

FREELY SPEAKING

FREE MINDS
FREE PEOPLE

Vol. 3, No. 5

January 2006

Eight pages

SKIRMISHES

A judgment

• In ruling against the introduction of “Intelligent Design” into science classrooms in the Dover, Pennsylvania, school district, U.S. District Judge John E. Jones III (a Republican and a Bush appointee) had no difficulty recognizing the religious character of the ID movement.

In his decision, Jones observed the goal of the ID movement (as stated in the “Wedge Document” created by the Discovery Institute’s Center for Renewal of Science and Culture) is to “...replace science as currently practiced with ‘theistic and Christian science.’”

He goes on to note, “A careful review of the Wedge Document’s goals and language throughout the document reveals cultural and religious goals,

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An insider’s report from the Evil Atheist Conspiracy

By *Dianna Narciso*

Well, it appears we have survived the war on Christmas. Our devious plans for taking Christ out of the national holiday by getting Christians to insist retailers put him back into their advertising has turned out well. I do believe we made excellent progress, especially as regards Hooters’ “Have a Hooters Christmas” radio ad campaign. Score one big one for our side.

Our number-two top-secret operative, Bill O’Reilly, continues to champion the cause by stirring the faithful into froths of agitated frenzy. He intones his coded mantra daily: “The more we scream about persecution, the more ridiculous we become.” Of course, the opposition only hears “The no-spin zone.” O’Reilly must be bucking for accommodation in next year’s “Secularization of America” awards and trying to oust Pat Robertson from his number-one-operative spot.

Halloween went well this year also as more Christians than usual came out on our side damning the pagan celebration and attacking schools for allowing it under the guise of “fall festival.”

The one-two punch of evil Halloween and Christ-filled Christmas will surely work to our advantage next year when we launch our “Say Happy Halloween or else” campaign through our secret-operatives-in-the-open, Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert. All is working as we had planned, my friends.

Locally, your Evil-Atheist-Conspirator President stuck her nose out very far this past year. She blasted the Brevard County Commission on her personal website after our attention-focusing campaign against the promotion of the religious program Life Choices in our public schools. This, thus far, has yielded little fallout, but time will tell; if we can stir up more trouble we may have crosses burning on her lawn in 2006. And of course, you remember her rushing to join the lawsuit against the school board in their stupefying decision to allow graduations to take place in the Calvary Chapel mega-church of Melbourne. She appreciates your having her back through these ordeals.

As a group we wrote various local representatives

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HAPPENINGS

The Space Coast Freethought Association holds its February meeting from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Feb. 5 at the Melbourne Public Library, 540 E. Fee Ave., Melbourne.

February’s meeting will be in the small meeting room - on the left, after the main desk but just ahead of the reference desk.

Our meetings are free and open to the public. 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 begin at 10 a.m. on January 15. 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.

.....

SOLOF (Sense of Life Objectivists of Florida) will hold its next great books discussion at 6 p.m. on January 21 at the Barnes & Noble book store on Merritt Island. For more information go to:

<http://www.solohq.com/Florida/>

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CONSPIRACY (from page 1)

regarding the Life Choices program and we wrote the mayor of Palm Bay and its city council regarding a picture of the American flag with a cross on it placed on the City of Palm Bay website. While neither of these has produced positive action, we are making ourselves known at least, so that when our secret spy operatives make the faithful look totally out of touch, people will have somewhere to turn for sanity.

And don't forget, we recognized Jennifer Musgrove, for her courage in filing suit against the school board for the graduation situation, with an award and some money. We got some notice in the Hometown News with that one.

Among those activities, we've also had our share of fun with dinners, picnics and parties. Even those in the Evil Atheist Conspiracy take time out occasionally from the battle of removing God from every facet of American life for a little camaraderie and socializing (You know the faithful read that as communism and socialism). It's not easy work, but someone has to do it, right?

