Thomas Paine Washington, D.C. Monument Project Updates on House Bill 6720

The Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA) is pleased to announce several significant advancements of House Bill 6720. The Bill was originally introduced on February 11, 2022 by Representative Jamie Raskin (D-MD). On September 16, 2022, Representative Victoria Spartz (R-IN) became a co-leader of the Bill. The addition of Representative Spartz and Representative Jay Obernolte (R-CA-8) makes House Bill 6720 a truly bipartisan effort.

House Bill 6720 authorizes TPMA to establish a commemorative monument dedicated to Thomas Paine in the District of Columbia. Details of the Bill and the list of sponsors can be found at this link: https://bit.ly/HR6720Bill

Every proposed Washington, D.C. monument and museum must be presented to the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (NCMAC) for consideration. The members of the Commission vote on whether or not the proposal has merit and is deserving of their endorsement. TPMA spokespersons conducted a presentation to NCMAC on July 27, 2022. This link will take you to a recording of the actual hearing, discussion and vote: https://youtu.be/ZJJNu4mfUbA

In the video you will see presentations from (in order of appearance) Congressman Raskin, Mark Dann (Freedom From Religion Foundation’s Director of Governmental Affairs), Margaret Downey (president of TPMA), Gene Jones (president of the Florida Veterans for Thomas Paine), Karen Heineman (legal fellow of the Freedom From Religion Foundation), Mandisa Thomas (president of Black Nonbelievers), and Charis Hoard (summer intern at the Freedom From Religion Foundation). The speakers presented a variety of viewpoints. NCMAC Commissioners gained an appreciation of why everyone involved is working hard to finally have Thomas Paine recognized for his important work.

After the presentations the Commissioners were very complimentary and a vote was immediately taken and voted unanimously to endorse and support a memorial project to recognize Thomas Paine's important work in achieving American independence from Britian.

TPMA thanks the following members of NCMAC for their advocacy in favor of the Thomas Paine memorial project: Edwin Fountain, Joe Imamura, David Maloney, Peter May, Paul McMahon, Michael Sherman, and Mina Wright. A letter from NCMAC Chairman May was sent to the Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, Congressman Raúl M. Grijalva (D-AZ). The letter stated, in part:

“This letter is intended to fulfill the requirements of Section 8903(d) of that Act, which states that the Congress shall solicit the views of the Commission in considering legislation authorizing commemorative works within the District of Columbia and its environs.

“The Commission discussed H.R.6720 and quickly agreed that Thomas Paine's legacy rises to the level of ‘lasting historical significance’ to the American people, as required by the Act. Commissioners generally voiced surprise that a commemorative work to honor Thomas Paine had not already been established in Washington, DC. Several commissioners noted the importance of Paine's relevance to a variety of viewpoints and political philosophies; one commissioner observed that Paine was a 'tent of compassion.' The Commission concluded its review by unanimously supporting H.R.6720 with no recommended changes.

Please visit the link above House Bill 6720 to see if your Representative is already a sponsor. TPMA will provide additional information to you on how to approach a Representative to support House Bill 6720. Please contact Downey for more information regarding how you can be of assistance: margaret@ThomasPaineMemorial.org
Photos from the Thomas Paine Memorial Association’s Meeting with the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission

Pictured above left is Mark Dann. He is the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s (FFRF) Director of Governmental Affairs. Dann has arranged Zoom meetings with legislators across the nation to discuss support for House Bill 6720. As of the printing of this ezine, House Bill 6720 has nineteen cosponsors. Cosponsor names are at: https://bit.ly/HR6720Bill

Charis Hoard is pictured right. She spoke about the importance of recognizing Thomas Paine’s work and legacy from a Generation Z perspective. She is a summer intern at FFRF.

Mandisa Thomas is pictured left. As president of Black Nonbelievers, Thomas spoke about Paine’s anti-slavery legacy and abolitionist work.

Pictured right is Margaret Downey. She is president of the Thomas Paine Memorial Association. Her presentation covered details of the Association and the monument.

Gene Jones, president of the Florida Veterans for Thomas Paine, is pictured below left. He talked about Thomas Paine’s military service in the Revolutionary War and how that work made him one of the very first veterans in the United States.

Karen Heineman is pictured below right. She is a legal fellow of FFRF. During her presentation, Heineman presented a Republican point of view and praised the legacy of Thomas Paine.
The United States of America would not exist without Thomas Paine, and it certainly would not exist as the world’s first great constitutional democracy.

Before Paine and the Revolution, everything was ruled by kings, queens, emirs, czars, and emperors — you name it.

