**Secular Week of Action vs. Day of Prayer**

The Secular Week of Action was a call to individuals and organizations across the United States to put secular values into community service projects. Created this year by the [Secular Coalition for America](https://www.secularcoalition.org) (SCA), the intent is to highlight the fact that a national day of prayer is useless in comparison to the good works humans can actually accomplish. The Freethought Society (FS) was a national partner in this endeavor along with the Secular Student Alliance, Foundation Beyond Belief, American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Camp Quest, Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations, Institute for Humanist Studies, Society for Humanistic Judaism, Freedom From Religion Foundation, Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers, Atheist Alliance of America, Ex-Muslims of North America, Black Nonbelievers, Humanist Unitarian Universalists, Center For Inquiry, and Recovering From Religion.

In 1988, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the designation of the first Thursday of May as the annual observance of the National Day of Prayer, for “people of all faiths to pray for the nation.” According to their website, the National Day of Prayer exists to communicate with every individual the need for personal repentance and prayer, to create appropriate materials, and to mobilize the Christian community to intercede for America’s leaders and its families.”

The first Chair of the Day of Prayer Task Force was Shirley Dobson of Focus on the Family, a conservative Christian organization that lobbies for conservative issues such as creationism, school prayer, opposition to abortion and to same-sex marriage. They also seek to return the United States to its supposed Christian roots. “The Task Force represents a Judeo-Christian expression of the national observance, based on our understanding that this country was birthed in prayer and in reverence for the God of the Bible,” declares the website.

The Secular Week of Action is designed to coincide with this overt federal endorsement of religious practice and offer a positive alternative involving the diverse nontheist spectrum — atheists, agnostics, ex-Muslims, secular Jews, freethinkers, humanists, skeptics, and many more who make up the one-in-four Americans who are unaffiliated with any religion. Nontheists demonstrate their values powerfully by performing acts of service, education, and solidarity rather than praying. From a secular perspective, praying and not praying have the exact same empirical outcome. The National Day of Prayer is both an attempt to change the world through appeals to a divine authority and a call to unity on the part of the religious right in America. The Secular Week of Action is also a call to unity. In sharp contrast, however, the National Day of Prayer is exclusively religious. The Secular Week of Action is inclusive, appealing to anyone who wants to participate.

The Secular Week of Action, which begins the week before the National Day of Prayer, is a positive response to aggressive religious intrusion into United States public life. Rather than simply saying “no” to prayer, nontheists said “yes” to positive action. During the inspiring week, participating organizations buckle down and do work that matters, taking social, political, and charitable actions that make a positive impact in their communities.

For FS, the Secular Week of Action began on Friday, April 26 with a planned road cleanup project. FS President Margaret Downey arranged for FS to participate in The Great American Cleanup/Keep America Beautiful effort by registering with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT) in a volunteer partnership. The goal is to inspire volunteers to take the cleanup experience to smaller-scale events in neighborhoods and other public spaces. Great American Cleanup programs are designed to end littering, improve recycling and beautify communities. The FS road cleanup plan was thwarted by an unpredicted rain, thunder and lightning storm.
For safety reasons the April 26th event was cancelled. Please watch the FS Meetup page and future ezine announcements for another opportunity to improve the environment and work with other like-minded people. PennDOT provided FS with trash bags, gloves and safety vests. FS will supply water and snacks to all participating volunteers. Trash is not picked up by prayers.

In Southern California, Atheists United (AU) conducted their Great Los Angeles River Cleanup and highway cleanup. Secular Humanists of Tippecanoe also conducted a highway cleanup project in Lafayette, Indiana. In Apple Valley, Minnesota the Minnesota Atheists did a highway cleanup.

Advocacy activities were conducted by the Humanists of Minnesota. On May 2nd the group had breakfast with legislators in the Vault Room of the Minnesota State Capitol. There they celebrated “The National Day of Reason” instead of a National Day of Prayer.


Advocating freedom of speech, the Ethical Society of St. Louis, Missouri conducted a free and open-to-the-public Letters to the Editor Workshop.