While we did some good God-banning here locally, we do owe our success to the national operatives for creating an atmosphere in which we look positively angelic compared to the opposition. We had those covert workers on the Dover school board who did their best to show the ridiculousness of Intelligent Design by forcing a showdown with parents, AU, and the ACLU. The ID operatives worked well in their roles making it obvious they were, indeed, repackaging Christian Biblical Creationism and attempting to subvert the constitutional separation of church and state. Bravo, folks. We couldn't have asked for a better performance. We realize they lost their positions with the school board with the next election, but that is a well-known risk of undercover, top-secret, God-riddance work.

True, ultra-secret-secret (and numero uno) operative, the most "Reverend" Pat Robertson has managed to put himself into a position where he can never lose his job with our cause. He did his part this year (he's so good at it) by making conservative Christians look like fools by claiming the Dover electorate had, in effect, thrown God out of Dover when it voted out the school board. "Don't go crying to God when something bad happens now" he told them. Liberal Christians everywhere were left red in the face with that one. You really have to hand it to co-conspirator Pat. We couldn't do this job without him.

And let's not forget Pat for his "fatwa" against President Hugo Chavez of Venezuela. Could he have made the Christian right look more ridiculous? While he did lose points for not garnering any outrage from the current U.S. administration, many of us think that in itself boosted our ratings with the middle-grounders and may have pushed many of them into the Evil Atheist Conspiracy camp.

It's been a banner year for a Godless nation. We've made so much progress that our heads are still spinning and may spin well into 2006. Don't forget our operatives donning Christianity's glassy-eyed fanaticism to stand outside Terri Shiavo's hospice supposedly praying to their God to save her. You can hardly ask for a better display to make people turn away from theocracy.

Except maybe Repent America's claim that hurricane Katrina was God's judgment on the wicked city of New Orleans for its planned "Southern Decadence" celebration. That's right, RA, keep pushing that God-Hates-Fags agenda for us and we'll get this nation back to its secular roots in no time.

"Even those in the Evil Atheist Conspiracy take time out occasionally from the battle of removing God from every facet of American life for a little camaraderie and socializing (You know the faithful read that as communism and socialism)."

Minor efforts include the media's constant and sappy coverage of the death of Pope John Paul, angering many a soap-opera fan. The election of the new pope who resembles the evil emperor in the Star Wars trilogy (practically gospel for millions) can only be good for our side.

True, there have been moments when it looked bad for us. The Ten Commandments ruling that made no sense at all and allowed the display on public property in some cases was a blow and will guarantee that the fight will continue for generations to come. But if our top-secret (even to themselves) Evil-Atheist-Conspiracy operatives keep doing what they're doing, we should be all right in the end.

Freely Speaking is the newsletter of the **Space Coast Freethought Association, Inc.** It is published monthly and distributed free as a pdf file. Print copies are available to members on request.

Freely Speaking is published and edited in Palm Bay, Fla., by George A. Ricker on behalf of the SCFA. All contents © 2005 by the **Space Coast Freethought Association, Inc.** unless otherwise indicated. Copyright of any reprinted material remains with the original publisher.

Freely Speaking invites articles which promote freethought and church-state separation 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 by email or by mail to: SCFA, PO Box 60448, Palm Bay, FL 32906-0448 - att: newsletter.

Humor in Religion

A worthwhile confession?

Michael took Kevin along with him to confession for moral support.

Kevin waited in the pews while Michael approached the confessional.

"Forgive me father, I have sinned, I have been with a woman."

"Ah Michael," sighed the priest, "you have grieved the Holy Spirit. Tell me, was it Mary McCarthy?"

"I can't tell you, father," answered Michael, "I promised I wouldn't say, but forgive me, I have sinned, I have been with a woman."

"Michael, this is not what you have been taught by Mother Church. Was it Sinead O'Rourke?"

"I can't say, father, I promised I wouldn't, but forgive me, I have sinned, I have been with a woman."