It was Paine’s writing that came to define the meaning of America, and his vision was so much more comprehensive and sweeping even than the most radical Founders like Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. All of them attributed the success of the Revolution to Thomas Paine — because even Franklin and Jefferson were, at the beginning, before Paine got there, just talking about vindicating the rights of Englishmen under the Magna Carta. Paine said we have the opportunity to create a completely new country.

He arrived in 1774, two years before the Revolution, and he fell in love with the promise of America. He said that America would become a haven of refuge and an asylum to mankind — not an insane asylum, mind you, but a place of refuge for people fleeing from political and religious and economic oppression from all over the world.

Paine said once we created government on the principle of democracy and self-government, then the cause of America would become the cause of mankind. So we not only ourselves would incarnate and instantiate the principles of democratic self-government, but we would become a model and then aid to people all over the world who themselves were trying to throw off the yoke of oppression.

So, Paine wrote, in 1776, Common Sense. It became America’s first bestseller. It swept the country. There were more than half a million copies in print. We tried to figure out what that would be today — something like 60 million copies. Everybody was talking about Common Sense, because what he was talking about was creating government on a completely different principle — on the basis of freedom and rights in a person.

Then the Declaration of Independence becomes the unalienable rights of the people, and the principle of equality among everyone. That becomes the statement in the Declaration of Independence “all men are created equal.” Then, the idea of democracy itself, or the consent of the governed — as Jefferson would come to put it. Jefferson, of course, comes to credit Paine for a lot of his ideas.

Paine wasn’t just an ivory tower intellectual, He was a rabble-rouser and an organizer of Americans against the Crown and for the Revolution.

He had many stirring statements, such as “...the times have found us.” And then in 1776, when the Revolution began, he wrote this beautiful pamphlet called The American Crisis. This was the one that George Washington had read to the troops at Valley Forge and other places. He also had readings of it provided to Revolutionary War troops, wherever they were.

In it, Paine said — and I will update the language a bit, at the instruction of Speaker Nancy Pelosi, because she claims correctly that Paine was an early feminist who argued for equal rights of women — Paine wrote in this pamphlet, “These are the times that try men’s (and women’s) souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will shrink at this moment from the service of their cause in their country. But everyone that stands with us now will win the love and the favor and the affection of every man and every woman for all time. Tyranny like hell is not easily conquered, but we have this saving consolation: the more difficult the struggle, the more glorious in the end will be our victory.”

Those words were read to Revolutionary war troops in tattered uniforms, sleeping in dirty blankets in the mud. Washington talked about the electrifying effect that it had on people.

He had many other writings that were so beautiful. My favorite is really his answer to Edmund Burke, on the Rights of Man, when Burke was attacking the French revolution.

Paine was a controversial figure because his passion for democracy was so overwhelming. For that reason, he has been overlooked and he has been pushed to the side, but I think that Americans across the political spectrum can invoke Paine. To the extent that all of us are trying to articulate the values of democratic self-government, he will always be a sterling example.

Napoleon Bonaparte said that there should be statues erected to Paine all over the world because he was really the first great champion of democracy. Paine was a figure of imperishable historical importance. I think that Paine is exactly the kind of person we need to honor, and who we should honor — especially in a century where democracy is under siege all over the world. What better time could there be to honor him?
It has been said, with some justification, that philosophy is “questions that may never be answered” and “religion is answers that may never be questioned.” But some questions in philosophy have been answered — by science. Branches of science sprang out of philosophical questions, many of which were once thought to be empirically impossible to test, like the idea of an atom propounded by Greek philosopher Democritus, as represented by the above picture. Ancient Greek philosophers concerned themselves with deducing what matter is made from, what the nature of the stars are, and concepts like chemistry and physics. These were regarded as philosophical issues, but many such questions have been explored and answered by scientists.

Philosophy, religion, and science are each involved with a search for truth. Science describes the way the world is. Philosophy and religion attempt to answer questions about what ought to be and why. But religion, unlike philosophy and science, is usually based on divine revelation and authority.

The word “theology” comes from the Greek words theos meaning God and logos meaning the word about (or the study of) God. Theology assumes that the divine exists in some form, and evidence for and about that existence may be found through personal spiritual experience or historical records of such experiences as documented by others. In short, theology is the study of God and of God’s relationship to the world.

I consider myself to be an expert on theology. Why? Because I think the number of experts on any topic is inversely proportional to the evidence available on that topic. And by that criterion we are all experts on God because there is absolutely no evidence for her/his existence. Many theologians make up stuff about God or quote stuff from books made up by others. My acknowledgement that I know nothing about God makes me more of an expert than those who claim to know God or to know about him/her.

