

# Atheists of Florida CHAPTER MEETINGS:

## MIAMI:

Sunday, December 17, at the Ft. Lauderdale Main Library, 2:00 pm in the Boardroom. Additional information - Atheist Hotline: (305) 936-0210.

## TAMPA:

Our final meeting for the year will be a social gathering combined with the Humanists of the Suncoast. Note, we will meet at a different location than usual. December 30, Clearwater MAIN Library, on Osceola between Cleveland and Drew Streets at 2:00 pm. Bring snacks to share, swap, bring something to drink, we'll have cups and ice and napkins. This isn't going to be a meal, and the chairs will be set up for smaller groups and socializing. If you're here, be there!

## MANA-SOTA:

Sunday, Dec. 31, 1:30 to 3:30, at the Marie Selby Public Library, 1001 Boulevard of the Arts, Sarasota.

## Letters

*continued*

"I have been sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24). "Do not take the children's (Jews) bread and throw it to the dogs" (non-Jews) (Matthew 15:26); and that he shall rule the nations with an iron rod (Revelation 2:27, 12:5 and 19:15). And those are but a few of the absurdities and contradictions recorded in the New Testament as said by Jesus.  
*Mike Perdomo*  
Miami

## Atheist discrimination OK

Editor:

On October 21, the Associated Press reported nationwide that President Clinton endorsed a bill that would end job discrimination against homosexuals. The President stated that, "Individuals should not be denied a job on the basis of something that has no relationship to their ability to perform their work". Clinton noted that in 41 states, job discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is legal. In those states, men and women can be fired for their sexual orientation even when it has no bearing on their job performance. Of course, this bill excludes, among others, religious schools and organizations.

They can continue to discriminate against human beings because of, among other things, their sexual orientation. This terrible bit of hypocrisy was added to by none other than Senator Ted Kennedy when he stated that, "It is a reaffirmation of his fundamental and core belief that we as a society should free ourselves from the negative forces of discrimination and bigotry."

It seems strange that, before he became President of this great Christian nation, President Clinton was the governor (and protector of the constitution) of the state of Arkansas. Throughout his tenure there and even to this very day Arkansas' constitution states in Article 19, Miscellaneous Provisions, Section 1, Atheists disqualified from holding office (in) the civil departments of this state, nor be competent to testify as a witness in any court. This requirement was sustained by the United States District Court of Appeals. I wonder what would happen if the word "atheists" was replaced by words like "Jews", "Baptists" or even "blacks" in the above document?

Alas, I guess it's still true that we proud atheists of America are indeed "the last minority."  
*Edward J. McDougall, Sr.*  
Sarasota

**A**

8 December 1995

*Atheists of Florida*

# Atheists of Florida

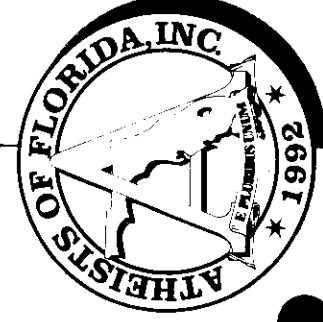
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Volume IV Number 9

December, 1995



## We're making progress

**HARDLY MARKING TIME:** Atheists of Florida continues to grow, expand and progress.

In 1995, we again produced twelve *Atheist of Florida Forum* cable access programs which were shown in Dade and Hillsborough Counties, as well as St. Augustine Cable and several outlets in other states. In October, the *Forum* was selected as a winner in the 1995 Southern Sunshine Video Festival Awards under the category of "Educational", Division of Series Media Professional. The Festival's second annual awards drew nearly 160 entries.

Thanks to the efforts of member Ed Corl, the Tampa Bay Chapter has established an outdoor outreach stand which appears regularly at the University of South Florida's weekly outdoor fair and the Circus McGurkis (*see article within*). A of F also participated in protests at the Promise Creepers rally in St. Petersburg and a rally in downtown Tampa, as well as the Rally for Reason in Downtown St. Petersburg and the Earth Day festivities in Tampa.

The Atheist Alliance convention in Los Angeles found an impressive turnout from the A of F member society. That will be followed by the second Alliance convention in April, 1996 hosted by the Minnesota member society in Minneapolis.

The Mark Twain Scholarship Fund

is sponsoring the first competition for scholarship grants (*September newsletter*).

