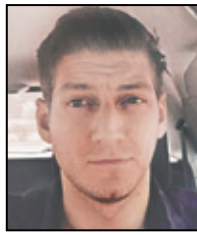


# FREETHOUGHT TODAY



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contest winners  
announced**

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Vol. 41 No.7

Published by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

September 2024

## Monkeying around



**FFRF Events Manager Sadie Pattinson shows off the Clarence Darrow statue in Dayton, Tenn., while visiting there to begin preparations for next year's 100-year celebration of the Scopes "monkey trial." The 7-foot-tall statue by sculptor Zenos Frudakis was installed by FFRF in 2017 on the Rhea County Courthouse grounds, opposite a statue of William Jennings Bryan, the prosecuting attorney in the famous trial in 1925.**

## Settlement reached by FFRF on behalf of The Satanic Temple

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has reached a settlement on behalf of The Satanic Temple, in a federal lawsuit filed earlier this year against the Shelby County Board of Education in Memphis, Tenn., over serious First Amendment violations. FFRF represented the Temple in the suit and successfully ended the school system's constitutional violations.

The school district attempted to thwart The Satanic Temple's efforts to begin an afterschool club at Chimneyrock Elementary School. Rather than allowing it to rent school facilities on the same terms as other nonprofit organizations, including the Good News Club, the Shelby County Board of Education chose to defy the First Amendment. The district charged The Satanic Temple discriminatory rental and security fees, refused to adequately communicate, canceled the Temple's club reservations, and generally treated members of the club as second-class citizens.

Memphis-Shelby County Schools "cannot pick and choose how much it charges an organization renting its facilities based on how much it does or does not favor the organization's viewpoint, the content of its speech, or its religious beliefs," asserted FFRF's lawsuit filed in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Tennessee in March.

Finally, the Shelby County Board of Education agreed to make amends in a number of ways.

The board will pay more than \$15,000 to resolve the suit. That includes \$14,845 in attorneys' fees and costs to FFRF and



cooperating counsel. The board will also pay one dollar for nominal damages to The Satanic Temple and \$196.71 for various fees previously paid by the Temple in connection with rental reservations that had not yet been refunded.

Further, the Shelby County Board of Education has agreed not to discriminate against the organization with regard to its requests to rent and use school board property at Chimneyrock Elementary School; the Temple will be subject to the same rules and requirements as other nonprofit organizations seeking to rent or use the school's facilities. In addition, the school board's administration has promised not to hold any press conference with regard to the Temple's lawful rental or use

See *Satanic Temple* on page 4

## Texas finally pays FFRF over lawsuit

The 8-year legal saga over censorship by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott of a Bill of Rights display has finally ended with receipt of attorneys' fees by the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

Although FFRF won the lawsuit with a judgment by the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals last year, disputes and delaying tactics by the governor held up the required attorney fees and costs totaling \$358,073.67, which were received this week. Of that, \$184,727.11 reimburses FFRF for staff attorney time.

"We're pleased this federal lawsuit can finally be put to rest," comments Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president. "But had Ab-

bott only done the right thing from the start, or at least accepted the decision of the federal court back in 2017, Texas taxpayers would have been spared most of these attorneys' fees."

The lawsuit began in February 2016, after Abbott ordered removal of FFRF's duly-approved and permitted Bill of Rights "nativity" display from the Texas state Capitol. Abbott ordered the display removed only three days after it was put up on Dec. 18, 2015, lambasting it as indecent, mocking and "contributing to public immorality."

The exhibit, designed by artist

See *Texas* on page 4



## FFRF survey results Who are we?

Freedom From Religion Foundation members are a unique group, bound by a commitment to reason, evidence-based beliefs, and the separation of church and state. But what sets us apart?

What shared experiences, convictions, and demographics define our vibrant community?

With an impressive more than 11,000 of our 40,000 members responding, our 2024 membership survey results provide a comprehensive view of our organization. This exceptional level of participation, nearly three times the typical rate, is a testament to the active engagement of the FFRF membership. Our survey captures our unwavering commitment to secularism and the dynamic shifts within our ranks.

See *Snapshot* on page 8

## THEY SAID WHAT?

Thank you to everyone for your thoughts and prayers yesterday, as it was God alone who prevented the unthinkable from happening.

**Former President Donald Trump, the day after he was shot during a rally in Pennsylvania.**

*TruthSocial, 7-14-24*

Fortunately for Trump — and perhaps for us — God works in mysterious ways.

**Shadi Hamid, in his column, “Is Trump’s near-death experience part of God’s plan?”**

*Washington Post, 7-17-24*

I would submit that maybe if the Ten Commandments were hanging on [Thomas Matthew Crooks’] wall at the school that he was in, maybe he wouldn’t have taken a shot at the president.

**Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry, who signed into law a bill that requires every public school classroom to display the Ten Commandments.**

*Washington Post, 7-19-24*

We will not allow rogue districts and administrators to indoctrinate hatred of America by refusing to teach foundational Oklahoma standards.

**Oklahoma state Superintendent Ryan Walters, after hearing that some “rogue” teachers are not going to teach the bible, which would go against the mandate from his office.**

*New York Times, 7-25-24*

Being pro-life is good politics. Don’t let anybody tell you otherwise.

**Sen. Lindsey Graham, speaking at the Road to Majority Policy Conference.**

*Religion News Service, 7-23-24*

We hear all the time that religion divides this country. Religion unites Americans! We are a religious people. I’ll tell you what divides America. What divides America is the left’s attempt to demote religion, to erase our heritage, to erase the foundation this country has in, yes, the bible.

**Sen. Josh Hawley, speaking at the Road to Majority Policy Conference.**

*Religion News Service, 7-23-24*

The Word of God was and is the foundation of our Constitution. If we choose to continue allowing that Word to be replaced by humanism, we will fail.

**Tennessee state Rep. Monty Fritts, who authored House Joint Resolution 803, which “designates the period of July 1, 2024, through July 31, 2024, as a time of prayer and fasting in Tennessee and seeks God’s hand of mercy healing on Tennessee.” It was signed into law in the spring. Fritts was named the FFRF Action Theocrat of the Week on Aug. 1.**

*X, 7-14-24*

My number one qualification for being mayor of Tulsa is that I am an unashamed follower of Jesus. I think that if you go back and study the history of our nation and our founding, the pulpit was the primary tool [during] the Revolutionary War [for] communicating to people. But [also], public officials had to be Christians in many areas and we’ve gone so far away from that and we need to get back.

**Tulsa, Okla., mayoral candidate Brent VanNorman, speaking at a church.**

*Right Wing Watch, 7-30-24*

# Christian nationalism going under the radar

*This article first appeared on the Religion News Service and is reprinted with permission. (The survey referenced in this article was commissioned by FFRF, but is not the one that FFRF members received in June.)*

By Paul Djupe

Some far-right Christian lawmakers have proposed that nonreligious Americans are not fit to govern because, without Christ, they are “evil.” Is it possible, given their relative lack of concern about such statements, that nonreligious Americans don’t know what Christian nationalism is?

In fact, it may be expected. As the nonreligious population grows, and as people increasingly choose where they live based on religion and politics, this group has less exposure to conservative Christian politics. While many nonreligious Americans today are aware of the political stakes and players, substantial minorities are socially insulated from religious forces and their effect on political realities as we head toward the 2024 election.

Mobilizing groups into politics can mean introducing terminology that helps people quickly make sense of the political world. Christian nationalism, a worldview seeking and legitimating Christian dominion in the United States, is the crucial term here. While it may seem obvious that the nonreligious would have interests at stake were Christian nationalists to gain power, it actually comes as a surprise to a number of the nonreligious that they are combatants in a war for America.

A good example of Christian nationalism at work is the Texas Republican Party. As Texas Tribune reporter Robert Downen put it on X recently, “The [2024] Texas GOP convention was one, long and open call for spiritual warfare.” Speaker after speaker reinforced the theme that “they” — a loosely defined set of tags like liberals, globalists and LGBTQ Americans — “want to take God out of the country, and they want the government to be God.”

Proposals passed in the Texas GOP convention have required teaching the bible in public schools and changing election procedures to protect the interests of rural, largely white, conservative Christians. These measures are designed to allow the government to force Christianity on others and to reinforce the privileged position of white Christians in power — a canonical case of Christian nationalism.

With such blatant Christian nationalism on the march, why aren’t more nonreligious Americans concerned?

The simplest answer may be that they don’t know about it. A recent report by Pew Research Center showed that in February 2024 slim majorities of Americans (54 percent) said they had not read or heard anything about Christian nationalism. Of those who identify as atheists, agnostics or “nothing in particular,” Pew found that a substantial minority (44 percent) had not heard of Christian nationalism.

But, on examination, the answer appears to be more complicated. Many nonreligious left a Christian congregation at some point in their lives to become nonreligious, often as the result of the visible, alienating presence of the Christian

right in American politics. Such leavers, in fact, are the main source of growth of the nonreligious since 1995. Surveys show that those who left a Protestant church to become nonreligious were more likely to have heard of Christian nationalism, while estimating evangelicals to be a significantly larger group than the nonreligious.

In our May 2024 survey of 2,406 nonreligious American adults, which was funded by the Freedom From Religion Foundation, nonreligious respondents consistently reported evangelical Christians as a larger group than the nonreligious by 6 percentage points on average, estimating the nonreligious to be 34 percent of the U.S. population and evangelicals as nearly 40 percent. (Both estimates are too high.)

This overestimation of conservative Christians’ numbers seems to result from living in states with a majority of evangelicals. Having conservative Christian neighbors drives down their sense of their own numbers. So while the nonreligious are the largest “religious” group in the country by at least a few percentage points and have been for a few years, many of them wouldn’t know it.

The stakes are clearer for this group, but they underestimate their influence.

Another growing group of nonreligious Americans, however, lacks the history and direct exposure to Christian conservatives, and that lack of experience may be equally politically consequential. Plenty of nonreligious Americans were raised nonreligious and remain so. In the General Social Survey, this number has been increasing since data collection began in 1973, when 15 percent of religious nones indicated they were raised that way. By 2000, that figure had stabilized at about 30 percent. In our survey, just over a third (37 percent) indicated that they were raised nonreligious and continue to be.

About 7 percentage points fewer of these never-churched have heard about Christian nationalism than those who have left Christian groups. They are also 15 percentage points less interested in learning about organizations fighting Christian nationalism (compared with those who left a Protestant group).

These nonreligious were also the least likely to realize that their action might be required. Our survey asked participants whether they agreed that “To combat Christian nationalism, the non-religious need to be vigorously involved in politics.” Only half of those raised nonreligious agreed, compared with 68 percent of those who had left Christianity. Only 43 percent of those who had not heard of Christian nationalism before our survey agreed that action was necessary, compared with 68 percent agreement among those who had.

The nonreligious are growing and diversifying in ways that defy easy assumptions. They no longer are simply “exes” with an extensive knowledge of a religion left behind. Without this context, many nonreligious need to be informed about the threat that radicalized Christian nationalism poses to their fundamental rights and liberties, as well as to the democratic constitutionalism that protects us all.

Without that education, many Americans may not understand the stakes of the coming elections, nor see the efficacy that the nonreligious have to promote a more inclusive future of the United States.

*Paul A. Djupe directs the Data for Political Research program at Denison University.*



Ryan Walters

### Note to members

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

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

The online version at [freethoughttoday.com](http://freethoughttoday.com) also follows this protocol. Only the actual print newspaper contains all of these items.

If you would like to continue reading

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

In order to do that, follow these simple steps:

- Log into your FFRF.org account.
- Click on “Update your contact information.”
- Go down to “Deliver Freethought Today by” and click on either “Newspaper by mail” or “Both PDF and paper copy.”
- Click “Submit.”

**FFRF**  
**FREETHOUGHT**  
**TODAY**

Published by Freedom From Religion Foundation, Inc.

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*The only freethought newspaper in the United States*

Only a few weeks away!

# Don't miss FFRF's Denver convention!



Charles M. Blow



Kate Cohen



Two well-regarded national newspaper columnists have recently been added to the distinguished lineup of speakers for the Freedom From Religion Foundation's national convention!

New York Times columnist **Charles M. Blow** and Washington Post contributing writer **Kate Cohen** will help FFRF celebrate its 47th national convention on Friday, Sept. 27, and Saturday, Sept. 28, at the Sheraton Denver Downtown. For more information on the convention, go to [ffrf.org/convention2024](http://ffrf.org/convention2024).

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

Blow will receive FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award. His columns in the New York Times tackle hot-button issues such as social justice, racial equality, LGBTQ-plus issues and national politics. Blow is an MSNBC political analyst and has been the anchor of PRIME with Charles Blow on the Black News Channel and a CNN commentator. Mr. Blow is the author of New York Times bestselling books "Fire Shut Up in My Bones" and "The Devil You Know." "Fire..." has been developed into an opera, the first by a Black composer to premiere at the Metropolitan Opera.

Cohen most recently spoke at FFRF's convention last year in Madison, where she received the Freethought Heroine Award and talked about her book "We of Little Faith: Why I Stopped Pretending to Believe (And Maybe You Should Too)." Cohen's columns as a Washington Post contributing writer exposing America's reflexive deference to religion and its effect on education, health care and human rights. She is also an Emmy Award-winning documentary script writer.

Garmus will be accepting 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.

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. He's an open atheist and will be speaking on "Unshackling Ourselves from Holy Handcuffs."

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, will be accepted by **Brandon Wolf**, the national press secretary for the Human Rights Campaign. Wolf is a nationally recognized advocate for LGBTQ-plus 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 Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism," is a rare look inside the machinery of the movement that brought Donald Trump to power.

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 also recently added **Josh Cowen** to its distinguished lineup of speakers. Cowen is professor of education policy at Michigan State University, and an author on topics related to education politics, school choice and culture wars in the United States. His new book, "The Privateers: How Billionaires Created a Culture War and Sold School Vouchers," will be the topic of his speech.

FFRF has also assembled a panel of secular state legislators, including Colo. Rep. **Judy Amabile**, Colo. Rep. **Brianna Titone** and Okla. Rep. **Mickey Dollens**.

## 2024 Convention Schedule\*

Thursday, September 26			
<b>4-6 PM Registration / Complimentary Slider Bar / Dessert Reception</b> <i>(Please pre-register for food count.)</i>	Annie Laurie Gaylor <b>9:30 AM "The Consequences of Religious Decline in the U.S."</b> Sociologist Ryan Cragun	Senior Litigation Counsel Sam Grover, Intake Attorney Maddy Ziegler	Katherine Stewart
Friday, September 27			
<b>8 AM Registration opens and stays open throughout conference</b> Ballroom and sales tables open <i>(Complimentary coffee, tea)</i>	<b>10:15 AM BREAK / Book signing</b> Ryan Cragun	<b>3 PM Legislative Report, FFRF Action Fund</b> Governmental Affairs Director Mark Dann, Senior Policy Counsel Ryan Jayne and State Advocacy Specialist Ryan Dudley	<b>Noon Book signings</b> Bradley Onishi, Josh Cowen and Katherine Stewart
<b>9 AM Welcome</b> Director of Operations Lisa Strand, Event Manager Sadie Pattinson and Denver Chapter Leader Claudette St.Pierre 2024 FFRF Highlights & Achievements Co-Presidents Dan Barker &	<b>10:45 AM</b> Kate Cohen <b>11:15 AM Clarence Darrow Award</b> Michelle Goldberg, NY Times columnist <b>12-2 PM NOON LUNCH BREAK (on own)</b> <b>Book signing</b> Kate Cohen <b>2-3 PM Legal Report</b> Legal Director Patrick Elliott, Deputy Legal Director Liz Cavell,	<b>3:30 PM BREAK</b> <b>4 PM Secular Legislative Panel</b> Colo. Reps. Judy Amabile, Brianna Titone and Okla. Rep. Mickey Dollens <b>5-6:30 PM DINNER (ticketed)</b> <b>7 PM</b> Charles Blow <b>8 PM Evening Keynote Ron Reagan</b> <b>9 PM Complimentary dessert and beverage reception</b>	<b>12-2 PM NOON LUNCH BREAK (on own)</b> <b>2 PM Contraduction</b> Dan Barker <b>2:30 PM Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalist \$50,000 Award</b> Human Rights Campaign Accepted by Brandon Wolf <b>3 PM BREAK</b> <b>3:15 PM Emperor Has No Clothes Award</b> Bonnie Garmus <b>4 PM Book signings</b> Dan Barker, Brandon Wolf and Bonnie Garman
Saturday, September 28			
		<b>8 AM Non-Prayer Breakfast (ticketed)</b> <b>9:30 AM Student Activists (TBA)</b> <b>10 AM "Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism — And What Comes Next"</b> Bradley Onishi <b>10:30 AM The Privateers: How Billionaires Created a Culture War and Sold School Vouchers</b> Professor Josh Cowen <b>11:15 AM Freethought Heroine Award</b>	<b>6 PM DINNER (ticketed)</b> <b>8 PM Drawing for "Clean Money"</b> Emcee Buzz Kemper <b>8:30 PM "Blacks and Latinos: Unshackling Ourselves from Holy Handcuffs"</b> Actor Jon Huertas



**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).

**Sunday, September 29**  
**9 AM Annual Membership Meeting**  
**11ish State Representatives Meeting**  
**ADJOURN BY NOON**  
\*Schedule is subject to change

- Across**
- \*"Cloud \_\_\_\_" author  
David Mitchell: "I am a kind of secular Buddhist"
  - \*Irreverent Aaron Rodgers in 2011 or 2021, e.g.
  - Blast's origins?
  - Bridal veil fabric
  - Lungful
  - Itsy-bitsy bits
  - Acrylic fiber
  - Hula dancer's necklace
  - Dough
  - \*Harvard chaplain Greg Epstein's book "Good \_\_\_\_ God"
  - \*U.K. Prime Minister and atheist Keir \_\_\_\_
  - Supply with weapons
  - Self-satisfied
  - \*Freethinking scientist  
Francis Crick's office, e.g.
  - Not much (2 words)
  - Huey, Dewey or Louie to Donald Duck
  - \*Irreverent singer Billy \_\_\_\_ of "White Wedding" fame
  - Makes a mistake
  - Because of (2 words)
  - In 1492, it "sailed the ocean blue"
  - \*January 6, 2021, events and such
  - Undesirable dwelling
  - Drench
  - Dick's and Jane's dog
  - Pop
  - Acquiescence

- Large purchase, on social media
  - X
  - Oscilloscope graph
  - Grandma, in Britain
  - \*Freethinking "Titanic" movie director James \_\_\_\_
  - \* Penn Jillette's book "God, No!: Signs You May Already Be an \_\_\_\_ and Other Magical Tales"
  - Opposite of alpha
  - \_\_\_\_ out a living
  - Title holder
  - Gerrymander
  - Bird word
  - Reconnaissance, for short
  - What Lizzie Borden did
  - Reunion bunch
  - Fill with optimism
- Down**
- Give Oath of Office for the Presidency, e.g.
  - Torus, pl.
  - Upswing, in speech
  - Hawaiian goodbye
  - Mrs, in Spain
  - Fountain treat
  - What presidential candidates do
  - Spectrum maker
  - Standard's partner
  - \*Particle in international symbol for atheism, Atomic Whirl
  - Price drop
  - Russian monarch
  - X-rayed, e.g.
  - Earthy color
  - 252-gallon wine cask
  - Precedes antistrophe
  - \*Singer \_\_\_\_ Ronstadt, a self-proclaimed "spiritual atheist"
  - Goodbye, in Mexico
  - Holiday surprise for employee
  - \*Atheist Booker-Prize winning author \_\_\_\_ Murdoch
  - Boot-wearing feline
  - Feudal lord's property
  - \*Atheist composer Robert Schumann's short musical piece, e.g.
  - \*Freethinking Barbra Streisand's song "\_\_\_\_ in Love"
  - Use a surgical beam
  - Greek portico
  - Dangerous movie trick
  - Envelop
  - Tactical action officer, acr.
  - Capital of Punjab, Pakistan
  - T-shirt option
  - Handrail post
  - Cordelia or Coraline, for short
  - "Don't Leave Home Without It"
  - Internet share-able
  - "Good grief!"
  - Eon, alt. sp.
  - Ancient Peruvian
  - Dissenting clique
  - Genealogy "plant"
  - Ornamental pond dweller

### Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12	
13						14				15				
16						17				18				
19					20			21	22					
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57	58	59	60					61				62	63	64
65						66	67			68				
69						70				71				
72						73				74				

Answers on page 21

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

## Texas

Continued from page 1

Jake Fortin, commemorates the "birth" of the Bill of Rights (adopted on Dec. 15, 1791), depicting Founding Fathers and the Statue of Liberty gazing adoringly at a manger containing the historic document. A sign by the display also celebrated the Winter Solstice. FFRF placed the display to counter a Christian nativity scene placed in the Capitol in 2014 and 2015.

