

Johno (Jonathan MS) Pearce - “Jesus, Lord, at Thy Popping Right Out of the Grave?” (Or, “The Resurrection: A Critical Examination”)

On Sunday, October 10, at 1:00 pm via Zoom, AFS will have another world-class Zoom meeting for October, happily a repeat of an earlier popular speaker with a new topic. AFS will once again host internationally known **Jonathan MS Pearce**, a noted philosopher, teacher, atheist writer, blogger (“A Tippling Philosopher”) and speaker. Pearce has written quite a few books, including fiction and two especially telling titles, *The Nativity: A Critical Examination* (2011) and *The Resurrection: A Critical Examination of the Easter Story* (2021) and has a growing pan-oceanic following.



Jonathan Pearce

The Resurrection story, the crucial (pun intended) follow up to the nativity bit, is integral to the Christian faith; its truth has been crucial for Christians since the inception of the belief system. But did the events reported in the Christian Bible actually happen? How do the claims made by the authors look in light of careful historical analysis? Are the Gospel claims internally coherent? Do Christian believers have justification in believing the chapter and verse of this most famous of miraculous stories?

Jonathan MS Pearce looks at all of the problems with the Easter story in the same way he analyzed the Nativity accounts. This talk, based on his recent book, is a diligent examination of the Easter story, the claims, the likelihood of truth, and what may have been the original events that inspired the biblical writers and believers to write and believe what they did. And still do.

Pearce is a philosopher, author, public speaker and skeptic fascinated by all things religious and nonreligious: what we believe and why we believe it. He blogs at the Patheos Nonreligious channel as **A Tippling Philosopher**, a moniker derived from a casual group of thinkers that he is a part of who

Calendar

Oct 10	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Nov 14	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Dec 12	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm

All events are via Zoom unless noted and are subject to change.

met in normal times for a drink at the pub for an analysis of all things real and unreal. He advocates good philosophy and good ale, but also accepts that, on occasion, one is not conducive to the other.

Pearce is the author or editor (or co-author/ editor) also of many other works, including *Free Will? An Investigation into Whether We Have Free Will* or *Whether He Was Always Going to Write This Book* (2010); *Twins: A Survival Guide for Dads* (2011); *The Little Book of Unholy Questions* (2011); *Beyond an Absence of Faith: Stories about the Loss of Faith and the Discovery of Self* (2014); *13 Reasons to Doubt* (2014); *The Problem with “God”: Classical Theism under the Spotlight* (2015); *Filling the Void: A Selection of Humanist and Atheist Poetry* (2016); *Survival of the Fittest: Metamorphosis* (2016); *Did God Create the Universe from Nothing?: Countering William Lane Craig’s Kalam Cosmological Argument* (2016); and *Not Seeing God: Atheism in the 21st Century* (2017).

The Pearce program, free and open to the public, will be preceded by a few minutes of social distanced (with a vengeance) socializing starting about 12:30 P.M., for those interested. The program will start at about 1 P.M. (ET in US) on Sunday, 10 October, via Zoom. Please click on the link below to participate. Socializing starts at 12:30 pm.

AFS October Meeting Oct 10, 2021 1:00-2:30 PM (EDT)

To join Zoom meeting go to this link:
us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911

For the latest in upcoming AFS events, join our Meetup group!
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Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, 30339 unless presented online due to global pandemic (see link on page 1). Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:30 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy.



October 10: Jonathan Pearce

November 14: Alison Gill

December 12: TBA

January 9: TBA

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To keep up to date on the Atlanta Freethought Society calendar of upcoming events, please join our Meetup group: meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define freethought as “the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.”

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other’s company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences. Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

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FFRF files Supreme Court brief to counter Mississippi's anti-abortion gambit

ffrf.org

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and its secular allies are pushing back in the U.S. Supreme Court against Mississippi's religion-infused attempt to severely curtail abortion rights.

The state/church watchdog has drafted and filed a friend-of-the-court brief before the highest court in the land in *Dobbs v. Jackson Health Organization*. In the brief, FFRF puts forth a well-reasoned argument as to why Mississippi's lawsuit to effectively overturn *Roe v. Wade* will require courts to confront the religious purposes underlying abortion bans: "Religion has always been at the heart of anti-abortion legislation, and Mississippi House Bill 1510 is likewise motivated by religious ideology." This is revealed by various highly sectarian religious statements that Mississippi legislators made in support of the legislation, such as: "I believe that life is precious and children are a gift from God" and "I am not God, but I serve a God who says life is in the blood. And this bill will protect those lives."

