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# PANViews



***Newsletter of PA Nonbelievers, Inc., affiliated with American Atheists,  
Atheist Alliance International and the Council for Secular Humanism.***

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## ***President's Report***

*Josh CruverKibi*

The United States election is this week, as many of you are quite aware. I hope that if you voted absentee, you have already mailed in your ballots. If you have not, it is recommended at this point to hand in your absentee ballots into your County Board of Elections office by 8 PM Tuesday November 3<sup>rd</sup>. Those of you who are voting in person on Tuesday November 3<sup>rd</sup>, please be careful, wear a mask, be prepared to wait in line, practice social distancing, and the polls are open from 7 AM to 8PM. Unfortunately, we live in a demon haunted state in which many of our fellow citizens can be convinced of absurdities and non-science, so masks are only recommended and not required at polling locations. My advice will definitely be to do only what you need to do safely to exercise your civic duty to vote. Also, some polling places have been relocated, so you should check and make sure that your voting location has not changed, which can be found at the <https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov>.

And to those of you who are volunteering on election day in and around the polling locations, we thank you for your service to the community, but please follow as many scientifically safe protocols as you can to defend against catching COVID-19.

It is also time for our 2021 PA Nonbelievers Membership Drive. PA Nonbelievers memberships run on the calendar year, so all current memberships expire on January 1, 2021. If you would like to continue or become a member of PA Nonbelievers, we can take your membership applications online. You can start or renew your membership on our website: <http://www.panonbelievers.org/>. The website is currently being updated and will be available again soon to apply for membership. We hope you will like the new look and resource usefulness of our website. You can also use the printable form and send your membership in through the postal service, if you prefer.

Your membership helps us continue to do the work we do on behalf of Atheists, Agnostics, and Humanists in Pennsylvania. The need for a sense of community, for education, secular awareness, and rational and critical thinking continues to be a significant imperative for us in Pennsylvania. So, I hope that you continue to volunteer and support our community through PAN membership and participation in our monthly meetings, social outreach events, and hopefully tabling events next year.

Membership also gives you the right to vote in PA Nonbelievers elections in March of next year.

## ***Atheist News in Pennsylvania – The Nation – The World!***

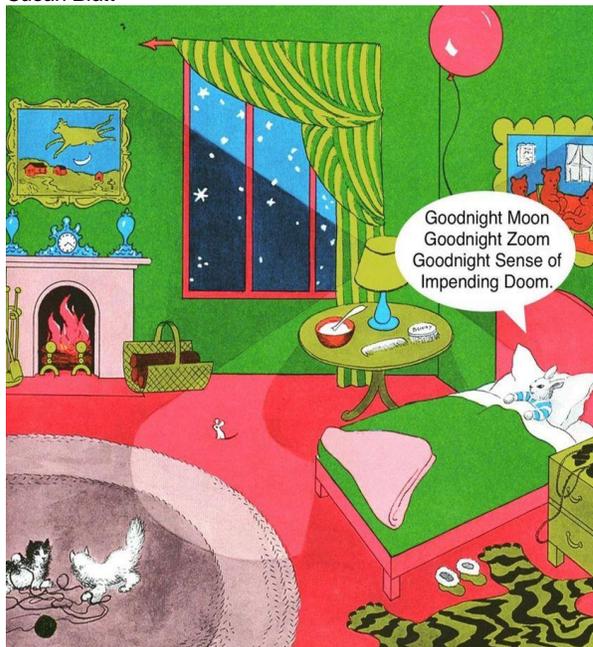
### **Religious Privilege**

The US government continues to do favors for religious institutions. According to Atheists.org, the Small Business Administration has issued a new Paycheck Protection Program regulation that helps churches out. The regulation says that the SBA will forgive business loans up to \$50,000, even if the business ignored the loan rules and fired workers. However, if the business is affiliated with a larger organization, the exemption applies to up to \$2 million in aggregate. This aggregate limit specifically does *not* apply to religious organizations. They will receive loan forgiveness, even if they fired employees.