Largely due to Abbott's refusal to accept the ruling of the court in FFRF's

favor, the case ping-ponged before the federal courts and the appeals court, which ruled on it twice. The state later closed the public forum altogether.

On Jan. 27, 2023, the 5th Circuit unanimously ruled in FFRF's favor. FFRF is pleased that the court warned the state that closing its forum in the Texas Capitol does not mean the state has free rein to discriminate when displaying exhibits in the future.

## Satanic Temple

Continued from page 1

of school property.

With the case settled, FFRF filed to voluntarily dismiss the lawsuit on July 16.

The district's discriminatory behavior gained a national spotlight last December when the district held a press conference in which school board members, administrators, and other officials, surrounded by clergy members, expressed hostility toward The Satanic Temple and validated community members' hostility toward the After School Satan Club's then-upcoming first meeting at Chimneyrock Elementary.

Shortly after the press conference, FFRF sent the first of three complaint letters to the district in response to the deeply concerning and discriminatory remarks. FFRF's first letter urged the district to continue to abide by the First Amendment and allow The Satanic Temple to rent facilities in accordance with the district's own written policies.

Instead, the district notified the Temple in early January via a phone call that it had assessed a "special security fee" of over \$2,000 against the group for "additional security." The district also charged the Temple another fee of \$250 for "field lights," both fees that other organizations meeting regularly at the school (such as the Christian Good News Club) have never been charged. FFRF and The Satanic Temple's requests to the district for a fee waiver were ignored, and so the Temple reluctantly paid the fees.

On Jan. 10, Memphis-Shelby County Schools finally allowed the Temple to hold the first after-school meeting at Chimneyrock Elementary. When club leaders arrived at the school, they discovered that various district administrators, school board members and members of the clergy were already at the entrance of the building. The district continued attempts to thwart The Satanic Temple and deter its club for students from meeting at Chimneyrock. It abruptly changed the meeting time, canceled rental applications, refused to communicate with the Temple regard-

ing rental rates, and continued to treat the Temple unfavorably.

The district's discriminatory and illegal behavior left The Satanic Temple and FFRF with no choice but to sue. The Temple didn't want special privileges, just to be treated the same as all other organizations renting from the district. The lawsuit asked the court to order the district to approve The Satanic Temple's reservation requests, treat the Temple fairly, and refund it the discriminatory fees the district forced it to pay.

The settlement, hopefully, resolves these issues.

"A long and tedious battle for our First Amendment Right to equal access has finally come to an end with the Memphis-Shelby County School District," says June Everett, campaign director for The Satanic Temple's After School Satan Clubs. "We are extremely grateful for the team at the Freedom From Religion Foundation for their work ensuring that public school districts cannot use viewpoint discrimination against minority religious groups. It is clear that the First Amendment is necessary to prevent the government from picking and choosing who has access to their facilities based on viewpoint."

### Freethought Today Cryptogram

Z NZO'B QPFSHZT YQFZESGI BFGVTU YQ YZBQU

QKKQHPVZTTA GO BANCZPFA, QUVHZPSGO ZOU

B G H S Z T P S Q B; O G I Q T S L S G V B Y Z B S B S B

OQHQBZIA. — ZTYQIP QSOBPQSO

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

Example:

UOG RLQTM HYVBF DVP SLACN VWGY UOG KJEZ XVI.

THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG.

This month's clue: I => R. Answer is on page 21.

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

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## IN THE NEWS

### Majority still credits God for humankind

A majority of Americans still believe God played at least some role in the creation of humankind, but a majority also believe humans evolved from less advanced forms of life.

Though diminished from the early 2000s, the largest segment of Americans, 37 percent, are creationist purists, saying God created humans in their present form within the past 10,000 years.

Twenty-four percent of U.S. adults accept the scientific theory of evolution, that humans evolved from less advanced forms of life over millions of years without God's involvement.

One in three, 34 percent, straddle both theories, saying humans evolved, but with God's guidance.

These findings, from a May 1-23 Gallup poll, come at a time when Americans are increasingly likely to say they do not identify with a religion or belong to a house of worship, and that religion is not important in their daily lives.

Gallup began measuring Americans' views of human origins using this question in 1982 and has intermittently tracked opinions since then. Belief in creationism and God-guided evolution reached their peaks of 47 percent and 40 percent, respectively, in 1999 and have since trended downward. Meanwhile, support for evolution without divine intervention has nearly tripled since 1999.

### Appeals court revives photographer's lawsuit

A federal appeals court panel has revived a lawsuit filed by a Christian photographer against a New York law that would force her to service same-sex wedding ceremonies.

A three-judge panel of the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled July 12 that Emilee Carpenter's lawsuit over New York's public accommodations law could continue.

Circuit Judge Alison Nathan, a Biden appointee, authored the opinion, writing that the lower court must consider Carpenter's free speech claims "to determine whether the application of the law at issue actually compels Carpenter's expressive conduct, rather than non-expressive conduct that imposes an incidental burden on speech."

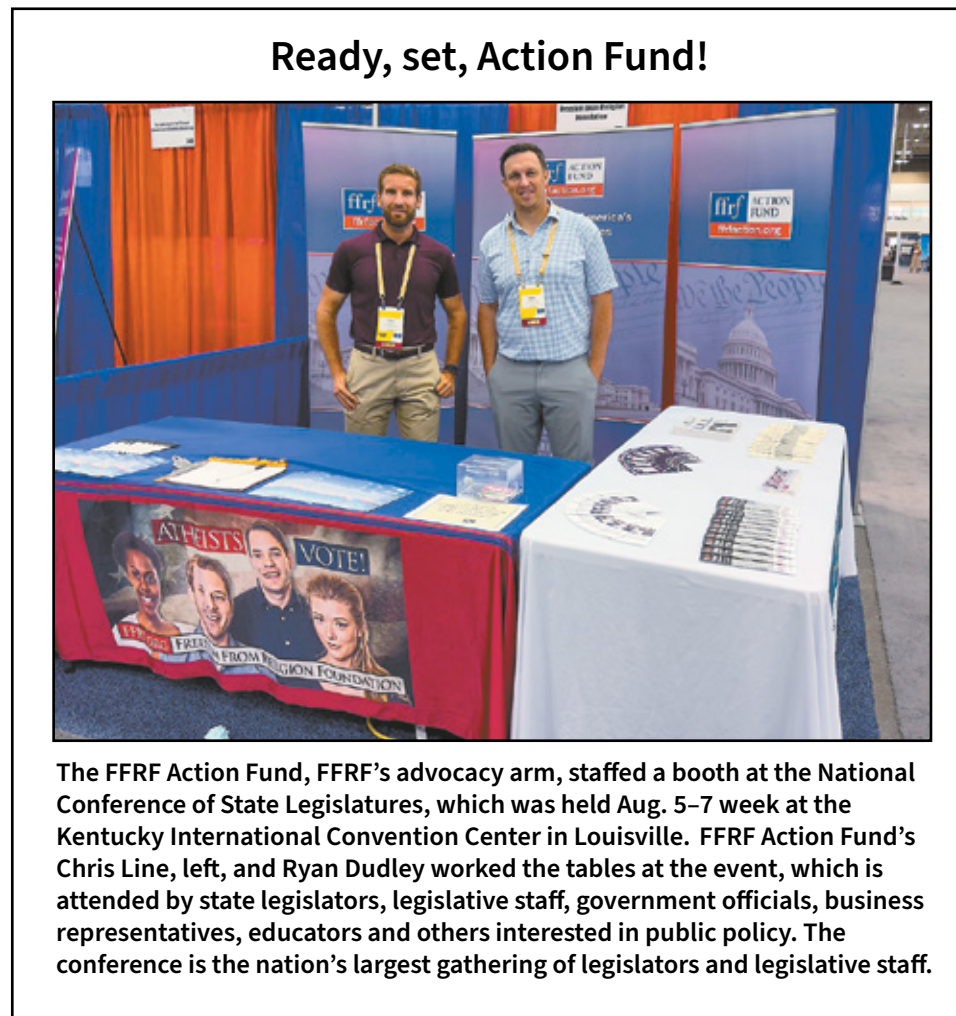
Nathan urged the court to reconsider Carpenter's claims in light of the 2023 U.S. Supreme Court decision 303 Creative LLC v. Elenis. The high court ruled 6-3 last year that Colorado could not force a Christian website designer to build websites celebrating gay marriage.

The appeals court panel denied Carpenter's request for a preliminary injunction blocking enforcement of the law against her, instead deciding to "remand to the district court to consider the application for preliminary injunctive relief on a developed factual record."

### Florida council to appeal ruling over prayer vigil

The Ocala City Council in Florida has appealed a federal judge's decision that a 2014 prayer vigil held in the Ocala Downtown Square was unconstitutional.

The appeal of U.S. District Judge



**Ready, set, Action Fund!**  
The FFRF Action Fund, FFRF's advocacy arm, staffed a booth at the National Conference of State Legislatures, which was held Aug. 5-7 week at the Kentucky International Convention Center in Louisville. FFRF Action Fund's Chris Line, left, and Ryan Dudley worked the tables at the event, which is attended by state legislators, legislative staff, government officials, business representatives, educators and others interested in public policy. The conference is the nation's largest gathering of legislators and legislative staff.

Timothy Corrigan's decision was filed in the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. If the city were to accept Corrigan's decision, it would have to pay about \$500,000 in legal fees to the plaintiffs. If the city wins, there is a chance for the plaintiffs to be responsible for the fees.

The vigil, which took place in September 2014, was backed by the late and former Ocala Police Department Chief Greg Graham, who asked citizens to pray for the end of violent crime after a series of shootings. After attending the vigil, plaintiffs Art Rojas, Lucinda Hale, Faniel Hale and Frances Jean Porgal filed the lawsuit against the city, Graham and then-Mayor Kent Guinn.

The plaintiffs argued that hosting a government-backed prayer vigil in the Ocala Downtown Square violated the Establishment Clause of the Constitution. Corrigan first ruled in 2018 that the vigil was unconstitutional, then was directed to reconsider the case in 2022 when the city appealed the decision and won in the 11th Circuit.

### Church of Nazarene drops LGBTQ-affirming minister

A Church of the Nazarene disciplinary board found Thomas J. Oord, a prominent theologian and now-former minister, guilty of teaching doctrines contrary to the church's official position on human sexuality because of his acceptance of LGBTQ-plus individuals and same-sex relationships.

Oord was most recently the director of doctoral programs in open and relational theology at the online Northwind Theological Seminary.

"Our sincere prayer is that Oord will repent of his heretical teachings and devote his considerable talents in a way that he and all those whom he has led astray will find wholeness in Christ," said a statement by the seven-member board announcing its verdict.

Oord told the Idaho Statesman he was not surprised the church stripped him of his clerical credentials but did not expect to also be excommunicated from the denomination that has over 2.6 million members.

### 200K people abused in care in New Zealand

New Zealand's independent inquiry into decades of abuse of children and vulnerable adults released a blistering final report July 24 finding the country's state agencies and churches failed to prevent, stop or admit to the mistreatment of those in their care.

The scale of abuse was "unimaginable," with an estimated 200,000 people abused over seven decades, many of them Maori, New Zealand's Indigenous people, the report said.

In response to the findings, New Zealand's government agreed for the first time that historical treatment of some children in a notorious state-run hospital amounted to torture, and pledged an apology to all those abused in state, foster and religious care since 1950.

The findings by the Royal Commission — the highest level of inquiry that can be undertaken in New Zealand — capped a six-year investigation that followed two decades of similar probes around the world, as nations struggle to reckon with authorities' transgressions against children removed from their families and placed in care.

### Christianity had key role in boarding school trauma

The U.S. Department of Interior's report on its three-year investigation into federally funded Indian boarding schools — documenting the many Native American children who suffered physical, sexual and emotional abuse in that system — shows the key role Christianity played in destroying tribal identity and family ties.

The Interior Department confirms that 973 American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian children died in these schools. By the year 1900, 1 out of 5 Native American school-age children attended a boarding school.

Completing an initial study released in May 2022, the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative's second and final report lists 417 Indian boarding schools

established between 1819 and 1969. Religious institutions or organizations ran more than half — 210 of 417 — of federal Indian boarding schools.

More than 18,600 children who entered the system have been identified by name, although those in many other institutions, such as orphanages, asylums and sanatoriums, were not included in the report. Almost 300 children who died have yet to be identified. Only 53 marked burial sites and 21 unmarked sites have been located.

### Evangelical leaders: Don't endorse from pulpit

According to the May/June 2024 Evangelical Leaders Survey, 98 percent of evangelical Christian leaders say pastors should not endorse candidates from the pulpit.

"Church leaders should inform, uplift and draw people into deeper discipleship that impacts how they engage in their communities, including how they vote," said Walter Kim, president of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), which released the survey. "Endorsing a political candidate is rarely helpful and most often breeds division."

Based on a 1954 law known as the Johnson Amendment, the IRS bans all 501(c)(3) nonprofits — including churches — from active involvement in political campaigns. However, the Johnson Amendment does not restrict pastors from offering biblical guidance on contemporary issues, and many evangelical leaders say pastors have a clear responsibility to do so.

Kimberly Reisman, executive director of World Methodist Evangelism, said, "Endorsing from the pulpit further polarizes our current culture. God can use leaders from all parties, and to equate God's will with the will of any political party or person is exceedingly dangerous and a threat to the overall witness of Christians in the United States."

### Satanic Temple loses discrimination suit

The U.S. 1st Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the city of Boston declining to allow The Satanic Temple to give an invocation prior to city council meetings doesn't violate constitutional prohibitions against the government establishing a religion.

The Satanic Temple sued Boston for religious discrimination after it was denied an invitation to deliver a legislative prayer, a custom at each Boston City Council meeting.

"The Constitution does not require that legislative bodies accept all speakers who request to give invocations," the court said Aug. 6 in an opinion authored by Judge Sandra L. Lynch.

Council members have invited Christian, Jewish, Unitarian and Muslim speakers, as well as guests to give non-religious invocations, but the court noted council members tend to invite a member of their community to give the invocation, a decision the city claims involves politics, not religion.

The Satanic Temple failed to show "evidence of discrimination based on religious beliefs as to which speakers are invited, much less evidence of intentional discrimination," the court said.

# VICTORIES

By Greg Fletcher

## FFRF pushes back against community college prayer

FFRF was able to stop a teacher from offering prayers to students in the nursing program at the Southeastern Community College in Whiteville, N.C.

A concerned Southeastern Community College student reported that, on March 28, an instructor in the nursing program led the class in prayer just prior to scheduled testing. FFRF’s complainant reported that this was a frequent occurrence and that the instructor regularly asked to pray over the class or spoke about prayer during class. The complainant chose not to participate in the program due to the instructor’s inappropriate conduct and feared retaliation for speaking out about the behavior.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line contacted Chris English, the college’s president. The college’s Director of Human Resources Ian Callahan informed FFRF of the college’s response via email. “There should be no future concerns with the report of religious activities involving our instructors in the classroom setting,” Callahan wrote. “We here at Southeastern Community College strive to investigate and remedy all concerns reported by our students.”

## FCA ‘character coach’ no longer proselytizing

Clay County District Schools in Green Cove Springs, Fla., has taken action to end proselytization from a religious “character coach” after FFRF got involved.

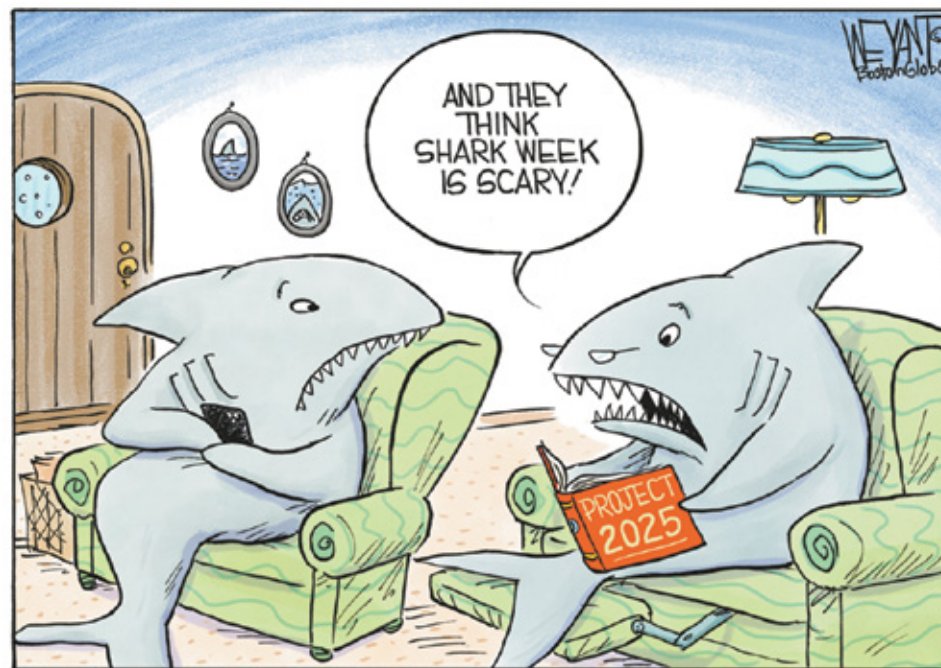
FFRF received a report that the district’s high schools were permitting an outside adult — specifically, the head pastor at the First Baptist Church of Orange Park and a Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) “character coach” — to inappropriately participate in the district’s school-sponsored high school athletics program. This was confirmed thanks to a post from the pastor’s official X account, reading, “I love being able to serve as the character coach for our local high school sports teams. Able to provide copies of the Athlete’s Bible from the FCA for student-athletes who desire one (absolutely no pressure for athletes to take one.)”

FFRF Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to Superintendent David Broskie with FFRF’s concerns. Broskie replied to FFRF in early July. “The district has taken your correspondence into consideration and has done a thorough investigation into the allegation involving [the pastor] and his involvement with student athletics and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes,” Broskie wrote in an email. “The district has met with both [the pastor] and the principal to ensure that all [school codes] are followed with fidelity.”

## FFRF stops solicitation at Ky. school district

The Carter County Schools system in Grayson, Ky., will no longer allow the Grayson First Church of Christ to attempt to recruit middle school students to the church.

A concerned district community member reported that East Carter Mid-



dle School allowed two representatives of the church to enter the school and approach students in order to invite them to religious activities. The complainant specifically referenced an incident on March 7, 2023, wherein the church distributed flyers to students during the school day, inviting them to participate in the church’s new after-school program.

FFRF Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to Superintendent Dr. Paul Green, who emailed FFRF back, informing it that action had been taken shortly after receiving FFRF’s letter, despite having not written back in over a year. “School administrators were provided training in appropriate policy for allowing the distribution of material,” he wrote. “To my knowledge, no further allegations have been made.”

