

# Freethought Today

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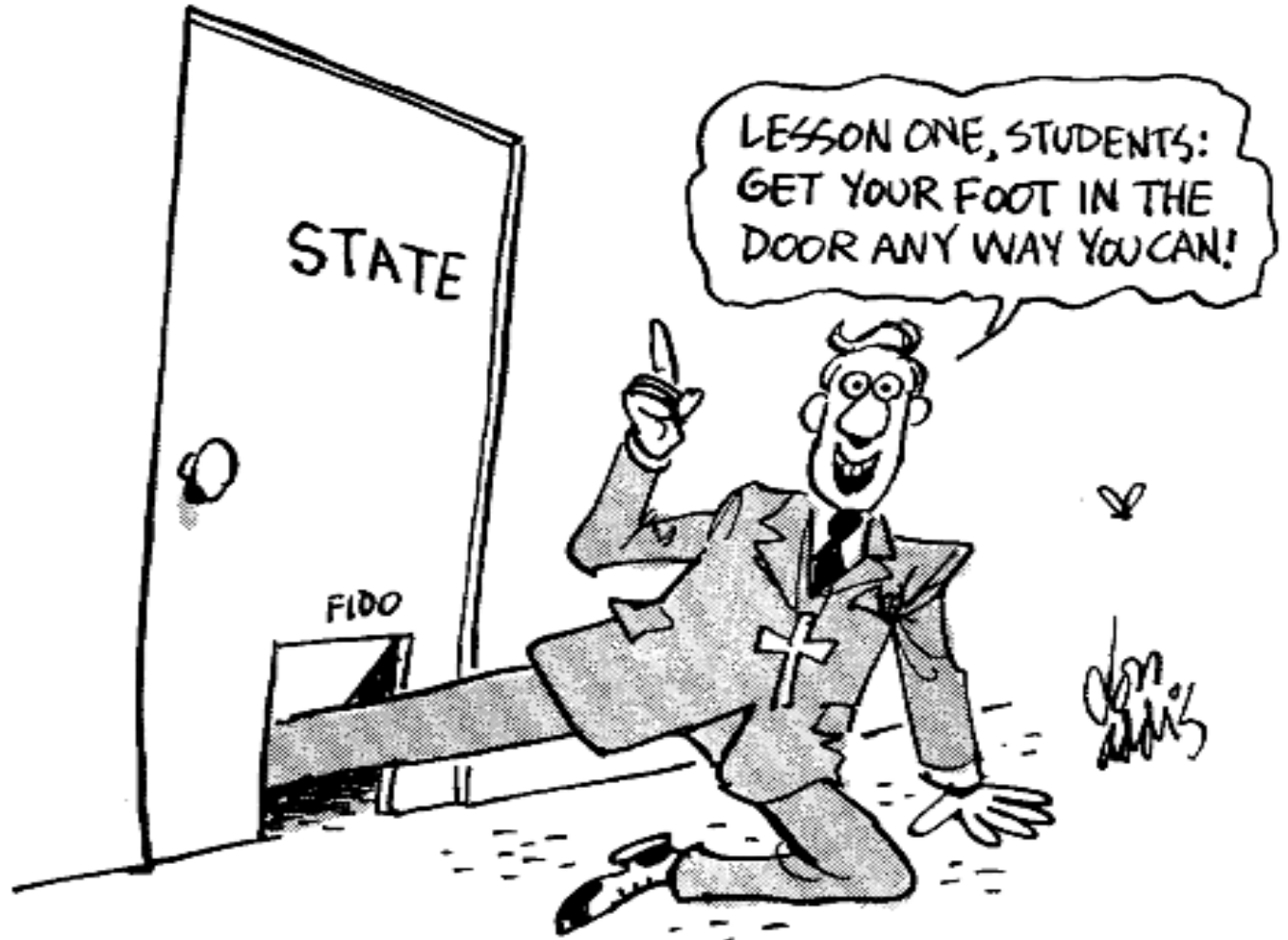
## Ursula Le Guin to Speak at FFRF Seattle Convention

Joining the lineup for the early November national convention of the Freedom From Religion Foundation will be celebrated author Ursula K. Le Guin, an award-winning science fiction and fantasy author.

The self-described “irreligious” author has agreed to accept an “Emperor Has No Clothes Award.”

The 32nd annual national convention, taking place at the Red Lion Hotel in downtown Seattle Nov. 6–8, 2009, will be an upbeat gala event. “Unabashed atheist” **Ron Reagan**, well-known radio host, will headline the convention, along with many other fascinating authors (see back page).

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## FFRF, Parents File Suit Against South Carolina Release-Time Credits

# Grade for Practicing Religion Challenged in Federal Court

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and two parents of public school students filed a federal lawsuit on June 17 in U.S. District Court, Spartanburg Division, Greenville, S.C., challenging the awarding of academic credits for evangelical release-time instruction.

The Supreme Court, in the 1954 *Zorach* decision, approved release-time instruction. Public school students may be released to attend privately-conducted religious education classes during the school day, provided parents consent and they are conducted off-campus.

In 2006, the South Carolina Legislature went beyond the dictates of *Zorach* and approved the granting of academic credit for release-time religious instruction. Students taking a devotional class whose purpose is to teach them “the meaning of Christ’s resurrection in their lives” may therefore receive a public school grade for the course.

“Citizens are free to believe as they wish, but our schools are not free to promote religion,” said Dan Barker, co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

The Foundation, a national group based in Madison, Wis., has members in every state, including in South Carolina and in Spartanburg County.

“A public school could not constitutionally teach this course, yet in South



Attorney George Daly

Carolina, a student may now receive public school academic credit for taking this class,” explained George Daly, a well-known North Carolina civil rights attorney who is representing the plaintiffs.

Daly researched the matter after the Foundation received a complaint last year about the credit change from a South Carolina resident.

“The school has delegated to a church what it cannot do itself. Students aren’t just released to study

religion, as *Zorach* allowed. They get a public school grade for practicing religion,” Daly added.

Spartanburg (S.C.) High School had offered a release-time option in the past, but interest in it dwindled until the accreditation change. In 2007, Spartanburg High School revived its release-time course, which is taught by South Carolina Bible Education In School Time (SCBEST).

One of the purposes of the evangelical organization includes helping the student “make a rock-solid, lifelong commitment to Christianity.” SCBEST “regards the Bible as the word of God and will teach it as such.”

“This means a student can more easily qualify for a scholarship based on GPA if she commits to follow Christ for life!” said Barker.

The local plaintiffs each have children attending Spartanburg High School, and are “adversely affected” by the implementation of the accreditation policy, according to the legal Complaint.

Spartanburg High School apparently supplied the release-time ministry with the names and addresses of all rising tenth, eleventh and twelfth grade students, who then received a letter inviting them to participate in the Christian education. The plaintiff par-

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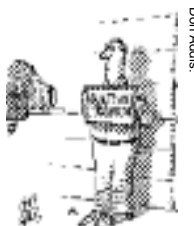


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Don Addis

## Release Time Credits Challenged in South Carolina

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ents, according to the complaint, found this offensive, and believe it is a violation of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

The policy places the plaintiffs' two minor children, one of whom will be entering 11th grade and one who will be a senior in the fall, at an academic disadvantage based on religion, according to the legal complaint. Academic grades determine class rank, and class rank determines eligibility for South Carolina Legislative Incentives for Future Excellence (LIFE) scholarships and for other educational opportunities.

"Defendant aids its release time provider in carrying out its religious mission by the threat of enforcement of its compulsory attendance powers against students enrolled in the released time course," the Foundation complaint charges.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, established as a national group in 1978, has brought more than 40 lawsuits to protect the constitution-

al principle of the separation between church and state. Among its legal victories, the Foundation won a decision by the 6th U.S. Court of Appeals in 2004 barring Christian evangelical religious instruction in the public schools in Rhea Co. (Dayton), Tenn.

District Judge R. Bryan Harwell, a George W. Bush appointee, has drawn the case.

"We wish to thank the two local parent plaintiffs, Robert Moss and Ellen Tillet, without whom the Foundation could not have brought this case.

"We also extend our warmest thanks to attorney George Daly for his diligence and commitment in pursuing this violation, and for taking this lawsuit on behalf of the Foundation," said Foundation copresident Annie Laurie Gaylor.

To read the legal complaint of *Moss v. Spartanburg Co. School District*, 7:09-cv-01586-RBH, visit:

[ffrf.org/news/2009/releasetime.php](http://ffrf.org/news/2009/releasetime.php)

News coverage (including TV reports) can be found at: [ffrf.org/media/](http://ffrf.org/media/)

## FFRF Complaint Ignites Media Prayer Table in City Hall Protested

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is investigating a "prayer table" agreement between the Tabernacle Church of God and the city of Warren, Mich., which permits the church to operate a "prayer table" in the lobby of city hall three days a week, from 9:00 AM – 3:00 PM.

After a resident of Warren asked the Foundation to look into the "prayer table," Foundation staff attorney Rebecca Kratz wrote a May 26 letter seeking further information.

In her letter, Kratz noted: "The City should not be providing space inside the walls of City Hall to a church for worshipful practices such as prayer. Given that there is no disclaimer anywhere near the "prayer table" which properly disassociates the city from the religious messages of the Tabernacle Church of God, any reasonable city resident or visitor could only conclude that the city endorses religion."

A large banner hangs over the table which reads "prayer table."

Although the Foundation has learned that the city supposedly "leases" table

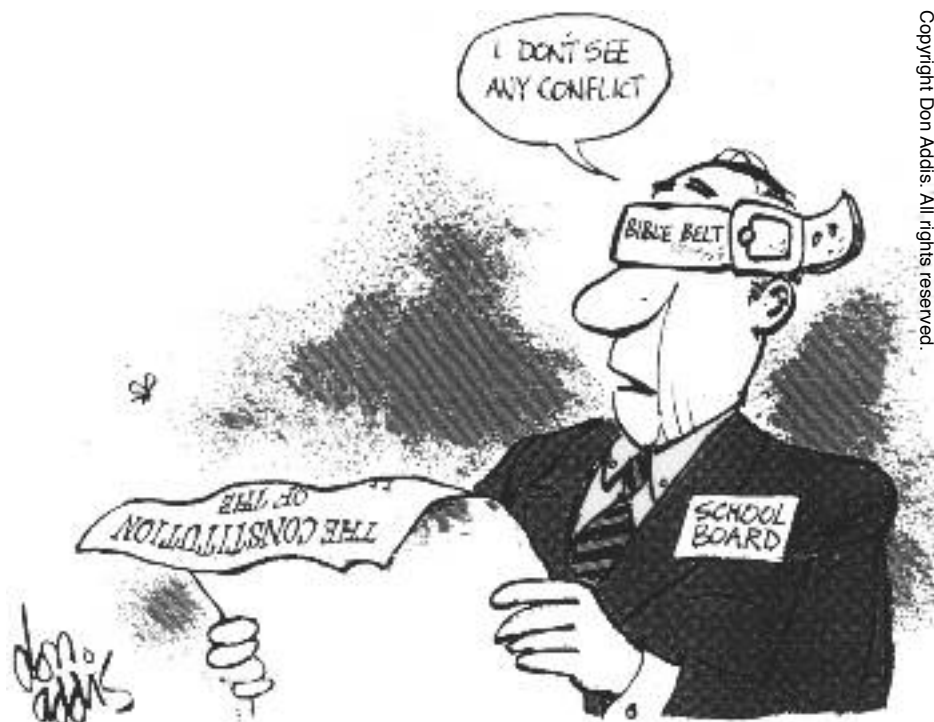
space in the large city hall atrium for \$10 a day, the city's response reveals that the city has waived the fees for the church. The contract is also irregular, giving no starting or ending dates.

"This favoritism is not only showing preference and endorsement for religion, but it amounts to outright taxpayer subsidy of proselytizing," said Foundation copresident Annie Laurie Gaylor.

"Devotional actions, much less evangelizing, have no place in the seat of city government. Residents doing necessary business at City Hall, or going to the public library housed in the same building, cannot avoid this church's proselytizing presence," she added.

"We have occasionally heard of city halls renting out space after hours for meetings, but never in the lobby during the business day!"

The Foundation's complaint has attracted media attention, with area newspapers, radio and TV stations reporting on FFRF's objections, including a news interview on bestselling author Mitch Album's radio program.



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## After FFRF Complaint School Removes Prayer Posters

Posters placed by a student-run prayer group at Hobart High School, Indiana, were removed in May after a complaint by the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

The posters read: "Got Prayer? We Do . . ." and invited students to morning prayer meetings. "All are welcome in HIS name!" The posters displayed the very large handwritten signature of principal David Spitzer at the bottom.

Rebecca Kratz, the Foundation's attorney, sent a May 21 letter to school district Supt. Peggy Buffington, pointing out that the posters made it appear that the district was sponsoring prayer meetings.

"We are deeply concerned at the appearance that this prayer group has school sponsorship," Kratz wrote. Any reasonable student would surmise that "the group is sponsored by the school, and perhaps, based on his signature, even organized by the high school principal."

