

Atheists of Florida CHAPTER MEETINGS:

MIAMI:

For date and time of meetings call the Atheist Hotline at (305) 936-0210.

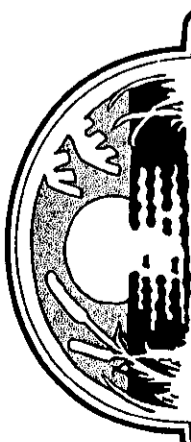
Saturday, September 30, 10:00 to noon. Clearwater East Public Library, 2251 Drew Street, Meeting Room B. Chapter officers will be elected and we will view an Atheists of Florida Forum program titled "The Ten Commandments".

Saturday, October 28 the chapter will participate in the Circus McGurkis. All members are encouraged to attend and help occupy our table. The Circus begins about 10:00 and runs until about 3:00. (See ad this page). At noon, Gary Posner, head of the Tampa Bay Skeptics, will give a talk to us and the other local freethought groups which will be in attendance in our area.

TAMPA:

MANA-SOTA:

Saturday, October 28 the chapter will join the Tampa Bay chapter and attend the Circus McGurkis. For car pool setup, contact Ed McDougall at 922-8200.



**CIRCUS
MCGURKIS**
The People's Fair

**SATURDAY
OCTOBER 28**

LAKEVIEW DARK
20th St. & 28th Ave. South
St. Petersburg
Rain Date November 4

Letters continued from page 7

Forum participant says thanks

I wish to thank you for your gracious hospitality and for having me as part of the taping of your television show informing the public of the philosophy and activities of the Atheists of Florida and of our work in SMART Recovery. It was truly a pleasant afternoon and I greatly enjoyed meeting you and the other stimulating and pleasant participants. Also, I hope we can again engage in activities beneficial to both the Atheists of Florida and SMART Recover Self-help Network.

Philip Tate, Ph.D.
Altamonte Springs, FL

A

Atheists of Florida Forum

Cable telecast times

Miami-Dade Cable-TAP Channel 36
Monday noon
Tuesday 9:30 pm
Friday 5:00 pm

8 September 1995

Atheists of Florida



P.O. Box 130753
Tampa, FL 33681-0753

ADDRESS CORRECTION
REQUESTED

Volume IV Number 7

September, 1995



What's up?..

BESIDES THE CONVENTION to be held by the Atheist Alliance next April, which was announced in our previous newsletter (see page 5 of this newsletter), the Alliance will be conducting a poll of atheists in the very near future. A project of *Secular Nation*, the journal of the Atheist Alliance, each recipient of a newsletter of a member society will receive a questionnaire. It will ask members and non-members about their atheism, pre-atheist attachments, politics, and other demographic information enabling the Alliance to form a data bank. Names and addresses will not be requested.

The name of the organization that sent the questionnaire in its newsletter will be asked in order to assist the Alliance in returning a profile of local respondents to each member society. When the survey is complete, each member society will be given the national results and the local findings which we can report in this newsletter.

And remember, several positions are available for the board of Atheists of Florida. Some board members may not renew their positions. Therefore, the exact number of openings is not yet confirmed. If interested, send a biography to Atheists of Florida, Miami.

Alliance Members:

Atheists United
Los Angeles
Atheist Coalition
San Diego
Atheist Network
Houston
Minnesota Atheists
Atheists of Florida
Atheists of San Francisco Region
Atheists and Agnostics of Wisconsin
Atheist Centre
Vijayawada, India
Atheist and Other Freethinkers
Sacramento CA
Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia
Pocapson PA
Metroplex Atheists
Dallas/Ft Worth TX

Scholarship contest

THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE MARK Twain Scholarship Fund, Inc. is proud to announce the first official competition for grants of \$300.00 and \$200.00, to be awarded to First and Second-place winners, respectively.

To qualify, the students must be current members of Atheists of Florida, Inc., or join the organization prior to entering the competition, and must be a registered full-time student (or have been accepted for admission) at a secular university, college or institute which awards Bachelor of Science or Bachelor of Arts degrees.