In September, Atheists of Florida was deemed eligible for the Combined Federal Campaign Fund, a project realized by President Iznatakos after two years of effort.

And the newsletter you are holding was produced entirely in house by our new copy machine. This will generate considerable savings on our newsletter production costs and help our treasury grow without increasing our monthly dues. Thanks primarily to Treasurer Charles Ross for the primary contributions for the purchase, with help from Mike Perdomo.

Renewal time is at hand and let's face it--we are the *only* atheist organization in Florida and we have no reservations about speaking out loudly about state/church separation issues. But the more people we represent, the louder we speak. We are very optimistic about our future and need the help and support of everyone who receives this newsletter to continue. Besides, we have some great features planned for upcoming newsletters which you won't want to miss. Renew or join today!

## Coming in January, 1996...

Most of us are familiar with the Xian religion because of its prominence in our society. But how much do you know about the other major religions of the world. Many of our members really do know it all, but for those of us who aren't quite sure about some of the others, Atheists of Florida will present a scenario of a different religion in each newsletter in 1996. Also, Jim Strayer comes up with Biblical answers to the ten commandments.

**YES, THREE!** WE ARE! at the beginning of the holiday season, a deeply religious time of year where most of us celebrate by attending services at the mall of our choice. Shortly following these acts of worship, we participate in the traditional "spend the day with people you couldn't stand except for the fact they're related to you" ritual in honor of our masochistic ancestors, who got out while the getting was good.

Yes, it's a time of peace and love and joy and, well,

suicide. The highest rates occur around the holidays, because for most of us it really is a time of depression and stress. Of course, if you're a loving Xian, you can always cheer yourself up by sending out hate mail.

Yep, I got myself another one of those lovely notes from an admiring Xian reader. I'm not sure where he read me (I'm assuming it's a he, which as you'll see is a compliment to women), whether it was an A of F newsletter or an e-mail message or what. It was postmarked Meadville, MS, a town of roughly 600 in the southwest section of the state (according to my atlas). This will take on a note of irony as you read the note:

"You are so funny!!! you are from so far back in the swamps of Florida. Maybe you need to get out and look around and see the world! God loves even you!!"

Handprinted, on yellow, lined paper, unsigned, no return address. Improper capitalization and sentence fragments are identical to the original.

#### From the swamps

Now, I realize that Pinellas County, one of the most densely populated counties in the United States, might not compare to the cosmopolitan center of Mississippi where the writer resides. At least, however, we do have access to atlases, which would have revealed to the writer that the City of Seminole alone has a population roughly eight times that of his own recurring metropolis, and that the surrounding cities of Clearwater, Tampa, and St. Petersburg hold a combined population roughly one thousand times the size of his burg. Swamps? He's seen too many Burt Reynolds movies.

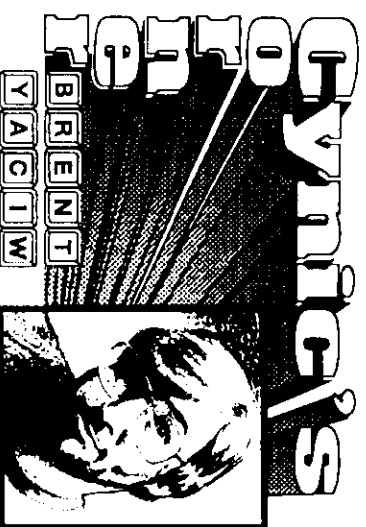
This is not counting the other assorted cities around like Dunedin, Palm Harbor, Lutz, Plant City, Bradenton, all within easy driving range. I could probably see "more of the world" within an hour and a half drive than he could in his entire state!

Of course, unlike our writer, I've been a few other places. I've been to Mississippi, as well as New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska, Iowa, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, Missouri, Tennessee, Kentucky, Georgia, West Virginia, North and South Carolina, Canada and Mexico. Not that any of these places convinced me there was a god, which is apparently what I'm supposed to believe after having "seen the world." Maybe if I checked my brain with my luggage—and it got lost!

#### Ignorance not limited to small-town clowns

Well, enough about the intelligence and tolerance of this particular bozo; I'd rather talk about a more general concern, and that's the absurd idea that Xianity, or "our Xian roots," bear responsibility for whatever tolerance we enjoy in this country. The letter writer above was comparatively mild. Some letters I've received have been much more obvious in their hatred, and some actions clearly not friendly or tolerant. Yet a Jewish professor of religion at the University of South Florida, Jacob Neusner, recently wrote a column titled: "Christian roots make us a nation tolerant of all religions." I wonder what planet he's spent the last few years on?

