

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Letter From the Editors	3
Science and Religion	5
New Chaos, Same Scapegoat	6
Does Religion Cause Violence?	7
Half Empty, Half Full: World Religion Class at JFKS	8
Religion Survey Analysis	10
Finding Meaning Outside Religion	12
Atheism vs. Agnosticism	13
Legalized Discrimination: Religious Expression and the Law	14
IDEAS Looks Forward To	15
Credits	16

# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

#### Dear Readers,

In our final IDEAS Journal of this school year, created in lessthan-ideal circumstances, we look both inward and outward to discuss religion. Faith plays a major role both in the world at large and in many of our internal lives, with religious and spiritual ways of perceiving the world being a nearly constant part of the human story across the world and over time. Traces of religion have always and still do exist in nearly every aspect of daily life. Religion informs our discussions of morals and ethics, politics and people, art and architecture, language and traditions, and generally how individuals view themselves and the world. Whether you are of a religious faith or not, understanding the impact of religion, for better and or worse, is essential to a both empathetic and critical perspective on how we make sense of the universe. Religion is many things to many people: An explanation, an oppressor, a

comfort, an obligation, a moral code, a set of social guidelines, a means of communication and self discovery. It's because of the diversified role that religion plays in our individual lives that conversations about religion can lead to conflict and oppressive ideologies can be perceived as religious beliefs. This journal seeks to sensitively grapple with these aspects and more, exploring perspectives within the IDEAS journal team and throughout the JFKS community and beyond.

As we do for all of our journals, we sent out a survey regarding JFK'S attitudes towards religion to students in grades 9-12. When surveyed, many students expressed that they do not identify strongly or at all with religion, and thus need not or should not discuss religious issues (page 10). We believe this is not the case. Religious discussions can be contentious, even hurtful. For this and many

other reasons, as discussed in our piece on World Religion classes (page 8), it is contested whether religion should be discussed in our classrooms. At this time of change, though, when the of non-religious percentage members of society is greater than ever before, we have both the privilege and the burden of considering questions of faith. Does science contradict religion fundamentally? (page 5). Where does religious freedom cross the line of discrimination? (page 14). And what does life mean if it wasn't created with a purpose? (page 12).

IDEAS is now embarking upon a new era with a new leadership team. As my time in IDEAS comes to a close, I reflect fondly on the origin of this journal and how much it's reach has broadened since then. I'd like to thank Amalia Anhalt and Emma Nathenson, who have worked diligently to craft the foundation of this journal that

# **CONTINUED...**

future generations of leadership will now be able to build upon. We have grappled with topics that challenge not only us as individuals but our school community as a whole. I hope that the articles so carefully crafted by our reporters have instilled our mission of progress within our school community. Finally, I'd like to introduce our wonderful new leadership team. Jakob Reuter is the new Director of IDEAS, Hannah Cook is

the Director of Community Outreach, and Liliana Walker the emperor of the IDEAS Journal and Podcast for the coming year. I couldn't have asked for a more dedicated, talented and bright new leadership team and look forward to seeing the new heights IDEAS will reach under their guidance.

To close out this year of exploration and fruitful discussion in IDEAS, we

ruminate on all we have done and why we did it—to promote understanding, to foster a community of openminded and forward-thinking individuals, and to consider the world in ways we may never have before. Religion is for many of us the most personal and introspective topic we have discussed so far. We hope you will enjoy our perspectives and consider religion anew.

# Yours, Liliana Walker and Lena Marzona Editors-in-Chief





#### **SCIENCE AND RELIGION**

#### IS THERE A PEACEFUL PATH TO COEXISTENCE?

Lauri Eckle

A study conducted by San Diego State University in 2015 showed that millennials in the U.S. "were significantly less religious than previous generations". Disparities between religion and science were named as one of the many possible reasons for this trend. As this conflict has been ongoing for centuries, it alone doesn't explain the recent decline, but may contribute to it. The authors theorized that, "the reemergence of the science-religion conflict debates about teaching with creationism or intelligent design in U.S. schools" could have impacted the religious affiliations of the younger generation. While the main cause of this tendency is unclear, it highlights differences between science and religion. Is it possible for science and religion to coexist?

