

# FREELY SPEAKING

FREE MINDS  
FREE PEOPLE

Vol. 2, No. 2

January 2005

Six pages

## SKIRMISHES

### A change

• Antony Flew, a British philosophy professor and prominent atheist, has declared he now believes some sort of intelligence must have been involved in order for self-reproducing life to develop.

Flew said his opinion is more in line with the Deism of a Thomas Jefferson than with revealed religions like Christianity or Islam.

The 81-year-old professor explains the change in his thinking in the introduction for a new edition of his "God and Philosophy," scheduled for release next year by Prometheus Books.

It was a gradual change, he says, which simply resulted from his commitment to follow the evidence, wherever it leads.

Of course, Flew is a philosopher and not a scientist. His comments offer yet another version of the "God of the Gaps" — which invokes a deity whenever knowledge is inadequate to explain an observed phenomenon.

"I don't know" would serve as well and be much more honest - at least, in this editor's opinion.

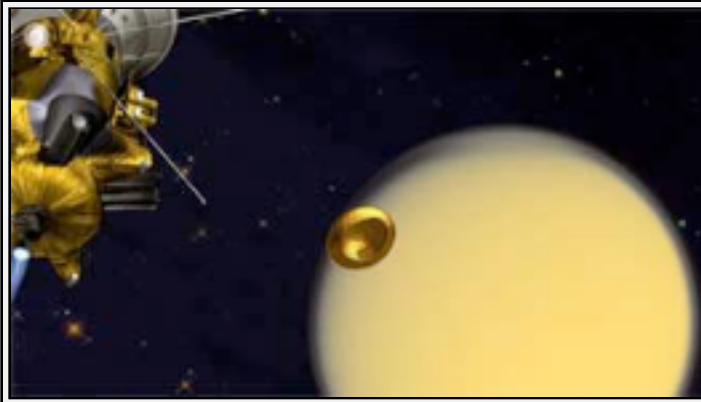
### Another change

• However, while Antony Flew was finding a god of sorts, many of his countrymen were flying the coop of religious orthodoxy.

According to a "YouGov poll" posted by the News Telegraph (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news>), there are now more Brits who don't believe in a god than do.

This is a dramatic change

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Artist's rendition of the Huygens probe release. The probe is the metallic disc seen against the backdrop of Titan. The Cassini orbiter is in the foreground. The Cassini-Huygens mission is a cooperative undertaking by several space agencies.

### Huygens probe heads for Titan

The human species reached another milestone on Dec. 24 with the launch of the Huygens probe. Part of the Cassini-Huygens mission, the probe is expected to reach the upper atmosphere of Saturn's largest moon, Titan, on January 14.

As it plunges through Titan's murky atmosphere toward the surface, the probe's instruments will taste the moon's chemical

See PROBE on 2

### The more things change

By Dianna Narciso

Roman Forum: *Battle of the Gods: Readers respond to the recent Christmas/Saturnalia confusion*

Decembris, 1130 AUC [since the founding of Rome]

Emendator:

Well, here we go again! Last market day I saw more and more signs exclaiming Merry Christmas. What has happened to our traditions? How dare those Saturn-haters change the name of our festival? They say they're just trying to not to offend the Christians, but they're offending all the rest of us who treasure our moral and family values!

They've taken to calling our wreaths, Christmas wreaths and one group of Saturn-haters has even set up a booth selling Christmas mistletoe!

The Birthday of the Unconquered Sun is the reason for the season, people! Not this Jesus fellow! I resent that they're stealing our festivals and giving them to this new god. It's time we Pagans stood together and protested.

Signed, Rabidus

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## HAPPENINGS

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

George Ricker will present "A short, unexpurgated history of Valentine's Day" at this month's meeting.

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

The room we meet in is the large room on your right as soon as you enter the library.

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

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The 31st Annual National Convention of American Atheists will be held from March 25-27 in Philadelphia, Pa. The venue is the Hyatt Regency Philadelphia at Penn's Landing. The hotel is on the Delaware River and close to downtown Philly with its impressive list of world-class museums, restaurants, shopping attractions and historic sites such as the Liberty Bell and the National Constitution Center.

