

PANViews

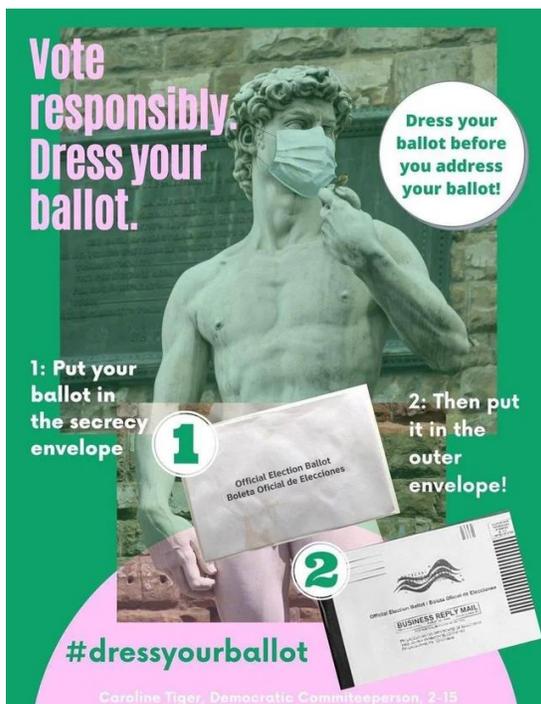


Newsletter of PA Nonbelievers, Inc., affiliated with American Atheists, Atheist Alliance International and the Council for Secular Humanism.

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President's Report

Josh CruverKibi



Do you have a plan for how you will be voting this year? There has been no area of our lives in which the Corona virus has not affected us, and that now included the elections process. Please plan ahead for how you will be voting and take steps to make sure your votes get counted. The last day to register to vote in Pennsylvania is October 19th. The last day to apply for a mail-in absentee ballot is October 27th.

But why wait? You can register to vote, and apply for mail-in and absentee ballots, at <https://www.pavoterservices.pa.gov>. You can also find your in person voting location, check on your registration and ballot status, and more at this government website. If you plan on voting in person, election day is Tuesday November 3rd and the polls are open from 7:00 am through 8:00 pm. 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 above website. And of course, wear a mask, be safe, be prepared to wait in line, and practice social distancing.

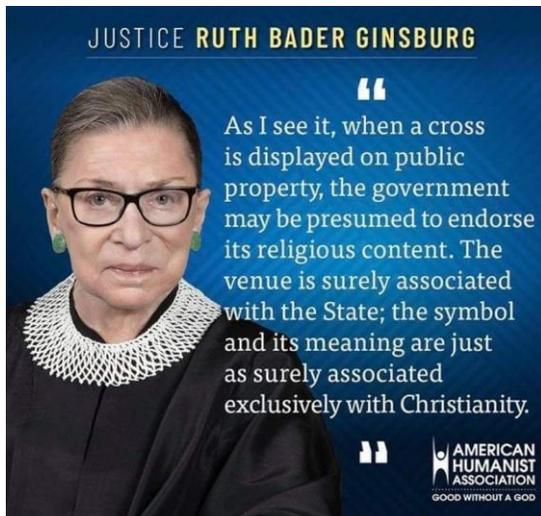
If you are voting by mail-in or absentee ballots, it is very important that you to place your ballot inside of the white envelop labeled "Official Election Ballot", seal it, and then place this sealed envelope into the second mail envelop with postage and return address. The Trump campaign and Republicans sued Pennsylvania in federal court arguing that "naked ballots" or ballots that arrive without inner secrecy envelopes, should not be counted. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled in agreement with not counting naked ballots last week, which means your ballot will be thrown out and not counted if you do not follow instructions. As rationalist and scientifically objective people, we can handle this, right?

