



# The Freethought Society News

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## *The Disestablishment of the Establishment Clause*

by Jon Meador

*“The danger of silent accumulations & encroachments by Ecclesiastical Bodies have not sufficiently engaged attention in the U.S.” ~ James Madison, “Detached Memoranda,” January 31, 1820.*

Two hundred years after Madison wrote those words in the “Detached Memoranda,” silent accumulations and encroachments are worse than ever. We are beginning to see the deification of the Free Exercise Clause and the demonization of the Establishment Clause. The Supreme Court’s most recent reinterpretation of the Free Exercise Clause in *Espinoza v. Montana Department of Revenue*, dealt a direct blow to the Establishment Clause. Technically, *Espinoza* was not an Establishment Clause case. However, *Espinoza*, I predict, will be cited for the proposition that the application of the Establishment Clause violates the Free Exercise Clause because religion was the motivation for the underlying decision. “Never-say-no-to-religion” is the new test.

The Constitution clearly states “no” to religion (Article VI, commonly called the “No Religious Test Clause”), but the “never-say-no-to-religion” test was first conceived in a case argued 70 years ago — *Everson v. Board of Education of Ewing Township*. *Everson* established a general rule that the government could never be averse to religion. This understanding of both of the Religious Clauses is unmoored from the original meaning of the First Amendment. The unqualified gift of the Constitutional Right to freely exercise a religious belief, a gift the world perhaps had never seen before, had its counterweight, a sort of legal ballast preventing the “silent accumulations & encroachments by Ecclesiastical Bodies,” a prohibition that is itself a first. We’re clearly listing to one side.

No review of the First Amendment can begin without first conferring with Madison, whose opinion ought to matter. Two years before the United States Constitutional Convention in 1787, he, along with **George Mason**, and many others, opposed a bill introduced by **Patrick Henry** in the Virginia legislature in June 1785 assessing a tax on all Virginians “for the support of Christian teachers.” The bill, *A Provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion*, is dated December 24, 1784. That Madison opposed the Bill (albeit anonymously) is reason enough to place Madison on the strict, separation-of-church-and-state side of the ledger. That he did so as forcefully as he did confirms it. Why should we not provide tax money to Christian school teachers? In his June 1785 rebuttal, *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments*, Madison provided us with 15 reasons:

1. As was stated in the Virginia Declaration of Rights, adopted in 1776, “...the duty which we owe to our Creator and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence” and not by majority rule;
2. if religious belief is not subject to majority rule, it cannot be a legislative issue;
3. the provision of tax money to Christian schoolteachers establishes a religion;
4. the bill burdens some religions while exempting others;
5. religion should never be the engine of civil policy;
6. religion existed independent of civil policy and disavowed it, and religion’s reliance on civil support arouses suspicion in its merit;
7. ask the teachers of religion to point you to a time in which Christianity “...appeared in its greatest lustre,” they would point you to a time when religion was not the engine of civil policy;
8. if religion does not need civil government, civil government does not need religion;

9. it is un-American because as quoted by Madison “Instead of holding forth an Asylum to the persecuted, it is itself a signal of persecution. It degrades from the equal rank of Citizens all those whose opinions in Religion do not bend to those of Legislative authority. Distant as it may be in its present form from the Inquisition, it differs from it only in degree.”

10. it will drive people away;

11. it is divisive;

12. it is anti-Christian;

13. it is unenforceable;

14. it may lack public support; and

15. finally, if “...the equal right of every citizen to the free exercise of his Religion according to the dictates of conscience’ is held to the same tenure with all our other rights” and religion can be the engine of civil policy, then every other fundamental right may be legislated out of existence. We oppose it, and “no effort may be omitted on our part against so dangerous a usurpation.”

About three months later, Mason sent a copy of *Memorial and Remonstrance* to **George Washington**, who wrote back saying that he had not read Henry’s bill, that he was not “alarmed at the thoughts of making people pay towards the support of that which they profess,” and that “as the matter now stands, I wish an assessment had never been agitated & as it has gone so far, that the Bill could die an easy death.” Washington’s Letter to Mason is dated October 3, 1785. Henry’s bill died an easy death only to be resurrected 230 years later in the state of Montana.

The underlying rule is this: Religion should never be the engine of civil policy. This is not a rule favoring “non-preferentialists,” who claim that religion can be the engine of civil policy as long as the law does not prefer one over the other.

*Everson* is the case that birthed the “never-say-no-to-religion” rule. It held that the provision of public money to reimburse the expenses incurred by parents paying for their children’s bus fares to attend private religious schools did not violate the Due Process or the Establishment Clauses because a decision to use public money to send children to nonreligious, non-public schools must also extend to religious schools.

That governments can never-say-no-to-religion or take an adverse posture toward religion was expressed this way: The First Amendment “requires the state to be neutral in its relations with groups of religious believers and nonbelievers; it does not require the state to be their adversary. State power is no more to be used so as to handicap religions, than it is to favor them.” So wrote Justice **Hugo Black** for the Supreme Court regarding *Everson*.

The law didn’t pit “religious believers and non-believers;” it gave preference to a subset of believers, who wanted public funds to send their kids to a religious school. Every governmental dollar spent benefits believers and non-believers equally. That the dollar is not earmarked for a sectarian purpose doesn’t make it non-religious.

On the plus side of *Everson*, all nine judges signed off on upholding the Jeffersonian Wall of Separation of Church and State. On the minus side, the wall had a small crack in it. Unfortunately, the flat end of a crowbar is made to fit small cracks.

Space limitations here prevent me sharing the entirety of Justice **Robert Jackson**’s dissent and the 4-vote dissent

authored by Justice **Wiley Blount Rutledge**. The following are excerpts of their dissents, but I highly recommend reading their opinions in full. Justice Jackson, channeling Madison, sets out the metes and bounds of the Religious Clauses:

*[The government] “may socialize utilities and economic enterprises and make taxpayers’ business out of what conventionally had been private business. It may make public business of individual welfare, health, education, entertainment or security. But it cannot make public business of religious worship or instruction, or of attendance at religious institutions of any character. ...That is a difference which the Constitution sets up between religion and almost every other subject matter of legislation, a difference which goes to the very root of religious freedom and which the Court is overlooking today. ...its strength is its rigidity. It was intended not only to keep the states’ hands out of religion, but to keep religion’s hands off the state, and above all, to keep bitter religious controversy out of public life by denying to every denomination any advantage from getting control of public policy or the public purse.*

*“...we cannot have it both ways. Religious teaching cannot be a private affair when the state seeks to impose regulations which infringe on it indirectly, and a public affair when it comes to taxing citizens of one faith to aid another, or those of no faith to aid all.”*

Justice Rutledge added:

*“This case forces us to determine squarely for the first time what was ‘an establishment of religion’ in the First Amendment’s conception.*

*“Not simply an established church, but any law respecting an establishment of religion is forbidden. The Amendment was broadly but not loosely phrased. It is the compact and exact summation of its author’s views formed during his long struggle for religious freedom. In Madison’s own words characterizing Jefferson’s Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom, the guaranty he put in our national charter, like the bill he piloted through the Virginia Assembly, was ‘a Model of technical precision, and perspicuous brevity.’ Madison could not have confused ‘church’ and ‘religion,’ or ‘an established church’ and ‘an establishment of religion.’*

*“The Amendment’s purpose was not to strike merely at the official establishment of a single sect, creed or religion, outlawing only a formal relation such as had prevailed in England and some of the colonies. Necessarily it was to uproot all such relationships. But the object was broader than separating church and state in this narrow sense. It was to create a complete and permanent separation of the spheres of religious activity and civil authority by comprehensively forbidding every form of public aid or support for religion. In proof the Amendment’s wording and history unite with this Court’s consistent utterances whenever attention has been fixed directly upon the question.”*

Justice Jackson’s final words were prophetic: “I cannot read the history of the struggle to separate political from ecclesiastical affairs...without a conviction that the Court today is unconsciously giving the clock’s hands a backward turn.”

