

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 › MADISON, WI 53701 › (608) 256-8900 › WWW.FFRF.ORG

September 14, 2021

SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL: (512) 475-2576

The Honorable Greg Abbott
Governor of Texas
State Capitol
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, TX 78711

Re: Your inappropriate and counterfactual religious remarks

Dear Governor Abbott:

We are writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) and our Texas membership to object to your recent troubling religious remarks suggesting that “restoring God” can reduce crime. FFRF is a nationwide nonprofit organization with more than 35,000 members across the country, including over 1,400 members in Texas. FFRF’s purposes are to protect the constitutional separation between state and church and to educate the public on matters related to nontheism.

It is our understanding that on Sept. 13, 2021, at a bill signing for Texas’ new bail reform law you said, “We need to restore God in our communities. ... If we do that, we will be able to reduce crime in this region.”¹

As governor, you have many tools to actually help reduce crime in Texas, yet you have eschewed using your position for good and instead, because of your religious blinkers, have misused your office to promote your personal religious views. Your continued promotion of religion is not only useless in reducing crime, but it is insulting to citizens who do not believe in a deity and yet live happy, moral lives. Nonreligious Americans make up the fastest-growing segment of the U.S. population by religious identification — 35 percent of Americans are non-Christians,² and this includes the more than one in four Americans who now identify as religiously unaffiliated. The nonaffiliated, in fact, are now the largest demographic by “denomination.”³

Your suggestion that Texans should be religious “sends the ancillary message to . . . nonadherents ‘that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community,

¹<https://www.businessinsider.com/greg-abbott-restore-god-crime-better-parenting-quote-video-texas-2021-9>

² *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Oct. 17, 2019), available at <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

³ *Id.*

and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309-310 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*).

Apparently, you believe that thrusting religion onto Texas’ citizens will stop crime. But this is simply not true. First, scientific studies⁴ show that societies with less religion have less violence:

Murder rates are actually lower in more secular nations and higher in more religious nations where belief in God is deep and widespread. And within America, the states with the highest murder rates tend to be highly religious, such as Louisiana and Alabama, but the states with the lowest murder rates tend to be among the least religious in the country, such as Vermont and Oregon. Furthermore, although there are some notable exceptions, rates of most violent crimes tend to be lower in the less religious states and higher in the most religious states. Finally, of the top 50 safest cities in the world, nearly all are in relatively nonreligious countries, and of the eight cities within the United States that make the safest-city list, nearly all are located in the least religious regions of the country.⁵

When any given factor of societal health or well being is measured, invariably the *less* religious countries score better. The *least religious countries* of this world:

- Have the lowest rates of violent crime and homicide
- Are the best place to raise children and be a mother
- Have the lowest rates of corruption
- Have the lowest levels of intolerance against racial and ethnic minorities
- Score highest when it comes to women’s rights and gender equality
- Have the greatest protection and enjoyment of political and civil liberties
- Are better at educating their youth in reading, math, and science
- Are the most peaceful and the most prosperous
- Have the highest quality of life.⁶

The pattern of lower religiosity to higher societal well being also exists within the United States. Those states that are the most religious also have a high occurrence

⁴ In a synthesis of the latest social scientific research concerning some of these issues *see* Zuckerman, Phil. 2009. ‘Atheism, Secularity, and Well-Being: How the Findings of Social Science Counter Negative Stereotypes and Assumptions.’ *Sociology Compass*, Vol. 3 Issue 6, 949-971.

⁵ Zuckerman at 955 (internal citations omitted).

⁶ Zuckerman at 960-61 (internal citations omitted).

of societal ills.⁷ States that tend to be among the *most religious* in the nation have the highest rates of violent crime and murder.⁸

These studies do not prove that religion causes all of society's ills, but it seems that your suggestion to "restore God" may actually be counterproductive. This makes a certain amount of logical sense too. As Thomas Paine said, "**Accustom a people to believe that priests or any other class of men can forgive sins, and you will have sins in abundance.**"⁹

Second, religious people regularly commit crimes, including religious leaders. FFRF has long run a black collar crime series in its newspaper Freethought Today, which chronicles the crimes of preachers and church leaders, and unfortunately for those who fall prey to these criminals, it is a robust section with dozens of crimes reported monthly.

You were elected governor, not preacher. We ask that you, as governor of Texas, remain cognizant that you have taken an oath to uphold and defend the U.S. Constitution, an entirely godless and secular document, and are charged with great responsibility over citizens, including those citizens who may not share your personal religious viewpoints. To avoid the constitutional concerns and the divisiveness your remarks have generated, ***the solution is simple: discontinue using your official office to promote your personal religion.*** Do something practical to prevent crime.

Very truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor & Dan Barker
Co-Presidents

⁷ States that tend to be among the *most religious* in the nation have the highest rates of poverty, obesity, infant mortality, STDs, teen pregnancy, as well as, the lowest percentage of college educated adults. Zuckerman at 955, 961 (internal citations omitted).

⁸ Zuckerman at 955, 961 (internal citations omitted)

⁹ Thomas Paine, A Letter to Camille Jordan (1797), in *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, (GP Putnam's Sons, 1896) IV:252. Available at <https://books.google.com/books?id=srpGH65Zl9kC&pg=PA252>