Applicants also must submit an essay on Article One of the "Universal Declaration on Human Rights" which states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act toward one another in a spirit of brotherhood."

The Trustees will select the winners at their December 1995 meeting and the winning essays will be published in 1996 in the Atheists of Florida Newsletter. The Treasurer will issue the two checks in the name of the winner's university or college to be credited in their accounts for tuition or the purchase of books.

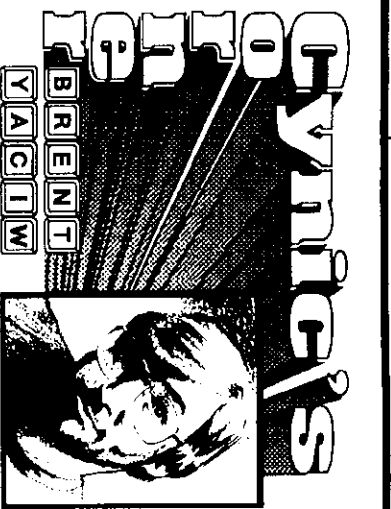
Applicants must submit their essays typed/printed with a cover page that carries name, address, and attending school. No other page should have information which might identify the entrant's identity.

All submissions should be received by November 30th, 1995 at the following address:

THE MARK TWAIN SCHOLARSHIP FUND
c/o ATHEISTS OF FLORIDA INC
P O BOX 530102
MIAMI FL 33153-0102

A

In national print media has gotten religion, which one could perhaps have predicted given the decline in quality that began with McPaper (*USA Today*) and reflects the Dumbth that infects the populace at large. Any society that can sit mesmerized over the trial of an ex-football-playing, wide-beating clown has obviously lost its grip on intelligent priorities. However, I'm currently looking at a "Floridian" section of the *St. Petersburg Times*,



The media: Falling into the trap of religion

which I'll note is not the usual place for the Religion section. It's typically entertainment / "human interest" / humor, so I suppose in a way it is the appropriate place for the story I'm looking at. Space measurement: 116 column-inches, or 267.5 square inches of graphics and photos. 82.5 column-inches of text, which tells you something in itself about the intelligence level of the appeal: more pictures than words means lower than average. The story is titled "Fall to grace." It's about a group of people in Melbourne who gather together to make absolute idiots of themselves, claiming to be "pushed down" by god, falling on the floor. Okay, sure, we can't prove nothing except their own foolishness is making them fall down, that and perhaps sheer exhaustion. Neither do they have any evidence that their absurd activities are anything more. One participant, perhaps innately rational despite his trying real hard not to be, stood and was "prayed at" for over half an hour without falling. Finally, he muttered some gibberish that was allegedly "speaking in tongues" (apparently tongues he didn't understand either), and they let him go.

Imagine a similar circumstance at an Atheists of Florida meeting. Imagine browbeating someone who really, desperately wanted to be an atheist, but just couldn't. Imagine repeating chants to Robert Ingersoll or Bertrand Russell for hours, until someone fell down and cried, "Yes! Logic has entered me and knocked me down!" You can't? No surprise to me. Though we have our unusual moments at meetings, especially when directing our frustrations at the politicians trying to ruin our society, we usually don't set out to act in ways that will make people laugh at

us. In fact, there's the root of my reluctance to engage in those traditional protest rituals of the 1960's like picketing and marching. Sure, it sometimes brings exposure, but I wonder about the quality of the exposure as much as the quantity. Think about it: what's the first thing that comes to mind nowadays when you mention picketers? Right, anti-abortion wackos. How about protest marches? Right again, the KKK. Okay, sure, there are a few other groups that traditionally use such methods to try and publicize their cause, groups whose cause I could support if not applaud. Reality is that pickets and marches are associated with fringe groups on both sides, and while I'm perfectly willing to admit that atheists are still considered a fringe group, I've begun to wonder if one reason why isn't that we sometimes act the part. The most successful parts of the 1960's movements are the ones who've managed to become "mainstream." As long as atheists represent an image of extremism, the religionists will be able to portray us as a societal evil. Is that what we want?

