

IN CELEBRATION OF THOMAS PAINE: *THE AGE OF REASON AND THE REASON PAINE IS FORGOTTEN*

A presentation by John F. Makens and Cheryl Cerell to the meeting of the Freethinkers of Fayetteville, Arkansas, February 28, 2010

Text provided by John F. Makens

Jack begins:

Good Afternoon Fellow Free Thinker...

We wish to celebrate with you Thomas Paine's birthday January 29th, and also to celebrate another very important date...January 10, 1776. And why is this date important?

... it is the publication date of *Common Sense* which changed a war of rebellion against taxation to the concept of independence breaking away from the irrational rule of Monarchy. Prior to the publication of *Common Sense*, our forefathers such as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and George Washington, as shown in their own writings, did not want to break away from Monarchy. They only wanted lower taxes and to have more considerations from the King. As a matter of fact...how many of you are aware that there were many who after breaking away from Britain wanted George Washington to be King? Fortunately, Mr. Washington was influenced by Paine's logic and flatly refused!

So the question for today is; why does not this man, whom we owe so much to, have his name up there with Franklin, Washington, and Jefferson? Because he had the audacity and courage to write this book! [*Holding up "The Age of Reason"*] How many of you have read this book? [*A few respond with a show of hands.*] I highly recommend it!!!

While the world was ready for Paine's logic in *Common Sense*...they were not ready for his logic in *The Age of Reason*. And sadly...307 years later...they still aren't. Before examining *The Age of Reason*, let's see by a show of hands, how many of you think Paine was an atheist? A Deist? How many of you have no idea what he was?

Paine called himself a Deist. But what is a Deist? Let's look at some dictionary definitions. My dictionary--the *Reader's Digest Oxford*--says: "belief in the existence of a supreme being arising from reason rather than from revelation." Cheryl's dictionary, *The Online Webster*, says, "a movement or system of thought advocating natural religion, emphasizing morality, and in the 18th century denying the interference of the Creator with the laws of the universe." Cheryl's *Webster's* dictionary also says Deism is synonymous for Atheism. So, which is it? I believe we have some major semantic problems here to sort out.

Now, Cheryl will read to you from this pamphlet [*holding up*

"Excerpts from The Age of Reason", an eight-page publication by Carl Shapiro, Independent Publications] some specific quotes from Paine on the subject. And why it is...that we say Paine was actually a scientist who used religious terms to convey his thought about "God" and "Religion".

Cheryl proceeds:

As Jack said ...There is a semantic problem and I hope to show you that Paine really was a scientist at heart. So let's look at what Paine says and what he means by using such words as: Deism; God; theology; revelation; the word of God; Almighty power; heaven; Divine Origin, etc., in *The Age of Reason*. I believe he chose to use religious terms to express his logical scientific thoughts, in hopes that they would have better receptivity and be less threatening.

It is relevant to know the year Paine wrote *The Age of Reason*, 1793, and why Paine says:

I am well aware of the difficulties that attend the subject, and from that consideration had reserved it to a more advanced period of life. The circumstance that has now taken place in France makes it exceedingly necessary...

If it were not for the violence of the French Revolution Paine would have waited until the end of his life, for he KNEW it would NOT be a popular subject, just as it hadn't been for Giordano Bruno who was burned alive for saying the earth was not the center of the universe; and Galileo who was imprisoned at home for his scientific writings. Paine risked his life to save the King even though he didn't believe in Monarchy, and he was willing to risk his life again by speaking openly about false religious ideology.

Paine wrote:

I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish, Christian, Roman, Greek, Turkish, Protestant, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church. I do not mean by this declaration to condemn those who believe otherwise; they have the same right to their belief as I have to mine.

However, he points out that it is impossible to calculate "the moral mischief" that false theology produces in society.

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What did he mean by the use of the word theology?

He explains...

A **"True Theology"** is a system of thought that is verifiable.

He states:

that which is called natural philosophy, embracing the whole circle of science, of which astronomy occupies the chief place, is the study of the works of God, and the power and wisdom of God in His works, and is the true theology. Every science has for its basis a system of principles as fixed and unalterable as those by which the universe is regulated and governed.

In general he is saying true scientific principles are called "laws of nature". Paine states that man does not make these laws, he can only discover them, define them, and apply them to useful purposes such as: understanding the properties of a triangle and how it applies to a part of science called trigonometry which is used in geometry; surveying; navigation; architecture; astronomy; and predicting the motion of the heavenly bodies, as in eclipses. Man did not create the sun, or the eclipse, he only discovers the laws of nature to explain them.