## FFRF takes on violations in La. school district

FFRF worked to remove multiple religious violations, including religious instruction to children, from the West Carroll Parish Schools system in Oak Grove, La.

A student’s parent reported that on Dec. 19, 2023, their child returned home from Oak Grove Elementary School with several overtly Christian assignments from the kindergarten teacher. The assignments explicitly referenced the Christian god, Jesus Christ and the Christian nativity story. One coloring page required kindergarteners to color a Christian nativity scene depicting the biblical story of the birth of Jesus. The same teacher also showed the class a religious film about Jesus Christ, while a Pre-K teacher led a class of four-year-old children in an explicitly Christian prayer before the students were allowed to eat. Finally, the superintendent had a quotation referencing God on his district profile. The quota-

tion, “Success is not measured by what you do compared to what others do; it is measured by what you do with the ability God gave you” was directly under his official headshot.

After FFRF Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to the district, the superintendent reported to FFRF that he had requested the quote be removed from his page. “I honestly think it was left there from the previous superintendent. I do not remember providing that quote and typically include meaningful quotes from others in my letters and emails and letters,” he wrote. Additionally, he promised to meet with the principal and teachers at Oak Grove Elementary the following week to discuss the concerns. In July, FFRF confirmed that the meeting took place with the school and the employees.

## FFRF protects students from proselytizing teacher

After hearing from FFRF, a teacher from the Lee County Schools system in North Carolina is no longer engaging in multiple religious activities during the school day.

A community member reported that a social studies teacher at Lee High School was promoting their personal religious beliefs to students in their classroom. FFRF understood that the teacher wrote bible verses on the board in the classroom multiple times and regularly played Christian music while students were present. The teacher regularly wore a shirt in class reading, “Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the district detailing FFRF’s concerns. Stephen Rawson, legal representative for the district, emailed FFRF, informing that corrective action had been taken after the initial letter of complaint. “The administration reviewed this matter carefully at the time of our previ-

ous correspondence, and met with the teacher who was the focus of the complaint. [They] understood the concern and agreed to stop playing the music that was part of the complaint,” Rawson wrote. Additionally, while the administration was not able to find evidence of the other violations, the teacher was also warned about them to prevent further unconstitutional behavior.

## FFRF gets bible verse removed from jobs center

The Texas Job Corps Center in McKinney, Texas, removed a bible verse from the cafeteria after FFRF took notice.

A student reported that the center displayed a bible verse in the cafeteria near the front of the food service line, reading, “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts. Acts 2:46.” The complainant reported being secular and feeling that displaying a bible verse in the center’s cafeteria directly conflicted with the fact that the center’s program is public and encourages religious diversity.

While FFRF never heard back from the center after FFRF Attorney Sammi Lawrence contacted it, the complainant contacted FFRF to inform it that the bible verse had been removed from the cafeteria.

## Bible distribution ended in Ga. school district

FFRF put a stop to the distribution of Gideon bibles at the Thomaston-Upson Schools system in Thomaston, Ga.

FFRF was informed that, each year, the district allowed the Gideons to come into Upson Lee Elementary School and distribute bibles to fifth-grade students. Reportedly, the Gideons set up a table right outside the fifth-grade wing, and, during instructional time, students were lined up to walk through and pick up bibles.

After FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Larry Derico, FFRF heard back from him. “As superintendent, it has been my practice to remind school district administrators of the benefits and detriments of creating a limited public forum and its impact on the separation of church and state,” he wrote. Derico stated that he advised that the distribution of Gideon bibles on school campuses would not be permitted.

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## W. Va. senior center to stop pre-meal prayers

FFRF wrote to the Gilmer County Senior Center in Glenville, W. Va., twice to ensure that employees of a state-funded senior center would not engage in unconstitutional pre-meal prayer.

A community member informed FFRF that Gilmer County Senior Center employees had been leading Christian prayers during lunch. The complainant reported that the senior center felt more like a church than a senior center, and due to this religious environment, they have been afraid to raise their concerns with staff directly.

In response, the executive director wrote back, saying that “the seniors that come into the Gilmer County Senior Center want to have prayer before lunch.” Prayers were scheduled at 11:30 if “anyone wants to participate.”

“While we appreciate that you have indicated the employees will cease leading prayer, the senior center cannot have any involvement in lunch prayers,” FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote in a follow up letter. “It cannot help seniors who wish to have a collective prayer to impose a group prayer on those seniors who don’t want to pray. Seniors are free to pray to themselves before lunch or whenever they please.”

After receiving the second letter, the director noted that the senior center would comply with the Constitution. “I have taken the prayer post down. My employees will not lead any prayer while they are on company time,” they wrote.

## Latin cross removed from N.C. classroom

FFRF had a Latin cross and a bible verse removed from the Guilford County Schools system in Greensboro, N.C.

On March 21, 2023, FFRF sent a letter to Guilford County Schools after being informed that Northwest Guilford Middle School was displaying a decoration in a classroom that included a Latin cross and a bible verse, reading, “Let the field be joyful and all that is in it — Psalm 96:12.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to District Superintendent Whitney Oakley and followed up to ensure that the display was not still standing. Legal representation from the district called and confirmed that the district had taken it down the day the district received the letter, and was unaware that no one from the district had reached out to report the corrective action.

## Pioneering woman



Photo by Chris Line

**A new statue outside the Wisconsin State Capitol of Vel R. Phillips is the first statue of a Black woman at any state capitol building in the United States. Phillips was the first Black woman to graduate from the University of Wisconsin, the first woman and first Black person to be elected to Milwaukee’s Common Council, the first Black American elected to the national committee of either political party, the first woman judge in Milwaukee County and first Black judge in Wisconsin, and the first Black American and first woman elected to statewide office. FFRF was pleased to make a contribution toward this Boys and Girls Club-paid statue.**

## FFRF removes God from Kansas poll worker oath

FFRF got the Johnson County Election Office in Olathe, Kan., to remove a reference to God in the poll worker’s oath.

A Johnson County resident reported that all citizens who wanted to work as poll workers were required to swear an oath to God in order to serve. The complainant reported that the form necessary to become a poll worker required the applicant to sign a statement saying, “I solemnly swear (affirm) that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Kansas,” but the oath/affirmation ends, “so help me God.”

After FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the Johnson County Election Office Election Commissioner, the assistant county counselor replied that it was not in complete agreement with FFRF, but had taken action regardless. “We appreciated your client’s concern and recognized the practice of providing secular alternatives, as has been approved by courts in other jurisdictions,” they wrote. “We also began offering the words ‘upon my word and honor’ as an alternative to the words ‘so help me God.’”

## FFRF strikes prayer from S.C. grad ceremonies

FFRF took action after the Bridges Preparatory School principal delivered a prayer before the 2024 graduation ceremony.

A Bridges Preparatory School parent reported that on May 31 the school’s graduation ceremony included a scheduled invocation delivered by the principal, referencing a “heavenly father.”

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to the district’s superintendent.

The district’s legal counsel, Erik T. Norton, wrote back to FFRF. “This is the first such complaint regarding the graduation ceremony at Bridges that has been brought to the district,” Norton wrote. “The attorney for Bridges subsequently counseled the school on compliance with this guidance and applicable federal law.”

## Baccalaureate ceremonies no longer school-backed

Religious baccalaureate ceremonies will no longer be school sponsored at the Hart County Charter System in Hartwell, Ga., thanks to FFRF’s advocacy.

A student reported that each year Hart County High School sponsors and hosts a religious baccalaureate ceremony. The complainant reported that students were required to help fund the religious service with their class dues in 2023. The complainant included an image from the student handbook showing the school not only hosting the religious event, but also requiring students to pay for the event regardless of whether they wanted to attend. Additionally, the school advertised and promoted the ceremony alongside other official graduation activities on its website and official social media pages. The event was even streamed live on the school’s official Facebook page.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to District Superintendent Jennifer Carter outlining the violation. FFRF heard from the district’s legal counsel, Cory O. Kirby, who worked with the district to bring it more in line with the Constitution. “Ms. Carter, Superintendent, has met with high school personnel to discuss the changes required for baccalaureate next year. Those changes include no school or school employee active involvement,” Kirby wrote.

## Decalogue removed from Ky. courthouse twice

FFRF has ensured a Ten Commandments display from the courthouse in Taylorsville, Ky., would stay removed.

In December 2023, FFRF was informed by a concerned resident that the Ten Commandments were currently displayed inside the Spencer County Courthouse. FFRF spoke with Corey Thomas, the Spencer County attorney in February 2024, who confirmed that the display had been taken down.

However, in late June, FFRF was notified that the Ten Commandments were on display once again. FFRF’s original complainant confirmed that it was

the same display that was allegedly removed in February, which sparked the question of whether or not the display had been removed at all.

FFRF Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote back to Thomas.

“I’ve shared your previous correspondence with the clerk who, I’m sure you’re aware, is an independently elected constitutional office holder,” he wrote. “The display has been taken down. The clerk has been made aware of the need for permanency regarding the removal of the display.”

## FFRF removes Christian poster from classroom

A teacher at West Rapids Elementary School in Grand Rapids, Minn., removed a poster referencing God after FFRF reminded the district of its constitutional obligation to remain secular.

In November 2023, a concerned parent reported that a kindergarten teacher had a religious poster displayed in the classroom in full view of students. The poster reads, “Just think, you’re here not by chance, but by God’s choosing to fulfill His special purpose for this generation.” FFRF understood that the poster had been on display since at least Sept. 7.

After FFRF Attorney Sammi Lawrence wrote to Superintendent Matt Grose about the constitutional violation, Grose finally responded in August. “It was removed at the end of last school year,” he confirmed.

## FFRF ends school field trip to a religious ranch

FFRF fought to keep elementary school children in the General McLane School District in Pennsylvania from being taken to a religious ranch to be proselytized.

A concerned GMSD parent reported that, in May 2023, first-grade students of McKean Elementary School participated in a field trip, which included prayer and proselytizing remarks. The field trip occurred at WLD Ranch, whose mission is “to guide campers and guests to Jesus as the Truth in life.” FFRF’s complainant reported that a WLD Ranch staff member gathered the students together to engage in a prayer prior to a horseback-riding activity. Additionally, the complainant was uneasy that a field trip would take place at a Christian camp, but they wanted to give the school the benefit of the doubt that there would be no religious instruction. The unease then turned to mistrust in GMSD after learning that children were coerced into prayer.

FFRF Staff Attorney Madeline Ziegler contacted Superintendent Matt Lane. On Aug. 13, 2023, Lane wrote back to Ziegler via email, writing that he “understood the concern,” and instead, would be “informing families/students that this trip does offer a prayer opportunity, but this opportunity is completely optional, not required for participation, and not a part of the district program.”

After receiving the email, Ziegler pushed back, writing that “it is not realistic to expect children as young as 6 years old to be one of the few to not go along with the rest of the class to pray, and the district should not be allowing the students in its care to be put in the position to make this choice.” After nearly a year of silence, FFRF received a follow-up letter from Lane, writing, “students at General McLane are no longer attending WLD Ranch as part of a school-sponsored trip.”

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# A snapshot of FFRF's secular community

Continued from page 1

## A snapshot of FFRF

FFRF membership remains older, with 68 percent retired or semi-retired and our average age (you won't believe this) 66.6! Two-thirds (68 percent) of FFRF members are male, a finding that has been generally consistent throughout FFRF's 46 years despite FFRF's strong feminist bent. Two-thirds are married or in a partnership, 12 percent are single, and 17 percent are divorced or widowed. Ninety-four percent identify as white. A small but important 1 percent identifies as non-binary or third gender, and 11 percent identify as LGBTQ-plus — no surprise given many religions' overt hostility to queer and trans individuals. FFRF continues to engage in significant outreach, such as dedicated scholarships and co-sponsorships to better appeal to youth, women and Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

## Our shared identity

Asked to select your preferred label, a significant 65 percent of FFRF respondents proudly identify as atheists. Another 8 percent identify as agnostic, while others prefer terms like humanist (7 percent), freethinker (7 percent), secularist (4 percent) or rationalist (3 percent). FFRF remains an "umbrella" organization for nonbelievers and secularists, whatever you prefer to call yourself!

What's particularly exciting is the increasing number of new members joining FFRF. Over half of respondents — 58 percent — have been members for no more than five years. This influx of new members is a clear indication of the growing appeal of our mission and the increasing need for a strong voice in the fight for secularism.

Nearly three-fourths (72 percent) are first-generation freethinkers, speaking to the courage and independence that define our community. Only 7.5 percent of you left religion slowly once you decided. Religious backgrounds include 42 percent mainline Protestant, 39 percent Catholic, 18 evangelical Christian and 10 percent Jewish. We've chosen a path that often goes against the grain of societal expectations, and that's something of which to be proud.

Cognitive dissonance played a role in many of your childhoods and young adult lives, with more than a third of you having a nonreligious father, compared to 20 percent who had a nonreligious mother.

## Nonreligious experience

Why did you leave religion? Allowed to choose as many reasons as apply, more than three-quarters agree "Religion doesn't make sense" and cite "science" and "religious hypocrisy" for rejecting religion. Two-thirds invoked the "harm caused by religion in the broader world" and "lack of evidence." "Religious bigotry" moved more than half of you to reject religion. Religious prejudice against women and LGBTQ individuals, reading skeptical authors and "reading the bible" were catalysts for a third or more of you.

Almost two-thirds of you had left religion by age 30, with an amazing plurality, nearly 40 percent, leaving religion between the youthful ages of 10 and 20.

Although about a third of you (36 percent) are the only nonreligious person in your family, more than half of FFRF members (55 percent) say most of their



Photo by Ingrid Laas

**In FFRF's survey, 68 percent reported that they had at least a bachelor's degree, which is significantly higher than the general population's 38 percent.**

immediate family members are religious. Fortunately, two-thirds (62 percent) of you have a spouse or companion who is also nonreligious to keep you company. Half of you also indicate most of your children are nonreligious.

When it comes to feeling comfortable speaking out as nonbelievers, an inspiring 75 percent say you speak out freely about your lack of religion. Hearteningly, reflecting our activist membership, 88 percent of you have spoken out or complained about state/church entanglements! Kudos.

Yet a third of you indicate you've experienced social stigma or other prejudice, are wary of letting others know you reject religion and "often feel like the only nonreligious person in my area." In good news, only 10 percent of you indicate your children or grandchildren have experienced social stigma or prejudice.

## A highly educated group

Many members of our educational association have dedicated your lives to education — 25 percent of us are or have been teachers. FFRF is a highly educated group, with 68 percent having at least a four-year college degree (compared to the national average of 38 percent), 27 percent of you holding one or more master's degrees and another 9 percent with PhDs.

Additionally, 19 percent have some college or trade school. Our collective knowledge and expertise are invaluable assets in our advocacy efforts.

## Our political views

FFRF is genuinely proud that 98.4 percent of FFRF members responding are registered voters, with 97 percent saying they intend to vote in the upcoming presidential election.

Although FFRF is a nonpartisan, apolitical organization, the survey (made before Joe Biden decided to drop out) found that of those of us "definitely" planning to vote, more than 95 percent selected the Democratic Party's then-candidate. Under a half percent chose Trump. Sixty-four percent identify as Democrats, and another 28 percent identify as independent but leaning Democrats, with 6 percent being pure independents. By contrast, less than a half percent identify as Republican, and 1.5 percent are independent but lean Republican.

Nearly two-thirds of you expressed concern that Republicans in Congress "would not respect my rights," three-quar-

ters that "conservative Christians would not respect my rights," and 85 percent that Donald Trump "would not respect my rights." Similarly, 88 percent agree or somewhat agree that "Persecution would be widespread if Republicans control the federal government."

## Secular voter values

The 2024 member survey provides a fascinating profile of American nonbelievers and our views on the significant social issues of the day: A whopping 96 percent strongly support legal abortion as a woman's choice, with another 2 percent somewhat agreeing (compared to Pew Research findings of 63 percent of Americans overall). Similarly, 90 percent strongly support same-sex marriage, with another 5 percent somewhat agreeing, which compares to 69 percent of Americans overall, according to a June Gallup poll. Fully 97 percent of you support civil rights for the LGBTQ community, compared to two-thirds of Americans, according to PRRI (March 2024).

It's not surprising that only 3 percent of us support private school vouchers, 83 percent of FFRF members say humans are causing climate change, and 89 percent say, "churches should play by the same rules as secular non-profits." Other findings show strong support for universal vote by mail (78 percent), an increase of SCOTUS judges to reform the court (60 percent) and guaranteed minimum income (69 percent).

We differ in other areas — 12 percent of members are vegetarians or vegans (compared to 5 percent of Ameri-

cans overall), and 19 percent serve or served in the military compared to 6 percent overall, according to the U.S. Census. On a lighter note, 21 percent of us enjoy regular cycling!

## Commitment to action

We're not just talkers — we're doers. Whether it's attending an FFRF convention (which 10 percent of us have done in the past decade) or seeking assistance from FFRF regarding a church/state violation (which 11 percent of us have done), we're actively engaged in the fight for secularism. Many also volunteer in our communities — 39 percent of us are regular volunteers, much higher than the American average of 23 percent, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

This spirit of activism and engagement drives FFRF forward and ensures our voices are heard. Your commitment to action is not just a part of our community; it empowers us and keeps us moving forward.

When it comes to communication, you've spoken: 73 percent of you feel we've struck the right balance in our outreach, a slight improvement that shows we're listening and adapting to your needs. Your future engagement and support are not just desired; they are crucial to the continued success and growth of our community.

## The dual mission

The dual mission of FFRF — educating the public about nontheism and advocating for the separation of church and state — continues to resonate with members. In a slight increase from a previous survey, 62 percent of respondents view both purposes as equally important.

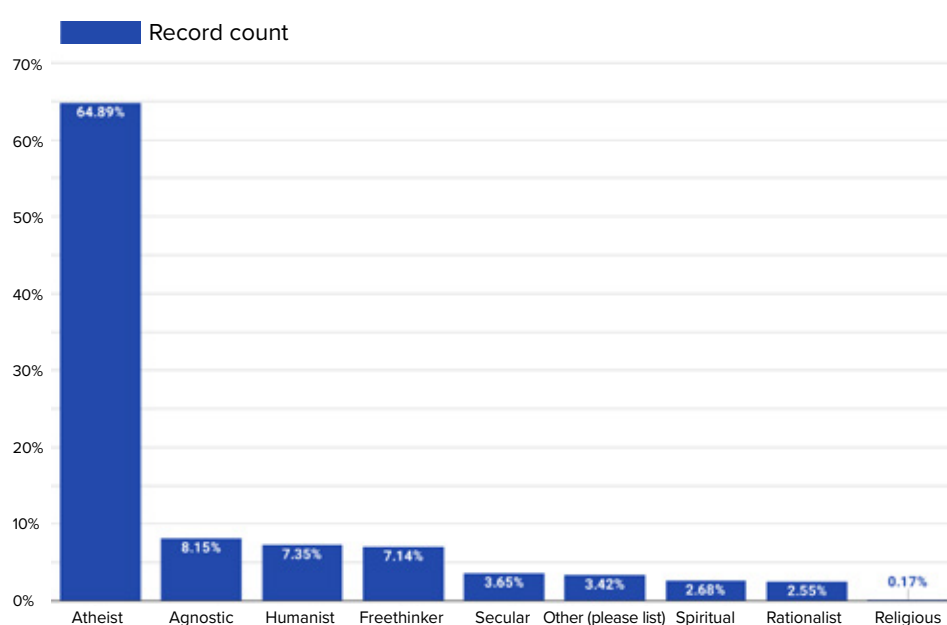
Meanwhile, 35 percent prioritize state/church advocacy, which has also remained stable, underscoring the enduring centrality of this issue for FFRF members.

