

## SKIRMISHES

### Get government out of marriage business

• Writing in the L.A. Times, Professor Alan Dershowitz has a simple solution to the conflict over marriage between gays.

If marriage is truly a religious sacrament — as religious groups keep insisting — then government has no business making rules about it anyway, he opines. Let churches, synagogues and the like handle marriages in whatever fashion they choose.

Meanwhile, government should handle civil unions that carry actual legal rights and have legal standing in the courts. In short, no secular consequences would follow from marriages, and no religious requirements could be imposed on civil unions.

Hmmm ...

### Yet another minority!!!

• According to a recent poll by the religious Barna Research group, only four percent of Americans have a biblical worldview.

Barna Research defined a biblical worldview as one that “included a belief that absolutes exist and a belief that the Bible defines them,” and “stipulated a belief that: Christ lived a sinless life; God is the all-powerful and all-knowing Creator of the universe and He stills rules it today; salvation is by grace and not by works; Satan is a real being; Christians have a responsibility to witness; and the Bible is accurate in all of its teachings.”

See SKIRMISHES on page 3



### Reflecting on a jolly old fraud

By George Ricker

What ever happened to Santa Claus, anyway?

You know the guy — the one with the red suit who slips down the chimney with a bag full of goodies for good little boys and girls on Christmas Eve. Yeah, that’s him.

He was around when I was small.

Somehow he got lost though — back there in the dusty corridors of my childhood. One day he just disappeared, never to be heard from again.

My brother — he’s three years younger — and I learned early on where the goodies really came from. We also realized that the jolly old elf was a fiction, created by grownups to satisfy children’s curiosity and give them an incentive for good behavior.

After all, most kids know they can con mom and dad.

But a red-suited stranger is a different matter altogether. He might not be susceptible to Suzie’s bright, blue eyes or to Johnny’s heartfelt “I’m sorry.” He might be immune to all of the skills children learn at an early age to practice on their parents. I mean, Santa supposedly had that list wherein he had recorded all your good and bad deeds for the year. Well ... you might be able to put one over on your parents, but there just was no arguing with that list. It was objective evidence, immune to blandishment.

Once I realized the truth about Santa, I became suspicious of the other myths too. I soon understood that there was no Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy was a fiction as well. Not that I minded the disillusionment. Frankly, I always believed it was a dirty trick for grownups to try to tell me something they really didn’t believe themselves.

Beyond that, it always had seemed strange to me that a wierd-looking dude in a funny get-up would be giving me presents. Didn’t mom and dad warn about accepting the offerings of strangers? What did he want?

See SANTA on page 2

## HAPPENINGS

The Space Coast Freethought Association will hold its monthly meeting from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on December 14th at the Melbourne Public Library, located at 540 E. Fee Avenue in Melbourne.

The room we will be meeting in is close to the reference desk and holds about 15 people. You may bring light refreshments if you like - coffee, soda, water, snacks and so on (obviously, nothing alcoholic).

Come prepared for a wide-ranging conversation on a host of interesting topics. Then again, maybe we’ll just all chat about whatever comes to mind.

See you at the library!

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Dianna Narciso’s new book, *Like Rolling Uphill: Realizing the Honesty of Atheism*, will soon be published by Llumina Press and should be available through Amazon.com shortly thereafter.

After years of repeatedly explaining atheism to believers and continually correcting misconceptions about lack of belief, Dianna finally put it all in a book. What is atheism? What do Christians think of atheists? Why do people believe what they do? It’s all there, she says, including answers to questions atheists get asked most often and a guide for Christians on how to approach atheists.

## SANTA (from page 1)

You see, the presents meant a lot more once I realized they didn't come from some ideal workshop at the North Pole with an endless supply of both raw materials and cheap labor. Once I discovered the presents came from my parents and their effort, I also gained a new appreciation of the true value of the things I was receiving. Santa's gifts were free. The ultimate free lunch. But gifts from mom and dad cost something. Their hours of hard work meant much more to me than the bounty of the bearded gent and his eight tiny reindeer.

So there were no sobs of anguish when I learned Santa wasn't real. I always had been more than a little suspicious of the old boy anyway.

Years later, with children of my own, I had to fashion an answer to their questions about the annual Christmas visitor. They were hearing about him from all sides.

