



Willamette Freethinker



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A publication of Corvallis Secular Society
<http://css.peak.org>

Corvallis Secular Society (CSS) is a Humanist and Freethought society for all nontheists of good will.

CSS is affiliated with the American Humanist Association (AHA) and the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH).

From the Editor:

I'm having a hard time writing a column this month (see "Voice of an Angel" for part of the reason why).

It's not like there's nothing serious to talk about.

- California atheist Michael Newdow's case to remove "under God" from the pledge is being heard by the Supreme Court (and since Antonin Scalia has recused himself, there's an honest chance of a 4-4 tie vote, which would leave the Ninth Circuit Court's ruling AGAINST "under God" in effect for at least PART of the country!)
- There is some REALLY obnoxious legislation stripping away even more of our civil liberties, easily passing through our traitorous, yes, TRAITOROUS Congress, even as we speak.
- Easter just passed; surely there's some pithy commentary to be made on THAT topic.

So what's the only thing I can think about? "He was crying and asking me why the bunny was being whipped." (see page 10). Best laugh I've had in weeks...

Reed Byers

Editor, *Willamette Freethinker*

Parking lot 'Jesus' causes stir in Albany

Democrat Herald, 4/10/2004

ALBANY — Someone dressed as Jesus Christ made a brief appearance Saturday in the parking lot of an Albany shopping center.

According to a police dispatch report, Albany officers received a call at about 3:25 p.m. from someone complaining about a man dressed as Jesus, covered with fake blood, being scourged by another man with a rope in a 14th Avenue parking lot near Safeway and G.I. Joes.

The caller said his children were upset by the display and that shopping plaza employees were trying to get "Jesus" to leave. The dressed-up man kept walking, the caller said.

The dispatch report stated that police checked the area and did not locate anyone matching the description, nor did they receive any other calls.

However, one officer wrote, "I am confident that (Jesus) will be back some day soon."

CSS Meetings and Events

Calendar:

Saturday, Apr 17th 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting
 Saturday, May 15th 2:00-4:00 CSS regular meeting
 Saturday, Jun 19th 1:00-4:00 CSS potluck

Regular meeting time:

Third Saturday of each month, from 2:00-4:00 pm.

Regular meeting location:

Corl House (3975 NW Witham Hill Dr, Corvallis).

Announcement

We are sad to report that long-time CSS Member Catherine Desmond died on March 7. No information was given as to cause of death (but we think it was just old age).

She's been an active member since before I took over the newsletter in 1997, sending regular notes and donations. She was very sweet, and really enjoyed being part of our group.

She will be missed.

There are now
three ways you can financially
support CSS online! See back page for
more details...



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From the President:

The Draft and Bush's War: Vietnam All Over Again

I graduated from high school in June, 1965. As I began my adult life, the specter of war hung over me and others of my generation. The United States of America, the greatest military power on Earth, was at war. Without a Congressional Declaration of War, our country had attacked a small nation that was no threat to us. For the eight years after I graduated, the U.S. was bogged down in a war it couldn't win. This war led to the death of many American servicemen, as well as of citizens of the country we were attacking. It was a terrible drain on our nation's resources. Americans were torn apart by conflicting feelings about the war. Of course, the Vietnam War eventually grew to be much larger than our current war in Iraq, but it started out smaller also, then grew and grew. The parallels between my generation's war in Vietnam and today's war in Iraq are striking.

Then, as now, our troops were confronted with terrorist attacks and guerrilla warfare in a strange foreign culture where so many in the country we were invading did not welcome us. The domino theory was presented then, as it is now. President Johnson said then, "If we quit Vietnam, tomorrow we'll be fighting in Hawaii, and next week we'll have to fight in San Francisco." President Bush said last September 7, "We are fighting that enemy in Iraq and Afghanistan today so that we do not meet him again on our own streets, in our own cities." The Vietnam War had to go on and on, so America could "save face," and to protect the world from "godless communism"; but at least there was always light at the end of the tunnel. Always. For years.

And thousands of my generation died every year, for years, because of these lies.

Vietnam required the use of the military draft, as nowhere enough volunteers were available to fight the war. But as we who faced that draft used to say, "If you can't win this war without us, you can't win it with us." Many young men's lives were disrupted, damaged, or even destroyed by this draft. Who knows what they might have accomplished in life had there been no draft.

