



# The Freethought Society News

Editors: Margaret Downey and the Freethought Society Board of Directors  
Published by: The Freethought Society | <http://www.FtSociety.org>  
Mailing address: P.O. Box 242, Pocopson, Pennsylvania 19366-0242  
Phone: (610) 793-2737 | Email: [Ezine@FtSociety.org](mailto:Ezine@FtSociety.org)

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## The Secular Day of the Dead 2019 Event

by Margaret Downey

It is with great pride that I report on the growing trend of celebrating a Secular Day of the Dead. The Freethought Society (FS) first developed the concept in conjunction with **Victoria de la Torre** in 2014. In 2018, a Secular Day of the Dead toolkit was written and made available to any secular/nontheist group who requested it. This year we know of four events that took place in various parts of the country.

On Saturday, November 2, 2019 FS and the San Diego Humanist Association co-sponsored a Secular Day of the Dead in San Diego, California. The event drew 50 people to Emiliano's Mexican Restaurant and Cantina in order to honor the life legacies of dead loved ones as well as to appreciate life in the here and the now.

The San Diego event included a Mexican buffet food service, entertainment by **Juan Jose Cortés**, and an Honoring Ceremony. The event opened with a welcome delivered by me, de la Torre and **Consuelo Fleming**. During the opening, each of us lit two Secular Saint candles. I lit candles to honor **Carl Sagan** and **Christopher Hitchens**. De la Torre honored **Socrates** and **Sigmund Freud**. Fleming honored her secular heroes **Charles Darwin** and **Frida Kahlo**.

Most of the attendees brought framed photos of their dead loved ones to place on the Honoring Table (also known as an "Ofrenda"). Very few people shared their memories and stories publicly. It's not an easy thing to do, but for those who did talk, the ceremony seemed healing and very special. The Honoring Ceremony ended with the lighting of a **John Lennon** Secular Saint candle and everyone in attendance rose from their seats to sing "Imagine." It was a beautiful conclusion to a lovely ceremony.

As soon as possible tables and chairs were moved to the side of the room to create a dance floor. Mexican music was played and many people danced. Dancing is a recognized tradition in the Hispanic community and the Secular Day of the Dead was the perfect place to enjoy music as well as the energy that is generated by people enjoying life.

Across the country, The Humanists and Freethinkers of Fairfield County (HFFC) hosted a Secular Day of the Dead on Friday, November 1<sup>st</sup> at the Rio Bravo Tacos & Tequila restaurant located in Norwalk, Connecticut. HFFC's announcement of the event was very well done. Below is a reprint:

*Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) is still an important holiday for people of Latin American descent all over the world, but its Catholic traditions no longer resonate with some. To be inclusive of those who practice other religions, or none at all, affiliates of the Freethought Society across the United States recently began to host 'secular' celebrations, which put religion on the back burner in recognition of the core purposes: culture, community, and family.*

*This year, The Humanists and Freethinkers of Fairfield County (HFFC) is bringing one to Norwalk. Come to share a story of a deceased loved one, a quote that reminds you to seize the day, or just listen while you enjoy delicious tacos and good company.*

*Our theme is Carpe Diem — Seize the Day! Live your best life even in the face of knowing you will die. We embrace the cultural message of the Day of the Dead, to remember and commune with those who are no longer with us physically, but remain inside of us and inspire us to live our best lives. Share a quote about carpe diem; tell a story of someone who influenced your life; bring a memento to remind you of your mortality; you can come in costume or with your face painted as is the custom for this holiday.*

*The Day of the Dead is a Mexican holiday celebrated throughout Mexico and the Mexican diaspora. In Mexican culture, death is viewed as a natural part of the human cycle. On the Day of the Dead, family and friends gather to remember and celebrate friends and family members who have died.*

*A Secular Day of the Dead is a celebration of life and family legacies. Our humanist friends in California created this celebration as a cultural event without any religious context or belief in an afterlife. Skulls and skeletons are images of memento mori (Latin for 'remember you will die') to remind us of our mortality and to remember carpe diem — to seize the day.*

HFFC Director of Programming **Anita Peters** was the main organizer of the 2019 Secular Day of the Dead. HFFC invited the Norwalk Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to attend and subsequently referred their members to a wonderful Google YouTube video, *Dia de los Muertos: Celebration of Life*. The video is done in Spanish and has English subtitles. The video can be viewed at this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j44yUsIzUks>

The video provided information about the history of Dia de los Muertos. It began as an Aztec celebration that was adapted by Catholic Spaniards. The celebration spread throughout Latin America and is now appreciated by many secular Hispanics as an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of life, ancestry and living life to the fullest. HFFC encouraged participants to arrive in costumes and bring articles of memento mori to share.

During the event everyone put their business card in a jar for a chance to win two bobblehead skeletons. Peters said:

*The HFFC Secular Day of the Dead was a fun social get-together. This was the first time we organized such an event, but we plan on making it an annual celebration. We, of course, will always include an invitation to the Norwalk Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. HFFC hosted 15 participants including the President and Vice-President of the Norwalk Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, but we hope to greatly increase attendance in 2020.*

Another Secular Day of the Dead event took place on November 1<sup>st</sup> in Tysons Corner, Virginia, located just outside of Washington, DC. The event was hosted by Hispanic American Freethinkers (HAFree). Twenty people were in attendance at the event, which took place at a restaurant located on the top floor of a newly-opened Whole Foods. HAFree founder and president **David Tamayo** describes the event below:

*Some of us drive electric cars and Whole Foods has free car charging for up to two hours. The restaurant at Whole Foods has a lot of tables which we put together and decorated with colorful signs.*

*We provided everyone with Dia de los Muertos masks. During the event we had a discussion of the future of humanity considering the many different ways humans can kill themselves as a species, not counting the ways that nature can do us in. Yes, the conversation was a bit morbid, but perhaps appropriate for the holiday.*