With this as a backdrop, we can move on to *Espinoza*. At issue was the application of Montana’s constitutional prohibition against aiding sectarian schools to a bill establishing scholarships for children attending a “qualified education provider.” By rule, sectarian schools were deemed unqualified. The Montana Supreme Court agreed and held that the

scholarship program violated its no-aid provision and invalidated the entire program. No money could flow to private schools of any sort. It also said tangentially (and this was a mistake) that the program might violate the Free Exercise Clause under certain circumstances not present in the case.

The United States Supreme Court found a reason to address the Free Exercise issue. Echoing *Everson*, it held that the Montana Supreme Court should not have considered the possible religious use of the money as a basis for finding the program unconstitutional. No one argued that the program violated the Establishment Clause. “Nor could they,” the Court said, because it had “repeatedly held that the Establishment Clause is not offended when religious observers and organizations benefit from neutral government programs” especially where parents are given the choice on where to send the money.

The holding is this: A decision based on religious “status,” i.e., religion was the basis for the decision, would violate the Free Exercise Clause. As for basing a decision on eventual religious “use” of the money, the Court was unclear but it did what it seems to always do: it planted the seed for the next case. While it said it wasn’t addressing the “religious use” issue, it also said this: “Status-based discrimination remains status-based even if one of its goals or effects is preventing religious organizations from putting aid to religious uses.” It is difficult to imagine not using that dictum as the essential holding in the next case. Then, once we’ve transitioned from “religious status” to “religious use,” we will transition from “religious use” to “religious belief.”

The problem, I think, that carried over from *Everson* was considering public education as benefiting only the “non-religious” or, as we hear today, “secular,” even though all public welfare expenditures benefit persons of all beliefs. The court is engaging in a sort of Constitutional Apologetics, i.e., making unsubstantiated claims.

The concurring opinions were worse than the majority opinion. The worst opinion came from Justice **Clarence Thomas** and Justice **Neil Gorsuch**, who employ a belt-and-suspenders argument and believe, first, that the Founders originally intended for the Establishment Clause to forbid the government from simply “establishing a national religion” and, second, failing that, the Establishment Clause does not apply to the States. Yet, if the Establishment Clause is not incorporated nationally neither should the Free Exercise Clause. And as for the limited understanding of the Establishment Clause, the legislative history shows that the drafts “No religion shall be established by law, nor shall the equal rights of conscience be infringed” and “Congress shall make no law *establishing* religion, or to prevent the free exercise thereof, or to infringe the rights of conscience” was changed to “Congress shall make

no law *respecting* an establishment of religion or prohibit the free exercise thereof.” The words “establishing” and “respecting” are not synonyms. The Establishment Clause prevents Congress from doing piecemeal what it can’t do wholesale.

I would discuss the dissenting opinions, but I don’t think they are important given the lamentable current trend toward dismantling the Establishment Clause. Justice **Ruth Bader Ginsburg** and Justice **Elena Kagan** point out that there was no Free Exercise Clause violation because there was no “burden on petitioners’ religious exercise” as they “may still send their children to a religious school.” No one, in other words, was “prevented” from freely exercising anything. I do think that the Free Exercise Clause only prevents Congress from “abolish[ing] religion altogether,” which was a concern Representative **Peter Sylvester** of New York expressed on August 15, 1789 during the House hearings on the proposed *Bill of Rights*.

Things have changed, though. What are we to make of this statement uttered by Justice **Lewis J. Powell** in 1977 (*Wolman v. Walter*, 433 U.S. 229, 263 (1977) Powell, J. concurring):

*“At this point in the 20<sup>th</sup> century we are quite far removed from the dangers that prompted the Framers to include the Establishment Clause in the Bill of Rights. ...The risk of significant religious or denominational control over our democratic processes or even of deep political division along religious lines is remote, and when viewed against the positive contributions of sectarian schools, any such risk seems entirely tolerable in light of the continuing oversight of this Court.”*

Because the Court no longer wants to exercise its “oversight,” we might add Justice Powell’s above sentiment to the list of famous last words.

The author of this article is **Jon R. Meador**. His expressed views are his own and do not, in any way, represent the views of his employer. He graduated cum laude in 2002 from South Texas College of Law located in Houston and is an attorney currently working in Texas.

Meador follows separation of religion and government cases in the courts. As a hobby he studies religious history. He is a board member of the American Ethical Union, a member of the Ethical Society of Austin, and a supporter of the Freethought Society.



The left graphic is one of two that are appearing as digital billboards in Atlanta, Georgia. The billboards can be seen at Peachtree Road by the Piedmont Hospital and at the intersection of the 75/85 Highways at the Langford Parkway exit. These billboards are co-sponsored by [Black Nonbelievers](#) and the Stiefel Freethought Foundation.

# Heritage and Hate

by Herb Silverman

In 1976 at the age of 34, after living in the Northeast my entire life, I moved to Charleston, South Carolina to teach mathematics at the College of Charleston. A few weeks later, I was shocked to learn that the Confederate flag flew atop the state capitol in Columbia. I considered that flag a symbol of white supremacy, hatred, and slavery. It might merit space in a museum along with other artifacts of the Civil War, but deserves no greater respect.

When I questioned southerners in my community about the flag, I often heard the H-word (Heritage). But some heritage is hateful or worse, including what the Confederate flag and swastika represent to most of the world. One of my math students belonged to an all-white fraternity that flew the Confederate flag. He said it meant “rebel” and defiance of conventional behavior.

A colleague, who had come to Charleston from New York in 1971 at the height of the Vietnam War, told me he asked a woman at a party what she thought about the Civil war. She answered, “It was terrible what happened to my great-granddaddy and other brave family members.”

Talk about living in the past! Not only do I not understand glorifying Confederate relatives, I’ve never understood unconditional ancestor worship. I have no animosity toward descendants of slaveholders or Nazis, nor do I hold any special esteem for the descendants of heroes. We are responsible for our own actions, not the actions of others.

It was nice to hear that **Robert Wright Lee IV** (great-nephew of Confederate general **Robert E. Lee**), is a supporter of Black Lives Matter. He would like to see statues of his ancestor come down because his famous relative has become an “idol of white supremacy, racism, and hate.”

Motivation for the Civil War came with the blessings of some southern clergy and politicians who used the bible to justify slavery. Reverend **Richard Furman**, from my adoptive hometown of Charleston, was the first president of the South Carolina Baptist Convention and founder of the university that bears his name. Said Furman in 1838, “The right of holding slaves is clearly established in the Holy Scriptures, both by precept and example.”