Nobody can produce evidence that God is more than a thought or belief. Scientists can see stars that have been dead for billions of years and can document microscopic bacteria that lived on Earth eons ago. But of God we have no trace, except reports about God that neither the writers nor those around them ever witnessed, and the faith of millions who convinced themselves that God lives and reigns somewhere in the sky. If I told people I have an unverifiable, invisible friend that I speak with, they would think I have an overactive imagination, if not outright insanity, unless I named this friend “God.”

Most theists recognize how intellectually feeble faith is when they see it applied to anything other than their personal god belief. Competing and contradictory claims for thousands of gods by billions of people throughout history only says that humans can believe just about anything. Religious belief is not a logical conclusion arrived at after researching all the world’s faiths and deciding on the most sensible one. It usually comes from childhood indoctrination and is wrapped up with values and loyalties developed at that time. People don’t make a rational choice to believe in a god, so they are unlikely to make a rational choice to stop believing in that god, though some do if they become evidence based.

In debates I’ve had with Christian theologians my opponents use what is called “apologetics,” a branch of Christian theology that defends Christianity against objections. Scientists don’t need apologetics because nobody must believe in science for it to exist. When I provide debate opponents with biblical contradictions, or questions they can’t answer because no answer matches reality, I sometimes hear the un falsifiable response “God works in mysterious ways.”

Confirmation bias also plays a large role when interpreting passages in “holy” books. For example, some theologians claim that the Bible has it right in ways that prominent scientists had it wrong. Many scientists once believed in an eternal, steady-state universe before we learned about the “Big Bang” and an expanding universe. Genesis opens with “In the beginning,” which some Christian apologists interpret as scientific evidence that the Bible describes a Big Bang beginning. I point out that Genesis goes on to say that God then created two lights, the greater to rule the day, and the lesser the night. Almost as an afterthought, God then made stars (which biblical writers did not know were other suns, many larger than our sun). The Bible contains so much anti-scientific nonsense because it’s a product of an Iron Age culture, and the Bible has no more knowledge in it than people of Mesopotamia had at that time.

I think there is a place for teaching the philosophy of religion in academia, including by religious studies departments at public universities. Also, perhaps, in theology departments, depending on how the topics are taught. Philosophy of religion is a branch of philosophy concerned with questions regarding religion, including the nature and existence of gods, the examination of religious experience, the analysis of religious vocabulary and texts, and the relationship of religion to science. A good religious studies program should expose students to all kinds of religious beliefs, and some students might realize that the religion in which they were raised makes no more sense than do a lot of other religions.

A fine book for philosophy of religion or religious studies is Karen Armstrong’s A History of God, though more accurately it should be called “A History of God Belief.” Within authentic academia, in the absence of proof of the existence of something that something must be deemed not to exist until verifiable proof is found. So “God” should be held not to exist pending some sort of verifiable evidence.

College theology departments that mainly promote apologetics in religion-affiliated schools do not undertake a legitimate search for truth. At such schools I like to see what science courses are in the curriculum, if any. Some religion-affiliated schools “teach” why evolution is wrong. I don’t so much mind theological viewpoints that incorporate legitimate science, but too many don’t. It is difficult, I would even say impossible, for apologists to show how their “holy” book is consistent with modern scientific findings.

I remember a time when people would feel a little embarrassed when they admitted they knew almost nothing about science. I never expected to hear what I hear from so many today, that they don’t believe in science, as if science (like religion) is no more than a belief. Ignorance is not bliss, and refusing to accept what we know is ignorance squared.
Herb Silverman is a regular contributor to The Freethought Society’s ezine, *The Freethought Society News*. His first article “National Day of Reason” appeared in the September/October 2019 issue of *The Freethought Society News* (Volume 11, Number 5). To date, The Freethought Society (FS) has published 18 articles by Silverman. He always receives compliments and his articles are shared by readers on an international level. The archived collection is available at:

https://www.ftsociety.org/herb-silverman-articles/

The article *Theology* that appears on the previous page of this publication will be added to the above mentioned section of the FS website. Additional articles by Silverman will be added as they become available.

If you enjoy reading any of the posted articles, Silverman would like to hear from you. He also welcomes ideas for future articles and enjoys making new friends. Here is his email address:

SilvermanH@cofc.edu

Aside from the articles Silverman has written for FS, more of his work can be seen at the below link. At the “Herb Silverman” website you can find information about upcoming speeches, presentations on video, photos, and much more:

http://www.herbsilverman.com

We usually only have a small amount of page space to provide short author biographies, so in this issue of *The Freethought Society News*, we are taking an opportunity to tell you more about Silverman.

