

# FREETHOUGHT TODAY



Christians against  
Christian  
nationalism

PAGES 10-11



'It's just  
chaos, it's  
all chaos'

PAGES 12-13



Restoring  
reason to its  
rightful place

PAGE 17

Vol. 41 No. 5

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June/July 2024

## Looking back 40 years



Dan Barker as an evangelical preacher in 1983.

## 'I just lost faith in faith'

*This column ran 40 years ago in the June/July 1984 issue of Freethought Today. It was Dan Barker's first column for the newspaper, just months after he gave up religion.*

By Dan Barker

Religion is a powerful thing. Few can resist its charms and few can truly break its embrace. It is the siren who entices the wandering traveler with songs of love and desire and, once successful, turns a mind to stone. It is a Venus fly trap. Its attraction is like that of drugs to an addict who wishes to be free and happy, but becomes trapped and miserable.

But the saddest part of the dependency is the fact that most participants are willing victims. They think they are happy. They believe religion has kept its promises and have no desire to search elsewhere. They are deeply in love with their faith and have been

blinded by that love — blinded to the point of unquestioning sacrifice.

I know this is true because I was one of Christ's disciples for over 17 years, and my subsequent self-excision was/is traumatically painful.

My dad was a professional musician during the 1940s. At one of his concerts, he met a female vocalist and, as things go, they went (lucky for me). They got married and, when I was a toddler, they both found true religion. Dad threw away his collection of original Glenn Miller recordings (ouch!), turned his back on his former "sinful" life and enrolled in seminary to become a minister. He didn't finish because of the strong demands of raising three boys. But he lived his faith through his family and through lay ministry in local churches.

See Barker on page 9

## FFRF victory

## Jail 'repaints and repents' over display of decalogue

Inmates and others at Minnesota's Itasca County Jail will not have religion forced upon them in the form of a massive Ten Commandments display, due to the Freedom From Religion Foundation's intervention.

Following a number of complaints from area residents and taxpayers, FFRF recently sent a legal complaint letter about various religious phrases at the jail, including the massive biblical edicts painted on a wall. Statements promoting religious belief or the bible, such as "Within the covers of the bible are the answers for all the problems men face." — Ronald Reagan," were even inscribed above cellblocks. In order to protect the First Amendment rights of incarcerated individuals, FFRF wrote to Jail Administrator Lucas Thompson demanding that the Ten Commandments display, as well as the other religious quotes, be removed.

"Constituents — including prisoners — have the right to be free from government proselytization," FFRF Legal Fellow Hirsh M. Joshi wrote. "By suggesting that the bible holds 'the answers for all the problems men face,' the jail sends a message — to a captive audience — that those who practice Christianity during their stay will get favored treatment over those who do not."

To fulfill its constitutional obligations under the First Amendment's Establishment Clause — and to respect the religious diversity of all prisoners — the jail needed to remove the Ten Commandments display and any quotes promoting religion, FFRF asserted.

Thankfully, FFRF's efforts won the day.

See Jail on page 3

## FFRF, others to sue Louisiana over Ten Commandments

Christian nationalists are at it again, this time in Louisiana, where the state Legislature just passed a bill that would mandate that every public school put a Ten Commandments display in every classroom. The government has even placed its stamp of approval on a specific version of the decalogue, amounting to a literal state establishment of religion.

House Bill 71 requires schools to display the Ten Commandments in every classroom on "a poster or framed document that is at least 11 inches by 14 inches." The Ten Commandments must be the "central focus" of the display and "printed in a large, easily readable font." FFRF, as part of a coa-

lition that includes the ACLU, ACLU of Louisiana, AU and international law firm Simpson Thatcher, is set to sue Louisiana over this blatant constitutional violation, once Gov. Jeff Landry signs this bill into law, as is expected.

The law violates long-standing Supreme Court precedent and the First Amendment. More than 40 years ago, in *Stone v. Graham*, the Supreme Court overturned a similar state statute, holding that the First Amendment bars public schools from posting the Ten Commandments in classrooms. No other state requires the Ten Commandments to be displayed in public schools.

The displays mandated by H.B.

71 will result in unconstitutional religious coercion of students, who are legally required to attend school and are thus a captive audience for school-sponsored religious messages. They will also send a chilling message to students and families who do not follow the state's preferred version of the Ten Commandments that they do not belong, and are not welcome, in our public schools.

FFRF and its partners stated: "The government should not be taking sides in this theological debate, and it certainly should not be coercing students to submit day in and day out to unavoidable promotions of religious doctrine."





## MEET A MEMBER

# Reason Station founder keeps up the fight

**Name:** Douglas Marshall.

**Where I live:** Warren, Mich.

**Education:** B.A. in business administration with a major in transportation management.

**Occupation:** Retired, but worked for 31 years in transportation and logistics.

**Military service:** Two years in the U.S. Army (1968-1970).

**How I got where I am today:** At the end of my service in the Army, I took a European separation and traveled around Europe until my money ran out. In 1976, I took a six-month leave of absence from work and hitchhiked out west from Montana to Puno, Peru. During that time, I backpacked in the Bob Marshall Wilderness area in Montana, horse packed in the Wind River Mountains in Wyoming, backpacked from the North Rim to the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, and hiked the Inca Trail unguided to Machu Picchu. In October 1980, I quit work and rode my bicycle from Flint, Mich., to Little Rock, Ark., then joined HikaNation in Yellville, Ark., and walked to Cape Henlopen, Del.

**Where am I headed:** Eventually the



Douglas Marshall poses with the Charles Darwin statue in Freethought Hall.

grave, but before I get there, I want to get the city of Warren to stop violating the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

**Person in history I admire:** Thomas Jefferson, because he is the one who came up with the idea of separation of church and state.

**A quotation:** “Question with boldness even the existence of a god.” — Thomas Jefferson

**Things I like:** At my age, I do not do much anymore other than manage the Reason Station, which is a protest of the city of Warren’s violation of the Establishment Clause. The Reason Station operates on Tuesdays and Wednesdays to take away the respect the city gives to a religious group which operates a table to proselytize. When I was younger and physically fit, I enjoyed backpacking, walking, bicycling, cross country skiing, fishing, boating, racquetball and gardening.

**Things I smite:** People proselytizing and Christian nationalism.

**My doubts about religion started:** I stopped believing in the Christian religion between the age of 11 and 12. When I was in the eighth grade, my parents would take me to church and we would separate, each going to our different Sunday schools. I would go out the back of the church and spend my donation money in a pool hall down the block. When I started ninth grade, my dad suggest that he and I stop going to church on Sunday mornings. I did not think of religion much after that until the mid-70s, when I started to self-identify as a Taoist. In the mid-80s, I returned

to identification as an atheist. Other than self-identifying as an atheist, I did not participate in the atheist movement other than doing what I enjoyed on Sunday morning. That changed in 2009 when I visited my city hall and found a prayer table with people proselytizing. I complained to the mayor, which only made me mad, so then I went on the internet and found FFRF and contacted them. That interaction led to me joining FFRF. In 2010, when I found out that the city was holding a National Day of Prayer event, I created a protest sign and went to the event to protest. I was almost immediately surrounded by the police who told me that I was trespassing and that if I did not get off of City Hall property, I would be arrested. I replied that I had an invitation in my monthly water bill. They responded that the event was only for Christians and if I did not leave, I would be arrested. In 2011, FFRF offered my “Let Reason Prevail” solstice sandwich board because when I questioned a nativity display in City Hall, I was told that the city would allow any seasonal display in the City Hall atrium. The city refused to allow the sandwich board and I ended up filing a suit in federal court, which I lost in 2013. In 2014, the Michigan Atheists named me “Atheist of the Year” and, in 2015, FFRF named me “Freethinker

of the Year.”

**Ways I promote freethought:** At the FFRF convention in 2013, I met with FFRF Attorney Patrick Elliott and we discussed the Reason Station. FFRF agreed to supply the insurance coverage required to have a table in the Warren City Hall. I also talked to ACLU and Americans United to see what they had to say about my rights to table in City Hall. In March of 2014, I applied for a table in the City Hall, which was refused because I was a member of FFRF and an atheist. After a federal suit, backed by FFRF, ACLU, AU and an outside attorney, we reached a consent decree, where the city paid the ACLU \$100,000. I started the Reason Station in 2015. The Reason Station operated from April 2015 until the Covid pandemic in March 2020. The Reason Station resumed operation in September 2023 when we found out that religion had returned to City Hall. The Reason Station has also kept a nativity display off of the Mound Road median for a number of years. Although the Reason Station only has a membership of 10 or 12 people, the Reason Station tables in the Warren City Hall atrium about 400 hours per year, making it the most publicly active freethought organization in Michigan. The Reason Station volunteers have given more than 3,700 hours of their time to promote the separation of church and state.



Douglas Marshall hikes the Appalachian Trail in Virginia in this 1981 photo.



Standing at the Reason Station, a group of Michigan freethinkers showed up to protest the National Day of Prayer event in front of the Warren, Mich., City Hall.



## FREETHOUGHT TODAY

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*The only freethought newspaper in the United States*

### 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 [freethought-today.com](http://freethought-today.com) also follows this protocol. Only the actual print newspaper contains all of these items.

If you would like to continue read-

ing 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.”



## FFRF convention — Denver Sept. 27–28

## Sign up now for FFRF's 47th annual convention



Katherine Stewart



Bonnie Garmus



Jon Huertas



Ron Reagan



Michelle Goldberg



Bradley Onishi



Judy Amabile



Brianna Titone



Ryan Cragun



Dan Barker



Brandon Wolf

Have you signed up yet for FFRF's national convention in Denver? Well, what are you waiting for?

We'll be celebrating our 47th national convention on Friday, Sept. 27, and Saturday, Sept. 28, at the Sheraton Denver Downtown. Because this year's big event is earlier in the year than usual, don't delay in getting registered and securing your hotel room.

The convention's keynote speakers will be author **Bonnie Garmus**, actor **Jon Huertas** and **Ron Reagan**.

Garmus will accept FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award. Her thought-provoking novel, "Lessons in Chemistry," has sold in the multimillions. The award-winning global phenomenon, which has been translated into 42 languages and has been on the bestseller list for more than a year, was recently turned into a TV series on Apple TV starring Brie Larson. The novel, part romantic comedy and part satirical commentary, is about a determined chemist who encounters so much sexism in the 1950s that she turns to hosting a highly scientific TV cooking show. While the book's feminism has been much-remarked upon, also standing out is that almost every main character is a pronounced atheist.

Actor Jon Huertas is best-known for starring as Miguel Rivas for six seasons on NBC's popular "This Is Us." Viewers know him as Detective Javier Esposito from ABC's hit dramedy "Castle," as well as for a stand-out performance as Sgt. Tony "Poke" Espera in HBO's limited docudrama series, "Generation Kill," where he offered a streetwise view of the Marine Corps invasion of Iraq. As an Air Force veteran himself, Jon calls that his most meaningful role. He is one of the few Latinx actors who has broken the ceiling in mainstream TV, portraying characters telling diverse but universal stories. He's an open atheist and will be speaking on "True Freedom: Breaking the Shackles of Religious Indoctrination." Jon explains: "Blacks and Latinos in the Americas



Photo by Shutterstock

The skyline of Denver is shown looking west toward the Rocky Mountains.

have long been two of the most religious groups. I want to talk about how we can help people of color feel safe about facing their skepticism and allow people like me to feel free enough to be open about being nonbelievers."

The Human Rights Campaign will be honored with the 2024 Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award. The award, which comes with a monetary prize of \$50,000 (minimum), will be accepted by **Brandon Wolf**, the national press secretary for the Human Rights Campaign. Wolf is a nationally recognized advocate for LGBTQ+ civil rights and gun safety laws and a survivor of the 2016 shooting at Orlando's Pulse Nightclub. In 2019, Wolf became the first survivor of the Pulse tragedy to testify before Congress and returned in 2022 to testify on the rise of anti-LGBTQ hate violence before the House Oversight Committee. His memoir, "A Place for Us," was released in July 2023 and became an instant bestseller.

**Katherine Stewart** will receive the "Freethought Heroine" award. Stewart has covered religious liberty, politics, policy and education in her various professional roles. Her latest book, "The Power

Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism," is a rare look inside the machinery of the movement that brought Donald Trump to power. The recent documentary feature movie "God and Country," co-produced by Rob Reiner and Stewart, is based on "The Power Worshippers." Stewart's journalism appears in the New York Times, NBC, the New Republic and the New York Review of Books. She last spoke at FFRF's convention in 2021 in Boston.

FFRF is also excited for the return of "unabashed atheist" **Ron Reagan**, who recorded FFRF's long-playing TV commercial, and last spoke at a conference in 2015. Reagan, a political commentator and broadcaster, is the freethinking son of President Ronald and Nancy Reagan.

Another crowd-pleaser returning to speak about religion and politics will be New York Times columnist **Michelle Goldberg**, whose book "Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism" in 2006 was an early warning call. Goldberg, who is also an online contributor to MSNBC, will receive FFRF's Clarence Darrow Award and statuette.

Also addressing Christian nationalism is **Bradley Onishi**, who is on the faculty

of the University of San Francisco and co-host of the top-ranked religion and politics podcast, "Straight White American Jesus." He is author of the timely book, "Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism — And What Comes Next."

FFRF, which held the first-ever panel of nonreligious state legislators at its conference last year, is assembling for 2024 a panel of secular Colorado state legislators. Confirmed are: Rep. **Judy Amabile**, a businesswoman and progressive advocate who represents the 49th district, and Rep. **Brianna Titone**, a geologist who represents the 27th district and was the state's first openly transgender state legislator.

"The Consequences of Religious Decline in the U.S." will be the topic of University of Tampa sociology Professor **Ryan T. Cragun's** speech. Cragun, who served as a Mormon missionary before leaving religion, is an expert on the rise of the "Nones" (religiously unaffiliated) and author or co-author of a host of books including "Beyond Doubt: The Secularization of Society," "What You Don't Know About Religion (But Should)," "How to Defeat Religion in 10 Easy Steps" and "From One Missionary to Another."

Last but not least, FFRF Co-President **Dan Barker** will be speaking about his forthcoming new book, "Contradiction: The Death of the Design Argument." After 140 debates for FFRF, Dan proposes a new way of looking at assumptions behind "fine-tuning" arguments for the existence of a god.

The convention will feature its usual reports by the co-presidents, the legal staff and legislative/lobbying team, plus a chance to peruse FFRF book and product tables and mingle with other freethinkers. The annual meetings of the state representatives and membership take place on Sunday morning, Sept. 29.

Turn to the back page to register and find complete information or check online at [ffrf.org/convention2024](http://ffrf.org/convention2024).

## Jail

Continued from page 1

FFRF's victory made front-page news in the Minneapolis Star Tribune. "The oversized display was discovered during tours of the new northeast Minnesota facility. The Madison, Wis.-based Freedom From Religion Foundation had received 20 complaints by the end of April, many contending the displays were unconstitutional."

The right-wing Epoch Times also commented on FFRF's ability to get the commandments display removed. "A two-story mural featuring the Ten Commandments and historic religious quotes, including two from former President Ronald Reagan, at

a new county jail in Minnesota, has been painted over due to pressure from the same group that won a federal court ruling against recognizing Good Friday as a state holiday." The article notes that Itasca County Sheriff Joe Dasovich did not want to paint over the religious displays, but did so on the advice of legal counsel.

"We told the county to 'Repaint and Repent,' and they got the first part right," quips FFRF's Joshi, adding, "Now, it's up to county officials to regain the trust of their constituents. Today, the wall between state and church remains standing."

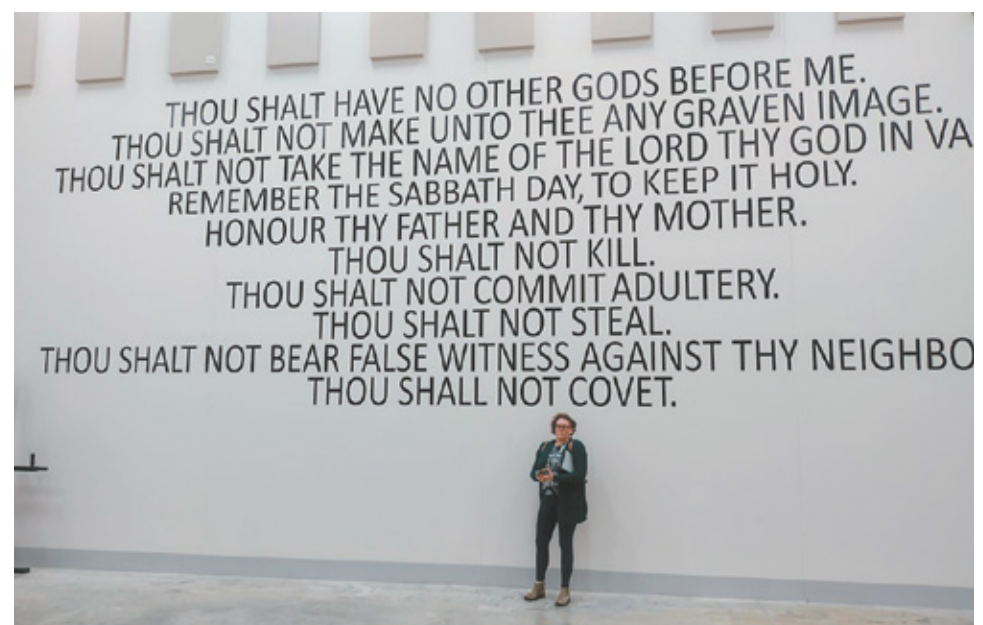


Photo from Minnesota Reformer



- Across**
- Meteorologist's tool
  - Globe, e.g.
  - Main web page
  - Popeye's sweetie
  - \*Atheists Crick's and Watson's discovery, acr.
  - Pickled garnish
  - Sanctioned by law
  - \*\_\_\_ Barker, FFRF co-president
  - \*Speak at FFRF convention, e.g.
  - \*Freethinking Bonnie Garmus' "\_\_\_ in Chemistry"
  - \*The Satanic \_\_\_\_, non-theistic organization
  - Chi precursor
  - Backtalk
  - Tax pro, for short
  - What nonconformists do
  - Start of basketball game
  - Clue
  - Freebie, for short
  - Sweet potato, e.g.
  - Hipbones
  - Bert's "Sesame Street" sidekick
  - Unacceptable, to a baby
  - Red-dot pointer, e.g.
  - Facts
  - 1/60 of min, pl.,
  - \*What irreverent poet Alexander Pushkin did

- right before he died
- Make content
- Between game and match
- Soda option
- Good times
- \*Composer Johannes \_\_\_\_, a humanist and agnostic
- \*Freethinking philosopher Baruch Benedict \_\_\_\_, author of "Ethics"
- Bird-deposited fertilizer
- Pirate's turf
- Spelunked
- Balance sheet entry
- \_\_\_ de Triomphe
- Caribbean island destination
- Meat and potato dish
- "Yakety \_\_\_"
- Madagascar primate

- Down**
- Sushi selection
  - Sheltered, at sea
  - Pad
  - Halt, to a salt
  - Add a new magazine
  - Bookie's number
  - Biology class acronym
  - African language
  - Zither's cousin
  - Iridescent gem
  - Dole out
  - Before, in verse

- Dried fruit & nut candy
- Marilyn Munster to Herman Munster, e.g.
- Young newt
- Beam and bars athlete
- \*Chef Julia \_\_\_\_: "A Catholic could not be a free man"
- Pilaff, to some
- Liquorice flavor
- \*Freethinking "Indiana Jones" actor
- Plays on words
- Double-reed instruments
- Use an épée
- \*Freethinking "The Road Not Taken" poet
- Asian weight unit
- Falafel bread
- Relish (2 words)
- Frank's famous sauce
- Not bright
- Pertaining to "Odyssey"
- \*"How can 'Nones' transform America?" contest entry
- Rabbit trap
- "Oregon or \_\_\_!"
- Tear down
- Afresh
- Quarterback's downfall
- Female gamete
- Domesticated ox
- Jewish month
- Neon or radon, e.g.
- A in B.C.E.

## Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12	
13						14				15				
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68							69				70			
71							72				73			

Answers on page 21

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

# OVERHEARD

With our democracy under siege by authoritarians, theocrats and fraudsters — enemies of reason one and all — America needs a National Day of Reason to restore truth and facts to their central place in American democracy. Designating May 4 as our Day of Reason recognizes our nation's commitment to empirical inquiry and science.

**Rep. Jamie Raskin, in the resolution to recognize May 4 as a National Day of Reason.**  
*5-1-24*

Many of the authors of Project 2025 are Christian nationalists who believe in a very [fringe] vision of Christianity. Essentially, they want the bible to supplant secular law. Some of them make that very much a straightforward statement. It's kind of a long-term goal to eventually make the United States a Christian nation.

**Anne-christine d'Adesky, an investigative reporter, who has organized colleagues into the Stop the Coup 2025 campaign.**  
*Religion Dispatches, 5-3-24*

Here's what I know: There are going to be more atheist/agnostics who identify as Republicans in the future. It's almost inevitable at this point. A group like the Nones can't get to 30 percent of the population by just drawing from the same segments of society over and over again. It will have to get more politically diverse in order for it to grow. How can the GOP be hospitable to this group, while still remaining the party of a whole of evangelicals? Time will tell.

**Ryan Burge, in his blog post "Atheist/Agnostic Republicans?"**  
*GraphsAboutReligion.com, 5-6-24*

I stand tall in my agnosticism, because the essence of it is not merely not knowing, but something far more challenging and infinitely more intriguing: the magnificent oxymoron inherent in the concept of unknowability.

**Psychologist Lesley Hazleton, author of many books, including "Agnostic: A Spirited Manifesto," who, at 78, chose to take her own life on April 29 after being diagnosed with terminal kidney cancer. She was interviewed on Freethought Radio on Sept. 17, 2016, available to listen here: [ffrf.us/4ahtQqS](http://ffrf.us/4ahtQqS).**  
*New York Times, 5-8-24*

I've called vouchers the education equivalent of predatory lending: all promise, no results. . . . Vouchers may provide a temporary coupon to change schools, but they are hardly a long-term solution to problems of racial inequality that persist across schools and communities.

**Josh Cowen, a professor of education policy at Michigan State University, and author of the upcoming book "The Privateers: How Billionaires Created a Culture War and Sold School Vouchers."**  
*Wisconsin State Journal, 5-17-24*

You don't have to be a constitutional scholar to see that this is problematic. It flies in the face of the First Amendment. . . . I didn't have to learn the Ten Commandments in school. We went to Sun-

day school. You want your kids to learn about the Ten Commandments, take them to church.

**Louisiana state Sen. Royce Duplessis, speaking out against a bill that would require the Ten Commandments to be displayed in public classrooms. Duplessis was named FFRF Action Fund's "Secularist of the Week" on May 24.**  
*WWLTV, 5-20-24*



Hank Johnson

The public is rapidly losing faith in the Supreme Court, which is dangerous to our very democracy. I fear for the rule of law when, every day, it becomes more apparent that a Supreme Court justice has publicly advocated for a particular candidate and for the movement to overturn a lawful election.

**U.S. Rep. Hank Johnson, Ga., a member of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, in an emailed statement.**  
*New York Times, 5-24-24*

There are days that I've come to my office after an announcement of a case and closed my door and cried. There have been those days. And there are likely to be more.

**Justice Sonia Sotomayor, speaking to a crowd at the Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University, where she was being honored.**  
*New York Times, 5-24-24*

While I lost my religion, I have gained an appreciation for true love and empathy and a willingness to serve others. I realized religion has nothing to do with any of those things. You can be a good person while religious or while an atheist. That was a surprise to someone raised in an evangelical church.

**Jess Piper, in her column, "Losing my religion."**  
*Substack, 5-24-24*

## Freethought Today Cryptogram

T' A I O T C X D D U D C T R V D Y T G C .

T' A V R C G O W X U G C T C T R O G .

T C S T V N Y T Z X T G C R R Z O Y Y R Z V D C O U D Y

H R V P X U G D V P Y R K T F G Y F R A W Y X L T C T X G C R

H R U U M D J R O C T Y R K T F D Y C S T V K G .

— J X V X P T F C F O A J X U J D C F S

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:  
U O G R L Q T M H Y V B F D V P S L A C N V W G Y U O G K J E Z X V I .  
T H E Q U I C K B R O W N F O X J U M P S O V E R T H E L A Z Y D O G .

This month's clue: A => M. Answer is on page 21.

This puzzle is from *Freethinking Cryptograms* by FFRF member Brooks Rimes, available on Amazon.com for \$13.95.



## IN THE NEWS

### NY AG sues groups over 'abortion pill reversal'

New York Attorney General Letitia James is suing an anti-abortion group and nearly a dozen pregnancy centers in the state for false and misleading statements promoting an unproven procedure they claim can reverse the effects of the abortion pill.

James alleges in the civil suit filed May 6 that Heartbeat International and 11 of the anti-abortion pregnancy centers linked to it have engaged in fraud, deceptive business practices and false advertising by promoting "abortion pill reversal," a procedure that major medical groups say is not backed by science and does not meet clinical standards. James' office says the pregnancy centers' "mission is to prevent people from obtaining abortions."

Medication abortion, which is approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, involves a pregnant person taking two oral medications, mifepristone, followed by misoprostol up to 48 hours later.

James says that some of the centers named in the lawsuit claim to facilitate the reversal procedure on-site.

### Chicago schools face suit over religious practices

Chicago Public Schools is facing a class-action lawsuit from former students about allegedly being pressured into meditation and "Hindu practices" they were told to keep secret from parents.

Kayla Hudgins, a former CPS student, is one of the plaintiffs alleging her constitutional rights were violated. Hudgins said her teachers pressured her to participate in transcendental meditation as part of a "quiet time" curriculum. Hudgins on one occasion said she didn't want to participate and was sent to the dean's office.

After quiet time, students were pressured to sign nondisclosure agreements to not tell their parents when they got home from school. Students were told that if they didn't sign the agreement it would affect their grades.

A federal judge on April 19 certified the case as a class-action lawsuit. The law firm handling the case, Mauck and Baker, in November 2023 won a \$150,000 settlement for another student forced to participate in the program or face being booted from her high school basketball team.

### Medical residents avoid abortion ban states

According to new statistics from the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), for the second year in a row, students graduating from U.S. medical schools this year were less likely to apply for residency positions in states with abortion bans and other significant abortion restrictions.

Since the Supreme Court in 2022 overturned the constitutional right to an abortion, state fights over abortion access have created plenty of uncertainty for pregnant patients and their doctors.

But that uncertainty has also bled into the world of medical education, forcing some new doctors to factor state abortion laws into their decisions about where to begin their careers.

Fourteen states, primarily in the Midwest and South, have banned nearly all abortions. The new analysis by the AAMC — exclusively reviewed by KFF Health

### Day of Reason in the Land of Lakes



Photo by Patrick Elliott

FFRF was a participant at the Minnesota Capitol on May 1 for a National Day of Reason breakfast. Julie Legg, president of the Grand Rapids Atheists and Freethinkers, is pictured here with FFRF's Ryan Dudley. FFRF Legal Director Patrick Elliott spoke on May 1 at the Capitol and Ryan Dudley spoke on April 30 at the Day of Reason Happy Hour.

News before its public release — found that the number of applicants to residency programs in states with near-total abortion bans declined by 4.2 percent between 2024 and 2023, compared with a 0.6 percent drop in states where abortion remains legal.

### Mexico's new female president is a None

Besides being elected Mexico's first female president, Claudia Sheinbaum also considers herself culturally Jewish and religiously unaffiliated.

"I grew up without religion. That's how my parents raised me," Sheinbaum said. "But obviously the [Jewish] culture, that's in your blood."

Sheinbaum said she considers herself a woman of faith but is not religiously affiliated; perhaps that's why there has been relatively little discussion about her becoming Mexico's first Jewish president.

"Of course, I know where I come from, but my parents were always atheists."

### Corporate interest in religious diversity rises

More than 85 percent of Fortune 500 companies now include religion in their commitment to diversity, more than twice the number that did in 2022, according to the 2024 Corporate Religious Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (REDI) Index and Monitor. And 62 Fortune 500 companies (12.4 percent) now showcase faith-based employee business resource groups, up from 7.4 percent in 2022.

These numbers represent a "tipping point," said Religious Freedom and Business Foundation President Brian Grim, in the number of companies embracing religion as a core component of diversity. He added that this year, companies were especially attentive to how people of faith responded to global news, including the Israel-Hamas war.

The survey evaluated companies in 11 categories, including their religious accommodations, spiritual care/chaplaincy services and procedures for reporting discrimination.

This year, Accenture and American Airlines tied as the most faith-friendly Fortune 500 companies, both earning perfect scores on the index.

### Census: Majority in Scotland has no religion

A majority of people in Scotland say they do not follow any religion — the first time secular attitudes have overtaken religious identity.

Data from the latest Scottish census, carried out in 2022, shows 51 percent of the population reported they belonged to no religion — a sharp increase on the 36.7 percent in 2011.

The Church of Scotland, the once-dominant Presbyterian church, was the most heavily affected by the surge in secularism. The census found the number of people who identified with the Church of Scotland had slumped by more than a third over the decade, falling from 32.4 percent of the population in 2011 to 20.4 percent, or 1.1 million people, in 2022.

The number of Catholics in Scotland also fell, though less dramatically, from 15.9 percent to 13.3 percent, or 723,000 people.

### Egyptian blogger gets 5 more years in prison

Sherif Gaber, an atheist blogger who has been behind bars in Egypt since 2019, has been given an additional five years in prison.

"Today, I've been sentenced to another 5 years in prison, bringing the total sentence against me to 9 years in prison for criticizing Islam," Gaber wrote on X on May 26. "If you know a way to help,

please don't hesitate to contact me. I need urgent help."

In May 2018, Gaber was arrested in Egypt for expressing his views on Islam, minorities' rights and evolution. Gaber was first detained in 2013 for allegedly promoting atheism, which can be punished in Egypt under a law that bans "insults to religions."

Gaber's website includes YouTube videos with titles such as "Criticizing religion is a human right," "Does God exist?" and "Evolution and religion are incompatible."

### Study: Atheists, agnostics seen as equally immoral

Both atheists and agnostics are similarly perceived as immoral when compared to Christians, challenging the notion that agnostics are viewed more favorably than atheists, according to a recent study published in the journal *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*.

Atheism and agnosticism are two distinct positions concerning belief in God or gods. Atheism is characterized by a lack of belief in the existence of any deities. Agnosticism, on the other hand, is the position that the existence of God or gods is unknown or unknowable. Despite their differences, atheists and agnostics often find themselves grouped together as nonreligious individuals.

Atheists remain one of the least accepted minority groups and face ongoing discrimination, largely due to the stereotype that they lack a moral compass. This stereotype is rooted in the supernatural monitoring hypothesis, which suggests that people behave more morally when they believe they are being watched by a supernatural entity.

The second part of the study found that participants were more likely to attribute moral actions to Christians rather than to atheists or agnostics. Similar to the findings on immorality, there was no significant difference between atheists and agnostics in terms of the likelihood of being associated with moral behavior.

### Texas schools to include biblical references

Texas elementary school students would get a significant dose of bible knowledge with their reading instruction under a sweeping curriculum redesign unveiled May 29.

The curriculum redesign includes lessons on things like Leonardo da Vinci's portrayal of The Last Supper and Martin Luther King Jr.'s references to the biblical Book of Daniel. Proponents depict the lessons as context for classical literature, while critics accuse the plans of forcing Christian ideology into the classroom.

In an interview with a Christian talk show, GOP Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who described himself as a "Christian first, conservative second," praised the curriculum changes, saying they will "get us back to teaching, not necessarily the bible per se, but the stories from the bible."

The release comes four days after the state Republican party passed a platform calling on the Legislature and the state Board of Education to require instruction on the bible.



# VICTORIES

By Greg Fletcher

## FFRF gets W.Va. teacher to stop proselytizing

A West Virginia physical education teacher part of the Raleigh County School District will no longer be leading students in prayer after classes, thanks to FFRF.

A Bradley Elementary School parent informed FFRF that the physical education teacher at the school had been abusing his position to proselytize and impose his religious beliefs onto students. The complainant reported that the teacher began classes with bible stories and ended them by leading students in prayer. The school-sponsored religious activity had been occurring since at least 2019.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the district regarding the concerns. Superintendent Serena L. Starcher wrote back to FFRF, indicating that the letter had been received, but would not divulge the outcome of the situation. "Given the serious nature of the allegations, an investigation is being conducted," Starcher wrote. "As the allegations are related to a school employee, I will be unable to share specific information regarding any action taken regarding the employee."

After FFRF received the letter in April, the complainant reported back on May 1, stating that their children informed them that prayers and bible stories had ceased.

## Prayer removed from Mo. graduation ceremonies

FFRF has successfully stopped a long-standing tradition of including prayers at graduation ceremonies in the Kennett School District in Missouri.

FFRF learned that Kennett High School graduation ceremonies include an invocation as an official part of the program. In the 2023 graduation ceremony, a prayer was delivered to the "Heavenly Father." Similar prayers commenced graduation ceremonies from 2017 to 2022, delivered to "Lord" or "God" as well.

"Public school students have a constitutional right to be free from religious indoctrination in their public schools," FFRF Patrick O'Reiley Legal Fellow Hirsh Joshi wrote to the district.

The district's legal representative, Natalie A. Hoernschemeyer, wrote back to FFRF, confirming that action had been taken. "The district undertook a comprehensive review of its policies and procedures for its high school graduation ceremonies. Following this review, the district is changing the structure of its high school graduation ceremonies. Going forward, the district is removing the student-led invocation from its high school graduation ceremonies."

## Superintendent no longer prays at school events

FFRF has gotten the Iroquois School District superintendent in South Dakota to stop using his position to pray before parents and students at official school events.

A concerned parent reported that Superintendent Mike Ruth led the audience in prayer at both the May 23, 2023, Iroquois Sr. High School graduation ceremony and the Sept. 19, 2023, Iroquois Jr./Sr. High School volleyball

## Spring into secularism



The FFRF Kentucky Chapter had a tent at the Old Louisville Springfest on May 18 at Toonerville Trolley Park, where members, from left to right, Judi Madger, John Sutton, Robert Harpool and Maha Harpool, helped hand out FFRF information and talked with interested festival attendees.

game. The superintendent reportedly led the prayers while acting in his official capacity, and asked all attendees to participate in the prayers. FFRF's complainant stated that, while they identify as Christian, they felt it was inappropriate for their child's superintendent to force his religious beliefs on their child and all other attendees at school-sponsored events.

"By delivering sectarian prayers at school-sponsored events in your official capacity as superintendent, you coerce students and their families to observe and participate in a religious exercise," FFRF Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence wrote to the superintendent.

Ruth wrote back to FFRF after the complaint. "Thank you for bringing this to my attention and the feeling of inappropriateness by the citizens of our district," he wrote. "After discussing this situation with our legal counsel, our district will fully comply with case law moving forward."

## FFRF stops distribution of religious books in La.

FFRF stopped the Vermilion (La.) Parish School System from distributing books containing prayers to elementary school students.

A concerned district parent reported that Dozier Elementary School distributed a book containing a Christian prayer to students. FFRF learned that second graders were given the children's book "Case and the Sugar Run," which contained a Christian prayer on the end page.

"By distributing a book containing prayer and promoting belief in Christianity, the school usurped the authority of parents who have the constitutional right to determine their children's religious or nonreligious upbringing," FFRF Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence wrote to Superintendent Thomas J. Byler.

Byler responded to FFRF via email, confirming that action had been taken. He assured that the prayer was not read to children during class time, as well as confirming that measures would be taken to prevent literature with religious tones from being distributed to students. "Administrators will be instructed to read all literature prior to distribution brought by guest speakers ensuring the central message of the product aligns to Louisiana curriculum standards," he wrote.

## Religious event no longer pushed by Ore. school

FFRF reminded the West Linn-Wilsonville (Ore.) School District of its obligation not to promote religious events in official event calendars and communications.

In July 2022, FFRF wrote to West Linn-Wilsonville School District regarding concerns with West Linn High School organizing and promoting a religious baccalaureate ceremony. In response to FFRF's letter, the district noted that it needed to "be clear and careful about who is responsible for advertising the event and who is sponsoring it. Or, if it was sponsored by our own staff." The district had additionally "engaged [its] legal counsel to provide advice and will ensure corrective action for the future."

But, FFRF was informed by a West Linn High School parent that despite the district's action in 2022, the school was once again advertising a baccalaureate in its official newsletter and through official communication channels. The newsletter urged parents to "save the date for the Baccalaureate on Sunday, June 2nd at 7pm!" The baccalaureate was also listed on the school's list of "upcoming important dates," and appeared to be a school-sponsored event with no indication about who was responsible for advertising the event or who was sponsoring it.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Kathy Ludwig. Andrew Kilstrom, director of communications for the school, then responded to FFRF via email. "The staff member who included the information for a similar event this school year (2023-24) is new to our district this year, and was unfamiliar with the process for vetting what is and isn't included in the school newsletter. The staff member had been approached by a local community member and asked to include information about the ceremony, and not knowing what a baccalaureate ceremony was, assumed it was OK to include."

After the administration learned of the event's inclusion in the newsletter, it was immediately removed. Staff members were additionally reminded of what events are not OK to include in school calendars, including baccalaureate ceremonies.

## School learns real meaning of the First Amendment

The Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union was taught a lesson about religious liberty after an elementary school assistant principal hosted a religious assembly about the "real meaning of Easter."

A concerned Bennington Elementary School parent contacted FFRF to report that on April 7, 2023, the assistant principal led a school-wide Zoom assembly in which he preached about the "real meaning of Easter" and showed an animated video depicting the biblical story of Jesus and the crucifixion. Parents were reportedly not informed of the assembly, nor were they given the opportunity to opt their students out of it in accordance with school policy.

"[The assistant principal]'s religious message demonstrates an unlawful preference for religion over non-religion and, specifically, Christianity over all other faiths," FFRF Equal Justice Works Fellow Kat Grant wrote to Superintendent James Culkeen.

Dina L. Atwood, legal representation from the district, emailed FFRF and explained the outcome of the complaint. "The SVSU and particularly the Southwest Vermont Elementary Union School District Board (the board which directly employs the assistant principal), had discussions regarding how best to address this matter. There was administrative action taken which can include professional development as well as disciplinary action," Atwood wrote. Atwood also explained that the board understood the severity of the issue, and took action quickly to resolve the issue.

## Religious post by college PD removed from Facebook

A post promoting Christianity was removed from the University of Wisconsin – Stout Police Department's Facebook page after the department was contacted by FFRF.

A community member reported that on May 6, 2023, the official UW-Stout Police Department Facebook page posted an image of a sheriff's badge imposed over a Latin cross with the phrases "In God We Trust" and "Blessed Are Our Peacemakers." The phrase "Blessed are our peacemakers" is taken from biblical scripture. While the image may have been posted in an effort to honor St. Croix County Sheriff's Deputy Kaitie Leising, who was fatally wounded in the line of duty earlier that month, the image was posted without any clarifying details or information contextualizing the department's post. The complainant explained that as a non-Christian they did not feel "safe to file a police report or expect [their] reports to be taken as seriously" as someone who is Christian.

"Promoting Christianity through the Department's official social media suggests that it prefers Christianity over all other religions and nonreligion," FFRF Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow Sammi Lawrence wrote to the department.

FFRF was informed by Interim Chief of Police Lisa Pederson that the former chief, Jason Spetz, had retired. "I, as interim chief of police, can assure you that the post your organization was concerned with had been taken down and deleted from the UW-Stout Police Department Facebook page during the previous chief's tenure," Pederson assured.



