percent of my benefits.

It is clear that gun manufacturing makes money. We already have more guns than people in this country, yet we manufacture 3 million more guns a year! Daniel Defense, which manufactured the gun used in the Uvalde, Texas, mass shooting, is a major contributor to the Republican Party.

I shall close by paraphrasing President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, regarding the date the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade: June 24, 2022; a date that shall live in infamy. Democracy died in the United States of America. Now, guns have rights, but women do not!



Dick poses next to the “Atheists in Foxholes” monument outside of Freethought Hall in Madison, Wis.

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WOMEN OF COLOR BEYOND BELIEF



The third Women of Color Beyond Belief conference took place in Chicago over the weekend of Sept. 30–Oct. 2. FFRF, the biggest co-sponsor, salutes the Women of Color Beyond Belief Dream Team: Co-organizers Bria Crutchfield and Sikivu Hutchinson and emcees Tina Marshall, Charone Padgett and Mandisa Thomas.



FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor, left, and Dan Barker, right, are pictured with Mandisa Thomas. Some of the discussions at the Women of Color conference included “Reproductive Justice: How Do We Fight after the SCOTUS Decision?,” “Taking Care of our Mental Health: Solutions to Healing from Trauma,” “Death, Dying and Disbelief,” and “BIPOC Gen Z Secular Activists: The Future Speakers.”

Charis Hoard, not pictured, who was FFRF’s strategic response intern for two years and has since graduated with a Master’s degree and has now taken a prestigious research job, spoke remotely at work workshops during the Women of Color Beyond Belief conference.



As a clinic escort in North Carolina, Tina Marshall tells besieged patients: “Hold your heads up. Do what you need to do for you. You’re not doing anything wrong.” Tina, who served as an emcee at the Women of Color Beyond Belief conference, is lead organizer for Black Nonbelievers of Charlotte. She’s also the founder of the Black Abortion Defense League.



Speaker Karina Quintanilla made history in Palm Desert, Calif., in 2020, by becoming the first Latina and youngest woman ever elected to the city council. As part of Hispanas Organized for Political Equality (HOPE), she and fellow participants lobbied state senators to pass Senate Bill 4, Health for All, bringing accessible health care to all Californians.



Belen Padilla, a pre-med student who is first in her family to go to college, was a speaker at the conference, where she recounted the challenges of graduating from an underfunded Nevada high school serving many Mexican-Americans that didn’t even offer chemistry or calculus. Last year she was one of the winners of the jointly sponsored tuition scholarship through Black Skeptics LA and FFRF’s Forward Freethought Tuition Relief Fund, endowed by FFRF member Lance Bredvold.



Volunteers participated in the “Secure the Bag” service project, which helped feed hundreds of individuals.

OVERHEARD

Once a country is habituated to liars, it takes generations to bring the truth back. **Gore Vidal, as quoted in the 2013 movie, “Gore Vidal: The United States of Amnesia.”**

Josh Hawley is disturbingly wrong: The U.S. Constitution is not based on the bible. **Headline of newspaper editorial, after Sen. Hawley told the National Conservatism Conference, “Without the bible, there is no modernity. Without the bible, there is no America.”**
Kansas City Star, 9-17-22

The majority of students chose to attend this field trip on the promise of free food and the opportunity to skip class, however, the majority of students were not only disappointed by this event, but traumatized, as well.
Alexis Budyach, a senior at Baton Rouge

Magnet High, in a Facebook post, after 2,100 students attended what was billed as a “College and Career Fair,” but what was actually called a “Day of Hope” and held at Living Faith Christian Center.
Baton Rouge Advocate, 9-21-22

If we take a clear-eyed look at our history, we see a widespread, centuries-long Christian defense of white supremacy. **Robert P. Jones, who leads the Public Religion Research Institute, on the strong connection between racism and the right-wing movement.**
Washington Post, 9-28-22

The melding of MAGAism with QAnon — and toss in a helping of Christian nationalism — seemed inevitable. . . The irrationality has spread from the evidence-free belief that sinister players (China, Venezuela, the CIA, the media,

Democrats, voting machine companies) conspired to steal the election from Trump to the conviction that American politics has become a clash between patriotic Christians and cannibalistic Satan-worshipping pedophiles. **David Corn, author of American Psychosis: A Historical Investigation of How the Republican Party Went Crazy, in his column, “Donald Trump and the birth of QMAGA: The storm is coming.”**
Mother Jones, 9-23-22

Bringing religion into civil government accelerates conflict, often leads to civil and religious war, and uses force to enforce religious beliefs. If you think there is conflict now, just wait. **Gene Goffin, in his column, “The crushing weight of government religion.”**
The (Grand Junction, Colo.) Daily Sentinel, 9-25-22

I’m not religious in the sense that I’m [not] dedicated to a religion. I’m much more of a spiritual person. I would say I’m a seeker. **Singer Shania Twain, following an interview with Oprah, where, as Twain remarked, “As soon as we started talking about religion, it all went sour. So, I said, ‘Let’s stop talking about religion!’ She is quite religious.”**
Yahoo News, 9-28-22

Political parties and ideologies with winning ideas don’t need to ban books. Christian nationalism, however, features inferior ideas that can’t compete in the modern world without cheating. **Marty Essen, author, in his op-ed “Christian nationalism and book banning.”**
The Missoulian, 9-7-22

Students earn FFRF cash awards through SSA

FFRF, with the financial backing of the individual donors, has collaborated with the Secular Student Alliance to select, announce and distribute these student awards. (As per SSA policy to help protect the students’ identities, only the students’ first names are used.)

This year’s winners are:
Isaiah — Al Luneman Student Activist Award (\$2,000).
Courtney — Yip Harburg Lyric Foundation Student Scholarship (\$1,000).
Sage — FFRF’s Strong Backbone Student

Activist Award (\$1,000).
Daniel — Cliff Richards Memorial Student Activist Award (\$1,000).
Kourtney — Cliff Richards Memorial Student Activist Award (\$1,000).

FFRF has a variety of scholarships available to give directly for exceptional student activism, as well.

If you know of any student who is actively helping to uphold state/church separation or fighting for the rights of nonbelievers, please contact Free-thought Today Editor PJ Slinger at editor@ffrf.org.

Al Luneman Student Activist Award (\$2,000)

Isaiah

Austin Community College

At Austin Community College, Isaiah served as the student body president, is a member of Phi Theta Kappa and a commissioner with the city of Austin on the College Student Commission, as well as the Human Rights Commission. Isaiah served as a legislative intern and as a congressional intern at the U.S. House of Representatives. Isaiah will graduate with an associate of arts in government and plans to go to law school. Isaiah is currently working on starting a nonprofit organization that provides assistance to the unhoused population, LGBTQ youth, and all others that are in need of humanitarian services and support. In his spare time, Isaiah volunteers for poverty alleviation and engages in public service to help be the change that he wishes to see.

During high school, Isaiah successful-



Isaiah

ly challenged Birdville Independent School District and Lake Dallas Independent School Districts’ unconstitutional announcements of church activities during their football games with help from the American Humanist Association. He also successfully challenged Birdville Independent School District for allowing school administrators to participate in baccalaureate ceremonies, having its retreats in church, and having cross displays in the classroom. Isaiah is an advocate for the separation of the church and the state and religious freedom and believes that the government should always remain neutral when it comes to religion.

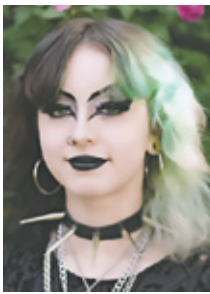
FFRF thanks FFRF Member Al Luneman for making possible this scholarship.

FFRF’s Strong Backbone Student Activist Award

Sage

Dallastown Area High School

Sage looks forward to studying forensic psychology at George Washington University for a career as a criminal psychiatrist or a forensic social worker. At 15, Sage studied The Satanic Temple and Humanism, both with similar tenets. Sage identifies as a secular satanist and humanist. Sage is also “a loud and proud member of the LGBT+ community.”
Last year, Sage started an SSA chapter at their school because there were so many students questioning their identities and needing a safe place to learn and be surrounded by respectful peers. SSA members made homemade bracelets to sell during lunch, rais-



Sage

ing over \$250 for Ukraine. Following the overturning of Roe v. Wade, Sage protested at numerous events. As someone who was assigned female at birth, Sage found it difficult to hear that the right to an abortion, menstrual products, equal wage or bodily autonomy were “women’s rights.” Reminding people of their existence, Sage says these are HUMAN rights.

FFRF thanks an octogenarian member, who wishes to remain anonymous, for funding FFRF’s Strong Backbone Student Activist Award.

Cliff Richards Memorial Student Activist Award

Daniel

Moorehouse College

A junior communications major at Morehouse College, Daniel wants to become a sports broadcaster. When Daniel was 9, his grandfather shed light on the idea that there was no higher power after Daniel’s mother was unable to answer some of his questions about Christianity. Growing up, he did not tell others that he was a nonbeliever.
Daniel says being a Black atheist is almost unheard of in his community. Today, Daniel often mentors young Black men who question religion and



Daniel

encourages them to be freethinkers. This semester, Daniel plans to find more Black men who have a similar mindset and create a Black secular club. Starting a nonreligious student club at a Historically Black College or University is difficult. He says it would allow more Black men and women to view life from a different spectrum and not be bound by the shackles of religion.
FFRF thanks the estate of Cliff Richards for this scholarship for HBCU students.

Yip Harburg Lyric Foundation Scholarship

Courtney

Smithfield-Selma High School

After Courtney graduates Smithfield-Selma High School, she plans to pursue an arts degree from a university to become a gallery artist. In comparing religion and God to Santa, the Easter Bunny and other implausible characters, Courtney realized in elementary school that she was an agnostic atheist. Growing up in a small religious town and being non-Christian, she felt personally targeted by many in her community. She says, “I believe that my secularism has influenced my life by allowing me more freedom and a more open worldview.”
Courtney expresses her secular activism through art, highlighting the importance of the separation of church and state. Her most recent art piece, “June 24,” highlights



Courtney

the terror of living in a post-Roe v. Wade America in which women’s rights can be dictated by a majority religion. She has completed five public murals, including one at a middle school and two murals in the town of Selma, N.C., highlighting the racial diversity of that town. Courtney founded and currently runs a youth arts program, Youth In Art Initiative, advocating for the inclusion of youth in the arts. She is currently organizing a youth arts exhibition for ages 13-21 titled “Pieces of Us: An Exhibition Celebrating the Diversity of American Identity.”
FFRF thanks the Yip Harburg Lyric Foundation for this scholarship.



Courtney shows off her painting, “June 24,” which is a reference to the date the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade.

Cliff Richards Memorial Student Activist Award

Kourtney

Smithfield-Selma High School

Kourtney wants to pursue a Ph.D. for a career as a college professor to advocate for the ideas and experiences of all Black people and address how systemic racism and sexism are harmful to marginalized communities. She says, “my dedication to secularism and the social promotion of Black and Brown people influences me to learn more profoundly about myself. Being a Black woman in America is inherently political.”
Kourtney’s secular activism rests upon the practice of keeping morality and political activism separate from religious influence. To advocate against the policies of far-right Christian politics, Kourtney is involved with Unite for Reproductive and Gender Equity (URGE)



Kourtney

chapter, advocating for free and safe abortions and advocating for trans and LGBTQ civil rights. As Pad Project coordinator within the URGE chapter, she counteracts menstrual cycle miseducation through educational workshops. In volunteering at Planned Parenthood WestEnd, she will engage in Black birthing advocacy and Black bodily autonomy. Through her UNCF/Mellon Mays Fellowship, she will research how Spelman College’s Black, queer, femme women use sex as a form of radical resistance to counteract respectable femininity.
FFRF thanks the estate of Cliff Richards for this scholarship for HBCU students.

FFRF awards \$17,850!

Winners of FFRF’s 2022 high school essay contest

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the winners of the 2022 William Schulz High School Essay Contest. FFRF has awarded \$17,850 in scholarship money for this year’s contest!

College-bound high school seniors were asked to write a personal persuasive essay based on this prompt: “Please write a letter to a religious friend, relative, classmate, teacher, etc., who buys the myth that one can’t be moral without believing in a god. Explain why you can be “good without God.”

FFRF awarded 10 top prizes and 12 honorable mentions.

Winners are listed below and include the college or university they are now attending and the award amount.

First Place
Noel Atkinson, 18, St. Olaf College, \$3,500.

Second Place
Hannah Shiohara, 18, University of California, Berkeley, \$3,000.

Third Place
Patrick McDonald, 19, Hillsdale College, \$2,500.

Fourth Place
Melanie Barry, 18, Western Washington University, \$2,000.



