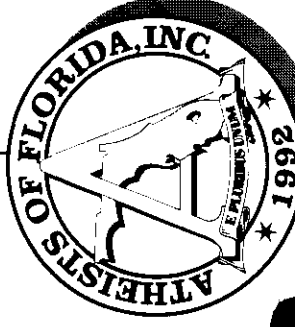


Atheists of Florida

Dedicated to the absolute separation of State and church

Volume III Number 8

December, 1994



Another successful year

THE ANNUAL BOARD MEETING of Atheists of Florida was held on November 6, 1994 in Miami. Sixteen board members were present. The meeting began with a State of the Corporation report by the president, Christos Tzanetakos.

Among the year's accomplishments were the formation of the Mark Twain Scholarship Fund, so named during the meetings, which currently holds a balance of \$1,400. A Board of Trustees was elected to assume responsibility for the promotion, fund raising and distribution of grants, which will be based solely on essays submitted by applicants.

Also, the *Atheists of Florida Forum* had completed another series of twelve cable TV programs and expects to duplicate this effort again in 1995. To help fund production costs of the *Forum* it was agreed to increase the membership dues in Atheists of Florida by \$5 a year. A membership/renewal form is included with this newsletter. All memberships should be sent to Miami as indicated on the form.

The Board voted to join the Alliance of Secular Humanist Societies. This is a network created for mutual support among local and/or

regional societies of secular humanists. Each society is associated with the Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (CODESH, Inc.) and is autonomous and self-governing.

Among the projects to be undertaken this year include production of membership cards for Atheists of Florida members. Additional committees formed were a membership expansion group, a public relations committee, and a fund raising committee.

We are compiling a rather large amount of books, video tapes and archives which is being assembled in one place. This will allow us to inventory all items including books for sale and offer them in the newsletter.

Elected officers for 1995 are:

Chairman: Albert E. Lyngzeitson, Davie
President: Christos Tzanetakos, Ft. Pierce
Vice-President: Ed Golly, Tampa

Secretary: Anthony Schlieffstein, Davie

Treasurer: Charles A. Ross, North Miami

Please renew early for 1995. It seems that the need for our organization increases almost daily in light of the recent national elections. And we expect to be making considerable headway this year. Our January newsletter will feature the first of a two-part series by Jim Strayer. After being a biology teacher for thirty-four years, Strayer reflects on some of the more interesting topics that were brought up by students. Part I: *He spilled his seed on the ground.* Part II: *The real history of human sex.* Part III: *Who is responsible for spontaneous abortions?* Part IV: *The helping hand.* These are articles you'll likely want to keep, so don't be dropped from our mailing list — renew now!

"If prayers worked, Hitler would have been stopped at the border of Poland by angels swords of fire."

— Nancy Willard

Letters continued

Letters that I get ask me, "What is Southern religion?" I believe that would be a misnomer. What people call religion in Mississippi is really a political movement called Republican Party.

Political parties should be called movements. We have the Republican movement and the Democratic movement. The leaders of the Republican movement advocate theocracy. The Democratic movement advocates democracy.

A preacher is a business man and must destroy any self-confidence a person might have and make a sinner and customer of his church forever.

A school teacher is an employee of the government, paid to teach facts and increase self-confidence.

Society always will establish what is right and wrong. The schools can do a better job of teaching morals, ethics and family values.

The Democratic movement needs to enforce the Constitution of the United States and get the religion back in the church.

The Republican movement is known as the GOP. A friend of mine said, "The movement should be called LSDTH (Live, Suffer, Die and Go to Hell) movement."

John Marthaler
Pascagoula, MS

Atheists of Florida



Atheists of Florida at Circus McGurkis, the People's Fair, October 29. Manning the table are Britt Girard, left, and Ed Cort. Also making an appearance were Brent Yacow and Jerry Moore, project coordinator.

Henry Scambini coming to Ft. Lauderdale

The Bible — A Time to Laugh will be presented by comedian Henry Scambini December 16-18 at the Singer Island Oceanfront Holiday Inn, West Palm Beach. The event is the December conference for the Council on Democratic and Secular Humanism (CODESH) titled, "Is the Bible the Word of God?"