The convention will feature talks by Dr. David Eller, a cultural anthropologist and the author of *Natural Atheism*; Seth Asser, M.D., a

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# PROBE (from page 1)

makeup. The data gathered during this 2-1/2 hour descent will be transmitted from the probe to the Cassini orbiter. Afterward, the orbiter will relay the data to earth through NASA's Deep Space Network to the Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) and on to the European Space Agency's Space Operations Center in Darmstadt, Germany, which serves as the

## HAPPENINGS (from page 1)

pediatrician who has been professionally involved with issues of child abuse and neglect and is medical consultant to Children's Healthcare Is a Legal Duty (CHILD), Inc., an Iowa-based nonprofit which seeks to ensure that children receive appropriate and timely medical care for serious and life-threatening illnesses, regardless of the religious preferences of their parents; Pastor Deacon Fred, head of Landover Baptist Church; and others.

For a more complete list of who will be speaking and details about the convention and other planned activities go to:

<http://www.atheists.org/convention/>



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.

## SKIRMISHES (from page 1)

from a 1968 Gallup poll that asked similar questions.

In 1968, 77 percent of the British answered "yes" when asked "Do you believe in God?" Eleven percent said "No," and 12 percent said "I don't know."

According to the most recent poll, only 44 percent said they believed in a god, while 35 percent said they did not and 21 percent said they didn't know.

Among those who said they did not believe, 46 percent described themselves as agnostics, 35 percent said they were atheists and 18 percent weren't sure.

Here's my question. How is it possible not to know whether you believe something? Isn't the belief switch either on or off? Put another way, if you aren't sure whether you believe something, doesn't that mean you really don't believe it?

Hmmmm .....

operations center for the Huygens probe mission.

The Huygens probe, built and managed by the European Space Agency (ESA), was bolted to Cassini and has been riding along, largely in a "sleep" mode, during the nearly seven-year journey to Saturn.

Huygens will be the first human-made object to explore the unique environment of Titan, whose chemistry is assumed to be very similar to that of early earth before life formed.

The Cassini-Huygens mission is a cooperative project of NASA, ESA and the Italian Space Agency. JPL, a division of the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena, manages the Cassini mission for NASA's Science Mission Directorate, Washington, D.C.

JPL designed, developed and assembled the Cassini orbiter. The European Space Agency built and managed the development of the Huygens probe and is in charge of the probe operations. The Italian Space Agency provided the high-gain antenna, much of the radio system and elements of several of Cassini's science instruments.

More information on the Cassini-Huygens mission is available at:

<http://saturn.jpl.nasa.gov> and <http://nasa.gov.cassini>.

**No gods ... No masters.  
No problem!**

# 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://www.geocities.com/atheist\\_anon/index.htm](http://www.geocities.com/atheist_anon/index.htm)

Atheists Anonymous was established in March 2002 as an internet based support network for people who lack a belief in any kind of supernatural deity. The site offers some activism resources (sample pamphlets), an emailed newsletter, a chat room and a message board.

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

The James Randi Educational Foundation/an educational resource on the paranormal, pseudoscientific and the supernatural. This is home base for the "Amazing Randi" these days. For those interested in Randi, curious about some of his projects or who just want to be amazed, this is a good site to bookmark.

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

The website of the Freedom From Religion Foundation has been updated and given a new look. One of the most active groups working to promote and protect the constitutional principle of the separation of church and state, the FFRF has been in existence since 1978. The site contains lots of information about the FFRF and access to a number of publications, including selected articles from Freethought Today, their monthly freethought newspaper.

**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.

# CHANGE *(from page 1)*

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Emendator:

In the article by Pessimus, "Christians For December 25th," his writing masks the CFD's true purpose: to dismantle a Pagan nation case by case through the Christian-controlled Senate.

In writing this piece, Pessimus took time away from such worthy endeavors as destroying the Saturn Scouts and removing the Ten Mysteries of Mithras from anywhere in the public square. He defends this practice with the bogus claim of separation of church and state, which is found nowhere in our Republic.

