

## Nativity from page 1

On February 8, 1995, a response was prepared and sent to Trop by City Attorney Roger G. Orr. His response:

Re: Holiday decorations  
Dear Mr. Trop:

This is in response to your letter of January 31, 1995, directed to the City Manager concerning the above-referenced matter.

The issue of holiday decorations was addressed by the City Council who, at this juncture, have indicated a policy that they are going to allow the display of holiday decorations, including such

decorations as the nativity scene and the menorah, consistent with the guidelines established for such displays by the Supreme Court to the extent that such guidelines may be ascertained. The Council has been advised that any position on this matter may subject them to litigation and has elected to follow the course of action as I have stated.

I trust that you will find this responsive to your correspondence.

Sincerely,

Roger G. Orr

City Attorney

cc: City Council (w/enclosures)  
Donald B. Cooper, City Manager

Responsive indeed! They are simply going to ignore the constitution and if litigation ensues, the taxpayers can pick up the tab for whatever it takes.

We'll keep you posted as the situation develops. **A**

Have an IBM-compatible computer? Would you like a freethought library rivaling that of most public libraries, and exceeding many? You're in luck! A project that has been ongoing is the creation of such a library. The current update includes the complete works of Robert Ingersoll, plus selections from Joe McCabe, John Ramburg, Martin Avery, Charles Bradlaugh, and many more. The entire collection is on ten 3-1/2" or eleven 5-1/4" high-density disks, in self-extracting compressed format (easy to use even if you're roughly 27 megabytes paired). It takes roughly 27 megabytes uncompressed, but can be uncompressed one file at a time if you are short on space. The entire collection is \$15.00 including postage and packing! Order from: Brent Yaciw / P O Box 8046 / Seminole, FL 34645

# Atheists of Florida

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church

Volume IV Number 2

February / March 1995



## Nativity scene continued...

LAST MONTH we ran a story on the efforts of Atheists of Florida president Christos Tzanetakis to have a nativity scene and other religious icons removed from the City Hall of his home town of Port St. Lucie, Florida. His eloquent letter to City Manager Don Cooper was blatantly ignored. Next stop, Attorney Mark Trop.

Trop prepared the following letter which was sent under his letterhead to Cooper on January 23, 1995.

Dear Sirs:

This is written on behalf of the Atheists of Florida Incorporated.

Last month my client communicated to you that the public display of a nativity scene at the City Hall offended their sense of propriety. To my knowledge the City has not responded.

Objections to secular participation in religious activity are necessary and proper. Though a minority view on problems that seem abstract compared to budget, crime and zoning matters, the relationship between state and religion is addressed by the First Amendment of the Federal Constitution which provides that the two must remain separate and government shall not establish religion. Your display of religious icons may well transform the administrative function of government into an item of faith.

I sense that we have a dispute

after the failure to acknowledge the previous letter. We do demand the City cease and desist from displaying these things and we will seek legal relief if forced to this alternative. Currently however, we have an ample opportunity before the next holiday season to discuss this matter. As stated above, this is surely a valid object of conversation and consideration. To be sure, I ask that you provide explanation of City policy in this regard and further we seriously try to understand each others interests and work this conflict to a mutually satisfactory resolution.

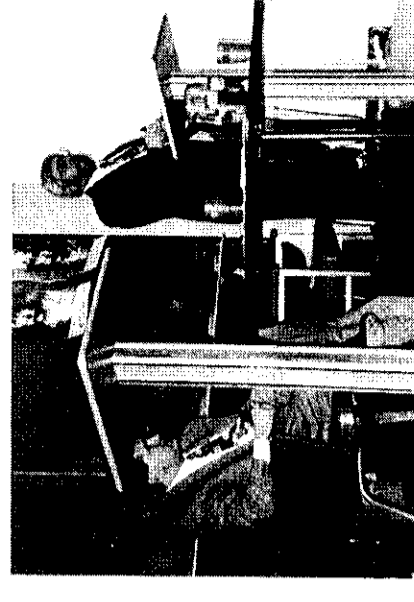
Remaining,

Very truly yours,

Mark Trop

Attorney at Law

(continued back page)



Atheists of Florida member Brent Yaciw, right, reminds John Stemberger that the burden of proof is on his shoulders. This live debate on the Florida State University campus was attended by about 140 students.