You can also hand deliver your mail-in and absentee ballots to your County Board of Elections office on Tuesday November 3rd by 8:00 pm and in some counties you can hand deliver them on Monday the 2nd as well. There is a County Board of Elections office for every county, a drop off box for your mail-in or absentee ballots, and a website for each County Election office to check when

you can drop off your ballot. Again, mail-in and absentee ballots have to be received at your County Board of Elections office by 8:00 pm on November 3rd. You cannot hand deliver your ballot to your regular in person voting location. Mail-in ballots that were post marked by 8:00 pm on November 3rd can still be accepted and counted at the County election office if they are received by 5:00 pm Friday November 6th. But why chance your vote not being counted? Mail your ballot in as soon as you can fill it out correctly or hand deliver them to the County Election Office.

This will be a good topic at our PAN Zoom meetings this month, as I know many of our members are experts and or have interest in the political process and policies in our respective counties. PAN Zoom meetings are weekly on Wednesdays at 6:00 pm. Please feel free to ask other members advise, tips, and keep each other informed to make sure that our non-believer voices are heard in this upcoming consequential election.

Atheist News in Pennsylvania – The Nation – The World!



The Real Handmaid's Tale

Amy Coney Barrett, Supreme Court nominee, is a well-known conservative jurist. Her devout Catholicism has also been publicized. Many articles about her note her membership in a group called People of Praise. What is this group like? Well, Margaret Atwood may have used it as one of her models for *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The Handmaid's Tale is a dystopian novel, published in 1985. Set in the near future, it's the story of Gilead, a totalitarian state that has replaced the United States government. It explores the role of women in a patriarchal society, among other things.

Newsweek.com reports that Margaret Atwood has discussed the role that a charismatic Catholic group played in inspiring her to write the novel. It quotes an interview Atwood gave *The New York Times* in 1986: "I delayed writing it for about three years after I got the idea because I felt it was too crazy. Then two things happened. I started noticing that a lot of the things I thought I was more or less making up were now happening, and indeed more of them have happened since the publication of the book." She went on to say: "There is a sect now, a Catholic charismatic spinoff sect, which calls the women handmaids. They don't go in for polygamy of this kind but they do threaten the handmaids according to the biblical verse I use in the book—sit down and shut up."

Atwood has not named People of Praise as her inspiration. However, a *New Yorker* profile in 2017 says that she had a box of newspaper clippings collected as she wrote the novel, including an Associated Press story about a Catholic church in New Jersey that had been taken over by a fundamentalist sect that called wives "handmaidens," as People of Praise does.

On its website, People of Praise says that it is not a church, but a "charismatic Christian community". It claims 1,700 members in 22 cities in the US, Canada and the Caribbean. Both Barrett and her husband belong to the group, as do both of their fathers. The group is officially ecumenical, but most of its members are Catholic. Members are required to swear an oath of loyalty to each other, and to donate at least 5% of their earnings to the group. Men have authority over their wives. Women are expected to subject their will to their husband, and he makes all decisions for the family. He is responsible for the state of her soul.

Each member is assigned a personal adviser of the same sex. These used to be called "head" for men and "handmaids" for women, until Atwood's book became popular. Advisers of both sexes are now called "leaders." Leaders can have tremendous influence over their advisees' lives, directing who they marry, where they live, and how they raise their children.

People of Praise was formed in 1971 in South Bend, IN as part of the Charismatic Renewal movement. It emphasizes a direct personal experience of God, which is quite different than the normal Catholic reliance on priests and bishops to act as intermediaries. They believe that marriage is only between a man and a woman, and that only married couples should have sex. Anyone engaging in homosexual activity would be expelled.

Judge Barrett has refused to comment on her membership in the group.

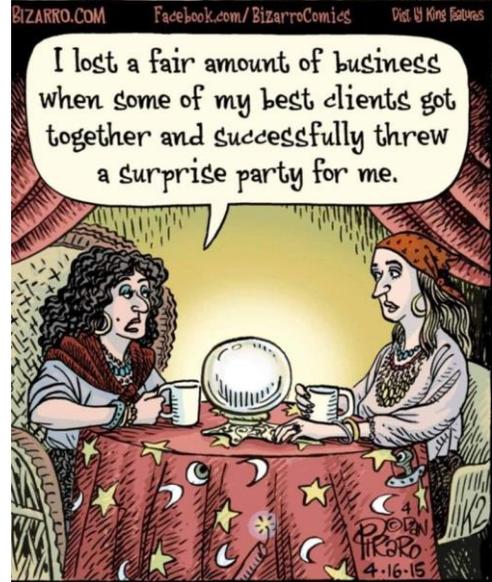
Progress in Sudan

Sudan's transitional government has agreed to end Islamic rule, according to Bloomberg.com.