*A HAFree hero, **Hector Avalos**, is dying of cancer, so we also talked about his decision to not go through any additional medical treatments. I have the honor of making sure his life is memorialized and at his request I will be filming his dying message. The group made suggestions about what questions I should ask during the filming. There, at our Secular Day of the Dead, we were all rationally discussing death and life legacies. We celebrated our lives and friendships that special evening.*

Inspired by the Secular Day of the Dead toolkit provided by FS, **Nick** and **March Schweitzer** held a celebration in their home on November 1, 2019 in Madison, Wisconsin. The Schweitzers provided the below description of their event:

*We invited only 20 people to our celebration because that seemed to be the right number for each person in attendance to talk about their dead loved ones during the event. And they all did! Many people brought and shared foods associated with the legacy of their loved ones.*

*A secular ofrenda (honoring table) was prepared with marigolds, candles, sugar skulls, and food offerings of fruit and breads, especially pan de muerto. Mexican food and drink were served. Time was taken during the evening for each person to tell a story and highlight the life legacy of her/his honoree.*

*As an initial trial, the event was not advertised to the general public, but based on its success plans are now proceeding for a 2020 celebration in a larger venue. Next year, we will send invitations to groups such as the Humanist Union of Madison; Atheists, Humanists & Agnostics at the University of Wisconsin; the Free Congregation of Sauk City; and the Freedom from Religion Foundation, hoping that they will join us to celebrate life and the legacies of our dead loved ones.*

FS is pleased that the Secular Day of the Dead concept is being used across the country. To help individuals and groups host this type of activity, a PDF version of the Secular Day of the Dead toolkit is available at the following link:

<https://www.ftsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/SDoD-Toolkit.pdf>

If you host a Secular Day of the Dead event, please remember to send FS a report and please include photos. FS is keeping an archive of all the Secular Day of the Dead events to enable an exchange of ideas throughout the secular community. The San Diego, California Secular Day of the Dead Honoring Table (Ofrenda) is pictured below:



# Photos of the 2019 California Secular Day of the Dead



Pictured left in the top row are the three hosts of the San Diego, California Secular Day of the Dead/Dia de los Muertos Secular event. Left to right are **Victoria de La Torre**, **Margaret Downey** and **Consuelo Fleming**. Seated is the classical guitarist entertainer, **Juan Jose Cortés**.



For over eight months, **Indra Zuno** helped to organize the Secular Day of the Dead event. She could not attend the event due to a family emergency, but without her help the San Diego Secular Day of the Dead would not have been a success. Her photo is at right. We thank her for all her hard work leading up to the 2019 Secular Day of the Dead.



Pictured left is **Jamy Ian Smith** honoring the life of his friend and fellow magician, **Johnny Thompson**. In the above middle photo, **Amy Turner** is pictured honoring her grandparents. **Michael McCarron** is pictured in the above right photo honoring **Katie Corish**, who was a second mother to him. She died from cancer 3 years ago.



Pictured left is **Michael Estes** honoring the life of his sister, who is shown in a family photograph being held by **Victoria de La Torre**. In the above middle photo, **Melissa Krawczyk** speaks fondly of a dear friend who died tragically in a motorcycle accident a few years ago. **James Nunnelley** talked about the life of **Stephen Hawking**, a scientist he admired greatly.

# Should Atheists Debate Theists?

by Herb Silverman

Understandably, we like to talk about things important to us. That's one reason evangelicals talk about religion more frequently than atheists. Religion is extremely important in South Carolina, where I live, so it frequently enters conversations. Many atheists are quiet about their religious views, especially in the Bible Belt, not wanting to appear impolite or offend others. Being polite by avoiding conflicts has never been a guiding light for me.

I've had quite a few public debates with Christian leaders on various topics including whether God exists; if we should have prayer in public schools; whether we are a Christian nation; if atheists should be allowed to hold public office; whether we can be moral without God; and whether society would be better off without religion. This last debate was at a Veritas Forum in 2019 with a professor from **Jerry Falwell Jr's** Liberty University, and it may be viewed at the link below, along with some of my other debates:

<http://lowcountryhumanists.org/default.php?page=videolibrary>

Most of my debate opponents have been fundamentalist ministers, with most of the audience coming from the ministers' flock. Religious discussions and debates can be productive for atheists because a theist is more likely to hear something new from an atheist than the other way around. It can also help break stereotypes about atheists, especially when some know about atheists only from what they've heard from their preachers. Debates are never about changing the mind of the debate opponent, but to plant seeds of doubt in the minds of those in the audience who are open to new ideas.

Many atheists, myself included, have been overly optimistic that a rational argument will be sufficient to change minds. I initially thought I could apply logical arguments and biblical contradictions to show religious people that probably no god exists. However, you can't reason someone out of a belief that they didn't come to through reason. I now think the best we can do is to make good points in a reasonable and pleasant manner. I emphasize "pleasant" because many in the audience of a debate make unconscious judgments based more on personality than on arguments. That was difficult for me to understand at first, since it's so different from my academic world of mathematics. Smiling is effective in debates and useless in mathematics.

Whenever overly enthusiastic Christians in the audience interrupt, shout, or makes nasty comments, I try to look sad, but I am secretly delighted. I sometimes later get apologies from Christians about the inappropriate behavior of these other Christians. I then say, "There are good and bad



Pictured above, standing at center stage, is **Herb Silverman** participating in a May 25, 2005 debate at Oxford University. The topic was "Does American Religion Undermine American Values?" Silverman's debate opponent was **Rich Lowry**, editor of the *National Review*.

Christians, as well as good and bad atheists, and we shouldn't stereotype."