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A

columnist for the St. Petersburg Times recently wrote a column decrying the murders by anti-abortion fanatics. At one point he said, "That's not the God my grandfather [a Pentecostal minister] taught me about." I wrote him a response, which noted: "Most [Xians] rely on the word of a trusted elder, as you relied on your grandfather, to interpret or answer for them . . . The god of Salvi, Griffin, Hill, and Spitz IS the god in

# Gymnastics



## Using that "A" word

the King James version of the Bible." I suggested he try reading it for himself. His response: "I don't believe in anyone's god—including your "ism" of atheism. I said the God as I was taught to know Him. I never said I believed in him. My grandfather hated my young attitude about his god."

"Curiouser and curiouser," I replied. I explained that considering atheism a religion because it ended in "ism" was as absurd as including activism, literary criticism, or any one of dozens of "isms" in that category. I said that despite his semantic evasions, he was an atheist, and wondered why he was so afraid of the word?

His reply? "Whatever." Someone is murdered because what they do violates the irrational beliefs of religion. Whatever. A Panhandle sheriff sexually harasses a dozen female employees, forcing them among other things to perform oral sex in his office—but it's okay, because his God has forgiven him. Whatever.

A young mother tries to kill her children after convincing them that they will all go to heaven together. Her attorney defends her by saying she was suffering from a "heightened religiousness."

Whatever. A young girl stands on the railroad tracks and commits suicide, believing she will go to heaven and be with her dead mother. Whatever.

A President, elected in a Democratic country supposedly representing all of its citizens, claims those without god-belief aren't really citizens, and definitely aren't patriots. Few bother to protest this, and he never retracts or

apologizes.

Whatever. A religious fanatic, convinced he's the savior of his people, gains political power and murders millions because they differ in their religious beliefs. Millions of those murdered still cling to the same religious beliefs that formed the basis for their killer's delusions. Whatever.

### It's up to us

The short story is that we can't rely on anyone in the mainstream media to help make atheism a respected word. We are the ones who need to make people as ashamed to say, "I'm a Xian" or "I'm a Muslim" as they should be to say, "I believe the Earth is flat." We're the ones who need to make people realize that admitting they are an atheist is *not* equivalent to admitting to being a child molester, a communist, a thief, a believer in an alternative religion, or whatever else people assume it is—positive or negative.

I'm not saying we can't be other things besides atheists, or that calling yourself an atheist is an all-encompassing label that identifies you indelibly and unequivocally. You can be a humanist, agnostic, freethinker, nullifidian, Republican, Democrat, mechanic, schoolteacher, 7-11 clerk, or atomic engineer, and still be an atheist, because all of these things do not exclude atheism. However, there are occasions on which the use of the word "atheist" is clearly called for, and most of these involve dealing with the general religious public.

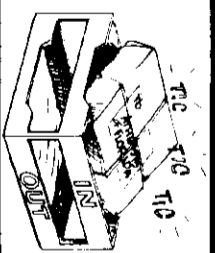
Frankly, few comprehend that all agnostics are atheists, or that most humanists and freethinkers are atheists, or that atheism is not a political party or an economic philosophy. I'll agree that we need to educate them on this, but the first thing they need to be educated about is that Madalyn Murray-O'Hair is NOT the queen mother, sole representative, inventor, or whatever other label she has adopted or

## Backing up

*Brent Yaciv sends electronic mail to the front office (Linton)*

To: president@whitehouse.gov

It's ironic that Joycelyn Elders is fired for advocating that children be taught that masturbation isn't wrong, while at the same time you attempt to pacify those fanatics promoting that ultimate in mental masturbation, prayer.



I'm sure Ms. Elders always thought you would stand behind her. Too bad she didn't realize it was merely a more convenient stabbing position!

Brent Yaciv AthAl:FL B Seminole, FL

# Letters

## Take a moment...

With the new Congressional agenda likely to focus on constitutional issues such as school prayer or school vouchers, we all need to make our voices heard to our own legislators. Take a moment to write expressing your strong opinion and send a copy to us for the newsletter. Here are a few tips on writing to legislators:

1. Describe yourself as a:
  - constituent
  - member of Atheists of Florida
  - registered voter
2. Limit your letter to a single issue. Be brief and to the point.
3. Your letter should be typewritten and neat.
4. Ask for a reply. Try to get a commitment from the legislator regarding the issue you have addressed.
5. Sign your letter and put your return address on the letter as well as on the envelope.

## Days now will become longer

*Printed Dec. 29 in Florida Today*

It's that time of year again. Millions of people regard it as a Christian celebration. But, for many others it is a healthy fascination with the nature of the cosmos. Few are aware that the winter solstice was celebrated by humans centuries before the invention of Christianity.