"Ah, Michael, your poor mother and father would be heartbroken to know this. I wonder, was it Philomena Donnelly?"

"I can't tell you, father, I promised, forgive me, I have been with a woman."

"Michael, my son, I harbored such high hopes for you when you were an altar boy. Tell me, was it Therese Murphy?"

"Father, I can't say, I promised, forgive me father, I have sinned, I have been with a woman."

The priest pronounced, "Michael, you must say 50 Our Fathers and 30 Hail Marys."

"Thank you, father," a relieved Michael acknowledged, and went back to the pews where his mate Kevin was waiting.

"Michael, Michael, what did the father say?"

"He gave me 50 Our Fathers, 30 Hail Marys and four good leads."

SPACE COAST FREETHOUGHT ASSOCIATION
A non-prophet organization

SCFA store open at CafePress

How would you like to buy a tee-shirt or a button with the Space Coast Freethought Association's logo on it?

Did you even know we had a logo?

Check out the new "Space Coast Freethought Association" store at [cafepress.com](http://www.cafepress.com). You'll find the site at: <http://www.cafepress.com/scfreethought>

A portion of the purchase price of these items will be donated to the SCFA treasury. Included among the items for sale are the aforementioned tees and buttons, coffee mugs, aprons, a chrome license-plate holder, an ornament for your Winter Solstice bush and so on. The merchandise is of good quality and the prices are about what you would expect to pay for similar items in other retail outlets.

Even if you don't want to buy anything, stop by and take a good look at that logo.

For more information about the cafepress.com site and the items we have available, contact Doug Cramer.

SCFA Board of Directors (officers)

Dianna Narciso (President) ...George Ricker (Vice Pres.)
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SKIRMISHES (from page 1)

as opposed to scientific ones. ID aspires to change the ground rules of science to make room for religion, specifically, beliefs consonant with a particular version of Christianity."

Unfortunately, the clarity of Judge Jones' opinion is unlikely to have much influence on the ID crowd. Rational argument has never been their strong suit, and they demonstrate a preference for shrieking headlines over reasoned discourse.

HAPPENINGS (from page 1)

The Humanist Club at Barefoot Bay holds its next meeting from 2 to 4 p.m. on January 14 at the South Mainland Library, 7921 Ron Beatty Boulevard, Barefoot Bay.

This month's program will feature a talk by Tom Belanger on "Intelligent Design."

Contact George Oertel at 772-664-0170 for more information.

THIS MONTH IN HISTORY by Cameo Johnson-Cramer

This month in history - January

Merry ----- mas

~50 years ago - Steve Benson was born - January 2, 1954

Political cartoonist and ex-Mormon.

FMI - <http://www.exmormon.org/mormon/mormon418.htm>



<http://www.comics.com/editoons/benson/> - December 27, 2005

~ 80 years ago - Martin Luther King, Jr. was born - Jan. 15, 1929

Baptist minister and advocate of church/state separation. Dr. King spoke often of the failings of the church, the benefits of science, and the need for government not to be controlled by religion.

In reference to a recent Supreme Court ruling that found school prayer unconstitutional, he said, *“I endorse it. I think it was correct. Contrary to what many have said, it sought to outlaw neither prayer nor belief in God. In a pluralistic society such as ours, who is to determine what prayer shall be spoken, and by whom? Legally, constitutionally, or otherwise, the state certainly has no such right.”* — *Playboy*, January 1965.

“Softmindedness often invades religion. This is why religion has sometimes rejected new truth with a dogmatic passion. Through edict and bulls, inquisitions and excommunications, the church has attempted to prorogue truth and place an impenetrable stone wall in the path of the truth-seeker.” — *The Strength to Love*, 1963.

~100 years ago - Butterfly McQueen was born - Jan. 8, 1911

An actress and an atheist, she was best known for her portrayal of “Prissy” in “Gone with the Wind.” She quit acting in 1947 because she didn’t like the types of roles available to her. Eventually she earned a bachelor’s degree in political science in 1974.