On October 20, 1969, I wrote my first letter to a newspaper: it was to *The Daily Barometer* at Oregon State University. It read in part:

GET OUT OF VIETNAM NOW! WE HAVE NO RIGHT TO BE THERE

In Tuesday's *Barometer* (Fencing) Ira White demonstrated that statistics can lie. He suggests that 99.5 per cent of Americans support the war of annihilation in Vietnam, because relatively few participated in the moratorium. But obviously if only 0.5 per cent of U.S. citizens oppose the war, there would not be such a furor over our

involvement; and there certainly would not be any need for the draft. Later in his letter, when he forgets his initial argument, he admits that President Nixon "seems to have more opposition in the U.S. than in South Vietnam."

Mr. White claims that Vietnam protestors are racists. I suggest the contrary. The attitude of the military-industrial complex (shorn of patriotic slogans) seems to have been that we have the God-given right to interfere and exploit anywhere we choose. President Eisenhower's comment in 1953 is enlightening in this regard: "Now let us assume we lost Indo-China. If Indo-China goes, the tin and tungsten we so greatly value would cease coming. We are after the cheapest way to prevent the occurrence of something terrible—the loss of our ability to get what we want from the riches of the Indo-Chinese territory and from South-East Asia."

As [Oregon Senator] Wayne Morse pointed out last week, only the Congress has the constitutional authority to commit American troops to fighting, yet they were committed by the Presidents involved. It is time for the citizens of the U.S. to demand that we get out of Vietnam **now**; foreign policy must be made by the people, not the President.

On November 15, 1969, I wrote my second such letter, also to *The Barometer*. It read in part:

HAVE THE COURAGE TO FIGHT THE DRAFT!

"Involuntary servitude shall not exist within the United States, except as a punishment for crime, whereof the accused shall have been duly convicted." This is the supreme law of the land: no president has the authority to violate this amendment. Yet today many who talk of law and order support violation of this (and other) Constitutional principles.

The draft is undemocratic; when the president, at his own discretion, can send people to probable death, then where is our democracy? Democracy cannot be defended by giving it up in the process. A publication of the Selective Service System some months ago on "Manpower" made it clear that the citizens of this country are a natural resource to be manipulated much as oil or timber is manipulated, in the "National Interest" (in the interest of the government)! I maintain that, in a democracy, the people collectively are more

important that any portion thereof (including the "Defense" Department), and that the collective interest is served only when the rights of the individual are held inviolable.

The draft isn't needed, even by conservative standards. As Nixon pointed out, the "silent majority" backs his conduct of the war; if so, recruiting stations must certainly be overflowing with those eager to "serve" their country.

Everyone is affected by this blight on our nation, and all must speak up; the timid as well as the articulate: in a democracy citizens must constantly guard their rights, for it is the nature of government continuously to try to increase its power over the people.

Those who have never expressed their opposition to the draft must do so at the November moratorium; those who have declined to exercise their duty as citizens must realize their folly. "Many a man will have the courage to die gallantly, but will not have the courage to say, or even to think, that the cause for which he is asked to die is an unworthy one." (Bertrand Russell)
Fight conscription: end the draft **now!**

After Vietnam, I thought the horror of an unjustified war against a country that posed no threat to us would never happen again. I thought that a military draft would never again be instituted by my government in order to wage such a war. I thought that my generation would be the last to find itself under attack by its own government.

I thought wrong.

Bush is apparently planning to reinstitute military conscription — *after* the election, of course. Bush has our forces stretched so thin, and the war is so unpopular among the servicemen and servicewomen in Iraq, about half of whom say they will not reenlist, that he soon will not have the number of military personnel he needs to continue his preemptive wars. He has wasted our military resources by *attacking the wrong country* while responding to terrorism. Bush spent more on wars in 2003 than he has on education during his entire term!

The Pentagon has quietly begun recruiting for local draft boards. The *Vancouver Independent Media Center* reports that "The current agenda of the US federal government is to reinstate the draft in order to staff up for a protracted war on 'terrorism.' Pending legislation in the House and Senate... would time the program so the draft could begin as early as Spring 2005 — conveniently just after the 2004 presidential election!" This plan would eliminate higher education as a shelter and would not exclude women — and escaping to Canada is no longer an option. Twenty eight million dollars has been added to the 2004 Selective Service System budget to prepare for this draft.

