

# 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*

PA Nonbelievers attended two tabling events for October, Pumpkinfest and Lancaster Pride. I really enjoyed these events, especially the Lancaster Pride event. Pride tabling events are always so much fun and there such a great sense of community, that we are all supporting each other. It is always a refreshing community vibe at pride events! The event was also less stressful than other events I have attended this year, because they required everyone that entered the event, which was inside the Baseball stadium, to show proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test. I did not even see any protesters outside of the stadium. This fact in particular spurred my optimism about why we attend tabling events. 10-20-30 years ago, we would have definitely seen protesters outside of an event like this. But I have noticed the anti-LGBTQ protesters have been steadily decreasing over the last 5 years I have personally attended Pride fests with PAN. The last protesters I saw were at Harrisburg Pride 2019 and they were a measly small group that appeared defeated by the end of the event, because no one really engaged with them. Having and attending events is important for normalizing and humanizing groups and educating people about groups that have been marginalized by the majority traditions. Many people often hate or dislike what they do not understand or have been specifically taught to hate and or fear. We can help counteract these harmful traditions by showing up and representing alternatives to hate, such as rationality, humanism, and altruism. People who have been attending PA Nonbeliever tabling events for the past several years have also noticed a significant decrease in people protesting Atheists and Non-believers at events as well. We are also increasingly normalizing and humanizing non-belief in religion.

As a side note, someone noted a potential correlated variable to me on why there potentially were no protesters at the event. They noted that anti-LGBTQ would likely also be anti-vaxxers as well, and knew that they would be denied entry. This variable was of course not tested and is just conjecture, but I think it is an interesting hypothesis.

It is time for our 2022 PA Nonbelievers Membership Drive. PA Nonbelievers memberships run on the calendar year, so all current memberships expire on January 1, 2022. Of course, we typically count people that have signed up for membership in the last 4 months of 2021 as having a membership for 2022. 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/>. 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. We also need active volunteer members to give more opportunities and ideas to PA Nonbelievers to get together and do events with each other as a community. The Pandemic really dampened our ability to do things together as a community. We hope we can change that for the

upcoming year. 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 tabling events next year. Membership also gives you the right to vote and run in PA Nonbelievers elections in March 2022.

Don't forget to vote Tuesday 11/2/21. This is important due to being representation for our local government and Pennsylvania Judges. Be cautious, though, several people running have won on the Democratic and Republican tickets, so they may not be who you think they are. This is an opportunity for us to use our skeptical and objective researching skills to determine who we are willing to 'vote our conscience' for.



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

### **Do No Harm**

Sen. Cory Booker (NJ) and Rep. Bobby Scott (VA) have reintroduced the Do No Harm Act, which would act as an antidote to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). The Do No Harm Act would prohibit the use of the RFRA to interfere with other people's civil rights.

Insidernj.com explains the history of the RFRA. Originally, the purpose of the law was to expand civil rights protection for religious minorities; it was a response to a 1990 Supreme Court case that allowed discrimination towards Native Americans. Over the years the law has been interpreted to allow religious rights to trump other rights. For example, in 2014, the RFRA was cited in the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby decision, allowing businesses to refuse to offer contraception coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

Americans United for the Separation of Church and State goes into more detail about what the Do No Harm Act wants to accomplish at [au.org](http://au.org). It would keep RFRA from undermining nondiscrimination laws; evading child labor laws; denying access to health care; avoiding workplace protections, such as fair wage and equal pay laws; refusing to provide government services, or perform governmental duties. More than 100 civil rights, health, labor and faith-based groups have endorsed the Do No Harm Act.

One of the co-sponsors in the House is Mary Gay Scanlon, who represents Pennsylvania's 5<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, which encompasses all of Delaware County, an exclave of Chester County, a small portion of southern Montgomery County and a section of southern Philadelphia.

The RFRA has its defenders. The *Deseret News*, [deseret.com](http://deseret.com), quotes Matt Sharp, who directs the Center for Legislative Advocacy at the Alliance Defending Freedom: “Religion’s vast benefit to the whole of American society will only last so long as people of faith maintain the freedom to exercise religion, not just in their home or place of worship, but at work and in a wider community.”

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Courtesy of Scott Bitzer



### Flag Fight

The City of Boston flies ceremonial flags outside its city hall, alongside the Stars and Stripes, a POW/MIA flag, and the state flag. Trouble started when it refused to hoist the “Christian” flag (white cross on red square, blue background) of Camp Constitution. Camp Constitution’s Facebook page describes itself as “a New Hampshire based charitable trust founded in 2009 for the purpose of teaching the principles of liberty, freedom, and our nation’s Godly heritage.”

A better sense of Camp Constitution’s political positions comes from its descriptions of one of its booklets, “Inside the United Nations.” It says that the booklet talks about the United Nations, “the house that Hiss built.” Hiss is presumably Alger Hiss, 1940s state department official who was convicted of perjury for the answers he gave about spying for the Soviet Union. (The statute of limitations had run out on the espionage charges.)