We often have opportunities in debates to ask our opponent questions. In one particular debate, I asked the minister how his behavior would be different if he stopped believing in God. He thought for a minute and said, "I'm sometimes tempted by other women to cheat on my wife, but I resist because of my love of Jesus and knowing how much it would hurt Jesus." My response was, "I'm sometimes tempted by other women, but I resist because of my love for my wife Sharon, knowing how it would hurt Sharon."

After the debate, several women in the minister's church told me they liked my answer a lot more than they liked his, and the minister's wife didn't look all that happy with his response, either. Whether to base decisions on the needs of an imaginary god or on real human beings is an essential difference between conservative religionists and humanists.

The atheist community is divided about religious fundamentalism and creationism, but not about whether such preposterous claims have any validity. They disagree on whether atheists should debate fundamentalists about the "science" of the Bible. Here are arguments against debating: "What's to debate? Evolution is true! That a man named Noah put pairs of all species from a 6,000-year-old Earth in an ark he built when he was 600 years old is false! Sharing a stage with creationists can lend them credibility." But if we don't defend our positions I worry about losing the battle of public opinion. As the saying goes, the best way to counter bad speech is with good speech.

I would not debate Holocaust deniers or members of the Flat-Earth Society because there isn't much of a constituency for these preposterous positions as there is for the equally ridiculous literal belief in the Bible. I understand why a famous atheist like **Dr. Richard Dawkins** doesn't want to give credibility to some theists by debating them. I've never worried about giving credibility to ministers, who more likely might be worried about giving credibility to me. **William Lane Craig**, one of the best-known Christian apologist debaters, has spent countless hours trying to get Dawkins to debate him. Craig has even debated an empty chair that he substituted for Dawkins (I think the chair won). Dawkins, who has debated people like archbishops of Canterbury, didn't want to give undeserved credibility to Craig by debating him.

On the other hand, I was happy to debate Craig. Dawkins, in the Foreword to my autobiography, *The Candidate Without a Prayer*, commented about my debate with Craig: "This full-time debater (Craig) fatuously asserted that the resurrection of Jesus must be a historical fact because the disciples were

prepared to die for their beliefs. Herb's answer was devastatingly succinct: '9/11.'"

I've become more sympathetic toward religious fundamentalists who want to convert me because I now see why it's so important to them. Since I came to atheism through following what I consider to be a sensible, evidence-based path, it doesn't much matter to me whether others adopt my position. For Christian fundamentalists, on the other hand, eternal life is at stake. And for many of them, that's more important than life itself. I find such a worldview odd at best, and potentially dangerous, but I understand that they want to "save" me from hell.

I also understand why some Christian fundamentalists want nothing to do with to me. They have taken to heart II Corinthians 6:14:

*Believers must not commune with unbelievers. What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, light with darkness, believers with infidels?*

On the other hand, I like finding ways to get along with people with whom I have significant disagreements. Instead of bashing each other, I suggest organizing the kind of group we once formed in Charleston, South Carolina. Several

## *Freethought Society President's Ohio Speaking Tour*

The Center for Inquiry's Northeast Ohio affiliate recently teamed with the Cleveland Humanist Alliance (CHA) and the Cleveland Freethinkers to host Freethought Society (FS) founder and president **Margaret Downey** as a two-day speaker. They shared transportation and hotel fees to bring Downey into town.

On Friday, September 20, 2019, Downey delivered a presentation about the 80-year struggle of Women's Suffrage. Center for Inquiry Northeast Ohio's VP of programming **Mark Tiborsky** said:

*"Our 2019 Humanism Awards Banquet had a theme — the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of women's suffrage. When I saw that one of the presentations Downey offered was on that very topic, I thought her talk would be perfect for the banquet. And it was! We were treated to a very interesting and informative presentation that was loaded with great visuals. Downey's talk was very well received, and everyone in attendance came away with a better knowledge of the history of the Women's Suffrage Movement."*

On Saturday, September 21<sup>st</sup>, Downey spoke about the FS *Tree of Knowledge* project. CHS's founder and organizer **Megan Denman** said:

*"Margaret Downey's presentation about the Tree of Knowledge deeply inspired a segment of the secular population of Cleveland. We were moved to share a positive, meaningful Winter celebration and to be counted alongside our religious brothers and sisters."*



Baptists and Secular Humanists decided to meet periodically for conversation and refreshments, simply to get to know one another and learn about different perspectives and world views. We gave ourselves the acronym BaSH (Baptists and Secular Humanists). Our goal was to find common ground, without attempting conversion. We succeeded, and managed to disagree without being disagreeable.

An article about BaSH appeared in our local paper, *The Post and Courier*. The article's title was "Squared off, but not angry." First Baptist Church **Pastor Lamar King** said that we were more tolerant than many on the Religious Right. Another Southern Baptist was quoted as saying about our discussions, "It really makes me sharpen my thinking and question what it is I really believe and how I can put my beliefs forward in such a way that's attractive and not offensive to people."

These Southern Baptists wanted to prove to us that they can be reasonable. They proved their case, but shortly thereafter Pastor King lost his job. Assuming that his public comments about secular humanists was a factor in his being fired, it appears that there weren't enough like-minded congregants at his church. This should indicate to all concerned that atheists are more tolerant than Southern Baptists.

Below is a photo of Downey speaking at the Cuyahoga County Library. Downey is available for other speaking engagements and has many topics from which organizations and groups may choose. Please see her bio and topic list at the two links below:

[https://centerforinquiry.org/speakers/downey\\_margaret/](https://centerforinquiry.org/speakers/downey_margaret/)

<https://americanhumanist.org/what-we-do/speakers-bureau/margaret-downey/>

To arrange for Downey to speak at your venue, please contact her at: [Margaret@FtSociety.org](mailto:Margaret@FtSociety.org). She is particularly eager to book speeches about The Women's Suffrage Movement, as 2020 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of women finally obtaining full voting rights in the United States. "The history and details of the Women's Suffrage Movement should never be forgotten, and my goal is to tell the story in an entertaining and educational way," Downey said.