“As my ancestors are free from slavery, I am free from the slavery of religion.”

~200 years ago - Jefferson’s Danbury Baptist Letter - Jan. 1, 1802

In this famous letter, Thomas Jefferson explains to the Danbury congregation the meaning of the First Amendment phrase, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.”

“I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibit the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between church and state.”

~220 years ago - Jefferson’s “Statute for Religious Freedom” passed - Jan. 16, 1786

Thomas Jefferson considered this Virginia statute so important, it was one of three accomplishments he wanted engraved on his tombstone.

“[T]hat no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief: but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities.”

~300 years ago - Thomas Aikenhead died - Jan. 8, 1697

During the 16th century, blasphemy against the Christian religion was considered an offense against Britain’s common law, and therefore punishable in court. Britain’s last execution for blasphemy occurred on this date. Thomas Aikenhead was hung for denying the trinity. The last imprisonment for blasphemy in Britain occurred in 1921.

Sham battles obscure the real war

By George A. Ricker

Over the past month or so we have been regaled with complaints from many Christians about a so-called war on Christmas. The mavens of public morality have demanded—with threats of economic boycott for recalcitrants—that retail outlets wish customers a “Merry Christmas” instead of using such nonspecific, and entirely appropriate, phrases as “Season’s Greetings” or “Happy Holidays.”

Government agencies that refer to “holiday parades” and so on are accused of the new crime of “Political Correctness.” Apparently anyone who shows the slightest concern for the sensibilities or sensitivities of anyone besides the largest gang (i.e. the Christian majority) is guilty of this crime. It’s funny. When I was growing up, we used to call this sort of consideration good manners or basic politeness.

Meanwhile talk show hosts like Bill O’Reilly and religious hacks like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson kept the faithful enraged—and the donations flowing—with visions of poor persecuted Christians suffering terrible penalties for uttering the words “Merry Christmas.” To hear them tell it there are hordes of secularists who are so bothered by the phrase favored by Christians that they are determined to drive it from the lexicon of public discourse.

The reality is that the only effort made by organizations concerned about upholding the wall of separation between government and religion has been to get government agencies out of the business of peddling Christianity in particular and religion in general. What private citizens and private organizations do or don’t do to observe the various holidays that fall around the time of the Winter Solstice is entirely up to them.

Unfortunately, the hysteria surrounding the “War on Christmas” and other sham battles manufactured by the Religious Right has obscured a more serious purpose and hidden the nature of a real war. There really is a culture war going on in the United States. It is not, however, a war on religion. It is a war by the religious on secular society—a struggle that has been waged, with increasing desperation, by religionists fearful of losing their privileged place in our culture.

Although it was the clear intent of the founders to establish a national government that derived its sole authority from the “consent of the governed,” modern-day fundyevangelists claim our government is somehow based on Christian principles and the belief in a deity. Politicians, seeking to accommodate the squeaking wheels in the fundamentalist minority, have taken our government far from its roots.

Today, it’s commonplace to hear politicians claiming our laws are “based on the Ten Commandments”—which is a ludicrous idea to anyone

who has actually “read” them—and the “wall of separation” between religion and government is really a mythical creation by the ACLU and “liberal” judges. And, of course, all are agreed that the Constitution protects the freedom OF religion but not the freedom FROM religion—as if the former is possible without the latter.



What’s needed today is not more accommodation between government and religion but an end to it. There is a clear line of demarcation between what should and should not be acceptable.

Government officials, as private individuals, have every right to practice their religions. They have every right to express their points of view on religious matters. However, they do not have the right to make their personal beliefs the sole basis for public policy, and they do not have the right to impose those beliefs, or even to promote them, as part of their official duties.

By the same token, government agencies must be respectful of the rights of conscience of all their constituents, not just those of the majority. In a democratic republic, the absolute bedrock of our system is that each of us is equal under the law. Government agencies have no business expressing any sort of preference for one class of citizens over another class of citizens. It may not do so because of gender, age or ethnic background, and it ought not do so on the basis of religious opinions or the lack of them.