The website <http://www.importanceofphilosophy.com> says that "A Military draft is the practice of a government

forcibly conscripting members of the population into the armed forces. This is a violation of the right to life, an initiation of force by the state against the individual, and a betrayal of the purpose of the government. A free nation will have no lack of volunteers to defend their freedom against aggression. A man will fight for his freedom. He won't fight for some cause he doesn't understand or believe in. Volunteer armies are an excellent check on statist governments declaring arbitrary and unnecessary wars — if there is no conscription, the statists will have no army for their power-lust causes."

Now, it appears that the children and grandchildren of many who lived through the Vietnam War era may also face the draft, and forced participation in war. If this happens, many of them will be maimed, physically or psychologically; many will die. Unless we Humanists and other humane people speak out to stop this madness. Unless Bush and others like him are stopped. And speak out we must, for all that is needed for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing.

Speaking personally, having had children late in life, I have two sons at home, ages 16 and 9. Am I going to let them become cannon fodder for George W. Bush?

Over my dead body.

John Dearing
President of CSS

Voice of an Angel

[Editor's Note: *We got rear-ended on the road a few days ago, and while I suffered no ill effects, Angela suffers from whiplash and is in a great deal of pain. Her pain medication leaves her "spacey" and in no condition to attempt to form coherent thoughts that she would care to have anyone else read. If she WERE to write a column, it would look something like this...]*

PAIN BAD. PAIN MEDICATION GOOD. SLEEPY NOW.

[Editor's Note: *Rather than torture her (and you) with any further from her right now, I will use the rest of this space to tell you more about the accident. The rest of this will be boring for anyone who doesn't know us, so feel free to change the channel, err, flip the page now.]*

We were heading in to Corvallis on Highway 34 to listen to fellow CSS member Bonnie Windish give an open-to-the-public presentation as part of her PHD work. The car in front of us stopped suddenly, trying to merge into an already-full left-turn-lane (at the 99W bypass). I stopped in time. The car behind us didn't. He swerved enough such that he only hit the corner of the rear passenger-side bumper, but we estimate he hit it at 40-45 MPH. He was VERY sweet and apologetic, and the insurance adjuster has already determined that WE were not in any way at fault. Angela is on serious pain meds and will have to take some physical therapy; the corner of the car's rear bumper is crumpled and the estimate on the car repair is over \$1300.

Pacific Northwest FFRF “Mini-Convention”

July 9-10, 2004

A long-promised Pacific Northwest “Mini-Convention” will take place in Seattle this July, for the convenience of Freedom From Religion Foundation members in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. Foundation members from afar are also invited to plan a vacation around the conference.

The gathering, opening on Friday night, July 9, and continuing through Saturday, July 10, will meet at the ideally-located Red Lion Hotel on Fifth Avenue in downtown Seattle.

The convention program promises to be lively. Appearing will be comedian, actress and freethinker Julia Sweeney, a former cast member of “Saturday Night Live” (known for her “Androgynous Pat” character). Ms. Sweeney is currently working on her third one-woman show, “Letting Go of God.”

Also performing their freethought revue will be Foundation staff musician Dan Barker and Pulitzer Prize-winning daily editorial cartoonist Steve Benson. “Tunes ‘n ‘Toons,” which combines music and parodies with topical cartoons, is a satiric look at religion in the news.

Receiving a Young Activist Award will be Jesse Card, 20, a plaintiff in a legal challenge of a Ten Commandments monument on public property in Everett, Wash. Jesse, a former Mormon, started an atheist club when he was in high school.

Also speaking on “No One Complained About This Before! Why Protest Is A Good Thing” will be Matthew Barry. Matt has been a long-time advocate for the separation of church and state and first received notoriety in 1987 when he and the ACLU unsuccessfully sued the University of Maryland to end graduation prayers. In 1994, he and the ACLU stopped Washington State from paying for Christian Science “treatment” (i.e., prayer). Matt also protested against permanent religious inscriptions at a public library in 2000.

He is listed in Who's Who in Hell for an FFRF article about his experiences at a Benny Hinn faith-healing crusade and has had more than 100 letters published in the past 5 years. Matt is also an activist for the separation of lungs and secondhand smoke and sharpens his letter-writing skills by editing documents for a software company.

A complimentary dessert reception will be offered Friday night.

Convention-goers will be on their own for Saturday lunch to explore downtown Seattle. The hotel is close to City Centre shops and dining, Nordstrom Flagship store, upscale shopping and dining at Pacific Place, the Seattle Art Museum, Benaroya Concert Hall and the 5th Avenue Theatre. It is also within walking distance of the Pike Place Market. There are two restaurants in the hotel.