- Fifth Place**
Oliver Brown, 18, Western Washington University, \$1,500.

Sixth Place
Maya Michalski, 18, Marymount Manhattan College, \$1,000.

Seventh Place
Lindsey Lopez, 18, University of North Texas, \$750.

Eighth Place
Sarah Petty, 18, University of North Texas, \$500.

Ninth Place
Adam Tobin-Williams, 18, Johns Hopkins University, \$400.

Tenth Place
Morgyn Michelson, 18, UCLA, \$300.
- Honorable mentions (\$200 each)**
Dakota Allred, 18, Arizona State University.
Evan Brown, 18, University of Missouri – Columbia.
Gianluca Ghinazzi, 19, Virginia Polytechnic University.
Sara Kephart, 19, Drexel University.
Ane Kirk-Jadric, 18, Vanderbilt University.
Ben Martin, 18, Syracuse University.
Gracie McCurdy, 18, Austin Peay State University.
Angelique Miller, 18, Ohio University.
Ashley Parow, 18, University of

South Florida.
Lily Prince, 18, Western Oregon University.
Jariah Richardson, 18, Horry Georgetown Technical College.
Alexandra Share, 18, West Chester University.

The high school contest is named for the late William J. Schulz, a Wisconsin member and life-long learner who died at 57 and left a generous bequest to FFRF.

FFRF also warmly thanks FFRF “Director of First Impressions” Lisa Treu for managing the infinite details of this and FFRF’s other annual student competitions. And we couldn’t judge these contests without our “faithful faithless” readers and judges, including: Don Ardell, Kate Garmise, Ricki Grunberg, Tim Hatcher, Joe Hendrickson, Dan Kettner, Brianna Knoppow, Gloria Marquadt, April O’Leary, JoAnn Papich, Sue Schuetz, Wanda Shirk, PJ Slinger and Sarah Weinstock.

FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994, grad students since 2010 and one dedicated to students of color since 2016. A fifth contest, open to law students, began in 2019.

FIRST PLACE WILLIAM SCHULZ ESSAY CONTEST FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

No, Dad, I’m not a rapist

FFRF awarded Noel \$3,500.

By Noel Atkinson

Dear Dad,

No, Dad, I’m not a rapist because I no longer believe in a god. My morality didn’t dissolve when I stopped receiving communion and reciting the “Our Father,” nor will it vanish when I stop attending Mass. My morals are still present. I value life in all forms, care about others, respect social order, have no desire to hurt those around me, and I stand up for what’s right — all things you and Mom have taught me, not some supernatural being housed above the clouds.

Faith does not automatically mean one is moral. If this were true, then the Catholic Church wouldn’t have a track record of child abuse, the Crusades, or a Wikipedia page dedicated to the “Bad Popes,” like the adulterous murderer Pope John XII.

Step away from Roman Catholicism, and the Westboro Baptist Church is another infamous example of how believing in God does not make one moral. (“God hates fags” doesn’t exactly scream “I’m a good person.”) And Jared Padgett, a highly spiritual teen from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, brought a gun to Reynolds High School to kill all the “sinners” there. He believed in a god,



Noel Atkinson

was active in his church, and yet was an atrocious person. Then there’s al-Qaeda, ISIS, the Jewish Defense League, Buddhist nationalism in Myanmar — the list goes on and on.

Too many “big picture” examples? Let’s look at our own family, then. Your dad, “Poppie,” as we grandkids call him, is a devout Christian, a member of the Knights of Columbus and a Freemason, reads the bible, and goes to church every Sunday. He also abused you, your sister and your mom throughout your childhood. He’s racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, and has routinely criticized my siblings’ and my

own weight to the point of our tears and disordered eating. He’s close to his god, but has proven he’s not good.

Yes, Dad, I know you say not all Christians are horrible, and this applies to members of all religions, too. But, how can you say this and then turn around and say that all atheists lack morals? There are good and bad Christians; there are good and bad atheists. Theological beliefs don’t matter, there are just good and bad people. Morals derive from humanity, not religion.

Give yourself and Mom some credit — I’m a good person because you raised me that way, not because you raised me Catholic. How can you say that my values and morals are equal to those of a rapist or murderer just because I don’t believe in a god anymore? You know me. You raised me! I’m not going to kill someone because I think an “eternal punishment” doesn’t exist. I’m not going to kill someone because killing is wrong. Rape is wrong. Stealing is wrong. I don’t need a god or a holy book to tell me these things — I’m good without them.

Noel, 18, is from Minneapolis and is attending St. Olaf College, with plans to major in music education and eventually earn a

“ Give yourself and Mom some credit — I’m a good person because you raised me that way, not because you raised me Catholic.

master’s degree in music and/or education. She recently worked as a political canvasser for Minnesota state Rep. Zack Stephenson and as a Target Starbucks barista. Noel writes: “I have volunteered through Health Occupational Students of America and the National Honor Society at my high school, which included making stuffed animals for patients at the Children’s Hospital, wrapping presents for poverty-stricken families, and sewing cloth masks for the community during Covid.”

The Not So Good Book: What Does the ‘Holy Bible’ Really Teach?

By Brian Bolton
Foreword by Dan Barker
Illustrated by Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist Steve Benson

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SECOND PLACE

Development of morality outside of religion

FFRF awarded Hannah \$3,000.

By Hannah Shiohara

Dear Charlotte,

I would like to offer my opinion on the myth that one cannot be “good without God.”

Morality refers to the principles that allow one to distinguish right from wrong and good from bad. The prejudice that atheists cannot be “good without God” stems from the assumption that practicing religion is the only way to develop morals. However, this is not the case. Yes, religion is a set of organized beliefs, practices and systems that will often heavily influence and determine the moral judgments of its members. However, religion is not the only factor that develops morality, and atheists can develop morals in several other ways, such as through influence from their culture, socialization, and, from a scientific perspective, evolution.

Psychological and neuroscientific research suggests that morality is a product of evolution, and that it has been passed on throughout generations. Since humans are social crea-



Hannah Shiohara

tures, morality is crucial in order for them to interact with each other and survive. Research shows that “building blocks” of morality, such as empathy and fairness, can be observed in infancy, before factors such as religion can even influence the brain. And damage to certain parts of the brain can lead to dramatic changes in moral judgment and behavior, suggesting that morality is, to an extent, an instinct that humans naturally possess.

Furthermore, there are no moral principles that are shared by all religious people but not with atheists. This suggests that atheists do not behave less morally than their religious counterparts. This is because other factors, such as culture and socialization, also aid the development of morals. It must be noted that culture and religion are not synonymous; one can identify as part of a culture without being religious. Therefore, religion is not necessary to know “good” from “evil.”

Consider the debate on abortion. In many Christian religions, abortion is considered to be a “sin against God” because a fetus is considered a “living but unborn person” and the Fifth Commandment states that one “shall not murder.” However, atheists may consider abortion as the correct choice because their morals state that giving birth to an unwanted child is wrong. The prejudice that atheists cannot be good is false because their opinions on abortion show qualities of goodness: selflessness, empathy and kindness.

“There are no moral principles that are shared by all religious people but not with atheists.”

With so many factors influencing the development of morality, it is understandable that there are varying definitions of right and wrong. Instead of attempting to reach an absolute agreement of what is moral and immoral, people should work to accept the fact that there are different beliefs. One does not have to understand or agree with another person’s beliefs in order to respect them. Instead of discriminating against people with unfamiliar beliefs, I believe that accepting everyone’s differences will be more effective in maintaining peace among communities.

Hannah, 18, is from Toronto, and now attends the University of California, Berkeley, where she plans to double major in economics and data science. “As a passionate advocate of social justice, I hope to study economics as a medium to stimulate positive social change,” she writes. “I have volunteered at my local public library as a tutor once a week all throughout high school, and have dedicated one month of every summer to volunteering full time. I have also won several economics competitions.”

THIRD PLACE

Morality is what humanity makes it

FFRF awarded Patrick \$2,500.

By Patrick McDonald

You may think that I am irredeemable, corrupted, depraved. You may think, because I don’t share your beliefs, that I can never act righteously. That I can never act with compassion. That I can never be good. But what does it mean to be good? What does it mean to act morally?

If I were to pose these questions to ancient civilizations, they would likely recommend human sacrifice to the gods. The Romans, I assume, would advise bravery, while people of the Renaissance would encourage education. Different cultures define morality in different ways.

Society determines its own morality; humankind dictates its own standards.

Our culture’s concept of morality is easily recognizable: People should not kill, rape, steal, cheat or lie. They should

“Society’s concept of morality is always evolving. That means your holy book is antiquated, anachronistic, old-fashioned.”

be prudent, gracious, charitable and fair. Your religion might recommend some or all of those. But please don’t act like it discovered them. Society had reached consensus on most of these rules long before your favorite holy book was even written.

Since their inception, these standards have reflected societal agreement, not religious doctrine. Society’s concept of morality is always evolving. That means your holy book is antiquated, anachronistic, old-fashioned. It was written in ancient times and reflects ancient moral theory. Death to anyone who dishonors the Sabbath? Really? How could that be moral?

You know it’s not. You must know. But on what grounds? On what basis do you determine which commands to follow and which to ignore? Why are some parts of your book valid, but not others? What standard are you using to make such a delineation?

You are using your own moral intuition. Something within you recognizes that following certain commands would



Patrick McDonald

be abhorrent. And thus, you reject them. But what gave you this intuition? Your parents? Your friends? Other people you admire? Yes! All of them. And plenty others besides. The people in your life instilled within you the values you hold dear, just as those same values were instilled within

them. With each passing generation, the values change. Usually, it’s for the better. But it’s not your holy book that is improving. It is us, and our understanding of the world in which we live.

With the passage of time, our values more completely reflect the best interest of humankind as a whole, for that is our common goal — to maximize happiness for human beings.

That is something we can all agree on — that the world would be a better place if suffering were alleviated. As such, as time progresses, that goal takes shape and defines our moral standards.

I believe that maximizing happiness and reducing suffering are our most sacred responsibilities. This belief drives me to act with compassion, charity and kindness. I do not believe this because I have extensively consulted ancient religious texts. I do not believe this because a deity told me to. But I believe it, nonetheless. Because I can see the good in other people all by myself. And I know that it’s worth fighting for.

Patrick, 19, is from Mashpee, Mass., and attends Hillsdale College, where he plans to major in politics and math. He enjoys playing sports and traveling.

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Edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor

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By Ruth Hurmence Green

A Missouri grandmother debunks the bible as no one has debunked it since Thomas Paine.

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FOURTH PLACE

Nonbelievers: Proof of human morality

FFRF awarded Melanie \$2,000.

By Melanie Barry

Dear friend,

Earlier this week, you expressed bewilderment that I could have high integrity without a religious moral compass to rely on. I have always struggled to understand this perspective because I was never given any reason to believe that religion and morality go hand in hand. In fact, I've only found evidence to the contrary.

For example, a large percentage of the crimes against humanity that have occurred over history are faith-based. Of course, religious people tend to distance themselves from instances of religious extremism, such as the Holocaust and 9/11, saying it doesn't represent them or their faiths. But that is a poor (and easily disproven) attempt to shirk association.

There are dozens of passages in the bible, the Quran and the Torah that encourage — even demand — the murder of people from other faiths or of no faith at all, and extremists often quote these



Melanie Barry

verses so as to legitimize their violence. Religious extremists get their justification from the same book that you say you get your morals from.

Then, there are the immeasurable number of crimes that occur not necessarily because of religiosity, but despite it.

Within the last century, Catholic priests and other church employees across the globe have sexually abused hundreds of thousands of children. And how do leaders within the churches overwhelmingly respond to news of this abuse? By prioritizing the concealment of these crimes above the removal of the accused from their position. These devoted Catholic leaders, who serve as representatives of their faith, are arguably as “godly” as one can get — and yet, when their morals are tested, they knowingly do the wrong thing.

So, taking all that into account, the idea of a causal relationship between religion and morality is absurd.

What really fascinates me, though, is the narrative that religious people embrace when it comes to morality. As a Christian, you said you couldn't fathom where my morals would originate from if not God and the bible. I understand that is because

“ Religious extremists get their justification from the same book that you say you get your morals from.

you believe — as the bible asserts — that humans are naturally malicious and evil creatures, and abhorrent acts like murder and rape — “temptations,” as the bible puts it — can only be firmly denied by embracing Jesus Christ. So, according to the bible, I am a catalyst of evil, lawlessness and darkness. But you and I have been friends for a long time, and we both know that I am a good, kind person. My hands are clean; so are yours. The difference between us is that I know my hands are clean because of me and my own morality. You believe your hands are only clean because Christ wills them to be.