Government agencies don’t get to have religions or religious rights. They don’t have any business promoting religion or religious ideas. They should stand mute on the subject altogether, neither promoting the cause of religion nor hindering it.

Nothing less than an absolute separation between government and religion can serve the interests of all our citizens. Those who clamor against such separation are waging a war on the rights of conscience of all the rest of us—those who have a different religion than the flavor preferred by the accommodationists or those who have none at all.

That’s the real war we’re fighting. It can only be won by a clear commitment to government that is secular and not sectarian. But it will surely be lost if we allow that effort to be muted by fear or indifference.

When he was near the end of his life, the great abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass, who had once

See **REAL WAR** on page 6

BOOKNOTES

The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution

by Richard Dawkins

If you want to know what the modern biological sciences have to say about the theory of evolution, you will search in vain for a better guide than Richard Dawkins.

In *The Ancestor's Tale*, Dawkins takes his readers on a journey through generations of living creatures, taking care to point out the highlights along the way.

The author begins his narrative with modern man and works backward, through rendezvous with "concestors," ancestors who stand at the points of divergence where other species branched off from the line of descent that leads from the earliest life-forms to us. Surprisingly, only about 40 rendezvous points are needed to trace our human line back to the origins of life itself.

As he is telling that tale, Dawkins also takes the time to introduce some of the other pilgrims we encounter on our journey and to show the connections and implications they hold for us. Read "The Howler Monkey's Tale" to learn about the way we see color and how those New World monkeys independently arrived at the same solution we Old World monkeys had found.

But while *The Ancestor's Tale* is about the story of evolution, it also is about the current state of evolutionary science. Here again, Dawkins is uniquely qualified to discuss the controversies, to talk about what we think we know and why we think we know it.

The Ancestor's Tale is 673 pages, including notes and index, and some of it requires moderate to heavy lifting. But those who make the effort will be rewarded with a much clearer understanding of evolution. —GR

Space Coast Freethought Association, Inc.

The Space Coast Freethought Association is a Florida non-profit corporation, based in Brevard County. To join the online discussion group go to:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/SpaceCoastFreethought/>

Our mailing address is:
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For more information, contact President Dianna Narciso by email at catspah@cfl.rr.com. or visit our website at:
<http://www.spacecoastfreethought.org/>

CONNECTIONS:

some web addresses that may be of interest to freethinkers

The free flow of information is essential to the existence of a free society. Those who seek to inhibit that flow proceed from a variety of motives, but the preservation and enhancement of our liberty is not among them. —GR

<http://www.openthegovernment.org/>
If you are concerned about recent revelations about the White House's authorization of warrantless wiretaps on American citizens, this may be a web site you will want to bookmark.

OpenTheGovernment.Org is devoted to openness in government and an end to government secrecy. The site offers a number of resources, information and links to other organizations with similar concerns.

<http://www.cjog.net/>
The Coalition of Journalists for Open Government is another group dedicated to promoting openness in government. They are particularly interested in making the best use of the "Freedom of Information Act" and other laws to ensure that openness. Although this site is primarily aimed at journalists, it also can provide useful information to activists and concerned citizens interested in enhancing the free flow of information.

REAL WAR (from page 5)

been a slave himself, was asked by a young black man what he—the young man—could do to further the cause of equal justice for his race.

"Agitate," Douglass told him, "agitate, agitate!"

That advice has application beyond the sphere of racial injustice. We who seek an end to the co-option of our government by religionists of every stripe need to agitate continuously on behalf of a secular government that treats the religious and the nonreligious with full equality and without preference or prejudice.

This war may never be truly won. Religion always seeks to protect its interests by co-opting public institutions. But it is a war we must not lose—not if we wish to preserve our freedom.

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Did you know?

The Bible says eating shrimp is forbidden.