## Please take FFRF's 2024 membership survey

# Do you have 15 minutes to help shape policy?

Members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation — provided we have a working email address for you — should have received an invitation via email on or about June 17 to fill out FFRF's 2024 membership survey. Our last survey was 2020.

Different from previous years, the email isn't being sent directly from FFRF, but via an academic researcher who is an affiliated scholar of PRRI and who has streamlined our questions to make them more meaningful. For greater efficiency and an updated survey, we're utilizing Qualtrics, an industry-leading platform for conducting surveys online.

**Please look for the email address: "noreply@qmailserver.com," which was sent on or around June 17.** The subject heading will read: "FFRF 2024 Membership Survey." (If you don't find it, please check your spam folder.) If you don't respond, a few reminders may be sent to you. In that case, the heading will read: "A Reminder: FFRF 2024

Membership Survey."

**Please fill out the survey as soon as possible so your voice counts.** FFRF learns so much from it. The survey will ask you questions in several categories: your freethought background; your personal demographics; your opinion about FFRF and its work and services; and your views on some social and political issues.

We're working with Denison University Professor Paul Djupe, an expert in data collection and analysis who has received approval from his Institutional Review Board for procedures to protect the confidentiality of your responses. FFRF will not be able to see who has responded to the survey and will not associate contact information with responses.

A bonus is that we have commissioned a scientific survey to query "Nones" on many of the same questions we are asking you — our members — so we will be able to compare and contrast FFRF

members with religiously unaffiliated Americans in general.

The views of freethinkers tend to be ignored in our society, so this is your chance to chime in and to also help FFRF be responsive to your concerns. Thank you!

P.S. If you haven't received the survey (and have checked your spam folder) or you have never shared your email address and you want to take the survey, please promptly email: [info@ffrf.org](mailto:info@ffrf.org) to request a survey link, which will come through the third party, not from FFRF. Use the subject heading: "Send me a survey." Include your first and last name, your mailing address and email address. Please indicate whether you are sharing your email address for this one-time use or whether we should add your email address to our database so you'll receive the weekly wrap (summarizing FFRF's weekly achievements, sent on Fridays).

## Action Fund to endorse school board candidates

The FFRF Action Fund is announcing a new initiative to begin endorsing school board candidates who champion secular education and the separation of state and church.

This groundbreaking move is aimed at supporting candidates who are not only qualified and uphold secular values but also have a demonstrable path to victory.

Endorsed candidates will have shown that they are viable contenders who are deeply committed to maintaining a strong secular public education system.

Candidates who seek the endorsement of FFRF Action Fund will have the opportunity to connect with and represent a significant and growing demographic — the religiously unaffiliated population, which now makes up roughly one-third of Americans.

Furthermore, FFRF Action Fund has more than 30,000 advocates across the United States, many of whom donate regularly to and get involved with political candidates.

Other helpful endorsement criteria include whether the candidate:

- Is a freethinker (i.e., not religious; atheist, humanist, agnostic, etc.).
- Has completed a candidate train-



This article is from the FFRF Action Fund, a 501(c)(4) lobbying entity which reimburses FFRF for the space in Freethought Today. For more information about the FFRF Action Fund, go to [ffrfaction.org](http://ffrfaction.org).

ing program.

- Is a member of a School Board PAC or slate (the endorsement would go to the specific candidate and not the slate).

- Has been engaging in the schools and school board.

- Has been endorsed by local leaders and/or national or local organizations.

The need for endorsing school board candidates has never been more urgent in the face of the rising tide of Christian nationalism, widespread book bans, and anti-LGBTQ policies infiltrating our schools.

"Voters deserve to know which candidates will stand firm on the separation of state and church, and resist efforts to impose religious ideology in public education," states FFRF Action Fund Board Member Brandi Alexander. "We hope that by spotlighting candidates who oppose these regressive measures, the FFRF Action Fund can help to empower communities to make informed decisions on which candidates will uphold the rights and dignities of all students."

FFRF Action Fund is a 501(c)(4) organization that develops and advocates for legislation, regulations and government programs to preserve the constitutional principle of separation between state and church. It also advocates for the rights and views of nonbelievers, endorses candidates for political office, and publicizes the views of elected officials concerning religious liberty issues.

For more information, go to: [ffrfaction.org](http://ffrfaction.org).

## AN APPEAL TO HEAVEN



## FFRF: Alito must resign or be impeached

Alito must go.

It's time to demand the resignation — or impeachment and removal — of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito.

The New York Times reports: "The justice's beach house displayed an 'Appeal to Heaven' flag, a symbol carried on Jan. 6 and associated with a push for a more Christian-minded government."

The Times obtained photographs and reports from "a half-dozen neighbors and passers-by" showing the Appeal to Heaven flag flying at the Alito home on Long Beach Island in July and September 2023, plus Google street view image verification.

The "Appeal to Heaven" flag and movement exist to "honor the Lord by supporting candidates for public office who are believers in Jesus Christ, who regularly attend and display a commitment to an evangelical, Gospel-centered church and who will commit to live and govern based on biblical ... principles." Its causes include protecting heteronormativity and defining life at conception, a sales tax-based system, and a rigorous view of the 10th Amendment. The flag was widely displayed by Jan. 6 rioters.

The Times points out that a major case to do with Jan. 6 — challenging whether insurrectionists invading the Capitol could be charged with obstruction — was before the court during the period the Appeal to

Heaven flag was flying in Alito's New Jersey home.

The Times recently revealed that an upside-down American flag, a symbol of distress, had been displayed at his home in Virginia in 2021, almost immediately after the Jan. 6 insurrection and at a time when the high court had been considering a number of cases to do with "stolen election" claims by Donald Trump. Pro-Trump forces urged individuals to display the upside-down flag as a sign of protest against certification of Joe Biden as the president.

The upside-down flag at the Alito home was apparently up for days, even as the court weighed in on a case challenging the outcome of the election. Alito did not recuse himself, but voted to hear the case. Fortunately, he was in the minority. Alito has shrugged off the ethical breach and pusillanimously blames his wife, saying he had nothing to do with her feud with an anti-Trump neighbor.

An upside-down flag flagrantly displayed political partisanship. That is bad enough. But the "Appeal to Heaven" flag goes beyond that by signaling Alito's fealty to Christian nationalist principles.

If Alito has any respect for his office, he would resign. Assuming otherwise, the House should do its job and impeach Alito and the Senate should convict him. Now.

### MOVING?



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# Create a lasting legacy with FFRF and FreeWill

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is fortunate that many of our supporters have designated a gift in their will or trust to support FFRF's work for years to come. Others would like to make a planned gift but don't know where to start, or they lack a trusted attorney to document their wishes.

Now, it's easy to create a lasting legacy in just a few minutes and help secure FFRF's future, while also ensuring peace of mind for you and your loved ones. Go to [ffrf.us/freewill](https://ffrf.us/freewill) to use free tools available through our partnership with FreeWill to create a will or revocable living trust that is compliant with the laws of your state.

It's easy to complete the online form with the step-by-step instructions provided. If you have complex needs or a larger estate, you can print out the completed documents



and take them to an attorney for further review. Even if you can't include FFRF as a beneficiary now, these

tools are free for you to use as our gift to you!

If you've already named FFRF

Get started at [ffrf.us/freewill](https://ffrf.us/freewill)

as a beneficiary in an existing will or trust, you can let FFRF know by using FreeWill's gift notification form at [ffrf.us/gift](https://ffrf.us/gift). We know your circumstances might change, so rest assured that reporting your gift today does not obligate you now or in the future.

Another option is to name a FFRF as a beneficiary on your non-probate assets, such as an IRA, 401(k) or life insurance policy. Use the FreeWill beneficiary planning tool to record your assets and set beneficiaries properly to speed the transfer of these assets. Get started here: [ffrf.us/beneficiary](https://ffrf.us/beneficiary).

Thank you for being part of FFRF's future!



Photo from WCNC News

This statue of Billy Graham was unveiled May 8 in the U.S. Capitol.

## FFRF: Billy Graham statue doesn't belong in Capitol

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is sorry to see the addition of a statue of a white Christian nationalist in the U.S. Capitol.

A bronze statue honoring evangelist Billy Graham was unveiled May 8 in the National Statuary Hall Collection as one of two statues representing the state of North Carolina as a replacement for a statue of racist N.C. Gov. Charles Brantley Aycock. Making the tribute all the more untenable, the 7-foot statue depicts a gesturing Graham holding an open bible — and the pedestal is engraved with bible verses. Those verses are the pinnacle of Christian dogma: John 3:16 (“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life”) and John 14:6 (“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me”).

Sen. Tedd Budd, R-N.C., admitted the religious rationale for honoring Graham: “The legacy of Rev. Billy Graham is based on his simple message of forgiveness based on John 3:16. His lifelong commitment to preaching the Gospel, his fight for civil rights, his opposition to communism, and his spiritual guidance provided hope

to hundreds of millions.” Budd is being generous. Graham was a purely religious figure with no redeeming secular achievements who certainly wasn't a champion of civil rights unlike Martin Luther King Jr.

And he did a lot of harm to the secular fabric of this country. FFRF was instrumental in calling the nation's attention to the role Graham played in lobbying Congress to pass the National Day of Prayer. During a long rally in Washington, D.C., Graham called for such a day, saying “What a thrilling, glorious thing it would be to see the leaders of our country today kneeling before Almighty God in prayer.” FFRF sued over the unconstitutional act of Congress that Graham's words inspired, which have spawned countless entanglements between religion and government.

As FFRF has pointed out in the past, Graham had a checkered history that included antisemitism, disdain for atheists, and other alienating and divisive views. Graham vociferously opposed gay rights and marriage equality, saying that “we traffic in homosexuality at the peril of our spiritual welfare.” He once suggested, then withdrew the suggestion, that AIDS could be a “judgment” from God.

## FFRF, Satanic Temple plan to hand out materials in Colorado school district

FFRF and the Satanic Temple are planning to distribute materials to students in a Colorado school district if officials don't prevent the Gideons from targeting students with bibles.

An Edith Teter Elementary School parent reported that on May 5 their young child came home with a bible. The complainant reported that an outside adult was permitted to stand on school property and hand out bibles to students. Their child believed that they had to take a bible and that the bibles were being distributed by the school, a reasonable assumption for a 7-year-old to make when being offered something in their public school during the school day.

Only after the outside group was allowed to use the elementary school to spread their religious beliefs and distribute bibles to students, Park County School District Superintendent Cindy Bear notified parents that it is district policy to allow outside adults to target students during the school day.

FFRF says the board must change its policy and cease allowing the distribution of bibles or other religious propaganda to students while they are in school or on school property. If the district continues to allow the Gideons to distribute reli-

gious material, FFRF will be working with the Satanic Temple to distribute materials to students next school year.

“It is inappropriate and unconstitutional for the district to offer outside adults access to students in order to indoctrinate them and distribute religious materials,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line writes to Park County Board of Education President Sheila Waite.

The district may not allow its schools to be used as recruiting grounds for religion, FFRF emphasizes. It is well-settled law that public schools may not show favoritism toward nor coerce belief or participation in religion or allow such distributions. By allowing the distribution of bibles to students, the district displays blatant favoritism for religion over non-religion and Christianity above all other faiths. This also needlessly alienates all students and families who do not subscribe to Christianity.

The district may not maintain its policy whereby any private organization may take advantage of school resources to further its personal goals. FFRF has sought to distribute its own literature in schools with overly broad distribution policies — and aims to do so in the Park County School District if it maintains this open forum.

## Judge: FFRF lawsuit can resume

A lawsuit seeking to block the state of Oklahoma from sponsoring and funding the nation's first religious public charter school can move forward, an Oklahoma judge ruled June 5.

During the hearing, Judge Richard Ogden of the District Court of Oklahoma County issued a new ruling in *OK-PLAC Inc. v. Statewide Virtual Charter School Board* denying nearly all of the defendants' motions to dismiss the case. FFRF, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the American Civil Liberties Union and the Education Law Center, who represent the nine plaintiffs in the case, applauded the decision.

Still pending before the court is the plaintiffs' request for a temporary injunction to prevent St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual Charter School from operating and receiving state funds as a public charter school. In a motion filed May 31, the plaintiffs explained to the court the importance of ensuring that no taxpayer money funds St. Isidore and that the school does not open as a public charter school during the 2024-25 school year while litigation is ongoing in their case and in a similar lawsuit filed in the Oklahoma Supreme Court by Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond.



## Barker

Continued from page 1

My folks' spirituality was so strong that they often found it hard to find a church that met their needs. So, we church-hopped for many years. I can't remember all the churches, but we were Baptists, Nazarenes, Assemblies of God, Pentecostals, fundamentalist, evangelical, "bible-believing" and charismatic.

For a number of years, we formed a family musical team and ministered in many Southern California churches. Dad played trombone and preached, Mom sang solos, I played piano, my brothers tooted various instruments and we all joined in singing those famous gospel harmonies. It was a neat experience for us kids. My childhood was filled with love, fun and purpose. I felt truly fortunate to have been born into "the truth," and, at age 15, I committed myself to a lifetime of Christian ministry.

My commitment lasted 17 years. It gave me a feeling of purpose, destiny and fulfillment. I spent years trekking across Mexico doing missionary work — in small villages, jungles, deserts, large arenas, radio, TV, parks, prisons and street meetings. I spent years as a traveling evangelist crossing the United States, preaching and singing in churches, on street corners, house-to-house witnessing, TV, college campuses and wherever an audience could be found.

I was a "doer of the word and not a hearer only." I went to a Christian college, majored in religion/philosophy, became ordained and served in a pastoral capacity in three California churches. I personally led many people to Jesus Christ, and encouraged many young people to consider full-time Christian service.

I served for a while as librarian for Kathryn Kuhlman's L.A. choir, observing the "miracles" firsthand. I was even instrumental in a few healings myself.

For a number of years, I directed the "King's Children," a local Christian music group that performed quite extensively, including a brief term of hosting a local Christian TV show.

For 15 years, I worked with Manuel Bonilla, the leading Christian recording artist in the Spanish-speaking world. I am his main producer/arranger and working with him has given me the opportunity to learn the skills to produce many more Christian albums, including some of my own.

I have written over 100 Christian songs, which are either published or recorded by various artists, and two of my children's musicals continue to be best-sellers around the world. ("Mary Had a Little

Lamb," a Christmas musical, and "His Fleece Was White as Snow," for Easter. I think you can see the religious symbolism in the titles: Christ, the unspotted lamb of God who became the final sacrifice for sin. Both were published and distributed by Manna Music.)

I could go on listing my Christian accomplishments, but I am already beginning to bore myself. I think you get the picture that I was very serious about my faith, and that I am quite capable of analyzing religion from the inside out.

Last Friday evening, I directed a bible study in my own home. I opened it to all comers and announced that I would welcome all points of view with the purpose of critically examining the documents with skepticism rather than faith. The eight people who arrived (to my astonishment) were Christians who had been informed of my present atheistic stance and were curious about my intentions. My closest ally was my brother, a theistic agnostic. One fellow, a theologian, informed me that his purpose in coming was to convert me back to the faith. (He failed.)

It was a fun, lively evening and much information was exchanged, but I noticed something interesting. They were more concerned about me and my atheism than they were about the bible. The discussion kept coming around to an analysis of my conversion from the faith. They were intrigued that someone who had been so strongly religious could so radically "stray" and not be ashamed. They kept probing for some deep psychological cause, some hidden disappointment, secret bitterness, temptation or pride. They were like spiritual doctors trying to remove a tumor or blinding cataract.

One fellow suggested I had been blinded by Satan — the devil being so intimidated by my strong Christian witness that he needed to neutralize the enemy, get me out of commission. That was very flattering, but it misses the point.

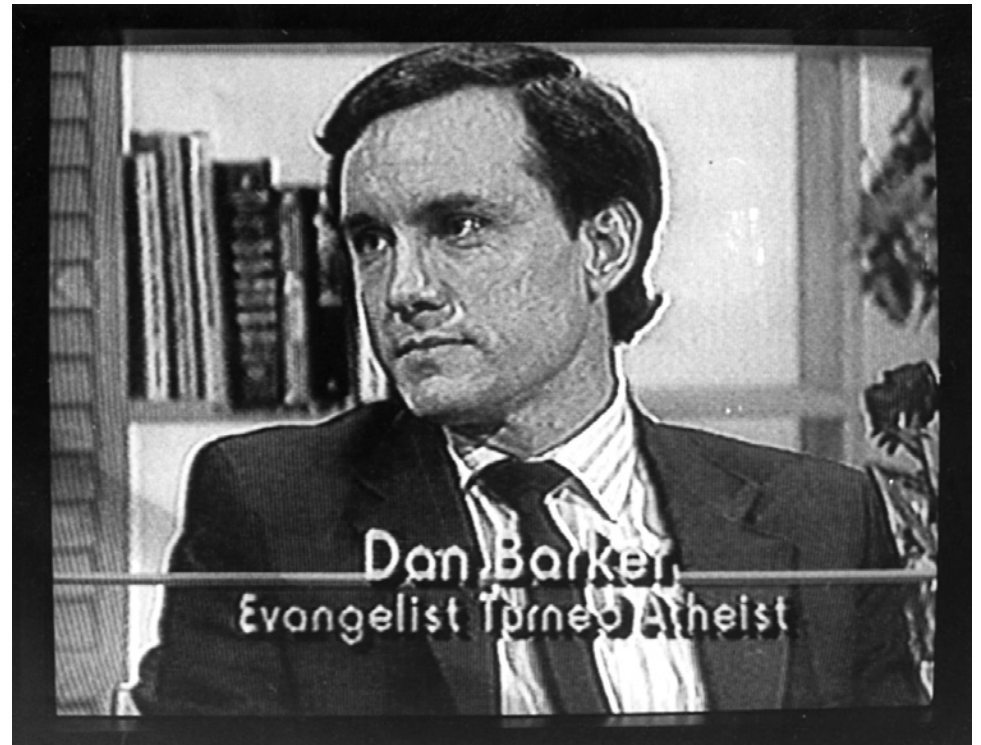
The point here is that the merits of an argument do not depend on the character of the speaker. All arguments should be weighed for their own sake, based on their own evidence and logical consistencies.

Before the bible study even commenced, one fellow said, "Dan, tell us what caused you to lose your faith." So, I told them.

I did not lose my faith. I gave it up purposely. The motivation that drove me into the ministry is the same that drove me out. I have always wanted to know. Even as a child, I fervently pursued truth. I was rarely content to accept things without examination, and my examinations were intense. I was a thirsty learner, a good student, and a good minister because of that drive. I always took things apart and put them back together again.

Since I was taught and believed Christianity was the answer, I dedicated myself to understanding all I possibly could. I devoured every book, every sermon and the bible. I prayed, fasted and obeyed biblical teaching. I decided that I would lean my whole weight upon the truth of scripture. This attitude, I am sure, gave the impression that I was a notch above, that I could be trusted as a Christian authority and leader. Christians, eager for substantiation, gladly allowed me to assume a place of leadership, and I took it as confirmation of my holy calling.

But, my mind did not go to sleep. In my thirst for knowledge, I did not limit myself to Christian authors, but curious-



Dan Barker appears on a television show in the 1980s where he talks about his transformation from an evangelical preacher to an atheist.

ly desired to understand the reasoning behind non-Christian thinking. I figured the only way to truly grasp a subject was to look at it from all sides. If I had limited myself to Christian books, I would probably still be a Christian today. I read philosophy, theology, science and psychology. I studied evolution and natural history. I read Bertrand Russell, Thomas Paine, Ayn Rand, John Dewey and others. At first, I laughed at these worldly thinkers, but I eventually started discovering some disturbing facts — facts that discredited Christianity. I tried to ignore these facts because they did not integrate with my religious worldview.

