

# FREELY SPEAKING

FREE MINDS  
FREE PEOPLE

Vol. 2, No. 3

February 2004

Four pages

## SKIRMISHES

### A challenge

• For years the Stevens Creek Elementary School in Cupertino, California, has been regarded as one of the state's top-performing schools. Today the school finds itself embroiled in a controversy because one of its teachers claims he is being discriminated against because he is a Christian.

Stephen Williams, a fifth-grade teacher at the school, has sued the school district and the principal because the latter refused to allow him to use "historical documents" that, according to Williams, show the role of religion among the nation's founding fathers.

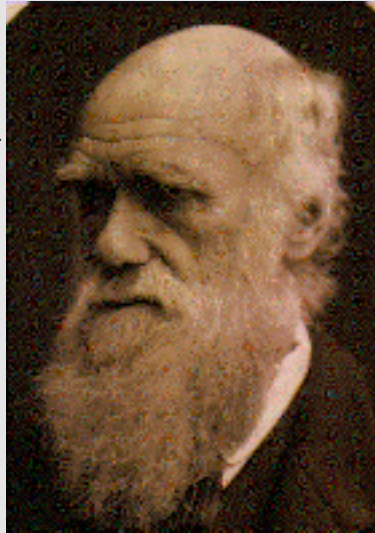
School administrators say the material in question is inappropriate for 10- and 11-year-olds, according to an AP report. Included among the materials is a brochure, prepared by Williams himself, called "What Great Leaders Have Said About the Bible," which includes quotes from Jesus and nine U.S. presidents.

Meanwhile, the school has received hundreds of angry phone calls and more than 3,000 emails, some of them obscene, others threatening, since the story first broke in the national media last November.

At that time, the Alliance Defense Fund, a Christian legal group which is handling Williams' case, issued a press release proclaiming "Declaration of Independence Banned From Classroom." They neglected to mention that the Declaration, in its entirety, is included in the history textbooks the children use. Stay tuned.

## Charles Robert Darwin 1809-1882

- Born Feb. 12, 1809 in Shrewsbury, England
- Served as naturalist on H.M.S. Beagle from 1831 to 1836.
- Published *The Origin of Species* in 1859
- During his lifetime, Darwin published 17 books in 21 volumes containing more than 9,000 pages. Another 1,000 pages appeared in various monographs and articles written for scientific journals.
- Darwin died in 1882
- He is buried in Westminster Abbey



## How to talk to Christians (and eventually you'll have to)

By Dianna Narciso

They're coming! And they're armed with the answer to the question you never ask and don't even care about. But that won't stop them; nothing can. Whether you like it or not, they are determined to show you a version of your life that doesn't fit and then offer you a cure that you don't need.

Who am I talking about? Christians, of course. And they're loaded down with copies of *Mere Christianity* and Chick Tracts to convince you of your sickness. You are, despite evidence to the contrary, a lowly, desperate, vile sort and all you have to do is accept that fact and they'll give you the free cure: their religion!

They will find you. There is no escape. Whether you open your door some Tuesday morning to find them there, smiling, well-dressed, with their weapon cradled in their arms, or whether they approach you in the parking lot of the mall, in your office, or in the school yard, they will eventually find you.

What will you say when they ask you if you think wars and rumors of wars is happening right now in our very own time? How will you react to their plea to let them share with you the love of Jesus Christ? Ideally your response to both will be no, but I realize that there lies within many of us a desire to attempt to actually discuss the matter of religion with these people. My advice is...don't.

See TALK on page 2

## HAPPENINGS

The Space Coast Freethought Association holds its next meeting from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on March 6th at the Melbourne Public Library, located at 540 E. Fee Avenue in Melbourne.

We will continue our discussion of bylaws, establishing a board of directors, and so on.

In March we will be meeting in the small room that is on the left as you enter - after you pass the main desk but before you get to the reference desk.

Come and join the conversation about church-state separation and the importance of freedom FROM religion.

