

Deism Today...

The Deist Alliance Quarterly Newsletter...



Volume 1, Section 4, December 1, 2006

Weekly Chats...

Unless otherwise noted weekly chats will be held on Friday evenings at 10:00 p.m. central time. You can join in on the chat by going here...

www.positivedeism.com/chat

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Digging For Hidden Treasure...

I suspect that dismay at harsh and cryptic bible teachings, recast into unbending church doctrine, looms large as a reason why some abandon Christianity and find their way to Deism. The bible is a complex book, a collection of many books, sometimes history but always a testament of a people's journey of faith. It has many inconsistencies, errors, and flagrant biases. From our 21st-century perspective we might view it as, at best, an unreliable source and, at worst, an effort to intentionally deceive its readers. Certainly the Christian bible has been used as a weapon of mass terrorism and mind control for 2000 years. It is no surprise that thinking people turn away from it in disgust.

I offer that it is our great loss if we do cast it off. I set Christianity aside because I could not accept church doctrine about Jesus, whereby worship of God has been supplanted by the cult of Christ. I set aside orthodox teachings ABOUT Jesus, but I cherish the teachings OF Jesus. Above all, I seek to honor and worship God. From the pages of the gospels it jumps out at me how close Jesus felt that God-connection, which he called "the kingdom of God". He taught many things about it; in my own quest to know God, I do well to turn to him for insight.

"Seek first the kingdom of God, and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Matthew 6:33.) My interpretation: Get right with God, and love God without reservation, and Life will get right with you. Jesus' words uplift and guide me when my life is turned upside down and life's demands press upon me. "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near." To repent is to turn away from what is causing imbalance in our life, and thereby return to wholeness. That's all. Jesus, the wise teacher, coaxes us to return to God, and assures us that that holy balance is our reward.

Lucky us. We have slipped the bonds of church doctrine and are free to go beyond the stone wall of bible inerrancy to enter the garden of delights. Like any garden, we have to tend it and remove the rocks of error and the weeds of propaganda. In the bible's fertile fields the hidden treasures are many. We just have to dig for them. It is a lifelong work, but for me a work of joy and rich reward.

I paraphrase Matthew 13:52: Every student of the bible who thoughtfully chooses the path to Deism "is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old." Why cast away old treasures, when they only need polishing to remove the tarnish of centuries?

Bev Kline

Deism and Revealed Religions...

There are many religions in the world with each having certain beliefs that make them unique. Overall, most have more similarities than differences. Religions can be broken down in many ways and is beyond the scope here so the simplest method will be used. The easiest way to break them down is using the terms “revealed” and “natural.” A revealed religion is one that is based on Faith and Revelation. Essentially, God revealed his existence, law and will to an emissary called a prophet and then the prophet carried it to the world. On the other hand, a natural religion is one that tends to be based on Nature. This type believes that Gods existence is not revealed by direct revelation but generally by observing nature and how it functions. From these descriptions it is obvious that most religions are a combination of the two but every religion will fall more into one category more than the other.

The major revealed religions are: Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Baha’ism. The major natural religions are: Buddhism, Pantheism and Deism. Of the natural religions, Deism best fits the explanation of a natural religion as it is based on nature without revelation. Deism is a belief in God based on Reason, Experience and Nature (nature of the universe) rather than the divine revelations and holy books of revealed religion. Essentially, through the use of Reason, a belief in God is determined by the observation of the order and complexity found in nature and our own personal experiences of nature. The nature of God has been a point of contention for Deism because it has been defined as a religion that acknowledges a specific nature of God but in actuality it does not and leaves it up to the individual Deist to determine what they believe that nature to be. Overall, Deism is not a hard concept to understand as Deists use Reason and rational thought to develop their view on God, morals and life.

