

Letters *continued*

unsubstantiated opinions or beliefs. Therefore, such items and statements properly belong in the Religion section, not mixed in with legitimate news. By including this proselytizing in news items, the *Times* risks joining "infomercials" and supermarket tabloids as a provider of dubious journalistic quality.

Certainly, the Religion section provides entertainment and insights into human nature even for non-believers; if nothing else, it gives us warning of the latest tactics by those who wish to make everyone conform to their beliefs.

I, too, am trying to make a difference in the world; imagine a world without the religion-based strife found in Ireland, the Middle East, or our own country: a world where rational exploration by science supersedes the inconsistent guesswork of superstition. I dream of such a world.

Brent Yaciw
Seminole, FL

Yaciw's opinion resulted in several other responses disputing his point. On November 7, George Starkes was published with this letter of support, again, edited for space:

Christians should do as they preach

Editor: Letter writer Jim Meir of Clearwater suggested that Brent Yaciw of Seminole needs to show more tolerance for the beliefs of others. What utter hypocrisy.

When are religionists going to learn tolerance for the non-religious freethinkers of society? Whenever an atheist writes a letter to the editor, it is followed by a flurry of antagonistic letters from extremist religious-right fundamentalists who insist that their dogmatic mindset is the only true belief.

Our society is bombarded with religious propaganda and rhetoric (radio, TV, newspapers, billboards, etc.), yet we atheists tolerate this on a daily basis with nowhere near the protest that Christians display

toward atheists.

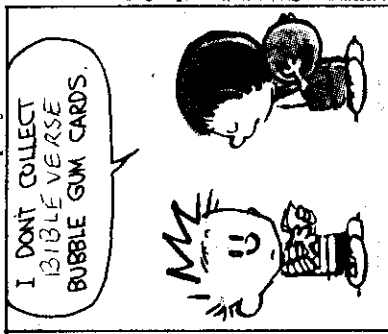
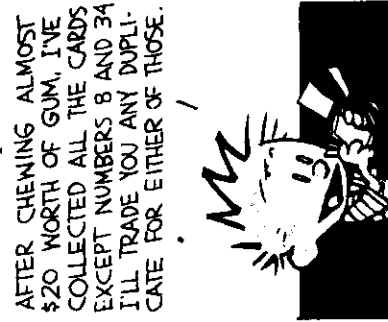
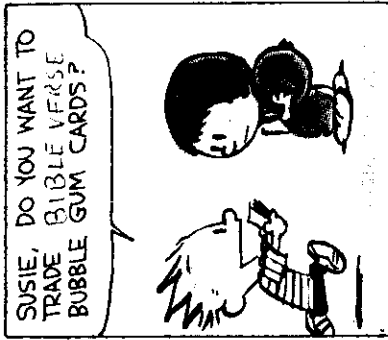
I heard a preacher on a radio program making complete mockery of atheists as he continued to denigrate and belittle them with a hatred beyond compare.

Where are the so-called tolerant, sensitive, understanding and compassionate religionists to denounce this bigotry toward the non-religious? None were to be found.

I could tell horror stories all day of the way I and many atheists have been mistreated, harassed and insulted by the so-called "righteous" religionists who are ultra-intolerant to those who do not embrace their philosophical mindset. I have yet to meet a Christian who practices what he or she preaches. Atheists represent 10% of the American population, yet are not allowed 1 percent of media coverage. Talk about intolerance!

George Starkes,
secretary

Tampa Bay Chapter,
Atheists of Florida



ATHEISTS of FLORIDA

"Dedicated to the absolute
separation of State and Church"

"Election time is when the people learn what the politicians stand for, and the politicians find out what the people will fall for."
— A. E. Newman

Newsletter of Atheists of Florida, Inc.
Volume 1
Number 09

Chapters in Miami and Tampa Bay
November, 1992

First Annual Board Meeting of Atheist Alliance

MIAMI—Joining the ATHEIST ALLIANCE last August, Atheists of Florida, Inc., was represented at the first annual board meeting by its president, Christos Tzanetakos, who flew to Los Angeles for the October 17th & 18th event.

Atheist Alliance, for those still unfamiliar, was organized to democratically coordinate the activities of autonomous Atheist societies in the U.S.A. and abroad.