Silly statues in the news

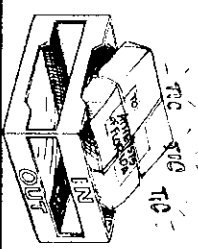
Here's another winner, this one from the religion pages: people are burying little plastic statues of "St. Joseph" because they think it helps sell their house faster. The story comes complete with an anecdote about a Syracuse, N.Y. woman who claimed that because of the statue, she sold her house in only ten days. As usual, there's no mention of how many thousands--and one store in Syracuse said it sold 1,000 a year easy--of people bought the "home kits" and didn't sell their houses, nor of the other factors that might be involved such as seller desperation, willingness to deal, home preparation, etc. The basic "innuendery" of the populace allows such "news" to become a story. The official church position is, of course, don't mess with our territory. "Magic is always corruptive of authentic religion. . . and the whole idea of God's omnipotence," claims a professor of religion at Catholic University in Washington. Authentic religion?

Wall does not protect atheists

Mana-sota skipper Ed McDougall responds to a letter which appeared in the Sarasota Herald Tribune in July.

A letter to the editor on July 9 asked, "Should churches ignore state?" The writer

Letters



asked several questions as an obvious swipe at church/state separation. He missed one great, important point.

If the church decided to cease all those things, it would be free to do so. It is not forced by the state to perform services or rituals of any type. This is not true for those millions of Americans, uninhibited by religion, who are forced to hear their Pledge of Allegiance and see their currency and official seals adulterated with the God word.

The non-religious of our nation are prohibited from holding political office or serving on juries in many areas. They are forced to swear to a governmental God before being allowed to serve their country in the armed forces. They are forced to sit through non-sensical prayer sessions at the opening and closing of official government meetings and ceremonies.

And last but not least, they are forced to pay taxes that, in part, support the existence of churches. The writer and his church should be thankful for the "wall." It protects their right to trample the rights of all those who don't agree or believe as they do.

*Ed McDougall
Sarasota, FL*

Letter gets response

The following letter, published September 9 in the Tampa Tribune generated responses in that publication three days in a row.

In the past couple of days you've had letters concerning the biblical condemnation of homosexuality. I must admit, as far as the King James Version goes, the writers are absolutely correct: The book is definitely homophobic. In fact, it's also sexist, racist and in general a flawed guide for life. I wonder why anyone who was not a WASP male would bother defending it or try to join in the community that calls itself "Christian." I see it as equivalent to a black person trying to join the KKK—why bother?

On the other hand, the entire discussion begs the question of the ultimate value of the

Bible, whatever version. I fail to see value in adopting the superstitions of 2,000+ years ago as a manual for modern life. No one has ever, *not ever*, proved that a god exists, nor a heaven or hell, soul, spirit, demon, devil or whatever other bogeymen human minds have invented. I certainly agree with letter writer Joe Hoggard that these things should be discussed in the public forum; the churches should be required to prove their claims just as any other business must live up to its advertisements.

To anyone who says he has "the way, the truth, and the light," I say fine: Prove it. Only an idiot would base his or her life on the hallucinations of the ancients. Only bigots would try to justify their prejudices by quoting the traditional prejudices of the past. Only power-hungry authoritarians would presume to regulate the private behavior of others according to their prejudices.

People have the right to believe as they wish, and live according to their belief, no matter how little I may think of that belief. No one has the right to force his beliefs on me, nor I on him. Since I see no evidence that the private sexual behavior of others does any harm to the lives of those who honestly call themselves Christians, they have no right to regulate it.

Well-informed mind at work

*Brent Yaciw
Seminole, FL*

Dear Editor:

As a new member I simply want you to know of the great pleasure I got from reading Brent Yaciw's column in our August, 1995 newsletter. It is very rewarding as well as entertaining to follow an incisive, well-informed mind at work.