Downey is in discussion regarding the possibility of delivering Women's Suffrage speeches to Orange County, California and Las Vegas, Nevada Girl Scout of America (GSA) troops. She is hoping to be scheduled at many more GSA locations across the nation.

FS supporters are encouraged to contact local Girl Scout Troops to suggest that they host Downey as a speaker. Reimbursement of hotel and all travel expenses are required. Donations can be sent to FS earmarked for a GSA Women's Suffrage speaking sponsorship. Donate at: [www.ftsociety.org/donate/](http://www.ftsociety.org/donate/)

# *Religiously Traumatized: The Negative Impact of Modern Religion*

by Alberta Parish

As a former person of Christian faith, I am now dealing with the religious trauma that Christianity has done to my subconscious mind. Prior to my de-conversion, I suffered from a range of negative emotions which began in earnest after a major job loss in June of 2017. Nearly four months later, my mother died from Stage IV uterine cancer. Even while grieving the loss of my mom and having suicidal thoughts, I continued going to church and worshiping God. But 2019 is when I truly demanded evidence for God. Nothing seemed to be improving in my life, and I needed real solutions to real problems. I felt myself growing more frustrated day by day. This was the time I needed this Christian God that I had been taught to believe in for so many years to show up. Christianity produces fear-based consciousness by reinforcing the concept of Hell to its adherents. I spent years dedicated to a religion that did not produce real tangibles in my life.

In April of 2011, I walked away from the church and Christianity, but three-and-a-half years later I returned after reading a book entitled *A Land Unknown: Hell's Dominion* by **B.W. Melvin**. I wasn't strong enough to stand on my square. Instead, the fear of going to Hell seized me and I went back to the church.

During these past several months, I've taken a much harder look at Christianity, the Bible, and the concept of Hell. I will no longer dedicate my life to fictional tales and a belief system that I know is not based on reality. Neither will I live the remainder of my life perpetuating these lies to others. It is clear to me that the Jesus of scripture never historically existed. In fact, Jesus and the Four Gospels were invented by the Roman imperial Flavian family, according to **Joseph Atwill**, author of *Caesar's Messiah* (2005), whose theory contradicts the mainstream historical view. Atwill also claimed that the three-and-a-half-year ministry of Christ is an allegorical tale based on the military campaign of Titus, who sacked Jerusalem in 70 AD. Based on scholarly consensus, the Four Gospels were all written by anonymous authors and not by the names the gospels claim. Other biblical scholars and researchers, such as **Abelard Reuchlin**, who authored *The True Authorship of the New Testament* (1979), have also made claims that a family of Roman aristocrats known as the Pisos invented Christianity, Jesus, all the disciples, all the Marys, all the Josephs and other fictional characters in the New Testament, and then placed these characters at a specific place and time in history.

I've been lied to for a greater part of my life by the ideological programming that Christianity has reinforced time and time again. Now, I'm reprogramming my mind to set aside all religious beliefs, and just focus on the facts. For many believers, it is easier to live in a world of make-believe and fantasy as they try to explain away the negative events in their lives or try to find some measure of happiness and personal fulfillment. Many people of faith don't want to go through life believing there is no supernatural savior that will rescue them and ease their burdens.

The church has repeatedly reinforced that God is a protector, he is a healer, he is a provider, he is a deliverer, he is a miracle worker, he is good all the time and his mercy

endures forever. However, I see an increasingly wicked world and no biblical God to be found because either he's in hiding or he's *NOT* real. I don't see how a just and loving God would allow such insurmountable evil to perpetuate throughout the ages and not stop it at its main source. The God of scripture that I've been taught since childhood has been bragged about and misrepresented as a protector of the innocents. Yet, throughout the Old Testament the slaughter of innocents is widespread. One does not have to look very deeply to see that Judeo-Christian teachings are dangerous because these teachings justify violence against women and children. Christians often would prefer to turn a blind eye to these stories in the effort to justify their New Testament ideology of how Christ became God. As the Jewish Holocaust was never justified, we cannot justify biblical accounts of atrocities all in the name of Yahweh. Never can we justify the worst crimes committed against humanity in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries due to ethnic cleansing or religious ideologies.

Not only did the Old Testament God allow non-Israelite children to be slaughtered at the hands of the Israelites, but he also allowed pregnant women among his own people to be ripped open. II Kings 15:16 states, "At that time Menahem, starting out from Tirzah, attacked Tiphshah and everyone in the city and its vicinity, because they refused to open their gates. He sacked Tiphshah and ripped open all the pregnant women."

Another horrific story in II Kings 2 states that after little children had mocked a prophet named **Elisha** telling him, "Go up, you bald head," he turned around and looked upon them. Then, he cursed them in the name of the Lord. Soon after, two female bears emerged from the woods and tore to pieces 42 little children, according to the King James Version.

More of God's mass murders and his sanctioning of mass murder at the hands of the biblical Israelites can be found in Numbers 31:15-18, which states, "Have you allowed all the women to live? They were the ones who followed Balaam's advice and enticed the Israelites to be unfaithful to the Lord in the Peor incident, so that a plague struck the Lord's people. Now kill all the boys. And kill every woman who has slept with a man, but save for yourselves every girl who has never slept with a man."

If Christians want to continue justifying these heinous crimes against humanity, then the same justification can be made for abortion. Yet, the Evangelicals, Protestants, Catholics or any other Christian organizations have continuously lobbied politicians to reverse current laws making late-term abortion in some states illegal and a felony. These groups are constantly condemning people to Hell's fire who are pro-choice while justifying state-sanctioned murder for offenders of violent crimes. How about getting rid of capital punishment if you feel that strong against the murder of another human being whether innocent or guilty? Instead of harassing women due to 'unwanted' pregnancies, how about putting forth all your energy and resources to end homelessness throughout the United States?