The Alliance's Board of Directors, is composed by one representative from each member society having one vote. Currently the Alliance has seven U.S. member societies and one International: 1. Atheists of San Francisco Region, 2. Atheist Network of Houston, TX. 3. Atheist Coalition of San Diego, 4. Atheist League of Washington (state), 5. Minnesota Atheist, 6. Atheists United of CA. and 7. Atheists of Florida. International member: Atheist Centre of Vijawada, India.

For 1992-93 the Board elected John B. Massen of Atheists of San Francisco Region, CA as President; Marie Castle of Minnesota Atheists Vice President; Howard Kreisner of Atheist Coalition, San Diego, CA, Treasurer; and John Edwards of Atheists United, CA, as Secretary. Among the agenda items, the Board voted: To publish a quarterly newsletter compiling news and events form all member societies. The Quarterly newsletter will be distributed to all the member societies, and would be available to individual members of all the organizations for a subscription fee.

The Alliance will issue a Press-Release announcing its existence in the National Media.

The Board voted to develop and publish an organization promotional leaflet, and Uniformed Atheist information leaflets to be used by all the member organizations.

The possibility of a National Atheist convention was also discussed, but its date has not been decided.

The first Board Meeting was adjourned with feelings of exhilaration among its participants for a brighter Atheist future.

Dark Ages alive and well Vatican updates its Medievalism -- surges to only 359 years behind the present

EARTH—The Catholic Church has updated its superstitious perception of reality to within 400 years of today with the recent disclosure that they have finally seen fit to agree that the Earth *does* in fact revolve around the sun and is not the center of the universe.

As we all know, upon reaching this conclusion in 1633, Galileo Galilei was forced to repent by the Roman Inquisition and spent the last eight years of his life under house arrest.

The oxymoronic "Pontifical Academy of Sciences" overturned the present denial of astronomical reality after thirteen years of deliberation with some rather curious language.

In explaining Galileo's clerical judges of the seventeenth century, the commission surmised his theories were "incapable of dissociation faith from an age-old cosmology"—the biblical vision of Earth as the center of the universe. "God fixed the Earth upon its foundation, not to be moved forever," says a supportive Bible verse. Unable to comprehend a non-literal reading of Scripture, the judges feared that if Galileo's ideas were taught, they would undermine Catholic tradition.

According to the pope, the case was important because over the centuries it had become "the symbol of the church's supposed rejection of scientific progress, or of 'dogmatic' obscurantism opposed to the free search for truth."

He continued by maintaining that Galileo's condemnation had led many scientists to conclude that there was "an incompatibility between the spirit of science and its rules of research on the one hand, and the Christian faith on the other." We're just not sure why he would limit that concept to scientists?

But true to form, the pope continues to date his ideals in the Dark Ages by announcing there are two realms of knowledge, "one which has its source in Revelation and one which reason can discover by its own power." They are distinct but compatible, he said. **A**



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

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

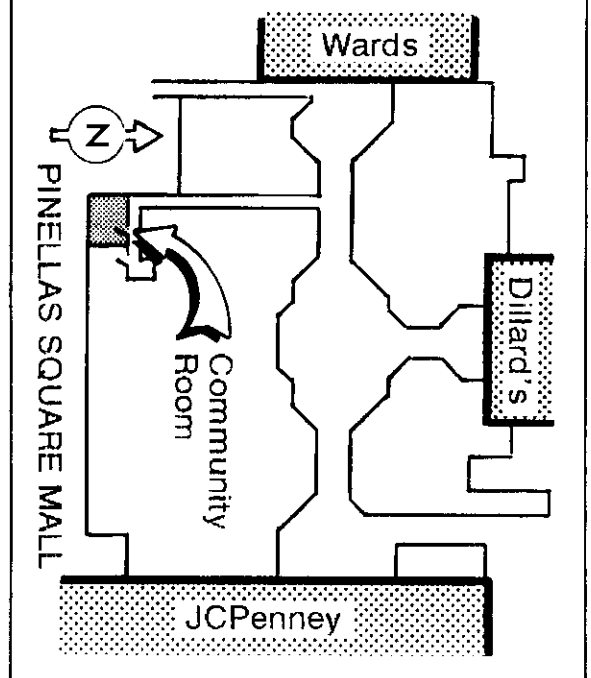
Atheists of Florida CHAPTER MEETINGS:

MIAMI

The Miami / Ft. Lauderdale Chapter will meet Sunday, November 22nd in the Board Room of the Ft. Lauderdale Main Library, 100 S. Andrews Ave. For time and other specifics, call the "Atheist Hot Line" at (305) 936-0210.