*A.J. Herschel
Sarasota, FL*

Should churches ignore state?

Since the government has gone "neutral" on religion, in order to uphold the wall of separation between church and state, should the churches go "neutral" on the government?

Should churches stop pledging allegiance to the American flag in their vacation Bible schools? Should churches stop displaying the flag in their auditoriums? It's a state symbol.

Should churches continue encouraging their members to be good Americans, or is that a violation of church and state separation? We must hold that wall up, which was mentioned in a letter written by Thomas Jefferson, but which, of course, is not in the Constitution.

*John T. James
Sarasota, FL
(continued)*

Atheists of Florida

Published eight times a year by Atheists of Florida, Inc., a non-profit organization designed to provide atheists with a mutually stimulating contacts for the membership, dues and general correspondence should be sent to:

Atheists of Florida
P.O. Box 550102
Miami, FL 33155-0102
Contact phone is (305) 956-0210.

Annual dues are prorated:
 Sustaining \$ 50.00 May-Aug. Sep.-Dec. \$15.00
 Couple 40.00 25.00
 Individual 30.00 20.00
 Student (under 25 yrs.) \$10.00 all yr.
 Send newsletter correspondence to:
 Tampa Bay Chapter
 P.O. Box 130753
 Tampa, FL 33681-0753

AMAI.FL.E@AOL.COM

The A. of F. newsletter is provided free to our members as a medium of exchange. Letters from members are published 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.

Officers:

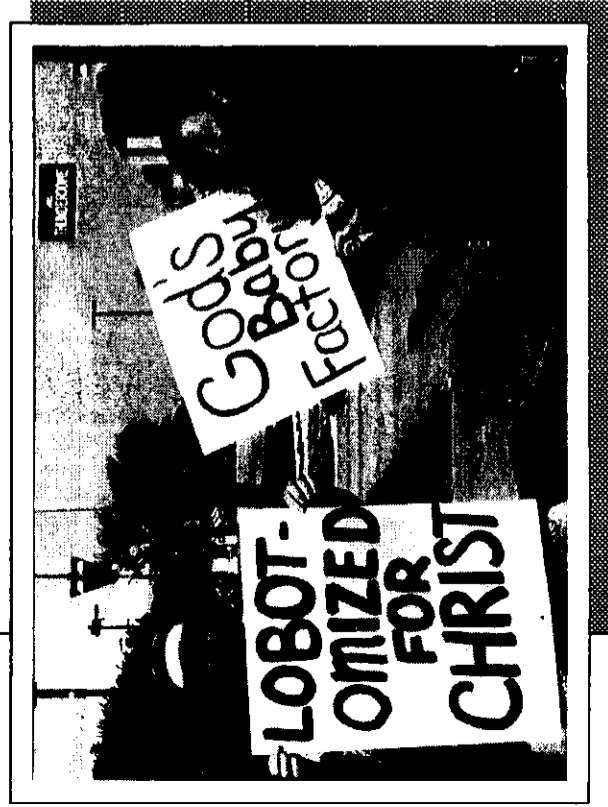
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THE GOD RACKET is really on a roll with the "Promise Keepers." The Men's organization is growing rapidly with very profitable stadium tours. The weekend of August 4-6 will have grossed about \$3.5 million with the Thunderdome getting about \$150,000. By the end of the year, the conferences will have filled 13 sports venues around the U.S. Of the 10 rallies held before St. Petersburg's, 8 were

Atheists and N.O.W. Picket Promise Keepers at St. Petersburg Thunderdome

— Ed Corl

Below: Atheists of Florida and N.O.W picketers at the Thunderdome



sellouts. The year will gross \$40-\$50 million. NOT BAD FOR PEDDLING THE SAME OLD BIBLICAL OPIATE. Next year they plan 20-30 stadium conferences which should bring the 1996 gross to about \$100 million. Not a bad bottom line for a tax-exempt, non-profit organization that grossed \$4.1 million in 1993. That should get them in the Fortune 500 by the year 2000 and have a dandy army of Ditto Heads to vote in the 1996 election.