A group meal will be offered Saturday night.

The full speaker roster will be announced in future issues of *Freethought Today*.

A modest number of rooms are being held for the convention, with a cut-off of June 9, 2004. The room rate during Seattle's peak tourist season is \$129.00 single or double plus tax, \$139.00 triple, and \$149.00 quad. Please plan ahead and make your hotel reservations promptly to avoid disappointment.

Phone the Red Lion Hotel directly at 206-971-8008 or 206-971-8000. Please be sure to indicate you are attending the Freedom From Religion Foundation convention to assure the convention rate.

Although there is no direct shuttle to the hotel from the airport, the Gray



**Steve Benson and Dan Barker
to perform Tunes ‘n ‘Toons**
Photo by Brent Nicastro

Line Shuttle drops off at the Sheraton on Sixth Avenue (1 block away) and is \$8.50 per person. Taxis from the airport to the hotel run about \$30. There is limited on-site parking for registered guests at \$22 per day.

Convention registration is \$45 per Foundation member, \$50 for companion or spouse accompanying member, and \$70 per non-member. Students may register for \$25.

The Saturday banquet dinner (\$50 includes 27.3% service charge and state tax) meal choice is Pacific Northwest salmon baked in a hazelnut crust with port wine sauce, or the non-fish, vegetarian alternative of portabella mushroom ravioli with sun-dried tomatoes, spinach, cheese and toasted pine nuts in a white wine sauce.

Dinner entrees are accompanied by a salad of fresh seasonal greens, red seedless grapes and glazed walnuts with raspberry vinaigrette, with vegetables, potato or rice, fresh bakery rolls, and coffee, decaf coffee or tea. Dessert is raspberry and chocolate mousse cake with ganache peaks and raspberry and vanilla sauces.



**Comedian/actress
Julia Sweeney**
Photoby
Brent Nicastro



Jesse Card



Matthew Barry

Mini-Convention Registration Form

For more information on this and other FFRF events, see: <http://ffrf.org/events/>

Please photocopy this page and mail it with your check to:
FFRF, Inc., P.O. Box 750, Madison WI 53701

Pacific Northwest Mini-Convention

July 9-10, 2004

Red Lion Hotel on Fifth Avenue, Seattle

_____ Member registration(s) @ \$45.00 per person \$_____

_____ Non-member spouse or person accompanying member @ \$50.00 per person \$_____

_____ Non-member registration(s) @ \$70.00 per person \$_____

_____ Student registration(s) @ \$25.00 per person \$_____

_____ Saturday Night Salmon Dinner @ \$50.00 per person \$_____

** _____ Check here if you prefer vegetarian (Portabella Mushroom Ravioli).

All food prices include tax and gratuity.

Make check payable to "FFRF, Inc."

Total enclosed: \$_____

Name (Please include names of all registrants for name-tags)

Address

City/State/Zip

Phone/E-mail (in case we have a question about your registration)

Note from CSS

Please note that **this is NOT the annual Oregon Secular Symposium** that CSS members have worked so hard on, in the past. That event is currently on hiatus, mainly due to the lack of people willing to take an interest and really work to make the Symposium happen. One or two people cannot single-handedly organize, plan, advertise and basically force an event that size to happen.

THIS event is organized and sponsored by Freedom From Religion Foundation, and will take place in Seattle. We strongly encourage all interested parties to make an effort to attend this "FFRF Mini-Convention", and if you like what you see, contact Angela Byers (webmaster@css.peak.org; 541-924-9128) and offer your services to help revive the Oregon Secular Symposium for NEXT year!

Why make such a big deal of two little words?

by Ellen Goodman, *Boston Globe*, 3/28/2004

You gotta love Michael Newdow. No, actually you don't gotta love him. You don't even gotta like the combative zealot fighting to take two little words — "under God" — out of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Newdow is your worst fantasy in a custody dispute. The atheist has not only kept up a running custody battle with his daughter's born-again Christian mother, he's kept up a running battle with his daughter's school, his state and his government. Every morning when she pledges to one nation, under God, he regards it as a slap to his face.