For years, I went through an intense inner conflict. On the one hand, I was happy with the direction and fulfillment of my Christian life; on the other hand, I had intellectual doubts. Faith and reason began a war within me, and it kept escalating. I would cry out to God for answers, and none would come. Like the battered wife who clings to hope, I kept trusting that God would someday come through. He never did.

The only proposed answer was faith, and I gradually grew to dislike the smell of that word. I finally realized that faith is a cop-out, a defeat — an admission that the truths of religion are unknowable through evidence and reason. It is only undemonstrable assertions that require the suspension of reason, and weak ideas that require faith. I just lost faith in faith. Biblical contradictions became more and more discrepant, apologist arguments more and more absurd, and, when I finally discarded faith, things became more and more clear.

But don't imagine that was an easy process. It was like tearing my whole frame of reality to pieces, ripping to shreds the fabric of meaning and hope, betraying the values of existence. It hurt. And it hurt bad. It was like spitting on my mother, or like throwing one of my children out a window. It was sacrilege. All of my bases for thinking and values had to be restructured. Add to that inner conflict the outer conflict of reputation and you have a destabilizing war. Did I really want to discard the respect I had so carefully built over many years with so many important people?

I can understand why people cling to their faith. Faith is comforting. It provides many "answers" to life's riddles. My Christian life was quite positive and I really see no external/cultural reason why

I should have rejected it. I continue to share many of the same Christian values I was taught (though, I would no longer call them "Christian," — they are my values); and many of my close friends are decent Christian individuals whom I love and respect.

Christians feel deeply that their way of life is the best possible. They feel their attitude toward the rest of the world is one of love. That's how I felt. I couldn't understand why people would be critical of Christianity unless they were inwardly motivated by "worldly" Satanic influences. I pretended to love all individuals while hating the "sin" that was in them, like Christ supposedly did. (We were taught that Christ was the most loving example.)

It was a mystery to me how anyone could be blind to the truths of the Gospel. After all, don't we all want love, peace, happiness, hope and meaning in life? Christ was the only answer, I believed, and I figured all non-Christians must be driven by other things, like greed lust, evil pride, hate and jealousy. I took the media's caricature of the world's situation as evidence of that fact. For me to grow into one of those godless creatures was almost impossible, and I resisted all the way. (I have also discovered that ethics has nothing to do with religion, at least not in a positive correlation.)

There was no specific turning point for me. I one day just realized that I was no longer a Christian, and a few months later, I mustered the nerve to advertise that fact. That was in January, six months ago. Since then, I have been bombarded by all my caring friends and relatives. I appreciate their concern and I sincerely wish to keep a dialogue open.

As an example, while I was typing this article, I received a long-distance call from a former Christian friend who had heard about my "defection." It is hard to handle calls like that. She was stunned, and I am certain she is at this very moment in prayer for me, or calling others to join in prayer. I love this person, I respect her and do not wish to cause any undue harm. She told me that she read an article I wrote to my local paper. I understand her concern and I sympathize with her because I know exactly what she is thinking.

I was a preacher for many years, and I guess it hasn't all rubbed off. I would wish to influence others who may be struggling like I did — influence them to have the guts to think. To think deliberately and clearly. To take no fact without critical examination and to remain open to honest inquiry, wherever it leads.

Dan Barker has been on FFRF's staff since 1987 and co-president since 2004.



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# Champion of the First Amendment award Christians against Christian nationalism

*This is the speech (lightly edited) given by Amanda Tyler at FFRF's national convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 14. She was introduced by FFRF Board Chair Stephen Hirtle. You can watch the video of the speech (and all other convention speeches) at [ffrf.us/con23](https://ffrf.us/con23).*

**Stephen Hirtle:** Our next speaker on Christian nationalism will be receiving FFRF's Champion of the First Amendment award. Amanda Tyler is the executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, known as the BJC, which upholds the historic Baptist principles of religious liberty, defending the free exercise of religion and protecting the establishment of religion by the government. She's the lead organizer of BJC's "Christians Against Christian Nationalism" campaign and cohost of BJC's "Respecting Religion" podcast. Amanda worked closely with FFRF to produce 2022's report on Christian nationalism at the Jan. 6 insurrection. She also testified in 2022 before Congress about ways in which Christian nationalism provides cover for white supremacy.

A member of the Texas and U.S. Supreme Court bar, Tyler has experience working in Congress, in a private legal practice, and serving as a law clerk for a federal judge. Tyler was named executive director of BJC in 2016 and lives in Dallas with her husband and their son.

Please welcome FFRF's Champion of the First Amendment, Amanda Tyler.

By Amanda Tyler

**T**hank you so much. It is really a profound honor to receive this award from FFRF today. It has been a joy to work with FFRF on so many of our shared values when it comes to keeping the institutions of church and state separate, because that is the truly and best and only way to protect religious freedom for all people.

I want to provide a brief update about what BJC is, because you might be hearing about us for the first time today. BJC is an 87-year-old advocacy and education organization headquartered on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Our mission is to advocate for everyone's faith freedom. We are the only denominationally based organization that is solely focused on religious freedom and the separation of church and state. We file briefs at the U.S. Supreme Court, we advocate in Congress, and we talk about our advocacy on a podcast that I co-host called "Respecting Religion."

I want to talk a little bit about why Baptists care so much about the separation of church and state. That might be a surprise to some of you. But we at BJC are heirs to people like Roger Williams, who was the founder of the First Baptist Church in America, and whose efforts to oppose state-sponsored religion in the Massachusetts Bay Colony ended in his banishment and eventually in his founding of Rhode Island as a haven for religious freedom. In many ways, Roger Williams was himself a victim of Christian nationalism.

But it is both Black and white Baptists who have stood up for the principles of separation of church and state and religious freedom. Martin Luther King Jr. was not just a powerful and prophetic advocate for racial justice and economic justice, but also for religious freedom. He said that the church must be remind-



Photo by Kyle Hilker

**Amanda Tyler of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, speaking at FFRF's national convention on Oct. 14, 2023, in Madison, Wis., talks about the Christian nationalist roots of the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection.**

ed that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but the conscience of the state, and really, Dr. King was speaking to this healthiest relationship between religion and government, and that is the institutional separation of church and state. That is, of course, protected by the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment. It speaks to this fundamental constitution-

al truth that one's belonging in American society should never depend on what we believe or how we worship or how we identify, whether it's religious identification or not.

But this separation of church and state is also good for religious institutions. It gives religious institutions the necessary freedom to follow the dictates of their religion in ways that don't impose on the rights and freedoms of others, without unnecessary government involvement.

But opposing this long and deep legal tradition of separation of church and state has been an equally long and deeply seated political ideology of Christian nationalism, and I believe that the single biggest threat to religious freedom to all today is Christian nationalism.

## Creating our group

Four years ago, our advocacy for religious freedom caused BJC, along with a group of other ecumenical Christians, to form something called the "Christians Against Christian Nationalism" campaign.

This work was born out of a realization that Christian nationalism was becoming increasingly violent and was killing people, particularly in houses of worship.

So, we gathered around an interfaith table and said we need to do something

about Christian nationalism. And it was our interfaith colleagues that said we absolutely agree with you, but we think that you Christians need to be the ones who are speaking most loudly and most forcefully against Christian nationalism.

That's because, for one, Christians can speak with the most authenticity about how Christian nationalism is at odds with

“Christian nationalism uses the language and the symbols of Christianity, and so to the casual observer, it looks like the same thing.”

an understanding of the teachings and life of Jesus. And, it's also because it is the people who are not Christians who find it most unsafe to live in our society. That our interfaith colleagues said we simply do not feel safe calling out Christian

nationalism with the kind of force that it needs to be called out.

One of our main goals at Christians Against Christian Nationalism, for the last four years, has been to answer this question: What is Christian nationalism and how can we recognize it?

We are inspired by the words of James Baldwin, who said "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed if it is not

faced." So, if we are going to dismantle Christian nationalism, we first need to understand what it is.

## Defining terms

I am just presenting to you all today a very similar presentation to what I present in churches across the country. I always start with definitions. I think it's important that we ground conversations of Christian nationalism within a larger frame of religious nationalism — that is, a fusion of national and religious identities and goals. It's a recurrent problem throughout history and around the world today.

But with that as a frame, understanding how we are in a larger arc of history and a larger global context, we zero in on what is Christian nationalism in the American context. So, this is the definition that we use: "Christian nationalism is a political ideology and a cultural framework that seeks to merge Christian and American identities." You'll note that this is a very expansive definition. It suggests that to be a true American, one has to be a Christian. And not just any kind of Christian, but a Christian that holds fundamentalist religious beliefs that are in line with conservative political positions.

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It also suggests that God loves the United States over other countries, and so, for Christians, this contradicts the gospel — John’s gospel — that God so loved the world, not that God so loved the United States. But Christian nationalism tells a story that relies heavily on the myth of the founding of the United States as a Christian nation, this myth that it includes God’s providential hand guiding the course of our history.

We also define white Christian nationalism: “Christian nationalism often overlaps with, and provides cover, for white supremacy and racial subjugation.” This is because it allows this coded language that is still filled with white supremacy and racism, but less explicit than more explicit examples of racist language. We can look to our not-so-distant history and the KKK as an example of Christian nationalism from the past, with its toxic mix of white supremacy, Christian nationalism and violence.

## A lot like racism

Christian nationalism operates a lot like racism. It’s pervasive. It touches every aspect of our culture. And, that Christian nation myth, of course, if it were imbuing God’s favor on the history of the United States, that means that we also say that slavery and racial violence and segregation were also endorsed by God. This is the kind of racism that we’re also seeing in our schools today that are rejecting attempts to teach about racism and slavery, that they would much rather teach a Christian nation mythology than a more candid assessment of U.S. history.

In defining Christian nationalism, we also need to distinguish it from Christianity. For Christians, Christian nationalism is idolatrous, because it merges the political and state authority, which causes us to confuse the two.

It is also a gross distortion of the teachings of Jesus. Jesus, who is always on the side of the marginalized and the oppressed, who was himself a victim of state power, a victim of capital punishment, put to death by the state, Christian nationalism takes the central message of Christianity, which is a gospel of love, and turns it into a false idol of power.

The Christian in Christian nationalism is much more about ethnonational identity than it is about theology or religion. And it carries with it assumptions about nativism, white supremacy, authoritarianism, patriarchy and militarism. But, of course, Christian nationalism uses the language and the symbols of Christianity, and so to the casual observer, it looks like the same thing.

We have to acknowledge that because Christian nationalism has been so much a part of the culture in our country for centuries that American Christianity has been impacted about Christian nationalism. And, it can be difficult to tell the difference between the two. One of the central callings of the Christians against Christian Nationalism campaign is to ask Christians to examine their own theologies, their own worship practices, and to understand how Christian nationalism is leading them away from following Jesus.

We also distinguish Christian nationalism from patriotism. Definitions are important. I define patriotism as a love of country, which can be expressed in many different ways — symbolic ways, like waving the American flag or saying the Pledge of Allegiance, and demonstrable ways, like exercising our First Amendment rights, protesting, choosing not to say the Pledge of Allegiance, voting and helping other people to vote. These are all ways to have a healthy sense of patriotism. Nationalism, on the other hand, is allegiance to



Photo by Chris Line

**Amanda Tyler receives the Champion of the First Amendment Award from FFRF Board Chair Stephen Hirtle.**

a country that demands allegiance over all other allegiances. I tell Christian nationalists that it is no longer patriotism but rather it is veering into the unhealthy territory of nationalism.

## BJC, FFRF Jan. 6 report

We also need to recognize where Christian nationalism is showing up. As referenced earlier, BJC was proud to partner with FFRF to coproduce the report on Jan. 6 and Christian nationalism, which is to date the most comprehensive accounting of how Christian nationalism both inspired and worked to intensify the attack on the Capitol.

It is really vital that this report was made public and was provided to the Jan. 6 Select Committee. Of course, we are deeply disappointed that the report itself was not included in the final report from that committee. But, because it is public, it is out there for all Americans to help understand how Christian nationalism both inspired that attack so we can learn from it to help prevent further attacks on U.S. democracy. But, we would be incomplete if we didn’t understand how Christian nationalism is showing up in other areas, including in churches.

So, I challenge Christian audiences to think about how Christian nationalism is showing up in their worship spaces themselves. Many American churches have an American flag in the sanctuary, often right up on the altar, and so I ask Christian audiences to question, why is that symbol so important to be in your worship space? Are we here to worship God or are we here to worship the United States? To challenge those congregations to have those discussions within their congregations, because before we can be powerful advocates against Christian nationalism in the public square, it’s important that we grapple with how Christian nationalism is impacting us in our religious spaces, as well.

We are also seeing a large resurgence of Christian nationalism in our public schools, and there are so many different examples of this. We’re seeing it in the teaching of Christian nation mythology

in place of a more honest account of U.S. history. We’re seeing it whenever we see the words “Judeo-Christian values” being espoused in the public schools, in the posting of “In God We Trust,” or as Texas is trying to do, in the posting of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms, in bills that would encourage the teaching of the bible as an elective course, in “don’t say gay” bills, in book bans and in my state of Texas, in the passage in the first of its kind of law, that encourages public schools to replace their school counselors with school chaplains.

I want to say a little bit about that law now, in particular. I know it’s already been a conversation when it comes to litigation, but you might know that the group behind that law is an organization called Mission Generation, and that group has stated as its goal to work through public education to win, disciple and send pre-K to 12th-grade youth, the ministry goal is to have 100 million people in discipleship by 2025, by offering the chaplain program in English, Spanish and Portuguese. This group has succeeded in Texas in passing this law, but the way this law is

passed, it does not immediately go into effect. It leaves it up to school boards to vote on whether they will have a school chaplain program.

## Going local

Which leads me to the next phase of the Christians Against Christian Nationalism project. We believe the only way to really scale our project is to go local, so we have started a pilot project, a local organizing project, in North Texas, to help bring together both Christian communities, but also to build a large and diverse network of people who are committed to opposing Christian nationalism in their locality. And so, part of our work to oppose the implementation of the school chaplain law in Texas, has been to work with chaplains, licensed chaplains, in Texas, who came together, and wrote a letter to say that they do not support the school chaplain law.

We had our early signers of this letter, 100 chaplains from various faith traditions and from various contexts, who wrote this letter opposing the school chaplain law. We released it to the media, and that letter was in 30 different media outlets across the state of Texas.

So, the first time that most Texans learned about this law was they heard that chaplains don’t want school chaplains.

We are setting the tone, and so now that school boards are starting to vote, the vast majority of school boards that have voted no, we do not want a school chaplain law in our school.

So, our work at Christians Against Christian Nationalism is really to help bring people of faith together, to show what it means to have responsible faith-based advocacy. One of our principles at Christians Against Christian Nationalism is that people of all faiths and none have the right and responsibility to engage responsibly in the public square.

We have far too many examples of people who say they are motivated by their faith behaving badly in the public square. A very extreme example of that was on Jan. 6, 2021, but we are trying to bring people to go to have a different kind of witness in the public square, to say they are motivated by their faith, but they are not insisting that their faith be reflected in law and policy.

We have an opportunity to do something different, to help legislators tell the difference between faith-based advocacy and Christian nationalism. This is a way for us to support equality, religious freedom, American democracy and to say no to theocratic authoritarianism.

Thank you.

“Christian nationalism tells a story that relies heavily on the myth of the founding of the United States as a Christian nation.”



Photo by Chris Line

**Amanda Tyler, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty, chats with two FFRF members during a break in the convention.**



## Emperor Has No Clothes Award

# Lizz Winstead: ‘It’s just chaos, it’s all chaos’

*This is the speech given by Lizz Winstead at FFRF’s national convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 14, 2023. She was introduced by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. You can watch the video of the speech (and all other convention speeches) at [ffrf.us/con23](https://ffrf.us/con23).*

**Annie Laurie Gaylor:** I’m very excited to end this very stimulating convention with our final speaker, who will be receiving FFRF’s Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

This award is reserved for individuals who make known their dissent from religion, who are like the child in the Hans Christian Andersen fairytale who tell it like it is about religion.

Previous recipients have included: Stephen Weinberg, Andy Rooney, George Carlin, Richard Dawkins, Penn and Teller, Ron Reagan, Christopher Hitchens, Charles Strouse, who wrote the music to “Annie,” Donald C. Johanson, who discovered [the fossil] Lucy, Daniel Dennett, Julia Sweeney, Oliver Sacks, Salman Rushdie and John Irving.

This year, a self-described “insufferable wench” is receiving it, as her Twitter handle is called. Like FFRF, she was born in the Midwest. She grew up in a Minneapolis in a conservative Catholic family and currently lives in Brooklyn, and, needless to say, she’s an atheist. She’s also a comic, co-creator and head writer of Comedy Central’s “The Daily Show,” which forever changed the way people get their news. In 2004, she cofounded the late great Air America radio network, which Freethought Radio used to be a part of. She continues to make numerous TV appearances, including on Comedy Central Presents, HBO, CNN and commentary on MSNBC.

A prominent abortion rights activist, she is one of the founders of Abortion Access Front, a team of comedians, writers and producers, using humor to destigmatize abortion and expose the extremist anti-choice networks working to oppose abortion restriction in all 50 states. She has a podcast called “Feminist Buzzkill.”

Before I bring out the Emperor award and hand it to Lizz, she’s asked us to play this video.

[Video plays, showing the works, benefits and importance of Abortion Access Front.]

Now, I’m going to ask Lizz Winstead to come up and get her Emperor Has No Clothes Award.

### By Lizz Winstead

**W**ow. Thank you! That’s wild. Can you give somebody a naked man in Wisconsin? I feel like it’s illegal. I don’t know what you can do in this state. I’m terrified. Can you exfoliate? I mean, it is removing cells. I don’t know where we’re at anymore, honestly!

Well, I’m honored. Thank you for this award. It’s thrilling to be given an award from people who believe in nothing. I really just want to thank you from the bottom of my believe-in-nothing heart.

I grew up in Minneapolis. I actually live in Minneapolis half the time and in Brooklyn half the time and, every time I drive to Wisconsin, it is always a joy because the billboards are so con-



Photo by Kyle Hilker

**Lizz Winstead gives a look of disbelief while talking about all the outrageous political things happening in the country.**

tradictory. This is the only place where they just aggressively advertise for a porn superstore.

I’ve never understood what a porn superstore is. Is it a place where you buy a pallet of dildos or do you buy just one giant dildo? I don’t know. Maybe both. I don’t want to judge.

And, the abortion billboards are really great. There’s just a baby, like sailor hat at 10 weeks, and you’re like, really? Teeth at two minutes. Are they chewing their way out? What is happening with these billboards? I don’t understand.

I’ll talk a lot about abortion tonight. I’ll talk a lot about a lot of things, but I’ll start with abortion, get to some other stuff, get back to abortion, so just buckle up.

Bodily autonomy is the one thing that we have. It is the thing we must hold dear because it’s the thing that with everything else in our lives, if we do not have that, then we are not 100 percent citizens of this nation.

The government doesn’t need to regulate our bodies. We have Activia for that. There are just things that are simple and that we know to be true.

One of the things that Elie Mystal touched on [in his convention speech earlier in the day] was this imaginary way that you create a false scenario and then it becomes a Supreme Court case or a law. Then it’s this sort of cyclical thing you watch — create a crackpot theory and then write a law that is going to fix the crackpot thing and then the crackpot thing goes away and then they’re like, “see, we fixed it.” It’s like “no, it never fucking existed.” We all feel like we’re losing our minds.

This year in Texas, somebody proposed a law that they wanted to label all of the food products that had fetuses in them. Who’s this for? Is it for people who are just desperately searching for food with fetuses but they can’t find it? Is it for people that have fetus allergies? At a restaurant, you’re like,

“I’m sorry, you said this one didn’t have fetuses. I don’t have my EpiPen.” I mean, OK, the king cake, maybe, but there are really no fetuses in food that I can imagine.

And the intersections of hate are really what’s kind of astounding, right? They’re very good at being intersectional. We talk about it, we need to be better on our side, but it’s true.