The Secular Week of Action inspired a blood drive in Austin, Texas, sponsored by the Ethical Society of Austin; a “Bags of Care” effort for the needy in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, sponsored by the Susquehanna Valley Ethical Society/Ethical Humanism; a Senior BINGO game at the Pocopson Home in Pocopson, Pennsylvania, sponsored by FS; and a fundraiser for the Capital Diaper Bank in Richmond, Virginia, sponsored by Little Heathens of RVA.

There were many community service projects that concerned food pantries, homeless shelters, food banks, and soup kitchens. End of the Line Humanists conducted a garage sale that benefited Beyond Hunger in Forest Park, Illinois; Minnesota Atheists worked at the Second Harvest Heartland food bank in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota; FS joined with Philadelphia’s Muslims Serve group to feed the needy at that city’s Hub of Hope homeless shelter; Secular Humanists of Western Lake Erie volunteered at the Toledo Northwestern Ohio Food Bank; Little Heathens of RVA participated in a drive for Feed More’s Backpack program in Richmond, Virginia; and Center for Inquiry – NYC volunteers worked in the Xavier Mission soup kitchen in New York City.

The following is SCA’s May 2, 2019 press release:

In the week leading up to the National Day of Prayer, nonreligious Americans have dedicated thousands of hours to community service as part of the Secular Week of Action.

Led by the Secular Coalition for America, their 19 member organizations and nearly 100 partners across the nation participated in service events in locations including Alaska, California, Nebraska, Georgia, and Long Island. Actions included road, river and park cleanups, efforts to support the homeless and children in foster care, fundraisers, communication to elected officials, and more.

To view photos of secular public service events from across the country, click here: http://bit.ly/WeekOfAction2019

“The Week of Action is about showing our neighbors that secular values are American values,” said Debbie Allen, Acting Executive Director of the Secular Coalition for America. “Through The National Day of Prayer, our govern-
2019 Secular Week of Action Photos
Highlighting Two Freethought Society Events

Pictured above helping with the Dr. Seuss-themed Senior BINGO game are (left to right) Downey, Barrie Hazzard and Sally Flynn. The game took place at the Pocopson Home, which is a state-run rehabilitation and elder care facility.

Pictured above are Downey, Garland and Garabian holding the FS sign over the dessert table at the Hub of Hope. The picture became a part of the Secular Week of Action activities photo album, which can be seen at: http://bit.ly/WeekOfAction2019

Pictured below is Freethought Society (FS) supporter Deeksha Yogish. She enjoyed working at the Hub of Hope so much that she has volunteered to inform FS of other volunteer opportunities. Please check the FS Meetup page for notices.

Pictured above is FS president Margaret Downey preparing table settings at the Hub of Hope.

Pictured right are FS supporters Kelly Garland and Keith Garabedian. They are cleaning pots, pans, and dishes after the feeding the hungry effort that took place at The Hub of Hope. The Hub is located underground, below the Thomas Paine Plaza at 15th Street and JFK Boulevard.

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The second of four planned Freethought Society (FS) Secular Week of Action events took place at the International Spring Festival. The festival is held every year at the North Penn High School in Lansdale, Pennsylvania.

This year, volunteers Margaret Downey, Glen Loev and Patti Butcheck conducted a book giveaway at the FS free literature table. Below is commentary about the conversations they had with the people they met.

**Festival comments from Margaret Downey:**

When I registered FS as a vendor for the 2019 International Spring Festival, I requested two tables instead of only one. I did so knowing that we would need the extra space to conduct our book giveaway. The larger booth also made it possible for us to display our literature and to have several sign-up sheets handy. Unfortunately, not many people stopped by the table. Those who did stop were eager to introduce themselves as freethinkers, secular Jews and/or atheists.

I realized halfway into the day-long event that many people who wanted to stop to talk simply could not do so due to being in the company of either family or friends who would frown upon any show of interest.

I witnessed several young adults stopping for a few minutes at the FS table, only to be pulled away by the older people with whom they were walking.