The Boston *Herald*, [bostonherald.com](http://bostonherald.com), tells the story about the flag at city hall. When former Mayor Marty Walsh refused to fly Camp Constitution’s flag, the organization sued, and now the US Supreme Court has granted the group’s petition to be heard. Camp Constitution has previously lost in federal court.

Boston has flown flags such as the LGBT rainbow, or flags of other countries, when their representatives are visiting the city. Some of those flags – for example, the Chinese flag – have generated protests. The city has turned down flags before, like a “straight pride” one.

Walsh’s objection the Christian flag was that it would appear that the city was endorsing one religion over others, which it cannot do. The city has an official policy that states it will not fly nonsecular flags.

Camp Constitution counterargues that the city has flown so many other flags that it’s clear it’s discriminating against conservative Christians. A spokesman says the group is optimistic about their chances before the Supreme Court. He added, “This case could benefit other groups, no matter their ideology.”

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### Queer people and Churchy Cherry-Picking

Sarah Nicell

*The following essay was awarded Honorable Mention in the Freedom From Religion Foundation’s college essay contest. Sarah, 19, attends Franklin & Marshall College. “I have volunteered for local political campaigns, advocated for LGBTQ+ rights, engaged as a journalist for The College Reporter, and participated in my college’s student governments,” Sarah writes. “I am a Class of 2020 Diabetes Scholar, a winner of NextGenAmerica’s ‘Pride is Political’ contest, and an alumnus of the Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership seminar.” The essay is reprinted with the permission of the author and the FFRF.*

For as long as I can remember, God has hated me. Not in a chuckle-inducing I-forgot-my-homework-ugh-God-hates-me kind of way, nor in the infamously traitorous I-committed-adultery method of religious betrayal. I was extricated from the womb at 4 pounds, 6 ounces, and nothing — not my mother's blood, nor my first bath, nor the doctors, nor my baptismal introduction into the church — could rinse me of all of the inevitably horrific shame, guilt and sin this infant would collect and propel at the world like the plague.

Freedom From Religion Foundation, via Yen Liang Chen



## FREETHOUGHT OF THE DAY

"I'm so afraid of religion. Its capacity for murder is terrifying."

**Doris Lessing**

Interview by Harvey Blume  
Boston Book Review

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I was informed that God would hate that baby because she wasn't just any regular baby. She was a gay baby. A lesbian baby. That baby would grow up to dream about girls in the way that boys were supposed to, and she would question her gender in the process. In being baptized into Catholicism, receiving the Eucharist, getting confirmed, and being bestowed with the name of Mary Magdalene herself, these sacraments simultaneously welcomed me into the church and informed me that my type of person was not acceptable.

To me, religion has always been a juxtaposition of "love thy neighbor" and "burn in Hell," all wrapped up in forcibly well-intentioned comments and gossip that spread like wildfire. My church hand-selected its true sins from the bible just as customers might their meals at a diner, perusing the pages to find which acts to condemn and which to gloss over. Unfortunately, homosexuality was popular on the menu. I was told from a young age that lesbians were apparently not all the rage up in Heaven, and neither was abortion or premarital sex, two rules which simultaneously perceived women as objects and villains with no bodily autonomy. On the other hand, disillusionment ran rampant, for hatred, pedophilia, adultery, lust, lying, theft, masturbation and greed were "sins" that were discussed far less than the ever-so-scandalous nature of two men creating a life of love together.

This churchy cherry-picking is incredibly problematic, but its influence would be far less harmful in a secular world. Today, the hateful views of bigoted religious figures disguised as holy men impact my everyday life beyond pious institutions. Despite no longer attending church, I am forever plagued by news of equal rights failures carried on the backs of conservative Christians. The Westboro Baptist Church throws slurs around like they're empty words, proudly protests military funerals, and features frequent cultish behavior that is inexplicably protected by the law. The *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission* apparently left businesses with the ability to turn away LGBTQ+ consumers on the basis of religious expression and freedom. At the same time, Christians began to label transgender individuals who simply wanted to use the restroom assigned with their gender identity as predators, despite some of the most frightening predators being active pedophiles within the church.

A secular world combats the hypocrisy of religion — a reality that allows for the double-dealing of love to the churchy and hate to the queer — while promoting the freedom of choice. A secular world is an inclusive world, one in which belief and identity can co-exist, where neither are boosted above others, and neither are excluded from opportunity. A secular world accepts me, a gender-nonconforming lesbian, when God and his people don't. A secular world gives me the chance to be queer without the unwashable guilt, and that sounds pretty good to me.

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## Good News for Christian Schools

At least one group has benefitted from the pandemic: Christian schools.

The New York *Times*, [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com), reports that conservative Christian schools have grown during the past year. The story states, “The median member school in the Association of Christian Schools International, one of the country’s largest networks of evangelical schools, grew its K-12 enrollment by 12 percent between 2019-20 and 2020-21.” The Association of Classical Christian Schools taught 59,200 students this year, as opposed to 50,500 in 2018-2019.



The *Times* mentions in passing that this trend has not benefitted Catholic schools; their attendance continues to shrink.