During Covid, we were trying to do abortion activism, but was incredibly hard because the unmasked, unwashed nut bags were outside of clinics making things unsafe. There was a woman holding a sign outside a clinic that said, “I will not mask my unborn child.” And I’m like, “Ma’am, you’re wearing pants. If you’re wearing underwear, you’re double masking, so you better sue yourself.”

### We’re in a mess

But, we’re in a mess. The Supreme Court, it’s a mess. The overturning of Roe, Dobbs. Amy Coney Barrett was like, “Why do we need abortion anymore when we just have drop boxes for babies now,” like, “Can’t you just drop it in the Blockbuster slot?” What is she really asking?

Clarence Thomas terrifies me. This whole Clarence Thomas mess, I’m so obsessed with this Harlan Crow situation. First of all, Harlan Crow has this

garden called the “garden of evil,” where he has statues of Stalin and all of these people, and yet he invites Clarence Thomas and Ted Cruz over to his house. Why do you have statues? You could just put up mirrors. Seems easier.

Harlan Crow also has one of the largest collections of Nazi memorabilia. He has a copy of “Mein Kampf.” And he has a yacht. What is it called? The SS-SS? That’s one of my favorite jokes that I’ve written this year, I’m not gonna lie.

But Clarence Thomas warned us in Dobbs when he wrote in his opinion, “We should be looking at birth control. We should be looking at gay marriage.” Should we be looking at interracial marriage? People are like, “not Clarence Thomas,” and I was like, “yes, Clarence Thomas.” Think about it. Ginni Thomas is terrifying. He probably can’t ask her for a divorce, so he’s like, “What if I make my marriage unconstitutional? That’s one way to get rid of the old bitch!”

I bet their safe word is “Don’t tread on me.” I think their favorite sexual position would be the overreach-around. Stay with me, I’ll stop with the Clarence Thomas visuals. I’m sorry, you’re nice people, what am I even talking about?

It’s just chaos, it’s all chaos. The

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House of Representatives is chaos. What is happening? Matt Gaetz is in charge, it seems. Here's a fun fact about Matt Gaetz. Did you know that Matt Gaetz was a strong proponent of the 1619 Project? Did you know that? Yes, until he found out it wasn't a dating site.

I'm just a clown who's mad, right? I started my career wanting to expose hypocrisy, and doing it in corporate media spaces was super hard. Even at "The Daily Show," they'd say to me, "You can make fun of people, but we're not activists here." But that doesn't make any sense. It does people a disservice if you're exposing hypocrisy, but then you don't give them the tools with which they can then fight the hypocrisy.

So, I left there and I did Air America and it was just kind of the same thing, where it was like, "Don't talk about subjects that everybody doesn't want to hear about." And this is progressive people and it really felt patriarchal. It was like, "If you want to talk about abortion, ooh, do men want to hear about it?" I'm like, "Shouldn't they hear about it? I feel like nobody ever got pregnant from a vibrator. Maybe they should hear about it."

## Becoming an activist

I had left Air America and I didn't know what I was going to do next. I decided that I was going to write a book, so I drove back home from Brooklyn in a van with my two dogs so I could write a memoir. As I was wrapping up the memoir, it was right when Wendy Davis was on the floor in Texas. Right? The pink shoes.

I don't know if you remember this, but the media didn't cover it. The internet covered it. And people were live-tweeting it, and only then did the media pick up on it.

I, as somebody who's had an abortion, who kind of had my privilege really shoved in my face, like, "I had my abortion, I moved on." Then I watched Wendy Davis, and then I started doing research, and I learned that week that 27 states dropped that same piece of legislation that they dropped in Texas. And nobody was talking about it.

I was like, "Holy shit, half of America is trying to do this. And no one's reporting on it. No one's talking about it." I didn't know what to do. I was finishing up my book and was going back to New York and was going to drive back with my dogs, and I'm going to go do fundraisers for all of these clinics on the way home.

So, I started calling clinics. I'm like, "Hey, I'm driving across country with two dogs and a van," and they're like, "Yeah, I don't know." But then eventually they looked me up and they were like, "OK, she seems OK." What started out as six shows turned into me traveling to over 100 clinics, doing 100 shows and raising \$18 million.

But here's the thing, y'all: I would do a show, and then I would go visit the clinic. And every other clinic was weirded out that I was there because they didn't know how to accept support because nobody was giving it to them. They were left isolated in their communities. There was nobody saying, "Hey, how can we help you? Are you OK? Do you need help? Is your staff OK?"

Nobody was looking in on them.

And I was like, "Holy shit! This is a crisis!" Because if we burn out these folks and we leave them to provide the care, correct the record, and fight the laws, we're selfish. We're selfish. So, I



Photo by Chris Line

Lizz Winstead is presented the "Emperor Has No Clothes" award by FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

thought, I can try to fix this.

I got back to New York and I had a dinner. I made a bunch of chili and invited a bunch of activist friends and comedians and producers and writers and I said, "I just got finished doing this thing that was supposed to be 10 days and it turned out to be six months and these folks need us to help build them community. Who's in? I want to start an organization. Who's in?"

## Abortion Access Front

And everybody was in. So, what we did in forming Abortion Access Front, we made videos exposing shit and we started traveling around the country. Our organization is part Habitat for Humanity, part USO for abortion care.

We'd do these shows with all those people you saw in the video, and then through the course of the show we had conversations with the activists and the providers in those towns, and they would talk about what their needs are. One of the things that I learned that was so profound was that if you're providing abortion care in a hostile environment, you can't find people to mow your lawn, fix your plumbing or fix your roof. So, we'd do some of that work. We'd redo their gardens, we'd paint their clinic, we'd fix their fence and when it came time for the show, they would talk about what kind of maintenance needs they had. I'll never forget being in Oklahoma City. I was like, "Do you have something to say?" And he says, "I do. Do you mean being an activist I get hired by them and I get paid and I do their lawn?" And I said "Yes. You parking your van out in front of that clinic tells the community you support them, and tells the clinic that they're part of the community."

It was astounding. Then the activists would have tables in the room, and then you'd have 300 or 400 people signing up in the community to then help the community.

Now, they're showing up at school board meetings because there's people to do it. Now, they're showing up for the clinic when there's any kind

of like city council initiative around protesters outside the clinics and stuff. So, we started meeting these pockets of activists and growing these activist communities.

The second thing we learned is a happy accident that a bunch of comics did and I still kinda can't believe it. Let's say we're in Jackson, Miss., and there would be a barrage of protesters. They knew all their names — "That's Cal, that's Chet, they're from there," and we'd go to Alabama and there'd be Cal and Chet, and they'd be like, "They're our locals, Cal and Chet." And I'd go, "Wait a minute, Cal and Chet are from Jackson." So, A, there was tourism, but B, people didn't have a database of who all these people were and what they were doing.

## We joined their churches

So, we all started Facebook accounts, different names, and we started joining their churches, and we started infiltrating and seeing what their plans were, and we started meeting. We've been to 35 states, so we're gathering information from all of these people and through the course of this past seven years, we've amassed the largest

antiabortion database in the country.

In late December of 2021, we started hearing rumblings in the churches. "We're going to go to D.C. We're meeting in D.C." And then we were like, "Hey, all these anti-abortion folks are going to D.C. Does anybody know anything about it?" Then we started following them. Then, Jan. 5, we were watching their prayer services and we're like, "Holy fuck, Greg Locke is there, Jason Storms from Wisconsin is there, all these people are there." Everybody started rolling on all of these different Facebook pages, tonight and tomorrow, and when Jan. 6 happened, these dumb shits, going live on Facebook, and Instagram, and here we are at Abortion Access Front, snap, pull, snap, pull, 30 people we reported to the FBI.

A year later, the same dumb fucks go invade a clinic in Tennessee. The same comedians and activists are like, "Hey, get that shit on tape, because you can't invade clinics. Turns out it's against the law. Actually, it's a federal law." Whoops, 11 people arrested just this week and their charges were upheld . . . and we're just the comedians.

So, when the Dobbs case leak happened, we knew Roe was gonna fall. We started a big giant program called Operation Save Abortion. Within that we did a day-long training that 10,000 people watched and streamed online with five different areas of abortion activism and reproductive rights.

It lays out on our website all the different ways that people can get involved with differing abilities, how much commitment can you make, what can you do? We have expanded out our work to not only help the clinics travel, but help people find a home to help protect abortion rights, because there hasn't been a home.

So, we are growing and expanding with the goal to be a piece of us to be the next Act Up, to take that direct action, to bring joy and fun to expose hypocrisy, because it just isn't any fun to just throw spitballs. If I can't throw spitballs, hit a target, and then have people rallying to make sure that the light is shined on them, it doesn't do any good.

So, to be able to have these tools and create this arsenal for people to have joy, have fun, make change, have hope, it's really the greatest thing I've ever done in my career. I feel really honored that you have honored me with this award of this naked man because I feel like it could come to good use in a fight.

Thank you so much.



Photo by Steve Solomon

Lizz Winstead shares a laugh with the crowd while holding the "Emperor Has No Clothes" statuette at FFRF's national convention in Madison, Wis., on Oct. 14, 2023.



# Why still so few atheists as Nones soar?

This article first appeared on *TheConversation.com* on May 6 and is reprinted with permission.

By Christopher P. Scheitle  
and Katie Corcoran

The number of individuals in the United States who do not identify as being part of any religion has grown dramatically in recent years, and “the Nones” are now larger than any single religious group. According to the General Social Survey, religiously unaffiliated people represented only about 5 percent of the U.S. population in the 1970s. This percentage began to increase in the 1990s and is around 30 percent today.



Christopher P. Scheitle



Katie Corcoran

At first glance, some might assume this means nearly 1 in 3 Americans are atheists, but that’s far from true. Indeed, only about 4 percent of U.S. adults identify as an atheist.

As sociologists who study religion in the United States, we wanted to find out more about the gap between these percentages and why some individuals identify as an atheist while other unaffiliated individuals do not.

## Many shades of ‘None’

The religiously unaffiliated are a diverse group. Some still attend services, say that they are at least somewhat religious, and express some level of belief in God — although they tend to do these things at a lower rate than individuals who do identify with a religion.

There is even diversity in how religiously unaffiliated individuals identify themselves. When asked their religion on surveys, unaffiliated responses include “agnostic,” “no religion,” “nothing in particular,” “none” and so on.

Only about 17 percent of religiously unaffiliated people explicitly identify as

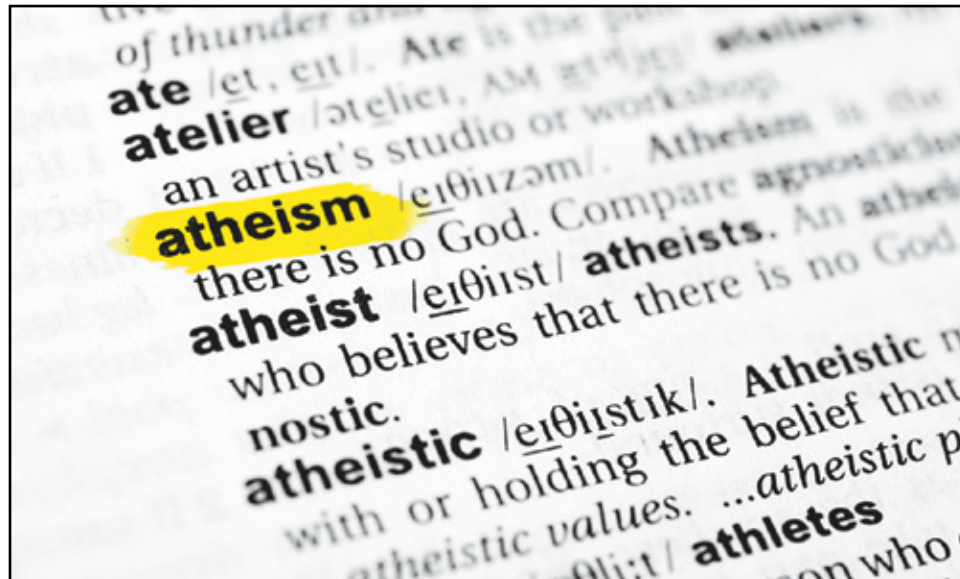


Image by Shutterstock

“atheist” on surveys. For the most part, atheists more actively reject religion and religious concepts than other religiously unaffiliated individuals.

Our recent research examines two questions related to atheism. First, what makes an individual more or less likely to identify as an atheist? Second, what makes someone more or less likely to adopt an atheistic worldview over time?

## Beyond belief

Consider the first question: Who’s likely to identify as an atheist. To answer that, we also need to think about what atheism means in the first place.

Not all religious traditions emphasize belief in a deity. In the United States context, however, particularly within traditions such as Christianity, atheism is often equated with saying that someone does not believe in God. Yet, in one of our surveys we found that among U.S. adults who say, “I do not believe in God,” only about half will select “atheist” when asked their religious identity.

In other words, rejecting a belief in God is by no means a sufficient condition for identifying as an atheist. So why do some individuals who do not believe in God identify as an atheist while others do not?

Our study found that there are a number of other social forces associated with the likelihood of an individual identifying as an atheist, above and beyond their disbelief in God — particularly stigma.

Many Americans eye atheists with suspicion and distaste. Notably, some social

science surveys include questions asking about how much tolerance people have for atheists alongside questions about tolerance of racists and communists.

This stigma means that being an atheist comes with potential social costs, especially in certain communities. We see this dynamic play out in our data.

Political conservatives, for instance, are less likely to identify as an atheist even if they do not believe in God. Just under 39 percent of individuals identifying as “extremely conservative” who say they do not believe in God identify as an atheist. This compares with 72 percent of individuals identifying as “extremely liberal” who say they do not believe in God.

We argue that this likely is a function of greater negative views of atheists in politically conservative circles.

## Adopting atheism

Stating that one does not believe in God, however, is the strongest predictor of identifying as an atheist. This leads to our second research question: What factors make someone more or less likely to lose their belief over time?

In a second survey-based study, from a different representative sample of nearly 10,000 U.S. adults, we found that about 6 percent of individuals who stated that they had some level of belief in God at age 16 moved to saying “I do not believe in God” as an adult.

Who falls into this group is not random. Our analysis finds, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the stronger an individual’s

belief in God was at age 16, the less likely they are to have adopted an atheistic worldview as an adult. For instance, fewer than 2 percent of individuals who said that “I knew God really existed and I had no doubts about it” as a teenager adopted an atheistic worldview later on. This compares with over 20 percent of those who said that “I didn’t know whether there was a God and I didn’t believe there was any way to find out” when they were 16.

However, our analysis reveals that several other factors make one more or less likely to adopt an atheistic worldview.

Regardless of how strong their teenage belief was, for instance, Black, Asian and Hispanic Americans were less likely to later identify as an atheist than white individuals. All else being equal, the odds of individuals in these groups adopting an atheistic worldview was about 50 percent to 75 percent less than the odds for white individuals. In part, this could be a product of groups that already face stigma related to their race or ethnicity being less able or willing to take on the additional social costs of being an atheist.

On the other hand, we find that adults with more income — regardless of how strong their belief was at 16 — are more likely to adopt the stance that they do not believe in God. Each increase from one income level to another on an 11-point scale increases the odds of adopting an atheistic worldview by about 5 percent.

This could be a function of income providing a buffer against any stigma associated with holding an atheistic worldview. Having a higher income, for instance, may give an individual the resources needed to avoid social circles and situations where being an atheist might be treated negatively.

However, there may be another explanation. Some social scientists have suggested that both wealth and faith can provide existential security — the confidence that you are not going to face tragedy at any moment — and therefore a higher income reduces the need to believe in supernatural forces in the first place.

Such findings are a powerful reminder that our beliefs, behaviors and identities are not entirely our own, but often shaped by situations and cultures in which we find ourselves.

*Christopher P. Scheitle and Katie Corcoran are associate professors of sociology at West Virginia University.*

## CRANKMAIL

Here is a collection of correspondence we have received at FFRF from our faithful, but not to us, followers. Printed as received. (We have also opted to no longer include the names of the writers.)

**Repent:** Who cares if there is a Bible verse at school if someone has a problem with it they don’t have to partake. Just like anything else presented to people. You people don’t have a problem pushing homosexual crap on people and stupid pronoun stuff. You should be ashamed of your selves and you will have to answer to God one day and I pray you repent before it’s to late for you.

**FFRF:** Your organisation is an affront to God.  
**Hypocrites:** Isn’t your support of equal representation for satanists akin to supporting organized religion. Sure seems like it to me. Anyhow, gotta run, and I truly hope Ed Asner is still smoldering in hell. I’d pray for you, but who am I kidding, you ain’t worth it.

**Jesus in King!:** Keep LYING. You can do that until Jesus begins to JUDGE your precious world which welcomes only liars and immoral. No liars will be with me in my Kingdom JC. And you will be hated by all on account of my name...but these things will soon be a thing of the past. We will be enjoying our life showered with God’s blessings that you the wicked will not even come to our mind. Soon you will disappear and your dishonesty will be forgotten. Also your names.

**God is in charge:** How did this “life” become “your” life? Did you just spawned yourself at the

desired day? Please, do us all a favor and fly away. Some need to learn the hard way. Fortunately for me I was born in a very cold and selfish world so I have no longing to go back. All the best and the worst. You need it.

**Choose peace:** Can’t deal with fools. Peace on earth is for those who receive him. But division for those who reject him. Done. Can’t deal with fools. There’s clearly peace with the Christians but division with our adversaries.

**F yourself:** Go f yourself you not stopping coach prime you racist troglodytes.

**We are free:** Twist it anyway you will, but you are absolutely WRONG in preaching against our faiths. I think freely for myself and I know very many people who tho k you rooms ars the ones in bondage. Sequelar constitutional is so treasonois of you to say....

**Read the Constitution:** No where does it say “Separation of Church and State in our Constitution you r credibility just went down the Toilet.

You obviously HAVE “NEVER” READ THE CONSTITUTION. You are just like the commies say something often enough and the people will believe YOUR LIE!

NO SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE IN THEIR EXCEPT IN YOUR HATEFUL IMAGINATION.

**We can help:** I feel sorry for Mr. Reagan. We as a human race should reach out to the mentally ill. Like most mentally challenged, they are unaware and not capable of recognizing there illness. Least

we can do is to pray for him.

**Read the bible:** Do not listen to these atheist they don’t know what they are talking about this believe will lead you to HELL FIRE read ROMANS chapter 10:10 it show you how to get save. And save you soul from HELL no tears in HELL FIRE it doesn’t do any good to cry what a horrible place.

**Losers:** What a mistake. Living without religion is like living without breathing air.

**Preach love:** I’m an Idahoan, born and raised. I am a Christin, white. Idaho is too great too hate!

Keep your religion away from my freedoms. And if you can’t? DON’T COME HERE!!!

**Disgusting!:** You people are disgusting trying to force someone to go against their religion when you could just go somewhere else and why don’t you targeting Muslim families who own cake shops how how come how come how come because you only hate Christians it’s only the real God who you fear. Sickening accusing someone of honoring their faith of discrimination. YOU TARGET & DESTROY CHRISTIANS ONLY NOT TARGETING MUSLIMS!



**FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION**  
P.O. Box 750 • Madison, WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • [ffrf.org](http://ffrf.org)

### What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?

Founded in 1978 as a national organization of freethinkers (atheists and agnostics), the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc., works to keep state and church separate and to educate the public about the views of nontheists. FFRF has more than 40,000 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](mailto: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](mailto:info@ffrf.org).



## FFRF student activist award

# Treaty of Tripoli proves we live in secular state

Malik Boyd received a \$2,000 scholarship from the Freedom From Religion Foundation, through the Robert G. Ingersoll Student Activist Award, named for the 19th century's most illustrious freethought advocate, set up by FFRF member John Pusey. FFRF thanks Mr. Pusey for his generosity, making possible Malik's participation in the "We the People" competition in Washington, D.C.