**Jefferson Davis** (president of the Confederate States of America from 1861-1865), added, “Slavery was established by the decree of Almighty God. It is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation.”

In 1962, at the height of the civil rights movement, the Confederate battle flag was placed on the South Carolina state capitol dome by vote of an all-white legislature, purportedly to commemorate the Civil War centennial. There it remained despite many protests, long after the centennial commemoration. The South Carolina legislature finally voted to remove the flag from the state Capitol grounds in 2015 shortly after a white supremacist on June 17<sup>th</sup> killed nine black people praying at Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, three blocks from where I live in Charleston. This church was once a secret meeting place for African Americans who wanted to end slavery at a time when laws in Charleston banned all-black church gatherings.

On the day following the massacre at Mother Emanuel Church I attended a vigil at nearby Morris Brown African

Methodist Episcopal Church. The presiding minister asked the entire congregation to pray for peace, understanding, and healing. As an atheist I don’t pray but I do support those goals. I thought of the anti-war song *Lay Down* by Melanie, in particular the line “Some came to sing, some came to pray, some came to keep the dark away.” I was there to help keep the dark away by showing support for a beleaguered African American community.

During this tragic time I was amazed to watch people singing, clapping, and dancing in the aisles with broad smiles. I’m more than 99 percent certain that no God or Jesus was listening to their prayers. Yet I’m 100 percent certain that many in the audience felt transformed, if only by what I viewed as a placebo effect.

I was happy to see that at least a third of the attendees at the vigil were white. I applauded when one minister told the crowd, “Pray, but also get off your knees and work to improve our community.” Holding hands with our neighbors at the end of the service, we sang “We Shall Overcome.” I had never thought of this as a hymn but it reminded me of when I sang it in the 1960s during civil rights marches and Vietnam War protests. We were asked to continue holding hands as we prayed to Jesus. I didn’t want to withdraw my hand from the black man on my right. We held hands as the minister prayed for Jesus to get rid of any hate in our heart and replace it with love. So it turned out that I came to sing, and *pray*, and keep the dark away.

One of the most moving moments in Charleston occurred three days later when thousands of people marched onto the long Ravenel Bridge in a show of solidarity with those affected by the church murders. Blacks and whites clasped hands and hugged in a city where blacks were once expected to get off the sidewalk to let a white person pass. Everyone knew that this was a historic moment for all of us in Charleston. We hoped that out of that tragedy would come lasting good.

Fast forward to 2020. After the police killing of **George Floyd** on this past May 25, 2020, peaceful protests began in Charleston. On the night of May 30<sup>th</sup> a raucous group rioted in downtown Charleston, destroying property and looting stores for hours. Though no one was physically hurt local police were unable to contain the mayhem. The following morning (a Sunday) my wife **Sharon Fratepietro** and I walked through town and saw smashed glass windows and doors. There were empty shelves inside many stores. It was gratifying later that morning to see many volunteer Charlestonians showing up with brooms and lumber to clean up the damage and board up broken windows and doors.



Shortly afterwards numerous peaceful protests took place in front of the monument of **John C. Calhoun** located in the center of Charleston at a park named Marion Square.

Calhoun served as vice president under both **John Quincy Adams** and **Andrew Jackson**. Calhoun was an ardent defender of slavery, calling the horrific practice a “positive good.” He said this on the floor of the Senate in 1837.

Calhoun argued that enslaved people in the South were

better off than the free black people in the North. He helped push ideologies that led the South to secede. He died in 1850, more than a decade before the start of the Civil War.

The speakers at the protests near the Calhoun statue were both black and white. My wife and I attended and wore face masks (though many others did not) and socially distanced by lingering near the back of the crowd. Most protesters looked to be about 50 years younger than me. It was good to see young people so energized in support of racial justice. Quite a few wore religious symbols. I wore a secular humanist T-shirt.

The protests worked. Seizing the moment, the Charleston City Council voted to take down the hated statue. On June 20, Calhoun was plucked from his 115-foot perch where he had stood for 124 years, just a block from Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church. That was only one victory. As of this writing, there is at least one more yet to come. First, a little history.



Charleston is near Fort Sumter on a tiny island in Charleston Harbor where the Civil War started (still referred to by many Charlestonians as the “War of Northern Aggression”). Fort Sumter is visible across the water from The Battery area at the tip of peninsular Charleston. The Battery was named for a Civil War coastal defense artillery battle at the site. The Battery today is the most expensive place to live in Charleston, famous for its stately antebellum homes and mansions that overlook the harbor.

On December 20, 1860, shortly after **Abraham Lincoln’s** presidential election victory, South Carolina adopted an ordinance declaring its secession from the United States. By February 1861, six more Southern states had seceded. After the Battle of Fort Sumter (April 12-13, 1861) the United States Army surrendered, starting the Civil War. Confederate troops occupied Fort Sumter for nearly four years, resisting bombardments by Union forces, until General **William Tecumseh Sherman’s** capture of Charleston in February 1865.



Today in White Point Garden, at the southern tip of the Battery, stands a statue installed in 1932 by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. The monument is titled “To the Confederate Defenders of Charleston — Fort Sumter 1861-1865.”

The monument commemorates the soldiers who fought for their city and the southern states during the Civil War. The bronze statue is 12 feet tall and rests on a 13-foot-high granite base. Every weekend a small group of Confederate War enthusiasts erect a huge Confederate flag next to the statue. Lately there have been protests confronting the flag and monument, nonviolent but with lots of strong feelings expressed. As of this writing, we are still hopeful that the statue will be taken down sooner rather than later.

There is also talk of removing more symbols and names from public buildings in South Carolina, including those of “Pitchfork” **Ben Tillman**, a former governor of South Carolina and former United States Senator. He would today be

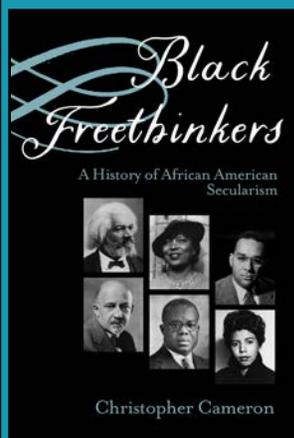
considered a white supremacist who defended lynching on the floor of the United States Senate on March 23, 1900.

Critics sometimes argue that getting rid of statues erases our history. However, we don’t learn history from statues. They are usually meant to honor people. Nobody can forget the history of Nazi Germany but there are no public statues of **Adolf Hitler** or **Heinrich Himmler** or **Josef Mengele**. It’s a shame that some people in Charleston spent decades dismissing the offense their black neighbors took when viewing the city’s statues. Charleston has a long and often unpleasant past. I’m pleased that it is making strides to acknowledge some of its past “sins.”

The question remains about what statues and symbols of famous Americans should come down. I don’t think there is an easy answer in South Carolina or anywhere. I do think we should take down statues of those who committed treason by fighting for the Confederates against the United States. Some argue that we should take down statues of **George Washington** and **Thomas Jefferson** because they owned slaves. Even though they were a product of their times (as were all slave owners), it really is a blot on their records. However, I would want to remove from places of honor statues of people primarily known for owning slaves or supporting racism. With Jefferson I think mostly of his support for a wall that separates religion and government, but I can understand why many blacks might focus on Jefferson’s sexual relationship with slave **Sally Hemings** instead.