Nevertheless on Wednesday morning, the emergency room doctor and lawyer put on a virtuoso solo performance in the Supreme Court. He bravely faced eight justices and left them with a tough choice. Is the phrase "under God" just a historical reference, a nod to a civic deity with no more religious significance than a post-sneeze god-bless-you? Or, are children pledging allegiance to one nation under monotheism, which could just be unconstitutional?

First, a little history for those who assume the pledge was written by George Washington. It was actually penned by Francis Bellamy, a Baptist and socialist, in 1892. Back then, the National Education Association was trying to boost secular public education over the parochial schools built by Catholic immigrants. It wasn't until the 1950s that Congress added "under God" as a nervous Cold War response to "godless communism."

Today Newdow is not the leader of some mass protest to return to the old days. About 90 percent of Americans want to keep the phrase "under God" in school, which is probably more Americans than want to keep lunch in school.

Even those who worry most about the separation of church and state don't put the pledge very high on their dance card. As someone who pledged before and after "God," I think this is a battle we could do without. So, it seems, do the justices.

Still, it was hard not to keep score in the courtroom.

The solicitor general argued that "under God" is just a ceremonial acknowledgement of the framers' belief that "God gave them the right to declare their independence." Maybe so. But the framers' belief in the separation of

church and state created the first secular government in the world.

Justice Sandra Day O'Connor said, "there are so many references to God in the daily lives of this country" that the words in the pledge have no more religious meaning than the words on the coin. Maybe so. But remember that adding "In God We Trust" was also a political sop to opponents after Lincoln rejected their proposal to insert Jesus Christ into the preamble of the Constitution.

Maybe too, as Justice Stephen Breyer pondered, the God in the pledge is so "generic" that it includes everyone, and so vague that it bothers no one. But Newdow was quite right in saying that a pledge to one nation under even the

most generic God doesn't include people who believe in "no God."

And maybe, as Justice David Souter added, it's "so tepid, so diluted . . . that it should be under the constitutional radar." But if the phrase is so tepid, why all the passion?

In the end, the court may sidestep the whole issue by declaring that Newdow doesn't have the standing to bring the case because he doesn't have custody of his daughter. They can also decide that the pledge is less like a prayer than a Hallmark card.

But I keep thinking: Isn't this just the sort of argument over religion and patriotism that the founding fathers wanted to avoid? "It's always said that we're a religious people," says Susan Jacoby, who has just written "Freethinkers," a lively, engaging history of secularism in America. "But we can be a religious people without having a religiously based government. The men who wrote the Constitution said 'We the People' not 'We the people under God.'" And, she adds, "it's been a subject of dispute ever since."

One of the problems today, in post-9/11 America, is what Jacoby calls a "melding of religion and patriotism. The insistence that patriotism must be religious and to be religious is to be patriotic." And even if this case is way down my list of priorities, doesn't a Pledge of Allegiance suggest that you can't be a loyal American unless you believe in a nation "under God"?

What a pain this Michael Newdow is. Who needs this in the middle of an election? Why stir up the culture wars? Why make such a big deal of two little words? Aren't there bigger fish to fry?

One of the problems today, in post-9/11 America, is what Jacoby calls a "melding of religion and patriotism. The insistence that patriotism must be religious and to be religious is to be patriotic."

A Gay Marriage Exchange with “Mom”

[Editor’s Note: *My mother has always been a source of endless debate (or perhaps, argument) over just about everything I feel strongly about. So I thought it would be interesting to have her write about gay marriage, in time for last month’s issue. Alas, her position was SO abhorrent to me, I felt I had to respond, and it’s taken me this long to contain my rage long enough to write a coherent response. So here it is — an exchange between mother and son on the topic of gay marriage. I think I need a counselor...*]

Letter from Louise Byers

I am old, and have pretty well bowed out of the world of conflict because I’m tired and don’t see that I’ve made a lot of difference to anyone, family included. Nevertheless, I do feel I’m grounded in reality — having lived through quite a bit, and am still here.

I’m a Christian (and in case any of you think that is a dirty word, go look it up. Actually you can’t because so few people these days don’t know what Christians are suppose to be anymore that we know what Muslims are supposed to be. Hint: These religions are not what their extremist groups think they are). So, I repeat, I am a Christian and a product of my own era, from 1928 on, and I believe the “great debate” over gay and lesbian marriage is the result of having lost sight of what marriage is.

