

FREELY SPEAKING

FREE MINDS
FREE PEOPLE

Vol. 2, No. 7

June 2005

Six pages

SKIRMISHES

A report

• Human Rights Watch (HRW) charges that government inaction led to the deaths of thousands of Nigerians in religious conflicts from September, 2001 through the first half of 2004. In a report titled "Revenge in the Name of Religion: The Cycle of Violence in Plateau and Kano States," HRW documents the escalation of violence that occurred as Muslim and Christian groups attacked, then retaliated against one another. Most of the victims of the violence, the report states, "were unarmed men, women and children who were targeted simply because of their religion."

The report charges, "What had originally been an ethnic and political conflict turned into a religious one ... as both sides exploited religion as an effective way of mobilizing large-scale support."

More blood shed in the name of religion ... now where have we heard that before?

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SCFA honors Musgrove with first-ever Defender of the First Amendment award

On June 5, at 1:00 p.m., at the Melbourne Public Library, Space Coast Freethought Association will present its first-ever DEFENDER OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT award to former Palm Bay High School senior, Jennifer Musgrove. Musgrove recently filed suit against the Brevard County School District when her high school refused to relocate graduation ceremonies from a local church. In her diligent effort to secure the rights of freedom of conscience for all Brevard County students, she endured ostracism and denigration from many of her peers and their parents.

Space Coast Freethought Association applauds the dedication and bravery of Jennifer Musgrove and was moved to create the DEFENDER OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT award to be given to local residents who fight to maintain strict separation of religion and government.

(Space Coast Freethought Association is a local community of reason-based individuals organized to facilitate social interaction, promote the non-theistic, rationalist viewpoint as a valid contribution to public discourse, and reinforce the First Amendment guarantee of separation between government and religion through education and activism.)

Jennifer Musgrove's stand took courage

By Dianna Narciso

When I was a teenager, I was a sheep. No one ever had to tell me to sit down and shut up, because I never stood (or sat, as the case may be) and spoke out. It never occurred to me to not stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. It never occurred to me to not say "one nation, under God." It wasn't because I necessarily believed it, I just never dared to consider not doing what everyone else did. I recall attending *baccalaureate* as a senior in high school. I didn't know what *baccalaureate* was. I never bothered to ask; everyone was going, so I went. When I sat with my fellow graduates and listened to one prayer and sermon after another given by students and local clergy, I was disgusted. But not because I thought this was an infringement on my rights — because I was bored out of my mind. I was too easily led.

When I think about Jennifer Musgrove, the eighteen-year old high school senior who took on the school district recently, I am in awe. It amazes me that someone so young could understand herself so well — to know what is right and to stand up for it (or sit down, as the case may be).

See **COURAGE** on page 2

HAPPENINGS

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

We meet 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 9 to 11 a.m. on June 12. 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 June 21 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 June 18 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

COURAGE (from page 1)

When I found out last May that Palm Bay High School was graduating its seniors at Calvary Chapel of Melbourne, I was upset. I couldn't imagine under what circumstance such a thing could have been agreed upon. Did no one raise any concerns about parading students across an altar in front of an enormous cross for a solemn, secular ceremony? What sort of arrogance, or ignorance, would make a principal think there was nothing wrong with forcing a religiously diverse group of students to enter a church in order to take part in one of the most important ceremonies of their lives?

I complained as best I could. I contacted the principal of Palm Bay High School, as well as the principals at the two other high schools who planned graduation ceremonies at the church. When that got me nowhere, I wrote a letter of complaint and sent it to the Superintendent of Brevard County schools, each member of the school board, and the principals of all the high schools in the county. I encouraged others to write as well. I did receive a reply from the Superintendent; it was clear that he saw nothing wrong with holding public school ceremonies in churches and he decided I was unreasonable in my complaint. I wrote back to him, once more attempting to get him to see my point of view, but I never heard from him again.

My son entered Palm Bay High in the fall and all year I wondered what I could do about the situation before he graduated. I tried to get a guest column published in the newspaper to garner public support, but that didn't work out. As the end of the school year approached, I considered standing in front of the school with a huge sign that read: stop graduations in churches. I even considered picketing at the graduations themselves, which was something I really did not want to do.

The Sunday before four Brevard high schools were to graduate seniors at the church this year, I planned to write a letter to the editor about the issue, but I felt like I was an insignificant gnat buzzing around a giant's face, getting no more attention than a casual wave of a hand. I felt hopeless and trampled upon. When I opened the Sunday newspaper, I found salvation.