By Malik Boyd



Malik Boyd

I had the opportunity to represent Wisconsin on the national stage in the "We The People: The Citizen and the Constitution" civic education competition from April 13–16. My class from Wauwatosa East High School was one of two Wisconsin teams competing. Each team has six "units" that specialize in different curricular topics ranging from political philosophy to contemporary challenges to democracy. The competition simulates a congressional hearing. Three "hearing questions" are distributed months ahead of the competition. Every unit must read a four-minute prepared response to each question, followed by a thoughtful discussion with a panel of expert judges on matters relating to the topics.

I am a member of Unit One, which

specializes in the philosophy of the Constitution and colonial American governance. During the state-level competition, one of our hearing questions was "How did the Protestant Reformation contribute to developing political thought and governance in colonial America?" Although not directly mentioned in our statement, one document I discovered to be fascinating and useful in supporting our claim was the 1797 Treaty of Tripoli. The treaty secured the safety of American commercial shipping in the Mediterranean, and established a more amicable relationship between the young nation and the Barbary states.

However, what is of most importance to not only my research, but American history as a whole, is Article 11 of the treaty, which states: "The

government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion; as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility, of [Muslims]." It establishes, in plain language, that we live in a secular, pluralistic state. America is not only a country that welcomes a variety of Christian denominations, but also one that welcomes Islam, among other beliefs. Interestingly, the Treaty of Tripoli was approved unanimously in the Senate — although there are some who claim the Senate was unaware of Article 11 — highlighting that this was an accepted truth even during the Constitution's infancy. Only five years later, Thomas Jefferson would write his famous letter describing the "wall of separation between church and state."

The "We the People" competition truly has been life changing, and the best educational experience of my life. Civics education is fundamental to any nation, and especially our Great Experiment. Next year, I will serve as a teacher's assistant in the "We the People" program at Wauwa-

tosa East, with the goal of furthering civics education and passing the "We the People" torch to my younger peers.

I would like to thank my teacher, Mr. Aronow, for his devotion to our class, and my close friends and Unit One mates, Julia Fossum and Felix Gilgannon, for sharing this journey of civic learning with me. Finally, I would like to thank the Freedom From Religion Foundation and Mr. Pusey for their generosity in covering my full travel costs to the national competition.

Malik writes: "I am 17 years old and a junior at Wauwatosa East High School. Since early elementary school I have been fascinated by history and government. My passion for both subjects has grown during the

past decade. I am the junior class president and a member of the Student Council. I also have a deep love for the German language. I am a member of the German Honor Society and the social media manager for my school's German Club. Additionally, I am an editor for my school district's newspaper, *The Tosa Compass*. I plan to earn a bachelor's degree in either economics or political science, and to later attend law school."

“The “We the People” competition truly has been life changing, and the best educational experience of my life.”

## IN MEMORIAM

# David Wilson was noted computer scientist

FFRF Member David L. Wilson, 80, died on Jan. 9 at St. Mary's Hospital in Madison, Wis. A longtime Parkinson's patient, David received all available Covid vaccinations and boosters, yet still died of complications of Covid.

The oldest child and only son of Alan Todd Wilson and Anabel "Ann" Louise Snyder, David was born July 26, 1943, in Milwaukee. After graduating from Pulaski High School, he stumbled in his first semester in college, nearly flunking out and losing the financial support of his parents. After realizing that he had to either attend class or read the material, David thrived academically. At UW-Milwaukee, he completed a B.S. in applied mathematics and engineering physics (1965) and a Master's degree in math (1966). At UW-Madison, he completed a Master's degree (1967) and "all but dissertation" Ph.D. graduate work in computer science.

David served in the Peace Corps from 1967–1969 in Ankara, Turkey, where he taught calculus and computer programming at the Middle East Technical University (METU)



David L. Wilson

and began attending Quaker meetings for the first time. David returned in the summer of 1970 to program a computer-based student records system for METU, now one of Turkey's premier research universities.

Barely six months after being introduced by friends, David and Ann Jarvella were married on July 3, 1971. David was a doting father to their daughters, Sonja and Lydia.

For several decades, he worked happily in two half-time jobs at UW-Madison, the first as a technical writer at computer-aided engineering (CAE), an academic unit that he first joined in 1966. In 1974, he

began concurrent employment as a computer programmer at the Waisman Center, a UW research hub on developmental disabilities and neurodegenerative diseases. While at Waisman, he collaborated with language researchers under the leadership of Professor Larry Shriberg to develop open-source computer programs designed to help therapists evaluate and serve children with unknown causes of speech impairment.

David enjoyed games, especially those that depend on logic. He was a nationally ranked chess player in his young adulthood. For decades, while working at CAE and Waisman, he participated in lunch-hour Sheepshead card games. For fun, he and an electrical engineer friend, James Luscher, built a working computer from a kit (and a few extra parts). Later, David wrote a computer-aided solver for the pen-and-paper game dots-and-boxes and developed a computer-based college football rating system, both of which he shared freely and were adopted and used by others around the country. Most recently, he became interested in Connect 4, at which he remained a strong competitor to the end.

David thought carefully and cared deeply about ethical issues. He and his family attended Quaker meetings for years, though — at the same time — he remained a committed atheist and a supporter of the Freedom from Religion Foundation. This contra-

diction never bothered him. When asked about it, he explained that he never let his atheism stand in the way of his Quakerism. He was an ardent pacifist, never drank alcohol or gambled, supported progressive political and social causes, and was unfailingly honest. He stopped eating red meat in the 1970s, not for health reasons but for moral ones.

An avid reader of science fiction in his youth, he transitioned to non-fiction in later years, particularly to topics in history and science. He enjoyed music, especially musicals, but also folk and classical works. He and Ann sang in the Madison Civic Choir in their pre-parenting lives and later in the Edgewood College Chorale while and after Ann taught there. He was also known to sing and skip in public with his daughters; he was always exuberant, never embarrassed, never self-conscious. He enjoyed life, vacationing every summer in Wisconsin's north woods with his family from the 1980s until 2016.

David was diagnosed with early-stage Parkinson's disease in 2008 and faced this diagnosis without despair. He worked hard to maintain his facility of movement as long as possible and accepted his increasing disability with equanimity and good cheer. He very rarely lost his temper and was a generous colleague and friend. He celebrated the accomplishments of others, particularly those of his family, of whom he was very proud.

### 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.



# FFRF, others host Congressional Reason Reception



Rep. Jared Huffman gets animated during his remarks during the Congressional Reason Reception.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, the Secular Coalition for America and the American Humanist Association were proud to host the inaugural congressional Reason Reception at Capitol Hill on May 1.

Coinciding with the National Day of Reason (annually on May 4) and the Secular Week of Action, the reception celebrated the invaluable role of reason in public policy and honored the enduring legacy of our nation's Founder Thomas Paine, who wrote "The Age of Reason" and strongly supported the concept of separation of church and state during the country's establishment. The event featured the wit and wisdom of secular advocates and members of Congress and served as a strong contrast to the doom and gloom and victimization that is pervasive in Christian nationalist circles.

The reception was attended by the co-chairs of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, **Reps. Jamie Raskin** and **Jared Huffman**, Congressional Freethought Caucus member **Rep. Greg Casar** and numerous congressional staffers, community members and secular and religious activists.

Huffman, who addressed the standing-room only event, called the reception a "counterweight to the National Prayer Breakfast." Casar, who also spoke, said he was "sent here from my constituents in Texas because we badly need help back home here at

the federal level fighting to make sure we are working on inclusion and kindness and helping people and not relying on old theocratic ideas in order to bully people."

Raskin later added his words of wisdom.

"Our people have had it with conspiracy theories, disinformation, fake news and propaganda. It's time to stand up strong for reason, science and Enlightenment values," he remarked. "I was delighted to attend the inaugural congressional Reason Reception with my friend, the co-founder and co-chair of the Congressional Freethought Caucus, Congressman Jared Huffman, as well as the Secular Coalition for America, Freedom From Religion Foundation and the American Humanist Association. With democracy under siege, we're putting truth, critical thinking and common sense back on the public agenda."

Attendees enjoyed the program, preceded and ending with socializing and refreshments and packed with insightful discourse, wit and humor.

Three awards channeling Thomas Paine's writings were bestowed.

"We are proud to present tonight three annual freethought awards in Thomas Paine's honor," Huffman announced. "The awards will recognize the brightest luminaries of Paine's legacy, and we'll also call out one individual who exemplifies everything Thomas Paine opposed."

Casar presented the Age of Reason Award to Texas state **Rep. James Talarico**. "I am so proud that our members voted overwhelmingly to give the award to a rising star in Texas politics," Casar stated, adding that Talarico "is a theologian against theocracy."

Huffman introduced the Common Sense Award, which is dedicated to someone who has stood up for reason, secularism, science and state/church separation. Huffman announced that **Rev. William Barber** who, "has been for years an outspoken critic of Christian nationalism," would receive the honor.

Attendees also had the pleasure of hearing speaker **Kate Cohen**, Washington Post contributing columnist and author of "We Of Little Faith," deliver a keynote address (see following page), and introduced the final award, the Uncommon Sense Award. "This year it goes to a man who has said that God put him in the job to which American citizens elected him, that his position on every issue can be found in the bible, that America is a Christian nation, and that 'separation of church and state' is a 'misnomer': My speaker of the



Pictured on the balcony of the Gold Room at Rayburn House Office Building in Washington, D.C., on May 1 are the planners behind the Congressional Reason Reception. From left: AHA Legal and Policy Director Isabella Russian, AHA Policy Manager Lily Bolourian and Secular Coalition of America Director of Policy and Government Affairs Scott MacConomy. (Not pictured: FFRF Governmental Affairs Director Mark Dann.)

House and yours, **Mike Johnson**."

FFRF Co-Presidents **Dan Barker** and **Annie Laurie Gaylor** were in attendance. In brief welcoming remarks, Gaylor praised Raskin and Huffman for annually introducing a resolution declaring May 4 the National Day of Reason, countering the official National Day of Prayer taking place the first Thursday of May. Gaylor recounted FFRF's court battle to overturn the congressional law, which it won at the district level, but was thrown out on standing. "Nevertheless the National Day of Prayer is unconstitutional," she concluded.

Given the success of this year's event, the secular community plans to return April 30, 2025, to celebrate the next congressional Reason Reception.



FFRF Co-Presidents Dan Barker and Annie Laurie Gaylor and secular activist Bonya Ahmed stand outside the Rayburn House Office Building.



Zenos Frudakis, sculptor of the Thomas Paine statue, shows photos of his latest work to Freethought Society's Margaret Downey and Kate Cohen's husband Adam Greenberg.



Rep. Jamie Raskin aide Rachel Marshall and Rep. Jared Huffman aide Quentin Dupouy were instrumental in setting up the Reason Reception.

Photos by Annie Laurie Gaylor and Margaret Downey

**What are you missing? Check out our other offerings!**

FFRF offers much more than just <b>Freethought Today</b> for news, information and lively banter about freethought and state/church separation.	<b>FFRF press releases</b> <a href="http://ffrf.org/releases">ffrf.org/releases</a>
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<b>Freethought Matters</b> TV weekly show <a href="http://ffrf.org/freethought-matters">ffrf.org/freethought-matters</a>	<b>We Dissent</b> monthly podcast <a href="http://wedissent.org">wedissent.org</a>
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## ‘Uncommon Nonsense’ award

# Restoring reason to its rightful place

*This was the keynote speech given by Kate Cohen at this year’s inaugural Congressional Reason Reception on May 1.*

By Kate Cohen

I will begin this evening by citing scripture.

Thomas Paine wrote, “A long habit of not thinking a thing wrong gives it the superficial appearance of being right.”

Breaking that habit — convincing people to see something as wrong — is the first step toward making change. It is, I believe, at the heart of the protests on college campuses today.

It is also part of my job as a columnist. I look for the things that appear right and ask whether we should be thinking them wrong instead.

I told readers that though I admired then-presidential candidate Pete Buttigieg, I was leery of his use of religion — even for a good cause — even to fight Christian bullies. I asked how exactly posting the Ten Commandments in schools would stop school shootings. No — really — how? I suggested that hospitals that receive public money should make medical decisions based on medicine, not on the bible. I wondered, why do we keep giving churches a pass for discriminating against gay and trans people — do we think they can’t help it? I argued that it’s wrong to grant a public school charter to a Catholic school not just because it betrays the Constitution, but also because you can’t teach Christian doctrine as fact and call it education. And so on.

You know — what should we call it? — common sense.

I write about other topics for the Washington Post — the Barbie movie, zombie laws, soup — but I do often return to the question of America’s cultural, political and judicial deference to religion because the general public persistently seems to think it right, and because I, as an atheist, have no trouble thinking it wrong.

Other wrongs are harder for me to recognize — it takes lots of reading or long discussions with my kids, or, more likely, like most people most of the time, I fail altogether.

But this wrong to which we are acclimated, this elevation of religious belief above other kinds of belief and of a particular religion above other religions, this increasing willingness to ignore our country’s foundational dividing line between government and religion, it’s pretty easy for me to spot.

I was raised Jewish, but I never really believed that the god to whom I directed my dutiful prayers actually existed. I thought of him as a character in a book — a powerful, fascinating, messy character, no more (or less) real than Oberon or Mr. Darcy or Harriet the Spy.

When I heard public prayers as a Jewish kid — and I heard a lot growing up in the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia — I was always braced to hear “Jesus” invoked and relieved those few times when he was not.

But it wasn’t until I thought of myself as an atheist — much later, when I started to raise my kids — that I realized any prayer to a higher power left me out, no matter how carefully crafted it was so as not to offend.

Now, of course, we face a cadre of Christian nationalists who don’t mind giving offense at all, who instead love to



Rep. Jamie Raskin and Kate Cohen at the Congressional Reason Reception on May 1 in Washington, D.C.

take offense at the suggestion that they might have to abide by, say, U.S. labor or public health or nondiscrimination laws. And because I think of God as a human creation — like Huck Finn, but less politically correct — when a judge cites “God’s image” as a reason to ban IVF or when state legislators invoke “Almighty God” in a law forcing people to give birth or when a congressman insists that Israel be supported because of God’s covenant with Abraham, my natural response is . . . “What now?”

You’re making law and deciding law and setting foreign policy based on your interpretation of a translation of the statements of a character in a book?

It’s fine if you want to live your life that way. But it’s wrong — it’s un-American — to make me and my fellow citizens live our lives your way. Lots of us are nonbelievers. But even believers might have a different interpretation. Or a different translation. Or a different book.

You don’t have to be an atheist to think this. You can — as this caucus well knows — believe in God and belong to a congregation and fiercely advocate for the separation of church and state. Bishop Barber shows us that. But it’s harder to trick your average atheist into believing that if we define religion broadly enough, if we refer to a god who is vague enough, we can make it OK to introduce religion into our secular democracy because we’ve somehow included everyone. I mean, not those pesky Satanists, of course. But everyone else.

It’s easier for atheists to see through that. We have the long habit of thinking a wrong thing wrong.

I’ll give you a small recent example. Most of the time, I respond to my editor’s suggestions with: “You’re absolutely right!” and “Good catch.” But, for an early draft of my column on the National Day of Prayer, my editor questioned my use of the word “coercion” to describe how state-sanctioned religious speech affects citizens. Maybe “coercion” was too strong? Maybe I wanted something gentler?

No.

For years I hid my own lack of belief because I was informed by no less an authority than the federal government that a citizen in good standing in this country trusts in God and believes the nation to be under God’s protection. The weight of that rhetoric — and congressional invocations and “so help me God” and “God bless America” after every official speech — kept me from saying what I believe.

That rhetoric and the silence it created helped usher in this moment of astonishing attacks on our freedom — freedom of mind and, increasingly, freedom of body, too. Here, I just want to note that today [May 1], Florida’s six-week abortion ban went into effect, and to extend sympathy and fellowship to the people who will thereby be prevented from living their lives their way. I look forward to the ensuing election results.

Now, I try to say what I believe. And, sometimes I try to get other people to do the same. I don’t ask believers to stop believing. I ask nonbelievers to be more vocal about not believing. If they already think God is a human inven-

tion — like Ahab, but less chill — they should, I think, call themselves “atheists.” They don’t have to give up other cherished identities — they can still call themselves Jewish, too, or Catholic or Baptist. One reader told me he’s working on an autobiography called “The Amish Atheist.” Great.

More people thinking and speaking of themselves as atheists makes it easier for their neighbors and family and elected representatives and even themselves to call out “coercion” when they see it.

More people thinking and speaking of themselves as atheists — more believers glimpsing the perspective of atheists — makes it easier for those who, like you, are defending the wall of separation between church and state.

More people thinking religion in our government is wrong brings us closer to making things right.

Will it work? I don’t know. Thomas Paine wrote, “Time makes more converts than reason.” Bit of an ego check for an opinion writer. On the other hand, he wrote that in the introduction to “Common Sense,” a 47-page triumph of reason that helped spark the American Revolution.

So, time plus reason?

I worry that even both won’t be enough. Especially with the Supreme Court now firmly stacked on the side of “hey — what if religious liberty meant the freedom to discriminate?” and “What if we left pregnant people to the mercy of the well-organized religious right?”

We need help. We need a leader. We need someone to rouse the American people — all of us, believers and nonbelievers — to recognize that the intermingling of religion and government is a true threat to democracy and freedom. We need a unifying figure, a figure who can inspire a revolution.

So, I am pleased to announce that the Congressional Freethought Caucus has one more award to bestow. The 2024 award for Uncommon Nonsense recognizes the person who most violated church/state separation and betrayed the legacy of Thomas Paine. This year it goes to a man who has said that God put him in the job to which American citizens elected him, that his position on every issue can be found in the bible, that America is a Christian nation, and that “separation of church and state” is a “misnomer.”

Believe it or not, this man had strong competition. Govs. Greg Abbott and Ron DeSantis, you’ve done impressive work. Oklahoma Superintendent of Schools Ryan Walters, I salute your efforts. But in a crowded field that includes Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Tom Parker, with an opinion citing God 40 times . . . there’s still a clear winner. The man who said that “every Christian should seek to bring industry, government and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness,” my speaker of the House and yours, Congressman Mike Johnson.

Mr. Johnson, your efforts and your words are moving our cause forward faster than we ever imagined. Together, we can restore reason to its rightful place in American politics.

Thank you.

*Kate Cohen is a contributing columnist for the Washington Post and author of the book “We of Little Faith: Why I Stopped Pretending to Believe (And Maybe You Should Too).”*



# Immortality 'exists' only because of our egos

By Barbara G. Walker

The concept of immortality is one of the most grandiose expressions of human egotism: the pretense that we are so radically different from every other form of life on Earth that we will not cease to exist as individuals.

Despite the undeniable proof we see all around us, that every living thing sooner or later comes to its end, we invent mental images of our own perpetuity. We greatly fear the intrusion of reality upon this imagery, so we create religious brainwashing that begins in childhood and usually remains unquestioned throughout life.



Barbara G. Walker

We also fear to witness what really happens to the dead. In most cultures, corpses are either completely destroyed, or securely enclosed and hidden away. Some

have invented mummification, and its highly profitable modern descendant, embalming, to pretend for a while that the body won't decay after all. But it will, in spite of all such complex procedures, and we don't want to watch. According to the Catholic Church, there are numbers of alleged saints whose bodies remained fresh for centuries, but such nonsense is not much heeded nowadays.

Nevertheless, we have to realize that the dead rot away inevitably, so we create non-Earthly places for them to exist: heavens in the sky, hells underground. We surely know that the sky really has nothing but air, and beyond it lie billions of light-years of dark, empty space. We also know what lies beneath the Earth's surface, and it's not a realm of tormenting demons or hell-fires decreed by the cruelty of a punishing God. How could we endure eternal torture when we are without any nerves to feel?

We know that the pearly gates and legions of harp-strumming angels, which have been literally believed for centuries, are simply not possible. Yet, we can envision them as clearly as we see Santa Claus.