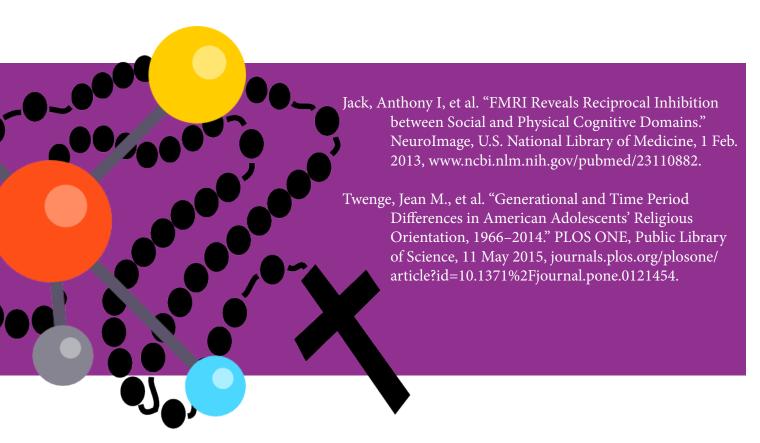
Religion and science have long been polarized. On the one side, there are studies linking higher IQ with lower church attendance and showing that scientists are less likely to believe in God than nonscientists. Many in the scientific community argue that believing in something supernatural is intellectually absurd, even a moral danger. On the other side, there are studies attributing the decrease in faith to a decline in empathy over the years. There is also data linking religious belief with a longer life span or better psychological health.

Religion and science both play complex and ever-evolving roles in our culture.

The philosopher Immanuel Kant juggled different stances toward religion throughout his lifetime. He once said, "I had to deny knowledge to make room for faith." This is one of his most famous quotes. It shows a divide between spirituality and science.

While Einstein is not a theologian, he famously argued that, "[s]cience can only state what is, not what should be," highlighting how clash between religion and science is artificial. They are complementary because science and religion answer different questions. Science is an analytical, experimental process, not an ideology or a theology.

Conflict only arises when scientific or religious leaders claim a monopoly on Truth, drowning out space for debate. Much better that we open the space for debate and drown dogma.



# **NEW CHAOS, SAME SCAPEGOAT**

Hannah Cook

We live in troubled times. Faced with the uncertainty and hostility the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic imposes globally, Germany and other countries have seen not only a rise in patients but also, anti-Semitism. While initially, these may seem unrelated, the inconspicuous ties between them trace back to the utilization scapegoating. Finding an outlet for blame in unstable and worrisome times redirects broad fears into focused anger. This coping mechanism is buried deep in the human psyche. As a result,

# "anti-semites have sought to tie Jews to the creation and/or spread of the Coronavirus"

a lot of conspiracies have emerged, taking advantage of the growing gullibility of people in the state of hardly harnessed chaos.

While many conspiracies may be innocuous, others have serious implications and can quickly evolve into extremism that threatens our fragile social peace. Countless accusations on social media blames

Israel and Jewish people for the origin of the virus, its spread, and profiting from exploiting vaccines against COVID-19. Not only are anonymous and unknown internet users spreading staggering allegations, elite politicians have also encouraged such scapegoating. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has openly promoted anti-Semitic rumors and condemns Zionists (Zionism is the belief of the establishment and need for a Jewish state) for supposedly creating the virus as a biological weapon. Police in the U.S. have foiled planned attacks directed at Jews as a result of believing that accusations tying them to the purposeful spread of the virus. This sends a vexatious and terribly disappointing message and is a harsh reminder that anti-Semitic tendencies still reside in many. And while they may come as a surprise for some, others like Jonathan Tobin, editor in chief of the Jewish News Syndicate, reminds us that "[t]hough the world has changed a great deal in the intervening centuries ... it's hardly surprising to learn that there has been a surge of anti-Semitic activity in which anti-Semites have sought to tie Jews to the creation and/or spread of the Coronavirus."



Turkish President Erdoğan Image via AP

While there has certainly been progress in reducing anti-Semitism, our current crises are uncovering hidden prejudices.