In another example, American Atheists has filed an amicus brief in a case before the Supreme Court, *Tanzin v. Tanvir*. In this case, several Muslim men were approached by the FBI and asked to inform on members of their mosques. When they refused, they were put on the “no fly” list. The men are suing under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) for monetary damages. While American Atheists agrees that the FBI’s behavior was “unconscionable” other people in non-religious circumstances would not be able to sue for monetary damages.

Alison Gill, AA’s Vice President for Legal and Policy, explains: “If the Supreme Court were to rule in the religious litigants’ favor, it would create the sort of double standard the First Amendment was intended to prevent: religious individuals would have greater opportunity to protect their rights in court than nonreligious individuals. *Tanzin v. Tanvir* provides a perfect example. Ex-Muslims unjustly placed on the ‘No Fly’ list for refusing to act as informants would be prevented from suing for damages purely because they are nonreligious. And that disparity would extend to all nonreligious Americans.”

Susan Blatt



### **Real Change?**

Pope Francis continues to present himself as a more cuddly version of Catholicism. He recently suggested that the Church might no longer oppose same-sex unions.

This doesn’t have much practical impact. He said nothing about allowing same-sex partners to actually marry or opposing the firing of married gay teachers at Catholic schools.

Even this mild statement set off Catholic conservatives, though. Apnews.com reports that Bishop Thomas Tobin of Providence, RI made his opposition clear: “The Pope’s statement clearly contradicts what has been the long-standing teaching of the Church about same-sex unions. The Church cannot support the acceptance of objectively immoral relationships.”

Rev. Donald Paul Sullins, a sociology professor at Catholic University, notes that Francis' remarks "directly contradict the Catholic Church's most recent teaching on this matter." Sullins referenced a 2003 Vatican document, approved by the now sainted Pope John Paul II, that said, "The Church teaches that respect for homosexual persons cannot lead in any way to approval of homosexual behavior or to legal recognition of homosexual unions."

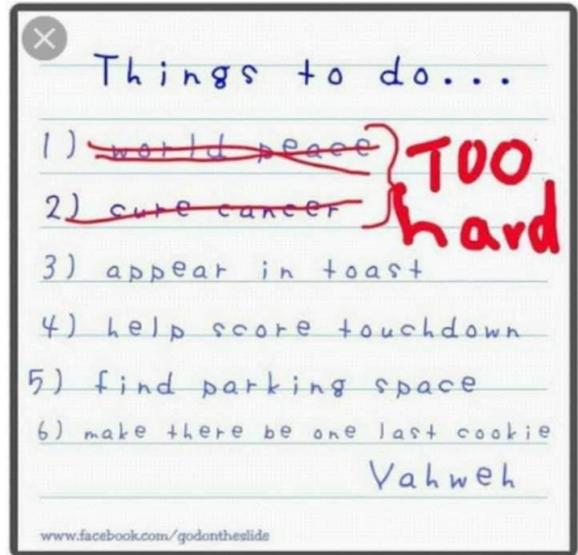
The story notes that Catholics aren't as opposed to LGBTQ rights as some of the clergy are. A December poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that about 6 in 10 Catholics support government protection to bar discrimination against LGBTQ people.

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### France and Muslim Terror

Samuel Paty, a history-geography teacher in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, a northwestern suburb of Paris, was teaching a class about freedom of speech. As part of that class, he showed cartoon depictions of the prophet Muhammed. This was not the first time he had showed a class these kinds of cartoons; as he had in the past, he told Muslim students to look away if they were offended.

According to BBC.com, a few days later, an 18-year-old Muslim man originally from Chechen stood outside the school and asked students to identify the teacher who showed the pictures. When they did, he beheaded the teacher in front of the school. The attacker fired on police before being shot dead.