Image by Shutterstock

People speak of the dead "looking down" on them, as if the dead somehow exist in the empty sky. On the other hand, sometimes they "walk the Earth," and are seen as benevolent or malevolent spirits still among us, seen or unseen.

Deep down, we know perfectly well that the only real persistence of our individual image is in the memories of other humans, usually family for a generation or two, or because of our works. Much flowery language develops around our overwhelming desire to be "remembered." We are enjoined to "remember" deceased heroes of all sorts, so they can still exist at least in the imaginations of the living.

Today's fancy, expensive funerals developed from the centuries-old, primitive belief that ghosts are out there somewhere watching and listening, and they want praise and kowtowing, or they might take offense. Ghosts were feared, even those of formerly beloved relatives.

“We know that the pearly gates and legions of harp-strumming angels, which have been literally believed for centuries, are simply not possible.”

A tastier synonym for "ghost" is "soul," a typically religious concept that exists only as a word. It is roughly envisioned as our basic consciousness, actually a product of the gray matter within our skulls, which is

just as perishable as the rest of the body. Patriarchal societies insisted that soul is the really important part of a person, and it is simply a "seed" implanted in a woman by a man. Official church doctrine always declared that a baby's soul comes only

from the father's semen. This led to male claims on family names, property, and innumerable rights not allowed to women.

Of course, it was not until 1827 that the human ovum was discovered and seen to be much larger and more complex than a spermatozoon. Religious notions of the male "seed" bearing the soul are obvious nonsense, but they persist nevertheless among the ignorant who still worship Allah or Yahweh.

Centuries before the advent of patriar-

chy, worldwide beliefs usually attributed the soul to the mother. The primitive but logical assumption was that babies were formed from the mother's blood, which remained in the womb for that purpose instead of emerging with each menstrual phase of the moon. Thus, family relationships were always "blood" relationships; we still use the same term. According to the early Egyptians, a mother gave her "heart's blood" to create her child's soul. Mothers were given more respect than fathers, but male "blood" relatives such as brothers, maternal uncles, nephews and cousins in the maternal line were all part of the lineage.

When Darwin demonstrated that humans are simply life forms like all other animals, having outsized brains to make up for their usually inferior senses and physical strength, religious fundamentalists were horrified by the possible diminution of father souls and father gods, and frantically denied the facts of evolution. Some still do, even though against incontrovertible truths. They claim that only humans possess souls, and all other creatures are soulless. Those who are keenly aware of the genuine love and intelligence demonstrated by their pets tend to contradict this view. Some people bury their deceased pets with as much ceremonial grieving as they lavish on relatives.

So, what can we conclude about our fabled immortality? First, that it is a monumentally successful money-making scam; second, that it is perpetuated by our monumentally egotistical view of ourselves; and third, that it can exist only in our imagination, but nowhere in the real world. The fact that it still exists, and continues to be perpetuated by a majority of human beings, attests to the determination of believers, no matter how contrary the evidence. We need to be grownup enough to control our egotism, accept the brevity of each individual human life, and use our time as wisely as possible.

FFRF Life Member Barbara G. Walker is author of 24 books, including her "Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets," which has been in print since 1983 and was named Book of the Year by the London Times.

## THEY SAID WHAT?

I'm going to state something that you all know — at this critical moment, the United States must show unwavering strength and support for Israel. . . . We have to make certain that the entire world understands that Israel is not alone and God is going to bless the nation that blesses Israel. We understand that that's our role. It's also our biblical admonition. This is something that's an article of faith for us. It also happens to be great foreign policy.

**Speaker Mike Johnson, addressing an emergency meeting of Christians United For Israel.**

*Fox News, 4-15-24*

God is watching. And on judgment day we will all stand before the Lord, Jesus Christ, and we will confess that he is Christ. **Arizona state Sen. David Farnsworth, who voted against a repeal of a 160-year-old abortion ban in Arizona. Farnsworth was named FFRF Action Fund "Theocrat of the Week" on May 10.**

*AZ Mirror, 5-1-24*

Let me be crystal clear: Satanists are not welcome in Oklahoma schools, but they are welcome to go to hell.

**Oklahoma Superintendent Ryan Walters, responding to the Satanic Temple's statement that said they would place their ministers in public schools if Senate Bill 36 becomes law.**

*Fox News, 5-2-24*



Lynn Fitch

First of all, to God be the glory. We all prayed, worked so hard for this day. It all came together because everyone here, everyone that's been involved across our country, we're believers, and we knew this day would come. God selected this case. He was ready. . . . This has been certainly a God thing. We've all been called. We've all been waiting.

**Lynn Fitch, Mississippi's attorney general, at a dinner sponsored by Alliance Defending Freedom in Washington, D.C., in December 2021, to celebrate the fact that the Supreme Court had accepted her state's appeal on Mississippi's abortion ban. This was reported in a major ex-**

**posé, "The untold story of the network that took on Roe v. Wade: A conservative Christian coalition's plan to end the federal right to abortion began just days after Trump's 2016 election."**

*New York Times, 5-28-24*

I think it is you, the women, who have had the most diabolic lies told to you. Some of you may go on to lead successful careers in the world, but I would venture to guess that the majority of you are most excited about your marriage and the children you will bring into this world.

**NFL player Harrison Butker, during his commencement address at Benedictine College, stating that a woman's "most important title" should be that of "homemaker."**

*Associated Press, 5-14-24*

We don't need to live by the regulations and the rules of this state. We are here to serve and to honor God. **Rosemary Baxter, former library director in Metropolis, Ill., who was fired for refusing to stop praying aloud with children and for not ap-**

**plying for state grants because "God would provide."**

*NBC News, 4-18-24*

I'm not concerned with an atheist. I'm not concerned with a Muslim. I'm concerned with our children looking and seeing what God's law is.

**Louisiana state Rep. Dodie Horton, who authored a bill that would make Louisiana the first state to require public schools to display the Ten Commandments in classrooms. For her words and actions, she was named FFRF Action Fund "Theocrat of the Week" on May 24.**

*WWLTV, 5-20-24*

When my mother was alive, I used to believe that I was born biologically. After she passed away, upon reflecting on all my experiences, I was convinced that God has sent me. This energy could not be from my biological body, but was bestowed upon me by God. . . . whenever I do anything, I believe God is guiding me.

**India Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during a re-election campaign stop.**

*Business Today, 5-23-24*



# FFRF members are well versed in poetry

FFRF members occasionally send us their poetry, which usually ends up languishing in our inboxes. For this issue only, we have culled several of these poems and present them to you. We hope you enjoy them.

## Tweaking Noses

“Were you born in a barn?” I was once asked  
by a pious hostile stranger.  
“No,” I said, “it was a stable, and I was placed  
in a manger.”  
I detected in him a dearth of mirth, so I said,  
“For what it’s worth, I don’t think it was a  
virgin birth.”  
He didn’t cry foul or throw in the towel, but  
only reacted with a scowl, so I said,  
“I can walk on water, but not when there’s  
no frost on the heather. Whether I can  
walk on water depends entirely on the  
weather.”  
I then pulled my tongue from out of my  
cheek to go out into the street to seek  
more pious true believers’ noses to  
tweak.  
The clergy would say what I espouse is akin  
to treason.  
I say it’s the result of freethought and reason.  
I once was in the cloud of a religious culture,  
which was like living in the shadow of a  
giant soaring vulture.  
Or perhaps expressed with more effective  
candor,  
Like living in the shadow of a giant soaring  
condor.

**George Tresnak**  
Iowa

## Revisiting the ‘Wizard’

Imagine a religious girl who one fine day  
awakens to the realization that her life story  
is in a strange way similar to Dorothy’s in the  
“Wizard of Oz,” and pens these lines.

• • •

My childhood days seemed bathed in grace.  
I knew each bible tale.  
One day I’d see his heavenly face.  
That was my Holy Grail.  
Back then I thought the preachers’ right  
who praised him to the heights.  
His love was great, so was his might,  
according to their lights.  
Ages ago hadn’t he been there  
to set his people free  
And stop the Pharaoh’s army where  
he drowned them in the sea?  
But what about the Holocaust?  
Something didn’t fit.  
Did his love and might get tossed  
into the corpses’ pit?  
Uncovered by the opened curtain,  
The light begins to stream.  
What once appeared so certain  
is fading like a dream.  
A woman now, this I’ll share,  
A thing must be said:  
Gods do not exist out there,  
they’re only in your head.

**Tom Schlicht**  
Wisconsin

## I Am Eternity

The stars are my gods.  
I spend each day and night among them.  
Through them, I am more than blood and  
tissue and bones.  
Through them, I am the universe. I am  
matter, universal.  
Through them, I am eternity. I am life,  
eternal.  
Through them, I am existence.  
I am infinite.  
I am stardust.  
Every time I awaken, I open my eyes to the  
heaven around me.  
And know that with physics, their rod and  
chaos their staff,  
They created its beauty.  
In this way, when my body is returned to dust  
from which it came,  
I will have lived my entire life in a place  
others only dream of.

**Bryan Petitt**  
North Carolina



Image by Shutterstock

## Move!

Here, the speaker is warning the reader of  
the pitfalls of Christian nationalism. As with  
all of my poetry, I use rhyming and syllable  
patterns and often vary them within and  
between stanzas, which is used quite a bit in  
this poem.

• • •

It’s there, try looking here.  
It’s not anywhere and there is no need to  
fear.  
Biblical inerrancy and nothing for you, clear!  
Their hate, don’t take their bait.  
Control their ingrate fate and before it’s too  
late.  
Legalism and injustice and resist this trait!  
It’s a lie!  
They will try!  
Like a spy!  
To hide the truth from you, take a stand,  
make your command for them to. . .  
Move! Just move!  
It’s time, it’s time to climb.  
Above their hate crime and your life is at its  
prime.  
Reconciliation missed and not their evil  
grime!  
It’s you, in the church pew.  
They’re forming their coup and the bible  
they will skew.  
Forgiveness and acceptance and they have  
no clue!  
Servitude!  
They are shrewd!  
Power rude!  
Love and beauty are true, know firsthand,  
make your demand for them to. . .  
Move! Just move! Where? I don’t care! Just  
get the hell out of here!  
You hurt, resist covert.  
They will harshly convert and drag you  
through their dirt.  
There is no blood atonement and do not  
subvert!  
Be right, with all your might.  
Weather this dark plight and serve love  
throughout the night.  
Not an “Amazing Grace” wretch and keep  
love in sight!  
Theocracy!  
Disagree!  
Set you free!  
Altruism’s the glue, force one’s hand, make  
your grandstand for them to. . .  
Move! Just move!  
**Larry Farr**  
Indiana

## My Invention

It’s a god!  
Not like the ones you see:  
clad for battle, or winged, snakelike,  
formed like the sun, or as an angry beast.  
You can’t see my god,  
who’s like a ghost, without a shadow:  
has a voice, though, talks mainly to Jews,  
in Hebrew, and speakers of English.

This god I made up — out of nothing,  
where there was nothing — found there  
a milieu fit for a universe of things  
he made up: space, stars, planets,  
water; invented light, for the view,  
then a cozy, round world, with  
live creatures, including snakes,  
and beneficial foliage, like fruit trees.  
Here, in a quest for entertainment,  
my god birthed human beings, made them  
subservient to certain requirements:  
to worship him alone, but not be snooping  
into his business; be diligent  
in bearing lots of children.  
For the dutiful, he promised a home  
with himself; damnation for all others.  
As happens with gods, mine, too,  
came off as unreal; so, I made him  
a father; let him sow his seed  
in a Jewish housewife  
(stay with me here) and produce  
a god/man hybrid son, looking like  
a human, making talk like a god;  
could even match his dad at displays  
of magical powers, e.g. resurrecting  
a dead man; bringing the afflicted  
back to health; balancing on water;  
making wine from water; causing  
a multitude of hungry people to feel  
well fed from a small picnic lunch.  
A well-known trait of gods is that,  
in their omnipotence, they can  
answer any pleas from worshippers  
for deviations from the normal.  
A god, such as mine, can honor  
one person’s request for rain, yet  
that of another to stop it;  
aid a nation at war and, also, comfort  
the victims of conflict; bless his clerics,  
but, equally, the sexual targets  
of predator priests; help keep a nation  
white, while easing the pain  
of the dark-skinned who suffer.  
Now, I, like some other inventors  
(Alfred Nobel of dynamite; J. Robert  
Oppenheimer, the “bomb;”  
Kalashnikov, the AK47, to name a few)  
am regretting my handiwork, my  
failure to foresee that a god  
can become a petty tyrant:  
as to murder all the first-born of Egypt;  
nearly cause all life to perish  
in a great flood; tolerate the spread  
of deadly diseases; give license to wars  
between differing religious sects;  
and condone racial disharmony.  
If only I hadn’t had this foolish idea,  
if only such cruelty weren’t now an ideal;  
if only I hadn’t made of this god a “he,”  
so that male jurisdiction would have such  
appeal.  
Too bad that confessing my fault won’t  
absolve me  
of loosing a peril on all who exist.  
Of all of the crimes any man could be guilty  
inventing a god must come first on the list.  
**Bill McCormick**  
Ohio

## My God

My God cannot be found in gold-leafed  
scrolls  
or in any holy books, or etched onto stain  
glass windows,  
or pronounced from the mouths  
of evangelical holy men spewing words  
as if they come from a haunting terror.  
My God does not flaunt itself in ritualistic  
dances,  
or lie in ancient tombs or pyramids.  
It doesn’t hide in the clouds or watch  
over humanity  
from some strange sphere beyond life.  
It neither rewards nor scolds nor offers  
solace  
to those who renounce hedonism.  
My God is the hum of the winds in spring  
and the opalescent colors of desert sands.  
My God ejects lava from forbidden  
volcanoes  
and comes thundering as frothy waves  
in a winter storm.  
It lives in the eyes of a tiger and in the gait  
of a tortoise.  
It drifts as a jellyfish on ocean currents  
and drips as sap from venerable trees.  
My God does not live apart from anything.  
It lives beyond time in an imponderable  
place  
which cannot be explained.  
But assuredly, it exists or just is,  
animating itself in a zillion miraculous  
manifestations throughout the Cosmos.  
Everything is a signature of my God.  
It is change and it is consistency.  
It is logic and it is chaos.  
It is ecstasy and it is sadness.  
It is nothing and it is everything.  
I cannot speak about my God because it  
lives  
in my tongue and my thoughts and the  
dark fissures  
lurking in my world without revealing its  
ultimate nature.  
My God hangs on the threads of light and  
dark  
on a delirious ride with me as its  
momentary partner!

**Neal Grace**  
New Mexico

## Atheist

Atheist is a word for the emotionally  
charged herd,  
I prefer a realist as my word.  
A myth is unreal but is the religious deal,  
with lots of money appeal and control  
zeal.  
People are afraid of a virus they can’t see,  
but follow a cult with also no real view for  
you and me.  
Viruses are real but a myth is someone’s  
ideal,  
real and ideal have no common feel  
for people’s mythical appeal.  
People want to believe in an afterlife for  
their need,  
but where that is must be a crowded place  
indeed.  
Hundreds of religions/cults have come  
and gone  
with no answers for their hopeful throng.  
People pray all the time to their mythical  
view,  
only to find nothing new.  
People pray for something to save their  
day,  
only to find it not going their way.  
A myth is a view obscured to you,  
to go against your view a real few that  
confront you.  
The group’s zeal is to fight the godless  
few that have a counter view  
that doesn’t appeal to your mythical ideal.  
You have a right to believe in any view  
as long as it doesn’t harm me or you,  
a destructive view is not good for most of  
you.  
In God we trust, let us all go bust.  
**Tom Forgatsch**  
Hawaii



## LETTERBOX

### Religion has long been the inspiration for wars

It's no secret that most, if not all, wars have been started and inspired by religious differences, whether disagreements between different factions of superstition or against nonbelievers. In more recent history, Hitler was strongly supported by both Catholics and Protestants during WWII, and was even backed by the pope, at least partly, against the Jews. In even more recent times, President George W. Bush started two unnecessary, unwinnable wars in the Mideast because his fictitious "god" inside his head told him to, and he obediently did so. First Afghanistan, then Iraq.

According to Yale history professor Timothy Snyder's book "The Road to Unfreedom," Putin's attack on Ukraine is also highly inspired by religion, since it has been "known" for hundreds of years that God wanted the two countries to be united!

House preacher Mike Johnson must have been weak in history, though, since he acted against God's will when he joined the Democrats and supported help for Ukraine. Didn't he consult God first, as he does for just about everything else? Ironic, isn't it?

And in our own very religion-infested country, we may be approaching some kind of civil war, again thanks to religion! Don't we ever learn?

California

### Freethought Today remains informational, inspiring

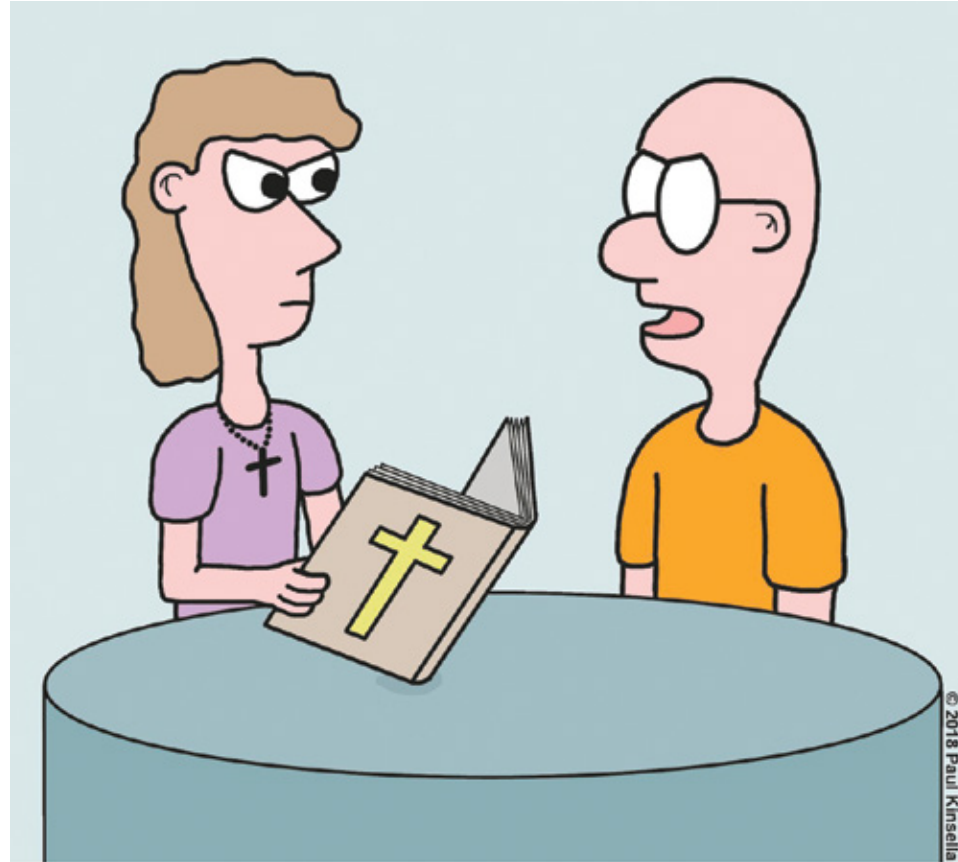
Each month, I receive several fine publications in the mail, and usually set them aside on my desk until I have leisure time to leaf through them. Unfortunately, most remain there for days or even weeks as I invariably have less free time than my reading queue requires, that is, with one exception — Freethought Today, which is so thought-provoking and compelling for me, I never fail to devour it straight away. Each issue is informational, educational, entertaining and, most of all, inspiring.

Freethought Today helps to connect me, if only vicariously, with like-minded folks, providing me with a sense of fellowship, something sorely lacking in the very conservative rural community where I live. I can often relate to many of the topics and stories, such as the article, "Kindergartners no longer being led in class prayer," from the March issue.