We must seize moments like this one to self-reflect and face our underlying biases. Especially in times like these, it is important to avoid falling into old traps and remain united in the fight against the virus.

#### DOES RELIGION CAUSE VIOLENCE?

Jakob Reuter

argument that "religion The causes violence" is an interesting political football, as it is often used by both the left and the right to make very different points. The right often uses this argument to justify stances against Islam, which they correlate with terrorism. The left, on the other hand, tends to argue there is a link between Christianity and regressive views which often manifest in violence. The fundamental argument seems to be the same, though: religion causes violence. But does it?

Certainly, differing ideologies cause violence, but that this can be separate from religion. Right and left leaning Christians disagree with almost all of the ideals that exist on the other side, but maintain that they follow the same faith. This could seem like an impossibility upon first glance-how can you read the same scripture and form opposite moral compasses from it? In reality, though, this is one fundamental aspect of religion. Interpretations of scripture and law have always been a cause for conflict. Millions have died throughout history because their sect of a religion interprets certain phrases differently than others. When Martin Luther reinterpreted the bible to found Protestantism, Europe erupted

into nonstop warfare for more than a century, each side fighting for "true" Christianity. Somewhere between 6 and 16 million people died during the wars that followed. A more modern and perhaps more relevant example is the fight between Shia and Sunni Muslims. Many compare the Shia-Sunni divide to the Catholic-Protestant divide, but the difference between Shia and Sunni Islam is much smaller and the two interpretations align almost perfectly. Despite this, the two branches of Islam have been at each others throats for centuries and still contribute to modern conflicts in the Middle East. It must be noted, however, that conflicts in the Middle East are almost always motivated by much more than the Sunni/Shia divide, which leads to the conclusion that many factions are masking their true intentions by appealing to this divide as a justification for violence.

# "any given person's interpretation of religion is almost entirely based on their own values"

Most people arguing that "religion causes violence" don't mean sectional infighting, though, but rather extremist terrorism in the vein of 9/11 or the KKK. The real questions, then, are: Does religious violence actually represent the religion? Is the Islamic terrorist who pledges to kill the infidels representative of the "true" Islam, and is the racist Christian who assaults people of color representative of the "true" Christianity? The answer is clearly no-they represent their own fringe ideologies, which they weakly justify through religion. In fact, anyone doing anything in the name of religion, good or bad, is representing only their own ideology. The fact of the matter is that any given person's interpretation of religion is almost entirely based on their own values, which they would likely hold regardless of divine intervention. The Bible, Quran and Torah are long and complex, and whether you interpret them as justification to discriminate against those different from yourself or as a motivation to treat everyone with kindness, it is most likely your personal values and ideology which drove you to this conclusion. Using a religion as justification for violence is simply not a valid argument. If someone interprets holy scripture as hateful or as a call to violence, that should reflect on them alone—not religion as a whole.

# HALF EMPTY, HALF FULL

#### **WORLD RELIGION CLASS AT JFKS**

Johanna Tigges

Any discussion of interest will sport at least two opinions. This is precisely why one should take both sides into consideration to allow a fully educated and well-thought out opinions to be formed. Or if not that, to at least give the issue at hand more context. The broad theme of this journal is religion. Religion as a subject at JFKS is basically

non-existent beyond Elementary School. World Religion class would give students a general view of the role of religion in societies. It may include comparisons of similarities and distinctions of religious viewpoints. Classes would allow students to explore historical accounts of and core beliefs held in the practices of Christianity,

Judaism, and Islam, to name a few examples. This may sound more or less appealing to different students and faculty members. This article will debate whether or not JFKS should have a mandatory World Religions course.

Image via PBS LearningMedia



# HALF FULL

There should be a mandated World Religion class for all students. Religion provides many students and teachers at JFK with comfort and security and for some even shapes part of their identity. However, the religion they practice at home may be the only religious influence they have. This is not a bad thing, but knowledge of other religions could be useful as well. A World Religions class would broaden perspectives for religious and non-religious students and give insight into different ways of thinking about and expressing spirituality.