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The next Melbourne **Atheist Meetup** will be on Feb. 15 at 7 p.m. at House of Joe 1220 W. New Haven Ave Suite 150, Melbourne, FL

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The 31st Annual National Convention of **American Atheists** will be held from March 25-27 in Philadelphia, Pa. For more details about the convention go to: <http://www.atheists.org/convention/>

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The next **Freedom From Religion Foundation** convention will take place on Nov. 11-13 at Rosen Plaza Hotel in Orlando, Fla. Details will be forthcoming at a later date. Check the website at: <http://www.ffrf.org/events> for more information.

## TALK (from page 1)

You really must come to terms with the reality that the chances of your logical statements making it, unfettered, into their brains is so remote that you might as well not waste the energy putting thoughts into words. They have the answer to literally every single objection to their religion that you could come up with. There is no response that will be new to them, so don't even try.

But you will have to deal with them in some way, sooner or later. So, maybe we, as nonbelievers, ought to have a game plan of our own. I'm not talking about keeping non-tracts by the door, or memorizing vile scripture. I'm thinking more in the line of answering the door in the nude and inviting them to join you. Now, now, I know few of us are that brave. But here are a some tamer suggestions.

When the Jehovah's Witnesses ask you to go get your Bible (and they will, if you talk to them long enough), bring a Harry Potter book to the door and looked baffled when they ask you to find a particular scripture. It would be cool if you had a few choice paragraphs marked ahead of time.

Keep a Yo, God! God Detector in your desk at work. When your "friendly" Christian co-worker stops in to ask you if you had time to think about his words about the blood of Christ, whip it out and wave it around his body like Dr. McCoy might do with his Medical Scanner. Then you might look frustrated and rattle it a bit, hold it up to your ear and walk back to your desk shaking your head.

When they pop out at you in parking lots or shopping malls, you could look at them like they're crazy and keep asking them to repeat themselves because you don't have a clue what they're talking about. "Jesus what? Where? Here? What did you say he did? Do you want me to call the cops for you? I'm sorry you aren't making any sense."

If it's your family that's been bothering you, I recommend this response from now on, "Oh, Jesus! If I hear that \*&%\$-ing God's name one more time I think I'll puke!" Then gasp a tiny little gasp and ask politely, "Did I say that out loud?"

Just remember this: you will have to talk to a Christian at some point in your life. Make it memorable. And think of the rest of us when you immortalize yourself in their camp stories now and in the hereafter.

Very often we're hit with god-talk that isn't of the persuasive kind, but that might rattle us just the same.

Do you ever feel a tad annoyed when you do something nice for someone and they respond with a hearty "God bless you!" Do you feel like it would be nice to let them know you're an atheist? One of the reasons atheists have a bad name is that it's not tattooed on our foreheads. People just assume we're "good Christians like everybody else."

Recently The Brights' Net asked for responses to "God bless you!" Few of the responses they received serve the purpose of communicating to the Speaker For God that you are not One Of Them. And strangely, no one proposed Seinfeld's "you are sooo good lookin'" which makes me wonder at the cultural literacy of Brights in general. You can read their responses here: [http://www.the-brights.net/gby\\_replies.htm](http://www.the-brights.net/gby_replies.htm)

I think the best, and most succinct, response to all offers of blessings and salvation might be a succinct, "No thanks, I already got one." But then, the cultural literacy of the population in question, especially as regards Monty Python, is seriously weak. Perhaps a wild look toward the sky, a ducking motion accompanied by a swat or two at the air with a frightened, "God? What god?" would do better.

Whatever you come up with, just remember, you will have to talk to them sometime. Best to get some enjoyment out of it. *Freely Speaking* welcomes you to share your experiences with Christians for the greater purpose. If nothing else, a good laugh in an otherwise dreary situation is a good thing.

@2005 by Dianna Narciso

## 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://uselectionatlas.org/>

For the political junkies out there, Dave Leip's "Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections" is a treasure trove of information about presidential elections, past and present. Interestingly, his site uses blue for Republicans and red for Democrats.