A group of teenagers stopped by the table — all chatting at one time — excited to see that three atheists dared to display godless books and literature at this community event. The table sign “Don’t believe in God? You are not alone!” on display seemed to stop them (and most people) in their tracks. As I gave each of the teenagers a free book, their joking and laughing ceased. They became more serious about the subject of nontheism as I described the books we were giving away. Holding up The Lord Was Not On Trial, I said, “This book was written by the son of a founding member of the Freethought Society. His mother, Vashti McCollum, was the plaintiff in the 1948 United States Supreme Court case McCollum v. Board of Education. This is important for all of you to know because it struck down religious education in public schools.” Many of those teens wanted to take that book, but then I described the other giveaway book.

Proudly I said, “This book is written by Stephen Uhl.

Ten years into the priesthood, he started doubting the priesthood, religious doctrine and the entire Catholic Church. He earned a PhD in psychology, left the church and started to enjoy life with a thriving private psychology practice. This book, Out of God’s Closet, is about his journey from priest to atheist.”

The offer of this book caused many to sigh and say, “I don’t know which one to take.” I realized that here was an opportunity to educate quite a few young folks, so I let everyone take home both books instead of picking just one.

This incident made our table efforts worthwhile as far as I’m concerned. It was fun to interact with this group of teens and I knew the books were going to good homes. I thank Uhl and Daniel McCollum for donating a box of books to FS for this and other giveaway endeavors.

I also thank FS board member Alan Gold for alerting us to the opportunity to host an information table at the Festival.

**Festival comments from Patti Butcheck:**

2019 marked my first time attending the International Spring Festival, and I was excited to be there volunteering at the FS table. The gymnasium was filled with charming exhibits, cultural performances took place on a center stage, exhibitors wore and sold vibrant cultural clothing, and unusual foreign foods were offered in the cafeteria. Overall, the entire event was a positive and upbeat experience. One encounter, however, left me disturbed.

A Boy Scouts of America (BSA) Scout Leader stopped at the FS table and engaged Loev and me in an interesting conversation. We, of course, wanted to talk about the fact that nontheists are not allowed to join BSA, but within minutes he was expounding on problems with recent membership policy changes which permitted girls to participate in the Scouts. He felt that “girls ruin the Scouting experience for boys.”

This Scout Leader believed that mixing boys and girls created an environment that was a detriment to the boys — only the boys. “The girls,” he said, are “getting something” at the cost of the boys.”

I asked what the boys were being denied? “...boys can’t be their true selves with girls around” was his general answer. But he couched his explanation in “safe” examples, like: Boys are gross and like to fart, boys can’t act natural when girls are around, and boys get in trouble doing normal boy things because girls don’t like farts. This made us laugh because we both knew that girls can “out-gross” any boy, given the right circumstances.

Loev and I were gently rebutting his claims with answers we felt were reasoned and fair. We asked him many times why a female should be denied Scouting experiences based entirely on her gender? Or why BSA is incapable of managing children in a way that benefited both boys and girls rather than focusing only on male experiences. He could not, or would not, answer these questions.

We were then told that Scouting taught boys how to become men. We asked how creating a false, all-male environment prepared boys for the real world? “The boys,” he said, “would know how to behave by then.” I asked why the Scouts didn’t teach social norms to both boys and girls so that all children learned from adults, peers, and real-world experiences? Here he struggled to answer, but managed to convey that the BSA was teaching boys how to perform in society. This left me chilled. The BSA goal was to create two behaviors: public performance, and private... something else.

The conversation shifted to everything being the girl’s responsibility: their presence ruined scouting events. Several examples were given and we rebuffed each example with simple questions. He even tried to blame girls for the boys unacceptable behavior, despite admitting that Scout leaders and adults were present to oversee and correct bad behavior.

The Scout leader kept repeating “Girls have their own clubs.” Attempts to explain clubs for girls were created to compensate for male-only clubs was lost on this Scout leader.

I concluded that this Scout Leader is a tragic, misogynistic throw-back to the imagined “good ol’ days” in which boys played outside and girls learned to bake. His warped logic that girls should be “equal, but separate” was unsettlingly familiar. Where have we heard that before?
Photos from the 2019 International Spring Festival

Pictured left (left to right) are Margaret Downey, Glen Loev and Patti Butcheck. They are standing in front of the Freethought Society (FS) free literature table.