How can nonbelievers be moral? We are the very proof of human morality. We disprove the “religion equals morality” myth every day by being good people without it.

Melanie, 18, is from Issaquah, Wash., and is attending Western Washington University, with plans to major in journalism.

FIFTH PLACE

Letter to a Mormon mother

FFRF awarded Oliver \$1,500.

By Oliver Brown

Dear Molly,

Since I started dating your daughter, your scrutinous distrust in me has become evident.

Based on your conservative religious views, I've been led to believe that because of my lack of faith, you think that I am not worthy of being part of your Mormon family. Like many others, you've been sold the idea that to be moral, one must be religious, and that I'm therefore nothing but an unethical shell of a human. For some deeply pious individuals, dependence on faith to act good may be a sad reality. But for me, and for most of my fellow freethinking atheists, our morals come naturally, as they are absolutely not synonymous with religion.

What are morals? They are the set of standards we live by, a code of conduct that allows us to coexist. Morals and ethics are the rights and wrongs, the goods and bads, the do's and don'ts. They have come to us through our empathy, educa-

tion, and community life.

To say that morals are a religious invention is a blatant misconception. The first humans are thought to have lived hundreds of thousands of years ago, whereas the first religions only appeared a few thousand years ago. Are we to believe that our ancestors lived for thousands of years with no moral philosophy to guide them? Of course not. Our species would not have survived without some sort of community principles. Similarly, other animals, which obviously have no religious values, have a sense of right and wrong that allows them to coexist successfully. This is because ethical standards are natural to some extent, being present in humans long before faith, simply imitated by religious scriptures at the time of their writing.

What many people don't understand is that morals are subject to change. As humanity learns and adapts, we find better principles to live by. Most faiths, however, present morals that are absolute and untouchable. This is dangerous, as it allows for uncontest-



Oliver Brown

ed atrocities to be committed in the name of religion. The morality of a behavior should be measured based on valid reasoning and knowledge, rather than being passed through a religious filter immune to questions and criticism. For this reason, many claims in old religious scriptures don't sit right

with the moral sensibilities of modern theists. It's almost impossible to completely ignore the ethical codes of today's society in favor of dated ideas that often feel wrong.

I consider myself a freethinker, and I have not been indoctrinated with any religious ideals. Yet, even without these teachings, morality has not escaped me. I may ask you, what drives theists to be moral? Is it for fear of punishment, or hope of reward, after death? Or, like me, do you simply believe in empathy, kindness and love?

Instead of wondering why I don't need God to be good, ask yourself why others do. Consider that true morality lies in doing what's right without expecting divine retribution or recompense for our actions.

Oliver, 18, is from Custer, Wash., and attends Western Washington University, with plans to study environmental science and re-new-able energy. Oliver writes: “During most of my high school years, I lived and traveled on a small sailboat with my family. It was a life-changing and eye-opening experience, which shaped my worldview.”

SIXTH PLACE

To the boy who hit me with a bible

FFRF awarded Maya \$1,000.

By Maya Michalski

To the boy who hit me with a bible in the 6th grade: We were in our social studies class discussing world religion when our teacher said, “Most of you probably already know a lot about Christianity.” I did not. You said God did not love me because I didn't know him. I didn't grow up with him. I was not indoctrinated, like you were. I was fine without him. I didn't even notice he was missing until you pointed it out.

Even in his absence, without his “guiding hand,” I was no criminal. But, you looked at me like I was, almost like I had offended you by not being a part of your group. So, you hit me over the head with your pocket bible. The irony of it all is almost hilarious — “God tells me to do good, so I will use him to harm.” You said you did not want to be my friend anymore because I was not a good person. Were you a better

“ Everything is bigger in Texas — the hypocrisy, the judgment and the piousness, too.

person than I was?

Sophomore year, you told me you were disappointed in me, that I had lost my way. All I had done was cut off my hair. I was no longer tolerable to you. I was all the things you were told not to be.

You hated me for it. Was it because I wasn't part of your little group? Or is it because the girl you had a crush on had a crush on me?

You told me that everyone sins,



Maya Michalski

but being gay is morally the worst. Morally. That word stuck. What made you so morally righteous? Your use of slurs? Your bible smacks? You told me Texas wasn't the place for me, that I made too many waves here. I was "too much" for it. Everything is bigger in Texas — the hypocrisy, the judgment and the piousness, too.

Before we graduated, you told me getting into heaven is like a point system. You made a joke that I was

"too far gone." With your theory, you get points for helping someone up, opening a door or spreading his word. You lose points by disobeying God, committing crime and harming others.

I challenged myself that day. I will get more points than you. I will continue to love, not because someone told me too, but just because it is right. I will continue to give, not because someone told me too, but

just because it is kind. I will continue to live, not because someone told me too, but just because it is fun. I will do it how I want to do it. Your religion does not make you a good person. The way you use it actually makes you a bad one.

Thank you for hitting me. You taught me how to live. Not because you "showed me the light," but because you pushed me further from it. *Maya, 18, is from Fort Worth, Tex-*

as, and attends Marymount Manhattan College, with plans to major in musical theater.

"I would love to become an interpreter for the stage," Maya writes. "I am a costume designer and performer and have been in theatre since I was 8. I was VP of my chapter of National Honor Society. I'm an amateur chef and, according to multiple sources, one of the coolest people of all time."

SEVENTH PLACE

The depurification of my life

FFRF awarded Lindsay \$750.

By Lindsey Lopez

Dear Tia, I see the look you give me when I walk into the room, inspecting my crisp clothes, looking for a loose string or hair out of place, as if these flaws are the tendrils of your devil sewn into the etches of my clothes, telling sweet nothings of depravity in shorts shorter than you deem fit, shirts tighter around the bust that'll label me a whore, even though your god gifted them unto me.

In your eyes, the moral rules you have followed make you an angel, protesting in front of abortion clinics while holding signs that vilify other people's choices. While you dance over the graves of mothers whose choices were stripped away, forcing matters into their own hand, you continue to



Lindsey Lopez

wave your "children are a gift from God" sign upon them in ignorant bliss.

"How can you be good when you don't follow God's scripture?" But, are these words on a page what prevents you from killing, persecuting and bullying another human being? What is it that makes you good? The actions you have made in the name of your

God, the people you have hurt in his defense, wrongly justified, in a line you do not know where to draw. Is that your good?

My sense of good lies in the bones of my body, hidden in the crevices of every step I take. I was given the gift of life by my parents, and every experience since then has been cherishing the fragility of life. There is no rulebook to refer to, just my brain telling me wrong from right. When someone yells or hits, it hurts me. I strive to never hurt, only heal. To give my support in actions unseen and quiet, but also as loud as I can muster, straight from the fire in my chest. That is the secret to a perfect moral life and ethical pro-

“The actions you have made in the name of your God, the people you have hurt in his defense, wrongly justified, in a line you do not know where to draw. Is that your good?”

cedures. Be good to others, be kind, and keep your business to yourself. You have no right to dictate the lives of

others and neither do they. The decisions you make will affect everyone, but, at night, the only person who can give you solace is yourself. I hope one day you'll see life as beautiful as I have, unruled with the opportunities of a lifetime, with your own morality leading the way.

Lindsey, 18, is from Houston and attends the University of North Texas, with plans to major in hospitality management. "I was lucky enough to be given a culinary internship at Rice University, where I worked hands-on with some of the best chefs in Houston," Lindsey writes.

EIGHTH PLACE

Maybe you're the problem

FFRF awarded Sarah \$500.

By Sarah Petty

Dear religious individual, Oftentimes, the argument against atheism depicts a life of barbarity and chaos. We are told that religion is essential to society as it reduces crime and generates morality in individuals.

This statement is even supported by many great writers and philosophers. Voltaire, a French philosopher and critic of atheism, wrote "If God did not exist, it would be necessary to invent him." Similarly, in his critiques of atheism, John Locke wrote "Promises, covenants and oaths, which are the bonds of human society, can have no hold upon an atheist. The taking away of God, though, but even in thought, dissolves all."

After being told these facts my entire life, I'm left confused. Why must humans collectively believe in a higher power in order for society to function? How can the idea of hell prevent an individual from committing a crime, but government and societal ramifications can't? How does God's love force someone to be good, but familial love can't?

Morality, defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, is "a set of personal or social standards for good or bad behavior and character."

For instance, an individual with good morals would tell the truth, have integrity and be kind to others. Theists, specifically those who believe

in the Christian God, assume these essential teachings are instilled in them through their religion because the bible says, "You shall not murder" and "you shall not steal." However, I would disagree with this belief. Society and culture establish your set of morals, not the belief in a higher power.

Morality is taught to a child before any concept of God reaches their mind. Parents tell children to share their toys, not to hit others, and to say "please" and "thank you." All of these moral doctrines are not introduced to the child for the sake of going to heaven, but rather to teach the child how to be a good person in our society, which will increase their chances of survival when away from the parents. When a child is rude or misbehaves, we don't think, "If only that child believed in God, maybe they would have better

“If you only remain moral in fear of God’s wrath, and not simply out of desire to be a good person, what does that say about you?”



Sarah Petty

morals." Instead, we criticize the parents for not teaching the child better. This is because one's environment, including one's family, shapes their morality, rather than their inherited belief in God.

That said, when the belief in God is subtracted from one's life, morality still remains, as those morals were not established on the basis of religious teaching. In fact, if you only remain moral in fear of God's wrath, and not simply out of desire to be a good person, what does that say about you?

Sarah, 18, is from Rowlett, Texas, and attends the University of North Texas, with plans to major in communication design. Sara's interests include reading, journaling and watching movies.

Your weekly antidote to the Religious Right

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FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

What Is a Freethinker?

freethinker *n.*

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

NINTH PLACE

The human condition

FFRF awarded Adam \$400.

By Adam Tobin-Williams

Hello fellow human, I am among those deemed an atheist, and I have not a god to worship. However, I am a human, and that makes all the difference. To be human is to be subject to the tumult and psychological capriciousness of human life, so I, as well as you and all others, are subject to our human nature. This is the part of us that proceeds beyond our physical similarities, appendages and organs, to our fundamental dispositions and characteristics. I believe that all of humanity has the same capacity for moral behavior.

Morality is the distinction made between right and wrong, good and bad, and it is baked into us. This is evident in the diverse growth of religions, philosophies and law systems espousing nearly the same ideals despite having no connection to any primal religious organization that could have influenced them all.

Confucianism, a philosophical system of morality in China originating



Adam Tobin-Williams

in the 5th century BCE, singles out the five constants of human virtue which correspond to benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom and sincerity.

Nearly 900 years and 10,000 miles away was the Incan Empire, which had *ama suwa*, *ama llulla* and *ama quella*, which translates into do not steal, do not lie, do not be lazy. Another ocean, age and language away was the French revolution supporting *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*, which are liberty,

equality and fraternity. One was an ancient philosophical system, another a medieval religion, and the last the slogan of a contemporary revolution, and all three reveal the similarity of human culture across generations and environments. The overarching themes were those of justice and solidarity, where we need to be truthful and equal for justice to occur, and to do so, we must stand together in fraternity through propriety and hard work.

Morality, therefore, is not handed down by the gods for a select few to dole out. Humanity has not fought civil wars over whether there should be justice and truth, but rather how those terms are defined: whether Black slaves deserved to be considered human, whether Jews caused hardship and were punishable by extermination, or whether the solidarity of a working class-based government would have a more or less just compensation than a free market.

“I believe you can rethink your beliefs so as to not rely upon another’s faith, but on another’s humanity.”

There is no moral principle that is shared among all religious people, but not atheists, as divergences within and between religions are as great or greater than the average difference between a believer’s and nonbeliever’s morals. We are all capable of doing great harm to our brethren, whether in war or otherwise, but it is not because some are atheists and some are not.

I wish you a good future and I believe you can rethink your beliefs so as to not rely upon another’s faith, but on another’s humanity.

Adam, 18, is from San Diego and now attends Johns Hopkins University, with plans to major in chemical engineering and economics. “With two white dads, one black brother, and me, a second-generation Chinese-Filipino immigrant, I am not from your typical family,” Adam writes. “In robotics, I learned four coding languages, hosted the yearly Hackathon, and helped construct our data analysis software, robot code, and machine hardware.”

TENTH PLACE

Morality and religion

FFRF awarded Morgyn \$300.

By Morgyn Michelson

Dear Grandma, I don’t believe in God anymore. Regardless, I still strive to have good morals.

Being moral means feeling guilt when you harm another person or violate a principle you believe to be just. It means trying to atone for what you did through apology, replacement or some expense of your time and service that does not benefit you directly. It means recognizing what is right and what is wrong. It’s striving to change a bad situation or fix something unjust. It’s helping others even if it means putting yourself at risk because inside you know that something is wrong and you can’t forgive yourself if you do nothing.