While the numbers are increasing, they are still small, compared to the overall total. Only 3.5 million of the 54 million US students attend religious schools, and only 600,000 of those attend so-called conservative Christian schools. Before the pandemic, private school enrollment had been declining, so that the growth in Christian schools does seem to be a result of recent trends.

The reason isn't just the pandemic – parents who are worried about how public schools teach about race, and how they treat transgender students, are choosing Christian schools, too. The pandemic lead to students learning at home. Many Christian schools remained open, so parents chose them to allow their kids to actually have a physical classroom. Before the pandemic, private school enrollment overall had declined gradually since the turn of the millennium, while the subset of non-Catholic religious schools held steady, suggesting that the recent growth in conservative evangelical schools is a distinct phenomenon rather than part of a general retreat from public schools.

The article quotes Jeff Keaton, president of RenewaNation, an evangelical organization that works with Christian school, calls this period “the second Great Awakening in Christian education in the United States since the 1960s and '70s.”

It is important to note that the first Great Awakening was caused in part by white Southern parents founding “segregation academies” in reaction to the widespread integration of public schools. In additions, fights about school prayer, teaching evolution and sex education caused Christian parents to leave public schools.

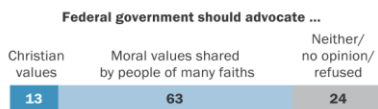
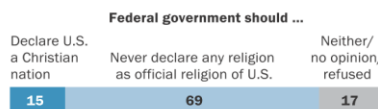
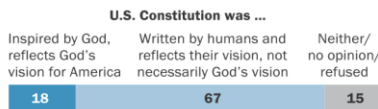
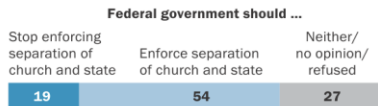
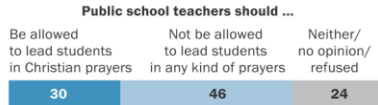
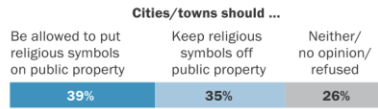
Today's Christian schools are often quite clear about where they stand. “Critical Race Theory will not be included in our curriculum or teaching,” promises a new school opened by a large church in Lawrence, KS. “The idea of gender fluidity has no place in our churches, schools or homes,” the headmaster of another new school in Maricopa, AZ., writes on his school's website.

The story concludes with a question: Will these schools continue to grow, after the pandemic is over? Or will the culture wars keep attracting students?

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## Most Americans oppose declaring Christianity (or any other religion) as official faith of U.S.

% of U.S. adults who say ...



Source: Survey conducted March 1-7, 2021, among U.S. adults. "In U.S., Far More Support Than Oppose Separation of Church and State"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Good News?

American Atheists publicized the Pew Survey results on the left, stating how great it was that most Americans think the Federal government should enforce the separation of church and state.

But are these results so reassuring? 39% of respondents think cities and towns should be allowed to put religious symbols on public property; only 35% oppose that. Only 46% think public school teachers should not be allowed to lead students in prayer.

And on the issue that made AA so happy, only 54%, a bare majority, actually thought the government should enforce the separation of church and state.

There are a couple of better results: 67% don't believe the Constitution was divinely inspired, and only 13% thought the government should advocate Christian values. Altogether, though, the results aren't all that encouraging.

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## Where Religion is Growing

Ryan Burge teaches political science at Eastern Illinois University, and has studied religious belief in the US. He is the author of *The Nones: Where They Came From, Who They Are and Where They Are Going*, and *20 Myths About Religion and Politics in America*.

The New York *Times*, nytimes.com, recently reported on Burge's conclusions about nones, which it describes as "secular Americans." Burge notes that the number of nones has grown dramatically; in the 1970s, they accounted for about 5% of the population; now the number is about 30%. This would lead one to believe that religious groups are losing adherents.

However, Burge points out that a recent Pew study showed that the number of white self-described evangelical Christians did not decline between 2016 and 2020; in fact, the number actually increased.



Why did this happen? Burge theorizes that it is tied to the presidency of Donald Trump.

He notes that in 2008, 16% of white evangelicals reported that they rarely attended church services. By 2020 that number was 27%. Further, in 2008 about one third of evangelicals who didn't go to church described themselves as politically conservative. By 2019, that number jumped to about 50%.

Pew's data also shows that fans of President Trump were more likely than non-fans to become evangelical between 2016 and 2020.

*Lancaster Freethought Society*



Another interesting discovery is that many people who call themselves evangelical are not Protestant. Catholics who identify as evangelical increased from 9% in 2008 to 15% in 2018. The same thing is true, Burge says for Muslims, Mormons, Orthodox Christians and Hindus. The non-Protestant evangelicals are as devoted to Donald Trump as the Protestant ones, but the non-Protestants are much more likely to actually attend religious services. What Burge concludes is that people who are very politically conservative and religiously engaged consider themselves to be evangelical – even if they don't believe in the divinity of Jesus.

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### Which Good Book?

