

WORDS (from page 1)

a basic truth that so few seem to understand. And second, many Christians in the United States don't care one whit about fairness. They don't want freedom of religion for all Americans or all humans; they want everyone to believe the way they do, if for no other reason than to ease that gnawing, festering doubt they must live with when they dare to open their eyes to the world around them.

There is another part of the population that appears to desire fairness, but simply doesn't understand freedom well enough to recognize it. It is with these persons our hope lies. It is for them I write letters to editors and post entries to my diary at Atheist View. When they ask questions, such as, "why do the courts always side with nonbelievers?" they are admitting they have a basic grasp of the ideas of freedom and fairness, but something, most likely their religiosity, has skewed it out of whack. Our words may straighten one of them out someday.

The first task is to make sure these people understand that not only do other people have differing belief systems, but that there is a possibility that these other people are correct in their "odd" worship practices. This may be impossible. They also must understand that, even if these "evil, cultist, devil-worshipping freaks" are wrong, they have every legal and moral right to their beliefs and to the protections guaranteed by our Constitution. This may be another impossible dream, because Christians are afraid of differing beliefs and practices for varying reasons not the least

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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 with the subject heading "newsletter submissions."

of which is that admitting someone else could be right is akin to doubt and doubt must be erased at all cost. And worse, once you admit that people who believe in different gods have rights, you end up accepting that atheists have rights too. Egad!

So, what's the harm in those two little words anyway? Only someone who can admit that people with other beliefs, and no belief, are worthy of the same rights and freedoms as they themselves can understand what freedom actually is. It's not about being able to have a government that supports and promotes your faith...it's about having a government that allows everyone to have any faith he wishes, or no faith at all. The only way it can do so is to refrain from religious expression. Any expression of religion by government divides the citizens of the country into those who do and those who don't. Avoiding such expression does not create an atmosphere of hostility toward religious belief; on the contrary, it leaves religious belief to the individual, where it belongs, and absolutely guarantees freedom of conscience for every one of us.

Those opposed to secular government and a secular pledge either don't understand freedom, or they just don't like it.

Freedom doesn't mean getting your way. It means leaving the way open for all. It doesn't mean having a government that supports your beliefs; it's having a government that allows you yours, and everyone else theirs. It is unfortunate that even those as powerful as Supreme Court justices apparently do not understand the simple concept of freedom.

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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 or by telephone at (321) 952-1231.

CONNECTIONS:

some web addresses that may be of interest to freethinkers

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

The Internal Revenue Service web site offers information about e-filing your taxes, most of the forms and instruction booklets, general information about filing your taxes and so on. With April 15th about two weeks away, this is a site you might want to check out. I ran this one last month, but thought I would include it again for obvious reasons.

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

"The History Net: where history lives on the web" is a site for history buffs and includes articles on all sorts of topics. The site also offers email newsletters and links to other sites. This site seems to be especially focused on American and British history over the last few centuries and military history,

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

This is the home of the Library of Congress. It's a good starting point for all sorts of research projects — especially anything having to do with Americana, history or the humanities. After the original library with its 3,000 volumes was destroyed by the British during the War of 1812, the library was reconstituted with the purchase of former President Thomas Jefferson's personal library of 6,487 volumes in 1815 for \$23,940. In addition to doubling the number of volumes in the library, the acquisition greatly expanded the scope of the library's collection. It is now one of the most comprehensive and most respected library collections in the world.

<http://www.thememoryhole.org/index.htm>

The Memory Hole publishes all sorts of reports from government insiders, whistle blowers and so on. It can be a useful source of information. However, as is the case with all such sites, it probably should be approached with caution. It may make a good starting point for someone interested in researching such subjects, but I would want more corroboration before accepting any such material at face value. The editor and publisher of the site is Russ Kick, author of *50 Things You're Not Supposed to Know*.

Searching for meaning in a godless world

By George A. Ricker

One of the questions often posed to atheists is "How can you find any meaning in life if you don't believe in a god?"

Essentially, the question separates itself into two parts:

1. How do you find meaning in your day-to-day life?
2. How can you not believe your life has ultimate value (meaning) in the life of the universe or cosmos?