As we look to the future, each of us plays a crucial role in furthering FFRF's mission. Whether you're a first-generation freethinker or come from a long line of secularists, your contribution matters. Our commitment makes us strong.

Together, we will continue to educate the public about nontheism, advocate for the separation of church and state, and support each other in our shared journey. As members of FFRF, we're not just part of an organization — we're part of a movement, and that's something to be proud of.

Thank you for being a part of this community. Your commitment, voice and activism make FFRF the powerful force it is today.

## How FFRF Members Identify





# Judge: La. must wait on Commandments law

## FREETHOUGHT BOOKS

After FFRF and other groups filed a motion for injunction, a federal judge ruled July 19 that the state of Louisiana cannot immediately move forward on its new law of requiring public schools to display the Ten Commandments in every classroom.

U.S. District Judge John deGravelles of Louisiana's Middle District set a hearing for Sept. 30. A ruling on the case is expected by Nov. 15.

Until then, the Ten Commandments can't be displayed in schools located in five of state's parishes: East Baton Rouge, Livingston, Orleans, St. Tammany and Vernon. The agreement also states that Louisiana's Board of Elementary and Secondary Education cannot "promulgate advice, rules or regulations regarding proper implementation" of the new law until Nov. 15.

Under the new law, public K-12 schools and college classrooms are required to display the Christian Ten

Commandments on posters measuring at least 11 by 14 inches and featuring "large, easily readable font." Schools are also required to post a three-paragraph statement that explains how the texts were "a prominent part of American public education" from the late 17th century through the late 20th century. The law gives schools until Jan. 1 to put up the Ten Commandments, and requires them to use donated posters or spend donated money, rather than public funds, to buy the displays.

Shortly after Gov. Jeff Landry signed the bill on June 24, FFRF, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, and the American Civil Liberties Union's national and state offices, filed a federal lawsuit. The plaintiffs in the case are nine Louisiana families of different or no faiths who say the law violates the First Amendment, forbidding government establishment of religion and protect-

ing free exercise.

"Permanently posting the Ten Commandments in every Louisiana public-school classroom — rendering them unavoidable — unconstitutionally pressures students into religious observance, veneration, and adoption of the state's favored religious scripture," the lawsuit states.

Then, on July 8, the advocacy groups filed a motion for a preliminary injunction, asking the court to refrain from imposing the law or allowing any related enforcement of it during pending legal proceedings.

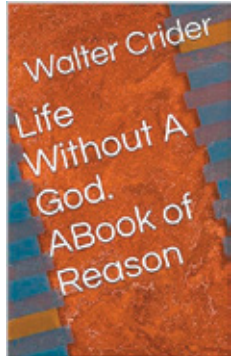
However, under the terms of the agreement, only students in those five Louisiana parishes are guaranteed not to see the Ten Commandments when they return to school. Hopefully, most schools will adopt a "wait and see" approach prior to the Jan. 1 deadline, as the lawsuit continues to progress.

The following books are written by FFRF members on the topics of religion or freethinking. FFRF does not do book reviews. These books are not offered through [ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop).

### Life Without a God. A Book of Reason

**By Walter Crider**  
Paperback \$12  
Kindle \$5

This book describes the basic scientific principles that formed our galaxy and Earth from the material gathered from a previous galaxy without invoking the power of an omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent spirit. It includes the beginning of our galaxy and continues through the beginning of self-replicating forms of mobile fauna and non-mobile flora.



# Religious charter school a no-go, for now

The Oklahoma Statewide Charter School Board voted unanimously Aug. 12 to rescind the contract for what would be the nation's first publicly funded religious charter school after the State Supreme Court ruled the school's contract was unconstitutional.

The move follows a request from Oklahoma Attorney General Gentner Drummond to the State Supreme Court to force the board to rescind the contract of St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual Charter School or face contempt charges.

In its meeting, the board voted with the caveat that the school's contract will be immediately reinstated should the State Supreme Court or U.S. Supreme Court reverse or nullify the current order. (At its July 30 meeting, the board voted to appeal the case to the U.S. Supreme Court.)

FFRF and a coalition of groups and plaintiffs filed a separate lawsuit on July 31, 2023, challenging St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School. The coalition represents nine Oklahoma resi-

dents and a nonprofit organization that is committed to protecting Oklahoma's public school system.

Drummond said in a statement Aug. 12 that while it was "appalling" the board took so long to rescind the contract, he was pleased at the outcome.

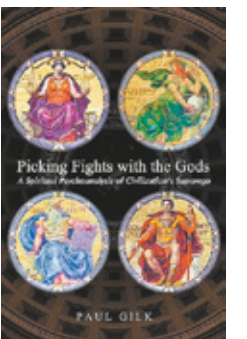
"The proposed state-sponsored religious charter school, funded by our tax dollars, represents a serious threat to the religious liberty of all four million Oklahomans," Drummond said in the statement.

### Picking Fights with the Gods

#### A Spiritual Psychoanalysis of Civilization's Superego

**By Paul Gilk**  
Paperback \$31.08  
Hardcover \$48.48  
Kindle \$9.99

The common understanding of "apocalypse" suggests End Times or Armageddon. But the Greek word "apokalypsis" means neither of those things. Apocalypse doesn't generate End Times but, just the opposite, End Times compels apokalypsis. The actual threat of End Times — explicitly so with weapons of mass destruction and Anthropocene climate change — forces thoughtful people into a search for fundamental causes.



## OVERHEARD

Project 2025 is nothing less than a blueprint for returning America to Christian nationalist control.

**Columnist Margaret Renkel, "Why are there neo-Nazis on the streets of Nashville?"**

*New York Times, 7-22-24*

These are attacks on religious freedom. We are a constitutional republic which is a form of democracy, NOT a theocracy. More people across the U.S. need to start paying attention to what's happening [in] Oklahoma.

**Oklahoma state Rep. Mickey Dolens, who the FFRF Action Fund named as the "Secularist of the Week" for his outspoken opposition to the "Christian nationalist crusade" against Oklahoma's secular public schools.**

*X, 7-24-24*

Norman Public Schools is not going to have bibles in our classrooms and we are not going to require our teachers to teach from the bible. The standards are clear and our curriculum is very clear. And we're not going to deviate from that.

**Norman (Okla.) Nick Migliorino, Public Schools Superintendent Nick Migliorino, in an op-ed calling out the mandate that bibles must be present and taught in every public school classroom. Migliorino was named FFRF Action Fund's "Secularist of the Week" on July 18 for his comments.**

*Norman Transcript, 7-11-24*

Since I turned 18, I have never missed a vote for president. If you don't vote, you don't get the right to com-

plain. As President Obama says, "Don't boo. Vote." If you don't know the facts, research them — that should apply in politics and life. Don't ignore the local and state elections. As we've seen in recent years, school boards and libraries really matter.

**Actress Leslie Uggams, in a personality profile article.**

*New York Times, 7-28-24*

The plaintiffs are free to practice their religion, including the teaching of their religion as they see fit, but cannot require the state to subsidize their religious teachings if they conflict with state antidiscrimination law.

**U.S. District Judge John Woodcock Jr., in his ruling that Maine didn't violate the U.S. constitutional rights of religious schools by requiring them to abide by the state's antidiscrimination law to receive taxpayer-funded tuition assistance.**

*Associated Press, 8-12-24*



New fall season starts Sunday, Sept. 8

### Freethought Matters

An antidote to religion on the airwaves and Sunday morning sermonizing

Freethought Matters TV talk show airs in:

Chicago	WPWR-CW (Ch. 50)	9 am
Los Angeles	KCOP-MY (Ch. 13)	8:30 am
Madison, Wis.	WISC-TV (Ch. 3)	11 pm
New York City	WPIX-IND (Ch. 11)	10 am
San Francisco	KICU-IND (Ch. 36)	10 am
Washington, D.C.	WDCW-CW (Ch. 50, 23, 3)	8 am

*Changes for 2024 in FFRF broadcasting.*

Watch our show every Sunday!

Watch Freethought Matters anytime on FFRF's YouTube channel!

Go to: [ffrf.org/freethought-matters](http://ffrf.org/freethought-matters) for more information

**American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll**

By Orvin Larson

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

— 316 pages / PB  
\$15 Item #FB18

Published by FFRF

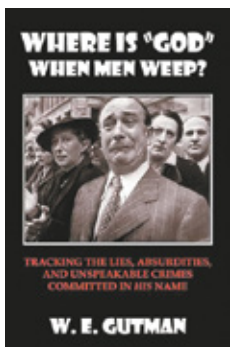
Buy it from FFRF online @ [ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop)

### Where is 'God' When Men Weep?

#### Tracking the Lies, Absurdities and Unspeakable Crimes Committed in His Name

**By W.E. Gutman**  
Paperback \$17.95

Gutman's book questions the existence of deity and paints a terrifying and compelling picture of man's inhumanity to man. The author laments God's godlessness and rails against the mind-boggling absurdities promoted by the religions on which are anchored the most ruthless systems of repression, and on whose behalf the ghastliest crimes have been and continue to be committed.



# No, we don't have an 'atheist government'

This article first appeared on FFRF's *FreethoughtNow.org* blog site.

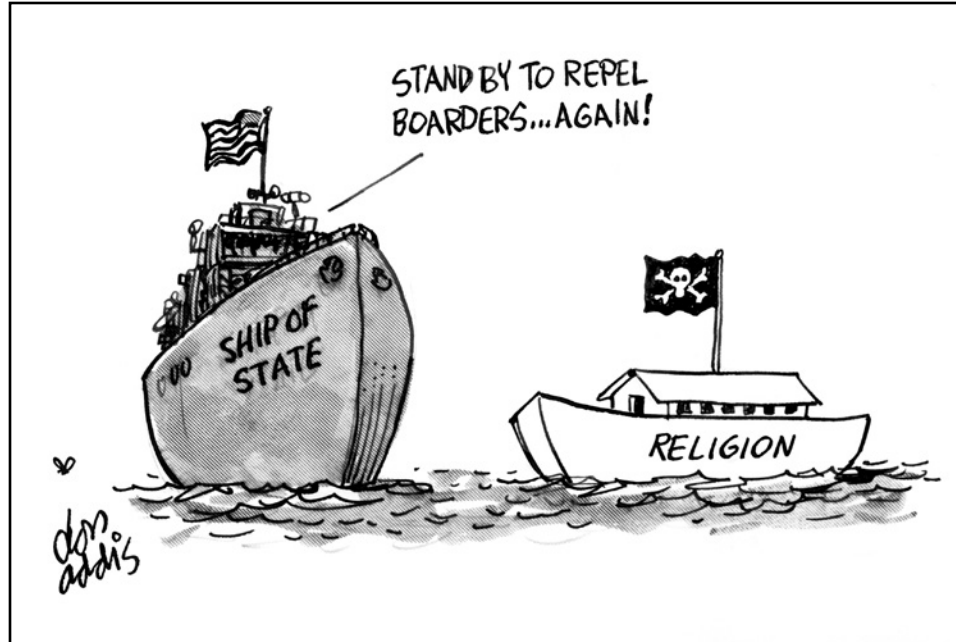
By Annie Laurie Gaylor

The paranoid attitude displayed by Jesus in his statement, "Whoever is not with me is against me" (Matthew 12:30), has been recycled into a Washington Times op-ed by a band of infamous Christian nationalists.

Rogue Oklahoma schools Superintendent Ryan Walters, discredited purveyor of made-up quotes David Barton and the Blaze TV broadcaster Steve Deace, describing themselves as "conservative evangelists," are urging Christians to vote for Donald Trump because "he will end atheism as a state-run religion." They write, "This battle is not just cultural; it's a fundamental struggle for the soul of America, deeply rooted in spiritual warfare. The election ahead is more than a political contest; it is our opportunity to affirm our commitment to our nation's Judeo-Christian values." The rest of the op-ed makes it pretty clear they really mean "Christian values."

These extremists, like Jesus, cannot distinguish between neutrality and hostility, when he said, "He who is not with me is against me." If the government is not espousing and enforcing their religion, they think it is evincing outright hostility. A persecution complex is an intrinsic part of Christian nationalism. Ben Franklin would have corrected them: "When a religion is good, I conceive it will support itself; and when it does not support itself, and God does not take care to support it so that its professors are obliged to call for help of the civil power, 'tis a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one."

Christian nationalists — and they've been around since the Puritan days — believe in theocracy, which won't countenance religious liberty or freedom of conscience. As the old joke goes, the Puritans loved religious freedom so much they decided to keep it all for themselves. Bizarrely, the trio actually praise the fact that the original colonies "each had ties to some vestige of the Christian faith."



Let's briefly look at religious freedom in what the authors apparently believe were the "good old days" of the 13 colonies. All but two had established religions — official state religions. Prosecutions and persecutions were rife. In Virginia, anyone but Anglicans were second-class citizens. Quakers were roundly targeted in almost all the colonies. Baptists were often persecuted. Even in Maryland, where the landmark Act of Toleration of 1649 was adopted, the death penalty and forfeiture of estate still befell anyone who shall "blaspheme God, that is curse Him, or deny our Savior Jesus Christ to be the Son of God, or shall deny the Holy Trinity."

It's instructive to look at just one colony with an established religion: Virginia. It's no coincidence that two of the most ardent advocates of secular government came from Virginia with its established Anglican Church. What did establishment of Anglicanism mean? One example: You were required by law to attend an established Anglican church, which all citizens were taxed to support.

In its early days under the laws of 1612, Virginia punished by death anyone who would "speak impiously of the Trinity or one of the Divine Persons," "blaspheme God's holy Name" or who was convicted of a third offense of "cursing" or breaking the Sabbath. These laws were softened over

time, but fines continued to be imposed for nonattendance of church services and tithes were compulsory. Local taxes paid for parish churches, and Anglican parsons were given land. Conversely, Puritan clergy were banished, Quakers fined, imprisoned and banished. Catholics were notably disqualified for public office, and a Catholic priest entering the commonwealth was subject to instant banishment. There were even penalties for failure to baptize infants.

Aware of his colony's history, James Madison in 1785 wrote his famous "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments,"

protesting even "three pence" in taxes being used to support "a provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion." He wrote, "During almost fifteen centuries has the legal establishment of Christianity been on trial. What have been its fruits? More or less in all places, pride and indolence in the clergy, ignorance and servility in the laity, in both, superstition, bigotry and persecution." The proposal died.

The following year, Virginian Thomas Jefferson wrote the landmark "Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom," a precursor to the First Amendment, in which he argued for true freedom of conscience, noting "civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, any more than our opinions in physics or geometry" and

“Public school teachers are not forcing kids to recite an atheist manifesto or putting Richard Dawkins quotes calling God a delusion on the walls.”

that "to compel a man to furnish contributions of money for the propagation of opinions which he disbelieves and abhors, is sinful and tyrannical."

The act, which passed and which inspired similar language (now under attack) in more than 30 state constitutions, concludes that no one "shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities." Amen.

It was knowledge of the Protestant persecutions in the New World, preceded by the religious wars, inquisitions, witch hunts, pogroms and Crusades in the Old World, that prompted the Framers of the Constitution to purposely become first in the world to invest sovereignty not in a deity but in "We the People." Then they adopted the Bill of Rights with its First Amendment explicitly barring any establishment of religion while promising no prohibition of the free exercise of religion.

An atheist government? Hardly.

Public school teachers are not forcing kids to recite an atheist manifesto or putting Richard Dawkins quotes calling God a delusion on the walls. Kids are not reciting a pledge that says "one nation, under no God" or singing anthems making fun of religion. Freethought groups are not demanding to make atheism the national philosophy, to prefer atheist citizens by law, or grant them privileges or more rights than their religious neighbors. As Thomas Jefferson pointed out, "The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are 20 gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."

Our secular Constitution and Bill of Rights ensures that the government does not endorse religion over nonreligion, likewise irreligion over religion. Maybe what this band of theocrats needs is not only a class in constitutional law, but also one in logic.

**Note:** Most of the colonial history cited is thanks to the renowned legal scholar Leo Pfeffer, author of the classic "Church, State and Freedom."

Annie Laurie Gaylor is FFRF's co-president.

## CRANKMAIL

Here is our latest installment of Crankmail, where we publish (unedited) some of the missives we receive from our detractors.

**Get out:** This country was found under Christians if you have problem with government put 10 commandments in classroom the get of our country we don't want you here

**U.S.A.:** The Bible, which contains the Ten Commandments, is the basis for the three branches of government and the division of power among them. Stop undermining our system of government.

**Constitution:** The first amendment gives us freedom of speech, which includes public prayer and evangelism. Since you obviously don't appreciate the freedoms we have here in the United States, my suggestion is that you take a one way trip to China or North Korea.

**Abortion kills economies:** It does not take a rocket scientist to understand that a loss of \$37 trillion to our economy since 1973 has taken a big toll. Because of abortion, we have 52 million fewer taxpayers who would have provided a strong economic foundation for the nation. Abortion is an economic issue.

**Commandments not religious!:** Sorry liberal pinheads, not this time with a conservative U.S. Su-

preme Court. The ten commandments are not religious but, was given to Moses by God as A MORAL CODE, like THOU SHALT NOT KILL!!!!!! which has no religious connotation other than attacking abortion, WHICH IS MURDER, LIBERALS!! By the way, Florida politicians will follow suit

**Hell or bust:** Given what the Bible says about Hell, if you follow this course and continue to reject Jesus Christ to the point of death, and your reality is eternity in Hell, I can't imagine that you and all those that feel the same as you will feel that it was worth it. You have free will and so as you know the decision is entirely up to you.

**You are wrong:** Stop trying to insist on your pagan beliefs. Our country was founded on IN GOD WE TRUST. You don't even understand the Bill of Rights, the Amendments and the Constitution. You are fighting a losing battle. The only reason this nation has outlived the lifespan for most countries is because we made a covenant with God. Learn history. You can change facts.

**Bibles:** How do you people feel now that there's going to be a Bible in every classroom and it's going to be taught out of. So much for your so called "freedom from religion". It's not about religion anyways

it's about a relationship with Jesus Christ!!! Nothing you can do about the 10 commandments in the Louisiana schools either! Every knee shall bow and every tongue confess Jesus Christ is Lord!!!! I truly hope you repent because hell is no place to be

**FFR:** your one of the reasons the USA sucks now prayer should be in schools

Your misuse of the constitution. It's freedom of religion. The freedom to actually worship GOD. This group attacked a prison where the inmates were actually benefitting from the scriptures and you seek to take that from them through your lies.

**Stay away from us:** If any of you from come down to the South and walk down our streets, you better not let on that you don't believe in God, because if you do, you might not make it off the streets alive. We don't like your type down here.

**We all pray:** I am sure you have been getting a lot of emails regarding the foolishness you are atheist trying to put your beliefs on school systems it is sad to see how yall can push that bull shit on someone else but someone can pray in schools I will continue to pray in school. Stop your foolishness you just mad no one wants to fallow your bs God not dead he is alive .

**It's your fault!:** Keep your communist fucking hands out of spirituality and AMERICA. YOU are the reason why AMERICA is failing. Since the 70's we have seen an erosion of American Values and status in the world because of your picking at spirituality. Why do you think we have so many fucking homeless and disbanded family units that have ended in divorce and so many kids with single mothers. BECAUSE OF FUCKING ORGANIZATIONS LIKE YOURS!!!! SPIRITUALITY AND FAMILY is what made America the way it is. VALUES is what made AMERICA. What is your alternate to spirituality???? FUCK YOU!!!!

**Absolute proof:** You really are a bunch of freaks, is what you are. If you say that God doesn't exist, why do you exist? Why do you have an organization if God doesn't exist? You just proved beyond a shadow of doubt that God almighty exists.

