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Freedom of Religion

By Skye Thomas

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by: **Skye Thomas**

We were all taught in school that our forefathers left England to escape religious dictatorships. Okay, there was a lot more to it then that, but it was a big enough deal that they made sure it got honorable mention in our rulebook. They clearly made the point that we were to have freedom of religion here in America. They also used the word "God" in some of their formal paperwork and even on our money. I don't want to argue politics here, but rather semantics. They didn't say "freedom of Christianity," they said "freedom of religion." The boys who wrote up all of our formal paperwork were wordsmiths and they debated long and hard to find the perfect set of words to govern ourselves by. It wasn't decided that we had the freedom to choose whichever form of Christianity that we liked, but whichever form of religion. Religion is in and of itself a much broader concept then Christianity. "God" can mean a lot more then just the Christian definition too.

No, I don't agree with all the bickering and arguing over whether or not there should be prayers in school or if the Pledge of Allegiance is constitutional. You can't stop someone from praying whenever or wherever they choose. Nor can you force a prayer out of someone either. It's a dumb thing to argue about and not worth being offended over either way. I think it's important to teach out children what our country's Pledge of Allegiance is, but I don't know that it's right to force anyone to state a pledge, especially children. Seems a bit dictator like and kind of like brainwashing. Teach them what it means. Teach them what prayer means. Teach them what making a pledge of any kind means whether it's a pledge of one's allegiance to their country's flag, a pledge of fidelity to a spouse, or a pledge of loyalty to a boss. But also teach them that in this country we have the freedom to make pledges or not. Teach them that in this country we have the freedom to pray to whoever or whatever we like and the freedom not to pray. Teach them just how important that freedom is.

I'm saddened when I hear of Pagan's being persecuted for their spiritual beliefs in this country. Did the Sunday school teachers forget to mention that using the colors green and red for Christmas is Pagan? Did they mention that Christmas lights, yule logs, and wreaths are all Pagan? Did they mention that almost every single Christian holiday is celebrated ironically on top of a Pagan festival? Why do you

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think we have bunnies, baby chicks, and pretty flowers as part of our Easter celebration? Because it coincides with the Pagan's celebrations of Spring's renewal. From what I can see, Pagans aren't all evil ugly witches anymore than all Christians are white supremacists.

I don't have a deep knowledge of all of the different religions of the world, but I can tell you that it doesn't take much research to see that they're all very much the same. Get past which church uses which secret handshake and which rule book you should follow, and you find that they're all teaching us to respect each other, to love each other, to conduct yourself with honor, and to be good to the planet and animals that we're blessed with. The rest is all dogma and debatable. Nobody has any real concrete proof that their particular form of God is the only one. Who's to say that God or Jesus isn't wise enough to visit more than once using different names and different forms? Wouldn't it make sense given the size of the planet that the rest of the world would need to be given a fair chance at knowing about God too? Is Buddha so very different from Jesus? Their teachings are incredibly similar. Why limit God to a concept that only fits what your particular culture or region of the world

knows about?

Another thing that always puzzled me is why prophets and seers are allowed to channel holy books and tell of the Messiah's coming, but then we're told by the churches that being psychic is demonic? It seems a bit contradictory to me. Every psychic I've ever met lost power over their visions if they weren't acting in the highest good. Most of the psychics I've met believe very deeply in a form of God or some sort of a higher magical loving guidance over us. They're visions into the other side created that belief. There's nothing quite like chatting with the All-Mighty to make a believer out of you. Isn't prayer in and of itself a form of telepathic psychic connection with the other side?

It just seems to me that if we quit arguing over what words, labels, and names we give these concepts and quit arguing over methods of prayer and such that we'd see that we're all so much more alike than we are different. I've known three different Catholic men who fell in love with the Buddhist faith because it so beautifully highlights the teachings of Christ. I really believe that is what we're meant to do. All of the holy books tell us to love one another. You can't truly love someone if you don't take the time to really get to know them and what they stand for. Shouldn't we learn about each other from a place of love rather than from a place of judgement? Nobody can prove that anyone else's religion is wrong and nobody can prove that theirs is right. Too many translators over the course of history to be able to be 100% sure about anything any more. We can't really assume that the others are completely wrong and we can't assume that our own religion is completely right. Religion and God is so much more than we can fully understand at this time.

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Skye Thomas is the CEO of Tomorrow's Edge, an Internet leader in inspiring leaps of faith. She became a writer in 1999 after twenty years of studying spirituality, metaphysics, astrology, personal growth, motivation, soulmates, and parenting. Her books and articles have inspired people of all ages and faiths to recommit themselves to the pursuit of happiness. After years of high heels and business clothes, she is currently enjoying working from home in her pajamas. To read more of her articles, sign up to receive her free weekly newsletter, and get free previews of her books go to

Fan the 4 Flames of Freedom

By Paul Siegel

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On September 11, 2001, 4 freedom-hating zealots tried to snuff out the 4 freedoms that are the foundation of, not only the U.S., but of all freedom-loving countries around the Globe. The terrorists hijacked 4 airplanes and crashed them into 3 of their 4 planned targets: the Pentagon and the 2 financial towers in New York. This attack shocked the U.S. and shocked the world. It produced death and destruction, anger and misery, defiance and calls for revenge.

Although some military strikes may be needed, the best way to fight terrorism is by stoking and fanning the 4 flames of freedom everywhere.

The 4 Freedoms are Attacked

Why was the U.S. attacked? Because the U.S. is the leader of the free world. It stands for ideas which are contrary to what radical terrorists believe. They consider the U.S. to be the devil that must be obliterated. What are the ideas the U.S. stands for? It stands for, it burns, the 4 flames of freedom:

1 – FREEDOM OF SPEECH – The terrorists hate the idea of free speech. Free speech implies disrespect for authority. Free speech means you can utter blasphemies. Free speech means you can be subversive.