To begin with, marriage has little to do with love /and or sex. Since the beginning of the human species there has been plenty of both without benefit of marriage. What we had was “mates”, which could be interchangeable or accomodated for any number of reasons. I think the idea of marriage began with royalty or great power and wealth. The peasants didn’t need it. Marriage was the joining of great houses or families for the purpose of progeny to create a permanent bond (who wants to fight their grandchildren?) and therefore less risk of future warfare between two powerful entities. What had been permanent unions of mates by accident, became formal unions between chiefdoms, kingdoms, or whatever powers existed. It was marked with public festivities, and declarations of permanent union. Probably love was added later.

I don’t know if the Jews got there first — the world was too big and there are many religions — but the formality of marriage evolved as the name of the permanent, public, honorable declaration of a man and a woman to intend to become one entity, a family, firstly for the procreation and protection of children, and secondly for wealth, political bonds, and preservation of the joined estates. Homosexuals have also been with us since the beginning of time.

They took mates, occassionally permanently, and sometimes achieved great wealth, power, and creativity. They did not join together powerful families, or create children. Their union is always a sterile one.

In the Christian Church (but certainly not there alone) the formal Marriage became one of the seven sacrements of the church. It has never meant anything but the union of a man and woman for the procreation of children and protection of the family. The political state, wherever civilization existed has always found it in their own best interests to protect that union for the sake of it’s future citizens. In all this time it has not found it had any interest in protecting the unions of homosexuals as these unions were sterile and not important to future generations. This is not to deny the love or emotional bond between them, or to deny them “civil rights”. It is an acknowledgement that growing families need special consideration, through all

their generations. When you consider the very elderly and physically handicapped who cannot have children, marriage would still join a man and a woman symbolically, for what they ARE: man and woman, the only ones who can be fruitful and multiply, even symbolically.

I really don’t believe that I’ve met any homosexual couples who want to be considered a man and a woman. They surely want to be

considered two men, or two women, thank you. If they are jealous of any special benefits bestowed upon married families, let them consider the work and heartache involved in birthing children, raising them in any age of civilization, providing for them, instructing them, suffering for them, and convince me that their essentially selfish union (for their own gratification and joy, what else?) is of the same benefit to society. Note that I am NOT saying that they as individuals are selfish, etc. They are usually as loving, generous, hard working as anyone else. But their UNION is not of any benefit to society.

As for any civil rights, liberties, and benefits granted to the married, our legal system provides whatever they want. There are wills, partnerships, civil unions, powers of attorneys and legal documents by the dozens that can ensure all homosexuals of whatever legal benefits they yearn for. But don’t call it marriage. That is a contradiction in terms. No constituitonal amentments can change that and shouldn’t try. Calling a committed union of two men or two women a marrage is a contradiction in terms. I don’t understand why they would realistically want to. With outside help two lesbian woman may want and have a child, but they are then deliberately depriving that child of a father throughout it’s life, and if that isn’t selfish what is? Granted there are many men and women who should never marry, each other or anyone else, but there is no way

When you consider the very elderly and physically handicapped who cannot have children, marriage would still join a man and a woman symbolically, for what they ARE: man and woman, the only ones who can be fruitful and multiply, even symbolically.

to distinguish before hand who they might be. Homosexuals, by definition are easily distinguished, by their own definition.

If we let the term “marriage” stand for the union of homosexuals, we change the meaning of the word and then we will have to coin a new one for the union of men and women. The unions of each is NOT the same and in fact are fundamentally different. and if we have to coin a new word, then men and women have dibs on “marriage”. We’ve used it longer.

I have sympathy for homosexuals. I know that the God I know loves them as dearly as He loves me. They have a difficult life to live. I don’t want to impose a burden on them beyond what they already have. But I think they should just be truthful, acknowledge who they are, and the facts of their relationships, and go from there. They are not less valued by any sensible person, and have made fabulous contributions to society. They cannot “marry”, but they can and have formed loving, committed, and enduring relationships. Not marriage but respectable, certainly in my eyes. There is nothing wrong with “civil union”, “partnership”, or whatever they choose. Just don’t lie and try to call it marriage because noone will believe you. Marriage between homosexuals doesn’t exist by definition.

I guess I could go on, but I’m old and tired and it’s late. I invite any civilized, gentle, mannerly person, who is homosexual, to talk, write, or email me to discuss this further. I haven’t retired yet, but hope to do so soon and I will have both more time and rest to devote to discussions. And yes, I do have homosexual friends — a few — and they are sweet, loving, and great friends to have.