Some items on the table included five tri-folds entitled The Thomas Paine Memorial Committee, Information on the Helping Hands Committee of the Freethought Society, What in the world is a freethinking atheist?, Secular Celebrations, and Erasing Prejudice. Business cards, signup sheets, newsletters and donation information were also on the table, but the most popular items were the free books, The Lord Was Not On Trial by Daniel McCollum and Out of God's Closet by Stephen Uhl.

Pictured right (left to right) are Zenos Frudakis, Alan Gold, Downey, Butcheck and Loev.

Frudakis is a world-famous sculptor working and living in Glenside, Pennsylvania. He stopped by the Lansdale International Spring Festival to offer his help at the FS table. Frudakis is a Life Member of FS and works closely with the Thomas Paine Memorial Committee.

Gold is an FS board member. He is also a board member of the Lansdale International Spring Festival and works hard before, during, and after the event making sure that attendees have a wonderful time celebrating community diversity.

Pictured above are the Festival volunteers who dined with friends after the long day of tabling. In the back row are Frudakis, Downey, Susan Rade, and Steve Rade. In the front row are Butcheck, Loev and Youval Balistra. The group toured the Frudakis Studio after dinner. Studio visitors can see his work in various stages of completion. At right is a bust of Dr. Richard Dawkins in the first stage of design.
May 4th is not a usual date to celebrate the life and work of Thomas Paine. I normally plan Thomas Paine-themed events on the date of his birth (January 29th) or on the date of his death (June 8th). This year, however, May 4th was chosen so the Freethought Society (FS) could include West Coast supporters Valerie Hoffman and Bob Hoffman.

The Hoffmans live in Long Beach, California, but notified me of their East Coast vacation plans in 2018. I was more than happy to make sure they and others could meet, socialize and honor the legacy of Founding Father Thomas Paine. Pictured below, at a pre-event dinner, (left to right) are the Hoffmans, me and FS Life Member Tom Schottmiller.

Thomas Paine is a hero in the freethought community due to his contributions to the Enlightenment as a political activist, philosopher, political theorist, and revolutionary. He is most admired and highly regarded by freethinkers because of his writings in The Age of Reason. Paine’s treatise attacked institutionalized religion and the inerrancy of the Bible. The book highlighted corruption within the Christian churches, criticized the church’s attempt to gain political influence through religion, rejected claims of miracles, and refuted the notion that the Bible is a divinely inspired text.

The day of celebration began with a guided tour of the Museum of the American Revolution located at 101 South 3rd Street in Philadelphia. I arranged for a discounted group rate at the museum and greeted attendees with a special gift — a Thomas Paine-themed hand fan. Our group was limited to 20 people and we sold out several weeks before the tour date.

After the tour, I met the group in the lobby of the Museum to announce that I had arranged for everyone to see the only white marble bust of Thomas Paine in existence. The bust is housed in the private office of Patrick Spero, the Librarian of the American Philosophical Society (APS).

The story of who, when, where, how and why the bust was created and now located at APS is long and complicated. I told one-third of the story in the Museum lobby before setting out for our short walk to APS. To summarize this first part of the story: In 1876 the local San Francisco group of the National Liberal League called for a national memorial to Thomas Paine. The group resolved that “a worthy bronze or marble statue or bust be placed in Independence Hall or on the grounds belonging thereto.” The group also called on other freethought and liberal societies to cooperate in raising the necessary funds.

Carrie Burnham Kilgore, who chaired the Philadelphia Liberal League’s Collections Committee, was tasked to obtain the necessary funds. The League suggested that the work be done by sculptor Sidney H. Morse of Boston. In the Fall of 1876, the bust and pedestal were sent to Philadelphia. The full cost of the bust and pedestal was $1,200.