This organization has become poison. They will aid any group or person bent on censoring the teaching of Saturnian principles. They talk about tolerance, but their actions show an intolerance to anyone who wishes to uphold or defend traditional moral values.

Yours, Leviculus

Emendator:

Where's Saturnalia?

Recently I went to a local market to do a little shopping and enjoy the Bacchanalian spirit. There was no mention of Saturn, only "Merry Christmas."

The birth of that other pagan god, Jesus, is Christmas, and that was sometime in the summer or fall. Saturnalia is the celebration of the birth of Saturn and all our other savior gods, and of the winter solstice.

In my 71 years I have never been offended by anyone else's celebrations. But Saturnalia is Saturnalia. Let's call it that. I'm sure that there are a lot of us offended by this "Merry Christmas" nonsense.

Sincerely, Plumbeus

Emendator:

In some countries people are prohibited from celebrating Saturnalia, or even to mention Mithras' name. It doesn't surprise me because most of those countries are communist.

What is unbelievable is that in our country, with a Republic that serves as a model for other nations, Pagans are fighting against a minority who want to steal all our symbols and celebrations. They want to rob us of the celebration of Saturnalia.

We already are limited in the way we that we can use the word Sun. Enough is enough! Our right to freedom of expression is in jeopardy. So, while I still can, though it may be politically incorrect, I'll wish all a Merry Saturnalia.

In Sun, Vulgus

Emendator:

It seems many market booths are banding together to excise the words "Happy Saturnalia" from any of their Solstice holiday advertisements or store posters. They say this is their way of not affronting the feelings of any Christian who may not wish to see these words while shopping in the market during the Solstice season.

In their haste to "not offend" anyone, they alienate the vast number of Pagans who are shopping for gifts to celebrate the birthday of the Unconquered Sun with their friends and family. It is easy to spot these stores; no banners wish you a Happy Saturnalia or Good Solstice.

The only way they will change this insulting policy is when they see their competition's sales going up and their own going down, because Pagans, who are the most tolerant of people, are also offended when others, especially merchants, go out of their way to disrespect the celebration of their Lord and Savior Saturn or Mithras or whichever. Happy Saturnalia to all, even the unbelievers, especially the unbelievers—those poor Christians.

Yours in Saturn, Vituperium

## The FORUM in the Roman Forum

*How might Romans of the fourth century C.E. reacted to the subversion of their traditions by a new religious sect?*

*This selection of fictional responses (all created by Dianna Narciso) bears a striking resemblance to those we have seen from Christians in more recent editorial pages.*

*Resistance to change is endemic to our species, but that is never a sufficient reason not to make one.*

Emendator:

What is the matter with our country? Saturnalia is the celebration of the birth of Saturn and the Unconquered Sun. However, it's turned into one big Christian party to indoctrinate our children. It's so wrong! If people don't believe in Saturn, that's their choice. I'm 82 and for years I lived the season with beautiful songs that related the birth of the Unconquered Sun: "Oh, Longest Night," and "Away in the Zodiac." Rome has no morals. The world is in a turmoil. Our leaders better return to faith. I'm sick and tired of a minority ruining our traditions. Happy Saturnalia from the formerly silent majority.

In tolerance, Pauci

Emendator:

Reporting on damage caused by heavy winds in the city that toppled the temple's huge Sacred Tree, the reporter referred to the tree as a "Sac —," stopped, paused, then called it a "Christmas tree." When did the Sacred Tree become a Christmas tree?

"Christmas" is to celebrate the birth of the Christian savior god. But he wasn't born in Decembris! Decembris is the time of Saturnalia and the Birthday of the Unconquered Sun. Celebrate or don't, but leave it alone. It's not anyone's right to change or steal it. It belongs to Saturn. It's called Saturnalia. A merry and riotous Saturnalia to all.

Signed, Tumultus

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# So what do you tell the children?

By Charles Trantham

One day when Christmas was near, I finally tired of answering questions about Santa. My children, a daughter, 6, and son, 8, had grown more suspicious about my answers.