A question that many Deists are asked is in regards to how they view the revealed religions. With so many it is impossible to say how Deists view each but it is important to generally understand how Deism views the basic tenets of the revealed religions. Each revealed religion is unique but at its core they have some of the same basic components. These components do not exist for all but are found in many. The basic

components with their views versus Deist views are:

Holy Books - *“sacred scriptures of a religion”*

Revealed: There are many books that are said to have come from or were inspired by God. Some are the Bible, the Koran and the Gita. For the believers of these religions, the books are more than just words on paper but are the divine “word of God.” Depending of the individual, they may be viewed from a literal, metaphorical or combination viewpoint. These are believed contain all of God’s law, will and history and should be honored and respected as such.

Deists: These are considered to be books written by man and should be viewed as such. Thus, since humans are make mistakes the books are errant and contain contradictions and are not the “word of God.” The only evidence that they are of God is the book itself, which is not evidence to the Deist. Some argue that many of the books have been proven scientifically or by prophecy but there is no evidence to support this claim. However the Deist believes that these holy books contain wisdom and should not be discarded but viewed with Reason.

Revelations - *“an act of revealing or communicating divine truth”*

Revealed: This is believed how God communicates with man. He may do this directly or indirectly by messenger. Regardless, God gives his Law and will by these messages and they should be obeyed. Revelations are a rare and important event for all of humanity and should not be taken lightly.

Deists: Revelations are viewed from the perspective of secondary information. Any information given to the individual is only for the individual and cannot be shared by others as only he/she had the revelation and we cannot know what they heard. Others may take it further and say that revelations do not occur or exist. Regardless, the Deist does not view these revelations as the “word of God.”

Prophets - *“one who utters divinely inspired revelations”*

Revealed: These are believed to be individuals that have been chosen as God’s messengers. Why he chose them is not important. What is important is that they have been chosen and should be respected and followed. They speak of

God's will and are some of the most important people in history.

Deists: As with revelations, the message cannot be proven and cannot be proven to be from God. The messenger may be an "Enlightened" individual and much wisdom may be available but they are just human non-the less.

Sin - *"an offense against religious or moral law"*

Revealed: Sin is believed to be an offense against God that keeps God and us separate. Humans are born imperfect and will sin, as it is part of our very being. We can overcome sin by accepting God and following his will and living as he wants us too.

Deists: Sin simply means, "to miss the mark." This basically is saying that man is flawed and will make mistakes. Deists completely agree that man was born flawed, is flawed and will make mistakes. Thus, for the Deist, sin means that we make mistakes.

Messiahs - *"an expected redeemer"*

Revealed: The messiah is believed to be the one who will come to deliver us to God when the proper time arrives. God and the prophets have foretold his/her arrival and it will be a blessed time as humanity can reclaim our connection to God.

Deists: The idea of a messiah and prophet are similar. While each can be an important and wise teacher, they are non-the less human and should be viewed as such.

Afterlife - *"an existence after death"*

Revealed: Some believe in a Heaven and Hell and others in Reincarnation. Regardless, each carries with it the punishment of not living life as God has intended and revealed.

Deists: Deists may or may not believe in an afterlife as Reason tells us there is no way to know. However, many believe that something will occur but are not worried about it and believe we should live life to the fullest.

Nature of God - *"the characteristics of God"*

Revealed: God is personalized and made anthropomorphic which means that God is given human characteristics and takes on human attributes. He is given the classic human emotions and may be seen as a Father Figure that loves his creation. Furthermore, he is seen has all powerful and all knowing. God may intervene in human

affairs, the world and the universe when God deems it necessary.

Deists: God is depersonalized without human characteristics. God is seen as abstract concept that we cannot comprehend at this point in time of our existence. God does not love or hate us but just "is" (thus the term abstract). Human words fail to portray God properly and should be avoided as much as possible. God may or may not be active in the world and this is left up to the Deists to decide for themselves.

Morality - *"a system of conduct"*

Revealed: It is believed that God has given man his laws. These laws are absolute and should not be questioned. These laws and moral codes have been given through the prophets.

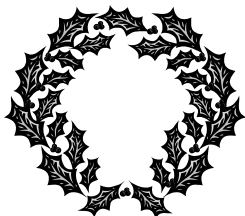
Deists: This varies among Deists but overall most believe that we are born with bio-moral/bio-ethical principles. These principles are not specific but instill man with a sense of right and wrong. An example would be the Golden Rule. God may be seen as the creator of these principles through the natural laws.