"C'mon dad," they asked, "is he real or what?"

It may shock some of you to learn that I agonized not at all over my answer. You see, I made one decision very early about how I would raise my kids. I promised myself I would never lie to them. I would never tell them something was true when I knew it to be false, or vice versa. I promised myself I would answer their questions as honestly and directly as I knew how.

So my answer was direct and simple. "No, he's not," I told them.

I went on to explain to them that, having gained that bit of knowledge, they need not feel obliged to inflict it upon their

classmates. It wasn't necessary, I told them, and it would only complicate their lives. Doubtless, that was more answer than they wanted. But when an aunt or uncle or grandparent would start feeding them the standard line about Santa, Tommy and Lori never argued. They would just cast a knowing look my way, and smile.

At any rate, in my own childhood the discovery of the truth about Santa left no traumatic scars, nor did it diminish my fun at Christmas.

My parents always made the effort to see that Bob and I had a good Christmas. Sometimes there was more. At other times, there was less. But always there was enough. Usually, it was more than either one of us deserved.

The best gift they gave me, one that I did not fully appreciate until much later in life, was the understanding that the real meaning of Christmas was the bonding of the family, the sharing, the being together and the *giving*, rather than the receiving, of presents.

It was a gift that has outlasted all the goodies and was, by far, the best of the lot. They taught me how to "keep Christmas in my heart" long before I had heard of Ebenezer Scrooge and his late-night callers.

And all my Christmases since have been good ones.

**Note:** I wrote this some years ago. Thought you might enjoy it. Besides, it seemed appropriate with the elementary school teacher in South Florida being attacked because she didn't perpetuate the myth in her classroom. The original ran in the *Sebastian Sun* in 1989. This is a shortened version. Happy holidays!

## Space Coast Freethought Association

Founded by Dianna Narciso, the SCFA seeks to bring freethinkers of Brevard and surrounding areas together for social interaction, activism and community outreach.

To join the group go to:  
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SpaceCoastFreethought/>

For more information, contact Dianna Narciso by email at [catspah@cfl.rr.com](mailto:catspah@cfl.rr.com) or by telephone at (321) 952-1231.

## CONNECTIONS:

some web addresses that may be of interest to freethinkers

<http://thomas.loc.gov/>

Named after Thomas Jefferson, Thomas is the first place to look for legislative information on the Internet. You'll find information about both houses of Congress - the House of Representatives and the Senate - as well as information about members, committees, legislation, hearings and so on. This is an absolutely indispensable source for anyone who wants to track the progress of a bill or keep track of what his or her local congress critters are up to, legislatively speaking.

<http://www.supremecourtus.gov/>

This is the official website of the U.S. Supreme Court. It's a good place to go for information about cases pending before the court and the court's recent decisions. This website also has information about past and current members of the court, a brief history of the court and a section about the Supreme Court building. Since most of the major governmental decisions regarding religious liberty are made here, it's usually worthwhile to visit this site regularly.

<http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/>

This is a good place to go for information about the early Christian church and the writings which document it. In addition to the writings themselves, Peter Kirby has assembled an impressive collection of material from various sources, religious and nonreligious alike. Whether you are a casual reader or an academic, you're apt to find useful information here.

<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/>

The home of the First Amendment Center is a good place to go for information about the First Amendment and current news items about it. This site has a number of sections and a wealth of information on the subject. It's a useful place to visit for information that is sure to be near and dear to the heart of any freethinker.

**Freely Speaking** is the newsletter of the Space Coast Freethought Association. It is published in the first week of the month and distributed free as a pdf file via email and/or by regular mail. Print copies may be available on request.

**Freely Speaking** is published and edited in Palm Bay, Fla., by George Ricker on behalf of the SCFA. All contents © 2003 by the Space Coast Freethought Association unless otherwise indicated. Copyright of any reprinted material remains with the original publisher.

**Freely Speaking** invites the submission of articles which promote freethought and church-state separation or may otherwise be of interest to our membership and announcements relating to groups and activities which do the same. Articles should be a maximum of 1,000 words and announcements a maximum of 100. All submissions are subject to editing and may be cut to conserve space. Email submissions to [gricker@cfl.rr.com](mailto:gricker@cfl.rr.com) with the subject heading "newsletter submissions."