In Spero’s office, I told the next second part of the three-part story: On October 13, 1876, Kilgore delivered the marble bust and pedestal to City of Philadelphia Mayor William S. Stokley. When it was presented to the Mayor, as a gift to the City, the Philadelphia Liberal League specified its desire for the bust to be placed in Independence Hall, side by side with the portraits of other heroic historical figures and Founding Fathers. The City Council of Philadelphia accepted the gift and by a vote of 40 to 2 accepted the placement recommendations made by the League.

At this time, an attorney named Charles T. Jones waged an elaborate attack upon Paine. He claimed that Paine had been treacherous to Washington’s presidency and reputation. Jones also asserted that Paine had “borrowed” his arguments against Christianity from Voltaire.

As a result of Jones’ anti-Paine campaign, the bust and pedestal were rejected on December 29, 1876. Only 4 votes out of 31 were cast in favor of acceptance. Paine’s friends in the Liberal League were dismayed by the decision, and the sculptor urged that the bust stay in Philadelphia. He was certain that the bust would be accepted one day and that meanwhile it would provide the focus and inspiration of “a certain missionary service” for the liberal cause.

The Philadelphia Liberal League and other Philadelphia sponsors shared that same confidence and planned a dedication ceremony. They invited Walt Whitman to speak on the occasion. Whitman was deeply sympathetic to Paine and an admirer, having read many of Paine’s writings. Whitman immediately agreed to speak upon being asked.

Though frustrated in their effort to enshrine Paine at Independence Hall, the Philadelphia Liberal League did not allow the 140th anniversary of Paine’s birth on January 29, 1877 to pass unnoticed in Philadelphia. They engaged Lincoln Hall at Broad and Fairmount Streets for a grand unveiling on Sunday afternoon, January 28th.

At the event, Whitman told the story that some 35 years earlier he had become friends with a very aged man named Colonel John Fellows. Whitman explained that Colonel Fellows had been an acquaintance of Paine’s in New Rochelle, New York. Through the stories told by Colonel Fellows, Whitman learned that Paine had lived very simply. Colonel Fellows stated that Paine was always “cheery and courteous, occasionally a little blunt, having very positive opinions upon politics, religion, and so forth.” Whitman delivered a wonderful address that included stories from the lips of Colonel Fellows along with praises for Paine’s accomplishments and worldwide influences.
The bust and pedestal was then displayed in the Philadelphia Liberal League’s office at 605 Walnut Street. On the granite pedestal, the words stated that the bust had been presented to the City of Philadelphia by the Liberales of America on October 13, 1876. However, additional words were now inscribed, “but rejected by Select Council.”

In 1896, the building in which the Philadelphia Liberal League operated was threatened with demolition. Kilgore offered the bust to the city for the second time. In a long letter of presentation, she rejected charges of indefidelity brought against Paine and asserted flatly that America was indebted to him “more than to any other man for the Declaration of Independence and for our civil and religious liberties.” The City Council took no action.

In 1901, Kilgore once again offered the Paine bust and pedestal to the city. The city promised to inspect the items, but more than three years passed before anything happened.

In the spring of 1905, the secretary of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association, despairing of Philadelphia ever accepting the bust, proposed that it be given to the Library of Congress or be presented to France, “where it would be assigned a place of honor.”

Kilgore objected to sending the bust away. Once more, on June 5, 1905, she formally offered it to the City of Philadelphia. After a long discussion, the Board to Collect Historical Relics for the Museum of Independence Hall voted to accept the bust, on condition that the offending inscription be erased from the pedestal and a new one substituted, declaring that it was the gift of “patriots,” not the “liberals” of America.

Two months later the bust was at last appropriately installed in the long gallery on the second floor. It had taken almost 29 years!

At this point of the story, our group proceeded to The City Tavern where lunch was to be served. We traveled a route to the restaurant that took us down a small cobblestone street named after Thomas Paine. Thomas Paine Place is located at Dock and Third Streets. The street was so named thanks to Thomas Paine Place was located at Dock and Third Streets. The street was so named thanks to the efforts of Philadelphia educator Mark Stone. Stone is now deceased.