It’s possible to hold an unshakable belief in justice and human kindness without being religious. I choose to believe, just as you do, that killing,

theft, abuse, rape and oppression of others’ rights are wrong. Does it matter that our reasons for this belief, this ethical code, are different? I don’t go to church on Sundays, listen to biblical anecdotes, read the bible, or talk to other members of a congregation to reaffirm my beliefs and shape my opinions.

Instead, I look at stories from the world around me, read articles of varying opinions, and debate my thoughts with others. I don’t pray to an omnipotent being for guidance or confess my sins to a priest. Instead, I look inward and analyze what I want out of life, what my regrets and mistakes are, how I can move past them and make myself a better person. In fact, personal morals and beliefs have a fluidity that allow them to adapt with time, reshape to be more just as our prejudices are challenged, or perspectives shifted. This is something that religious structures based on centuries of tradition often lack. Human interpretation of religion

“Personal morals and beliefs have a fluidity that allow them to adapt with time.”



Morgyn Michelson

is fallible, which can lead to people ingraining their biases into their religious beliefs and using their religion as a moral high ground that vindicates hurting others.

For example, due to the slavery that was present in America for over a century, many people held the belief

that if you had darker skin, you were lesser in God’s eyes, and this became part of religious teachings. This racial bias is still intrinsically tied to religion today in many places.

Another example is the rejection of LGBTQ people, simply because one passage in a centuries-old book says their lifestyle is wrong. In comparison, a personal ethical code is challenged and shaped by experiences and information gained throughout your life.

Core values remain the same, just as the core values of your religion do, but an individual’s interpretation is more dynamic than a religious code, allowing for changes for the better. I can be a good person, recognize right and wrong as you do. I don’t need religion to guide me. I trust myself. Why can’t you?

Morgyn, 18, is from Santa Cruz, Calif., and attends the University of California, Los Angeles, with plans to major in biochemistry. During high school, she was part of the varsity tennis team, a props crew member for her school theater productions, and a pre-trial attorney for the Mock Trial club. She hopes to one day be a forensic pathologist.

Yip Harburg,
from his book:

Illustrated by Seymour Chwast

Rhymes for the Irreverent

Miracle

We’re wise to prestidigitators,
We’re hip to all theatrics,
We know how rabbits turn to doves
In all the magic hat tricks,
But how did Mary’s manger
Turn into the posh St. Patrick’s?

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FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION
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What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists. FFRF has more than 38,000 members. FFRF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit and donations are tax deductible for income tax purposes.

FFRF’s email address is info@ffrf.org. Please include your name and physical mailing address with all email correspondence.

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

ON THE ROAD



FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, top right, spoke at numerous places and events in the past couple months, including the Kentucky Freethought Convention in Louisville on Sept. 4. Other convention speakers are, from left, Candace Gorham, Monica Burns, FFRF chapter leader Mikel Hensley Hensley, Aron Ra, FFRF Board Member Jeremiah Camara, Nick Fish and Hemant Mehta. Top row are Phil Zuckerman and Barker.



On Sept. 18, Barker spoke to members of FFRF’s East Tennessee Chapter about “Losing Faith in Faith” in Knoxville, Tenn., at Pellissippi State Community College. From left to right: Ryver Mutsu, Jenn Taylor, Aleta Ledendecker, Dan Barker, Eliot Specht and Lee Erickson.



On Sept. 9, the San Jose Atheists hosted Dan Barker. From left, FFRF Members Judy Banister, Mark Thomas and Barker.



Speakers and organizers from the Latin American Freethought Conference in Pereira, Colombia, on Sept. 22-24, gathered for a photo at Valle de Cocora. Dan Barker is in the front row, second from the left.



This cartoon by Ernesto Elizalde caricatures the speakers at the Colombia conference. Dan Barker is wearing the red shirt.



Peruvian author Ricardo Zavala stands by a poster highlighting Barker’s appearance at a one-day international symposium on “The Secular State & Human Rights” at the University in Bogotá on Sept. 26. The event was co-sponsored by FFRF.



On Sept. 11, the Greater Sacramento Chapter of FFRF hosted Dan Barker, who spoke about “The End of Worship.” Pictured are members of the Sacramento Chapter board, including, from left, Erin Fritze, President Judy Saint, Judy Roberson, Barri Babow and John Lucas.



On Oct. 12, FFRF Attorney Chris Line, left, spoke to the Prairie State Humanists in Naperville, Ill. Also included in the photo are Scott Thompson, president of the Prairie State Humanists, and Jack Sechrest, co-founder and former president of the 23-year-old chapter. “I gave them an overview of some of FFRF’s work and then talked about current issues and opportunities related to the separation of church and state, and thoughts about religious freedom, especially the right to be free from religiously inspired rules, norms and laws,” Line said.



On Sept. 10, the San Francisco FFRF Chapter Organizing Committee hosted FFRF Co-President Dan Barker, who spoke on the topic of the “Battle of Church and State.” Pictured are (seated) Dick Hewetson and Barker and (standing) Steve Johns, Dana Treadwell, Brian Ball, chapter director Walt Bilofsky and Sara Orban.



Pictured at the Celebrating Dissent conference in Germany in August, which was co-sponsored by FFRF, are, clockwise from bottom left, Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-presidents, Nina Sankara, director of Poland’s atheist group, Kazimierz Łyszczyński Foundation, and Marek Lukaszewicz, president of that foundation. Nina reports that FFRF and its members contributed 30 percent of funding for the group’s Humanists Across Borders charity, helping Ukrainian refugees settle in Warsaw. Eight apartments were rented and 86 refugees were offered varying help, including a mother reunited with her young daughter, who has cancer.

OVERHEARD

A nation as diverse as America needs to reckon head-on with the current push to weaken the separation of church and state, indeed, to resist creating, for all intents and purposes, a national religion. **Linda Stamatoa of the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers, in her column, “Christians, please listen. There is no national religion in America.”** *NJ.com, 9-25-22*

The court has unmoored itself from both the Constitution it is sworn to protect and the American people it is privileged to serve. This could not be happening at a worse moment. . . . It is precisely during times like these that the American people need the Supreme Court to play the role Chief Justice Roberts memorably articulated at his own confirmation hearing — that of an umpire calling balls and strikes, ensuring a fair playing field for all. Instead, the court’s right-wingers are calling balls for one team and strikes for the other. **Editorial, “The Supreme Court isn’t listening, and it’s no secret why.”** *New York Times, 10-1-22*

Each of us, regardless of one’s personal beliefs, has a responsibility to speak out against those who would use government to impose their religious beliefs on everyone else. We must preserve our constitutional separation of church and state. **Minnesota state Sen. John Marty.** *Twitter, 10-5-22*

For months, conservative Christianity’s uncompromising quest for political power has been central in the midterm elections. Candidates have openly rejected the historic principle of the separation of church and state. Rituals of Christian worship are embedded in right-wing rallies. Abortion abolitionists believe they are fighting a holy Christian mission. **Reporter Elizabeth Dias.** *The New York Times, 10-10-22*

I still live in the Commonwealth of Religious Deference, where rules can be broken and citizens can be denied basic services as long as someone has decided that’s the way God wants it. **Kate Cohn, in her column, “I don’t want your god in charge of my health care,” regarding how Catholic hospitals that receive public funds can still turn away patients who seek services that go against Catholic teachings, such as abortion care.** *Washington Post, 9-26-22*

Conservative Christians have a deep sense of victimhood and fear about a secular America and are willing to end democracy to prevent it. . . . I feel like I should not have to write this, but having conservative religions joined at the hip with an authoritarian single-party state can only end badly. **Brynn Tannehill, in his column, “American Christianity is on a path toward being a tool of theocratic authoritarianism.”** *New Republic, 10-6-22*

The attack on women’s self-determination and autonomy is as much a part of MAGA’s fascist affinities as is the cult’s fondness for violence and white Christian nationalism. **Jennifer Rubin, in her column, “The war on abortion rights meshes perfectly with MAGA authoritarianism.”** *Washington Post, 10-3-22*

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LETTERBOX

I, too, appreciated Donald Ardell’s column

Brian Hammond’s letter regarding Donald B. Ardell’s essay from the March issue (“Live your best life in a meaningless universe”) reminded me of how much I also appreciated and treasured this article. I immediately put it away to save after reading it several times.

Seems like it should be obvious to everyone, though it took me most of my long life to come to the same conclusions.

Thank you FFRF for doing what you do so well.

New Hampshire

I love Freethought Today for many reasons

Thank you for your paper! This little old lady in Carlsbad, Calif., loves it for MANY reasons. I send clippings to various relatives via snail mail because it’s too easy to ignore emails.

California


At least there’s FFRF to help fight ignorance

I just finished reading the September issue. I did so with my usual mix of relief and concern. My concern stems from the examples of extremist ignorance displayed by so many Americans on a daily basis. I worry about where all this aggression and animosity are headed. I am, however, somewhat relieved to read about the actions of FFRF and others to counteract this alarming trend. My fear is that the country may not be able to pull back from the precipice upon which it is perched.

Thank you for what you do!

Michigan

Shroud of Waukegan



Pete Bullock of Illinois added this paper cover to a Ten Commandments monument just outside the Waukegan, Ill., Police Department. “This seems to be the last Ten Commandments monument in Lake County,” Pete writes. “The ACLU, FFRF and local lawyers all agreed there was little chance of removal. FYI, the paper shroud on the monument lasted two days.”

Our motivations to do good are not religious

There was a repeated refrain in the essays in the September issue about how those who don’t believe in an afterlife aren’t motivated by heavenly rewards or threats of punishment in hell. I believe all humans are motivated by reward and punishment, but what motivates the nonreligious?

As a child, the adage “it’s better to give than to receive” seemed like nonsense to me, but somewhere along the way, it became true. I do enjoy the pleasure of making someone else happy more than I enjoy receiving a gift myself. I think it is that pleasure that motivates the nonreligious to do

good. In fact, I think most religious people are also motivated by that pleasure, not by promises of rewards after dying. So, we all have the same motivation to be good people, even though some may think the nonreligious are different.

The idea of heaven and hell serves a different purpose than motivation. For example, if your life is truly awful (as it must have been for slaves), believing in heaven at least gives you hope that things will improve, even if it’s only after you die. Grief for a loved one is eased is if you think you will eventually meet again. Heaven gives people hope when they need it most.

Hell, on the other hand, gives you

a way to threaten your enemies (just read the Crankmail). If someone has wronged you and is escaping punishment while alive, you can console yourself with the idea that punishment will be exacted after death. I doubt many people are truly afraid of hell, because they believe it is for others, not for themselves.

FFRF’s full-page ad was breath of fresh air!

Ah! I was so happy to see the FFRF’s full-page ad in my local newspaper’s Sunday edition. FFRF’s presence and message is so needed in this conservatively ideological area. I appreciate the neutral straightforward messaging that avoids the emotionally laden triggers. Thank you.

Kansas

Reagan’s ‘value’ column was well-reasoned

Thank you all so much for the September issue of Freethought Today. What a joy to read!

Ron Reagan’s article, “Who is best able to decide ‘value’ of life?” was the most well-reasoned argument for choice that I have ever seen.

Michigan

Crankmail entry made me laugh out loud

Sometimes parts of Freethought Today are amusing, but rarely do they make me start laughing.

From the Crankmail: “If you have low tolerance of pain, hell is not the place for you.” – Debbie Guinn

It is so absurd it is just really funny!

New York

CRANKMAIL

We hope you enjoy this installment of Crankmail, where we post some of the vitriol, hate and nonsensical ramblings we receive all too often. Printed as received.