Silverman founded the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) and he is president emeritus. He served as president SCA through December of 2012 and again from December 2014 to June 2017.

Born in Philadelphia Silverman received his Ph.D. in mathematics from Syracuse University and is Distinguished Professor of Mathematics at the College of Charleston in South Carolina. He has written over 100 research papers in mathematics journals, and two scholarly books (*Complex Variables* and, with co-author S. Ponnusamy, *Complex Variable with Applications*), and is the recipient of the College of Charleston Distinguished Research Award.

In 1990 a colleague pointed out that atheists were ineligible to hold public office in South Carolina. Silverman ran for governor of South Carolina to challenge that state law. He did not become governor, but continued to challenge the religious requirement to hold public office. He applied to become a state notary and refused to agree that he was a believer in a god. After an eight-year battle, Silverman won a decision in the South Carolina Supreme Court, which struck down any religious test requirement.

Silverman founded the Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry in Charleston and is founder and the first faculty advisor to the College of Charleston Student Atheist/Humanist Alliance.

Silverman has appeared in debates on topics such as: “Can We Be Moral Without God?,” “Does God Exist?,” and “Is America a Christian Nation?” He has also debated at the Oxford Union in Oxford, England on the topic: “Does American Religion Undermine American Values?”

Silverman has spoken at numerous atheist and freethought conferences, presented sermons at Unitarian churches, and has conducted book tours throughout the United States.

He has written for the *Washington Post*, *The Huffington Post*, *The Humanist*, *Free Inquiry*, *Humanistic Judaism*, many other magazines, and for a huge amount of blogs.

Silverman is a recipient of the American Humanist Association's “Lifetime Achievement Award.”

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

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Silverman’s Notary Certificate can be seen hanging on the wall right under his sign “Love Thy First Amendment.”
I grew up in a small suburban town in Northern New Jersey just outside of New York City. The area is very diverse and very liberal. More importantly, there are no religious fundamentalists there — at least not openly fundamental. I recall, however, that I had a sixth-grade science teacher who said he didn’t “accept evolution.” I later realized that he must have been a fundamentalist, but he had kept that pretty quiet. I never met an openly fundamentalist believer until I went to college. Growing up, Christians might go to church on Sundays and Jews might go to synagogue on Fridays. But not everyone did. My family, for example, only went to synagogue on the holidays. Religion was around and I guess people believed it somewhat, but it just wasn’t a big deal in my area.

I attended Hebrew School on Saturday mornings and for a few hours after public school two days a week for about nine years. I learned about God the same way I learned about science. I accepted that God was real and never thought that it was something that could be questioned. So, yeah, I did actually believe in God. I really and truly did. But that belief wasn’t fundamental to my life.

Shortly after my bar mitzvah, I started to have a rough time in school. I was getting harassed. The harassment really got to me and made me feel like a social outcast. Looking back it doesn’t seem like a big deal, but for a 13-year-old it seemed like my whole world was being destroyed.

I remember asking God why this was happening to me. How could God allow this mean people to prosper? I was a good person and yet God did not seem to be on my side. I began to wonder — maybe God didn’t exist. That was the first time I ever conceived of the thought that God did not exist. I remember telling someone — I can’t remember whom — that I questioned the existence of God. This person told me that I must be an “atheist.” That was the first time I had ever heard the term. When I told people at school that I was an atheist all of a sudden everyone around me got very religious and tried to dissuade me.

I really didn’t want to think much about this at the time. Religion wasn’t that important to me and the subject didn’t really come up much in my small suburban hometown.

Flash forward five years, to when I attended college in West Chester, Pennsylvania. All my thoughts about philosophy changed. I had met a core group of friends, but within the first few weeks I also met a separate group of people who were extraordinarily nice. They went out of their way to be my friend and spend time with me. After hanging out with this new group of people for about a week or two they asked me to come with them to their Christian meeting. I told them that I wasn’t Christian. But they didn’t care. They said that they thought I was open-minded enough to listen to new ideas. Nothing gets an open-minded person more eager to do something than challenging their open-mindedness. So, of course, I went.

The group was called “Christians In Action.” CIA, for short. When we arrived to the meeting place I saw about four people doubled over each other — as if they were all tackling a football or something. The thing was that they were all shaking.

I asked one of my Christian friends what they were doing and she told me, “Jesus was moving them through the Holy Spirit.” I had never seen anything like that before and I have to say that it seemed really wacky to me.

