

# Seneca Update

In this age of tolerance...

By Russell Pangborn



Here at the college, the Computer Studies students aren't just agonizing over that unsolvable program application they have been having nightmares about. Some of the bigger questions in life also intrude in their discussions. That fact was drawn to my attention recently when in a washroom stall. Someone had written something religious and then proceeded to draw up a tally sheet entitled "Mid Crap Survey". The two categories were Atheist and Deist. There were five check marks under Deist and six under Atheist. My marking instincts immediately kicked in because occasionally someone cheats on a test or an exam. In this case, the pro deist blurb stating there has to be a God was written in a heavy black marker. Four of the five check marks below Deist used the same type of marker. The final check mark was in ink. The six atheist check marks were in pens of different colours—black, blue etc. It looks like the initiator of the survey was stacking the outcome!

You can find this type of discussion online also. I started thinking of the differences between the old fashioned washroom graffiti discussion and the online postings we encounter. One participant of the washroom discussion wrote, "This imbecile argument is over 5,000 years old ... do you really think you can end it". That point could also easily be made online in a discussion thread. One religious proponent had to write fairly small on the wall to fit in his argument about all the marvels of the universe climaxing in the statement "... the only answer is God" If this was handled on the internet, a discussion thread may limit the reply size. But, the writer could also go on forever with their own Web page and never ending links defending the existence of a deity.

For the truly undecided, the sheer volume of information on the internet versus the wall wins hands down. I can't google all the washroom walls that are wrestling with this issue.

One writer chose to state something that only really applies to the washroom stall wall. "If there was a God, he'd let me take a crap in piece, instead of being coerced into reading what you idiots wrote". Good point. It is pretty boring sitting there. You can't help reading all this stuff. Most of the time I choose what to read online. Anytime a page redirects me to something not desired, a simple click usually gets me out of there. Of course there are malicious things sometimes included on a Web page or a download that are capable of wrecking my computer. But, as long as I don't touch the washroom stall wall, I shouldn't get any viruses.

I guess both mediums are capable of getting the facts wrong or interpreting the facts incorrectly.

Then, there is the issue of anonymity. Most discussion threads require you to include some name. Even if you name is "Weirdo", there is a digital trail to what you submitted or to your posted Web page. It is a little tougher to track who wrote the wall posting denigrating atheists as "immoral bastards that should be exterminated".

Removal of offensive material is definitely easier on the Web. A few clicks and it is gone. I'm sure the maintenance staff here at my building would love to be able to do that with the stall wall. Unfortunately they have to rely on a good cleaner and some elbow grease.




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The most important thing in this sort of discussion (whether it is on a washroom stall or on the Internet) is tolerance. Here is my two cents worth. It is an excerpt from a letter to the editor that the Toronto Star called me about publishing—but ultimately did not.

Recently **Larry King** asked **Rick Warren** a question after his interviews with **Obama** and **Mccain**. Larry wanted to know if there would be anyone Rick would not want to see in the White House. Mr. Warren responded that he would have a big problem with an atheist because they do not have a set of morals. In this age of tolerance Mr. Warren would be okay with a candidate from any other religion. Just not atheists.

What galls me is nobody blinks when these types of comments are made. The media reacts strongly to someone who states Jews, Arabs, Christians are (insert your derogatory comment here). But we atheists, who have undergone as much intense soul searching as any religious person are considered substandard people when it comes to morality. I know that none of us could successfully run for political office stating our strong beliefs.

I do consider myself a moral person. My wife is very religious and we have gotten along fine for twenty nine years. She doesn't assume I will engage in reprehensible behaviour because she knows that how you act is more important than a label of Jew, Christian, Muslim or Atheist. 

... [if] one person, acting from conscience and love, is able to neutralize bigotry, imagine, then, what an entire community, working together, might do." — <http://www.tolerance.org>

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