

# FREELY SPEAKING

FREE MINDS  
FREE PEOPLE

Vol. 1, No. 10

June 2004

Four pages

## SKIRMISHES

### A call

• The New York Times reports (NYT May 5, 2004) that some citizens of Hamtramck, Michigan, are upset over the city council's decision to allow the al-Islah Islamic Center to broadcast its call to prayer over an outdoor loudspeaker.

Some Christians in the city of 23,000 complained about the content of the call. Others simply objected to the increased noise.

Said Joanne Golen, "I don't want to be told that Allah is the true and only God five times a day, 365 days a year. It's against my constitutional rights to have to listen to another religion evangelize in my ear."

The city council noted that the Islamic Center did not need the city's permission to broadcast the call to prayer at all, but that by granting the permission, the city was getting leverage to limit the volume and hours of the broadcasts.

Now ... about those church bells.

### An appointment

• Boston Globe columnist Eileen McNamara called it "Rome's new Cardinal Sin" in her May 30th column. A short time ago Cardinal Bernard F. Law was forced to resign as head of the Catholic Archdiocese of Boston after a protracted and painful sex abuse scandal involving members of the clergy. On May 27 Law was chosen to head a basilica in

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### Author ... Author!

Dianna Narciso autographs a copy of her new book, *Like Rolling Uphill*: realizing the honesty of atheism, at the most recent Space Coast Freethought Association meeting on May 9 at Melbourne Public Library. For more information about the book see "Happenings" on page 2.

Narciso's book is published by Llumina Press and can be ordered direct from the publisher or through Barnes & Noble, Amazon.com or Books-A-Million.



Dianna Narciso

## Running with the pack

By Dianna Narciso

There seem to be leader wolves and pack wolves. Naturally, we can't have too many leader wolves, so that leaves the majority of us in the pack. You know the wolf submission stance — head tilted, neck bared, eyes downcast. You take that stance in the presence of the lead wolf who tells you how it is and how it's going to be. Instinct tells us to shut up, sit down, and let it go. So when something happens that you think you ought to speak up about, it can be difficult to actually do it.

My son is starting high school this fall. I'm already on the parent email list for news and updates. I want to start off with a good impression; I'd like to be involved without making waves. But something happened in May that set me off. I received a jovial email from the list moderator. How exciting! We could actually watch Palm Bay High School graduation online, live from Calvary Chapel in Melbourne. Immediately I dashed off a return email asking, "You mean a public high school is holding graduation in a church?" That's all it said. Maybe that was bad, maybe I ought to have explained myself more at the outset so as not to raise the hackles of the other wolves, I don't know. But here's the thing: I hesitated before hitting "send." I sat there at my computer wondering, "Should I do this?"

I imagined the list owner's reaction. Here's a woman whose son hasn't even entered the school yet and she's already causing problems. But then I looked forward four years from now when my son graduates. Will they still be using Calvary Chapel? How

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## HAPPENINGS

The Space Coast Freethought Association will hold its next meeting from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on June 13 at the Melbourne Public Library, located at 540 E. Fee Avenue in Melbourne.

The room we meet in is near the reference desk and holds about 15 people. As you enter the library walk past the circulation desk and look to your left.

Come and help us plan an agenda for the next 12 months.

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**Martin Cowen III**, author of *Fellowship of Reason*, will appear at Barnes and Noble Booksellers on Saturday, June 19 at 6 PM to answer questions regarding the concepts presented in his book. As founder of the organization **Fellowship Of Reason (FOR)**, he seeks to open chapters around the world.

**Fellowship of Reason (FOR)** is a rational, moral community whose members share a belief in Eudaimonism (pronounced "yoo-DIE-monism"), a theory that embraces Reason as the best method for determining moral principles and for achieving personal happiness. Eudaimonism has its roots in ancient Greece and today draws heavily upon Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism. Activities focus on personal growth, individual achievement, and social interaction rather than

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# PACK (from page 1)

will I feel about watching my son receive his diploma in front of that huge gold cross? I hit "send" and waited.