TAMPA

The Tampa Bay Chapter meets in a new location this month. We have secured the community room in the Pinellas Square Mall (see map) for Sunday, November 22nd, 4:00 to 6:30 pm. Following our regular business, Florence Morgenroth, in initiation of our speakers bureau, will give her presentation of "Abuse of Women by Religion". This 30-minute talk will be followed by questions and analysis by the chapter, so be prepared.



Tampa: America's Next HATE City!

Atheists Of Florida, Inc., is a non-profit, educational organization designed to heighten public awareness about atheism and atheists, and to provide intellectually stimulating contacts for the membership.

Membership dues should be sent to the chapter of interest. General correspondence should be directed to the Miami Chapter, P.O. Box 330102, Miami, FL 33153-0102. Contact Phone is (305) 936-0210. Annual dues are: \$50.00 - Sustaining; \$30.00 - Couple; \$25.00 - Individual; \$5.00 - Student (under 25 yrs.). Dues are pro-rated quarterly, with annual renewals due by January 1.

Newsletter correspondence and chapter inquiries should be sent to the Tampa Bay Chapter, P.O. Box 1340753, Tampa, FL 33681-0753. Deadline for newsletter items is the 15th of each month. The A.O.F. newsletter is provided free of charge to our members as a medium of exchange. Letters are published from members on a space-available basis, in general accord with guidelines set out in Vol.1, No.6, national Atheists Of Florida, Inc., is affiliated with the national Atheist Alliance for purposes of information exchange.

Chairman	Albert E. Lyngzeidson
President	Christos Tzanetakes
Vice President	Eli Golly
Secretary	Celia Glantz
Treasurer	Charles A. Ross
State Board of Directors	Kyoko Bogdon John J. Dinnord Steven Miles Louis Miller Florence Morgenroth Daniel Street Brent Yaciv
Newsletter Editor	Eli Golly
Assistant/Letters Editor	Brent Yaciv

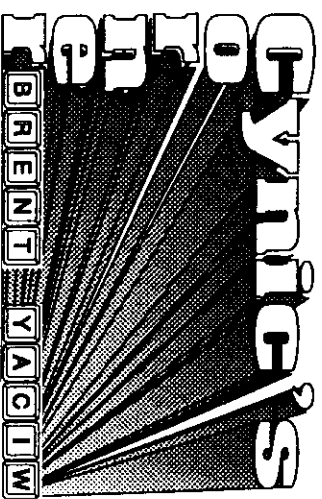
The election's over, and for better or worse, we now have a new president and a new precedent. I'll give precedence to the precedent.

About a year and a half ago here in Hillsborough County,

they passed a human rights ordinance, commonly referred to as the gay rights ordinance because for the first time it specifically mentioned sexual orientation in its provisions. This happened despite considerable pressure from the religious right, who came out in droves, busloads of bigots often traveling in church-sponsored groups to protest at the commission meetings. At the time, David Caton, local leader of the American Family Association and self-proclaimed "ex-porno addict," threatened to form a group and "Take Back Tampa."

As of November 3rd, they did: with the help of the local Ku Klux Klan and religious leaders from numerous churches, including black churches not generally known to side with the KKK, the ordinance was voted out of existence almost two-to-one.

Why and how did this happen, and what can we do about it? The first part is tough; there are several theories. The most obvious one is that Hillsborough County is full of bigoted rednecks



who are happy to deny basic human rights to any group they consider deviant. While there is some justification for this theory, I'd like to think that it isn't the whole story, although I may be trying to rationalize like a Christian here. There are a couple of other scenarios that might be reasonable. The first is based on the wording of the referendum. Because this was an attempt to overturn an ordinance, voters were placed in the awkward

(continued next page)

the Vatican admission of erring on Galileo, Nov. 1.

It took the Vatican approximately 360 years to admit the error. Such is progress.

Perhaps in another 360 years (years of gross overpopulation, years of starvation of the masses, of "wall to wall" people), do you think they might admit their error in "family planning" and birth control?

Something to look forward to?