Texas legislators are unsurpassed lately when it comes to dumbness. Austin TV station KXAN reports at KXAN.com that state Rep. Glenn Rogers has filed a resolution to have the Bible designated as the "official state book of Texas."

Rogers was happy to explain why he thinks this is a good idea. Davy Crockett and Sam Houston, Texas heroes, used the Bible as a source of "wisdom and inspiration." The resolution notes that 30 Texas governors have been sworn into office using a Bible that purportedly belonged to Houston. Since many people use their Bibles for record-keeping, they are part of family histories. The resolution concludes, "... As a prominent element in the rich fabric of our Texas heritage, the Bible is truly deserving of such acknowledgment."

The article notes that Rogers doesn't specify which Bible he wants to be so honored. It quotes Cambridge University as listing the 11 most popular English versions of the Bible, including the English Standard Version, the New American Standard Bible, the New International Version (NIV). The King James remains the most popular.

KXAN points out that about 77% of religious Texas identify as Christian, with 31% evangelical Protestant, and 23% Catholic. 4% of the state is non-Christian, with 18% identifying as some variation of none. The article concludes that similar resolutions failed in Louisiana in 2014 and in Mississippi in 2015.

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Recovering From Religion



### Is Anybody Still Surprised?

An independent commission just completed a study of sexual abuse by religious figures in France. According to the *New York Times*, [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com), the study found more than 200,000 children over the past 70 years. If perpetrators who worked with the church (Boy Scout leaders, for example, or staff) are included, the figure grows to more than 330,000.

The study noted that these numbers are higher than previously suspected, and that the abuse, and the cover-up, was more systematic than anyone had realized.

The investigating committee was set up in 2018 by the Catholic Church in France in response to critics of how the church had handled allegations of abuse.

The president of France's Bishop's Conference, Eric de Moulins-Beaufort, expressed shame at the report's findings, and promised to act. Victims and other observers were happy to hear that, but understandably skeptical. The co-founder of a victim's association, *La Parole Libérée*, was present at the press conference announcing the results. He addressed the many Catholic officials who were also present, telling them, "You are a disgrace to humanity."

One thing French Catholics found encouraging about the report: The people who prepared it held open meetings, and sought input from victims, a group that the French Catholic Church had largely ignored. However, problems remain.

In a related story, *The Guardian*, at [guardian.com](https://www.guardian.com), reports that France's interior minister has clarified that Catholic priests must report child sexual abuse allegations to the police, even if they find out about them during the sacrament of confession. The Catholic Church has long been allowed to maintain (in the US, too) that the secrecy of the confessional is absolute.

Despite Bishop de Moulins-Beaufort's "shame," he rejected the commission's recommendation that priests report sexual abuse, regardless of where they hear about it. He said, "The secrecy of confession is a requirement and will remain a requirement – in a way, it is above the laws of the Republic. It creates a free space for speaking before God."

French President Emmanuel Macron has criticized Muslims when he thought they were undermining French law. He asked the interior minister, Gerald Darmanin, to meet with de Moulins-Beaufort to "make sure that things are clear," said a government spokesperson. "Nothing takes precedence over the laws of the Republic in our country."

The interior minister, Gerald Darmanin, met with the bishop. After the meeting, Darmanin told an applauding National Assembly, "I told him what I say to all religions: there is no law that is superior to the laws of the National Assembly and the Senate ... The French Republic respects all religions from the moment they respect the Republic and the laws of the Republic."

De Moulins-Beaufort issued a statement apologizing to anyone he had offended. He added that the church will review its practices, and work "to reconcile the nature of confession with the need to



protect children.” This non-apology is in line with Vatican guidelines which stated that when handling abuse cases, any crime admitted during confession is subject to “the strictest bond of the sacramental seal.”

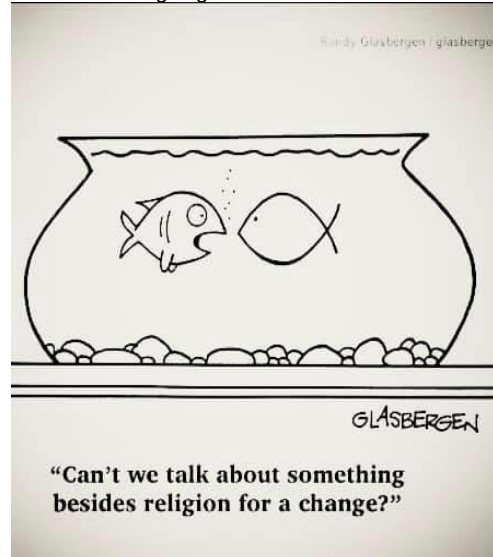
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### Invocation Battles Continue

Battles over atheist invocations feel like old news, but they still pop up from time to time. FFRF.org reports that atheists caused some upset when they were permitted to give an atheist invocation before the Polk County, FL, commissioners in May. But it looks as if there was a happy ending.

Sarah Ray, director of Atheist Community of Polk County, said the following: “We are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Humanists, atheists, agnostics, unaffiliated, uncertain and so many others. There is one thing on which we all agree: We share the goal of making Polk County — our county — the best place it can be. And we unite here today around that noble aim and common purpose.”