I suppose the murders of doctors at women's health clinics around the country by Christians were an example of the lack of threat from the Radical Religious Reich? The burned clinic right here in St. Petersburg? Maybe the hate mail I received when I announced in the University of South Florida *Oracler* that I was an atheist, several years ago, or the occasional hate-filled pieces I receive like the one quoted



**Those holidays again!**



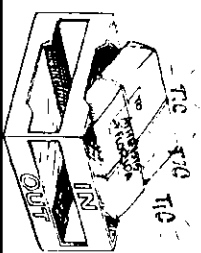
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The A of F newsletter is provided free to our members as a medium of exchange on a space-available basis. Articles may be edited for clarity or length.  
Atheists of Florida, Inc. is affiliated with the national Atheist Alliance for purposes of information exchange.

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# Letters



## Priced at what they're worth

*As you can see from this letter, some nuts are trying to give out bibles to 5th graders in Volusia County. A of F board member Jim Strayer sent this to The News Journal in Daytona Beach.*

### Greetings,

Dick McCoy, president of the West Volusia Camp of the Gideons has made a request to the to the school board to allow Gideon New Testament Bibles to be handed out on school buses. The Atheists of Florida have never made such a pompous request to hand out their materials because they believe in the constitution and that religion is a family matter. Apparently Mr. McCoy does not. McCoy states, "The free distribution of the Bible to school children in the state of Florida is not against the law."

The Atheists of Florida publish a brochure titled *The Truth about Atheism*. I wonder how Mr. McCoy would feel about an Atheist standing next to a Gideon at a school bus

while both handed out materials that invade the privacy of the family.  
Just as there are families that do not want atheist materials given freely to their children, there are also families that do not want the Bible given freely to their children. Mr. McCoy's request is arrogant to say the least. The family should decide if their children read religious or atheist material, not Mr. McCoy and the Gideons.

Jim Strayer  
Ormond Beach, FL

## Yes and No at the same time

Very good and interesting the article *Our National Neurosis* written by Norman B. LeClair on the September 1995, Vol IV, #7 newsletter. We might as well add the contradictory sayings that show in the New Testament.

While there are verses that depict Jesus as saying, "Love your enemy" (Luke 6:27); "Love your neighbor" (Luke 10:27); "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" (Luke 20:25) and others, there are also verses that clearly contradict those sayings, like "I have come to cast fire upon the earth" (Luke 12:49); "Anybody coming to me that does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26); "Bring my enemies who do not want me to reign over them and kill them in my presence" (Luke 19:27);

(continued next page)

Beginning in 1996, we will code mailing labels with your expiration date. When you renew it will show a date of 12/96 indicating your membership is active through December, 1996.

The stalwart workers of Atheists of Florida have worked very hard to try to make the organization more productive and our future more secure. And remember, we are a completely democratic operation which doesn't pay out one dime of your membership dues in salary or compensation to anyone. In fact, better than that, we have some compensation for you!

Bumper stickers aren't just for bumpers. The "Freedom from Religion" sticker including the A of F logo all in white on a red field can be applied to your favorite garbage can, men's room stall door, phone booth or whatever.

Our bookmarkers are adorned with a famous thought-provoking statement regarding religion and

state/church separation, our logo and phone number on yellow or orange.

But most vital is your copy of our first official publication, *Women, Religion and Power* by Florence Morganroth (a \$5 value) mailed to you when your check clears. You'll receive all three items when you join or renew your membership.

What can you do for us? Send us your favorite religious joke for inclusion in our latest project, the A of F joke notepad. These 4 1/4" by 5 1/2" pads will feature a joke per page and an occasional cartoon and regardless of the price, you can look forward to receiving your own pad when you renew for 1997. If you just can't wait and we get it done before the end of next year, we'll save one for you anyway.

Please be sure to help us continue what we've worked so hard to establish by joining or renewing your membership today.

## Atheists of Florida, Inc. MEMBERSHIP / RENEWAL

Simply cut this section of this page which includes your mailing label on the reverse side and send to:

Atheists of Florida, Inc. / P.O. Box 530102 / Miami, FL 33153-0102

- Sustaining: \$50.00     Couple: \$40.00  
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## South Carolina dragged into 20th Century

CHARLESTON, SC—*The Freethought Observer* reports that Herb Silverman has succeeded in reversing that state's laws banning atheists from holding public office.