I ended up emailing the principals of the three Brevard County schools graduating their seniors at Calvary Chapel of Melbourne and the pastor of said church. The responses ranged from polite, to childishly stupid, to nonexistent. And the hesitation came again. Do I pursue this? Is it my fight or my son's? Am I just a troublemaker? I could almost feel my head tilting, offering my neck as a show of submission. Instinct tells us to go along to get along and that's how they'll get us in the end. That's how the religious right will

## HAPPENINGS

(from page 1)

activism, although members are free to pursue activist goals individually or as part of other organizations.

Freethinkers who seek positive interactions aimed at rational self-growth have much to gain from opening or joining a local FOR chapter. For more information, contact Luke Setzer at (321) 544-7435.

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Dianna Narciso's new book *Like Rolling Uphill: Realizing the Honesty of Atheism* is now available from Llumina Press. It can be ordered online at:

[http://www.llumina.com/store/likerollin\\_guphill.htm](http://www.llumina.com/store/likerollin_guphill.htm)

To learn more about the book go to Llumina's website, listed above, or to Dianna's Atheist View website at:

<http://www.geocities.com/atheistview>

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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](mailto:gricker@cfl.rr.com) with the subject heading "newsletter submissions."

take control of our government, our public schools, our very lives — we will give it up to them.

So, I wrote a letter to all the high school principals in Brevard County, the school board, the superintendent, and the editor of the local newspaper. And I hesitated again. "Do I really want to do this?" But by that time I was so used to asking the question that I paid little heed.

I wish I was a leader wolf. I realize I'm not. I'm merely a defiant pack wolf, shaking off the cowering stance with some difficulty, standing straight and speaking out. I can't say if my actions will cause any changes, but I can say that, if they don't, the path is already paved. Next year, if local public schools graduate students in churches, they'll hear from me again because once you stand up, striking the subservient pose is harder to do.

Being a thorn isn't natural for me — it's not natural for most of us. But I've noticed that the religious don't seem to mind being thorns in my side. Actually, they don't even seem to notice. They don't seem to understand that their religion might not be acceptable other people and therefore, they ought to keep it out of government functions. To them, a Pagan, Wiccan or atheist is simply wrong, so there is nothing inherently bad about forcing such people to pay homage to their religion. And they'll keep thinking that and getting away with it, until we all stand up and speak out.

And if we all start doing it, maybe the day will come when we won't have to anymore. Maybe they'll be sitting there in their official office chairs conjuring up their insensitive ideas and someone will say, "No, no, we can't do that or that atheist will be writing letters again." At that point we will have grown from rebellious pack members to leader wolves and the religious right will have no choice but to take notice.

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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](mailto:catspah@cfl.rr.com) or by telephone at (321) 952-1231.

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## CONNECTIONS:

some web addresses that may be of interest to freethinkers

<http://www.time.gov/timezone.cgi?Easter/n/d/-5/java>

Want to get the correct time? This public service is cooperatively provided by the two time agencies of United States: a Department of Commerce agency, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and its military counterpart, the U. S. Naval Observatory (USNO). Readings from the clocks of these agencies contribute to world time, called Coordinated Universal Time (UTC). The time maintained by both agencies should never differ by more than 0.000 0001 seconds from UTC.

**With elections in the news, here are some urls that may be of interest.**

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

This is the official website of the Bush Cheney '04 campaign. It contains biographical information about the president and his family, positions on issues, information about upcoming appearances, information about how to participate and/or contribute to the Bush campaign and so on. If you are considering voting for Bush and want more information, this is one place to look.

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

This is the official website of the John Kerry for President campaign. It contains biographical information about Kerry and his family, positions on issues, information about upcoming appearances, information about how to participate and/or contribute to the Kerry campaign and so on. If you are considering voting for Kerry and want more information, this is one place to look.

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

This is the official website of the Nader For President 2004 campaign. It contains biographical information about Nader, positions on issues, information about upcoming appearances, information about how to participate and/or contribute to the Nader campaign and so on. If you are considering voting for Nader and want more information, this is one place to look.

## Notes of a godless man:

# Some dare call it reason

By George A. Ricker

Now and then, I run across a statement in a newspaper or news magazine article that irritates me all out of proportion to the significance of the thing itself because the statement reflects an attitude that's all too commonplace and totally at variance with the way things really are. One such occasion occurred recently.