Scambini, a retired professional comedian from New York City, trained Lenny Bruce and many others. Now retired living in California, he calls himself the *Humanist Humorist*. His luncheon monologue consists of the vile parts of the Bible that are skipped over in church. Scambini has dug these out—to quote one book, "they are legion"—and comments on them in a fashion which can be called memorable. If you found Judeo-Christianity ridiculous before, this meeting will definitely reinforce that, while making you appreciate one of the few things it can be appreciated for: a mother lode of (literally) unbelievable laughter.

10 December 1994



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With minor modifications, this was a talk delivered to the Unitarian-Universalist Church in Clearwater, Florida, July 3, 1994

N MARCH OF THIS YEAR, James J Hogan, former bishop of the Altoona, PA Diocese, told a court he did not believe it was necessary to discipline one of his priests for rubbing his penis on the bottoms of young boys' feet because "I did not recognize it as molestation." Obviously somewhere there's a lack of education here, but I think most of us would consider this action abuse.

Hogan probably went to a Catholic school. Despite their many claims of doing better jobs than public schools, the facts do not bear this out. Religion-based schools, when scores are adjusted for the levels on tests administered prior to the student's entry, show significantly poorer results in academic subjects. Even more to the point, despite claims of producing "more moral" students, a survey done in

HYMNICAL LIBERATION YACIWI



Who Owns the Children? Part Three



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Atheists of Florida, Inc. is affiliated with the national Atheist Alliance for purposes of information exchange.

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Newletter Editor

which only accept students of their religion (such as Bob Jones University) or have financial ties to the schools which produce favoritism. They may be less likely to drop out of school because they are often kicked out first: public schools must often accept students no private school is willing to deal with.

In short, religious schools offer no proven advantage to public schools, and offer the disadvantage of indoctrinating students in traditions that affect their future potential, as well as that of the country's, negatively. There is nothing at all new about this. In 1890, when the Supreme Court of Wisconsin stopped bible-reading in public schools, the Court observed:

There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state, as religion. Let it once enter into our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed. Let it once enter our common schools, they would be destroyed.

This is exactly what has happened, though in a much more indirect manner. Religion has entered the school system through the practice of home schooling, wherein parents may fill their children's heads with the most noxious garbage possible so long as the children pass MINIMAL standards of learning - but in those rare cases where the state has seen fit to insist that the child be returned to the public school system, or to an accredited private school, can the damage done in those formative years ever be repaired? How much effort will be required to disabuse a child of the ingrained prejudices gathered in those years? Don't children deserve some protection? (continued)

Figures lie...liars figure

1987 by the Catholic Church showed that students in Catholic schools were more likely to have done drugs, drank alcohol, or shoplifted than their public school counterparts. More likely, in other words, to be "immoral."

Religious schools love to massage statistics to present a better face. First they'll tell you they are cheaper than public schools. However, when the tax exemptions they receive, as well as exemptions received by those who donate to them, are factored into the equation, such schools generally cost more per student than comparable public schools.

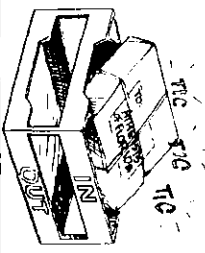
Next they tell you their students score higher on standardized tests, get accepted into colleges at a greater rate, and are less likely to drop out of school. What they fail to mention is that since they are often selective as well as have a higher-income parent group (meaning they can afford tutors, computers, and other outside help), they start out with better students to begin with, and show no significant advantage in improving the students they have. Many of their graduates are accepted in to colleges

Most impotent office

In his Nov. 8 column, ultraconservative right-wing fundamentalist Cal Thomas stated that no office in the U.S. Senate is of greater or more profound importance than that of Senate Chaplain.

Thomas also stated that Halverson's prayers were so meaningful and relevant. But, on the Senate floor on June 23, 1994, Halverson

Letters



prayed for O.J. Simpson, calling him a "great hero" deserving of "a special dispensation of grace," and mourned "his profound loss." The victims and their families were mentioned by afterthought. Halverson never mentioned by name Nicole Brown Simpson, the woman Simpson battered and is accused of stabbing to death, or her friend Ronald Goldman. Nicole's motherless children were not specifically referred to.