To freedom-loving countries, however, free speech is our strength. By criticizing authority we reduce corruption. By allowing people to speak freely about religion, we keep our spiritual environment strong. By allowing people to speak their mind, we learn to get along better with each other.

2 – FREEDOM OF RELIGION – The terrorists probably hate this freedom most of all. According to them there is only one religion and everyone in the world must agree with them and practice this religion the way THEY see it. They do not practice Islam, but a corrupted form of Islam. Islam does not advocate killing people whose beliefs are different from yours. Like the other big religions,

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it favors peaceful communication.

In the U.S. and other freedom-loving countries, members of all the major religions live together in harmony. Each person practices

his or her religion as he or she sees fit. Like freedom of speech, freedom of religion builds true communities.

3 – FREEDOM OF SELF-GOVERNMENT (DEMOCRACY) – Terrorists are unqualifiably against democracy. They believe that "spiritual" leaders deserve a greater voice than others. The average citizen should do as he is told.

We, in the free world, relish our democracy. It means that everyone has rights as well as responsibilities. We argue constantly about the best way to do things. But, as a result, when we do make a decision, we support it. We realize, especially at a time like this, that we are all in this together. Democracy gives us unity.

4 – FREEDOM OF INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITY – Terrorists do not understand this concept. They believe one should subordinate oneself to the group and to one's god. Thus they eagerly become martyrs.

Freedom-loving countries, especially the U.S., thrive on individual opportunity for all. This concept has led to the growth of great corporations and to many rich citizens. Even the very poor in freedom-loving countries live better than many in poor countries that harbor terrorists.

Our Response

How should the U.S. and other freedom-loving countries respond to the attack? Many see the start of a war. But no country has declared war. A network of terrorists is responsible for the atrocity. Some call what happened evil and that we should eliminate evil. This scares me. Who defines what is evil? The terrorists have defined the U.S. as evil and look what it has led to.

We are not fighting another country. Some military strikes may be needed to show the terrorists we mean business. But this fight will not be won by military means. Neither should we fight evil with another crusade. We are fighting a monstrous attack on our way of life. Therefore, we must:

> Stoke the 4 Flames of Freedom locally

> Fan the 4 flames of freedom throughout the Globe

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Stoke the 4 Flames of Freedom

There are those who say we must sacrifice some of our freedoms to fight these terrorists. I say, if we do this the terrorists will have won. Instead of reducing our freedoms, we should nourish them. Instead of snuffing out the 4 flames of freedom, let us light them brighter. Stoke them and make them stronger:

1 – FREE SPEECH – You need to give up some privacy, some say. We need freer use of wiretaps,

others say. In a war there must be a limit to free speech. My reply: If you limit free speech, what is the purpose of the fight? You do not fight by surrendering the most cherished freedom. Not only must we keep free speech alive, we must make it stronger.

2 – FREE RELIGION – Some say, let us use religious and ethnic profiling to keep tabs on possible terrorists. Others, even now, are attacking Muslims. We must fight the terrorists by allowing everyone to practice his own religion or lack of religion. We must not smother one of our strengths and thereby help the terrorists in their fight against us.

3 – SELF GOVERNMENT – In times of crisis, political leaders tend to be more secretive, more authoritarian, less open to criticism, less democratic. We must avoid these misdirected approaches. If anything, we must be more open and inclusive, more eager for discussion, understanding and resolution of problems.

4 – INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITY – Make sure there is opportunity for everyone. This is tough in the current bad economic situation. The airlines are getting a helping hand from government. How about the people who have lost their jobs? Perhaps this is a good time to rebuild the infrastructure – public buildings, roads, utilities, bridges, schools, the environment – to supply work to those who need it.

Fan the 4 Flames of Freedom Throughout the World

Not only the U.S., but all freedom-loving countries are under attack by the terrorists. An excellent strategy for winning this fight is to increase the number of countries on our side. In other words, let us do what we can to bring as many countries into the freedom-loving part of the world. We know how to do this and we should do it – the freedom way, not the military way:

1 – FREE SPEECH – We take free speech for granted. But there are many places around the Globe where people know only what authorities allow them to know. In an age where we have so many sophisticated means for spreading news and information, this situation is outrageous. Our antagonists spread propaganda. We must spread true information. Information will beat propaganda every time.

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2 – FREE RELIGION – We believe in this. But why keep this freedom to ourselves? Through our actions, through the media, through diplomacy, through business contacts, and through any other means, let us show the world the value of religious liberty.

3 – SELF GOVERNMENT – Democracy has been making inroads in many countries before the attack occurred. Let us not let up in fanning this flame. Let us try in every way possible to bring about democratic changes everywhere.

4 – INDIVIDUAL OPPORTUNITY – Here is where business people can contribute the most. Instead of focusing on business opportunities in the U.S. and other rich countries, we must search

for opportunities in poor countries. True, citizens of rich countries have more money to spend. But they are getting tired of pursuing the latest "new thing." Poor countries represent an untapped market. Help them get on their feet and they will become loyal customers. And you will help fan the flame of individual opportunity, and thus, help win the fight against terrorism.

Paul –the soarING– Siegel is a provocative Internet speaker and author of HELPFULNESS MARKETNG, an ebook stressing learning, cooperation and community. Learn about it at <http://www.learningfountain.com/>. Subscribe to newsletter, LearningFOUNT, by sending blank email to: <mailto:LearningFOUNT-subscribe@topica.com>.

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