God Is Still Laughing



Not offensive, right? Wrong, apparently, if you are Polk County Commissioners' Board Chair Rick Wilson. After Sarah was finished, he asked everybody to stand and bow their heads, and then said: “Father God, thank you for this day and for Your mercy and grace. We ask Your guidance and blessings on this meeting and our county. In Jesus' name, amen.”

On Oct. 5, David Williamson, director of the Central Florida Freethought Community, was scheduled to deliver a secular invocation before the Polk County Commissioners. A consortium of freethought groups – FFRF, Atheist Community of Polk County, Central Florida Freethought, and Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, asked that Williamson be treated with respect. If the commissioners cannot do that, the consortium says, invocations should be eliminated. Here's part of their statement:

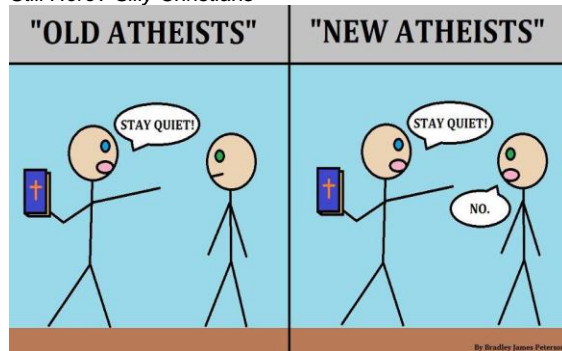
*Citizens, including Polk County's nonreligious citizens, are compelled to come before local government bodies like the board on important civic matters, to participate in critical decisions affecting their livelihoods, property, children and quality of life. The prayers exclude the 22 percent of Polk County residents who are not religious. It is coercive and intimidating for these nonreligious citizens to come to a public meeting and be required either to make a public showing of their nonbelief or to show deference to a religious sentiment they do not believe in, but which their board members appear to endorse.*

The board's policy on invocations actually agrees: *This policy is not intended, and shall not be implemented or construed in any way, to affiliate the board with, nor express the board's preference for or against any faith or religious denomination.*

It appears that the board saw the light. PANViews could find no reference to any issues with the October 5 invocation online, on the above groups' websites or local newspapers, and the board's minutes simply list Williamson as giving the invocation.

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*Still Here? Silly Christians*



## Black Atheists

American Atheists and Black Nonbelievers surveyed 891 Black nonreligious people, with researchers from Strength in Numbers Consulting Group. The results were released at [atheists.org](http://atheists.org). 39.6% of Black survey respondents said they mostly or always kept their nonbelief to themselves among family members, as compared to 31.2% of other nonreligious respondents.

Both groups are even more likely to hide their nonbelief from extended family: 51% of Blacks did that, as compared to 42.7% for other respondents. In fact, 62% of Black participants reported negative experiences with their families. 24.6% of Black respondents suffered from depression, as opposed to 17% of respondents of other races. Younger Black nonreligious participants, ages 18 – 24, were more likely to be depressed than older ones, 44.4% to 20.5%.

The survey results included a request that the media stop pushing the stereotype that all Black people are religious.

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## 8-Year-Old Blasphemer

Pakistani police gave into pressure from the media and government figures and dropped blasphemy charges against an 8-year-old Hindu boy.

The Guardian, at [theguardian.com](http://theguardian.com), explains what happened. The boy was charged with deliberately urinated on the carpet in a madrasa library, where religious books are kept. He is the youngest Pakistani ever charged with a crime. When he was released on bail, Muslim protestors attacked a Hindu temple.

Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, the prime minister's special representative on religious harmony, said the charges were baseless, and that the police officers who arrested him had been arrested themselves. Ashrafi said, "Our Islam does not allow attacking of any other religion's places of worship."

The government repaired the Hindu temple, and gave it back to the Hindu community in a formal ceremony. Many people have been arrested for attacking the temple, and will be expected to pay for the repairs.

Despite the government's efforts, the boy and his family are in protective police custody, because of the possibility of reprisals. Amnesty International has demanded the blasphemy charge be dropped and that the government continue to protect the boy and his family, and the Hindu community. In a statement it said, "Pakistan's blasphemy laws have long been abused to target minority groups, but this case marks a shocking and extreme departure."

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*God Is Still Laughing*



## **LGBTQ Rights and African Churches**

Churches in several African countries have denounced LGBTQ relationships as perverted and pushed for them to be illegal.

According to the Associated Press, [apnews.com](http://apnews.com), major churches in Ghana have joined together to denounce homosexuality as a “perversion” and pushed for harsh anti-LGBTQ laws throughout Africa.

In Nigeria, the umbrella body for Christian churches describes gay relationship as evil, and deserving of the long prison sentences Nigerian law enacts.