Thomas failed to tell the American people the Rev. Halverson is paid \$80,000 per year to pray before the Senate. Thomas also neglected to mention that Congressional chaplancies are unconstitutional, a clear violation of the First Amendment.

The truth is that there is no office in the entire U.S. government of lesser importance than that of chaplain. Nothing fails like prayer. And sometimes, nothing can be more offensive. Keep church and state separate, forever!

Barry A. Rowe
Indiatlantic

New motto

I would like to suggest an alternative to our current state motto, namely: *In God We Trust to / trust in Life.*

They are both 15 spaces and it shows what I think is the real intention of Southerners when they made or say it.

Since Florida (meaning flowers) is so profuse with life due to its good climate during the last ice age, this would be a most appropriate motto. The current phrase violates the separation of religion and state.

Rich Wenzstein
Margate

Individual effort

Published November 19 in the St. Petersburg Times

When will people the likes of two recent letter writers realize that this country belongs to all of us — with our diversity of races, ethnic groups and religions — and there will never be a unanimous agreement

as to which religion is the one true religion? In the Protestant religion alone, there are over 200 different sects.

Contrary to their uninformed opinion, Americans United for Separation of Church and State supports the equal protection of all religions and the right of all children to pray in schools. What Americans United is against is state-mandated prayers, favoring one religion over another. Since children are forced by law to attend school, if they are forced to listen and participate in prayers not their own, their constitutional rights have been abrogated. Therefore, Americans United encourages children to pray in schools on an individual basis, not as a group effort. After all, most parents do not want their children exposed to Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim or Santaria prayers if they are not of that faith.

Incidentally, the executive director of Americans United is a Baptist minister, the Rev. Barry Lynn, and many members of the board of directors are clergymen.

Why is it that it only seems to be the members of the religious right who complain about their right to pray? Don't their children get religious training at home and in their churches?

Florence Morgenroth
St. Petersburg

Never satisfied

Published in the Tampa Tribune Dec. 11

I'm confused. Recently Cal Thomas and John Leo wrote in support of school prayer, maintaining that we need affirmation of America's motto, "In God We Trust" in schools, government and public life. But to what effect?

Besides chaplains employed by the military, there is one flagrant constitutional violation of state/church separation going on in the land which it might be interesting to hear them address.

Congress employs an official chaplain to open each session with a prayer. Presumably it asks that Congress be guided by some imagined god which we could assume is the same god Thomas wants promoted by the government in every possible arena. If prayer is such a worthwhile effort and our lawmakers have been so guided, why is he so vehemently upset with the results? Isn't this the same Cal Thomas who so strongly applauds the sweeping GOP elections so we can initiate change?

So which is it, Thomas? Do you dare question the results of a government which has been guided by your god for the past 30 years, or could it be that prayer is really a totally useless exercise?

Ed Golly
Tampa

Election view

Our dear friend in Mississippi sends us a proper summation of the elections (continued)

Vouchers struck down

The Puerto Rico Supreme Court last month struck down the largest school voucher program in the United States, leaving officials there searching for other ways to help the 2,013 students it benefits.

The program, which would have given public school students vouchers to attend private schools, violates the commonwealth's constitution.

NEWS FILMS

Really, what would you expect?

In light of our recent elections, we witnessed a frightening reminiscent scene in January of this year during Italy's election fray. The pope stepped in with a message saying that, "while some of Italy's Roman Catholic leaders are corrupt, they have saved the country from communism."

Apologism must simply run with the territory.

Lake County safe

Christian conservatives who had pledged to return public education to the Dark Ages have lost their stronghold on the school board.