Repent: You are definitely the mouths of Satan-/ may God deliver you of your evil! Shame on you people! You will be afraid of burning in hell when you go there if you don’t repent — *Rena Caldwell*

Full-page ad: In this day and age with all that is wrong with this divided country, faith and religion are still holding this country together. Atheism in a time like this is dangerous and even more divisive. To seek and spend money for full-page ads promoting your narrow view is money that is tainted for an unjust cause. — *Donna Graber*

Lawsuit: Stay out of South Carolina and stay out of our business!!! — *Charles Wactor*

Constitution: CONSTITUTION GRANTS FREEDOM “OF”,,,,,, SHOW ME THE “FROM”,,,,,, I double dog dare you,,,,,, morons — *Cecil Wheeler*

Not scared: I am not scared of you assholes. You are so scared of God you threaten to sue anyone over anything. You make me sick. You country is not the one I want to be a part of. you obviously do not understand the constitution. — *Jamie Tersdale*

God is real: maybe the fact that you even got a television show called ask an atheist is offensive as hell to all of the humanities intelligence please stop f**** with mine a very top and bottom from reality no reality is everything in existence has a full knowledge of

God existence as the Creator and know that he is so even if you claim to not believe in God you’re lying to us and yourself who you trying to convince me or you that God is not real because anybody that got a belief system of their own and they’re going to stick to it till the very end it’s not going to sit and have a debate and have a simple ass TV show called ask an atheist cuz we know where your mind is at the middle of nowhere and any dimension and we ain’t going to ask you a m***** thing — *Veronica Poullard*

It’s not too late: When you die,,when you leave this existence,,you will find out that you were indeed wrong! But,,unfortunately,it will be too late! There are no do- overs!! Man has always sought to do his own thing,right or wrong! Man love evil,,is prone to doing evil! Loves evil! You, sir,,like anton lavey,,as he lay dying, cried out” what have I done?” “What have I done?” But, alas,too late! Wake up! The devil is actually laughing at you3 misguided souls,,he is waiting for you in hell!! Don’t believe his lies!! Good vs evil!! — *Marc Hessing*

Jesus saves: JESUS WAS ONE OF MIGHTY MESSINGER FROM OUR CREATER. HE HADE MANY HUGE MIRACLES. JESUS MOTHER WAS GOD MOTHER AND,JESUS WAS GOD. INTELLIGENT PERSONS DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT IT’S REALLY MEAN BY THIS STATEMENT. YOUR LORD MIGHTY ONE THE MOST HIGH. ABSOLUT OWNER OF ALL PRAISE. LORD OF TREMENDOUS MIGHTY THRONE. ABSOLUTE ETERNAL. ASK ABOUT HIM HE WHO

HAVE KNOWLEDGE AND SENSE. IT’S HE CREATED SUN MOON STARS THAT YOU MAY COUNT DAYS MONTHS AND YEARS AND FROM STARS YOU FIND WAY. IT’S HE CREATED MAN FROM FLUID OF SEED THEN FROM CLOT OF BLOOD TO TEST YOU. HAVE YOU NO SENSE. THEY CHOSE EARTHY IDOLS STONS DEAD HUMANS AND DEVILS BESIDE THERE LORD THAT THEY MAY GET HELP FROM THEM. INDEED THERE ARE LOSER IN HEARAFTER..... — *Ibrahim Abdullah*

Bring God back: Its funny how we built a great nation with God in our schools. Now look at our country its a clown world. — *Jef-frey Potts*

FFR: You guys claim they want freedom from religion but you attack religion? This act

binds you to religion. You might try living and let live or move to a country were religion is illegal not protected by federal law. Why are you attempting to fool us? — *James R. Park*

You lost: You’re fortunate to live in a country where you can deliver your hate and intolerance under the guise of freedom of speech . Very sad that you put so much energy into denying inarguable truths. But our beautiful homeland and our Constitution permits your view and I defend your right , though your are so very incorrect in your opinions. I have proof that God exists . The atheist , while fun to debate , lost the argument before it started. So keep fueling yourselves by embracing each others ignorance , we’ll keep praying for your souls non the less — *Craig Bartok*

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‘Freethought
Matters’ mug

Celebrate FFRF’s TV show.... because freethought matters! Ivory imprint on burgundy with a glossy finish. 8 fl. oz. American made mug.

\$25 each, 2 for \$40

Item# MU02

Price includes over \$10 in shipping cost.



Order online at ffrf.org/shop

Ready to be a volunteer for next newspaper ad

I just saw your full-page ad in the Santa Fe New Mexican. Thank you! If you ever need another member for a future ad, I volunteer!
New Mexico

We should speak up about our freethinking

As the Freedom from Religion Foundation frequently asserts, the younger generation in America is the least religious segment of the population, with a significant number of 18- to 29-year-olds lacking affiliation with any religion and identifying as “Nones.” I discovered the reality of this firsthand when I traveled to Southern California in mid-June of this year.

I was in the San Diego area for my nephew’s graduation from Coronado High School. At some point during our stay there, I thought I overheard him saying “I’m an atheist.” When I returned to my home in the Seattle area, I wrote him a letter telling him that, as an atheist, he’s hardly alone, mentioning that many Americans ages 18 to 29 consider themselves Nones (though, of course, not all Nones are atheists or agnostics).

I mentioned how involved I had been in recent years with FFRF, including attending the past three national conventions. Because I had taken part in webinars and other online events that FFRF had participated in, I received three postcards from the Secular Student Alliance, which I forwarded to him. I said that I wasn’t sure how political he was — or might become — but that maybe he’d be involved at some point with a secular student organization at Colorado State, where he started school recently.

I received a text shortly thereafter (with photos showing the Secular Student Alliance postcards I had sent him), in which he said “Thanks, Uncle Randy, very interested! I did see your note, and yes, you’re right, my best friend and I are both atheists and quite politically left.”

So, this is an example of how important it is to speak up, to encourage and support all of those nonbelievers around us, whether they’re family members or not.

Washington

WHAT ARE YOU MISSING?

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

Check out these other offerings!

Ask an Atheist online weekly show
ffrf.org/ask-an-atheist

Freethought Matters TV weekly show
ffrf.org/freethought-matters

Freethought Now blogs
freethoughtnow.org

Freethought Radio weekly show
ffrf.org/radio

FFRF press releases
ffrf.org/releases

FFRF action alerts
ffrf.org/action

Freethought of the Day
Daily online calendar of famous freethinkers
ffrf.org/day



Demanding justice together



FFRF’s Director of Governmental Affairs Mark Dann, right, thanks Martin Luther King III for all of his work to support the separation of state and church. They were both attending the We Demand Justice Ideas Conference in Washington, D.C. on Sept. 28.

Abortion decision isn’t always difficult

In his column “Who is best able to decide ‘value’ of life?” Ron Reagan asserts that he has never met a person whose decision to have an abortion was not wrenching and painful. I am not suggesting that Reagan is lying, but I doubt that his statement is true.

Abortion is normal. But in our society, even people who support abortion often claim that the decision to have an abortion is never easy. This attitude makes it hard for someone to come forward and say, as Hanna Rosin did in her article “Abortion is Great” (published in Slate in 2014) “The truth is, I hardly thought about it after I did it, because I was too busy working and raising two small children.”

Abortion is normal. Although abortion rates in the country appear to have declined in the last decade, many sources suggest that roughly one in four American women and girls will have an abortion by the time they reach menopause. There are as many different stories about abortion as there are abortions. Choosing to have an abortion can be as simple as deciding that this is not the time to have a child. Perhaps there are already as many children as the family wants or can support. Sixty percent

of the women having an abortion are already mothers. Perhaps the pregnant person is in school and wants to continue without the distraction of parenthood. It does not have to be a traumatic decision.

Abortion is normal. Many people you know have had abortions and for many, if there was trauma, it was related to the shame and stigma that our society places on the perfectly reasonable notion that every pregnant person has the right to their own future. People who support reproductive rights should stop apologizing for abortion and stop wringing their hands about what a traumatic decisions it always is. Certainly, sometimes it is a difficult decision. But for many people, abortion is a wise choice about their future and their family’s future. Abortion is normal.

North Carolina

Impressed with FFRF’s mission and actions

I’m sending \$1,000 to support your work. Over the past half year, I’ve been impressed with your mission and actions — your educational outreach, your watchdogism, your legal suits or briefs, your news, your newspaper, your “Freethought Matters” and “Ask an Atheist,” your billboards, the conferences you attend and put together, Freethought Radio, Freethought of the Day, the honors you award, the essays you spark, the interviews with interesting people, the spin-offs (the “We Dissent” podcast), and Dan Barker’s wonderful pia-

Write to us

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

no playing. I have been bolstered and have benefitted tremendously from all you do.

I love that your newspaper is big, jam-packed with information and on inexpensive newsprint. I love that there are so many ways your foundation educates the believing public about freethought (Knowledge lessens fear), just as it educates “Nones” about the amazing heritage of nonbelief.

Most important, however, has been and is your work to keep our government secular, countering the ever-louder/stronger voices of the Christian right, who believe this country was founded upon biblical principles and who believe non-Christians and nonbelievers should be controlled by superstitions, anti-empiricism, anti-rationalism and magical thinking of a small group (well, maybe not so small) of Christian chauvinists.

When the mortar joints in the wall of separation between state and church are chiseled out as blatantly and harmfully as they have been of late (Dobbs, Kennedy, Carson, and the Catholic hospital situations), the whole wall is apt to fall. We must stop these chiselers. That is your mission and I applaud you for it.

California

As an atheist, I still appreciate Christianity

Already an atheist — without God — since early childhood, I nevertheless have an appreciation for what Christianity in its better application has meant for Western society, how it had tempered the baser instincts of humans, despite the global depredations it wrought in earlier times, and despite its present day corruption of politics in weakening state/church separation. Through the years I have enjoyed the immense contribution of Christianity to art and music. I can listen to the likes of Handel’s “Messiah,” or regard the works of Leonardo and Michelangelo, some of many church-commissioned masterpieces, and be thankful Christianity has inspired beauty in the world.

The bible itself — though an arbitrary compilation of many stories, some novel, others repackaged such as the creation myth — does make for thought-provoking reading as an endless source for scholarly and archaeological research and philosophical debate. I know most of these stories from exposure through the years, but I can’t quote from memory chapter and verse, as some seem to rattle off from an encyclopedic command of both testaments. As the foundational document of Christianity, based mostly on myth and heresay, the bible incorporates universal themes of humanity’s fallibility and potential that enrich our understanding of the world.

I’m clearly no Christian soldier, but call me a “cultural Christian,” a term that even the well-known atheist, Richard Dawkins, applies to himself. Though in no way atoning for its collective damages, this religion, for its serious faults in application, has brought beauty and perhaps kindness — as in, “What would Jesus do?” — to the world.

Thank you for the good work that FFRF and Freethought Today do in their legal and journalistic endeavors.

Maine

Crossword answers

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

Cryptogram answer

We live in societies that are still constrained by religious laws and threatened by religious violence.

— Sam Harris

BLACK COLLAR CRIME

Compiled by Bill Dunn

Arrested / Charged

Jaroslaw “Jerry” Gamrot, 58, Rocky Ridge, MD: Misdemeanor indecent exposure. Gamrot, pastor at Holy Face Catholic Church in Great Mills and administrator at Little Flower School, is accused of driving his Mitsubishi Outlander SUV on Route 70 in Frederick on July 25 while masturbating with no pants on. He was ordained in 1991 in his native Poland.

A driver who took photos of the Mitsubishi told police Gamrot pulled up next to his vehicle several times to expose himself. He has been put on administrative leave by the Archdiocese of Washington. *Source: Baynet.com, 9-1-22*

Elmer Pineda-Molina, Santa Ana, CA: Contacting and meeting a minor for sexual purposes. Pineda-Molina, volunteer pastor at Iglesia Ministerios Betesda, is accused of trying to arrange a sexual encounter with a teen girl. He served the congregation for 6 years before resigning in June, citing family issues and the need to care for his ailing mother-in-law.

Events leading to his arrest were live-streamed by CC Unit, an independent group that confronts potential child predators. *Source: Daily Pilot, 8-30-22*

Lucas D. Bowen, 33, Texas Right to Life political director and treasurer, was charged with online solicitation of a minor during a police sting operation in Conroe. It’s alleged he knowingly solicited a minor to engage in “sexual contact or sexual intercourse or deviate sexual intercourse.”

The anti-abortion group said in a statement that he was immediately fired: “As a Christian organization, we do not tolerate criminal activity or behavior contrary to biblical morality.” Its mission statement says “Texas Right to Life legally, peacefully and prayerfully protects the God-given Right to Life of innocent human beings from fertilization to natural death.”

Defense attorney said the charge “revolves around a fictitious alleged minor created by law enforcement and posted on the internet. There is not a real victim in the case.” *Source: Dallas Observer, 8-25-22*

Keenan Hord, 32, Centerton, AR: Sexual indecency with a child and possessing sexually explicit material involving a child. Hord worked at First Baptist Church in Bentonville starting in 2016 and became a youth pastor in 2018.

It’s alleged he had inappropriate contact with a 15-year-old, including over 5,000 text messages. Prosecutors said at a bond hearing there are potentially over 30 victims.

FBC-Bentonville is a campus of Bellevue Baptist Church, based in Cordova, TN. Hord interned in Bellevue’s student ministry from 2011-14 and then was the student pastor at Bellevue Arlington from 2014-16.