The first is easily dealt with. Atheists find meaning in their lives in most of the same ways that theists find meaning in theirs. We find it in the relationships we have with family and friends and in the interactions we have with society as a whole. We find it in the joys of creativity, the satisfactions of productive work, the pleasures of sensual gratification, and the challenges of intellectual pursuits of all kinds. We find it in the appreciation of the world around us and of the beauty created by other human beings. We find it in all sorts of ways that are made no less valid or less rewarding by the absence of a belief in a deity. All of these things make life meaningful.

The second part expresses a longing of the human species that probably goes back to antiquity. We want to believe that our lives have meaning beyond the every day business of living. We want to believe that our lives have importance that extends beyond the span of our years and the narrow range of our own existence. Because we want to believe it, it's all too easy to convince ourselves that it must be true.

As an atheist - and speaking only for myself - I don't believe in the supernatural at all. Consequently, I don't believe in immortality, just as I don't believe in ghosts and goblins, and I find the proposition that we live forever to be just so much wishful thinking.

I submit the only importance our lives can have beyond the meaning we give it in day-to-day living is the legacy we leave behind for those who follow. Of course, at that point the legacy, whatever it may be, is meaningless to us as individuals.

SKIRMISHES (from page 1)

A charge

• Stephen Pizzo, writing on AlterNet, charges that a "Christian Taliban" was being installed in our national government by the Bush administration, even as our nation was denouncing the Islamic fundamentalists who had taken control of Afghanistan.

Pizzo writes, "Since 2001 dozens of far-right Christian fundamentalists have been quietly installed in key positions within the Department of Health and Human Services, the Federal Drug Administration and on commissions and advisory committees where they have made serious progress. Three years later this administration has established one of the most rigid sexual health agendas in the Western world.

One of Bush's first acts as president, Pizzo notes, was the reestablishment of a "global gag rule" that had been suspended by the Clinton administration. The rule prohibits federally funded family planning providers from even discussing abortion with their clients.

Material discussing reproductive health issues such as condom use, abortion and links to non-governmental family planning websites were expunged from government website. There's lots more in the article "The Christian Taliban" at:

<http://www.alternet.org/print.html?storyID=18259>

So I guess the bottom line is that, as an atheist, my life has meaning only as I give it meaning. Frankly, I don't find that a hopeless proposition at all. And although I guess, like everyone else, I can't help feeling just a twinge of regret that the universe will continue on its merry way whether I'm along to enjoy the ride or not, I also can't escape the truth of that proposition.

In my view, questions about the ultimate meaning of it all are ultimately meaningless. The meaning of life is found in living it. It is, quite literally, its own reward. What it means depends entirely on how it's lived.

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SPEAKING OUT:

SCFA members in print - more on p. 4

Orlando Weekly—March 25

Shame on the Christians

John Lubow asks where separation of church and state is mentioned in the United States Constitution [Letters, March 4]. I would ask Mr. Lubow where Christianity, Christ or Jesus are mentioned? Christians love to claim there is no separation of church and state, but if the majority in this country were Muslim, they'd be screaming for it.

Many Christians don't want freedom of religion for all people, only for themselves to use the government of this religiously diverse population to promote and support their faith. Shame on them.

— Dianna Narciso, Palm Bay

Tallahassee Democrat—March 30

Church and state: Atheism is not unconstitutional

Re: "Church and state: Atheism is unconstitutional" (Letters, March 28).

The Constitution is an entirely secular document. There are no mentions of "God," "Jesus," "Lord" or any other deity or supernatural reference. In fact, the only references to religion forbids our government from using religious tests to disqualify prospective elective officials or from passing legislation respecting an establishment of religion.

If anybody should be considered "un-American," it's those who agree with the letter writer's witch hunt-style assertions and his perversions of the Constitution.