Jennifer Musgrove and her father didn't waste time. As soon as they found out that Jennifer would be forced to attend graduation in a church, they took action. When their complaints to the school got

them nowhere, they didn't bother with the damsel-in-distress mode that had hampered me for an entire year, they contacted Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

"What sort of arrogance, or ignorance, would make a principal think there was nothing wrong with forcing a religiously diverse group of students to enter a church in order to take part in one of the most important ceremonies of their lives?"

Here we have a young woman who already knows who she is; she's awake to the world — a lion, not a lamb. I can only imagine what great progress she will make in her life having such self-awareness at such a young age. The funny thing is that such fierce defense of what is right and just ought to be applauded in our youth. The school, its staff and principal, ought to have recognized her bravery with daily announcements during the week leading up to graduation. The school board should present her with an award for daring to stand up for her rights. The general public should offer her some kind of tribute. Palm Bay should give her the key to the city.

Instead she was met with anger and ignorance. That's how the majority likes to keep us down. But it never really works. Other students and adults will follow her example and honor her. I know I will.

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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. or visit our website at: <http://www.geocities.com/spacecoastfreethought/index.html>

CONNECTIONS:

some web addresses that may be of interest to freethinkers

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

This is home to Human Rights Watch, an organization dedicated to the protection and promotion of human rights around the globe. The web site has a wealth of information about various campaigns and reports of human rights violations around the world.

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

Amnesty International may be the best know organization championing the cause of human rights around the globe. AI has been especially effective in raising awareness of the abuse of political prisoners, the poor and the disenfranchised. The organization issues an annual report on the state of human rights in nations around the world. The current edition, "Amnesty International Report 2005" is available to be read on the web site.

<http://www.doctorswithoutborders.org/index.shtml>

Doctors Without Borders (or Medecins Sans Frontiere) delivers emergency aid to victims of armed conflict, epidemics, and natural and man-made disasters, and to others who lack health care due to social or geographical isolation.

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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.

Judge allows graduation in church, but sides with AU

By Jeff Nall

For Humanist Network News

May 18, 2005

(reprinted by permission)

On Wednesday, Federal District Judge Gregory A. Presnell rejected Americans United for Separation of Church and State's (AU) request to stop four Florida high school graduation ceremonies from taking place at a church. Judge Presnell did not, however, reject the temporary restraining order on its merit. Instead the judge said there was an insufficient amount of time to move the ceremonies. The Brevard County graduations are scheduled for this Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Wednesday's request was made by AU on behalf of Jennifer Musgrove, a Palm Bay high graduating senior, her Buddhist father David Musgrove and Atheist Dianna Narciso, whose son is a ninth grader at Palm Bay high.

AU charged that holding the graduations at Cavalry Chapel, a large West Melbourne church, would be unconstitutional ! because alternative secular facilities were available, and the church refused to cover religious symbols inside the building.

The case in question stems from father David Musgrove's initial objections to his daughter's graduation being held at a church. Musgrove contacted AU in April after the school, Palm Bay high, denied his requests in March to have the ceremony moved to a secular alternative -- or to at least cover religious iconography within the church.

On May 2, AU issued a letter calling on Brevard county school Superintendent Richard A. DiPatri to relocate Palm Bay High's graduation from Melbourne Cavalry Chapel to a secular venue. In the letter, AU stated that "holding graduation ceremonies in such a venue constitutes a strong message of unconstitutional endorsement of religion by requiring students and their families to choose between missing graduation, on the one hand, and being subjected to unwanted expressions of religion, on the other."

In a response issued 10-days later, DiPatri denied the group's request on the grounds that Calvary Chapel was the only nearby facility capable of accommodating Palm Bay high's expected 3,500 guests. In the statement DiPatri wrote: "The school's use of this facility is for the purely secular purpose of accommodating a very large graduation ceremony in an available, indoor facility located in the school's community."

Previously, Palm Bay High had held graduation at the school's own football field, which several other Brevard County schools will do this year, and the Clemente Center, belonging to local college Florida Institute of Technology (FIT). Contradicting claims that the church is the only facility capable of handling Palm Bay High's ceremony, the Clemente Center's Web site states "approximately 3,400 people attended graduation in May of 2002". Additionally, Clemente Center Director Mark Ritter said the center is among the largest venues in South Brevard. He also said 3,200 people attended FIT's most recent graduation ceremony.

Aside from the choice of a religious venue, those involved in the case questioned how the event would remain purely secular when the church consistently refused to remove or even cover the 15-20 foot cross, standing at the center of the facility's center-stage. Before the ruling, the church's communications manager Melody Glover told *Florida Today* that Calvary Chapel would not cover the cross. "It's part of who we are. We're just offering our facility, but we're not going to hide what our facility is." (The cross can be viewed at the Church's Web site: www.cccsmelb.org -- small photo, bottom right, above "Our Church" section.)

