The Thomas Paine Birthdate Celebration Brings Great Progress for the Statue Project!

Almost 1,000 people registered for the Thomas Paine Zoom event that took place on Saturday, January 29, 2022. The event was created to celebrate the birthdate of the often-forgotten Founding Father. The January 29th event was, as far as we know, the very first Zoom celebration of his birth. People joined in from all over the world and everyone was invited to toast in celebration of the life and work of Thomas Paine — an amazing champion of reason, independent thought, and revolutionary ideas.

The event was presented by the newly formed Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA), a 501(c)3 organization, with the purpose of educating the public and installing statues of Thomas Paine in Washington, D.C. and other places of significance in the life of Thomas Paine. TPMA, the American Humanist Association (AHA), Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), Freethought Society (FS), Stiefel Freethought Foundation (SFF), and the Center for Inquiry (CFI) cosponsored the event.

The Zoom technician was Emily Newman. She is the Senior Education Coordinator at AHA’s Center for Education. Independent video editor Buck Bowen provided help with music and other submitted videos. James Phetteplace from FFRF assisted by providing much needed pre-event IT services.

The program opened with welcome messages from TPMA board members, including John de Lancie, Julia Sweeney, Gary Berton, Ann Druyan, Marnie Mosiman de Lancie, Christopher Cameron, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Thomas Legg, and Robyn Blummer.

During the program, Todd Stiefel announced that SFF would triple donations. The opportunity created great interest and attendees donated generously. The triple match donation offer lasted until midnight. $30,000 was raised for the project, but with the SFF triple match the donations increased to $90,000. Thanks to an additional monetary pledge from SFF, TPMA is pleased to announce that the January effort generated almost $500,000! The Washington, D.C. statue project is now fully funded. Future donations to TPMA will fund a statue maintenance plan and other projects to honor Paine’s life and legacy.

Actor and TPMA board member Ian Ruskin spoke about his experiences portraying Paine. Ruskin also talked about his one-man play, To Begin the World Over Again: The Life of Thomas Paine. He shared photos of various appearances that included an overview of his “Walk in the Footsteps of Thomas Paine” tour in England. During that trip Ruskin performed in the towns of Thetford, Diss, and Lewes.

TPMA President Margaret Downey talked about the many Paine related activities she has sponsored, including her “Walk in the Footsteps of Thomas Paine” in Paris, France. She showed photos of events sponsored by FS, including four “The Life and Work of Thomas Paine” elementary school assemblies.

Commissioned sculptor Zenos Frudakis joined the festivities from his studio in Glenside, Pennsylvania. The Frudakis Studio is filled with examples of past commissions, ongoing projects, and ideas for future sculpting projects.

Remarks were delivered by Congressman Jamie Raskin, who announced his intention to present a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives that would provide government endorsement for the placement of a Thomas Paine statue. As promised, Raskin submitted House Bill 6720 on February 11, 2022. More information about the Bill is printed elsewhere in this newsletter (see page 4 and 5) and details are posted at the TPMA website: https://thomaspainememorial.org

Educator, songwriter, and recording artist James Klueh performed two Thomas Paine-themed songs prior to the interactive social hour. His terrific recording of Tom Paine’s Bones was presented during the credits portion of the event. To view the entire recording of the Thomas Paine Birthdate Celebration Zoom event visit: https://youtu.be/mq-oOdD5g94
Above left is Emily Newman, American Humanist Association representative and Zoom technician.

Above right is Todd Stiefel, the founder and director of the Stiefel Freethought Foundation. Stiefel is pictured announcing the triple donation match during the Thomas Paine Birthdate Celebration.

Professor Christopher Cameron is pictured above as he welcomed people to the January 29th Celebration. Cameron is a Board Member of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA).

Pictured above right is TPMA Honorary Board Member Ann Druyan (professor, director, writer and producer). She delivered a lovely welcome message and stayed to participate in the social hour.

Comedian, author, and actor Julia Sweeney is a TPMA Honorary Board Member. During the Celebration she imagined what it would have been like to be a friend to Thomas Paine during his lifetime. Sweeney also stayed online to participate in the event’s social hour.
Actor and TPMA Board Member John de Lancie is pictured left as he delivered a heartfelt welcome address.

Pictured above center is Robyn Blumner, CEO of the Center for Inquiry and the Vice-President of TPMA.

Annie Laurie Gaylor is pictured above right. She represented the Freedom From Religion Foundation and holds the position of TPMA Secretary.

Zenos Frudakis is the commissioned sculptor for the Thomas Paine statue project. He is pictured at his Glenside, Pennsylvania studio. Frudakis is standing in front of the clay model of the statue which is over seven feet tall.

Pictured right is actor Ian Ruskin. Ruskin is a Board Member of TPMA and is the author of the one-man play To Begin the World Again: The Life of Thomas Paine.

Upper left is TPMA President, Margaret Downey. She also represented the Freethought Society (FS) at the January 29, 2022 Thomas Paine Birthdate Celebration and talked about past events she organized as President of FS.