The brief elaborates on its secularly informed assertion.

"The state is asking the court to toss out the decades-long safeguard of choice before viability, and require courts to engage in fact-finding and searching analysis of state interests in order to judge them compelling enough to justify abortion bans," it states. "But doing away with the viability framework and asking courts to review and weigh state interests before viability will require courts to address the underlying purpose of such abortion bans — to enshrine into civil law a religious belief about when personhood begins."

Due to the religious impetus of Mississippi's anti-abortion onslaught, FFRF felt a compelling need to make itself heard in this Supreme Court case.

As FFRF stated in May when the Supreme Court decided to hear the lawsuit, abortion access and care are unnecessarily divisive due to the ideological motivations of the few. A recent Pew study found that the majority of Americans believes that abortion should be legal in all or most cases, and 82 percent of religiously unaffiliated people support legal abortions. Not surprisingly, today almost all of FFRF's members consider reproductive rights a vital secular policy issue. A recent membership survey showed that 98.8 percent of FFRF members support the constitutional right to legal abortion embodied in *Roe v. Wade*. Among FFRF members and the general population, abortion rights have high approval, but a religious minority is driving the agenda of states such as Mississippi.

This brief states in its closing portion: "The government has no business requiring citizens to comply with the religious beliefs of those who are in power. The framers of the Constitution adopted a godless and entirely secular Constitution, in which the only references to religion are exclusionary."

It is simply unconstitutional for a state to force a religious belief about personhood onto anyone else, FFRF contends and urges the Supreme Court to uphold the judgment of the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals that struck down the Mississippi anti-abortion law.

"Religion has no legitimate function to play in lawmaking in the United States," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "The Supreme Court, as guardian of our Constitution, should be fully cognizant of this."

FFRF Associate Counsel Elizabeth Cavell drafted the amicus brief for the organization, with help from FFRF Legal Director Rebecca Markert, Senior Counsel Patrick Elliott and FFRF Reproductive Rights Intern Barbara Alvarez. The Center for Inquiry and American Atheists are the other groups that have joined in FFRF's brief.

Atheists to the Supreme Court: Don't Allow Lawmakers to Limit Abortion and Force Their Religion onto Patients

atheists.org

On September 20th, American Atheists joined the Freedom From Religion Foundation in an amicus brief to the Supreme Court for the upcoming case *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. The organizations are calling on the Court to keep abortion care legal in Mississippi before viability, defined as up to 24 weeks of pregnancy.

In 2018, the Mississippi government passed an unconstitutional law that bans abortion after 15 weeks of pregnancy.

This law violates the constitutional right to choose an abortion prior to viability, forcing people to carry a pregnancy to term against their will.

"The Christian nationalist majority on the Supreme Court already failed to act on Texas's 6-week abortion ban. If the Supreme Court also fails to stop Mississippi's unconstitutional law, it will spell the official end to *Roe v. Wade*," said Alison Gill, Vice President for Legal and Policy at American Atheists.

In an earlier ruling, the Fifth Circuit ruled in favor of the abortion care provider. "Until viability, it is for the woman, not the state, to weigh any risks to maternal health and to consider personal values and beliefs in deciding whether to have an abortion," wrote the judges. FFRF and American Atheists' brief points out that passing pre-viability bans is just "acrobatics to obfuscate [government officials'] true legislative motivation and intention—imposing a particular religious ideology upon other citizens."

"No government should force subjective and controversial religious beliefs onto those seeking medical care, least of all when it is, as Justice Ginsburg once said, something as central to a person's life, dignity, and well-being as the choice whether to bear a child," said Nick Fish, president of American Atheists. "Americans broadly support access to abortion, and they agree that it's government overreach when the state's only justification for controlling its citizens' bodies is religion."



South Dakota Governor Claims She'll Allow Students To 'Pray In Schools Again'

au.org

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem (R) said recently that she soon plans to promote legislation to bring back school prayer.