That's right. Before the section of Leviticus that denounces homosexuality as an abomination (Leviticus 20:13), Yahweh declares shellfish are an abomination (Lev. 11:10) and may not be eaten. In fact, the book of Leviticus is filled with things Yahweh considers to be abominations, from foods considered "unclean" to mixing linen and wool in a garment.

Any day now, we may see fundamentalists picketing Red Lobster restaurants with signs that read "God hates shrimp-eaters."

SPEAKING OUT: SCFA members in print (more on p. 8)

Jacksonville Times Union—December 13, 2005

WINTER SOLSTICE: Traditions are repackaged

'Tis the season when misinformed Christians claim the winter holidays as their own.

Christians complain about the phrase "Happy Holidays" being used instead of "Merry Christmas" and claim that Jesus is the reason for the season.

The truth is that early Christians took the winter solstice celebration and tried to repackaged it as Christmas. Many of the holiday traditions, such as decorating trees, making wreaths and exchanging gifts, predate Christianity.

Ironically, what is now called the Christmas tree is not even Christian. Even the Bible (Jeremiah 10:2-8) forbids the cutting and decorating of trees.

According to the Bible, no one knows when Jesus was born. Most biblical scholars believe his birth took place in the spring. Some even question the existence of Jesus, as there is no indisputable evidence to support this.

Orlando Sentinel — November 28, 2005

Mistaken remembrance

In his Tuesday letter to the editor, G.T. Armitage is mistaken when he states the Ten Commandments are on display at the Supreme Court building in our nation's capital. The truth is there is not a single public monument on government-owned property in Washington, D.C., where any version of the Ten Commandments can be read in its entirety.

On the courtroom frieze, depicting the world's great lawgivers, is a representation of Moses clutching two stone tablets. On one of those tablets portions of commandments six through 10, written in Hebrew, are visible. Also visible is the prophet Mohammed holding a copy of the Quran. The figure of Moses is given no place of prominence among the many figures in the frieze.

All other depictions of tablets in the decorations of the Supreme Court are either blank or contain Roman numerals one through 10. For more information, readers should go to <http://www.supremecourtus.gov/visiting/visiting.html>, where they will find, among other things, a full description of the court's architecture.

Only a fool would deny the influence of religion on our nation's culture and history, but it just as wrong to overstate the importance of that influence as it is to pretend it doesn't exist.

George A. Ricker, Palm Bay

Christians needed a birth date for their savior so they took Dec. 25 from Mithraism, the date Mithras, a Persian god, was born.

Today, many acknowledge the name Christmas but are actually celebrating using winter solstice traditions. Some Christians are still trying to convert winter solstice celebrations into the birthday of their savior.

CHARLES E. TRANTHAM
Titusville

Editor's note: Versions of this letter also appeared in *Florida Today* (under the byline Charles Eugene) and the *News Chief* on December 19, 2005

Pensacola News Journal - November 29, 2005

Pagan day first

While I agree with Michael D. Bonsall ("Tolerance needed at Christmas," Letters, Nov. 21) that tolerance for everyone's religious traditions is needed at Christmas, I'm afraid his understanding of the history of the holiday is deficient.

The real reason we celebrate Christmas when we do is that in the fourth century CE, the early church fathers decided to graft a religious holiday onto a pagan tradition, the celebration of the birth of Sol Invictus ("The Unconquerable Sun"), which was observed at the winter solstice (on the Roman calendar then, it was Dec. 25) and was recognized as the birth date of a number of sun gods.

That's the "reason for the season."

While we certainly ought to keep sectarian religion out of government offices and public schools, the holiday has such a long and rich pagan tradition, it has appeal for most people.

As an atheist, I usually wish people "happy Winter Solstice," but I'm not bothered in the slightest when my Christian friends respond with a heartfelt "Merry Christmas."