In May of this year, the Lake County board adopted its "America First" policy by a 3-2 vote. That was the policy which required schools to teach that American culture is superior to any other (read: God holds us in the "most favored" status). Each of the three school board candidates with ties to the

nationwide Christian Coalition, evangelist Pat Robertson's political action arm, lost a bid for re-election in the primary run-off. Concerned parents and teachers had recognized this attempt to dismantle the school district's Head Start program, abolish its traditional sex education program, block the construction of a much-needed middle school and blatantly defy a state mandate to teach children about other cultures.

Voters in Florida need to be aware that our politics are being manipulated by a strong, partisan, ultraconservative religious movement that has vowed to dismantle our public school system by using tax money — via tuition vouchers — to support religious schools or, failing that, to turn our public schools into agencies for the dissemination of their particular religious dogma. The only way to stop this juggernaut is to vote against these people wherever and whenever they are identified.

Making graven images

Hollywood remains true to its fantasy image. Faced with a blackout in Russia and the loss of 90% of his European TV audience after losing access to a major satellite network, the Rev. Robert Schuller has a low-tech plan to propagate his worldwide propaganda.

He plans to put his weekly *Hour of Power* TV show on film, to be shown on a delayed basis every Sunday morning in theaters around the world.

"We will be the first ministry in history to produce a church service as a movie," Schuller told worshippers at his Crystal Cathedral.

By November he had hoped to have 30 theaters in the US lined up. His goal: to have screenings in 2,000 theaters worldwide within two years.

Kosher contributions

Sunday contributions apparently aren't filling the coffers for the Christian Coalition of Evanston, Illinois. They've come up with a new way to suck up money every day of the week. While filling your basket in the frozen food aisle at the local Jewel Food Store, you can be contributing to the local Christian Coalition. In fact, when shoppers present their voucher at the check-out counter, seven percent of the bill will go to the churches named on the voucher. Those churches in turn donate the proceeds to the Christian Coalition.

...And spotted recently in the Tribune — Librarian Lorraine Stickney of Gorham High School in Maine collects her favorite requests from students. One in particular caught our eye:

"Do you have a photograph of the Devil?"

Atheists of Florida CHAPTER MEETINGS:

MIAMI:

The last of the 1994 lectures will be **Sunday, December 18 at 2:00 pm** in rooms A and B, 8th floor of the **Ft. Lauderdale Main Library**. Lecturer: **Dr. H. James Bix**, Professor of Anthropology. Topic: **"GIORDANO BRUNO"**. Atheist Hotline: (305) 936-0210.

TAMPA:

The Tampa Bay Chapter will meet **Saturday, December 31 at the Clearwater East Public Library from 10:00 am to noon**. We will plan the "Jeopardy" satire. For more information: **Ed Golly 839-7567**.

MANA-SOTA:

No meeting on its regular date of Dec. 26th for obvious reasons. We will, however, attempt to meet for an informal holiday covered dish picnic to celebrate the winter solstice. Chapter members should contact **Ed McDougall** with ideas as soon as possible. We will attempt, as a chapter, to attend the December meeting of the Tampa Chapter in Clearwater on Dec. 31st (see above). Members interested in forming a car pool should contact **Ed McDougall** at 922-8200 to set the meeting place and time; departure must be no later than 8:45 am.

Plans are under way for our **January 29th** meeting when we will host, if possible, **Atheists of Florida President Christos Tzanetakos**. Mark your calendars early to attend this important meeting. In less than one year, we have grown to a chapter of 16 members. Christos has been, and continues to be, a tireless leader of our organization and cause in the state. Let us show our support and respect by attending the January meeting.



A of F Vice-President **Ed Golly**, left, addresses **Mana-Sota** chapter Nov. 27 giving the history of atheism in Florida. (**Ed McDougall**, right)