Congressman Jamie Raskin is pictured above. His remarks during the celebration were inspiring, educational, and passionate.
House Bill 6720 was created to authorize the Thomas Paine Memorial Association to establish a commemorative work in the District of Columbia and its environs, and for other purposes. House Bill 6720 was introduced by Congressman Jamie Raskin (D-MD-08) on February 11, 2022. He recently stated, “Despite his catalytic role in founding America and our constitutional republic, Thomas Paine remains too often on the dark outskirts of history. It is way past time for Congress to give Thomas Paine the central place of respect and awe he deserves in our nation’s capital. This memorial to Thomas Paine — amazingly, already pre-funded with a flood of voluntary contributions and pledges from private citizens — will be a powerful and dramatic addition to the symbolic life of Washington, D.C.”

Who was Thomas Paine?
Thomas Paine was a Founding Father and patriot who was far ahead of his time. Thomas Paine was one of the greatest political writers and philosophers of the Revolutionary era. He galvanized the American public to support the Revolution with his pamphlet *Common Sense*, which spelled out the case for independence from Great Britain. Thomas Paine then served in the Continental Army.

In his other works, such as *The Crisis*, *Rights of Man*, and *The Age of Reason*, Thomas Paine fundamentally altered the political and social landscape of the 18th and 19th centuries and helped forge the United States of America. He opposed slavery and favored abolition, called for a progressive income tax to pay for universal education (for both sexes), a welfare system for poor relief, pensions, and more. He was an eloquent advocate for equality and representative government, writing “The true and only true basis of representative government is equality of rights.” He added, “…danger arises from exclusions.”

Thomas Paine rose from poverty to become a foremost political figure of his time, a friend to humanity, a promoter of enlightenment ideals, and a foe of tyrants. He championed the rights of the “common” people and believed emphatically in the dignity and rights of humans, which drove him to challenge the divine right of kings, forever changing the course of human history.

Why is a memorial important?
Despite Thomas Paine’s catalytic role in founding America and our constitutional republic, he has not received proper recognition. It is time for Congress to give Thomas Paine the central place of respect and awe he deserves in our nation’s capital. This memorial to Thomas Paine — already pre-funded with a flood of voluntary contributions and pledges from private citizens — will be a powerful and dramatic addition to the symbolic life of Washington, D.C. The Thomas Paine Memorial Association has commissioned world-renowned sculptor Zenos Frudakis to build the monument to Paine. The sculptor and his masterpiece are pictured right.

What does House Bill 6720 do?
The legislation will authorize the Thomas Paine Memorial Association to establish a Memorial to Thomas Paine in the District of Columbia. No public funds will be used in the development, construction, or maintenance of the Memorial.

Who already supports House Bill 6720?
Sean Casten (D-IL-06), Madeleine Dean (D-PA-04), Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA-11), Jared Huffman (D-CA-02), James P. McGovern (D-MA-02), Jerrold Nadler (D-NY-10), Mark Pocan (D-WI-02), Thomas R. Suozzi (D-NY-03), Jim Cooper (D-TN-5), and Jerry McNerney (D-CA-09).
Tracking House Bill 6720
(Plus, what you can do to make this House Bill become law!)

Finding Supporters for House Bill 6720:
Contact your Congressperson and ask that they support House Bill 6720. You can write a letter, send an email, and/or make a phone call to your Representative. Below are a few ideas about what can be said in your correspondence:

Sample Statements:
Thomas Paine was a man so far ahead of his time and his work still challenges us today to build a more democratic society.
It is far past time for Congress to give Thomas Paine the place of respect he deserves in our nation’s capital.
The Thomas Paine statue is fully funded and the sculptor Zenos Frudakis is famous throughout the world.
A statue of Thomas Paine will draw many tourists who value Paine’s legacy to our nation’s capital. He is a beloved historical figure for people around the globe as an advocate of freedom, equality, and democracy.
Statues provide great educational opportunities. Thomas Paine’s legacy encompasses anti-slavery, public education, social security, equal rights, anti-autocracy, the concept of the United Nations, and much more.

House Bill 6720 Referred to Committee:
House Bill 6720 has been referred to the Natural Resources Committee. Committee members — groups of Representatives review, research, and revise the bill before voting on whether or not to send the bill to the House floor. While the bill is in Committee, the bill is examined and expert opinions are often gathered. Constituents of Committee members are welcome to communicate with their representative about the bill. Members of the Natural Resources Committee can be found at this link: https://naturalresources.house.gov/about/our-members

The Bill is Reported:
When the committee has approved a bill, it is sent — or reported — to the House floor. Once reported, a bill is ready to be debated by the United States House of Representatives.

The Bill is Debated:
When a bill is debated, Representatives discuss the bill and explain why they agree or disagree with it. Then, a reading clerk reads the bill section by section and the Representatives recommend changes. When all changes have been made, the bill is ready to be voted on.