There are no perfect beings. It is important to learn about the good and bad of past leaders and so-called American heroes. The idealized version I learned in elementary school about **Christopher Columbus** and others does not comport with reality. It’s difficult, if not impossible, to walk in someone else’s shoes. But, if we try, we might better be able to decide how or whether we should honor certain past leaders, keeping in mind that wise observation by **George Santayana**: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

## *This book is a must-read!*



*Black Freethinkers* argues that, contrary to historical and popular depictions of African Americans as naturally religious, freethought has been central to black political and intellectual life from the nineteenth century to the present.

Author **Christopher Cameron** suggests an alternative origin of nonbelief and religious skepticism in America, namely the brutality of the institution of slavery. He also traces the growth of atheism and agnosticism among African Americans in two major political

and intellectual movements of the 1920s: the New Negro Renaissance and the growth of black socialism and communism. In the final chapter, he explores the critical importance of freethought among participants in the civil rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

If interested in making a purchase, please order through the [Amazon Smiles](#) program to benefit the Freethought Society.

# My Journey Story

by David Simms

It was the summer of 1997. Under a clear night sky, deep in the North Georgia woods, a campfire crackled. In front of this fire, a fervent young man, full of religious vigor and holding his Bible high in the air, proudly preached the Word of God. He was teaching a group of young campers about the love God had for them and how God had specially made each and every one of them in his own image. He challenged them to “put on the whole armor of God” because the Lord had called them to be faithful warriors for Christ.

This young Christian zealot also boldly proclaimed that many of the ideologies these campers had learned in school were wrong. They were in conflict with the teachings of “True Christianity.” These young warriors for Christ had not evolved from monkeys! No! If they had, then why do monkeys still exist? No! Each and every one of them were descendants from the first couple, Adam and Eve, who were created from the dust of the earth, and breathed to life by God himself no more than 10,000 years ago. This was the absolute truth, and the bold campfire minister preached it confidently and proudly.

Now, this particular Young Earth Creationist Christian wasn't a paid speaker like **Kent Hovind** or **Ken Ham**. He didn't have his own television show like **Ray Comfort** or **Kirk Cameron**. No, that ardent preacher was 16-year-old me, David Simms, serving the Lord as a camp counselor at an annual summer camp hosted by my church — the same Southern Baptist church where my father was the senior pastor.

I come from a long line of southern Baptist pastors. My father, uncle, grandfather, and great-great-grandfather were all pastors. Most of my extended family is also involved in the ministry in one way or another. We have music ministers, youth group leaders, missionaries, and choir members. That's one of the reasons why it was always a tradition at our three-day-long family reunions to hold multiple worship and prayer services. So it would be a bit of an understatement to say I was raised in a religious household. From the moment I was born my training in the Christian faith began. As it was written in Proverbs 22:6, “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it,” so my family did.

From the time I could read I was studying and memorizing passages from The Holy Bible. At the age of seven I walked down the aisle of my church to publicly announce that I had accepted Jesus as my personal Lord and Savior.

Growing up, since my father was the senior pastor of our church, we were usually there multiple times during the week. When we weren't at church I attended a private Fundamentalist Christian school where students were taught Young Earth Creationism in science class and were required to read from the King James Version of The Holy Bible. Throughout high school and college I was a part of multiple church singing groups and praise bands. I taught Sunday School, led worship services, preached, and participated in street evangelism. I was doing what I had been taught to do — using my gifts in the service of Christ.

Through it all I never felt forced into any of it and I believed this prescribed dogma wholeheartedly. I accepted the indoctrination I received at home, at church, at school, and in my extracurriculars. My world essentially revolved around Christianity. And because I had shown plenty of aptitude for

being on stage in front of an audience, many people believed I would follow in my father's footsteps to enter the ministry professionally. But, much to their dismay, that is far from what eventually happened.

From a young age, I understood that people who made a career in the ministry had felt called by the Holy Spirit to do so. Even though I had an obvious passion for Christianity and had known it to be the absolute truth, I had never felt such a calling to follow that career path. It wasn't as if I doubted the Holy Spirit or its power to guide people. I fully believed that God did operate in such a manner. But I also knew that God had not revealed that “calling” to me.



I gladly devoted a lot of time to the church, however. The photo above was taken just before I left with my youth group for a mission to Mississippi in 1998. We went there to rebuild homes that were damaged in a series of storms. I was only 17 years old and full of the need to do the Lord's work.

During our missions we held prayer sessions as a group, and we always included the people we were helping. We were encouraged to share the gospel whenever we could. The adult group leaders never failed to proselytize to both the homeowners and any passersby who could be approached.

After college I married my college sweetheart. We eventually moved to her hometown of Gainesville, Georgia, where we were both active in her home church. We were regular participants in our adult Sunday School class and worship services. I was even active in the church's drama department as an actor and scriptwriter for many of their Sunday morning productions. We were doing what we had been trained to do since childhood — be faithful followers and servants of Christ.

My wife and I also attended a weekly Bible study with a group of friends. We would have devotional readings, intercessory prayer time, and discussions about Scripture. It was at one of these meetings that I experienced a moment I will never forget.

The group was discussing various ways in which God reveals himself through people's personal experiences. As we went around the circle, every person there recounted a time in their life when they personally experienced the working hand of God. They told stories of magnificent moments when they knew, beyond any doubt, that God was revealing himself to them personally.

As I sat there listening to their stories of miracles, answered prayers, and revelations, I probed my memory for an equally remarkable story. Eventually, it was my time to share with the group. I desperately wanted to recall a time when I knew that I had witnessed God at work in my life. But try as I might I became very aware that I could not reasonably attribute divine intervention to any experience that I had ever had. I was left without a satisfying answer, and I was seemingly alone in this predicament.

Though this evening stands out in my mind even to this day, at the time I didn't read much into it. I blamed my faulty memory and my fallen nature for not clearly recognizing God's hand in my life, and I wasn't going to let this affect my walk with Christ. My life would go on as it always had.

Then came September of 2008. The global financial crisis began and the world economy was crashing. For a while I thought my job and my family would be safe from the economic fallout, but in March of 2009 I was laid off from my job. Neither my wife nor I could find work. We found ourselves with no income and mounting debt. We were in trouble.

Now, at this point in the story, some readers might jump to the conclusion that because of this hardship and in emotional defiance, I turned my back on God. But, in fact, the opposite happened. For months after losing my job I stayed active in our church, fervently participating in worship services, proud of myself for continuing to trust in God's boundless love and grace.

However, there is a funny thing about being out of work. You have more free time to spend doing other things like reading and pondering the larger questions of life. Unbeknownst to my wife I began to internally question why this was happening. As my job applications continued to be rejected time and time again, and our situation grew more dire, I questioned why God might allow his faithful followers to go through such painful experiences. From what I had been trained to believe since I was a child, the answer must be that God's plan was bigger than me. His plan was more complex than I could possibly imagine. And, if I remained faithful, not only would he guide me through this painful time but his awesome and perfect plan would ultimately be fulfilled because of it.