Cynic continued

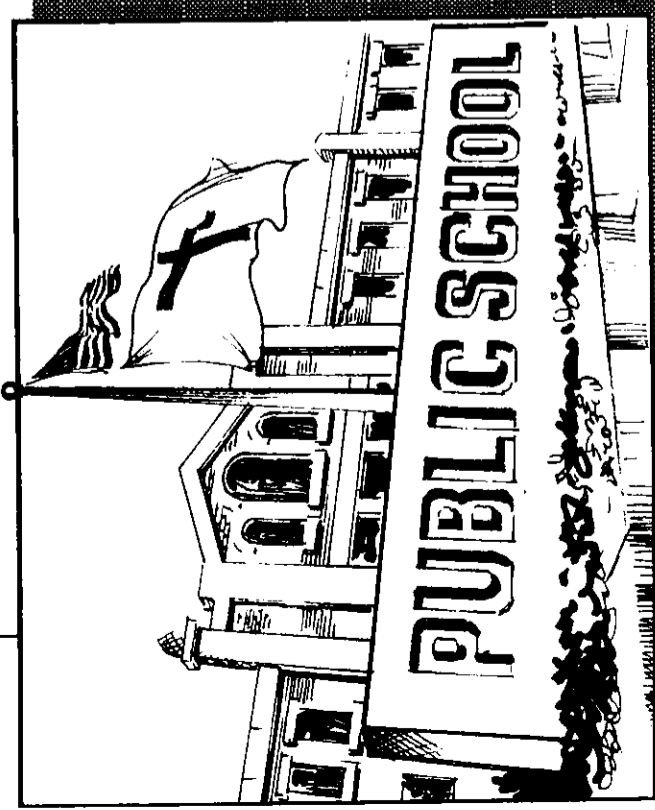
I'll make short work of secular private schools. Yes, there are some excellent ones out there, and many can do a much better job than our current public schools because they have significantly greater funding. However, getting back to my comment on making the best use of the minds we have, isn't it about time that the education a child receives is based on his or her ability and potential, instead of how much money the parents have? Should a parent have to worry about a child not getting into a college on scholarship because a private school is holding up her transcripts until the bill is paid, as happened in Tampa recently?

I'll note that I'm not in any way demeaning or discounting the importance of parental bonding, nor am I suggesting that we form state repositories where all children are shipped and raised. I am proposing that it's time to start seriously considering statutes that discourage parenthood for unqualified individuals and mandate a secular education for the resulting children.

I realize that this opens a can of worms that few people want to face, and that echoes of Nazism are floating through some minds. Let

me first assure you that I believe the goal of zero population growth can be achieved entirely through voluntary means. Next let me qualify my term "unqualified." I'll start with age: statistically, children born to parents under the age of twenty-one are at a disadvantage, a greater disadvantage as the age of the mother decreases. Society might well be better off if a thousand dollars per year, or more, were paid to any person under twenty one who agreed to temporary sterilization, using Norplant or the equivalent for males when it becomes available — and it's about time we start finding that equivalent!

I realize that I've probably raised a few issues that are of concern to many of you, and in closing I'd like to note that none of this would be necessary in a perfect world. In a perfect world everyone would be educated to reach their maximum potential, children would always have loving parents who did only what was best for their children, and there would be no old superstitions begetting prejudices and holding the world's scientific progress back. Unfortunately, we don't live in that perfect world. As humans, it is our responsibility to approach perfection as best we know how, and one of the ways of doing that is protecting the rights of others. Even from their parents. **A**



Here we go again

—by Ed Golly

Insight

Let us pray:

May Jesus bless Shannon, Jason, Katie,
Alex and Anna.
May the Virgin of Guadalupe bless
Hector, Luisa, Elena and Ryan.
May Yahweh bless Rachel and Ben.
May Allah bless Ali and Tawana.
May Buddha bless Maya.
May Krishna bless Rajiv.
May the Great Spirit bless Gerónimo.
May the Great Mother bless Sunflower.
May Quetzalcoatl bless Xochi.
May the Mystical Traveler Consciousness
bless Mike.
May Satan curse Damien.
May Mamon bless Whitney, Tiffany and
Donald.
May the ACLU bless Lisa, Sean, Brent and
Michelle.
OK, class, we were going to discuss religious
freedom today, but we seem to be out of time.
Tomorrow, we'll start your oral reports on
"My Faith: Believe or Be Damned." What is
it, Xochi? I'm sorry, finding a virgin is your
responsibility. Cultists, remember our class
rule: No note, no gun.