The God of the Old Testament not only condoned mass murder but he also condoned slavery, rape and forced

marriages involving young maidens (i.e., little girls). Every society has sexual predators, rapists, incestuous persons and pedophiles, but the United States (as called by the Religious Right a “Christian Nation”) has terrible statistics when it comes to sexual crimes against women and children.

Wherever Christianity exists, you can find high crime rates of domestic violence, abuse of children, abuse of women, infanticide, mass murder, incest, rape, and so forth. These are the common threads holding together a patriarchal system wherein the Bible has been the sole anchor promoting barbaric ideas for the past two thousand years.

The Old Testament God Yahweh comes across as a barbarian who has commanded the slaughter of nations (other than the Israelites), including women and children. The God of the Bible is guilty of infanticide and murder of women who could not defend themselves. Since the Old Testament God kills people for not worshiping him alone, this same logic has been used to justify the genocide of African nations beginning in the 1400s because they worshiped different gods and had other customs outside of Christendom. The same logic was also used to justify the annihilation of native tribes after religious colonizers settled in the New World. Christian slave owners provided religious instructions to their slaves and taught them to be obedient to their masters — no matter how brutal the actions of their slaveowners.

As long as the Bible, the Qur’an and the Tanakh exist in human consciousness, mankind cannot evolve.

I feel as if I’ve lost something essential to finding true happiness because I’ve been religiously repressed for so long. Who knows what I would have become in life had I not grown up in Christianity? Maybe I would have married and maybe I would have had children. Maybe I would have become a bestselling author. Writing has always been my true talent, after all. Perhaps I would not have to work at a job that I disdain.

I never wanted to be poor. There's no honor in being poor. There's no honor in perpetual suffering. There was no honor in the way my mother died! Or how she spent her last living days in perpetual pain, under toxic medications such as oxycodone and morphine, crying in pain, and barely able to talk or form a cohesive sentence. All the religious fairytales I told myself this past year has not eased the pain of having watched her suffer in the last two months of her life.

Little children suffering from cancer and other diseases cannot be explained away with religious fairytales. Children suffering from fatal diseases is not the result of mankind's fall in the Garden of Eden, which is obviously a mythical story. It is the result of civilization... a civilization based on greed and power wherein much of the world's wealth and resources are concentrated in the hands of a few. Worldwide famine can never be justified in a world full of religions and gods clamoring to be the one True and Supreme Being. Worldwide famine is the result of men's greed. Show me what intelligent human being wants to live in abject poverty, eating mud cakes for breakfast, lunch and dinner because this is the only food source that is available around them. All the religious fairytales I've heard, believed and shared over the years cannot explain away the pain and suffering that exists in the world. No biblical God or Savior is going to save us from evil or suffering. It is up to humanity to save ourselves.

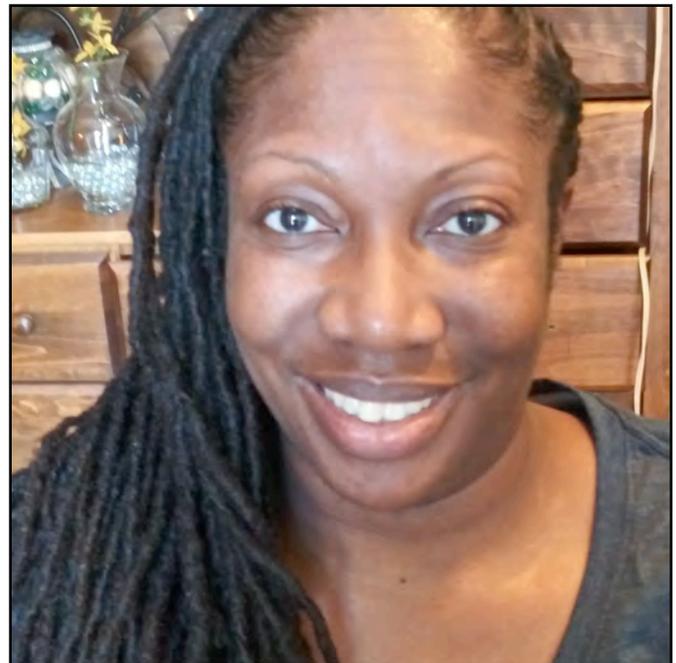
Because Christianity induces fear, many former believers are suffering from what has been termed “religious trauma

syndrome.” Although I have less nightmares these days, I greatly miss my mom and have often seen her in my dreams. I also miss people at my former church like the senior pastor, my sister, who is a member, my friend, and certain others. I feel in some ways that I’ve let people down. Some days, I feel angry because I’ve spent so many years involved in a religious organization and serving what I believed to be the one True God only to end up feeling empty, unfulfilled, depressed, and miserable.

I don’t feel guilty for leaving Christianity and the church. However, I feel strange about being the “odd ball” who decided to leave the church because I realized that Christianity was not based on reality.

Today, I can no longer serve an invisible God. What can an invisible God do for anybody? If I cannot say that God is real based on conclusive evidence, then whether I believe in God is totally irrelevant. Belief doesn’t require evidence. Belief can be anything I want it to be. Belief is not reality. Belief is assertion. Belief is science fiction. Belief is myth. Belief is hallucination. It only exists in the mind and no place else. That is why most believers say they believe in God without actually saying, “I know God,” or “I have seen God face to face.” Because knowing something doesn’t require belief. Belief doesn’t require knowing. You know because you have evidence and can show evidence. I cannot show evidence of a God I have never met. Neither will I serve a God that I don’t know is real.

Letting go of religion and all its associated trappings has probably been the most challenging and traumatic mind-bending event I’ve dealt with apart from losing my mother. But it was time for me to evolve. Therefore, I am evolving.