Of course this made sense because my answers did not agree with reason. Although I had seen the tremendous power I have, as their father, in getting them to believe the unbelievable, I was feeling guilty knowing that I was not telling the truth.

Yes, I followed the tradition that was handed down to me in the same way, telling falsehoods about Santa and flying reindeer to my own children. At first it was fun. Seeing their little eyes grow wide with excitement at the thought that elves and magic are real! But this day the fun had all but disappeared.

So I sat them down and told them the truth about Santa. I could see mixed emotions in their eyes from a little arrogance as they claimed they knew all along, to a little sadness in

knowing that the magic was not real. Hearing the truth from their father and using their own ability to reason and think rationally — as well as reinforcement from their older friends who also knew the truth about Santa — was enough to undo the indoctrination I had spent many years putting in their minds.

My children also came to me with questions about God (the Christian God). Once again I sat them down and told them how some people believe in the Christian God, some believe in Buddha, some in Allah, and some have no beliefs in any gods. They of course asked me what I believe and I let them know that I have no belief in god(s).

I once again could see the power I have, as their father, as they immediately claimed no belief in God. At first, I was glad. But then I feared the thing I hate most "indoctrination" was once again appearing.

So I once again instructed my children to use their own minds and reason so that they can decide whether or not they wanted to believe in god(s). I further let them know that it is OK with me if they choose to believe.

My girl is now 8 and my boy is 10. She sometimes believes in God, although she cannot explain what God is, beyond it being something that her young Christian girlfriends also believe. My son believes in God just as much as he now believes in Santa.

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## CHANGE (from page 1) —

Emendator:

I've never felt compelled to write to the Forum before now, but I am so outraged! We'd been enjoying a perfectly magical Saturnalia since the 17th when on the 25th we went to the parade of the gods. Well, our servant Vanalis obviously got the time wrong because instead of being treated to the usual regalia, we got played. All the usual trappings were there, mind you, the Sacred Tree decorated with fruits was carried by priests. Wreaths, holly, ivy, mistletoe, plenty of dancing and merry making. But to our horror, only one god was represented and it was that new-fangled quasi-historical Jesus!

I just don't get it. They keep saying their god is a real man. Like that makes any sense. But why is his birthday so coincidentally on the same day as Mithras? Why can't these newbies just join in our wonderful Saturnalia? All savior gods are welcome. Why do they have to be so greedy and say all our party stuff is really only theirs? Before you know it, no one will even remember Saturnalia!

Regretfully, Saevio

Emendator:

I'm so sick of hearing the Christians whine about Jesus. They keep saying that Jesus is the one true god who became man and died for our sins. Nothing could be further from the truth! What do they think all the other gods were for? Just to get us all used to the idea of Jesus coming? Don't be ridiculous! Why don't you Christians just get over it, already! Face it, Saturnalia is the reason for the season. If they want eternal life, they'll stop with this Jesus nonsense. Think about it!

Most Sincerely, Mortalitas

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*“Scientific laws do not ‘govern’ the universe as a king governs subjects; nor does matter in motion ‘obey’ laws as do the people in a functioning state. Scientific laws are the expression in intellectual terms of the way matter behaves, of its stable and enduring habits of action. Again, to utilize the law of parsimony, substances determine their own laws and require no Supreme Law-Giver to lay down or maintain their patterns of behavior.”*

**Corliss Lamont**  
*The Philosophy of Humanism*  
Eighth edition, revised

# Science and religion: differences that matter

By George A. Ricker

One of the difficulties encountered by nonbelievers in attempts to engage in any sort of meaningful dialogue with believers is found in the effort by the faithful to reinvent language so that their beliefs will appear to be based on substance. This is accomplished not by offering evidence for the veracity of their claims but by attempting to shift the burden of proof to nonbelievers.

An effective technique for doing this is to equate science - or evolution or secular humanism or whatever - with religion. "You have a religion, too," they argue. "It is science."