I met Stone in 1991, and we became fast friends. I worked with Stone to have Paine’s accomplishments recognized throughout the City. We were proud to have a “Common Sense” historical marker installed near the location of Thomas Paine Place on Third Street. Fifteen more people joined our group at the City Tavern and all were greeted by Julian Musolino, who was portraying Thomas Paine.

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Lunch began with a short welcome from Musolino, who was portraying Thomas Paine. ballot, and I inquired of the mayor whether you cannot arrange in some manner that this celebrated statue be removed from dead storage and placed once again on exhibition in Independence Hall where citizens can view their hero.” Nothing, however, came of Gimbel’s appeal and resulted only with stalling tactics, thus feeding suspicions of a sinister conspiracy to withhold Paine’s bust from public view.

Ten years later, now 1947, a new curator of Independence Hall, Warren A. McCullough, brought the matter again to his superiors’ attention. McCullough knew that the bust had formerly been on display, but was now in storage. He was not familiar with the reasons for the removal so he further implored for, “a reviewal by the Art Jury.” McCullough believed the Paine and other busts “should be used throughout the buildings or loaned to some other museum rather than being placed in storage for no one to see.”

The Art Jury, after “a careful study,” informed Gimbel that they had removed certain busts in 1931 “because they had never been submitted to the jury for approval as required by law.” They further stated “that they would be glad to have those works submitted to it, with such evidence as may be available as to their authenticity. Until such time that the bust of Thomas Paine is properly identified, it cannot be displayed.”

The National Park Service, now custodians of Independence Hall since 1943, informed Gimbel that the bust...
belonged to the city “and that its future use will be determined by the Art Commission of that city.”

From Connecticut, Gimbel pleaded the Paine cause once more. In a long letter he asked the Mayor “to restore this celebrated bust of Thomas Paine to its proper place on public view in Independence Hall in accordance with the original desires of the City Council of Philadelphia.”

Should this not be possible, he offered it a home in the Edgar Allen Poe House until “...the time arrives when Philadelphia becomes more enlightened on the subject and builds a Paine museum along the newly created mall, where this great statue will be surrounded by a notable collection of his works, and be honored by the people of his city, of his country, and of his world.”

As a result of all this pressure, the Art Commission allowed Gimbel to appear before it. He made an eloquent appeal, and the Commission unanimously reversed the 1931 decision of the Art Jury, resolving on September 22, 1954, that the bust be displayed in Independence Hall.

The Art Commission, however, would not and could not make the final decision. In response to Gimbel’s query, regarding when the bust would go on public view, the Park Service replied that they were “studying the Paine bust and related problems.” They promised an answer in the near future, but it was clear that the Paine bust was not yet out of the cellar.

It was later decided that Independence National Historical Park was “to gradually and progressively restore Independence Hall and the other significant historical structures in the Park, as nearly as possible, to their condition during the focal period of 1774-1800 when significant events related to them took place.”

Since the bust of Paine was not part of the furnishings of the Hall in that period, it was not eligible for exhibition.

Perhaps in time,” they said, “some museum facility would be established where such articles as Paine’s bust could be shown.”

For nearly three years the Paine question lay quiet and the Paine bust remained in storage. Someone else asked the embarrassing question about how the National Park Service could reject a bust of Paine on the grounds that it had not been created from a live model, all the while it continued to exhibit in Independence Hall the Bass Otis’ portrait of Paine painted 30 years after Paine’s death. That portrait is still on display at the Second Bank of the United States (143 South 3rd Street). The Portrait Gallery is free and open to the public.

Then, in the summer of 1957, The Friendship Liberal League of Philadelphia asked for a loan of the bust to display in their newly-opened Thomas Paine Center (chartered by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1885). As a responsible not-for-profit group, able to carry insurance on the bust, and, after the usual consideration, the Park Service acceded to the request.

An agreement was signed and the bust was picked up, but Gimbel still hoped to see the bust in Independence Hall or its neighborhood, and he was not entirely pleased to see it go on display a distance away at 5233 North 5th Street. “I am very much afraid,” he told the secretary of the League, “that if the bust is removed, it will be very difficult to replace it there, and that is where it belongs.”

