

AOK| ATHÉE OKIE

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MERRY CHRIST MASS

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Can freethinkers celebrate the holidays without unduly honoring ancient deities? Surely so! But there are some pitfalls to be avoided. This article outlines some of the major ones.

Polytheism: The Roman god Saturn presided over the festival bearing his name – Saturnalia. During the latter part of December, people and took off work and school, exchanged presents, feasted, and indulged in good cheer.

Paganism: To the north, Germanic and Celtic tribes also celebrated the winter solstice, holding a “Yule” festival to celebrate the return of the sun and the greening of the frozen Earth. These events were symbolized in the burning of the Yule logs and the hanging of holly and mistletoe. All these *and* the well-decorated evergreen tree are relics of pagan Europe.

Mithraism: As the Roman pantheon gave way to mystery/saviour cults, Europeans began to celebrate December 25th as *Natalis Solis Invicti*, heralding the birth of a newborn god-child to a virgin in a cave, attended by shepherds and Magi. Legend has it that he traveled the land performing miracles with twelve disciples before being killed and buried in a rock tomb and rising again after three days (around the vernal equinox) and later ascending into heaven. His name was *Mithras* (AKA “The Way, Truth, and Life,” “Son of God,” and “Good Shepherd”) and he was worshipped throughout the Empire from well before King Herod the Great.

Christianity: One need not worry about this season being considered an homage to Jesus, as nothing about it actually originated with him.

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GOD IS THE ANSWER?

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In the wake of the Bush Administration, the 9/11 terrorist attack, school shootings and sundry other crises, secularists have found themselves in the midst of a struggle with those that would rewrite history and/or revise the Constitution – particularly the First Amendment. These are people who do not simply disagree with freethinkers about the desirability of separation of church and state, but characterize supporters of that most American of doctrines as anti-religious – or, in the case of admitted atheists, akin to Satan worshippers.

“Culture war” may be a good description of this tension between these views. Our culture has seen much diversity develop in the past twenty to thirty years. We’ve seen a large influx of people from Middle Eastern countries, Vietnam and Mexico making this their home. Black people are no longer segregated to one side of town – out of sight and out of mind. They brought their issues to the forefront and won a little more freedom in the process, just as women had done much earlier in their fight for suffrage and equal treatment. More recently, gays and lesbians jumped out of the closet and to this very day continue their efforts to confront mainstream society with their social concerns.

We've seen a big change come about, slowly but surely, in the level of conservatism in the mainstream. People who were once content with the cozy lifestyle of Norman Rockwell's middle-class America realize that what they once had is now lost, and they're surrounded now with the byproducts of the change. Their shell has been penetrated and just as society has changed, so now they are forced to accept the change or else moan and bitch about it.

And bitch they have. What we are seeing now is pissing and moaning rather than a real takeover by the religious right.

Sure, they've managed to join forces with others who fear and reject the changes that this country has seen and their voice is powerful at times, but time moves on regardless and they are not going to be able to recreate an era of the past that has long since vanished. The changes that have been made are going to remain and become more deeply rooted in the core of our society – no one can isolate themselves from even more change bound to come in the future (excepting, of course, the Amish and their ilk).

Those who have chosen to follow the simplest and most convenient path in answering the Big Questions have chosen organized religion of one sort or another. Those very people also choose the easiest solution to complex contemporary social problems – “We need more God!”

Whether it be in the schools, to protect our country from terrorists, to rehabilitate an addict, it does not matter what the problem at hand, their solution is simple: “Do what I do...pray and put yourself in the arms of the Lord.”

The more troubled the times, the more we will be hear the faithful cry out their solution to everything, “God save us!” Those candidates who hope to get elected will play right along and represent themselves as being all that is good and morally correct in our society. They will emphasize that they are decent, God-fearing folk and their opponents are not quite up to snuff in that department. It is nothing more than the old “Holier than thou” attitude, but it does seem to win elections, does it not? (*Editor's note: It does, unless you are Steve Largent.*)

Such tactics would be even more comical than it is, but for the overwhelming hypocrisy and constant reminder that they are directing an

all too effective appeal to the spiritual mentality of the majority of Oklahoma voters.

