



RELIGIOUS LIBERTY vs EQUAL TREATMENT

It could easily be said that the essence of morality, and of its paler sibling, the law, is equal treatment. The idea of rules applicable to all represents a turning away from the primordial "Law of the Jungle," of people doing whatever they please simply because they possess the power to do it. But it was far from a complete repudiation. "Might makes right" survived in the qualification that, as Orwell put it, "some are more equal than others." Thus, in various times and places, privileges have been accorded to the wealthy, the powerful, "the nobility," to men, to those of certain ethnicities and skin colors and religious opinions over others and to heterosexuals over homosexuals. But these privileges have all been eroding.

It is not so obvious exactly how everyone is to treat everyone else equally. No one is going to treat everyone else just the same as they treat their own parents, spouse, child, and so on. To expect such would be madness. But those acting impersonally, on behalf of the government, for example, are certainly under such an obligation. It is the stuff of scandal for public officials, in their official roles, to favor their family and friends.

Now if everyone could provide completely for themselves, perhaps that would be the end of it. But even simple human societies consist in people being dependent on each other. The dignity, if not the survival, of individuals depend on such things as their participation in the division of labor and on the shifting roles of the young and the old. Therefore, equal treatment, or "equal opportunity," as it is also styled, must apply to the treatment of everyone by everyone else in their "public" social roles even if not in their "private" roles. That is, we may fairly include or exclude others as we please in some situations but not in others. In most cases, people readily recognize this. "The customer is always right" is a well-known slogan that reflects this ethic, even though everyone knows that the customer is not always right. The body of law relating to civil rights is an explicit expression of the understanding that, when it comes to commerce, in the marketplace of goods and services, invidious discrimination on the basis of such things as gender, skin color, ethnicity, religious affiliation

and sexual preference is unacceptable.

This brings us to recent items in the news. On the one hand, the erosion of "some are more equal than others" exceptions accounts for the crumbling of the last barriers against "gay marriage." On the other hand, there are now cases of bakers and florists and photographers getting into trouble for refusing business connected to gay weddings. Their claim is that by baking a cake or supplying flowers or taking photographs, these business people are being made to participate in the "sin" of homosexuality. A similar – but also very different – claim is made by corporations such as Hobby Lobby now appealing to the US Supreme Court in order not to have to purchase medical insurance for their employees that includes coverage for "sinful" medications and medical devices.

Such claims are spurious. Baking a cake for a gay wedding is not to participate in any way in a homosexual act. Not anymore than to bake a cake for a heterosexual couple's wedding is to participate in any way in whatever that couple do privately, whether it is "sinful" or otherwise distasteful or objectionable to those who bake the cake. Otherwise, an employee of a baker asked to participate in the baking of a cake for a gay wedding could refuse, be fired, and collect unemployment. In the alternative, especially if such a person found out after the fact that a cake they had helped make was for a gay wedding, they could sue their employer over the matter. Thus is religious liberty pitted against the law generally and the principle of equal treatment and civil rights specifically.

But this is nothing new. In the 19th Century there was another controversy of a similar kind. Tradition and popular opinion (if not Old Testament practice) were aligned against Mormon polygamy in the then-territory of Utah. The Mormons finally lost the battle – and their "religious liberty" – in 1879 when the US Supreme Court upheld a federal law against bigamy in the territories. The court said that: "Laws are made for the government of actions, and while they cannot interfere with mere religious belief and opinion, they may with practices." This follows from Thomas Jefferson's observation in his letter to the Danbury

(continued from page one)

Baptists – the very same letter in which is described the “Wall of Separation” represented by the First Amendment – that “the legislative powers of the government reach actions only, and not opinions.” The 1879 decision further observed that to conclude otherwise “would be to make the professed doctrines of religious belief superior to the law of the land, and in effect to permit every citizen to become a law unto himself.” The Mormon Church responded, in 1890, by changing its doctrine on polygamy. Utah became the 45th state in 1896.

The story today is made more complex by the 1993 Religious Freedom Restoration Act, as well as by peculiar interpretations of the concept of the legally incorporated “person.” But the basic issues remain the same. When theological doctrines prohibit doing something that the law requires or require what the law prohibits, it is the law that must prevail. For such doctrines, as important as they are to so many, are a matter of taste, and not a matter of true moral obligation. Nor should someone even have to play “the religion card” to remain loyal to their likes and dislikes. Disliking broccoli and enjoying the freedom of choosing never to eat it is not in conflict with serving it if someone works at a restaurant that includes broccoli on the menu, for instance.

The Bible clearly commands the execution of homosexuals. And of witches. And of blasphemers and others. But there is no “religious liberty” for Bible-worshippers to practice and enjoy the “free exercise” of this part of their religion. It is to be hoped that the US Supreme Court of 2014 will figure this out and agree with the US Supreme Court of 1879 that religious liberty does not “permit every citizen to become a law unto himself.”

**PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH:
“FREETHOUGHT
FAMILY VALUES”
>>> Sunday, May 4th, 2014 <<<
SHERATON GRAND DFW AIRPORT
SE CORNER OF 114 AND ESTERS**

**YOUR GENEROUS DONATIONS TO THE
NTCOF ARE NEEDED, APPRECIATED,
AND TAX-DEDUCTIBLE!!**

All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar , or our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at:

**- www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought -
JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!**

Social Luncheon: Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion. Today we meet at the Jason’s Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of 635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

Freethought Salon: Get together to discuss today’s service topic or other conundrums of interest for Freethinkers. Most Sundays, over breakfast, at the Hilton DFW Lakes Hotel restaurant in Grapevine beginning 10:30 AM; see the meetup site!

Game Night: The regular game night crew meets nearly every Friday night at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Risk, Rummikub, and other fun games!

Have Another Idea? Email or call us about it!

WHY GOD NEVER GOT TENURE

**He had only one publication, and no references.
It wasn’t even published in a refereed journal.
There are serious doubts he wrote it himself.
No one has been able to replicate his results.
When one experiment went awry, he tried to
cover it up by drowning his subjects.
He rarely taught class, saying “read the book.”
Some say he had his son teach the class.
He expelled his first two students for learning.
Although there were only 10 requirements,
most of his students failed his tests.
His office hours were infrequent and usually
held on a mountain top.**



DFWCOR

Dallas-Fort Worth Coalition of Reason

The North Texas Church of Freethought
The Fellowship of Unbelievers

Presenters:	Sarah Nejdil Tim Gorski
Welcome Coordinator	Mark Barnick
Videographer:	John Gauthier
WebMasters	Rusty and Sarah Nejdil

P.O.Box 202447, Arlington, TX 76006
(214) 702-2050

Website: www.churchoffreethought.org
Email: info@churchoffreethought.org