The Bill is Voted on:
There are three methods for voting on a bill in the House of Representatives: With a “voice vote,” the Speaker of the House asks the Representatives who support the bill to say “yea” and those who oppose it say “nay.” With a “division vote,” the Speaker of the House asks those Representatives who support the bill to stand up and be counted, and then those who oppose the bill to stand up and be counted. With a “recorded vote,” Representatives record their vote using the electronic voting system. Representatives can vote yes, no, or present (if they don’t want to vote on the bill). If a majority of the Representatives say or select yes, the bill passes in the House of Representatives. The bill is then certified by the Clerk of the House and delivered to the United States Senate.

The Bill is Sent to the Senate:
When a bill reaches the United States Senate, it goes through many of the same steps it went through in the House of Representatives. The bill is discussed in a Senate committee and then may be reported to the Senate floor to be voted on. Senators vote by voice. Those who support the bill say “yea,” and those who oppose it say “nay.” If a majority of the Senators vote in favor of the bill it passes the Senate and is ready to go to the President.

The Bill is Sent to the President:
When a bill reaches the President, there are three choices: 1. The president can sign and pass the bill, making it become law.
2. Refuse to sign, or veto, the bill. In that case the bill is sent back to the House of Representatives, along with the President’s reasons for the veto. If the House of Representatives and the Senate still believe the bill should become law, they can hold another vote on the bill. If two-thirds of the Representatives and Senators support the bill, the President’s veto is overridden and the bill becomes law.
3. The president can also just do nothing. This is known as a “pocket veto.” If Congress is in session, the bill automatically becomes law after 10 days. If Congress is not in session, the bill does not become law.

The Bill Becomes Law:
If a bill has passed in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, and has been approved by the President, or if a presidential veto has been overridden, the bill becomes law and is enforced by the government.
Talking to Christian Fundamentalists  
by Herb Silverman

How should we talk to Christian fundamentalists whose worldview is so different from ours and who don’t accept the evidence that we offer? While we can’t reason people out of a belief they didn’t come to through reason, I’ve found that we still might be able to find points of agreement.

For instance, I might start with the commonality of “Love your neighbor” and describe varieties of the Golden Rule that predate Jesus, including Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and Confucianism. Something else we could probably agree on is that all faiths (except theirs) are wrong.

I also say that every educated person should read the Bible because it’s an important part of our culture. I also mention that everybody needs to read more than just one book, no matter how much we value a particular book, and I then offer some secular books worth reading.

If I’m asked for biblical quotes I like, I mention Matthew 7:16: “By your fruits you shall know them.” I also like John 8:32: “The truth will set you free,” which it did for me when I became an atheist. If they tell me they support blasphemy laws, I say I might, too, if the offended deity personally files charges.

It helps in discussions with Christian fundamentalists to treat them with kindness and respect. We should assume that they believe what they say, even if it sounds to us like nonsense. When I hear personal attacks, I ignore them and stick with the issues.

Usually the best I can hope for in talking to committed Christian fundamentalists is that some of their stereotypes about atheists will change and they will think I’m a nice guy with a sense of humor (even though I’m going to Hell). I point out that there are good and bad atheists as well as good and bad Christians, and that I think we should judge people on what they do rather than on what they say they believe.

Since I came to atheism through a sensible evidence-based path, I don’t try to convert others to my position. I just hope they will think about the beliefs with which they were raised and whether those beliefs still make sense to them. This is especially useful if I’m in a public debate with a Christian fundamentalist, providing some in the audience an opportunity to hear about atheism from an atheist rather than just from their minister.

I understand why it’s important to Christian fundamentalists that they try to convert me: Eternal life is at stake. And for many of them that’s more important than life itself. I find such a view odd at best. A Christian fundamentalist worldview can also be dangerous if conversion to it is forced on others, as has happened frequently in the past and still happens today.

The Bible was written thousands of years ago by misogynistic men. What does the Bible say about women and their bodies? The punishment for a man who raped a virgin woman was that the man should pay her father 50 shekels and that she must marry her rapist because she has become damaged goods to her father (Deut. 22:28).

In Genesis 9, Lot was praised for offering his virgin daughters to a band of marauding men. If a woman’s husband dies without providing her with a son, she must marry her husband’s brother (Deut. 25:5). Countless women were once put to death because of Exodus 22:18: “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.”

Men were allowed to take many wives and sex slaves (concubines), but if a wife was found not to be a virgin she would be stoned to death (Deut. 22:20-21). And King Solomon’s brain was not his most prolific organ. According to 1 Kings 11.3, Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

Some Christian fundamentalists ignore several of these ridiculous passages or find creative interpretations for what God really meant. Some say that the Hebrew Bible (their Old Testament) is superseded by the Christian Bible (their New Testament). However, Jesus said that not one jot or tittle shall change from the old law (Matthew 5:18). There are also passages in the Christian Bible about women not having authority over a man, that the man is head of the household, and that women are created for man (Ephesians 5:22–24).

Many of my Jewish ancestors suffered from passages like Matthew 27:25: The blood of Jesus will be on all Jews and on their children.” And John 8:44: “The Devil is father of the Jews.” The Christian Bible does not oppose slavery, just that slaves should obey their masters (1 Timothy and Ephesians 6). The Bible also doesn’t say not to abuse children, not to abuse your wife, or not to torture and kill in God’s name.