This change came about as the Sudanese government is negotiating a peace deal. Prime Minister Abdalla Hamdok and Abdel-Aziz al-Hilu, a leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement-North rebel group, signed a declaration which stated the following: "For Sudan to become a democratic country where the rights of all citizens are enshrined, the constitution should be based on the principle of 'separation of religion and state,' in the absence of which the right to self-determination must be respected."

The rebel group had refused to sign any peace agreement that doesn't help Sudan reintegrate itself into the international community.

God is Still Laughing



Sudan has been embroiled in a civil war since now ousted dictator Omar al-Bashir seized power in 1989. Bashir implemented a stringent version of Islamic law with the goal of making Sudan the "vanguard of the Islamic world." Al-Qaeda and the terrorist Carlos the Jackal both took refuge there. The US designated Sudan a terror sponsor in 1993, and imposed sanctions that were lifted in 2017.

In another sign that Sudan is trying to get out from under the yoke of sharia, it also recently lifted its ban on alcohol and apostasy. The *Washington Post*, [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com), reports on one worrying sign, though: 61% of Sudanese wanted Sudan's laws to remain based on sharia.

Southern Baptists Shrinking

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) reports that its membership dropped 2% last year, which is largest decrease in over a century.

Christianitytoday.com notes that some SBC state conventions had growth in baptisms and church membership. But the denomination's Annual Church Profile shows that the loss of 288,000 church members last year leaves the church with 14.5 million members, down from its peak of 16.3 million in 2006. Average worship attendance remained steady at 5.2 million. (Note what a small percentage of SBC members actually go to church!)

Total baptisms, obviously a key figure for any church, fell by 4% to 235,748, the lowest number since World War II. Finances are still all right, although last year's total of \$11.6 billion, is down, after two years of increases. The SBC says its pent \$1.1 billion on missions.

One other key detail, from researcher and statistician Ryan Burge: fewer children raised in the SBC stay in the church as adults. He suggests that the SBC's problem isn't fewer converts; it's that they can't keep their members.

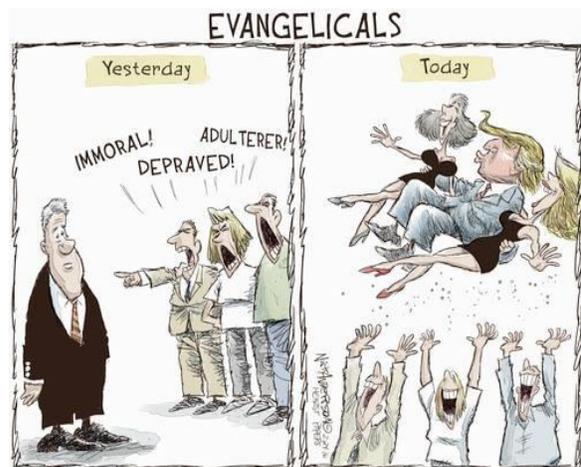
Controversy at the Catholic Prayer Breakfast

Prayer breakfasts are not usually controversial. This year's National Catholic Prayer Breakfast (NCPB) has stirred up some dissent because it will honor Attorney General William Barr. The reason that choice was controversial is a bit surprising.

The National Catholic Reporter, ncronline.com, explains that Barr will be awarded the Christifideles Laici Award (Faithful Christian Laity), named after a post-synodal apostolic exhortation of Pope John Paul II, signed in Rome on December 30, 1988. It is summary of the teaching that arose from the 1987 synod of bishops on the vocation and mission of the laity in the church and the world. The goal of exhortation was to explain that lay Christians must make their daily life "a shining and convincing testimony to the gospel." This is a new award, created in 2019. According to the NCPB website, its citation reads: "In Honor and Gratitude for Fidelity to the Church, Exemplary Selfless and Steadfast Service in the Lord's Vineyard."