The omission of a disclaimer and/or the name of the student club sponsoring the event implies endorsement, Kratz wrote.



School officials announced that in the future, the principal would stamp his name on posters. Kratz is still asking the school to make sure all student posters carry the name of the sponsoring club to avoid future confusion.

The Foundation complaint received local news coverage.

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Arrange a bequest in your will or trust, or make the Freedom From Religion Foundation the beneficiary of an insurance policy, bank account, or IRA. It's easy to do.

For related information (or to request a bequest brochure), please phone Annie Laurie Gaylor at (608) 256-8900.

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**What is the Freedom From Religion Foundation?**

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

The Foundation's email address is [info@ffrf.org](mailto:info@ffrf.org). Please include your name and physical mailing address with all e-mail correspondence.

Foundation members wishing to receive online news releases, "action alerts" and "Freethought of the Day" should contact [info@ffrf.org](mailto:info@ffrf.org).

# Heads Up

*A Poetry Column by Philip Appleman*



## The Doctor Killer Reads His Bible

*“The defendant’s attorney argued that the killing of those who performed abortions was ‘consistent with biblical truth.’”*

—New York Times, November 1, 1994

*It is written:*

“The Lord god is  
a consuming fire,  
eye for eye,  
tooth for tooth,  
burning for burning;  
so cast out devils,  
kill every woman  
who has known a man,  
stone her with stones  
that she might die . . .”

*for it is written:*

“Thou shalt not suffer  
a witch to live,  
beware of men  
defiled of women,  
destroy young and old  
with the edge of the sword,  
scorch them with fire  
(serpents among you,  
bad seed)  
the sword to slay,  
dogs to tear,  
beasts of the field

to devour and destroy,  
and let the dead  
bury the dead . . .”

*for it is written:*

“There shall be wailing  
and gnashing of teeth,  
famine and plague,  
generations of vipers,  
locusts and scorpions,  
fathers shall eat  
their sons, sons  
shall eat their fathers,  
bad seed,  
strike them,  
destroy them utterly,  
show no mercy,  
carcasses falling  
like dung on the field . . .

“All these things  
the Lord has spoken:  
fear the Lord  
and obey, for *it*  
*is written.*”

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Philip Appleman is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Indiana University. His eight published volumes of poetry include *Darwin’s Ark* (new 2009 edition) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* (2009). His nonfiction work includes the widely used Norton Critical Edition, *Darwin*, and the Norton Critical Edition of Malthus’ *Essay on Population*. His poetry and fiction have won many awards, including a fellowship in poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Castagnola Award from the Poetry Society of America, the Humanist Arts Award from the American Humanist Association and the Friend of Darwin Award from the National Council for Science Education. His work has appeared in *Harper’s Magazine*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *The New York Times*, *The Paris Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Poetry*, and *The Yale Review*.

He and his playwright wife, Marjorie Appleman, are both Lifetime Members (twice over) of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. They recorded an excerpt of “Noah,” Philip’s comic masterpiece, for the Foundation’s newest musical CD, “Beware of Dogma,” featuring Dan Barker. That CD also includes Phil’s poem “Fleas,” set to the music of “Trees.” *New and Selected Poems* is available for sale from FFRF for \$23 ppd. The Norton Critical Edition, *Darwin*, is \$22 ppd. from FFRF.

## In Their Own Words

‘Tiller the Killer’ is dead. Who will mourn for this man? . . . It is not a tragedy that Tiller will never be a killer again. Will anyone argue that it is a tragedy that the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will never again be dishonored by this churchgoing Sweeney Todd of the medical profession?

**Doug Phillips’ press release**  
Vision Forum Ministries  
San Antonio, June 1, 2009

[Scott Roeder, arrested for shooting Dr. George Tiller, became] very religious in an Old Testament, eye-for-an-eye way. The anti-tax stuff came first, and then it grew and grew. He became very antiabortion. That’s all he cared about is antiabortion. ‘The church is this. God is this.’ Yadda yadda.

**Ex-wife Lindsay Roeder**  
Associated Press, June 1, 2009

He [Scott Roeder] was a confessing Christian. He always had his bible, which wasn’t uncommon. He professed faith in Jesus Christ.

**Antiabortion activist Anthony Leake**  
CNN, June 3, 2009

[R]eligious leaders, almost all men, fan the lethal fury of fanatical terrorists. Their pious hands are not clean

when these people act out violently. Most of these religious leaders do not even know the openness to abortion choices in their religious traditions and should be sent back to school.

**Prof. Daniel Maguire**  
American Prospect, June 10, 2009

We’re not ashamed to say that there was a strong belief in God and firearms—without that, this country wouldn’t be here.

**Rev. Ken Pagano**  
New Bethel Church, Louisville, Ky.  
Re: *Bringing guns to church to celebrate the Fourth of July*, AP, June 5, 2009

I went to the [Senate] hearing room doors, and, following biblical and long-held Christian traditions, anointed them with oil as a symbol of consecration, or a setting apart for God’s purpose. In respect for Judge Sotomayor’s strong Catholic background, I used oil specially formulated for this purpose. . . .

As I prayed, I touched the doors in three spots, making the sign of the cross. I prayed for God to superintend over the entire confirmation process.

**Rev. Rob Schenck**  
Faith & Action in the Nation’s Capital  
CBN.com, June 2009

## Overheard

Underneath it all, he [Pres. Barack Obama] is a pretty standard Christian, by-the-book kind of person. Look at all the stuff he is trying to do in the White House [continuing faith-based initiatives]. I mean, come on. I think that is probably not constitutional.

**U.S. Rep. Pete Stark**  
Politico, June 9, 2009

One of the first things that strikes me is we are watching the fall of Islamic theocracy . . . Something very important has been laid bare in Iran today—legitimacy does not flow from divine authority but from popular support.

**Commentator Fareed Zakaria**  
Freed Zakaria GPS, CNN  
June 19, 2009  
(Suggested by Glen Salter)

The appointment of the executive director of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good isn’t really about disputes between religious figures; it’s about something much more urgent.

It raises serious doubts about the wisdom of having an Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships at all.

**Sarah Posner**  
The American Prospect, June 10, 2009

It’s bizarre that we could have had a woman in the White House, we might have had a black man—but not if they were atheists.

**Canadian writer Julian Barnes**  
MacLean’s, Nov. 10, 2008

In our country, we cannot accept that women be prisoners behind a screen, cut off from all social life, deprived of all identity.

The burqa is not a religious sign, it’s a sign of subservience, a sign of debasement—I want to say it solemnly. It will not be welcome in the territory of the French Republic.

**French Pres. Nicolas Sarkozy**  
Presidential Address,  
June 22, CBS News

### YOUR WEEKLY ANTIDOTE TO THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT

#### TUNE IN TO FREETHOUGHT RADIO

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news, music & interviews**



# Slavery: 'A Trust from God'

By Anne Nicol Gaylor

Abolitionist Theodore Parker once remarked that if the whole American Church had "dropped through the continent and disappeared altogether, the antislavery cause would have been further on."

When William Lloyd Garrison delivered his first antislavery lecture in Boston, church halls were closed to him, and he was obliged to accept the use of the small and unprestigious Julian Hall from Abner Kneeland, a noted "infidel," who once had been prosecuted and imprisoned for blasphemy.

Mid-1800s estimates reported 80,000 slaves owned by Presbyterians, 225,000 by Baptists and 250,000 by Methodists. Anglicans probably owned most of the rest of the nearly 4 million blacks held in serfdom in the United States at the outbreak of the Civil War.

That bloody Civil War was fought, in part, because of the bible and the church. Although there were denominations that spoke out against slavery, with the exception of the Unitarians and the Quakers they were Johnny-come-latelies; freethinkers again led the fight against this fundamental wrong.

Clergy could turn to their God and their bible for justification of slaveholding, and they did.

This is Benjamin Morgan Palmer speaking, clergyman of the First Presbyterian Church in New Orleans, whose sermon, given near the outbreak of the war, survives.

"(Our) duty is plain of conserving and transmitting the system of slavery, with the freest scope for its natural development and extension. Let us, my brethren, look our duty in the face. With this institution assigned to our keeping, what reply shall we make to those who say that its days are numbered? My own conviction is, that we should at once lift ourselves, intelligently, to the highest moral ground, and proclaim to all the world that we hold this trust from God."

Antislavery societies had existed in the United States for a quarter of a century before the Civil War, and it is apparently from Rev. Palmer's

remarks that he had felt the sting of their rebuke. Nevertheless, the rationalization went on.

"The argument which enforces the solemnity of this providential trust," he said, "is simple and condensed. It is bound upon us, then, by the principle of self-preservation, that 'first law' which is continually asserting its supremacy over others.

"Need I pause to show how this system is interwoven with our entire social fabric? That these slaves form parts of our households, even as our children; and that, too, through a relationship recognized and sanctioned in the scriptures of God. . . ."

Rev. Palmer had harsh words for the abolitionists.

"The worst foes of the black race are those who have intermeddled on their behalf," he said.

**"The Abolition spirit is undeniably atheistic."**

—Rev. Palmer

The condescension reserved today for women seeking equality was turned in full force by clergy in their justification of the slavery system.

"We know better than others that every attribute of their (the blacks') character fits them for dependence and servitude. By nature, the most affectionate and loyal of all races beneath the sun, they are also the most helpless; and no calamity can befall them greater than the loss of that protection they enjoy under this patriarchal system. . . . Freedom would be their doom; and equally from both they call upon us, their providential guardians, to be protected.

"I know this argument will be scoffed abroad as the hypocritical cover thrown over our own cupidity and selfishness; but every Southern master knows its truth and feels its power. My servant, whether born in my house or bought with my money, stands to me in the relation of a child. Though providentially owing me service, which, providentially I am bound to exact, he is, nevertheless my brother and my friend; and I am to

him a guardian and a father.

"He leans upon me for protection, for counsel and for blessing; and so long as the relation continues, no power, but the power of almighty God, shall come between him and me."

Rev. Palmer knew exactly who was on his side and who the enemy of slavery really was.

"In this great struggle," he said, "we defend the cause of God and religion. The Abolition spirit is undeniably atheistic. The demon which erected its throne upon the guillotine in the days of Robespierre and Marat, which abolished the Sabbath, and worshipped reason in the person of a harlot, yet survives to work other horrors, of which those of the French revolution are but a type.

"Among a people so generally religious as the American, a disguise must be worn; but it is the same old threadbare disguise of the advocacy of human rights. . . ."

"This spirit of atheism, which knows no God who tolerates evil, no Bible which sanctions law, and no conscience that can be found by oaths and covenants, has selected us for its victims, and slavery for its issue.

"It is time to reproduce the obsolete idea that Providence must govern man, and not that man should control Providence. In the imperfect state



of human society, it pleases God to allow evils which check others that are greater.

"To the South the highest position is assigned, of defending, before all nations, the cause of all religion and all truth."

The Rev. James Henley Thornwell, speaking in

Charleston, S.C., on "The Rights and Duties of Masters," echoed the cry that atheists were at fault.

"The parties in this contest are not merely abolitionists and slaveholders—they are atheists, socialists, communists, red republicans, jacobins, on the one side, and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other. In one word, the world is the battle ground—Christianity and Atheism the combatants; and the progress of humanity is at stake."

It is "impossible to deny that slavery is sanctioned by Christ and His Apostles," the Rev. Thornwell reiterates.

The Apostle Paul, he goes on to say, "considered slavery as a social and political economy, in which relations subsisted betwixt moral, intelligent, responsible beings, involving reciprocal rights and reciprocal obligations. There was a right to command on one hand—an obligation to obey on the other."

Obviously, Parker and Thornwell knew their bible.

Rules for slavery appear in the Mosaic Law. Among the more familiar passages is this excerpt from the Exodus 21.

*If thou buy a Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing.*

*If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him.*

*If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the wife and her children shall be her master's and he shall go out by himself.*

*And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife and my children; I will not go out free:*

*Then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore into his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him for ever.*

The chapter goes on to allow a father to sell his daughter; another verse refers to the slave as his owner's "money."

According to Genesis 9, God first ordained slavery because of the behavior of Noah's son Ham who committed the apparently unpardon-

able sin of observing his drunken father's nakedness. God punishes Ham, with typical biblical justice, by condemning Ham's son Canaan to be "a servant of servants."

The New Testament doesn't help matters any; Jesus left the laws of slavery exactly as he found them.

In Timothy, Paul tells slaves to honor their owners.

"Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed." (Tim 6:1)

In Ephesians (6:5) servants are to be obedient "with fear and trembling."

Titus (2:9) says that they must please their owners "in all things."

Again in 1 Peter (2:18), "Servants, be subject to your masters in all fear."

Paul sends the slave Onesimus back to the slavery from which he had fled. (See Epistle of Paul to Philemon.)

As for Jesus, his terrible parables (as Ruth Green called them) are filled with references to slaves and masters, none of which denigrates slavery in any way.

The Civil War is more than a century behind us, but it does behoove freethinkers to be aware of just whose book upheld slavery, in the same way it still upholds and fosters so many evils.