**About the Author: Alberta Parish** is the author of several books *The Evil Within Him*; *Vanished*; and *Matters of the Heart*. She is also the editor of “Ancient Creation Myths,” a website featuring her latest editorials on ancient myths and the repackaging of these myths in modern religious systems. In addition to blogging, Parish is a longtime researcher in religious studies and is writing a book based on her findings.

# *Freethought Society Introduces Reason University at Center For Inquiry Conference*

The *Freethought Society News* was pleased to help promote the Center for Inquiry's Committee for Skeptical Inquiry's (CSI) October 16-20, 2019 Las Vegas conference. A full-page advertisement about the event appeared in the July/August 2019 ezine. Many FS supporters were in attendance, having been given the information early enough to register.

Conference presenters were **Janyce L. Boynton, Richard Dawkins, John de Lancie, Brian Greene, Jen Gunter, Bailey Harris, Britt Marie Hermes, Elizabeth Loftus, Jonathan Jarry, Jeff Hawkins, Nathan Lents, Kurt Anderson, David Mikkelson, Troy Campbell, Joe Schwarcz, Nick Little, Gordon Pennycook, Kavin Senapathy, Jan Bellamy, Michael Mann, Seth Shostak, and Eddie Tabash.**

Pre-conference workshops were conducted by **James Alcock, Kenny Biddle, Chip Denman, Grace Denman, Kathleen Dyer, Mark Edward, Susan Gerbic, Ray Hall, Ray Hyman, Loren Pankratz, and Jim Underdown.**

Entertainers were **Banachek, Piff The Magic Dragon, and Julia Sweeney.**

The emcee of the conference was skeptic and comedian extraordinaire **Leighann Lord.**

On the Saturday night of the conference, CSI hosted a 1950s-themed dance party. Attendees to the party were encouraged to dress in costume and most did so. There were many creative costumes, including a man dressed as a carrier delivering Polio vaccines and a fellow dressed as Sputnik.

Representatives of FS entered the 1950's costume contest as students of the imaginary "Reason University." The concept made for a lot of interesting costuming and activities. **Heidi Ickes** made Reason University pennants and each participant preordered special costuming to wear. The men in the group wore lettermen sweaters emblazoned with a large maroon "R." The women wore outfits that echoed the maroon black and white colors on the pennants. Picture below (left to right) in the back row are **Mackenzie Harris, Doug Harris, Marjorie Goldman, Glen Loev, Amelia Hart, Christina Jones, Margaret Downey, and Tom Schottmiller.** The cheerleaders in the front are (left to right) **Elle Harris and Bailey Harris.**



The Reason University student body and cheerleaders also sang an Alma Mater with lyrics written by Goldman. Below are the words to the song which was sung to the tune of *O Tannen-baum*:

O Reason U,  
O Reason U,  
We sing this song to honor you.

Because of you, O Reason U,  
we'll always know a thing or two.

We pledge to you our hearts and minds:  
Reason University.

If superstition there we find,  
we know it's just stupidity.

We know that theories make no sense  
Without compelling evidence.

May we be always true to thee:  
Reason University.

The Reason University costume contest entry captured the \$100 second prize, which helped to offset the costs of printing and the creation of the pennants.

Attendees seemed to enjoy themselves very much at the conference. Below are some highlights and comments from the participants.

**Margaret Downey** (FS founder and president):

The entire CSI conference was really fantastic! I was able to spend quality time with many wonderful friends, all of whom have been very supportive of FS over the years. Pictured below (left to right) are **Celestia Ward, Leighann Lord, Julia Sweeney** and me.



I was proud to have helped CSI by connecting them to conference speakers such as actor **John de Lancie** and young author **Bailey Harris**. CSI conferences are very educational and I always enjoy socializing with like-minded individuals.

I'm happy to report that many new acquaintances gave me their email addresses and asked to receive the FS ezine.

**Bailey Harris** (author of three science books for children):

I had the privilege at the CSI conference to meet one of my heroes, **Dr. Richard Dawkins**. When I was younger, my dad read *The Magic of Reality* to me. That Dawkins book became one of my favorites. Dr. Dawkins was so kind to speak with me about my books and he also showed me a picture of his beautiful grandson, William. I gave Dr. Dawkins all three of my books to take home to his grandson.



After a good day of listening to talks and being a speaker myself, we attended the 1950s dance to have some fun. They served Root Beer Floats at the party! My sister Elle and I were the cheerleaders for the Reason University costume contest entry. When the Reason University group went to the dance floor, we did our cheer and then sang the Reason University Alma Mater. Here are the words to the cheer:

When we say "Reason," you say, "More."  
Reason... More!  
Reason...More!  
GOOOOOOOOOOO, Reason!"



Pictured left is **Christina Jones**. She sent the following statement for publication in this article about participating in the Reason University group:

*"I can't fully describe how much fun events are when **Margaret Downey** (pictured right) is involved. From the events that she creates, like the Secular Day of the Dead, to conferences that we attend, her creative ideas for costumes are inspiring, even contagious! I had a rockin' good time at the costume party and it was a nice balance to all the educational programming that took place during the conference. I look forward to the next costumed adventure with my dear fun-loving friends in reason."*



I can't wait for CSICon in 2020! I want to attend again and again.

**Glen Loev** (Vice-President of FS):

As if CSICon wasn't enjoyable enough, FS president **Margaret Downey** helped a group of friends take it to the next level, coming up with a super idea for a group "performance" at the Saturday evening costume party. Eight of us dressed as students from "Reason University." We were accompanied by two adorable young cheerleaders. **Marjorie Goldman** wrote clever lyrics to an Alma Mater and she also directed the singing.

At a reception, Margaret introduced me to **John de Lancie** (pictured below left) and snapped a photo for me to text to my daughter, **Eve Loev Balistra**. Eve is a *Star Trek* fan and immediately texted back one letter, "Q!"



I'm already looking forward to next year's conference, wondering what the costume party theme will be, and how we could top this year's entry. The 2020 CSICon will take place, once again, in Las Vegas, Nevada, October 15-18 .