A promise keeper, Mr. Hendricks of Melbourne, said all men can benefit from Promise Keepers rallies: "Christianity is for all of us," he said.

Others disagreed. On Saturday morning, atheists Ed Corl and T. Clark picketed outside the Dome. They carried signs that read: "Schools are broke—tax the churches" and "No Prayer in Schools."

The atheists were joined by a dozen members of the Pasco and West Pinellas chapters of the National Organization for Women. Their signs said: "Real Men Don't Need Lessons" and "Lobotomized for Christ." Most of the Promise Keepers ignored the protestors: a few said "God bless you."

One Bible-bearing man walked past Doris Rosen of N.O.W.'s Pasco chapter and said, "How are you?" "Just as good as you," she said. **A**

NEW MEMBERS:

Robert P. Curry
Andrea Herschel
Arlen G. Steinke
Stacy Taylor
Olga Minero
Ray Blett

RENEWALS:

Ed McDougall, Sr.
Monica Madden
David J. Vogt
Virginia and George Meyer, M.D.s
Norman Slocum

MARK ANDREW TROP
Attorney at Law

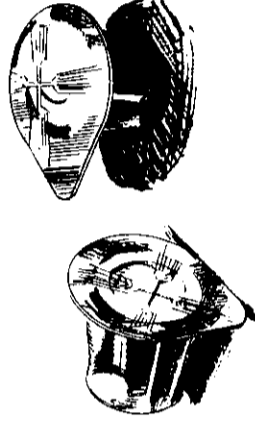
Shoreview Bldg., Ste. 201
9999 N.E. 2nd Ave.
(305) 759-5727 · Miami Shores, FL 33138

What is that? I haven't found one yet. The store owner says, "In my opinion it borders on superstition," but that doesn't stop him from selling them. *Borders* on superstition? I'd say it crossed the border long ago, but then I'd say that of damn near everything sold in a place called The Catholic Shop.

A business like any other

Ironically, the *St. Petersburg Times* chose to complement the statue story, which originated with a wire service, with a column on how religion is becoming more and more like a traditional business. Again, this is not news to us in the freethought community, and the absurd advice given at the column's end—to get a New Testament if you want to learn about JC—is typical of religion news' emphasis on the status quo.

Still, it's clear that religion's use of marketing techniques like promotions and sales, "events," and sales through secular channels helps make our case that it doesn't deserve special treatment by our laws. It's becoming more and more difficult to buy anything, shop anywhere, or travel without giving tacit support to religion. It's more than just Gideons in hotel rooms. One person reported buying a carton of eggs,



Cannibalism in a box! These communion wafers are packaged with wine in a self-contained cup.

opening them up, and finding Xian quotes like Chinese fortunes. Don't be surprised if some company starts manufacturing Xian fortune cookies. Our bill for our vertical blinds included a Xian tract; our response included one of FFRF's excellent non-tracts, of course. I've received store receipts with computer-printed "Jesus is Lord" on them. The post office has only issued one version of 55-cent self-stick stamps, and it has an angel on it. (I usually stamp below it with "CHURCH and STATE SEPARATE!")

All this marketing naturally leads to advertising dollars. Religion and other pro-religion businesses account for more and more of newspaper revenues, in an era of declining readership and advertising competition from more new media forms all the time. Religion is marketed on the Internet; religion has developed computer programs to auto-proselytize; religion should be TAXED!

One possible means of fighting this is dissemination of your own freethought materials via computer. Emmett Fields has been responsible for putting all of Robert G. Ingersoll's works, plus hundreds of pages of other freethought literature, onto IBM-compatible disks. These sets are constantly updated, and compressed into self-extracting form. Order direct from him: a 10-disk (1.44 3.5" HD) set is only \$10.00 from Bank of Wisdom, Inc., P.O. Box 926, Louisville, KY 40201-0926. Then make copies and get them onto your local BBS systems, into your local schools, get your kids, or grandkids, to pass them out. The only way to fight the rising tide of religious disinformation is with good information of our own! **A**

Join the Atheist Alliance Tour of India

Dec. 27 - Jan. 14

4th World Atheist Conference, Atheist Centre, Vijayawada, India January 4 - 6, 1996

Treat yourself to the trip of a lifetime.