The French police have arrested several Islamic radicals, including some who posted messages of approval about the murder. This is delicate subject in France, in part because the man who killed 12 employees of the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo over Muhammed cartoons is currently on trial. French Muslim leaders condemned the beheading. Tareq Oubrou, imam of a Bordeaux mosque told France Inter, "A civilisation does not kill an innocent person, barbarism does."

However, the violence continued in Nice. A Tunisian man fatally stabbed 3 people in the Notre-Dame basilica there. The suspect was wounded as he was captured by police but survived. French President Emmanuel Macron described it as "Islamist terrorist attack". He added that France would not surrender its core values, and 4,000 additional troops have been sent to protect churches and schools.

The New York *Times*, nytimes.com, notes that France has undergone 36 Islamic state-sponsored terrorist attacks in the last 8 years, killing more than 200 people. The French people generally applaud Macron's defense of secularism and free speech, but this is a complicated subject in France, because of its colonial history, and its more than 6 million Muslim citizens.

Muslim countries have pushed back against Macron's aggressive approach. For example, Turkey's Recep Erdogan, said in a speech, "Macron needs mental treatment. What is the problem of this person Macron with Muslims and Islam?" Approximately 40,000 people took part in an anti-France rally in Bangladesh, burning Macron in effigy. The protestors also want the Bangladeshi government to recall its ambassador to France and threatened to tear down the French embassy.

Imran Khan, Pakistan's Prime Minister, accused Macron of encouraging anti-Islam prejudice. He tweeted, "This is a time when President Macron could have put healing touch & denied space to extremists rather than creating further polarization & marginalization that inevitably leads to radicalization. By attacking Islam, clearly without having any understanding of it, President Macron has attacked & hurt the sentiments of millions of Muslims in Europe & across the world."

Kuwait objected to the linking of Islam to terrorism, stating that it "represents a falsification of reality, insults the teachings of Islam and offends the feelings of Muslims around the world." French products were removed from stores there and in Qatar.

Jordan and Saudi Arabia concentrated on Muslim objections to cartoon depictions of Muhammad. Jordan's foreign ministry condemned the "continued publication of caricatures of Prophet Muhammad under the pretext of freedom of expression." Saudi Arabia's state-run press quoted an official as saying that Saudi Arabia "rejects any attempt to link Islam and terrorism and denounces the offensive cartoons of the Prophet." A religious authority there added that "defaming" Muhammad "only serves extremists" and "these insults have nothing to do with freedom of expression."

It is hard to see that these competing values – France's belief in secularism and free speech, and Islam's insistence on the sacredness of its religion – can ever be reconciled.

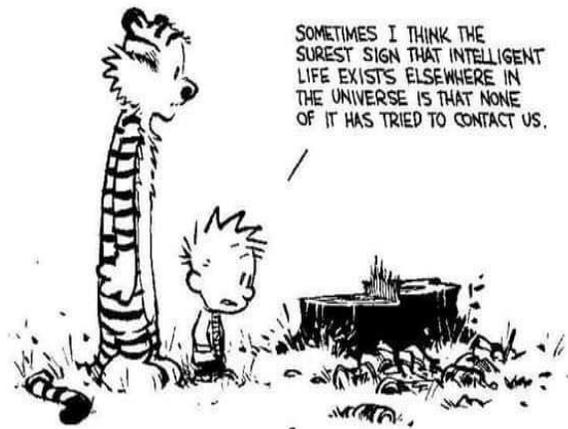
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### Threat to Gay Marriage

York Emporium

There has been a lot of concern about new members of the Supreme Court leading a reconsideration of *Roe v. Wade*. But two long-time members seem to be rethinking *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the decision that legalized gay marriage.

According to CNN.com, the subject came up when the Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal from Kim Davis. Remember her? A few years ago, she was the darling of the religious right, because, as a county clerk in Kentucky, she refused to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples, even being briefly jailed.



Davis was sued by two of the couples to whom she denied licenses. She claimed qualified immunity from lawsuits. She lost, and appealed to the Supreme Court, which declined to hear the case, so the lawsuits can go forward. Davis was voted out of office in 2018.