Members of the revealed religions are varied and have many views into each of these categories. Some may view some parts of the holy books as metaphorical while others view all of it as literal. They will not accept the prophets of other religions but may chose to learn from them anyway. Therefore, the above explanations are important but are generalized and must be viewed as such. All members are individuals and assumptions and stereotyping should be avoided. Deist's view these religions with respect and at the same time do not agree with the basis of their beliefs. The majority of Deists have a "live and let live" attitude. Ultimately, religion and a belief in God is a subjective concept and no one can say another is wrong. Essentially, all individuals will find an avenue that best suits them for finding God. The Deist is one that uses Reason rather than Faith and will rely on using rational thought based on scientific understanding. This does not mean that no members of revealed religion use Reason, it simply means that the Deist uses Reason as the primary basis for belief as compared to the revealed religions that use Faith as the basis.

~ Joe Hardwick

*Deist Alliance Member
Sites...*

- **PONDER: Presence On the Net of Deists for Enlightenment and Reason...**
Promoting Deism and Deists' Communications Worldwide
<http://www.deistnet.com>
- **Modern Deism: Reason, Nature, Free Thought, Liberty, and Respect...**
<http://www.moderndeism.com>
- **Deist.Info...**
<http://www.deist.info>
- **POSITIVE DEISM: Promoting Online Deist Community and Friendship...**
"Reason and Respect in all you think, say and do"
<http://www.positivedeism.com>
- **Dynamic Deism: Belief in God Through Reason and Nature...**
<http://dynamicdeism.org>



Editor's Note...

"The views expressed by the authors of the articles in this newsletter don't necessarily reflect the views of all Deists, or of the Deist Alliance"

A Humanist Morning Prayer

Dear World,
Be with me in my hours of joy, and my hours of sorrow.
Reveal to me, as much as you can, the beauty and the bounty of Earth. You are my Academy, my Playground, my Home. Let me always embrace you with love, and with care for your creatures, your rivers and streams, your skies, your seas, your sons and your daughters who people these lands. May this day be marked, through the light and into the darkness, with learning, laughter, and love; not just here, on my little piece of the planet, but all over the face of the Earth. May humanity flourish.

This is my heart's desire.

~Queen Qaab
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From Nothingness to Divine...

There won't be a great flood; there will be no cleansing fire.
No judgment from above will come against the liar.

There ain't no god who's gonna save the day,
no angels in heaven no matter how hard you pray.

Fairytales and lullabies, bible stories idolized,
create a world without wonder: an abject paradigm.

We're told that love is lust, that life is born of sin,
that being dead is more important than what we're living in,
and some who die are worth less, than others who believe.
They commodity the elusive soul and practice to deceive.

Religion is a ready prison, devoid of truth and spirit.
It fosters only division, hate, ignorance, and fear.

So when the world ends, and mankind has turned to dust.
Everything will be the same as it was before us.

For life is but a journey through this mystery,
and as to when the end comes calling; there is no prophecy.

Because we are all the same kind of blind wasting breath, wasting time,
as we trip along the mortal coil from nothingness to divine.

~Uriah

What am I Going to Get?

On Christmas day my thoughts always turn to what Christmas was like for me as a child. Waking up at about five in the morning, purely from a feeling of excitement. Laying in bed for another two hours, because you know that no one else will get up any earlier than seven, and you are not allowed in the living room, because that is where the presents are. And so I would lie in bed, feeling the magic of that one day.

As I think about it now, it was not any religious impulse that spurred this magical feeling. As I lay there, I had no thought of “Baby Jesus” or of fellowship... I did not feel any excitement about others opening the presents I had bought (with my parents money) for others. It was not even excitement about the wonderful Swedish Tea Rings (pastries) that my mother would have for our Christmas breakfast.

No, my excitement was focused on one great question.... What am I going to Get?!?