Response from Reed Byers

Less than forty years ago, there were still many states where mixed-race marriage was illegal. (The Supreme Court only forced the last sixteen states to drop their “antimiscegenation” laws as recently as 1967, the year before I was born.)

From your email, I can only suppose that you were in favor of keeping interracial marriage illegal. After all, these would have qualified as “essentially selfish unions (for their own gratification and joy, what else?)”.

Interracial marriage certainly wouldn’t be about having children, for if they ever chose to have a child, they would be “deliberately depriving that child” of a pure racial heritage. The child would be teased at school, and confused at home. “And if that isn’t selfish what is?”

I’m sure you didn’t consider yourself a racist for thinking this way. After all, you had black friends! So you would have been all in favor of some OTHER arrangement — perhaps, “biracial unions” — in which mixed-race couples could receive all the same rights and privileges of marriage, without actually CALLING it marriage.

I can just hear you argue: “If we let the term ‘marriage’ stand for the union of [mixed-race couples], we change the meaning of the word and then we will have to coin a new one for the union of [single-race couples]. The unions of each is NOT the same and in fact are fundamentally different. And if we have to coin a new word, then [single-race couples] have dibs on ‘marriage’. We’ve used it longer.”

You would continue: “There is nothing wrong with [biracial unions], partnership[s], or whatever they choose. Just don’t lie and try to call it marriage because noone will believe you. Marriage between [mixed-race couples] doesn’t exist by definition.”

Fortunately, the good guys won that debate, and despite the howls of the religious loons and the well-meaning-but-WRONG people such as yourself, we expanded the definition of “marriage” to include mixed-race couples. And the world didn’t end.

Now, forty years later, it’s gay couples who sow panic in the hearts of the unenlightened. And the unenlightened respond in the same old, predictable ways. You’d think that after all of the prejudice this country has fought over in the past two centuries, maybe JUST ONCE we would be able to see it, recognize it as wrong, and correct it WITHOUT having to go through a huge national debate about it.

But no. Human civilization must struggle EACH and EVERY step of the way. We can never learn from the past. So be it.

Let’s address your arguments...

Your first argument is simply that “gays can’t get married because that’s not what marriage *IS*”. But that is the utter definition of circular reasoning. If we as a country decide to recognize gay marriage, then by that very decision, we change what marriage “*IS*”.

We did it when we allowed interracial marriage. We can do it again. The world won’t end. If Christian leaders choose not to accept gay marriage, fine! Nobody’s asking them to. But they DON’T get to decide for the rest of us.

However marriage evolved is a moot point. Whatever the various churches think of marriage now is a moot point.

The “marriage” we are talking about now is the SECULAR, GOVERNMENT-RECOGNIZED arrangement that any straight couple sober enough to sign a marriage license can receive in 15 minutes in Vegas or Reno, anytime of the day or night.

That shabby piece of paper — so trivial that any drunk in Vegas can get one — THAT is what marriage “*IS*”, in the eyes of the law. And good, God-fearing straight Christian people like you MADE it that way.

Gay couples CAN and DO have children all the time, but you’re so concerned with SYMBOLIC children you’re perfectly willing to ignore the REAL THING?

So lets not get too persnickety about somehow doing harm to the sacred institution of marriage by allowing loving gay couples to have it too!

Your second argument is that marriage is all about children. This is nuts, AND YOU KNOW IT. There is no state-imposed requirement for married couples to produce children! People marry ALL THE TIME while never intending to have children. And as you yourself point out, no one seems to object to old, sterile and/or crippled people getting married!

You try to excuse this obvious flaw in your argument, by claiming that at least all male-female marriages can SYMBOLICALLY “be fruitful and multiply”.

EXCUSE ME?!?

Gay couples CAN and DO have children all the time, but you’re so concerned with SYMBOLIC children you’re perfectly willing to ignore the REAL THING?

In this modern world of adoption, artificial insemination and children-from-previous-marriages, you would let two 95-year-old geezers in a nursing home get married because of “symbolism”, but not a loving young gay couple trying to live the American Dream making house payments and raising a child or two on a modest household budget?

Your premise that gay couples are “sterile”, is utterly beside the point — as I’ve said, they can and do have children.

Your characterization of sterile marriages as being “selfish”, and “for the own gratification and joy” is vicious, unfair and untrue. A gay marriage (WITH or WITHOUT kids) is no more or less selfish than a straight marriage (WITH or WITHOUT kids).

