

ATHEISTS WHO ARE HATERS

Catholic League president Bill Donohue comments on the work of the Freedom From Religion Foundation:

When I studied at New York University for my undergraduate degree, no one had a greater influence on me than Sidney Hook.

Hook was one of the most brilliant political philosophers of the 20th century. He started as a Marxist and wound up a moderate conservative. He was also an atheist, though I never detected, or read about, any hateful comments that he ever made about religion, or people of faith. He was too decent a man to engage in hate speech.

There is no reason to believe that most atheists today are hateful persons; they simply don't believe in God. Unfortunately, when it comes to organized atheists, that's a different story: many are hateful persons, spilling their venom at innocent men and women who practice their faith. Among the worst are the atheist haters at Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF).

When FFRF is in the news, it is a sure bet it is trying to censor some person or religious symbol. It is known for what it is against, not what it is for, save hatred for religion. Recently, it got bent out of shape when Oklahoma Gov. Kevin Stitt said he would speak at a Protestant church in Tulsa. What makes FFRF's beef so dishonest is its habit of ignoring politicians who use black churches for a rally. This goes on all the time.

FFRF is based in Madison, Wisconsin, a left-wing college town. It was founded in 1976 by Anne Nicol Gaylor and her daughter, Annie Laurie Gaylor. They regard themselves and their members as "freethinkers," to be distinguished from all of those close-minded persons who believe in God. They are too smart for that. Yet they have no idea how the world began or why we

are here, choosing to believe in nothing. "Nothinkers" may be a more apt way of characterizing them.

Last year at this time, FFRF featured Cecile Richards at its annual convention; she was the outgoing president of Planned Parenthood. She was a good choice: FFRF is passionately pro-abortion. So much so that Anne Nicol Gaylor once wrote a book, *Abortion Is A Blessing*. So much for the argument that "no one is really *for* abortion."

Why are so many organized atheists rabidly pro-abortion? Sex. They believe in a pansexual world where everything goes, absent any judgment. For them, the three most dreaded words in the English language are, "Thou Shalt Not." They don't want to be told by anyone what they should and should not do, and they sure don't want to hear from religious Americans.

One reason why FFRF is on the march these days is because of the lack of competition from American Atheists. There is great irony in this story: its former chief, David Silverman, was fired on April 12, 2018 for sexually assaulting women. Had he not sneered at "Thou Shalt Not" he might still be president.

Religious liberty is constantly under attack by FFRF. It recently became apoplectic when it learned that the Trump administration, under the tutelage of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, announced the formation of the Commission on Unalienable Rights. This entity, led by Mary Ann Glendon, the brilliant Harvard law professor who serves on the Catholic League's advisory board, is charged with assessing human rights from the perspective of natural law and natural rights. These founding principles scare the daylight out of FFRF: that's because they reflect our Creator, the source of our unalienable rights.

Religious symbols in the workplace bother FFRF. They want them banished. When it learned that employees in a municipal building in Taylor County, Texas had crosses on their desks,

it went bonkers. Another worker had the gall to have a Bible on his desk. To make matters worse, "God Bless America" signs were also found, including one on the door of the Veterans' Service Office.

FFRF sees Christian symbols as analogous to swastikas. That's why it had a fit with an Alabama school board in Cullman County when it added "In God We Trust" to school displays last year. In 2017, it wrote a threatening letter to Dan Hughes, mayor of Henderson County in Tennessee. Why? FFRF learned of a biblical verse from Psalms etched on the wall of the local county courthouse. It did not matter that the verse had been there for a half century without anyone complaining.

The good news is that FFRF loses more than it wins. Over the summer it took it on the chin when a federal appeals court overturned a lower court ruling on the constitutionality of allowing Lehigh County, Pennsylvania to keep its 75-year-old seal that has an image of a Christian cross. The Philadelphia appeals court noted that the seal did not amount to a government endorsement of religion.

The House of Representatives begins each legislative day with a prayer, a practice that has been observed since the First Continental Congress. In 2016, FFRF officials demanded equal time: it asked House Chaplain Father Patrick Conroy for the right to offer a "non-prayer" invocation. After they were denied, they sued. In 2017, they lost in federal district court. The next year they lost on an appeal to the D.C. Circuit Court. It was only fitting that they lost on Good Friday.

Veterans often rely on religion for peace and solace. When FFRF found out in 2007 that the Department of Veterans Affairs gave veterans spiritual assessments, asking about their religious practices, it sued. Chalk up another loss.