Silverman made a run for the governor's office in 1990. That necessitated his filing a suit against the state for violation of his religious liberties in requiring him to take a god-affirming oath if he were elected. However, since he was not elected and consequently had no occasion to take such an oath, he was denied standing.

Later applying to become a notary public, he crossed out the word "God" from the applicant's oath. His application was rejected, the first ever of over 33,000 applications. Having won the suit, it is now being appealed to the state Supreme Court.

## Justices reject case on religious speech

*At least we won this one!*

WASHINGTON — Acting on a case that has drawn considerable attention from the religious right, the Supreme Court last month turned down an appeal that argued a public school teacher's refusal to accept a ninth-grader's research paper on the life of Jesus amounted to discrimination against religious speech.

The student, Brittney Settle, sued the Dickson County, Tenn., school board after she received a grade of zero on the paper she submitted to fulfill an assignment to write a research paper on any topic using four sources.

The teacher had earlier rejected Brittney's proposal to write about Jesus on the ground that the girl's strong Christian beliefs and deep knowledge of the subject would make it difficult for her to approach the topic in a scholarly way or to accept criticism of her paper.

"People don't send their children to school for a teacher to get in a dialogue with personal religious beliefs," the

teacher, Dana Ramsey, said at a school board hearing, held after the girl's father complained about the grade. The school board backed the teacher, and two lower federal courts rejected the family's argument that the teacher's action violated the student's First Amendment right to free speech.

"Learning is more vital in the classroom than free speech," the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said in May when it dismissed the student's appeal from an unfavorable U.S. District Court ruling.

The student's lawyers argued in their Supreme Court appeal that the case was an example of "viewpoint discrimination" against religious speech that was "disturbingly recurrent" in the public school setting. A week before the ruling at a congressional hearing on a proposed school prayer amendment, those arguing for greater accommodation of religion in the schools invoked the case as an example of public school hostility toward religion.

## Facts of choice

MONTGOMERY, AL — The Alabama School Board voted 6-1 last month to include a disclaimer in public school biology textbooks telling students that evolution is a "controversial theory," not a fact.

The insert reads in part: "This textbook discusses evolution, a controversial theory some scientists present as a scientific explanation for the origin of living things, such as plants, animals and humans."

"No one was present when life first appeared on earth. Therefore, any statement about life's origins should be considered as theory, not fact."

School Board Vice President Ethel Hall, who cast the only dissenting vote, said the wording of the insert is "too complicated" for ninth-graders. But education itself, it seems, is too complicated for the administrators.

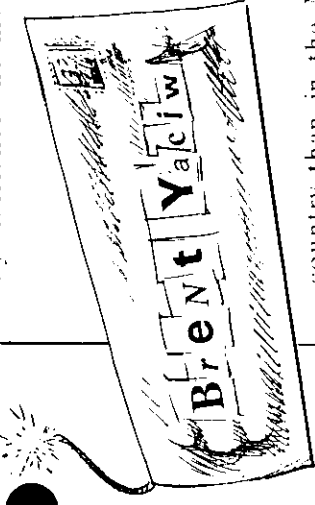
They apparently listened to James Payton, representing the First Baptist Church in Dadeville at a public hearing before the vote, who said, "evolution comes from the devil." One teacher described the insert as "foolish."

## Atheists would probably get the chair

TRENTON, N.J.—A state judge, citing the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah as evidence that homosexuality is immoral, upheld the Boy Scouts' ban on gays.

Superior Court Judge P. McGann found the Scouts did not violate state discrimination law when it expelled James Dale as an assistant scoutmaster in 1990 after learning he is gay. **A**

above — from all over the country — from loving, tolerant Xians, because I publish a column in freethought newsletters? Perhaps by "tolerance" he means the upraised middle



finger my "Darwin Fish" plaque or bumper stickers evoke from motorists with crosses or fishes of their own on their vehicles. Where has he been?

Sure, it might be safer — now — in this Middle East, but that's only because the *secular* nature of our country has kept the fanatics in check. So far.