Bellevue, a prominent Southern Baptist church pastored by Steve Gaines — a former Southern Baptist Convention president — has come under fire recently for how it’s handled abuse allegations. It’s one of the largest Memphis-area churches with average Sunday attendance of about 8,000. *Source: Commercial Appeal, 8-26-22*

Makanjuola Olabisi Lanre, Ilorin, Nigeria: Rape. Lanre, pastor of Revolutionary Insight Church, is accused of having carnal knowledge of biological sisters who were converts to his church in 2018.

The police report alleged he “invited the eldest sister for prayers after she declined his proposal to be his lover but eventually raped her and her two siblings at different times.

“When the complainants discovered that the pastor had been taking sexual advantage of them, they stopped attending the church, a development that made the pastor threaten that calamity will befall them,” the report said. *Source: Daily Post, 8-22-22*

Sean Higgins, 31, Palmyra, NJ: 75 counts, including endangering the welfare of a child, aggravated sexual assault and cyber harassment for allegedly posing in 2020 as a teen girl on social media to get boys to send him explicit images and videos. Higgins was youth pastor and music leader at Harbor Baptist Church in Hainesport and taught at the K-12 Harbor Baptist Academy.

He’s accused of using Snapchat and Instagram to introduce himself as Julie or Julia Miller to at least 13 victims aged 12 to 17 in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Alabama, Michigan, Minnesota, S. Dakota and Tennessee. It’s alleged he blackmailed victims to perform sexually while he recorded them remotely. *Source: WPVI, 8-19-22*

Ubaldo R. Huerta, 50, Winona, MN: 5th-degree criminal sexual conduct, a gross misdemeanor. Huerta, a priest who served several Hispanic Catholic parishes, is accused of assaulting an intoxicated adult several times Dec. 13-14, 2020, at a Winona residence where they had been drinking tequila. The Diocese of Winona-Rochester revoked his clerical status in October 2021. *Source: Post Bulletin, 8-18-22*

Bobby Cornealius Smith, 45, Las Vegas,



NEWS IN BRIEF

Mormon Argues His Faith Has Just As Much Legitimate Sexual Abuse As Any Other Religion

From the satire site The Onion: “‘People think that because our religion is only 200 years old, our sexual abuse cases are somehow less valid than those of other faiths, but to our church’s members, the sexual abuse they’ve felt is as powerful as it is real,’ said Elder Bingham.”

NV: Child abuse and 3 counts of sexual assault. Charges stem from allegations by 3 women about 2012-14 incidents when Smith was pastor at New Beginnings Ministries. His wife, **LaShawn N. Smith**, faces a single child abuse count.

One woman told police she was assaulted about 30 times as a minor. Smith allegedly pressed her and other victims to use sex toys he provided so they wouldn’t be tempted to have sex with boys. She alleged Smith regularly used at least 4 different toys on her.

Another woman told police she became one of Smith’s “God daughters” and was assaulted as a teen while living with his family. *Source: KTNV/Review-Journal, 8-18-22*

Joseph Kodiyan, 63, Varapuzha, India: Kodiyan, a Catholic priest, is accused of sexually assaulting a 13-year-old boy who had brought food to his residence. Parishioners took turns bringing him home-cooked meals. *Source: Hindu Post, 8-18-22*

Rajkumar Yesudasan, 50, Navi Mumbai, India: Yesudasan, pastor at Bethel Gospel Pentecostal Church, is accused of molesting at least 3 minor girls staying in a children’s home run by the church. During an Aug. 5 inspection, police found 12 girls and 33 boys between ages 3 and 18 living in 2 small rooms.

“They came here through various churches,” said Pallavi Jadhav, child protection officer. “These are children from underprivileged homes wherein the parents are unable to take care of them. Currently, all have been handed over to their legal guardians.” *Source: Hindu Post, 8-18-22*

Luke Seguna, 39, Tarxien, Malta: Fraud, falsifying a public deed, using a falsified document and money laundering. Seguna, pastor of a Catholic parish in Marsaxlokk, is alleged to have misappropriated €500,000 in donations meant for the church over a period of several years. Seguna’s personal income between 2016-22 totaled about €449,000 while his salary was only about €75,000, according to police inspector Christopher Ellul, who was assigned investigations into the flagged suspicious transactions back in March.

Investigators noted that while the parish account registered a drop in deposits since 2017 — also impacted by COVID-19 — Seguna’s accounts showed an influx. He also owns 5 motorbikes, a Fiat 500 and a Land Rover.

His attorney Matthew Xuereb questioned the timing of the arraignment a day before Seguna’s birthday and after he received treatment for cancer. He has been placed on administrative leave. *Source: Times of Malta/Malta Independent, 8-12-22*

V. Chandrasekar, 55, Kandasamy Nagar, India: Arrested under provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act for alleged assaults on 2 girls at the Hindu temple where he is a priest.

He’s accused of molesting a 14-year-old student in 2018 while she was staying with her mother at the temple for 15 days on **Chandrasekar’s** advice that it would ward off “bad spirits.” The other alleged assault on a minor occurred on an unspecified date at the temple. *Source: The Hindu, 8-12-22*

Jordan R. Huffman, 51, Satellite Beach, FL: 1st-degree sexual assault of a child, causing a child to view sexual activity, contributing to the delinquency of a child, 2 counts of repeated sexual assault of a child and 3 counts of child enticement. The complaint alleges that a couple in 2017 asked Huffman, a pastor at Woodlands Church in Plover, WI, to mentor their 12-year-old son, who had started drinking and getting into trouble.

Instead, it’s alleged, he gave the boy alcohol, marijuana, nicotine cartridges and prescription pills and touched him sexually with his mouth or hands, including a single instance of intercourse while Huffman’s wife and children were gone.

Huffman later took a job with the Evangelical Free Church of America in Stevens Point, where more encounters took place in his office, it’s alleged. When the boy told Huffman he didn’t want to have sex anymore, Huffman agreed to stop. *Source: Stevens Point Journal, 8-11-22*

Martin Sargeant, 52, London: Embezzlement. Sargeant, the Church of England operations manager for the Diocese of London, is accused of stealing £5.2 million (\$6.3 million) from 2009 until retiring in 2019.

His job entailed facilitating approval of grant money to churches needing restoration and improvements. He allegedly filed false claims and redirected money to his own accounts. *Source: BBC, 8-9-22*

Mary Moton, 62, Milwaukee: Felony forgery and theft from a business setting greater than \$10,000 to \$100,000. Moton, financial secretary at Shiloh Baptist Church for 11 years, started writing checks to herself last April, it’s alleged, and other checks started bouncing.

Prosecutors said she told police she lost all the money she stole — about \$30,000 — investing in bitcoin. *Source: Fox 6, 8-8-22*

Pleaded / Convicted

Brandon N. Tovar, 37, Decatur, IL: Guilty by jury of 2 counts each of predatory criminal sexual assault of a child and aggravated criminal abuse. He was accused of assaults in 2020 while serving as a children’s ministry volunteer at Heartland Community Church.

Tovar lives alone but on occasion his daughter would bring friends with her when she stayed overnight with him. She told her mother she had found explicit Snapchat messages between Tovar and her 12-year-old friend and learned they were sleeping together.

“I liked it,” the 12-year-old told the jury in a hushed voice. With her divorced father not in her life, she said she was flattered by the attention and affection.

Prosecutor Kate Kurtz said Tovar made the girl “feel special, except that [he] wasn’t trying to make her feel special, he was trying to have sex with her.” *Source: Herald-Review, 8-24-22*

Victor Gonzalez, El Centro, CA: Pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit benefits fraud. Gonzalez and **3 co-defendants**, including his wife, admitted taking part in a labor trafficking scheme to recruit homeless people and force them to panhandle to raise money for Gonzalez’s Imperial Valley Ministries. Charges for **8 others** are pending.

It’s alleged the scheme used food stamp benefits of over 30 people living at “restoration homes” Gonzalez operated. Doors were locked with windows screwed or nailed shut to prevent escape. The estimated value of food stamp benefits illegally acquired is about \$103,000.

It was alleged that a diabetic victim was denied access to treatment until she was able to escape. The ministry operated about 30 affiliate churches in the U.S. and Mexico. *Source: Calexico Chronicle, 8-23-22*

Robert L. Harris, 35, Overland Park, KS: Guilty by jury of 1st-degree murder in the 2018 strangulation death of his wife Tanisha Harris, 38, who was an associate pastor at Repairers Kansas City, a nondenominational church where Robert Harris was an elder.

Tanisha Harris was reported missing after she left her job at an Overland Park bank for lunch and never returned. Her body was found the next day in a garbage bag in a field.

Police had responded to a domestic disturbance report from the manager at the Harris’ apartment complex and saw blood stains on the carpet. The Harrises had been married 18 months. *Source: Kansas City Star, 8-20-22*

Alex Lloyd, 56, Moscow, ID: Pleaded guilty to possession of child pornography. Lloyd, a deacon at Christ Church — a 2,000-member Christian Reconstructionist congregation — admitted to trading porn in online messaging groups.

He was indicted after it was discovered his Apple iPhone 8 contained images of a “prepubescent” minor under age 12 engaging in sexually explicit conduct.

The parish has come under fire for mishandling sexual abuse allegations and made headlines in the fall of 2020 for holding “psalm sing” events to protest Moscow’s COVID-19 restrictions. *Source: Idaho Statesman, 8-15-22*

Rick E. Haberland, 48, Oneida, WI: Pleaded no contest to 4 counts of possession of child pornography. Nine more counts were dismissed in a plea deal as was a charge of possession of methamphetamine. Haberland, pastor at United Methodist Church in De Pere and 2 other Methodist parishes, was arrested on a tip from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

Police linked his Skype account and email address to multiple exchanges of child porn and to Zoom meetings to display it to others. A digital forensic examiner estimated Haberland’s phone had over 150 videos depicting sex abuse and written statements about assaulting infant and preteen boys.

The complaint included Skype chat log records in which he allegedly said he liked “young boys only however I love abusing young girls.” A phone personal profile said he was physically and sexually abused as a child. The profile said he is “an active pedophile” who’s molested children as young as 3 days old to 12 years old and his motto is “molest, abuse, rape & reuse.”

A search found 1.2 grams of meth in his bedroom closet. *Source: Post-Crescent/WBAY, 8-12-22*

Sentenced

Robert W. Becker, 77, Hagerstown, MD: 5 years in prison and 5 years’ probation after pleading guilty to 3rd-degree sex offense with an underage victim. Becker taught history and physical education at Heritage Academy at the time of the incidents with a 10-year-old student in 1976-77 at the Christian school. He has also been a school board member.

His accuser, now 56, alleged Becker twice touched her under her clothing in the genital area. She told the court at sentencing that he is a “master manipulator” who has “never shown the slightest remorse for what he’s done to me.”

“I would like to say that I am very, very sorry for the pain and the hurt that I caused by not admitting to that act,” said Becker, reading from a written statement and not looking at the woman.

“I don’t want to be a monster,” he said. “I love the Lord and I want to serve him.” *Source: Herald-Mail, 8-26-22*

Shawnte Hardin, 41, Columbus, OH: 11 years and 10 months in prison after a judge found him guilty of 31 charges, including abuse of a corpse, operating an unlicensed funeral home, passing bad checks, theft and tampering with records. Hardin operated Celebration of Life Memorial Chapels.

He’s also linked to the cremated remains of over 80 people found inside Greater Faith Missionary Baptist Church in Akron, where he was pastor. That case remains under investigation. Hardin’s attorney said the cremains were being stored at the church after a Toledo friend of Hardin’s lost his funeral home license and later died.

At sentencing, a woman in tears yelled “You lied to me, you lied to me!” Another crying woman asked Hardin, “Is this how you treat family?” *Source: WOIO/WBNS, 8-26-22*

Antwon M. Funches Sr., 48, Freeport, IL: 2 years’ probation and \$200 fine after pleading guilty to misdemeanor battery. A criminal sexual abuse charge against Funches, lead pastor of St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, was dismissed.

He was arrested in July 2021 after a parishioner reported she was abused at her home when Funches came to fix her refrigerator. A charging document said he “knowingly and without legal justification made physical contact of an insulting and provoking nature to [her] in that said defendant used his hands to rub various parts of [her] body without her consent.”

Funches resigned from the Freeport School Board in 2019 after it came to light he had pleaded guilty in 2008 to federal drug charges for serving as a lookout during heroin and cocaine deals. He had no other criminal record but Illinois law prohibits anyone with a felony conviction from serving on a school board. *Source: Journal Standard, 8-25-22*

Thomas D. Johnson, 49, Sand Springs, OK:

135 months in prison and 10 years' probation after a jury conviction for attempted coercion and enticement of a minor. Johnson volunteered as a youth leader at a church where he was known for mentoring teen boys, which the victim's family availed themselves of. The U.S. attorney's office declined to name the church, citing victim privacy concerns.