Christian fundamentalists may try to live according to their interpretation of the Bible, but they have so far been unsuccessful in making it the law of our land. Unfortunately, they have been somewhat successful promoting their political agenda in public schools through school boards, city councils, and state legislatures, often trying to eliminate the teaching of evolution or teaching it along with “intelligent design.” They have tried to pass biblically-based laws against LGBTQ rights. In some places they try to deny women contraceptives and abortions.

Preventing women from having the right to abortion seems to have become the top issue for Christian fundamentalists today. What does the Bible say about abortion? Absolutely nothing! Jesus never mentioned abortion. The closest the Bible comes to bringing up abortion is that the husband deserves recompense if another man harms his wife’s fetus during a fight. Exodus 21:22-25 says: “When men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall be fined, according as the woman’s husband shall lay upon him. And he shall pay as the judges determine.”

Christian fundamentalists should accept that the most prolific abortionist is their god. Based on current evidence, if you factor in fertilized eggs that fail to implant along with pregnancies that end in miscarriages, around 70% to 75% of all conceptions end in pregnancy loss.

When talking to Christian fundamentalists I think it is okay to bring up some of these issues in a polite way. We can quote passages and ask how they interpret them. Many are not even aware of uncomfortable passages and it gives them something to think about on their home turf (the Bible).

What should we think about the many religious colleges and universities in the United States? Many have decent academic programs. They usually offer obligatory courses in religion, which do not interfere with legitimate and rigorous academic subjects. When I was a Professor of Mathematics at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts in the early 1970s, I knew several faculty members at the College of Holy Cross, a Roman Catholic college one mile away. They were not particularly religious and had no religious restrictions on
what they could teach. What was most significant to me at the time was that Daniel Berrigan, a graduate of Holy Cross and a priest, gave the commencement address at Holy Cross in 1973. He and his brother, Phil Berrigan, also a priest, were active in the antiwar and anti-draft movements during the Vietnam War. I participated in some marches with them and walked with quite a few Holy Cross students.

The Berrigan brothers were part of the Catonsville Nine, who in 1968 went to jail for burning draft files. They issued the following statement: “We confront the Roman Catholic Church, other Christian bodies, and the synagogues of America with their silence and cowardice in the face of our country’s crimes. We are convinced that the religious bureaucracy in this country is racist, is an accomplice in this war, and is hostile to the poor.”

In my home state of South Carolina, Furman University was founded in 1826 as a Baptist university, but has become more diverse, not requiring students or faculty to hold specific religious views. In 1992, Furman separated from the Southern Baptist Convention in order to exert more control over their institution. On the other hand, in Charleston, my home city, Charleston Southern University (formerly called Baptist College) is decidedly Christian, where it integrates faith with learning, and is in good standing with the Southern Baptist Convention. Its faculty are required to sign an oath of belief. In 2004, I debated a professor from that institution on the existence of God, though the debate was not allowed on their campus and took place at a nearby church. He later accepted my invitation to speak on my College of Charleston campus. The professor then invited me to speak to his class, but the invitation was rescinded because his administration refused to allow me on campus. So much for academic freedom.

We know that many religious universities do not teach subjects like evolution that conflict with their religious agenda. Even worse, some have political agendas, including the well-known Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. Its former president, Jerry Falwell Jr., considered it immoral for evangelicals in 2020 to not support President Donald Trump, adding that he could do nothing to lose his support. Falwell was later forced to resign his presidency because of a sex scandal. He hadn’t objected previously to Trump’s sex scandals.

I’ll close with some questions I get from Christian fundamentalists, along with my answers.

*Why do you hate God?* I don’t hate God any more than I hate the Tooth Fairy, and I didn’t become an atheist because something bad happened to me. I became an atheist because I find no evidence for any gods.

*What is the purpose of life?* I don’t need to believe in a god to find a purpose. There may not be a purpose of life, but we can find many purposes in life.

*Why be moral?* Personal responsibility is a good conservative principle. We should not give credit to a deity for our accomplishments or blame satanic forces when we behave badly. We should take personal responsibility for our actions. I try to live my life to its fullest — it’s the only life I have, and I hope to make a positive difference because it’s the right thing to do, not because of future rewards or punishment.

*Why do you think science is more reliable than religion?* Because we know how to distinguish good scientific ideas from bad ones. Scientists start out not knowing the answer and go wherever the evidence leads them. Science relies on experimenting, testing, and questioning assumptions critically until a consensus is reached, and even that is always open to revision in light of later evidence. This is why scientific truths are the same in Saudi Arabia, the United States, Israel, and India — countries with very different religious beliefs.

Don’t you worry that Heaven and Hell might be real and that you will be going to Hell? Here are questions I have for you about Heaven and Hell. Why is faith not only important, but perhaps the deciding factor about who winds up in Heaven or Hell? What moral purpose does eternal torture serve? If we have free will on Earth, will we have free will in Heaven? If so, might we sin and go from Heaven to Hell? If not, will we be heavenly robots? If God can make us sinless in Heaven, why didn’t he create us sinless on Earth? Can you be blissfully happy in Heaven knowing that some of your loved ones are being tortured in Hell? And what do you do for an eternity in Heaven without getting bored? Wouldn’t a loving God who wants us all to go to Heaven make it unambiguously clear how to get there?