First stop: Delhi.

Celebrate New Year's Eve in the gateway to Asia and tour ancient monuments.

Next: Agra, for a stunning sunrise view of the Taj Mahal.

Then on to sightseeing in Hyderabad before attending the 4th World Atheist Conference in Vijayawada.

Enjoy discussions, music, dancing, firewalking and a view of the future of atheism. Here you will see positive atheism in action.

Later, a gala reception awaits in Madras, followed by tours of the Atheist Centre's projects and sightseeing among ancient temples.

Bombay is the last stop before heading home with memories to last a lifetime.

Cost is about \$2,500 including airfare from New York on KLM Airlines and lodging, travel and conference costs within India. (KLM frequent flyer miles can be used for domestic flights on Northwest Airlines.)

For details and reservations, contact:

Marie Castle,
Minnesota Atheists
P.O. Box 6261
Minneapolis MN 55406
612/588-1597

Please respond as soon as possible.



With my children in tow, I walked the warm pavement of London, England this summer and one of the guides I did research in was the *Michelin Green Guide*. Maybe hardly a book to make the top ten list of Atheist literature, it has given me in-between-the-lines information of historic importance about the way the Church of England conducted its cruel

book & film REVIEW

Return of the Clink

—by Patrick Bens

business.

Take for instance the Clink. Atheists must visit this small private museum before it disappears beneath the wrecker's ball. Clink Street, from which the museum and former prison gets his name, is located in Southwark in between Shakespeare's Globe Museum and St. Mary Overie or Southwark Cathedral. The Green Guide says on page 203: "The



precinct of the Bishop of Winchester's Palace contained a prison for errant clergy and nuns, which lay below the water level at high tide. From the 15th Century it was known as the Clink Prison, which gave rise to the expression "to be in the clink".

On the site of this church prison today exists the "Clink Exhibition", a small private museum depicting methods and machinery used to restrain and torture priests, quacks, paupers and prostitutes. This hands-on exhibition with an adults-only room explains in cruel detail how the Bishops held law over 80 acres of fairgrounds called "Liberty of the Clink".

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

fighting rings (sounds like Wall Street), a brewery or two, leftover enterprises from a monastic past serving an endless array of pubs, taverns and inns just west of London Bridge, the only bridge to the city for most of its history.

Only steps away is the Southwark Cathedral which served also at one time as prison and at another time as collection site for the "profits of the cross-ferry". A few steps more and you arrive at another thorn in the eye of the Church: the fearsome London Dungeon.

The London Dungeon boasts to be the scariest museum in London. Far from being a Halloween extravaganza to frighten youngsters, this museum of horror uncovers the terror of the Church during the Inquisition, the witchhunts, the Plague and the reigns of the successive religious despots. In over 40 spine-chilling tableaux extracted from chronicles and court records, this museum, buried beneath London Bridge Station, educates the visitor in graphic detail on how torture and sadism were ecclesiastical means to rule nations. What we read or what we see in Hollywood movies is here present in detailed exhibits, tailored to the national curriculum. Teachers, students and parents benefit from witnessing this terrible truth displayed. If it is scary to walk through still, motionless landscape, imagine how frightening it must have been to be singled out for being different (or blasphemous) and consequently be punished for it through pressing, boiling, nail pulling, tongue pulling; if an ingenious cleric could invent the method and a pious smith could hammer the iron device into existence, progress was made in the judicial system.

This Michelin guide gives constant reminders that law and order (read: morality and militia) were in the bloody hands of the local clerical organization. And it didn't end when Henry VIII acquired them. One gets the impression that a little warning is warming inside this cool objective travel guide: the paper power may have shifted from the Bishop to the King and then to Parliament; but it's still the Head of the Church who opens Parliament while the best view on the Houses of Parliament is from the Palace of the Bishop of Canterbury.