Thus, the important and profound differences between religion and science are obscured and the dialogue becomes an attack by religion on science. In this venue, religionists have the advantage because: (a) they are under no obligation to be either rational or factual in their arguments — consider the "willful ignorance" demonstrated in so many of the posts defending creationism by attacking evolution — and (b) they have been at it for centuries. Indeed, the so-called "War" between science and religion mostly has been a one-sided conflict. Science does not attack religion. It simply describes the natural world as it finds it. That so many religionists view this as an attack only demonstrates the weakness of their own position.

In this context, it should be noted that there are many religious people who see no conflict between the findings of modern science and their religion, and there are scientists who are religious. Nonetheless, throughout human history, religion, especially the Christian religion, has stood in the forefront of opposition to most of the discoveries of modern science and has, when it had the means to do so, actively sought to suppress that information and to punish those who offered it. That many Christians today take a more tolerant view cannot be allowed to obscure the fact that many others do not. A casual perusal of letters to the editor in any major newspaper and statements by many pundits and preachers offers ample support for that statement.

What usually happens once science has been reduced to the status of a religion is a discussion that degenerates into a debate about opinions.

"My opinion is just as good as yours," the religionist argues. "I believe what I believe and you believe what you believe and neither one of us can prove the other wrong." Of course, they don't really believe that at all. What they really believe is that they have found "God" and that you are bound for perdition - or something like it. But they don't want to say that because then they would have to defend the position. By shifting the argument, they let themselves off the hook. Besides, if everything really is just a matter of opinion, their belief has, at least, a chance of being true.

Before proceeding, I should offer a few words of explanation. In what follows, I will focus on Christianity because Christians seem to be the ones most often indulging in this tactic - again, I'm not talking about all Christians but about those who want to make a religion of science. So when I talk about religion here, I am referring specifically to Christianity, even though some of the points made may apply to other religions as well. Secondly, I'm not a scientist. If I misspeak about science or its nature in what follows I will welcome correction from those who are.

Why is it wrong to equate science and Christianity?

Christianity claims divine authorship. It claims to offer eternal Truths that are valid for all humankind for all time.

Science makes no such claims. It is clearly a human enterprise. Its truths are not eternal but represent our understanding of the evidence available at the time. As such, those truths are always subject to review and may be changed if the evidence suggests they no longer apply or require modification.

Christianity resists correction. Because of its claims of Absolute Truth, any effort to change it is usually met with resistance. That fact accounts for a number of religious wars and also for the proliferation of religious denominations. If you can't change a religion from the inside, which is well-nigh impossible if the religion is firmly established, the next best thing is evidently to start a new one.

Science welcomes correction. Indeed, a large part of the business of science is involved in the constant verification of the prevailing theories in any discipline. Because of that science is a self-correcting enterprise. It makes no claims of absolute certainty or absolute knowledge. (Note that while this attitude is characteristic of science in general, it may not apply to particular scientists - I deal with that at the end of the post.)

Christianity is based on "faith."

Science is based on verifiable evidence.

Christianity demands uncritical acceptance of its teachings - a "leap of faith" so that one may gain the "higher" understanding of the deity and religion itself.

Science requires critical examination of the evidence. It demands not "belief" but thought. It asks not for uncritical acceptance but for rational understanding.

Christianity is grounded in supernatural phenomena that cannot be shown to exist.

Science is grounded in natural phenomena that can be demonstrated to exist.

Christianity is, for the most part, subjective.

Science is, for the most part, objective.

I could go on, but I think you get my drift. And lest anyone think I am hopelessly naive in my assessment of science and, by implication, scientists, I am well aware that there have been, and probably are now, scientists who do not fit the description I have offered. They are the ones who offer outrageous theories based on proof that is, at best, speculative. What generally happens in such cases is that (a) the theories are examined and shown to be valid explanations for the data they are intended to interpret, in which case science advances or (b) the theories are shown to be false, in which case they are either ignored or discarded.

Scientists who persist, in spite of the evidence to the contrary, in advocating a theory that cannot withstand the objective scrutiny of their peers have, in my view, ceased to function as scientists at all. Instead, they have become the self-appointed high priests in churches of their own construction.