Herb Silverman is a regular contributor to the Freethought Society’s ezine, *The Freethought Society News*. He is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Mathematics at the College of Charleston, South Carolina.

In 1990, a colleague pointed out that atheists were ineligible to hold public office in South Carolina. After an eight-year battle, Herb won an unanimous decision in the South Carolina Supreme Court which struck down this religious test requirement.

Silverman is the author of two books,* Candidate Without a Prayer* and *An Atheist Stranger in a Strange Religious Land*. Both of these books are available through amazon.com.

When designating “The Freethought Society” as your chosen AmazonSmile benefits recipient, it automatically increases the organization’s funds.

The Secular Student Alliance is accepting applications for 2022 Student Activist Scholarships. The scholarships are available to full time students enrolled in high school or college in the United States and are designed to support students who, in addition to pursuing excellence in their academic studies, are also activists for secular values on their campus and/or in their community. Application link: [https://secularstudents.org/scholarships/](https://secularstudents.org/scholarships/)

If you are enrolled in school in Pennsylvania, The Freethought Society sponsors a *$1,000 scholarship* for one qualified student:
China has an app called “Little Angels.” The app allows for someone to talk with a “professional listener,” paying by the hour. The service is very popular. Could it be that simply being heard is a basic human need?

I’ve never had a “need” for spiritual counseling, perhaps because of my atheism as well as my independent personality. Even during my brief recent hospitalization, at no time did I think I needed counseling. I certainly did not need nor want religious guidance either. To my surprise, however, I did enjoy talking with the hospital chaplain who, unexpectedly, visited my room.

I had typically just passed on such a visit, so I’m forced to wonder: why did I even welcome him into my room? I suppose I was a little curious, more so than I would have otherwise been, because I had recently heard about Harvard’s new ATHEIST chaplain. As for experiences with other chaplains from my past — that would be nil — except for M*A*S*H’s Father John Mulchahy, and he was a real sweetheart, if anyone was.

I was very surprised by the absence of dogma expressed by the chaplain who was assigned to me. This thirty-something gentleman, during our surprisingly-long hour of conversation, demonstrated his great interpersonal skills. I discovered that he didn’t challenge my viewpoint or try to convert me to Christianity. Rather, in hindsight, I suppose he sought primarily to allow me to talk, without causing any type of dispute himself. To achieve this aim, I envision that he had to discover common ground between us, between my truly unvarnished, honestly expressed views and the portion of his own that he felt comfortable sharing with me. I’m sure he was aware that sharing the wrong views could raise the blood pressure of a patient, or worse!

The Mayo Clinic website states that chaplains “offer spiritual guidance and pastoral care to patients and their families…using the insights and principles of psychology, religion, spirituality, and theology.”

What we didn’t discuss during his visit was Christianity or his desire that I embrace Christianity, which I had initially feared. I was entirely able to share with him my personal philosophy of life and my essentially anti-religion perspective, without receiving resistance or push-back from him.

I expressed to him the strong fidelity I have towards the search for truth/understanding of this world, the conflict that I see between so many religious perspectives, and the actual truth as found primarily through science. I made the case that this world could have been started in only one way rather than in many ways, and I think Richard Dawkins would agree.

Perhaps the world was started in a big bang 14 billion years ago, or not, or perhaps it was started as described in the Old Testament, or as in other religious books, but any rational person must believe that it cannot have started in more than one way. Only one creation story can actually be true, with significant repercussions. I furthered shared my perspective that scientific facts most accurately described the world around us. The designated chaplain didn’t disagree with me out loud, but that doesn’t guarantee that he actually agreed with me, I suppose.

We found common ground in our shared concern for humanity and in progressive political viewpoints. We additionally discussed ways to improve the experience for hospital patients, whether as a business or as a volunteer organization.

He opened up to me a bit about himself. Surprisingly, the chaplain had originally opted in life to become a real estate agent in order “to make the most money in the quickest way.” He shared that he really didn’t find that first career choice rewarding, thus motivating him mid-career to enter the field of chaplaincy.

Our conversation was one of my longest one-on-one adult discussions with an ostensibly religious leader, and at least from my perspective, it ended well. I really liked him because we apparently agreed on many issues, and I sincerely thought about asking him if he’d like to keep in touch.

I was, however, conscious that our mutual footing really hadn’t been even, and his talking to me — how he received what I said, what he said, and what he didn’t say — was probably just part of his job. I was being unrestrained in voicing my opinions. Was he actually presenting a professional façade? I wonder.

Really, our discussion was enough. He had helped me to blow off some steam, get a little mental stimulation, and observe his viewpoints in just the right amount. Maybe that Chinese Little Angels app or those who educate and provide chaplains are onto something.

Art Karloff, pictured above, has been a supporter of the Freethought Society for 25 years. He majored in physics in college, and spent his career in industry, holding various roles as a software engineer.

Karloff’s passions include fighting against the tyranny of a religious and objectively wrong/irrational majority, as well as trying to preserve American democracy.