# Attending the 2019 SCA Lobby Day Event

by Alan Gold

I was very pleased to attend the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) Lobby Day in Washington D.C. on September 27, 2019. Actually, the festivities started with a social hour and dinner on September 26<sup>th</sup>, which is always a joy to attend.

For lodging, I stayed at a Washington, D. C. hostel, which only charged \$35 a night. Unbelievably, that cost including fees and taxes! The hostel location required of me some walking to get to the event venue, but I didn't mind. The way I see it, the money I saved by staying at the hostel helps me make greater financial contributions to nonprofits I love — such as the Freethought Society (FS) and SCA.

I arrived early on Thursday, September 26<sup>th</sup> and walked around the area, gaining new insight into things that I missed during previous trips. For example, there is a fine arboretum right next to the Capitol building, packed with interesting plants. They have excellent free weekly concerts. I was fortunate to enjoy the last one of the season.

During Lobby Days, lobbyists rarely actually talk to senators and/or congressional representatives directly. We prepare for this during the Friday morning training. The training is extremely valuable, no matter whom we meet and talk with.

It's particularly fun to be with like-minded folks from across the country. I was able to rekindle longtime friendships and to make many new friends. It's also highly educational to learn about current social justice topics and to get trained on how to convey our point of view during our legislative visits.

The two topics we were assigned to discuss with our representatives during Lobby Day were:

1. Secular concerns about the possibility of passing blasphemy laws, and
2. the need for a secular/nontheist option availability concerning drug and alcohol recovery programs.



Pictured above is Pennsylvania Congressman **Brian Fitzpatrick** (left) and Freethought Society Board Member **Alan Gold**. (right).

Participants in our Pennsylvania contingency conveyed personal stories about the subjects at hand. Each of us provided examples of why blasphemy laws should never be endorsed and the type of harm that religious 12-step programs do to those who are nonbelievers.

SCA is an extremely well-organized and active organization. The founder is the modest and brilliant **Herb Silverman**. He is always in attendance. The SCA staff is friendly and helpful. There are always a few like-minded politicians who stop by at the dinner as well as the Friday morning brunch. This year, SCA arranged for Lobby Day attendees to have the use of the Gold Room at the Sam Rayburn building all to ourselves. We put it to good use the entire day.

I was especially pleased to discover that the Freethought Caucus, started by Rep. **Jason Huffman** and Rep. **Jamie Raskin**, has risen from four members to twelve members in just one year. Additional members are Rep. **Susan**

**Wild**, Rep. **Sean Casten**, Rep. **Jerry McNerney**, Rep. **Dan Kildee**, Rep. **Mark Pocan**, Rep. **Pramila Jayapal**, Rep. **Hank Johnson**, Rep. **Zoe Lofgren**, Rep. **Steve Cohen**, and Rep. **Eleanor Holmes Norton**.

The visit to the office of Pennsylvania Congressman **Brian Fitzpatrick** was exceptional because our group was actually able to talk directly with him. He is a terrific fellow, and he is a personal friend of mine from my home area. I see him many times in Pennsylvania at different community activities. I was pleased that he recognized me before I told him what I was there in his Washington, D.C. office to talk about. Fitzpatrick is a Republican. He appears to weigh issues and seems to try to be sensible. He rarely, however, strays from voting a straight Republican party line.

When the 2020 SCA Lobby Day events are announced, I hope many more FS supporters will remember this article and sign up to participate. We need more voices during our visits and I know you will have a great time — just as I did this year.

Conference  
On  
Religious  
Trauma

Vancouver, BC  
April 24th - 26th 2020  
[CORT2020.com](http://CORT2020.com)

## Conference on Religious Trauma:

The Secular Therapy Project (a division of Recovering from Religion) is pleased to announce sponsorship of the Conference on Religious Trauma, being held in Vancouver, British Columbia, April 24-26, 2020.

This conference will feature international experts who seek to educate mental health professionals and help trauma survivors. The conference will address the damage caused by religious fundamentalism, and include needed steps to recovery. Speakers include Dr. **Valerie Tarico**, Dr. **Marlene Winell**, Dr. **Darrel Ray**, **Yasmine Mohammed**, Dr. **Janja Lalich**, and **Nathan Phelps**.

Space is limited. Please sign up as soon as possible if you are interested in this subject matter and can travel to this location.

# Honoring Thomas Paine's Date of Birth

**Thomas Paine** was born on January 29, 1737. To commemorate his birth, the Thomas Paine Memorial Committee (TPMC) encourages enthusiasts to participate in a new fundraising effort. The effort was announced in the November/December 2019 Freethought Society (FS) ezine. Throughout the years, TPMC has honored the life and legacy of Thomas Paine in many ways. TPMC has received local, national and international recognition for its efforts.

TPMC is now concentrating on installing a Thomas Paine sculpture to be designed and created by renowned sculptor [Zenos Frudakis](#). Frudakis is considered one of the top 25 sculptors in the world. He is a Pennsylvania resident and a Life Member of FS.

Frudakis has created a 20 inch tall sample sculpture, which is also known in the art world as a "maquette." The maquette pictured right depicts Thomas Paine holding a copy of *Common Sense* in his left hand and a quill pen in his right hand. Statue design details are subject to change as this project evolves.

The plan is for a final bronze statue to stand approximately 8-9 feet tall, with a base that may have the names of the books Paine has authored — one title on each of the four-sided base.

FS is pleased to announce that a designated \$20,000 pledge was received in November 2018. The Stiefel Freethought Foundation immediately sent \$10,000 to begin Phase I of the project. The other \$10,000 pledged will be sent to FS towards the end of the effort.