Justice Clarence Thomas, writing for himself and Justice Samuel Alito in denying Davis' appeal, took the opportunity to complain that *Obergefell v. Hodges* "enables courts and governments to brand religious adherents who believe that marriage is between one man and one woman as bigots, making their religious liberty concerns that much easier to dismiss."

Thomas went on to call Davis "one of the first victims" of the court's "cavalier treatment of religion" adding that "she will not be the last."

He agreed that the Davis case should not be taken up by the Supreme Court, because it did not “clearly present” the questions raised by *Obergefell v. Hodges*. However, he concluded that the Court had granted a “novel constitutional right over the religious liberty interests explicitly protected in the First Amendment, any by doing so undemocratically, the Court has created a problem that only it can fix.”

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**FREETHOUGHT OF THE DAY**

“It took me years, but letting go of religion has been the most profound wake up of my life.”

**Julia Sweeney**

© 2018 Freedom From Religion Foundation



**Nones Losing Ground?**

The growth of religious “nones” over the past few years has given great comfort to the secular movement. A post in [religioninpublic.blog](http://religioninpublic.blog) discusses evidence that maybe that growth has peaked.

The blog notes that according to surveys, nones have grown from 5% of the American population in 1994 to 34% in 2019. It posits that this increase was the result of the extreme positions

of the religious right, which gained power when the Republican party gained control of Congress in 1994 for the first time in 40 years.

The authors compared data from the Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) and PRRI’s American Values Atlas and the General Social Study (GSS). Apparently PRRI found that the rate of nones was slightly lower in 2019 than in 2018, by about one point, which contradicted CCES.

What’s interesting is the blog’s theory on why that might have happened. While the methodology of both surveys was excellent, PRRI uses a telephone-based survey, with live interviewers. PRRI had previously found a “social desirability bias” when people discuss their religiosity, or lack thereof. PRRI found 5% fewer nones, and 20% fewer never attenders when it did live interviews. Of course, the blog points out, that doesn’t necessarily resolve which finding is more accurate.

The blog authors are Paul A. Djupe, Denison University, is an affiliated scholar with PRRI, the series editor of [Religious Engagement in Democratic Politics](#) (Temple), and Ryan P. Burge who teaches political science at Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, IL.

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**On His Way to Sainthood!**

The Catholic Church has sent a new dead person on the route to sainthood! According to the Catholic News Agency, [catholicnewsagency.com](http://catholicnewsagency.com), Carlo Acutis was beatified recently. (“Beatified” is the first step in the process. He is now, officially, Blessed Carlo Acutis. This means, among other things, a miracle has been attributed to him, as will be discussed below. After more review, and another miracle, the next step is canonization, which would make him Saint Carlo.)

Carlo is the first millennial to be beatified, and to make the Catholic Church even more hip, he was interested in computers, maintaining websites for many Catholic organizations. The Catholic News Agency describes him this way: “the Catholic Church now has its first ‘Blessed’ who loved Super Mario and Pokémon, but not as much as he loved the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.”

Acutis died at 15 in 2006, so the computer game references are not as completely outdated as they seem. He died of leukemia and is described as offering his suffering for the pope and the church.

Cardinal Agostino Vallini gave the homily during the beatification ceremony. “Since he was a child ... he had his gaze turned to Jesus. Love for the Eucharist was the foundation that kept alive his relationship with God. He often said, ‘The Eucharist is my highway to heaven.’” He went onto say that Acutis is an example of how young people can use technology to serve the gospel. Acutis’ parents attended the ceremony, with a relic of their son’s heart, which was placed near the altar.

The Catholic News Agency closed its story with a quote from Acutis: “When we face the sun we get a tan ... but when we stand before Jesus in the Eucharist we become saints.”

BBC.com provided more details on his purported miracle. In 2013, a Brazilian boy suffering from a rare pancreatic disorder prayed to Acutis, and after coming into contact with a relic of Acutis (a piece of his t-shirt) he was cured.