During an interview with conservative personality David Brody, Noem bemoaned that we've "seen our society, our culture, degrade as we've removed God out of our lives." She told Brody that when she was growing up, "Our church family was a part of our lives. We read the Bible every day as a family together. I don't know if families do that as much anymore."

Perhaps they don't, and there may be a good reason for it – **they don't want to**. As recent polling data has shown, a growing number of Americans are "nones" when it comes to religion. They choose not to affiliate with any particular denomination. Some remain spiritual, but others have left religion entirely.

In a free country with a secular constitution, we all get to make our own decisions about what role, if any, religion will play in our lives. That's not good enough for Noem and those who think like her. They seem to believe the government should have a role to play in these deeply personal matters. It's a very curious stand for a conservative who claims to want to get government out of our hair.

Noem was vague about her school prayer proposal, telling Brody that South Dakota public schools already post "In God We Trust" signs, then adding, "And I have legislation that will allow us to pray in schools again."

Noem made a similar claim while speaking to Christian nationalists in



Iowa in July. She was short on specifics then, too, and her office later refused to provide more details to the media.

Suffice it to say, any sort of proposal to bring back school-sponsored, mandatory, coercive or compelled prayer in the public schools of South Dakota would be illegal. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled definitively in 1962 that public school students can't be pressured to pray in class. (It's also worth noting that the South Dakota Supreme Court invalidated a law requiring recitation of the Lord's Prayer in public schools much earlier, in 1929.)

Public school students have the right to engage in voluntary, non-disruptive prayer in public schools. It's possible that Noem may end up proposing symbolic legislation that merely restates this fact. Anything beyond that, any bill that pressures public school students to take part in prayer or allows school officials to sponsor it, would be a clearly unconstitutional infringement on the rights of students and their families.

P.S. To learn more about the religious freedom rights of students, parents and staff in public schools, check out these great "Know Your Rights" guides produced by Americans United.

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Do away with the bible-based death penalty, FFRF urges the Supreme Court

FFRF.org

Abolish capital punishment, the Freedom From Religion Foundation and its allies are asking the U.S. Supreme Court.

The state/church watchdog's **friend-of-the-court brief submitted on September 27** in the *Ramirez v. Collier* case (which deals with religious access) argues that the death penalty is unjustified in a secular nation such as the United States, since it stems in part from biblical roots, and is unconstitutional under the First and Eighth Amendments.

Ramirez v. Collier has been in the news recently because of the Supreme Court's seeming willingness to make a religious allowance for the death-row inmate.

"The Supreme Court agreed to postpone the execution of **John Ramirez**, who was scheduled to die on Wednesday night in Texas," **reports SCOTUSblog**. "The last-minute respite will allow the justices to fully consider Ramirez's request that his pastor be allowed to physically touch Ramirez and audibly pray in the execution chamber while Ramirez is put to death."

FFRF's brief asserts that the issue before the court is Kafkaesque because the law is quibbling over Ramirez's constitutional rights moments before it takes them away forever. Also, if there is going to be an execution, FFRF maintains, any rule the court hands down should apply to the nonreligious.

"A state-sponsored execution violates the Eighth Amendment because it permanently destroys a person's human dignity, and is thus cruel and unusual," states the brief. "Further, the Damocles sword hanging over a person on death row is torturous, and death row tenure is so long that a death sentence in practice amounts to more than a decade of torture, which is itself cruel and unusual punishment in violation of the Eighth Amendment."

The brief makes a number of cogently argued points.

First, it contends, the Supreme Court should hold that capital punishment is unconstitutional, since the current application of the death penalty as a punishment in America is fraught with peril — from its unreliability to its arbitrariness to its cruelty. Death sentences infamously fall disproportionately on prisoners of color. The Supreme Court rightly abolished the death penalty in 1972,

but cavalierly reversed course just four years later.

And of all the ways a state could impermissibly interfere with someone's free exercise of religion, killing them is certainly the worst way. This simple fact highlights a legal absurdity in the petition before the Supreme Court: Ramirez is asking it to recognize that Texas' policy requiring him to die without physical contact violates his ability to freely exercise his religion, but even if the court vindicates Ramirez's asserted right, it simultaneously allows that same right to be permanently obliterated by allowing his execution to go forward.