FS seeks to educate the public about the important work that was done by Thomas Paine. His writings paved the way to the Enlightenment Era and his books inspired civil revolutions on two continents that were governed under tyrannical rule. Many regard Thomas Paine as a "forgotten Founding Father." FS is determined to remedy that and create a place of honor for this remarkable Freethought hero.

A target installation date is now June 8, 2021 or June 8, 2022, as fundraising efforts dictate. June 8<sup>th</sup> was the date of Thomas Paine's death in 1809.

June 8<sup>th</sup> is already officially recognized in France and England as Thomas Paine Day. June 8<sup>th</sup> is also recognized as Thomas Paine Day in Pennsylvania (Lancaster, Philadelphia, and York), New Jersey (Bordentown and Cherry Hill), Illinois (Champaign/Urbana), New York (New Rochelle), and California (Garden Grove).

So far, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania is the preferred site, but Washington, D.C. is also being considered. Location research is ongoing and many public venues and privately-owned properties are being considered.

In the meantime, FS continues a formal fundraising campaign. The projected overall cost will be approximately \$400,000.00.

To inspire donations, Thomas Paine memorabilia collector **David Henley** has provided FS with interesting items to distribute to those who donate. Please see details in the donation form below and consider donating generously. All donations are tax-deductible.



## Donation Form for a Thomas Paine Statue

Yes! I would like to donate to the Thomas Paine statue project. Please process the following financial donation for:

Name (first and last): \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, and Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

For a donation of **\$50** or more the donor will receive ten Thomas Paine lapel pins.

For a donation of **\$100** or more the donor will receive one CD of the writings of Thomas Paine, and ten Thomas Paine lapel pins.

For a donation of **\$200** or more the donor will receive one CD of the writings of Thomas Paine, ten Thomas Paine lapel pins, and a framable color portrait of Thomas Paine.

For a donation of **\$300** or more the donor will receive one CD of the writings of Thomas Paine, ten Thomas Paine lapel pins, a framable color portrait of Thomas Paine, and a Thomas Paine collectible book.

\_\_\_\_ I do not need a gift. I am donating the following amount to the Freethought Society's Thomas Paine statue project: \$\_\_\_\_ Credit cards may be used at: [FtSociety.org](https://www.ftsociety.org)  
**Note:** Any amount is appreciated; however, gifts are limited. Donors may receive special mention in this publication.

Please mail this form to: The Freethought Society, Thomas Paine Statue Project, P. O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366.  
Donations can also be made online at: <https://www.ftsociety.org/menu/thomas-paine-memorial-committee/>

The Freethought Society (FS) promotes freedom of thought, expression, and choice. FS also advocates separation of religion and government. FS publishes *The Freethought Society News* every other month. The publication is delivered as an ezine via email and is complimentary to supporters, donors, like-minded individuals and those who are interested in learning more about freedom of thought.

Monthly events take place in locations across the United States, with emphasis in the tristate area of Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey as well as Southern California. FS activities and services depend on financial contributions from supporters. Funds may be sent using this form or via the FS website ([www.FtSociety.org/donate/](http://www.FtSociety.org/donate/)). All contributions to FS are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law (Tax ID Number: 23-2738574). Please [donate](#) generously.

Yes! I would like to:

( ) become a supporter / renew support of FS (Please enclose checks payable to the Freethought Society):

**\$30** Individual Supporter      **\$40** Family Supporter      **\$20** Student      **\$1,000** Supporter for a Lifetime

( ) become a "Freethought Star" by setting up an automatic monthly donation to FS from my bank or through

PayPal in the amount of (circle one): **\$5** **\$10** **\$15** **\$20** **\$25** **\$30** **\$35** **\$40** **\$45** **\$50** **\$55** \$\_\_\_\_\_ other (per month)

( ) earmark a donation to (insert project, event or committee name): \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State and Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

( ) Check here if you prefer your sponsorship to remain anonymous.

FS will send a complimentary ezine (or hard copy upon request) to potential supporters. Please provide contact information for anyone who might be interested in receiving an FS publication.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail this form to: Freethought Society, P.O. Box 242, Pocopson, PA 19366

Scan and email this form to: [Ezine@FtSociety.org](mailto:Ezine@FtSociety.org)

## ***Volunteer Opportunities Through the Freethought Society***

Supporters of the Freethought Society (FS) often want to do more than just donating money. Listed below are various committees organized by FS. The committees are designed to fulfill the mission, goals and vision of FS. We assist nontheists, educate the public about nontheism, and provide social opportunities where like-minded individuals can meet, socialize and share ideas. Please see the FS website or contact FS to volunteer at: [volunteers@FtSociety.org](mailto:volunteers@FtSociety.org).

### **Anti-Discrimination Educational Committee**

*(nontheism explained in classroom settings)*

### **Anti-Discrimination Support Network**

*(assist Secular Coalition for America gathering reports)*

### **Community Outreach**

*(locate tabling opportunities)*

### **Diversity Outreach Committee**

*(brainstorming about and developing programs to appeal to minorities)*

### **Free Speech Zone Committee**

*(research and implement displays in public venues)*

### **Helping Hands**

*(provides helpers to seniors in emergency situations)*

### **Jump into the Jean Pool**

*(collection of jeans for the homeless)*

### **Meetup Committee**

*(social events and improving online communications)*

### **Monthly Meeting Coordinators**

*(schedule and manage speakers and venues)*

### **Secular Celebrations**

*(develop, organize, and implement new nontheist celebrations)*

### **Speakers Bureau**

*(provide FS a resume, photo and speech subjects/titles)*

### **Special Events**

*(coordinate unique events of interest to nontheists)*

### **Sole Searching**

*(collection of athletic shoes for donation to the homeless)*

### **Thomas Paine Memorial Committee**

*(assist with assemblies, city proclamations, and work on themed events)*

### **Tree of Knowledge/Winter Display Committee**

*(make ornaments, find venues, write articles, and support the Winter symbol concept nationwide)*