See Here? Silly Christians

Some prominent Catholics opposed giving this award to Barr. Why? Because he was a key figure in the federal government's decision to reinstate the death penalty, which is opposed by Pope Francis and the US bishops. 5 prisoners were executed by the Federal Bureau of Prisons in a little more than a month this summer, and more are scheduled. The Catholic Church's position is that "the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person, and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* #2267).



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Sister Helen Prejean, the nun whose opposition to the death penalty figured in the movie *Dead Man Walking*, tweeted: "I raise my voice in fervent opposition to the National Catholic Prayer Breakfast's scandalous offer of an award to Attorney General Barr for his 'exemplary Christlike' behavior. I urge the group to immediately rescind their invitation, and I urge anyone reading this to join me." The Association of U.S. Catholic Priests called the award "shocking, incomprehensible and scandalous."

According to thehill.com, more than 22,000 people have signed a Faithful America petition calling on the NCPB to cancel giving Barr the award.

Catholicnewsagency.com reports that in his speech accepting the award, Barr expressed concern about "a new orthodoxy that is actively hostile to religion." He had this to say about the separation of church and state: "militant secularists have long seized on that slogan" to try to move religion out of the public square and out of conversations on the common good. They are replacing religion "with a new orthodoxy that is actively hostile to religion" which, he said, has resulted in "urban violence," drug abuse, and broken families. He had nothing to say about the death penalty.

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Pennsylvania Apostle

Aden Rusfeldt is the pastor of Key of David Christian Center in Philadelphia, a tiny church with 20 members. Aden doesn't seem to find the small size discouraging; he and a few of his disciples eagerly generate publicity by engaging in demonstrations at PA colleges.

The LGBTQ community is a prime target. According to the York Daily Record, ydr.com, he and 3 of his misfits recently demonstrated at Cheyney University. One of their signs said "Trump, Make America Great Again: Ban homo marriage." Another sign issued a "warning" to "obey Jesus" or endure "hellfire." Apparently to make sure that they offended as many people as possible, they also yelled racist hate speech.

Rusfeldt said that his group targeted the LGBTQ community, but admitted that they also used racial slurs. "We don't like white racists or black racists," Rusfeldt said. "We condemn the KKK and any group that says blacks are superior to whites." He went onto say that hate speech is a "myth."

Chad Dion Lassiter, the executive director of the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission, does not agree. "We have a different interpretation of how folks are looking at free speech when it crosses the line of racial and ethnic intimidation," he said. "We know there are aspects of the evangelical white population that hide racism under Christianity."

Rusfeldt said that he and his group next plan to demonstrate at Penn State, because he has heard "rumors" that there are gays there.

The Philadelphia *Inquirer*, inquirer.com, provides more information on Rusfeldt's background. Although he mostly targets colleges, he got into a fight while demonstrating at the Harry Potter Festival in Chestnut Hill, demonstrated outside Lincoln Financial Field after the Eagles' NFC championship victory a few years ago, and was charged with ethnic intimidation and harassing congregants at a Buddhist Temple in Montgomery County. Colleges are familiar with him, upping campus security (and notifying anti-hate groups) when he announces a visit.