So began Joanne Jacobs' column regarding
Newt Gingrich as the plethora of see-saw
arguments erupted immediately following the
November elections. It seems that after being
elected to execute a ten point "Contract with
America", the GOP got right to work on
number 11 — prayer in public schools.
This month, *Insight* looks back to where it
all began.

History repeats

One year after it barred a 22-word prayer,
written and authorized for use in public
schools by the New York State Board of
Regents, the Supreme Court issued an even

*Ed Golly is Vice-President of
Atheists of Florida, Director of
the Tampa Bay Chapter, and
Secretary of Atheist Alliance*

Protestantism felt itself to be most involved
in this decision. As the dominant religious
group in the 19th century, when U.S. public
schools were established, Protestantism had
left its own stamp on many devotional prac-
tices in schools. Therefore, the removal of
Bible reading and devotional exercises seemed
to most Protestants to disrupt a widely
accepted pattern of American life.

Contrasting Views

An opinion survey taken some months after
the June decision indicated that over three-
fourths of the American people disagreed with
the Court. Nevertheless, the reaction by the
Protestant leadership was less vocal than it had
been the year before. In fact, many Protestant
clergymen and religious thinkers, if you'll par-
don the oxymoron, accepted the decision as
consistent with Protestant views on the separ-
ation of state and church. They felt it would
force the churches to reconsider and clarify
their own purposes in society.

But others, among them many fundamen-
tal leaders, as well as a few liberals, including
Episcopalian Bishop James Pike of California
and Dr. John Bennett of Union Theological
Seminary in New York City, disagreed. They
were concerned lest recent tendencies in court
decisions would one day rule out sacred expres-
sion in public life.

Bishop Pike advocated a constitutional amendment which would make prayer in public schools legal.

On the other hand, the United Presbyterian
Church in the U.S.A., went on record as
concurring in the decision. The assembly asked
Presbyterians to re-examine their practices in
the area of church-state relations.

This was a year when U.S. Catholics
numbered 43.8 million. The Presidential
Medal of Freedom was awarded posthumously
to two "outstanding Catholics of the century",
Pope John XXIII and President John
Kennedy, the first Roman Catholic President
of the United States.

Back to the present

Now here we are in 1994. This time it's the
American Baptist Churches USA opposing
"any effort of government to poke its nose
into our prayers, especially our children's
prayers." Baptists even vow to lobby against
any proposed constitutional amendment on
school prayer. The religious mis-leaders say
they oppose changing the First Amendment

a new and improved translation by Francis Steegmuller

— review by Patrick Bens

SOAP OPERA AFICIONADOS will recog-
nize in *Madame Bovary* the romantic nuances
the daytime TV-dramas are known for. Yet this
new and improved translation by Steegmuller



Madame Bovary

of Gustave Flaubert's classic novel is set in a

MADAME BOVARY

gentler, kinder and
smoother English as
velvety as the origi-
nal french prose.

Two myths that
school books force-
feed our students
are, after a second
and in-between the
lines reading, clearly
establishment crea-
tions. Firstly, it is
widely believed that
Flaubert had legal
problems with this
book because the
story lends itself to
be repeatedly erotic.
The same hypocrisy
that was plaguing
the Marguis de
SADE is here pre-
sent. The sexual ad-
ventures of Emma
Bovary do not rep-
resent, in my opin-
ion, the immorality
Flaubert was



GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

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

charged with. Instead,
the church must have
objected indirectly to
the anti-clerical opinions
uttered throughout this
novel.

The second myth, that Flaubert would have
written this book as Mr. Bovary, a country
doctor like Flaubert's father, is simply ridicu-
lous since Charles Bovary is endlessly por-
trayed as a clumsy, somewhat goofy character
— a looney loser.

No, the real Flaubert hides behind Charles
Bovary's neighbor, the knowledgeable, popular
and successful pharmacist, who is the one
uttering all the anti-religious smear.

Flaubert is one of those artists who intro-
duced a new era in art: he walked out of
Romanticism into Realism. In the details you
still find a lot of romantic traits, but the way
those details are assembled and set in motion
create a new and humorous criticism that's far
play to all. The story is spun in a Normandy
country town and superstitions are a common
part of life. One man who stands out as a
rationalist is the apothecaire or pharmacist. In
the book he also has the last word, on the last
page.