George A. Ricker
Palm Bay

Congratulations!
*You have found a
non-prophet zone*

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

SPEAKING OUT: SCFA members in print (more on p. 7)

Pensacola News Journal—December 26, 2005
Pagan tradition

If I were a Christian, I'd spend every possible moment reading the Bible. I'd study the history of my religion. So, if I were a Christian I'd know that cutting down a tree and decorating it with silver and gold as the heathens do is forbidden by God. And I'd know that Jesus wasn't born on Dec. 25.

I'd know that Dec. 25 is the birthday of the pagan god Mithras. I'd know that all the trappings of the season -- the decorated tree, mistletoe, wreaths, gift-giving, caroling, etc. -- were pagan traditions. The early Christian church put Jesus' birthday on top of Mithras' and called it Christmas in an attempt to turn the pagans to Christ. All they ended up doing was making the practice of their own religion a pagan heresy.

For years the Christians were angry about the commercialization of Christmas, and now they're happy that Hooters recognizes the holiday? If I were a Christian, I'd hope that my faith was not so weak that I would require everyone I met to reinforce it for me with a "Merry Christmas."

But I'm not a Christian, and from what I have witnessed, I'm very glad of that.

-- Dianna Narciso, Palm Bay

Editor's note: a version of this letter ran in the Press Journal on Dec. 21, 2005.

Florida Today—December 18, 2005
Insulting beliefs not job of leaders

Regarding your recent block of letters on "Church vs. state," I am saddened that some people are willing to inhibit the religious freedoms of anyone who doesn't agree with them.

County Commissioner Helen Voltz did not merely express her religious views to me, as one letter writer said.

She questioned my competence as a non-Christian parent and said that I had "everything to lose" for not believing what she believes.

If Voltz had done this in a private conversation it would have been insult enough, but that she did it from her position as an elected county commissioner and through a tax-paid, county e-mail address was extremely vulgar.

To see what Voltz has been saying to constituents, see my Web site, www.atheistview.com.

Religious freedom is not possible until religion and government are separate.

Dianna Narciso, Palm Bay

Polk County News Chief—December 11, 2005
'Christmas' editorial was bad form

I was very disappointed with your editorial of Dec. 7: "Merry Christmas. We're not shy about saying it."

I am saddened that editors of a newspaper are unable to see through obvious propaganda. There is no war on Christmas. Secularists are not offended by the phrase "Merry Christmas" and have no loathing of the holiday. Then, you took that propaganda and used it to treat those who don't share your beliefs rather nastily. And you seemed to enjoy it a lot. Bad form.

Secularists don't want to stop anyone from celebrating Christmas. We just don't want the government of this religiously diverse population to treat us as if we're all Christians. Because, as you know, we are not.

Christians succeeded in making their holy day a national observance. And now they are reaping what they've sown. Christmas is beginning to lose its religious overtones and going back to what it was before the early church usurped Saturnalia celebrations, slapped Jesus' birthday on top of Mithras' and called it Christ Mass. Christmas has to lose its religiousness now, because you can't force an entire nation to celebrate your religious holy day. It's just not moral.

No one's screaming about getting a "Merry Christmas." So why are the Christians screaming about getting a "Happy Holidays"? Could it be that you are not secure enough in your faith that you require everyone you meet to reinforce it for you?

Dianna Narciso
Palm Bay, Fla.

Sun Sentinel—December 18, 2005
Then we'll work on `justice for all'

The writer of Wednesday's letter, "Respect for pledge," just doesn't get it.

The reason many are rejecting the Pledge of Allegiance is based on religious freedom, not patriotism.

Our original pledge did not have the reference to God. Once the words, "under God," were added, the pledge became a religious statement. Saying the pledge now forces a person to acknowledge the Christian God.

The truth is that we are not one nation under God, but rather a very diverse population with many different religious beliefs and even those who subscribe to no religion at all. Either include all the other gods' names (and there are hundreds of them) and a reference to no god (for atheists), or simply have no reference to any god in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Charles Eugene
Titusville