The Friendship Liberal League rejoiced in this splendid addition to the Thomas Paine Center, but in 1958 differences of opinion within the League about various policies were growing into angry divisions. In the end, the Regional Director of the National Park Service suggested that consideration be given the use of the bust somewhere in the National Park, “for if it is returned, it will probably have to be placed on display.”

Gimbel kept his eye on the controversial sculpture, and in April 1967 he inquired of the Friendship Liberal League whether they would consent to the bust being housed at the American Philosophical Society (APS). Paine had been elected a member of the Society in 1785 and many of his fellow members in the 1780s shared his political and religious views.

The president of the Friendship Liberal League endorsed the idea “wholeheartedly.” The Librarian of APS also liked the idea, but he had no authority to add to the furnishings of this building without approval of the chairman of the Society’s Committee on Hall, Henri Marceau, who said no on the grounds that it was the Society’s practice not exhibit any portrait not done from life.

At the end of 1967, the question was again presented to the APS Library. This time the request was presented by the Curator of Independence National Historical Park, as the Friendship Liberal League, possibly tired of paying insurance premiums, had returned Paine’s bust to the Independence National Park Service.

The bust was subsequently delivered to the APS Librarian’s office a few days later — a compromise location agreed to by Marceau since it would be on exhibition without aggressively offending the Independence National Historical Park’s preference for life portraits. Within the APS congenial and honorable surroundings, the bust (sans the pedestal) has since remained.

The entire story of the white marble bust was condensed due to spacing difficulties. The most important facts were highlighted, however. I hope you enjoyed reading about the journey of the bust and appreciate the reasons FS continues to find ways to honor the life and legacy of Thomas Paine.
Pictured above are (left to right) Musolino, Hetti Strobel, Nico Strobel, and Margaret Downey. Musolino is pictured left with Haverford College student Alexander Gutierrez. Gutierrez was one of several students who were able to attend the May 4th event thanks to a donation of tickets from Preston Luitweiler. FS maintains a list of students who have expressed interest in attending freethought activities. When a ticket holder must cancel, donating a ticket, rather than a refund is suggested. Upon consent, the student next on the list is contacted and offered attendance. Donors can be proud to have provided a complimentary participation opportunity.

Pictured left at the City Tavern luncheon are (left to right) Janice Real, Julien Musolino (portraying Thomas Paine) and Blake Cash. Real volunteered her time to the Freethought Society (FS), to be the Eventbrite Ticket Sales Coordinator. Pictured left is Terry Stimpfel. She traveled to Philadelphia from Trenton, New Jersey to attend the museum tour and luncheon, as well as to learn more about Thomas Paine. Stimpfel also went to the Second Bank of the United States after the luncheon to see the portrait of Thomas Paine displayed there.

Pictured right are Gus Widmaier and Donna Widmaier. At the May 4th event the Widmaiers delivered a copy of a “Thomas Paine Day” Resolution (HR 927), passed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania House of Representatives in 2018. The Widmaiers live in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania.
Television Miniseries Review: **Good Omens**

by Tom Melchiore

Is the phrase “good omens” an oxymoron? It is. But as the title of the Amazon Prime miniseries Good Omens, the oxymoron is heavenly, hellishly, and humanistically apropos. But let me be perfectly clear up front: this review is not a comparison of the made-for-TV miniseries with the novel of the same name, something which is what more than a few reviews have done. I haven’t read the book. This is strictly a review of the miniseries, which stands quite well on its own.

**Good Omens** is the story of Armageddon, the ultimate battle between Heaven’s angels and Hell’s demons, but with a twist. Starring David Tennant as the demon Crowley and Michael Sheen as the angel Aziraphale, the two are perhaps the most amusing odd couple since Oscar and Felix. Tennant, as most know, was the 10th Doctor Who, and his presentation of the demon Crowley is a mirthfully evil version of that character. Sheen’s Aziraphale was best described in Wired’s review of the series as “a much older version of Niles Crane.” Let that combination set in.