That's when it hit me. This was God's perfect plan? His perfect plan, for some reason, included massive amounts of suffering all over the world? And, apparently, he was incapable of fulfilling his ultimate goals without it? The logical disconnect of an omnipotent god and the requirement of so much suffering was starting to become clear. But this still wasn't a breaking point for me. My doubts had to be wrong. I had been trained to know they were wrong. I simply had to seek the answers. That's when I began studying. I examined the problem of evil. I read the works of Christian apologists who claimed to have solved this ancient conundrum. I also studied the one book that I knew would have my answers — The Holy Bible.

As a Biblical-literalist and a Young Earth Creationist, I trusted that the Word of God was perfect in every way. It was without error and would be my guide in answering the increasing questions that I had. During this study, I finally read passages that I had never read or paid close attention to. They were verses that had either been intentionally skipped over by every Sunday School teacher and pastor that I had ever known or had been spun in such a way that they appeared more palatable. I discovered that the God of The Holy Bible

endorsed slavery, as well as the murder of homosexuals, disobedient children, anyone who worked on the Sabbath, and anyone who was not a member of the faith. This was not the God I knew. On the one hand I believed The Holy Bible could not be in error. But on the other hand I also knew that no moral being could ever, at any point in history, endorse such atrocities. Something was wrong. Could this "perfect" Scripture contain errors? The armor began to crack.

Still I remained faithful to God, trusting that he would reveal himself and make the answers clear to me. After all, if God could reveal himself to Saul on the road to Damascus certainly he could reveal himself to me, a faithful follower. If I just sought after him I would finally have the kind of experience that everyone else in my Bible study group had testified to experiencing. I would know beyond any doubt, through my own personal revelation from God, that the Lord Almighty was guiding me. So my diligent search for answers continued.

In late 2009 I happened upon videos and articles from **Matt Dillahunty**, an atheist activist based out of Austin, Texas. I watched episodes of *The Atheist Experience*, a live call-in show that Dillahunty co-hosted, and I found myself yelling at the atheists who were featured. I heard Dillahunty's responses to theist callers and thought to myself that he just didn't understand Christianity! He didn't understand the God — the God that I loved and worshipped.

The more I watched Dillahunty, the more I heard him routinely ask callers, "Do you care if your beliefs are true?" He would usually go on to explain, "Do you want to have as many true beliefs and as few false beliefs as possible?" I knew how to answer that question. I did care if my beliefs were true.

Because I cared, I wanted to ensure that I had good reasons for believing the things that I believed. I wanted a good methodology for differentiating between beliefs that are justified and those that are not. Even though I had been trained all my life to repeat "I believe based on faith," I knew that was not the sufficient justification that I needed. After all, every other religion besides mine also based their beliefs on faith. I certainly thought that they were all wrong. How could I possibly use the same basis for my beliefs? I had no way of reliably distinguishing between a "proper" application of faith and an "improper" one. I realized that faith was not a methodology for seeking truth.

If my Christian beliefs were true, they needed to be supported by more than simple faith. I needed to find real, valid, and reliable justifications. And I needed to start by scrutinizing my most foundational belief — the belief that a God does actually exist.

I examined the cosmological, teleological, and ontological arguments for the existence of God. I read apologetics and counter-apologetics for all of the classical arguments. Yet the more I studied the more I was shocked by what I found. Nothing!

I spent month after month trying to find the justifications for my beliefs. Nevertheless, I came up with nothing. Every single argument that I could find in favor of the existence of a god was filled with logical fallacies and unwarranted assumptions, thus they were neither valid nor reliable. It wasn't simply that I could not support belief in the Christian God. I could not rationally justify belief in the existence of any god whatsoever.

I never thought of myself as one given to irrational thinking. I didn't believe many supernatural or unsupported claims like ghosts, psychics, cryptozoology, or even miracle

healings from Christian televangelists. I practiced healthy skepticism to such claims, and I found no evidence to support them. But I had never applied that same standard to my own religious indoctrination. I realized that I had spent my entire life compartmentalizing my religious beliefs, protecting them from rational scrutiny.

Once I applied the tools of skepticism and critical thinking to my belief in a god, I finally heard myself utter words that most Christians simultaneously fear, loathe and pity the most — “I am an Atheist.” I had no reason to believe in the existence of any gods.

In one surreal moment, those words actually came out of my mouth. It was as if everything and everyone began to look different from that point on. When your entire worldview for almost 30 years has been shaped by an ideology that you are no longer convinced is true you begin to see things from a new perspective. It’s a radical departure from the way you previously made decisions and even from the value you placed on your life in the present. It also forces you to reevaluate the way in which you view people, especially those whose lifestyles you once held in contempt because your religious dogma commanded you to. When your most foundational belief is discovered to be wholly unjustified, it becomes necessary to rebuild your worldview from the ground up.

This earth-shattering shift in one’s perspective could be a terrifying experience. But for me it was entirely freeing. I had a new lease on life and a much greater appreciation for the life I had yet to live. And it was all because I came to a point in my life where I was finally willing to honestly examine my most cherished and closely-held beliefs.

Of course, that is not where my journey ended. Since de-converting a whole new world has truly opened up to me. I want to learn as much as I can now about it. I finally understand that the search for answers to life’s biggest questions is never complete. While I remain open to evidence of the existence of gods, just as I would be open to evidence of any discovery, I have finally equipped myself with the tools and willingness to skeptically examine any and all such claims.

**“The hands that help are better far than lips that pray.” ~ Robert Green Ingersoll**

The above **Robert Green Ingersoll** quotation is the motto of the Freethought Society’s (FS) Helping Hands Committee. FS recognizes the good deeds and community service of the following two nontheists who donated their time for helping others. Please visit the FS website for more information about the [Helping Hands Committee](#)’s past, present, and future work and consider volunteering for the many opportunities available including Secular Week of Action events and senior citizen house helpers.



Pictured left is **Kimberly Ellingson**, a resident of Raleigh, North Carolina and FS supporter. She personally delivers *The Freethought Society News* to **Frederick Ellis**, who is living at the Fremont Rest Center in Fremont, North Carolina. He is openly atheist. Her visits bring a lot of joy into his life and she feels the same benefit. “We will all be senior citizens someday,” Ellingson says. She is hopeful that other like-minded people will be inspired to help nearby seniors.

**David Simms** is pictured right. He regularly visits sick children at both the Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta-Egleston Hospital and the Scottish Rite Hospital dressed as characters such as Superman and Captain America. He also participates in charity events with the Cosplay Volunteers of Atlanta.

Ultimately, my story comes down to this: I care if my beliefs are true. That is why I must question with boldness and follow the evidence where it leads.