The Catholic Church does not often sanctify nonentities, as opposed to people like Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa. The Church must have been eager to take the opportunity to set up an example that might appeal to younger people.

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**Here’s Why**

The request of two men, Daniel and Luke Swain, in Harford County, MD, for a temporary restraining order allowing them to vote without wearing face masks, was rejected. Why did the men request court intervention? While they had several arguments, one was especially interesting. According to the Baltimore Sun (baltimoresun.com), it’s a religious freedom issue. From their amended complaint: Daniel Swain is a Christian, so he was created “to breathe as part of our direct worship.”



It quotes Psalm 150:6, “let all that has breath praise the Lord.” It continues, “Plaintiff Dan Swann believes in his religious right to breath oxygen and worship the Lord his creator with an uncovered face, including while he votes, and not with a muzzle, face covering or mask, and as such has had his religious freedom violated.” The story notes that the Swains could have voted by mail, have not been banned from any polling place, and are completely free to vote. While wearing masks.

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**Elected Atheists**

Atheists in the US are resigned to the reality that politicians usually have to pander to religious groups to get elected. An article by Phil Zuckerman in religionnews.com points out that other democracies have elected nonreligious figures. He gives as examples Jawaharlal Nehru in India, Olof Palme in Sweden, Jose Mujica in Uruguay and Golda Meir in Israel. New Zealand’s recently re-elected Jacinda Ardern describes herself as agnostic.

But that doesn’t happen here. Zuckerman quotes a 2019 Gallup poll found the following: 96% would vote for a candidate who is Black, 94% for a woman, 95% for a Hispanic candidate, 93% for a Jew, 76% for a gay or lesbian candidate and 66% for a Muslim. However, only 60% said they would vote for an atheist. (See chart on the next page for more categories.)

The two reasons Zuckerman suggests for this prejudice will be familiar to PAN members. The first is the old favorite, “Godless Communism.” Other dictators, such as Cambodia’s Pol Pot, were explicitly atheistic as well.

The second reason is that Americans think that nonreligious people are immoral. If you don’t believe in God, then you have no reason to lead a decent life. He even references a 2014 study that found participants intuitively linked atheism with bestiality and cannibalism. There’s no such link, of course; Zuckerman points out that there are many studies that show atheists tend to be less racist, homophobic and misogynistic than religious people.

There is one ray of light. In 2018, a group of 13 members of Congress formed The Congressional Freethought Caucus. Here are the members: Jared Huffman, Zoe Lofgren and Jerry McNerney, California; Hank Johnson, Georgia; Sean Casten, Illinois; Jamie Raskin, Maryland; Dan Kildee and Rashida Tlaib, Michigan; Steve Cohen, Tennessee; Pramila Jayapal, Washington; Eleanor Holmes Norton, Washington, DC; Mark Pocan, Wisconsin.

There’s even a member from Pennsylvania: Susan Wild, from the 7<sup>th</sup> District, which includes Allentown. So maybe it’s not hopeless.

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## Percentage of Americans willing to vote for a presidential candidate if they were...

A 2019 Gallup survey found that just less than two-thirds of voters would be willing to back an otherwise qualified atheist for high office.



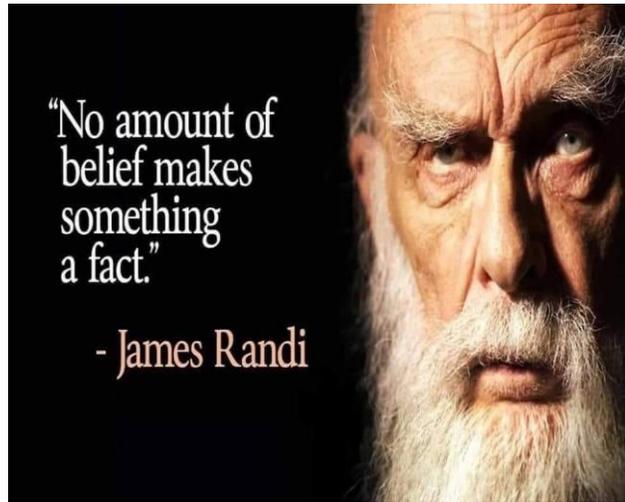
Chart: The Conversation, CC-BY-ND Source: [Gallup](#) [Get the data](#)