Methodist bishops in several African countries are working with the international United Methodist Church to form a breakaway Methodist denomination, the Global Methodist Initiative, so they can continue to not allow same-sex marriages, or LGBTQ clergy. Gay people in Uganda are often closeted because of the possibility of violence or arrests; a retired Anglican bishop there was barred in 2006 from representing the church publicly because he expresses empathy for gays. In fact, only one country in Africa, South Africa, has legalized gay marriage, and many churches there will not perform LGBTQ marriages.

The article describes Ghana as being regarded as more respectful of human rights than other African countries. But there is a bill before the Ghanaian Parliament that would require prison sentences of 3 to 10 years for people whose only crime is identifying as LGBTQ, or supporting that community. This bill has been generally supported by religious leaders, including the Christian Council of Ghana, the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference, and Ghana’s chief Iman.

The president of the Bishops’ Conference, Archbishop Philip Maameh, made his feelings clear. He told the AP, “We don’t accept murderers, why should we accept somebody who is doing sex in a sinful way? If you take a stance which is against producing more children, it is a choice which is injurious to the existence of the Ghanaian state.” The Christian Council’s secretary general, the Rev. Dr. Cyril Fayose of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, was equally damning. He said the Christian Council considers homosexuality “an act of perversion and abomination.” Fayose had previously stated, “Homosexuality is not a human right and we reject it in all uncertain terms.” Nigeria is equally as intolerant. The Christian Association of Nigeria has threatened to sanction any church that shows tolerance for same-sex relationships.

Rev. Keith Boyette, a Methodist elder from the US, chairs the breakaway Global Methodist Initiative. He believes that this disdain for LGBTQ rights is widely shared across Africa. “Same-sex orientation is viewed negatively,” he said. “That’s true whether a person is from a Christian denomination, or Muslim or from a more indigenous religion.”

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## Generous Joel Osteen

Remember awhile back, there was outrage because Joel Osteen, pastor of Houston's Lakewood Church, got \$4.4 million in pandemic loans from the government? This outrage was fueled because Osteen is supposedly worth \$50 million, owns a \$10.5 million mansion and a \$300,000 Ferrari. And of course, he travels on private planes.

Steve Withrow



The Daily Beast, thedailybeast.com, notes that after the loan was announced last year, "Osteen" and "Ferrari" trended on social media as people wondered why, exactly, Osteen had gotten a loan. Osteen told the Houston Business Journal that the church, which pre-pandemic had a weekly attendance of 45,000, had to shut down in-person services during the pandemic, and lost the "ability to collect substantial donations." The church insisted that none of the money went to Osteen or his wife, and that it was used exclusively to pay employees, and maintain their health insurance. Osteen wasn't alone, of course, in getting a PPP loan; some estimates show religious organizations getting up to \$7.8 billion in PPP loans.

A Lakewood spokesperson has now provided copies of bank statements to the Texas media, showing that its loans have been repaid. Technically, it didn't have to repay; the loan was forgivable if no employee were fired, all continued to receive their pre-pandemic pay, and if the loan was used for payroll or certain other expenses. Other organizations, such as Shake Shack and the Los Angeles Lakers, returned loans after they were heavily criticized for getting them in the first place.

Rob Boston, senior adviser of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, told the Houston Chronicle that Osteen was "rightfully" criticized for taking the loan. He pointed out that there is a larger issue: "...religious freedom is a core promise of our Constitution, and that means that no one should be forced to pay for someone else's religious beliefs or practices."

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## Religious Exemptions

Most churches are looking skeptically at requests for religious exemptions from COVID vaccines. One exception is the Catholic archbishop assigned to the US military. According to the Daily Mail, dailymail.co.uk, Timothy Broglio issued a statement that supported people who object to the vaccines because they were developed using cells from aborted fetuses. Broglio's statement said, "Notwithstanding the moral permissibility of these vaccines, the Church treasures her teaching on the sanctity of conscience. Accordingly, no one should be forced to receive a COVID-19 vaccine if it would violate the sanctity of his or her conscience." This would put Broglio in opposition to Pope Francis, who has encouraged Catholics to get vaccinated, regardless of the origin of the vaccine. Catholics represent about 20% of active-duty troops, roughly the same percentage as they are in the general population.


All military personnel are supposed to get vaccinated, but each branch has its own deadlines and rules. As of a few weeks ago, the Daily Mail reports that the Navy and Marine Corps had not issued any religious exemptions, but was unsure about the Army or Air Force. In any event, the vast majority of military personnel has been vaccinated; 96.7% have received at least one shot, and 83.7% have received two.