RIED CROWE

Free Minds - Free People

SPEAKING OUT: SCFA members in print (more on p. 3)

UCF's Central Florida Future—March 1

The Bible has problems

A recent writer ["Bible is Truth," Reader Views, Feb. 23] claims the Bible is full of history and truth. Did you know that the different books of the Bible (Luke, John, Matthew, etc.) were selected by mere humans? There were many more books than the ones that actually ended up in the Bible; some were selected to be in the Bible, while others were not selected.

So how did these men know which writings were the true word of God and which were not? How do we know if they picked the right books? Here are just a few examples of absurdities showing the teachings of the Bible to be immoral: Jesus says you must hate your family and is against peace (Luke 14:26; Matthew 10:34-36). The Lord God orders killing (Exodus 32:27; Numbers 15:36; 1 Samuel 6:19, 15:2,3,7,8), even infants and unborn children. He also allows committing horrific abortions (Hosea 13:16).

God makes people lie (I Kings 22:23 and II Thessalonians 2:11). God orders stealing (Exodus 3:22, 12:35-36). Jesus orders stealing (Luke 19:29-34).

Millions of Americans should be put to death for working on the Sabbath (Exodus 31:15, Numbers 15:32,36). The Bible condones slavery (Leviticus 25:45-46; Genesis 9:25; Exodus 21:2,7; Joel 3:8; Luke 12:47,48; Colossians 3:22). God is a man of war (Exodus 15:3; Joel 3:9-10). Jesus is a man of war (Matthew 10:34; Luke 22:36).

The Bible is full of blood, violence, killing, mass exterminations, suppression of women, torture, discrimination and intolerance. It claims unbelievable things like a talking snake and donkey, food raining from the sky, the sun standing still and traveling backwards, a stick turning into a snake, water turning into wine, a river turning into blood, etc.

Rather than history and truth, the Bible is nothing more than a story of fiction. To discuss further go to <http://www.infidels.org> and click on "Forum."

— Charles Eugene

"Atheism, in its basic form, is not a belief: it is the absence of a belief. An atheist is not primarily a person who believes that a god does not exist; rather he does not believe in the existence of god."

George H. Smith
Atheism The Case Against God

Bradenton Herald—March 1

Right not to pray

In her letter "Why offended?" of Feb. 13 Mary Forristall asks why anyone would be offended by the Lord's Prayer, and she also states that our country was founded on Christian principles.

I am not offended by your Lord's Prayer itself. It means nothing to me. I am offended by people who try to force others to acknowledge their God/religion via public prayer. Our country is made up of many different religions and even some who don't subscribe to any religion at all. In order to fairly represent all the people, either have a statement that represents all religions and nonreligion, or have a simple moment of silence, or have nothing at all. I find it interesting how the very people fighting to have a public prayer are going against the word of their own God. Matthew 6:5,6 says you are to pray in private.

Our country was not founded on Christian principles. Thomas Jefferson was one of the most important forces behind the formation of our secular new nation. Jefferson and his fellow founding fathers were influenced by a European Enlightenment philosophy that recognized a Creator that was an uninvolved deist and not the god of Christianity. Jefferson wrote he did not believe in the divinity of Jesus, and he was very much in support of keeping religion out of government. You can check out his version of the New Testament, called the Jefferson Bible.

Charles Eugene, Titusville

Bradenton Herald—March 6

Self-righteous

I can only express disappointment with the recent spate of letters supporting government-endorsed religion as it involves the Manatee County School Board.

Contrary to one letter writer's opinion, we are not a "nation built upon the word of God." We are a constitutional republic in which the rights of the minority are supposed to be protected from the tyranny of the majority. The First Amendment was meant to protect the religious freedom of all citizens. Any person is free to pray on his own at any time, but government bodies should not be leading anyone in prayers to any god while on taxpayer time.

This is not a difficult concept to embrace. I used to think that if only these people could hear the facts, they would realize their error and desist from attacks on our freedoms. But I now understand that Christians don't want freedom of religion in America. They've managed to twist the meaning of "freedom of religion" into "anti-Christian sentiment," and now government neutrality to religion means hostility to Christianity. To them, religious freedom means freedom for Christians to use our government to promote their own faith. Their self-righteousness is shameful.

Dianna Narciso, Palm Bay