I was reading an article in *USA Weekend, Florida Today's* Sunday news magazine, which discussed the popularity of books, encounter groups, etc., dealing with the question of the human soul. And the statement that set me off was one attributed to Thomas Moore, who was described in the article as "a de facto spokesman for the new soul movement." Moore was quoted as saying, "People are looking for a way out of the rationalism of our time."

Which leads me to wonder ... what "rationalism of our time"?

There are lots of ways one might describe our modern world, many adjectives and adverbs that could be used to paint a picture of the age we live in. However, "rationalism" is the last word I would choose to characterize this period in human history — especially in the good old U.S.A.

On the contrary, our society, right now, just a few years from the turn of the century and the dawn of a new millennium, is a virtual monument to the irrational.

Moreover, why would we feel a need to escape "the rationalism of our time" if, in fact, the phrase *were* an apt description of this point in human history?

We live in an age of violent imagery and violent conduct on the part of individuals and nations. Violence is what happens when reason breaks down or is not used at all. Only in circumstances involving self defense can a case be made for violence as a rational response. However, for the most part, violence is driven by emotion and adrenaline, not by reason.

At a time when we should be striving for educational attainment and need a well-educated work force, educational establishments throughout the land are graduating many young people who lack basic communication skills, have no understanding of the historical antecedents of our culture, lack even the most rudimentary understanding of science and mathematics, and are chiefly concerned with short-term solutions for long-standing problems.

In this so-called "rational" age individuals are gobbling up all sorts of psychic mumbo-jumbo and claptrap, and spending substantial amounts of time, energy and wealth in the pursuit of every New Age trend that comes along. Books and magazines on astrology outsell those on astronomy by huge (dare I say "astronomical") proportions.

Science itself is under attack from both the right and the left. In many cases, the evidence offered by science is dismissed as opinion while the sheer conjecture put forth by science's detractors is treated as fact.

Everywhere reason and rationalism are under the gun, as we humans seek the quick fix, the easy answer, while, in far too many cases, disclaiming any responsibility for our own lives and our own actions.

So "the rationalism of our time" — where it can be found at all — seems to be in short supply.

Our society suffers from many problems, and some are due to excesses of one sort or another. However, a surfeit of reason is not among them. Indeed, the fundamental problems we face as a society, a nation and a world, stem not from reason or rationalism but from their lack. It is the irrational, the mindless, that we should be seeking to eliminate from our human culture, not the rational.

Reason is our chief tool of survival as a species. We ignore and evade it at our own peril. What is really encouraged by those who propose escaping "the rationalism of our time" is a desire to escape the necessity of acting as self-aware, self-responsible human beings.

Of course, the catch in that mode of thinking is that, in the long run, we cannot survive as anything else.

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**Editor's note: a somewhat longer version of this column first ran in the Sebastian Sun in 1994. I've polished it and shortened it a bit but, otherwise, it appears here as it was written then. Ten years later, it still seems apt.**



## SKIRMISHES (from page 1)

Rome. In one of life's supreme ironies, Law's appointment was announced in the same week the Boston Archdiocese announced the closing of 65 parish churches as those parishes were being closed and consolidate with other parishes in an effort to economize that is, at least partly, due to the costs to the archdiocese of the sex abuse scandal.

## A removal

• After being threatened with a lawsuit by the ACLU of Southern California, Los Angeles County has decided to remove a cross from the official seal of the county. Officials said the cross represented the historical influence of missions in California. The ACLU maintained it was an "impermissible endorsement of Christianity" and violated the First Amendment requirement for separation of church and state.

"Religious experiences are like those induced by drugs, alcohol, mental illness, and sleep deprivation: They tell no uniform or coherent story, and there is no plausible theory to account for discrepancies among them."

**Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), p. 159.**

# SPEAKING OUT: SCFA members in print

Florida Today— May 3, 2004

## 'Under God' fans don't accept 1st Amendment

FLORIDA TODAY recently ran a collection of letters on "Under God and Government." Two of the letter-writers believed the phrase "under God" should not be in our Pledge of Allegiance and offered sound and conscientious reasoning.