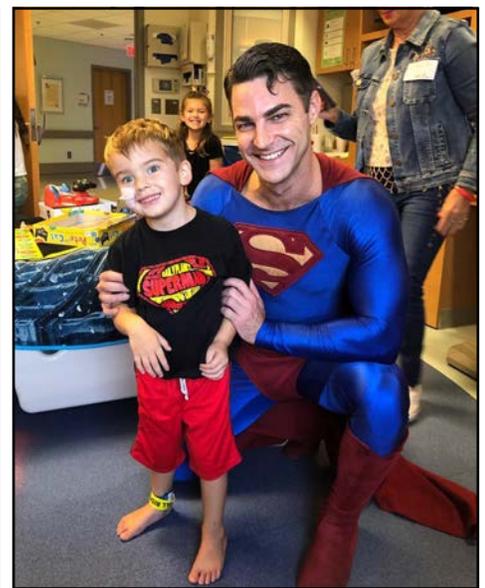
**David Simms** is a Senior Web Designer and Developer originally from Athens, Georgia. After spending almost 30 years as a fundamentalist Southern Baptist and Young Earth Creationist, he became an atheist and a strong advocate for science, skepticism, and the separation of religion and government.



Once a year at DragonCon (held every year on Labor Day weekend in Atlanta, Georgia) Simms performs as a member of the 300 Spartans, a group which combines three of his favorite hobbies — cosplay,\* fitness, and body-building.

Simms is currently writing part two of his journey story to share what it has been like to live a religion-free life. Watch for the follow-up article in an upcoming issue of *The Freethought Society News*.

\*Cosplay is a portmanteau of the words “costume play.” Cosplay is a performance art in which participants called cosplayers wear costumes and fashion accessories to represent a specific character. Spartan cosplay photo below:



# *The Questions of a Child*

by Mike Judge

What would be our reaction upon learning of a specific and significant aspect of the human condition that we had never heard of, have no understanding of, and are completely unable to relate to? How would we react? How would we describe the experience? How would it affect us?

During the Age of Exploration, European explorers made first contact with many unknown cultures in Africa, Asia and the "New World." Societies tend to expend significant time, energy and resources in the practice of their religious and spiritual beliefs. The reaction and interpretation by the explorers to these new (for them) cultures and beliefs was colored by the fact that they, and essentially all humans, were familiar with the concept of engagement with the supernatural.

Imagine how a being from another planet, one in which there were no words, definitions or concepts for religion or belief in supernatural beings or events, would react to discovering this planet's excessively energy consuming participation in the bizarre and irrational worldview of religion. It is unlikely that we will ever witness this type of reaction from an alien visitor or even an earthly explorer. However, there is one category of being that is truly ignorant of mankind's obsession with religion. When these individuals first confront the world of religion their impressions and reactions are completely non-preconceived and unbiased.

My daughter, Michele, related this story to me about a group of five-year-olds and their first encounter with religion. Their reaction surprised and impressed her with the focus and interest on a subject of which they had no previous knowledge. It was such an intriguing encounter that I decided, with her permission, to share her story.

Michele is a single mother raising a precocious and inquisitive five-year-old daughter. She is a professional artist living in a lower income urban neighborhood in West Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As an artist she focuses on the things that she can see, touch, experience and affect. As such, she feels she has no need of a television to bring in the existential world in which she has no interest. Her commitment is to the well-being of her family, friends and community.

As a child, Michele was confirmed by the Catholic Church. However, she never had any interest in religion and so as an adult she did not continue to participate in any religious activities. Consequently, Michele's daughter was never exposed to religious ideas. It's not that Michele doesn't want her to know about religion. It's just that she knows that there is so much more to teach her that is more relevant to live a happy and productive life than wasting time on imaginary biblical stories and characters.

Michele is proactive in teaching her daughter about things that are applicable to her worldview of reality. She encourages her to find her own creative artistic talents and interests. She teaches her about science and its potential. As there are no televisions in their home, she encourages her to learn about what life and the world has to offer through print, computers, and her own playful explorations and imagination.

In an effort to expand her daughter's interests, Michele banded with several other parents in her area to form a cooperative learning program. In this six-week program, the parents would alternate days in which they would introduce the children to areas and subjects in which that particular parent had

some expertise. Each day had a particular theme. They learned about computers, animals, cooking and baking, horses and, of course, art.

One day Michele decided that the theme for the day would be "Art in Architecture." She spent the day browsing the neighborhoods with the children discussing the details of the local architecture. This area of West Philadelphia is dominated by three-story, two bay, Queen Anne style row houses with second story projecting semi-hexagonal bays, columned porches and decorative spindle work. She pointed out the steeply pitched gables with fish scale slate shingles, turrets, balconies, and windows with a single pane surrounded by several small panes. Michele proceeded to point out commercial buildings influenced by Art Deco.

As they continued their excursion through the checkered streets they came to a large ornate church. It was the Saint Francis de Sales Catholic Church. Constructed in 1907-11, it was in the Byzantine Revival style inspired by the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. This style utilizes extensive use of interior mosaics but its dominant feature is its heightened dome, which is 62-foot-wide and towers 90 feet above the nave floor. After discussing the church's exterior domes, corner towers and 72-foot-long marble ashlar façade, the children wanted to see the inside.

The group stepped through the heavy entrance doors and entered the massive interior space dominated by huge terra cotta arches and eye catching circular designs depicting the ascension of the Virgin Mary flanking both sides of the transept. Above the entry way was a stunningly huge pipe organ framing a stained glass of St. Cecilia. All this is overlooked by the sky-reaching main dome covered in complex decorative Guastavino tile and lined with arched stained glass windows around the base. Facing them is the welcoming, but also intimidating, pompously ornate altar.

Michele explained to the children the various artistic and architectural devices that helped create the interior's sense of openness and upward movement. She explained the way stained glass is constructed and then arranged in a way to relate a story. The children asked practical questions regarding how the glass was cut and connected. But they also had more on their mind than architectural and artistic methodology. They became obsessed with content.

Observing a sculpture of a man in a glass case, they asked "Who's that?" Michele read them the plaque which identified him as one of the founders of the church. "They make statues of people who work here?" a child asked.

"Apparently so." Michele said.

As they approached the front of the church, the children wanted to explore the ostentatious altar and the area around it. Michele stopped them, stating, "You aren't allowed to go up there."

"Why?"

Michele said, "Because someone might yell at you."

"Why?"

"Only the guy who runs the group can go there. He is called a priest," Michele explained.

Continuing on they come upon a set of four pictures depicting the crucifixion and death of Jesus. One of these depictions was Pieta style with Mary holding the dead body of Jesus. They asked "Is that man sleeping?"

"No. They usually show him as dead," Michele explained.

"Why do they show him dead?" asked several youngsters.

Michele considered the question and had to admit that she

didn't know why. She said you would have to ask someone from the church why they do that. She explained that the dead man was named Jesus and he was supposed to have lived thousands of years ago. Many people consider him very important and that this whole church was created for him and that there are many more churches dedicated to this man.

From this innocent start, a deluge of questions erupted. At this point Michele recognized that her responses could have an effect on these children and that she might have to answer to their parents for it. She knew she needed to avoid even subtle bias criticism of religious beliefs but she also did not want to give unintended legitimacy to the myths. She carefully worded her answers in a way that, while they were certainly cold hard truths, the five-year-old children could understand and be able to relate to them.

The children continued, "Who is that woman and why is she holding a dead man?"

While answering, Michele directed their attention to one of the pictures showing him carrying the cross. "Here he is not dead," Michele explained.

"Why is he carrying that thing? Who is he? What did he do?"