Paine states:

It is the structure of the universe that has taught this knowledge to man. That structure is an ever-existing exhibition of every principle upon which every part of mathematical science is founded. The offspring of this science is mechanics; for mechanics is no other than the principles of science applied practically. It is from the study of the 'true theology' that all our knowledge of science is derived...

Paine goes on to refer to nature as an **"Almighty Power"** that cannot be falsified. In other words, Paine is saying God is Nature.

Then Paine makes it clear how we have benefited with a higher standard of living than "common animal(s)" by studying science; and what the proper role of preacher(s) in "every house of devotion should be." Here are his words:

All the knowledge man has of science and the machinery, by the aid of which his existence is rendered comfortable upon earth, and without which he would be scarcely distinguishable in appearance and condition from a common animal, comes from (understanding) the great machine and structure of the universe.

And Paine also states: "...every preacher ought to be a philosopher. Most certainly; and every house of devotion a school of science."

In essence, Paine is saying, **RIGHT IDEAS ARE VERIFIABLE AND THE ONLY "TRUE THEOLOGY"!**

I hope I have shown you, Paine was a scientist at heart, and strived to solve problems through rational thought. He wrote *The Age of Reason* to promote science as the mechanism for obtaining true knowledge. Paine also states: **"WE SHOULD SHOW OUR GRATITUDE TO OUR SCIENTIFIC ANCESTORS FOR UPON THEM LAY THE IMPROVEMENT OF OUR LIVES HERE ON EARTH!"** **THUS WE HONOR PAINE!**

Jack resumes:

Now, where have you heard the phrase; "Nature's God"? Please note...it is mentioned in the *Declaration of Independence*:

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for

one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

Did you catch within that beginning of the *Declaration of Independence* I just read, *Laws of Nature and of Nature's God*? This is only one of the many connections to Paine, and his ways of expression, in the *Declaration of Independence*. You might say it's just a coincidence, however I recommend some interesting sources with very strong evidence that Paine most likely was the original author of the *Declaration of Independence* [holding up Joseph Lewis' book: "THOMAS PAINE, AUTHOR OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE", and the V-76 CD set by Andrew J. Galambos: "Thomas Paine, The American Revolution and Your Future". And I mentioned there are additional materials at our table and invited them to see Cheryl at the table, stating that Cheryl is an "authorized" representative of Galambos' works and will be glad to answer any questions they may have.]

Was Paine a Deist, Atheist, or religious? I think it comes down to being a semantic problem. Actually semantics is a MAJOR fundamental problem in general, as Andrew J. Galambos, a physicist, points out in his courses for creating a Rational Social Structure. [holding up Galambos' book of definitions]

Paine says, "...MY COUNTRY IS THE WORLD AND MY RELIGION IS TO DO GOOD..." Fraud, force and violence were abhorrent to him. He was a man of high ideals based on rational thought and principles who had the courage to confront irrational, unpopular ideas. This [holding up "The Age of Reason"] is why he became unpopular, and forgotten. He was a rational man in a predominantly irrational world.

When you read Paine's works, the picture will become even clearer to you of his scientific mind and his drive to make a better world based on rational thought. He definitely qualifies as one of the greatest "Free thinkers of all time!" I brought copies of "Excerpts of *The Age of Reason*" as well as other things I think you might find of interest; so be sure to check our table. [Here I told the audience about my Thomas Paine children's essay contest that was written up in the Spring Bulletin of Thomas Paine Friends. And during this, the picture of the winner, Isaiah Newburn, showing the coin-medal he won, was being projected on the screen.]

[And here, Cheryl presented the co-founders, Darrel Henschell and Doug Krueger, of the Fayetteville, AR Freethinkers Society with a silver Franklin mint Thomas Paine coin-medal in appreciation for their continuing work in bringing rational thought to our community.]

I then concluded our presentation with:

WE OWE MUCH TO PAINE, AND HIS WORKS.

To summarize, they are:

**BREAKING AWAY FROM MONARCHY - COMMON SENSE
DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE**

ABOLITIONIST - His first writing on anti-slavery

THE RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUALS, clearly spelled out

in another of his best sellers.... RIGHTS OF MAN

And this work, last but not the least...THE AGE OF REASON

THANK YOU FOR HELPING US CELEBRATE THIS GREAT MAN

WHOM I BELIEVE SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN!