

FREELY SPEAKING

FREE MINDS
FREE PEOPLE

Vol. 2, No. 6

May 2005

Four pages

SKIRMISHES

A vote

• While the mass media treated us to a virtual "Pope-pourri" of news from the Vatican, the Catholic Church got a figurative slap in the face when the lower house of the Spanish Parliament approved the Socialist government's gay-marriage bill on April 21.

Spain's Roman Catholic Church and the conservative opposition Popular Party had opposed the bill, which will make Spain the third European nation - joining Belgium and the Netherlands - to legalize gay marriages.

The Associated Press story reports, "According to Madrid's Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouca Varela, while 80 percent of Spaniards consider themselves Catholic, half ignore church teachings, and religion for most is more an inherited tag than a way of life."

The bill, which also paves the way for gay couples to adopt children, will now go to the Senate - where the Socialists have ample support - for final approval in the coming weeks.

Habla Espanol anyone?

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Celebrate 'Reason' on May 5 *The National Day of Reason*

Many who value the separation of religion and government have sought an appropriate response to the federally-supported National Day of Prayer, an annual abuse of the constitution. Nontheistic Americans (including freethinkers, humanists, atheists, agnostics, and deists), along with many traditionally religious allies, view such government-sanctioned sectarianism as unduly exclusionary.

A consortium of leaders from within the community of reason endorsed the idea of a National Day of Reason. This observance is held in parallel with the National Day of Prayer, on the first Thursday in May (5 May 2005). The goal of this effort is to celebrate reason - a concept all Americans can support - and to raise public awareness about the persistent threat to religious liberty posed by government intrusion into the private sphere of worship.

Join the members of the Space Coast Freethought Association and Sense of Life Objectivists of Florida at Back Bay Seafood Restaurant, 4910 Stack Blvd, Melbourne, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. on May 5 (Thursday) for dinner and discussion celebrating the National Day of Reason. For more information, contact Luke Setzer at (321) 544-7435

Confessions of a ... sort of ... lapsed Catholic

By Dianna Narciso

Okay, time to 'fess up. I'm Catholic. Some time back, an adversarial type, a bit put off by my atheism, asked me what my religious background was. I'm not sure why I said I was Catholic because in reality, Catholicism had very little impact on my life. I didn't become Catholic until I was twenty-seven and then, while my intentions were good, I really just fell into it in a rather spontaneous and confused manner. But this guy rolled his eyes and retorted, "That explains it."

Catholicism, in his opinion, turns out atheists quicker than a good Crusade or witch burning could ever hope to. That was enough for him to feel better about my being an atheist. It was all because of a Catholic upbringing, nuns swatting my hands with a ruler in Catholic school, or ridiculously rigid Catholic dogma.

I never really got the chance to explain to him that I hadn't been raised Catholic and could hardly lay claim to the label at all. I wanted to marry this guy who was Catholic and it seemed like a nice thing to do, getting baptized and all. It's a pretty religion, if you forget about the torture of its central figure, and the church had those really lovely windows. I even kind of liked all that kneeling and pretending to pray.

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HAPPENINGS

The **Space Coast Freethought Association** holds its next meeting from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. on June 5 at the Melbourne Public Library, located at 540 E. Fee Avenue in Melbourne.

The June meeting will be held in the large conference room located immediately on your right as you enter the library entrance. Come and join the conversation about the need for a wall of separation between government and religion and the importance of freedom FROM religion.

Our next **Adopt-A-Road** cleanup will be from 10 a.m. to noon on May 15 (May 8 is Mother's Day). We meet in the parking lot of the Atlanta Bread Company Restaurant, located on the northwest corner of the intersection of Palm Bay Road and Stack Boulevard.

The next Melbourne **Atheist Meetup** will be on May 17 at 7 p.m. at House of Joe 1220 W. New Haven Ave Suite 150, Melbourne, FL

SOLOF (Sense of Life Objectivists of Florida) will hold its next great books discussion at 6 p.m. on May 21 at the Barnes & Noble book store on Merritt Island. For more information see: <http://www.solohq.com/Florida/>

The Humanist Club at Barefoot Bay holds its next meeting from 2 to 4 p.m. on

See **HAPPENINGS** on page 3

LAPSED (from page 1)

I made arrangements with one of the priests; he was going to tutor me on the side because it was too late for me to join the annual class of converts. I took home some books and read them, but when I called back after a couple of weeks, the priest had taken a permanent leave of absence. So I was tossed into the regular class at the end. I caught a lesson on baptism and the next thing I knew, I was at the font getting dribbled on. My Godfather (a necessity) was the guy doing the baptisms because I had no one else. Sometimes I wonder if the other converts, watching their videotapes, ever ask themselves who that kook in the blue jeans is. Later, I met with the head priest for a lesson on the Eucharist (that's the body of Jesus in the form of a dry and tasteless wafer) so I'd be prepared for my first communion.

I remember asking him if bad people didn't really know right from wrong. He must have been telling me about people who aren't baptized not knowing they were sinners or something. He looked down to the floor and gave me a "well, maybe, who knows" kind of answer.

Then I learned how to do that cross thing on your forehead and across your chest; and I got myself a rosary (such pretty little things) and had it blessed. I still have it around here somewhere, I think.

So, I'm Catholic. I will, it appears, always be Catholic. Being Catholic is something you can't escape. Once they get your name, you're theirs for the duration. That's how they keep their numbers up. Last I heard, they were still praying for me at mass. They don't know it but they're praying for me at two different churches. So, it's possible that the Catholic Church is counting me double.

I was thinking I could try to get myself excommunicated but it seems like an awful lot of trouble for nothing. And this way, I can go into any Catholic church and desecrate the Eucharist with a clear conscience any time I want.

Now, it just so happens that I am also Mormon. I may not be Mormon yet, but I will definitely be Mormon after I die. We will all be Mormon after we die because the Mormon Church baptizes everyone into the faith posthumously. If you join Ancestry.com and do your family tree, they use it to baptize all of your dead ancestors. So, my grandfather is a Mormon now.

I think my being made a Mormon is really fitting because when I was twelve-years old, I sent a letter to Donny Osmond telling him the big, fat lie that I was a Mormon just like him. I really wanted to marry that guy. But I ended up with a Catholic instead (except, he turned out to be as Catholic as I am). I think I got the better deal...except for the neat underwear. Catholics don't have to wear any underwear if they don't want to. I wonder if I could get some of the Mormon underwear, seeing as I am, or will be, baptized into the Mormon faith. If they really want me to take the whole thing seriously, I think they should send me some. Or at least send me my grandfather's pair; he has no use for them now.

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CONNECTIONS:

some web addresses that may be of interest to freethinkers

<http://www.ccr-ny.org/v2/home.asp>

The Center for Constitutional Rights is another organization involved in legal challenges to violations of constitutional and human rights.

According to the site, "The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR) is a non-profit legal and educational organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

"CCR uses litigation proactively to advance the law in a positive direction, to empower poor communities and communities of color, to guarantee the rights of those with the fewest protections and least access to legal resources, to train the next generation of constitutional and human rights attorneys, and to strengthen the broader movement for constitutional and human rights."

In the aftermath of the Terry Schiavo case, here are some web sites for those seeking information about advanced directives and end-of-life decisions.

<http://www.caringinfo.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1>

Caring Connections is a program of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. The site offers state-specific living will and medical power of attorney documents on the web, as well as a wealth of information about end-of-life options, services and care.

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

The U.S. Living Will Registry is a site that "electronically stores advance directives and makes them available to health care providers 24 hours/day via secure Internet or telephone-facsimile." Registration is free to individuals, according to the site. Included in the process is a wallet-card you can carry with you that identifies you as a member of the registry and gives information about how to obtain information about your wishes. There's lots to look at on this site. It includes copies of necessary documents and even has a section for those who are, or wish to be, organ donors.

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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. Email submissions to 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.

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. or visit our website at:

<http://www.geocities.com/spacecoastfreethought/index.html>

America ... we have a problem

By George A. Ricker

In 1989, I read a news story in which a reporter, describing Voyager 2's remarkable performance returning pictures from Neptune, made the following statement: "Before Voyager 2 is lost to another solar system, the one-ton spacecraft continues to return images from Neptune, almost three billion miles from earth."

Do you see the problem?

What other solar system?

There is none in the neighborhood.

Beyond that, most astronomers believe the likelihood of Voyager 2 ever being captured by another solar system is vanishingly small, given the vastness of space and the relatively sparse scattering of the matter within it. So the statement is inaccurate on, at least, two counts. First, because there is no solar system in our neighborhood to which Voyager 2 could be lost. Second, because the likelihood of it ever being captured by another solar system is very remote.

The news story was written more than 15 years ago. Voyager 2 was launched on Aug. 20, 1977. On Jan. 5, 2005, the spacecraft had been in operation for 10,000 days. By then it was 75 Astronomical Units (one AU is the distance from the earth to the Sun) or 11 billion kilometers away from earth and only then could it truly be said to be at the edge of our solar system. Can you say, "Strike three?"

And before any of you accuse me of nit-picking, let me quickly add that I don't bring this up to take issue with the reporter who wrote it. In the business of journalism, one quickly loses any illusions of infallibility. It is very difficult, maybe impossible, to write flawless copy. We all make mistakes. I certainly have made my share.

HAPPENINGS (from page 1)

May 28 at the South Mainland Library, 7921 Ron Beatty Boulevard, Barefoot Bay.

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The Freedom From Religion

Foundation will hold its next annual convention from Nov. 11-13 at the Rosen Plaza Hotel in Orlando, Florida. Registration details will be forthcoming at a later date. Check the web at: <http://www.ffrf.org/events/> for more information.

My point is somewhat different.

I wonder how many people who read the piece caught the errors. I also wonder how those errors slipped by the editors and proofreaders who reviewed the story before it went into print.

After all, these were not trivial facts buried on the back pages of the newspaper. They were contained in the third paragraph of a front-page story in a well-known daily newspaper with good distribution.

We live in strange times.

One can hear men and women speaking with great conviction about the value of astrology (*Well, after all there must be something to it, mustn't there?*), about the usefulness of Tarot cards, about the wisdom to be found in the esoteric babbling of practically any self-styled guru who has an exotic-sounding name, yet we are woefully ignorant of basic facts about how the universe appears to work.

The prophets of willful ignorance to the contrary notwithstanding, we really do know quite a bit about the place we inhabit, and we are learning more every day. At least, some of us are. A growing percentage of our population seems unwilling to make the effort.

I am not so naive that I believe science has found all of the answers. I doubt human knowledge will ever achieve such a state. Indeed, it is very unlikely we have seen all of the questions.

But it is disturbing to me — and I hope to you as well — that so many in our society will accept the most ludicrous mumbo-jumbo without a shred of evidence, yet insist that science produce irrefutable proof before they will accept what scientists tell them.

Such an attitude reveals the absence of both sophistication and education.

Science is not about absolutes.

It is a method for attempting to find such truth as is available. Not "The Truth" but truth. Science courses ought not to be chiefly a recitation of facts, as they all too often are, but an introduction to the scientific method and to thought itself. The facts in science change constantly. The more we learn, the more we realize there is much left to learn.

Far from disproving the scientific approach to knowledge, the constant state of flux in scientific knowledge simply reinforces its validity.

If you are concerned, as many are, that our society appears to be losing its edge, appears to have begun a slide into second-class status, I suggest a part of the answer is to be found in our attitude toward science and our unwillingness to learn its basics. At a time when we need a well educated population, far too many of us are uneducated or miseducated about a great many things, science among them.

Such a state of affairs has a payback, one I suspect already is being felt. To the extent we are willing to abandon disciplined intellectual pursuits and to follow instead after psychic and religious placebos that offer only pabulum for the mind, we doom our society and ourselves to a second-rate existence.

I am not talking about national prestige or anything like that. It matters little to me whether we are the biggest and most dominant. What does matter is that we aspire to be the best we can be, and not be willing to settle for something less.

In a world increasingly dependent upon rapid changes in science and technology for its progress, a nation whose chief interests are the comings and goings of celebrities, "reality" TV shows, the latest scandals and the most sensational crimes is unlikely to succeed.

The statement that Voyager 2 will be "lost to another solar system" is a simple error of fact, easily corrected.

But the attitude that produced it is not
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Voyager 2's incredible journey

- Launched on Aug. 20, 1977 from Cape Canaveral, Fla.
- Closest approach to Jupiter on March 5, 1979
- Closest approach to Saturn on Aug. 25, 1981
- Closest approach to Uranus on Jan. 24, 1986
- Closest approach to Neptune on Aug. 25, 1989
- Current Status - Voyager 2 is escaping the solar system at a speed of about 3.3 AU per year.
- Both Voyager 1, which is about 15 billion kilometers from earth, and Voyager 2 continue to return data to scientists here on earth. As they leave the influence of our sun, the two spacecraft are expected to continue to operate and return data to earth until the year 2020.

SPEAKING OUT: SCFA members in print

Bradenton Herald - April 21, 2005

A secular nation

Once again a Christian makes false statements in a letter ("Live up to principles," April 18). The writer uses emotions and belief, rather than knowledge and facts, when stating that our country was founded on the morality of the Bible and the Christian God. If people would do a little research, they would know that our country was founded on secular principles. Thomas Jefferson was not a Christian, and he did not believe in the Bible. Nowhere in our Constitution does it mention the words Christian, Bible or God.

Also, morals do not come from religion, another misconception by Christians. Morals come from society as we continually strive to better humanity. In fact, the Bible and God are immoral. Two examples (there are many more): The Bible condones slavery and God orders killing of innocent children (Leviticus 25:45,46; Hosea 13:16).

Why do Christians continue to say things that are not true and try to change historical facts in order to support their religion? Rather than trying to change reality to fit the religion, why not change the religion to fit reality?

*Charles Eugene
Titusville*

St. Augustine Record - March 27, 2005

Letter: Why do we hide Christian principles?

Greg Marsh
Palatine, Illinois

Editor: In response to the letter with the question, "I never can understand what commandment is not liked ...?", the answer is commandments one and two in Exodus 20: No other gods, and make no idols. After receiving the Ten Commandments Moses commanded 3,000 brothers and friends and neighbors to be killed in Exodus 32:27-28. The killings were ordered because the 3,000 people broke these two commandments.

One of the reason people migrated to the United States was, until around 1800 in Europe, the church had the power to kill people. The last execution of a witch in Poland was in 1793, and inquisitorial torture was not abolished in the Catholic Church until 1816. A principle this country was founded on is found in the third Article of the Bill of Rights, which became the First Amendment, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion ..."

**Congratulations! You've found a
Non-prophet Zone**

St. Augustine Record - April 22, 2005

Christianity is punitive by Greg Marsh

Editor: This is a response to the letter "Christians didn't enslave and plunder new lands," which claims Christians peacefully converted much of the world. This is in conflict with scripture and world history. Some teachings of the Bible concerning people who do not accept its God:

Hosea 13:16 "? because they have rebelled against their God. They will fall by the sword; their little ones will be dashed to the ground, their pregnant women ripped open."

Jesus in John 15:6 "Anyone who parts from me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned."

The letter claimed, "European settlers didn't take a "continent" away from the Indians."

The forced relocation of Indians, or the Trail of Tears is commonly taught in high school history.

The letter described the conquering of Central America Indians as liberation, not a destruction of other peoples' belief systems.

This contradicts the Pulitzer Prize winning book "Guns, Germs and Steel" by Jared Diamond, that describes the religious justification for killing the Inca Indians by Pizarro; when the Indians rejected the Bible the soldiers were ordered to attack.

The letter also links secularists with Communists atrocities.

Secular humanism emphasizes individual freedom and the need for tolerance.

Joseph Stalin apparently was not taught these guidelines the five years he attended seminary.

The Bible promotes communism in the following scriptures: Mark 10:25 "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

Acts 4:32 "? No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had."

*"... the being cannot be termed
rational or virtuous who obeys
any authority but that of reason."*

Mary Wollstonecraft,
A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)