And your assertion that gay marriage is of “no benefit to society” is simply false. There is societal benefit in marriage due to more than just baby-making!

Society benefits because a married couple is responsible for each other. Neither party is as likely to become a drain on society, because they have each other as a cushion in rough times.

Society benefits because a married couple is less likely to be promiscuous, potentially spreading disease and making unwanted babies. (And isn’t THAT why gays are supposed to be so bad? They are “immoral”, having multiple partners and spreading disease? Yet when they try to form committed relationships and get married, you won’t stand for it!)

Society benefits simply by example — LOVE is GOOD, and PREJUDICE is BAD. By REWARDING LOVE and by DISCOURAGING PREJUDICE, we build the society that we liberals CLAIM to have been fighting for all of these years.

You argue, as virtually all politicians currently do, that civil unions could be JUST as good as marriage in every way. But we’ve learned from painful past experience that SEPARATE IS NEVER EQUAL. If the two were TRULY the same, there wouldn’t be any need to distinguish!

The entire point of “civil unions” is to shoehorn gay couples into a second-class marital status. This is simply not acceptable!

Women got the vote a long time ago. Blacks don’t sit at the back of the bus anymore. We no longer have water fountains marked “white” and “colored”. Why should our licenses to wed the one we love be marked “gay” or “straight”?

Gays and atheists are the last two groups in this country that are socially acceptable to discriminate against. I, for one, will not sit still for it — and I’m disappointed that you seem to accept it so easily.

You raised me on Star Trek. On Roddenbury, Asimov and Sagan. (Humanists, all.) You taught me that everyone was equal. That discrimination was wrong. That logic, reason, and thinking for yourself were the way to understand and solve problems.

You taught me to be RATIONAL, not to RATIONALIZE.

This is how I became an atheist — the arguments in favor of any sort of God all smack too highly of rationalization. You start with the conclusion you want — that God exists — and then search for any possible argument to support it. If you were honest and examined the universe from a neutral standpoint, it’s hard to see how you could deduce any intelligent creator; much less the very specific Judeo-Christian version of one.

Your arguments against gay marriage sound very much the same. You already KNOW you don’t like it — for your own reasons. So you try to rationalize your feelings, grasping for any reasonable-sounding basis for your foregone conclusion. And in so doing, you wind up defending patently ridiculous assertions, such that marriage is all about children — but it’s OK for old and sterile people to marry because they can “SYMBOLICALLY” have children.

See? That’s just silly.

Rationalize all you like, the question isn’t “Why should we give gays the right to marry?”, it’s “Why should we STOP gays from doing the same thing everyone else takes for granted?”

In this country, a person starts out HAVING rights, and it takes a damned good reason to take them away. Neither you nor anyone else has presented a good reason to categorically take the right to marry away from an entire class of people. And barring such a reason, it is morally, ethically and Constitutionally wrong to treat gay people or their relationships as if they were “second-class”, or worse, illegal altogether.

Actors Whip Easter Bunny at Church Show

by Associated Press, 4/8/2004

GLASSPORT, Pa. — First, the Passion of the Christ. Now, the torment of the Easter Bunny?

It may not have been as gruesome as Mel Gibson's movie, but many parents and children got upset when a church trying to teach about Jesus' crucifixion performed an Easter show with actors whipping the Easter bunny and breaking eggs.

People who attended Saturday's show at Glassport's memorial stadium quoted performers as saying, "There is no Easter bunny," and described the show as being a demonstration of how Jesus was crucified.

Melissa Salzmann, who brought her 4-year-old son J.T., said the program was inappropriate for young children. "He was crying and asking me why the bunny was being whipped," Salzmann said.

Patty Bickerton, the youth minister at Glassport Assembly of God, said the performance wasn't meant to be offensive. Bickerton portrayed the Easter rabbit and said she tried to act with a tone of irreverence.

"The program was for all ages, not just the kids. We wanted to convey that Easter is not just about the Easter bunny, it is about Jesus Christ," Bickerton said.

Performers broke eggs meant for an Easter egg hunt and also portrayed a drunken man and a self-mutilating woman, said Jennifer Norelli-Burke, another parent who saw the show in Glassport, a community about 10 miles southeast of Pittsburgh.

"It was very disturbing," Norelli-Burke said. "I could not believe what I saw. It wasn't anything I was expecting."

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