And:

It is gratifying indeed to learn that the Vatican has finally overturned the verdict against Galileo. Let us now pray that it doesn't take another 360 years for the Pontifical Academy of Sciences to accept the facts regarding the consequences of human overpopulation, or there may be no Earth left for anyone to pontificate about.

Now why didn't any of us write one of those letters?

This letter appeared 10-7-92 in the Largo-Seminole Times with the title:

It is useless to cling to religion

Must we have a Religion section all week? I realize you have no control over the topics of letter writers such as "Volunteers demonstrate our compassion" (October 1, 1992), but articles like "Rain makes religious man ever stronger" and "God has an incredible way of bringing us down" are in sections supposed to be news.

What is news about a man suffering hardship and refusing to face it, wallowing in a state of denial and claiming "God never makes a mistake"? How does he know? For that matter, how does he know God even exists? He doesn't, and while I might have every sympathy for his plight, his clinging to superstition is certainly nothing new. Humanity has invented such beliefs for countless events exceed comprehension,

giving false comfort to victims of random events.

What is news about Richard Dorch making excuses for his scurrilous behavior, and claiming that it's all part of God's design? God didn't bring Dorch down, humanity did. There was never a single instance where God broke into the television broadcasts with a telltale message about these charlatans.

The most accurate writing is, surprisingly, from the Salvation Army. Yes, if there is a God, it is certainly responsible for creating "God's poor," and for keeping this segment of humanity suffering for ages. Volunteers may demonstrate compassion, but praising this cruel, probably nonexistent being demonstrates irrationality. A rational believer would curse the source of pain and suffering.

Why don't you talk to some of those who have suffered hardship and dealt with it without sinking into denial? They're out here; I know one man whose wife is also hanging on the edge of existence, who has not turned to useless deity begging. I know another whose brother recently chose his own "final exit" when faced with deterioration and death; instead of lamenting the loss, the survivor is cheered knowing that his brother died with his dignity intact. There are more out there, but you won't find them hanging out in churches. You have to seek groups based in reality, such as Atheists Of Florida or Humanists of the Suncoast.

Brent Yaciv
Seminole, FL
After several responses to Yaciv's letter, he was given about a quarter of a page to clarify on the Opinion page...six columns by 5 inches with a 48 point headline. Due to space requirements, we have capsulized here:

Reader seeks to clarify his opinions on religion
Editor: Apparently, in my efforts

to minimize verbiage in my previous letter, I caused some confusion among some readers, and I would like to correct this.

I apologize if my general reference to "churches" caused a misunderstanding. For my purposes, I consider a church as a place where people go to praise, worship, or grovel to some "deity" that they assume exists based on specious evidence or illogical grounding.

I recognize that some rational people attend such churches from habit, curiosity, or societal pressures; while I hope that someday the habits and societal pressures will disappear, I would not consider restricting their attendance.

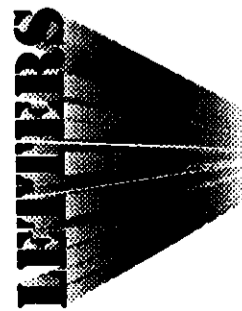
My concern is not for the thinking person, who will remain skeptical of irrational ideas no matter how ancient or venerated. I am more concerned for impressionable children reading this when it is presented in a manner indistinguishable from legitimate facts, or those who have idealistic and saccharine views of religion and continue to deny any rational appraisals of this deity's role, if said deity exists.

As for tolerance, never once did I suggest discontinuing the Religion section, nor did I try to "silence" any believers, nor suggest misquoting. I merely asked that statements claiming religious cause-and-effect relationships be held to the same news standards as any others.

If I were in a car accident and claimed George Bush had caused it, I would be expected to produce additional witnesses or physical proof of his presence. Yet if someone claims that God or Allah or any other deity caused something, the statement is printed as accepted fact, despite the lack of witnesses or physical proof.

This is not good quality news reporting; no verifiable facts are available that back up these spurious assertions, they are merely

(continued)



Bible doesn't corrupt with mentions of sin

In your Oct. 10 edition, there was a letter stating that there is merit in an atheist's petition to remove the Bible from public schools because it is filled with tales of polygamy, rape, incest, etc.

I hope the writer will consider me one of the "religious right" (rather than the religious wrong) when I respond to this absurd idea. I surely agree that all the sins of mankind are included in the Bible — just as all the sins of today's world are included in your daily newspaper.