It is the time of our solar year when our planet is tilted on its axis 23.5 degrees from direct sunlight in the Northern Hemisphere, or one can think of it as the time when the sun is at its greatest distance south from the equator.

After the cycle is completed, around Dec. 23, the length of the sunlight in the Northern Hemisphere begins to increase during the day.

To the pagans who lived eons ago, the winter solstice signified the rebirth of vegetation, which lay dormant during the harsh winter months. Thus, evergreen trees became the lifelong symbol of the seasonal change.

Whether one chooses to celebrate these holidays from a religious perspective or a scientific one, suffice it so say that it's just nice to be nice. Happy Solstice!

Barry Rowe  
Indiantantic, FL

## Intriguing hindsight

Barry Rowe sent this letter to us in May, 1994, six months before Jeffrey Dahmer was whacked in the joint. At the time, we held it for lack of room. Now it has a rather chilling touch.

Jeffrey Dahmer has found God. His reverend believes he (Dahmer) is sincere, has been saved, and has washed his sins away via baptism.

The basic tenet of Christianity is that regardless of a person's nefarious, unthinkable crimes against humanity, he or she will have everlasting life and love in paradise, as long as they believe.

However, a non-believer who abhors violence is also promised everlasting life—in an inferno.

Consequently, Dahmer will have a good life, and Carl Sagan and I will suffer an eternity of unthinkable brutality. Not to be dismayed though, for we will have the opportunity to meet folks such as Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Edison, Mark Twain, Voltaire, Albert Einstein, Abraham Lincoln, and Isaac Asimov, to name a few.

Dahmer will serve his utopia with the likes of David Koresh, Adolf Hitler, Charles Manson, Danny Rolling, and the Rev. Jim Jones.

Barry A. Rowe  
Indiantantic, FL



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## But what if you had none?

Did you ever wonder if you would stand a chance of being appointed to a jury if you made it clear to the court that you were an atheist? The Texas Court of Criminal Appeals has ruled that potential jurors cannot be excluded because of their religion.

The issue arose when prosecutors in 1991 wrongly excluded two prospective jurors in a sexual assault case because they belonged to the Pentecostal religion. The issue is now being pushed toward the Supreme Court.

But just exactly how does the decision read? After all, any religious person would likely take a god-oriented oath. Therein lies the difference. An atheist would not take an oath since it is a religious test (in violation of Article VI of the Constitution). Could (s)he then be excluded on this ground? If so, the issue is not complete

## NEWS FILES

### Think of it this way...

If an oath really had any validity, couldn't the State of California save itself a lot of time and money by simply putting O.J. Simpson on the stand, giving him the oath, and accepting his word of guilt or innocence? If not, it's an admission that an oath is virtually meaningless. Of course it would mean eliminating Amendment V of the Bill of Rights, wherein "No person...shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself". But then again, the Constitution is amendable.

more closely in line with international religious affiliation, where the "nonreligious" are consistently the second largest grouping by affiliation (or lack of affiliation).

The 1995 *Information Please Almanac* shows that the nonreligious and atheists combined worldwide number 1,154,726,000, outnumbered only by Christians (1,869,751,000) and outnumbering the next-largest religious group, Muslims (1.014 billion).

### Still censoring

An item spotted in the *St. Pete Times* announced that the National Council of Churches has quit the National Coalition Against Censorship. It seems the Coalition, a New-York based anti-censorship group filed a friend-of-the-court brief in August on behalf of a bookstore in Cincinnati which had been charged with selling pornography. Actually, the bookstore was renting a video of an Italian film which contained some scenes of extreme violence and explicit sexual conduct to portray the treatment of a number of adolescents by the last survivors of fascism. Although the coalition, which argued on behalf of the bookstore's right to sell and rent the video, ultimately prevailed and charges against the store were dismissed, the question of the religious group's affiliation with the coalition were kept alive by the American Family Association, a group familiar to all Tampa Bay Area atheists. The Tupelo, Miss.-based association, headed by the Rev. Donald Wildmon, began a campaign calling for religious groups to quit the coalition.

### Psalms up

The *Weekly Planet* (a weekly news/entertainment paper in Tampa) reported that the Hillsborough County Commission, at its first meeting with newly-elected commissioners, voted 5-2 to start each meeting with a short prayer. Ignoring the religious and cultural diversity of the people they are pretending to represent, the Commission once again demonstrates conclusively that they represent themselves first and foremost.