The meeting itself was a typical fundamentalist meeting on a college campus. There was a rock band playing exclusive Christian music. Everyone was waving their hands around and dancing in their seats. The pastor delivered his sermon. There was more singing and dancing. I just sat there and took it all in.

Towards the end of the meeting, the pastor asked everyone to stand. He then said that everyone who has been saved by Jesus could sit down. Now there were only a handful of us still standing and all eyes were on us. The pastor then informed us that he felt the “Holy Spirit” in the room. He then said that if anyone else felt it they could sit down too. The room was completely silent and everyone stared at those still standing until one by one the peer pressure got to them and they all sat down — all except me, of course.

For what seemed like about five minutes, the room was silent. Everyone was staring at me. It was very uncomfortable. I had already been an outcast in high school, so I stood there unbothered. Finally, it became clear to the Pastor that I was not going to sit down, so he told me that perhaps the Holy Spirit will save me next week. The band started playing again and everyone stood up and broke out into song and dance.

After the meeting a bunch of us went out for dinner and conversation. I loved talking to these people. They wanted to convert me so badly and I had a lot of fun discussing life’s issues with them. Not surprisingly, the “Holy Spirit” never did get around to saving me despite returning to CIA week after week.

I even started attending other Christian group meetings, but the “Holy Spirit” never got around to saving me at any of those meetings either. Despite the craziness of it all, I really loved these religious people. It was the first time I had met anyone who actually made religion the center of their lives and believed such irrational things. It was fascinating to me.

I eventually became friends with people who had radical and strange religious beliefs. There are two Christian friends in particular that stand out in my mind. The first was someone I met at CIA. I’ll call him “David,” and he was a Messianic Jew, often called “Jews for Jesus.”

Messianic Jews are basically more fundamentalist Christians than fundamentalist Christians in that they take the Jewish aspects and traditions just as seriously as the Christian aspects. David believed all the same mumbo jumbo that my other Christian friends did, but he was much more well read. He had read a lot of commentaries by ancient rabbis on the Torah and he was the first person to tell me about the Gnostic Gospels. He even gave me a copy of the Gospel of Thomas. More than that, David was genuinely funny, which is a trait that few fundamentalists of any religion are able to adopt. David not only wanted to teach me about religion, he truly wanted to be my friend. To this day I often refer to him as my religious mentor, in spite of having very different religious views.

Another college friend of mine, I’ll call Greg, was also more of a fundamentalist than the standard fundamentalists on my campus. Unlike David, Greg had no sense of humor at all. He was, in fact, deadly serious and with good reason. Greg was convinced that in September of 1994 the world was going to end. Yes, Greg was an early follower of the radio personality Harold Camping. For the record, this was the second of Camping’s failed three predictions for the “End Times.”
I would sit in Greg’s dorm room listening to Camping week after week. Greg and I would discuss the eminent demise of the world and my fated trip to eternal damnation in Hell. Our friendship was always a bit more antagonistic than my friendship with David. Still, I did get the brief opportunity to introduce each of them to each other. Now that was a lot of fun!

Of course, there were many other Christian friends I enjoyed talking to and hanging out with all on various positions of the fundamentalist spectrum. Sometimes I would go to dinner with my old friends from CIA and other times, we would just sit in my dorm room to talk about religion and philosophy. I really liked how they forced me to think deeply about religion and the world in general. Yet the more I thought about it the more ridiculous religion seemed. It was fun, however, to talk about why people believed ridiculous things. That’s still an interest of mine today.

It wasn’t long before I switched my major to Philosophy and started learning about other religious beliefs. I ended up getting a Master’s degree in Philosophy. I still enjoy discussing religion with fundamentalist believers.

I continue to talk to people from various religious beliefs and backgrounds too. My cousin, for example, came from a slightly more religious background than mine, but while in college he became what I would call a born-again Jew. Despite our obvious religious differences, we remain fairly close and I enjoy discussing religion and religious issues with him.

While some journey stories involve the discovery and reading of anti-religious books, it was my conversations with religious believers that taught me about atheism. Staks Rosch is a former radio talk show host. He is the author of the book, *Disproving God and 5 Adequate Reasons to be an Atheist*. It is available for $6.66 with the foreword written by Herb Silverman. The book is available through Amazon.com. Designating “The Freethought Society” as your AmazonSmile recipient automatically increases the organization’s funds.

**An unconventional, satirical, controversial, time travel comedy!**

**What if you could reach back in time to deport the world’s worst environmental villains to a depository planet before their greed condemns Earth to an ecological apocalypse?** What if each time you did so, an alien instantly extracted a body part and replaced it with a refurbished one? Would you still do it?