However, God does not condone sin, but rather condemns it. Shall we take out of our schools all the newspapers so that children will not know what crime is?

Let me tell you, they don't have to learn it from the paper or the Bible. The Bible clearly states that people who do these things will suffer retribution. With God there is justice as well as mercy. If there is no understanding of sin, how can one repent and be pardoned?

If we're going to remove anything immoral from our society, it had better be the pornographic books, movies, magazines and TV programs that promote illicit sex as normal and cussing as manly.

Joy Fisher
Homosassa

Another letter in the *Tampa Tribune* addressed Kasmar's argument by suggesting he omitted the results of the immorality and subsequent justification by faith in JC and submits that the degeneration of our schools began with the removal of prayer and the teaching of evolution. In addition, the issuance of condoms by schools along with sex education has also initiated many problems resulting in the system's need for a remedy available only within the pages of the Bible.

What's interesting is that the opposition letter-writers are in inadvertent agreement with Kas-

Members of the Tampa Bay Chapter have been busy with the pen this month. To begin with, the Religion section of the October 10 edition of the *St. Petersburg Times* ran the following letter:

Atheist's petition to remove Bible has merit

Recently, in the Religion section of the *St. Petersburg Times*, there appeared an article stating that an atheist had filed a petition with a school district in Minnesota seeking removal of the Bible from public school libraries in the district.

This gentleman claims the Bible's content is "lewd, indecent and violent" and, therefore, should be banned in a school and learning environment.

Anyone who has ever read the Bible from cover to cover would have to agree, since the Bible is replete with tales of polygamy, rape, incest, murder, slavery and subordination of women.

It will be interesting to see how the religious right rationalizes and justifies these sordid tales.

There is one ray of hope, however, for a fair and reasoned decision regarding this petition: The assistant superintendent of the district did not dismiss the claim as trivial and unjustified. Instead, he said the Bible does, indeed, contain some "poor human decisions and some rather archaic social practices."

The ruling, due in four to six weeks, may be surprising.

Jerry Morgenroth
St. Petersburg

Three weeks later, the same section ran this follow-up response to Morgenroth's letter:

Cynic continued

position of voting "NO" if they wanted to retain the ordinance; confusion might explain the margin if you consider that a similar ordinance in Maine was passed by an almost identical margin.

Another theory is that the publicity influenced the voters. Despite a campaign of "Say NO to hate" sponsored by the mayor and other decent citizens of Tampa, the right-wing "Take Back Tampa" group was heavily financed and smooth in their approach. Ads urging repeal of the ordinance talked of "special rights for special interests," regardless of the fact that the rights protected were nothing more than any human being should have. The ads also claimed that there was no need for the ordinance, that the rights involved were already protected under other laws. This is an outright lie; the rights are protected against sexual, age, or religious discrimination, but NOT against discrimination based on sexual orientation. Honestly is obviously not one of the "family values" this group was promoting.

Whatever the why, the question is what we can do. Here is where I come to the president part (finally!) I must admit that it simply feels good to say "former President Bush" no matter who was elected; a president who openly declares that he doesn't consider atheists as citizens is obviously someone to get rid of. I also think that Bill Clinton has demonstrated at least a willingness to tolerate other ideologies, despite his Southern Baptist background. The next step is ours.

If Bill Clinton truly desires to end the divisiveness of this country, he needs to make a commitment to tolerance from the very beginning. I realize the limitations of the presidential powers, but leadership can overcome many of those limitations. We all need to help guide

that leadership in a positive direction, and I therefore have an assignment for you. (Okay, I know my English teacher persona is showing.) Seriously, all of us should take the time to write Pres-elect Clinton and show our support for a new Equal Rights Amendment that is specifically worded to foil attempts by the religious right to subvert it. How about:

As a nation composed of a variety of people, we must affirm our commitment to equal protection under the law. In order to make our intentions clear, let it now be known that discrimination against any human being over the age of eighteen on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, sexual orientation, or any other factor that might differ from what the current society considers "normal," is strictly prohibited. I'm certain that the lawyers could pick this apart, and that the armchair lawyers among us might do as well. Bill Clinton can hire his own lawyers to make clear the intent. Our job is to let him know that there is support out there for societal progress. Write him.