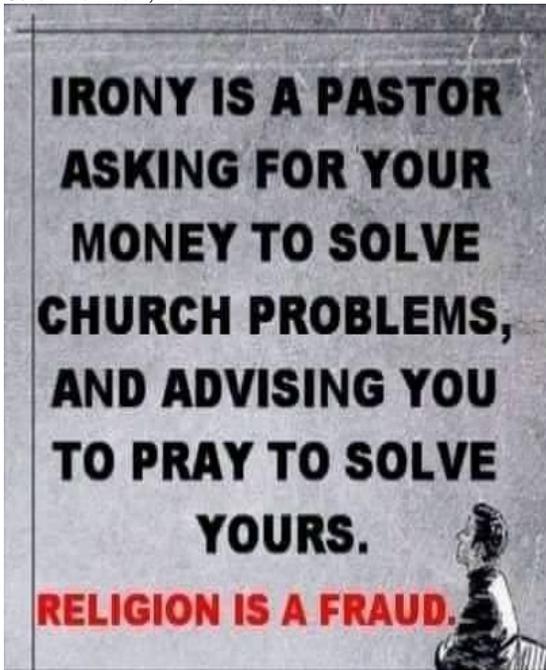
As is the case with a lot of Christian revival types, he has a history as a con man. He began as a semipro snowboarder, but then renamed himself Pastor Aden. In the early 2000s he claimed to be an expert in the foreign exchange market. He said he had an investing technique that was just like planting a "money tree" that would produce hundred-dollar bills every day. He even boasted about attending a business conference with Eric Trump.

Unfortunately, it was not true. (Well, maybe the Eric Trump part is true.) In 2007 the Texas Commodity Futures Trading Commission sued him for defrauding clients. He settled by agreeing to

stop offering financial advice, and to repay clients \$1.9 million. He didn't make repayments, and by 2015 was fined \$3.2 million. Even Rusfeldt agrees he owes more than \$5 million. His excuse: "I used to have a greed problem," he said last month. "I used to have sex before marriage. I used to hit the bong like Cheech and Chong."

He has now conveniently been saved, married, and has 2 children. God sent him to the Philadelphia area, where he founded the Key of David Center. Rusfeldt says the name comes from a passage in the Book of Revelation directed "to the angel of the church in Philadelphia" from the one "who is holy and true" that possesses the key of David.

Sarat Waikhom, via Mikki Weidman



Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia

The Catholic Church has reiterated its opposition to assisted suicide and euthanasia, which is not new, but comes at a time when several countries, including some traditional Catholic ones, are considering legislation that would allow it.

The New York *Times*, nytimes.com, reports that the Vatican again stated that assisted suicide and euthanasia are "inherently evil" acts, "in every situation or circumstance." The document, titled "Samaritanus bonus" (the Good Samaritan), adds some new thinking to the Church's traditional position. It discusses what it calls a "throwaway culture," where people look for the easy way out instead of finding ways to support people with terminal illnesses, their families and the health care workers who treat them. "Incurable cannot mean that care" has come to an end, states the letter, which calls for a "wider notion of care" for terminally ill people.

The letter also addresses Catholic hospitals, which account for 14.5% of all US hospitals. It instructs them to "abstain from plainly immoral conduct," including referrals to hospitals where euthanasia or assisted suicide is possible.

Euthanasia is legal in the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. Switzerland allows physician-assisted suicide in some cases, and Italy and France allow the terminally ill to stop treatment in some cases. New laws are under discussion in Spain and Portugal, and New Zealand is supposed to be holding a referendum on the issue. According to the organization Death with Dignity, California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Maine, New Jersey, Oregon, Vermont and Washington also allow assisted suicide.

Coronavirus and Religion

PANViews thought that the coronavirus might make religious people wonder why God allows such bad things to happen. PANViews is wrong.

According to the Washington *Post*, washingtonpost.com, only 2% of Americans say that the coronavirus has weakened their faith, while 25% say it has actually strengthened it. This survey, from Pew Research, found that faith was deepened among people who are already religious, who

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frequently pray, and go to church regularly. Pew's report notes, though, even among people who aren't very religious, few said their faith had weakened.

47% of Americans say the virus has had no affect on their religion. 26% agreed with the statement "I am not a religious person and this hasn't changed." Pew concludes that Americans are not turning to religion as a result of the disease.

Pew did find a racial gap. 41% of African Americans said their faith was stronger, while 20% of whites and 30% of Hispanics said that.

Interestingly, people who know someone who has been hospitalized or died are more likely to say their faith is stronger, by 33% to 21%. 56% of Black Protestants, 42% of evangelicals, 27% of Catholics, 22% of white mainstream Protestants and 7% of Jews said the virus had deepened their faith.

There are differences between genders, too. Among men, 18% said their faith had grown, 48% hadn't changed, and 32% said they are not religious; among women, those figures are 30%, 46% and 21%.