Michele stated that the man was a teacher. Some of the children asked, "What did he teach? Who was he teaching?"

Michele explained that the people in the church believe that Jesus taught kindness and that people should be good to others. The children solemnly observed and agreed that such teachings are good messages.

The group continued with their questions, "How did he die? Did he have cancer?"

Addressing the rapid-fire questions, Michele explained that he was purposely killed by other people. "Why did they kill him? What did he do?"

She said that the people in charge didn't like what he said and that because a lot of people were listening to him, they felt threatened so they nailed him to a cross. "What do you mean?" asked one inquisitive child.

In response, Michele showed them a mosaic of the entire crucifixion. "This was done as a warning to other people not to say things that leaders don't like."

They next moved on to examine the finely hand-carved ornamented confession booth. Michele began to describe the ways craftsmen use chisels to carve the figures in the wood, but the children wanted to know more and asked why the booth was there. Michele smiled and reminisced. "The strange thing is that I had to go in there as a little girl," she said.

"Why did you go in there? Who goes in this side? What did you do in there?"

She explained, "You go in this side and a priest goes in that side. You then tell the priest about things you did that you feel bad about."

They asked, "Why do people do that?"

She then explained, "After you tell him about something you feel bad about, he says a lot of things that you don't understand and then he says he forgives you."

"What does forgiven mean? Who forgives you?"

"The priest says that a special being forgives you," Michele responded.

"Then what happens? Why does he forgive you?"

She never thought about why a priest forgives you for something you did. She honestly had no idea how to answer that question. She looked over at the once familiar confession booth and then down at their curious faces and said, "After he forgives

you, you leave and you're not supposed to feel bad anymore about what made you feel bad in the first place."

The group traveled through the church. The curious children played with the padded kneelers lining the floor along the pews and asked "What are these things for and why do they go up and down?"

Michele asked them if they knew what praying is. None of the children knew. She said that many people believe that you can close your eyes, ask for something you want, and it will happen. She also explained that there are certain pre-worded prayers that people say together and that those padded kneelers were used for this purpose.

As they worked their way out Michele reflected on the children's lack of any preconceived notion of what religion is or why people expend so much time and money on it. This enormous building was obviously expensive to construct and maintain. The questions expressed were from children that lived and learned in the same neighborhood as this magnificent church. Their homes, however, were simple small unassuming structures. Every question the five-year-olds asked was simple, rational, and pertinent. The answers were much less so.

Adults, forcibly immersed in religious irrationality since childhood no longer question why these structures and their supporting institutions exist. They have come to accept that the reasons don't seem to matter anymore.

The group sat on the front steps beneath the imposing façade and discussed what they had learned. The lesson ended when one of them asked with excited expectation, "Can we get some Water Ice now?" Water Ice is a summer treat available in the Philadelphia area similar to a "snow cone" made of shaved, sweetened/colored ice.

Michele considered the question wholly appropriate. It was the easiest question of the day to answer!

When Michele related the day's events to the other parents, she discovered that they too did not actively teach their children about religion. As time went on, the children seemed to have no lingering desire to learn about the functions and reasons for these religious institutions. However, it is now an irreversible fact that they have been exposed and have had an introduction to an aspect of the human race that has been a major driving force in the development of the modern social order. They will never again see religion with the innocence that they had previously to that day. They will confront the force and consequences of irrational belief systems for the rest of their lives.

Hopefully, Michele's straight-forward answers to their questions on their initial contact with religion will continue to inspire the children to question popularly accepted "truths" and find out what is actually proven and real.

Pictured right is **Mike Judge**. He is a former Freethought Society (FS) board member. Judge is also a founding member of the FS Helping Hands Committee.

Judge is a retired airline pilot living in Gilbert, Arizona. He enjoys hiking and traveling around the state exploring the Arizona backcountry.



# The Freethought Society Black Lives Matter Statement

The Freethought Society stands in solidarity with those demanding a criminal justice system free from racial bias and discrimination. We support those who march and protest because Black Lives Matter.

The Freethought movement began with the premise that Freethinkers have the power to change the status quo. We believe in our ability and obligation to make the world a better place. Since its founding the Freethought Society has been committed to fighting racism and to creating a safe space for all. We value diversity, equity, and inclusion. With this in view, we strive to advance social justice and human rights.

Like many of you, we have been outraged and saddened by the murders of people of color at the hands of law enforcement. Abuse of power has generated a stronger desire to become more empathetic regarding the plight of fellow Americans. Our endeavor has always been to nurture a space where all community members regardless of race, ethnicity, and national origin are welcomed. However, recent events have helped us to realize the urgent need for more work to be done.

The Freethought Society invites people of color to voice their perspectives. Together we can and will discuss ways to both actively combat racism and cope with the associated trauma of past and present events. Our priority is to support freedom of thought, expression, and assembly which must be maintained at the forefront of civil rights.

In the words of African American Humanist **A. Philip Randolph**: “A community is democratic only when the humblest and weakest person can enjoy the highest civil, economic, and social rights that the biggest and most powerful possess.” Randolph was the civil rights movement senior organizer of the March on Washington in 1963 at which Dr. **Martin Luther King** delivered his “I Have A Dream” speech.

The Freethought Society is committed to enacting the following:

- The Freethought Society will work with our Diversity and Inclusion team to create a better platform in which we can further engage in essential dialogue in regard to inequity, racism, and injustice.

- The Freethought Society is committed to standing against the widespread disenfranchisement of Black and Brown communities whose voices must be heard at the polls. To that end, The Freethought Society will continue voter registration efforts and a “drive-you-to-the-polls” campaign.

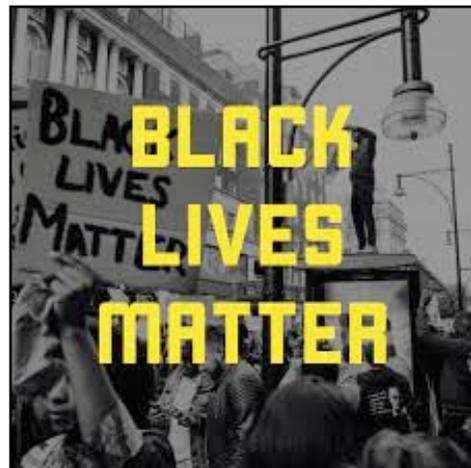
- The Freethought Society’s Prison Library Freethought Literature Placement program will continue to provide complimentary educational materials nationwide, and we will review our current program in an effort to include relevant materials that are in line with our country’s current climate.

Together we can — we *must* take action to oppose racism in all of its ugly manifestations — overt and subtle. Not being racist is insufficient; we must be proactively anti-racist.

There is much work to be done. Please join us in transforming noble ideas into action.

Approved and signed by the Freethought Society Board of Directors on June 19, 2020.

**Olga Bourlin**  
**Patricia Butcheck**  
**Charlotte Carney**  
**Victoria de la Torre**  
**Margaret Downey**  
**Sally Flynn**  
**Alan Gold**  
**Marjorie Goldman**  
**Patrick Inness**  
**Glen Loev**  
**Jennifer Taylor**  
**Greg White**



**Note:** A special thank you to board members **Margaret Downey, Glen Loev, and Jennifer Taylor** for composing most of the wording of the Freethought Society’s *Black Lives Matter Statement*.