## Amazing

*Galactic Hitchhikers*

James Randi, the MacArthur award-winning magician has died at age 92. As the New York Times (nytimes.com) put it, he went from being an illusionist to a disillusionist, dedicating his skills to expose con artists and chicanery, which often hid under the cloak of religion.

FFRF.org quotes from Randi's newsletter at randi.org: "There are two sorts of atheists. One sort claims that there is no deity; the other claims that there is no evidence that proves the existence of a deity. I belong to the latter group, because if I were to claim that no god exists, I would have to produce evidence to establish that claim, and I cannot."



He started young, according to the Times. "They started to read to me from the Bible. And I interrupted and said: 'Excuse me, how do you know that's true? It sounds strange.'"

Preacher Peter Popoff was one of his most satisfying triumphs. At that point, Popoff's con was healing the sick. He held revivals throughout the country where he would call on audience members by name and identify their ailments. In 1986 – a year in which Popoff earned approximately \$550,000 per month – Randi planted an associate in Popoff's audience with a scanner and tape recorder. The scanner picked up Popoff's wife relaying information to him that she and Popoff's assistants had gathered from the audience before the show. Played on the Johnny Carson *Tonight Show*, it drove Popoff out of the field. (He is unfortunately back, of course, hawking Miracle Spring Water).

Randi was particularly irritated by Uri Geller, who was famous for bending keys and spoons, he claimed, by "telepathy." When he appeared on *The Tonight Show* in 1973, Randi told the show's producers to insist on providing the props. Surprise! Uri sat there for about 20 minutes, while nothing moved. For some reason this didn't end Geller's career. Randi was perturbed enough to write an exposé, "The Magic of Uri Geller" (1975), republished in 1982 as "The Truth About Uri Geller."

In 1976, Randi, astronomer Carl Sagan and writer Isaac Asimov formed the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry. It promotes scientific investigation of supernatural claims and publishes *Skeptical Inquirer* magazine. Randi also sponsored the Million Dollar Challenge, offering \$1 million to anyone who could, while following scientific protocols, prove a paranormal, supernatural or occult event. More than 1,000 people tried to win the prize. No one ever did, and the Challenge ended when Randi retired in 2015.

He received many honors from scientific groups, including having a planet, Asteroid 3163 Randi, named after him in 1981. A pragmatist, even to the end, Randi told the New York Times how he wanted his death celebrated: "I want to be cremated," he said. "And I want my ashes blown in Uri Geller's eyes."

## **Member Submissions**

### **The Auto-Correct Prayer**

*Jim Eshleman*

The old minister finally got a new toy, a word processor with an automatic correction function. Assuming that he wouldn't need his secretary to correct his spelling, he gave her the afternoon off, and worked up the prayer for the next bulletin:

Brethren and Cistern, lettuce prey:

Holey further, we be seek the, granite are witches, and bliss the pour, pervade fore them and make them hole. Bliss those with seek minds and heel them. Bliss those with sod hearts and give them piece.