The poll explores what effect the virus will have on faith, and on the future of church attendance. Will people get used to not going to church in person? The article quotes religious leaders who are optimistic that online services have attracted people who have never gone to church and will want to go to physical services when they can.

Orthodox Jews and the Pandemic

New York City is seeing a worrying increase in coronavirus in its Orthodox Jewish communities. The New York Times, nytimes.com, reports that health inspectors have started emergency inspections at Orthodox schools, and the city government is threatening to impose a lockdown in specific neighborhoods with a large Orthodox population.

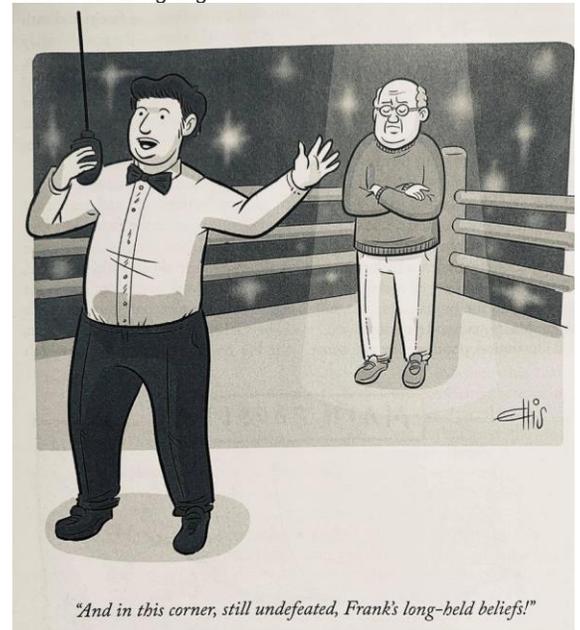
Residents in these neighborhoods haven't been wearing masks, or social distancing. Leaders in these neighborhoods say that residents have not cooperated because of hostility to Mayor Bill de Blasio and the influence of President Trump.

The Health Department announced that if the situation did not improve by September 28, it would begin issuing fines, limiting gatherings and closing businesses and schools.

The positivity rate for the virus has grown from 3% to 6% in Orthodox neighborhoods, as compared to 1% to 2% in the rest of the city.

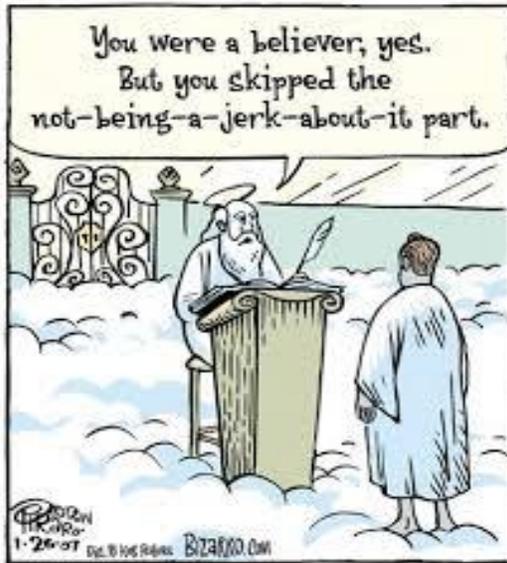
In a radio interview, de Blasio said that the city has already closed 4 yeshivas because of violations of social distancing rules. The concern of course is that the coronavirus could begin to spread again throughout New York City. If the city's positivity rate reaches 3%, it would trigger a new lockdown for all of it.

God is Still Laughing



Members of the Orthodox community are not convinced. At a news conference with city health officials in Brooklyn, a member of the audience interrupted the speaker to say that the city was exaggerating the outbreak. Another man, who wasn't wearing a mask, approached a speaker, who asked him to back off, or put on a mask. The man said that he wouldn't wear a mask, and if the speaker didn't like it, he could leave. He also shouted, "Go to East New York!" which is a Black neighborhood in Brooklyn.