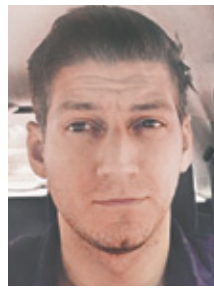
**State's rights:** I've been looking up what you people are up to. The federal government doesn't fund our schools, they don't do anything with schools. It's local property taxes that pay for schools, so what you are doing is interfering in state's rights, you're interfering with my rights. I'm not gonna take it. If I have to file a lawsuit against you, I will. I'm fixin' to sue you. I'll nail you to the wall. I guarantee it.

# U.S. secularists are unique political force

This article first appeared on *PsyPost.org* and is reprinted with permission.

By Eric W. Dolan

Over the last few decades, America has witnessed a substantial decline in religiosity. Although the United States remains relatively religious compared to other nations, it is markedly less religious today than it was 30 years ago.



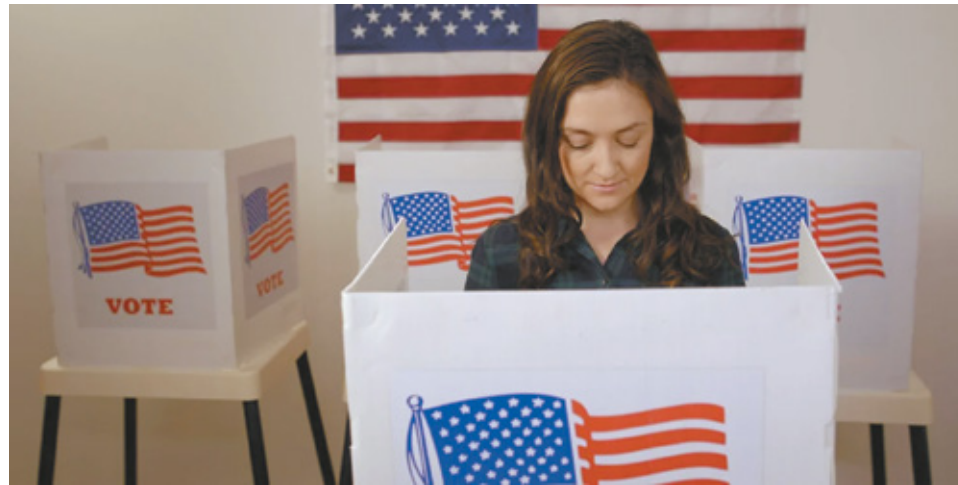
Eric Dolan

However, a recent study published in *Advances in Political Psychology* uncovers an important nuance: secularism is distinct from mere nonreligiosity. The findings reveal that secularists form a unique group within the American electorate, suggesting a more nuanced understanding of secular trends is essential for grasping contemporary political dynamics.

While the increase in nonreligiosity, often termed “the rise of the Nones,” has been widely documented, the new study sought to delve deeper into the distinctions between secularism and nonreligiosity. By doing so, the researchers aimed to clarify the political implications of these trends and how they might shape the future of American politics.

The researchers drew on data from several large-scale surveys, including the General Social Survey, Gallup Poll, Pew Research Center, and the Public Religion Research Institute. These data sources provided a robust foundation for examining trends in secularization and religiosity in the United States over the past several decades.

The study’s findings provide evidence that secularism is not simply the absence of religion, but a distinctive identity characterized by specific beliefs and orientations. Unlike nonreligiosity, which denotes a lack of religious affiliation



or belief, secularism involves an active identification with principles grounded in empirical evidence and rational thought. Secularists, therefore, are defined by what they believe in rather than what they lack.

For instance, secularists exhibited strong opposition to conspiracy theories. The researchers found that secularists are less likely to believe in various conspiracy theories compared to nonreligious individuals. This skepticism towards conspiracy theories is consistent with secularists’ reliance on empirical evidence and rational thought.

By contrast, nonreligiosity did not show a consistent relationship with opposition to conspiracy theories. This highlights the importance of the affirmative secular identity, which actively seeks evidence-based explanations and rejects unsubstantiated claims.

One of the most significant findings of the study is the strong association between secularism and liberal political attitudes. Secularists are more likely to support Democratic candidates and align with liberal policies compared to their nonreligious counterparts. This tendency is evident across various policy areas, including social welfare, environmental protection and immigration.

The study also reveals that secularists are staunch supporters of core democratic values. Secularists exhibit strong support for participatory democracy, advocating for the inclusion of all individuals in the political process and the removal of barriers to voting. They also emphasize the importance of freedom of expression, opposing censorship and supporting the right to express even unpopular or controversial ideas.

“We suspect that having traditionally been the subject of political intolerance, secularists — particularly atheists — are highly supportive of extending political rights and civil liberties to other groups, even groups they dislike,” the researchers remarked.

Interestingly, the researchers found that liberals, particularly those identifying as very liberal, are generally unsupportive of allowing disliked groups such as “MAGA supporters,” “racists,” or “Muslim extremists” to hold rallies, teach or have their books in local libraries. On the other hand, secularists, despite having similar disliked groups, are more likely than nonsecularists to extend civil liberties to these groups, demonstrating a higher level of political tolerance.

“It is striking that when the American

right accuses secular liberals of trying to censor it or ‘cancel’ it for expressing ideas they find distasteful, they are only half right. Ideological liberals do appear to support censoring and limiting the expression of some types of ideas and certain kinds of groups,” the researchers explained.

“However, when ideology and partisanship are held constant, secularists are just the opposite. They oppose censorship and limits on freedom of expression, and they support allowing all groups — even groups they find dangerous or distasteful — to have a societal forum for expressing their perspectives.”

Despite their strong secular identity and political engagement, secularists exhibit relatively low levels of participation in organized secular activities. The study found that while religious individuals often engage in regular communal activities, such as attending services and participating in church-related events, secularists do not have a comparable level of organized social engagement.

This finding suggests that secularism functions primarily as a psychological and ideological identity rather than a social movement with formal structures and regular communal activities. The lack of organized secular behavior highlights the individualistic nature of secularism, where personal beliefs and identities take precedence over collective action.

“In American politics, religion has long mattered,” the researchers concluded. “The contours of American public opinion have been shaped by the nuances of religiosity, and religious appeals by candidates are commonplace. Now, secularism matters, too — although its presence in the electorate remains largely hidden. However, as current trends continue, secularism will only be ignored at politicians’ peril. No understanding of the American electorate is complete without attention to the secular voter.”

*Eric Dolan is the founder, publisher and editor of PsyPost.*

“Secularists . . . are defined by what they believe in rather than what they lack.”

## Discussing religion isn’t all pie in the sky

By Roger Lindsay

A tricky aspect of criticizing religion is the difference between challenging institutions vs. conversing with individuals. I call it the Grandmother Problem: Could I honestly tell my sweet grandmother what had driven me from religion without hurting her feelings? Could I explain myself without seeming to condemn her, as well?



Roger Lindsay

I never resolved that specific dilemma, but perhaps you, too, have a Grandmother Problem (or a Roommate Problem, a Neighbor Problem, etc.). As much as we may relish imagined heroic confrontations with villainous bullies, not every believer wears a black hat, and, more to the point, few have that much power.

Think of a religious institution whose policies and activities you oppose. Now, consider your believing

neighbor or co-worker. How do the two relate? Some individuals, however emotionally or otherwise invested, may be uncomfortable with church/corporate policy themselves and wish it were different. How much blame should be theirs, and are we blaming actual supporters or actual victims?

Large corporations usually have giving programs or charitable foundations precisely to deflect negative assessments of their behavior, political lobbying and tax avoidance. Critique the corporation and one is shown crowds of well-intentioned if perhaps uninformed volunteers wearing the corporate logo. What big oil company doesn’t fund some small environmental project like planting trees during carefully managed photo-ops? This shouldn’t divert our attention for long or keep us from exposing these companies’ other actions. But the people planting the trees could be very nice.

Much like Big Oil, Big Religion does

this kind of corporate PR very well, appearing to mitigate damage caused by its own larger agenda — social services in poor countries it has helped subjugate, orphanages in Ireland or Texas, and so on. Even the Taliban provides community assistance of a sort in Afghanistan.

I predict a coming boom in the United States for charities serving women forced to carry their pregnancies to term. Guess who will take credit — for the charity, not the force?

But, what of the believers wishing for change mentioned above? A well-meaning layperson seems rather like a passenger sitting in the last row of coach on a jumbo jet. In this religious business — let’s call it Pie in the Sky Airlines — does the CEO consider passengers’ views on corporate policy? Is the board of directors interested in passenger input on the airline’s lobbying efforts and finances? Would the pilots of the plane listen to this passen-

ger’s opinion about how the plane is being flown or where it should land? Even the flight attendants probably don’t really care what this layperson in coach thinks so long as they obey the rules. So, how guilty is the person in Seat 36F? (I don’t mean to imply that all such airline passengers are wholly innocent — though some of them are probably simply using tickets handed down from their parents.)

Now, suppose the lay member is female. Who’s listening to her? She’s not even sitting in the last row of coach, is she? No, she’s basically luggage. Many of the “airlines” I’m discussing have made it quite clear that women’s primary value is their carrying capacity, have they not?

Maybe I could have found the words to criticize Pie in the Sky Airlines without making my grandmother feel accused, sitting as she was way at the back, if she’d been permitted a seat at all.

I expect many of you reading this have come up with better ways to approach your friends and neighbors. It’s a discussion I’d like to see continue.

*FFRF Member Roger Lindsay is a retired public librarian and lives in Minneapolis with his wife.*

“As much as we may relish imagined heroic confrontations with villainous bullies, not every believer wears a black hat, and, more to the point, few have that much power.”

## FFRF awards \$18,850!

# 2024 BIPOC student essay contest winners

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the 11 top winners and seven honorable mentions of the 2024 David Hudak Memorial Black, Indigenous and Persons of Color Student Essay Competition.

FFRF has paid out a total of \$18,850 in award money for the contest this year.

BIPOC students were asked to write on the topic of “How does religion hinder racial equality and civil rights?” where they were to compose an essay from the perspective of history or current struggle, religious psychology or personal experience.

Winners, their ages, the colleges or universities they are attending and the award amounts are listed below. (FFRF seeks to distribute essay scholarship monies to a higher number of students, so ties — such as fourth place in this contest — are not regarded in the typical tie fashion, where, in this instance, fifth place would be skipped.)

### FIRST PLACE

Rita Nyamkimah, St. Joseph's University, \$3,500.

### FIRST PLACE

## Gods of their people

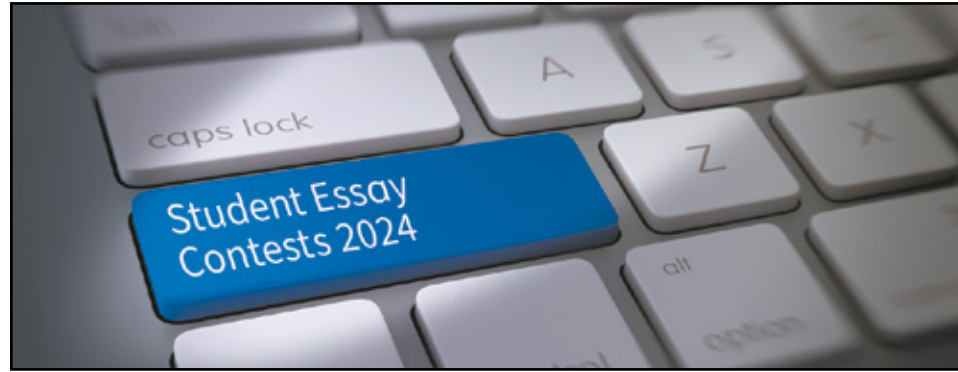
FFRF awarded Rita \$3,500.

By Rita Nyamkimah

The roots of Christianity go deep into my family tree. My paternal great-grandfather was baptized Roman Catholic as a young boy by missionaries in Cameroon. On my mother's side, my great-grandfather had converted to Christianity after escaping the Biafra War. The common thread in the fabric of these stories is the overarching influence of colonialism on these drastic changes to the beliefs of not just those in my family, but many other Africans whose families experienced the same.

The influence of Christianity on my parents' home countries is nearly unavoidable and I found myself continually grappling with this reality as I grew more interested in my heritage. I have been robbed of the unadulterated experience of my own culture as a result of the harrowing legacy of colonialism. In eastern Nigeria, Catholicism became the dominant force after the war, providing solace and stability to the Igbo people in the aftermath of war and mass starvation.

Although they found comfort in



### SECOND PLACE

Katelyn Boozer, Jacksonville State University, \$3,000.

### THIRD PLACE

Lionel Walraven, University of Hawaii-Maui, \$2,500.

### FOURTH PLACE (tie)

Akil Malik, Alabama A&M University, \$2,000.

### FOURTH PLACE (tie)

William S. Torres, Texas A&M University, \$2,000.

### FIFTH PLACE

Alexander Lumala, Arizona State University, \$1,500.

### SIXTH PLACE

Sarah Ramos-Gonzalez, Yale University,

\$1,000.

### SEVENTH PLACE

Naya Lewis, University of Oregon, \$750.

### EIGHTH PLACE

Yao Liu, Northeastern University, \$500.

### NINTH PLACE

Krishna Verma, Simon Fraser University, \$400.

### TENTH PLACE

Devin Armstrong, University of North Carolina, \$300.

### HONORABLE MENTION (\$200 each)

Jailyn Agard, Ramapo College of New Jersey.

Zyah Bostick, University of North Carolina.

Shaun Chaney, Goucher College.

Dominique Davie, Vanderbilt University.  
Georgia Davis, University of Central Arkansas.

Bianca Dishmon, Northwestern University.  
Bridelle Toumani, Russell Sage College.

FFRF thanks Lisa Treu for managing the details of this (and FFRF's other essay competitions).

FFRF would also like to thank our volunteer and staff readers and judges, including: Darrell Barker, Patrick Duff, Kate Garmise, Ricki Grunberg, Linda Josheff, Dan Kettner, Sammi Lawrence, Bernard Leigg, Michael Luther, Katya Maes, Don Onnen, PJ Slinger, Kimberly Waldron and Karen Lee Weidig

This contest is named for the late David Hudak, an FFRF member who left a bequest to generously fund a student essay contest.

FFRF has offered essay competitions to students of color since 2016. It has also offered essay contests open to all college students since 1979, high school students since 1994, grad students since 2010 and one for law students since 2019.



Rita Nyamkimah

Christianity, I couldn't help but consider how this change brought the inevitable rejection of our ancestral traditions. It is the nature of colonial Christianity to alienate its subject from their origins in favor of a foreign God who will punish them for being true to themselves.

Separating my culture from Christianity became a daunting task. Christianity is such a deeply ingrained part of Igbo culture that in trying to gain a better understanding I had met a painful irony: In seeking to deep-

en my cultural connection, I would become further alienated from my community, as being Christian was now synonymous to being Igbo. Even though our religious practices had predated the arrival of missionaries by thousands of years, they had been dismissed to the margins of societal consciousness after a few centuries of colonization. Our native beliefs were suddenly overshadowed and now only relegated to being spoken of in hushed tones and disapproving whispers.

My own struggles with religion and culture have made me deeply committed to maintaining cultural traditions. Understanding how critical it is to preserve our indigenous customs and stories, I have actively sought to record the oral histories from my own family and of other Igbo families in my community. Having tangible records of our history is the last resort in preserving our cultural practices so they're not lost to the sands of time.

Ultimately, my journey of self-discovery and cultural reclamation has led me to embrace a more nuanced

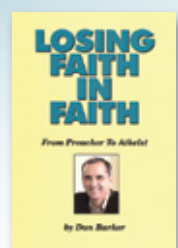
understanding of my identity — one that acknowledges the multifaceted influences that have shaped me as a person. While the legacy of Christianity remains a part of my heritage, I have found solace in embracing a more humanist approach, as our relationships to each other as human beings hold far more weight than any duty to a great omniscient force far in the cosmos.

*Rita, 18, is from Hockessin, Del., and will be attending St. Joseph's University in Philadelphia, where she plans to get a degree in*

*health sciences within the pre-medical program. She writes: "I have been the student representative for my school in the Red Clay School District Superintendent Advisory Council since 2023, as well as the president of the Black Student Union of A.I DuPont High School. I'm a photographer in my leisure time, not professionally but rather for the purpose of documenting the lives of young Black people in Wilmington, Del. My ultimate goal is to be a psychiatrist in order to provide essential mental health services to underserved communities."*

“I have been robbed of the unadulterated experience of my own culture as a result of the harrowing legacy of colonialism.”

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## SECOND PLACE

# We are only equal within these walls

FFRF awarded Katelyn \$3,000.

By Katelyn Boozer

While it is difficult for me to imagine the ways other religions go about curbing racial equality, having not experienced it for myself, I can certainly state that Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States do not foster an environment fit for racial equality. The tactics that religion uses to ignore racial equality are conformity, separation from the ideals of the world, and ignoring everything outside of theirs.

To be the perfect Jehovah's Witness is to be as interesting as a pile of eraser shavings.

Living by the standards of Jehovah's Witnesses is an erasure of culture, holidays, and often includes family members who do not want to conform to the same rules. As a child, I grew up with two messages — one from the world, telling me that family comes first; and one from a tightly knit cult telling me that even family will not be exempt from shunning if they break their



Katelyn Boozer

rules. It is insisted that everyone shares the same beliefs, beliefs taught through literature that exclusively included whitewashed figures, crafted by people who saw the world through a white lens.

There is no curiosity or willingness to learn about the point of view of people

outside of their religion; it was their job to remain ignorant. The congregation I was raised in was predominately white, with the only other Black people being my family members. People felt the need to touch my hair without asking or would tell me that I "speak properly." These were things that happened to me outside of their walls, too, but it was always by peers who did not know any better, not by grown adults.

There are many things that I am still recognizing as harmful, such as the requirement to remain apolitical. Abstaining from voting was painted as being on a moral high ground. They feel no need to try to improve the world they live in, for themselves or for others. In the mind of a Jehovah's Witness, the world is already on its way to its end, therefore nothing outside of their small bubble matters. Every political issue was an issue only worldly people faced.

Life as a Jehovah's Witness becomes a one-size-fits all, but with a bias for white people. It is comparable to the way that the majority of unisex clothing is based

on what is socially acceptable for men to wear. I found it hard to accept myself in an environment that only conditionally accepted me. Even then, the acceptance came with no protection, and instructions to pray instead. It would be hard to be encouraged to fight for oneself when living in a cult mindset that teaches that exercising the right to protest and vote is going against the religion.

Katelyn, 20, is from Valley Head, Ala., and attends Jacksonville State University in Jacksonville, Ala., where she is majoring in technical theater. She writes: "I was raised as a Jehovah's Witness for the first 15 years of my life. After realizing that the constant pressure was nonsensical, my immediate family stopped attending. With the free time this granted, I joined my school's volleyball team and the community theatre. The enjoyment I get from building and painting sets is something I am not ready to let go of. I want to spend the rest of my life learning all that I can about technical theatre, and falling in love with the world that I had spent years waiting to end."

## THIRD PLACE

# My heritage and the colonization of my people

FFRF awarded Lionel \$2,500.

By Lionel Walraven

I am Native American on my mother's side. My mother is Yaqui and Diné on her maternal side, while her paternal side is Chicano and Chumash. The Chumash tribe is native to the coast of Southern California. They had a rich culture built on community, storytelling and living in harmony with the earth.

The Catholic Church enslaved my ancestors in missions using their religion as a weapon to exploit and subjugate for generations. Our once-thriving civilization and culture was slowly erased by the hands of a group who saw themselves superior under the power of their god.

In 1769, the Portola Expedition had come through California. This expedition would establish missions along the California and Baja coastline, where they would eventually make contact with the Chumash tribe. Upon making contact, they had titled the Chumash people "Pagans and

Heathens." Upon the missions being established, many natives were converted and put to work. Even to this day, the Catholic Church says most of the natives died from disease; however, history books reveal that natives were being worked for 11-13 hours a day, being fed small portions of non-nutritious food and were consistently beaten, making them susceptible to said disease.