# SPEAKING OUT: SCFA members in print - more on p.4

*Pensacola News Journal - Nov. 29, 2003*

## Had slavery, too

I am absolutely floored by Teresa Mullen's lack of connection with reality, as revealed by her Nov. 3 letter, "State churches."

Mullen begins by asserting that "there is no doubt that America's founding fathers regarded ... the Ten Commandments ... to be mankind's organic law (as) reflected in America's founding documents." What?! This couldn't be further from the truth. The fact is that the very first amendment to the Constitution - America's self-described "supreme Law of the Land" - directly violates various aspects of the First, Third, and Fourth Commandments.

Second, our misguided author spews forth the following gem: "America has never suffered a constitutional separation of church and state." Again, this is totally bogus. Thomas Jefferson himself coined this phrase in his famous letter to the Danbury, Connecticut, Baptists.

Finally, Mullen asserts that "(T)he Constitution does not bar the states from having established churches, as several had well into the 19th century." While I know of none of these claimed "state churches," I certainly know that this practice, if it ever existed, would have been as unconstitutional as the institution of slavery that surely did exist but was eventually shown to be unlawful. - **Ried Crowe, Powder Springs, Ga.**

## SKIRMISHES (from page 1)

According to the Barna pollsters, Republicans were 10 times more likely to have a biblical worldview than Democrats.

Aha ... maybe *that* explains it.

## WHAT? NO SANTA???

• Some parents are upset because an elementary school teacher in South Florida raised some questions about the "jolly old elf" in her first-grade classroom

According to press accounts the teacher read the class a story about the tooth fairy, which led in turn to a discussion about what was real and what was not. At that point the teacher asked how a jolly fat man could fit down a chimney and how reindeer could fly around the world in one night. She suggested such things were impossible.

One parent, irate over the teacher's actions, stated, "Kids don't believe in enough things already."

Yeah, that's the ticket. Let's raise children to be more gullible.

## Got an announcement to make?

*The Space Coast Freethought Association welcomes announcements from other groups and organizations who are interested in promoting reason, freethought and the separation of church and state.*

*Please submit announcements of your group's meetings and activities no later than the last Friday of the month. All announcements should be emailed to: gricker@cfl.rr.com. Please do not send them as attachments but in the body of the email message. Please head all such messages "newsletter submission."*

*Announcements should not exceed a length of 100 words. All announcements will be subject to editing and may be shortened to meet space requirements.*

*Florida Today - Nov. 30, 2003*

## Thomas argues for intolerance

By Dianna Narciso Palm Bay

In a recent article headlined "Doing what feels right in our eyes," syndicated columnist Cal Thomas claimed that marriage was established by God and our society has "abandoned any and all authority outside itself."

What Thomas doesn't seem to understand is that his belief that a particular god created the institution of marriage is just that -- his personal belief.

Citing his preferred holy book is meaningless in a debate regarding civil rights.

Our society has embraced the authority of "the governed" to grant powers to a government of the people and by the people.

If his religion calls on him to limit the civil rights of others, he ought to keep his religion in his home and church and out of the government.

Our secular Constitution guarantees freedom and justice for all, not just those of the majority religion.

Further, Thomas whines that his antiquated definitions of virtue and human value are to be preferred over anyone else's and claims that people of his ilk are considered enemies of progress, homophobes and Neanderthals.

Aside from his insult to the Neanderthals, if the shoe fits . . .

*Daytona Beach News Journal - Nov. 7, 2003*

## Pledge to the country

Re "Pledging allegiance," Nov. 5 letter:

Shirley Dorfner doesn't want any change made to the Pledge of Allegiance. I want the pledge restored to its pre-1954 form, before those two little words, "under God," were added.

In the previous form, the pledge was an affirmation of allegiance to the preeminent secular symbol (the flag of the United States of America) of a secular nation (the republic for which it stands). In that form, the pledge could be said proudly by all Americans, whether they worshipped one god, many gods or no gods at all. In that form, the pledge was nothing but unifying.

Why should any American be required to affirm belief in a deity in order to pledge allegiance to our national flag? How can the insertion of "under God" into the pledge not be regarded as an establishment of religion, which is prohibited by our Constitution?

No, America's religious freedom is not damaged in any way by removing "under God" from the pledge, but some Americans' rights of conscience are violated by leaving the words in.