## Especially the Greeks should know better

FT. PIERCE — Christos Tzanetakos, President of Atheists of Florida, spotted an article in the *Greek-American Press*, published in Ft. Lauderdale. Although written in Greek, Tzanetakos was able to compose a translation which appears below. A photo of Tzanetakos standing beside Mana-sota chapter director and A of F board member Ed McDougall, Sr. accompanies the article. It is insulting not only for Tzanetakos but also for the organization.

After discussing the situation with attorney Mark Trop, it was decided to bring suit against the publication. Tzanetakos has provided personal funds to cover filing fees and Trop has agreed to take the case pro-bono. The article:

## And then they are saying...In which god do you believe?

Well, what do you think? Does it take much here in Florida to go nuts? A little bit the heat, and a little bit the fruitcakes of Florida; in other

MARK ANDREW TROP  
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However, the violence has been escalating, pumped up by the myths and distortions spread by the far right he so willingly overlooks.

In the letter I wrote in response to this column, I reminded Mr. Neusner that hundreds of Jews in Germany underestimated the threat Adolf Hitler posed, and paid with their lives for the error. I sincerely hope Mr. Neusner, along with freethinkers like myself, need not pay the same price for his complaisance. We can never underestimate the potential threat of the RRR, and those who attempt to mollify our concerns by distorting history and crediting Xianity with "tolerance" do no one any favors, including themselves. **A**

words, some of the leaders of the churches and organizations with their oddities can lead you to insanity.

The fruitcake in our photograph is Christos Tzanetakos, President of the Atheists in our area, who is also in search of believers who do not believe.

In final analysis my friends, I think a rumor must be going around in the other parts of the country that the Greek-Americans of our area are knuckleheads (xaxoxaroumenoi), or [happy idiots] — what other explanation can I find? Just look at what is happening around you and you will understand that I am not exaggerating. Just think what fruitcakes surround us and they think that they can fool us...Mitropoulos, Kalonaros, Pleyritis, and there is no end, unless our "friend" the president of the Atheists, Tzanetakos, was a member of St. Dimitrios church and after seeing everything going around he shouted, "Better be an atheist than to deal with: Kapoto, Katicika, Athanasako and Mitropoulos." **A**

## NEW MEMBERS

Jose R. Solorzano - North Miami Beach  
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Scott A. Riesner - North Miami Beach  
Joe Redner - Tampa  
Greg Antoine - Miami  
Dan Bridges - Aurora, CO  
Dr. Marvin Engle - North Palm Beach  
**RENEWALS**  
Greg L. Alexander, Mountain View, CA  
Steven Miles, Gainesville

*Holiday Romance and other writings for children*  
(including *The Life Of Our Lord* and *A Child's History Of England*)

by Charles Dickens  
— review by Patrick Bens



Seasonal sleuthing

How religious was Charrels Dickens?



CHARLES DICKENS

HOLIDAY ROMANCE  
AND OTHER WRITINGS FOR CHILDREN  
WITH ALL THE ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS  
EVERYMAN DICKENS

Atheists of Florida charter member Patrick Bens is a native of Belgium now living in Miami

literary work. Yet, with children in mind, this naive religious guide is best read before, or perhaps after, and possibly, as I have done, parallel to *A Child's History of England*, a brutal, morbid telltale that no child dares to read.

We know from his first major work, *The Pickwick Papers*, how antilethical Sam Weller and his father were. This aggressive attitude permeates further in *Oliver Twist* in a variety of ways and is symbolized climactically in his next novel, when Nicholas Nickleby throws punches at an abusive evangelical headmaster, his boss. *Little Dorrit* shows still more rejection of church authority.

Is Jay Cee the bearded Jew in Fagin? Is the Mount of Olives in the name *Oliver*? Is Judas the traitor in Nancy? Is London Bridge Dickens' Gethsemane?

By rewriting history and His Story, Dickens toys with established dogmas in a dangerous way. How could Charles Dickens as a famous father talk to his twelve-year-old son Charley about the second commandment which implies masturbation ("Love thyself") and homosexuality ("Love thy neighbor as thyself")?

Controversially in *The Life of Our Lord*, Dickens portrays Jay Cee as no special human being with faults like any man. It even amused my ignorance when I read that Dickens makes Jay Cee look like an accomplice to a petty crime when he sends two apostles to steal an ass so he can ride into Jerusalem as if it were on a stolen bicycle. Common humans however do not perform magic, called miracles, and so soon enough the real Jay Cee comes out of the hat as a clever quack and a gang leader who bullied the Jewish merchants as Christian leaders have done ever since.