AU argued that legal case history made it clear that a religious venue could not be used unless "all religious symbols are covered or removed."

In principle, Judge Presnell agreed with AU's concern about the Constitutionality of holding the graduations at a church. The *Orlando Sentinel* reported the judge as having labeled such practices "questionable at best". Additionally, Presnell's decision does not impede the case, *Musgrove v. School Board of Brevard County*, from continuing. In fact, Presnell's comments seem to spell out a potential victory for the plaintiffs. *The Associated Press* reported that the judge said, "I don't necessarily approve of the school board's decision because it seems clear to me that a secular facility without these religious icons should have been chosen."

While suffering an initial loss, Mark Tietig, the attorney who filed Wednesday's suit, believes his clients will prevail in the end. "The writing's on the wall, to use a religious analogy, that the school board cannot pull this kind of stunt

for commencement exercises in the future."

Echoing Tietig's optimism, David Musgrove told HNN he believes he and his daughter have won in the larger sense.

"I couldn't be happier," he said. "I think it's a major victory. I think it's a victory because the judge found our case had merit on every Constitutional issue we brought in. The only thing that was against us was the timing."

Musgrove also believes the judge's criticism of the Brevard County School Board will resonate throughout Florida.

"I think it sends a message to the state of Florida that there's a judge on the Federal Court that interprets the First Amendment in a way that we believe it should be interpreted; and will make other venues, other school districts think twice before they do this."

Despite the tumult which has grown out of the case, Jennifer Musgrove, who had to be escorted to her classes out of concerns for her safety on Wednesday, said she had to take a stand.

"I don't want (Christianity) interfering in my life," said Musgrove, 18, "especially when it's violating separation of church and state. It's supposed to protect us and it's not working."

Jeff Nall is a Central Florida based writer. He has contributed to publications such as the Humanist, Humanist Network News, Freethought Today, Z-Magazine, Clamor, and Liberty.

Sources include: * "Judge critical, but lets Brevard hold graduations at church," (story by *Orlando Sentinel*, May 18, 2005). * "Judge critical, but lets Brevard hold graduations at church," (story by *The Associated Press*, May 18, 2005). * "Judge chastises Brevard, but lets graduations go forth at church," (story by *The Associated Press*, May 18, 2005).

HAPPENINGS (from page 1)

June 25 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 information, including a form that can be downloaded, is available on the web at: <http://www.ffrf.org/events/>

Several members of the SCFA have declared their intention to attend the convention this year. We hope to have the opportunity to set up a display of materials from and about the group.

The more things change ...

By George A. Ricker

“The more things change, the more they stay the same.”

No doubt, you have heard the statement dozens of times in your life. You may even agree with it. It's a comforting thought, the idea that nothing really changes. Another is the axiom, “You can't change human nature.”

Armed with those two assumptions, we make life an easy matter because it is so simple to pigeonhole people and events and be relatively confident they will remain where we put them. Like most conventional wisdom, the two ideas both contain a kernel of truth. They also are used to justify an awful lot of nonsense.

There is no question human beings, like all biological organisms, are driven by certain fundamental urges. The need to sustain life and to reproduce it is characteristic of our species, as it is of all others. However, beyond that basic set of facts one may not safely go. You can prove almost any case by the argument from human nature. What is most interesting about human nature is not its constancy but its adaptability.

It is our ability to adjust to new circumstances that has made us so successful as a species. Undeniably, all men and women share the same, basic biological and psychological needs. However, we have devised an infinite number of strategies and modes of living in order to satisfy those needs.

In an excellent book, called *Man on Earth*, author John Reader describes some of the variations in human cultures, variations that have arisen out of the attempt to satisfy those fundamental drives within the context of the environments in which the cultures have emerged.

Man's seemingly infinite adaptability is revealed as Reader talks about the lobstermen of Maine, the bushmen of the Kalahari and the rice farmers of Bali. Each culture is very distinct, yet each was devised to satisfy the same fundamental human requirements. Although no one of them would appeal to most of us, each is right and proper for the context in which it was developed.

Beyond the evidence of human adaptability suggested by Reader's book, it is apparent that within cultures people also change. The values of a person raised in the United States during the Great Depression are fundamentally different from the values of a person raised in the 1950s and are far removed from the values of those who grew up during the American Revolution or the Civil War.

Within a given culture, values change as the culture in which those values are formulated changes. Each generation holds its values to be the correct ones and looks with suspicion at the values of others. It is common to dismiss many of those changes as mere “changes in technology.” Human nature hasn't changed, we say, just the technology has changed. That view has always seemed incredibly superficial to me.