Blacks as well as women and homosexuals, who say they "love" the bible, truly revere the chains that bind them.

*This article was originally published in the May 1984 issue of Freethought Today.*

Anne Nicol Gaylor, Foundation President Emerita, was principal founder of the Freedom From Religion Foundation and served as its president from 1978–2004. She lives in Madison, Wis., with her husband Paul, a longtime Foundation volunteer. Anne continues to direct the Women's Medical Fund, which provides financial assistance for abortions to women without means in Wisconsin. The Women's Medical Fund, the longest continuously serving abortion charity, was founded by Anne, Foundation member Prof. Paul West and the late Peg West. Yes, atheists do run charities!

## A Column by Barbara G. Walker

*Heresy*

By Barbara G. Walker

**B**ertrand Russell wrote: "It is strange that the last men of intellectual eminence before the dark ages were concerned, not with saving civilization or expelling the barbarians or reforming the abuses of the administration, but with preaching the merit of virginity and the damnation of unbaptized infants. Seeing that these were the pre-occupations that the Church handed on to the converted barbarians, it is no wonder that the succeeding age surpassed almost all other fully historical periods in cruelty and superstition."<sup>1</sup>

There is a letter attributed to Clement, alleged bishop of Rome (i.e., pope) toward the end of the first century, although no contemporary documents support Clement's reign or even his existence. Nevertheless, the church still claims him as the third pope after Peter, whose existence is equally dubious. Clement's letter holds a definition of heresy that actually belongs to a much later century, after consolidation of the church's temporal power. It says that "authority of reign" is designated by God to the priests, deacons, and bishops on earth, and whoever refuses to "bow the neck" to them is guilty of insubordination against God, and must receive the death penalty.<sup>2</sup>

On the basis of this probably spurious letter, the church declared war on all its critics: Gnostics, pagans, unbelievers, and other dissidents. Church Father Irenaeus wrote: "It is necessary that every church should agree with the Roman church, on account of its preeminent authority." Heresy was defined in Rome as "insubordination to clerical authority," meaning that anyone who disagreed with anything a priest said was by definition a heretic. Of course the church fathers themselves argued bitterly on all points of theology, and murdered one another with considerable enthusiasm. One scholar points out that whenever the clergy met in large numbers, as at a council, they chose a town near a large body of water for disposal of the bodies. It was said that Lake Constance received some 500 corpses during the council that met there, and the Rhine River received many more.<sup>3</sup>

Christians persecuted other Christians with as much fervor as they spent on killing pagans. In 385 the pious Bishop Priscillus of Spain and six of his followers were first tortured and then beheaded for holding certain doctrines associated with the Manichaean heresy.<sup>4</sup> The fifth-century pope Leo the Great endorsed the death penalty for all "erroneous beliefs."<sup>5</sup> Pope Urban II declared in the tenth century that all heretics must be tortured and killed; and Pope Innocent III (who was certainly not innocent) stated that everyone must obey the pope even if what he commands is evil.<sup>6</sup> He further stated that anyone holding a personal view of God that conflicts in any way with church dogma "must be burned without pity."<sup>7</sup>

It is interesting, though, to note that of the 80 or so heresies during the first six Christian centuries, not one makes any reference to the claim to authority

of the Roman pontiff, because no one had yet heard of it. Only the Catholic Church postulates an unbroken succession of allegedly infallible popes dating from St. Peter. There is no record of it anywhere else.<sup>8</sup>

Because church officials kept slaves, a fourth-century council ruled that anyone who encouraged slaves to rebel against their masters "under pretext of piety"—that is, according to Gnostic opinions of human equality—would be subject to excommunication and prosecution as heretics. Runaway slaves who took refuge in a church were captured and returned to their masters.<sup>9</sup>

The equality of men and women in most Gnostic sects particularly irritated the church fathers, who were sexist in the extreme. Tertullian called woman the gate of hell, the devil's doorway, who should always wear rags and mourning garments in acknowledgement of her crime. St. John Chrysostom (John Golden-Mouth) called woman more harmful than any savage beast. St. Clement of Alex-

andria wrote that every woman should be overwhelmed with shame because of her gender. And the church council of Macon in 584 seriously debated the question of whether women could be considered fully human. After much argument for and against, the question was decided in favor of women's humanity by a vote of 32 for, 31 against. So by the narrowest of margins—only one single vote—the prelates decided to consider women part of humanity.<sup>10</sup>

John Scotus Erigena stated that at the end of the world, however, the female part of humanity will be eliminated, and "that imperfection, that stain on the purity of creation, will be no more."<sup>11</sup> Both St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas declared that women are good for nothing but procreation and housekeeping. The fifth-century pope, Gelasius, noted that among Gnostic Christians women could serve at holy altars, which represented what he called "a contempt for divine truths."<sup>12</sup>

On the question of female clergy the church has not yet progressed beyond the fifth century. In 1917, the book of canon law, *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, declared that no female person may approach an altar for any reason, not even a nun serving her sisters at chapel mass; and Pope John Paul II said "women are not allowed the functions of a mass-server" in his instruction curiously entitled "A Priceless Gift." Pope Pius X, now declared to be a saint, in 1903 reaffirmed the traditional ban on women's voices in church choirs, saying that only boys may be used as sopranos.<sup>13</sup> Throughout most of the Christian centuries, church choirs included castrati, talented male sopranos who were castrated before puberty to preserve both their virtue and their voices, because (it was said) God was more pleased with them than with the "impure" female voice.<sup>14</sup>

Early churches, both Gnostic and orthodox, had many leaders advocating rigid asceticism, claiming that men



The torture of the schoolmistress Ursel in Maastricht, 1570.

Engraving by Jan Luyken.

### SECRETS OF RELIGION: WHAT LIES BEHIND BELIEF

could be saved, or could attain true spirituality, only through total avoidance of contact with women. By the fourth century B.C.E., the ideas of Jain Buddhist eremites had penetrated Syria, Egypt, Macedonia, and many other middle-eastern areas, touting

the wonders of self-denial in the development of spiritual and magical powers.<sup>15</sup> Similar ideas evolved among the Essenes and other sectaries. Strict celibacy was said to enable the enlightened ones to walk on water, to fly, to heal lameness and blindness, to turn base metals into gold or water into wine, and to perform many other Messiah-like miracles. The orthodox church reasoned that man fell from grace through woman, therefore man could return to grace only by renouncing woman.<sup>16</sup> Once St. Augustine had labeled sexuality as the pipeline of original sin, and marriage as a moral crime, the old pagan respect for the institution of marriage was on its way out.

St. Ambrose called marriage a crime against God, because God had intended every person to maintain the state of virginity that came with birth.<sup>17</sup> St. Jerome said the primary purpose of any man of God was to "cut down with the ax of Virginité the wood of Marriage."<sup>18</sup> Tertullian called marriage "an obscenity" and a moral crime "more dreadful than any punishment or any death."<sup>19</sup> There were churches in Syria that accepted only celibate men, and refused to baptize any man who had ever been married.<sup>20</sup> In 251, Bishop Cyprian of Carthage praised the currently spreading plague because it allowed Christian youths to die while still in a state of virginity.<sup>21</sup> The Council of Trent ruled that a person who even hinted that marriage might be more blessed than celibacy was a heretic and must be declared anathema—that is, formally cursed and excommunicated.<sup>22</sup>

Marriage was not to be saved even by dutiful production of offspring, according to Pope Gregory the Great, who wrote that "babies are born as the damned fruit of the lust of their parents. From the first, they are the offspring of hell; they are justly children of wrath because they are sinners. If they die unbaptized, they are condemned to everlasting torments for the guilt of their birth alone. Existence is itself a state of sin."<sup>23</sup> These harsh pronouncements were later contradicted (despite the doctrine of papal

infallibility) by the invention of limbo or purgatory, when it was found that people would pay handsomely for priestly rituals purporting to parole their dead relatives out of hell or keep them in a less uncomfortable after-life.

There was no Christian marriage sacrament until the sixteenth century.<sup>24</sup> A Catholic scholar writes that "nothing is more remarkable than the tardiness with which liturgical forms for the marriage ceremony were evolved."<sup>25</sup> In fact they were not so much evolved as copied from the common law long established under paganism, and had more to do with the sharing of property than the sharing of love. One authority says that in the modern Greek Orthodox Church, the religious wedding service is "intrusive, no real part of the ceremony of marriage, but an elaborate way of calling down a blessing on the ceremonial, or what is left of it, which constitutes the real wedding."<sup>26</sup>

In the first half of the Christian era, women could still be major property owners. The ever-practical church began to favor clerical marriages after all, when it perceived that a rich wife could be very handy. From the sixth to the eleventh centuries, the majority of priests were married, and thus gained ownership of women's property.<sup>27</sup> Then it was noticed that when married priests died, they tended to bequeath their property to wives and children instead of to the church. All of a sudden, clerical marriage became a heresy.

The 11-century Gregorian Reform Movement forced clergymen to cast out their wives and children, or else lose their ordination, benefices, and salary, and become subject to fines, physical harassment, or imprisonment. The children were disinherited and declared illegitimate. Historian David Noble writes that most of the abandoned women "suffered horribly, reduced to poverty, homeless, exiled; others mutilated, tortured, murdered. Clergymen were abused and deposed, but their wives were destroyed. Abandoned by the church to utter destitution, they and their children confronted the horrors of starvation, prostitution, servitude, murder, and suicide."<sup>28</sup>

By the twelfth century it became a firm rule that all who entered holy orders must turn over all their property to the church. Wealthy female landowners who had joined convents in order to keep their property to themselves were now threatened with excommunication and prison. Some groups of nuns, such as the well-

endowed and enlightened teaching order of Beguines, were forced to integrate into papally approved orders where education of, and teaching by, women was forbidden, and all real estate and other valuables were appropriated by the church. Frequently, the formerly female-owned buildings were converted into dwellings and prison-houses for the Inquisition.<sup>29</sup> Such rules, together with its crusades and wars of acquisition, made the church the owner of nearly half of all the feudal lands in Europe. Here began the era of Renaissance heresy-hunting, when the greed and corruption of the church were at their height, and critics were attacked with the most ruthless cruelty ever seen in the history of civilization, surpassing even the Nazi holocaust of the twentieth century. That holocaust lasted less than ten years. The church's version lasted more than five hundred years, and its Inquisition is still nominally part of the Holy Office.

The Inquisition was created to win the war between the church and the disillusioned public, during the period when ecclesiastical corruption was at its height. It was established by a series of papal bulls, notably the 1251 *Ad extirpanda* of Pope Innocent IV, described by J.B. Russell as "a terrible measure against heretics . . . authorizing seizure of their goods, imprisonment, torture, and . . . death, all on minimal evidence."<sup>30</sup> The "minimal evidence" was usually obtained by torturing previous victims until they gave names of so-called accomplices, who were then arrested and tortured to contribute more names, and so on, until whole villages were implicated and everyone went in terror of the devil on the one hand, and the church on the other.

Only a few decades ago, Catholic manuals mendaciously claimed that the Inquisition was a purely civil tribunal, established to punish secular crimes.<sup>31</sup> Actually, the Inquisition was not interested in secular crimes except as they might relate to heresy, the one offense whereby otherwise law-abiding citizens could merit the death penalty. Even today, Catholic sources continue trying to falsify the staggering numbers of legal murders committed by the Inquisition and the extraordinary cruelty of its methods.

The great historian Henry Charles Lea considered the Inquisition "a standing mockery of justice—perhaps the most iniquitous that the arbitrary cruelty of man has ever devised. . . . Fanatic zeal, arbitrary cruelty, and insatiable cupidity rivaled each other in building up a system unspeakably atrocious. It was a system which might well seem the invention of demons."<sup>32</sup>

Here's how it worked. 1) All procedures were kept secret. 2) "Common report" and hearsay were accepted as proof of guilt. 3) The accused was never told of the nature of the charges nor allowed legal counsel. 4) Witnesses were kept concealed. 5) Perjurors, excommunicates, or children could give evidence. 6) No favorable evidence or character witnesses were permitted. In any case, anyone who spoke for an accused heretic was arrested as an accomplice. 7) Torture was used always, without limit of duration or severity. (Official sources said that torture could be used "only once," but weeks or months of daily torturing were simply described as "continuations.") Even if the accused confessed before torture, the torture was applied anyway, to "validate" the confession. If the accused died under torture, the re-

cord stated that the devil broke his neck in prison. 8) The accused was forced to confirm under torture the names of "accomplices" suggested to him by the judges. 9) No accused person was found innocent.<sup>33</sup>

The rule of confiscation was what made the Inquisition so enormously profitable. All the property of an accused heretic could be seized by the church immediately upon his arrest. The popes praised the rule of confiscation as a prime weapon against heresy.<sup>34</sup> Victims were expected to pay the expenses of their own imprisonment as well, even to pay for the ropes, wood, and stakes used to kill them. There was a schedule of fees for each torture operation. Those without money could starve to death in prison. Pope Gregory XI wrote that too many accused heretics were dying of starvation in prison before they could be brought to the stake, and he offered indulgences to all who would donate food to them. Lea comments: "There is something so appallingly grotesque in tearing honest, industrious folk from their homes by the thousand, in thrusting them into dungeons to rot and starve, and then evading the cost of feeding them by presenting them to the faithful as objects of charity, that the proclamation which Gregory issued August 15, 1376, is perhaps the most shameless monument of a shameless age."<sup>35</sup>

The title of Inquisitor was applied for the first time to the judges who investigated the Albigensian heresy in the south of France, which was "the most civilized land in Europe" in the twelfth century, according to Briffault: "There commerce, industry, art, science had been far in advance of the age. The cities had won virtual self-government, were proud of their wealth and strength, jealous of their liberties . . . The nobles, for the most part, were cultivated men, poets themselves or patrons of poetry, who had learned . . . that municipal liberties were a safeguard rather than a menace to the wise ruler."<sup>36</sup> The church's problem was that these enlightened people paid no allegiance to Rome, followed Gnostic beliefs concerning reincarnation and the demonic nature of the biblical Jehovah, condemned idolatry, denied the Trinity, and refused the sacraments of the Roman Church, which they called the Synagogue of Satan.