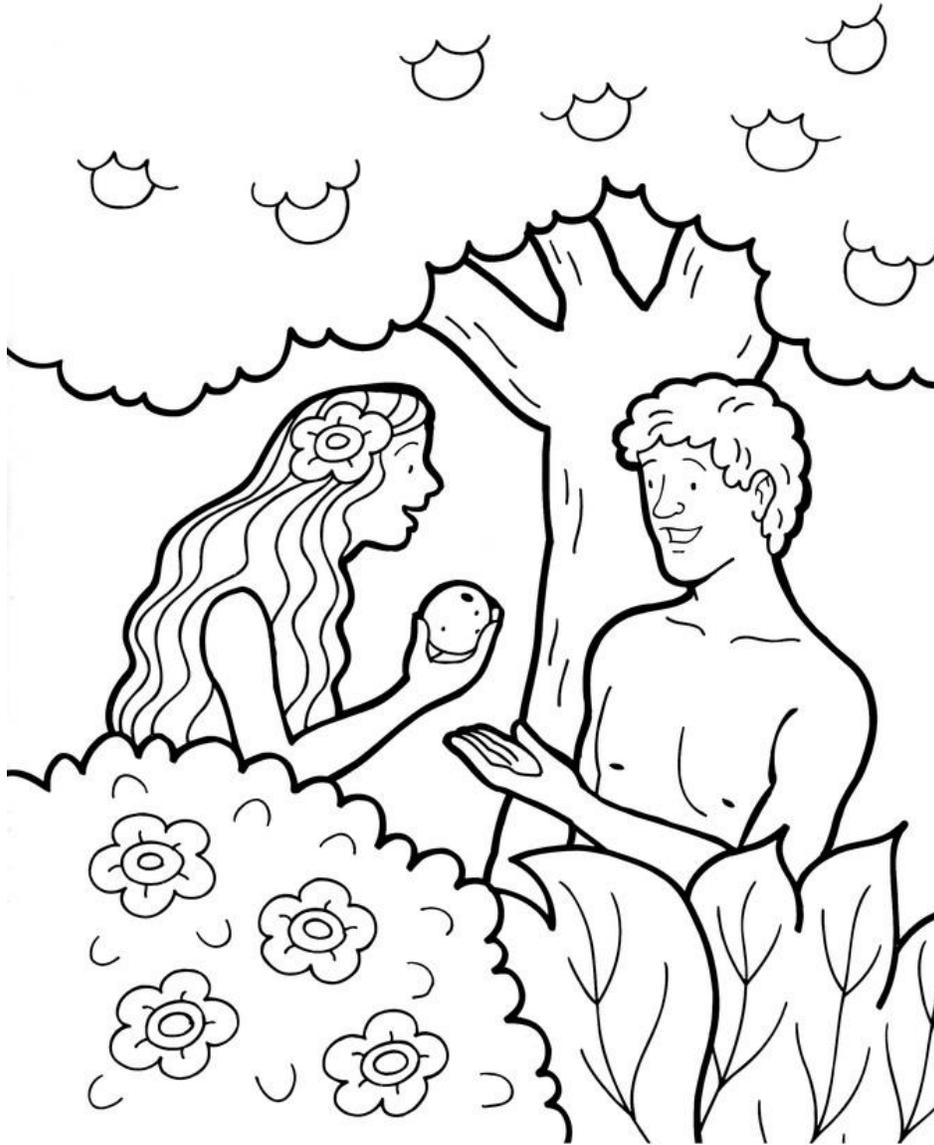
Bliss hour bizarre so we can give to those in knead. Think you fur being are bacon in these dark daze. And thank you four our spiel chucker with ought to cracked so we can send hour massage fore and wade. Oh, Lard, we think the in the name of His Sun, and the Wholly Goes. Amend.

*God Is Still Laughing*



# FUN!

*Where's the snake?*



Genesis 2:9; 3:1-24

## **Adam and Eve Disobey God**

Big Book of Coloring Pages  
with Bible Stories for Kids of All Ages  
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November 2020

### Logic Puzzle

*Solution is on last page*

5 people are standing in a queue for plane tickets in Germany; each one has a name, an age, a favorite TV program, where they live, a hairstyle and a destination.