He is most proud of having raised a daughter who actually became a scientist.
When asked for the difference between a religion and a cult, Richard Dawkins famously quipped “About 2,000 years.” The current iteration of the Republican Party, the Trump Republican Party, although not a religion, is often called a cult.

Two-thirds of Republicans now believe that the 2020 election was “stolen.” Even if you factor in the liars and cynics in their midst you still end up with an immutable cohort of one-third of Republicans who are thus convinced. That adds up to tens of millions of Americans.

As a result, the majority of Americans who see this fraudulent claim for what it is ask themselves, “How can these people possibly believe that this election was ‘stolen’?” There is no evidence supporting this baseless claim. In fact, in 60 or so court hearings no fraud has been found, and some lawyers bringing suit have been admonished and/or fined as well as disbarred.

The perpetrators of the “big lie” are using a tried and true two-pronged strategy:

1. Doubt to delay. They are employing the same tactics used by the tobacco industry, climate crisis deniers, and anti-vaxxers: doubt the science to postpone. In this case, doubt the voters, doubt the votes, and doubt the vote counters.

2. And lie. From “Gaslight” to Goebbels’, just “rinse and repeat,” continue to restate the falsehood. The bigger the better, and any contradictory information is to be regarded as “false news.” Like cults these true believers are cut off from most of society in the sense that their “information” is siloed: delivered exclusively by Fox News, News Max, OAN, and the likes of Alex Jones.

Thus the majority of Americans remain stupefied at those who cry “the election was stolen,” and that this well-known falsehood is so gob-smackingly fictitious that to give it any credence defies reason. Yet those same Americans are quite comfortable with their own assertions that are similarly without a shred of evidence: i.e., the numerous supernatural claims made by religions. For example, the most common religious assertion is an unshakable belief in the existence of an afterlife, usually Heaven and Hell. In fact, most of the world’s population has the rock-solid belief that they are going to either meet their maker in paradise or not. To be clear, such a belief is just that, a belief; a nonpartisan one at that. There is no supporting evidence. Anyone pointing that out, however, is immediately considered a pariah, and must be isolated and otherwise reviled.

One could argue that both the believers in the “big lie” and the believers in an after-life have come to their positions emotionally, and to reason with them is a fool’s errand even if such thinking works against their own self-interest. They have all been groomed and continue to groom others. Such relentless lying exploits the biological weakness in the wiring of the human brain. That is, when a lie is repeated often enough over time we come to accept it as fact, an article of faith.

Please Visit and Subscribe to the Freethought Society YouTube Channel

Did you know that the Freethought Society’s YouTube channel has a large collection of interesting, entertaining, and educational recorded programs? To see the full collection and subscribe to receive film posting notifications, please visit the below link:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSPXwTm8UpzkxAezBWoFew

‘Your child belongs to us already. What are you? You will pass on. Your descendants, however, now stand in the new camp. In a short time they will know nothing else but this new community.’ Adolf Hitler, November 1933

Some might say that belief in an afterlife has nothing to do with belief in a “stolen” election. But if we are to accept religious unprovable “facts” then why not accept the outcome of an election based on widely debunked “evidence?” To put it another way, once you permit belief in the supernatural the door is wide open for Trump and other would-be despots to claim that an election was indeed “stolen.” We can’t have it both ways. Decrying the belief in the “stolen” election and yet affirming faith in an afterlife is a classic case of cognitive dissonance.

In fact, belief in a fact-free assertion like the “big lie” or any religious declaration is a choice. And yet most are complicit. Either mankind has a reckoning with the truth as opposed to what it wants to be true, or we will always be faced with the consequences of more “stolen” elections and other outrageous phantasmagorical claims.

Truth or Consequences

by Vic Losick

Vic Losick is a documentary film producer based in New York City. He has a special interest in religion and politics.

His film on religion and state issues, “In God We Teach,” is available to screen for free online at:

www.InGodWeTeach.com

Losick is also very active in secular approaches to substance recovery.

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Did you know that the Freethought Society’s YouTube channel has a large collection of interesting, entertaining, and educational recorded programs? To see the full collection and subscribe to receive film posting notifications, please visit the below link:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCSPXwTm8UpzkxAezBWoFew

Vic Losick is a documentary film producer based in New York City. He has a special interest in religion and politics.

His film on religion and state issues, “In God We Teach,” is available to screen for free online at:

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Imagine for a moment that you run an ad agency and your new client needs to advertise his product. When you take a closer look at his “product” you realize something wild — it does absolutely everything. What’s more, it’s available to everyone FOR FREE. A joke, right? Well, listen to this: I did run a Madison Avenue ad agency and one day my church minister asked me if I could come up with an ad campaign to attract more young people to the church.

It was a totally unexpected proposal. So, just to see how serious he was, I replied, “Ok, and what’s your budget?” He said, “150K, for three months.”

Flash forward a month and I’m sitting in my office trying to figure out how to convince jaded young Manhattanites to go to church on Sunday morning. I was stymied.