It's also true that there are individual scientists who are just as dogmatic in their views as some religionists. The difference is that the very nature of science militates against that approach. Science requires that, ultimately, even dogma must yield before the evidence.

Finally, the enterprise we call science is both a method for acquiring knowledge and the body of knowledge that has grown out of that method. It requires evidence, experiment and verification. It has little in common with religion except in the minds of those who would distort both its nature and its purpose.

# **SPEAKING OUT: SCFA members in print**

*St. Augustine Record - Oct. 12*

## **Church and State must stay separate**

by Dianna Narciso

Editor: Dick Birch's comments Oct. 4, were typical of those who think freedom of religion means freedom for Christians to use our government to support their faith. We could argue over the founders' intentions, tossing quotes around and offering our opinions without evidence, as Birch did when he said, "whether you like it or not ... America was formed as one nation under God and He is the basis of our moral codes." But that won't change the fact that our founders left us with a secular Constitution without reference to Birch's god, Christianity, Christ or the Bible.

America was formed as a secular nation in which Christianity would hold no more sway than atheism. From the very beginning, theocrats have done all they could to undermine that noble ideal.

They realize that without the force of government to back it up, Christianity will lose its influence and their free ride on the money train will be over.

Without freedom from religion, there is no real freedom of conscience. Anyone willing to undermine that freedom for others must be, in my opinion, incredibly insecure in his own beliefs. The only way to ensure total freedom of conscience for all is to completely separate religion and government.

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*Stuart News - Dec. 16, 2004*

## **Place for God is in our society, not in our gov't**

Martin Sandigo's recent letter, "Ours is still a nation that is 'under God,'" (Dec. 3) was insulting.

To insinuate that atheists "want to remove God from our society and create an immoral society that is destroying our families, schools and moral principles of this country" is soundly disgusting and hateful.

As an atheist, I have no problem with people practicing their faiths, in private or out in public. I do not want an immoral society, but one in which we tolerate our differences. I am very much a caring mother who applauds the public school system, though I did homeschool two of my children for many years. And, I love the principles upon which this country was founded, not the least of which is the freedom to believe or not believe in other people's gods.

I do not want to remove God from society. I want it removed from government. We cannot all be free if we are all forced to acknowledge Mr. Sandigo's version of the Christian God. Freedom is moral; government endorsement of religion is not.

Dianna Narciso  
Palm Bay

*Florida Today - Dec. 3, 2004*

## **Heritage defense belies real agenda**

When conservative syndicated columnist Cal Thomas starts offering advice to Democrats, they would do well to consider the source.

His suggestion that we should take up the cause of a California school teacher is a case in point. The teacher has sued the Cupertino School District because a principal refused to allow him to use brochures containing historical quotations that referred to God and Christianity in his fifth-grade classes.

Thomas didn't say how the teacher was using the material in question, so it's impossible to assess the validity of his complaint. Was he accurately presenting American history or using the references to buttress the spurious notion that all the founders were devout Christians who intended to base our government on Christianity?

For example, when teaching about the Declaration of Independence, when the teacher informed his students that Thomas Jefferson referred to a "Creator" as the source of human rights, did he clarify that Jefferson was a Deist and did not believe in the same kind of God as theistic religions like Christianity.

Jefferson clearly stated government received its sole legitimate authority not from a God of any description but from the "consent of the governed."

I'm all for teaching American history accurately and honestly. Somehow, I doubt that's what Cal Thomas had in mind.

George A. Ricker,  
Palm Bay

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*Pensacola News Journal - Nov. 22, 2004*

## **Beliefs are different**

I would like to remind Jerri Justl ("God's standards," Letters, Nov. 13) that not everyone believes in her interpretation of the Bible, in her version of Christianity, or that her God even exists.

Christians can believe whatever they want, but in a free society, they don't have the right to limit other people's civil rights based on that belief.

If you don't like homosexuality, don't do it. If you don't like gay marriage, don't have one. Two gay people having all the benefits my husband and I enjoy by being married hurts no one, not even Jerri Justl.

Dianna Narciso  
Palm Bay