I walked my fingers through several guides before deciding that the Michelin Green guide dared to bare the darkest side of clerical history. It is a history of inhumanity that repeats itself to this day.

Travel brochures in the U.S. may want to warn travellers about ongoing religious harassment like Gideon Bibles, prayer breakfasts in the White House, biased news media and the return of medieval preaching in the classroom, squeezing future generations into the iron maiden of cultural death.

FOR THOSE WITH cognitive skills, a discerning eye and an open mind, the reading of the gospels will reveal that Jesus of Nazareth routinely displayed all the classic behavior patterns of a psychotic personality.

extraordinarily high mountain top where they were able to view all the kingdoms of earth. As the line between reality and make-believe became ever more indistinguishable, (progressive deterioration), the fantasy that he was the son of God (delusions of grandeur) was eagerly embraced. Eventually, in the tragic belief that his behavior was predestined and controlled by God (delusion of influence), he willingly forfeited his young life (suicide) convinced, as only a true believer can be, that he was somehow immortal and would enjoy forever after the bliss of eternal life (the ultimate delusion).

OUR NATIONAL NEUROSIS

—Norman B. LeClair

tial and/or total loss of contact with reality.

As the gospels tell us, he heard voices in his head (auditory hallucinations), and believed that some fabulous being or God was communicating with him. On other occasions he attributed the voices to an equally fabulous devil. His hallucinations were frequent and totally bizarre. At one point he believed that he and the devil flew through the air to some

The English psychologist, physician and writer, Havelock Ellis, put this pathetic tragedy in stunning perspective when he wrote, "Had there been a lunatic asylum in the suburbs of Jerusalem, Jesus Christ would invariably have been shut up in it at the outset of his public career. That interview with Satan on the pinnacle of the temple would alone have damned him, and everything that happened after could but have confirmed the diagnosis. The whole religious complexion of the modern world is due to the absence from Jerusalem of a lunatic asylum."

SECOND ANNUAL ATHEIST ALLIANCE CONVENTION EASTER WEEKEND, APRIL 5, 6 AND 7, 1996. MINNEAPOLIS-ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

THEME: IMAGINE A WORLD BEYOND BELIEF

CALL FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

Humankind is in deep trouble. Religionists claim they have the answer—government mandated prayers, tax supported religious activities, and a return to patriarchal, racist practices of the 50s.

About the location: It's the Sheraton Park Place, a truly luxurious hotel with rooms at the astonishingly low convention price of \$39 per night, single or double.

What do atheists say? Do we have a better answer? This convention will explore the possibility. We invite speakers who can offer a secular understanding, secular approach and secular solutions to the problems of crime, teen pregnancy, the welfare system, racism, sexism, disdain for education, ignorance of human sexuality, alcohol and drug addiction, poverty, environmental degradation, population pressures—you name it.

The low rates include two nights before and after the convention, April 3 to April 8. Take advantage of this opportunity to enjoy the local attractions. Spend a day at the Mall of America—the third largest tourist attraction in the country. Check out the Italian casinos—Mystic Lake Casino is close by and offers all the glitz and glamor and pot-of-gold fantasies of Las Vegas.

We think an atheistic approach based on reason, reality and common sense offers the best hope for making this truly a world beyond belief in terms of a good life for all without the irrationality and divisiveness of religion.

We promise a convention filled with rational hope, positive ideas, and fine entertainment. Watch for details in your member society newsletter and keep an eye out for sale prices on airfares. The Twin Cities are a hub for Northwest Airlines, so there are plenty of non-stops to major cities.

YES, I would like to be a program participant. My member society is:

I have expertise to be a speaker on the following topic (please elaborate):

Name _____ Phone () _____
 Address _____ City/State/Zip _____
 Please return to Minnesota Atheists, P.O. Box 6261, Minneapolis MN 55406.