Some employers, when faced with a request for a religious exemption, are trying to check into how sincere the underlying religious beliefs really are. If the person requesting the exemption claims to be



opposed to taking a vaccine that uses fetal stem cells, the employer then checks to see if the person uses other medical products developed using those cells. Reproduced below is a notice Conway Regional Health System (Conway, AR) uses to verify that the person who wants to opt out of the vaccine is truly doing so for religious reasons:

Revised 9-3-21

**CONWAY REGIONAL  
HEALTH SYSTEM**

**Religious Exemption Attestation for Covid-19 Vaccine**

Based upon your religious exemption request, we ask that you complete the below attestation. This will help to validate your understanding of the ubiquity of fetal cell use in the testing and development of common medicines and consumer products and support your claim of a "sincerely held belief". The following is a list of common medicines that have used fetal cells in their development. This is a commonly used and available, but not all inclusive list of every day medicines that fall into the same category as the Covid-19 vaccine in their use of fetal cell lines:

Tylenol	Ibuprofen	Benadryl	Claritin
Pepto Bismol	Maalox	Sudafed	Zoloft
Aspirin	Simvastatin	Albuterol	Suphedrine
Tums	Ex-Lax	Preparation H	Prilosec OTC
Lipitor	Zocor	Enbrel	Azithromycin
Senokot	Zostavax	MMR Vaccine	Varilrix
Xigris	HIV-1	Acetaminophen	Havrix
Motrin	Tylenol Cold & Flu		

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### Change Comes to Comics

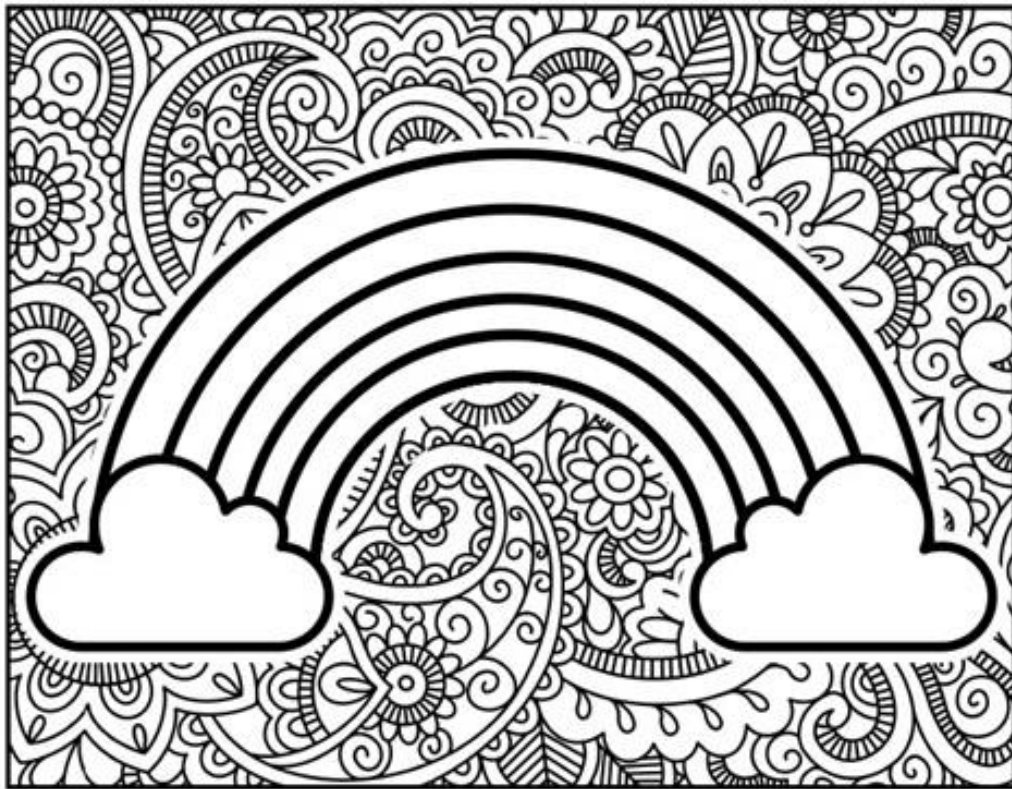
For *PANViews* readers who haven't kept up with the comics, Clark Kent and Lois Lane are now married, and they have a son, Jon Kent. According to [scmp.com](http://scmp.com), Jon has stirred up controversy by revealing that he is gay. He kisses his reporter friend Jay Nakamura in "Superman: Son of Kal-El."

Not everyone is happy about this. Some LGBTQ readers are enthusiastic, but others – for example, commentators on Fox News – are outraged. Surprisingly, one of angriest reactions is coming from Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim-majority country.

In Indonesia, opposition has come from religious, political and even child welfare groups. The Indonesian Ulema Council (IUC), an Islamic scholarship body, issued a statement saying it was disappointed that "anyone could produce comics that promote the LGBT lifestyle." The Vice Chairman of the IUC told *This Week in Asia* that "LGBT [sexual orientations] are not in accordance with human nature. [LGBT is] even anti-human because if everybody on Earth followed this lifestyle then it could be guaranteed that in 150 years there would be no humans in this world." He added that police should "arrest the creator and the distributor of the comic."

This level of anger seems especially misplaced, because Superman comics aren't even sold in Indonesia.