## Burn without pity.

In 1209 Pope Innocent II preached a great crusade against the Albigensians (also called Cathari), which resulted in the extermination of half the population of France. When the papal legate was asked how the crusaders might distinguish the heretics from the faithful, he answered: "Kill them all—God will know his own."<sup>37</sup> It has been written that more than a million people were slaughtered.<sup>38</sup> Briffault says, "A people of rare gifts had been tortured, decimated, humiliated, despoiled . . . The precocious civilization which had promised to lead Europe in the path of culture was gone, and to Italy was transmitted the honour of the Renaissance."<sup>39</sup>

A 19th-century prelate tried to defend the church's actions against



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the Albigensians by saying that their heretical opinions "brought violent disturbance into men's minds," in keeping with the traditional ecclesiastical definition of any theological diversity as violent disturbance.<sup>40</sup> However, a massacre on the scale of the Albigensian crusade may be considered a disturbance considerably more violent.

The riches brought into the church by this campaign encouraged further forays against heresy in all the countries of Europe. Mass executions became commonplace, one inquisitorial chronicler describing the burning of 180 people at once as a "holocaust very great and pleasing to God."<sup>41</sup> Popes praised the Inquisition's soldiers, as when Pope Gregory XIII sent congratulations on the slaughter of ten thousand French Protestants: "We rejoice . . . that with the help of God you have relieved the world of these wretched heretics."<sup>42</sup> Of course it was not the world but the church that was worried about their existence.

Heresy, or dissatisfaction with the church's ways of thinking and doing, was actually spread instead of stifled by the violence of its punishments. Here and there a few honest clerics spoke up against the abuses of their superiors; some paid with their lives for their boldness, like Brother Raymond Jean, executed for preaching: "The enemies of the faith are among ourselves. The Church which governs us is symbolized by the Great Whore of the Apocalypse, who persecutes the poor."<sup>43</sup> Nicholas de Clamanges, rector of the University of Paris, said in an open letter that the popes were ravishers rather than pastors of their flocks: "The priesthood has become a misery reduced to profaning its calling . . . Who do you think can endure, among so many other abuses, your mercenary appointments, your multiple sales of benefices, your elevation of men without honesty or virtue to the most eminent positions?"<sup>44</sup> Even the revered St. Bernard deplored the church's greed: "Whom can you show me among the prelates who does not seek rather to empty the pockets of his flock than to subdue their vices?"<sup>45</sup>

The Spiritual Franciscans, or Fraticelli, were declared heretics when they withdrew from the orthodox Franciscan order and claimed that the pope and all his kind were tainted with the sin of simony; that because of its evil, the church had been excommunicated by God, and the pope was an Antichrist. In direct opposition to the church's official declarations, they insisted that Jesus was a poor man, and good Christians should be similarly free of acquisitiveness, as St. Francis himself had taught.

Needless to say, these well-meaning heretics didn't last long. A whole town in Italy, Magnalata, known to be one of their centers, was leveled to the ground by order of Pope Martin V, and every inhabitant of the town was slain.<sup>46</sup> Other Franciscans, however, continued to supply judges and other personnel for the Inquisition, along with the Dominicans, who earned the punning title of *Domini Canes*, the Hounds of God. In 1325, Pope John XXII issued a bull "infallibly" declaring it heretical to say that Jesus and his apostles owned no property, and ordering inquisitors to prosecute those who called Jesus a poor man. The pope had 114 Spiritual Franciscans burned alive, just to drive the point

home.<sup>47</sup>

The legend of St. Francis also inspired an Italian peasant named Segarelli, who tried to join the Franciscan order and was rejected. Still, he believed himself a true spiritual son of St. Francis, and founded his own order, which was named the Apostolic Congregation, preaching against the worldly wealth of the church. Segarelli was caught and burned, but the Apostolic Congregation continued under the leadership of Fra Dolcino, hence they came to be called Dolcinists. They welcomed women to their order and granted their "Sisters in Christ" the same right to preach and lead prayers as the men had. They claimed to renounce sexual relations, so when Fra Dolcino's particularly beloved Sister in Christ, Margherita, bore him a child, it was announced as a miracle brought about by the Holy Ghost.

Three crusades were preached against these tenacious heretics. Finally, in the harsh winter of 1307, they were trapped in a mountain hideaway, reduced to starvation, and slaughtered. After watching his dearly beloved Sister Margherita burned to death, Fra Dolcino was slowly torn to pieces by red-hot pincers on a cart that rolled along public roads, where everyone could see the edifying spectacle and learn the consequences of heresy.<sup>48</sup>

The Inquisition invented many new and ingenious ways to increase its treasures, such as accusing the dead of heresy in order to dig up and burn their remains, and take property away from their legal heirs, on the ground that heretics couldn't own anything.<sup>49</sup> If a person, fearing that he was about to be arrested, should commit suicide to cheat the torturer, all his property was automatically taken by the church. Families were left destitute by this rule, and no one dared to help them for fear of reprisals. The Inquisition thus established the law of property seizure for suicides, which remained in force in most European countries until 1870.<sup>50</sup> The use of torture in ecclesiastical tribunals was officially sanctioned in 1257 and remained a legal recourse for the church for five and a half centuries, until it was abolished by Pope Pius VII in 1816.<sup>51</sup>

There was at least one inquisitorial judge who experienced a revulsion for his lifework and dared to say that his victims' confessions were false, due only to the agony of the torture. His name was Dietrich Flade. His archbishop had him arrested and put on the rack until Flade admitted having spoken heresy because he sold his soul to the devil. Then he was burned.<sup>52</sup>

The Inquisition remained active until 1834, especially in Central and South America, where the "heathen" natives were tortured and killed for crimes against the true faith, such as not believing in it.<sup>53</sup> Many Native Americans were burned at the Mission of San Francisco before the tribes were persuaded to accept the Word of God.<sup>54</sup> As far away as India, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Inquisition killed nearly four thousand people in the district of Goa.<sup>56</sup>

And still the Inquisition has its defenders. At the beginning of the twentieth century a cardinal, endorsed by Pope Pius X, wrote: "The naked fact that the Church, of her own authority, has tried heretics and condemned them . . . shows that she truly has the right of killing . . . Who dares to say

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that the Church has erred in a matter so grave as this?"<sup>57</sup> Of course, quite a few have dared to say so, especially some women who were understandably annoyed by the linguistic habit of referring to this all-male and fiercely autocratic church as "she."

One of the most famous victims of the Inquisition was Giordano Bruno, one of the best thinkers of the sixteenth century, a forerunner of philosophers like Leibniz and Spinoza. Accused of heresy at his monastery school, he fled to Rome, was accused again, and traveled through Switzerland, Germany, France and England as a teacher. He lectured on the theories of Copernicus, anticipating Galileo and Kepler. In his lectures on "natural science," mathematics, and cosmology, he taught that the universe may contain many worlds. He was accused of holding opinions "contrary to the Catholic faith," and condemned to death. He was burned in 1600 on the Campo dei Fiori in Rome, close to the Vatican, where his memorial statue was erected in 1889, funded by an international committee in spite of clerical opposition. (58)<sup>58</sup>

Another notable heretic was the Spanish theologian and writer Michael Servetus, who was burned in 1553. He wrote works on medicine and pharmacology, and first recognized the circulation of the blood, later confirmed and elaborated by Harvey. He was arrested by the Inquisitor-general of Lyons for denying the trinity, opposing infant baptism, and publishing other heretical ideas. He managed to escape, and fled to the Protestant stronghold of Geneva – an unfortunate choice, because it was the theological territory of John Calvin, who had declared himself Servetus's enemy. Calvin helped to arrange his second arrest, leading to his trial and execution. Calvin wrote that Servetus's views were "such detestable heresy as to abolish the whole Christian religion;" and Servetus could "destroy all the fundamentals of the faith."<sup>59</sup> So fearful are the faithful!

The Quakers were often accused of "ungodding God," or "robbing God of his glory," or "deposing the majesty of God himself," showing that on some level their critics believed God to be

very vulnerable, a mere bit of ephemera capable of being blown away by a breath. Seventeenth-century England forbade publications that might doubt the Trinity, "to the great dishonor of God" and even verbally denying that Jesus was God was declared a capital offense.<sup>60</sup> Believers' most homicidal rage has always been aroused by those who suggest that belief may be unfounded.

During the Age of Enlightenment, the panic of orthodox theologians became even greater. Pope Gregory XVI in his 1832 bull *Mirari vos* said liberty of conscience is madness, and any work advocating freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, or freedom of education is "a filthy sewer full of heretical vomit."<sup>61</sup> (So much for "American principles;" the papacy has "infallibly" condemned them.)

The second phase of the Inquisition had to do with the definition of witchcraft as a heresy, which didn't occur until the fourteenth century. Witches were the doctors, midwives, spiritual counselors and wise-women for rural Europe throughout the first half of the Christian era, and the Frankish Salic Law of 500 C.E. officially recognized their right to practice their arts. An edict of 643 made it illegal to kill a witch, and in 785 the Synod of Paderborn said anyone who killed a witch must be sentenced to death for murder.<sup>62</sup>

The *Canon Episcopi* declared that fear of witchcraft was nothing but a delusion, and to believe in witches' occult powers was heretical. But after the reign of Pope Innocent VIII, it became heretical not to believe in them. The Pope's bull *Summis desiderantes* "infallibly" declared that witches blast crops, cause diseases in people and animals, prevent married couples from copulating, and generally "outrage the Divine Majesty."<sup>63</sup> Apparently, believing the Divine Majesty helpless to take care of the matter by himself, inquisitors undertook to do it.

Declaring witchcraft a heresy enabled the Inquisition to survive as a money-making institution. In 1375, a French inquisitor pointed out that most of the rich heretics had been exterminated, so fresh confiscations of wealth wouldn't be forthcoming in the



Engraving showing that Democracy = Heresy.

foreseeable future. "It is a pity," he said, "that so salutary an institution as ours should be so uncertain of its future." Pope John XXII then empowered the inquisitors to prosecute any woman who worked charms, spells, or folk remedies, and the church began to develop its concept of witchcraft.<sup>64</sup>

From the 12th century on, village healers had been in competition with the priests, who were forbidden to practice medicine on the ground that all diseases were caused by demons, and the only permissible cures must depend on prayer and holy water.<sup>65</sup> The wise-women's procedures succeeded more often than prayer and holy water did; and this had not gone unnoticed.

Besides, the witches were predominantly women. "Any woman by herself knows more . . . superstitions and charms than a hundred men," said the Dominican monk Johann Herolt.<sup>66</sup> The church distinguished between sorcery, which was generally acceptable because it was practiced by men, and witchcraft, which was heresy because it was practiced by women. Agrippa von Nettesheim's books of sorcery were published under church auspices, accompanied by a statement of ecclesiastical approval; his instructor in magic had been an abbot named John Trithemius.<sup>67</sup> And one Pope Honorius was famed as the author of a popular grimoire (book of sorcery).

Two monks, Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, were sent to Germany and other parts of Europe to "investigate" the phenomena of witchcraft, and to evolve plans for dealing with it.

