

People of Faith, People of Conscience

by Anitra Freeman

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Freethinkers : A History of American Secularism

by Susan Jacoby

Metropolitan Books, 2004

Hardcover, 432 pages, \$27.50

God's Politics : Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It

by Jim Wallis

HarperSanFrancisco, 2005

Hardcover, 416 pages, \$24.95

Jim Wallis, leader of the national church-based effort to address poverty, speaks often of the importance of being "people of faith." But comparing these two books, I think a more accurate term for what he is describing is "people of conscience." If faith is a commitment to values that you stand by come what may, then non-theists have faith as much and as often as theists do.

Both Susan Jacoby and Wallis describe an America that has barely begun to live out the commitment to human rights expressed in our founding documents, and has been over the past 30 to 40 years eroding what advances we had made. Both call for a recommitment to "liberty and jus-

tice for all," and illustrate in their equal passion, and the passion of those they describe and admire, that such a commitment transcends boundaries of theism and non-theism.

Jacoby shows how religious evangelicals allied with freethinkers and deists to ratify a Constitution with no mention of God or any appeal to Divine Authority. Instead of secularizing the nation, Jacoby explains, the secularized Constitution put the just-sprouting Protestant denominations on equal footing with established religions, which "has probably enabled religion to flourish throughout the 20th century in this country in ways that it doesn't in other developed nations."

Jim Wallis describes the coalition of evangelical as well as liberal Protestants, Catholics, and Jews who are now allying to speak out against the theology of American Triumphalism that passes for Christianity on the Right, and refocus the message on social justice: in particular, the related issues of poverty, racism, and the environment.

While Jacoby's book celebrates the respect for reason and rejection of "truth by decree" that is essential to carrying out such a commitment,

Wallis illustrates how emotional faith is not necessarily in conflict with free reason and the criticism of tradition. In an article on racism as "America's Original Sin," he writes that the nation "was established as a white society, founded upon the near-genocide of another race and then the enslavement of yet another."

Jacoby acknowledges the work of progressive Christians in working for the advance of democracy and civil rights, while providing a much-needed corrective to American's historical amnesia by publicizing the leadership of secularists, including agnostics and atheists, in those advances. While Wallis advances a very progressive agenda, he rarely acknowledges the contributions of atheists and agnostics, or even of those religious outside of the Jewish-Christian-Muslim family of faiths, in advancing the principles of conscience he proclaims for a new "spiritual" politics.

Yet both Jacoby and Wallis — and all of the people they praise and identify with — are committed to the same principles of human rights and common good; of Dr. Martin Luther King Junior's vision of "The Beloved Community."

These principles seem to Jacoby to be

rooted in secular values; to Wallis they seem rooted in the values of the God of the Bible, proclaimed by the prophets of the Bible — prophetic voices still lifted up today. Both regard the effort to incorporate these values into social life as an ongoing countercultural revolution. The revolution to establish liberty and justice for all may have begun in 1776, but it has never ended, and has a long way yet to go. Engaging in that effort is a profound moral commitment.

Both Jacoby and Wallis say that we need a revitalized commitment to those values to even regain what we once had, and to build on it. That both books are bestsellers today demonstrates that this message transcends theism or secularism.

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[Editor's note: *The Street News Service is a project of NASNA, the North American Street Newspaper Association, whose member papers publish with and on behalf of persons who are experiencing homelessness across the country. Loaves & Fishes is proud to be a continuing member of NASNA*]

Opportunity of a Lifetime!

by Pat Hughes

[Editor's note: *Pat was a beloved part of our community before her death in 2002. Her own experience of homelessness made her an uncompromising advocate for others. Just before Year 2000 she wrote the following which we have recalled from our archives:]*

Please join in this unique chance to make, not a "New Year's Resolution" list, but a compilation of desired "**Commitments for the new Millennium.**"

- To honor the need for fences, but agree that their height must allow for the reaching over of hands in the clasp of friendship
 - To uphold and cherish the innocence of children
- To learn and to use with respect the names of all we meet
 - To value silence
- To give because we love, not in order to feel gracious
 - To make "peace" a verb
- To uphold ourselves as unique gifts of the Creator
 - To fill our palettes with every nuance of color
 - To accept changes as growth
- To hum a little tune whenever possible

Save the Date

Meeting Ground's 2nd Annual Fall Gathering

• Saturday, October 22, 2005 •
11:00 - 1:30



Schaefer's Canal House
Chesapeake City, MD

Speaker: Michael Stoops

National Coalition for the Homeless

More information in July issue of *Loaves & Fishes*



A civilization of love

THAT did NOT DEMAND JUSTICE of people
would NOT BE A TRUE CIVILIZATION:

IT WOULD NOT DELINEATE GENUINE HUMAN RELATIONS.

IT IS A CARICATURE OF LOVE TO TRY TO COVER OVER
WITH ALMS WHAT IS LACKING IN JUSTICE,
TO PATCH OVER WITH AN APPEARANCE OF BENEVOLENCE
WHEN SOCIAL JUSTICE IS MISSING.

TRUE LOVE BEGINS by DEMANDING WHAT IS JUST
IN THE RELATIONS OF THOSE WHO LOVE.

- Dorothy Day