From an historic viewpoint, this book tells
us a detailed lot of the good times of the early
Belle Epoque and how the snobbish in-crowd
would hide behind religion as a protective
curtain. From a philosophical standpoint
Flaubert mocks the pretentious middle class
hourgeoisie who clings to traditions like
sheep's wool to barbed wire. His "supporting
actor", the pharmacist wins the Oscar, holding
his head up over the peaks, secure like a ram.

Cautiously at first, then blatantly, Flaubert
inserts his own ideas on religion through con-
versations between the pharmacist and the
local priest. During the wake of Emma Bovary,
the priest's superstitions are ridiculed, celibacy
is mentioned as a life style leading to crimes;
confession is questioned as being a laundering
of crimes. The pharmacist further argues that
the Jesuits have altered the history books
during centuries. To top it all off, when the
priest insists it's time for prayer, the phar-
macist notes, "Since god knows all our needs,
what purpose can be served by prayer?" As for
Charles Bovary, who, with his wife "even went
to church once", bursts out to the same priest,
"I detest your god."

It is obvious proof that Flaubert was a
rationalist himself and that he stepped out of
the emotion laden romanticist period to crack
like a whip his sharp wit at the church. Humor
is the atheist's most efficient weapon and
Gustave Flaubert has shown us how to use it
with success.

If a book or film is judged to be immoral, it
likely has some pretty prickly criticism of reli-
gion, too. Only by calling a book "immoral"
does the church establishment try to label it
"criminal". If the church would charge that a
book is blasphemous, it has no leg to stand
on, for blasphemy is freedom of speech.

protection of religious freedom and ban on government establishment of religion.

House speaker Newt Gingrich has said he wants a vote on the school prayer amendment by July, around the fourth. The amendment reads as follows:

ARTICLE -

Nothing in this Constitution shall be construed to prohibit individual or group prayer in public schools or other public institutions. No person shall be required by the United States or by any State to participate in prayer. Neither the United States nor any State shall compose the words of any prayer to be said in public schools.

What they're saying

A cross-section of response from all walks of society frames the arguments.

"I appeal to Newt Gingrich: This is a wrongheaded, misguided, divisive agenda," said Rabbi David Saperstein of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations. A spokesman for the American Jewish congress said the November elections showed that Americans want less government in their lives. "It strikes me as a very surprising reading of the election that the one area they believe the people want more government involvement is in the people's spiritual lives."

Columnist James J. Kilpatrick writes, "The school prayer amendment constitutes folly, pure folly, and ought to be opposed at every

step along the way."

But in the same column, he becomes unfocused by following that, "Gingrich should put a prayer amendment way back on the back of the stove. The courts have not thrown God out of the classroom. No court on earth could accomplish that. In the sectarian view, God has been there all along."

He even goes further to imply a sentiment which is all too commonly heard in dismissing the position of the non-believers when he faults the courts for "tilting away from accommodation in favor of an unwarranted hostility. Preceding a high school football game, a nondenominational prayer poses no danger of a state establishment of religion. A baccalaureate invocation at commencement imposes a trivial social burden upon atheists and agnostics."

Edwin Yoder writes, "Those who want to amend the Establishment Clause of the Bill of Rights (and that is exactly what a school-prayer amendment would do) are irreconcilably at war with those who believe, with Madison and Jefferson, that 'an establishment of religion' of any sort is an inappropriately coercive and fraught with the peril of conflict in a land dedicated to the utmost variety of religious faith and preference."

Anna Quindlen recognizes that "the current conservative mania for a constitutional amendment guaranteeing school prayer doesn't have much to do with prayer anyway, but with a time, a place, an ethos that praying and pledging allegiance at the beginning of each school day represent.

"It is an attempt to resuscitate an America that died a natural death and, like most dear departed, is now shrouded in the rosy tones of selective memory.