The result was their famous book, *Malleus Maleficarum*, "A Hammer for Witches," which became the standard reference for inquisitorial procedures. A more atrocious piece of literature can hardly be imagined, particularly when one recalls that this was not a sadistic fantasy but a real directive for dealing with real people. It stated that a witch must be "often and frequently exposed to torture. If after being fittingly tortured she refuses to confess the truth, the inquisitor should have other engines of torture brought before her, and tell her that she will have to endure these if she does not confess. If then she is not induced to confess, the torture must be continued . . . She is not to be altogether released, but must be sent to the squalor of prison for a year, and be tortured, and be examined very often, especially on the more Holy Days."<sup>68</sup>

Europe's witch trials went on for centuries and killed some nine million, most of them women—though some scholars consider this a low estimate.<sup>69</sup> Although the church has been quietly destroying records and will admit to only a few hundred thousand fatalities, the multiplicity of multiple burnings adds up to many more. We read of whole villages where only one or two women were left alive; of hundreds burned in a single day; and of stakes as numerous as a forest of trees. One bishop proudly claimed to have executed 1,900 in five years; and a Lutheran prelate, Benedict Carpzov, claimed to have condemned 20,000 all by himself. Even in relatively permissive England, some 30,000 witches were slaughtered.<sup>70</sup>

The women who were tortured and burned were accused of crimes ranging from being a midwife, possessing a cat, or having intercourse with the devil. Often, the smartest, most outspoken, most beautiful, educated, or wealthy women in a community would be singled out for murder by the female-hating celibate clergy . . . Almost the entire female population of a town would be immolated on a single day. In one German city, 900 women were burned in one day; in one French city, 400 were burned in a single day . . . An inquisitor of Como, Italy, was quoted as having burned 1,000 witches in a single year. The murders were not carried out by disorderly mobs, but were well-ordered, following a well-defined legal process involving sworn testimony from local citizens, gathering of evidence, extraction of confessions, and official ecclesiastical judgments.<sup>71</sup>

When such reports are multiplied by thousands of inquisitors and five hundred years, the comparison with Salem, Massachusetts, seems somewhat unbalanced—for which the United States may thank its tradition of religious freedom.

Heresy means "choice." But when worshipers are able to choose freely, there is no such thing as heresy.

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## Up-To-Date Atheism

# Summer Reading for Freethinkers

by Dan Barker

If you are lucky enough to be able to read on the beach this summer, you might want to pack a couple of those freethought books that you have been meaning to catch up on. Here are recommendations from the Freethought Hall library of recent books for the well-read freethinker (including others published within the last decade). Many of these authors have been featured on Freethought Radio.

*The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins (Houghton Mifflin, 2006). This international bestseller by the renowned biologist tells it like it is.

*Doubt: A History: The Great Doubters and Their Legacy of Innovation* by Jennifer Michael Hecht (Harper One, 2004). Believers have their histories, and now so do we nonbelievers.

*God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* by Christopher Hitchens. (Twelve, 2007). The first chapter alone is worth the price of the book.

*The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever* edited by Christopher Hitchens (Da Capo, 2007). The perfect antidote to all those “inspirational” books.

*The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason* by Sam Harris (W. W. Norton, 2004). Dense, passionate and meaty.

*50 Reasons People Give for Believing in God* by Guy P. Harrison (Prometheus, 2008). Geared toward debunking faith.

*The Quotable Atheist: Ammunition for Nonbelievers, Political Junkies, Gadflies, and Those Generally Hell-Bound* by Jack Huberman (Nation Books, 2007). An attractive arsenal of freethought.

*Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* by Susan Jacoby (Metropolitan Books, 2004).

*The Atheist's Bible: An Illustrious Collection of Irreverent Thoughts* by Joan Konner (HarperCollins 2007).

*What Is Atheism? A Short Introduction* by Douglas E. Krueger (Prometheus, 1998). Accessible “Freethought 101.”

*The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* by Michael Martin (Cambridge University Press, 2007). Essays by 18 leading scholars.

*Atheist Universe: The Thinking Person's Answer to Christian Fundamentalism* by David Mills (Ulysses Press, 2006).

*In Defense of Atheism: The Case Against Christianity, Judaism and Islam* by Michel Onfray (English translation, Penguin Canada, 2007).

*Irreligion: A Mathematician Explains Why The Arguments For God Just Don't Add Up* by John Allen Paulos (Hill and Wang, 2008). The author of the blockbuster *Innumeracy* turns his wit to religion.

*The Varieties of Scientific Experience: A Personal View of the Search for God* by Carl Sagan, edited by Ann Druyan (Penguin Press, 2006). Rediscovered lectures about religion.

*Why Atheism?* by George H. Smith (Prometheus, 2000). Simple but deep.

Two physics professors have written powerful books about atheism and science: *God: The Failed Hypothesis: How Science Shows That God Does Not Exist* by



This photo was taken by California Foundation member Debbie Skomer as she was reading Dan Barker's book, *Godless*, on Maui.

Victor J. Stenger (Prometheus, 2008); *Quantum Gods: Creation, Chaos, and the Search for Cosmic Consciousness* by Victor J. Stenger (Prometheus, 2009); *The Ghost in the Universe: God in Light of Modern Science* by Taner Edis (Prometheus, 2002); and *Science and Nonbelief* by Taner Edis (Prometheus, 2008). For a look at how religion is invading the medical profession, try *Blind Faith: The Unholy Alliance of Religion and Medicine* by Richard P. Sloan (St. Martin's Press, 2006).

Try these enlightening works about the “Not-So-Good Book”:

*Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence* by Hector Avalos (Prometheus, 2005); *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question—Why We Suffer* by Bart D. Ehrman (HarperCollins, 2008); *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* by Bart D. Ehrman (HarperCollins, 2005); *Jesus, Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (And Why We Don't Know About Them)* by Bart D. Ehrman (HarperOne, 2009); *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of its Sacred Texts* by Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman (Free Press, 2001); *Woe To The Women: The Bible Tells Me So* by Annie Laurie Gaylor (FFRF, Inc., revised hardback, 2004); *The Incredible Shrinking Son of Man: How Reliable is the Gospel Tradition?* by Robert M. Price (Prometheus, 2003).

On the question of morality and living a good life, here are some excellent resources (of course, the question should really be “Can you be good *with* God?”):

*The Atheist's Way: Living Well Without Gods* by Eric Maisel (New World Library, 2009); *Can We Be Good Without God? Biology, Behavior, and the Need to Believe* by Robert Buckman (Prometheus, 2002); *Society Without God: What the Least Religious Nations Can Tell Us About Contentment* by Phil Zuckerman (NYU Press, 2008); *Nothing: Something to Believe In* by Nica Lalli (Prometheus, 2007); *Freedom Evolves* by Daniel C. Dennett (Viking, 2003); *Parenting Beyond Belief: On Raising Ethical, Caring Kids Without Religion* edited by Dale McGowan (Amacom, 2007); *The Origins of Virtue: Human Instincts and the Evolution of Cooperation* by Matt Ridley

(Penguin Books, 1996); *Living Without God: New Directions for Atheists, Agnostics, Secularists, and the Undecided* by Ronald Aronson (Counterpoint, 2008).

Stories by—and about—former believers are always fun! If you haven't read Ayaan Hirsi Ali's gripping saga, *Infidel* (Free Press, 2007), now is the time to catch up. Also see *Losing My Religion: How I Lost My Faith Reporting on Religion in America—and Found Unexpected Peace* by William Lobdell (Collins, 2009); *Why I Rejected Christianity: A Former Apologist Explains* by John W. Loftus (Trafford Publishing, 2007); and *Why I Am Not a Muslim* by Ibn Warraq (Prometheus, 1995).

On the origins of religion, try these gems:

*Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* by Pascal Boyer (Basic Books, 2001); *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* by Daniel C. Dennett (Viking, 2006); *Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast: The Evolutionary Origins of Belief* by Lewis Wolpert (W. W. Norton, 2006); *How We Believe: The Search for God in an Age of Science* by Michael Shermer (W. H. Freeman, 1999); *Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time* by Michael Shermer (W. H. Freeman, 1997); *The Science of Good and Evil: Why People Cheat, Gossip, Care, Share, and Follow the Golden Rule* by Michael Shermer (Times Books, 2004).

*The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* by Steven Pinker (Viking, 2002) is on my Top Ten list of all-time favorite books.

For general freethought interest, state/church, history, poetry, fiction or freethought fun, add one of these to your carry-on:

• *Darwin's Ark*, poems by Philip Appleman (Indiana University, 2009) and *Karma, Dharma, Pudding & Pie* by Philip Appleman (Quattruck Lane Press, 2009). FFRF member Philip Appleman is a leading Darwin scholar as well as a witty poet.

• *Rhymes For The Irreverent* by Yip Harburg (FFRF, 2006). The lyricist of “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” entertains with light verse poking fun at all things sacred in this newly illustrated reprint of Harburg's two books of light verse from the 1960s and 1970s (plus some newly discovered poems).

• *Women Without Superstition: “No Gods—No Masters,”* edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor (FFRF co-president). These are the collected writings of women freethinkers of the 19th & 20th centuries (FFRF, 1997). (If you're flying, beware: it's more than 700 pages and weighs nearly 3 pounds!)

• *One Woman's Fight*, by Vashti McCollum. Legal battle to the historic Supreme Court victory removing religious instruction from public schools (FFRF, Inc., 1993).

• *The Lord Was Not on Trial: The Inside Story of the Supreme Court's Precedent-Setting McCollum Ruling* by Dannel McCollum (ARL, 2008).

• *Ellery's Protest: How One Young Man Defied Tradition and Sparked the Battle over School Prayer* by Stephen D. Solomon (University of Michigan Press, 2007). Recounts the famed *Schempp* decision against devotional bible readings in public schools from the perspective of FFRF Lifetime Member Ellery Schempp, whose high school protest resulted in the landmark ruling.

• *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* by Michelle Goldberg (W.W. Norton, 2006).

• *The Family: The Secret Fundamentalism at the Heart of American Power* by Jeff Sharlet (Harper, 2008).

• *Two Weeks of Life* by Eleanor Clift (Basic Books, 2008), recounting the Terri Schiavo saga, which occurred at the same time as the death by cancer of the author's husband Tom Brazaitis, a longtime FFRF member and respected journalist.

• *Salvation Boulevard: A Novel* by Larry Beinhart (Nation Books, 2008). Gritty mystery involving religion and government.

There are three superb books about the Dover, Pennsylvania “intelligent design” trial, all from a different perspective:

• *The Devil in Dover: An Insider's Story of Dogma v. Darwin in Small-town America* by journalist Lauri Lebo (New Press, 2008);

• *Forty Days and Forty Nights* by Matthew Chapman (Darwin's great-grandson) (Collins, 2007);

• *Monkey Girl* by Pulitzer-Prize winning author Edward Humes (Ecco, 2007).

For space reasons (typographically as well as in diminishing luggage), I left many worthy books off this list. You are welcome to let me know your own recommendations, as Annie Laurie and I are due for a vacation soon. If you can't find these at your local library, why not ask them to carry them? Quite a few of the books named above are available for sale at [ffrf.org/books/](http://ffrf.org/books/), along, of course, with enduring classics, such as *Why I am Not a Christian* by Bertrand Russell and *Atheism: The Case Against God* by George Smith.

Dan Barker is co-president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, co-host of Freethought Radio, and author of *Godless: How An Evangelical Preacher Became One of America's Leading Atheists* (Ulysses Press, 2008) and *Losing Faith In Faith: From Preacher To Atheist* (FFRF, 1992). Many of these books, including *Godless*, are sold by the Freedom From Religion Foundation (See [ffrf.org/books/](http://ffrf.org/books/))

## Surviving Rape, Battery & Illegal Abortion Circa 1954

# Never Again

*This memoir is reprinted in memory of Dr. George Tiller, assassinated by an antiabortion religious fanatic on May 31, 2009. Dr. Tiller dedicated his life to ensuring that women in need of abortion services would not face the kind of experience the author faced in the 1950s, when abortion was a taboo in America.*

*This article is adapted from one first published in June 1981 in *The Feminist Connection*, which was reprinted in *The Progressive Magazine*. The author, a Foundation member, became a national spokeswoman for legal abortion in the 1980s and 1990s.*

By Sherry Matulis

I was 23, very pleasantly married, the mother of two planned-for and especially loved children (the number later grew to five), and working my butt off nights in a cocktail joint, which at the time was one of the very few employment options available to any woman who needed to make more than \$27.50 a week.

And I did, I decidedly did. My husband was a construction worker; there was a depressive paucity of new building starts; and, like most young couples with rent to pay and a couple of kids to feed and clothe, we weren't making the Mellons and the Morgans turn green with envy. As a matter of fact, we were about two rungs on the ladder below extreme poverty. And happy. That we were. Dumbly, poorly but oh, lord, so truly happy!

Until I was raped. My god, how simple that sounds now. I—was—raped. Three little words. How could three little words wreak such havoc with one's entire life?

Here's how.

I got off the 1:20 a.m. bus and started my nightly trudge home, cutting the three blocks to two and a half by what we called the schoolyard shortcut. The route was the same one I'd taken nearly every night for a year.

I remember the moon was full; I remember thinking: Full moon brings out all the flakes and fruitcakes—there had been plenty of them that night, grabbing and groping. (I had “accidentally” dumped a tray of drinks on one of the more obnoxious ones.) I remember thinking how not too many moons distant I would be in a home of my own, a place with decent plumbing and a yard for the kids. My very first very own home. And then no more aching arches, no more fighting off the Cocktail Cassanovas with one hand and balancing a tray with the other. When I got my home, the one I'd been working for, between babies, for years, I was going to stay in it. Just me and my footbath, forever. I remember whistling—not out of fear but happiness.

And for a long time thereafter, that was all I remembered. It was all I could bear to.

He must have been waiting close to the building, in the shadows. I didn't see him until he was on top of me—no pun intended. And I still remember very little about the act itself; not because I'm any longer trying not to but because when he threw me down against the blacktopped court, my skull cracked and I blacked out.