What if I try advertising God? After days of soul-searching I came up with a thought…besides focusing on the church, what if I focused on, and tried advertising…God?

The campaign that I eventually created used a series of playful, God-themed headlines like “Make a Friend in a Very High Place” and “In this town it doesn’t hurt to have God on your side” and “Our Product Really Does Perform Miracles.”

This was pre-internet so the media we used included New York City subway posters, billboards, and print ads. After just a few weeks the campaign began creating buzz and got some great press coverage in The New York Times, The Daily News, USA Today, and TIME magazine soon followed with additional positive coverage. The church minister and I were even invited as featured guests on a TV talk show. It was all quite exciting and the minister could not have been more pleased. New people of all ages were coming to the church, so his investment clearly seemed to be paying off.

What began for my agency as a project ended up a sixteen-year business relationship. Now, the irony. By the end of those sixteen years I not only decided to leave the church, I decided to leave God.

My decision to walk away from church and God was based on multiple factors. Some had to do with my personal experiences with the church. Others where the result of my research and what I learned about religion. And, some reasons had to do with what was happening in the world — events like 9/11 and the Catholic Church sex abuse scandal.

As I became more detached from the concept of God I discovered that I was part of a much larger, growing trend in America. When I learned that even clergy members were leaving religion and God, I had a Eureka moment: “Wow. Someone should make a documentary about this.” So, I did. I titled it Leaving God: Why I left God and why so many others are too. I put all my creative talents into making the film. I then posted it online with no expectation that anyone would notice, never mind watch it. And, for six months, I was right. Then a crazy thing happened.

Over the course of a weekend the views of the film doubled. I assumed it was some erroneous glitch. But upon further investigation, I discovered it was no glitch. Somehow, my film was placed on a website called, “Top Documentary Films” and that’s where all the new social media traffic was coming from. Apparently someone from the site stumbled on my film, watched it, liked it, and then featured it on the site with a great review.

I was in shock. And here’s what else happened. The film got accepted into the Hollywood International Documentary Film Festival and won a “Best First Film” award.

I was in shock again. As if that wasn’t enough, in the following weeks the film received critical acclaim from a number of respected people and organizations, including Daniel Dennett and the BBC.

A fun benefit of the film’s subject and success is that I’ve been an invited speaker on a number of podcasts and radio shows. Some groups have also done live screenings followed by a question and answer session. Those invites have come from national organizations such as the Freedom From Religion Foundation, and Recovering from Religion as well as other similar groups from around the country.

Though I love doing these and plan to do more, I often feel like I’m preaching to the choir. I’m certainly not expecting any invitations from church organizations, but it would be nice to get more invites from groups and organizations that are not 95% atheist.

John Follis is an ex-Mad Avenue ad man and award-winning writer. Besides his film, his writing has appeared in numerous books, magazines, and blogs.

His essay, “Mad Ave,” was featured alongside essays from Stephen King, Dave Barry, Dick Clark, and others in the St. Martin’s Press anthology, Mirror on America.

The Freethought Society will be hosting a live and in-person viewing of the film Leaving God in the near future. We hope to find cosponsors to be able to invite Follis to attend, introduce the film, and conduct a discussion afterward. Invitations to the viewing will be sent to religious communities and interfaith organizations. Please watch for details in upcoming publications.
**Freethought Society Two-Month Zoom Calendar**

To receive notices about Zoom events, you must become a member of the Freethought Society Meetup group. Join the Freethought Society (FS) Meetup group at: [https://www.meetup.com/Freethought-Society-Meetup/](https://www.meetup.com/Freethought-Society-Meetup/). Each listing will have a unique Zoom link listed in the description of the event at the Meetup page. FS meetings will implement security features and will be recorded for replay on social media. Those who join the meeting consent to be recorded and agree to abide by the FS Anti-Harassment and Code of Conduct Policy found at the FS website: [https://www.fmlsociety.org/freethought-society-code-of-conduct/](https://www.fmlsociety.org/freethought-society-code-of-conduct/)

### May 13

The Freethought Society (FS) is pleased to present the very first Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center’s International Educational Seminar via Zoom on **Friday, May 13, 2022**. The event will be hosted by FS President **Margaret Downey**.

The event will start at **3:45 PM PDT/6:45 PM EDT** with the introduction of comedian **Ian Harris**. His 15-minute standup routine will take a humorous look at superstitions and irrational beliefs that permeate American culture.

At **4:00 PM PDT/7:00 PM EDT** social activist **Babu Gogineni** will tell us about superstitions that prevail in India. Be ready for shocking disclosures and unthinkable practices that are thought to have magical benefits strong enough to change the course of nature.

At **4:30 PM PDT/7:30 PM EDT** FS board member **Norm Allen** will convey the many African superstitions he witnessed and dealt with throughout his 30-year career as the Founder and President of African Americans for Humanism. He will share with us the horror of witch hunts and the belief that using certain body parts of albinistic people can transmit magical powers.

The keynoted speaker is author **Stuart Vyse**. His presentation will start at **5:00 PM PDT/8:00 PM EDT**. Vyse is an American psychologist, teacher, speaker and author who specializes in critical thinking and belief in superstitions. His book *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* won the William James Book Award of the American Psychological Association and was translated into Japanese, German, and Romanian.