**GEORGE A. RICKER, Palm Bay**

# SPEAKING OUT: SCFA members in print - more on p.3

*Pensacola News Journal - Nov. 4, 2003*

## It's up to us

Art Gottily notes that Jefferson credited a "Creator" with giving us the unalienable rights cited in the Declaration of Independence ("Rights from God," Letters, Oct. 26). However, Jefferson also noted that "to secure those Rights, Governments are instituted among Men." He went on to say those governments derive their "just Powers from the Consent of the Governed."

The point here is that whatever the source of our rights (Jefferson attributed them to a deity, I don't), the job of protecting them was left squarely up to the government, which in turn derived its power not from a deity but from the consent of the governed. And regardless of what Jefferson thought about gods (please note that his "Creator" or "Nature's God" had little to do with the deity proclaimed from most Christian pulpits), he clearly understood that government was a secular institution created for secular purposes.

"Under God" does not belong in the Pledge of Allegiance anymore than "In God we trust" belongs on our money. Both are sops tossed to the gullible by politicians professing public piety, cynical ploys that reflect little credit on either themselves or the religious impulses they claim to serve. -

**George Ricker, Palm Bay**

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*Tallahassee Democrat - Nov. 4, 2003*

## Our government was designed to be secular

Jessica Norris (Letters, 11/02) may believe the United States is losing its religion. I find it puzzling that she thinks we can lose something we never had.

At no time in the history of the United States have we ever had a national religion. The Constitution itself makes no mention of either gods or religions except in prohibiting religious tests for office and declaring that Congress shall make no law "respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Certainly, our nations' founders had many religious beliefs, and some were passionate about them. However, one of their most passionate beliefs was that government derived its powers from the consent of the governed. The majority of Americans worship gods of various descriptions, and some of us worship no gods at all.

Only a secular government can fairly administer a secular society. It is not a mark of decline that we are finally removing sectarian symbols from our secular government. It is a rejuvenation of the principles on which this nation was founded.

No religion is harmed by the separation of church and state.

**GEORGE A. RICKER**

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**Free Minds - Free People**

*Tallahassee Democrat - Nov. 9, 2003*

## Thank the founders for separating church, state

In Jessica Norris' misguided Nov. 2 letter ("The United States of America is losing its religion"), she contends that "the removal of God from our national government offices is an abomination" and that our country is becoming less religious.

If Norris feels this way because of recent court cases that declared certain public Ten Commandments displays to be unconstitutional, then she has folks such as Thomas Jefferson and James Madison to thank.

These "abominable" men helped draft the Constitution and its Bill of Rights, which are entirely secular and don't contain the slightest wisp of religious promotion, Christian or otherwise. The Supreme Court has consistently ruled that one of the primary intents of this "blueprint for America" was to ensure that our federal, state and local governments do not endorse or promote any one religion over another.

As an atheist, I only wish that Norris' second assertion were right. However, as a rationalist, I know that the statistical facts reveal how wrong she is. Because of our constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religious conscience and separation of church and state, America is more religious than every other major Western nation, while domestic fundamentalism is on the rise, not the decline.

I suggest that folks such as Norris and others who would like to honor the Decalogue erect monuments on whatever private property they wish and stop trying to hijack our governmental edifices for their own theocratic agendas.

**RIED CROWE**

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*Orlando Sentinel - Nov. 12, 2003*

## We, the people

In his Nov. 3 letter to the editor, "2 Words Make a Difference," Matt Blount, a senior at Altamonte Christian School, states that this country was "founded as a nation under the direct authority of God." If that is true, why is our Constitution a decidedly secular document? Why are the government's powers granted by the consent of the fsgoverned?

Why is it that "We, the people" establish justice, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity? Why did "We, the people" ordain and establish the Constitution? And to think that people want my tax dollars for vouchers so more students can attend religious schools to be indoctrinated with this kind of Christian "history."

Regardless of the misinterpretations of the founders' intentions being touted these days, the fact remains that the United States is a religiously diverse nation. Only a secular government that refrains from entanglement with the controversy of religion can adequately and fairly represent us all. "One nation under God" is just a sly way of saying Christian theocracy.

**DIANNA NARCISO**

**PALM BAY**