

Brittney wrote:

Hey Bob,

Before I continue, I wanted to tell you about a memory that I have of you. We were walking along High Street, probably after class and maybe after eating lunch. Anyway, someone walked up and asked you for directions to some place of business (maybe The Flying Pizza?) and I could see that the person was blind, but you didn't notice they were blind, and you just gave them verbal directions. They started walking away, and I said, "Bob, I think he's blind," and so you immediately caught up to him and I think, if I am remembering correctly, you actually took him by the arm and helped him either to the place, or close to it. I have always remembered this.

Just so we are perfectly clear, I should tell you that I do not consider myself a Christian. It's not that I don't necessarily believe in God and Jesus, but I just don't believe in the worship aspect. My husband is a Buddhist (Theravada) and there is a lot that I like about that particular Buddhism, but I am not a Buddhist. We plan on teaching our children about Buddhism and about Christianity--I mean the basic themes of both religions, which are actually quite complementary when you study them. I don't know what you would think about this, but it feels right to us. I am not an agnostic (I don't think so) but I probably identify with agnosticism more than anything else. I kind of get the idea from your writings that you are hostile to agnostics, or at the very least you dislike them.

The reason I am telling you this, is because I don't feel like I can really comment on what you wrote to your friend about his religious questions/problems. And also because I have never explicitly stated to you, since we reconnected on Facebook, what my religion actually is, and I didn't want you to just assume that I am Christian. Since I am in your confidence regarding your friend's problem, I wanted to be as honest as possible. When I wrote in an earlier message, how I agreed with you on the things that are important (regarding your writing), I meant the things that are important to ME, but they may not necessarily be the things that are most important to YOU. And also, I read a quote somewhere, something like "you have your truth and I have my truth, but it isn't the same truth". I don't why I am putting that in, but I am just thinking of it. When you friended me, and I saw that you had written something called "Truths of God", I had some serious reservations, but after reading it I was so relieved. It was Christianity as I feel it should be.

So, now that is said.

I hope your friend will be okay.

Brittney

Britt,

Your blind man story is a sweet memory that I'd have never thought of again had you not brought it up. I never would have thought of it, but when you say it, I can see him. Being too preoccupied to notice he was blind, and then helping him on his way when you pointed it out are both just the way I would do damned near everything my whole life. People think I've changed so much, but it isn't nearly true as they think. I still call myself a conservative. At the time you described I called myself an agnostic. I'm not ashamed of it even a little. I talked about God in a way that was skeptical of religion, but I didn't have an understanding to communicate in return other than my skepticism. "This can't be, That can't be," but not, "this is." I think that never being willing to settle on flawed or amoral ideas gave me the drive to understand the things I do later in life. I've always been a late bloomer, and much of my life it made me feel inadequate, but it is not so now.

It is relevant to earlier discussions to add that the first time I was with a woman I was already 19, and it was in John the cop's sister's bedroom. That may seem a bit off color, but it might give you some insight into my frustration with John. He wrote the kindest thing in my yearbook that anyone wrote. One of the kindest things written to me in my life. The relevant part was something like, "Bob, of all the people I've known in high school, you've grown the most." He was a philosopher wise beyond his years at 18. He engaged in a debate a woman from MADD who came to our school to threaten us about graduation parties with drinking, and I was floored by his understanding and courage. His dad was a multi-millionaire construction contractor, and John had everything, kind of like a non-violent Christian Slater in Heathers. But every time I saw him afterward, a year later, two years later, four years after that, it was like he was still the same person, and I had aged somehow. He decided early on, "Republicans rule, conservatives rule," and what they tell him becomes his doctrine. I want to shake him and just wake him up, but he will not, can not, engage if his belief system is threatened.

And so many so-called conservatives are like him. Do you remember when an American base in Beirut was bombed, and two-hundred or so American Soldiers lost their lives around 1985? Ronald Reagan tearfully apologized to the American people and pulled our troops out of Lebanon. Reagan talked tough all the time, but he was talking about the world of the 1980s, where we had to worry more about nuclear annihilation. In some ways he was right for that time. When I've told that story to people who have this glorified idea of war with the Arab world, their faces just go blank. They remember the rhetoric, but not the events. It's like they can't process the idea that Ronald Reagan was a human being who would pull American troops out when there wasn't a good reason for them to be there. It scares me, because they have nurtured the murder in their hearts and can't see it. They don't see an eventuality where their own children are dying and committing murder.