Many in the Orthodox Community support President Trump because they regard him as an ally on school choice, religious freedom, and support for Israel. In January Attorney General William Barr visited a community center in Brooklyn to announce federal hate-crime charges against a Brooklyn woman accused of assaulting three Orthodox women last December. By contrast, one leader pointed out, the city announced the crackdown for wearing masks just before Yom Kippur, and that Jewish leaders found out about it from a press release.



Socialism and the Bible

Religious people can get angry at the notion that Jesus, or the Bible in general, might support socialism, or anything other than capitalism.

An article on apnews.com, by Luc Bowens, UNC-Chapel Hill, lists many parts of the Bible that support a key tenet of Karl Marx' writings: *From each according to their ability, to each according to their needs.*

Bowens begins with the Book of Acts. Early Christian communities in Jerusalem "were together and had all things in common," selling their possession and distributing the proceeds to anyone who needed help.

The Book of Acts also supports "from each according to their ability": "So the disciples determined, everyone according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea." The Gospel of Matthew has a reference, too, in the Parable of the Talents. A master gives his servants "talents" or money, as follows: "To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability." First Corinthians continues the thought: "He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor."

Bowens references the Second Letter to the Thessalonians: "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat." He explains the background of the quote. St. Paul believed that he and his fellow Christians ministers should be supported by the church, because their ministry supported the common good. But there was a problem. Some of the Christian ministers weren't working; they were just along for the communal living arrangements. Paul was urging them to work, and set a good example for others.

As is so often the case, it seems a lot of Christians only read some of the Bible.

Member Submissions

Last month Cheryl Huber wrote a fun article about the derivation of the word “confetti.” She has discovered that it may have been an April Fool’s joke. It’s not clear, so *PANViews* readers can decide for themselves whether to believe it.

Feeling as One

Jim Eshleman

Recently a friend sent me a link to Peter Hollens performing a Capella in his sextet. Their excellence shows in songs from James Taylor’s “Fire and Rain” to “Amazing Grace”. I thought of the power in these performances and I thought of what it would feel like to be “inside” this group or a choir. More than belonging, it would be a “feeling-as-one,” a more emotional attachment to the others. And as the effort proceeds, it would be an “acting-as-one.” Aren’t these a significant part of why people find a home in religious groups?

I thought of the marching in formation that military basic training uses to promote group feeling. I thought of pep rallies, political rallies, sports teams, service organizations, and protest groups. Remember the “We Are the World” anthem for the cause of its time?

As atheists or Humanists we might not often feel comfortable joining groups, but what kind of belonging can we offer to a prospective member?

PAN members do act to support and donate to others. More than commiserating as outsiders and demonstrating our support for the separation of church and state, we might highlight our “feeling-as-one” and “acting-as-one” as we engage in benefitting others.

Learned persons have claimed that altruism does not exist, but those who give know that it does.

Some of the happy attendees at PAN's annual Susquehanna Riverboat ride

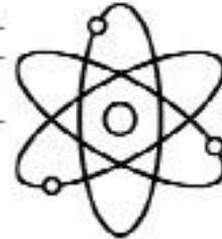


FUN!

The solution was not provided for this puzzle, so you're on your own.

Name: _____ Date: _____
Class: _____ Teacher: _____

Famous Scientists Word Search



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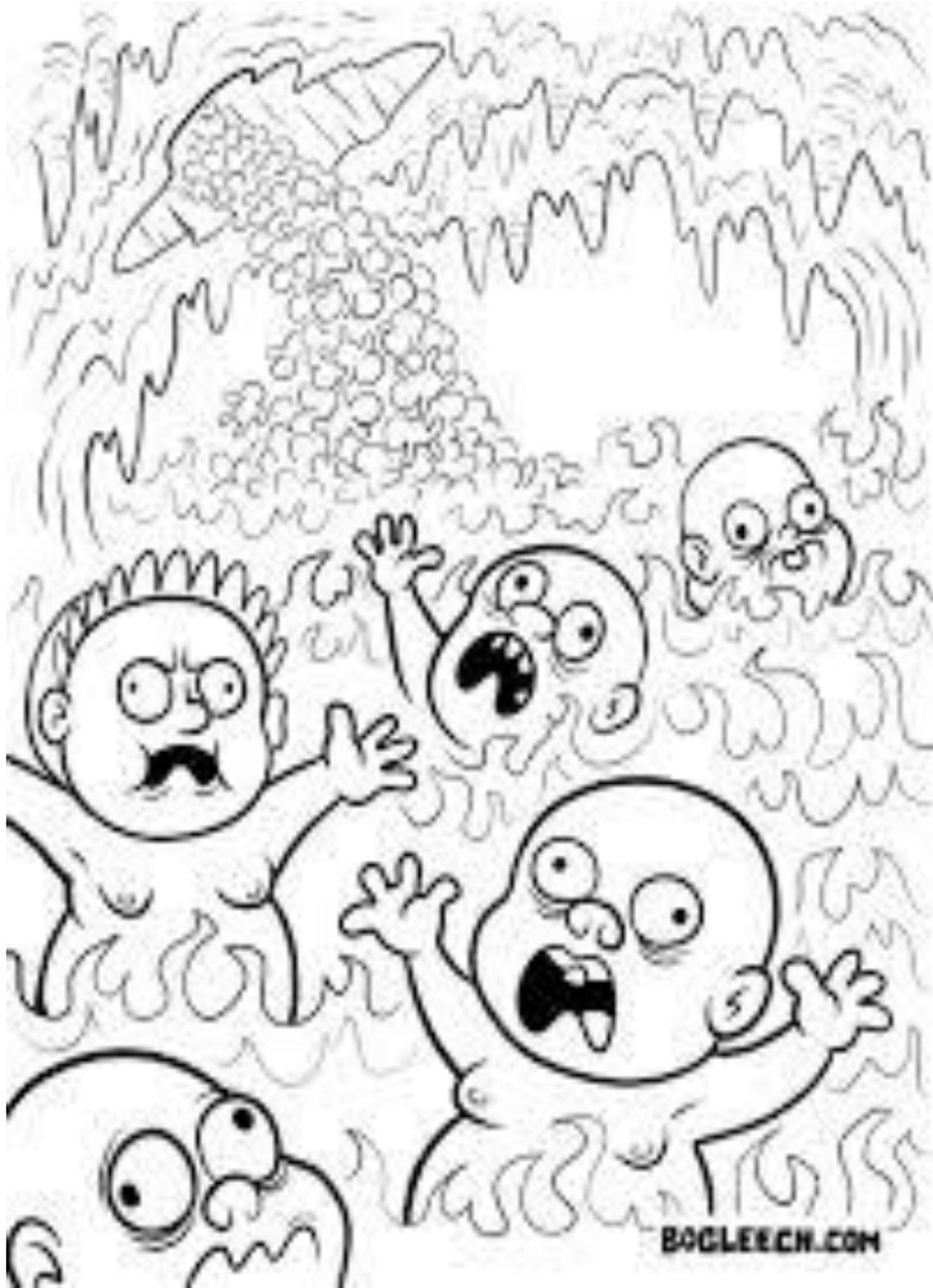
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EINSTEIN
HUBBLE
CURIE

GALILEI
RUTHERFORD
PASCAL
DESCARTES
MAXWELL
KEPLER

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Babies in Hell! Have fun!



PAN News & Update

Meetings - For more details about our meetings, which will remain virtual at 6:00 pm on Wednesdays for the time being, find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/groups/panonbelievers. Some groups may meet in person; check on Facebook or Meetup for details.

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

Chambersburg – Second Thursday of the month, 7:00 pm, Montezuma Mexican Restaurant, 820 Wayne Avenue, Chambersburg. This restaurant has outdoor seating, so they will be meeting in person.

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.

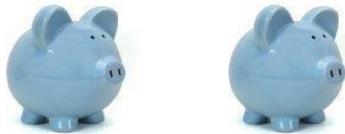
Lebanon - Second Wednesday of the month, 7:00 pm, Batdorf Restaurant, 245 W. Main St., Annaville

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, 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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