The boy's mother later discovered thousands of text messages on his phone dating back to March 2019 when he was 11. Johnson repeatedly asked for nude images and sent the boy a selfie with a banana in his mouth and asking if he "could handle it." He called the boy a "stud" and a "sexy beast" in other texts. *Source: Tulsa World/Justice.gov, 8-19-22*

Angela Rubio, 52, Elm Mott, TX: 12 week-ends in jail, 10 years' probation and \$173,000 restitution after pleading guilty to theft of more than \$150,000 but less than \$300,000 from a nonprofit organization. Rubio took the money from First Baptist Church, where she was secretary/treasurer from 2013-19.

The theft came to light when a \$26,000 check for a new air conditioner bounced.

"The only reason I am doing any of this and not sending you to prison — because I really wanted to — is that the pastor forgives you," said Judge Thomas West. "The congregation forgives you, and they see the love of Jesus before they see jail bars. And they want their money back. Because you robbed it from God." *Source: KWTX, 8-19-22*

Jerome Milton, 66, Tyler, TX: 180 days in jail and 10 years' probation after pleading guilty to property theft worth \$30,000 to \$150,000 (against an elderly individual) and money laundering. Milton, pastor of Open Door Bible Church, admitted using bank transfers and credit cards to steal from 2 elderly parishioners, from his previous church and from the East Texas Communities Foundation.

He was also track coach at Bishop Gorman Catholic School for over 20 years. Darryl Brown told the court Milton stole at least \$60,000 from his parents, including a disaster relief check from a 2021 winter storm, eventually draining the account of all but 28 cents.

A hearing will be held after his jail time is served to address how he will repay the money. *Source: KYTX, 8-18-22*

Misipouena "Misi" Tagaloa, 57, Long Beach, CA: 2 years' probation, 200 hours of community service and \$96,000 restitution after pleading no contest to felony theft from an elder dependent. Tagaloa, the prominent pastor of 2nd Samoan Congregational Church, was accused of stealing money from now-deceased Air Force veteran Phillip Campbell, a schizophrenic man in his 60s who was living in a facility for the homeless that Tagaloa operated next to the church.

Tagaloa had gained control of Campbell's finances, including his \$2,900 monthly VA check. The state Attorney General's Office did not immediately respond to why a probationary sentence was offered.

"I made some mistakes, but it doesn't make me a bad person," Tagaloa said at sentencing. He's prohibited from performing his community service at any veteran organization or church. *Source: Long Beach Post, 8-8-22*

Yaakov N. Litzman, 73, Jerusalem: 8-month suspended sentence and a fine of NIS 3,000 (\$907) after pleading guilty to breach of trust. A plea deal dropped an obstruction of justice charge against Litzman, a member of the insular ultra-Orthodox community who resigned last year from the Knesset as chair of the United Torah Judaism party and head of the Health Ministry.

He was accused of pressuring ministry employees to alter psychiatric evaluations to make it appear that educator Malka Leifer was unfit to stand trial. She awaits trial after extradition to Australia for sexual assaults of 2 sisters.

The Movement for Quality Government called the light sentence "shameful." *Source: Times of Israel, 8-8-22*

Bridget Coates, 49, Falls Church, VA: 30 months in prison, 3 years' probation and \$175,000 restitution after pleading guilty to wire fraud stemming from her time as principal of St. Thomas More Catholic School in Washington from 2012-18.

Coates devised a scheme to steal from the St. Thomas Home School Association, an organization that supported student services and activities, the complaint said. Prosecutors said Coates wrote 66 checks and used funds "to purchase designer fashion from luxury brands and to help her qualify for a home mortgage loan." *Source: Fox News, 8-4-22*

Civil Lawsuits Filed

Marc Ouellet, 78, former archbishop of Quebec and a Catholic cardinal since 2003, is being sued by a plaintiff identified as "F." in court filings for inappropriately touching and massaging her in 2008 and 2010. She was 23 in 2008 and still works for the archdiocese as a pastoral assistant.

F. alleges feeling "chased" by Ouellet because of the attention he gave her and actions he took to be close to her. Since 2010 he has headed the Vatican Congregation for Bishops, the office advising the pope on choosing bishops worldwide.

The case is the latest in a string of class-action suits in Quebec that accuse Catholic clerics of abuse dating to 1940, including those covered under an \$18 million settlement in 2013. *Source: NY Times, 8-17-22*

The **Southeast Congregation of Jehovah's**

Witnesses in Spokane, WA, is being sued by 2 men alleging sexual abuse in 1973-80 by ministerial servant and church elder **John E. Jones**, now 72 and living in California. Jones, twice convicted of sexual assaults involving other boys, is not listed as a defendant.

The complaint says Jones' abuse of Victim 1 included "fondling, masturbating, and orally copulating" him. It's alleged Victim 2 was 11 or 12 when subjected to "humping and fondling" by Jones.

Victim 1 alleges he told another elder in 1976 about Jones' abuse but was told he needed witnesses to substantiate the allegation. *Source: Spokesman-Review, 8-15-22*

Civil Lawsuits Settled

The **Catholic Bishops Conference of Costa Rica** and the **Archdiocese of San José** were ordered to pay 65 million colones (about \$100,000) to a survivor of sexual abuse by former priest **Mauricio Víquez Lizano**. The judgment is being appealed by the archdiocese, which claims the lower court wrongly interpreted the statute of limitations.

The court also ordered the archdiocese to pay trial costs of about \$16,000. Víquez Lizano was sentenced last March to 20 years in prison for the rape of an 11-year-old boy in 2003. *Source: Catholic News Agency, 8-24-22*

Finances

Venue Church in Chattanooga, TN, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection after most of its staff quit and attendance dropped after publicized reports in 2021 about a years-long extramarital relationship between senior pastor **Tavner Smith, 42,** and another staff member. Venue was named one of the fastest growing churches in America by Outreach Magazine and LifeWay Research in 2015.

Smith started the church in 2015 by hosting services in his living room for 8 families, growing it to regular weekly attendance of over 1,500.

The filing says revenues dropped from \$3.1 million in 2020 to just over \$2 million last year and are on pace to be under \$1 million in 2022.

Debts and other creditor claims of more than \$3 million are listed. The church estimates its property is worth \$4.5 million but that it owes \$2.77 million on its 7-year-old building. It closed its North Georgia campus in February.

Venue attorney Tom Bible said in a phone interview the church "intends to pay off all of its creditors in full" and that may entail selling the church building. *Source: Times Free Press, 8-26-22*

The **Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints'** proposed \$250 million payment to settle sexual abuse lawsuits against the **Boy Scouts of America** was rejected by U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Laurie Selber Silverstein in Wilmington, DE.

Silverstein said the settlement went too far in trying to protect the church from abuse claims only loosely connected to scouting activities. It would have covered abuse perpetrated by a church official who was also a scout leader, even if the abuse did not occur at a scouting event.

Jason Amala, whose law firm represents over 1,125 abuse victims, said claimants are better off without the \$250 million Mormon settlement. The church will now be forced "back to the negotiating table" to make a fairer offer to resolve claims, Amala said. *Source: Reuters, 8-18-22*

The Catholic **Archdiocese of St. John's,** based in **Newfoundland and Labrador,** will sell 43 properties as part of a settlement with sex abuse victims. The province's Supreme Court approved the proposal.

Nineteen were listed as "vacant land." Another 13 house parish churches. "Only a few of these proposed church sales are to buyers intending to have the building continue to be used as a Catholic church," wrote Archbishop Peter Hundt. *Source: Christian Post, 7-21-22*

Legal Developments

David L. Richards Jr., 43, Lenoir City, TN, is appealing his 2019 conviction on charges of rape, incest and sexual battery by an authority figure. He was sentenced to 12 years in prison for assaults on his adopted daughter Amber. Richards, pastor at My Father's House Church of God, and his then-wife took in Amber and her 3 biological siblings as foster children in 2008.

It's alleged that sexual touching started in 2011 and progressed to rape in the summer of 2013. Amber told police to look for semen stains on a bed comforter, bed frame and purple rug. Forensics expert Amory Cannon testified semen was found on the bed frame.

Richards' appeal claims he was represented by incompetent counsel and that evidence that surfaced later about Cannon's job performance warrants a retrial. She resigned from her state job in 2016 shortly after the trial. An internal investigation revealed incorrect reporting on payroll timesheets and case notes for work done when she wasn't in the building.

Doubt was also cast by a defense expert on Cannon's testimony about the seminal fluid, who testified it was likely canine, an assertion disputed by the prosecution. *Source: News Sentinel, 8-21-22*

The Executive Committee of the **Southern Baptist Convention,** based in **Nashville, TN,** confirmed that several of its major entities are under investigation by the U.S. DOJ related to a pervasive history of clergy sex abuse allegations and ensuing cover-ups by leaders. It's the largest Protestant and second-largest Christian denomination in the U.S. *Source: CBS News, 8-12-22*

David W. Bialkowski, former pastor of St. John Gualbert Catholic Church in **Cheektowaga, NY,** can spend a dead parishioner's \$2 million estate as he pleases despite relatives' objections and accusations he sexually abused children.

Erie County Judge Acea Mosey dismissed allegations by the widow's family that Bialkowski "groomed" Ruth Peters to become the executor of her estate before her 2019 death.

"I conclude that there is no proof that the will was the product of fraud perpetrated on decedent by Bialkowski or any other person," Mosey wrote in her decision.

The ruling lets Bialkowski, who is on the diocese's list of priests with "substantiated allegations of abuse of a minor" and is accused in 2 Child Victims Act lawsuits of sexual abuse, inherit \$125,000 in addition to controlling the remainder of the \$2 million estate.

The abuse plaintiffs have filed a motion asking the court to freeze the funds until their suits, which are stayed while the Diocese of Buffalo is in bankruptcy proceedings, are resolved.

Bialkowski was removed from ministry but never defrocked. He no longer receives a salary or benefits from the diocese. *Source: Buffalo News, 8-12-22*

Allegations

Redberry Bible Camp near Saskatoon is under investigation by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police for an alleged exorcism that endangered a young camper's life last July 13. The camp has been operated since 1943 by the evangelical Saskatchewan Mennonite Brethren.

Two witnesses alleged they saw counselor **Carlos MacIntyre** performing what they called an exorcism on a boy in a cabin. The boy was reportedly bleeding from the nose and twitching, with other children calling for help.

MacIntyre is accused of leaving the boy on the floor after the ceremony, then handing out business cards. On a video he posted online, MacIntyre bragged about "performing a miracle" and claimed the boy had been "practicing with ouija" and "drinking human blood."

Board chairman Wayne Dick said MacIntyre

no longer works at the camp, but questions linger why he was hired in the first place. In a pinned post at the top of his public Facebook page, he detailed his life story including exposure to pornography and sexual trauma at age 8 at a friend's house and high school years filled with drug and sexual addiction, jealousy and rage.

MacIntyre denied performing an exorcism and said he was fired because camp leaders were "terrified" of "atheist parents" and a public backlash, writing "Deliverance took place because a child asked me for prayer!!" *Source: CBC/Daily Mail, 8-28-22*

Yeshiva College Bondi in Sydney was expected to close in about a month for "ongoing noncompliance" with student safety standards. The New South Wales Civil Administrative Tribunal called for the closure.

A string of child molestation cases and financial problems led to the call. The school and its counterpart, **Yeshiva College Melbourne,** are run by the Chabad Lubavitch Hasidic movement.

In 2012 and 2016 it was singled out by the Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. The commission's report said some members of the Jewish community had been "discouraged from reporting" allegations of child sexual abuse against employees of both yeshivas. *Source: Haaretz, 8-17-22*

Emil Stehle, known in Latin America as Emilio Lorenzo Stehle, helped pedophile Catholic priests escape prosecution and has been accused of sexual abuse himself in 16 cases, said a statement by the German Bishops' Conference after an independent investigation. Stehle died in 2017 at age 80 after retiring in Germany.

Lawyer and mediator Bettina Janssen prepared the 148-page report for the Association of German Dioceses. "The described offenses spanned his time as a priest in Bogotá [in the 1950s], as Adveniat managing director in Essen [1972-84], and later as auxiliary bishop of Quito [1983-86] and as bishop of Santo Domingo [1987-2002] in Ecuador," the bishops' conference statement said.

Adveniat, the German church's overseas aid organization, was found to have facilitated alleged abusers' escapes to Latin American countries, including providing financial support from the bishops' conference. *Source: Catholic News Agency, 8-8-22*

Removed / Resigned

Chris Bird, Adamstown, New South Wales, was stripped of his Holy Orders and suspended from holding office in any Anglican church until he can prove he has been rehabilitated in the wake of "disturbing" allegations of assault, bullying and intimidation over more than 20 years.