One merciful concussion and a couple of hours later, I was again staring at the moons. Yeh, both of 'em. Both full. And all I could think was: Well, no wonder! What else, with two full moons?!

The back of my head was warm and sticky-wet. Blood. Lots of it. Most of my clothing had been torn off and scattered. And as I tried to get up to retrieve it, I felt a terrible searing pain in my midsection. Like a knife, I thought. Looking down, I saw this odd, ugly mass of something perched atop my abdomen. It took at least a minute to realize that it was part of my intestine. The knife was no longer there—I suppose he has it somewhere, with a few notches in the handle—but it had been; and my guts were oozing out of a neatly carved X.

Holding both hands against something I hope never to feel again in my life, somehow I managed to get up; and somehow I managed to get home; and somehow, with a lot of suturing and a couple weeks' intensive care and an infinite amount of love from a husband who rushed home from three states away and never left again, I managed to survive. Only to find myself wishing, about a month later, that I hadn't.

I was pregnant. And I was *not* pregnant by my husband. Something of which both of us hadn't the slightest doubt.

I was pregnant . . . by that *fiend*, that sub-human excuse for a life form, that *thing* who was not content with the

mere foul violence of rape but who found it necessary/pleasurable to also gut his victims and leave them to expire. (We later learned that the knife act was a religious rite, an act of “purification”; the X through which my innards became outwards was supposed to have represented the cross.)

I was pregnant. And I could not stay that way. But then what *could* I do?

I could finish the job he'd started—I could whack myself up in nice little pieces hoping no one would notice. And leave two wanted and loved children to fend for themselves? Great idea. Think of something else. Well, I could go see my doctor, plead with him, beg him for an abortion, tell him straight out the circumstances, surely he would understand, surely he would help.

Oh, yeh?

Oh, he was sympathetic, make no mistake about it; he patted me on the shoulder (my head still hadn't healed completely), all the while he told me how he'd really like to help, but he just couldn't, because it could jeopardize his whole career, and heavens! he



could maybe even end up in the slam for twenty years. By the time I left his office, I was almost feeling sorry for *him!* (In all fairness, what he said was correct; he could have gone to prison for aborting me. And I didn't want that; but then neither did I want to be raped and pregnant.)

He did offer a few suggestions—all zilch. I could, for example, he suggested, go ahead and have the baby, then place it for adoption. He didn't suggest, however, how I might explain such action to a frowning society—much less to a frowning mother-in-law: “Yeh, well, gee, mom, it's like this, see, I just decided I didn't want the third kid, so I gave it away. That's okay with you, right?”

(Had I been the doctor's wife and had the doctor's wife's money, I could of course have just taken an extended vacation. But then had I been the doctor's wife, it wouldn't have been necessary—doctors' wives had really no problem obtaining abortions, nice safe clean abortions.)

## I was pregnant. And I could not stay that way.

The rest of his ideas weren't quite so innovative, the main thrust being that I could have the child and accept my fate like a good girl and stop bothering people who didn't want to jeopardize their careers and spend twenty years in striped coveralls. He assured me, however, that no matter what I did and didn't do, everything would be fine, just fine. I was supposed to give my problem to the Lord (I would've loved to! especially since that was its original source) and then, “You'll find some way together to work it all out, I'm sure.”

And I was real glad he was. Sure, that is. Because what I was was confused. And hurt. And frightened. And desperate. And getting damned mad. And willing to try anything, everything,

one of each. Which is precisely what I did. I feigned migraine to get a prescription for ergotrate—which, I think, gave me a migraine. I went on a two day castor oil diet and lost five pounds and a quart of hemorrhoidal blood—and nothing else. I damn near scalded the lower two thirds of my anatomy squatting in hot tubs. I detested the taste of alcohol, but I held my nose and downed two pints of Everclear. And when I woke up, everything intact but the additional throbbing head, that was when I got out the meat mallet and began pounding my almost-healed abdomen.

My husband was ready to stick me in a straight jacket—just to preserve my original color. And like the doctor, but for an entirely different motive (his concern was for me, not the fetus), he wanted me to go through with the pregnancy. Actually, what he wanted was for me not to kill myself, nor to hire it done by the only sort of abortionist that was available at that time. His thought was that once the baby was born, we could both accept it was our own. And good person that he is, he probably would have tried. *Maybe* he could even have done it. But I could not, not ever. And I knew it. I knew that had I given birth to a child conceived under those circumstances, I would not be able to look at it without remembering. And remembering would mean hating all over again. And I wasn't willing to put either myself or a child through that. I would rather take my chances, slim as they might be, at the Main Street Butcher Shoppe.

When I was finally able to make him understand this, my husband reluctantly agreed to take me to the local back-alley abortionist—an alcoholic quack who quite literally buried more than one of his mistakes. This was in 1954, when a dollar was worth far more than what it is today. In the manner of first things first, I had to hand this drunken butcher one thousand of them before I ever got through the door. Which bought me the most painful, fear-filled and degrading experience of my life.

*Continued on next page*

# I Wish Atheism Were Boring!

By William Sierichs Jr.

**T**he Los Angeles Times (May 17) syndicated column by Charlotte Allen criticizes atheism for being “boring” and attacks prominent modern atheist writers. Allen is ignorant of the histories of both atheism and Christianity.

Atheism was literally a life-and-death issue for centuries: Announcing a lack of belief in gods, or even just suspicion of such, could get you burned at the stake in Christian nations; thrown to the lions in Rome—the fate of some Christians for denying the Roman gods; or forced to drink hemlock—as happened to Socrates.

Allen, like many Christians, apparently does not know that the historical Christian definition of atheism included denying the divinity of Jesus. On that basis, Christians denounced pagans, Jews, Muslims, even Christian “heretics.” Christians mixed this slur with a belief that, deep down, everyone knew the truth of the Christian god, and therefore was choosing Satan and immorality by refusing to convert. This underlies the claims atheists are not found in foxholes, are intrinsically immoral and criminal and are even Satan worshippers. Their mere existence was considered an offense to God.

Some of England’s American colonies mandated execution for blasphemy, which under English law then included denying God, Jesus’ divinity or the Holy Ghost. I don’t know of any colonial executions for atheism under blasphemy statutes (England had some burnings), but Massachusetts hanged four Quakers in the 17th century, and Quakers were considered atheists because of certain beliefs.

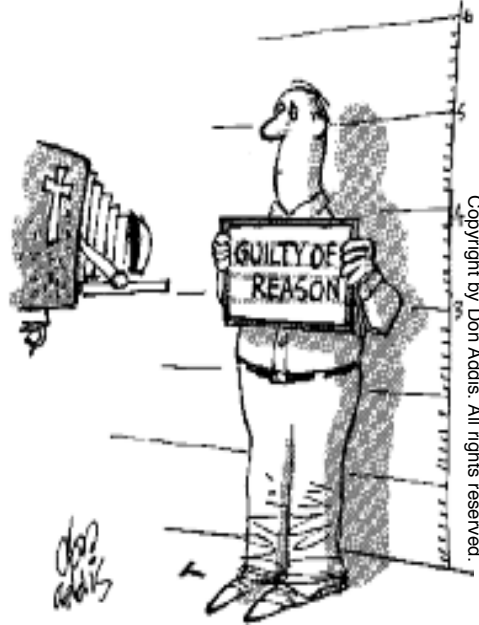
Thomas Jefferson noted that in Virginia, in an act of the assembly of

1705, “if a person brought up in the Christian religion denies the being of God, or the Trinity, or asserts there are more Gods than one, or denies the Christian religion to be true, or the scriptures to be of divine authority, he is punishable on the first offence by incapacity to hold any office, on the second by disability to sue, to take any gift or legacy, to be guardian, executor, or administrator, and by three years imprisonment, without bail” and could even lose permanent custody of his children.

Before the Civil War, slavery defenders routinely denounced abolitionists as atheists (or “infidels”), because they denied biblical statements supporting slavery, and connected abolitionism with the atheism and declarations of equality of the violent French Revolution.

One of the most colorful expressions of this idea is in a widely reprinted sermon on Nov. 29, 1860, in New Orleans, La., when Presbyterian Rev. Benjamin Morgan Palmer declared it a duty to defend slavery, even by secession. He said: “Last of all, in this great struggle, we defend the cause of God and Religion. The Abolition spirit is undeniably atheistic. The demon which erected its throne upon the guillotine in the days of Robespierre and Marat, which abolished the Sabbath and worshipped reason in the person of a harlot, yet survives to work other horrors, of which those of the French Revolution are but the type.” One contemporary credited Palmer with swaying Louisiana’s leaders toward secession.

Allen admits some states ban atheists from office but pooh-poohs the bans as unenforceable. Tell that to Herb Silverman, who spent seven years in litigation in South Carolina in the 1990s merely to challenge a state law that candidates must state a belief in a god.



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Fear/hatred of atheism were elements in the Christian extermination of paganism in Europe and the repression of Jews by law, sometimes by violence. Laws prohibited Christians from marrying nonChristians on the grounds that such contacts would lead Christians to atheism, immorality and Satan.

In the 19th century, many Christians decided that Jews’ so-called atheism and alleged immorality could be explained if Jews were an inferior race. Although racial antisemitism gained little traction before World War I, it soared in the 1920s. This was why Germans—more than 98% avowing theism—were willing to elect a Christian chancellor in 1933, knowing he was a racial antiSemite who led a party of mostly churchgoing Christians and routinely denounced atheism, in the forms of church-state separation, communism and Jews, as a moral pollution destroying Germany that had to be annihilated.

In a Feb. 15, 1933, speech, Adolf Hitler declared that under him, Germany was led by “Christians and not international atheists. I am not merely

talking about Christianity. I confess that I will never ally myself with the parties which aim to destroy Christianity. Fourteen years [the secular Weimar Republic has] gone arm in arm with atheism.”

Pro-Nazi “German Christians” won two-thirds of Protestant church offices in a 1933 national election. This group had declared: “Every Protestant pastor should be deeply grateful that at last no atheists are at the head of the German people, but rather Christian men . . . Hitler fought fourteen years for Christianity and church, misunderstood and opposed by many Christians. Next to God, the church and Christendom has the National Socialist leader Adolf Hitler to thank for its existence in the face of the attacks of Bolshevism.” Not surprisingly, a German Christian preacher declared at a 1933 rally, “the godless movement in Russia and in Germany is mostly propagated by Jews.”

Although secular factors figured in the rise of Nazism and similar right-wing movements in Europe, Christian leaders and clergy had often called for a religious and legal campaign against an alleged Jewish conspiracy to foist atheism upon the public for Jews’ greedy purposes. Many Christians also proclaimed the Soviet Union the sinister shelter of “godless Judeo-Bolshevism” that had to be destroyed to save Europe, and saw the 1941 German invasion as a crusade.

In effect, some six million Jews and 20–30 million Russians died in part because of historical Christian beliefs about, and fear of, atheism.

Contrary to Allen’s claims, most atheists would prefer to ignore religion as too silly to discuss. Atheist arguments generally are answers to relentless Christian demonizing.

Yet, a compelling moral reason can be advanced for atheist criticisms. Year after year, studies have shown the most secular countries, particularly in Europe, have overall the best social statistics—higher levels of health and education, lower levels of crime, teen pregnancies, etc., while the most religious countries, such as the United States, have overall lower quality of life—more crime, violent crime, sexually transmitted diseases, health problems, etc. Even within the United States, the most secular regions, such as the Northeast and West Coast, have much better social statistics than religious regions, such as the South. Although religion might not be the only factor here, sociologists say it plays a significant role.

I would argue there is an urgent moral need for boring “militant atheists” to save lives, not souls, put at risk by religions and theism.

**WILLIAM SIERICHS, JR.**, of Baton Rouge, La., has been a reporter, editor and occasional columnist on daily newspapers in Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas/Arkansas since 1974, and has won several state awards for news reporting and column writing. Bill is a Lifetime Member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

The Hitler quote is from **Hitler—Speeches and Proclamations 1932-1945**, vol. 1, translated by Wolfgang Domarus. The other German quote is from **Twisted Cross—The German Christian Movement in the Third Reich** by Doris L. Bergen.

## Never Again

*Continued from previous page*

After I had swallowed my two aspirin “anesthetic,” I was told to climb up on what resembled a dirty kitchen table and hoist my skirt. There followed a few obscene comments about my underpants and how I could take ’em off now, but I should have—ha! ha!—left ’em on before. Then pain. Eyeball-popping pain. Lots and lots of it. Far more, I’m sure, than was necessary. And just to be certain I’d remember the momentous occasion: after the scrapping-it-into-an-already-near-full-bucket procedure was over, El Quacko-Quacko offered me 20 of my 1,000 bucks back for a quick blow job.

Had I felt a little stronger at the time, had my life’s blood not been pouring out between my legs like Niagara Falls, I would quite likely have used his own damn dirty knife to do the world a favor. As it was, I simply stuffed a towel between my legs, pulled up my pants—which were still around my ankles, hied myself out of there and went home to hemorrhage.