## Politically Active? Most Atheists Are!

According to a 2018 Cooperative Congressional Election Survey, atheists are extremely politically active. No religious group rates as high! The “yes” or “no” survey details can be found at the below link:

<https://religioninpublic.blog/2020/04/13/atheists-are-the-most-politically-active-group-in-the-united-states/>

The survey revealed that four in ten atheists are regularly in contact with a public official and/or have donated money to a political candidate. Only the Jewish community can boast of similar numbers. Christians that were surveyed had a much lower number.



Interestingly, in 2016, an average atheist engaged in 1.45 activities. Christians engaged at 1.28. By 2018 things changed. Protestants and Catholics both saw a severe decline down to 0.90 or 0.95 actions. That same year, atheists had an uptick of engagement to 1.58.

The 2020 election is fast approaching. The nontheist community can be proud of the findings disclosed at the above survey link, but the goal is to increase involvement even more this year. The [Secular Student Alliance](#) is doing their part to help. Visit [secularstudents.org/vote](https://secularstudents.org/vote) to check your voter registration status, register yourself to vote, and sign up for election reminders. Find ways to get more engaged and [sign-up to receive updates on the Secular America Votes campaign](#).

# Freethought Society Three-Month Zoom Calendar

To participate in the below listed Zoom events, you must be a member of the [Freethought Society Meetup](#) group.

Join the Freethought Society Meetup group at: [www.meetup.com/Freethought-Society-Meetup/](http://www.meetup.com/Freethought-Society-Meetup/)

Each event will have a Zoom URL link listed in the description of the event. Connections will be secure, educational and fun!

## September 19

The Freethought Society (FS) is pleased to host award-winning author and *USA Today* columnist **Tom Krattenmaker** on **Saturday, September 19, 2020 at Noon (PDT)/3:00 PM (EDT)** for an online Zoom presentation entitled “A New Vision for Secular Transcendence.”

Please note the information under the headline of this page to learn how you can obtain the Zoom link by registering as a member of the FS [Meetup](#).

Krattenmaker’s talk will address how religion faded from importance in contemporary life along with a sense of transcendence, which is traditionally understood as the experience of “rising above” the mundane, ordinary aspects of our lives. Krattenmaker will present his alternative vision for a secular, or horizontal, transcendence that does not depend on belief in a deity or supernatural ideas but, rather, on people’s connections to one another and to life on our imperiled planet.

As a columnist, Krattenmaker specializes in beliefs and values in public life. He is the author of three award-winning books: *Onward Christian Athletes*, *The Evangelicals You Don’t Know*, and, most recently, *Confessions of a Secular Jesus Follower*, which was named one of the top two religion books of 2016 by the Religion News Association.

## October 10

FS is pleased to host author and attorney **Andrew L. Seidel** on **Saturday, October 10, 2020 at 3:00 PM (EDT)/Noon (PDT)** for an online Zoom meeting. Seidel’s presentation, “The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism is Un-American,” is based on his book by the same name.

Please note the information under the headline of this page to learn how you can obtain the Zoom link by registering as a member of the FS [Meetup](#).

Seidel is the Director of Strategic Response at the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF). When not fighting for the First Amendment with FFRF, Andrew writes for *Slate*, *ThinkProgress*, *Religion News Service*, *Rewire News* and many other publications.

Renowned constitutional scholar **Erwin Chemerinsky** described *The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism is Un-American* as “a beautifully written book” that “explodes a frequently expressed myth: that the United States was created as a Christian nation.”

Seidel’s book illustrates that not only is the United States *not* a Christian nation, but Judeo-Christian principles are fundamentally opposed to the values on which America was founded. Religion, law, and history will collide in this presentation. Seidel will discuss his book and field questions.



## November 1

A Secular Day of the Dead/Dia de los Muertos Secular event is a celebration of life. Nontheist Hispanics view the Secular Day of the Dead as a perfect way to remember the legacy of dead loved ones in a way that does not require prayer, church, or religious dogma. To nontheists, our legacies are our afterlife.



The Secular Day of the Dead event will include many redesigned Hispanic traditions and rituals that celebrate our one and only life, legacies and cultural heritage.

More and more people are abandoning their religious upbringing but still want to celebrate the beauty of their culture. This is why a Secular Day of the Dead was created. The 2020 Secular Day of the Dead will be presented as a Zoom event on **Sunday, November 1, 2020** with special attention to Spanish speaking participants. The 2020 Secular Day of the Dead is co-sponsored by The Freethought Society, Hispanic American Freethinkers, American Atheists, Center for Inquiry, and the Freedom From Religion Foundation.

### 11:45 AM (PST)/2:45 PM (EST) Pre-Event Social

Music and chatting opportunities with like-minded individuals will take place during this 15 minute time slot.

### Noon (PST)/3:00 PM (EST) Welcome

Bilingual welcome by organizers and co-sponsors **Robyn Blumner, Victoria de la Torre, Margaret Downey, Nick Fish, Annie Laurie Gaylor, and David Tamayo**. Co-sponsors and organizers will each light a candle to honor a “Secular Saint” of historic significance.

### 12:30 PM (PST)/3:30 PM (EST) Guest Speaker

**Dan Barker**: “Adios a Dios” (a journey story presentation)

### 12:45 PM (PST)/3:45 PM (EST) Honoring Ceremony

Reservations are being taken for speakers who want to celebrate the life of a dead loved one. Reserve a 3-5 minute time slot through the following email address:

[SecularDayoftheDead@FtSociety.org](mailto:SecularDayoftheDead@FtSociety.org)

**John de Lancie, Sasha Sagan, Michael Steven Martin, and Arlene Rios** have reserved honoring ceremony slots.

After the reserved speaking spots conclude, the Zoom spotlighting function will be available for anyone who would like to participate. The screen share function will be enabled so that speakers can display photos of the person being honored.

Zoom logon information is only available to those who pre-register as Meetup members. Register here:

[www.meetup.com/Freethought-Society-Meetup/](http://www.meetup.com/Freethought-Society-Meetup/)

A Spanish Speakers Zoom Room will be available to participants with a mirrored schedule. Prizes will be awarded and mailed to participants whom the co-sponsors determine to have the best Secular Day of the Dead themed clothing, face painting, face mask, hair adornment, and space/room decor.

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

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

Yes! I would like to:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*(nontheism explained in classroom settings)*

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

*(assist Secular Coalition for America gathering reports)*

### **Community Outreach**

*(locate tabling opportunities)*

### **Diversity Outreach Committee**

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

### **Free Speech Zone Committee**

*(research and implement displays in public venues)*

### **Helping Hands**

*(provides helpers to seniors in emergency situations)*

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

*(collection of jeans for the homeless)*

### **Meetup Committee**

*(social events and improving online communications)*

### **Monthly Meeting Coordinators**

*(schedule and manage speakers and venues)*

### **Secular Celebrations**

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

### **Speakers Bureau**

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

### **Special Events**

*(coordinate unique events of interest to nontheists)*

### **Sole Searching**

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

### **Thomas Paine Memorial Committee**

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

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

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