I'm not anti-war, as you seem to be. And I don't fault you for that. As a generality, better anti-war than pro-war. I'm probably getting this wrong, but in one of our last conversations years ago, you likened yourself to some kind of large Australian jackrabbit that could kick something to death, if it had to. I found that very endearing. Given that

you have kids around dinosaur-loving age, would you like to guess the dinosaur I've always likened myself to, since the age of five? But I'm not anti-war. I'm simply against war that is unnecessary, or done for evil purposes. But I'm against anything unnecessarily hurtful that's done for evil purposes. War should be avoided if it can be. So should killing people who don't need to be killed, locking people up who don't need to be imprisoned, and enslaving people for any reason. But people start wars for all kinds of evil reasons, greed, vengeance, fear of attack, and someone has to fight them.

Just a small aside, but in the vein of what people remember about you: I saw my conflicted friend D. at our fifteen-year class reunion, and I probably hadn't really spoken to him in more than twenty. He said, "You know what I remember about you? Our fifth grade teacher said someone had written a swear word on the computer, and no one was going to get afternoon recess unless the guilty party confessed. After a pause you (me) stood up and said, "I did it." (I had gotten the high score on some space invaders game on TRS 80, and where you enter your name, I typed FUC. Then the computer froze up and I panicked and sat down.) The teacher said you spelled it wrong, and you said, I thought if I spelled it wrong I wouldn't get in trouble. And she said, Well, you're in trouble now, Mr." One of my best childhood moments, and I would never have remembered it if he didn't point it out to me.

But to the core of your response, you wrote: "I kind of get the idea from your writings that you are hostile to agnostics, or at the very least you dislike them." I can only ask that you go back and read that section again. I wrote earlier about my friend who only saw "hate" in my writing. I think there's something about the things I write that makes people feel personally challenged, and frankly I don't know how to fix that, or if it should be changed at all. But I have no specific qualms with people who call themselves agnostics or, like yourself, have a very real faith in God but refuse to claim any particular religion, which I respect in the utmost. Your idea expressed in the quote above is completely inaccurate. Frankly I made you for a Buddhist from something on your web page. I do oppose Christians and Muslims that use their faith to encourage evil and harsh judgments. Christians who say Christ is God defend the evil actions of so-called Christians with disturbing uniformity, and I say they act against God in so doing. Devout Muslims sit silent while other Muslims go nuts and even kill people because someone has depicted Mohammed in a picture, or some other harsh enforcement of their religion, and I say they act against God in so doing. Atheists say there is no hope, there is no God, willfully acting to take away from people their faith in God, and I say they act against God in so doing. Of course, not all people of these faiths do these things, but the vast majority of each are willing to group themselves with them. I don't know much about Buddhism, but I can say my impression is that places where Buddhism is the primary religion tend to be dominated by dictatorial regimes with harsh laws that are not Godly. Not knowing enough about Buddhism, I could say as an outside observer that it gives its followers a fireproof room to meditate in while the world burns. Still, better to be a faithful sheep than a ravenous wolf. My only comment on agnostics was more about believing that there is a reason for faith in God, and for doing when the time for doing comes. But that applies to all people, whatever faith or non-faith they may have.

I told you in this letter that I'm not against war, but it shouldn't be read as saying I'm pro-war. I think war is the last alternative and one that we should avoid if there is any right way it can be avoided. I still believe the Iraq war will prove to be a terrible mistake. And I see this country, spearheaded by the so-called Christian church, gearing up for a much bigger war that can be avoided. Many Muslim peoples have been gearing up for this war for awhile now, but that doesn't give Christians leave to believe the way they do. The future is tenuous. We can fight an all-out war against one another, and kill hundreds of millions, which the villainous and profit-seeking choose, or we can find a way to back down from it and continue to engage in mostly peaceful relations. I mean to see that we choose the latter, but if we don't, and I fear that our hope for peaceful resolution is fading in religious zeal, I pray that the people that remain see and come to believe that God always intended that we find a way to live together for the betterment of all, ensuring that all have the opportunity to be free to make their own choices in life. It's our only chance, really. We have to have rules, but they're really not all that complicated. That's what Truths of God is about.

But it won't matter if no one reads it. You have given me counsel that I have not earned from you. I can't tell you how much I appreciate it. I love your honesty, and don't doubt it for a second. I think you know by now what I'm about. If you want to help me do it, I can only try to appreciate it more. But I'm glad to have your input in any case.

Bob.