Religion is not only crucial to some individuals' personal lives. Religion

is one of the primary disciplines for investigating the boundary questions of life and death, of love and hate, that characterize the human condition. Many modernday conflicts and tensions stem from and revolve around religious issues. This is a thought that is often neglected when considering a world religions class. A class like this is in no way meant to favor one faith. That would be teaching religion. The aim of this class would be to teach about religion. Religion curriculum World is solely meant to inform the students, striving to achieve a greater awareness of the important role that religion plays in the world, even in a society that is becoming less religious. Therefore, religious studies provides the opportunity to understand, with depth and nuance, the many communities of faith.

Religion and faith hold great cultural value that students might never be exposed to outside of school. Knowledge on the complexity and diversity that religion holds is priceless, because in most cases, knowledge promotes tolerance acceptance. and Especially for living and learning in a country that has a dark history with antisemitism and still holds antisemitic sentiments, one could argue that it is absolutely crucial to have a World religions class.

# HALF EMPTY

One potential issue with a World Religions class could be the collision with the already existing ethics class. I recall already having learned a great deal about different religions in the Ethics classes I took from 7th to 10th grade. Could a World Religions class effectively fill those four years? Along with that concern comes time management. Students already have a very full schedule with as many as 10 class periods a day. Adding on another

class to that mountain would certainly add undue stress.

Another point of conflict is the possibility that many parents in our community would decry this requirement. This may happen out of fear that their child's faith might be shaken by their participation in a class like the one proposed. Some parents argue that school should teach more fact-based and practical information and that religion may

be too personal and subjective to capture well in a school environment using generalizations about different religious groups.

Lastly, teaching religion is not the school's responsibility. That this is something students should be taught at home by their parents rather than in an academic environment.

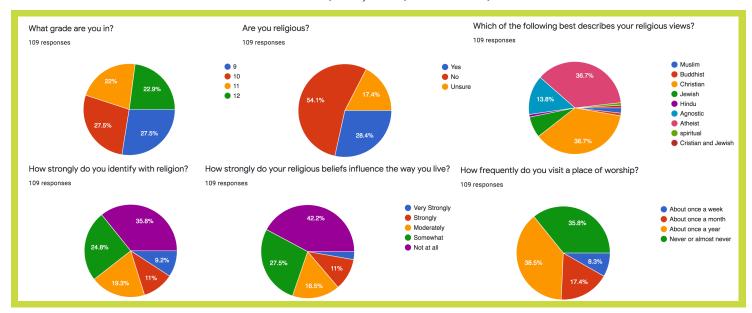
# RELIGION SURVEY ANALYSIS

Lena Marzona

At the beginning of quarantine the IDEAS Journal Team sent out a survey probing the student body's attitudes about religion at JFK. The survey was sent to grades 9-12, receiving 109 responses. Although the slim majority of survey-takers were in 9th grade, the distribution of respondents was relatively even among grade 9-12 students.

When asked if they were religious, 28% of respondents said they were, 17% reported being unsure and 54% said they were not religious. While JFKS sometimes seems to be non-religious in majority (37% identify as atheist, 14% as agnostic) there are multiple religions represented. Out of all respondents, 37% said they were Christian, 7% Jewish, 2% Muslim,

and less than 1% each were Hindu, Spiritual, and Buddhist. In an environment where students with varying religious backgrounds and practices spend a large chunk of their time, it is important to create a community open to all. But how realistic is that goal and how do JFK students perceive the climate of religion in their hallways?

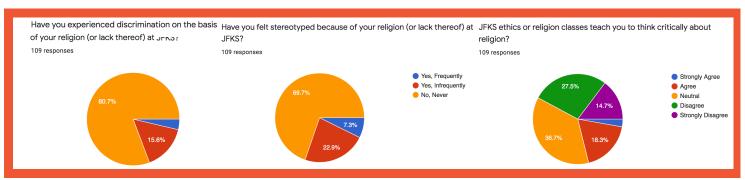


When asked whether students had felt stereotyped because of their religion or lack thereof, 70% reported that they had never and 30% said they had experienced stereotyping either infrequently or frequently. Around 80% said they had never experienced discrimination on the basis of religion or lack thereof at JFKS and 20% said they had indeed. These

numbers are unsettling and yet they are representative of a world in which religious discrimination is persistent.