ATHEISTS OF FLORIDA, INC. FINANCIAL REPORT

Third Quarter 1992
June 30, 1992

Previous statement:
General Fund Account: \$ 947.47
Scholarship Account: 0.00

REVENUES

Membership fees	\$ 100.00
Contributions	291.53
Scholarship Fund	
Fund raisings	4.02
Interest from Bank	
Total revenue	<u>\$ 395.55</u>
Net Income (Loss)	\$ 48.64

EXPENSES

Telephone	\$ 197.09
Postage	35.00
Bank charges	33.82
Board meeting	81.00
Total Expenses	<u>\$ 364.91</u>
	\$ 48.64

CURRENT ASSETS

Cash unappropriated:	\$ 1,023.51
Cash Scholarship Fund	250.00
Southern Bell (deposit)	149.09
Answering machine	1,058.94
Computer (book value)	750.00
Donated articles (estimated value)	<u>\$ 3,231.14</u>
TOTAL ASSETS:	

Victor St. John sent in a survey he spotted in the *St. Petersburg Times* which contained a few questions he thought might interest us. On the subject of atheism and public service, we were amazed to find that among write-in respondents, fully 50% agreed that "An atheist in public office will do just as good a job as someone who believes in God."; 45% disagreed.

But we still live in a nation of primarily superstitious citizens. When questioned if the Bible should be taken literally, respondents were evenly split in the written poll, while the same question polled by telephone resulted in 55% agreeing it should be with only 38% disagreeing.

About half of our population believes public school teachers should lead students in prayer during school hours. And should creationism (the Genesis account in the Bible) be taught along with evolution in the public schools? Fifty-nine percent said "yes" while only 36% realized it should not be.



Kasmar misunderstood

—Ed Golly

It seems that the Gene Kasmar story is beginning to generate some confusion within even our own ranks. Those who become familiar with the efforts of the Minnesota atheist to have the Bible removed from the Brooklyn Center (MN) schools on the basis of its being unsuitable for children often miss the underlying point Kasmar is attempting to make. In a nutshell, Kasmar is in fact decrying censorship of every kind.

Shirley Moll of Minnesota Atheists was thoughtful enough to send us some accounts of the true story. After the story first broke, the Minnesota Atheists prepared a news release to set the story straight. That article appeared completely uncensored and unedited in the (Twin Cities) *Star Tribune*. I have attempted to capsule it for you to give you an idea where Gene Kasmar is really coming from.

Kasmar maintains that he and Christians are extremely close to total agreement. "There have been thousands of gods over the centuries," he says. "We just disagree on the role of one God. The Christians and I are just this far [holding his thumb and forefinger a quarter-inch apart] from being in complete agreement on the total number of gods."

His effort to get the Bible out of Brooklyn Center schools was mostly an accident of geography. The school district he had initially targeted was Anoka-Hennepin, where last spring the old creationism vs. evolution debate was raging. Kasmar informed the Anoka-Hennepin school board that he intended to demand that the district remove the Bible from its schools. Anoka-Hennepin responded by saying that because Kasmar didn't live in the district, it didn't much care what he thought. Kasmar understood that logic, so he took

the issue to his home district, Brooklyn Center.

Suddenly, Christian fundamentalists, who often have fought to have books removed from libraries, are fighting to keep one in. The potential alliances can become quite disturbing to some. When a woman protesting outside Kasmar's house was asked if those fighting to keep the Bible at Brooklyn Center would want the help of the American Civil Liberties Union, she became angry. "The ACLU!" she said. "We will not accept the help of the ACLU. They have done nothing but destroy the morals of this country."

The fact is, Gene Kasmar does not endorse censorship. What he has done is to turn the tables on the religious right, which has long been engaged in a relentless campaign to censor materials it dislikes. By using the religious right's own criteria for what is unsuitable for impressionable children to read—lewd language, explicit sex, incest, satanism, drunkenness, violence, witchcraft—Kasmar shows the Bible to be censurable. What goes around comes around.

If the Bible were used as the basis for our laws, as the religious right claims it should be, we would have executions for blasphemy, breaking the Sabbath, complaining, and not following dietary rules—plus a couple of dozen other equally trivial offenses. Slavery would return, and women would again become the property of men. Atheists' attempts to tell the truth about the Bible are almost always ignored—censored might be the more appropriate term. It appears that the only way we can get this book seen for what it is is for someone like Kasmar to force the issue by turning the censorship tables on those who would censor others.