A church investigation found he failed in 2018 to provide pastoral care or report information to police and the church after a man in his 20s alleged to him that he had been sexually assaulted by the former dean of Newcastle, Bishop **Graeme Lawrence.** Lawrence was jailed in 2019 for assaulting a teen boy in the 1990s.

The standards board heard numerous allegations of physical cruelty displayed by Bird. Stephen Smith alleged Bird "harassed and assaulted" him in 2016 when he told him he was abused by a priest in the 1970s. Bird stared at him, Smith alleged, then "deliberately, forcefully drove his left elbow into the side of my stomach."

The board found he assaulted another witness in 1986 while teaching a divinity class at Newcastle Grammar School, that he grabbed a 13-year-old girl's bra strap "on more than one occasion" and engaged in "intimidating and threatening" behavior in 2013 with a woman working in administration for the diocese. *Source: abc.net/au, 8-17-22*

Rodney Thibault, N. Attleboro, MA, was put on leave by the Diocese of Fall River as pastor of Transfiguration of the Lord Catholic Parish during an investigation into alleged misconduct. Allegations do not involve a minor, according to the diocese. *Source: WPRI, 8-8-22*

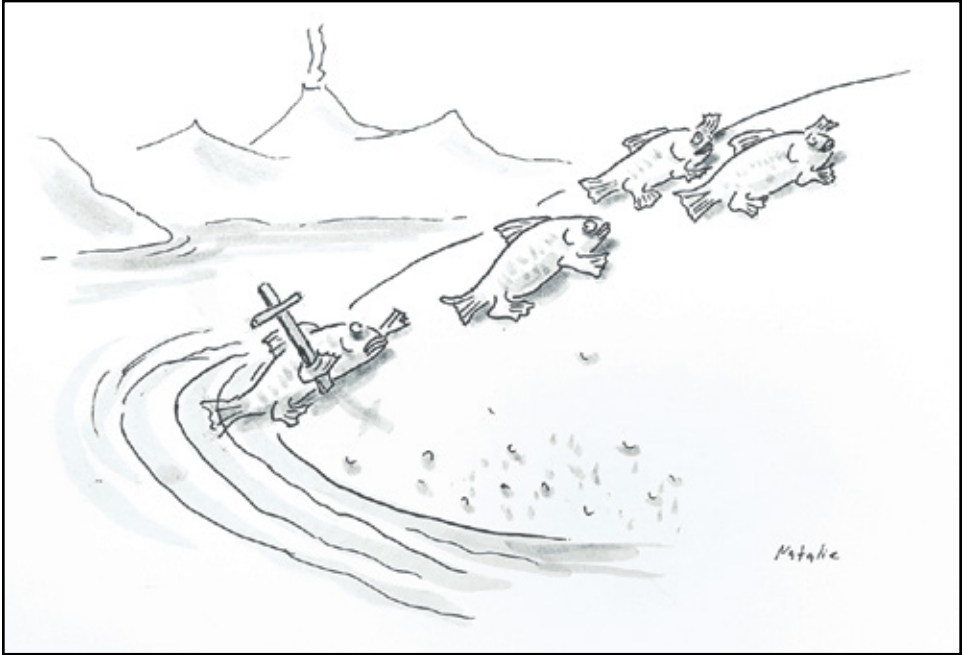
Other

Matt Monfore, a missionary from Jesus Is King Mission in **Oral, SD** (pop. 66), was barred from the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation after a vote by the Oglala Lakota Nation tribal council. Monfore "was found distributing material that literally demonizes the Lakota culture and faith," said a July 22 letter from tribal president Kevin Killer.

On his mission's website, Monfore compares Tunkshila — Lakota for the Creator and/or grandfather — to a corrupt demon. He calls revered medicine man Nicholas Black Elk a "racist" and spiritual leader Leonard Crow Dog a "drunk." He adds, "If your life does not bring exclusive glory to Jesus alone, it is not from God. Native teachings are of the spirit of the antichrist."

Monfore was ordered to leave Oglala lands and "cease any further hate speech actions." He is affiliated with **James White** of Alpha and Omega Ministries, a Phoenix-based Baptist splinter group.

"Our objective is to decolonize mind, heart, spirit, land and return to our Lakota ways; we don't need any more churches to assimilate us," Tyler Star Comes Out told the tribal council. *Source: Indian Country Today, 8-5-22*



IN MEMORIAM

Farewell to ‘unabashed atheist’ Connie Threinen

By Annie Laurie Gaylor

As FFRF honorary director and famed neurologist Oliver Sacks poignantly wrote before his own death:

“My generation is on the way out, and each death I have felt as an abruption, a tearing away of part of myself. There will be no one like us when we are gone, but then there is no one like anyone else, ever. When people die, they cannot be replaced. They leave holes that cannot be filled, for it is the fate — the genetic and neural fate — of every human being to be a unique individual, to find his own path, to live his own life, to die his own death.”

Connie Threinen, who died Sept. 17 at nearly 97, is part of that generation “on the way out.” And her death leaves a hole. There certainly will never be anyone else, ever, like this adorable-in-person, vigorous, thoughtful and forward-thinking woman.

Connie was born on Dec. 10, 1925, in Belmont, Mass., and attended Mount Holyoke College, finishing her degree in economics in 1948 at the University



Photo by Andrew L. Seidel
FFRF principal founder Anne Gaylor, left, shares a moment with Connie Threinen in 2015 in Freethought Hall’s new addition.

Dr. Nick Drakos dies at 73

Nick was born Sept. 17, 1948, in Toledo, Ohio, to Ruth and Tony Drake. Proud of his Greek heritage, Nick legally changed his name back to the original family name of Drakos when he was a teenager.

He graduated with a degree in philosophy from the University of Wisconsin. He then enrolled in medical school at the University of Cincinnati, earning his M.D. in 1979. After three years as a radiology resident, he decided psychiatry was his passion and completed his training in psychiatry at the University of Louisville in 1987.

Nick then started his 28-year career in community psychiatry as director of in-patient psychiatry at Life Spring Community Mental Health in Jeffersonville, Ind. Moving with his partner, Carole Morse, in 1989, to the Pacific Northwest, Nick practiced psychiatry at the Garlington Center in Northeast Portland, at Clackamas County Mental Health and finally at NARA (the Native American Rehabilitation Association) in Portland, retiring in 2015.

Nick was an expert woodworker. In his younger years, he built custom wooden boats in Ithaca, N.Y.; the first Bread & Circus natural food grocery stores in Boston; theatre sets at Actors Theatre in Louisville; and tongue and groove furniture.

When he and Carole purchased their 1910 home in Northwest Portland in 1990, Nick put his skills to work, trans-



Connie Threinen speaks at an FFRF convention in 1990.

Photo by Brent Nicastro

of Wisconsin-Madison. Her husband Bill Threinen predeceased her, and they are survived by three children, four grandchildren and a great-granddaughter. She died with her family by her side.

Connie, who lived in Middleton, Wis., a bedroom community to Madison, was a peer and colleague of my mother Anne Gaylor, the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s principal founder. Connie was an early member and supporter of FFRF, joining in 1978 when FFRF first became a national organization.

Anne and Connie bonded over a shared feminism as women who were in their 40s when the second wave of feminism hit. They became firm allies after an editorial that my mother, then editor of the weekly Middleton Times Tribune, wrote in the late 1960s, calling for the legalization of abortion rights. Connie’s immediate support when this editorial created a local firestorm was very meaningful to my mother. Meanwhile, Connie was doing her own activism, agitating for inclusion of women’s sports in schools when she served on the Middleton School

Board. She only served one term because, as her obituary put it, “some of the more conservative elements of the community rallied against her.”

Like my mother, Connie was a professional working woman prior to the feminist movement. She was also, like Anne, what was known quaintly in those days as a “working mother.”

Connie’s rebellious roots could be traced in her family tree to a famous ancestor. This independent thinker’s great-grand-aunt was Margaret Fuller, the early 19th century feminist. When I was editing the anthology of 19th and 20th century freethinkers, *Women Without Superstition*, published by FFRF, Connie provided a photo of the beautiful portrait of Fuller displayed in her home. Fuller was in fact among the foremost 19th-century women writers and critics, writing *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). (Connie’s other famous relative was Buckminster Fuller, inventor of the geodesic dome, who was the second cousin of Connie’s father.)

Long before our wonderful ally Ron Reagan recorded his television commer-

cial for FFRF describing himself as “an unabashed atheist, not of afraid of burning in hell,” Connie had labeled herself “an unabashed atheist.” My mother invited her to give a speech at our annual national convention in October 1990 in Ann Arbor, Mich., and Connie titled her talk, “An unabashed atheist looks at women and religion.” She opened that speech by observing: “This convention is one of the few places in the country where one could be announced as an atheist and not expect shock, disbelief and scorn in response.” It is religion, she said, that “still keeps women ‘in their place.’”

Connie worked for the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Outreach Division for 28 years, directing innovative educational problems for women, then went on to chair the Wisconsin Women’s Network, a coalition of 100 Wisconsin organizations working to advance women’s rights. She kept her hand in, teaching classes such as “Quest for Equality” at the UW Extension, including lectures broadcast over the university’s educational network. She was also active with the League of Women Voters. Her activism after retirement included chairing a committee advising the Department of Public Instruction about sex education.

Connie turned up at decades of feminist gatherings (many that she organized herself), protests and local FFRF events. Even in 2010, when she was in her late 80s, Connie was game to be part of FFRF’s launch in Madison of our “out of the closet” billboard campaign. She was one of about two dozen local members appearing on a revolving digital billboard filled with freethinkers coining their own slogans.

Connie Threinen did much to make the world a better, more rational and more egalitarian place. She is truly irreplaceable.



Nick Drakos

forming it into a whimsically curated comfortable home. He reveled in giving tours of the house to guests, telling them stories of each precious item, including many fish and bird sculptures; and most importantly, his impressive collection of vintage lamps and chandeliers, because “proper lighting creates the ideal ambience.”

His collection of jazz recordings was extensive. His favorite musician was Bix Beiderbecke. Nick liked Bix so much that he named two cats after him and called his home Bixwood Manor. “Be salubrious, not lugubrious” was his motto.

FFRF is deeply grateful to Nick after being notified of a bequest of about \$1 million.

Psychology professor Noel Smith dies at 88

FFRF Member Noel Wilson Smith, 88, of Sarasota, Fla., died on Aug. 14. He was born Nov. 2, 1933, in Marion, Ind., to Anthony Smith and Mary (Wilson) Smith. He graduated from Indiana University in 1955 and completed graduate studies at the University of Colorado (M.A. 1958) and Indiana University (Ph.D. 1962).

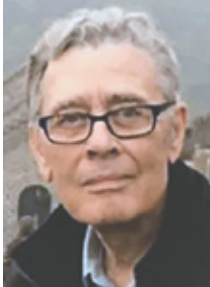
Noel was professor of psychology at the State University of New York (SUNY), where he retired from teaching in 1995 after 32 years. He continued his academic research in retirement, holding positions as professor emeritus at SUNY Plattsburgh, courtesy professor at the University of Florida, and fellow in the American Psychological Association.

Noel also held offices in the American Association of University Professors, where he was active in advocating for academic freedom. He authored multiple books including *Current Systems in Psychology: Theory, Research, and Applications* and *An Analysis of Ice Age Art: Its Psychology and Belief System*. He co-authored with J.R. Kantor *The Science of Psychology: An Interbehavioral Survey*; and he published numerous journal articles on prehistorical, historical and

interbehavioral psychology. He published his last book, *The Myth of Mind: A Challenge to Mainstream Psychology and its Imposed Constraints*, in 2016 at the age of 82.

Noel was interested in almost everything about the world and its people, with particular interests in anthropology, pre-history, ancient Greece, and the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright. He loved to travel and explore the world, with particular fondness for vineyard regions where a fine red wine could be found. He shared his adventures and enthusiasm with his family during many travels together, visiting ancient sites throughout Greece and Europe, roaming Scotland and Norway during a year as visiting professor at Hull College in England, and in many trips across the U.S. and Canada.

In retirement, Noel traveled to South America, Africa and Asia, and twice visited Lithuania, the “old country” his grandparents emigrated from, to research and document the family history. Noel enjoyed skiing and hiking in the Rockies and Adirondack Mountains in his younger days, and kayaking, wildlife viewing and bicycling after moving to Florida in retirement. He had a lifelong interest in photography, with a vast collection of photographs from black-and-white to Kodachrome to digital. In 1999, Noel founded the Humanists of Sarasota Bay (Husbay), where he made many friends, serving as its president until 2008.



Noel Smith