**Heartrending yet hilarious, Doctor Refurb is influenced by actual historical events and confronts the serious subjects of climate change, far-right politics, and child abuse committed by Christian authorities. Read it before it becomes the most frequently banned book of 2033! (We’re time travelers; we checked.)**

In July 2022, the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) launched an advertisement campaign calling attention to the growing political voice of nonreligious Americans. The campaign included billboards and kiosk ads featuring portraits of residents in swing states.

In the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania area the faces on kiosk ads belonged to Margaret Downey and Tom Schottmiller, as pictured right. Downey is the founder and president of The Freethought Society. Schottmiller is a retired insurance company vice-president.

The photo on this page was used for six kiosk displays in Philadelphia and a full-page ad in The Philadelphia Inquirer. The ad described Downey and Schottmiller as having been “married for 48 years, parents, grandparents, advocates of science, reason, critical thinking, and happily atheist. We’re two of more than 75 million secular Americans who are not religious.

The ‘Nones’ (those of us unaffiliated with religion) are now 29 percent of the United States’ population. As secular voters, we trust in reason, science, and America’s secular Constitution.”

The ad listed many examples in which religion should not be entangled with government, including social policies, public schools, bedrooms and personal lives, health care decisions, when or whether to have children, and deciding who we love and marry.

Downey also participated in a July 4, 2022 commentary outreach effort and the essay below appeared in the Harrisburg Patriot News.

4th of July: Time to Celebrate America’s Secular Founding
by Margaret Downey

As many families fire up their grills and light fireworks this Independence Day, there is one important American invention to celebrate: the world’s first secular Constitution. On July 4, 1776, as our Founders declared independence from the monarchy of King George III of England, they began a great and noble experiment. That experiment was to provide freedom of thought and expression to all citizens.

Until the concept of “We the People” was established, most of the world’s rulers reigned hand-in-hand with priests and holy men. This unholy alliance allowed emperors and kings to claim a monopoly on religion, which they forcefully used to control their subjects. They made threats of eternal damnation to justify crusades and punished religious minorities through inquisitions.

In the 18th century, as America was breaking from the king of England and a national church, there was no example of a government separated from religion. Fortunately, Thomas Paine, George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison — while far from perfect — were promoters of Enlightenment ideas.

The Founders and Framers adopted the first Constitution not predicated on a deity. They adopted an aspirational document, striving for “a more perfect union.” In fact, the document’s only references to religion are exclusionary, such as “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office of public trust” (Art. VI).

In 1791, the First Amendment was ratified to ensure that no government official may use their office to promote their personal religion. Paine said, “No country can be called free which is governed by an absolute power.”

“State and church will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together,” added Madison.

Despite this clear directive from our Founders, many mainstream religious groups and politicians have continually promoted the myth that America was founded as a so-called “Judeo-Christian Nation.” This myth does not reflect the intention of our Founders and it does not reflect the demographics of our population. While it is true that Americans were overwhelmingly Protestant in the early years, with Catholics making up the second major demographic, much has changed in the nearly 250 years since.

According to Pew Research, a major shift away from religion by Millennials, ages 18-30, has led to nearly one in three Americans now identifying as having no religious affiliation. This is 6 percentage points higher than it was five years ago, making secular Americans the largest single “religious denomination” in our country.

In Dauphin County, where the state capital of Pennsylvania is located, 25 percent of the population identifies as religiously unaffiliated, according to Public Religion Research Institute. I count myself as one of the more than 75 million secular Americans who are not religiously affiliated.

I’m also proud to be the founder and president of The Freethought Society, and a life member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF). FFRF has been fighting to protect our “sacred” separation of church and state for more than four decades. FFRF has won many legal battles against state-imposed prayers in schools, religious monuments on public grounds, and religious interference in women’s health care decisions, which are again under attack.

Since our nation declared its independence, persecuted minorities from across the world have risked everything to reach a land offering the promise of liberty and justice for all. They contributed to the American experiment and this has led to a nation of people with great diversity in race, class, ethnicity, and religion.

Like our Founders, citizens must band together to pass the torch of secular values to the next generation. On this, and every Independence Day weekend, I hope many will reaffirm a commitment to keep religion out of government and government out of religion. There is no freedom of religion without a government that is free from religion.
Announcing the 2022 Religious Recovery Retreat!