A rebellion was in the works when, in 1824, a young Chumash boy was beaten to near death by a soldier after traveling to visit his family, kickstarting the rebellion. This rebellion specifically occurred in Alta, Calif., within three of the missions. The fight went on for several days, but, in the end, the Chumash lost, their only weapons being common hunting tools while the Spanish had the technological advantage of gunpowder. The survivors scattered; many ran away, some stayed, having "converted."

At this point, the Chumash lost who they were; their language and culture were nullified by the Catholic Church. This terrible story of massacre and years of abuse affects us to this day.

Indoctrination and dominance were en-



Lionel Walraven

forced by the Church itself based on biblical texts of xenophobia and racism. There is a severe lack today of Natives tied to their culture in the Americas. My great-grandma Dorothy is an example of how xenophobia has survived for generations. Born in 1901 in the San Buenaventura Mission, she worked for multiple wealthy land-owners

under supervision of the Church. She was raised and indoctrinated into Catholicism. Our family has researched and learned the history and cultural practices from books that were written by anthropologists and not by our elders. They were taught that to be native was to be less than human.

Generational trauma is real. Loss of cultural identity is a process we have worked to reclaim. Xenophobia and racism are all too common in the modern world and are often structured around and supported by books within the bible. I have experienced people using hateful slurs and using their god as an excuse to try to elevate themselves above me. Religion creates racial inequality, divides humanity and erases identity.

Lionel, 18, is from Kihei, Hawaii, and will be attending University of Hawaii Maui Campus in Kahului, Hawaii. He writes: "In high school, I maintained a 3.8 GPA and won various awards for outstanding academic achievement, respect and courtesy. I've been accepted into the University of Hawaii and plan on pursuing a liberal arts degree. My hobbies include Dungeons & Dragons, coding and art. I love animals."

## FOURTH PLACE (tie)

# Religion binds us to racism, social discord

FFRF awarded Akil \$2,000.

By Akil Malik

More than 85 percent of the world's population (including 75 percent of Americans) identifies with some kind of religion. Since most religions promote beliefs based on love and peace, these statistics suggest that the world should be a much more loving and peaceful place. Instead, I think that religion is actually one of the most divisive forces in the world, encouraging hate, racism and chaos. Religion has caused wars and been the primary factor behind some of the most terrible incidents

throughout history, including chattel slavery, Jim Crow, the Holocaust, LG-BQT-plus discrimination, misogyny, political arguments and so many other conflicts.

For as long as I can remember, my parents have always said that religion was one of the primary reasons that the transatlantic slave trade was so successful, especially in America. Christianity became one of the most powerful ways to manage the difficult problem of the American Negro. Plantation owners weaponized the bible and religious rites like marriage to control the enslaved Africans. They used select scriptures to teach that the divine plan is for African Americans to suffer here on Earth in order to reap

rewards in heaven. In other words, it would displease the heavenly father if they rebelled against their bondage and did not do their "duty" happily. Sadly, that message has thrived in African American culture and churches still teach that we are supposed to suffer bravely to prove piety and faith. I believe this is what continues to hinder advances toward ending racism and supporting civil rights.

Today, religion continues to influence political races and manipulate laws that support racism, bigotry and misogyny. The former laws against same-sex marriage and the recent overturning of Roe v. Wade are prime



See Malik on page 14

Akil Malik

## Malik

Continued from page 13

examples of how people use religion to impose divisive laws based on faith, despite the separation of church and state. In the last presidential election, evangelicals pushed to elect the president who would appoint judges who would support overturning *Roe v. Wade*. Politicians are using religious language to encourage banning books and rewriting history lessons, which is causing more division in the

country as religious people try to impose their personal religious beliefs on everyone.

There are many more examples of how religion has historically and currently been a hindrance to ending racism and enabling civil rights for all. It has been used as a chain to bind America to the worst racist and intolerant social behavior since its beginning. Basically, it divides us and creates intolerance of people who do

“Christianity became one of the most powerful ways to manage the difficult problem of the American Negro.

not have the same beliefs. It also has dangerous messages, almost like brainwashing, which prevents some people from seeing the world as it really is — ignoring science and believing in faith over evidence. Ultimately, it is not possible to achieve racial equality or civil rights when religion is such a divisive factor.

*Akil, 18, is from Clarkston, Ga., and will be attending Alabama A&M University in Normal, Ala., with plans to major*

*in computer science with a concentration in software engineering. He writes: “I am a motivated and ambitious student-athlete with a passion for football. I am the youngest of three, with two older sisters. My goal is to eventually work in the gaming industry, helping to create innovative and exciting games and technology of the future. Throughout my high school career, I have played football and been a member of the 100 Black Men of Dekalb’s Leadership Academy, where I participated in community service projects and learned to develop and exercise leadership skills that I plan to use in college.”*

### FOURTH PLACE (tie)

## How religion limits

FFRF awarded William \$2,000.

By William S. Torres

Religion has undoubtedly played a major role in advancing civil rights. Individuals like Martin Luther King Jr., a Baptist minister, and Malcolm X, a prominent figure in the Nation of Islam, were leading the civil rights movement and still continue to inspire millions. At the same time however, religion was used to justify white superiority and racial segregation. The bible and other religious texts and doctrines have been used to fit the ideals of supremacists who believe that they are the perfect race. While, to some, religion is a sanctuary and they find a place through God, in others, their religion is their method to power, to prejudice, and a way to place themselves upon a pedestal and look down on others.

When considering the civil rights movement, religion was used on both sides. To those who were fighting for their rights and their lives, religion was used to argue that God made everyone equal. To those who were fighting against civil rights, they argued that God had made one perfect race, and they used quotes and scripts to



William S. Torres

justify their hate crimes. This idea begs the question then, if God were real, why would he make his words so ambiguous and able to be twisted into specific ideals? If God were real, then why, time after time, does it seem that his word is often the justification for both sides of war?

History has repeated itself time after time, where the root of conflict seems to always lead to religion. Even during World War II, Nazi Germany followed Christian ideals, and used them for the genocide of

over 6 million members of another religion. If God were real, why would he continuously let his subjects be murdered and conflict with each other? Many argue that this is because God chose to give humans free will. To this I respond: If he could make something as beautiful as life, could he also not have created a world where conflict is absent, even with free will?

It is easy to feel that secular individuals or groups are often overlooked, despite their incredible advancements to social equality. People such as Bayard Rustin, a secular and gay African American civil rights activist, who was a key organizer of the March on Washington, one of the largest marches on civil rights of its time.

As I grew up in a relatively conservative and religious small Southern town, I always felt as though the people around me were undoubtedly rude to others who were different from them, whether it was because of their sexuality or even race. It would be immature to blame this idea completely on religion, but given the past of the South, I do believe that religion has played a heavy

role in shaping the ideals of their families and cultures. Although religion can offer a place for those with nothing else, I believe that, in many circumstances, it may also be the cause of their having nothing.

*William, 20, is from New Braunfels, Texas, and attends Texas A&M University, where he is in the honors animal science program while working toward a minor in pre-medicine and*

*a minor in ecology and conservation biology, with the ultimate goal of attending vet school.*

*He writes: “I have always prided myself upon my ability to accept all others, and I believe it is heavily due to my family. My*

*mother is a lesbian, I have a Chinese brother, a white brother, two other Hispanic brothers, and Black step-brothers. I believe that growing up through this environment has led me to be who I am today. I was a service officer for a freshmen leadership organization, a member of Pre-Vet Society, Century Men’s Society, a Fish Camp counselor, a special events coordinator and ambassador at the College of Veterinary Medicine, and I even competed on the school’s animal welfare judging team, where I placed in an international competition.”*

“If God were real, then why, time after time, does it seem that his word is often the justification for both sides of war?”

### FIFTH PLACE

## Preaching subjugation

FFRF awarded Alexander \$1,500.

By Alexander Lumala

From the moment we set foot in America in 1619, Black people were (and still are) kept in line through religious manipulation. This developed as a necessity for white plantation owners. In some instances, slaves made up 60 percent of the population, as was the case in South Carolina. It was not enough to brutalize their slaves; they had to literally instill the fear of God to prevent them from rebelling.

Take Ephesians 6:5, where Paul says, “Slaves, obey your Earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.” This was drilled into slaves by the people they trusted to be messengers of God, the priesthood. So even if they thought rebellion was possible, they

were far too scared of eternal damnation to even attempt it. Blacks endured their brutalization for the vain promise they would be rewarded by God for their obedience to their masters when they die. Yet, in a final cruelty, many slaves were never baptized, as clergy were unsure whether it was moral to baptize a slave, just another moment when they tolerated racial inequality.

“Even as slavery ended, religion still seemed to slow or even hinder progress toward racial equality.

Even as slavery ended, religion still seemed to slow or even hinder progress toward racial equality. Take the civil

rights movement in the 1960s, which saw a large number of clergy take part. While much can be said about the bravery of such a move, make no mistake that, at the end of the day, clergy slowed down the movement significantly. Martin Luther King Jr.’s experience with white clergy was telling. As we all know, MLK was a pastor and often appealed to the “Christian



Alexander Lumala

Brotherhood,” which he believed compelled all of its followers to oppose injustice. His appeals were often ignored by the white clergy, with him commenting, “I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate . . . the Negro’s great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white mod-

erate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace, which is the absence of tension, to a positive peace, which is the presence of justice.”

When I was younger, I attended Black church, and they always had pictures of white Jesus. I’m sure many other Black people can attest to this disconnect when you posed yourself the question: Why was our savior white? This truly made me feel a certain way about my skin, and definitely led to some self-acceptance issues. Yet, I wouldn’t change this experience, as it taught me something valuable: religion is oppression.

*Alexander, 18, is from Scottsdale, Ariz., and will be attending Arizona State University in Tempe, Ariz., where he plans to major in computer science. He writes: “I have more than five years of experience in tech. This includes PC building, learning three coding languages (Swift, Python, Java), and founding and participating in various projects dedicated to technology. My goal is to utilize my passion for tech to address Black issues while pursuing higher education.”*

SIXTH PLACE

# Religion and racial equality in America

FFRF awarded Sarah \$1,000.

By Sarah L. Ramos-Gonzalez

For 18 years, I went to Catholic mass every Sunday. In a Mexican immigrant community, going to Spanish mass was a spiritual haven for the principled, but I, evidently, witnessed a culture of shame.

I remember my mother instructing me to close my legs at age 7, making me fear that someone would look up a child's skirt, and of old ladies forcing a shawl on my 10-year-old shoulders for modesty purposes. But I saw through their excuses to sexualize my body. I remember sitting at mass, and the priest blessing a 15-year-old girl by pressuring her to remain pure in a world where young porn-watching men kill indecent girls. It broke my heart the number of instances I recall priests and community leaders blindly demonizing the youth, being intolerant of other religions, involving the words "porn" and "drugs" in sermons, denying mental health issues' existence and spreading homophobic rhetoric.

From embedding extremist politi-

cal agendas in their interpretation of 2,000-year-old scripture to fear-mongering, the pain I felt after what should have been an uplifting religious experience told my soul that church was not for me. Even as I furthered myself from religion throughout my teens, I held onto the belief that the Catholics around me were open-minded in the name of Christ. My hopes withered through the alienating stares my Indian partner received when we attended church last year. I see religion as a vehicle for community leaders to subtly disseminate extremist right-wing political agendas to undereducated, predominantly poor populations. When advocating for racial equality, self-acceptance and civil rights, religious faith can hamper these causes by convincing its believers that diversity is wrong, and everyone must adhere to their strict guidelines to be equal.

Since race is something a person cannot change, joining a homogenous religious community is impossible.

My freedom from religion has taught me to be emotionally mature, critically thinking and compassionate, without the rigidity of tribal thinking. In an era of unlimited information, it takes one search to



Sarah L. Ramos-Gonzalez

see how the Catholic Church has a centuries-old tradition of avoiding accountability when abusing its believers, only to call their mistakes a forgivable exception.

In today's polarized America, religion can perpetuate its characteristic culture of entitlement and bias, making their believers vulnerable to the manipulative tactics of its leaders. I see the errors in the institutions that adults around us uphold. In religious communities, issues

regarding equality are regarded with discomfort and ignorance. In a world where young people like me are expected to fix the world, we need tolerance and diversity. Modern religion can become a place of confirmation bias for people with discriminatory rhetoric. By taking individuals outside their comfort zones, we can teach everyone that being a good person occurs regardless of religious virtue. Values such as kindness, selflessness and patience are timeless. In a crisis, they make the difference between tragedy and a community strong enough to problem-solve and move forward together.

Sarah, 18, is attending Yale University in New Haven, Conn., where she plans to go into law school.

Sarah writes: *I recently finished my medical gap year due to hip surgery in September. I am currently homeless. In my free time, I love to spend time with my amazing partner by playing video games and trying new food. I can solve the Rubik's cube in as little as 23 seconds, and I was featured on ABC15 news last spring. My career goal includes going to law school to become a lawyer who advocates for underprivileged communities, and writing books that reflect my journey as a person who overcame adversity.*

SEVENTH PLACE

# Religion's role in the downfall of Indigenous people

FFRF awarded Naya \$750.

By Naya Lewis

Religion is arguably one of the most influential sources of power in our society. It is one of the few things you aren't born with, such as your race, gender or sexual identity, but treated with the same amount of power as these factors that differentiate us as people. If you look back in history, religion is responsible for humanity's most impressive victories and tragic wars. It has the ability to polarize or unite communities.

I think most of the world can agree that of all religions, there is one that has the most power and influence on society — Christianity. Christianity has specifically had the largest forceful impact of any religion on minority communities. As someone who has Indigenous lineage from the Delaware Tribe of Indians and Cherokee Nation, I am very aware of the impacts Christianity has had on Native Americans.

Answering how religion has hindered racial equality is overwhelming because, in my opinion, religion is one of the main links to the downfall of Native people. The displacement



Naya Lewis

of Indigenous people, the erasure of culture, the mass killing of communities and the current history of Native American boarding schools our U.S. government forced upon Native people is all a result of colonization and Christianity.

Back in the 1800s, the phrase "Manifest Destiny" was coined. It was the idea that it was white European settlers' God-given right to traverse and settle North America. In complete honesty, they believed it was their right to eradicate Native pop-

ulations and culture and force upon everybody the religion of Christianity. This is a clear example of the negative impact religion has had on a minority population.

As a homeschooled kid, growing up religiously open and being on the more spiritual side, I found that this left me in an awkward place socially. Many homeschooled children I knew were extremely religious — specifically Christian. I found myself trying to navigate how I could believe that everyone's personal beliefs were valuable, but how my Christian friends may see me as a "sinner" or someone who needs to be "saved."

I learned about events driven by Christianity and colonialism like the Trail of Tears, Native American boarding schools, and Christopher Columbus's "discovery" of America and annihilation of Indigenous people. After learning this information at a young age, I found it difficult to understand

how religions like Christianity were still practiced and pushed upon people in our modern world.

Looking back, I'm thankful I was able to experience this dichotomy as a spiritual, homeschooled Native American student, as it gave me more insight into the negative impact religion has had on a racial and social level.

Naya, 20, is from Terrebonne, Ore., and attends the University of Oregon in Eugene, Ore., and is majoring in environmental conservation and sustainability. She writes: *"I'm from a very close-knit family of four. Growing up, I was homeschooled, which allowed us to do a lot of traveling. Because of this, I've been lucky enough to meet many different people and experience cultures of all kinds, which has made me very open minded and adaptable. I'm an active person and have played most sports. I'm a hard worker and got my first job when I was 15 and have had one ever since. My career goal is to work for the National Park Service. I want to educate future generations about our planet, its natural cycles, and how we can change our out-of-date systems to new sustainable alternatives."*

**“The displacement of Indigenous people, the erasure of culture, the mass killing of communities and the current history of Native American boarding schools our U.S. government forced upon Native people is all a result of colonization and Christianity.”**

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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.

## EIGHTH PLACE

## ‘Nolite te bastardes carborundorum’

FFRF awarded Yao \$500.

By Yao Liu

Although religion has commonly been attributed to achievements in the civil rights movement, it has undoubtedly undermined racial equality historically, as well as in my personal experiences. Faith has played and continues to play a complex role in the civil rights movement.

While it is true religious ideology has served as a driving force for many activists,

it is equally true that religious institutions have endorsed discriminatory practices, promoted exclusion and justified harmful beliefs like racism, white supremacy and homophobia.

As an Asian-American woman and a member of the LGBTQ-plus community, I think it is absolutely essential to hold religious institutions and ideologies accountable for shaping public perceptions of the significance of civil rights. To not do so is a disservice to the civil rights movement and the people behind it.

“Religious institutions have endorsed discriminatory practices, promoted exclusion and justified harmful beliefs like racism, white supremacy and homophobia.”

Historically, religion was used to defend the practice of slavery and racial discrimination in the United States and elsewhere. Biblical passages from the start and end of the Old Testament were oftentimes interpreted by white slaveholders who heavily framed the Christian faith in a way that supported the practice of slavery. The “curse of Ham” was one such passage that was used to

uphold the institution of slavery. Following suit, much of the Old Testament was “mined by pro-slavery polemicists” to serve their agenda, as Time magazine essayist Rae Noel put it (Feb. 18, 2023).

Furthermore, as

I have heard in history classes numerous times, white supremacist groups in the United States like the Ku Klux Klan spread their hateful beliefs behind a guise of adherence and devotion to the values of the Christian faith, even infamously using the cross as a symbol for their organization.

In my high school AP Literature class, the experience of reading “The Handmaid’s Tale” by Margaret Atwood continued to transform my perception of how religious texts can be manipulated to feed into a narrative



Yao Liu

that hampers racial equality, self-acceptance and civil rights.

It was horrifying to see how religion can be used as the backbone to rationalize injustice, oppression and inequality. Reading Atwood’s novel caused me to gain a deeper understanding of how marginalized groups in society can and do face racial and other forms of discrimination through people and organizations in power that perpetuate these messages using religion as a scapegoat.

Our class Socratic seminar surrounding “The Handmaid’s Tale” further heightened my awareness of the

flaws of religious fundamentalism, the connection between religion and power, and how a religious code has the tendency to be misused for ulterior motives. “The Handmaid’s Tale” had a strong and profound impact on me. I have been a skeptical person for much of my adolescent years, yet I could not help but feel the novel left me with a rude awakening on the concerning influence religion has on the masses and how often it is misused to foster ignorance and hatred.

Yao Liu, 18, is from San Diego, and will be attending Northeastern University in Boston, with plans to major in business administration. She writes: “As president of the Youth Care Club at high school, I led my peers to package food for the homeless at the San Diego Food Bank and refurbish computers for low-income families at Computers 2 Kids. Outside of volunteering, I have utilized my YouTube platform to highlight diverse authors and works. Additionally, during high school, I published more than 200 creative writing and nonfiction pieces on my blog. I have been recognized by TeenInk, Hot Dish Magazine, and other publications for my creative work. I have also worked with faculty at the School of Journalism and Media Studies at San Diego State University to build a website to combat Asian American misrepresentation in media.”

## NINTH PLACE

## Discrimination and racial alienation

FFRF awarded Krishna \$400.

By Krishna Verma

My name is Krishna, the Hindu deity for love, and growing up in New Delhi, India, the Hindu religion was amalgamated into our society and families. From daily prayers at the Mandir (Hindu temple) to school projects on Diwali, Hinduism was always a part of my routine. From an early age, I saw faith being used as a mechanism to perpetuate and justify derogatory rhetoric toward different faiths, sexual orientations and races.

A large reason why Pakistanis and Indians have historically held such violent relations is because of their religious differences — Islam and Hinduism being their primary religions respectively. I would often hear the phrase “it is wrong to be different,” as a means to alienate anyone who did not exhibit the same religion, customs or values that my family would. Ideas of social, racial and political equality are taboo in a country with millions of misinformed Hindus who see other religions and races as a perpetual threat to peace.