<http://www.thehungersite.com/cgi-bin/WebObjects/CTDSites>

The Hunger Site offers web-users a painless way to make a small donation for tsunami relief on a daily basis. Go to the site and click where indicated to make your donation. While you're at it, check out the links to other causes you may want to support.

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

This is the website for "Atheists in Foxholes." Check here for information about the planned salute and celebration of "Atheists in Foxholes" slated for Veteran's Day, Nov. 11, in Washington D.C. The site also offers a way to show support by endorsing the event and donating to it.

**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. 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 © 2005 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."

Inquiries about **Freely Speaking** should be directed to George Ricker either by email or telephone at (321) 727-8386.

# **SPEAKING OUT: SCFA members in print (more on p.4)**

*Press Journal - Jan 1, 2005*

## **Respect customers, even non-Christians**

Dr. Robert L. Sumner made one crucial error in his attempt to brand as hypocrites those merchants who wish customers "Happy Holidays" instead of Merry Christmas. He claimed that without Jesus there would be no Christmas. This is wholly untrue.

The solstice season was celebrated long before the Christian church usurped it as the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun or Saturnalia in ancient Rome. Various pagan dying-rising savior gods were worshipped. All the trappings of our modern Christmas, including the decorated tree and gift giving, were part of that ancient festival.

It is perfectly appropriate to wish customers a happy holiday, as they are not all Christians. One wonders what the problem is with Christians anyway. Are they so insecure that everyone must recognize their faith or it loses meaning for them?

**Dianna Narciso**  
Palm Bay

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*Pensacola News Journal - January 17, 2005*

## **Rights and freedoms**

When Ronny J. Lawrence asserts the right to "celebrate my religion or religious holiday any way that I choose," ("My right," Letters, Jan. 11) he is exactly correct. Americans hold rights of conscience, such as the right to practice a religion or not, to be inviolable.

And Lawrence is not obliged to "accommodate" anyone. He is free to wish anyone a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah or to react to all such sentiments with a "Bah, humbug" if he so chooses. He is free to take other people's wishes and sentiments into account or not. These also are rights that belong to all of us.

While government agencies, such as the public schools, are prohibited from conducting official prayers and such, there is nothing to prevent Lawrence and anyone else from saying a prayer privately to whatever god they believe in. That, too, is a right all share.

Our nation was founded by many people with various religious opinions. They were wise enough to keep those opinions out of the government they created with the Constitution of the United States.

Rights of conscience belong to all. They involve personal opinions, not government action.

-- George A. Ricker  
Palm Bay

*Florida Today - Dec. 26, 2004*

## **It's minority forcing will on the majority**

In response to syndicated columnist Joseph Perkins' article, "Tyranny of the nonbelievers," one crucial function of the federalist system of constitutional republicanism, as the founders established it, was to diffuse the passions of the majority.

Over time, this diffusion mechanism has gradually eroded. Today, we have a system in which representatives have no time to mull over what decisions best serve the good of all Americans. Instead, they find themselves constantly harangued by special-interest groups.

Sadly, these well-organized special interests can use the leverage of the government to force zealous minority viewpoints onto all of us. The average American with no particular ax to grind faces the impossible task of halting the efforts of every special interest.

I contend that religious zealots want to force those of less zeal, including many fellow Christians, to foot the bill with tax dollars for government endorsement of their beliefs.

Far from being an issue of "majority rules," this amounts to a minority seeking to force its will onto the majority.

This is the very abomination Perkins denounces.  
**Luther Setzer - Cocoa**

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*Pensacola News Journal - Jan 4, 2005*

## **Secular nation**

Shirley Wolfcale's Dec. 29 letter "Merry Christmas!" was shocking! I had no idea it was politically incorrect to wish others Merry Christmas. There are churches on every corner; their bulletin boards often contain religious sayings. There's an evangelical in the White House and the entire U.S. Congress stood on the steps of the Capitol and pledged we were "One nation, under God."