In December 8-11, 2022, an in-person Journey Free Religious Recovery retreat, will be led by Marlene Winell. She is a psychologist and author of Leaving The Fold: A Guide for Former Fundamentalists and Others Leaving Their Religion. Dr. Winell has been developing methods for religious recovery for 30 years and coined the term “Religious Trauma Syndrome.” She will be joined by Janice Selbie and Jayme Winell for special sessions. Other volunteers will help facilitate the weekend.

The retreat will take place at the beautiful Nine Mountain Retreat Center located in rural western Massachusetts. The retreat program is designed to support recovery from Religious Trauma Syndrome. See additional information about the Nine Mountain Retreat Center at:

https://ninemountain.com

Attendees can disconnect from daily pressures, share personal stories, examine the effects of past indoctrination, and learn strategies for recovery. The program will include short presentations, discussions, and structured activities. Additional activities include art, drama, music, and movement. There will also be time to socialize with like-minded people over delicious meals, hiking in surrounding forest areas, or enjoying the hot tub together!

The program covers many topics, including how to understand and begin effective steps in recovery from Religious Trauma Syndrome and learning strategies for dealing with family. Past participants have said:

“A recovery retreat is a great way to connect with others. You are not alone.”

“I would come again without hesitation. The retreat gave me the courage to trust myself.”

“Marlene provides a supportive, nurturing environment and validates and affirms each participant.”

“Take the risk...Invest in yourself.... It's one of the smartest things you can ever do for yourself.”

Listen to a Journey Free Retreat attendee at the below link:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pxYZr7J4YvQ

To register for the Religious Recovery retreat, please visit the following website link:

https://www.journeyfree.org/retreats/

After registration, specific details will be provided and a questionnaire will need to be completed. Space is limited. A $100 deposit will secure a reservation.

Retreat fees are based on a sliding scale with full consideration of the annual income of a household.

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<td>$200,000 and above</td>
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Additionally, the food and lodging is a set fee of $350. Included in that fee are three nights lodging and nine delicious meals. Sleeping arrangements are in shared rooms with bunkbeds.

Watch videos about the Journey Free program and retreats at the below links:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WOOh6DP_3KM
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N_aIMYQC_9M

Leaving the Fold: A Guide for Former Fundamentalists and Others Leaving Their Religion by Marlene Winell is available through Amazon.com.

Designating “The Freethought Society” as your AmazonSmile benefits recipient automatically increases the organization’s funds each time you order any item from Amazon. Please consider participating in the AmazonSmile program as an easy way to donate to The Freethought Society.
LIFE BEHIND BARS: COMPASSION AND REFORM

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SECULAR COALITION (SCSC) SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Hear experts talk about:
• How Religion Influenced Our Incarceration System
• What Life Behind Bars is Really Like
• Why Is It Often a Vicious Cycle
• What's Working in Other Places
• How Can We Make Our System More Humane and Effective

NOVEMBER 12, 2022


HYBRID MEETING (LIVE AND ZOOM)

FIND MORE INFORMATION AT THE ABOVE REGISTRATION LINK

This event is cosponsored by The Freethought Society’s Southern California Secular Coalition (SCSC) committee and the American Humanist Association.
Freethought Society Three-Month Calendar

To receive notices about Zoom events, become a member of The Freethought Society Meetup group. Join The Freethought Society (FS) Meetup group at: https://www.meetup.com/Freethought-Society-Meetup/. Each listing will have a unique Zoom link listed in the description of the event. FS meetings will include 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.ftsociety.org/freethought-society-code-of-conduct/

November 2
You are invited to attend the 2022 Secular Day of the Dead/Dia de los Muertos Secular Zoom event on Wednesday, November 2, 2022. The bilingual event will start at 3:45 PM (PST)/6:45 PM (EST). Sponsors are Freedom From Religion Foundation, Center For Inquiry, The Freethought Society, Hispanic American Freethinkers, and the American Ethical Union. To get your individual Zoom link, please pre-register at this link: http://vh9d.2.yu/12

The event will include many secularly redesigned Hispanic traditions and rituals that celebrate our one and only life, legacies, and cultural heritage. All are welcome.

Attendees are encouraged to participate in the honoring ceremony. Prizes will be awarded to the best Zoom box decor, face painting, honoring table, and hair/hat adornment.

Reserve your 3-5 minute in-person time slot to honor the life of a dead loved one at the following email address: victoria@FtSociety.org

We are pleased to host author Fernando Alcantar as the 2022 featured speaker. Actor Jon Huertas will welcome everyone with a very special message. Performances by Salvador Leon, Kaneko Leyva, and Juan Antonio Garcia Hernandez are also on the agenda.