FFRF hates Christmas. If it can't censor nativity scenes, it

settles for a contrived competition, displaying some silly secular symbols next to the crèches. This is another example of its “against” agenda: it is always against something that Christians like. Satanic displays, of course, meet with its approval. Though the atheists would like to stop the Catholic League from displaying its life-size nativity scene every year in Central Park, it cannot: we get a permit from the New York City Parks Department; the government cannot discriminate against people of faith in venues that are considered a public forum.

FFRF has a special hatred of Catholics. From time to time, it likes to take out newspaper ads imploring Catholics to leave the Church. I have never seen it ask Muslims to leave their mosques or Jews to leave their synagogues.

Whenever a Catholic is in the news for doing something wrong, FFRF pounces on it. But when Stephen Hicks murdered three Muslims near the campus of the University of North Carolina in 2015, it said nothing. That’s because Hicks was a militant atheist.

Lots of Americans who are not Catholic are proponents of school choice, but when this issue surfaces, FFRF chooses to make it a Catholic issue. For example, Trump’s Secretary of Education, Betsy DeVos, has been accused by FFRF of pushing a “theocratic agenda to destroy public, secular education.” The leading “theocrats,” of course, are Catholics.

In some parts of the country, it has long been considered acceptable to have polling stations in or adjacent to a church. Voters simply cast their ballot and leave. But the issue is not that simple for FFRF. Annie Laurie Gaylor zeroed in on Catholics when she addressed this in 2003, and her words were not measured. “Asking a feminist to vote in a Roman Catholic Church is like asking a black man to vote in a KKK hall.” That’s right—there is no difference between a local Catholic church and a facility used by racists and terrorists.

Whenever a pope comes to the United States, FFRF rears its ugly head in protest. It not only objects to spending public monies for security purposes (newsflash: the pope is a head of state, not just a religious leader), it objects when public institutions cooperate with his visit. In 2017, it was angered when it learned that the football team at the University of Michigan attended a papal audience. When it learned that the athletes were to receive a papal blessing, it said this was a violation of the First Amendment. It looked foolish again—no one paid it any heed.

FFRF doesn't like Catholic judges. It is therefore not surprising to learn that it thinks we have too many Catholics on the Supreme Court. It has a special hatred of Catholic male judges. In 2014, it took out a full-page ad in the *New York Times* objecting to the *Hobby Lobby* decision (which did not involve a Catholic company) because the five Catholic male judges voted to sustain religious liberties.

"DOGMA SHOULD NOT TRUMP OUR CIVIL LIBERTIES. ALL-MALE ALL-ROMAN CATHOLIC MAJORITY ON SUPREME COURT PUTS RELIGIOUS WRONGS OVER WOMEN'S RIGHTS."

Translated this means that it was furious with the ruling that sustained the right of an evangelical Christian owner not to pay for contraception in his healthcare plan for workers. FFRF blamed the male Catholics for the decision.

FFRF never says a word about the fact that one third of the Supreme Court is Jewish, though Jews make up only two percent of the population. Nor does it say anything negative about Sonia Sotomayor: not only is she not a practicing Catholic, she is reliably pro-abortion and always follows the gay agenda. She is the kind of Catholic FFRF likes.

Aside from the late Christopher Hitchens, the famous atheist whom I debated on many occasions, it would be hard to find anyone who hates Mother Teresa (now St. Teresa of Calcutta).

Hard but not impossible. FFRF does.

In 2003, FFRF condemned the Madison Metro System in Madison, Wisconsin because it put a picture of Mother Teresa on its bus pass for the month of April; its practice was to choose a prominent person each month for this honor. The fanatics at FFRF saw this as a violation of church and state. To show how much FFRF hates Catholics, when the May pass featured a picture of Rev. Martin Luther King, it said nothing.

In 2016, atheists took to the streets of Washington, D.C. to promote their cause. That agenda, of course, meant an agenda of hate. FFRF was there, of course, and no doubt was loving it when atheist Penn Jillette went on an obscene rant against Mother Teresa.

Owing to the clout of conservative evangelical Christians, FFRF has often set its sights on them, as well as Catholics. In 2012, it was so incensed about conservative Christians who allowed politicians to speak at their churches, that it actually sued the IRS for not enforcing its rules. Naturally, it said nothing about African American churches inviting candidates for public office to address their congregations. In 2014, FFRF claimed victory when there was none: FFRF withdrew its lawsuit after the IRS simply clarified its strictures.

I am saving the best for last. In 2018, the IRS revoked the tax exemption status of NonBelief Relief, an agency incorporated by FFRF for failing to file its Form 990 for three consecutive years. FFRF then sued the IRS, claiming the tax-exempt status was unfairly revoked.*

In October, it held its annual convention, featuring speakers no one ever heard of, which is precisely what we would expect from a group of "Nothinkers." They really are a sorry bunch of losers.

**This paragraph has been amended to reflect a more accurate*

representation.