From the invention of the plow to the creation of the latest, most sophisticated computers, technology has had a profound impact on human behavior. We have invented it, and it has changed our lives irretrievably.

I offer one modest example.

For the first 11 years of my life, I lived without television. For entertainment, I relied on a small radio my parents had given me one Christmas, on books and on the games and adventures I could fashion with my own imagination.

See **CHANGE** on page 5

This Month in History

By Cameo Johnson-Cramer

~30 years ago - **Lemon v. Kurtzman (Lemon Test)**

- **June 28, 1971**

This case decided that the use of public funds to benefit private religious schools was unconstitutional. "First, the statute must have a secular legislative purpose; second, its principle or primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion . . . ; finally, the statute must not foster 'an excessive government entanglement with religion'."

~100 years ago - **Mann Act established**

- **June 25, 1910**

(aka the White Slave Traffic Act.) Congress apparently thought that no woman would voluntarily become a prostitute, so they made a law making it illegal to "transport any woman or girl" across state lines "for any immoral purpose." Jack Johnson, a black world heavyweight boxing champion was arrested for taking his white girlfriend across the state line. (While in prison he became the prison's athletic director.) Charlie Chaplin was acquitted of his violation, but Chuck Berry spent two years in prison. They both took unmarried women across the state line for "immoral purposes." Once someone was even arrested for bringing a woman to another state so she could work as a chorus girl. The Mann Act was finally removed from the books in 1986.

~150 years ago - **Emma Goldman was born**

- **June 27, 1869**

An anarchist, feminist, and Freethinker, Emma Goldman was once known as "the most dangerous woman in America". She was a Russian immigrant, and her outspoken attacks on government, big business, and war eventually got her deported. "Religion is a superstition that originated in man's mental inability to solve natural phenomena. The church is an organized institution that has always been a stumbling block to progress." (What I Believe) <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/goldman/> .

~ 150 years ago - **Ambrose Bierce was born**

- **June 24, 1842**

Bierce was a writer, journalist, and an atheist, and mysteriously disappeared while attempting to join Pancho Villa in Mexico. Although he wrote Civil War and supernatural stories, he was also a satirist. One of his best known works, the *Devil's Dictionary*, states "Religion - A daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to Ignorance the nature of the Unknowable." Many of his works can be read online at <http://www.biercephile.com/work.cfm> .

~300 years ago - **First Salem witch hanging**

- **June 10, 1692**

Bridget Bishop was hung after being the first colonist tried in the Salem witch trials. In October the court was dissolved and those being held on witchcraft charges were released, but not after 19 women and men were executed.

~10000 years ago - **Atlantis destroyed**

- **June 5, 8498BCE**

According to Greek myth, the advanced Atlantian society had become a military aggressor, so the gods punished them by submerging them under the sea.

CHANGE (from page 4)

When I was 11, our family bought its first television set. It was a black-and-white Admiral console. State-of-the-art for its time, it was incredibly crude by today's standards. The arrival of the television gave me a new window on the world. I am a fundamentally different person than I would have been had the television set never been introduced.

One of my clearest recollections is watching Dwight D. Eisenhower win the Republican Party's nomination in 1952. I think watching that convention began my fascination with politics, one that has stayed with me to this day. It was a small modification in my personality, to be sure. It was but one of many.

The impact of technology on human behavior is incremental and cumulative. It also is undeniable.

Those who argue that nothing ever changes are really seeking refuge in humankind's oldest illusion, the illusion of permanence. Change introduces new elements into the equations of human existence. A changing world threatens us because it invalidates our assumptions about the way the world and its people are supposed to work.

Faced with a world in which change is accelerating, we cling desperately to our litany of permanence. "This is the way things are," we tell ourselves. "It is the way they always have been."

Yet the only reality we know is one that is constantly and inevitably changing. Both individuals and societies change. They always have. They always will.

Only in that sense is it valid to say, "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

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(• Reader, John. *Man on Earth*. University of Texas Press. Austin, Texas. 1988)

"A large proportion of the noblest and most valuable teaching has been the work, not only of men who did not know, but of men who knew and rejected the Christian faith."

-- John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, 1859

SPEAKING OUT: SCFA members in print (more on page 6)

Florida Today - May 19, 2005

Schools have obligation to find a neutral site

The graduation venue of local high schools using Calvary Chapel in West Melbourne should have been changed.

Regardless of Wednesday's judicial decision allowing the current crop of high school graduations to be held in the church, the controversy will not end here. Nor should it.

The Brevard County School District has been put on notice that some parents and students find this practice troubling, which should be sufficient reason for changing the venue of future ceremonies.