November 12
The Southern California Secular Coalition (SCSC: a committee of The Freethought Society) is pleased to present a hybrid, one-day conference entitled “Life Behind Bars: Compassion and Reform” on Saturday, November 12, 2022. The event is being cosponsored by the American Humanist Association and The Freethought Society.

The event starts at 9:00 AM (PDT)/Noon (EDT) with a welcome from Dave Rice, Margaret Downey, and the star of “Adam Ruins Everything” Adam Conover. Register for the Zoom event at: https://bit.ly/PrisonReform-Register

A complete schedule, speaker list, bios, speech titles, presentation descriptions, and a list of the in-person site locations can be found at the above registration link and at the Freethought Society Meetup page:

https://www.meetup.com/freethought-society-meetup/events/289012426/

SCSC is pleased to present a wide variety of speakers including Professor Jordan Hyatt, who will present an overview of the “Little Scandinavia” Chester, Pennsylvania prison project modeled on the humane Nordic system, and Andy Thompson, evolutionary psychiatrist, and spokesperson from Recovering From Religion Foundation.

December 4
The Philadelphia Tree of Knowledge will be installed and decorated at an in-person event on Sunday, December 4, 2022, in the lobby of the Philadelphia Ethical Society (1906 Rittenhouse Square, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania).

The event begins at 11:00 AM (EDT) with a presentation by Hugh Taft-Morales, who is the Philadelphia Ethical Society Leader. The title of his presentation is “‘Open Minds: Gift a Banned Book this Holiday Season.”

Freethought Society founder and president Margaret Downey will create ornaments on-site for anyone who brings two color copies of the front cover of their favorite book.

December 17
A virtual HumanLight event will be held on Zoom Saturday, December 17, 2022 at 1:00 PM (PDT)/4:00 PM (EDT). HumanLight is a nonreligious holiday and was created to provide a specifically Humanist celebration during the December holiday season.

Please use the following link to register for this Zoom celebration of HumanLight: tinyurl.com/HumanLight2022

Have a beverage of your choice available for a toast to this festive occasion. The 2022 event is being cosponsored by the American Ethical Union, American Humanist Association, Baltimore Coalition of Reason, Go Humanity, Freedom From Religion Foundation, and The Freethought Society.

January 29
Hear ye, hear ye! It’s time to celebrate the birth of Thomas Paine! The Zoom celebration will take place on Sunday, January 29, 2023 at Noon (PDT)/3:00 PM (EDT). Registration at the below link: bit.ly/PaineProclamation

The 2023 Thomas Paine birthdate celebration is sponsored by the Thomas Paine Memorial Association, Freedom From Religion Foundation, Secular Student Alliance, Center For Inquiry, and The Freethought Society.

The theme of the 2023 event is “Thomas Paine Day Proclamation Celebration.” Thomas Paine Memorial Association board members will each read previously passed Thomas Paine Day proclamations as an example of how a proclamation can be written to honor the life of our freethought hero. Congressman Jamie Raskin will also provide news on the Congressional front, and the keynote speaker is Professor Emeritus of History at the University of London, Greg Claey.

Thomas Paine Day is celebrated on June 8th every year. In Europe the date of death is used as an official time to reflect upon and honor the life accomplishments of noteworthy people. Paine died on June 8, 1809.

The 2023 June 8th Thomas Paine Day will be enhanced when more proclamations are written and approved by mayors, governors and city councils. We will, therefore, provide instructions on how to write a Thomas Paine Day proclamation and how to have it approved.
The Freethought Society (FS) promotes freedom of thought, expression, and choice. FS also advocates separation of religion and government. We assist nontheists, 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 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. 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.

Yes! I would like to:

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

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

( ) become a “Freethought Star” by setting up an automatic monthly donation to FS from my bank or through PayPal in the amount of (circle one): $5  $10  $15  $20  $25  $30  $35  $40  $45  $50  $55  $_____other (per month)

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

Name: ______________________________________________________________________________________________

Street Address: _______________________________________________________________________________________

City, State and Zip: _____________________________________________________________________________________

Email Address: _________________________________________________________________________________________

Phone: ___________________________________________ Cell: _________________________________________________

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

FS will send a complimentary ezine 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.

Anti-Discrimination Educational Committee
(nontheism explained in classroom settings)

Community Outreach
(locating 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 help to seniors in emergency situations)

Jump into the Jean Pool
(collects gently worn 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 new nontheist celebrations)

Southern California Secular Coalition
(connect, share, and grow together)

Speakers Bureau
(provide FS with 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)