Minnesota Atheists sincerely hope Kasmar's approach to censorship will result in much less of it.

Another month has passed since our last atheist newsletter. One of our focal points should be to ask what have we as atheists accomplished during the previous month of since our organization originated. How many new members have we recruited or simply informed of our newly formed organization? What's on the agenda? Is it typical business as usual or are we engaging in an all out campaign to open the eyes of the general populace to the reality of being a freethinker?



George Starkes

I guess some are now thinking -- there he goes again with the pep talk or motivational speech.

We need all the motivation we can get. The only ones who are going to motivate us will be ourselves. We as atheists are accustomed to the cold hard facts of life and the reality of the world around us. We need and trust each other. Atheists happen to be the minority of minorities in a world of mass mythology.

I don't want to come across as being the aggressive "Rambo-Humanist" but it's time to kick butt! By this I mean it's time to be more assertive, more active and more steadfast in our cause.

We also have an image to (continued)

uphold. The world is watching us--the way we conduct ourselves in public, our politeness, kindness and considerate extraverted sensitivity to others is certainly a plus for us.

Let us be the shining example of dignity. It is atheism that will ultimately resolve conflicts in race relations, gender relations and governmental/political interactions. Racism, sexism, political corruption, wars, poverty and general human suffering are the product of religion.

Now that I got that off my chest, where do we go from here? Tampa Bay Chapter Vice-president Brent Yaciv was successful in getting several letters published in the Largo-Seminole edition of the *St. Petersburg Times* newspaper where, by several Christian fanatics responded with their basic religious absurdity. We ask that members in both chapters please respond in return by writing supportive letters to the editor in support of one of our atheist members and let's do the same for all atheist letter writers to counter the religious wacko rhetoric that we are bombarded with constantly.

Thank you.

Follow-up to the elections: An equal rights amendment was up for consideration in Iowa which would have barred discrimination against women by adding language to the state constitution. The amendment was defeated. Pat Robertson had labeled the proposal part of a "socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism and become lesbians." Pity poor Pat...born a thousand years too late.

And from the courthouse comes a woman who filed a \$40-million lawsuit against a Texas evangelist for continuing to send solicitation letters to her dead husband, promising that God would restore his health.

Antidiseestablishmentarism

—by Florence Morgenroth

Several members of the Tampa Bay Chapter of Atheists of Florida, Inc. attended a program sponsored by the Florida Suncoast Chapter of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Oct. 25th, at the Pilgrim Congregational Church, in St. Petersburg.

A turnout of seventy people saw an excellent short documentary film on how and why the disestablishment of religion was incorporated into the Bill of Rights and the danger the Religious Right poses to this cornerstone of our religious liberty.

Dr. James Armstrong, past president of the National Council of Churches, then spoke, hitting hard at Republican Presidential campaigns, starting with Reagan, which have gotten more and more religious and have served to divide the nation, no unite us.

On the issue of prayer in the schools, Armstrong said the home and the church should provide religious instruction, not the schools, besides, no one stops the children from praying.

On the issue of abortion...it should not be a political issue but a matter of personal choice.

Armstrong felt that the most dangerous threat from the Religious Right involves spending tax dollars for private school vouchers.

His comments on a voucher system elicited a lively discussion

following his speech. Among the points that were made was that a voucher system would destroy public education and would promote ideology rather than serve the needs of the children; vouchers benefit only those who had transportation to other schools of choice; tax subsidies is elitist since it benefits only those who can afford to send their children to better schools; and instead of strengthening the communities by strengthening the schools, tax subsidies will destroy the schools and the communities.

The program ended with an invitation to people of every faith, including Atheists, to join Americans United.

I called Marilyn Balkany whose name and phone number was listed in the St. Petersburg Times to find out more about the organization. She told me that the organization was not affiliated with any religious organization, had a membership of 50,000, and was dedicated to the preservation of religious liberty. I took their literature home with me and they publish an excellent monthly periodical called Church and State. The organization also initiates lawsuits, provides legal counsel and support in other cases, and serves as partners in joint lawsuits.

It was a good meeting and good to know we are not alone in our mission.

 **Merrill Lynch**

Anthony J. Schleiertein
Financial Consultant

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