### How ironic

Here's an exemption found in the IRS code for non-profit corporations:

Non-profit corporation exempt from Federal income tax under s. 501(c)(3) of the IRS Code are not required to pay the supplemental fee of \$68.75. Exemption status is granted to religious, educational, charitable, [etc.] or prevention of cruelty to children or animal organizations.

### Don't judge us by the meetings

A poll showcased in the January 30, 1995 *Time* magazine shows the "nonreligious" at 18.5% of the U.S. population, outnumbering mainline Protestants at 18%, and outnumbered only by Evangelical Protestants (25.9%) and Roman Catholics (23.4%). *Time's* source is the National Survey of Religion and Politics, 1992, University of Akron Survey Research Center.

This survey shows the United States to be

## Atheists of Florida CHAPTER MEETINGS:

Since the newsletters are mailed at bulk rate, it can require well over a week to be delivered to the South Florida region. Since newsletters may actually arrive after the date of the meetings, we will always have the date and time of the upcoming meeting on our **Atheist Hotline: (305) 936-0210**. Call to be sure you don't miss a meeting due to postal delays.

The Tampa Bay Chapter will meet **Saturday, April 29** at the **Clearwater East Public Library, 2250 Drew Street from 10:00 am to noon**. This meeting will follow the Atheist Alliance convention in Burbank to be held on the week-end of April 15th. Bring your two best religious jokes and a Forum program will be shown.  
Information: Ed Golly 839-7567.

**Sunday, April 30th from 1:30 to 3:30** at the **Marie Selby Public Library**.

A of F President Christos Tzanetakos, left, and Mana-Sota Chapter Director Ed McDougall, Sr.



## Rally for Reason

### West coast atheists take note:

All mainstream liberal thinkers are invited to join in the "Rally for Reason" **Saturday, April 8, 1995**, in Williams Park, St. Petersburg, from **1:00 until 4:00 p.m.** Sponsored by the Thomas Jefferson Society and the Bill of Rights Network (BORN), it is intended as a means of bringing together people who are concerned about the erosion of our Constitution and the Bill Of Rights by the radical religious right.

Participants are encouraged to bring a picnic lunch and stay for the entire afternoon. The program will include a variety of speakers and entertainment. Dozens of diverse community organizations will provide information and literature about themselves and about how every individual can be an important part of the political process. "We need to band together," states Florence Morgenroth, Coordinator of the Bill of Rights Network. "The Christian Coalition has a budget of \$20-million this year and they have a head start. We have the numbers to defeat them if we work together. We need the participation of everyone to stop the slide to fascism."

For more information or if you can help, call (813) 391-3980 or 578-1677.

the media has put on her, of atheism. I'm not going to knock her accomplishments here, but we all know there are plenty of other people who deserve credit for promoting and sustaining atheist thought in this country and abroad.

It's time we let the rest of the world in on the secret. **A**

### \*\*Debate Notice\*\*

Debate and open forum on "Religion and the Constitution: The Proposed School Prayer Amendment", Brent Walker of Washington, D.C., associate general counsel, Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, versus Richard Nelson of Orlando, legal associate, Liberty Counsel. Panel members include Profs. John Cooper and Thomas C. Marks Jr. of the law school faculty and representatives of the Pinellas County Chapter, American United for Separation of Church and State, and the Christian Legal Society, **noon to 2 p.m. Friday, March 31**, in Nemas Auditorium (Classroom A).

### Welcome new members...

A fo F is pleased to welcome these new members: Alex Gribko; George Emil Aubin; Jo Ann Geist; Marilyn P. Woolman; Joanne Gonzalez; C. M. Lopez; Kris Bussell; Jenni Swegan; and Consigli.

## Thirty-Fours Years As An Atheist Teacher

— Jim Strayer

# Insight

*After being a biology teacher for thirty-four years it seems only natural to reflect on some of the more interesting topics that were brought up by students or came up naturally because of the subject matter and as a result of current events.*

*Biology is very interesting and quite straight forward except for drug use (mostly alcohol and tobacco), human reproduction and evolution. I have tried to grasp thirty-four years of issues and compress them into something meaningful.*

## Part III Who Is Responsible For Spontaneous Abortions?

Christians seem to be extremely upset about abortion in recent years. When I started teaching it was against the law. So was almost everything connected with sex. We can be thankful to a few stand-up folks that many of the ridiculous laws have been changed, many of them because of scientific knowledge. Most of the scientific information that has been discovered has not yet affected the fundamentalists point of view. It would seem from our scientific research that the most successful abortionist of all time is, according to the theists, their own Creator.