Just this past school year there were instances of violently racist and anti-semitic propaganda on JFKS bathroom stalls. Whether that be anti-semitic drawings on the bathroom wall or demonstrations

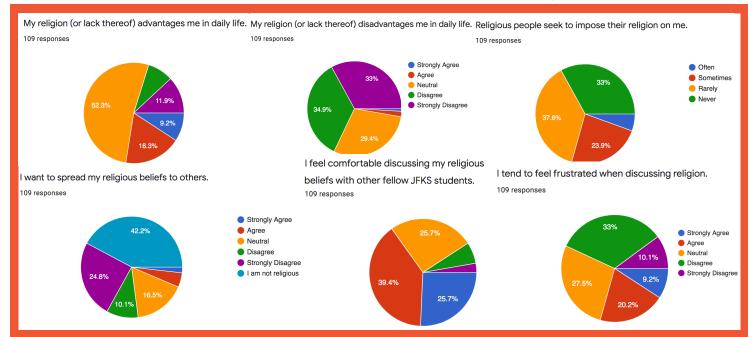
held in Germany by Holocaust deniers, discrimination is on the rise globally. The JFKS "bubble" is not immune from this trend. While this instance was isolated and responsibly handled, it is disturbing. Clearly, there is a lot of room for JFKS to grow and become more accepting.



So what can our community do to combat this discrimination? An obvious answer might be to educate students about various religions and their histories. When asked whether respondents believe religion should be taught at classes in JFKS, around 40% said they either agree or strongly agree, 35% were neutral and 26% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. While this data point slightly contradicts responses to question whether students would

be interested in learning more about major world religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Taoism, and Buddhism at JFKS (60% agreed, 22% were neutral and 18% disagreed) it is still surprising that a percentage of students don't care for religious education in school. This might have to do with the fact that 29% of respondents feel frustrated when discussing religion. Religion can be a polarizing and thorny subject. IDEAS members have experienced

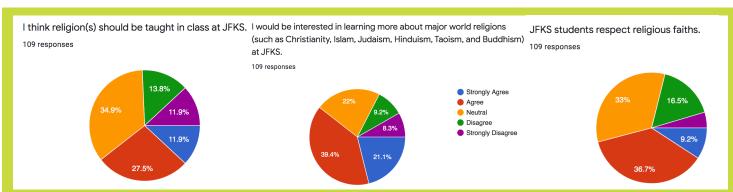
these challenges first hand during our Monday meetings and have realized that it takes effort and sensitivity to have a productive and rewarding conversation regarding religion. However frustrating these challenges may be, a mandatory world religion class could greatly benefit students who might be impressionable to discriminatory religious attitudes and could thus help prevent mis-education and instances of discrimination on school grounds.



The responses to the last question on the survey which asked whether JFKS students respect religious faiths is indicative of the progress that we need to strive towards. While 46% agree or strongly agree that religious faiths are respected, 21% disagree. Looking forward, this data suggests that we must fully acknowledge that there is a problem in regards to religion in

school. There are conversations that need to be had, both on a personal level and in classrooms. By recognizing, understanding and educating students about various religions we can promote more acceptance, awareness, and respect. We all wake up every morning to go to school in order to learn and see our teachers and friends. While our school is something we

all have in common, we should be educated about our varying religious backgrounds and the history they carry with them. If we understand and respect each other we can grow and learn alongside each other in an environment that is open and empathetic to different religious beliefs.



# FINDING MEANING OUTSIDE RELIGION

Hannah Cook and Carlotta Senftleben

How do you go about finding a purpose outside of religion? Discovering your place in the world without a religion to guide you is a complex task that requires a lifetime of self-exploration.

Wanting to serve a greater purpose unites us as humans. We want to know that our efforts are not futile and that the hardships we endure have meaning. This desire can be observed in the books we read and the movies we watch. For example: Harry Potter is "the chosen one". He has almost Divine powers that he deploys to fight evil makes his story much more interesting.