Another trip to the hospital, another ten days’ stay, a little bout with peritonitis, a half-dozen transfusions (all of which we could ill afford and which put me back to square one re: owning

my own home) and what the hell! the old girl was good as new. Almost. But not quite. Not quite ever that “good” again. Not in the sense that “good” is docile or tractable or pliant or amenable or submissive or for one second willing to sit silently by while a bunch of Pollyanna Prufaces do their obscene vocal best to bring back the back-alley quack. The one *they’ll* never have to patronize—not because they don’t have abortions but because they do have pull.

Fifty-five years ago, I was physically and financially brutalized, not only by two cretin-thugs—the first who raped, the second who robbed—but by a myopic, bluenosed and totally hypocritical society; a society that revered ignorance and made it the criterion for most of its laws; a society that looked upon rape in much the same light as it looked upon stealing a package of Spearmint gum—and acted on it to an even lesser degree; a society that made it a felony for any woman to own and control her own internal organs. A society which really hasn’t changed very much for the better, and which is now on the verge of reversing the only good thing to have happened in the ’70s.

This is the society that allowed someone else to spill my guts but gets terribly indignant when I spill them. Well, scaaarooooo you, society! I survived in spite of you. (Countless others, sad to say, weren’t so fortunate.) I don’t know that I could again. I do know that no woman should have to. And if I have anything to say about it, no woman ever will.

**SHERY MATULIS** has been a member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation since 1981, and has served as an officer. Her writings are featured in **Women Without Superstition: No Gods — No Masters: Women Freethinkers of the 19th and 20th Centuries**, published by FFRF and edited by Annie Laurie Gaylor (1997).

Sherry has spoken about her experiences with illegal abortion before a U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee, chaired by Orrin Hatch, in 1981. She has testified before state legislatures and in 1990 spoke at the U.S. Senate committee hearings on the Freedom of Choice Act. She served both as a state and a national representative for the “Silent No More” campaign sponsored by National Abortion Rights Action League.

Sherry has appeared on “Oprah Winfrey” and “Sally Jessy Raphael” and is featured in the film, “Personal Choices,” produced by Planned Parenthood in 1985.

# Holy Goats

by David Kent

**F**rom its beginning, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has assigned woman a secondary role as an aid to a man seeking heavenly glorification for himself. Rabbits and goats run a poor second to a Mormon male. One apostle, Orson Pratt, did the math: If on his way to godhood, a Mormon collected a hundred wives and bred a child a year by each, in merely a billion years he would father 105 billion offspring (*The Seer*, pp. 38f). Alas for Pratt's pipe-dream, Mormonism's founder, Joseph Smith, had sent Pratt to England to proselytize so he could make a move on Pratt's beautiful and charming wife, Sarah, who repeatedly refused Smith despite his threat to ruin her reputation. When Pratt learned of it, "his mind collapsed."

In 1838, blacksmith and counterfeiter Oliver Cowdery, who had helped Smith to produce the Book of Mormon, condemned Smith to his

face for the "dirty, nasty, filthy affair of his and Fanny Alger." Smith could hardly deny it; his wife Emma had discovered them in the act in the barn. He excommunicated Cowdery, but learned to present a revelation from Almighty God to other women he attempted to seduce into polygamy.

The "revelation" was successful with at least 23 women, and failed with at least five, in the two years before Joseph Smith was killed by Levi Williams in 1844. He had moved on to teenage girls, other men's wives, widows, even marrying some followers to cover for the affairs. To claims that these were "spiritual" wives only, wife number fourteen, Eliza Roxcy Snow, remarked, "I thought you knew Joseph Smith better than that."

That women were regarded with contempt is well illustrated in Smith's attempted seduction of Nancy Rigdon in 1842. "Joe took her into a private room and locked the door, swore her to secrecy, and told her she had long been the idol of his affections, and that he had asked the Lord for her. . . . He then attempted to kiss her, and desired her to kiss him. She told him that

she would alarm the neighbors if he did not open the door and let her out immediately. . . . On Tuesday, the 28th day of June last, Joe went to Mr. Rigdon's accompanied by his High Priest and, by boisterous words and violent gestures, tried to deny the attempted seduction and alarm the girl; but, with daring bravery, she met the Monster of Iniquity, and told him he was a 'cursed liar;' that all that she said of him was true to the letter, and dared him to face her to the contrary. Joe then made a full acknowledgment of the whole affair, in the presence of her family," stating that he had done this as a trial only of her faith—the same excuse he made to critics of his smoking and drinking—and circulated a story that he was attempting to reprove and reclaim her from the slough of prostitution, in a vindictive attempt to ruin her reputation.

Are these merely matters of long ago and far away? "When our leaders speak, the thinking has been done—it is God's plan" (1945), and "Women will never receive the priesthood in this church" (1978). Utter and complete obedience to the male-only



Joseph Smith

prophet is required. No woman on her own will ever reach to the highest heaven in Mormonism.

We should remember whenever an LDS person is fielded for political office, that this is the history of the religion of that person.

The best sources to document the facts above are: T. Compton, *In Sacred Loneliness* (1997); G. Smith, *Polygamy in Nauvoo* (2008); J. and S. Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* (2008 format).

**DAVID KENT** is a Texas Foundation member who left the Mormon Church many years ago.



By John Carver

A long-time freethinker and humanist, Freedom From Religion Foundation Lifetime Member John Carver has enjoyed a give-and-take, running e-mail correspondence with religiously conservative high school classmates. This column discusses part of that dialog.

**A**n old classmate e-mailed me a rousing video clip of a song that treated being a good American and a good God-believing person as inextricably joined. Its lyrics had references to "No separation [of church and state], we're one nation under Him," "Folks want to push him out, they're silencing His word," "Here in America it's God we still trust," and so forth. Throughout the video, beautiful American scenes were shown, including one of Niagara Falls. The e-mailer lamented that "major radio stations wouldn't play [the song] because it was considered politically incorrect," then added, "Let us cease being the silent majority and join together as Americans!"

The lyrics were testimony to how unifying it is for a nation to have a

## Conversations with the Faithful

# Christian Nation Claims

shared belief. True or untrue, it is a gratifying, exciting, powerful force, as it was in Nazi Germany, still is in present Iran and North Korea, and elsewhere throughout history back to primitive tribes, who at least had the excuse of ancient ignorance.

It alternately amuses me and infuriates me when religious folks think their religion is what this country is all about. They seem to be unable to understand that this country is not about their belief in a god, but about their right to believe or not believe in a god all they want to . . . and it doesn't even have to be about a particular god or the god of the majority. That is what the country is about—that was one of the shared beliefs in our Constitution. Does freedom of religion matter only to groups in the minority? Some of the people most concerned about freedom of religion in the early years of the republic were Baptists! Yet Baptists are among those stifling freedom of others when their numbers will allow them to do so.

Early settlers in New England made that mistake; religious persecution was rampant. The Southern Baptist Convention gave a perfect exhibit of that mistake within this past year, succeeding in having the Georgia legislature prevent communities from even having the option of choosing to sell beer on Sunday. They did that because their religious interpretation is that God is anti-alcohol—or, at least, anti-alcohol one-seventh of the week. Not only were they happy to impose their values on nonChristians, but on huge numbers

of Christians who didn't agree with them. Legislators gave openly religious reasons for voting as they did.

Religious people seem more comfortable forcing their beliefs on others than even they seem to realize, unaware that what is godly to them is civic bullying to others. In countless ways—consider gay marriage, Sunday blue laws, religion in schools, "under God" in the pledge, the morning-after pill, birth control—the force of government action springs from basically religious beliefs that are pushed onto everyone. I remember a church leader in my youth saying religious freedom shouldn't extend to Catholics, but just to churches that were "right." I wonder if fundamentalist Muslims think religious freedom consists in allowing women to wear whatever color burkha they choose?

To hear songs like this complaining of the feigned victimization of Christians, one would think Christmas and Christians really are under attack. I suppose they are, if "attack" means that some proportion of the population has finally rebelled at Christians making the rules for everyone else. To Christians who frantically fear losing their civic hegemony, no amount of misrepresenting the facts seems to be in conflict with their version of morality. If there were actually any truth that someone is setting out to keep children from privately praying in school . . . or to prevent you from worshipping in your church and home any way you wish . . . or to stop you from posting your religious messages and sym-

bols on your private property . . . or to bar you from presenting your religious ideas as truth, then I'll be there shoulder-to-shoulder with these Christians to protest their rights being violated.

If, however, they want the civil government to support their religious ideas in language or in symbols, to teach public school children their religious dogma, to suppress or modify scientific findings to fit their religious ideas, or to subject candidates for public office to a religious test, then I'll be there to protest the destruction of our founders' most precious bequests.

Christianity is not under attack. Bullying Christian civil control is and should be. If it were up to the people who push this misguided godliness, our great country would be a theocracy wherein Christian imagery and phrases would be so prevalent as to make Mao's and Stalin's ubiquitous portraits of yesteryear look positively unobtrusive by comparison.

Oh, just a side note. The beautiful video accompanying the song portrayed, among other gorgeous sights, Niagara Falls—the Canadian side of Niagara Falls!

**JOHN CARVER**, Ph.D. received his doctorate from Emory University. He is author or co-author of five books and over 200 articles on corporate governance and has worked internationally in that field for 30 years. In semi-retirement he has returned to his first great interest: secular humanism, particularly in its application to church-state separation, morality, and the struggle between the scientific method and religion. He lives in Atlanta.

# Lodi Council Prayer Complaint Makes Waves

A letter by the Freedom From Religion Foundation asking the city council of Lodi, Calif., to drop unconstitutional sectarian references from prayers opening government meetings has stirred up lots of debate.

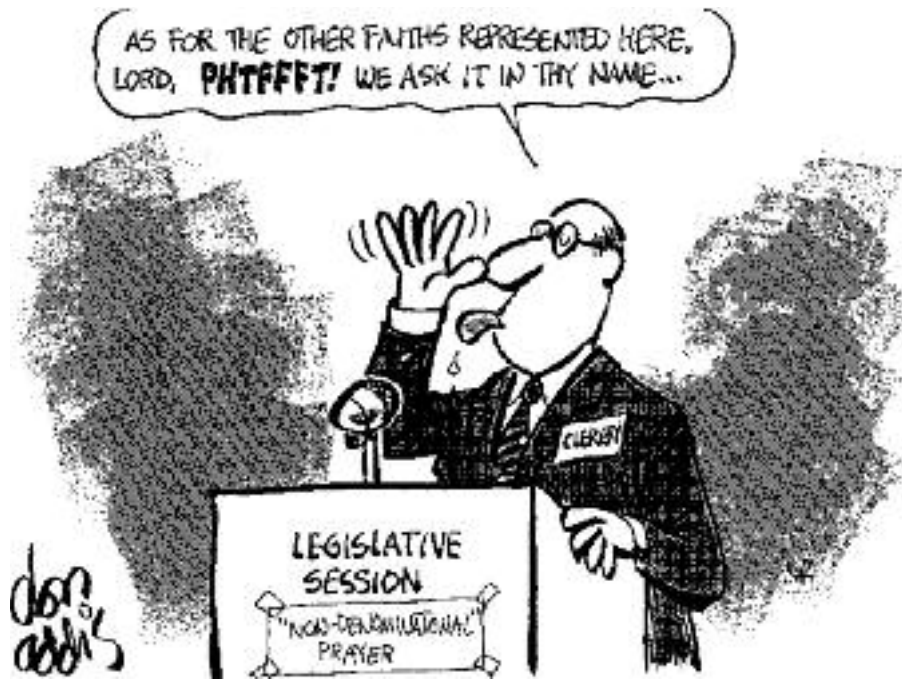
A letter by Foundation staff attorney Rebecca Kratz noted that a review of prayers from 2007 through May 6, 2009 makes "clear that these prayers are rarely, if ever, nondenominational." Kratz enclosed a chart showing that 39 of the invocations since 2007 invoked Jesus Christ.

"The prayers being offered before the Council's meetings do not fall into

the narrow exception of constitutionally permissible government-sponsored prayer laid out by the Supreme Court," she pointed out, noting that such prayers may not be sectarian or be directed toward citizens. Nor does the city have a "unique history" of legislative prayers, since they began in 2006.

The Ninth Circuit, which encompasses California, has continued to emphasize that government-sponsored prayers may not be sectarian—invoking a particular faith or deity.

"The City Council of Lodi cannot, under current law and the Council's



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own policy, permit any prayers that contain references to an explicit deity. The prayers currently given during Council meetings impermissibly advance Christianity and lead a reasonable observer to believe that the Council is endorsing not only religion over nonreligion but also Christianity over other faiths," Kratz wrote.

Significantly, a city attorney had pointed out that the Council prayers are in violation of court precedent. Yet

the attorney's suggestion in 2006 that the violation be remedied was ignored by the council. During Council debate following FFRF's letter, Council member Bob Johnson called Lodi a "Christian community, regardless of whether people like it or not."

News-Sentinel reporter Maggie Creamer, in an article, "Is Lodi a 'Christian community?'" interviewed local nonbelievers and nonChristians who felt excluded by such comments.