I immigrated to Canada in 2013, where multiculturalism would be the central focus of my community. I saw people of all different backgrounds within my neighborhood. However, the conversations within my family still exhibited the same prejudices as before. I would turn on the news from India, only to see politicians proclaiming statements like “Muslims ruined



Krishna Verma

our country.” Festivals I would attend at Mandirs would still display an air of Hindu superiority by claiming anyone who is different as “lost.” In a Christian-majority country like Canada, immigrants who were once a part of the religious majority find themselves being the often persecuted minority. In school, I was told to go back to my country. Because of people’s ignorance, I was called a terrorist and became the victim of Islamophobic taunts despite being Hindu.

Instead of our discriminatory experiences teaching us to be more accepting and open-minded to everyone, many immigrants become more

resentful of diversity to avoid introspection and exploring what it can mean to be a part of a highly religious community.

Everywhere around the world, there are marginalized communities that celebrate faiths different from the majority. Religion’s rigid views often present a tool in which marginalized communities’ discrimination worsens and the consequences are presented as natural and correct.

These rigid societal views are one of the reasons why discrimination and historical conflicts still persist in today’s world. Collectively, religion is supposed to represent love, like my name, to spread onto the world. Unfortunately, it is used as a tool to spread fear and keep different communities divided. We do not have to all agree religiously to spread love. What we need is acceptance of each other despite our differences. Diversity is one of the biggest assets to our world, and should not be neglected. Differences make us who we are. Embracing our differences would allow us to overcome racial inequality and present a better future with everyone in mind.

Krishna, 19, is from Surrey, British Columbia, Canada, and attends Simon Fraser University in Burnaby, B.C., majoring in biological sciences. He writes: “I have a passion for helping people in need, so I

often volunteer and run my respective charities. As the founder of the Wellness Initiative, a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of impoverished people in Vancouver, I have been responsible for

providing a wide range of services to support vulnerable members of our community. Our organization works in conjunction with many other youth-led initiatives across British Columbia, to create a more inclusive and supportive community for all.

Growing up, I developed an immense passion for debate, which has continued to shape my life. In February 2023, I served as the Secretary-General for the largest free Model United Nations conference in Canada, the Johnston Heights Model UN.”

“Religion’s rigid views often present a tool in which marginalized communities’ discrimination worsens and the consequences are presented as natural and correct.”

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



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

A sourcebook for all Americans who consider fundamentalist Christian zealots to be a threat to religious freedom.

—Published by FFRF. 368 pages / PB  
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Buy it from FFRF online  
[ffrf.org/shop](http://ffrf.org/shop)



TENTH PLACE

# Holy texts influencing human rights

FFRF awarded Devin \$300.

By Devin Armstrong

“Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren” (Genesis 9.25).

In the American South, this passage was not only referenced but ingrained into the daily lives of white Christians. This verse excused and glorified slavery, allowing white people to profit off of enslaved Blacks for centuries.

Throughout modern history, religion has been utilized as a reason to promote racial inequality and the civil rights of minorities worldwide. Dating back to chattel slavery in American history, slave owners have used excerpts from the bible to justify the use of enslaved people for their benefit. Whether intentional or not, religion was adopted to normalize an inhumane and immoral system. While religion can be crafted as a tool for growth, it can just as easily turn into a weapon to further the personal goals of a group.



Devin Armstrong

Texts written long ago can be used and manipulated to convey a point wanted to get across rather than the truth.

Religion is not needed to solve problems of morality when there is a distinct line between right and wrong.

In more personal terms, religion is currently inhibiting the civil rights of

people in Palestine. Pro-Israelites use religious texts as justification for the erasure of Palestinian people and the reclaiming of their land by any force needed. As a student at the University of North Carolina, I have seen first-hand the protests and counter-protests that have taken place. One thing I have noticed is that pro-Israelites use their faith and beliefs to create misconceptions about people who are pro-Palestine. Much of the Pro-Palestine protests have been arguing for divestment of Israeli-connected companies to support the people of Palestine who are being removed from their homes. They have also argued for a cease-fire in Gaza to protect the lives of all. Counter-protesters have seen this call for civil rights and changed the narrative to one of religious loyalty to the state of Israel. The issue gets twisted into defending their faith and the state of Israel against perceived threats when this is not the case. Those who argue for Palestinian civil rights are labeled as anti-Semitic, undermining the actual reason for protest: the violation of Palestinians’ natural-born civil rights.

Religion can cause us to ignore the bigger picture. Whether purposeful or not, it is incredibly harmful when one’s civil rights and racial equality are disregarded. One of the dangers of religion is that it closes our minds off to different perspectives. While it is within everyone’s civil rights to practice the religion of their choice, being able to look past faith to address human rights is essential in creating an environment where everyone’s equality is upheld. Placing human rights and equality above religious differences allows for a world where everyone can freely and safely exist.

Devin, 19, is from Wake Forest, N.C., and attends the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, N.C., where he intends to major in business administration and information science. Devin writes: “Outside academics, I work as a student researcher in a marine sciences lab on campus. Additionally, I serve as a tech support consultant for students on campus. While I am not fully sure of my future career, I want to be driven by innovation and creativity to further what I do next.”

# BIPOC essay contest honorable mentions

The following are excerpts from the essays of those who earned honorable mention distinction.

## Jailyn Agard

In the bible, many excerpts normalize slavery. These verses have been cited as supporting evidence for the prolonging of both slavery and segregation. Those who understand this simple fact will have no issue rejecting the idea that Christianity played a role in relieving the world of racial inequality. Rather than improving the world, Christianity strongly implemented discrimination.

History proves that Christianity conserves discriminatory beliefs and refuses the change necessary for a better world. Until it changes its ways, I argue that the Christian faith has done little to nothing to lift the profound struggles of racial inequality.

Jailyn, 17, is from Irvington, N.J., and is attending Ramapo College of New Jersey in Mahwah, N.J., with plans to get degrees in biochemistry and environmental studies.

## Zyah Bostick

I remember the bigoted comments my father would make about people who “looked gay” and said that it was a sin, or how he said young women in crop tops were unholy and sexual deviants. My father prides himself on being for Black liberation. However, these judgments rooted in religion that he places on Black women and LGBTQ+ people do not reflect that. Wanting liberty for all Black people except when they are different from you is not wanting equality.

He does not realize how interconnected the struggle of the communities he looks down upon is with the Black struggle. He is not the only one; many black Christians think the way he does. As long

as people like my father put themselves in positions of leadership, there will be few real tangible strides for racial equality.

Zyah, 20, is from Charlotte, N.C., and attends the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, N.C., with plans to major in informational sciences.

## Shaun Chaney

Religion places barriers against important dialogue and thoughts that are necessary for advancement as a species.

Religion has been used to justify the disenfranchisement of people. Religion played a huge role in the political and social landscape of the Atlantic Slave Trade. Religious ideologies, especially those of the Catholic Christians, were used to justify the slavery and dehumanization of the African people.

The systems put in place by religious institutions inherently will hinder racial equality and civil rights if we continue to teach less of history and science while allowing people to teach their kids the biases that religion creates.

Shaun, 20, is from Capitol Heights, Md., and attends Goucher College in Baltimore with plans to major in political science.

## Dominique Davie

Religion, while a great tool of faith and self-discovery, takes away humanity’s ability of natural moral discernment, thus suppressing those who initially contrast standard religious beliefs.

From social movements in history and current times, people are passive in their compassion and respect to one another. It won’t be until we

can start to learn empathy and perspective toward the people we walk side by side with every day. This doesn’t come from religion and a sermon on Sunday, but instinctual awareness. That’s the hindrance of religion on civil progress: the dampening of what it means to be humans.

Dominique, 18, is from Crofton, Ky, and will be attending Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn.

## Georgia Davis

Examples of people of color being oppressed due to religion can be found within the history of American Indian/Indigenous communities, regions of Africa and in regions along South Asia.

As European colonizers/conquerors were predominantly Roman Catholic, they forced their religion upon the Indigenous tribes in order to convert and “civilize” the people group. Thus, while attempting to promote their religion, European imperialists actually resulted in eliminating the rights and lives/well-being of Indigenous peoples.

Overall, while it may be true that religion has furthered civil rights agendas in some instances, clashing religions and efforts of conversion ended in mass genocide and forced religion for Indigenous people groups.

Georgia, 18, is from Beebe, Ark., and will be attending the University of Central Arkansas in Conway, Ark., with plans to major in international business.

## Bianca Dishmon

Christians tend to strictly adhere to the doctrines outlined in the bible surrounding race. However, in the majority of cases, these doctrines are misconstrued in order to fit an overarching agenda.

I’ve had the pleasure of taking a comparative religion class, during which I have had the ability to study religions that I had



Bianca Dishmon

been previously unfamiliar with. Through this class, I gained a deeper understanding of the five dominant world religions and the ways they interact with one another, and I truly believe that if every individual took the time to do the same, there would be less hindrance between race and religion, and we would all be on a journey toward improvement in the relationship between religion and race.

Bianca, 18, is from Germantown, Tenn., and will be attending Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., with plans to earn a law degree.

## Bridelle Toumani

The First Amendment includes the Establishment Clause, outlining the idea that the U.S. government cannot show preference to a religion or establish an official one. However, Christianity has had a major say in the public policy of our country for many years, as it is usually the predominant premise behind the “banning of abortions” argument. Christianity also allowed for the continuance of slavery, since excerpts of its religious texts suggested that slaves must obey their masters.

Religions in today’s America are blinders of perspective, limiting the scope for followers to think rationally outside the scope of their pious beliefs.

Equal opportunities for people of all races and all sexual orientations should be a given as we are born with natural rights that are unalienable. However, religion skews it as a privilege, when it should solely promote autonomy, not diminish it.

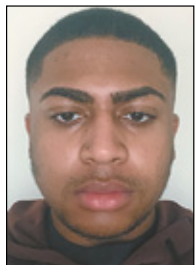
Bridelle, 18, is from West Henrietta, N.Y., and will be attending Russell Sage College in Troy, N.Y., with plans to major in biology.



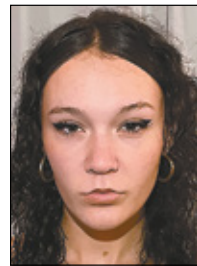
Bridelle Toumani



Jailyn Agard



Shaun Chaney



Georgia Davis



Zyah Bostick



Dominique Davie

# Thomas Jefferson and James Madison

## How two friends shaped state/church separation



White House History via Wikimedia Commons

**Thomas Jefferson's official presidential portrait, painted around 1800 by Rembrandt Peale.**

*This article appeared on Conversation.com on June 25 and is reprinted with permission.*

By Steven K. Green

Few constitutional principles are more familiar to the average American than the separation of church and state.

According to the Pew Research Center, 73 percent of adults agree that religion should be kept separate from government



Steven K. Green

policies. To be sure, support varies by political or religious affiliation — with Democrats supporting the principle in much higher numbers — and depending on the specific issue, such as prayer in public schools or displays of the Ten Commandments monuments. Yet only 19 percent of Americans say the United States should abandon the principle of church-state separation.

That said, criticism appears to be on the rise, particularly among political and religious conservatives. And such criticism comes from the top.

Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson remarked in 2023 that “The separation of church and state is a misnomer . . . it comes from a phrase that was in a letter that [Thomas] Jefferson wrote. It’s not in the Constitution. And what he was explaining is they did not want the government to encroach upon the church — not that they didn’t want principles of faith to have influence on our public life.”

As a scholar of American legal and religious history, I have written extensively about the development of religious freedom in the United States, and the origins of the separation of church and state.

Two of the Founding Fathers shaped American views on these topics more than any other: Jefferson and James Madison. Yet their views have also become lightning rods for controversy as the “wall” between church and state comes under scrutiny.

My forthcoming book, “The Grand Collaboration,” seeks to answer several questions: What was Jefferson’s and Madison’s understanding of religious freedom? And why were they so deeply committed to that principle?

### Bedrock of law

Jefferson wrote the Virginia Bill for Religious Freedom in 1777, the most comprehensive declaration of religious freedom at the time. The bill guaranteed freedom of conscience, protected religious assemblies from government oversight, prohibited



Christopher Hollis/Wikimedia Commons

**Thomas Jefferson asked that his gravesite commemorate three of his accomplishments, including writing Virginia’s statute for religious freedom.**

government funding of religious institutions and boldly declared that religious opinions were outside the authority of civil officials.

Several years later, Madison guided these ideals into law. His “Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments,” a protest against a proposal to support Christian teachers with tax money, affirmed the values of church-state separation and religious equality. He helped defeat the proposal — and set the stage for Virginia to adopt Jefferson’s bill.

As president, Jefferson went on to pen a letter to a Baptist association in Connecticut where he immortalized the phrase “a wall of separation between church and state.”

The Bill of Rights contains two clauses about religion, both in the First Amendment: that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.”

What qualifies as “establishment of religion,” however, is open to debate.

In 1947, the U.S. Supreme Court embraced church-state separation as the guiding principle for interpreting the religion clauses, relying extensively on the two Virginians’ writings and actions. As Justice Hugo Black wrote, “In the words of Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law was intended to erect ‘a wall of separation between Church and State.’”

The duo’s documents served as the authority for the legal principle of church-state separation, and for more than five decades, their bona fides remained unquestioned in the law.

### Shift at SCOTUS

Criticism of church-state separation intensified in the 1980s. As the religious right grew into a political force, commentators argued that the concept was anti-religious and did not represent the prevailing views about church and state during the founders’ time.

In recent decades, such arguments have attracted politicians and jurists, including members of the Supreme Court. Justice Clarence Thomas has written that the court’s earlier separationist interpretations of the Constitution “sometimes bordered on religious hostility.” Legal scholar Philip Hamburger has declared that “the constitutional authority for separation is without historical foundation” and “should at best be viewed with suspicion.”

Several recent Supreme Court decisions have rejected a separationist approach to church-state matters. For example, the conservative majority has allowed taxpayer dollars to be used at religious schools, the display of religious symbols on government property, and religious expression by public school employees.

In a 2022 dissent, Justice Sonia Sotomayor bemoaned that the court has turned the separation of church and state from a “constitutional commitment” to a “constitutional violation.”

The justices’ earlier reliance on Jefferson and Madison has borne the brunt of criticism that their views on church-state matters did not represent their peers, or that neither man was in favor of separation as he has been portrayed.

### Exchange of ideas

To better understand Jefferson’s and Madison’s beliefs, I examined many of the 2,300 letters between the two on “Founders Online,” a National Archives website. I also looked at correspondence with other acquaintances.

Both founders had deistic leanings, meaning they believed in a supreme being, but thought science and reason were the best paths to understanding religion. They were only nominally observant Christians, but more protected from religious intolerance than other “dissenters” due to their high social standing and affiliation with the Anglican Church.



Daderot/National Portrait Gallery via Wikimedia Commons

**A portrait of James Madison by Chester Harding, painted around 1829, a few years before his death.**

All the more striking, then, that they worked throughout their lives to advance religious freedom.

Religious matters were never far from their minds. For instance, in Madison and Jefferson’s exchanges discussing the need for a bill of rights, freedom of conscience was invariably at the top of the list. Both were convinced that government should avoid supporting religion, even if no particular religion was given preference. They also insisted that people should have broad religious freedoms.

These views were clearly on the vanguard, but other religious rationalists and religious dissenters also advocated a comprehensive understanding of religious freedom.

Both men were committed to advancing religious freedom because they saw it as deeply entwined with freedom of inquiry and conscience. “Reason and free enquiry are the only effectual agents against error,” Jefferson wrote in 1784. Allowing people to investigate ideas freely “will support the true religion,” because “Truth can stand by itself.”

Similarly, Madison declared “the freedom of conscience to be a natural and absolute right.”

In their view, free inquiry was the fount of other rights. Religious freedom, for example, was a subset of freedom of conscience. And a healthy separation of church and state was key to ensuring those freedoms.

### ‘A pillar of support’

The letters reveal the extent to which Jefferson and Madison complemented and reinforced each other’s attitudes toward church and state. They also reveal the close intellectual and emotional affection that each man held for the other, and how much each man valued the other’s support.

In their final exchanges before Jefferson’s death on July 4, 1826, he implored Madison, “To myself, you have been a pillar of support thro’ life. Take care of me when dead, and be assured that I shall leave with you my last affections.”

Madison responded with similar affection: “You cannot look back to the long period of our private friendship & political harmony, with more affecting recollections than I do.”

Jefferson’s and Madison’s half-century of collaboration on behalf of religious freedom and equality is an important chapter in the nation’s founding history. I believe its legacy should be remembered and celebrated, not discarded.

*Steven K. Green is a professor of law and adjunct professor of history at Willamette University in Salem, Ore.*

# How patriarchal religion suppressed sexuality

By Barbara G. Walker

**A**round 12,000 years ago, some humans first realized that sexual activity actually had something to do with the production of new life, formerly considered an enviable magic embodied only in females. Once fatherhood began to be recognized, men could assert that sexual activity was something more than a mere pleasure. As an essential part of the mysterious miracle of life-giving, it could be revered as sacred.

Early peoples generally had very positive views on sexuality. In Graeco-Roman times, sexual pleasure was widely believed to be a foretaste of paradise, a gift of the goddess Aphrodite/Venus. Some claimed that a blessed afterlife would consist of an eternal orgasm. This concept contributed to the later Muslim notion of the so-called “72 virgins” to be enjoyed by male heroes in the afterlife. Of course, this was a profoundly patriarchal concept. Virtuous women — no matter how heroic — were never to be provided with comparable postmortem lovers.



Barbara G. Walker

Indeed, Islam has been often devoted to the idea that women should experience little sexual pleasure. To this end, in major portions of the world, Islam has practiced routine clitoridectomy, often wrongly described as “female circumcision.” It is nothing like circumcision. It is comparable to what would be, in male anatomy, amputation of the penis, and it usually has included extensive mutilation of the vulva as well. Over the centuries, untold numbers of women have died from these operations or the ensuing infections. According to the World Health Organization, more than 200 million women alive today have been subjected to this horrendous procedure.

But these are customs of a fully developed patriarchy — centuries after initial recognition of sexuality as a basic life-giving magic. Earlier male gods proudly displayed endless erections to demonstrate superhuman potency. Phallus worship was not uncommon. In Egypt, for example, the Earth god Geb was shown lying face up, erect phallus reaching up to the goddess Nut, queen of the night, as she passed overhead, while the stars of the Milky Way, still so named, poured from her world-nourishing breasts. His phallus was represented by the obelisk, of which many examples still exist. It is perhaps amusing that the biggest obelisk in the world today is the Washington Monument.

Roman roads often sported the statues known as “herms” at their crossroads, which travelers would touch for good luck as they passed by. A herm is a short stone pillar with the head of the god Hermes carved at the top, and an erect penis sticking out halfway up the column. Ritual consecration of crossroads contributed to the later witchcraft craze, in which inquisitors claimed that witches engaged in evil ceremonies at crossroads. Of course, all their claims were amply confirmed by their routine use of torture.

The charm involved in touching the sexual parts of a deity seems to have first arisen very long ago in India, where some temples of the goddess Kali Ma featured a yoni or vulva symbol at the doorway, where worshippers could touch it as they entered. The goddess was shown in a crouching posture, knees apart, displaying her yoni in the form of an upright, double-pointed oval. The same symbolism was found among the tribes who first populated Ireland. It is shown by the pre-Christian sheila-na-gig statues, which used to appear over the doors of houses of worship until the Catholic Church declared them evil and removed them. Some are still found in museums.