For more details see the Meetup page created for this event at the below link: [https://bit.ly/Frigga13th](https://bit.ly/Frigga13th)

### June 16, 17, and 18

You are cordially invited to attend the live, in-person 2022 Thomas Paine Festival honoring the legacy of Founding Father **Thomas Paine** and the grand opening of the newly named **Thomas Paine New Rochelle Center** located at 983 North Avenue, New Rochelle, New York. The Center includes the Thomas Paine Cottage Museum, the Thomas Paine Monument, and the Thomas Paine Memorial Building.

The Festival will begin the evening of **Thursday, June 16, 2022** when Festival sponsors host a Colonial Tavern Night starting at **5:30 PM EDT**. A large party tent will be located at the Center. Sponsors will be offering free food, drinks, and live music.

**Friday, June 17th** events will start at **10:00 AM EDT** with a Symposium featuring presentations about Thomas Paine’s life, works, and legacy. The Symposium will be held at the **Thomas Paine Memorial Building** and brings together scholars and others interested in the writings and historical legacy of Thomas Paine. Presentations will prepare the way for increased international recognition of Paine’s role in the American Revolution, the French Revolutions, and the spread of democratic ideas globally. Members of the Editorial Board of the Thomas Paine Collected Works Project will conduct a panel discussion, closing out the Symposium around 2:30 PM.

Continuing that afternoon at **3:00 PM EDT**, the **Iona College Library** (715 North Avenue) will host a viewing of Thomas Paine-themed artifacts including his hair, death mask, writing kit, and various personal items.

The **6:30 PM EDT** Friday night reception and dinner theater will bring an end to the day’s festivities. The event will take place at **The Greentree Country Club** (538 Davenport Avenue). Actor **Ian Ruskin** will present his one-man play, *To Begin the World Over Again: The Life of Thomas Paine*.

The Saturday, June 18th agenda includes an **11:00 AM EDT** ribbon-cutting and wreath-laying ceremony at the **Thomas Paine New Rochelle Center** with special guests Mayor Noam Bramson, City Councilwoman Sara Kaye, State Senator Shelley Mayer, State Assemblywoman Amy Paulin, and Westchester County Executive George Latimer.

**Margaret Downey**, President of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association and the Freethought Society, will portray Madame Marguerite Brazier Bonneville. Bonneville, is the woman to whom Paine left the bulk of his New Rochelle estate. Her friendship with Paine led to the bequest.

Among the afternoon activities will be historical re-enactments, music of the colonial period, family-centered entertainment, lawn games, and educational opportunities, including Juneteenth information in recognition of Paine’s opposition to slavery. The Festival is designed to engage and stimulate the interest of all ages.

**Sarah Jane Marsh**, author of the children’s book, *Thomas Paine and the Dangerous Word*, will connect live online at **2:00 PM**. A video message from Congressman Jamie Raskin will be shown in the **Thomas Paine Memorial Building**. He will talk about why his House Bill 6720 was introduced for a Thomas Paine memorial statue.

**Zenos Frudakis**, the commissioned sculptor of the Thomas Paine statue, will be attending to answer questions about the statue project. Samples of his work will be on display inside the Festival tent.

To learn more about which Festival events are free and open to the public; which events require reservations and tickets; and to see a map of the locations mentioned above, please visit: [www.ThomasPaineCenter.org](http://www.ThomasPaineCenter.org).

Sponsors and Festival organizers are the Huguenot & New Rochelle Historical Association, The Thomas Paine Memorial Association, and the Thomas Paine National Historical Association.
The Freethought Society (FS) promotes freedom of thought, expression, and choice. FS also advocates separation of religion and government. We educate the public about nontheism, and provide social opportunities where like-minded individuals can meet, socialize and share ideas.

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 all those who are interested in learning more about freedom of thought.

Monthly events take place in locations across the United States via Zoom or in person when possible. FS activities and services depend on financial contributions from supporters. Donations may be sent using this form or via the FS website (https://www.paypal.com/us/fundraiser/charity/1554941). All contributions to FS are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law (Tax ID Number: 23-2738574). All donations, large and small, are helpful and appreciated.

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 your bank or through PayPal in the amount of (circle one): $5  $10  $15  $20  $25  $30  $35  $40  $_____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 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 or scan and email this form to: Ezine@FtSociety.org

**Volunteer Opportunities Through the Freethought Society**

Supporters of FS often want to do more than just make a financial contribution. Listed below are committees designed to fulfill the mission, goals, and vision of FS. Volunteers are needed in all committees listed. Please contact FS to volunteer at: volunteers@FtSociety.org.

| **Ant-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 donations) |
| **Literature Placement for Prisoners** | (providing literature to prison libraries) |

| **Meetup Committee** | (planning events) |
| **Monthly Meeting Coordinators** | (schedule, 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 donations) |
| **Thomas Paine Memorial Committee** | (work on themed events) |
| **Tree of Knowledge/Winter Display Committee** | (promote and support the concept nationwide) |