And then, seven o'clock would roll around, and I would hear my younger sisters squealing excitedly, and I would know that it was now ok for me to come out of my room and rush into the Treasure Trove that our living room would temporarily become. Over the next hour or so, our parents would try to pace us as we opened our presents. Some would be surprises, and some we had searched around the house to find out about weeks before. Each of us kids would stack up our loot in a different corner, ranging from toys to clothes, from candies to cards,

and from needed essentials to things we would never use. It didn't matter.... It was Bounty! Loot! Stuff!

We were never a rich family. My father was a career civil servant and soldier, and my mother stayed home to raise us kids. Both my father and mother did heroic work to introduce the “reason for the Season” to us, and also to try and provide that Christmas Morning Magic for us.... But they were just two people, competing with a whole society that tells us that Christmas is about one thing, and only one thing.

As kids, we interpreted that one thing as “What am I going to get?”, but as an adult, we have another name for it. Consumerism.

I have kind of taken Christmas off this year. Due to many reasons I am actually unable to travel to visit family, and so while I bought and sent presents, I told my family to hold any presents for me until March, when I plan to visit so I can meet my soon to be born nephew. My wonderful better 3/4ths is visiting her family, while I stay home this year. We will be having our exchanging of gifts when she returns in early January. As such, I think I have gained a different perspective on this holiday than I have had before. As I was not really participating, the excitement did not infect me this year.

What I have seen has disturbed me.

We all know the “Reason for the Season”... even those of us who do not accept the theological issues attached to this holiday. Whether or not Jesus of Nazareth was born on this day is inconsequential, for this mid-winter holiday existed long before his birth, and long before the Church adopted it.

No, when I say the “Reasons for the Season” I mean love and fellowship. This is the time of the first real snows each year. It is when our ancestral societies would band together, many in a single room (easier to heat) and tell stories, have meals, trade small gifts, and celebrate the fellowship of their community around a roaring fire. This was a time of love, life, and even loss. In those pre-industrial societies, most of those who “passed on” during a particular year did so in winter. And so, in this time of holiday, you

knew that some of those in that warm fire lit room with you might not be there to see the next spring.

The Reason for the Season is fellowship and love, two concepts that were near and dear to the heart and teachings of that mystic from Galilee who some say was born today. In fact, if you remove the mythology surrounding the life of Jesus from what he taught, you find that his message is the same as that expressed in those fire lit rooms. Love, Community, Fellowship, Forgiveness, and Repentance..

Over the past several years, we have all encountered four particular letters as a question... WWJD? What Would Jesus Do? As I was bombarded by the modern Christmas Culture this past few months, I began to ask myself this question. If Jesus were here, with me, watching the social cult that has grown up around this supposed celebration of his birth, what would his reaction be?

What would his reaction be to the torrent of commercials for this new toy, that new tool, this new sweater, that new car, this new bauble, that new gadget... all of which you have to buy for someone if you do not want to be "Ebenezer Scrooge"?

What would his reaction be to the pushy sales directed at kids, telling them they would only be cool if they got this new toy for Christmas?

What would his reaction be to stores who tell charities they are not allowed outside their doors anymore, because that might annoy paying customers?



What would his reaction be to all the news reports that if we Americans don't spend spend spend, If we

don't max out our credit cards, then the whole economy will fall apart?

What would his reaction be to stores beginning this sales pitch in September, and not ending it until January?

What would his reaction be to this whole consumer society that has grown up around this time of year once about fellowship, sharing, love, and community?

What would his reaction have been to that question that I asked myself as a kid "What am I going to get?"

I think we can find his reaction, laid out quite nicely for us, in a story told in the Bible itself. John 2: 12-16 to be exact.

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

How dare you turn my father's house into a market? Now many of you know that I am not the modern concept of a Christian. I am a Deist and a Unitarian, and to me Jesus of Nazareth was a teacher and moral philosopher, but he was not God. As Shakespeare said, "He was a man, all in all. I shall not look upon his like again."

And yet, many who accept the Divinity of Jesus think that, by celebrating this ancient holiday in an orgy of consumerism they somehow celebrate his teachings and his birth. Jesus argued strongly against such hypocrisy, and I believe would denounce it were he here with us today.