**Names:** Bob, Keeley, Rachael, Eilish and Amy

**TV programs:** The Simpsons, Coronation Street ("Corrie"), Eastenders, Desperate Housewives and Neighbours.

**Destinations:** France, Australia, England, Africa and Italy

**Ages:** 14, 21, 46, 52 and 81

**Hairstyle:** Afro, long, straight, curly and bald

**Where they live:** A town, a city, a village, a farm and a youth hostel

1. The person in the middle watches Desperate Housewives
2. Bob is the first in the queue
3. The person who watches the Simpsons is next to the person who lives in a youth hostel
4. The person going to Africa is behind Rachael
5. The person who lives in a village is 52
6. The person who is going to Australia has straight hair
7. The person travelling to Africa watches Desperate Housewives
8. The 14-year-old is at the end of the queue
9. Amy watches Eastenders
10. The person heading to Italy has long hair
11. Keeley lives in a village
12. The 46-year-old is bald
13. The fourth in the queue is going to England
14. The people who watch Desperate Housewives and Neighbours are standing next to each other
15. The person who watches Coronation Street stands next to the person with an afro
16. A person next to Rachael has an afro
17. The 21-year-old lives in a youth hostel
18. The person who watches Corrie has long hair
19. The 81-year-old lives on a farm
20. The person who is travelling to France lives in a town
21. Eilish is not next to the person with straight hair

(This puzzle was devised by Zoe Reader, Bourne Grammar School, Bourne, Lincolnshire, in March 2006, and revised by Bob Bundy, phrontister and anonimnystefy of the Math is Fun Forum in June 2012)

***PAN News & Update***

**Meetings** – Chambersburg and Lancaster are having in-person meetings. PAN is also holding virtual at 6:00 pm on Wednesdays for the time being. Get more information on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers](http://www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers).

Here's where they are held, when we are able to have them in person:

Carlisle – Fourth Friday of the month, 5:30 pm, Hops and Barley, 398 North York Street, Mechanicsburg

November 2020

Chambersburg – Second Thursday of the month, 7:00 pm.

The November meeting will be held at MOD Pizza, 917 Norland Avenue, Chambersburg; the December meeting will be held at Cafe Del Sol, 438 Geteway Avenue, Chambersburg.

Harrisburg– First Wednesday of the month, 6:30 pm, Midtown Scholar, 1302 N. Third St.

Lancaster – Fourth Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Centerville Diner, 100 S. Centerville Rd.

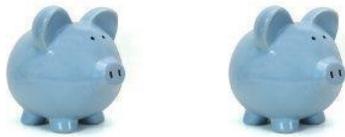
Lebanon - Second Wednesday of the month, 7:00 pm, Batdorf Restaurant, 245 W. Main St., Annullville

Reading – Third Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm, Oakbrook Brewing Company, 628 Park Avenue

York – First Sunday of the month, noon, I-ron-ic Coffee Shop and Art Boutique, 256 W. Philadelphia St.

**How to Contribute to PAN**

**Giant Cards** - We will have Giant grocery store cards available for purchase at PAN meetings. You pay face value for the card and use the face value at the store, but Giant let's PAN have 5% of that face value. If you shop at Giant, anyway, use the cards in lieu of cash and help PAN. What could be easier?



**Pennies for PAN** - Finally, we are happy to take money the old-fashioned way. You can give your tax-deductible contribution to a Board Member at one of our meetings or events, you can donate via PayPal on our website, [www.panonbelievers.org](http://www.panonbelievers.org), or you can mail a check to us at PA Nonbelievers, Inc. PO Box 702, York, PA 17405. Remember when you donate you can indicate what fund you want your donation to go to, you can find the list of our funds on the PAN website in the Donate section.

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**Puzzle Solution**

<b>Name</b>	Bob	Rachael	Eilish	Keeley	Amy
<b>Favorite TV programme</b>	The Simpsons	Coronation Street	Desperate Housewives	Neighbours	Eastenders
<b>Destination</b>	France	Italy	Africa	England	Australia
<b>Age</b>	46	21	81	52	14
<b>Where they live</b>	Town	Youth Hostel	Farm	Village	City
<b>Hairstyle</b>	Bald	Long	Afro	Curly	Straight