But three wrote in arguing the phrase should remain. Their reasons were that it's OK because God is already in government, the majority should be able to trample the rights of the minority and you can't sue a person for not saying it, therefore it should stay in.

Once again, Christians who oppose the separation of church and state showed no understanding of our form of government, Constitution or freedom of religion.

We do not live in a democracy, but in a constitutional republic in which the rights of the minority are supposed to be protected from the tyranny of the majority.

You do have the freedom to proclaim "in God I trust." But you do not have the freedom to force the rest of us to do so.

Any official pledge, oath or plaque that says so is a violation of the rights of nonbelievers.

Therefore, references to God should be removed from our pledge, money, courthouses and school board meetings. We don't all believe in it, and we don't all worship it. Only a secular government can fairly represent a religiously diverse population.

But the problem is that anti-separationists don't want freedom of religion. They only want freedom for themselves to force their religion on the rest of us.

Dianna Narciso Palm Bay

Hernando Today - May 13, 2004

## Blame Mel

I accept no responsibility for the treatment of the character named "Jesus" in Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ."

This demurrer seems necessary because so many are insisting we all are responsible (see John T. Boyle's column in your April 22 issue). Well, I'm not. Neither are any of you.

Consider the facts. First, it's a fact we don't know just what did happen 2000 years ago. There are no eyewitness accounts and no contemporaneous historical records. The earliest gospel, Mark, was written decades after the events reported in it supposedly happened.

It's also a fact that most of the elements of the Jesus story have parallels in other stories of deities and demigods that existed in the same cultural milieu.

Finally, it's a fact that if the Jesus story were true, the responsibility for what befell him would rest not with humankind but with a god so witless it could find no better way to achieve its goals.

Mel's "Passion" is a movie. It's fiction. Whether you consider it a gory, dehumanizing assault on the senses or a sublime tale that tugs at your heartstrings, it's not reality, present or past. The notion that anyone should accept blame for what happens is pure twaddle.

But if you absolutely must "blame" someone, here's an idea. Blame Mel.

George A. Ricker, Palm Bay

Orlando Sentinel - May 5, 2004

## Prayers and apologies

Here's a suggestion for the Florida Senate that would eliminate any controversy over what is and isn't said in prayers. Let each member say whatever prayer he or she wants to whatever god that person worships, or not, as the case may be.

There's no need for a public prayer at all. In fact, those Christians who actually "read" their Bibles might want to take a look at Matthew 6:5-7 and consider what Jesus reportedly said to his followers about how they should pray and why prayer should be a secret and not a public practice.

They also might want to consider that there is no record of Jesus ever leading anyone in prayer or praying in front of others. The "Lord's prayer," which is also in Matthew, is clearly intended to be a demonstration of how his followers should pray rather than an actual prayer.

So all the caterwauling about public prayer is unnecessary and downright unchristian.

People who feel the need for divine guidance from whatever god they worship are also free to quietly seek that guidance at any time and any place. Everyone else ought to shut up about it.

Let's end the practice altogether. Government is a secular business. Leave the decision of whether or not to pray up to the individual members on their own time and in their own way.

That seems a sensible solution, and, if we can believe what's written in Matthew, it's one all Christians should endorse wholeheartedly.

George A. Ricker Palm Bay

Tallahassee Democrat - May 6, 2004

## Senate prayers: What would Jesus do?

Why not stop public prayers altogether?

While Rod Bunton may be troubled by Senate President Jim King's reaction to a prayer (Letters, May 4), what's really troubling is why the Florida Senate feels the need for such prayers at all.

The best way to deal with the controversy would be to allow individual senators to pray or not to pray as they see fit on their own time. There's really no good reason to waste the Florida Senate's time with such matters.

And that's especially the case from the Christian perspective. Those Christians who actually read the Bible might want to consider Matthew 6:5-7, in which Jesus reportedly instructs his followers to pray secretly and not in public. The passage is not at all ambiguous.

If "what would Jesus do?" is truly the *sine qua non* of Christian living, then Christians should be asking the Florida Senate to stop the practice of public prayers altogether. Displays of piety by public officials do nothing to enhance either the quality of life or legislation in our state.

Let those who want to pray do so as they see fit. Quietly.

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