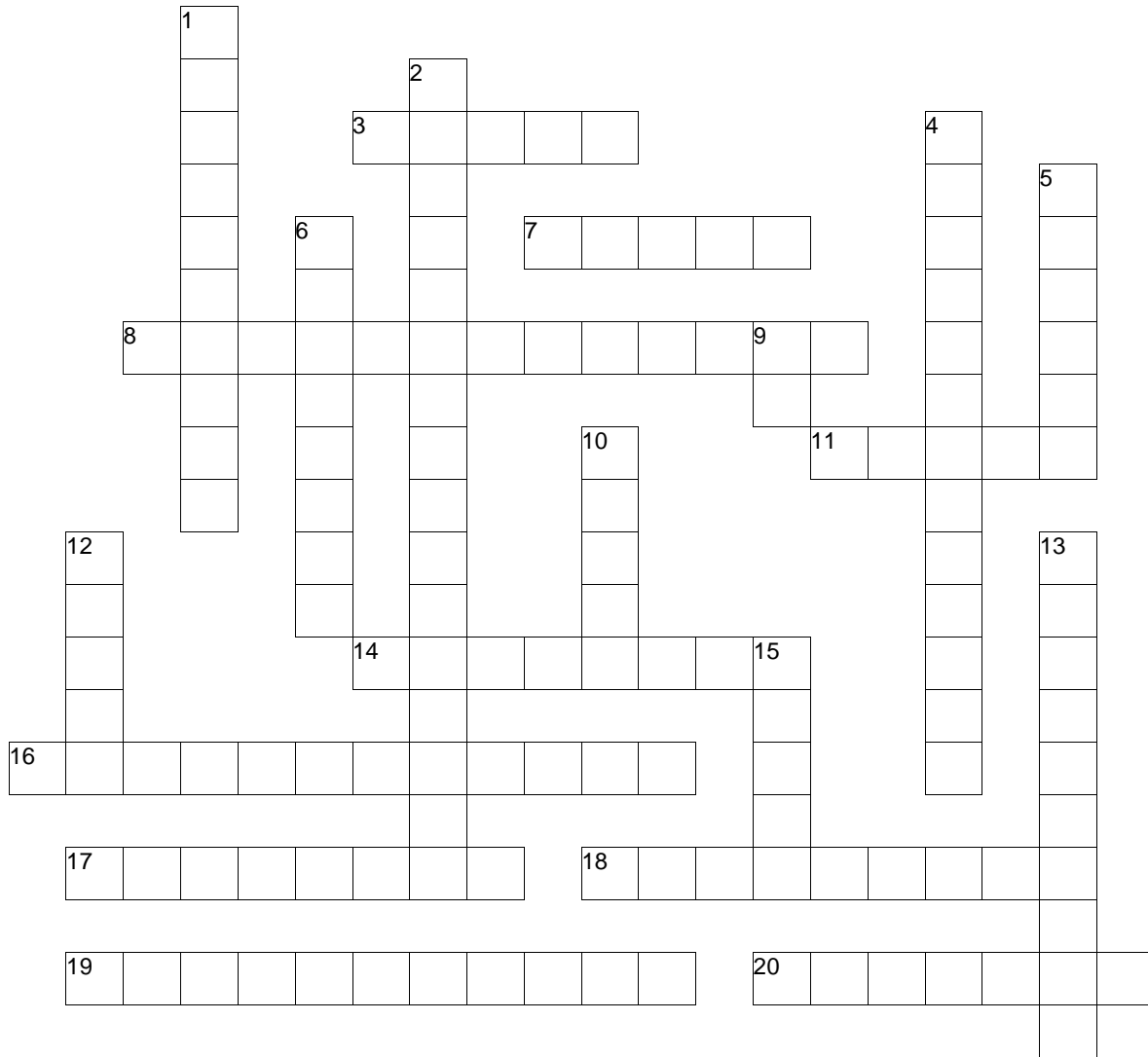
# FUN!





Answers at the end of PANViews.

# World Religions Review



## Across

- 3. Holy book of Christianity
- 7. Holy book of Islam
- 8. To be reborn
- 11. Main symbol of Christianity
- 14. Religion mainly found in East Asia
- 16. The religion that believes that Jesus is the son of God
- 17. The main prophet of Islam
- 18. Place of worship for Jews
- 19. The main teachings of Islam
- 20. Religion that began in the region of Palestine around 1800 BCE

## Down

- 1. The belief in many gods
- 2. Founder of Buddhism
- 4. The way to enlightenment is found through these steps
- 5. The four noble \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. The main religion of India
- 9. Name of main symbol of Hinduism
- 10. Name for God in Islam
- 12. Holy book for Judaism
- 13. Believing in one god
- 15. City Muslims face to pray

## ***PAN News & Update***

**Meetings** – PAN is holding in-person meetings again, but our virtual meetings at 6:00 pm on Wednesdays are continuing, too. Get more information on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers](https://www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers).

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

Chambersburg – Second Thursday of the month, 7:00 pm. The Historic Texas Lunchroom

Harrisburg– First Wednesday of the month, 6:30 pm. Cafe 1500, 1500 N. Sixth St.

Lancaster – **Date Change, for November and December: Second 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., Annville

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

Shrewsbury – Stay tuned! More information to come.

York – First Sunday of the month, noon, Prince St. Café, 2 W. Market St. We have reserved the back meeting room.

### ***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 lets 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](https://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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# World Religions Review