However, like the boy who cried wolf a few times too many, chances are people will get sick of their pious message and begin to ignore them. Many people will be repulsed at the hypocrisy involved and turn their backs on organized religion and those that promote it to their own ends.

Televangelists have been exposed for what they are, and more recently so have many priests. What will it take before it finally soaks in that politicians are merely using religion as a tool to keep them in office? Perhaps the more theocracy rears its ugly head and the more people see it for the hypocrisy that it is, the more disgusted they will become with it and the less they will participate in the religion that makes it possible. One can hope.

Oklahoma Atheists T-shirts!



Now available! Shirts with “AOK” logo.
E-mail: Orders@OklahomaAtheists.org

Events Calendar, Dec 2002

December 21st - Location TBD

Come one come all to the *second* annual Oklahoma Atheists Winter Solstice Party. Unbelievers gather to celebrate the true spirit of the season as we pay homage to the natural turning of the seasons and look forward to longer and warmer days. E-mail solstice@OklahomaAtheists.org for info / RSVP.

December 27th - [Galileo Bar & Grill](#) - Monthly dining out with local area atheists and agnostics.

ONE LAST BIGOTRY

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It seems in this day and age that everyone must watch what they say about others lest it be regarded as discrimination. This is true in matters of race, religion, sex, and national origin with age soon to join the list. However, there is a group still unprotected from public slander and defamation. *Atheists*. Private organizations, churches, and individuals preach the “evil” nature and lack of “good” morals in people who are Atheist. These are quite obviously statements made with malicious intent. There are several reasons this should not be allowed to go on. First of all, atheists are neither “evil” nor do they lack “good” morals. Secondly, intentional slander for malicious intent is an illegal act and should not be tolerated no matter who or what the target is. Lastly, as long as people are allowed to discriminate against others, for any reason, our nation is in danger of regressing back to a state of oppression.

People who consider themselves Atheist have no desire to suffer or inflict pain on anyone else. They simply do not believe in the existence of a deity. There is no other matter that all Atheists agree on as a whole. Atheist organizations seek only two things; total separation of church and state and to provide the public with truthful information about who they are. They do believe in “good morals” and ethical behavior. Like any other diverse group they may disagree on what constitutes moral behavior. Some Atheists are liberal and others are conservative. They may disagree on how to raise children, hot political topics such as war and abortion, and on matters of government and politics. They go about their daily routines just the same as many religious people and may even be assumed religious by their peers because of their high moral character. Moral character does not rely upon religious conviction.

Those raised in many churches are taught that Atheist are evil and seek to do the work of Satan. This sentiment is blatantly spread throughout American society by many different means. When people representing private organizations make derogatory comments about other minority groups they are publicly admonished and often sued. It seems that no

one has taken up the fight to maintain the human dignity and civil rights of Atheist. The United States may soon find that Atheists are rising up to their own defense. Suits are being considered against many organizations for public slander and defamation of Atheists. If the same rights allotted every other sub-group of American people are rightly extended to Atheists then many of the cases will be won once tried. Americans can look forward to seeing a more positive, truthful portrayal of Atheist Americans.

To blatantly and publicly slander, defame, and oppress any group of American people is to set back all that this country has stood for and strived to achieve since its inception. So far, The United States of America has had a history of positive change for the good of all people. First we left England to pursue religious freedom, seceded from England for economic freedom, and fought a bloody battle to keep the states united resulting in the freedom of slaves. If Americans now tolerate the oppression of non-religious individuals it will be a huge setback for civil rights for indeed this constitutes religious oppression. To claim to have religious freedom and stipulate that people must choose one, indeed, *any* religion in order to exercise this right would be ironic to say the least.