The pointed-oval yoni design has had an interesting history. Some versions of the Indian symbol were given two small curls at one end, signifying the tail of a fish. It was generally held that women’s sexual secretions smelled like fish. There was even a goddess figure whose name meant “Fishy Smell.” Fish were therefore held to be aphrodisiac foods, and inhabitants of Northern Europe ate fish on Friday, the day sacred to the goddess Freya, in order to maintain fer-



Image by Shutterstock

tility and good sexual relations. Then the church took over fish-eating Friday and declared it a “fast day” sacred to Jesus, who was described in medieval literature as “the little Fish that the Virgin caught in the fountain.” Christians later adopted the yoni, turned horizontally, and declared it a symbol of Jesus. I am always amused by seeing a yoni on the bumper of a fundamentalist car. I think: If they only knew!

Just as phallic symbols were widely worshiped in earlier prepatriarchal times, so also were yonic symbols. The famous omphalos or “navel-stone” in the temple of the Delphic Oracle is an example that has been widely misunderstood. According to its myth, the Delphic shrine was long sacred to the original Earth goddess Gaia, mother of the world, until it was taken over by the sun god Apollo; but the priestess who gave the oracular speeches remained a female, the so-called Pythia, receiving her inspiration from deep in the Earth rather than from Apollo’s sunlight. The so-called navel-stone does not look like a navel; it looks like a clitoris. It is hardly to be wondered at if women formerly worshiped their own sexual nature, just as men later engaged in widespread phallus worship.

Symbols of sexual conjunction were also fairly common. A prime example is the Egyptian ankh, which shows a round or oval female sign on top of a cross, which was a common sign of male genitalia. In literature of the medieval Kabbalah it represented God united with the Shekinah or female world soul, and it was said to be in the Ark along with the tablets of the law, showing “a man and woman in ultimate embrace.” All this history was quite deliberately forgotten when it came to be called the Star of David or Seal of Solomon, though it had nothing to do with either of them.

Among the various warring sects of early Christianity, there were some Gnostic groups that still defined the “bliss” of heaven as sexual in nature, and practiced “sacred sex” in their shrines like the pagans before them. St. Valentine, adopted by the church as a patron of lovers, was a semi-mythical Valentinus whose festival took place in the Ides of February, the month sacred to the goddess Juno Februata, when she was in her febris (fever) of love. The Gnostics performed what was called “a rite of spiritual marriage with angels in a nuptial chamber.” St. Valentine was a sketchily Christianized version of the love god otherwise known as Eros, Cupid, Priapus or Kama, all names associated with the goddess in sexual rituals aimed at promoting fertility.

However, when the official Church finally began to take shape in the early fourth century, the sects that formerly allowed some form of sexual license were condemned. The Church was influenced by the trend toward asceticism that had begun in India with yogis who claimed that self-denial of all Earthly pleasures would enable the performance of miracles like healing the sick, walking on water, and achieving nirvana while still alive. The earliest Christian saints were then declared extreme ascetics who starved, whipped, deprived and generally abused themselves in order to

atone for every sin and become particularly blessed. Sex became the instrument of the devil and the tool whereby women — those “daughters of Eve” — enticed men into evil behavior. According to St. Augustine, sex was the root of original sin and the means of transmitting it to all generations. Tertullian said sex renders marriage “obscene.” Numenius of Apamea proclaimed that only total cessation of sexual activity could unite the soul with God.

Early fathers of the Church became intensely committed to denial and condemnation of sexuality. St. Jerome ordered: “Regard everything as poison which bears within it the seed of sexual pleasure.” St. Athanasius said the only real message of Jesus was the saving grace of chastity. Legends were promulgated about (mostly imaginary) saints so holy that they chose physical torture ahead of sexual pleasure. Medieval theologians said sex “caused the damnation of humanity, which was on its account put out of paradise, and for its sake Christ was killed.”

According to Joseph Fletcher of the Episcopal Theological School, “Christian churches must shoulder much of the blame for the confusion, ignorance, and guilt which surrounds sex in Western culture.” Psychotherapist R.E.L. Masters has written, “Almost the entire blame for poisoning the sexual life of the West, rests squarely on the Roman Catholic Church.”

That’s why for most of European history, the ancient world’s knowledge of the location and function of the clitoris was totally suppressed, unknown even to a majority of women. When discovered on the victim of a witch trial, it was usually described as a “devil’s teat.” In 1503, an Englishman (though married) apparently saw one for the first time and said it was “a little lump of flesh, sticking out as if it had been a teat,” which at first sight he “meant not to disclose, because it was adjoining to so secret a place which was not decent to be seen; yet in the end, not willing to conceal so strange a matter,” he showed it to sundry bystanders, who had never seen anything like it either. The witch was convicted and killed.

In the Victorian era, priests held that “total repression of a woman’s sexuality was crucial to ensure her subjugation.” Leading medical authorities like Dr. Isaac Brown Baker performed many clitoridectomies to cure women of such symptoms of sexual frustration as “nervousness, hysteria and female dementia.” Such operations were also recommended to keep young women from masturbating. In the United States, the last recorded clitoridectomy to cure masturbation was performed in 1948 on a 5-year-old girl.

In the end, patriarchal efforts to repress female sexuality punished men also, since they led to repression of sexuality in general. When forbidden normal expressions of human love, both men and women suffer. Patriarchal religion has been the primary offender in promulgating this cultural distortion, from which we are just now beginning to recover. Our society is still crippled in many ways by this uncomfortable history.

FFRF Life Member Barbara G. Walker is author of 24 books. Many of her writings can be found here: [bgw.works/tub-v3.pdf](http://bgw.works/tub-v3.pdf)

“Almost the entire blame for poisoning the sexual life of the West, rests squarely on the Roman Catholic Church.”

— R.E.L. Masters

## LETTERBOX

### Thanks to FFRF for being an ally to secularists

I joined your organization today. As a resident of Louisiana and a staunch opponent of religion in our schools, I would like to thank and commend you for the work you do and will continue to do regarding this issue. Special thanks to your legal department for their necessary work.

Conservative policy is causing chaos in the Deep South. Thank you for being an ally for us secular folks who still believe in the Constitution.

Louisiana

### Louisiana law a violation of First Amendment

Through genealogical research, I have determined that my ninth great-grandmother was Mary Dyer, who was hanged on the Boston Commons on June 1, 1660, by the Puritans (of Thanksgiving fame) for being a Quaker. That was New World religion.

The First Amendment, not the Second or Third, reinforced the Founders' desire for a separation of religion and state with the words: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

The newly enacted Louisiana law requiring the posting of Ten Commandments is a clear violation of the free exercise of religion or non-religion among young, impressionable minds. This law amounts to nothing more than an indoctrination program sponsored by the state's public school system and its taxpayers.

For these reasons, among others, I am enclosing a check in support of your litigation against this law. Let's not go back to New World religion.

Colorado

### 'Atheist' term should include all supernatural

The article "Why still so few atheists as Nones soar?" in the June/July issue was absolutely fascinating. The fact that many adults who say they do not believe in God but who do not identify as atheists is somewhat irrelevant because by its very definition they are. The authors are quite right that the reluctance to accept the word is due to the stigma attached, which could seriously affect social standing.

One might argue that if one is using the term "God" as an actual being, then defining an atheist as "one who denies the existence of God," is quite incomplete because God is just one of an entire subset of creatures in which most atheists do not believe, including gods, angels, devils, elves, fairies, ghosts, giants, goblins, leprechauns, mermaids, ogres, spirits, trolls, unicorns, vampires, warlocks, witches and zombies.

All these creatures are of the supernatural. Many atheists would probably be pleased with the simple definition that, "An atheist is one who does not believe in the supernatural."

Wisconsin

### Summer intern-ship



Photo by Chris Line

FFRF's legal staff (and a couple future FFRF members?) took a voyage on the Pontoon Porch on Lake Monona in Madison, Wis., in mid-July as an appreciation event for the summer legal interns. FFRF thanks Professor Paul Newman for the wonderful donation to fund the outing every year.

### Why so many bibles for women in my family?

I have been in the throes of moving lately. I've been surprised at how many bibles I keep finding on my bookshelves. Most of them seem to have been given to women — either my grandmother, mother or myself. None of them has been made out to men, including my father, who was active in the Methodist or Presbyterian church his entire life. You'd think as a little boy that he'd have been given at least one. I wonder if girls were just considered to be naturally better propaganda targets than boys.

I had begun to question organized religion in high school. And, to finish me off, along came Bertrand Russell in college! But Mom and Dad remained faithful to the end.

The myths I was imbued with since early childhood are like so much dust now, clogging up my mental sinuses. And it's sad. But I suppose that is the price we must pay for outgrowing something.

New Mexico

### Contribution hopes to move FFRF forward

It is a pleasure for me to contribute to the activities of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

I believe in what you do, in what you hope to achieve. I trust my contribution will continue to move the organization forward.

Washington

### We all need FFRF now more than ever!

Your efforts are needed now more than ever. Keep swinging at it. Secularism must win this battle! I hope you are being swamped with donations and support.

Tennessee

### Be careful how you cook those baby goats

As a longtime member, I greatly appreciate all the great work you do. Have you thought about recommending to those who want to post the Ten Commandments that they consider the set of 10 that ends with "Thou shalt not cook a kid (baby goat) in its mother's milk." Maybe they would see how ridiculous they are. Probably not.

Many years ago, a minister came to me to give me the "good news." I quickly told him I was not interested, that I gave up pretend and make-believe when I was in grade school. I told him I had read the entire bible and, as a result, became a pacifist, socialist and atheist. He stammered something about me roasting in hell.

Kansas

### Pat Maginnis helped when I needed it most

Thanks for the heartfelt memories of Pat Maginnis! Although we never met, she affected my life in the most profound way.

In 1969, as a divorced single mother (no child support), working for a decidedly male-focused company and knowing that giving birth while unmarried would mark me forever as unfit for the promotion I needed, I was panicked and desperate. A friend took me to Ensenada, Mexico, where an old woman promised me she could help, but really just gave me a pelvic infection so severe that my own obstetrician begged me to finish a course of antibiotics before seeking an abortion anywhere else. This put me perilously close to the "too late for a termination" date!

I heard about Pat Maginnis and the help she offered women in my situation. Somehow, I contacted her and received the information for a doctor in Mexico City. He agreed to do the procedure (for what was a hefty fee) and, on borrowed money, I flew there, terrified, to find myself standing on a

street corner, waiting for an unknown man to pick me up and take me to what turned out to be a clean, very professional office.

I still remember crying tears of relief on my flight home — relief greater than any I've ever experienced since.

Pat Maginnis literally changed my life with her willingness to help an unknown woman! I sincerely hope she knew how many of us she saved from the disaster of unwanted pregnancies.

Thank you, Pat! And thank you, Annie Laurie, for such a lovely tribute!

California

### Everything doesn't happen for a good reason

PJ Slinger's essay in the March issue about the falsity of the concept that "God doesn't give you more than you can handle" prompted me to write about an oft-repeated and thoughtless concept that I believe to be untrue, heartless and offensive: "Everything happens for a reason."

Yes, everything happens for a reason. That is to say, everything has a cause, whether or not we know the cause. But when people intone this phrase, what they are usually asserting is that something good came out of something that looked bad. That is, that the bad thing happened for a good reason, for a good purpose. Oh, yeah? Dread diseases that lead to painful deaths of people whose lives are cut short? War? Genocide? Pandemics? Terrorism? Dire poverty? Slavery? Sex trafficking?

If people really thought about it, they'd be hard-pressed to assert that every dreadful thing in the world happens for a good reason or for a good purpose.

New York

### Eisenhower at fault for God in pledge, motto

Dwight D. Eisenhower: "Our form of government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious belief."

A month before his inauguration in 1952, Eisenhower, a deeply religious man, was the first and only president to write and read his own prayer at his inaugural ceremony. With the Cold War in the background, Eisenhower signed a bill in 1954 to add the phrase "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance. At a bill signing ceremony he said: "From this day forward, millions of our schoolchildren will daily proclaim . . . the dedication of our nation and our people to the Almighty."

Two years later, Eisenhower signed a law officially declaring "In God We Trust" to be the nation's official motto (replacing "E Pluribus Unum") and also mandating that the phrase be printed on all American paper currency. The Constitution, which prescribes the presidential oath (or affirmation) of office in Art.2, Sect. 1, does not contain "so help me God" language or require use of a bible.

Ohio

## What's left in bible if all killing is removed?

Oklahoma's top education official has ordered all public schools in the state to incorporate the bible into their curriculum as a historical text, while many other states obsessed with religion want the bible to be taught in school! What a horrible idea to teach from a made-up story book and killer manual!

First, let's strip from the bible(s) all the nonsense, impossible stories and evil orders to kill people for just about anything, from killing adulterers, witches, blasphemers, fortune-tellers, the curious, anyone who sins, gays, all non-Hebrews, non-believers and sons of sinners, anyone who curses God, and any child who hits or disobeys parents, those who work on or disobeys the Sabbath, strangers seen close to a church, those who curse mother or father, any bride discovered not a virgin, anybody in a town that worships the wrong god, and finally, anyone who kills anyone!

So, what are we left with after having cleaned it all up? We are left with good, old-fashioned humanism, which superseded all religions with the most basic of human values, namely, to help and look after each other, which initially spread from families to the wider circles.

California

## Graham statue does not belong in U.S. Capitol

Upon reading your June/July article about a bronze statue of evangelist Billy Graham being placed in our nation's Capitol, I became angry — however, for reasons in addition to those mentioned.

I served with the US Army's 23rd Infantry Division in Vietnam in 1969. During the latter months of my one-year tour, I came to the realization that the Vietnamese people were not the primitive people that, through indoctrination and peer pressure, we soldiers were encouraged to believe. They were hard-working, family-oriented human beings, just like most of us.

Evangelist Billy Graham disdained "atheistic communism" and vigorously advocated for the United States to halt its spread in Vietnam. In a secret letter written to President Nixon dated April 15, 1969, Graham stated that bombing the country's system of dikes, "could overnight destroy the economy of North Vietnam."

True! The 2,500 miles of dikes, levees, dams and sluices constituted a vital component of the country's transportation network. If destroyed, the resulting flooding would not only cripple the economy, but kill thousands of people.

Apparently for Billy Graham, the compassion expressed in Luke 27:8,

Crossword answers													
A	T	L	A	S	M	V	P	P	A	S	T		
V	O	I	L	E	A	I	R	I	O	T	A	S	
O	R	L	O	N	L	E	I	M	O	O	L	A	
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N	I	N	A	R	I	O	T	S	S	L	U	M	
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### The Founders have been found!



**Board members of the Central Ohio chapter of FFRF (COFFRF) — from left, Bill Fullarton (as George Washington), Glen Waring (as Alexander Hamilton) and David Jon Krohn (as Ben Franklin) — performed during the three days of ComFest from June 28-30 in Columbus, Ohio. Fullarton writes: "Our 'Founding Fathers' each studied their character's biography and interacted with audience members. We were very well received by the Comfest crowd and many wanted to take photos with us, and thoughtful, extended discussions ensued."**

"Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you," didn't pertain to those who would be most adversely affected — North Vietnam's majority population of peasant rice farmers. Such callousness expressed by a revered moral leader is repugnant and hypocritical. This is one more reason why a statue honoring Billy Graham does not belong in the U.S. Capitol.

California

## Trewhella's violence violates Jesus' teachings

Matthew Trewhella is a Milwaukee-based pastor of Mercy Seat Christian Church and founder of Missionaries to the Preborn.

Prior to his born-again conversion, he dealt drugs, stole cars, firebombed houses, burglarized homes and businesses and fenced stolen items to the mafia.

Today, Trewhella is a favorite among anti-abortion movements. To those not in agreement, he sneers and shouts, "wicked dogs, whores and tyrants." He instigates blockades at abortion clinics and declares shooting doctors who perform their services as justified.

Should this be of concern to humanists and freethinkers? Absolutely!

Trewhella's violence totally violates

### Cryptogram answer

A man's ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education and social ties; no religious basis is necessary.

— Albert Einstein

anything the bible's Jesus taught. His brand of Christianity is fallacious, and freethinkers must communicate such in everyday terms to the public. We can no longer just "preach to the choir."

Those claiming to be Christians should be encouraged to follow Jesus' example. Neither Jesus nor his disciples even once spoke a word opposing abortion. In other words, it is none of anyone's business the decision a pregnant woman makes.

Trewhella's concern for the unborn is a religious fabrication. The anti-abortion movement is religiously inspired. Our Founders recognized the dangers of religion and thus established the separation of church and state in the Constitution. Anti-abortion is not only contrary the Constitution, it is contrary to an America that respects all citizens of both genders as equal. The vast majority of Americans agree.

Minnesota

## Religion has unseen wide-ranging effects

As an atheist and a long-time member of FFRF, I must say that I think even your organization doesn't realize the wide-ranging effects that religion has on all of our lives.

For example, where I live, the outside temperature has topped 100 degrees for several days in a row, yet every person in my local area (and, I suspect, pretty much everywhere else) has left their home fully clothed, when really, all that's needed is a hat, sunscreen and a "fanny pack" for wallet, etc. It's religion that forces us to be clothed, even in this heat, not to mention the laws against nudity passed by legislators influenced by religion.

Also, what's with the description of people's genitals as "private parts"? What's private about them? Everyone has one set or another, and they're not very different from person to person, so why are so many people so guarded about allowing other people to see theirs?

I'm sure there are more examples I could come up with if I gave it some more thought, but I think those questions are a good starting point.

California

## I like to say 'under dog' and 'dog bless you'

I read with amusement Mark Nierenberg's letter in the August issue about using "Underdog" in the Pledge of Allegiance. I have been saying "under dog" when forced to recite the pledge, or sometimes I just leave "under god" out and continue to the end of the pledge. That's the way I learned it in grade school. Also, when someone says, "God bless you," I say, "dog bless you." Sometimes I get a "god" response and we just go back and forth: "dog"—"god"—"dog." I'm easily entertained.

Wisconsin

## Don't let Christian nationalists take over!

It is sad that large numbers of people want to make the United States a theocracy. They call themselves Christian nationalists. They believe our government was founded upon Christian principles and deserves to be returned to those same principles. They also believe that the Constitution was written as a Christian document. (It wasn't!)

Their story often lacks finesse and tact. And no wonder! It's the story of a government takeover, and, as some desire, the firing or execution of many federal employees. Then there are the inexcusable reasons for Jan. 6.

All of this is a good reminder for those of us who support democracy to realize how precious and delicate our democracy is and just how difficult it can be to keep it energized and relevant. Don't give in, don't cross swords and don't give up!

Minnesota

## 'Ungodparents' could help stop indoctrination

Many new parents ask other family members or close friends to serve as godparents for their child(ren). While this is sometimes simply a sign of special respect, in more religious families (especially Catholic ones) there is a specific expectation. This is that the godparents will play a role in the child's religious education and also act to ensure the child is following in the faith if the parents should die.

I would propose that FFRF members step up to serve as "ungodparents," offering to take steps to prevent children from being indoctrinated by any religion. Ungodparents can play an important role in assuring that children learn that there is an alternative to the religious beliefs of their parents. Parents who resist designating ungodparents can be told that this would be a great test of their faith as surely their god would block the influence of ungodparents.

Michigan



The convention will be held at the Sheraton Denver Downtown.

## Join us 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. To see if onsite tickets will be available for purchase and for general convention information, visit [ffrf.org/convention2024](http://ffrf.org/convention2024).

For more information about the convention speakers, turn to page 3.

### 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. Book online at <https://ffrf.org/hotelFFRFCon2024>

#### The Sheraton Denver Downtown

1550 Court Place, Denver, CO 80202  
Phone: 303-893-3333. State that you are with the “FFRF room block.”

Rates are \$249/night for a standard room

#### Brown Palace Hotel and Spa

(overflow, 5 min. walk to convention hotel)

321 17th Street, Denver, CO, 80202  
Phone: (888)236-2427. State that you are with the “FFRF room block.”

Rates are \$249/night for a standard 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.