In the early 1980s, I substituted for a kindergarten teacher in our public elementary school who required surgery. On my first day, when it was time to prepare the children for snacks, several of them informed me that their teacher always prayed with them before they ate. I was, of course, taken aback by this news, but calmly responded that they could pray if they wished, but they didn't have to, and could also just eat. A few bowed their heads, while most of them just eagerly proceeded to eat.

Troubled as I was about what this teacher was doing with the children, I was reluctant to raise the issue with the principal. After all, I was new to this school, and valued the job.

The teacher for whom I substituted was senior to me by many years and well-respected by the rest of the staff. Rather than report the infraction to the principal, I decided I would discuss it privately with the teacher when she returned.



"We are both 'godless'.  
I'm just the one who knows it."

Then, one day while eating lunch in the break room, I listened while several other teachers were expounding on religion and employing the false narrative that the United States is a Christian nation. One of them even boasted about having her misbehaving third-graders write out bible verses. After my recent classroom experience, I could no longer hold back, and interjected: "No, our nation is actually not a Christian nation, but a pluralistic society, with its citizens having diverse beliefs, including nonbelief in the supernatural." The room went silent, and the stares were chilling, but it wasn't long before I would discover an even more egregious constitutional transgression.

I soon became aware that, on a designated school day each week, a nun from a local parish would come into the school to provide religious instruction. Apparently, the school administrators felt it was easier to bring the nun to the students than take them to the parochial school a few blocks away.

At that time, I knew nothing of FFRF, but I did know I needed to report this blatant violation to someone capable of enforcing state law, so I called the New York State Department of Education and made a formal complaint, detailing everything I had witnessed at the school. It took a month or so for the wheels of bureaucracy to roll, but even before the praying teacher returned, I was informed by the person assigned to the case that the school received written notice from the department in the form of a "clarification" of state law regarding religious instruction and prayer in school. Soon thereafter, those students whose parents requested religious instruction for them could be seen marching from the school to the church on their designated day.

Though I was glad to see the issue "resolved," I could only hope the teachers at that school were able to enhance their own education regarding the status of religion in American public education.

Thank you, FFRF, for all you are doing to protect our right to reject religion!

New York

### Most U.S. holidays are based on secular reasons

Christopher Hitchens perspicacious book, "God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything," as well as Richard Dawkins' "The God Delusion," elicit the following in reference to how we are reasonably fortunate in the United States (so far) to have very few days wasted on officially sponsored holidays and, of those days, to have most of them derived from secular achievements.

In spite of Ronald Reagan's crass attempt to argue that there should NOT be a special holiday for Black Americans, most people think of Dr. Martin Luther King's Jr. birthday as a cause for general celebration. Thanksgiving has a spiritual undertone, but is nonsectarian and devoted mainly to family. President's Day, Memorial Day, Independence Day and Veterans' Day speak for themselves.

And we are edging ever nearer to point when Christmas/Hanukah/Kwanzaa have been sufficiently nationalized to be repackaged as the universal winter-solstice vacation with, as Thomas Jefferson used to say, "the compliments of the season."

Ohio

### Thanks, FFRF, for calling out prayerful coach

I am so proud of FFRF and will continue to be a member. I am a longtime sports fan, especially women's sports, but I have always been offended by coaches spewing religious propaganda. For the first time in my 58 years, I feel there is someone who has my back. FFRF! Thank you! People like South Carolina basketball coach Dawn Staley must be stopped. FFRF has stepped up to protect the young athletes who do not share their coach's beliefs but are too afraid to speak up. Keep it up!

California

### FFRF a ray of hope as country moves backward

Thank you for shoring me up each day by reporting your activities around the country. As a very senior senior, it is disheartening to see and hear of the machinations of Christian nationalists. You are a ray of hope as I watch the country turn back the clock. Will women ever be equal, in charge of our own bodies, and see permanent separation of church and state? I hope!

Massachusetts

### FDA should crack down on God-inspired remedies

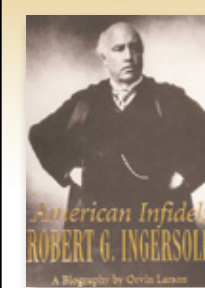
The letter from Stephen Van Eck in the April edition was a bit of a surprise to read. It's been quite a while since I've heard anyone mention the Genesis II Church of Health and Healing and their phony health product, the Miracle Mineral Solution.

Several years ago, I used to work for a natural products distributor. The business owners were very religious and, unfortunately, very gullible. While many of the products we carried were legit, I lost track of how many questionable lines we picked up over the years. Especially disturbing was the fact that if you could convince the owners that a certain product was inspired by God, that made it even more likely that they would fall for it.

Enter the Genesis II Church and their magical Mineral Solution. They claimed that its product came from God, and they meant that literally. I remember that the founder of that church stated that the very formula for this solution itself came in a direct revelation from God to him personally! Wowzers! It's bad enough to have an ineffective, even potentially dangerous, item on the market. But, it's even worse when people think it's somehow sanctioned by a deity, which makes it unquestionable, right? Our owners were beyond excited to add this "wonderful" new product to our catalog.

Not wanting to lose a job I needed at the time, but not sure I could stand by and do nothing about what I was witnessing, I took the initiative and actually sent a bottle of the Miracle Mineral Solution with a complaint letter about it to the FDA. Several months later, I actually got a response back. They essentially said that while they didn't have enough to launch a full investigation to ban the product, they would at least put it on the equivalent of an FDA fraudulent product watch list that was available to the public. Far less than what I was hoping for, but at least it was something.

#### American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll



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

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As FFRF frequently states, “It pays to complain.”

I know many people dread greater government oversight in our lives for different, understandable reasons. But I, for one, feel that the FDA, at least, needs more teeth and funding to go after the wave of bogus and dangerous so-called health products on the market, especially the ones that claim some kind of religious power or inspiration. Unless, of course, those manufacturers are prepared to actually prove that such claims are indeed true.

Missouri

## God’s omnipotence seems more like impotence

“Let’s be realistic, God can do anything,” said a commentator on the Catholic radio station Relevant, a nationwide mass-indoctrination — no pun intended — network that I monitor just for entertainment when the news on NPR gets too depressing. And what might be more entertaining than the dripping irony of such a statement made during a discussion of the 1917 “Miracle of the Sun,” when a large crowd in Portugal was said to have observed the appearance of the Virgin Mary descending from the sun. “Dripping” is perhaps another unintended pun, since the clothes of the assembled crowd had been drenched by rain before the angelic apparition, whereupon their clothes, of course, instantly became dry.

Well, to be “realistic,” if God can do anything, then he presumably does do anything, arranging for, say, wars, famines, murders, sexual assaults and the other ills of human existence. It’s all part of his plan. Yes, God certainly does work in mysterious ways.

How long will believers cling to the supposed realism of their deity’s power to “do anything?” Does it not seem to adherents that his omnipotence manifests more as impotence? Yes, let’s be realistic, Relevant radio. The true relevance to a world still held captive by religious dogma is, in Sam Harris’ words, “the task of convincing a myth-infatuated world that love and curiosity are sufficient and you don’t have to delude yourself and frighten yourself with Iron Age fairy tales.”

Maine


## Christians continue to degrade our language

I’m always appalled how Christians degrade and pervert our beloved English language. Here’s a sentence from the Monroe, N.C., public school’s Facebook page: “Please continue to lift up the prayer requests mentioned tonight.”

**Crossword answers**

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

**Dictionary**  
 Definitions from [Oxford Languages](#) · [Learn more](#)

 **a·vowed**  
 /ə'vould/  
 adjective

that has been asserted, admitted, or stated publicly.  
 "an avowed atheist"

For me, this evokes an odd image of stuffing a rocket’s payload compartment full of prayers and then launching it skyward hoping to influence a deity. They’ll keep using this ridiculous “lift up” device ad nauseum.

I get so tired of Christians’ misuse of language. I’ve heard Lutheran preachers do it from the pulpit since I was a little boy.

Michigan

## Human dignity does not come from religion

Married couples struggling with fertility issues. Teenagers struggling with sexual-identity issues. These troubled people are now, according to the Vatican, committing “sins” — in-vitro fertilization, surrogate motherhood, gender affirmation — that were unknown back when we all got absolved from sin in 29 A.D. But wait, no! These new crimes are not just personal “sins,” says the Church, they are offenses against all of humanity, offenses against human dignity.

What a sick joke. The Roman Catholic Church has been assaulting the dignity of billions of humans for two millennia. Forcing abject worship of an imaginary celestial tyrant. Forcing innocent children to fear eternal damnation. Forcing dying people to suffer agonizing pain until “God calls them.” Forcing women to bear and raise children they cannot properly care for, destined for a life of misery. The Church’s intellectual abuse of thinkers like Galileo is historic. The Church’s financial abuse of gullible “sinners” is a 2,000-year-old con game that pretends that death can be cheated, for a price. And, yes, we’ve begun to understand how much sexual abuse has been suffered over the centuries at the hands of priests, forced by unnatural vows of celibacy to violate every shred of human dignity.

If humans were all really deserving of eternal punishment in the pit of hell, that wouldn’t argue for human dignity. If a magic man in Rome were fetishized as the only person in the whole world who infallibly knows right from wrong, that wouldn’t argue for human dignity. If sadomasochistic fascination with a story and symbol of human torture and murder were considered “reverent,” that wouldn’t

**Cryptogram answer**

I’m quite a rationalist. I’m not superstitious. I think life is too full of natural wonders and logical complexities to worry about illogical things. — Benedict Cumberbatch

argue for human dignity.

But, it’s not true. Dignity does not come from submission to ancient superstitions or to modern-day made-up moralizing. It comes from a life lived fearlessly, generously, and rationally.

Arizona

## Try using the ‘I could be wrong’ strategy

Some years ago, while I was sitting at the tavern enjoying a beer, a young man wearing an emblazoned “Jesus” T-shirt walked in and sat next to me. Soon after sitting down, he said: “I don’t mean to interrupt, but do you know Jesus as your savior?”

Portraying seeming indifference and in a monotone voice, I said, “I’ve heard of him.” Undeterred, he persisted: “Would you like to talk about Jesus?” I said: “Sure, but before we do, let’s get an understanding. I don’t know everything there is to know in life. I could be wrong about certain things, yet, I must admit to having a strong opinion about your Jesus. So, right now, though, I am willing to say ‘I could be wrong.’ If you can say you could be wrong about Jesus, and I hear you say that, then let’s you and I have that discussion within an atmosphere of inquiry.”

There was a noticeably full-pregnant pause of confounding silence from him that I, chuckling inside, imagined his biased and resistant neuronics were blowing up inside his head. A few minutes later, he nonchalantly said: “Did you know that Jesus died for your sins?” Holding to my aforementioned preference, I sighed, looked at him and said: “Say it. Go ahead, say, ‘I could be wrong.’” Crickets.

Minutes later, I paid my tab, looked his way with a nod and a smirking grin, got off the stool, stretched and said: “I could be wrong, but it’s highly unlikely, I think your bible-Jesus is a man-made hoax. You have a nice day.”

My dear FFRF fellow freethinkers, try this effective strategy when dealing with the unrelentingly fervent ill-informed Jesus apologists out there. They squirm in their proverbial seats just to utter “I could be wrong.”

Washington

## ‘Faithmammals’ now the majority of population

It seems that our country is, unfortunately, heading toward Christian nationalism rule on multiple fronts. I will indeed vote secular.

There is evidence from University of Pennsylvania research that thousands of years of adherence to belief in gods and religious activity has changed the physical brain structure of many

humans. Brains are now hardwired to believing in a god. It’s a different species of human that now makes up the majority of the global population. De-luded humans.

Unnatural “faithmammals” (having a different brain structure than prior humans) far outnumber the natural humans now. It’s tragic that religions are promoted as true, good and even obligatory (among the faithful), when, in fact, gods are fake and religion was invented for gain.

My definition of “faithmammals” is “a religion-developed species variant of a human being with a spiritual-belief-altered brain.”

Missouri

## Founder Thomas Paine is deserving of a monument

When I was a high school student, I became aware of Thomas Paine from a single paragraph in a history book. That summer I read four of his books and they reshaped my understanding of the political philosophy underpinning the founding of the American republic. I learned that he influenced thinkers who have massive monuments in Washington, D.C., among them Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln.

It is fitting that there should be a memorial to someone who had such a profound yet mostly unknown influence on our country, and his progressive ideology challenges us to this day. Thomas Paine deserves much more than a passing thought in dry historical surveys for his lasting influence beyond politics and philosophy on writers such as Mark Twain and Bertrand Russell.

A Thomas Paine memorial is something I would take my family to visit and should be part of every tour of Washington, D.C. Young people need to be aware of Paine and his contributions to America and a monument will draw attention to his legacy and spur much deserved interest in his contributions. That is why I fully and enthusiastically support the efforts of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association to erect a monument to this pivotal figure in this nation’s early history.

Alabama

**Editor’s note:** For more information about the Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA) or to donate to help fund the memorial, go to [thomaspainememorial.org](http://thomaspainememorial.org). FFRF is a partner of TPMA and FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor is on its board of directors.

## Graham doesn’t deserve to have Capitol statue

I was sick to my stomach when I watched the unveiling a few days ago of a statue of Billy Graham in the U.S. Capitol. The ceremony was led by that known theocrat Mike Johnson.

Billy Graham has done nothing for this country to warrant such acclaim, other than to spread the nonsensical information about Jesus and the alleged miracles that he carried out.

It was disconcerting enough when, in 2020, his body laid in state in the Capitol Rotunda and was visited twice by Donald Trump and Mike Pence.

It was, indirectly, a dishonor to the two wonderful Americans who recently had the same recognition, Robert Dole and John McCain, who, based on what they did for this country, are 1,000 times more worthy of this honor.

New Jersey





The convention will be held at the Sheraton Denver Downtown.

# FFRF convention, Sept. 27-29 Destination: Denver

Join the Freedom From Religion Foundation in Denver for its 47th annual convention from Sept. 27-29 at the Sheraton Denver Downtown. For information about the convention speakers, turn to page 3, or go to [ffrf.org/convention2024](http://ffrf.org/convention2024).

## General schedule

There will be a Thursday afternoon Welcome Reception, which is complimentary (see registration form). Convention registration will re-open at 8 a.m. Friday morning. The program will begin at 9 a.m. that morning and will run through Saturday evening.

On Sunday morning, the membership and State Representatives meetings will take place, ending by noon.

## Registration

Registration for the convention is \$100 per FFRF member, \$105 for a companion accompanying a member, \$160 for nonmembers (or, you can save money by becoming a member for just \$40). High school students or younger are free and the college student rate is \$25.

Return the registration form on the right, or sign up at [ffrf.org/convention2024](http://ffrf.org/convention2024).

## Optional Group Meals

For organized group meals, there will be a Friday dinner buffet, a Saturday "Non-Prayer" breakfast and a Saturday dinner.

Vegetarian, vegan and gluten-free menu options are available. Please specify specialty/ADA requirements on the registration form.

### Friday dinner

Starter: Boston Bibb wedge salad, pancetta, heirloom tomatoes, Sedona blue cheese with a creamy chive dressing.

Entree 1: Pan-seared chicken with roasted red pepper sauce and brown butter gnocchi and snap peas.

Entree 2: Pan-seared salmon with charred corn soubise, snap pea and farro succotash and charred tomato beurre blanc.

Entree 3: Quinoa-stuffed heirloom tomato, roasted mushroom sauce, with butternut squash puree and vegetable medley.

Dessert: Carrot cake with mascarpone whip, bourbon caramel sauce, candied pecans. GF, VG: Coconut chia pudding with fresh berries.

### Saturday breakfast

Starter: Yogurt, berry compote, granola.

Scrambled eggs, bacon, potato cubes with parm and green onion). Fresh orange juice, Starbucks regular and decaffeinated coffee, selection of Tazo teas, sugar three ways, milk and cream.

### Saturday dinner

Starter: Roasted baby beet salad with radish, frisee, baby kale, watercress, dijon mustard vinaigrette.

Entree 1: Grilled sirloin, cauliflower mashed potatoes and charred broccolini with three-pepper demi.

Entree 2: Seared steel head trout, green onion beurre blanc, snap peas, and vegetable medley farro.

Entree 3: Roasted vegetable, tri-colored quinoa stuffed squash, carrot coulis with snap peas.

Includes: Oven baked rustic rolls and sweet creamy butter, freshly brewed Starbucks regular and decaffeinated coffee and specialty Bigelow teas.

Dessert: Chocolate cheesecake with raspberry sauce. GF, VG: Cassis mousse with peach compote.

## Hotel

We encourage you to register and book your hotel room soon. Reservations must be made on or before Sept. 3 to receive FFRF's discounted room rate. If you need an accessible room, please state your needs when making the reservation.

### The Sheraton Denver Downtown

1550 Court Place, Denver, CO 80202  
Phone: 303-893-3333. State that you are with the "Freedom From Religion" room block.

<https://ffrf.us/hotelFFRFCon2024>

Rates are \$249 for a standard guest room.

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION **2024**  
**NATIONAL CONVENTION**  
**DENVER** SEPTEMBER 26-29

## CONVENTION REGISTRATION FORM

Or register online: [ffrf.us/convention2024](http://ffrf.us/convention2024)

### REGISTRATION FEES

	Number Registering	Cost
Member	___ \$100	\$ ___
Spouse or Companion (Non-member accompanying member)	___ \$105	\$ ___
Child (High school or under accompanying registrant)	___ Free	\$ ___
College Student with ID	___ \$25	\$ ___
Non-member	___ \$160	\$ ___
<input type="checkbox"/> Or, I will join FFRF for \$40 (and save \$20)	___ \$140	\$ ___

### OPTIONAL MEALS / EVENTS

Please specify your dietary requirements below, under ADA or food allergy accommodations. FFRF does not make money on convention meals. Prices include the 8% sales tax and 27% service charge.

#### Thursday, September 26th

Welcome Reception [Must register to attend] \_\_\_ Free

Check box if attending  Registrant 1  Registrant 2

#### Friday, September 27th

Friday Night Plated Dinner \_\_\_ \$95 \$ \_\_\_

Registrant 1  Chicken  Fish  Vegetarian  Vegan

Registrant 2  Chicken  Fish  Vegetarian  Vegan

#### Saturday, September 28th

Non-Prayer Breakfast \_\_\_ \$55 \$ \_\_\_

Registrant 1  Regular  Vegetarian  Vegan  Gluten Free

Registrant 2  Regular  Vegetarian  Vegan  Gluten Free

Saturday Night Plated Dinner \_\_\_ \$100 \$ \_\_\_

Registrant 1  Beef  Fish  Vegetarian  Vegan

Registrant 2  Beef  Fish  Vegetarian  Vegan

► Total \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please describe your ADA or food allergy accommodations needed in order to fully participate:

Registrant 1  None  Vegetarian  Vegan  Gluten Free

Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

Registrant 2  None  Vegetarian  Vegan  Gluten Free

Other (Please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

(Make check payable to FFRF) Return with payment to:

**FFRF, Attn: Convention | P.O. Box 750 | Madison, WI 53701**

I attest that I and my guests will be fully vaccinated for Covid-19 as of 9/12/24.

I attest that I have a physician's order against my Covid-19 vaccination.

Name of Registrant 1 \_\_\_\_\_ Pronouns (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Registrant 2 \_\_\_\_\_ Pronouns (optional) \_\_\_\_\_

I am including additional registrants (enclose your additional list, with meals, if any).

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State / ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Phone\* \_\_\_\_\_ Email\* \_\_\_\_\_

Credit Card Number \_\_\_\_\_ Expiration Date / Security Code \_\_\_\_\_

Billing Name / Signature \_\_\_\_\_ \*Contact information for in-house use only

Registration and cancellation deadline is September 13th, 2024.  
Registration cancellations received after September 13th, 2024 will not be refunded.