What Would Jesus Do? He would overthrow the whole consumer culture that has infested this holiday season. He would disown those who looked at this season as a source of profits and revenue. He would chastise those, (like me as a child) who thought of Christmas as a time for "what I can get" not "what I

should give". Not give things as presents, but give of yourself, through charity, fellowship, love, and support for those around us.

He would make a whip out of cords (and words) and drive them out of the Season.

Yet, discounting the mythology around his life, he remains with us only in his teachings. And as the modern Christian Churches have come to focus more upon the mythical stories of his life and less upon what he actually taught, we have lost sight of those teachings and let consumerism replace fellowship. What matters if he mystically "died for our sins" if we celebrate his teachings in our world with holiday practices that would have enraged him... this man of peace.

Think on that. This man who taught peace, who taught forgiveness and turning the other cheek. This man who taught poverty and humility. Think on how contrary to what he believed something must have been to have brought this man of peace into such a rage that he made a weapon and attacked these merchants, and drove them out of the temple. Now, understand that all we have is this small story... yet to me it has the ring of truth. It seems to me that if this did not really happen, they would have left it out of the telling, because the story of the clearing of the temple is so contrary to the modern image presented of Jesus. And the lesson it teaches resounds to us today, in this time when consumerism has overtaken the true "Reasons for the Season". This does not mean we quit giving gifts, only that we adopt moderation in doing so. In those ancient fire

lit rooms of years past, the gifts that were given were often personal things, handmade, or intimately useful for the coming year. A new set of tongs for the blacksmith, a book for the inquisitive child, a new scarf for the mother. Things of utility, of purpose, and of feeling. Things that were needed, not just wanted.

But this giving of gifts should only be an aspect of the larger Reason for the Season, that of Love. I am focusing on the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth in this missive, for today is his symbol. If you want to truly commemorate his life and teachings, you can only do so by showing Love, Forgiveness, and Compassion. He was a poor man, most likely the son of a carpenter and a slave-girl. He owned little except his mind and his voice. Being able to share bread with his closest friends was one of his greatest moments.

So, this Christmas, and in those holiday seasons to come, remember as you are bombarded with commercials and news reports, by toys and jewelry, by cries of "I want this!" from all of society.... Remember that to truly celebrate this season, follow in the example of Jesus, and of those who celebrated Yule. Gather around a warm fire, tell stories, exchange small personal gifts, and enjoy the fellowship of each other. Our ancestors hid from a world of cold and dangers this time of year... we must learn to hide from a world of merchants and consumerism...

Or make our own whip out of cords.

~David Pyle

What is the Deist Alliance?

The Deist Alliance (DA) consists of various Deist groups who have formed a friendly alliance with each other in order to open channels of communication, share information, resources and advice, and generally work together toward a higher goal of promoting Deism to the world...

For more information about Deism or the Deist Alliance check out the following website: <http://deistalliance.org>

Famous “Freethinker” Quotes...

This section will feature quotes from famous deists and other "freethinkers". In this edition we will focus on quotes from Thomas Jefferson...

“Say nothing of my religion. It is known to my god and myself alone.”

“I am of a sect by myself, as far as I know.”

“I am for freedom of religion, and against all maneuvers to bring about a legal ascendancy of one sect over another.”

“I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of any party of men whatever in religion, in philosophy, in politics, or in anything else where I was capable of thinking for myself.”

“He who steadily observes the moral precepts in which all religions concur, will never be questioned at the gates of heaven as to the dogmas in which they all differ”.

“In the New Testament there is internal evidence that parts of it have proceeded from an extraordinary man; and that other parts are of the fabric of very inferior minds. It is as easy to separate those parts, as to pick out diamonds from dunghills.”

“...Man, once surrendering his reason, has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous, and like a ship without rudder, is the sport of every wind. With such person, gullibility which they call faith, takes the helm from the hand of reason, and the mind becomes a wreck.”

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

“Enlighten the people, generally, and tyranny and oppressions of body and mind will vanish like spirits at the dawn of day.”