## State/Church Bulletin

### Mother Convicted in Faith Death

Leilani Neumann, of Weston, Wis., was convicted on May 26 of 2nd degree reckless homicide in connection with the Easter 2008 death of her 11-year-old daughter, Madeline, known as Kara. Neumann was unrepentant—releasing a statement saying: "I didn't realize it would be a crime to pray for my daughter." She also said "the real issue is our local and national government is turning more and more anti-God."

Family friend/former business partner Randall Wormgoor testified that Neumann regarded illness as a "great sin." Althea Wormgoor, Neumann's former bible study partner, testified about the family's belief that "God can heal." Kara's older sister testified that if God had wanted to heal Kara, he had the power.

This is a landmark case, because the Christian Science lobby has managed to get exemptions in most states, including Wisconsin, so that parents who believe in faith-healing are not held accountable for the deaths or health complications of their children when they don't reasonably seek medical care for them for religious reasons. The father's trial is upcoming.

In a related story, the mother of a 13-year-old boy suffering from Hodgkin's disease returned with him to their Minnesota home in late spring. A judge ordered chemotherapy for Daniel Hauser, but ruled he can stay with his parents. The parents were following so-called natural healing practices suggested by a religious group called the Nemenhah Band.

### Year of Bible (Not Again!)?

U.S. Rep. Paul Broun (R-GA) has introduced a bill to dub 2010, "The Year of the Bible."

It is assumed a preoccupied Congress will not repeat its unconstitutional mistake of designating 1983 to be

"Year of the Bible." That action was challenged by Anne Gaylor, then president of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, in a highly-publicized lawsuit, *Gaylor v. Reagan*.

In that case, the federal court said it did not have the power to restrain Reagan from signing the bill into law, and once Reagan signed it, essentially declared the case moot.

### Religious Schools Breed Abortions?

Unwed pregnant teens and those in their 20s who attend or have graduated from private religious schools are more likely to seek abortions than peers from public schools, according to research published in the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* (June 2009).

### Two Bills Oppose Faith-healing

Legislation has been introduced in the statehouses in Ohio and Wisconsin to combat parental neglect in the guise of faith-healing. Parents would face criminal charges in Ohio for relying on prayer instead of doctors to treat sick children, under House Bill 213, introduced by Rep. Bob Hagan, D-Youngstown. Hagen said the bill would send a clear message to parents and legal guardians.

In Wisconsin, State Rep. Terese Berceau, D-Madison, has introduced a bill to repeal a section providing exemption for parents who rely upon prayer to heal. Under current Wisconsin law, a "person is innocent of the offense if they provide a treatment by spiritual means through prayer alone for healing."

### Church Graduation Goes On

U.S. District Judge Charles Clevert on June 2 denied a preliminary injunction that would have barred two high schools in the Milwaukee area from

## FFRF Complaint Ends Church Bulletin Discount

A member recently alerted the Freedom From Religion Foundation to an illegal promotion occurring at Poblano's Mexican Grill in Greensboro, N.C.

This local chain restaurant was offering a 15% discount to any customer presenting a church bulletin on Sundays.

Foundation staff attorney Rebecca Kratz called Poblano's owner and informed him this "church bulletin discount" violated the Civil Rights Act and a Greensboro city ordinance, since it discriminated against nonbelievers and those who do not attend church. Kratz advised the owner that any promotions should be available to

all customers regardless of religious preference or practice on a nondiscriminatory basis.

The owner acted quickly to remedy the situation. He informed the Foundation that Poblano's Mexican Grill would no longer advertise a 15% discount to customers who present a church bulletin, or distribute special coupons to area churches.

Furthermore, he called all managers at the three area locations to remove all postings on the "specials boards" about this promotion. He agreed that any future promotions offered on Sundays will be offered to the public at large, and will not single out any one religious group.

## Beaver Dam Prayer Update

Since the Board of Supervisors in Dodge County, Wis., adopted a March resolution calling for rotating prayers by religious leaders, only moments of silence have followed, according to the *Beaver Dam Daily Citizen* (June 4).

The Foundation joined Board Supervisor Dean Fuller in asking the Board to stop praying, particularly as most prayers invoked Jesus Christ. The county clerk, charged with compiling a list of local people willing to lead

prayers, sent out 126 invocations on May 18 and only 4 pastors responded that they are willing to donate their services. Responses came from Praise Assembly of God, First Evangelical Lutheran and New Life Pentecostal.

The Foundation and Dean Fuller are awaiting implementation of the policy. If sectarian language is used in prayer, they plan to challenge the violation in court.

holding their graduation ceremonies in a nearby megachurch.

"A ceremony in a church does not necessarily constitute a church ceremony," Clevert said from the bench, in refusing to bar the graduation venue.

Americans United filed suit on behalf of unnamed current and former students, parents and taxpayers.

The judge has not yet ruled on the merits of the case, which will proceed.

Elmbrook Church has been used by Brookfield Central and East high schools for nearly a decade. Christian iconography, including a large cross over the dais where grads receive their diplomas, are not covered.

## State/Church Bulletin

### Oklahoma Decalog Illegal

The 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in a 3-0 ruling by three Bush appointees on June 8 declared unconstitutional a Ten Commandments monument recently erected on the courthouse lawn in Haskell County, Okla.

One commissioner at the time said, "I'm a Christian, and I believe in this. I believe it's a benefit to the community."

Judge Jerome Holmes, writing for the panel, ruled that "the reasonable observer would find that these facts tended to strongly reflect a government endorsement of religion."

It is hoped the decision may adversely affect a law just passed by the Oklahoma legislature approving a privately-funded Ten Commandments monument on the grounds of the state capitol.

### Obama's Cairo Speech Extracts

*Below, some of the religious references in Pres. Barack Obama's historic speech to Muslims in Cairo on June 4:*

- "As the Holy Quran tells us, Be conscious of God and speak always the truth."

- "And I believe that America holds within her the truth that regardless of race, religion, or station in life, all of us share common aspirations—to live in peace and security; to get an education and to work with dignity; to love our families, our communities, and our God. These things we share. This is the hope of all humanity."

- "We can't disguise hostility towards any religion behind the pretense of liberalism. In fact, faith should bring us together."

"The enduring faith of over a billion people is so much bigger than the narrow hatred of a few. Islam is not part of the problem in combating violent extremism—it is an important part of promoting peace."

- "The Holy Koran tells us: 'O mankind! We have created you male and a female; and we have made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another.'

"The Talmud tells us: 'The whole of the Torah is for the purpose of promoting peace.'

"The Holy Bible tells us: 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.'

"The people of the world can live together in peace. We know that is God's vision. Now that must be our work here on Earth.

"Thank you. And may God's peace be upon you."

*The following passages may be more to free-thinkers' liking (unbelievers were not mentioned in this speech):*

- "There's one rule that lies at the heart of every religion—that we do unto others as we would have them do unto us. . . . It's a belief that pulsed in the cradle of civilization, and that still beats in the hearts of billions around the world. It's a faith in other people."

- "We are shaped by every culture. Drawn from every end of the Earth, and dedicated to a simple concept, E Pluribus Unum: Out of many, one."

### Obama Often Invokes Jesus

Politico writer Eamon Javers, in an article, "Obama invokes Jesus more than Bush" (June 9, 2009), charges that as president, Barack Obama has already mentioned Jesus Christ more than George W. Bush did as president.

Javers reports that religious leaders meet regularly with White House policymakers—for instance meeting with the White House speechwriter who worked on Obama's Egypt speech.

Tony Perkins, president of Family Research Council, a Christian group, told Politico: "I don't recall a single example of Bush as president ever saying, 'Jesus' or 'Christ.'"

### Religious Right Attacks Hamilton

U.S. 7th Circuit nominee David Hamilton, a federal judge from Indiana, is being widely attacked by the religious right and their friends in Congress, such as Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-AL).

Hamilton's opinion in *Hinrichs v. Bosma* has riled theocrats. Hamilton ruled that prayers to open the Indiana House of Representatives could not continue to be sectarian. That decision was mooted when the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals threw the plaintiffs out on standing. A preliminary vote in May was postponed by the Senate Judiciary Committee, which is controlled by Democrats.

Committee Chair Pat Leahy, in agreeing to delay consideration of the nomination, defended the judge's record, according to Bloomberg: "He is, after all, the son of a minister and he believes very strongly in the constitutional separation of church and state," said Leahy.

### Sixth Catholic for High Court?

Judge Sonia Sotomayor was nominated by Pres. Obama in late May to replace Supreme Court Justice David Souter, a solid, reliable moderate. Souter has invariably voted to defend the separation between church and state.

If confirmed, Sotomayor would become the sixth Roman Catholic on the nine-person court, and the second current woman. Her views on state/church separation, abortion and other Catholic hot-button issues are not well-known as of presstime. Sotomayor, who is not a regular churchgoer but is not described as an ex-Catholic, once ruled in favor of a placing a menorah on public land in a New York dispute. Despite the little known about her views, many in the religious right have gone after the Hispanic judge, who sits on the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

The five male Roman Catholics now on the Supreme Court—Scalia, Thomas, Alito, Roberts and Kennedy—typically vote as an arch-conservative bloc, with Judge Kennedy occasionally swinging more moderately.

### Obama Appoints Antiabortionist

Pres. Barack Obama appointed an antiabortion Catholic leader to head the Center for Faith-Based and



Neighborhood Partnerships at the Department of Health and Human Services.

Alexia Kelley is the executive director of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good.

According to American Prospect, when Kelley was asked about her position on the Freedom of Choice Act, a bill to bar government entities from interfering with the right to abortion, she invoked the opposition of Catholic bishops. She opposes FOCA, saying it would overturn "reasonable restrictions" on abortion access.

### PBS' Religious Programming Stays

The Public Broadcasting Service will ban member stations from airing new religious TV programs, but will permit stations already carrying "sectarian" programming to continue doing so, according to The Washington Post (June 17).

The PBS board refused a proposed ban on all religious programming. That proposal would have forced stations carrying local church services and religious lectures to give up their PBS affiliation.

The vote signals a major change. PBS stations officially had been required to present noncommercial, nonpartisan and nonsectarian programming.

At least five PBS stations carry religious programs, including: KBUY in Salt Lake City, operated by an affiliate of the Mormon Church; KMBH in Harlingen, Texas, operated by the local Catholic diocese, and WLAE in New Orleans, operated by a Catholic lay organization. WHUT, operated by Howard University, would not be barred from airing telecasts of "Mass for Shut-Ins," a weekly mass aired by them since 1996. (Concerned about the proposal, the Archdiocese of Washington preemptively negotiated a contract with another station.) WHUT had aired the masses for free, but the archdiocese will pay \$60,000 a year to a private station.

In its June 16 vote, the PBS board also decided to allow PBS stations to air religious programs on digital TV channels and websites, so long as those channels don't include PBS programs or brand identification.

### Fanatic Assassinates Dr. Tiller

Christian fanatic Scott Roeder, 51 (see Overheard, p. 4), was arrested for gunning down abortion provider George Tiller, M.D., in Tiller's Lutheran

church in Wichita, Kansas on May 31, where Tiller was an usher.

Tiller's family issued a poignant statement:

"George dedicated his life to providing women with high-quality health care despite frequent threats and violence. We ask that he be remembered as a good husband, father and grandfather and a dedicated servant on behalf of the rights of women everywhere."

According to Roeder's former wife, Lindsey Roeder, Roeder had a "drastic personality shift," first becoming a militant tax protester, then a zealous churchgoer and antiabortionist.

The assassination followed decades of religiously-motivated targeting and harassment of Dr. Tiller by national antiabortion groups. Antiabortion groups such as Army of God and Operation Save America claim all Americans must "bow down to Jesus." Five separate antiabortion operations were headquartered in Wichita, making Tiller's practice a national focus for antiabortion terrorists. In 1993, thousands of extremists tried to block off the clinic, which was bombed in 1986.

Tiller's home and neighbors were targeted. Women going inside the clinic received what The New York Times termed "obscenity-filled insults." Tiller and staff were often confronted at restaurants and churches.

Fox TV commentator Bill O'Reilly, continually referred to Tiller as "Tiller the baby killer" and accused him of "executing babies." Salon.com researched O'Reilly shows and found he had gone after Tiller on at least 29 separate episodes, libeling him as a "baby killer," comparing him to Al-Qaida, Mao, Hitler and Stalin, even claiming the clinic was covering up for child molesters and rapists.

Randall Terry, a religious bully with Operation Rescue, self-described as a "Christian activist organization," relentlessly hounded the Wichita clinic. Terry stated publicly on June 1 that Tiller had "reaped what he sowed."

Kansas Attorney General Phill Kline, often featured admiringly on O'Reilly's show, legally hounded Tiller.

Roeder had written for an online newsletter, Prayer & Action News, which calls the assassination of doctors who perform abortions "justifiable homicide."

Rachel Maddow, MSNBC TV host, has pointed out that the Bush Administration failed to enforce the federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act, which Roeder had violated routinely without consequence, even the day before he executed Tiller.