We first meet them in the Garden of Eden, where Crowley (who is first introduced as Crawley, for obvious reasons) has enticed Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge and, well, you know the rest of that story. I laughed upon seeing Adam and Eve, an amusing bit of casting against type, one of many things that has angered many Christians. As the original couple leave Paradise, Aziraphale hands Adam the heavenly flaming sword to help them survive in the cruel outside reality, only later admitting to a chastising God that he “lost” it. Therein begins the 6,000-year relationship of angel and demon, who are assigned to look after humanity in the case of Aziraphale and to help initiate catastrophes in the case of Crowley for all time, or until the preordained Apocalypse comes.

The twist of this series is both angel and demon have grown to enjoy all that humans have created over the millennia. While neither has to eat to survive, Aziraphale enjoys delicacies and good wine and is meticulously ordered and well-dressed throughout the ages.

Crowley, on the other hand, is not into clothing so much. He is dapper in his own way and lovingly enjoys material possessions, particularly his prized 1930s Bentley and the many creature comforts that Hell lacks. Multiply this by 6,000 years and neither wants to go back to their mind-numbing servitude of Heaven or the dank forever-leaking roof and deformities of Hell.

Armageddon and the Apocalypse will come, 11 years hence, once Crowley delivers the anti-Christ baby to replace the soon-to-be-born son of a U.S. senator, as the child discovers his true heritage on that birthday and brings angels and demons onto the battlefield Earth.

Things don’t go as planned with the switch, a comedy of errors involving a devil-worshiping order of nuns, a British couple in the room next door expecting their first-born, a misplaced anti-Christ, the frantic search to find the real anti-Christ, nuclear weapons, witches, nerds, Queen always playing on car radios, bicycles, and much more, including a surprising allusion as to what might have happened to that third baby in this three-card baby Monte. But to continue living the human lives they have so come to love, they have to find the real anti-Christ and somehow avert the ultimate war to save humanity. Heaven and Hell desperately want to settle things once and for all.

Throughout this eon-spanning story, the relationship between Aziraphale and Crowley evolves, as adversaries form a friendship of sorts, a bromance if you will, kept on the sly so their superiors don’t find out and call them “home,” becoming more and more human as the millennia move on, finally realizing that they are more human than angel or demon, and that Heaven or Hell is no place for them. At times they even cover for each other when one is obligated to be somewhere else. An interesting concept — the angel initiating destruction, the demon doing good. Though they dislike doing the other’s job, saving each other’s skin if you will (spoiler alert), they help each other when necessary so neither is fired. After all, what are friends for?

The episodes jump back and forth through time, with great scenery and costumes, keeping viewers on their toes in a most enjoyable way. Each episode begins with a Monty Python-ish, stop-motion cartoon, detailing, dare I say, the evolution of humanity, and the cartoon changes, however subtly, for each episode. Beginning is a misnomer, though, as the cartoon typically starts a few minutes in and, as we anticipate its changes, in one episode it delays our expectation for nearly 30 minutes, all for good storytelling.

The miniseries is much like Douglas Adams’ *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* movie in its format, with witty repartee, plot twists, and an enjoyable/amusing/despicable supporting cast of characters, both evil and good. The main characters of Aziraphale and Crowley portrayed by Sheen and Tenant were actually expanded beyond the novel because they worked so well together.

*Good Omens* deserves a binge watch. You won’t be disappointed. I watched it, appropriately, on a Sunday night. Like a good novel, I couldn’t go to sleep until it was all over. Pun intended.

On a related note, a petition was sent to Netflix to stop airing *Good Omens*, signed by over 20,000 Christian individuals offended and outraged by an angel and a demon working together, being friends, and all things so anti-Bible. It was greeted with amusement, if only for the simple reason the series isn’t airing on Netflix but on Amazon Prime. The powers-that-be at both streaming services were, ironically, very entertained.

*Good Omens* is still available to stream, Christians be damned! Aziraphale and/or Crowley saved them as well, at least in this life. No pun intended.
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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/). All contributions to FS are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law (Tax ID Number: 23-2738574). Please donate generously.

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**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.

- **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)