When understanding of any kind is lacking, the truth should be sought directly from the source of confusion. As long as discrimination of any kind is allowed then there is true risk of oppression and the downward social spiral associated with it. Atheists face slander and discrimination every day. They can not freely discuss their religious views among their peers, even when it is an agreed upon topic that others are participating in, without suffering discrimination. For many Atheists it even affects their jobs. If word gets out that they are Atheist they may suffer a hostile work environment or termination from their employers. They are constantly harassed by Theist to join their religious organizations or simply harassed for spite of what they believe. This type of treatment should not be allowed to continue, regardless of who the target is. May the United States of America continue to be known for protecting the civil rights of all people and let this start at home with those that choose to be free from religion – Atheists.

WHAT ARE YOU?

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(An unabashedly unbelieving, open-mindedly pontificating, morally relativistic freethinking humanist and agnostically strong atheist)

It's confusing. What are you? Are you an atheist, agnostic, humanist, infidel, freethinker, Satanist, non-believer, other? When I told my parent's in 1997 that I was no longer a believer in the faith that played so much a part of my upbringing, they took a small amount of solace in that I called myself an agnostic. "Well at least you don't deny the possibility." I guess they had it partially right, but five years later I still think they have no idea what I really think about religion and what my "religion" is.

Many non-believers debate this issue among themselves. Sometimes this discussion can get so heated that groups of "atheists" are pitted against "agnostics" in who is logically more correct. However, what seems to most often happen is that after a bit of discussion most people no longer see the point of the distinguishing nomenclature.

Many people associate these labels incorrectly. Though Webster's defines atheist as a denier of god, and many theists regard atheists as anti-religious, an atheist is someone who strictly doesn't have belief in a deity. A strong-atheist is someone who strongly believes that there is not a supernatural deity, whatever the form. A weak-atheist is someone who thinks it unlikely that there is a supernatural deity, but does not altogether deny the possibility of a god. Agnostic is really an adjective. Agnostic means not being convinced that you can make a decision either way. My parent's associate agnostic with confused, which is the furthest idea from the truth. Agnostics are rarely confused about what they think. They've usually spent a considerable amount of time educating themselves about the issues.

Personally, I feel a kinship to any person willing to critically think about and question their deeply held beliefs about religion, spirituality, and the nature of man. There are self-proclaimed atheists, agnostics, and infidels out there that do not fit into this category. I respect a religious man that searches open-mindedly for answers much more than people convinced of any persuasion.

By these definitions all people agnostic toward deity belief are atheists, but all atheists are not agnostic. With all of that said, my point is that being skeptical is the key to healthy thinking. Nothing is wrong with doubting and questioning everything you hear. I truly believe that if all of the religious sheep in the world would quit being so lazy and

use the head on their shoulder, the world would be a much better place.

The "atheists" that I've met have a vast array of specific beliefs when you get down to the details. Many atheists, for all practical matters, have the same basic belief that deists do. "If there is a god he hasn't had anything to do with humanity since the big bang." The common thread is that we've questioned and discussed and put effort into our philosophies. We've ACTUALLY read religious texts and studied philosophy. We still wonder about the unknowns and accept no absolute truths.

This is the problem of labeling a group that is defined by people who try to question what is normally not questioned. Non-believers celebrate diversity of thought. There can never be a bible for the non-believers. There is no orthodox or canon that sets limits to our wondering. It's the Heisenberg uncertainty principle for thought. If you can put a label on it, it's not free.

That's really the problem with all labels. Once you can name it, you don't have to deal with the information any longer. You don't feel compelled to listen further. You group them using your stereotypes and prejudices and keep thinking what you think.

The most telling situation that exposed the gulf between believers and non-believers is that the first night I talked with my parents about "loosing my faith". My father said, "I wish you never went to college!" He saw the truth that open-minds and education are death to superstition. He actually admitted that being close-minded and ignorant is preferable to critical thinking. I wish wholeheartedly that people would stop being so lazy. Stop depending on other's to tell you what you think!

If you read this and disagree, I applaud you. You actually took the initiative to see what someone else thinks. Now it's your turn to think about it.

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