# "Sit down and think about what ignites a fire inside of you."

We as people all want to know WHY? Why are we here? Why is the world the way it is? Why do I have to go to the horror that is school every day? Religion offers answers. Whether it states that our purpose is to elevate the physical world or to seek divine salvation, religion often offers the comfort of giving our life a clear purpose. And while religion presents one of the most common social systems for such fulfillment, secularism is on the rise.

Much of society today is abandoning their religious devotion and while some have argued that this desertion causes a lack of morals and meaning, many have explored different ways to find meaning in life outside of religion.

# "Friends, family, or idols can help imbue you with moral values."

We can find significance in our decisions. Through these, we have the ability to influence not only our own lives, but the lives of others in our community. Our choices are the building blocks that make up the construct of society. They give our life direction and guide us toward our self-determined future.

Another method to find your purpose is by discovering your passions. Sit down and think about what ignites a fire inside of you. Maybe you really like learning new things, maybe you like it more than anyone else in the world, maybe it is your purpose to pass this passion on or to make something out of this passion for the improvement of society.

You can also find your sense of morality and purpose on this planet

in building your own community and meaningful relationships. You are here to find your place in the world. You can find meaning in setting yourself goals and achievements that you want to do in order to become the person you want to be and working towards your own happiness. Friends, family, or idols can help imbue you with moral values. You are alive for all the little things that make your heart skip a beat. Whether this is watching your favorite series, eating food you love, or laughing at a dumb joke your friend just made. You are here to appreciate life.

Sometimes thinking of what you want to do in the future gives your life meaning. Thinking about how you can make the world a better place for everyone alive. Even staying up until 3 am with your friend to discuss the meaning of life outside of religion like I did for this article gave my life meaning because it showed me that I cared enough to concern myself with this topic.

Caring alone gives you a purpose in life. So if you want to figure out your meaning in society, find out what you care about and use this to develop your own purpose.

### ATHEISM VS AGNOSTICISM

Daniel Delfs

Times like these demand faith. Be it in the abilities of our essential workers, the actions of our governments, or in divine guidance, faith is a precious resource. From the development of civilization, human belief systems that extend beyond the scope of human understanding, ease natural fears in the face of the unknown. Whether or not faith is justified, it is a mechanism to alleviate our anxieties. In a way, we are mentally pushing the burdens we feel into the hands of a divine entity, relying on their ability, knowledge to guide us through the darkness.

While many of us do in fact place our faith in religion, many do not. The most commonly used title for a lack of faith is "atheism". However, belief is not often as clear-cut as either being a theist or an atheist. Agnosticism is a further variation on the spectrum of belief that many would see themselves as if only they understood it.

# "An agnostic cannot find evidence for or against the existence of a divine entity"

In order to comprehensively understand these terms, looking at the words' roots is helpful. Atheism and agnosticism share the same prefix of "a-", meaning "without". However, the words have different suffixes, one based on theos, ancient Greek for "god", which was then adapted in the 17th century to more generally act as a root for "belief" in the suffix "-theism". Gnosticos on the other hand is the ancient Greek term for "having knowledge",

and its English suffix "-gnosticism" has the same meaning. On a basic level this means that while an atheist is without belief, an agnostic is without knowledge. More practically applied, atheists are defined by their belief in the absence of a divine presence, while agnostics can be both theist and atheist, or neither. The agnostic, in modern vernacular, does not believe in a god, but does not rule out the possibility that one exists; simply without knowledge.

Agnosticism is an open approach to the concept of faith, consistent with the idea that "seeing is believing", not placing beliefs in things for which one cannot find evidence. An agnostic cannot find evidence for or against the existence of a divine entity, so they do not subscribe to an extreme of believing or not believing.

While seemingly simple labels for these complex relationships can be a fools' errand, considering the Self in relation to them can help us to consider our priorities and purpose in life.