Dickens' faith was methodically stretched into a commercial safety blanket that tended to be stretched to some breaking points along the many lines he wrote. He luckily could count on at least one man, friend and biographer John Forster, from whom in correspondence he got the advice to cool down the antilethical rhetoric and instead warm the hearts of his many fans with tales of social injustice, social reform and other romanticized socialism.

Socialism must have been the pub talk of the town in liberal Bloomsbury where Karl Marx, Charles Darwin and Charles Dickens walked the floors of the British Museum's Reading Room and many a pub in the area. Dickens was no stranger to pub life as many London public houses display his memorabilia or are enshrined in his novels. It comes as no surprise to the reader then that these *Writings for Children* seem to be inspired by the good spirits that are served in these establishments. One can hardly think of a child at Sunday

School avowing his pious faith to this observation: "I observe that it induced the ignorant people to consider him a holy man, and that it made him very powerful." One can, however, easily imagine Dickens bent over a pint looking a bar companion straight in the eye and telling, with a hiccup in his voice, "When he died, the monks settled that he was a Saint. They might just as well have settled that he was a coach-horse, and could just as easily have called him one."

Consider as well the amalgamation of state and church in this mid-Victorian statement: "The King was at first as blind and stubborn as kings usually have been when so ever they have been in the hands of monks." The most striking nonsense in Dickens' religious choo-choo train of thought is how he frequently tries to rail his children's belief system towards a better life after death...his children must have reasoned acceptably with him about the futility of a life, let alone a long one. Perhaps this may have been one factor for Dickens' decision not to publish his primitive religious prose. After all, infant deaths and juvenile suicide were only two of the many taboos plaguing dense cities during the industrial revolution.

*"Parliament retained the punishment of burning for those people who did not make believe to believe, in all religious matters, what the government had declared that they must and should believe."*

Circus McGurkis - The People's Fair

From left:  
Ed Corl,  
Vince Valva,  
Ed Golly at  
the People's  
Fair

WE HAD ANOTHER very busy day again this year at this fair known as the Alternative People's Fair with arts, crafts, music and booths such as ours with socio-agendas. We fit in well with the ACLU, Humanists, People for Separation of Church and State and lots more. This was the

If Dickens had released this statement before his death, he would never have been allowed to be buried so soon where he lies now. With this phrase he let the gentele deliberately backwards out of the bottle, for it is not the poor people who make believe they believe, but the rich, infatuated hypocrites wearing the red robes and rubies who pretend to be faithful so as to better blind and corral the people and control their purse, mind and sex life.

Temperamentally in disagreement with everyone, including himself, Charles Dickens has enriched humanity with his great novels about characters that we all personally know and are. His *Child's History of England* and *The Life of Our Lord* however, miss the bombastic theatrical Victorian lore for which he is famous and loved worldwide. By keeping up appearances of Christian faith, Charles Dickens could baste in financial comfort and provide securely for his enormous family. These *Writings for Children* are too gruesome or too unreasonnable for youngsters to adopt and are best enjoyable, tongue-in-cheek, by their parents on a stormy autumn night before a raging fireside and in the company of an uplifting bottle of booze.

Myself, I'm no longer puzzled as to how religious the mallowing Charles Dickens was, when I read deep into this afterthought on page 19: "Whether such a person really lived, or whether there were several persons whose histories came to be confused together under that one name, or whether all about him was invention, no one knows."

— Ed Corl

24th year the Circus was celebrated and it gives us a great opportunity to pass out literature, have discussions and be heckled every now and then.

The fair is sponsored by Quakers and held in a wooded park with lots of trees and with pathways and booths winding throughout in anything but a rectangular pattern. Our booth was always occupied with 3-10 people to pass out literature or have discussions with inquisitive people. Many people with kindred thoughts were happy to see us busy with the "ALL GODS ARE MAKE BELIEVE" message. We had T-shirts, book markers, bumper stickers and lots of literature to offer. If anyone in the other chapters would like a sample kit, write me. It's fun and a very worthwhile day.

Note: The Atheists of Florida booth is always in need of extra newsletters for distribution. If you have saved your newsletters over the year and would like to contribute them, send them to Ed Corl via the Tampa Post Office Box (masthead, page 2).