Second, FFRF asserts that the biblically based death penalty should be rejected once and for all. While the root of capital punishment may not be solely biblical, in the Western world the bible's primitive "eye for an eye, life for a life" injunctions in both the Hebrew and New Testament bibles have been a major sourcebook for the death penalty. The Christian church, in particular, "has played a significant role in validating the state's use of capital punishment," as scholar **Davidson M. Douglas** points out. These biblical justifications were also used by the colonists in the Americas.



Third, FFRF's brief posits that if executions are allowed to take place, end-of-life accommodations must be equally available. A long string of unbroken precedent holds that neither may the government officially favor one religion over another nor may it favor religion over nonreligion. If the court chooses to allow state-sponsored killings to continue, it must ensure that end-of-life accommodations are made equally available to those of all religions and those with no religion at all.

It suffices to say, FFRF concludes, that the Supreme Court need not decide whether Texas' policy of disallowing spoken prayer and physical contact inside the execution chamber is permissible, because it should conclude that the death penalty itself is unconstitutional.

"The United States' use of punishment by death is a global embarrassment," the brief convincingly states. "As our society moves toward an acknowledgment that punishment by death is no longer acceptable, this court should give effect to 'the evolving standards of decency that mark the progress of a maturing society' [to quote the Supreme Court's language from a past ruling] and end capital punishment once and for all."

The Freedom From Religion Foundation's interest in this case arises from its position that capital punishment is an unconstitutional, inhumane imposition of a religiously based punishment. In modern times, freethinkers have been the first to speak out for the abolition of the death penalty. The overwhelming majority of FFRF's membership opposes the death penalty, according to its 2020 survey. FFRF is headquartered in Wisconsin, which was the first state to abolish the death penalty permanently for all crimes (in 1853), and the second principality in the world, after Iceland, to abolish the death penalty.

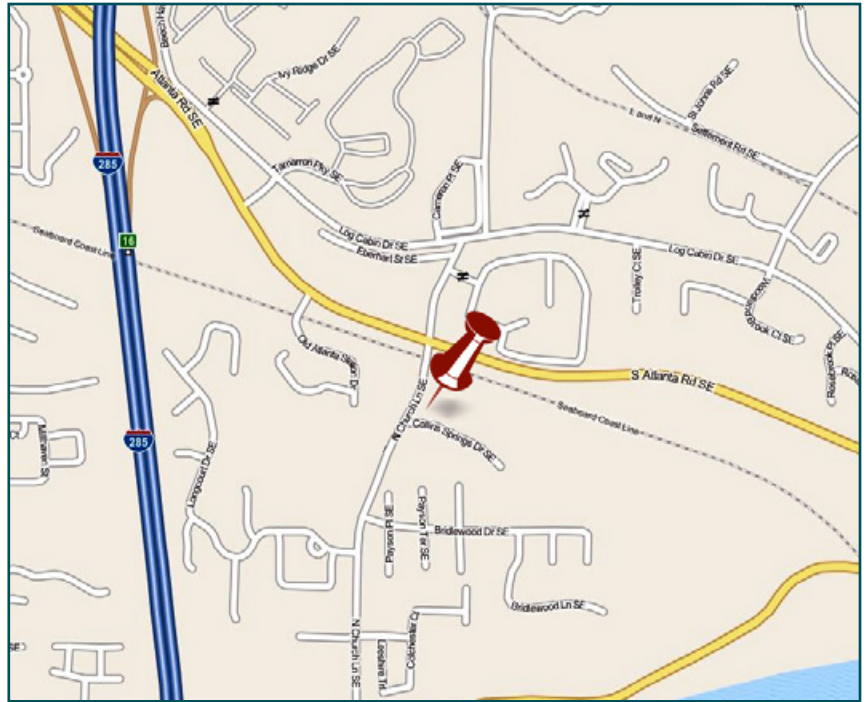
FFRF Legal Director **Rebecca Markert** and FFRF Staff Attorney **Ryan Jayne** drafted the amicus brief for the organization. The American Humanist Association and American Atheists are the other groups that have joined in FFRF's brief.

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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4775 N. Church Lane SE
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**Jonathan Pearce
10/10/21 1:00 pm EDT
(via Zoom)**



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