Had the district changed its policy last year, when the issue was first raised, there would be no problem now.

Why hasn't the school district considered moving the ceremonies to a neutral site, like the Clemente Center at Florida Tech, which would easily accommodate the expected turnouts for each of the ceremonies?

These are questions that should be asked and answered.

Rather than being angry at parents who have raised legitimate concerns about the propriety of using a church for public high school graduations, we should be angry at the public officials who created the situation and then arrogantly refused to correct it.

Whether the practice is constitutional or not, it's just plain wrong.

George A. Ricker
Palm Bay

Bradenton Herald — May 2, 2005

Free not to believe

I would like to address recent letters regarding the Pledge of Allegiance case before the Supreme Court. One writer wonders how such a seemingly trivial thing can be of such import to some American citizens when homelessness and hunger abound ("Tempest in teapot," Oct. 18). Freedom from religion may very well be the most important freedom we fight for. The freedom to say "I do not believe" is freedom of conscience and without it, we are slaves to the majority religion. My child should never be coerced, neither by the government, nor through peer pressure, to acknowledge any god, ever.

Another writer has the audacity to state that "all" means only people who agree with her viewpoint ("Defend the Pledge," Oct. 19). "With liberty and justice for all" means the atheists too.

Where is the justice in forcing the nonbelievers in this country to acknowledge the Christian God in a loyalty pledge? The Pledge should never have been amended from its original, secular form. "Under God" was inserted for religious reasons and separates us into two groups: believers and non-believers. How can this country be "indivisible" if we let religion divide us?

Dianna Narciso
Palm Bay

Congratulations!
You've found a
Non-prophet Zone

SPEAKING OUT: SCFA members in print (more on page 5)

Sun-Sentinel - May 17, 2005

Atheists' success

Before the righteous fundamentalists voice their indignation over Wednesday's letter, "Organized religion as a business," I should like to offer the writer my support, and simply add to his summation that, "No person can proclaim atheism and, at the same time, become successful as a doctor, a dentist, a nurse, a teacher or, least of all, a pope," by observing that we atheists are successful in one venue, and that is our ability to see clearly the foibles and folly of religious fantasy, and those adherents whose minds are washed squeaky clean by its groundless tenets.

You're not alone, writer. We may be a minority, but all seeds of change require time to germinate, sprout and grow.

Here's to tomorrow.

Harvey Freilich
Boca Raton

Orlando Sentinel - May 28, 2005

Respect refresher

In his May 19 letter to the editor, Joe Sewell misses the point of the lawsuit against conducting public-high-school graduations in a church.

It is precisely the lack of "mutual respect" that made the suit necessary in the first place.

The Brevard County School District was made aware there were parents who objected to the practice last year and did nothing to correct the situation. The district showed no "respect" for those parents' concerns.

Instead the school district continued to misrepresent the situation by claiming only that one church provided indoor facilities that could accommodate the crowds that were expected. In fact, there is, at least, one other, totally secular, facility that could have accommodated them -- the Clemente Center at Florida Tech in Melbourne. There may well be others.

It is also a lack of respect that suggests it's perfectly OK to force some parents and students to choose between attending a graduation ceremony and being made to feel uncomfortable because of the religious character of the location in which it is being held.

If the school district truly wants to show respect for all the parents and students who use its facilities, it will find a nonreligious venue for next year's graduation ceremonies.

George A. Ricker
Palm Bay

Florida Today — May 26, 2005

No one should feel left out at graduations

Kudos to the plaintiffs who tried to get Palm Bay High to cover the religious symbols at Calvary Chapel where graduation ceremonies were being held or move them to a secular location.

It's always hard doing something that is unpopular, even if you think the School Board is violating the law.

As an atheist, I'm used to being unpopular. I'm used to feeling like I don't belong in society. But when it comes to government, I do belong.

So thanks to the plaintiffs for reminding the government of that.

Perhaps the graduation ceremony was secular, but having it in a place with religious symbols in plain view makes some of us feel like we don't belong there.

And at a public graduation ceremony, all students should feel like they belong.

Cameo Johnson
Palm Bay

“I assert most unhesitatingly, that the religion of the south is a mere covering for the most horrid crimes,— a justifier of the most appalling barbarity, — a sanctifier of the most hateful frauds, — and a dark shelter under which the darkest, foulest, grossest, and most infernal deeds of slaveholders find the strongest protection. Were I to be again reduced to the chains of slavery, next to that enslavement, I should regard being the slave of a religious master the greatest calamity. For of all the slaveholders with whom I have ever met, religious slaveholders are the worst.”

Frederick Douglass

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave 1845)