Could she be upset that some nice people remember that we are a religiously diverse population? Or perhaps she is incensed that we are not, in reality, a Christian nation, but a secular constitutional republic in which the rights of the minority are protected from abuse by the majority. Isn't that really what Christians are so peeved about? They are offended when government, private businesses and schools don't proclaim their religion and their god.

Imagine if the Pledge stated "One nation, under Allah." Imagine if school children were taught five spells to the Wiccan Solstice Sabbat and only one song of Christmas. Imagine if a private business put up banners proclaiming "Happy Birthday Mithras." Imagine the outrage by Christians. And yet, they get mad when a private business is kind enough to try to include everyone.

-- Dianna Narciso  
Palm Bay

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

The Ledger - Jan. 12, 2005

Bradenton Herald - Jan. 10, 2005

## God, Government Don't Mix

Jim Posmer claims there are "those who would deny the use of the word God in any government forum or statement" ["God in Government," Jan. 5] and asks "How long before they demand a government denial of the existence of God?"

In asking the question, he demonstrates that he misses the point. It simply is not the business of government on any level to either affirm or deny the existence of a god of any description.

Our government is a secular institution. In the words of the Declaration of Independence, it derives its "just powers from the consent of the governed," not from anyone's "God."

Consequently, government has no right to interfere with anyone's rights of conscience. It has no charter to promote religion or endorse religion, and it has no business making religion -- or religious concepts such as "God" -- its business.

And though the words "separation of church and state" do not appear in the Constitution, as Posmer notes, it was clearly the intent of the founders of this nation to keep religion and government separate. That's why "God" is not mentioned in the Constitution -- not even in the oath of office to be taken by the president. That's why religious tests for office were prohibited. It's why the First Amendment declares that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

The founders understood that in order to keep government out of religion it was necessary to keep religion out of government. That did not in any way preclude individual officeholders from holding and expressing religious opinions. It did preclude them from giving their religions and opinions official status, or making them the law of the land. What a shame so many Americans fail to understand that principle.

GEORGE A. RICKER  
Palm Bay

## Got an announcement to make?

*The Space Coast Freethought Association welcomes announcements from other groups and organizations 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.*

## More to learn

Gail Gran is right about one thing. Saying something loudly and often does not make it so. That's true of all claims, including the claim she makes - as loudly and often as possible - that evolution is not a valid scientific theory (Letters, Jan. 4).

Whether she is simply misinformed or willfully ignorant, Gran's claim flies in the face of more than a century of scientific research, experiment and evidentiary findings in the biological sciences and all related fields.

Charles Darwin began the development of modern evolutionary theory but his was hardly the last word on the subject, for evolutionary theory itself has evolved since Darwin penned his "Origin of Species." Darwin knew nothing of genetics, of plate tectonics or of continental drift - the science on those subjects did not yet exist.

It is a sophomoric exercise to find quotes, take them out of context and then point to them as if they prove anything. To take a statement from one of Darwin's letters expressing his own uncertainty and transform it into the claim that he knew "evolution is not science" is dishonest.

It's also dishonest to make it appear that evolutionary theory has anything to do with the "Big Bang" or other cosmologies. The truth is that evolutionary theory not only appears to be valid but also is the only theory currently available to modern science that adequately explains most of the biological phenomena under examination.

Evolutionary theory will not be proven false by dishonest claims about what it is and what someone may have said about it but by the presentation of another theory that offers a more adequate explanation of the available evidence. To date, no one has presented such a theory.

In science no one ever gets the last word. As we learn, we discover we have more to learn. Science is a message in time's bottle: revealing our past, informing our present, enhancing our future. Science is our best tool for understanding ourselves and our world.

George A. Ricker  
Palm Bay

*"The known is finite, the unknown infinite; intellectually we stand on an islet in the midst of an illimitable ocean of inexplicability. Our business in every generation is to reclaim a little more land."* - **T.H. Huxley, 1887**