#### LEGALIZED DISCRIMINATION

#### **RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION AND THE LAW**

Emma Nathenson

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by law in the U.S. and Germany, but when does religious expression cross the line into discrimination? Often, the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable is murky. Sometimes displays of religion wander into hate speech territory, sparking heated debates on what constitutes free speech and religious expression. Restricting religious expression can also result from religious biases, though, perpetuating the polarization of certain faiths.

While teachers in the United States are freer to wear religious symbols in class, their counterparts in Europe struggle to defend their religious rights. These symbolic articles of clothing include the hijab, a form of headscarf that some Muslim women wear, or a kippa, a form of cap worn by Jewish men. The headscarf, in particular, has sparked controversies in many European countries. In lawsuits filed by teachers forbidden from wearing a hijab, German courts have argued that "legal trainees act as and are perceived to be representatives of public entities, and therefore must observe public neutrality policies," in order to avoid disruption prompted by the religious symbol. However, as Article Four of Germany's Basic Law guarantees, the rights to

"freedom of faith and conscience, and freedom of creed religious or ideological, are inviolable."

Free religious expression must not be selective and should not favor the expression of certain religions over others. However, German courts have tended to favor other, more traditionally accepted religious items over a hijab. As Human Rights Watch expertly explains, the bans against the symbols do not distinctly mention headscarves or, on the contrary, any exceptions to the rules, like cross necklaces for example. However, "the majority of the states with bans (Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Hessen, Rhine-Westphalia, Saarland) allow some form of exemptions for Christianity and Western cultural traditions."

When religious expression results in the rejection of other identities, laws defending freedom of religion become less forgiving. For example, certain laws protect members the LGBTO+ community from discrimination. This would prevent a business owner from refusing to sell to queer individuals even if their sexuality or gender identity conflicts with religious values of the proprietor. However, in many trials, legal protection has tended to favor the side of religious expression. This was the

case in 2018, when Masterpiece Cakeshop in Colorado refused to sell a wedding cake to Charlie Craig and David Mullins. When the case ended up in the Supreme Court, the justices ruled in favor of Masterpiece Cakeshop.

For Swedish Pastor Ake Green, however, religious expression led to a hate speech conviction when, in a sermon, he declared homosexuality to be, "[an] abnormal, a horrible cancerous tumor in the body of society." The prosecutor in the case argues that, "one may have whatever religion one wishes, but this is an attack on all fronts against homosexuals." Supporting Green, Ionathan Gallagher for Liberty Magazine, published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church raises of "thought-crime question legislation" (the idea popularized by George Orwell) warning that the law should not punish people for their beliefs, quashing free thought and expression.

Although religious expression should indeed be encouraged, it is necessary to navigate such expression in an open-minded fashion without denying the dignity of others.

# IDEAS LOOKS FORWARD TO...

- ... The coming year of opportunities for IDEAS at JFKS and beyond!
- ... Launching two seasons of the IDEAS Podcast, available soon wherever you get your podcasts.
- ... Developing our new website, jfksideas.wixsite.com/jfksideas , where you can view our old journals,

podcast, and more.

- ... New members! Join us for our weekly online meeting, or in B109 during 6th period every Monday once normal instruction restarts.
- ... Your input. Email us at ideas@jfksberlin.org.



#### Dear IDEAS Seniors,

Saying farewell is never easy, but it's especially difficult if it can only be done indirectly from afar. While we are unable to reflect and conclude your chapter in the IDEAS club during our weekly Monday meetings, we seize this opportunity to celebrate your commitment and efforts. All of you are pillars of the discussions and journals the

IDEAS club generates. You have many accomplishments ranging from great lesson plans to panel discussions, and inquisitive articles. With your help and guidance IDEAS has been able to warmly welcome new members and make them feel comfortable. You were always available when there were questions or uncertainties and never hesitated

to offer your help or support.

As we approach the end of the school year and your graduation we want to extend a virtual embrace and express our great appreciation for all your contributions. You have enriched our lives greatly and we wish you the best for your future beyond high school.

# With love, IDEAS Members

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IDEAS bids a fond farewell to one of our founding advisors, Mr. Brian Salzer. In words and deeds alike, he embodied and furthered the IDEAS mission. IDEAS is proud to be part of his robust legacy.