"Prayer in the schools represents a return to those good old days. They were days in which 12-year-olds didn't carry guns, in which children didn't mouth off to their elders, in which divorce was rare and marriages stuck for life, in which condoms stashed in wallets and out of schools.

"They were also days in which black men were strung up from tall trees, women poured caustic cleansers inside themselves rather than face pregnancy, and nobody talked about daddy's drinking. Queers were sick, women were irrational and real men taught their sons to use their fists and never mind about their feelings, what are you, a sissy, boy?"

Most frightening is what we hear from our most powerful leaders. Clinton: "The nation's schools ought to be teaching basic values of citizenship, including valuing the right of people to have and express their faith," which,

(continued next page)

Opponents of School Prayer Plan Rally

About twenty organizations of civic and religious groups have been formed in a coalition to fight any state legislative effort for school prayer. The members include the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida, People for the American Way, Jewish civic organizations and congregations including Unitarians and Seventh-Day Adventists. The coalition was formed by Gloria Dorfberger of Hollywood who is a leader of Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America. She fears that her teenage son's classroom may turn in to a place of worship if prayer is allowed in public schools.

The coalition has scheduled a rally for January 8 in Fort Lauderdale on the boardwalk before the Florida Legislature meets in March. As you may recall, earlier this year a group of Florida legislators sought to allow student-led, non-sectarian prayer at school events such as graduations, football games and assemblies. The bill passed in the House. It did not get a hearing in the full Senate before the Legislature adjourned in April.

he said, could be achieved "without crossing the line of the separation of church and state.

"Indeed, the schools, perhaps today more than ever before, need to be the instrument by which we transfer important values of citizenship."

Help!

Of course, Gingrich is the worst, with, "Re-establishing the legitimate right of praying is at the core of being American. It will have surprising impact within a year on the quality of life in the schools."

Polls

Therein lies the reason behind the movement. Polls indicating 90% of Americans favor a moment of silence as very or somewhat acceptable show politicians that the power of the office lies in public opinion rather up-

holding the constitution. Seventy-five percent favor some form of school prayer in class or at special events such as graduation; 15% are opposed.

Numbers like these indicate a blatant lack of comprehension of the constitution as we so often hear the misguided concept expressed that we are a nation ruled by democracy. Civil rights for minorities continues to baffle the common man. And lacking that understanding, the politicians will always be at the ready to capitalize on that shortcoming to enrich their own positions.

Our work is cut out for us.

What you can do

Be sure you know how your representatives stand on the issue and know their address so you may let them know what you think. **A**



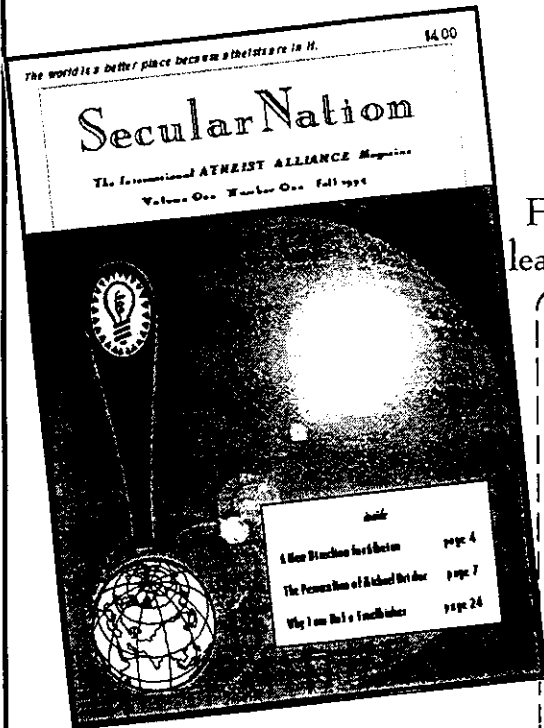
Anthony J. Schiefstein
Financial Consultant

Private Client Group

One Turnberry Place
19495 Biscayne Boulevard
Suite 700
Aventura, Florida 33180
305 933 6222 Dade
800 937 0335 Toll Free

MARK ANDREW TROP
Attorney at Law

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



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