The following is information about spontaneous abortion (that is abortion, according to the theists, that is caused by God):

1. The time from fertilization until implanting in the uterus is about five days. During this time cell division begins and continues.
2. During this time and after implantation in the uterus the zygote may split and form two or more individuals.

3. Sixty to eighty percent of fertilized human eggs do not implant in the uterus to continue development

Retired biology teacher and  
Atheists of Florida Board  
Member Jim Strayer lives in  
Ormond by the Sea, FL

and are flushed out with the first menses, usually unknown to the female.

4. One third of implanted zygotes are flushed out at the time of second or later menses. (Research at Loyola University Medical Center, Dr. Michael Zimman).

This information may cause some atheists to ask a few questions. (It may even cause a few theists to question a few things.)

1. When does a zygote receive the soul?
2. What happens in the case of Siamese twins?
3. In what part of the body is the soul located?
4. Is Jesus the killer if the soul is in the zygote at the time of fertilization and it is flushed out with the menses?
5. Did these souls go directly to heaven or because of "original sin" do they go directly to hell?

6. Does the soul of a medically aborted fetus go to heaven or hell?

7. Or do humans receive a soul at birth? (Is there a possibility of getting a new and better soul if "born again"?)

8. Does God, who knows all and therefore knows if an embryo is going to be born or aborted, have any control over the event of a spontaneous abortion or a medical abortion so that he could intervene to change events?

The apologists have unbelievable and often times humorous answers for all of these questions, while the Atheist is still waiting for proof that a soul exists.

## Part IV The Helping Hand

It is true that students ask many questions about birth control and sexually transmitted diseases, but I was not expecting the amount of religious superstition that came up about masturbation. From the first year to the last year that I taught the myths continued. The questions about masturbation were different, because of religious training, it was much more embarrassing for students to ask and to even listen to correct information about masturbation.

The problem seems to come from one Bible verse that even the church leaders were trying

**MARK ANDREW TROP**  
Attorney at Law

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to play down. I Corinthians 6:9 states, "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind shall inherit the kingdom of God." Some of the newer translations of the Bible try to interpret this to mean homosexuality, but that has already been mentioned in the "effeminate" statement. Even so, the damage to millions of young people has been done and the religious leaders do not have the honesty or strength of character to tell the truth.

In June of 1994 the Southern Baptists met in Orlando, Florida and one of the results of that meeting was that 100,000 young Baptists took a pledge of chastity until marriage. These pledges were written on cards and placed in a local park for god and the public to see. It was reported in the *Orlando Sentinel* by Barbara

Do you expect that things are **natural** or **SUPERNATURAL**?

If you walk on the **rational** side of the street

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A not-for-profit, 501(c)(3) corporation, ATHEIST ALLIANCE is a national association of democratic, autonomous atheist societies dedicated to separation of governments and religions.

Brake, the public relations person for the Southern Baptist Convention that these young people had joined the "true love waits" campaign and that they would refrain from sex.

Does this really mean that these young people intend to be without sex, and if so, has the Southern Baptist Convention issued any information on where it stands on sexual behavior? I believe that we have a right to know if the leaders of the Southern Baptists Convention condone or support masturbation, mutual masturbation, and mutual oral sex? Does the church expect the young people to be non-orgasmic for five to ten years or are they willing to support or at least not condemn other sexual practices? There seems to be a complete lack of discourse coming from the church on these matters. We are all well aware of the Southern Baptist stand on the matters of homosexuality and celibacy, but young people and those of us that deal with young people, need to know what the Southern Baptist stand is on other sexual practices. It seems to be implied that the young Southern Baptists will be asexual until marriage. If this is the case, it is not only impossible but inhuman.

Of course, the Baptists are not the only religious group to create problems with human sexuality. The Catholics have a history that still affects their behavior today. According to Aquinas, masturbation was a greater sin than fornication. In the five medieval codes for penance there are no fewer than twenty-five paragraphs dealing with masturbation on the part of laymen, to say nothing of others dealing with masturbation on the part of clergy.

This ridiculous stand by religions even invaded the medical text books until Master and Johnson's research. But like many other superstitions and myths the religious community is very slow to give them up in favor of science and new understanding.

So here is the truth from an Atheist, just as I use to tell it to my students. The Master and Johnson sexual research that was started in the 1950's and still continues today has determined that masturbation is normal. They found that people begin a sex life early and remain sexual for a greater number of years. Also, people that begin sexual practices later in life have more difficulty in adjusting to their partners sexual needs. They made it very clear that the best sexually adjusted adults masturbated without guilt in their youth.

